

## **About the use of article forms in the newspaper English.**

### **Cognitive and pragmatic aspects.**

It is well known that article forms serve to express mainly the category of definiteness/ indefiniteness. However, the basic principles of semantics state and practical observations of the language use prove that the form – function correlation rarely happens to be accurate. Such inconsistency causes additional complications in defining the meaning of a category or a lexeme, especially one with a wide scope of application. Using the main methodological basis of semantics about the direction of describing linguistic phenomena from their function towards the form, we shall first introduce the definition of the semantic category of definiteness/ indefiniteness, which according to V. Koseska-Toszewa [Koseska-Toszewa, 1982, 5] is viewed as a sentential category that defines the scope of a sentence meaning reference.

We shall also be using the method of describing examples of the definiteness category meaning which was inspired by B. Russell, and elaborated in detail for the language material use by V. Koseska-Toszewa. The method is based on a logical model where the linguistic category of indefiniteness quite accurately corresponds to the logical category of quantificational universality and existentiality, while the linguistic category of definiteness finds its reflection in the logical category of quantificational uniqueness [Koseska-Toszewa, 1982; 1990].

The meaning of the article is closely connected to cognition processes. For one participant of a communicative act a name (in a broad sense of the word, which means it can be both predicative and argumentative) can have a single denotate/ significate, or, using the language of logical semantics, the scope of the sentence meaning reference is reduced to a single, unique concrete object/ person/ situation, etc. On the other hand, the other participant often has to learn about it, that is, according to B. Russell [Russell, 19], has to elaborate a description which would suffice to limit the scope of the sentence meaning reference to a unique concrete situation (object, person) within the frames of at least a given communicative act.

However, cognition of something concrete is such a relative thing that it is often not known to the end, or it is difficult to prove or justify *when* we finally have to do with a scope which will

suffice to „define” our object, especially in the case of a situation of getting the information across to someone else.

The objective of our work is to consider and prove the following statements:

- Quantification in natural languages has a dynamic character, which means that during one piece of discourse can change, and the direction of the change always follows from existentiality towards uniqueness for the one being informed. (This transfer is the part of a cognition process. Due to significance of this phenomenon for our work, we shall use „transfer” as a term.)
- High frequency of transfers complicates a communication process, demanding more emotional and intellectual engagement from the informed person. **Referential burden** (the term, or rather a metaphor of D. Nunan) grows then. Psychologically this is expressed in such a way that the Informed becomes very strongly involved into the described situation. Due to the fact that in the case of newspaper language such an engagement is not always necessary – since a human being is capable of getting involved into a limited quantity of situations, and there are many of them in a newspaper – the **referential burden discharge** takes place. Or, if we abstract away from the idea of reference, it can be called **the quantification transfer suspense** (the term is ours), the essence of which is that **information quants** are classified into those more important, more informative (action names, agent names), those more verisimilar, less doubtful facts and their opposites. The latter ones often are formally existentially quantified, that is, seemingly the transfer does not take place. The former ones “take the floor” and become (again formally) quantificationally unique, due to the language forms used.
- Another way to lessen the quantity of transfers is to introduce an information quant at once as a unit of the unique quantification, even if semantically the quantification of the unit is existential, the object under discussion being not known to the Informed. The effect of this is that the Informed is imposed with the idea that the quantified in this way lexical/ syntactic expression is something that he/ she has to know (e. g. the White House, the President, the City).

Such a manipulation with the use of formal defining means becomes obvious thanks to B. Russell's theory of description, when the unique (something that is described unambiguously, identified among other objects of the same set /group with the help of temporal, localizing or other determining/ limitative descriptors) is presented in a linguistic form that is contradictory to the implications of its description.

The phenomenon is only possible due to existence of the article form in the English language. And it is rather impossible in non-article languages, where the Informed has to determine himself/ herself the status of definiteness of the object under discussion.

We can observe then a certain game in mass media of different kinds on this ground. The following four situations are possible:

1. Either the knowledge of the Informed is sufficient for defining X, and the Informant takes that for granted, using the definite article „the”.

*E.g. Iraq accepted **the** resolution on disarmament the United Nations Security Council passed unanimously last week.*

2. Or in fact, the knowledge of the Informed is rather insufficient for defining X, and the Informant coordinates his/ her message with that, using the indefinite article „a(n)”.

*E.g. The UN presented **a** peace plan for Cyprus to the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot leaders.*

*Russia and the European Union struck **a** deal, to come into force next summer.*

3. Alternatively, the knowledge of the Informed is rather sufficient for defining X, but on some reason the Informant uses the indefinite article „a(n)”.

*E.g. Argentina's president Eduardo Duhalde admitted that **a** presidential election due in March might be postponed. He blamed a judicial ruling; others claimed that Mr Duhalde wanted more time to prevent his archrival in the Peronish movement, Carlos Menem, a former president, from returning to power.*

*Indonesian police said **a** man named Amrozi... had confessed to being one of **a** gang that bombed the night-life district of Bali in October, killing 190 people.*

4. The knowledge of the Informed is not necessarily sufficient for defining X, but the Informant, even being aware of that, opts for using the definite article „the”.

E.g. *This leaves the Democrats in control of the Senate for a few more days until Jim Talent, the new Republican senator for Missouri, is sworn in.*

Those from the first glance paradoxical situations of types 3 and 4 can often be met in mass media, especially in short news messages. We call them paradoxical because first of all Grice's maxims of cooperation [Horn, p. 311-312] are violated here: the maxim of quality, according to which one should deliver information which is true from the Informant's point of view; as well as the maxim of manner, which tells us about clarity of expression. On the other hand, the messages are produced by Informants who professionally deal with the art of communication, hence we cannot consider the lack of communicative competence on a massive scale. So, what are we dealing with?

In order to find the answer we have to address a wider context, that is, the text linguistics/discourse analysis and methods of pragmatics. It is known that pragmatics is often called „the wastepaper basket of linguistics”, which often, not being able to define to the end a language form - lexical or grammatical - refers to the context or stylistics (in the case of metaphoric or metonymic use). Nevertheless, it manages to solve particular problems of semantics, and together with that creates next concrete tasks to be solved at the level of semantics. We will have because of the above said to introduce some notions, used in the text linguistics.

### **Text definition. Text and discourse.**

There exist theories stating that it is not a sentence but a text that is the basic unit of communication. Text as the basic language unit is often connected with the notion of discourse (a talk, continuous discussion of something, a lecture, preaching) and discourse analysis. However, those two expressions are sometimes used synonymously. Crystal [Nunan, 4] defines text as a piece of discourse, identified for analysis.

As for the size of the units under discussion, as well as a sentence can consist of one word, e.g. *with* (as an answer to the question *Will you drink your coffee with sugar or without?*), a text can also consist of one sentence, even a word. E. g. *Stop!*, *Attention!* etc., as long as it can function as a communicative unit.

We shall, as D. Nunan [p. 17] proposes, operate with the term „text” as the basic independent over-sentential unit and „discourse” referring to interpretation of a communicative act in a context. Hence, discourse analysis overpasses the limits of linguistic knowledge and to a great extent uses the knowledge of literature studies and pragmatics. The difference between discourse and text does not have to do with their size.

**Cohesion** is an indispensable category connecting particular sentences into a text. It should be differentiated from **coherence** – the basic discourse category. Reference is one of the most significant means of text cohesion; it can be anaphoric, cataphoric or egzophoric, depending on chronological appearance of the referent and its deictic “representative” in the text. Every time we use personal or determining pronouns or definite articles (in article languages), it is a reference to something/ somebody that we came to acquaint with a moment ago (anaphora), or we are going to learn about soon during the same piece of discourse (cataphora – is used for special stylistic effects), or something we know from life experience, good/ continuous acquaintance with communication peers (egzophoric, which can often be interpreted as a kind of anaphora in the sense that there has to exist the situation when the subject of the conversation was mentioned for the first time).

We often encounter egzophoric reference in press, when it is expected that the reader follows the sequence of events connected with a topic or a character, as it is for example with royal families, parliaments etc., and although the texts are divided in time and location, such a reference is very similar to anaphoric.

The „very” egzophoric examples are – the City (as London’s district), the Chancellor, the President\*, (the latter expression is used without the article in American English, which might follow from the absolute character of treating by Americans the figure of their president, cf. In God we trust). The knowledge about typical egzophoric subjects can be obtained from Informants or encyclopaedic sources.

D. Nunan introduces the notion of **referential burden** that is connected with the density of reference in a piece of discourse, which, as it grows, complicates more and more text comprehension. (Modern theories of stereolinguistics [Duren] as well as register blocks [Zolotova] allow gradual and more accurate research of regularities of this kind.)

At the same time we understand that being aware of the referential burden notion, or at least having a subconscious, intuitive idea of it, which is the case with professional language users – writers, journalists – the Informant can consciously charge or discharge the burden in order to regulate the degree of comprehension ease and achieve the desired effect. Using the semantic terminology and abstracting away from the notion of reference, we shall redefine the notion of **the referential burden discharge** (understood according to the classical categories of text linguistics) as **the quantification transfer suspense**.

Due to the said above we shall be talking about a subjective, non-continuous character of the scope of definiteness. The notion is closely connected to cognition process and the possibilities of the human memory, temporal distance between re-addressing to the denotatum and other factors.

Here we come to the discourse level in the sense used by D. Nunan, i.e. the interpretation of a communicative event in the context. It seems reasonable to introduce here two more terms of E. Woods [p.27], who differentiates between two parts constituting an utterance – information and the message. Information is a simple detail of communication and **can** be sent with errors. A message gets across much more. A message consists of:

- the information we want to get over
- the focus of this information
- the attitude of the Informant towards the information
- the attitude of the Informant towards the Informed

When we consider, for example, newspaper messages we cannot ignore the attitude of the Informant towards the Informed. Then the moment of referential burden discharge becomes important, as it (the burden) will correspond not to the factual quantification, but the psychological one.

One might have an impression that while using indefinite articles in definite contexts, a journalist is trying to avoid overloading communication with extra reference, and seems to “apologize” to the readers for the possible difficulties with “digesting” the referential burden. The indefinite article functions then as an existential expression: „there is/are an X, and what happened to it is Y”.

This technique is similar to what is called “face-saving” in the communicative grammar of English. It describes the phenomenon that is especially characteristic of British mentality when a person while inviting somebody somewhere and trying at the same time to be cautious in case the invitation will not be accepted formulates the message on purpose in an ambiguous way that can be interpreted both as a statement and an invitation. E.g. instead of asking directly *Will you go to the cinema with me?* or even *I invite you to go to the cinema with me*, one usually says *There is a very interesting movie in the cinema tonight*. Of course, the similarity is somewhat loose, but the essence of it is a certain freedom given to the Informed for interpreting the message and his/ her reaction to it. That is why both former cases are more polite variants of their neutral counterparts.

When we talk about a higher level of interpretation freedom for the Informed, we normally deal with the following modal meanings:

In the newspaper language: (examples 3) „The so-much-respected Reader is not obliged to know this, although as a rule this is presented as something that everybody should know, but we consider that such an approach could insult the Reader, hence first we should introduce the case to him/ her”.

In the invitation: „The fact that I am telling you about the film suggests that I would be very glad to have your company there, but I do not exclude the possibility of your being either too busy or just unwilling to have my company and will torture yourself making up reasons for rejecting the invitation. In order to dispense you from the necessity of lying, let us play such a game that in case you are not willing to accept the invitation, we shall pretend it was a common statement”.

At the professional level, the effect of the referential burden discharge can be observed in the newspaper language – (Examples from „The Wall Street Journal”, 21.10.2002).

*(E) Earnings (E!) jumped at 3M (E!) in the third quarter, (E!) rising 3,8% as (E) an 8.8% increase in sales abroad (E!) offset (E) a flat performance (E!) in the U.S.*

The quantification signs (E = existentiality, E! = uniqueness) added to the example correspond to the formal expression of quantification that is defined on the basis of the article forms, adverbial modifiers or other descriptors used. The theoretical background for that is the well-accepted B. Russell’s statement that in the English language the indefinite article represents an existentially quantified phrase, while the definite article represents a uniquely quantified phrase. At the

moment, we do not need to address to universality, as that scope of reference is not characteristic of the style and communicative needs of business newspapers.

Adverbials with defined concrete semantics used in the message (*at 3M, in the third quarter, 8.8%, in sales abroad (still in the third quarter – N. K.), in the U.S*) indicate definiteness of the verbal phrase as well as the semantics of the verbal forms: *jumped, offset* do. If repeated activities/ events were meant, continuous forms „were jumping/was offsetting” would have been used in combination with the above-mentioned adverbials.

As for the nominal phrase, the use of the indefinite article with *flat performance in the U.S.* seems to be rather unusual. The semantics of the verb *offset* (to balance) contains anaphoric reference in itself – something can become balanced only if before it held a different position, other than neutral, hence, it existed before. The lexical semantic interpretation of the *offset* entry in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary [p. 804] is as follows: „to compensate for sth, to balance sth.” The following sentence is given as the example of its use: *We had to put up prices to offset the increased cost of materials.* We can see that in an analogical case of the object a definite article has been used.

The whole distribution of *a flat performance* would have to provide a definition that would suffice to treat the NP as uniquely quantified. What kind of reasons could we give to justify the absence of the definite article?

Firstly, as it has already been mentioned before, it can be the attitude to the Informed; i.e. allegedly, the reader is not obliged to know what was going on in the American economy in general during the previous three months. However, as for the newspaper that specializes in economy news, moreover, in the USA, this seems to be rather odd.

Secondly, this may be the attitude to the information, and that seems to be a better interpretation, since *a performance* is characterized negatively, even euphemistically (*flat* means „even”, i.e. there is no growth, although we can conclude from the context that it was rather a decrease - judging from its consequences). Hence, the author either because of the patriotic feeling or other political reasons does not wish to accentuate attention on this phenomenon and uses the indefinite article, the parallel meaning of which is „not significant”.

A similar situation can be observed in the following text:

*A key measure of future economic activity fell in September, pulled down by the stock market's gyrations and continued job cuts. The Conference Board's index of leading indicators fell 0.2% to 111.6.*

*The stock market's gyrations and continued job cuts, which is used rematically in the message since it is presented as the reason for falling of **a key measure of future economic activity**, have to be known to the readers. Conversely, the *key measure* that allegedly has to be tracked by newsreaders because of its unstable character (judging from the adverbial *in September*) is presented as existential.*

Again, we are dealing with a message of rather unpleasant character. Again, the modal meaning is prevailing over the defining one.

*(E) Authorities searching for (E!) the Washington-area sniper said (E!) they received (E) a reply to (E!) their plea to be contacted by (E!) the person who left (E) a message near (E!) the latest shooting (place – N. K.). Meanwhile, police in Virginia surrounded (E) a light-colored van.*

In this message, the last NP *a light coloured van* attracts most attention. The presence of the definite article would have to be sufficient for the text cohesion, providing the anaphoric/egzoforic reference. It would seem logical to consider that the acquaintance of the readers with the figure of the sniper, the person who left a message, etc. is expected. Formal cohesion exists due to the temporal synchronization *meanwhile*. The use of the indefinite article can be explained then only by the author's doubts whether the van found by the police is the proper one.

All the time till now we have been dealing in our speculations with the pragmatic, practical sphere. Now we need to abstract away from it and pass to the sphere of semantics.

We shall present more examples already in a classified way, trying to show typical predicative phrases that create contexts for indefinite and definite expressions. (They are taken from the same page of world political news from „The Economist” weekly, 16. XI.2002.) The examples with asterisks have been used unconventionally from the point of view of quantification.

The division into proper unique and existential units (we do not consider here universal ones since they are not characteristic of the news language) is carried out on the basis of their contexts: the quantification of distributional expressions and their lexical semantics.

We shall single out first expressions of existential – introductive – character (we shall present them at this stage in the original form in order not to suggest the absolute status of their lexical meaning). Those expressions create contexts for existential quantification of NP in the sense that semantically they imply something new/ unknown, as for instance:

- announced
- acquired (= receive, obtain)
- struck (a deal)
- faced (a wave of sth/ a famine)

On the other side, there are expressions that imply an earlier mentioned object, the so-called retrospective verbs:

- accepted (the resolution)
- rejected (the idea)
- reoccupied (the West Bank city)
- \*postponed (a presidential election due in March)
- \*offset (a flat performance)
- \*blamed (a judicial ruling)

Expressions like *had confessed to doing sth* are rather interesting phenomena from the quantificational point of view. The example suggests the fact that is known to the confessing person and is not known for sure to the informed person.

Summarizing the presented above, we can say that any case of disturbance in the use of the proper defining form – the article – can be explained from the semantic point of view by modal markedness. Simply speaking, the informant marks informational quants classifying them into:

- those important vs not significant (deontic modality)
- those pleasant for the informant vs not pleasant (axiological modality)
- those certain vs doubtful (epistemic modality)

The scope of lexical semantics seems to be a fruitful field for research in terms of providing typical quantificational contexts. Such an idea arises a priori due to absence of article forms in many languages that nevertheless manage somehow to communicate the category of definiteness/ indefiniteness. Basing on the material selected for the present work we can only preliminary conclude that the semes of existence, coming into possession, meeting/ learning sth new, that is of a rematic character, create a context for indefinite expressions (at least at the level of NP). On the other hand, the semes of repetition, reaction for perlocutive expressions, generally speaking, those of a thematic character suggest definite distribution. However, such a solution, being based mostly on intuitive considerations, needs further investigation and proof due to more diverse and numerous materials and should be the matter for a separate article.

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