

Inclusive Use of Indefinite, Definite and Zero Article in English and Arabic Religious Texts

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the inclusive function of the indefinite, definite and zero article in English and Arabic. These articles are used in the two languages for generic reference but each language has certain conditions for this inclusive use. The researchers shed light on the syntactic and pragmatic aspects of the articles in each language because the syntactic structure of the sentence in Arabic determines the inclusive function. As for the pragmatic level, the interpretation of the reader and the context in which the articles are used determines their inclusive reference. The researchers select Five texts from the Holy Bible and Five texts from the Glorious Quran that are regarded as the standard languages. The selected texts are analyzed qualitatively in order to examine the similarities and differences of the inclusive use of articles in English and Arabic. Understanding the use of the articles for generic reference in English and Arabic is hoped to be helpful for translators, teachers and writers.

Key words: inclusive language, definite articles, indefinite article, zero article, pragmatic analysis

الاستخدام الشمولي لأدوات التنكير والتعريف والأسماء الخالية من الأدوات في النصوص الدينية في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية

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خلاصة البحث

تهدف الرسالة الحالية للبحث عن الاستخدام الشمولي لأدوات النكرة والمعرفة و الأسماء غير المُعرَّفة في اللغتين الانكليزية و العربية. تستخدم هذه الادوات في كلتا اللغتين لغرض الإشارة بصورة عامة، ولكن توجد هناك شروط للاستخدام الشمولي في كل لغة. قام الباحثان بتسليط الضوء على الجانب النحوي و التداولي لهذه الادوات في كلتا اللغتين وذلك لان الجانب النحوي للجملة في اللغة العربية يحدد المعنى الشمولي. في ما يخص الجانب التداولي فأن تفسير القارئ و السياق الذي تستخدم فيه هذه الادوات يحدد المعنى الشمولي لها. قام الباحثان باختيار خمسة نصوص من الانجيل المقدس و خمسة نصوص من القران الكريم لان اللغة المستخدمة فيهما تعتبر لغة رسمية او فصوى. تم تحليل النصوص المختارة تحليلًا نوعيًا وذلك من اجل بحث التشابه و الاختلاف في الاستخدام الشمولي لهذه الادوات في اللغتين الانكليزية و العربية. من المؤمل ان تكون هذه الدراسة مفيدة للمترجمين والتدريسيين والكتّاب في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الشمولية، أدوات التنكير، أدوات التعريف، الأسماء الخالية من الأدوات، التحليل ال

1. INTRODUCTION

In English language, articles are also called determiners which belong to the function word class.

They are either indefinite (a / an) or definite (the). These articles have a specific and a generic reference. The specific reference is interpreted when the article is used to refer to an actual person or thing, while the generic reference is indicated when the article is used to refer to the class as a whole rather than to a member of that class (Penston, 2005, p. 99). In this regard, Biber, Johansson, Leech and Conrad (1999, p. 265) notice that *generic reference* is employed by:

1. Indefinite article with singular countable nouns.
2. Definite article with singular and nationality words.
3. Zero article with plural countable and uncountable nouns.

As far as the Arabic counterpart is concerned, nouns are classified into two classes: المعرفة (definite) and النكرة (indefinite). Definite noun is the name of a known or specific person, place or thing, such as بصرة (Basra). Indefinite noun is the name of unknown person, thing or place such as قرية (village). Indefinite nouns can be converted into definite either by using the definite article (ال) or by *annexation* such as رجل (man), الرجل (the man), رجالكم (your men) (Ahmmad, 2017, p. 66). الشوكاني (1327 A. H., p. 113) mentions that the inclusive use of articles is employed by:

1. The article (ال) that denotes the genus whether it is used with singular or with regular and irregular plural nouns.
2. Nouns defined by *annexation* whether singular or plural.
3. Undefined plural nouns.
4. Undefined singular nouns in context of negation, prohibition, condition and interrogation.

3. Past Studies

Inclusiveness is mentioned by English and Arabic grammarians. The researchers will shed light on the scholarly works that related to this topic. Al-Hilali (2005) studied the English and Arabic forms of totality in legal text. She made a contrastive analysis in order to show the use of these forms in the two languages.

الزايدى (2010) studied inclusiveness only in Surat Alnisa. Her work was limited to the forms that are agreed upon by Arab grammarians and jurists. المالكي (2013) and راضي (2017) focused on inclusiveness and how the forms were employed in the Glorious Quran.

4. Inclusive Articles in English Language

Syntactically, in English language, there are indefinite and definite articles. The indefinite articles are *a* which is used before consonants and *an* which is used before vowels. Grammarians agree about using the indefinite articles before Singular countable nouns only (Leech, 1989, p. 1; Greenbaum & Nilson, 2002, p. 8; Leech & Svartvik, 2003, p. 35).

Pragmatically, Jespersen (1933, p. 174) and Reiter and Frank (2010, p. 40) believe that the indefinite articles are used for inclusive reference because they mean *any* which refers to unspecific persons or things as in the examples below. *A* and *an* represent one object but they are interpreted as representation to a whole class.

1. A dog is so vigilant.

2. An orange contains vitamin C.

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985, p. 281) say that in non-subject position, the indefinite articles *a* and *an* do not keep this inclusive function as in:

3. She is reading a mystery play.

In the previous sentence, *a* does not have an inclusive meaning because it refers to one play only.

There is only one definite article in English language which is *the*. Syntactically, it can precede singular, plural and mass words (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973, p. 62; Downing & Locke, 2006, p. 417).

Pragmatically, it is believed that the definite article *the* is employed for inclusive reference if it is used with a singular noun. It is used to refer to an

object that is interpreted as a reference to a group of persons, animals and so on as in:

4. The man is rational.

In the previous example, the definite article is used with the singular noun "man" but it refers to people in general (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 28; Brinton, 2000, p. 105; Krifka, 2003, p. 1; Leech & Svartvik, 2003, p. 224; Snape & García-Mayo, 2011, p. 4; Al-Malki, Abdul Majid & Omar, 2014, p. 15; Tomás, 2016, p. 11).

Quirk et al. (1985, p. 281) mention that in non-subject position, the definite article *the* keeps its inclusive reference. Although *the* has an inclusive function with singular nouns only, Biber et al. (1999, p. 266) state that it has this function with plural nationality words as in:

5. The Americans are exploiters.

Syntactically, Tomás (2016, p. 14) points out that plural countable and mass words cannot be used with indefinite and definite articles i.e. *zero article*. Quirk et al. (1985, p. 282), Biber et al. (1999, p. 265), Greenbaum and Nelson (2002, p. 107) and Kearns (2002, p. 139) agree that *zero article*, when used with plural countable or mass nouns as in the examples below, may refer to a kind of inclusive reference that is interpreted as a reference to the whole class:

6. Books are useful.

7. Gold is expensive.

Quirk et al. (1985) refer to the influence of the syntactic position of bare plural in the sentence. It has a universal interpretation in subject position as in (8), while in object position this interpretation disappears as in (9):

8. Beavers build dams.

9. Dams are built by beavers. (p. 166).

5. Inclusive Articles in Arabic Language

Syntactically, in Arabic language, the article *ال* is prefixed to nouns either to convert the indefinite nouns into definite which is called عهديه or to denote the genus which is called جنسية. الجنس (the genus) is a linguistic concept which refers to the species of people and birds such as النجم (the stars) and الطير (the birds) (السلمي, 2005, p. 300) as in:

10. "ان الانسان لفي خسر" (2: العصر).

"Verily Man is in loss" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 1783).

Pragmatically, *ال* الجنسية (the article that denotes the genus) is considered as a way of indicating an inclusive meaning. For example, the article *ال* in the word "الانسان" in the previous example refers to all people regardless of their gender (الشوكاني, 1327 A. H., p. 112; ابن عقيل, 1980, p. 86; العلائي, 1997, p. 415; ابن منظور, 1999, II, p. 383; Ryding, 2005, p. 158; السلمي, 2005, p. 301).

Syntactically, there is another way of converting the indefinite nouns into definite which is *annexation* as in:

11. "يوصيكم الله في أولادكم" (11: النساء).

"God (thus) directs you as regards your children's (inheritance)" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 181)

Pragmatically, the *annexation* whether to singular or to plural is regarded as a form that has an inclusive reference (ابن النجار, 1993, III, p. 136; السبكي, 2004, II, p. 102; Ryding, 2005, p. 160).

Concerning *zero article* in Arabic, syntactically, plural or singular nouns that are used without the article *ال* or without *annexation* are called undefined nouns. Pragmatically, a singular undefined noun indicates an inclusive meaning if it is used in a context of negation, prohibition, condition or interrogation. Negation is expressed by using negative particles such as لا and لم which means (no) that negate the genus as in:

12. "وما من اله الا الله الواحد القهار" (65: ص).

"No God is there but the One God, Supreme and Irresistible" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 1231)

Undefined nouns in a context of negation such as the word "الله" (God) in the previous example is regarded as a form of inclusiveness (البيضاوي, n. d., II, p. 322; الشوكاني, 1327, A. H., p. 112; ابن يوسف, 1399 A. H., I, p. 327; ابن الزركشي, 1957, IV, 351; الغلابيني, 1912, p. 400; صالح, 1980, I, p. 312; ابن النجار, 1993, III, p. 136; الامدي, 1993, II, p. 16; السامرائي, 2000, I, p. 39, 316; نعيرات, 2007, p. 265; السلمي, 2005, p. 306; 2003, II, p. 19).

(1399) ابن يوسف, (1327, A. H., p. 112) الشوكاني (1986, A. H., I, p. 283), (1957, IV, 355) الزركشي, (1993, III, 136), (1993, II, p. 17) صالح, (2000, IV, p. 8) and (2007, p. 85) السامرائي believe that the prohibitive particle لا (no) that is used before the verb in the present tense is regarded as an order which is similar to imperative sentence. It is used for the prohibition of the second person or the addresser. Undefined noun in this prohibitive context is considered as an inclusive form as in the word "قوم" (people) in:

"لا يسخر قوم من قوم" (11: الحجرات) 13

"Let not some men among you laugh at others" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 1405)

ابن النجار (1993, III, p. 141) says that condition means the adoption of something on something else. ابن (1327, A. H., p. 114) الشوكاني, (n. d., I, p. 199) أمين (1936, I, p. 104) ابن نجيم, (1399 A. H., I, p. 373) يوسف and ابن النجار (1993, III, p. 141) agree that any indefinite noun, as in the word "قوم" (people) in the previous example, in a context of condition is considered as an inclusive form.

(1327, A. H., p. 114) الشوكاني, (n. d., I, p. 199) أمين (1936, I, p. 104) ابن نجيم, (1399 A. H., I, p. 373) ابن يوسف, (1993, III, p. 141) ابن النجار and (2007, p. 104) السامرائي state that any indefinite noun in a context of condition has an

inclusive meaning as in the word "خير" (good deed) in the conditional sentence in the verse below:

"وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِهِ عَلِيمًا" (127: النساء) 14.

"There is not a good deed which ye do, but God is well-acquainted therewith" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 220).

الزايدي (2011, p. 142) states that undefined noun in a context of interrogation is considered as an inclusive form. She believes that if the interrogation is rhetoric, the inclusive meaning is more expressive as in:

"فهل ترى لهم من باقية" (8: الحاقة) 15

"Then seest no any of them left surviving?" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 1597)

ابن عبد (n. d., p. 205) امين Grammmarians like (1327 A. H., I, p. 201) الشوكاني, (1326 A. H., I, p. 115) المطروحي (2010, p. 36) and ابن النجار (1993, p. 142) consider undefined plural noun as an inclusive form as:

"فَإِنْ كَانَ لَهُ إِخْوَةٌ فَلِأَيِّهِ السُّدُسُ مِنْ بَعْدِ وَصِيَّةٍ يُوصِي بِهَا أَوْ دَيْنٍ" (11: النساء) 16.

"Left brothers (or sisters), the mother has a sixth (The distribution in all cases is) after the payment of legacies and debts" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 181).

6. Research Methodology

This study conducts qualitative analysis because it holds an interpretivist perspective which proposes that because of the interaction with the world around them, people create a new meaning in a particular context (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012, p. 5). Moreover, qualitative analysis does not aim at checking a prepared theory in real life but it aims at getting certain generalizations by using the researchers' own experience and also by the selected data which can be changed and modified during the research (Bernardete & Andre, p. 53). In this study, ten samples are selected to make a sufficient understanding of the inclusive use of the indefinite, definite and *zero articles* in English and Arabic. Five verses are selected from the Holy Bible and five verses from the Glorious

Quran. The English religious texts are selected from the New International Version because it employs the articles for generic reference in order to be inclusive (Marlowe, 2005 & Poythress, 2011, p. 79).

In this study, the model of analysis depends on the view of the English and Arab grammarians

concerning the inclusive use of *the indefinite, definite* and *zero articles*. The study adapts Biber et al. (1999, p. 265) to analyse the English data and ابن النجار (1993, p. 130) classification of the inclusive articles to analyse the Arabic data as in the Figure below

B. Pragmatic Level

In spite of using the indefinite article *a* with singular noun and verb, the verse does not refer to one nation only. It is interpreted by the reader as a reference to any nation that is not governed by good leaders or any county that has many wise advisers. Thus, *a* has an inclusive meaning that may refer to any country in such situations.

Text (2): "Cursed is anyone who makes an idol—a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of skilled hands—and sets it up in secret" (Deuteronomy 27: 15)

This verse is one of the commandments of Moses to the Israelites. He tells them that worshipping idols is prohibited by God. Anyone who makes idol by his hand and worship it, even secretly, will be cursed.

A. Syntactic Level

The indefinite article *an* is used before the singular noun "idol" that begins with a vowel sound. It is used in an object position in the sentence.

B. Pragmatic Level

Although "an idol" means one idol, it includes all kinds of idols whether they are made of wood, stones or iron. So, it does not refer to specific idols. "An idol" is used in object position, but it keeps its inclusive reference because it is a law that refers to the class of idols in general.

Text (3): "for the evildoer has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out" (Proverb 24: 20)

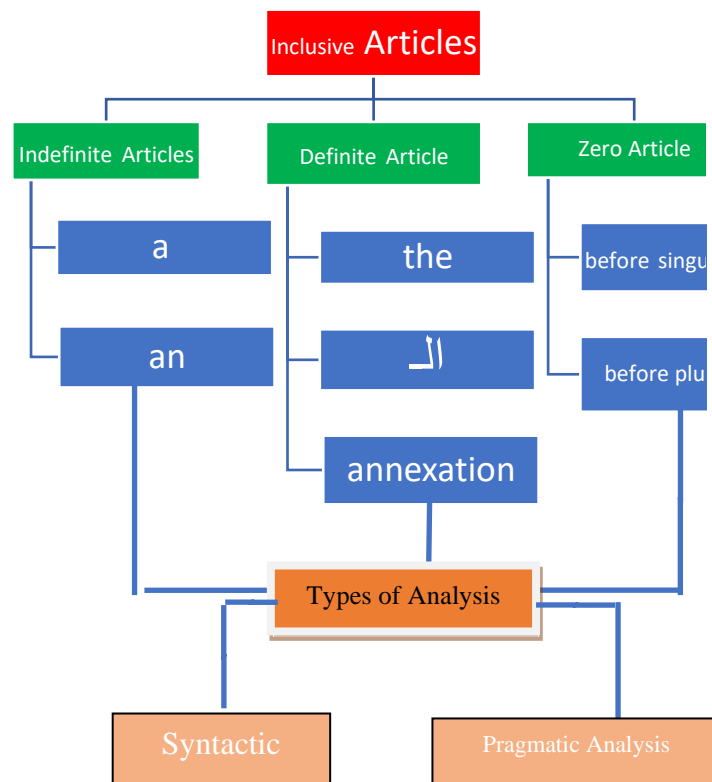
This proverb is about evil men. They have no reward because they do not have good deeds. They will not be happy because the candle of the wicked shall put out.

A. Syntactic Level

In this verse, the definite article *the* is used twice before the singular nouns "evildoer" and "lamp".

B. Pragmatic Level

The first definite article is used with the singular noun "evildoer" which is followed by the singular verb "has" and the second one is used before the singular noun "lamp". Using the definite article *the*



The Proposed Theoretical Framework [adapted from Biber et al. (1999) and ابن النجار (1993)]

7. Data Analysis

7.1 Analysis of the English texts

Text (1): "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure" (Proverbs 11: 14)

This proverb is about the rulers of nations and people. Any country without a wise ruler is similar to a ship without a captain that will be destroyed. On the contrary, any country that has many wise advisers is safe.

A. Syntactic Level

The indefinite article *a* is used before the singular noun "nation". Moreover, the verb "falls" contains the third person singular –s because the indefinite article *a* is used with singular nouns.

with singular nouns is interpreted as an inclusive reference especially in sayings and proverbs. The verse does not refer to a particular evil man or lamp, but it is a reference to all evil men and their lamps which are considered as symbols of their life.

Text (4): "But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites" (Exodus 1: 12)

The Israelites were aggrieved by the Egyptians but they were multiplied and grow. Therefore, the Egyptians were afraid of them.

A. Syntactic Level

The indefinite article *the* is used in the verse before the plural nationality words "Egyptians" and "Israelites". "Egyptians" is used as a subject in the sentence while "Israelites" is an object.

B. Pragmatic Level

Using the definite article *the* before plural nationality words is interpreted by the reader as an inclusive form. Therefore, "the Egyptians" and "the Israelites" in the verse include all of the Egyptians and Israelites that are found in Egypt. The definite article *the* keeps its inclusive function whether it is used in subject position "the Egyptians" or in object position "the Israelites".

Text (5): "Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright" (Proverbs 11: 9)

Those who make sins are considered as fools because they do not care about committing sins. Those who do good deeds are considered as wise.

A. Syntactic Level

The plural noun "fools" is used without a determiner as a subject in this verse.

B. Pragmatic Level

Plural nouns with *zero article* are interpreted as an inclusive form because it indicates indefiniteness. This indefiniteness refers to unspecific number of fools. In this verse, "fools" refers to all the sinners who mock at making sins.

7.2 Analysis of the Arabic texts

Text (1): "وخلق الانسان ضعيفاً" (28: النساء)

"For man was created weak (in flesh)" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 188)

This verse has two interpretations. The first one is that man is weak physically and the second is that man is weak because of his/her desires which

guide him/her and the breakdown which is caused by his/her sadness and fears.

A. Syntactic Level

In this verse, the article *ال* is attached to the singular noun "انسان" (man). Thus, it is called *الجنسية* (denotes the genus).

B. Pragmatic Level

The article *ال* in the singular noun "انسان" (man) denotes the genus. Therefore, it does not refer to a particular "انسان" (man) but to the genus of man. It includes all people males and females because all of them are weak and guided by their desires and needs.

Text (2): "وان تعدوا نعمة الله لا تحصوها" (18: النحل)

"If ye would count up the favours of God, never would ye be able to number them" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 660)

In this verse, Almighty God addresses all the people and tells them that if they try to count the favours and gifts of God, they will fail because these favours are so many. Therefore, they are countless.

A. Syntactic Level

The singular noun "نعمة" (favour) is annexed to the noun "الله" (God). The noun "نعمة" (favour) is indefinite but it is annexed to the definite noun "الله" (God). Thus, "نعمة" (favour) is defined by *annexation*.

B. Pragmatic Level

Nouns defined by *annexation* are interpreted as having inclusive forms. The word "نعمة" (favour) does not refer to a particular favour to human. It includes all kinds of favours. "لا تحصوها" (not able to number them) means that they are many and it is impossible to count them. Therefore, the reader interprets "نعمة الله" (the favours of God) as including all kinds of favours.

Text (3): "ما يود الذين كفروا من اهل الكتاب ولا المشركين ان ينزل عليكم من خير من ربكم" (105: البقرة)

"It is never the wish of those without Faith among the People of the Book, nor of the Pagans, that anything good should come down to you from your Lord" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 46)

The verse clarifies the intents of the unbelievers from the People of the Book or the Pagans. They do not want Almighty God to bring down any good things to the believers because of their envy.

A. Syntactic Level

The singular undefined noun "خير" (good) is used in this negative sentence which is negated via the particle "ما" which means (no).

B. Pragmatic Level

The sentence is negated by the particle "ما" (no). The noun "خير" (good) is indefinite because it is used without a definite article or *annexation*. Using the indefinite noun "خير" (good) in this negative context is interpreted by the reader as inclusion of and reference to any kind of good things that may come down from Almighty God.

6) "وان احد من المشركين استجارك فأجره حتى يسمع كلام الله"

Text (4): (التوبة)

"If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of God" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 440)

Almighty God addresses the prophet Mohammad and tells him that if anyone of the unbelievers, that He ordered His prophet to fight, request for safety, he must give him what he wants until he hears the Quran.

A. Syntactic Level

The sentence in the verse is conditional because it contains the conditional word "ان" (if), the conditional clause "احد من المشركين استجارك" (one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum) and the result clause "فأجره" (grant it to him). Concerning "احد" (one), it is a singular undefined noun that is used in a context of condition.

B. Pragmatic Level

The singular noun "احد" (one) is indefinite because it is used without a definite article or *annexation*. This undefined noun is used in a context of condition. Therefore, it has an inclusive meaning. "احد" (one) refers to anyone of the unbelievers whether young, old, normal or abnormal. Anyone asks for safety should get what he wants until he believes in the words of God.

176) "وان كانوا اخوة رجالا ونساء فللذكر مثل حظ الانثيين"

Text (5): (النساء)

"If there are brothers and sisters, (they share), the male having twice the share of the female" (Ali, Trans., 1937, p. 236).

This verse clarifies the laws that are related to inheritance. This part of the verse states that if a person dies and left a number of brothers and sisters, each brother will have the share of two sisters.

A. Syntactic Level

The word "اخوة" (brothers) is a plural noun. It is undefined because it is used without the definite article *ال* and without *annexation*.

B. Pragmatic Level

The undefined plural noun "اخوة" (brothers) refers to a limited number of brothers and sister of someone who dies and left no offspring. It includes all of them because all of the brothers and sisters have the same share of inheritance. The plural undefined noun "اخوة" (brothers) is interpreted as an inclusive form.

8. Conclusion

The study focuses on the inclusive function of indefinite, definite and *zero articles* in English and Arabic languages. The researchers shed light on the syntactic and pragmatic aspects of these articles in order to find out the similarities and differences between the English and Arabic texts. It has been found out that in English language there are indefinite, definite articles and *zero article* when none of them are used. The nouns in Arabic language are either defined by using the article *ال* or by *annexation*, or undefined.

In the English texts, the indefinite articles have an inclusive meaning when they are used to refer to one member or element which represents a class. It has been found out that the indefinite articles keep their inclusive meaning in subject and non-subject position, while Arabic language does not have indefinite articles.

Concerning the definite article *the* in the English texts, it has been found out that it has an inclusive meaning if it is used with a singular noun because it refers to the class of that noun in general. On the other hand, defined nouns by the article *ال* in Arabic texts have inclusive function if they only denote the genus of that noun. Moreover, nouns that are defined by *annexation* also have inclusive function.

Zero article in the English texts also has an inclusive meaning if it is used with plural and uncountable nouns. In the Arabic texts, *zero article* with singular nouns has an inclusive meaning if it is used in a negative, prohibitive, conditional or interrogative sentence. Plural nouns with *zero article* have inclusive interpretation whether they refer to less or more than ten members.

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