

# Schematic semantic conceptualization of English definite noun phrases

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Traditional syntactic analyses of various uses of English definite articles (or delimiters, as the author prefers to call them) have encountered difficulties due for various reasons, for example, due to their context dependence, suggesting that their usage is not strictly grammatical, and cannot be captured well by traditional grammatical rules. Other problems arise from their ambiguity, for example, indicating definiteness, specificity, or uniqueness, and possible interactions with tense and other grammatical features in certain contexts. Thus, the task of finding a comprehensive theoretical explanation has been challenging, as well as a practical model for language pedagogy.

More promising insights have come from considering the mental representations of such nouns in context, contextual familiarity of noun referents, and how language users conceptualize them. This approach will be extended further in this study to various uses of the English definite article, including levels of semantic concreteness and entitativity, or how a noun referent can be individuated and conceptualized. The basic core function of definiteness can then be extended in various ways to account for various uses in a more coherent manner, including patterns of article usage that have been regarded as idiomatic, sociocultural, or idiosyncratic. This includes usage of 'the' in certain verbal contexts (e.g., play the piano), certain types of locations (e.g., 'going to the store'), so-called unique referents (e.g., the sun), part-whole relations (e.g., 'the computer' leading to 'the mainboard'), 'the' used for first mention of nouns in various contexts (e.g., "At work, the photocopier broke down"). The proposed model will also account for some uses where the definite article is omitted, as in generic-like phrases (e.g., in orbit), and some types of variation (e.g., British 'in hospital' cf. US 'in the hospital').

The model sketched out here provide a more coherent explanation of various uses of English definite forms, in part because the model depends on how referents are conceptualized, schematized, and understood in context. This will not only be more theoretically coherent and comprehensive, but also bears direct language applications to pedagogy and applied linguistics.