

THE ARTICLE IN MODERN ENGLISH

A. STEPONAVIČIUS

Recent approaches to the article represent, as a rule, attempts to solve the problem in terms of grammatical categories. When structurally orientated, such works aim, first of all, at disclosing the oppositions upon which the system of the article is based. The main thing here is to discern the grammatical meaning of the category. And here, to start with, a structuralist finds himself in a rather difficult position. While a traditionalist in his atomistic approach is quite satisfied with the separate particular meanings he discerns and he may well see the final goal of his analysis in them, a structuralist must disclose the meaning which would cover separate particular meanings and which could be taken for the distinctive semantic feature in distinguishing the members of the opposition in question¹.

Determining the grammatical meaning of the category of article is an especially difficult task. Nor is it easy to determine on the basis of this meaning the actual scope of the category. And in this connection it may be well worth remarking that we may think, as a rule, those theories better which account for more linguistic facts and leave less room for "exceptions". According to one of the newer interpretations, nouns with the definite article the have particular meaning and nouns with the indefinite article a (an) have general meaning. Particular meaning is disclosed as a totality of generic and individual features, and general meaning, as a totality of generic features. But the opposition particular v. general does not always apply, because there are cases when both nouns with the and nouns with a (an) have „general“ meaning, and, what is even more embarrassing, nouns with the definite article may be even more generalizing than those with the indefinite article (cp. *The tiger is a ferocious animal* and *A tiger is a ferocious animal*). As a way out, a limitation is imposed upon the system: the opposition is declared valid in the case of what is called particular correlation, i. e.: when nouns name particular objects or phenomena, but invalid in the case of general

¹ Morphological oppositions, we hold, always prove to be binary, so the grammatical meaning of a category will characterize only one set of linguistic units, which may be termed the marked members of an opposition, while the other set will be lacking this meaning and, consequently, will be termed the unmarked members of the opposition.

² М. В. Никитин, Категория артикля в английском языке, Фрунзе, 1961.

correlation, i. e. when nouns name species of objects, phenomena, without correlating with any particular object or phenomenon. It is rather difficult to see why cases like A (the) flag is a symbol (general correlation) and cases like This is a (the) flag (we have found) (particular correlation) should be treated as quite different grammatical phenomena and even how the two correlations can always be told apart³.

The most common theory of the article prescribes the two meanings of definiteness (familiarity, determination) and indefiniteness to the definite and the indefinite articles respectively. Definiteness is made the grammatical meaning of the category of article by D. G. Radchenko (Radchenko calls it the category of specification)⁴. The scheme of the article as drawn by Radchenko is important in that it classifies nouns with the indefinite article (a book) and nouns with the „zero-article“ (books, water) as alloforms of the same indefinite specification, opposing the indefinite specification to the definite specification (nouns with the: the horse(s) we've bought; the water in our well; the horse is a domestic animal; the sun). As for the meaning of definiteness (or indefiniteness), it cannot account for some cases of article usage properly. We would rather define the grammatical meaning of the category as isolation, which characterizes the world-groups „the+noun“ as the marked members of the opposition. Here it will not be for the first time that the meaning of a noun with the definite article is referred to as isolation. This meaning is sometimes called isolation by P. Christophersen, though usually Christophersen holds that the marks familiarity and a (an) marks unity⁵. G. M. Raikhel⁶ and V. I. Plotkin⁷ also speak about the isolative meaning of the definite article.

Isolation is said to be always implying contrast: the contrast must be between the isolated object(s) and the other objects of the same class, between the isolated display of some abstract notion and the other possible displays of the same notion, between the isolated portion of material and the rest of it⁸. Yet we shall be nearer the truth, if we define the meaning as isolation irrespective of whether any contrast is implied or not. We may trace this general meaning of isolation

³ Or let us take, for instance, the two sentences *The (a) dog is a vigilant animal* and *This dog is a vigilant animal*. The correlation of the noun *animal* in the second sentence must be particular. But what is the correlation of the same noun *animal* in the first sentence? If it is general, as we may think, a strict line of demarcation is drawn between the two usages, though it would be a mere absurdity to observe such a distinction in practice.

⁴ See, first of all. Д. Г. Радченко, К вопросу о системе английских артиклей. — Черновицкий гос. ун-т, Научный ежегодник за 1957 год, стр. 278—280.

⁵ P. Christophersen, *The Articles*, Copenhagen-London, 1939, § 10 (p. 28), § 21 (p. 53), § 30 (p. 71), etc. Christophersen's book on account of rich material and many subtle observations ranks as the most important work on the English article.

⁶ Г. М. Райхель, Выражение отношений к классу однородных предметов существительными современного английского языка. — „Вопросы языкознания“, 1966, № 6, стр. 76—80.

⁷ В. Я. Плоткин, Система грамматических категорий имени существительного в современном английском языке. — XI научная сессия Новосибирского гос. пед. института, вып. 6: Иностранные языки, Новосибирск, 1967, стр. 61—71.

⁸ It is necessary to add that very often the definiteness theories also admit a similar contrast: what is familiar is said to be narrower than the whole genus, and so the familiar is said to be contrasted to the rest of the genus.

in practically all the cases of the use of the definite article, though, depending upon the number and the lexical character of a noun, as well as context, this meaning may undergo certain modifications. The meaning is „one object in isolation“ when the is used with a countable noun in the singular. The same meaning characterizes *Unica* (the sun, the moon, the sky, the Universe, the firmament). From the point of view of the article, there is nothing out of the ordinary about these nouns, except that their isolation is permanent⁹. In a similar manner the meaning is „a number of objects in isolation“ when the is used with a plural noun. An uncountable noun with the definite article will denote an isolated portion of material or an isolated display of some abstract notion (quality, activity, etc.). In some contexts the generalizing isolative meaning is met with. These contexts are such that a singular or a plural noun denotes the whole genus, not part of it. In this respect nouns with the generalizing isolative meaning are rather like *Unica*. The number of the countable nouns that may be used in the singular with this meaning is quite limited. Christophersen distinguishes five main types of such nouns: (1) types of men (the lunatic, the lover, the poet, the American millionaire, the juvenile offender, etc.; also the devil); (2) species of animals (the lion, the cat); (3) plants (the tulip, the potato, the violet, etc.); (4) precious stones (the emerald, the beryl, etc.); (5) cultural products (the telephone, the duel, the beer-hall, the book, the play, the drama, the rouble, the metre, etc.)¹⁰. The list of such nouns can be extended a little¹¹. First of all, nouns of measure (time, space, weight, number, quantity, etc.) in the so-called distributive usage also have the generalizing isolative meaning (by the thousand, the litre, the dozen, etc.; sixpence the bottle; two dollars the pound). Then, the names of parts of the body can also be used in this way. (Smoking is certainly bad for the throat. Writing with the left hand creates problems in school R. Long). Finally, we may add the names of seasons and parts of the day (the morning, the winter). This usage (the definite article with generalizing isolative meaning) is, on the whole, quite uncharacteristic of uncountable nouns¹². But it is rather common with plural nouns, especially with the names of nationalities, families, parties, etc.¹³: The women make their influence felt in politics now (R. Long). The idea of collectiveness is always implied here: not separate individuals but the class as a whole is denoted.

The meaning of the unmarked members of the opposition must be defined negatively, as the absence of isolation. It is present in the case of nouns with the indefinite

⁹ Cp. P. Christophersen, *Op. cit.*, § 10 (p. 29); O. Есперсен, *Философия грамматики*, М., 1958, стр. 124.

¹⁰ P. Christophersen, *Op. cit.*, § 59 (p. 128—129)

¹¹ See R. Long, *The Sentence and its Parts*, The University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 295—297.

¹² Christophersen has noted only a few uncountable nouns that are used with the generalizing isolative meaning: *the weather, the air, the wind, the light, the law, the life*, and some others (See P. Christophersen, *Op. cit.*, § 64 (p. 145). We may add *the beautiful* „that which has beauty“, *the bad* „that which is bad“, etc. In this case it is rather difficult or even impossible to distinguish countables from uncountables, on the one hand, and the generalizing isolative meaning from the simply isolative meaning, on the other hand. Neither is it so very important to observe such distinctions.

¹³ P. Christophersen, *Op. cit.*, § 64 (p. 146); R. Long, *Op. cit.*, p. 295.

article and nouns without an article¹⁴. Alternatively it may be said that nouns in this usage have only classifying meaning. The nounal classifying meaning¹⁵ equally inherent to nouns with the definite article, may be considered the basis of the opposition isolated v. non-isolated. At the same time nouns with the indefinite article or without it have separate syntagmatic meanings. For example, singular countable nouns may acquire the numerical meaning "one" (a thousand years; a quarter of an hour). The generalizing meaning is also met with. But all the cases of the use of nouns with a (an) or without an article are similar in that the meaning of isolation is lacking.

Having discussed the problem of meaning, we shall now turn to the problem of the actual scope of the category. In our interpretation the category is presented as a system which does not consist only of nouns with the articles *the*, *a (an)* (what may be termed analytical morphological forms) and nouns with no article (what may be termed synthetic morphological forms), though these forms, no doubt, constitute the grammatical centre of the category. We include in the system also the attributive word-groups the attributes of which have a lexical meaning consistent with the grammatical meaning of isolation (or non-isolation) and perform the functions of the auxiliaries *the*, *a (an)*, i. e. render the presence of the articles unnecessary. These words, together with the articles *the*, *a (an)*, may be termed determinatives. On account of mutual exclusiveness (e. g. *the* cannot be used with *my*: **the my book*) and meaning, the following words must be classified as the substitutes for the definite article: *this*, *these*, *that*, *those*, *my*, *our*, *thy*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *its*, *their*, *whose*, *which*, *what* (with the isolative meaning, like in *What clothes she has* are unsuitable), a genitive form. These words (together with *the*) may be termed definite determinatives. Analogically the substitutes for the indefinite article are distinguished: *one*, *every*, *each*, *some*, *any*, *either*, *another*, *neither*, *no*, *whatever* (whatsoever), *whichever* (whichever). These words (together with the indefinite article) will be termed indefinite determinatives¹⁶. The general scheme of the article may be illustrated as follows:

¹⁴ Here we shall not comment on the distinction between nouns with the indefinite article and nouns without an article. But it is self-evident that the marking of countability by means of *a (an)* is related more to the category of number than to the category of article.

¹⁶ The terms "definite" "indefinite" (determinatives), just like "the definite article" and "the indefinite article", should be taken as purely traditional terms, but not as suggestive of the meaning of definiteness.

We do not oppose the notion "morpheme" to the notion "word". Both notional and auxiliary words may be characterized as morphemes (or combinations of morphemes). Thus *the*, *a (an)* are both words and morphemes. The combinations "*the*, *a (an)* + noun" and "*this*, *some*, etc. + noun" may be equally referred to as word-groups. But the word-groups "*the*, *a (an)* noun" are purely morphological (what we call analytical forms). We may refer to "*the*, *a (an)* + noun" as definite and indefinite nouns (or forms). The word-groups "*this*, *some*, etc. + noun" are morphological in that their attributes perform morphological functions identical with the functions of *the*, *a(an)*, but, on the other hand, they are like regular attributive word-groups in that these determinatives are semantically full. In this case we may also use the terms "definite (indefinite) nouns (or forms)", because in our interpretation of the grammatical categories the term "form" means "a unit of a grammatical category".

ARTIKELIS DABARTINĖJE ANGLŲ KALBOJE

A. STEPONAVIČIUS

Reziumė

Pateikiamoji teorija nagrinėja artikelį ne kaip grynai gramatinę kategoriją, bet kaip gramatinę-leksikinę kategoriją. Jos pagrindas yra žymimųjų ir nežymimųjų formų priešpastatymas. Formalūs žymimumo (arba nežymimumo) požymiai yra vadinamieji determinatyvai. Žymimosios formos – tai daiktavardžiai, kurių determinacija išreikšta vienu iš šių žodžių: *the, this, that, those, my, our, your, thy, his, her, its, their, whose, which, what*, arba kilmininko linksnio daiktavardžiu. Tai vadinamos žymimosios determinacijos žodžiai. Nežymimosios formos – tai daiktavardžiai, kurių determinacija išreikšta žodžiais *a (an), one, another, every, each, some, any, either, neither, no, whatever, whichever* arba determinatyvinio žodžio nebuvimu. Tai nežymimosios determinacijos žodžiai. Žymimosios ir nežymimosios formos priešpastatomos pagal izoliacijos (išskyrimo) reikšmę.

АРТИКЛЬ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

A. СТЕПОНАВИЧЮС

Резюме

В данной теории артикль представлен не как чисто грамматическая, но как грамматико-лексическая категория. Основой ее является противопоставление определенных и неопределенных форм. Формальными показателями определенности или неопределенности считаются т.н. детерминативы (определители). Определенная детерминация выражается следующими словами: *the, this, that, those, my, our, your, thy, his, its, their, whose, which, what* или формой притяжательного падежа. Неопределенная детерминация выражается словами: *a (an), one, another, every, each, some, any, either, neither, no, whatever, whichever* или отсутствием детерминативов. Определенные и неопределенные формы противопоставляются по значению выделения (изоляции).