

Articles, Delimitation of Speech and Perception

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Abstract : The paper aims to clarify the function of articles in the English speech and specify their place and role in the English language, taking into account the use of articles for delimitation of speech. A focus of the paper is the use of the definite and the indefinite articles with different types of noun phrases which comprise either one noun with or without attributes, such as the King, the Queen, the Lion, the Unicorn, a dimple, a smile, a new language, an unknown dialect, or several nouns with or without attributes, such as the King and Queen of Hearts, the Lion and Unicorn, a dimple or smile, a completely isolated language or dialect. It is stated that the function of delimitation is related to perception: the number of speech units in a text correlates with the way the speaker perceives and segments the denotation. The two following combinations of words the house and garden and the house and the garden contain different numbers of speech units, one and two respectively, and reveal two different perception modes which correspond to the use of the definite article in the examples given. Thus, the function of delimitation is twofold, it is related to perception and cognition, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to grammar, if the subject of grammar is the structure of speech. Analysis of speech units in the paper is not limited by noun phrases and is amplified by discussion of peripheral phenomena which are nevertheless important because they enable to qualify articles as a syntactic phenomenon whereas they are not infrequently described in terms of noun morphology. With this regard attention is given to the history of linguistic studies, specifically to the description of English articles by Niels Haislund, a disciple of Otto Jespersen. A discrepancy is noted between the initial plan of Jespersen who intended to describe articles as a syntactic phenomenon in 'A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles' and the interpretation of articles in terms of noun morphology, finally given by Haislund. Another issue of the paper is correlation between description and denotation, being a traditional aspect of linguistic studies focused on articles. An overview of relevant studies, given in the paper, goes back to the works of G. Frege, which gave rise to a series of scientific works where the meaning of articles was described within the scope of logical semantics. Correlation between denotation and description is treated in the paper as the meaning of article, i.e. a component in its semantic structure, which differs from the function of delimitation and is similar to the meaning of other quantifiers. The paper further explains why the relation between description and denotation, i.e. the meaning of English article, is irrelevant for noun morphology and has nothing to do with nominal categories of the English language.

Keywords : delimitation of speech, denotation, description, perception, speech units, syntax

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