

EXPRESSING INDEFINITENESS IN ENGLISH

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0. In the extensive work of Jiří Nosek the category of definiteness received attention in several treatises written about the turn of the last decade (cf. Nosek 1989, 1990, 1991). As in many other studies, his interest in this question is general linguistic, embracing the relation of definiteness to other function words and to linguistic typology.

The aim of the present paper is to contribute to a partial aspect of the question, viz the means expressing nongeneric indefinite reference within the English determiner system, their semantic differentiation, and their role in functional sentence perspective.

Of the vast literature dealing with the category of definiteness (Christophersen 1939, Hawkins 1978, Hewson 1972, Yotsukura 1970, among others), the most relevant to the present study is the treatment in Quirk et al. (1985), Chesterman (1991), Sahlin (1979), and Mráz (1998).

1. The first question to be considered is the repertory of indefinite determiners. Besides the indefinite and zero article, most descriptions include unstressed *some* in the article system. Thus Quirk et al. 1972 (p. 150) speak of *some* as the “light quantitative article”, and Quirk et al. 1985 (p. 274; *CGEL* henceforth) include the “unstressed determiner *some*” among the uses of the zero article, since it is sometimes the plural or noncount equivalent of *a/an*. Similarly Yotsukura (1970, p. 53) includes unstressed *some* as an article, on the grounds that most informants give *There are some boys there* as the most obvious plural equivalent of *There is a boy there*.

2. Accordingly, three exponents of nongeneric indefinite reference will be considered to begin with: the indefinite article, the zero article, and unstressed *some*. In addition, attention will also be paid to *some* with countable singulars.

2.1 The article status of *a/an* is established to the extent that if discussed at all, then only from the historical point of view. Its origin in the numeral *one*, apart from petrified uses, such as *in a word*, *at a blow*, is reflected on the one hand in its incompatibility with other than singular countable nouns, and on the other hand in its basic function, viz denoting one member of a set composed of more than one. The former feature, being a matter of form, applies equally to the numeral and the article.

Where *a/an* determines a plural noun, as in *a barracks of a house*, or *a crossroads*, the noun is a notional singular. Unlike this basically general formal correspondence between the numeral and the article, the functional correspondence 'one of a set of more than one' necessarily represents only one of the uses of the indefinite article. In generic use, which constitutes the criterion of the article status of any potential article-like element, the indefinite article refers to the whole class, the opposition between the singular and the plural being neutralized. In nongeneric use, the meaning 'one of a set of more than one' combines with the function of introducing a nonunique referent into discourse (a first mention of an entity). Compare

(1) They were received by an official (situationally nonunique referent).
as against

(2) They were received by the Mayor (situationally unique referent).
The aspect of a first mention overrides the aspect of situational uniqueness of an otherwise nonunique entity in instances like

(3) I have sent him a letter
where the entire correspondence between sender and sendee may involve no more than one single letter. The predominance of the first-mention aspect is due to the fact that the determiner consistent with the notion of uniqueness, the definite article, would at the same time present the referent as having been mentioned before. What we are faced with is the interaction between the semantics of the articles and their role in functional sentence perspective.

A similar case is encountered where the uniqueness of the referent is due to cataphoric definiteness, which may again be overridden by the aspect of a first mention.

(4) He mentioned *an accident* he met with as a boy.

(5) I had *an impression* that they had just had an argument.

In (4) the accident involved may be the only one that the person concerned has ever had, the situational uniqueness of the impression in (5) being self-evident. However, while (4) follows the pattern of (3) in that the replacement of *an accident* by *the accident* again changes the presentation of the accident, respectively, from a first mention to anaphoric reference, no such change results from a corresponding replacement in (5). Ex (5') presents the object as an entity first introduced into discourse.

(5') I had the impression that they had just had an argument.

Here the difference presumably involves a subjective view of the speaker. In general, where the use of the definite article does not produce anaphoric reading, the difference between *a/an* and *the* with cataphorically determined nouns appears to conform to the indication of uniqueness by the definite article, cf. (6), as against the indication of 'one of a set of more than one' by the indefinite article, cf. (6').

(6) We took *the bus* that runs only on Sundays.

(6') We took *a bus* that runs only on Sundays.

Whereas in (6) there is only one bus, in (6') there may be one or more buses, the indefinite article being neutral in this respect.

A similar distinction presumably applies to (5) and (5'). While in (5) the impression is presented as a member of a large set including all impressions, in (5') the impression suggests a set with one member. This question is discussed in Chesterman (1991),¹ but even here we do not find an answer to the question why the cataphoric definite article sometimes induces anaphoric reading of the given noun phrase, and in others is consistent with its first mention.

Indication of uniqueness being the domain of the definite article, of special interest are instances in which *a/an* determines a noun with a unique referent, such as a body part, against cases of unique reference wherein indefinite determination is impossible. Compare the following examples, taken over from *CGEL* (p. 273): exx (7) and (8), and Chesterman (1991, pp. 22–23): exx (9), (10), (12) and (13).

- (7) He's broken a leg.
- (8) *Roger has hurt a nose.
- (9) *Fred lost a head during the war.
- (10) Fred lost a leg/a finger during the war.
- (11) *Fred lost a right leg in the war.
- (12) I have a head.
- (13) There is a head on my body.
- (14) There is no doubt that he has a shrewd head on his shoulders.
- (15) She has a sweet voice.
- (16) He is growing a beard.

Exx (7) and (8) are explained as follows: “The indefinite article... is sometimes used with body parts: Sally has sprained *an ankle*, He's broken *a leg*. BUT NOT: *Roger has hurt *a nose*. *A/an* cannot be used unless the body has more than one of the body parts mentioned; hence (8)² is absurd in implying that Roger has more than one nose. (*CGEL*, p. 273, Note). Chesterman (1991, pp. 22–23) explains the oddness of (9) by Hawkins' opposition of ‘inclusiveness’ vs. ‘exclusiveness’: when using *the* the speaker “refers to the totality of the objects or mass within this [i.e. the shared] set which satisfy the referring expression’ (1978, p. 167); and when using an indefinite article the speaker ‘refers to a proper subset, i.e. not-all, of the potential referents of the referring expression’ (1978, p. 187). Since Fred has only one head, the exclusiveness of *a head* is odd, implying that there were also other heads (which Fred did not lose). “If anything, this would have to mean that there were a number of other people's heads involved, which Fred was responsible for, and that he lost one of these. On the other hand, (10)³ ... is grammatical because it is possible to refer to ‘not-all’ the legs or fingers of a person: there exists at least one leg or finger which the speaker excludes from the reference.” (Chesterman 1991, pp. 22–23). In contrast to *a leg* in

¹ Cf. Chesterman's explanation of the difference between *We heard the/a cry of a jackal* (1991, pp. 13–14 and 82). He points out that although the contrast between *the man I met* and *a man I met* can be explained in terms of the presence or absence of previous knowledge, the same is not true of examples like *Fred has come to the conclusion that articles are a pseudo-category*, which are possible first mentions, not implying any necessary previous knowledge (pp. 13–14).

² In *CGEL* the numbering of the examples is [4] and [5], hence (8) corresponds to [5].

³ (34) in Chesterman's numbering.

(10), **a right leg* in (11) denotes a unique body part just as *head*, and conveys an analogous meaning to (9), which is so odd as to relegate this use of the indefinite article to the sphere of ungrammaticality.

Exx (12) and (13) are exceptions to the exclusiveness condition of indefinite reference, which Hawkins (1978, p. 221) explains by the meaning of the verbs involved: in contexts with *have* and *be* and other 'set-existential' verbs, which define existence within a set, the exclusiveness condition of indefinite reference does not hold. Chesterman (1991, p. 23) presents these examples without suggesting any contexts in which they would sound natural, and hence presumably regards them as natural even out of context. Yet they sound odd on account of the trivial nature of the information being conveyed. The information structure of these examples lacks a focus insofar as the relationship between the nominal elements representing the theme (*I, on my body*) and the rheme (*a head*), expressed by the verb, is pragmatically given, known. The fact that a person has a head is known to everyone, and need hardly be stated unless invoked by a special context (for example, enumeration by a child of the body parts that it can name (*I have a head, a nose, a chin, a neck, arms and legs...*)).⁴

The fact that the oddness of (12) and (13) is entirely due to the trivial nature of the content being expressed (to the lack of irretrievable information in the focus) is demonstrated by (14), in which the same noun *head*, constituting the rheme, is modified, the modification representing new information. Hence the information structure contains a new, irretrievable element in the focus part, and conforms to the usual configuration of a given, or more given, theme and a new, or less given element in the rheme. As regards the combination of a given and a new item in the rheme (*head* and *shrewd*, respectively), this type of composite rheme has been found to be the most common (cf. Dušková 1985).

What has been said about (14) applies to (15), with a minor difference consisting in the greater acceptability of *She has a voice* even without overt modification of the object since it would be understood as implying a voice of superior quality even without explicit qualification.

As shown by (16), the appropriateness of indefinite determination of a unique body part increases if the part in question ceases to be a universal feature. Since beards are worn only by some men, the information structure of (16) conveys irretrievable information in the focus even without modification of the object noun phrase, and hence avoids the deficiency of (12) and (13). The use of the indefinite article with a unique object can be ascribed to the particular meaning of the verb *grow*, which, in the sense conveyed by (16), allows to be classed with 'set-existential' verbs in that it brings into existence the entity referred to by its complement, cf. *he has a beard*. However, classing a verb with 'set-existential' verbs still fails to explain why these verbs behave differently from others, specifically why (17) a. is grammatical, while (17) b. is not.

⁴ In this connection, a well-known instance comes to mind, viz Olivia's inventory of her charms (*Twelfth Night*, Act I, Scene IV).

- (17) a. He grew/had a beard.
 b. *He shaved off a beard.
 c. He shaved off his beard.

The verb *have*, which may serve to illustrate the category,⁵ expresses the possessive relationship between the possessor and the thing possessed, and hence makes other means indicating this relationship, most importantly the possessives, redundant. In consequence, the determiner of the thing possessed can be selected according to the type of reference and function in the information structure (functional sentence perspective), as in (17) a. However, in (17) b. there is no indication of the fact that *a beard* is a thing possessed by the subject. In the absence of a verb indicating the possessive relationship the use of the possessive becomes obligatory, cf. (17) c. A determiner other than the possessive suggests a possessor different from the subject, cf. a sentence like *Can you shave off a beard now?* said by a barber to his assistant. A similar interpretation applies to the definite article, cf. *he broke a/the neck, he hurt a/the nose, she lost a/the head*. The difference between *the* and *a/an* consists in suggesting, in the case of the indefinite article, the presence of several objects with necks, noses and heads, whereas in the case of the definite article, which here indicates an associative anaphoric relation to an antecedent, some such context as *the neck of the bottle, the head of the doll*.⁶

The discussion of the indefinite article may be concluded by pointing out that the degree of grammaticality of the indefinite article with unique body parts depends not only on the semantics of the indefinite article ('one of a set of more than one'), but also on its role in functional sentence perspective, as well as on the semantic structure and functional sentence perspective of the sentence as a whole.

2.2 The assumption of a zero form of the indefinite article is based on two facts, both connected with the existence of two other noun categories in English, number and countability. The overt form of the indefinite article *a/an* being found with countable singulars, plurals⁷ and uncountable nouns are assumed to be determined by its zero form because the types of determination expressed by *a/an* with countable singulars appear to be denoted by plurals and uncountable nouns without an overt determiner. Compare the expression of generic reference by the indefinite article in (18) a., as against indication of the same type of determination in (18) b. and c. by zero:

- (18) a. A dog is a mammal.
 b. Dogs are mammals.
 c. Salt is soluble in water.

⁵ As shown by Lyons (1971, pp. 389–393), existential, locative and possessive sentences are to some extent parallel. Among other things, this parallelism manifests itself in the transformational relations between *have* and existential sentences, as illustrated e.g. by (14) and *There is a shrewd head on his shoulders*.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the role of the possessives in the English determiner system, see Dušková (1986).

⁷ Plurals as a rule correspond to countable singulars, and are themselves countable. Uncountable uses of plural nouns such as *vegetables, potatoes, corn flakes, soap suds* differ only in the choice of quantifiers (cf. *a little vegetables*), not in article usage. The latter follows the pattern of other plurals, identical with that of uncountable singulars.

An analogous situation is found where the indefinite article determining a countable singular expresses nongeneric indefinite reference. Plurals and uncountable nouns again appear without an overt determiner, cf. (19) a., b. and c.

- (19) a. There is a watchdog there.
- b. There are watchdogs there.
- c. Remember to buy salt.

Another reason for assuming a zero form of the indefinite article with plurals and uncountable nouns is the alternation, in some cases, of zero with unstressed *some*, as in (20) a. and b.

- (20) a. I've been writing (*some*) letters this morning.
- b. Would you like (*some*) coffee or (*some*) tea?⁸

Although there is a minor difference in meaning between the two forms ("The variant without *some* will focus on the category as a whole; ... But when *some* is added, the focus changes to whatever quantities of tea and coffee, or of letters, that the speaker has in mind." (CGEL, pp. 275–276), in the given contexts they are more or less interchangeable. In (19) a., b. c., the variant with *some* is less likely because the meaning here is categorial, rather than quantitative. Nevertheless, instances which allow the choice between *some* and zero support the assumption that the indefinite article has a zero form, occurring in complementary distribution with *a/an*,⁹ and in alternation with *some*. The zero article thus aligns itself with other zero exponents of grammatical categories, such as zero plurals and zero exponents of the preterite and past participle.

2.3 However, plurals and uncountable singulars are not the only noun categories that are found without an overt determiner.

CGEL (pp. 276–281) presents a section on the zero article with definite meaning, listing different classes and uses of countable singulars. The introductory formulation (5.41, p. 276) includes proper names, but in the sections treating proper names in detail this category is presented as having no article (cf. the section Proper names, pp. 288–297). In the section on Noun classes (5.2, p. 246) an explicit distinction is made between no article in cases like *I like Sid* and zero article as in *I like music*.

The zero article with definite meaning is illustrated by the following eleven groups of examples ((21) – (31)) in CGEL (pp. 276–281).

The zero article with a singular count noun as complement (or an equivalent appositive noun phrase), naming a unique role or task:

- (21) Maureen is (*the*) captain of the team.
- (22) As (*the*) chairman of the committee, I declare this meeting closed.

The zero article with noun phrases with 'sporadic' definite reference (comparable with definite noun phrases such *the radio*, *the theatre*).

⁸ Examples given in CGEL (p. 275).

⁹ The view that the zero article is the plural and noncount equivalent of the indefinite article *a/an*, alternating in many contexts with unstressed *some*, has not gone unchallenged; see Chesterman's discussion of Carlson's counterexamples (Chesterman 1991, pp. 29–32).

- (23) be in/go to *town, bed, hospital, prison*
 be at/go to *school, sea*
 be in/at *church*, go to *college*

as against

- (23') *The* town is very old, lie down on *the* bed, admire *the* church, walk around *the* prison

Means of transport and communication

- (24) travel/leave/come/go by *bicycle, bus, car, boat, train, plane*

as against

- (24') take *the* bicycle, be on *the* bus, prefer *the* car, choose *the* boat, take *a/the* train, be on *the* plane

- (25) communicate/communication by *radio, telephone, telex, post, mail, satellite*

as against

- (25') a talk on *the* radio, Jill is on *the* telephone, put a letter in *the* post, send it through *the* mail, etc.

Times of day and night

- (26) at *dawn/daybreak*, when *day* breaks, at *sunrise/sunset*, at/*around noon/midnight*, at *dusk/twilight*, at/*by night*, (*by*) *day and night*, before *morning* came, *evening* approached, after *nightfall/dark* etc.

as against

- (26') watch *the* dawn, during *the* day, we admired *the* sunset, in *the* afternoon, see nothing in *the* dusk, etc.

Seasons, meals, illnesses

- (27) in (the) *spring/summer*

- (28) stay for/have *breakfast, tea, lunch, dinner, supper*
 before/after/at/for *breakfast, tea, lunch, dinner ...*

- (29) *anaemia, appendicitis, diabetes, influenza ...*
(the) flu, (the) measles, (the) mumps, (the) chickenpox

Parallel structures

- (30) *arm in arm, face to face, eye to eye, day by day ...*
from father to son, husband and wife, from (the) beginning to (the) end, etc.

Fixed phrases involving prepositions

- (31) *at home, by hand, on foot, in turn*, etc.

Compare also proper names:

- (32) *Paris x The Hague, Crete x the Crimea*

- (33) *Lake Michigan, Mount Everest x the River Thames, the Suez Canal*

Of these, most attention has been paid to contrasting instances like (34) and (35).

- (34) I like cheese.

- (35) I like London.

It is argued that the overt absence of a determiner in the two cases is of a different kind. Yotsukura (1970, p. 68) distinguishes between the zero article in (34) and no article in (35), basing the distinction on the possibility of using the definite article in (34) (*I like the cheese* 'a particular kind of cheese that is present'), which is not

possible in (35) **I like the London*, unless the proper name is modified. Similarly Chesterman (1991, pp. 45–47) differentiates between the overt absence of a determiner with a plural or an uncountable singular (*olives, cheese*), for which he retains the term ‘zero’ article, and the overt absence of a determiner with proper names in the singular (*John, Helsinki*). He moreover distinguishes a third group represented by some count singular common nouns in certain ‘idiomatic’ structures (*at church, hand in hand, What about question seven? Breakfast is ready*, etc.). For the latter two instances he coins the term ‘null’. In contrast to Yotsukura, Chesterman bases the distinction between zero and null on the type of reference indicated by the overt absence of a determiner in the two cases: whereas the nouns with zero are indefinite, those with null are definite.

A virtually identical standpoint was adopted in Dušková et al. (1988, pp. 75–81). The type of determination expressed by proper names is here conceived as identical with that denoted by common nouns having nongeneric definite reference, in particular definite reference due to the presence in the situation of utterance of only one possible referent (cf. *George Washington and the first President of the United States*). Besides the absence of an overt determiner, even with proper names this type of reference is expressed by the definite article, i.e. by the same means as in the case of common nouns (cf. *Crete, Hampton Court x the Crimea, the Parthenon*). The absence of an article (here called ‘articleless use’) is distinguished from the zero article on the basis of their distribution and the respective type of determination: whereas the former is found with countable singulars and expresses nongeneric definite reference (situational uniqueness), the latter occurs with plurals and uncountable singulars and denotes either nongeneric indefinite or generic reference.

Obviously, the uses illustrating ‘the zero article with definite meaning’ represent instances of different kinds. A noun can be classed as having no (or ‘null’) article only if it is a countable singular expressing nongeneric definite reference, against the background of, or potential alternation with, the definite article. Of exx (21) to (31) only some meet the conditions for ‘no article’.

Apart from univocal proper names such as *John, Helsinki*, the clearest case of the ‘null’ article is presented by appositional constructions which are partly found among proper names, both personal and geographical, cf. *Dr Brown, Professor Smith, Captain Cook*; ex (33) *Lake Michigan, Mount Everest*, and analogous instances like *the Emperor Napoleon, (the) Czar Alexander, (the) Archduke Ferdinand, (the) Reverend John Smith* (examples from CGEL, p. 292, Note [d]); *the River Thames, the Suez Canal*. However, the construction is not confined to proper names. As shown by exx (36) and (36’), it also occurs with common nouns, which again here display both types of determiner: ‘null’ alongside the definite article.

(36) What about question seven? Open your books at page 10.

Figure 3, line five, Part 2, Example (36), Chapter 6, Section 8, Table 1, Type A, etc.

(36’) the letter A, the word *bizarre*, the year 2000, the plural *brethren*, etc.

Other structures that satisfy the conditions for the 'null' article may be found among instances illustrated by exx (30) and (31). In *They were walking arm in arm, talking face to face* and the like, the nouns *arm* and *face* can be regarded as referring to the particular arms and faces, but on the other hand, apart from being set phrases, the constructions have acquired an adverbial function, hence coming close to adverbs. This interpretation is presented in *CGEL*: "Phrases with the noun repeated typically have an adverbial function... It can be argued that the nouns have no article because they have largely lost their independent nominal status." (p. 280). Yet some of these instances, especially those where 'null' alternates with *the*, can be classed with the use illustrated by (36) and (36'), cf. *from (the) right to (the) left, from (the) west to (the) east, from (the) beginning to (the) end*.

A similar case is illustrated by (27), which shows alternation between 'null' and *the* not only in the function of a temporal adverbial, but also in other functions. Where the reference is deictic the use satisfies the condition of unique reference, cf. *(The) winter is coming* (*CGEL*, p. 278). Presumably also *I look forward to (the) spring*.

Of special interest in this connection is the behaviour of other temporal nouns, illustrated by exx (26) and (26'). All uses displaying 'null' are either adverbial with certain prepositions (*at dawn/daybreak, at dusk, at/by night*) or the temporal noun is the subject (when *day breaks, dusk was falling, before morning came, evening approached*). On the other hand, *the* is found with the object, cf. *watch the dawn, we admired the sunset*, and in adverbial prepositional phrases involving other prepositions. As regards the adverbial function, the choice between 'null' and *the* appears to depend on which preposition is used (cf. *at/by night* as against *during the night, all through the night*). The adverbial use of nouns of this group not only satisfies the condition of alternation between 'null' and *the*, but since they mostly refer to the respective time of a particular day or night, they also fulfil the condition of definite reference (as (27)).

However, the distribution of 'null' and *the* in the case of other syntactic functions, in particular the subject, appears to follow a different pattern. We are still mostly concerned with unique reference (*we watched the dawn* [on a particular day], *Evening came* [of a particular day]). Owing to their semantics, determiners signalling reference to a unique object are as a rule excluded from playing a role in functional sentence perspective insofar as noun phrases with this type of determination occur both in the theme and the rheme, their FSP function being determined by the interplay of the other FSP factors (see 3.). However, in instances like (37) the use of the 'null' form tends to conform to the pattern found with the nongeneric zero article indicating contextual independence of its head noun, in this case the subject, and together with the semantic structure of the sentence (presentation of a new phenomenon on the scene by means of a verb of existence or appearance on the scene), it signals the rheme.

- (37) before morning came; evening approached;
dusk was falling

For this reason temporal nouns in this use may be regarded as uncountable rather than countable.

Proceeding to (24) and (25), we again find the uses displaying 'null' to have a distinctly adverbial function, that of the adverbial of means. Significantly, as shown by (24'), and (25'), it is only in the adverbial function that the 'null' is found with these nouns. It can hardly be claimed that the nouns as used in (24) and (25) express unique reference. When saying *I'll go by train* the speaker is more likely to be referring to the means of transport rather than to a particular train. Or at least the two notions are merged. Consequently, this use might be classed with (30) and (31): the determiner is neither 'zero' nor 'null', the noun in this adverbial use having lost its independent nominal status, and consequently the noun categories. This interpretation is supported by the situation in Czech, where this adverbial function is expressed not only by noun phrases, but also by adverbs, cf. *letecky* [*flying* + adverbial suffix] 'by air', *pěšky* [*walk* + adverbial suffix] 'on foot', *koňmo* [*horse* + adverbial suffix] 'on horseback', *telefonicky* [*telephone* + adverbial suffix] 'by telephone', etc.

Exx (21) and (22) are interesting in that the nouns in predicative and appositive function are nonreferential. Otherwise, both conditions for 'null' are satisfied: 'null' actually alternates with *the*, and at the same time indicates that the predicative/appositive noun, albeit nonreferential, denotes a set with only one member.

The uses listed under (23) and (23') display semantic differentiation, which is at variance with the concept of 'null' as an alternative form of nongeneric *the*. This also applies to the meals as an institution, cf. (28), but where 'null' with a noun of this group alternates with *the* in reference to a particular meal, as in (38), the concept of 'null' is applicable.

(38) That day, *(the) lunch* was served at the terrace.¹⁰

Names of illnesses, as illustrated by (29), display alternation of 'null' with *the*, thus resembling proper names, but are not confined to unique reference, and might thus be regarded as a transitional category between proper and common nouns.

Although concerned with a type of reference other than indefinite, the foregoing discussion has been necessary insofar as it shows that the overtly unrealized determiner, usually described as the zero article, involves instances of different kinds: the zero article with plurals and uncountable singulars, which corresponds to the indefinite article with countable singulars and expresses generic and nongeneric indefinite reference; in the latter function it alternates with unstressed *some*; the null article with countable singulars, which alternates with the definite article and expresses nongeneric definite reference; and no article in adverbial prepositional phrases in which the noun has lost its independent nominal status, and hence its noun categories. As regards proper names, their type of reference shows them to be determined by null.

¹⁰ An example from *CGEL* (p. 279).

2.4 Unstressed *some* has been included in the article system on the grounds that it is found as an alternative form of the zero article with uncountable nouns and plurals where countable singulars are determined by the indefinite article expressing nongeneric reference (see 2.2). Although the interchangeability of the zero article and unstressed *some* is restricted to contexts in which the difference between the categorial meaning of the former and the quantitative meaning of the latter is not relevant, yet unstressed *some* appears to fit the article system better than it does the quantifier system. Not only does its prosodic structure conform to that of the articles, but also its quantitative meaning is weakened. This is what makes alternation with zero possible. Conversely, quantifiers are stressed, as a consequence of the full force of their quantitative meaning. Compare:

- (39) a. She has made (*some*) films abroad.
b. *Some* people don't like it. x People don't like it.

However, within the article system unstressed *some* has a special position insofar as it is the only member that fails to express generic reference. Admittedly, Chesterman (1991, p. 37) does adduce examples of generic *some*, which becomes acceptable 'if a subspecies reading is possible', cf. (40), but this use of *some* involves the quantifier, not the article, and is marginal in any case.

- (40) Continued destruction of the rainforest will lead to the extermination of *some rare insects*.

On the other hand, it may be claimed that the incapacity of *some* to express generic reference is no argument against its article status since this property is inherent in the very nature of a partitive article.

While the semantics of unstressed *some* often prevents its use where the zero article is appropriate, there are also instances in which *some* is a closer equivalent of *a/an* than zero. In discussing Carlson's arguments against treating the zero article as the plural and noncount equivalent of *a/an*, Chesterman (1991, pp. 29–32) presents examples with quantifiers whose scope is ambiguous in the singular and equally ambiguous in the plural with *some*, but unambiguous in the plural with the zero article. Compare (41) a., b. and c.:

- (41) a. Everyone read *a book* on caterpillars. (ambiguous as to whether the universal or the existential quantifier has the wider scope)
b. Everyone read *some books* on caterpillars. (ambiguous in the same way as (41) a.)
c. Everyone read *books* on caterpillars. (only the universal quantifier has the wider scope)

Another difference involves the specific/nonspecific reference of both *a/an* and *some*, as compared with only nonspecific reference of the zero article, cf. (42) a., b. and c.:

- (42) a. Minnie wishes to talk with *a young psychiatrist*. (specific or nonspecific)
b. Minnie wishes to talk with *some young psychiatrists*. (specific or nonspecific)
c. Minnie wishes to talk with *young psychiatrists*. (only nonspecific)

Obviously, this difference is connected with the categorial meaning of the zero article as against the quantitative meaning of *some*. The two plural forms of the indefinite article thus appear to be partly specialized, the zero form corresponding to both the generic and nongeneric *a/an*, while *some* only to the latter. On the whole, the semantic relations between *a/an* and *some*, illustrated by (41) and (42), testify to the integration of *some* into the English article system.

2.5 Two forms of indefinite determination are found not only with plurals and uncountable nouns, but also with countable singulars, cf. *a man* and *some man*. *Some* with countable singulars is as a rule excluded from the article system because it is stressed, according to *CGEL* (p. 257, Note [a]) even strongly stressed, especially with temporal nouns; according to Sahlin (1979, p. 13),¹¹ “*some* + Sg Count has some degree of stress-prominence in the majority of cases.” Hence it is classed with the quantifier *some*, which also occurs with plurals and uncountable nouns.

In a recent study by Mráz (1998), *some* determining a countable singular is treated comprehensively on the basis of a corpus of 352 occurrences of determinative *some*,¹² out of which *some* + countable singular accounts for 100 (29%) instances.¹³ In this study, Mráz is mainly concerned with verifying the presentation of *some* + countable singular in *CGEL*, which describes it as occurring especially with temporal nouns, less usually with other singular nouns, in the latter case with the meaning ‘a certain’ or ‘some...or other’ (pp. 384, and 257 Note [a]). Mráz’s results (1998, Table 10, p. 51) show the use of *some* with temporal nouns (*Some day he’ll get his scholarship*) to be represented by 15%. A comparable number of his examples (14%) illustrates expressive *some*, which carries emotive loading, mostly that of disparagement (*some wild wag of an oculist*). By far the largest group of *some* + countable singular is represented by what he calls ‘alternative’ (‘alternative’ because it alternates with other determiners), or neutral *some* (...*restricted in some way*) 69%, while the least frequent use (2%) is found in instances in which strongly stressed *some* means ‘remarkable’, ‘extraordinary’ (*Look at that coat. Some coat!*).

As a means of expressing indefinite reference, *some* + countable singular has to be included in the present discussion, and considered with respect, on the one hand, to *some* with plurals and uncountable singulars, and on the other hand, to the indefinite article.

Unlike unstressed *some* with plurals and uncountable singulars, which, as was explained in 2.4, fits the article system, *some* + countable singular qualifies as a quantifier, on account of being stressed and expressing specialized indefinite meaning (qualitative rather than quantitative, the term ‘quantifier’ being here used in contrast to ‘article’). Accordingly, the relation between *some* determining a countable singular and the indefinite article can be compared to the relation between stressed

¹¹ Sahlin’s spoken material is based on the Survey of English Usage (University College London).

¹² The sources of Mráz’s corpus were fiction (the concordance to *Great Gatsby*), a linguistic text (Crystal and Davy’s *Investigating English Style*) and a spoken sports commentary.

¹³ In the two written sources the percentage is even higher: 38% in Crystal and Davy, and 34% in *Great Gatsby* (Mráz 1998, p. 43).

(quantifying) *some* and unstressed *some* (article) with plurals and uncountable singulars, rather than to the relation between unstressed *some* and zero with these two noun categories.

In contrast to the indefinite article, *some* presents the identity of the referent as unknown both to the speaker and to the hearer, and is nonspecific. In both these respects the indefinite article is more neutral: the referent of the noun phrase with *a/an* may be unknown only to the hearer, and besides nonspecific reference, the indefinite article also expresses indefinite specific reference. Of the two types of reference, the specific is presumably the more usual. It might be expected that the specific indefinite article cannot be replaced by *some*, and this is indeed the case in (43).

- (43) a. He is growing a beard.
b. *He is growing some beard.

The only interpretation of (43) b. in which *some* is acceptable is to assign *some* strong stress and the meaning 'extraordinary', 'remarkable'. However, as shown by (44), this seems to apply only to 'set-existential' verbs:

- (44) a. He has written a book about it.
b. He has written some book about it.

While the actual state of the speaker's knowledge about the book may be the same in both (44) a. and b., the indefinite article is noncommittal in this respect. On the other hand, the use of *some* makes the speaker's lack of knowledge explicit; admittedly, the speaker may merely lack an interest in the referent, and only pretend a lack of knowledge.

As was shown by Mráz (1998, pp. 25–28), the nonspecificity of *some* shows different degrees, which he classifies into two types, referential and nonreferential. However, *some* is inherently referential.¹⁴ The distinction that Mráz draws between the examples listed under (45), and those under (46), which he regards, respectively, as nonreferential and referential, does not consist in non/referentiality, but in a smaller or larger degree of locatability.

- (45) a. I want to invite *some actress*. Can you suggest *any*?
b. *Some day* he'll get his scholarship.
c. Tom's got *some woman* in New York
d. *Some rare animal* has escaped from the zoo.

- (46) a. *Some man* was talking to him in a low voice...
b. He was saying *some last word* to her ...

The least locatable referents appear to be in (45) a. and b., which is reflected in the proform *any* (or *one*) in (45) a., and the replaceability of *some* by *one* in (45) b. In neither case does the noun phrase with *some* refer to a particular, albeit unspecified referent, replacement of *some* by *a certain* being thus inapplicable. In (45) c. and d.,

¹⁴ "A referential NP... involves, roughly the speaker's intent to 'refer to' or 'mean' a nominal expression to have non-empty references – i.e. to 'exist' – within a particular universe of discourse. All uses of *some* fulfil this condition, at least in assertive clauses" (Sahlín 1979, p. 29, quoting Givón).

the referent is a particular unspecified person or animal, but nonlocatable within the particular situation of utterance, whereas in (46) a. and b., the referents are present in the situation of utterance, and only presented as unspecified. These aspects do not appear to affect the replaceability of *some* by *a certain* insofar as in (46) b. *a certain* is again inapplicable, whereas in (45) a., b., and in (46) a., the use of *a certain* indicates the speaker's ability, as against his/her inability if s/he uses *some*, to identify the referent. The distinctions suggested between the three uses, (45) a.b., as against (45) c., d., as against (46) a.b., are obviously due to the context, reference to no particular objects being favoured by nonfactive ones. Compare (45) b. and (45') b. In the latter, only *one* can be used.

(45') b. *Some day he got his scholarship. / One day he got his scholarship.

It thus appears that even an extensive monographic study of *some* + countable singular, such as Mráz's diploma dissertation, leaves a number of questions open, and calls for further research.

3. The last point to be briefly discussed is the role of indefiniteness in functional sentence perspective (FSP). The relevance of FSP has already been mentioned in connection with the functions of the indefinite and the zero article. What remains to be surveyed here is the FSP role of indefiniteness in general.

The FSP aspect of indefiniteness, in particular of *some*, is discussed by Sahlin in terms of contextual non/boundness (contextual in/dependence) (1979, pp. 37–41). *Some* + countable singular, as well as nonselective *some* with plurals and uncountable singulars, is always contextually independent, and as such introduces new information. On the other hand, contextually bound *some* is found in what Sahlin calls the selective use, cf. *Some of them could have done it, Some people think so* (pp. 37–38). Presenting givenness as a natural property of the theme, since given items make a natural starting point for the sentence, Sahlin points out that noun phrases with *some*, except the selective uses, are rare in the subject, whereas selective *some*, being closely connected with definiteness, abounds in this function (p. 46). "Moreover, non-selective *some*, whether article or quantifier, is usually found with types of VPs held to favour new information in the subject, notably those indicating 'appearance or existence on the scene'" (ibid.). Sahlin's examples, however, support the claims made in the foregoing passage only where the sentence contains a verb of existence or appearance on the scene, as in (47).

(47) a. A tavern, ..., or *some other business* may go up near enough to hurt your home or to hurt its value.

b. When *some question* arises in the medical field concerning cancer, for instance, we do not ... (p. 47)

On the other hand, the examples here listed under (48) (p. 49 in Sahlin) are presented as "difficult to classify" and providing "compelling evidence in favour of the grammatical principle" (i.e. new information, which should appear at the end, is found in the subject).

(48) a. We found *some owls* had built a nest in the chimney ...

- b. At the rear of the auditorium, upstairs, *some men* tried to push open the door to the box corridor.
- c. We are worried ... – that *some crazy fool* may push the button.
- d. She felt as if *some dark, totally unfamiliar shape* would clutch at her arm,...

In (47) both a. and b. realize the presentation scale (cf. Firbas 1992, 66–69, 134–140), that is, a contextually independent phenomenon (the subject) is introduced on the scene (the adverbial) by means of a verb of appearance on the scene. Although the grammatical word order operates counter to the basic distribution of communicative dynamism (cf. Firbas 1992, pp. 10 and 118), the order theme – transition – rheme being here replaced by rheme – transition – theme, the FSP structure of the sentences is clearly indicated by the other FSP factors, the semantic and contextual (in speech an additional factor is intonation) (cf. Firbas 1992, pp. 10–11, 107–108, 147–148).

Interpretation in terms of the presentation scale may also be ascribed to (48) d., which, though not containing a verb of appearance or existence in the narrow sense, semantically implies appearance of a phenomenon (the subject) on a contextually bound scene (*at her arm*). However, this reading depends on the classification of the verb, which is not unequivocal.

In exx (48) a., b., and c., the communication focuses on verbal complementation, the verbs being outside the category of existence or appearance on the scene, cf. Firbas's quality scale (1992, pp. 66–69, 109–110, 134–140). As in general, the FSP structure is determined by the interplay of all FSP factors: contextual, semantic, and linear modification, including intonation in speech. In writing the latter is as a rule indicated by the other three factors. Given and new items, even though disposed to operate, respectively, within the theme and the rheme, are not necessarily thematic in the case of given, and rhematic in the case of new. The theme and the rheme being defined, respectively, as the least and the most dynamic element, new items, as well as given items, may be found in both the theme and the rheme.¹⁵

Indefiniteness as a means of indicating new, contextually independent items, appertains to the semantic factor, but as such is subordinated to the higher level of semantic structure, i.e. whether the particular sentence realizes the presentation scale or the quality scale, and ultimately acquires the respective amount of communicative dynamism from the interplay of all the FSP factors, semantic structure, contextual boundness and linear modification.

Taking into account these facts, as well as conceivable preceding contexts, Sahlin's examples being presented without context, we may interpret the FSP structure of (48) a. as having thematic subject (*some owls*) and rhematic object (*a nest*), which are both contextually independent, as indicated by the determiners. The FSP function of the prepositional phrase depends on the preceding context since the definite article, which indicates a situationally unique object, may determine either a new or a given item. A likely interpretation is to regard it as derivable from the situation of utterance, and hence belonging to the thematic section.

¹⁵ For the realization of themes and rhemes with respect to given and new items, see Dušková (1985).

In (48) b. the thematic nature of the locative adverbial is indicated even by its initial position. The determiner of the subject involves contextual independence, but the semantic structure of the sentence (the quality scale) assigns it the function of theme. The determiners in the object noun phrase play no FSP role since they again denote situationally unique objects, presumably mentioned for the first time and hence context independent. As a result of the interplay of all these factors, the object constitutes the rheme.

As regards ex (48) c., the most relevant factor appears to be the preceding context. According to the semantic structure of the sentence (the quality scale) the subject (*some crazy fool*) is again thematic. The FSP of the object (*the button*) depends on whether it is contextually dependent or not. In the former case, the rheme is constituted by the verb, in the latter by the object, the intonation centre (the nucleus) being placed correspondingly.

This brief discussion of Sahlin's examples will have shown that the role of indefiniteness in functional sentence perspective cannot be considered in isolation, but in connection with all participating factors, which determine the FSP structure through their interplay. Specifically, I attempted to show that the disposition of indefinite determiners to operate in the rheme is subject to the semantic structure of the sentence as a whole, and to the effect of linear modification and contextual dependence or independence of all elements constituting the sentence.

4. To conclude, the main points emerging from the foregoing discussion may be summed up as follows.

The means serving to express indefiniteness comprise both articles and quantifiers, the two categories in determinative function being basically distinguished by their prosodic structure and semantics. Articles are unstressed, and whatever their source, the original meaning is weakened in favour of indicating primarily the type of reference. On the other hand, quantifiers are stressed, and retain the full force of their quantitative meaning.

As regards the indefinite article, of special interest are instances of reference to a situationally unique object, which are considered with respect to the semantic and FSP structure of the sentence as a whole, as well as with respect to the function of the indefinite article in functional sentence perspective.

The zero article is conceived as a counterpart of the indefinite article, since it expresses the same types of reference with plurals and uncountable singulars as the indefinite article with countable singulars. Although in nongeneric indefinite reference it is sometimes a less fitting counterpart of the indefinite article than unstressed *some*, the zero article appears to be an established member of the article system on account of both its distribution and alternative means of expression. Unstressed *some* as an alternative form of the nongeneric zero article with plurals and uncountable singulars is included in the article system owing to its prosodic structure, weakened quantitative meaning, and close semantic relations to the indefinite article in certain uses.

Where overt absence of an article is found with a countable singular, it is distinguished from the zero article as 'null' or 'no article' on the basis of alternating with the nongeneric definite article, and expressing nongeneric definite reference (situational uniqueness). The term 'no article' is reserved for those instances in which the noun loses its independent nominal status.

Unlike unstressed *some* with plurals and uncountable singulars, *some* with countable singulars is a quantifier outside the article system. In comparison with the indefinite article, its reference is confined to indefinite nonspecific. Recent research has shown that *some* + countable singular expresses different degrees of nonspecificity, reflected in the respective proforms and replaceability by *a certain*.

As regards the role of indefinite determiners in functional sentence perspective, owing to their semantics, which indicates contextual nonboundness, they are disposed to determine noun phrases in the rheme. However, this disposition is subject to the semantic structure of the sentence as a whole, as well as to the effect of the other FSP factors, contextual boundness or nonboundness of the other sentence elements, linear modification, and intonation (in speech). Consequently, in dependence on the interplay of all FSP factors, indefinite determiners appear not only in the rheme, but also in the theme.

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Vyjadřování neurčité determinace v angličtině

Résumé

Článek se zabývá prostředky vyjadřování neurčité determinace v rámci systému členů a kvantifikátorů, z nichž je zahrnuto *some* determinující počítatelné substantivum v singuláru. Tyto prostředky se zkoumají z hlediska distribuce, vzájemných sémantických vztahů a úlohy v aktuálním členění větném. Neurčitému členu je věnována pozornost především v případech odkazu na jedinečného referenta. Nulový člen se chápe jako protějšek neurčitého členu u plurálu a nepočítatelného singuláru. Alternativním prostředkem vyjadřování negenerické reference je u těchto substantivních kategorií nepřízvučné *some*, avšak vzhledem k jisté sémantické diferenciaci je alternace mezi nulovým členem a *some* omezena jen na některé kontexty. Přesto je nepřízvučné *some* u plurálních substantiv v některých případech přesnějším sémantickým protějškem neurčitého členu než člen nulový. Schází-li determinátor u počítatelného singuláru, nejde o nulový člen, nýbrž o nerealizovaný determinátor alternující s negenerickým určitým členem, který označuje jedinečnost a vyjadřuje negenerickou referenci určitou, nebo jde o bezčlennost. *Some* s počítatelným singulárem, na rozdíl od nepřízvučného *some* u plurálů a nepočítatelných singulárů, představuje neoslabený kvantifikátor stojící mimo systém členů. Nespecifičnost jeho neurčitého odkazu se ukazuje být stupňovitá a vyžaduje další výzkum.

Úloha neurčitých determinátorů v aktuálním členění větném vyplývá z jejich sémantiky indukující kontextovou nezapojenost, což je disponuje vyskytovat se v jádru výpovědi. Tato dispozice je však podřízena sémantické struktuře věty jako celku a souhrě ostatních faktorů aktuálního členění (kontextové zapojenosti, lineární modifikace a intonace v mluveném jazyce). V závislosti na souhrě všech činitelů aktuálního členění se prostředky neurčité determinace vyskytují nejen v jádru výpovědi, nýbrž i v základu.