

CHAPTER I

DEFINITIONS OF ARTICLES

Grammarians of various schools defined articles differently. Following are some of the definitions of articles as presented in structural, transformational, and traditional grammars.

1.1 Articles in Structural Grammar

Structural grammarians define articles in terms of position.

Charles Carpenter Fries divides English words into word classes and function words. In his analysis, articles are placed in the function word Group A on the basis of their position in the sentence test frame:

Group	Class	Class	Class
A	1	2	3
(The)	concert	was	good. ¹

They share this position with other words, e.g. this/ these, that/ those, my, your, each, every, etc.

¹Charles Carpenter Fries, The Structure of English (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1952), p. 89.

Fries says that in the test frame above "... we want all the words for the position in which the word the occurs."²

and

... Group A consists of all the words that can occupy the position of the in this particular test frame. The words in this position all occur with Class 1 words³ and only with Class 1 words in our structures. Structurally, when they appear in this 'position', they serve as markers of Class 1 words. Sometimes they are called "determiners."⁴

William Branford states that

... The and a are typical markers of nouns: they are often called determiners because they are members of a small class of words which help to 'determine' or mark off the status of other words.⁵

and

Determiners are usually the clearest signals of the presence of nouns. The following invariably act as determiners; i.e. as markers preceding a noun:

A, an, my, our, the, their, your.

The following frequently act as determiners:

²Ibid., p. 88.

³Class 1 words in Fries' theory are usually known as 'nouns' in traditional grammar.

⁴C.C. Fries, op.cit., pp. 88-89.

⁵William Branford, The Elements of English (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967.), p. 106.

This, these, that, those; his, her, its; one, many a, more, several, no, all, both.⁶

Barbara Strang holds that

The name 'determiner' is appropriately given to words which, functioning as adjuncts, show their head-words to be nouns. The most central type of determiner is that to which traditionally the name article is given;...⁷

Robert L. Politzer analyses articles in the same way as Fries:

The (with any, some, more, many, eighteen, each, etc.) can be considered as belonging in the same substitution class. We shall call them function words of class 1 (F 1).⁸

1.2 Articles in Transformational Grammar

There are many schools of transformational grammar. Different schools treat articles differently.

Paul Roberts⁹ who works with the early version of Chomsky's transformational grammar introduces articles into the structure of noun phrase by the following rules:

⁶Ibid., p. 131.

⁷Barbara H.M. Strang, Modern English Structure (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., Reprinted 1969.), p. 124.

⁸Robert L. Politzer, Foreign Language Learning (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, Preliminary Edition, 1965), p. 49.

⁹Paul Roberts, English Syntax (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., Alternate Edition, 1964), pp. 12-13.



NP -----> Det + N
Det -----> Art
Art -----> { Def
 Nondef }

In this analysis, every noun phrase consists of an article and a noun. The article may be rewritten as the when it is definite,

Examples:

- the man - the girl,

a or \emptyset (zero) when it is indefinite,

Examples:

- a orange - oranges

- a boy - boys.

In Jacobs and Rosenbaum 's English Transformational Grammar,¹⁰ articles appear in the deep structure as feature of nouns. They may be realized in the surface structure as the when the noun has the feature 'definite,' a when it is 'indefinite,' and this, that, these, those when it is 'demonstrative.'

Grammarians who work with Harris's transformational grammar analyse articles as follows:

¹⁰Roderick A. Jacobs and Peter S. Rosenbaum, English Transformational Grammar (Massachusetts: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1968).

... the definite article has the status of a transformational constant introduced by those sentence-combining or nominalizing transformations which adjoin a right (i.e., post-nominal) adjunct in close apposition to a noun.

1.3 Articles in Traditional Grammar

In most traditional grammars the class 'article' comprises of two members: a/an and the.

A or an is called the Indefinite Article, because it leaves indefinite the person or thing spoken of;...

The is called the Definite Article, because it points out some particular person or thing;...¹²

Traditional grammarians have pointed out that a and an are weakened forms of one and the a weakened that.¹³

Unlike other grammars, traditional grammar provides rules for the use of the articles.

Examples:

The indefinite article is used:

¹¹Beverly Levin Robbins, The Definite Article in English Transformations (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1968), p.5.

¹²P.C. Wren, High School English Grammar (Bombay: K. and J. Cooper Educational Publishers, Reprinted 1966), p. 49.

¹³Both Jespersen and Curme say that a and the ^{are} derived from one and that respectively.

(1) With the meaning one, any, it doesn't matter which,

Examples:

- I have a sister and two brothers.
- The animals came in two at a time.
- A stitch in time saves nine. (Proverb)
- A triangle has three sides.
- Please pass me a fork.

(2) In certain expressions of measurements:
Examples:

- He drove the car at ninety miles an hour.
- This material is 12s. 6d. a yard.
- Butter is 4s. a pound.
- We have lessons three times a week.
- He earns £1000 a year.

The definite article is used:

(1) When we speak of a particular person or thing or one already referred to;

Examples:

- The book you want is out of print.
- I dislike the fellow.
- Let us go to the club.

(2) When a singular noun is meant to represent a whole class.

Examples:

- The cow is a useful animal.
- The horse is a noble animal.

- The cat loves comfort.¹⁴

Traditional grammar regards only the and a as articles; transformational grammar includes this, that, these, those and a few other words in the class of articles; structural grammar groups several words that can occur before a noun in the same class as a, an, and the.

It is apparent that these grammars do not agree as to what words are included in the class of articles. They, however, agree that

a) what is called 'article' or 'determiner' occurs before a noun or before any word that functions as a noun;

b) the function of the article is to show whether the noun is definite or indefinite.

The inadequacy of traditional and structural grammars in their treatment of articles has been pointed out by H.A. Gleason:

... Traditional grammar, structural grammar, and most linguistic grammars are all alike in stopping short of an adequate classification. What is given in most is not even adequate for the rather gross abbreviated treatment that can be given in a brief grammar curriculum.¹⁵

¹⁴C.E. Eckersley and J.M. Eckersley, A Comprehensive English Grammar (Hong Kong: Dai Nippon Printing Co., New Impression, 1969), pp. 52-54.

¹⁵H.A. Gleason Jr., Linguistics and English Grammar (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), p. 126.

Gleason suggests that Fries' function words Group A or determiners be subdivided.

The division or subclassification of Fries' determiner class must provide a means to describe various combinations of these words that are in use. For example, in the following phrases all but the nouns are determiners according to Fries:

all the men, the several men,
 all the several men, all his friends,
 his several friends, all his many friends.

In none of them can the order of words be altered, and a full grammar must be able to describe the facts. To do so, some further division or subclassification is required. As a first approximation, the following groups can be distinguished, mostly on the basis of occurrence in sequences of determiners:

- 1) determiners that can occur in sequences, but only as the first member - all, both;
 - 2) determiners that can occur as the first or second of two or as the second of three - the, this, that;
 - 3) determiners that can occur only as the last in the sequences of two or three - several, many;
 - 4) determiners that do not ordinarily occur with other determiners except occasionally with numerals - every, each, any;
 - 5) the numerals - two, twenty;
- and 6) the 'indefinite article' which most often occurs as the only determiner in a phrase, but may occur in certain very special combinations: many a...¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 126-128.

In the present study, this, that, these, and those will be grouped in the same class as the and a, and the term 'definite articles' will be used to refer to the, this, that, these, and those, and the term 'indefinite article' to a and its variant an.



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