Marking Definiteness in Farsi and English by Farsi Speaking EFL Learners

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Table of Contents

Marking Definiteness in Farsi and English by Farsi Speaking EFL[1] Learners

1. Introduction

Definiteness marking in written and spoken Farsi is the focus of the present study especially because differences in marking definiteness among various languages have been considered one of the most confusing areas for speakers of different languages (see Mizuno 1985). As a teacher of EFL to Farsi speakers, I have frequently noticed that the students face problems when it comes to marking a definite or indefinite noun in English.

One of the main objectives of the present study is to shed light on the trouble sources in practice of the use of articles in English among the subjects of my study. Farsi as a language which has two distinct registers of spoken and written forms with 9 various forms[2] of definite/indefinite markers is different from English with 4 definite/indefinite markers (Hedberg *et al*. 2009: 1). Based on what this study displays, when it comes to Farsi speakers learning English, one of the problematic areas is the use of definite markers.

Students who speak some languages, which lack these articles (such as Japanese) or probably do not have the one-to-one correspondence with definite marking system in English (such as Farsi), tend to face problems while using them in English. Geranpayeh provides some instances that people who speak Farsi face difficulties when trying to use definite articles in English due to the differences in marking definiteness in these two languages (2000: 47).

There are some certain areas, especially in the concrete ways of using definite markers in English, which I have spotted among Farsi speakers as troublesome. It seems that what is obviously 'unique identifiable' (Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharsky 1993) noun phrase in English sentence and marked as definite, is not equally appreciated in Farsi language. In what follows, I would like to investigate this issue in detail.

To serve the purpose of this study, I would like to base my argument about the use of definite/indefinite articles according to Gundel et al.'s (1993) 'the Givenness Hierarchy'.

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[1] EFL: English as a Foreign Language

[2] This is one of the findings of the present research, which is going to be discussed further in section IV

Following that, different sorts of definiteness marking in Farsi will be elaborated. The focus will be mainly on the differences between definiteness and specificity marking in spoken and written Farsi and the way that the informants use them in this study.

There have been many definitions for the concept of definiteness in general and there have been different points of view towards it (see Hawkins, 1978). Halliday and Hasan (1976: 71) provide a definition about the definite article, which seems to serve the purpose of the present research:

> [T]he definite article has no content. It merely indicates that the item in question is specific and identifiable; that somewhere the information necessary for identifying it is recoverable.

Definiteness in written Farsi is generally recognized by the absence of indefinite markers and indefiniteness in written Farsi is marked either by the numeral one (which is *'yek'* before the noun phrase; i.e. pre-positioned) or by using the suffix *'i'* after that (i.e. post-positioned). Definiteness in spoken Farsi seems to be generally marked by the use of the definite marker suffix *'e'* (i.e. post-positioned). However, one of the main arguments of this study would be that the concept of definiteness in Farsi (both in written and spoken) is marked through *'specificity'*, which can be arguably different from its counterparts in English.

Indefiniteness in spoken Farsi, on the other hand, does not differ much from the way it is marked in the written form. It is marked in three ways, first by the spoken form of the numeral one, *'ye'*, before the NP, second by using the suffix *'i'* after that and third by a combination of these two (*'ye'* before the NP and *'i'* after that). All the markers are going to be discussed in detail in the following sections.

In the beginning, however, some information about the aim, data, and methodology used in this thesis will be provided. In section 2.1, the 'Givenness Hierarchy' about English definite and indefinite marking that has been introduced by Gundel et al. (1933), is discussed in relation to Farsi. In sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4, definite/indefinite and specificity/nonspecificity marking in written and spoken Farsi are elaborated. In section 2.5, definiteness and specificity in Farsi from the point of view of scholars like Windfuhr (1979), Geranpaye (2000) and Karimi (2003) are discussed. In section 3, an analysis of the data which is

provided by the students, will be presented. Lastly, I will provide a brief concluding discussion in section 4, which will give a brief overview of the specifications of the study and its results, followed by some insights for further investigation.

1.1 Aim

Marking definiteness/indefiniteness can be considered as one of the areas that are so difficult for the learners when they have a language, which has a different definite/indefinite marking system. The aim of the present study is to shed light on the differences in the ways of marking definite/indefinite NPs, through the sentences that students produce in each language. The differences, which may be caused as a result of the differences between the definite/indefinite marking systems in Farsi and English, can be indicated by the sentences that have been produced by the Farsi native speakers. Comparing different ways of marking may indicate whether the students get help from the marking system of their native language to mark the definite/indefinite sentences in both languages.

1.2 Data

The data presented in this study has been collected from modern standard written Farsi[3] and a dialect of the contemporary language, considered standard spoken Farsi (Tehrani), which is used in colloquial conversations and informal written forms. The examples that are provided in this study, have been gathered from the informants whose first language is Farsi and all of them are from the same dialectic region of Tehran.

The empirical data has been gathered in an institutional setting through a quasi-experimental method. Thirty-five students of the English language, aged between fifteen and thirty, who were taking part in an EFL course were asked to participate in this study. The proficiency level of these students is evaluated as intermediate and according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) levels, they are categorized as 'Independent Users' (B1)[4], who are able to understand the main ideas of conversations, which contain the vocabulary used in familiar situations and can deal with them in most of the cases.

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[3] What is considered modern standard Farsi in this study is the language used by the contemporary average educated Farsi speakers in the respective language area (here the urban area of Tehran).

[4] B1: Those who are categorized in the B1 level can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans (CEFR global scale).

The students, whose first language is Farsi, were given a very short silent animated film to watch by their teacher, and they were asked to write the story of this film in three ways: spoken Farsi, written Farsi, and English. The procedure of producing the texts was kept under control only to the extent that, the students were asked and observed to produce the texts individually and independently and the rest of the procedure was left to be as natural as possible. Then the collected examples were coded in order to find definite/indefinite markers. Extracted from such a collection, the examples were used in different parts of this thesis. In the method of gathering the data, I was inspired by Päivi Juvonen's (2000) idea, of using some comic strips and asking the students to write a story for them.

Besides, the real data that I have gathered from the students I have also used myself as an informant to have supplementary data just in a few cases that will be reiterated through footnotes.

For the practical purposes, in the transcription or the provided examples, whenever I have to refer to some ill-formed sentences, I will mark them by an asterisk.

For transcribing the examples, three lines are provided. The first line is the transcription of examples in Farsi, which has been produced by the native speakers, the second line is the morpho-syntactic translation of the first line, and the third line is its English equivalent. The transcription is done by using the Latin alphabet with the exception of adding some symbols from IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) when the Latin alphabet lacks the symbols for some specific sounds. Those symbols and abbreviations of grammatical structures are explained in the appendix.

2. Theoretical Background
2.1 An Overview of the Definite/Indefinite Marking System in English
According to Gundel et al. (1993), the Givenness Hierarchy introduces a cognitive hierarchy to the hearer which helps him/her to locate the referent and identify it.

This hierarchy provides an expression that shows "the discourse status of the referent" in relation to the hearer's background knowledge (in Hedberg et al. 2009: 1):

FOC > ACT > FAM > UID > REF > TID

It this/that/this N that N the N indefinite this N a N

Hedberg et al. (2009) suggest some examples to clarify the Hierarchy (authors' emphasis):

(1) TID (Type-Identifiable)

Ex. 1

I couldn't sleep last night. **A dog** kept me awake.

(2) REF (Referentiality)

Ex. 2

I couldn't sleep last night. **This dog next door** kept me awake.

(3) UID (Unique Identifiability)

Ex. 3

I couldn't sleep last night. **The dog next door** kept me awake.

(4) FAM (Familiarity)

Ex. 4

I couldn't sleep last night. **That dog next door** kept me awake.

(T)ype-(ID)entifiable, as shown in example (1), is the weakest status of the Givenness Hierarchy. In this status, the hearer just needs to have basic background knowledge about what a dog is. (REF)erentiality which is considered synonymous to specificity, is shown by example (2). It is related to a colloquial indefinite sentence in which the hearer needs to know what a dog is and relate it to the phrase 'next door' to create a "unique representation" of the noun phrase. Example (3) which shows a status called (U)nique (ID)entifiability, refers to a unique referent for 'the dog next door'. In example (4) which is known as (FAM)iliarity status, the hearer should have the necessary background knowledge to locate it in his/her long-term memory. The next status which is called (ACT)ivated requires that the hearer's representation be in his/her "working memory" as shown in example (5):

Ex. 5

A girl is driving a red car. / The girl is driving **a red car.** / **A girl** is driving that red car. / That girl is driving **a red car**.

The last status is (FOC)us in which the hearer's representation must be at his/her "current focus of attention" as shown in example (6):

Ex. 6

I saw **a van** in the parking yesterday. Anita was driving **a van** this morning, of course it was *the van* I had seen yesterday.

If we intend to relate the Givenness Hierarchy to spoken and written Farsi, the above-mentioned examples will be as follows:

(1) TID

Example 1 in Hedberg *et al*. (2009), shows that in spoken form, indefiniteness is marked by the numeral one '*yek*' or numeral one together with the indefinite marker *'-i'* and in written form it is indicated either by the numeral one or by the indefinite marker *'-i'*. Spoken and written Farsi examples, written by some students can be provided to illustrate this point:

Spoken:
Ex. 7:
Ye ped[æ][5]r mikhad shæm'aye ruye keyke tævælode pesæresho ba kebrit roshæn kone.
One father WANT-3SG candle -a(Pl.) -ye (possessive) on-e (possessive) cake-e (possessive) birthday-e (possessive) his son-esh (possessive Adj)-o (object marker) by match to LIGHT DO-Subjuctive-3SG.
A father wants to light the candles on his son's birthday cake.

Written:
Ex. 8:
Yek pedær mikhahæd shæm'haye ruye keyke tævælode pesæræsh ra ba kebrit roshæn konæd.
One father WANT-3SG candle -ha(Pl) -e(Possessive) on cake -e(Possessive) birthday his son -ash(Possessive Adj) ra (object marker) by match to LIGHT DO-1SG.
A father wants to light the candles on his son's birthday cake.

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[5] Implies the open front unrounded vowel according to the IPA (International Phonetics Association) chart.

(2) REF

It seems that in Farsi, statuses 2, 3 and 4 of the Givenness Hierarchy, can all be shown by getting help of demonstratives '*in/an*' (this/that) and their meaning could be either specific or non-specific (depending on the context).

Spoken:

Ex. 9:

In pedær mikhad shæmaye ruye keyke tævælode pesæresho ba kebrit roshæn kone.
This father WANT-Present-3SG candle-a (Pl) -y-e(possessive suffix) on cake-e (possessive suffix) birthday-e (possessive suffix) son-esh (possessive suffix) -o(object marker) by match LIGHT DO-Subjective-3SG.
*This father wants to light the candles on his son's birthday cake.

Written:

Ex. 10:

(In) pedær mikhahæd shæm'haye ruye cake tævælode pesæræsh ra ba kebrit roshæn konad.
(This) father WANT-Present-3SG candle -ha(Pl) -ye(possessive suffix) on cake -e(possessive suffix) birthday son -ash(possessive suffix) ra(object marker) by match LIGHT DO-Subjective-3SG.
The father wants to light the candles on his son's birthday cake.

(3) UID

It seems that in English, there is a subtle difference between *'this dog next door'* and *'the dog next door'* and when the definite marker *'the'* is used before an NP, it is 'uniquely identifiable' to the hearer. However, it seems that in Farsi they can both be shown by the use of determiners such as *'this/that'* (*'in/an'*), equally.

Spoken:

Ex. 11:

(In/un) pedære mikhad shæm'aye ruye cake tævælode pesæresho ba kebrit roshæn kone.
(This/that) father -e(definite marker) WANT-Present-3SG candle -a(Pl) -ye(possessive suffix) on cake -e(possessive suffix) birthday -e(possessive suffix) son -esh(possessive suffix) -o(object marker) by match LIGHT DO-Subjective-3SG.
This/that father wants to light the candles on his son's birthday cake.

Written:

Ex. 12:

(In/an) pedær mikhahæd shæm'haye ruye cake tævælode pesæræsh ra ba kebrit roshæn konad.

(This/that) father WANT-Present-3SG candle -ha(Pl) -ye(possessive suffix) on cake -e(possessive suffix) birthday son -ash(possessive suffix) ra(object marker) by match LIGHT DO-Subjective-3SG.

The father wants to light the candles on his son's birthday cake.

(4) FAM

This status seems to be the same in both languages, since the use of *'an'* (that) in the sentence below requires that the speaker and the hearer share the same background knowledge on the piece of information that is discussed.

Spoken:

Ex. 13:

Un pedære mikhad shæmaye ruye cake tævælode pesæresho ba kebrit roshæn kone.

That father -e(definite marker) WANT-Present-3SG candle -a(Pl) -ye(possessive suffix) on cake -e(possessive suffix) birthday -e(possessive suffix) son -esh(possessive suffix) -o(object marker) by match LIGHT DOSubjective-3SG.

That father wants to light the candles on his son's birthday cake.

Written:

Ex. 14:

An pedær mikhahæd shæmhaye ruye cake tævælode pesæræsh ra ba kebrit roshæn konad.

That father WANT-Present-3SG candle-ha(Pl)-y-e(possessive suffix) on cake-e(possessive suffix) birthday son -ash(possessive suffix) ra (object marker) by match LIGHT DO-Subjective-3SG.

That father wants to light the candles on his son's birthday cake.

2.2 An Overview of Definite/ Indefinite Marking System in Spoken and Written Farsi

Generally, it can be stated that there are nine ways of marking noun phrases as definite or indefinite in written and spoken Farsi:

	Spoken	Written

Indefinite	*1) Quantifiers*
	Ex. **Ye(k)** mærd
	     A man
	2) Quantifier and -i (indefinite marker)
	Ex. **Ye(k)** mærd**i**
	     A man-**i**
	     A man
	3) Quantifier and –e (indefinite marker)
	  Ex. **Ye(k)** mærd**e**
	       A man**-e**
	       A man
		1) Quantifiers
		Ex. **Yek** mærd
		     A man
		2) -i (indefinite marker) (existential quantifier)
		Ex. Mærd**i**
		   Man-**i**
		   A man

Definite	*1)'-e' (Definite marker suffix)*
	Ex. Mærd**e**
	     Man-**e**
	     The man
	2) -o/ro as the spoken forms of object marker 'ra'
	Ex. Film**o** didi?
	     Film-**o** SEE-Past-2SG?
	     Did you see **the** film?
	Ex. Seda **ro** shenidi?
	     Noise **ro** HEAR-2SG?
	     Did you hear **the** noise?
		1) Demonstratives
		Ex. **In/an** mærd
		       This/that man
		2) Object marker 'ra'
		Ex. Ketab **ra** biavær.
		     Book **ra** BRING-IMP.
		     Bring **the** book.

Table 1: General rules of definiteness/ indefiniteness in spoken and written Farsi

The most important markers of definiteness in written Farsi are the demonstratives '*in/an*' (this/that) and the direct object marker *'ra'* which will be discussed in section 2.2.1. Definite markers in spoken Farsi have not been studied as much as they have been in written Farsi.

One way to mark definite noun phrases in spoken Farsi is adding the definite marker suffix *'-e'* to nouns which are construed as 'the noun mentioned'. The other way of marking definiteness is using *'-o'* or *'ro'* which are the spoken forms of the direct object marker *'ra'*. Definite noun phrase markers will be discussed in 2.2.2.

Indefiniteness in written Farsi can either be marked by the numeral *'one'* or by adding the suffix '-*i*', which will be discussed in section 2.2.3. Regarding indefiniteness in spoken Farsi, there are three main ways: either to use the numeral '*one'* or to use the numeral *'one'* together with *'-i'* or '-e' (indefinite marker suffixes). Indefiniteness in spoken Farsi will be discussed in section 2.2.4.

2.2.1 Definiteness in Written Farsi

2.2.1.1 When a definite noun is the direct object of the verb, it is marked by the addition of the object marker *'ra'*:

Ex. 15:

Ketab **ra** be mæn dad.

Book **ra**(object marker) to me GIVE-Past-3SG.

S/he gave me **the** book.

2.2.1.2 "When the antecedent of the relative clause is a definite direct object, object marker *'ra'* is attached to the head noun and is followed by relative pronoun '*ke*' (that)" (Mahootian, Gebhardt 1997: 31):

Ex. 16:

Pedar keyke tævælod **ra ke** do sham' ruye an bud, ruye miz gozasht.

The father cake -e(possessive marker) birthday **ra** (object marker) **which** two candle on – e(possessive) that BEPast-3SG, on the table PUT-Past-3SG.

The father put **the** birthday cake, **which** had two candles on it, on the table.

The demonstrative '-*i*' can also be attached to the head noun in this example. In this case, the bare head noun is definite (Mahootian, Gebhardt 1997: 31). Windfuhr (1979:35) however

calls this"*’ya-ye ta'riff/eshare’*, referential/demonstrative *i*", which by occurring before relative clauses, helps make a specific indefinite noun phrase:

Ex. 17:

Ketab**i ra** ke gofti, khæridam.

Book **-i**(Demonstrative) **ra** (object marker) that TALK-Past-2SGed about -you(suf) BUY-Past-1SGI (suf)

I bought **the** book **that** you talked about.

2.2.1.3 Demonstrative adjectives and possessives can also together with the object marker 'ra' make a definite noun:

Ex.18:

a) Lotfæn **an** ketabe kuchæk **ra** biavær.

Please **that**(demonstrative) book -e(possessive marker) small **ra** (object marker) BRING-IMP.

Bring **that** small book please.

b) Lotfan ketab**am ra** biavær.

Please book **-am**(possessive suffix) **ra** (object marker) BRING-IMP

Please bring **my** book.

In some cases, the demonstrative is optional. For example if there is only one green book, we can either say, 'bring *the* green book' or 'bring *that* green book', but if there are two or more green books, we will have to say '*that* green book' or distinguish it by the use of an adjective, for example: 'bring *that small* green book'.

2.2.1.4 Another way of definiteness marking in Farsi, which is used a lot in written texts, is using the demonstratives an/in in pronominal position while the definite object marker 'ra' is in the postnominal position:

Ex. 19:

In æx **ra** baraye to aværde'æm.

This picture **ra** (object marker) for you BRING-PP-1SG.

I have brought **this** picture for you.

2.2.1.5 "If more than one definite noun forms the direct object of the verb, these are regarded as a syntactical whole and 'ra' is placed after the final noun" (Lambton 2003: 4):

Ex. 20:

Ketab væ medad væ daftær **ra** biavar.

Book and pencil and notebook **ra** (object marker) BRING-IMP.

Bring **the** book and **the** pencil and **the** notebook.

2.2.1.6 When we have more than one adjective, all of them get '-*e*' (possessive suffix) and the last one is added with this suffix to the end of the noun phrase which is the object of verb and takes object marker -ra (Mahootian, Gebhardt 1997: 67):

Ex. 21:

Shæhr**e** zibay**e** tarikhiy**e** Shiraz **ra** didæm.

City **-e**(possessive suffix) beautiful **-e**(possessive suffix) ancient **-e**(possessive suffix) Shiraz **ra** (object marker) I SEE-PAST-1SG.

I saw **the** ancient beautiful Shiraz.

2.2.2 Definiteness in Spoken Farsi

2.2.2.1 In order to mark definiteness in Spoken Farsi the suffix *'e'* is used after the noun phrase.

This suffix seems to be the newest of the definiteness markers that are mentioned in the present paper. As Windfuhr mentions, Andreas was the first person to notice the definite marker suffix *'e'* in some dialects in Iran (Windfuhr 1979: 41). Nowadays *'e'* is used to mark definiteness in spoken Farsi and it is not just restricted to certain dialects:

Ex. 22:

Pesære nætunest shæm'ha ro khamush kone.

The boy -e(definite suffix) COULDN'T-Past-3SG candle -ha(PL) ro (object marker) BLOW OUT DOSubjective-3SG.

The boy couldn't blow out the candles.

2.2.2.1.1 We can have both *'e'* and *'ro'* attached to an NP and when the object marker *'ro'* is used after the definite marker the suffix *'e'*, a phonological change seems to happen and *'e'* is pronounced *'æ'*:

Ex. 23:

Suræte **pedæræ** ro misuzune.

Face of **the** father BURN-Present-3SG

He burns **the father**'s face.

2.2.2.1.2 When a noun ends with a vowel, an *'h'* is inserted before *'e'*:

Ex. 24:

Babahe vaseye pesæresh tævalod gereft.

The father -he(definite suffix) for son -esh(possessive marker) birthday party HOLD-Past-3SG

The father held a birthday party for his son.

2.2.2.2 The object marker *'ra'* is a free morpheme which is used in written Farsi. However, it can also change into a bound morpheme in spoken Farsi. It has two spoken forms which are *'-o'* and *'ro'*. *'O'* is used after nouns ending with a consonant and *'ro'* is used after nouns ending with a vowel:

Ex. 25:

a) Mæn **keyko** mizaram ruye miz.

I **cake -o**(object marker) PUT-PROG-1SG on the table.

I put **the cake** on the table.

b) Pedæresh tælash kærd **shæm'a ro** khamush kone.

His father TRY-Past-3SG **candle -a**(PL) **ro** (object marker) BLOW OUT-Subjective-3SG.

His father tried to blow out **the candles.**

2.2.2.3 a) If there are two or more definite nouns, only the last one gets the definite marker suffix *'e'*:

Ex. 26:

Dokhtær o **pesære** ræftæn.

Girl 'n **boy -*e***(definite suffix) GO-Past-3PL.

The girl and **the boy** went.

b) If we talk about a group of people or things, we use the plural marker *'a'* for the last noun, which is the spoken form of the plural marker *'ha'*:

Ex. 27:

Dokhtær o **pesæra** ræftænd.

Girl and **boy** *-a* (PL) GO-Past-3PL.

The girls and **the boys** went.

2.2.2.4 Demonstratives can co-occur with *'-e'* to specify the noun in spoken Farsi:

Ex. 28:

a) **In/un** ketab**e**.

This/that book**-e** (definite marker).

This/that book.

b) **Hamin/hamun** ketab**e**.

This/that very book**-e** (definite marker).

This/that very(specific) book.

2.2.2.5 Demonstrative adjectives and possessives also together with the spoken form of the object marker *'ra'* can make a definite noun:

Ex. 29:

a) Lotfæn **un ketab kuchikæ ro** biyar.

Please **that book small** -æ (definite marker) **ro** (object marker) BRING-IMP.

Please bring **that small book**.

b) Lotfæn **ketabæmo** biyar.

Please **book -æm**(possessive suffix) **-o**(object marker) BRING-IMP.

Please bring **my book.**

2.2.2.6 When there are more than one adjective, all of them get *'-e'* (possessive suffix) and the last one is added with this suffix to the end of the noun phrase which is the object of the verb and takes the object marker *'ra'* (Mahootian, Gebhardt 1997: 67):

Ex. 30:

Shæhr**e** zibay**e** tarikhiy**e** Shiraz**o** didæm.

City **-e**(possessive suffix) beautiful **-e**(possessive suffix) ancient **-e**(possessive suffix) Shiraz **-o** (object marker) I SAW-Past-1SG.

I saw **the ancient beautiful city of Shiraz.**

2.2.3 Indefiniteness in Written Farsi

In written Farsi, the numeral '*one*' or the suffix '-*i*' can be markers of indefiniteness in general. There are some other specific ways of using these two markers which will be discussed below.

2.2.3.1 In written Farsi *'yek'* can replace *'-i'*:

Ex. 31:

Pedæ**ri**/**yek** pedar.

Father **-i**(IND marker) or **one** father

A father

2.2.3.2 When a noun is modified by an adjective, the suffix *'-i'* could be either used together with an adjective or a noun to help in specifying the noun (Shabani Jadidi, Brookshaw 2010:108):

Ex. 32:

a) **Ketabe kuchæki** khæridæm.

Book -e(possessive suffix) **small**-**i** (indefinite marker) BUY-Past-1SG.

I bought **a small book**.

b) **Ketabi kuchæk** khæridæm.

Book -i(indefinite marker) **small** BUY-Past -1SG.

I bought **a small book**.

2.2.3.3 If a noun is made plural by the suffix *'an'*, the suffix *'-i'* can be either used together with an adjective or a noun:

Ex. 33:

a) **Mærdane bozorgi** inja bude'ænd.

Men-e (possessive suffix) **great-i** (indefinite suffix) here BE-PP-3PL.

Some great men have been here.

b) **Mærdani bozorg** inja bude'ænd.

Men-i (indefinite suffix) **great** here BE-PP-3PL.

Some great men have been here.

2.2.3.4 For more than one indefinite noun we can use only one *'ye(k)'* or one *'-i'*, we may also drop *'yek'* if it is in subject position (Lambton 2003: 4):

Ex. 34:

a) **(Yek)** ketab væ medad væ dæftær biavær.

(A) book and pencil and notebook BRING-IMP.

Bring **a** book and **a** pencil and **a** notebook.

b) Ketab væ medad væ dæftæri biavær.

Book and pencil and notebook**-i** (indefinite ssuffix) BRING-IMP.

Bring **a** book and **a** pencil and **a** notebook.

2.2.4 Indefiniteness in Spoken Farsi

2.2.4.1 In spoken language *'ye'* (spoken form of *'yek'*) which means 'one' can co-occur with *'i'*:

Ex. 35:

Ye ketabi khundæm.

A book -i(indefinite suffix) READ-Past-1SG.

I read **a book.**

2.2.4.2 In spoken Farsi 'ye' can co-occur with *'-e'*, in this case it is known to the speaker but not to the hearer (specificity) i.e. it is specified but not definite:

Ex. 36:

Ye mærde avordesh.

One man-e (definite suffix) BRING-Past-3SG-it (sufffix).

A man brought it.

2.2.4.3 A rule was mentioned in 2.2.4.3, stating that the demonstrative *'-i'* can be attached to the head noun and is followed by the relative pronoun *'ke'*. In this case the head noun is indefinite but specific to the speaker in spoken Farsi. The noun is preceded by *'ye'*:

Ex. 37:

Ye dokhtæri ke eynæk dasht, umæd.

A girl -i(indefinite suffix) who glasses WEAR-Past PROG-3SG COME-Past-3SG.

A girl who was wearing glasses, came.

2.2.4.4 Regarding the rule mentioned above when a noun is modified by an adjective, '-i' could be used together with an adjective or noun to help in specifying the noun (the numeral one also can appear together with them in spoken Farsi) (Shabani Jadidi, Brookshaw 2010:108):

Ex. 38:

Ye ketabe koochik**i**.

A book small**-i** (indefinite suffix).

A small book.

2.2.4.5 If the noun is generic (it is general rather than specific) *'ra'* or *'-i'* are not used after the definite singular noun:

Ex. 39:

Mæn **ketab** dust daræm.

I **book** LIKE-Present-1SG.

I like **books**.

2.2.4.6 When we have more than one adjective, all of them get the definite marker suffix *'-e'* and the last one is added with this suffix to the end of the noun phrase which is the object of the verb and takes *'o'*, the spoken form of the object marker *'ra'* (Mahootian, Gebhardt 1997: 67):

Ex. 40:

Shæhr**e** zibay**e** kuchæk**i ra** didæm.

Town**-e** (possessive suffix) beautiful**-e** (possessive suffix) small**-e** (possessive suffix) **ra** (object marker) I SEE Past-1SG.

I saw **a small beautiful town**.

2.3 'E' as a Unique Definite Marker in Spoken Farsi

Windfuhr (1979) mentions some controversial ideas about the definite marker *'e'*, which are the results of some research conducted from 1875 to 1970 by different scholars. He says that Andreas (unpublished notes 1875: 82) who was a German Iranologist, has been the first person to recognize *'e'* as a definite marker and it has been mentioned in the notes he has written from 1875 to 1882. He did not publish his notes but his students Christensen, Barr and Henning, published them in 1939. According to Christensen, *'e'* is a *'demonstrative'*

(1930: 31; Ac or 12 [1934]: 310, in Andreas 1939: 42 fn. 1), while Xorasani (1950: 529) mentions that *'e'* has the same meaning as the definite *'i'*, for example in:

Ex. 41:

"Folan do pesar daræd bozorg-**i** (pesær-**e** bozorg, bozorgtar-**e**) panj, va kuchek-**i** (pesar-**e** kuchek, kuchektar-**e**) chahar sale ast.

X has two sons, **the older**(-i) one (i.e. the older boy, the older(-*e*)) is five and **the younger** one (i.e. the younger boy, the younger(-*e*))is four years old."

Xorasani (1950), also says that *'e'* can be attached to proper nouns as is clear in:

Ex. 42:

Hoseyne.

***The Hoseyn mentioned**.[6]

Nye (1955: 79) and Jazayeri-Paper (1961: 264-67) call it *'definite'*, "the one mentioned."

Lazard (1957: 69) called it *'demonstrative'* and said, "it is mutually exclusive with plural – ha." Nye's idea led to Hincha's (1961) conclusion that *'e'* and the plural *'ha'* are opposites but as Windfuhr (1979: 41) claims in the following example, they cannot have a "one to one opposition":

Ex. 43:

Kaje **bozorge**.

The big pine (there).

Milanian (1970: 168) after a more detailed investigation, says that while after numbers greater than one in 'standard' (i.e. written) Farsi, a bare noun is used, in colloquial Farsi, the referential marker *(h)a* is used instead of *'e'*:

Ex. 44:

(**un**) se ta marda amadand.

(**those**) **the three men** have come.

It can be claimed that all these scholars have considered *'e'* as a definite marker from different points of view. It can also be concluded that this phenomenon has not been studied much

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[6] Such a structure does not seem to exist in English. In Farsi, especially in spoken form, it happens that a speaker uses such a structure to mark a proper name as specific.

because as Milanian mentions, it had not been a part of 'standard' Farsi which was only the written form of the language. However, this difference between written and spoken Farsi seems to have happened to compensate for a lacking function.

2.4 'Ra' as a Complex Definite Marker in Written and Spoken Farsi

'Ra' is generally known as an object marker. Besides, it has been considered by some grammarians to be a definite object marker even though, using it together with indefinite nouns is also possible. That is one of the reasons why some scholars like Windfuhr (1979), Karimi (1989) and Geranpayeh (2000) have claimed that marking specificity is more important than marking definiteness in Farsi. Windfuhr also states that "the impression created by frequency that *'ra'* is only an object marker is misleading". He says that it happens because the function of *'ra'* as a case marker has been perplexed with its function as a marker of reference (1979: 49). Some grammarians like Lazard (1970) say that *'ra'* is used only as a definite object marker and its use as an indefinite object marker goes back to early Farsi and thus it does not function in this way. Regarding this issue, Windfuhr comments on the function of *'ra'* as a referent (1979: 52). An example to make his comments clearer could be:

Ex. 45:

a) **Ruznameh** khandæm.

Newspaper READ-Past-1SG.

I read **a newspaper**.

b) **Ruznameh ra** khandæm.

Newspaper ra (object marker) READ-Past-1SG.

I read **the newspaper**.

Another complex function of *'ra'* can be its co-occurrence with the indefinite suffix *'-i'* which specifies the indefinite object. As a result, we can say that the noun phrase has a unique referent for the speaker:

Ex. 46:

Ketabi ra baz kærd.

Book-i (idefinite marker) **ra**(object marker) OPEN-Past-3SG.

S/he opened **a book**.

Windfuhr mentions that, the noun 'book' is (–definite) due to '-i' but is (+specific) because of *'ra'*. He says "while all (+definite) objects are (+specific) and take *'ra'*, not all (+specific) objects are (+definite)" (1979: 55). According to Donnellan (1966) the following examples can refer to referential and attributive definite noun phrases. From the referential point of view, the speaker means that s/he wants a special pen that cannot be found and from the attributive point of view, s/he means that any pen can be helpful:

Ex. 47:

a) Referential

Yek khodkar mikhahæm, (væli **hich** khodkari peyda nemikonæm).

One pen WANT-PROG-1SG, (but **any** don't FIND-Present-1SG).

I am looking for **a pen**, (but I don't find **any**).

b) Attributive

Yek khodkar mikhahæm, (væli peydayæ**sh** nemikonæm).

One pen WANT-PROG-1SG, (but **it** don't FIND-Present-1SG).

I am looking for **a pen**, (but I don't find **it**).

In the examples above the pen can refer to any pen (non-specific) or a special pen (specific).
It is because of using *'any'* in (a) and the pronoun *'it'* in (b), but if the speaker does not give this extra information to disambiguate the indefinite NP and only uses the first part of the sentence, it can be considered either specific or non-specific. Overall, it seems that in contrast with the claims of some scholars who say *'ra'* is functioning only as a definite object marker, *'ra'* can specify a noun without making it definite.

## 2.5 The Problem of Specificity and Definiteness in Farsi

Generally it can be said that definite nouns in Farsi are shown by a bare noun and there is no special definite marker in written Farsi, only in some cases words like *'ra'*, which is an object marker, are used to specify a noun. In spoken Farsi, however, there is also another way to show definiteness which is adding the suffix *'-e'* to the end of the word (as was extensively discussed in section 2.3. Indefiniteness in written Farsi is indicated by the numeral '*yek*' (i.e. one) and adding the suffix *'-i'* to the noun, (2.2.3.2) and indefiniteness in spoken Farsi is shown by the spoken form of this numeral, '*ye'* in most of the cases.

There are different ideas about definiteness marking in Farsi from different scholars' point of view. According to Windfuhr (1979), a noun is considered *"unknown"* or *"indefinite"* when it

is referring to "one or more individuals" among the other objects of the same class, without specifying the individuals. In addition, a noun is called *'definite'* if it does not occur together with *'-i'* as the only sign of indefiniteness. He also mentions that: "the interesting point here is that there is only one 'unknown' case" (Windfuhr 1979: 31). The other scholars, however do not seem to agree with Windfuhr on this idea and some people like Mahootian (1997), Karimi (2003) and Lambton (2003) have offered complementary ideas. They offer that in addition to the suffix *'-i'*, there is another indefinite marker which is the numeral *'yek'* (i.e one). Although numerals are used largely in written Farsi, the trend is different in current modern spoken Farsi. It can be stated that the numeral *'ye'* (i.e. the spoken form of yek) together with the suffix *'-i'* or suffix *'-e'* are used by people to mark indefinite nouns in spoken Farsi.

Some Farsi grammarians have considered the issue of definiteness and indefiniteness from a different point of view. They believe that marking specific and non-specific noun phrases in Farsi are of greater importance than marking definiteness and indefiniteness. Some of these ideas will be mentioned below.

Geranpayeh (2000) in his article (*the acquisition of the English article system by Farsi Speakers*) mentions that by studying Farsi syntax, we can say that there is no definite marker in Farsi but "there is a kind of specificity marker" instead of that. He tries to clarify his idea by using the following figure (figure 1):
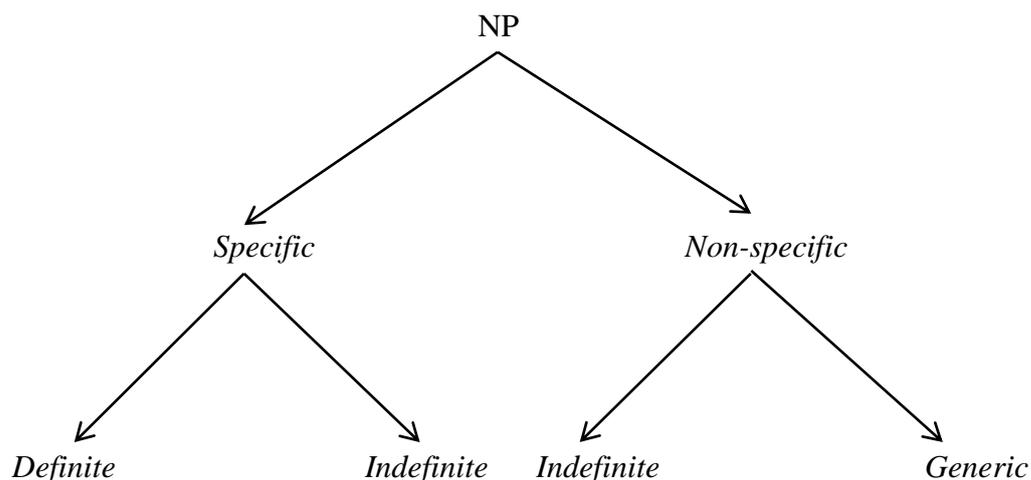
Figure 1: specificity/non-specificity in Farsi
Geranpayeh (2000: 42)

According to Geranpayeh, definite noun phrases are always specific while indefinite noun phrases can be either specific or non-specific and generics are always non-specific. In other words, definite nouns are supposed to refer to the nouns, which are known to both speaker and hearer; indefinites can be either only known to the speaker or unknown to both speaker and hearer (2000: 42). It is shown in the following figure (figure 2):

SPECIFIC

INDEFINITE   DEFINITE

Known only   Known to the
to the speaker   speaker and the hearer
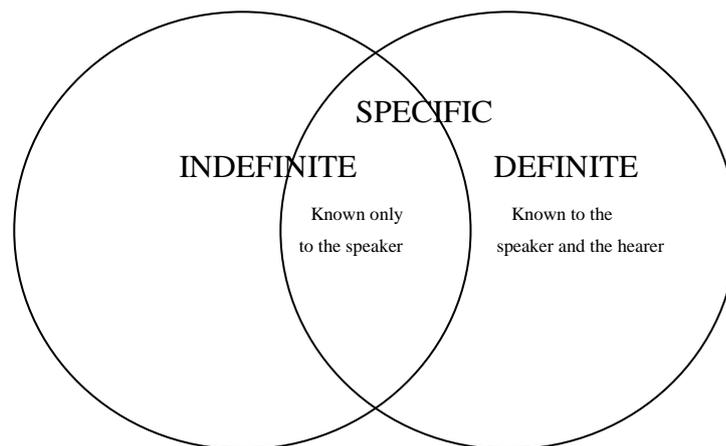
Figure 2: specificity vs. definite/indefinite

Geranpayeh (2000: 42)

Karimi (2005) is the other scholar who believes that noun phrases in Farsi can be marked for specificity as well as definiteness. She states that specific noun phrases that are in direct object position, are marked by *'ra'*. She says that specificity is an important factor in this process and every noun phrase marked by *'ra'* seems to be specific (1989:60).

Ex. 48:

Pesær bæche shæm'ha ra foot kærd.

The boy candle -ha (Pl) ra (object marker) BLOW OUT-Past-3SG

The boy blew out the candles.

In figure 3, she provides a more complete diagram to elaborate on the issue of specificity in Farsi and mentions that figure 3 is revised form of Enç's (1991) definition for specificity. According to Enç (1991), specificity is related to having strong and weak antecedents (as mentioned in the Givenness Hierarchy in section 2.1). She believes that definite DPs (demonstrative phrases) are the DPs that have a very strong relationship with their "previously established discourse referent" (Enç 1991: 1).

That is why definite DPs such as NPs, which are modified by definite articles or demonstratives, pronouns and proper nouns, are always specific.

Ex. 49:

Pedære u mikhast **shæm'ha ra** roshæn konæd.

Father -e(possessive suffix) **he** WANT-Past-3SG **candle -ha**(Pl) **ra** (object marker) LIGHT DO-Subjective-3SG.

His father wanted to light **the candles**.

DP
Specific
Non-specific
Definite
Indefinite
Existential
Kind-level
Partitive
Modified
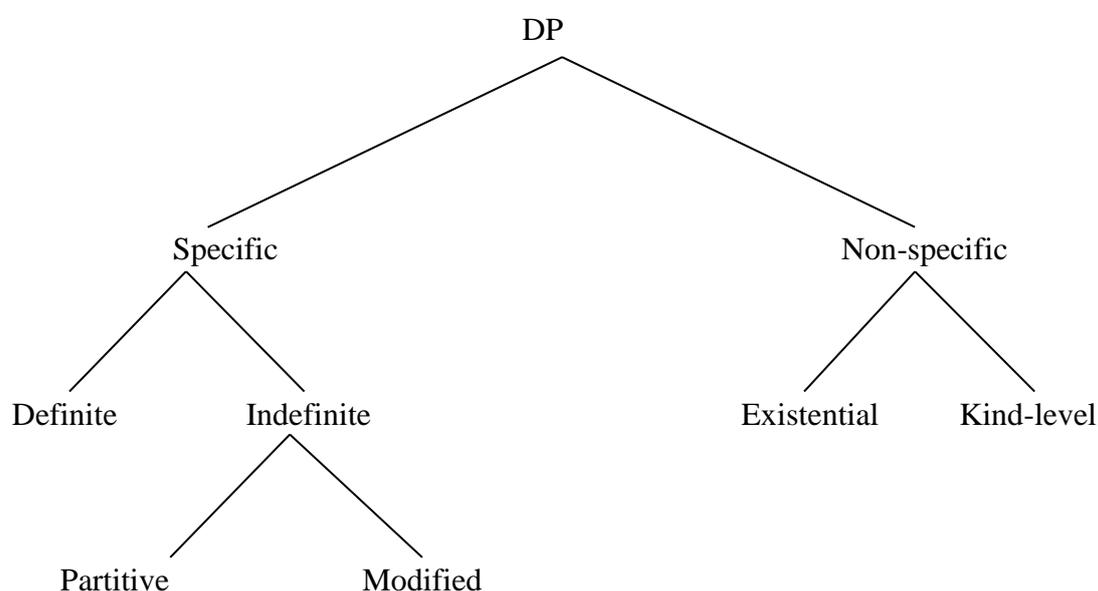
Figure 3: Specificity in Farsi
(Karimi 2005: 27)

Since there is an ambiguity in how much indefinite DPs "denote an inclusion relation to the previously established discourse" they are said to have a weak antecedent (Enç 1991: 2).
Ex. 50:

Pesær bæcheye digæri æz rah resid.

Boy child-y-e (possessive suffix) **another-i** (indefinite suffix) ARRIVE-Past-3SG.

Another boy arrived.

Karimi also mentions that there are two kinds of indefinites: specific and non-specific (2005: 26-27 and 2003: 97). She calls figure 3, a "revised version of Enç's definition of specificity."

According to her, indefinite specific either" denotes inclusion or is singled out in discourse" for example by the presence of a relative clause. However, non-specific DPs have two signs: 1) they lack a referent (kind-level), 2) indicate existence (existential) (Karimi 2005: 27). The following examples can clarify the data provided in figure 3:

1) Definite:

Ex. 51:

In film dærbareye jæshne tævælode yek pesær bæche ast.

This film about -ye(possessive suffix) party -e(possessive suffix) birthday -e(possessive suffix) a little boy IS Present-3SG.

This film is about the birthday party of a little boy.

2) Partitive:

Ex. 52:

Bahar **yeki æz medadha** ra khærid.

Bahar **one of pencil -ha** (PL) ra (object marker) BUY-Past-3SG.

Bahar bought **one of the pencils**.

3) Modified:

Ex. 53:

Maryam **yeki æz ketabhayi ra ke diruz xærideh budæm**, bærdasht.

Maryam **one of book -ha**(Pl) **ra** (object marker) **that yesterday BUY-**PP **WERE**-Past-1SG TAKE-Past-3SG.

Maryam took **one of the books that I had bought yesterday**.

4) Kind-level:

Ex. 54:

Ma har ruz **sib** mikhorim.

We every day **apple** EAT-1PL.

We eat **apples** every day.

5) Existential:

Ex. 55:

To emruz **yek sib** khordi.

You ate **an apple** today.

2.6 The Fluctuation Hypothesis

The *'Fluctuation Hypothesis'*, introduced by Ionin et al. (2004), refers to the L2-learners' erroneous choices of articles while learning how to use them in the second language. To find the stem of these errors they establish the setting of a parameter called 'the *Article Choice Parameter*' and they argue that "there is parametric variation in the lexical specifications of articles" (ibid. 2). According to this parameter they state that articles can cross linguistically mark the feature [+definite] or the feature [+specific] (ibid. 15):

> The Article Choice Parameter (for two-article languages)
> A language which has two articles distinguishes them as follows:
> The Definiteness Setting: Articles are distinguished on the basis of definiteness.
> The Specificity Setting: Articles are distinguished on the basis of specificity.

If this parameter is applied to Farsi, it can be said that Farsi is in the group of languages that have the *'specificity setting'* and English is among the languages that have the *'definiteness setting'*.

The errors that the L2-learners make may not be random; they indicate a "possible UG[7] parameter system setting" and they could stem in different parameter settings. While learning how to use the articles in the second language, the L2-learners may fluctuate between at least two parameter settings and finally choose one setting which may not be appropriate for the target language. The *'Fluctuation Hypothesis'* introduces two findings (ibid. 22):

> 1) L2-learners have full access to UG principles and parameter settings.
> 2) L2-learners fluctuate between different parameter settings until the input leads them to set the parameter to the appropriate value.

L2-learners may use *'the'*, both with definite and indefinite specific NPs or also use *'a'* with both indefinite and definite non-specific NPs. Ionon et al. call this phenomenon the *"Fluctuation Hypothesis"* since the meaning of the NP fluctuates between definiteness and

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[7] Universal Grammar. A detailed review on different views towards UG-access as well as L1-transfer, is presented in Epstein et al. (1996).

specificity: "*the* is both definite and indefinite and *a* is both specific and non-specific" (in Garcia & Hawkins 2009: 2).

3. Analysis

In the animated short film that the students watched, there were three main characters: a father and his two sons. While referring to these characters, students were supposed to introduce them to the story at first with indefinite NPs and then refer to them by marking them as definite NPs. Therefore the first mention of these NPs are supposed to be indefinite and the ones that come later are definite NPs. However, in the present data most of the students have chosen to introduce a character and then relate the others to the first one by the use of some possessives.

In the gathered data, sixteen out of thirty-five people used *'the'* for the *'candles'* that were introduced in the text for the first time and were indefinite specific NPs. Therefore, according to the *'Fluctuation Hypothesis'*, it seems that this has been a fluctuation between definiteness and specificity while making the choice of articles, because the same sentences, which have been written in Farsi, are marked by the *'zero article'*.

Considering the fact that definite specific NPs in Farsi are bare nouns, the students seem to have applied the same rule for the indefinite specific *'candles'* which were being introduced to the story for the first time. To be precise, nine people used the *'zero article'*, which was the correct form and five people used numerals and quantifiers, for example *'two candles'* or *'several candles'*.

The next frequent instance can be the use of possessives, which is noticeable. It takes place when they want to talk about the father and the son who are the main characters in this animated short film. It is so remarkable that thirty-two out of thirty-five students first introduce the father/son into the story as *'a father'/'a son'* and later they refer to them by using the possessive adjective *'his'*, for example *'his father'* or *'his son'*. The students apply the same rule to the English version of the story that they have provided. Although it seems correct in both languages, it can be said that in most cases that they can choose between the definite article *'the'* and the possessive adjective *'his'*, they tend to choose the possessive adjective. It can be said that the possessive adjective may be used to fill the gap that exists between the definite article *'the'* in English and the *'zero article'*, which is used to mark definite nouns in Farsi.

The above-mentioned NPs, provided by my students can be considered as known NPs to the writer/speaker but unknown to the reader/hearer. However, even if both of them have watched the animated film, the story still is narrated in the same way, so it can be stated that definiteness and specificity marking in Farsi are nearly the same. In addition, it can be mentioned that the trend is nearly the same in both written and spoken Farsi.

According to my data, this idea can also be supported by referring to the way students mark the same NPs in English: the number of people who use possessives in English as well as Farsi, is twenty-one out of thirty-five. In Farsi possessives are marked by a suffix (in this case it is the third person singular suffix), so the suffixes that are used are *'esh'* in spoken and *'ash'* in written Farsi. Furthermore, the instances of possessives used by each student in English are less than the ones that have been used in written and spoken Farsi. Table 2 showes the NPs produced in the data:

	Spoken Farsi	**Written Farsi**	**English**
Father Introduction	Ex. *Ye* pedær/ pedær*esh* A father/ his father	Ex.*Yek* pedær, pedær*i*/ pedær*ash* A father/ his father	Ex. A father/ his father
Son Introduction	Ex. *Ye* pesær/ pesære*sh* A son/ his son	Ex. *Yek* pesær/ pesæra*sh* A son/ his son	Ex. A son/ his son
Father Refernces	Ex. Un pedær/ pedær*esh*/ pedær*e* That father/ his father /the father	Ex. *An* pedær/ pedær*ash*/ pedær That father/ his father/ Father	Ex.The father/ his father
Son Refernces	Ex. Un pesar/ pesaresh/ pesare That son/ his son/ the son	Ex. An pesar/ pesarash/pesar That son/ his son/ the son	Ex. The son/ his son

Table 2: Definiteness/Indefiniteness and
Specificity/Nonspecificity Markers Used by the Students

3.1 Definiteness in Written Farsi by the Students

Considering the first mention and the later mentions of the words 'father' and 'son', the students have provided sixty-four NPs in this category, from which thirty-four are marked by the 'zero article', seventeen are marked by 'possessives', ten are specified by 'adjectives', and two of them are marked by 'determiners'.

3.2 Definiteness in Spoken Farsi by the Students

In order to mark the definiteness in the spoken Farsi, seventy NPs were produced, among which 25 were the suffix '-e' which (discussed in section 2.3), 23 were marked by possessives, eighteen were marked by the zero article, three were specified by adjectives, and one was marked by a determiner.

3.3 Definiteness in English by the Students

These people made seventy-nine sentences to refer to the definite NPs in English. Among these NPs, twenty-eight were marked by 'the', twenty-five by 'possessives', ten by zero article, and one by a 'determiner'.

3.4 Indefiniteness in Written Farsi by the Students

Overall sixty-seven NPs were produced to indicate indefinite NPs, twenty-nine of which were marked by 'possessives', thirteen marked by numeral 'yek' eleven were specified by 'adjectives', eight marked by the suffix 'i', four by the zero article, two were marked by both numeral 'yek' and suffix '-i', and two were wrongly marked by the spoken definite suffix 'e'.

3.5 Indefiniteness in Spoken Farsi by the Students

There were fifty-six instances of NPs marked as indefinites in the spoken Farsi, twenty-eight of which were marked by the 'possessives' (could be indefinite specifics), fourteen were marked by the numeral 'ye', seven were marked by both numeral 'ye' and suffix 'i', and three were marked by the 'zero article'.

3.6 Indefiniteness in English by the Students

In the English examples, seventy-four NPs were used to marked indefiniteness, twenty-three of these instances were marked by 'a', twenty two were marked by the possessives (could be indefinite specifics), seven NPs by 'the', six were marked by the zero article, four marked by the word 'one', and two were specified by adjectives.

4. Discussion

The language production used for the present study has been gathered in an institutional setting and the students have been asked to write a story about an animated short film. Their production, which shaped the primary material for this study, were taken as naturally produced storytelling of Farsi speaking EFL learners both in the written/spoken Farsi and in English. The primary material is, in this respect, real and not intuitive data. In addition, the perspective of this study is to examine the participants' method for using definite marking systems in both English and Farsi and compare them to the existing literature in this field. Therefore the result of this study is claimed to be driven from the real data. One of the ambitions of the present data could be that its endeavor in such a comparative analysis might serve some pedagogical purposes.

It was mentioned earlier that several scholars believe that Farsi marks noun phrases for specificity/non-specificity rather than definiteness/indefiniteness, while English marks nouns for definiteness/indefiniteness. The present study shows interesting instances of the choices of article that Farsi native speakers make when it comes to marking definiteness in English. It was also stated that definiteness is mostly marked by a bare noun, indefiniteness is marked by the numeral 'yek' (pre-positioned) or ye (pre-positioned) or suffix '-i' (i.e. one —post-positioned) and specificity can apply to both definite and indefinite NPs.

According to my data, it seems that the students face a difficulty while trying to make choices of articles. Their choice of articles can be well elaborated according to the *'Fluctuation Hypothesis'*, which states that L2-learners may fluctuate between the two parameter settings and finally choose one setting, which may not be appropriate for the target language (Ionon et al. 2004: 20). The marked NPs seem to have been chosen after being fluctuating between definiteness and specificity. This hypothesis could well support Windfuhr (1979), Mahootian (1997), Karimi (2003), Lambton (2003) and Geranpaye's (2000) ideas towards specificity/non-specificity marking and *'lack of strong definiteness/indefiniteness marking in Farsi'* that seems to have made it difficult for the Farsi Native speakers to distinguish between these two and make the correct choice to mark definiteness/indefiniteness or specificity/non-specificity.

The second point is about the common belief that zero articles in Farsi mark definite nouns. However, my data shows that a remarkable majority of the students tend to use the possessive

adjectives to mark definiteness of an NP and relate it to an NP that has already been introduced in the text in both Farsi and English. The link that the possessive adjectives create between the NPs, make them recognizable for the reader/hearer by referring them to the previous NPs, which are known to them.

It seems that this phenomenon could be defined by von Heusingr's (2002) idea when he says that specificity is *'referential property'* of an NP, which seems to cut across the distinction that exists between the definite and the indefinite. My students, who largely tried to define one NP by the help of another one, seem to have provided support for von Heusingr's idea. It seems that they have tried to introduce one NP and then by referring to that, specify the other NP. This issue does not seem to have been discussed much. In addition, the possessive adjectives, for Farsi speakers, clearly play a very important role in specifying the NP that is introduced later. Overall, possessive adjectives can be considered strong definite markers in English as well as Farsi, but the excessive use of them by the Farsi speaking L2-learners could be subject for further research.

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Appendix A:

List of Abbreviations:

1SG: first person singular

2SG: second person singular

3SG: third person singular

1PL: first person plural

2PL: second person plural

3PL: third person plural

æ: sounds like /æ/ according to IPA

DEF: definite

DP: demonstrative phrase

EFL: English as Foreign Language

IMP: imperative

IND: indefinite

L1: first language

L2: second language

NP: noun phrase

PL: plural

PP: present perfect

PROG: progressive

Appendix B:

The Story of the Animated Short Film

The animated short film, which was given to the students to watch is a short flash animation called *'birthday 2'* taken from http://www.gallegobros.com. The story is about a father and his two-year-old son. The father intends to celebrate his son's birthday and he tries to light the two candles, which are on the cake but whenever he lights a match, his son blows it out and consequently he does not succeed in lighting the candles. Suddenly the elder son of the family comes with a cigarette lighter in one hand and a spray in the other. He lights the lighter and holds the spray behind it, when he sprays it, a big fire is produced which is aimed at the candles. It seems that he has been meaning to help the father to light the candles so that his little brother cannot blow them off, but something else takes place instead of that. The fire is too big and it burns the father's head because he is standing right behind the cake. At the end, the younger son tries constantly to blow off the candles but he does not succeed.