

## Linguistics Assumptions between English and Arabic Articles

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### Abstract

This paper displays the linguistics assumptions of articles for Arabic and English languages. It attempts to deal with the fundamentals of articles and articles' use with respect to the two languages. The main objective of this paper is to help researchers in this field with the necessary similarities and differences of articles. The paper also highlights the importance of the context and provides some examples of articles' use with regards to Arabic and English languages.

**Keywords:** Linguistics assumptions, Articles, Arabic, English

### INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews the linguistics assumptions of articles for Arabic and English languages. It focuses on the similarities and differences with regard to articles in both languages in order to assist and guide researchers in the field of articles with the significant points. It starts with the importance of context by providing some examples of articles use with respect to the two languages. Then, it explains the use of English and Arabic articles. Also, it deals with the syntax of articles in both languages. Finally it displays the semantic parameter proposed by Ionin, Ko and Wexler's (2004) account of definiteness and specificity.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

The issue of context is essential in the case of article use. For example, most grammars state that proper nouns are definite. In fact, Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999, p. 275) stated that proper nouns are inherently definite by definition. Recognizing the use of proper nouns as common nouns requires understanding of the context in which the noun is used and that seems to be the issue for any article use. Moreover, Pica (1983, p. 222) states that article use is linked to communication and communicative competence with a limited connection with grammar and linguistic competence. Thus, instruction in the use of articles in isolation of the context is often impossible. Thus it is difficult to

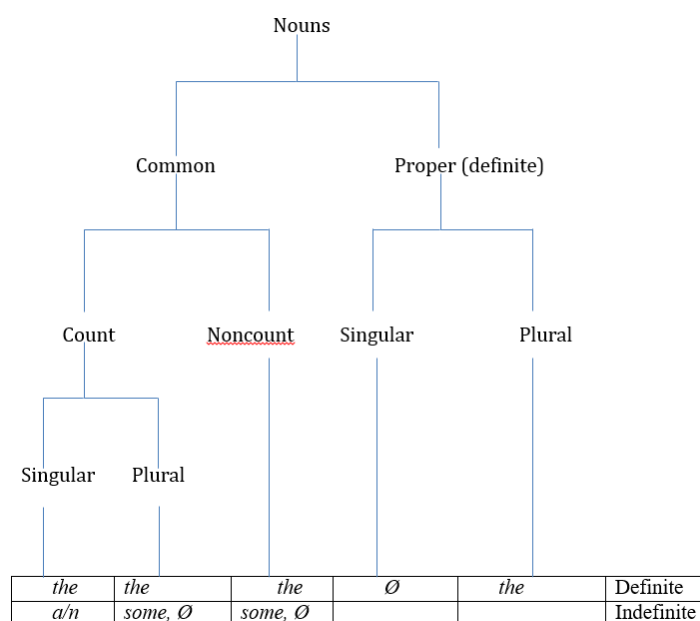
exclude the knowledge of the required article from the context in which it is used. Even after one has learned all the principles behind the use of these articles, one will find many situations where choosing the correct article or choosing whether or not to use one will prove to be a probability. For example, in the following two sentences,  $\emptyset$  long highways are dangerous and the long highway is dangerous, both forms (of articles) are correct. Thus it is the contexts which will help the speaker to decide which construction is most appropriate.

The article system in English marks definiteness and indefiniteness. Definiteness is marked by the, for example, the father of the family is a kind man. Indefiniteness is marked by a/an, for example, Carlos is a Mexican, and they grew up in an industrial town. The articles the and a/an are sometimes listed among the noun markers or determiners because they are followed by a noun or a nominal element (Ekiert, 2004).

Pica (1983) stated that the English article system is also affected by the context in which the target article is used. Thus it is difficult to exclude the knowledge of the required article from the context in which it is used. Even after one has learned all the principles behind the use of these articles, one will find many situations where choosing the correct article or choosing whether or not to use one will prove to be a probability. For example, in the following two sentences,  $\emptyset$  long highways are dangerous and the long highway is dangerous, both forms (of articles) are correct. Thus it is the contexts which will help the speaker to decide which construction is most appropriate.

### The English Article System

The acquisition of English article system depends on the acquisition of the English noun classifications. Figure 1 illustrates the latter as adapted from Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999, p. 272).



**Figure 1.** The English Noun Classifications

English nouns are either common nouns (e.g., a girl, a country, a bus) or proper nouns (e.g., Tun Mahatir, Sudan, Saturn). Common nouns are classified as count (e.g., book, class, and bag) or noncount (e.g., salt, rice, and luggage). Count nouns are divided into singular and plural. Singular nouns can take either the definite the or the indefinite a/n and plural count nouns can take either the definite the or the zero article Ø. Noncount nouns can take the definite article the and the zero article Ø (e.g., we can say water but we cannot say a water or some waters). On the other hand, proper nouns are same as count nouns because they are countable; however, they are different from count nouns because they are always definite, and thus, they never take the indefinite article a/n when they classified as true proper nouns.

The acquisition of English noun classifications is problematic, particular for an ESL learners. For example, the distinction between lexical classification of English common nouns (count and noncount) is very important for the acquisition of the English article system. This distinction is problematic for ESL and EFL learners because although the notions of definiteness and indefiniteness, and even articles for these notions are available in many languages, they have different criteria of what is countable and what is uncountable. For example, information and furniture are noncount nouns in English but count nouns in French and Spanish.

Moreover, the English language itself has many nouns that are used as count or noncount nouns; for example, performs syntactic tests to demonstrate the noun car is more countable than the noun cattle, which has no singular form. The abstract noun life can be used as a noncountable noun (e.g. life is difficult) and it can also be used as countable noun (e.g. the police officer saved a life, some lives are saved).

Furthermore, many abstract nouns can make another shift which is called mass count shift. If a noun refers to “a kind or a type of” we make it countable (e.g. cheese as generic noncountable noun, alternatively, a cheese or cheeses as a countable noun). If mass nouns refer to “a unit or a serving” we make it countable (aspirin as substance noncountable, alternatively, as a unit of serving such as an aspirin or two aspirins, then it is a countable noun) (Celce-Murcia & Freeman 1999, p. 273-276) (see also “Conflicting Issues”).

### **The Meaning of Articles**

All articles express a number of meanings; first, articles can express generic meaning which all elements of a sentence referred to, articles can convey nongeneric meaning in which one or more individual members of a set are being referred to. To make the distinction among the nongeneric uses of articles, first, we need to differentiate between specific and non-specific noun phrases. A specific noun phrase is one in which the uniqueness of individual number (s) is obvious, for example, the lion escaped from the zoo which means a particular lion is being referred to or there may be only one lion in the zoo. The non-specific is the one which identity is ambiguous for example have you ever seen a lion in your life? (Master, 1990, p. 261-498; 1996, p. 215-228).

### ***The Meaning of the Indefinite Article a/n***

Non-specific noun phrases can only be noticeable with indefinite articles (a/n, some, Ø), for example, let us rent a movie or listen to some Ø music. Both identity of movie or music is vague. ESL Learners of the English language need to differentiate between some and Ø, as in the following examples (I need some/ Ø stamps) to mean any stamps. In this, the speaker is saying that any stamp will do, the identity of stamps is not clear. The zero article Ø can express non-specific, semigeneric meaning, (I need Ø stamps) and it is used with plural nouns. In the case of singular nouns, the indefinite article is used (e.g. this is a pencil) (Hawkins, 1978; Sellen, 2002; Master, 1996).

### ***The Use of the definite Article the***

The definite article the signal for a generic function same as singular indefinite form a/n and the zero article Ø, thus the definite article the is used with singular nouns, generic use of the formal and abstract nouns.

Related to the notion of definiteness is the notion of specificity. These are related to the use of the definite article the. Definiteness and specificity include a variety of uses where we need to use the article the. The following examples which exemplify this point are adapted from Sellen (2002). In the sentence, the moon circles the earth, the nouns moon and earth represent something that is one of a kind. In the sentence I ate an apple and some pears, the apple was sweet but the pears were not ripe, the nouns, apple and pears, are named earlier in the text, so the article 'the' refers to something definite and specific. In the sentence Clara went back to the flat where they lived, the noun flat is specific to Clara, the owner.

In addition, when the noun we are talking about is clear, we use the before it, for example, this is the second part of the story (we already know that the story exists and we know that after the first part, there will be a second part). In these cases, the writer or speaker has shared knowledge with the reader or listener (Hewson, 1972, Master 1990, Sellen, 2002).

### ***The Use of the Zero Article Ø***

When the definite and indefinite articles are not applicable, the zero Ø article is said to be used. For example, with proper nouns no article is needed as in the sentence: Turner is my favourite painter. But if it means a painting by Turner, the indefinite article is needed: A Turner hangs in his bedroom. The zero Ø article is also used with names of places and institutions if they consist of a proper noun and another noun. For example, Kuala Lumpur Teacher Training College, Times Square, Serdang Station, Najib Razak Bridge, and KLIA Airport. With days, months, and seasons and holidays, the zero Ø article is required, for example, Monday, March, summer, and Labour Day. With names of pubs and restaurants the zero Ø article is required; for example, We went to Maggie's (name of a pub) last night and let us meet at Young's (name of a restaurant) dinner. The zero Ø article is also required with sports, for example, I love swimming, games, for example, solitaire is interesting, and activities, for example, she suggested baking.

The zero  $\emptyset$  article is also used with geographical names, for example, with continents, for example,  $\emptyset$  Africa,  $\emptyset$  Asia and  $\emptyset$  Australia but the Arctic and the Americas require the definite article. Most country names do not take an article ( $\emptyset$  Malaysia,  $\emptyset$  Yemen, and  $\emptyset$  Egypt) but those that are formed from a number of entities require the definite article: the United Kingdom (the UK) and the United States of America (the USA). With names of lakes and mountain peaks, the zero  $\emptyset$  article is required, for example:  $\emptyset$  Lake Geneva,  $\emptyset$  Mount Kinabalu and  $\emptyset$  Mount Kilimanjaro. The zero  $\emptyset$  article is used with most cities and streets, for example,  $\emptyset$  Beijing,  $\emptyset$  Khartoum,  $\emptyset$  New York, and  $\emptyset$  Downing Street. However, we would use the definite article for the High Way and the Mall (Examples in this section are adapted from (Hewson, 1972, Master 1990, Sellen, 2002).

When we mention a place or object and we do not mean the place or object itself, but the function it is used for, we use the zero  $\emptyset$  article. For example: He went to  $\emptyset$  bed (to sleep), Sara is in  $\emptyset$  church (to pray) and I went to  $\emptyset$  school (to study). However, if we mean the place (usually the building) itself, we use the definite article the. For example: Peter is in the church saying his prayers. I went to the school to get the children. Other uses of the zero  $\emptyset$  article are with prepositional phrases, for example: in  $\emptyset$  charge, in  $\emptyset$  tears, in  $\emptyset$  danger, at  $\emptyset$  war, by  $\emptyset$  heart, beyond  $\emptyset$  control, on  $\emptyset$  time and by  $\emptyset$  car. However, if we mean a certain kind of car, control, or war, we use either the definite the or the indefinite article a/n. For example: He drove in a blue car, Referees are beyond the control of matches, and He got wounded in the Second Gulf War. With certain nouns the zero  $\emptyset$  article is used. For example, Go to hell, Have you ever heard 'Tears in Heaven'? and  $\emptyset$  Travelling abroad can sometimes be dangerous (examples are adapted from (Hewson, 1972, Master 1990, Sellen, 2002, Master, 1996).

### Defining definiteness

The concept of definiteness is basically connected to the use of articles that precede a noun in a given context. A noun or a referent is definite if it is known, familiar, unique, or identifiable by the speaker or hearer. The referent is indefinite when it is novel, unfamiliar, or assumed not to be identifiable by the speaker or hearer (Hawkins, 1978, Thu, 2005).

Definiteness in the English language is marked by the use of the definite article the. The is used to indicate definiteness and a/an is used to mark indefiniteness, for example, I need the book (specific book), and I need a book (not specific) (Thu, 2005). In this regard, the notion of reference is important. Three rules are of importance here. The first rule indicates that every time a noun is mentioned, the writer or the speaker is referring to:

1. All of them everywhere (generic reference), or
2. One of many (specific indefinite reference), or
3. This one exactly (specific definite reference) (Thu, 2005).

The second rule shows that every kind of reference has a choice of articles:

1. All of them everywhere ... ( $\emptyset$ , a/an, the), or

2. One of many ..... (Ø, a/an), or
3. This one exactly ..... (Ø, the) (Thu, 2005).

The third rule highlights the fact that the choice of an article depends upon the noun and the context (Thu, 2005).

Next the notions of generic reference, specific reference, and unique reference are discussed.

### ***Generic Reference***

Generic reference is used to make generalizations, for instance to say something is true of all the nouns in a particular group, such as the entire species of human kind. When we use a generic reference we mean to talk about 'all of them everywhere' and in this case we have a choice of three article: Ø, a/an, the. The choice of article depends on the type of noun. The following examples (1) to (3) are taken from Lightfoot (2001).

With uncountable nouns, the zero article Ø is used.

1. a. Ø Temperature is measured in degrees.
- b. Ø Money makes the world go around.

With plural nouns the zero article Ø is used.

2. a. Ø Volcanoes are formed by pressure under the earth's surface.
- b. Ø Quagga zebras were hunted to extinction.

In the case of singular nouns, the definite article the is used.

3. a. The computer is a marvellous invention.
- b. The elephant lives in family groups.

In fact, the form the + singular noun is only used in technical and scientific writing to generalize classes of animals, body organs, plants, musical instrument, and complex inventions. However, the form is not used for simple inanimate objects like books or coat racks. For these objects, the form Ø + plural noun is used (Lightfoot, 2001).

With singular nouns, the indefinite article a/n is used.

4. a. A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet.
- b. A doctor is a highly educated person. Because of this, a doctor also has tremendous earning potential.

In the two examples above (4a and 4b) a singular noun (a rose, a doctor) represents the entire group. Hence in example 4b because it is generic, the second mention does not use the (Lightfoot, 2001).

### ***Specific Reference***

We use specific reference when the noun's exact identity is unknown to one participant, either the sender or the receiver, or both and it has two classifications: definite reference and indefinite reference. In case of indefinite specific reference, the indefinite article a/n is used with singular nouns and the zero article  $\emptyset$  or the unstressed indefinite 'some' with plural and mass nouns. The following example is taken from Thu (2005):

5. I bought a pen (singular)/ (some) pens (plural), some rice (mass noun).

Definite specific reference is expressed by the definite article the before all types of nouns, singular, plural and mass as in:

6. a. I bought the pen.
- b. I bought the pens.
- c. I bought the rice. (examples taken from Thu 2005).

It is also normal to begin with an indefinite noun, which subsequently becomes definite as shown in the following sentences:

7. I saw a man and a woman sitting under the tree.
8. The man looked about forty years old, and the woman about twenty.

In some cases the definite noun is used in the first sentence when it reflects intermediate situations as in (9) or is given information shared by the speaker and hearer as in (10) and (11). These examples are adapted from Thu (2005).

9. Open the window.
10. He works in the mountains.
11. I have a few problems with the car. The steering-rod is not working properly.

### ***Unique Reference***

Unique reference is the third type of reference and applies when both the sender and the receiver can identify the exact noun that is being referred to. This reference is expressed by proper nouns, for example, Kuala Lumpur, Washington. D.C, John, and the United Nations. The proper noun can be a personal name, for example Hassan, Omer, and Tamir; a geographical name, for example, Malaysia, Africa; or a temporal name, for example, 'Christmas' and 'Independence Day'. The following examples are adapted from Thu (2005):

With most proper nouns, the zero article  $\emptyset$ , is used:

12. a. My research will be conducted in  $\emptyset$  Kuala Lumpur.
- b. My supervisor inspired my interest in  $\emptyset$  Malaysia.

With uncountable nouns, the definite article the is used:

13. a. Step two: mix the water with the boric acid.

- b. The laughter of my children is contagious.

With plural nouns, the definite article *the* is used:

14. a. We recruited the nurses from Sri Lanka.  
b. The project described in your proposal will be fully funded.

With singular nouns, the definite article *the* is used:

15. a. Take the umbrella from my closet if it looks like rain.  
b. Did you get the visa you applied for?

If a proper noun, which normally takes the zero article  $\emptyset$ , is preceded by the definite or indefinite article, the proper noun no longer has a unique reference, it has either specific reference or a generic reference. The following examples (16) to (19) are adapted from Swan and Smith (2001):

Specific reference:

16. A Mr Lee telephoned us asking of you. (Mr. Lee is unknown).  
17. The Kuala Lumpur of the 1960's was not the one of 2011. (Two states denoting one city).

Generic reference:

18. We need a Messi to win this match. (Somebody like Messi).  
19. Layla is the Elizabeth Browning of the class. (She is like Elizabeth Browning).

### Choosing the appropriate article

In order to choose the appropriate article for a noun, we first need to decide whether or not the noun is singular. For instance, could we put the number 'one' in front of it or not? That is, we can say 'one experiment' but we cannot say 'one knowledge' or 'one books.' Consequently, we can say that 'experiment' is singular, 'knowledge' is uncountable and 'books' is plural. If the noun is not singular, then it is either plural or uncountable, and both plural and uncountable nouns use either *the* or  $\emptyset$ , and yet the decision is bound to whether the noun is definite or not (Mizuno 1993, cited in Beaubien and Currie, 1998).

Most grammars illustrate the decision process for article choice as a hierarchical system in which consequence conditions are processed. However, other scholars have proposed new schema for dealing with article choice. Mizuno (1993, cited in Beaubien and Currie, 1998) considers the process of choosing an article as binary, stating that there are four criterion levels that permit 'yes' or 'no' answers only:

- a) Discourse Labelling (Is the object new to the discourse?)
- b) Numeric Labelling (Is the object countable?)
- c) Class Labelling (Is the object plural or singular?)
- d) Phonetic Labelling (Does the noun which follows begin with a vowel?).



Master (1990, p. 461-478), on the other hand, has proposed a binary system that is based on the concept of 'identification' and 'classification' but not on 'yes' or 'no' decisions. He states that determining the appropriate article requires a consideration of definiteness, specificity, countability, and number. Master claims that this system has a pedagogical advantage for teachers because they can introduce dichotomies of 'identification' and 'classification' before introducing the article system.

In general, it can be assumed that some of the issues associated with the uses of articles are easy for teachers to explain and for students to understand, for example, first and second mention, use of *a* versus *an* and so on. Difficulties in this domain arise with the concepts of generic versus specific use of nouns, generic use of proper nouns and place names, abstract nouns versus generic use, and references (Park, 2006: 279-305).

### **Conflicting issues**

The English article system is complex and can be problematic to language learners be they L1 or L2 learners. In spite of the grammatical and linguistic endeavours of researchers and syllabus providers to make it easier for learners to acquire it, the English article system is still expected to cause confusion. However, in some instances, the use of articles is clearly easy to explain, for example, first and second mention and the use of *a* versus *an*. Hence, knowledge of the context is crucial. Put differently choosing an appropriate article without the justification of context is difficult (Pica, 1983). This section highlights some conflicting and problematic issues that might confuse L2 English learners as well as native speakers.

### ***Generic Use Versus Specific Use of Nouns***

The following examples (20) and (21) illustrate the difficulties that arise between generic and specific uses of articles (McEldowney, 1977, p. 95-112):

20. I have *a* computer disk (Specific computer disk).

21. *A* computer disk is used to store information (Generic: a computer disk in general).

In both the examples above, the article *a* is used to illustrate the conflicting nature of having one form for multiple functions (McEldowney, 1977, p. 95-112). In addition the inverse also seems to be problematic in that multiple forms can be used to fulfill the same function. Depending on the context, the same generic function can be fulfilled by any of the articles, as shown in examples (22, 23, 24 and 25) (McEldowney, 1977, p. 95-112):

22. *The* American is *a* good debater.

23. *An* American is *a* good debater.

24. *The* Americans are  $\emptyset$  good debaters.

25.  $\emptyset$  Americans are good  $\emptyset$  debaters.

### ***Generic Use***

Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999, p. 283) state that the four examples given in (40) to (43) above are believed to be the four patterns that express the generic form. In addition, they also state that uncountable nouns can also be used in a generic manner, for example, “*Water is essential for life*” (p. 283). However, these patterns may not be suitable for all nouns, for example are not sufficient and they do not fit for all nouns. For example, the pattern in example (40) above, (*the American is a good debater*) holds true for humans and animals, but it does not describe inanimate objects generically. Thus, ESL learners often produce incorrect sentences such as the following:

26. *The book fills leisure time for many people.*

### ***Proper Nouns and Place Names***

Proper nouns (names of people, places, religions, languages, and so on) are generally considered to be specific, taking either the zero article  $\emptyset$  or definite article *the*. Hence such proper nouns are sometimes treated as common nouns.

Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999, p. 275) state that place or geographical names also pose problems. There are only some rules with respect to place or geographical names, and these rules are not to be understood and followed to differentiate between the types of place names that take the zero or the definite article (Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999, p. 275).

### ***Abstract Nouns and Generic Use***

Abstract nouns are reported to be problematic in terms of countability. They have both a countable and uncountable form when they are used to express generality (Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman, 1983), for example:

27. *Necessity is the mother of invention.*

28. *Food is one of life's necessities.*

### ***Reference***

The English article system is complex and requires much consideration; learners need more than grammars and linguists are able to provide. For example, in addition to the fact that these articles are affected by context, the sense of written texts is also affected by the correct use of articles. The following is an example of student writing (Zalewski, 1993, p. 696):

29. *This article is about a thrift store in the United States that has become a way of life for many college students ... however; a thrift store in Bangkok is different from a thrift store in this article in the aim of establishment ... moreover, Bangkok thrift store is different from American thrift store in the idea that ... .*

The meaning in the example above is not conveyed exactly because of the article choice. Using the indefinite article followed by the zero article  $\emptyset$  makes it difficult for the reader

to understand what the student is referring to, a specific store or thrift stores in general. The following is another example taken from Zalewski (1993, p. 696).

30. ... *it was hard to endure to subjugate that feeling. So I ran away from my family and school. I just took and got on the train, and then left to somewhere. I did not have the destination.*

In example 30, the meaning is not ambiguous; however, there are issues of clarity in terms of the effect the student is trying to have on the reader. The student uses 'the train' instead of 'a train', (the latter of which might be the choice of a native speaker). It is not clear to the reader whether the writer means a particular train or whether the writer has made an error. Zalewski (1993) states that these types of errors interfere with the expression of the mental representation of the student.

### **Definiteness and indefiniteness in the arabic language**

The Arabic language shares the notion of articles with the English language in meaning; however, the forms of the Arabic article system are different from those of the English article system. The Arabic article system makes use of a binary distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness, but there is no corresponding equivalent for the English zero article  $\emptyset$  (see. e.g. Bataineh 2005).

Different structures of a given language property between L1 and TL are reported to have an impact on the acquisition of the latter by the L2 learners. In the English language, definite and indefinite articles always precede nouns and the supposed location of the zero article  $\emptyset$  is also before nouns. The Arabic language has a number of noun structures which may trigger some difficulty for L1 Arabic learners in the acquisition of English article system. The following section deals with the structure of the Arabic noun phrase.

Definiteness in the Arabic language is marked by the definite article *al*, and indefiniteness, marked by the absence of *al*. The use of *al* corresponds to English definiteness marked by the definite article *the*, at least superficially. In fact, according to Sarko (2008), although both English and Arabic lexicalize definiteness (that is there is the availability of the overt morphemes *the* and *al* respectively), they differ in the way the articles are assigned. In addition, according to Sarko, as mentioned earlier Arabic does not lexicalize indefiniteness (unlike English). In this, Arabic is semantically more like non-article languages such as Malay or it could be that there is an underlying indefinite determiner of some sort that is represented by a phonologically null element or exponent. This seems to have effects of transfer for L1 Arabic speakers.

However, in addition to the absence of an indefinite article, another view argues for the availability of the suffix *-n* to indicate indefiniteness in Arabic (see e.g. Lyons 1999, Bataineh 2005). However, for Sarko (2008), the Arabic language uses no morpheme to encode indefiniteness, for example:

Ex.1 Howa (pronoun) talib (noun)  
 He DEL. Art<sup>1</sup>-student (no suffix *n*)  
 He is a student.

Ex. 2 Zaka (that: demonstrative) Moalim (noun)  
 That DEL. Art-teacher (no suffix *n*)  
 That is a teacher.

The following Arabic sentence (31a) (adapted from Bataineh 2005, p. 4) shows how indefiniteness is represented in Arabic language, while (31b), (50a) and (50b) (from Bataineh 2005, p. 4) show how definiteness is represented.

31a. *Dahara assadun filhadega*  
 Appeared lion-IND Art<sup>2</sup> in garden  
 A lion appeared in the garden.

31b. *Dahara alasado filhadega*  
 Appeared DEF Art<sup>3</sup> lion in garden  
 The lion appeared in the garden.

The assumptions of (Bataineh 2005) and Sarko (2008) are both valid as they are both involved in the Arabic language; thus it is safe to say that indefiniteness is sometimes marked by the suffix *n* as a bound morpheme and sometimes without any morpheme, that is a null morpheme. On the other hand the definite article *al* is a free morpheme. These facts have implications for transfer for the L1 Arabic speakers of L2 English.

The Arabic language also possesses another way of marking definiteness that is by joining two different nouns that indicate one idea, the first noun is indefinite (without *al*) and is joined to a definite noun (with *al*) for example (adapted from Bataineh 2005, p. 4):

32a *Aad almodero.*  
 Returned DEF Art headmaster  
 The headmaster of the school is back.

32b *Aad modeer almadrasa.*  
 Returned headmaster DEF Art-the school  
 The headmaster of the school is back.

The indefinite noun *modeer* (headmaster) when used together with the definite noun *almadrasa* (the school), becomes definite, being associated with the definite noun.

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<sup>1</sup> DEL Art- Deleted Article.

<sup>2</sup> IND Art- Indefinite Article.

<sup>3</sup> DEF Art- Definite Article.

This way of marking definiteness is called specification. For example, the noun phrase *kitab* (book) in sentence (33) is initially not specific. However, it is specific in the subsequent sentences (34) to (35), (examples are from Algalayeni, 1995):

33. Wajatu kitab $n$  (the suffix  $n$  represent indefiniteness)

I found book  $n$

I found a book.

34. Hamalto kitab y

I took book mine

I took my book.

35. Haza (demonstrative) kitab Ali

This book Ali

This is Ali's book.

36. Ayiena kitab haza *al*golam?

Where book this boy?

Where is the book of this boy?

37. Zaka kitab **al**zee kana hona

That book DEF Art-one was here

That is the book of the one who was here.

Thus in (34, 35, 36 and 37), the noun may be definite when combined with a determiner. Additionally the Arabic language enables a combination of definite and indefinite nouns, a move which transforms the indefinite noun to a definite noun. The Arabic language does not have an equivalent corresponding morpheme, for the English indefinite article *a/n*. However, some suffixes may be specified for indefiniteness, for example, the suffix  $n$ . In this respect, it does not correspond to the single free English morpheme of *a/n*, the English indefinite article. This phenomenon may be responsible for much of the misuse of the English article system by L1 Arabic speakers. The most obvious errors made by L1 Arabic speakers involve the use of the indefinite article when it is not necessary (Swan & Smith, 2001):

38. a. Here are a chairs (error committed by L1 Arabic speaker).

38. b. Here are chairs.

Confusion is caused by the absence of the indefinite article which maybe a result of the influence of the Arabic genitive construction (Swan & Smith, 2001):

39. Maktab Ali

Office Ali

Ali's office (or the office of Ali).

40. Galam *al* talib

Pen DEF Art-the student

The student's pen (or the pen of the student).

The Arabic language uses some preposition of time and place and they come before definite nouns (Swan and Smith, 2001):

41. enda *al*-ghroob naltage (enda: preposition of time)  
 At DEL Art<sup>4</sup>- the sunset we meet  
 We meet at sunset.
42. Mata takoon fe *al*beit? (fe: preposition of place)  
 When be in DEL Art- house?  
 When will you be at home?

In other instances, the Arabic language uses the definite article with the days of the week, with some months in the Arabic calendar, and with many names of towns, cities and countries. The following two examples (43) and (44) are also taken from Swan and Smith (2001).

43. Darasto fi *al* seen  
 I learnt in DEF Art-China  
 I learnt in China
44. Safarna min *al*-Sudan ela *al*-Iraq  
 We left from DEL Art -Sudan to DEL Art-Iraq  
 We left Sudan to go to Iraq

### ***Generic Reference***

The Arabic definite article *al* normally precedes a noun to indicate generic reference: *al*-talibo (the student, a student), *al*-tolabo (students), and *al*-sukkar (sugar). Partial generic reference may be expressed by a noun. In contrast to the English, some nouns use the zero article (where in English, the definite article is used) in place of the English definite article. The following examples are adapted from Aziz (1989).

45. Tareekh Afregia  
 History Africa  
 The history of Africa
46. Ma'a Neel  
 Water Nile  
 The water of the Nile
47. Derasat *al*-oloom *al*-asaseia  
 Study DEL Art-sciences DEL Art-basic  
 The study of basic sciences.

The adjectival “equivalent” has the definite article:

48. *Al*-tareekh *al*-freegee  
 DEL Art-history of DEL Art-Africa  
 African history
49. *Al*-filim *al*-amreekee

---

<sup>4</sup> DEL Art- deleted article.

DEL Art-film DEL Art-American  
American film

Thus, in generic reference, singular and plural numbers are neutralized; however, dual numbers are always specific.

### ***Specific Reference***

Indefinite and definite specific references are expressed by the zero article and the definite article respectively. A speaker normally moves from indefinite to the definite. (Wright, 1971, cited in Aziz, 1989):

50. Ekhtara kitaban wa magalan. Thuma tarak *al-*kitab.  
Chose book and magazine. Then left DEL Art-book.  
He chose a book and a magazine. Then he left the book.

The definite article is also used in what is given within a situational context:

51. Eftah *al-*bab  
Open DEL Art-door  
Open the door.

52. Ayna *al-*maktab?  
Where DEL Art-office?  
Where is the office?

Definite specific nouns that are placed in contrast to another noun normally take the zero article  $\emptyset$  and the definite article in this case is attached to the second noun, for example:

53. Sayarat *al-*ab  
Car DEL Art-father  
The father's car.

54. Tareeg *al-*asima  
Road DEL Art-capital  
The road of the capital.

55. Nehayat *al-*gissa  
End DEL Art-story  
The end of the story.

56. Sorat *al-*bint  
Picture DEL Art-girl  
The girl's picture.

### ***Unique Reference***

Unique reference indicates a single noun where the zero article is used with proper nouns such as *Cairo*, *Hamed*, and *Afreegia (Africa)*. However, a number of proper nouns, especially geographical place names are used with the definite article, for example,

Albasra, Alkhaherah (the capital of Cairo), although the zero article is also used occasionally in colloquial style: Basra, Khaherah (Beeston, 1970, cited in Aziz, 1989).

Hence, the proper noun may be converted to a common noun with a change in its reference by placing it in contrast to another noun. The zero article is used and the noun phrase has generic reference: Aalem (the scholar) zamanuh–Aalem his time (a scholar of his time), Bagdad al-garab- Bagdad the west (Bagdad of the west). If the proper noun originally takes the definite article, the article is dropped, for example Al-Rassoul (the prophet), Rassoul Rabehi (Prophet of his God).

A summary of the occurrence or lack of articles in the two languages is presented in table 4 below.

**Table 1.** Articles in English and Arabic

Language	Definite	Indefinite	Zero Ø
English	+ (the)	+ (a/an)	+
Arabic	+ (al)	-	-

Key: + indicates the existence of an article.

- indicates the lack of an article.

## Transfer

As stated earlier in this chapter, the definite article *al* in Arabic language is the equivalent of the English definite article *the* to denote definiteness in unique references and to refer back to indefinite nouns in previous discourse. However, the lack of the indefinite article or the use of the suffix *-n* in the Arabic language to denote indefiniteness reveals a number of differences that are expected to cause negative transfer when L1 Arabic learners attempt to acquire the English article system.

Kharmma and Hajjaj (1977) and Smith (2001) note that:

- Because of the different ways of encoding definiteness between the Arabic and English languages, some underuse of *a* (e.g. *this is book*) is to be expected. Potentially, there might be an overuse of it too (e.g. *There are a books*).
- Nouns in genitive constructions are expected to cause negative transfer for L1 Arabic speakers when acquiring the English article system (e.g. *car the teacher* instead of *the teacher's car*).
- In the use of the zero article Ø, it is predicted that L1 Arabic learners may use the definite article *the* which is omitted in the English language, in other words, they might replace the zero article Ø by using the definite article *the* (e.g. *I went to the bed*).
- The Arabic language often uses the definite article *al* with proper nouns which is not the case as in the English language (e.g. *I studied in the China and worked in the India*). This phenomenon may cause negative transfer for L1 Arabic speakers



when dealing with the English articles, thus, they may use the definite article *the* in places that do not require the use of the definite article.

Kharma and Hajjaj (1977) add that:

- Compound noun phrases are also expected to cause negative transfer (e.g. *the salt and the pepper* literally: *almillih wa alfilfil* ).
- The Arabic definite article *al* is obligatorily used in generic plural noun phrases (e.g. *the horses are useful animals* literally: *alhasseen haiwanat mofeeda* ).
- The Arabic definite article *al* is also used with abstract nouns (e.g. *all men fear the death*: literally: *kullo alrijal yakhafoon almoot*).
- The Arabic definite article *al* is also found with mass nouns which is different from the English language in the generic use (e.g. *the milk is nutritious to the body. The sugar may cause problems for the body*: literally: *alsukar gad yosabib mashakil llejisim*). This phenomenon is predicted to cause difficulties for L1 Arabic speakers in their attempt to acquire the English article system.

Due to the absence of the zero article  $\emptyset$  in the Arabic language, it is predicted that the following uses of the English zero article  $\emptyset$  may be produced a result of negative transfer:

- The English zero article  $\emptyset$  is used with names of the days, seasons, pubs and restaurants, for example,  $\emptyset$  *Friday*,  $\emptyset$  *winter*,  $\emptyset$  *Maggie* (name of a pub) and  $\emptyset$  *Young* (name of a restaurant). In the Arabic language the definite article *al* is used in of these places of the English zero article  $\emptyset$ . Another structure is also used to replace the use of the zero article  $\emptyset$ , for example,  $\emptyset$  *Labour Day* follows the structure of ‘-article + noun’ ‘+ article +noun’ (*yuum alomal: day of the labour*).
- The English zero article  $\emptyset$  is also used with sports (e.g.  $\emptyset$  *swimming*) and activities (e.g.  $\emptyset$  *driving*) whereas Arabic language uses the definite article *al* in both cases.
- With certain nouns, the English zero article  $\emptyset$  is required; however, it replaced by the Arabic definite article, for example, ‘go to  $\emptyset$  hell’ the Arabic language ‘*izhab ela al aljaheem*’, the noun ‘hell’ (*jaheem*) is preceded by the definite article *al*) likewise, ‘*tears in  $\emptyset$  Heaven*’ and ‘ *$\emptyset$  travelling abroad maybe useful*’, the Arabic definite article *al* is used in both cases.
- Because of the fact that English idioms should be acquired as items and not as system and the three English articles are used with them, this might cause difficulties for L1 Arabic in their attempts to acquire the English article system.

The English definite article *the* is sometimes replaced by the use of different structures in Arabic language,. Let us take the NP the ‘*the prime minister*’, as an example. The

Arabic language uses the structure: ‘-article + adjective’ (*raies: prime*) ‘+ article + plural noun’ (*raies alwozaraa: prime the ministers*).

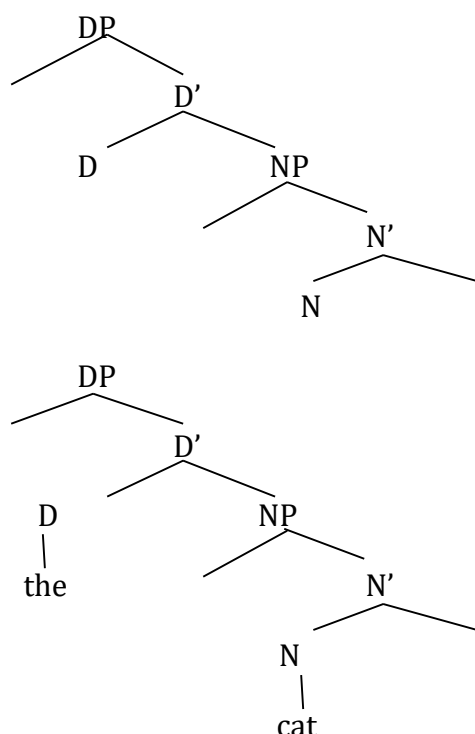
### The syntax of articles

From a syntactic account, following Abney (1987; in Carnie, 2002, p. 144), a determiner, which include the articles, not inside the NP. Rather, it heads its own phrasal projection. Articles, being subsumed under the category of determiners, would therefore head the Determiner Phrase (DP). The main groups of determiners in English are shown in table 2.

**Table 2.** Main Groups of Determiners

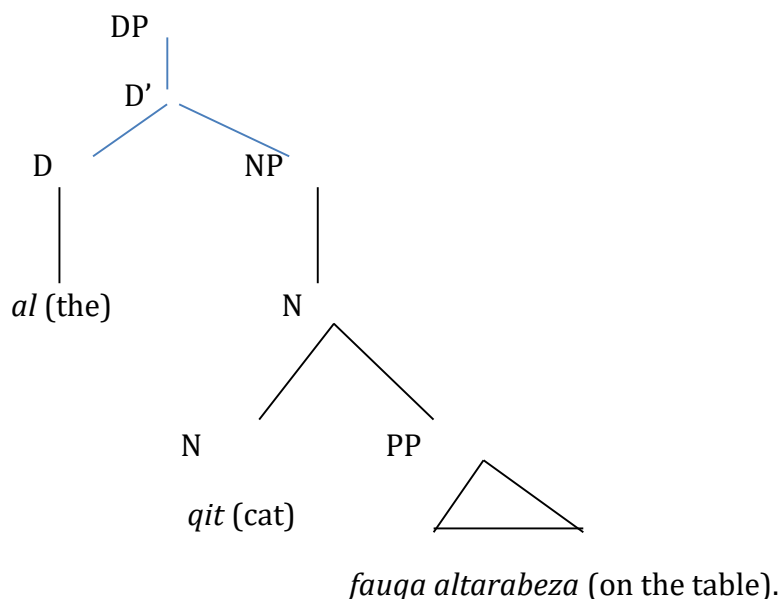
Determiners	Examples
Articles	<i>a/n, the</i>
Demonstratives	<i>This, these, that, those</i>
Possessives	<i>My, our, your, his, her, its, theirs</i>
Indefinites	<i>Some, any, no, every, other, another, many, more, enough, few, less, much, either, neither, several, all, both, each ...</i>
Cardinal Numbers	<i>One, two, three, four ....</i>
Ordinal Numbers	<i>First, second, third, ... last.</i>

The English DP is proposed as in Carnie (2002):



In this account the NP is a complement of the DP and the head could be an article. Further, the examples in table 5 show that the noun is modified by one the following: adjectives, numerals, quantifiers, demonstratives, preposition phrase or relative clauses. In the Arabic language there is the possibility of combination of two modifiers,

for example, two adjectives, as complements of the NP. Thus the Arabic DP would be as follow, where the head could be the definite article *al*:



### **Ionin, ko and wexler's (2004) account of definiteness and specificity**

Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2004) proposed a semantic parameter assuming that articles can be treated through the notion and definiteness and specificity. In their account the feature of [+definite] reflects that both of the speaker and the hearer share same knowledge in a context, unlike the feature of [+specificity], in which the state of knowledge is only unique to the speaker. Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2004) argue that the English language uses *the* and *a/n* to encode definiteness and indefiniteness respectively. However, no markers are available to illustrate the feature of [+specificity] in Standard English, only the demonstrative *this* is sometimes used for this purpose. Moreover, they state that the feature of both [+specificity] and [-specificity] can have wide-scope.

Briefly, Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2004) categorised the definite article and indefinite article as: (see Appendix 5 for examples of these features).

- [+definite, +specific] Definite, wide scope, speaker knowledge.
- [+definite, -specific] Definite, narrow scope, no speaker knowledge.
- [+definite, +specific] Definite, no scope interactions, speaker knowledge.
- [+definite, -specific] Definite, no scope interactions, no speaker knowledge.
- [-definite, +specific] Indefinite, wide scope, speaker knowledge.
- [-definite, -specific] Indefinite, narrow scope, no speaker knowledge.
- [-definite, +specific] Indefinite, no scope interactions, speaker knowledge.
- [-definite, -specific] Indefinite, no scope interactions, no speaker knowledge.
- Simple definite [+definite, +specific].
- Simple indefinite [-definite, -specific].

## CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the linguistic assumptions of the article system and the notions of definiteness and indefiniteness in the English and Arabic languages. It illustrated the discussion with detailed examples in both languages in order to facilitate information for the readers and researchers in the field of articles. It also, covered all the importance parts of the articles with respect to both languages in terms of syntax and semantic use.

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