

定冠詞と不定冠詞の機能と用法の考察

Consideration of the Function and Usage of Definite and Indefinite Articles

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要旨

英語には4つの冠詞、*the*、*a/an*、*some*、 \emptyset （ゼロ冠詞）がある。冠詞は主に名詞の前に置かれ、名詞を修飾する形容詞の働きをする。定冠詞である*the*は、相手にとってその名詞が何を意味するのかがわかるように、名詞の前に置かれる。2つの不定冠詞*a/an*と*some*は、一般的な名詞であるか、あるいは相手がその名詞が指し示すものについて知らない場合に使用される。これらに加えて、名詞が冠詞を必要としない特定の状況もあることから、この場合には限定詞として \emptyset ゼロ冠詞を使用する。本論は、文法的な観点から、英語における冠詞の適切な選択を理解することの限界と、第二言語学習者が冠詞の意味論的思考を理解することの利点を明らかにする。英語の冠詞体系についての意味的重要性を説明するための教材として、9-quadrantモデルを提示している。

Abstract

In English there are four articles: *the*, *a/an*, *some*, \emptyset . Articles are used before nouns and function like adjectives. The definite article *the* is used before a noun to indicate that the identity of the noun is familiar to the listener. The two indefinite articles *a/an*, *some*, are used before a noun that is either generic in context, or its identity is novel (unfamiliar) to the listener. Moreover, there are certain situations in which a noun does not require article modification, signified as \emptyset zero article. This paper explains the limitations of understanding the proper choice of English articles from a grammatical perspective, and it illuminates the benefits for second language learners to consider the semantic meaning of articles. A nine-quadrant model will be presented as a teaching aid to explain the semantic importance of the English article system.

●キーワード：定冠詞 (definite article)／関係節 (relative clause)／機能 (function)

Introduction

In an indiscriminate perusal of academic papers, Berry (1991) revealed, definite articles and indefinite articles occur in discourse with the average frequency of one in every ten words. Furthermore, Berry estimates the frequency of article and determiner choice occurs in normal discourse at the average rate of 1 in every 5 words. These facts make the function of encoding nouns, as either definite or indefinite, the most frequent if not most confusing decision L2 learners incur in their acquisition of English. When taking into account the use of the \emptyset zero article, indefinite article *some*¹⁾ along with the reoccurring necessity of nouns to utilize, quantifiers, demonstratives and possessives (see figure 1), the selection of the proper determiner reveals itself

to be quite daunting. Essentially, L2 learners are

Four categories of determiners:

Articles (*the*, *a*, *an*, \emptyset , *some*^{*})

Quantifiers (*a lot of*, *a few*, *a little*, *many*, *much*, *some*...)

Demonstrative Adjectives (*this*, *that*, *these*, *those*)

Possessive Adjectives (*my*, *your*, *his*...)

(figure 1)

confronted by an article or modifying determiner choice with every noun phrase they encounter.

L2 learners, cognizant of their article inexactitudes, often attempt to ameliorate such deficiencies with reference resources and grammar exercises, frequently associated with contradictory rules contained in the pedagogy. All too often, such endeavors amount to little

more than categorizing nouns for the purpose of encoding them with the correct article. For example, definite articles are used for hotels, restaurants, theaters, cinemas, museums, galleries, buildings, oceans, rivers, bridges, newspapers, etc. While such groupings can be helpful they give a false impression that article choice is a rule-based endeavor. Ultimately such collocations, article assignment based on word categories, are superficial to the actual function of definiteness and indefiniteness. The reality of course is that meaning is communicated through the constituency between an article and the noun it modifies. Article choice allows nouns to acquire relative meaning to the context in which they are used. That is to say, there is either implied relative clause (a familiarity) to nouns encoded with a definite article or no implied relative clause (a novelty) encoded with the use of a definite article. As a point of clarification, in this paper we shall use the term “encoded” to emphasize that there is additional implied meaning represented in article selection, which is discretely familiar between a speaker and a listener.

All too often, while sympathetically correcting article errors, teachers tend to place a low priority on full article acquisition. This likely stems from the fact the article inaccuracies seldom cause messaging errors in a learner’s overall topic or subject matter. What is required, as this paper will attempt to reveal, is a paradigm rethink (so to speak) in the pedagogical approach that teachers pursue. In particular, it is necessary to shift away from syntactic rules-based pedagogies toward a more semantic determination and comprehension approach, where definite articles are seen to encode nouns with familiarity and indefinite articles likewise encode nouns with novelty. The impetus, for a familiar/novel variable determination approach, would be to instill the notion that the primary function of articles is semantic not syntactic. That is to say articles encode nouns with meaning relative to a context existing between the speaker and listener, in both written and oral communication.

Among the multitude of natural languages, the use of articles is more the exception than the rule. (Dryer & Haspelmath 2013). Articles are generally classified as determiners, used to augment a level of shared knowledge between a speaker and listener. In English, the grammatical markings of indefiniteness and definiteness are commonly expressed by the construction of a noun phrase (NP). That is to say, the speaker selects an article to precede a noun, and the two-word constituency signals the NP’s level of novelty or familiarity. Novelty is expressed through indefiniteness, by use of the article *a* (modifying singular countable nouns), the \emptyset zero article (plural and uncountable nouns) or the article *some* (modifying singular countable, plural and uncountable nouns). Familiarity is expressed through definiteness, by use of the article *the* (a constituent of singular countable, plural and uncountable nouns). Moreover, in certain expressions and idiomatic phrases, nouns tend to use no article modification. These colloquial circumstances, which frequently compel the use of \emptyset zero article, require case by case recognition as they appear in discourse. “It seems that the article system in English is a reflex of a universal system of semantic and discourse marking that exists in order for speakers and hearers to sort out reference and to achieve topic continuity in connected discourse” (Young, 1996, 142).

From a pragmatic perspective, operating in broader set of determiners, English articles function much like adjectives, in that they modify the nouns they precede semantically. This function precludes obvious the exception that articles, similar to demonstrative and possessive adjectives, cannot be modified by intensifiers or migrators, or varied in degrees of strength, whereas quantifiers are subject to intensification. Nonetheless, there is something acutely perplexing about the use of determiners in general and articles in particular. Zamparelli (2005) inquires, “If many determiners are actually non-quantificational, and non-quantification determiners are treated as predicate modifiers, why are they so different from normal adjectives” (933). Unlike so-called “normal adjectives,” which offer the speaker’s

perspective, concerning the intrinsic qualities of persons, places and things, the determination of articles is discourse dependent—contextually derived. The choice of articles is frequently contingent on the relationship of speaker and listener. Explicitly, in English discourse “the article system is employed for the expression of definiteness and specificity and is linked to such pragmatic notions as shared assumptions between discourse participants about their knowledge of and familiarity with a referent” (Diez-Bedmar and Papp 2008 417). In other words, definiteness is inferred only if there is sufficiently shared information between the speaker and listener (an implied relative clause understood by each interlocutor). The identity of nouns, in respect to familiarity or novelty, can be seen as conditional in terms of their exophoric context (situational or generic shared knowledge understood outside the text or conversation) or their endophoric context (shared knowledge originated within the text or conversation). In conversation, endophoric contexts are almost exclusively derived from an anaphoric reference (prior mention). However, it should be noted that in works of literature cataphoric references (later mention) are occasionally used as literary devices.

“The essential function of definiteness is to signal that the intended referent of an NP is a referent with which the audience is already familiar at the current stage of the conversation” (Heim 1982 194). Definiteness is always derived one of two aspects of discoursal context, either exophoric or endophoric familiarity. In contrast, a noun phrase can be “considered as ‘indefinite’ if there is nothing in the discourse or the situation or our generic knowledge of the world that identifies it for us” (Downing and Locke, 2002, 418). Where definiteness signals what is familiar, between speaker and listener, indefiniteness assumes what is novel. For the instructor of English L2, conveying this essential semantical function should be a fundamental teaching point, in respect to article selection. Central to this paper is the notion that L2 learners need to develop an intuitive understanding of the meaning and semantical function of the definite/indefinite article system.

Discussion

The use of indefinite or definite articles in many languages can be viewed, from a syntactical perspective, as non-essential function words appearing in sentences. While articles may add meaning, a sentence can still function grammatically if they are removed. Let’s consider the following.

- (a) *I heard a dog barking.*
- (b) *I heard the dog barking.*
- (c) *I heard dog barking.**
- (d) *I heard dogs barking.*

In sentence (a) dog is a constituent in a NP encoded with an indefinite article as “a dog”, which conveys the meaning of a novel dog. In sentence (b) dog is encoded as “the dog”, invoking a definite article, thus transmitting the sense of a familiar dog. While sentence (c), seems ungrammatical, it nonetheless contains a subject and a functioning predicate. This becomes evidently clear by simply pluralizing the objective noun, as in sentence (d), thereby restoring the grammaticality of the sentence. We can thus conclude that articles are semantically useful but not syntactically essential to the function of a sentence.

To reiterate, when we speak or write, we often refer to things that were mentioned in prior discourse, we term such excerpts anaphoric references, meaning something, mentioned previous is reoccurring. English L2 learners are often taught as a general rule that the indefinite *a/an* or the \emptyset zero article should be employed when using a noun for the first time, and the definite *the* is required every time thereafter the first mention. The logic behind such anaphoric references is obvious. A new topic mentioned for the first time is likely to be novel to the listener. Thus, presumably it requires indefinite encoding. Moreover, if a topic has been previously mentioned, its second mention, and thus all subsequent mentions, will be familiar to the listener. Therefore, it is no longer novel and should be encoded as definite. Let’s observe this sort of rule-based example (first mention indefinite articles followed by second

mention definite articles):

1 (a) *I saw a great movie last night. The movie was about gladiators.*

(b) *I really love bitter coffee. The coffee I bought this morning was especially bitter.*

The problem with such rule-based examples is that they obscure the functional purpose of article encoding. Moreover, such rules can easily be violated (as below with a second mention indefinite article):

2 (a) *I saw the movie Gladiator last night. It was a great movie.*

(b) *The coffee I bought this morning was especially bitter. I really love bitter coffee.*

Sentences 1 (a.) and (b.) comply with the general rule that first mention nouns should be encoded with indefinite articles and second mention nouns require definite encoding. However, sentences 2 (a.) and (b.) invert the encoding order, without any significant change in meaning or coherence. These examples show, while a rule-based article selection frequently gives the L2 learner the correct coding, reliance on rules can unfortunately undermine the actual purpose of indefinite/definite article selection. That is to say indefinite/definite article selection is meant to disseminate semantical information, the context particular nouns being modified, rather than facilitate syntactical functions in sentence production.

Semantical transference in article selection

Indefinite articles *a/an* and *some*:

The indefinite article *a/an* is used to encode singular count nouns as either generic or specific and novel to the speaker and or the listener.

Generic/novel singular encoding:
A dog is a carnivorous mammal.

Non-specific/novel singular encoding:

I heard a dog barking last night

The indefinite article (*some*) is used to encode non-specific (as opposed to generic) plural or uncountable nouns that are novel to the speaker and or the listener.

Non-specific/novel plural/uncount:

Would you care for some coffee?

Non-specific/novel count/plural:

Would you care for some apples?

Definite article *the*:

The definite article *the* is used to encode singular or plural count nouns or uncount nouns, as either generic or specific nouns familiar to the speaker and or the listener.

Generic singular/count:

The automobile changed city planning forever.

Specific/familiar singular/count:

The window is open.

Specific/familiar uncount:

The traffic in Los Angeles is always bad.

Specific/familiar plural/count:

The apples I bought yesterday are too hard to eat.

Zero article (\emptyset):

The zero article (\emptyset) is used to encode plural count nouns and uncount nouns to express generic meaning.

Generic plural/count:

Dogs make good pets.

Generic uncount:

Happiness makes one healthy mind and body.

Four steps in determining the correct article

Step 1. Determine if a noun has a generic, non-specific or specific identity

A noun is classified as a generic noun when its reference is only a member associated to a category without any reference of it as a potentially identifiable

specific member of that category. For example, the statement dogs are barking animals makes no reference to actual dogs. A noun is classified as a specific noun when it references a potentially identifiable specific referent. For example, the statement I hear dogs barking refers to actual dogs (whether or currently identifiable or not) that can be potentially identified as specific dogs. Let's consider the following examples:

Generic identity:

Giraffes are strange looking animals.

A giraffe is strange looking animal.

The giraffe is strange looking animal.

Non-specific identity:

A giraffe escaped from the zoo.

Specific identity:

The giraffe that escaped was captured.

Step 2. Determine if a noun is countable or uncountable

For the purposes of encoding a noun with the correct article, it is first important to make a grammatical determination as to whether the noun is capable of being counted. Nouns like milk or cheese cannot be counted, only measured by volume or weight. Furthermore, only nouns that are actually capable of being counted, without the requisite use of a partitive structure, are considered countable nouns. Nouns like bread are uncountable nouns, quantities that cannot be counted without the use of partitive structures like slices or loaves. Let's consider the following examples:

Countable nouns:

I would like to have a fried egg and a slice of cheese on a piece of toast.

Uncountable nouns:

I would like to have ham and cheese on toast.

Uncountable nouns:

Milk spilled on the floor.

Uncountable nouns:

Some milk spilled on the floor.

Step 3. If a noun is countable it must be enumerated as singular or plural

Countable nouns need to be enumerated as either singular or plural. Singular countable nouns can be encoded with either the indefinite article *a* or \emptyset zero article. As seen above, uncountable nouns can never be identified as plural, and the can only be encoded with the indefinite \emptyset zero article or the indefinite article *some*. Plural nouns can also be encoded with the indefinite article *some*, as well as the definite article (*the*). Furthermore, enumeration is not a fixed property but rather singularity or plurality can be subject to the partitive structure of a noun's context. For example, if we are speaking of spilt *milk*, the spillage may consist of one *drop* (singular) or two or more *drops* (plural) of *milk*. Though milk in its own essence is a uncountable noun, the word *drop* in this context is a countable noun because we can count the partitive structure *drops*. Therefore, according to this rule as it is applied to countable nouns, the word *drop* can be encoded with the indefinite article *a* or definite article *the*, and its plural from drops can be encoded with the with the indefinite \emptyset zero article or the indefinite article *some* and definite article *the*. Let's consider the following examples:

Singular: *A drop of milk spilled on the floor.*

Plural: *Drops of milk spilled on the floor.* (\emptyset)

Plural: *Some drops of milk spilled on the floor.*

Plural: *The drops of milk spilled on the floor.*

Step 4 Determine listener's knowledge of a noun familiar (implied relative clauses) or novel

Encoding a noun with either a definite or indefinite article requires a determination about the listener's knowledge of the specific referent. The definite article *the* conveys that there is an implied relative clause about the listener's knowledge, in respect to the specific referent noun. That is to say an implication exists in the mind of the speaker that the listener has knowledge of the specific referent noun. Whereas, the indefinite articles *a/an*, *some*, \emptyset convey that the listener has no prior knowledge of the referent noun—the referent noun is novel to the listener.

Implied relative clauses:

Use of the definite article *the* with any constituent (whether singular or plural, count or uncount) implies the specific identity of the noun is familiar to the listener. Let's consider the following examples:

Definite singular count noun:

The car stopped on the highway.

Definite plural count noun:

The cars stopped on the highway.

Definite uncount noun:

The traffic stopped on the highway.

An implied relative clause familiar to the speaker and listener is implicated by the use of the definite article *the* above. Let's consider the possible implications of each sentence above.

The car stopped on the highway.

This sentence encodes an implication that this specific car is familiar or possibly owned by either the speaker or the listener or both. Furthermore, the sentence carries an idiomatic implication—the car broke down.

The cars stopped on the highway.

This sentence implies multiple or many specific cars, familiar or perhaps seen by either the speaker, the listener or both, stopped.

The traffic stopped on the highway.

This sentence implies a collective, group of many specific cars, familiar or perhaps seen by either the speaker, the listener or both, stopped.

No implied relative clauses:

Use of the indefinite article *a/an*, with any singular countable noun implies the non-specific identity of the noun is novel to the listener. Let's consider the following example:

Indefinite singular count noun:

A car stopped on the highway.

Use of the indefinite article *some* with any singular/plural countable noun or any uncountable noun implies a non-specific identity of a noun novel to the listener. Let's consider the following examples:

Indefinite singular count noun:

Some car stopped on the highway.

Indefinite plural count noun:

Some cars stopped on the highway.

Indefinite uncount noun:

Some traffic stopped on the highway.

Use of the indefinite zero article \emptyset with any plural countable noun or any uncountable noun implies a non-specific identity of the noun novel to the listener. Let's consider the following examples:

Indefinite plural count noun:

Cars stopped on the highway.

Indefinite uncount noun:

Traffic stopped on the highway.

Genericity and Specificity

While Japanese has no article system, it is nonetheless possible to differentiate between the concepts of genericity and specificity with a divergence in topic markedness and nominative markedness (Kuroda, 1992). Let's consider syntactic parsing of the sentences below, which demonstrates the emergence of generic (Japanese syntax does differentiate between generic and non-specific) and specific referents.

(1) Topic marker [は] *-wa*

犬は吠える。

inu-wa hoeru.

[_N Dog _{TM} *-wa*] _V bark

A dog barks. / Dogs bark.

(2) Nominative marker [が] *-ga*

犬が吠える。

inu-ga hoeru.

[_N Dog/_{NM} -ga] v bark

The dog barks. / The dogs bark. / *My dog(s)
bark(s).

The constituency of the bare noun *dog* (*inu*) and the topic marker *-wa* [_N Dog _{TM} -*wa*] produces a generic referent to *dog*, as a category of mammals (*canis familiaris*). Thus, the English equivalent of *inu-wa hoeru* would be a generic or a categorical description of “dogs” distinct from other animals. Furthermore, because *dog* can be pluralized in English, as opposed the Japanese noun *inu* (*dog*), which is uncountable, the English translation can appear in either generic singular (a dog barks) or generic plural (dogs bark). Sentence (2) is a bare noun with the nominative marker *-ga* [_N Dog/_{NM} -*ga*], which denotes a definite reference to a specific dog. Once again, sentence (2) like (1) can refer to one or more than one dogs depending on the context.

Thus far, generic nouns and specific nouns do not appear to differ dramatically, between English and Japanese. As we have just noted, the Japanese topic marker *-wa* references generic (*non-specific) nouns, in that all referent generic nouns by definition are not specific nouns, while the nominative marker *-ga* refers to a specific noun. However, as we shall observe, the property of English nouns, distinguished as either countable or uncountable, greatly confuses the matter. Whereas, in Japanese we have two categories of nouns, generic and specific, in English there emerges at least three categories. We can broadly classify these categories as generic, non-specific and specific. For this study genericity shall be defined as the grouping of nouns into categorical classes consisting of both abstract and concrete referents. Non-specificity shall be defined as nouns whose referent is a novel variable (between the speaker and listener). Specificity shall be defined as nouns whose referent is a familiar variable (between the speaker and listener).

Kind-Oriented v. Object-Oriented Nouns

Unfortunately, “genericity is not a uniform concept”

(Krifka 122). There are in fact two distinct phenomena associated with nouns that make the classification of genericity awkward. Krifka refers to these observable modes as *kind-oriented* and *standard object-oriented*. The *kind-oriented mode* refers to the genus of a noun’s grouping in a class or classification.

We can view the generic *kind-oriented* noun a semantic notion, defined by its ontological status. Whereas, the *standard object-oriented mode* embodies the “general property” of the noun, in terms of a syntactic notion. It is important to note that these types of generic NPs can function not only as a subject, but also as objects of a verb. Thus, they are more difficult to identify as generic, than abstract NPs, which contextually are in the subject position of a sentence. This is illustrated below: In sentence (1) the NP “the horse” (a classification of animal) operates as the subject of the sentence. However, in sentence (2) the NP “the horse” is an object nested in the predicate.

- (1) The horse is a four-legged mammal.
- (2) Man has long used the horse for transportation.

Understanding the distinction of between modes of genericity requires English L2 learners to develop intuitions, in regards to the semantical and syntactical notion of NPs. This is perhaps more of an acquirable skill than a teachable one. Nonetheless, L2 teachers need to consider ways of developing such intuitions. A nine-quadrant model is presented to assist with this task.

The Nine-quadrant Model

As observed, there are myriad criteria that are simultaneously coordinated into each context, from which an article selection is derived. It would appear that understanding context, as opposed to mere grammar rules, is ultimately the most important factor (and perhaps greatest stumbling block) in determining the constituent article for encoding nouns. Because the definite article *the* infers that there is an unspoken or implied relative clause associated with the noun, .

understanding implied relative clauses can either allow the L2 learner to clarify or constrain the nouns specific identity. Let's consider how L2 learners may attempt to understand the semantic meanings associated with such implied relative clauses. As we shall observe, L2 learners need to focus not so much grammatical rules, though initially they may prove beneficial, but rather develop intuitions about the semantical transfers. That is to say, there is implied knowledge that is encoded in article selection. A number of strategies have been devised to provide a visible charting of how such semantical contexts are orchestrated. The most prominent among these stems from the research of Bickerton (1981), Huebner (1983), Masters (1990) and Gundrel, Hedberg and Zacharski (1993). These studies attempted to develop non-grammatical systematic

approaches for the purpose of identifying the semantical underpinnings of English articles. Bickerton, subsequently adopted and elaborated by Huebner, developed a "semantic wheel" which offered a visual representation to explain why English speakers choose one article and not another. Its primary function was to show the conditions in which nouns can be encoded as a [+/- Special Referent] and the semantic transfers of what is [+/- Familiar to the Listener]. Likewise, Masters, and consequently Gundrel, Hedberg and Zacharski, developed binary hierarchical charts to distinguish the determination of definiteness from indefiniteness. All four of studies are given acknowledged deference in the development of the Nine Quadrant Model (see figure 2).

名詞のタイプ Noun Types 参照例 Reference	Generic Categorical Description 総称名詞	Non-specific novel variable 聞き手の知らない名詞	Specific familiar variable 聞き手の知っている名詞
Plural-countable noun 複数・可算名詞 Uncountable noun 不可算名詞	1 ∅ All constituents (full constituency) of a category	2 ∅ some Random and unknown	3 the
Singular-countable noun 単数・可算名詞	4 a/an Each constituent of a category the The whole category	5 a/an some Random and unknown	6 the
Proper noun 名詞	7 a/an Exemplar reference	8 ∅ Standard use a/an Rhetorical reference	9 ∅ Standard use the Special emphasis

Figure 2. Nine Quadrant Model for Articles

Using the Model

Let us observe the juxtaposition of noun specificity and countability, on *x* and *y* axes, respectively. Suppose we are presented with following utterance: "dogs bark." As listeners, what does this expression convey to us? With no additional context, the only thing that can be

extrapolated categorically from "dogs bark" is that it is a statement about the nature of dogs, as opposed to other animals, such as "cats purr" or "birds sing." Clearly, this is a generic statement about dogs. This conclusion is made all-the-more-clear if reduce the utterance to just "dogs." The point being, all nouns, if

void of any context, can be classified as generic. Given context is what determines a noun's level of specificity or non-specificity. If we want to plot the utterance, "dogs bark," into one of the quadrants in the model above: we can observe the referent, "dogs," is a plural-countable noun, and it has no constituent article, thus it is contextually generic [plural, \emptyset , generic]. The referent "dogs," in the utterance "dogs bark," can therefore be slotted into quadrant [1] of the model, where the x and y axes intersect. Quadrant [1] is a co-occurrence of a generically categorical description and plural-countable noun. Conversely, if we allow for additional context, we can alter the level specificity. Consider the utterance "dogs are barking." We are no longer talking about an abstract generic description of a particular animal, the nature of dogs as a species, but rather the actions of supposedly actual dogs. Somewhere, there are supposedly physical dogs barking, in a supposedly physical location (e.g. "dogs are barking in the street" or "dogs are barking in the park"). The context has shifted from generic to non-specific (actual dogs barking, whose identity is neither detailed nor exact). If we want to plot the utterance, "dogs are barking," into the model, we can observe the referent, "dogs," is a plural-countable noun, has no constituent article and is contextually a novel variable [plural, \emptyset , non-specific]. Thus, the given referent "dogs" in the utterance "dogs are barking," can be slotted into quadrant [2], where the x and y axes intersect—a co-occurrence of a non-specific, novel variable, plural-countable noun. Finally, let's observe the same referent, "dogs," when contextualized with maximum specificity. Consider of the utterance "the dogs are barking." Once again, the context of the utterance supposes actual dogs are barking in a supposedly physical location. However, use of the definite article in NP "the dogs" marks referent's identity with a sense of particularity, uniqueness shared between listener and speaker. The constituency, of definite article *the* and noun "dogs," indicates that there is familiarity, in respect to the dogs' identity—anaphoric or shared knowledge (e.g. they are our dogs, the neighbor's dogs or dogs contextual understood from a prior mention. If we want to plot the utterance, "the

dogs are barking," into the model, we can observe the referent NP, "the dogs," is a constituency between a plural countable-noun encoded with definiteness and contextualized as a familiar variable [plural, *the*, specific]. Thus, the referent "the dogs," in the utterance "the dogs are barking," can be slotted into quadrant [3], where the x and y axes intersect: a specific, familiar variable, plural countable-noun. The variations of specificity attributed to the referent "dogs" [plural-countable noun], detailed above can be summarize in the following notation:

Quadrant 1. dogs bark :

[plural, countable, generic]

Quadrant 2. dogs are barking*:

[plural, countable, novel , non-specific]

Quadrant 3. the dogs are barking:

[plural, countable, familiar, specific]

*For this example, we used the \emptyset article. However, for plural and uncountable nouns, *some* is often a preferable article choice, given that it is the constituent of a novel variable, non-specific referent. The article *some* for singular nouns connotes a referent that is more randomly novel, compared to NPs that use the article *a* as their constituent.

Moving horizontally on the x axis, from quadrants [1] to [3], we can track a noun's semantical changes, least to greatest, in contextual specificity. Each quadrant informs us of the article that is required in order to signify the intended level of specificity, for the given noun class on the y axis (*Noun Types*). In the example above, we tracked the plural-countable noun "dogs" as our referent. However, if we select an uncountable noun, the model clearly illustrates the relationship between plural-countable nouns and uncountable nouns. As classes of nouns, they function quiet differently, however, as noun types, in respect to levels of specificity, they assume identical constituent articles. From left to right, on the x axis, from quadrants [1] to [3], we can observe the semantical changes that occur in uncountable nouns, where they mirror plural-countable nouns, in contextual specificity (least to greatest). If we plot uncountable nouns into the model, quadrants [1] to [3], they can be summarized in the

following notation:

Quadrant 1. yogurt is a dairy food :

[uncountable, Ø, generic]

Quadrant 2. let's have some yogurt* :

[uncountable, novel, non-specific]

Quadrant 3. the yogurt landed on the floor :

[uncountable, familiar, specific]

*As noted above some is often a preferable article choice for plural and uncountable nouns. Compare the two sentences: (a). *Let's have some yogurt.* (b). *Let's have yogurt.* The former seems preferable to the later, though both (a) and (b) are acceptable.

Equally, moving vertically, on the *y* axis, the model can tell us which article is required for the given implied level of specificity, for each noun class on the *y* axis. Let's observe the intersection of non-specific, novel variables, referents on the *x* axis in quadrants [2], [5] and [8] on the *y* axis. We can plot co-occurrences of uncountable or plural nouns, singular countable nouns and proper nouns, respectively on the *y* axis:

Quadrant 2. would you like some donuts* :

[plural, countable, novel, non-specific]

Quadrant 2. would you like some coffee* :

[uncountable, novel, non-specific]

Quadrant 5. would you like a donut :

[singular, countable, novel non-specific]

Quadrant 8. a Mr. Jones is waiting for you :

[proper noun, variable, non-specific,
rhetorical]

Example: This morning _____ car broke down on the highway.

Solution 1: This morning a car broke down on the highway.

singular countable / novel / non-specific / intersects with quadrant 5 / there is no implied relative clause

Solution 2: This morning the car broke down on the highway.

sing. count. / familiar / specific / intersects with quadrant 6 / implied relative clause: a specific car, perhaps owned by the speaker and or the listener

Methodology

This model constitutes an effort to visually identify the familiar and novel co-occurrence of cross-sectional variables produced in a discursive context. While the examples given are certainly not exhaustive, they should be viewed as an attempt to curtail the more salient features of a nouns in a given context. From the L2 learner's perspective, we will assume a context and attempt to express an implied relative clause where possible.

Students are instructed to first fill in the blank space provided in each sentence, with a selected article: *a/an, the, some, Ø*. Then students are asked to give the context of the encoded noun phrase they have completed (e.g. quadrant 1: *sing. countable / novel*). Students should try to identify the quadrant number in which the context materializes on the *x* and *y* axis. The ultimate goal is for students to develop an intuition about their article selection. Students should be encouraged to speculate the implied relative clause, if one exists, between the speaker and listener. First, let's consider the possible varying contexts for the article selected, in the example (below). Then observe in solution 1 and 2 the expressed semantic implications provided.

After students become aware that answers can vary, and that there is correlation between article selection and the implied answer, additional exercises should be assigned. The teacher should try to develop examples where article selection can vary as often as reasonably possible, in order to emphasize that meaning is encoded by the article they select. Distinguishing

noun phrases from expressions and idiomatic phrases present a particular problem, when trying to acquire articles. However, once students recognize the function of articles in noun phrases, it is hopeful students will be able to flush out the special use \emptyset for idioms and particular expressions, as they arise. Let's view some additional exercises:

Exercises

1. It is hard to find \emptyset water in the desert.

uncountable / novel / non-specific / intersects with quadrant 2 / no implied relative clause

2. She took a breath and jumped into the water.

uncountable / familiar / specific / intersects with quadrant 3 / implied relative clause: perhaps a swimming pool familiar the speaker and listener

(3) Would you like some water?

uncountable / novel / specific / intersects with quadrant 2 / no implied relative clause

4a. I don't like sleeping on a bed.

sing. count. / generic / intersects with quadrant 4 / no implied relative clause / it could be could be any or all beds

4b. I carried our baby to the bed.

sing. countable / familiar / specific / intersects with quadrant 6 / implied relative clause: a bed owned by the speaker

4c. I went \emptyset to bed late last night.

sing. countable / expression* went to sleep

* Expressions like 4c should be compared to noun phrases like 4a and 4b.

5a. I'm going to the school.

sing. countable / familiar / specific / intersects with quadrant 6 / implied relative clause: commuting to a location

5b. I'm going to \emptyset school.

sing. countable / expression* studying or commuting

* Expressions like 5b should be compared to noun phrases like 5a.

6a. The guard works in a prison.

sing. countable / novel / non-specific / intersects with quadrant 6 / implied relative clause: in a physical location (prison)

6b. The convict is in ∅ prison for life.

sing. countable / expression* serving time, locked up, imprisoned or confined.

* Expressions like 6b should be compared to noun phrases like 6a.

7. Excuse me, a Mr. Jones is waiting in the lobby for you. .

Proper noun / novel / non-specific / intersects with quadrant 8 / an unknown person

8. Excuse me, ∅ Mr. Jones is waiting in the lobby for you.

Proper noun / familiar / specific / intersects with quadrant 9 / a (likely) known person

9a. Mars is the red planet.

sing. countable / familiar / specific / intersects with quadrant 6 / implied relative clause: the red planet is a nickname for Mars

9b. Mars is a red planet.

sing. countable / novel / non-specific / intersects with quadrant 6 comparisons between sentences like 9a. and 9b make a good teaching point for the semantic encoding of nouns for a given context

10a. He's talking to ∅ Bill Gates.

Proper noun / familiar / specific / intersects with quadrant 9 / a (likely) known person

10b. Is he talking to the Bill Gates?

Proper noun / familiar / specific / intersects with quadrant 9 / special emphasis

10c. No, it's popular name I knew a Bill Gates in high

Proper noun / novel / non-specific / intersects with quadrant 8 / an unknown person again juxtaposing sentences like 10a, 10b and 10c make a good teaching point to show semantic encoding of nouns for a given context

Conclusion

English articles, from a grammatical perspective, often appear enigmatic to L2 learners. Moreover, from the standpoint of teachers, the perpetual breaching of rules exposes further heights of complexity to tangible solutions. What emerges from the simple morphology of English articles is a system easy to explain, but frustratingly difficult for students to master. This difficulty is compounded for L2 learners whose L1 does not incorporate an article system, or whose L1 utilizes a definite/indefinite coding format vastly distinct from English. While rule-based instruction can benefit students to navigate difficult areas of article usage, there appears to be a diminishing return, which at some

point the voluminous rules can become overwhelming. This paper has suggested that in part the solution may be found not in pursuing grammatical solutions, but rather developing semantical intuitions. Attention to these aspects of article acquisition may serve more helpful to students than simply trying to apply rule-based prescriptions. We also acknowledge the enormity of this task requires more research, and it demands further developments to assist L2 learners acquire an accurate understanding of English articles.

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Notes

- i) *Some* is generally considered a quantifier in prescriptive grammars and the zero article \emptyset , rather than the indefinite article *a*, is used with plurals and mass nouns. However, *some* can be used descriptively as an indefinite plural article.