The Generic Use of Articles in English with Reference to Kurdish

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1. Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the generic use of articles in English language, and to make some reference to the use of these articles in Central Kurdish. The scope of the study is limited to focus on the form of an NP as subject in generic sentences. It is clear that in English there are three articles, namely, the definite article "the", the indefinite article "a/an", and the zero article "ø". In Central Kurdish, we have morphemes with the same meaning as the English articles, but with a different use. The Kurdish equivalent morphemes include: "eke", "êk/ê", and "ø" which function like definite, indefinite, and zero articles respectively.

There are various classifications of reference in English language, but the present study concentrates on generic vs non-generic reference. Articles in English language play an active role in determining the aspect of the generic reference of the noun with which they occur. The articles used in generic reference are the same articles used in non-generic reference. The subject NP and the predicate of the sentence together make the sentence generic. However, there are various aspects of generic NPs due to the occurrence of various articles. The generic occurrence of the article with the noun in subject position in English language and providing equivalent sentences in Central Kurdish is what the present paper focuses on. The paper ends with its conclusions. One of the conclusions is that all the English articles can be used generically, but in Central Kurdish only the zero morpheme has generic use.

2. Articles in English Language

There are three articles in English language: the definite article "the", the indefinite article "a/an", and the zero article "ø". These articles are used with different kinds of count and non-count nouns, i.e., they come with common nouns not proper nouns. As cited in Crystal (2003: 76), "the English articles are examples of proclitics since they depend on the following word". It is obvious that the articles used in generic context are those that are used in non-generic context as well. The following is a discussion of the articles in generic context.

A. The Definite Article "the"

When the definite article comes with a *singular* noun in subject position, especially an animal or a bird, it gives the noun a 'kind reference'. The reference in this case is to the whole class all over the world not one particular animal in a particular context (Cohen, 1999: 40-1). Consider the example sentences below:
 (1) *The dinosaur* is extinct.
 (2) *The tiger* is a cat.
 (3) *The female kangaroo* carries its young in its pouch.   (Ahmed, 2011: 41)

In sentence (1), the whole class, i.e., the kind of dinosaur is taken into account, not only one. Similarly, in (2) and (3) the subject NP refers to the kind of 'tiger' and 'female kangaroo' respectively. This is because of the use of the definite article. As Hurdford, Heasley, and Smith (2007: 75) point out, the syntactic reference of NPs like the above mentioned ones is definite, but their semantic reference is generic because there is no dinosaur, no tiger, no female kangaroo in the immediate situation.

Another generic use of the definite article is with nationalities, but different from the case of animals or birds, the noun should be *plural* not singular. According to Radden and Dirven (2007: 109-10), when the definite article occurs with plural ethnic names, the reference of the NP is a generic reference to many elements of the class rather than all of them. In the light of this view, in sentence (4) the majority of the Brazilians are fond of football rather than the whole people of Brazil, but the reference is still generic.

(4) *The Brazilians* are fond of football.

B. The Indefinite Article "a/an"

In generic use, the occurrence of an indefinite article with a noun functioning as subject, in accordance with its predicate, gives information about the essential property of each individual of a kind rather than referring to the kind (Cohen, 2001: 184). It is worth mentioning that it is the predicate which determines the property whether it is essential or accidental as it can be shown in the following examples:

(5) *A sonnet* consists of 14 lines.

(6) ? *A sonnet* is popular.

In the examples above, sentence (5) is possible and generic whereas sentence (6) is odd and not generic because in both sentences the same article is seen, but there are two different predicates: having 14 lines is an essential property of each sonnet written by any poet while popularity is not an essential property of a sonnet, it is an accidental one. However, when one wants to make the example sentence (6) well-formed, the indefinite article should be replaced with the definite article as in (7) below.

(7) *The sonnet* is popular.

An important fact concerning the above example is that it is not generic since the definite article 'the' with a noun is a kind-referring NP, and the sentence (7) does not refer to the kind of 'sonnet' at all. In brief, the example sentence (5) is generic, (6) is odd, (7) is non-generic. The state of these three sentences changes due to the use of the article.

According to Krifka et al. (1995: 47), sometimes problematic situations can be seen, one of these situations is having subclasses. For example, the water bird "duck" has two subclasses, namely, male and female. The problem is that using the indefinite article with the noun "duck" does not refer to the essential property of each individual of the kind. Rather, it refers to each individual of the subclass. The following two examples support the argument.

(8) *A duck* has colourful feathers.

(9) *A duck* lays whitish eggs.

The sentence (8) is about the essential property of each *male* duck, and sentence (9) is about the essential property of each *female* duck.

Once more, the predicate is very important in addition to the article as it can be felt in the sentences (8) and (9). Moreover, in (10) and (11) below a great difference exists in using articles.

(10)   *A duck* has two short legs.

(11)   * *The duck* has two short legs.

It is clear that the predicates of both sentences are the same (an essential property predicate), but the sentence (10) is well-formed while (11) is not since this kind of predicate should be used with an indefinite article plus noun in subject position.

C. The Zero Article "ø"

This article in English language has no overt syntactic position, but covertly there is an article with a noun, that is why it is called the zero article. In other words, it can be said that there is an implied article with the noun. Greenbaum and Quirk (1990: 85) state that this article which occurs with noncount nouns and plural count nouns has the greatest widespread use in generic contexts, as compared with the other two articles. According to van Geenhoven (2006: 11), the generic use of the zero article with noncount nouns and plural count nouns makes the generic reference kind-referring. On this basis, it can be posited that the zero article, in generic use, is similar to the definite article in that both are used to refer to a kind, but it is different from the indefinite article.

(12)   *Cats* like meat.

(13)   *Blood* is thicker than water.

(14)   * *The cats* like meat.

(15)   * *The blood* is thicker than the water.

The first two examples above are generic and well-formed, but the other two are not well-formed only in generic context. Otherwise, in non-generic context they are grammatical and possible (Ahmed, 2011: 44-5). The reason is that subject NPs like "cats" and "blood" should not be used with any overt article in generic use.

3. Kurdish Equivalent Morphemes to English Articles

In Central Kurdish variety, there are some linguistic units which are used in similar cases like those of English. These linguistic units include {eke}, {êk/ê}, and {ø}. Yet, there are differences between the two groups in the two languages. One of the differences is that in Central Kurdish the term "morpheme" or "determiner" is used in stead of the term "article" (though it is true to say that all articles are morphemes or determiners in English, but the term "article" is specifically used to refer to a closed group with certain functions and meanings). Moreover, all determiners in English and Kurdish are grouped under the cover term "morpheme". Another difference between the two groups is that the Kurdish equivalent morphemes are *enclitics* as they are attached to the preceding word.

A. The Definite Morpheme

As for the definite case in Kurdish language which is {eke}, Marif (1979:187-8) uses the term "nîşaneî nasîawî / definite determiner". He also adds that it can be attached to nouns and adjectives, but more actively to nouns especially common nouns. Its function is to make the noun known by the listener. The following are examples of the occurrences of the determiner with noun (in 16) and with adjective (in 17).

(16)   *Şîreke* kul bwe.   (*The sword* has been blunt.)

(17)   Kuře *zîrekeke* beriztrîn nimreî hêna.(*The clever* boy got the highest mark.)

Marif (ibid.: 189) argues against the idea that {eke} has any allomorphs and stands against it. In contrast, Amin (2009: 244) argues that {eke} is a morpheme and it has four allomorphs: {eke} as in *jureke* (the room), {ek} as in *minaľekan* (the children), {ke} as in *pîyaľeke* (the teacup), and {k} as in *firokekan* (the planes). To him (ibid.), the reason of having different forms of this morpheme is the phonological environment in which the morpheme occurs. It means that these allomorphs are phonologically conditioned allomorphs because they are influenced by their neighbouring speech sounds. The following are example sentences for each form:

(18)   *Jureke* pak kirawetewe.   (*The room* has been cleaned.)

(19)   *Minalekan* hemw řojêk yarî deken.   (*The children* play every day.)
(20)   *Pîyaleke* şika.   (*The cup* broke.)
(21)   *Firokekan* bordumanî şar deken.   (*The planes* are bombarding the city.)

Concerning these two different views, the researcher supports Amîn and argues for the fact that the morpheme {eke} has four allomorphs. Nonetheless, this is not the point the researcher intends to consider. The study seeks the generic state of the morphemes in Central Kurdish. Having a look at the examples above, no generic sentence exists because the words to which the enclitic (the definite morpheme) attaches have no generic reference, i.e., their reference is definite. Thus, the definite morpheme in Central Kurdish has a non-generic use, regardless of the predicate in the sentence.

Exceptionally, the occurrence of nationalities in Central Kurdish is the same as their occurrence in English in that the subject NP in both languages is definite plural and its reference is generic. The following sentence is generic since the subject NP has a generic reference, and its meaning is the same as the example sentence (4), which has been presented before.

(22)   *Berazîlîekan* şeîday topî pên. (*The Brazilians* are fond of football.)

B. The Indefinite Morpheme

When it comes to the indefinite case, Marif (1979: 202-3) indicates that two forms are used which are {êk} in Mukrîyanî variety and {ê} in Slêmanî accent. To him, these two forms, in addition to their main function which is making a noun or an adjective unknown, show individuality. According to the researcher, these two forms can be regarded as the allomorphs of the same morpheme, namely {êk}, in Central Kurdish. Also, the individuality Marif mentions is different from that of English because in Central Kurdish only one individual is meant while in English each individual member of the kind (class) is meant. Moreover, the situation in English is about having an essential property, but in Central Kurdish it is not so. The two Kurdish forms can be exemplified as follows:

(23)   *Pîawêk / Pîawê* leser pirdekeîe.   (*A man* is on the bridge.)
(24)   *Zîrekêk / Zîrekê* hat.   (*A clever* one came.)

Again, as it can be seen in the definite case, there is no generic sign in the indefinite Kurdish morpheme in that only one individual is taken into consideration. It is concluded that the definite and the indefinite morphemes in Central Kurdish have no generic use because whatever predicate we have in the sentence, the sentence remains non-generic. Thus, the subject NP alone makes the sentence non-generic.

C. The Zero Morpheme

The state of zero is the same in English and Kurdish because it is evident that when lacking an overt marker, it is posited that a zero marker is implied. In researcher's view, the zero morpheme in Central Kurdish, which is equivalent to the zero article in English language, is the only one to show the generic reference. When the zero morpheme occurs in Central Kurdish, the subject NP is usually singular. This can be proved by giving some example sentences in English in which the articles give a generic reference to the subject NPs, and presenting their equivalent sentences in Central Kurdish.

(25a) *The dinosaur* is extinct.
(25b) *Daînasor* nemawe.
(26a) *A duck* has two short legs.
(26b) *Mirawî* dû qaçi kurtî heye.
(27a) *Cats* like meat.
(27b) *Pişile* hezî le goşte.
(28a) *Blood* is thicker than water.
(28b) *Xwên* le aw xesttire.

All the italicised words above are subject NPs, and all of them show generic reference. From another perspective, all the English and Kurdish sentences are generic sentences. In (25a), there is an English definite article, in (26a) an English indefinite article exists, in (27a) and (28a) the zero article occurs. The English articles in the mentioned sentences function differently, though they all have something in common which is the generic use. Their Kurdish equivalent subject NPs in (25b), (26b), (27b), and (28b) invariably occur with only one morpheme, the zero morpheme, which functions as the zero article in English.

4. Conclusions

1. In English language, the genericness of a sentence is determined by its predicate, but the generic aspect of the subject NP in the sentence is determined by its article. In Central Kurdish, the genericness of the sentence is based on the subject NP.
2. Central Kurdish morphemes which function the same as the English articles are enclitics.
3. The three English articles (the, a/an, ø) have generic use while in Central Kurdish only the zero morpheme, in the majority of cases, occurs generically.
4. Concerning nationalities, as an exception, the use of the definite article in English is similar to the use of the definite morpheme in Central Kurdish.

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پوخته

ئەم توێژینەوەیـه هەولێکـه بـۆ لێکۆڵینـەوەی حاڵـەتی گشتگیـری ئامرازەکـان لـه زمـانی ئینگلیزیـدا، وه بەراوردی ئەو ئامرازانه به ئامرازەکانی دیالێکتی "کوردی ناوەراست". مـەودای توێژینەوەکـه سـنورداره بـۆ جەخت کردن لەسەر فۆرمی ناوی لە پێگەی بکەردا لـه ڕستـەی گشتگیردا. ئاشـکرایه کـه لـه زمـانی ئینگلیزیـدا سـێ ئامـراز هـەن کـه بـریتین لـه ئامرازی ناساندن، نەناسین، وه ئامرازی سـفر. لـه کـوردی ناوەراستدا دەستـەواژەی "مـۆرفیم" بـەکاردێت بـۆ ئامـاژەکردن بـەو یەکـه زمانەوانیانـەی کـه هـەمان واتـای ئامرازەکانی زمانی ئینگلیزییان هەیه، بەڵام بەکارهێنانیان جیاوازه. مۆرفیمەکانی کوردی ئەمانەن: "ەکـه"، "یـَك/ئ"، Ø" کە ئەرکیان وەك ناساندن، نەناسین، سفره بەدوای یەکدا.

پۆلێنی جۆراوجۆر هەن بۆ ئاماژه له زمانی ئینگلیزیدا، ئەم توێژینەوەیـه کـار لەسـەر پۆلێنی ئامـاژەی گشتگیر و ناگشتگیر دەکات. ئامرازەکان لـه زمانی ئینگلیزیدا ڕۆلێکی گرنگ دەگێرن لـه دیـاری کردنـی جـۆری گشتگیـری ئەو ناوەی کە لەگەڵیدا دێن. ئەو ئامرازانـەی لـه ئامـاژەی گشتگیردا بـەکاردێن هـەر هـەمان ئەوانـەن کـه لـه ئامـاژەی ناگشتگیردا بـەکاردێن. جۆراوجۆرێتی حاڵـەتی گشتگیـری فرێـزی نـاوی بـەهۆی جیـاوازی ئامرازەکـه دروست دەبێـت. دەرکـەوتنی گشتگیـری ئامـراز و نـاو لـه پێگـەی بکـەردا لـه زمـانی ئینگلیزیـدا و خستنەرووی ڕستـەی هاوتا لە کوردی ناوەراستدا بابەتی توێژینەوەکەیه.

المستخلص

هذا البحث محاولة للبحث فى حالة تعميم الأدوات فى اللغة الأنجليزية، و مقارنـة الأسـتخدام هـذه الأدوات فـى اللهجة الكوردية المتوسطة. خصص البحث لتأكيد على صيغة عقد الأسمى فى موقع الفاعل فى الجملة التعميميـة. واضح أن فى اللغة الأنجليزية ثلاث أدوات وهى: أدات التعريف، التنكير، و أدات صفر. فى اللهجة الكوردية المتوسطة تستخدم عبارة "المورفيم" للدلالة على الواحدات اللغوية التى تعطى معنى الأدوات الموجودة فى اللغة الأنجليزية، الا أن طريقة أستخدامهم مختلف. المورفيمات الموجودة فى اللغة الكوردية هـى: "ەکـه"، "یـَك/ئ"، Ø" وظیفـتهم هـى التعريف، التنكير، و الصفر على التوالى فى الجملة.

هناك عدة تقسيمات للاشارة فى اللغة الأنجليزية، الا أن هذا البحث يتهم بالتقسيم دلالـة التعمـيم و غـير التعميم. الادوات فى اللغة الأنجليزية لها دور بارز فى تحديد نوع التعميم مـع الاسـم الـذى يـأتى معـه. الادوات التى تستخدم للدلالة على التعميم فى نقس الوقت تستخدم ايضا لغـير التعمـيم. التنـوع يحـدث نتيجـة حالـة التعميم فى عقد الاسمى نتيجة التنوع فى استخدام الادوات. ظهور التعميم للاداة و الاسم فى موقع الفاعل فى اللغة الأنجليزية و عرض جملة المشابهة فى اللهجة الكوردية المتوسطة هو موضوع البحث.