

THE ENIGMA OF THE ARTICLES

Leonora Chernyakhovskaya

В настоящей статье делается попытка объяснить роль артиклей как специфических информационных сигналов, участвующих в создании текстовых сообщений и доносящих до получателя коммуникативное намерение отправителя текста, вербализованное в тексте полностью или частично.

Сообщение, закодированное в тексте отправителем и адресованное получателю, является результатом взаимодействия языковых знаков текста с так называемой «фоновой» информацией, которой обладает получатель. Текст, несущий сообщение, является языковой моделью мысленной модели референта, которого имеет в виду отправитель текста.

Артикли – один из важнейших текстовых инструментов, которые участвуют в построении таких моделей. Они выполняют две следующие важнейшие функции:

- переадресовать референции слов от именования понятий к именованию референтов, которые имеет в виду отправитель, помогая ему осуществить свое коммуникативное намерение и построить языковую модель соответствующего референта (референтов).

-помочь получателю определить, какую именно информацию, тематическую или рематическую, несут слова, организованные в текст (что является частью коммуникативного намерения отправителя).

Introduction. Articles are one of the most enigmatic categories of the English Language. Even native speakers of English are not always aware why they use a definite or an indefinite article in certain situations. For those who learn English as a second language the task of using the articles correctly is even more difficult. Grammar books offer a lot of rules and even more exceptions to those rules. Learning them all still does not exclude making mistakes.

Below there is an attempt to explain the usage of the articles from the position of their interpretation as specific text elements participating in creating messages and delivering to the recipient the sender's communicative intent.

Why are they different? Articles are traditionally viewed as a Grammar Category, a Part of Speech. However, this Category, as opposed to all the other Parts of Speech, contains only two elements, "a" and "the," which can hardly be called words. They differ from all the other words

pertaining to all the other Parts of Speech mainly because all the other words, irrespective of what Part of Speech they belong to, have some lexical meaning, whereas the articles don't. Since the articles are devoid of lexical meaning and denote something only when functioning in texts, there is no point studying them as language elements, whether taken separately or in word combinations, in isolation from texts.

I would even suggest that articles are not lexical units at all, like nouns or adjectives. They are specific speech signals participating in creating text messages. In order to understand the way they work, they must be observed while they are functioning, i.e. within text messages.

But first a definition should be offered of what a text message is. The definitions offered below may suggest a key to interpreting the role of the articles in creating and understanding text messages.

Text messages and text information. The term "information," or, to be more exact, "cognitive information," is understood here as human knowledge of the world around us – of the physical world we live in, including physical objects, facts, events, and of the world of concepts, including ideas (constructs) of physical objects, events, facts and logical connections between them established and evaluated by people. Texts are one of the major means of cognitive information storage.

A text is not just a chain of language symbols arranged according to certain Grammar rules. It carries certain information encoded in it by the text sender and addressed to a certain recipient of the text. But the encoded information is not equal to the sum of word meanings comprising a text, which can be illustrated by the following example:

"Do you mean to tell me that this boy - this boy! - knows nothing about ANYTHING?"

"I know some things, -he said. - "I can, you know, do math and stuff."

"Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone"

Harry, the main character of the book, interprets only the meanings of the words in this micro-text, in particular, in the word combination “nothing about ANYTHING,” and is responding accordingly, insisting that he does know at least something. But his relatives extract some additional information from this micro-text – a reproach to them for hiding very important information about his parents, himself and of many other important matters.

Harry and his relatives extract different information from the same micro-text because its message is something larger than a sum of language meanings. The language meanings in the micro-text are programmed by its sender to interact with some other information, already familiar to some of the micro-text recipients (Harry’s relatives) and not familiar to another recipient (Harry). Interaction of the words meanings of the micro-text with different background information its recipients possess produces different messages for them.

It is evident that a text message is the result of the interaction of language meanings contained in the text with the background information the recipient has. Lack of background information prevents the recipient from getting the text message.

This fact leads us to the conclusion that the message of any text is the INFORMATION encoded in the text by its sender and extracted from the text by a recipient on the prerequisite that the recipient has enough “background” information allowing him/her to extract and perceive the message. Hence the text message is the result of the interaction of the information the text verbally contains and the background information the recipient has, which allows this kind of interaction.

Information and language. Information contained in a verbal message presents facts, ideas, feelings etc. through the prism of the sender's personal evaluation.

Language, which shapes this information, is only an instrument of communication. Language meanings, both lexical and grammatical, are not identical to the information of a message shaped into words. People exchange information, not sets of grammatical and lexical meanings.

Language is only a part of human knowledge, though a specific part. Whereas cognitive information is knowledge of the physical world we live in, Language information is knowledge of word meanings and of rules of their implementation. This kind of information is directly correlated not with physical objects, facts, or events, but with Conceptual Categories of human knowledge, or Concepts.

The world of language meanings is storage of names of Conceptual Categories, segments of generalized human knowledge about objects, facts, events that are viewed as groups of similar objects, or events, etc., if they possess, in human view, more or less similar qualities and are therefore viewed as belonging to the same Conceptual Category labeled with a certain name. In Semiotics these Conceptual Categories are called **Designates**. The field of language meanings is **storage of names of Designates**.

The amount of cognitive information, both individual and social, is constantly being enriched, thus enriching Designates' contents. The number of language symbols - names - is more or less the same for people within a language culture, which is reflected in dictionaries describing word meanings. This is what makes verbal communication within a language possible and provides mutual understanding between communicants.

Words listed in dictionaries are correlated with Designates, not with any concrete physical objects, facts, events, etc. Designates are constructs belonging to the sphere of Cognitive information. Designates' names belong to the sphere of Language information. Since we are discussing articles accompanying nouns, we will further on discuss only nouns, though names of Designates may belong to any Part of Speech.

Nouns registered in a dictionary refer directly to Designates, naming constructs (abstractions).

One and the same word may refer to several Designates. (E.g. the name "table" refers to a certain kind of furniture and to certain graphic products.)

The references of a word to all Designates it names constitute the sphere of its meanings.

Bilingual dictionaries offer only approximate meaning correspondences, because references to designates in different languages may vary. Thus, the Russian correspondence to the English word "table", стол, has some other references – e.g. to a certain diet, which the English word "table" does not have.

Verbal communication. Exchange of information in verbal communication includes at least two processes: the sender encoding into a text the information meant for communication, and the recipient decoding, or extracting the information received.

A communicative speech act means the sender has a mental image (a psychic-emotional simulation) of a segment of non-lingual reality (an object, a fact, an event etc.), or of **a Referent**, and a desire to share the information about the Referent via a verbalized message. A verbal message, in addition to a set of language meanings, contains the sender's personal judgment, offers his/her own evaluation of the information

communicated, aims at some result, etc., – in other words, contains information of some **communicative intent** of the sender. The communicative intent may not necessarily be fully or even partially verbalized, and if verbalized, may not be identical to the number of lexical and grammatical meanings used by the sender. E.g. when somebody says, “It is raining”, his/her statement evaluates the event as no doubt taking place at the moment. But another sentence, “I am sure it will be raining soon,” despite the meaning of the phrase “I am sure,” tells us that the sender is not at all sure of his prediction, otherwise he would have said, “It will rain soon.”

By creating a text, the sender turns his mental simulation of a Referent into its verbal simulation. The Referent is represented in the text through the prism of the sender’s personal evaluation and through the prism of lexical and grammatical meanings chosen by the sender.

Verbalization turns the mental simulation of a Referent into its lingual simulation, or a text. It means that a **text message** is a lingual simulation of the sender’s mental simulation of a Referent built through the prism of the sender’s personal evaluation of the Referent.

Extracting the message from a text. Any text contains a message only potentially, as any text is dead without a recipient. The message is revived only when the text produces in the mind of the recipient a simulation of the Referent initially encoded in the text by the sender. The text message is produced as a result of the interaction of the information encoded in the text by its sender and the information programmed by the text (and its sender) to be drawn from the background knowledge of the recipient.

But the new Referent simulation pre-programmed by the sender and revived in the recipient’s mind, is not purely mental, like the sender’s

mental simulation of the Referent. This new simulation is produced in the mind of the recipient by the lingual information of the text, which is a certain arrangement of a number of grammatical and lexical meanings acting as a certain program for reviving the Referent's original mental simulation. As a result, the new mental simulation of the Referent, being programmed by a set of language signs, is, therefore, partially lingual and partially mental.

Thus, the decoded text message is a mental-lingual Referent simulation produced by the text in the mind of the recipient, while interacting with his background knowledge. Its closeness to the original Referent simulation verbally encoded by the sender depends upon the amount of background knowledge of the recipient. Background information is a mandatory prerequisite for extracting a message from a text.

Message structure. Even a single word may potentially contain a message if, while interacting with the recipient's background knowledge, it produces in his/her mind a mental simulation of a Referent. Such a word (or a group of words, or a phrase) may be viewed as a minimal text (which may be a segment of a larger text). Such a mini-text potentially contains information about those features of the Referent that the sender considered essential for the message. A minimal text segment containing a lingual simulation of a Referent contains a message and therefore presents **an utterance**, whether it is a single word, or a phrase, or a sentence, or even a paragraph.

E.g.: for a Russian the name "Moscow" refers to the capital of Russia even without any context, whereas for an American the same name should be accompanied with the information of a certain location where a town under the name of "Moscow" exists (there are several towns named "Moscow" in several US States).

Information encoded in utterances may vary endlessly, but there are certain types of information, or information parameters, that are mandatory for any verbal simulation of a Referent, whether they are fully or partially verbalized, or only programmed by the sender to be revived in the recipient's background knowledge. It is their verbalized or potential presence in the utterance that allows first simulating, and later identifying a mental-lingual simulation of a certain Referent verbalized in the utterance.

The major mandatory information parameters, whether fully or partially verbalized or implied, that assist in producing a Referent simulation and performing a communicative speech act are as follows:

1. **The name of a Referent** to be simulated. Naming the Referent redirects the word meaning from a Designate it refers to in a dictionary to a Referent the sender has in mind and is verbally simulating in the text.
2. Information that there is a certain object labeled with the Designate name (**Parameter of Existence**) existing in certain **Time** and **Space Parameters**.
3. Information about some **Personal Evaluation** by the sender **of a degree of reality of the Referent existence** in the above parameters (real, imagined, desired, etc.). This is what Grammar calls modality, but it is nevertheless only a personal evaluation by the sender which may be true or not true in reference to a real, non-lingual situation.
4. Information about some **Qualitative Characteristics** of the Referent that the sender considers essential for this particular communicative act. Since not all the mandatory information parameters are verbalized in the utterance (some of them may be familiar to the recipient from his/her past experience), not only a whole utterance, but even some of information parameters may have various degrees of verbalization, from

zero verbalization, a single word to several sentences. Therefore an utterance may be as long as a whole paragraph, and even longer. E.g.: "It happened many years ago. It was summer time. The weather was fine ...," etc. The lengthy introduction of time parameters may be followed by a brief or a lengthy verbal introduction of the Referent (an object, an event, a judgment of an event, etc.).

Redirection of word meanings while creating a text message. The first information Parameter of a lingual Referent simulation, i.e. labeling a Referent with a name, is one of the most important information components of a mental-lingual simulation of the Referent the sender has chosen for the communicative act.

One of the most important tasks for the sender is to indicate when the name in a text refers to a Referent being simulated, when it refers to the Designate or a Denotation, one of the informational parameters of the Referent being verbally simulated in the text.

Whereas nouns in the dictionary refer to Designates only, nouns used in speech communication process may refer either to abstractions (concepts, ideas) or to physical objects, events, facts etc., the way the sender intends them to. "When I use a word, - said one of most famous Lewis Carroll character, - it means exactly what I want it to mean." And this is, in a nutshell, what creating a text is about.

However, choosing a name for a Referent the sender has in mind, even within a certain context, is not enough to build the Referent's mental-lingual simulation. The simulation is produced due to the fact that the other information parameters offered by the text change the reference of the chosen name. While in a dictionary the word meaning is presented as its reference to a certain Designate, in an utterance the mandatory information parameters redirect the reference of the name used by the sender according to his/her intention, thus adjusting the word meaning to

label the object (event, fact, etc.) the sender has chosen as the Referent for this particular speech act. This is the way people communicate via language, applying word meanings to suit their own purposes, in order to verbally simulate ideas, objects, facts or events which become the subject matter of their communication.

The choice of any particular word for naming a Referent depends upon the communicative intent of the sender and his/her personal evaluation of the Referent.

Selecting a name for a Referent is contextually supported by the other Information Parameters offered by the text assist in adjusting the word meaning to label the Referent chosen as the subject for this particular speech act. The choice of a word for naming a Referent depends upon the communicative intent of the sender (the same referent may be called "a girl," "honey," or "beloved," or "a whore" depending on the sender's intentions, attitudes, personal evaluations).

In addition to re-addressing a Name from a Denotatum to a Referent, there is one more kind of re-addressing. A Name can be used in reference to the quality of belonging to a Designatum, i.e. to a class of similar objects. The quality of belonging to a Designatum as a class of similar objects (Designatum), another construct, will be called **Denotatum**, Re-addressing a name from its Designatum to Denotatum in speech redirects the name reference from the Class of Names to the Class of Predicates (Compare: "I saw a man in the street," "He was man enough to do it...").

Re-addressing words meanings from Designata to Denotata and from Designata to Referents is supported by the utterance Grammar structure and other indicators (e.g., by articles. Compare: "The book is on the table," with reference of the name "table" to the Referent; "The book is big enough to serve as a table," with reference of the name "table" to the Denotatum of the word "table," "A table is a piece of furniture with a flat

top," with reference of the name "table" to the Denotatum used as the Referent of the last message).

It is evident that in the above illustrations the word "table" carries different communicative information depending on the reference attached to it by the sender. This becomes possible because, in addition to its meaning, the name in the utterance is loaded with some communicative information that makes the word function either as (a) **the name of a Designatum**, i.e. a Conceptual Category; (b) **the name of a Denotatum**, i.e. of an object standing out for its quality of belonging to a group of similar objects within the Designatum; (c) **the name of a Referent**, i.e. the subject of the communicative act, i.e. a physical object, a fact, an event, a construct, etc.

It means that the choice of one of these three functions for a word used in an utterance depends solely on the communicative intent of the sender.

It is due to the redirection of words' references within utterances that a verbal model of a Referent becomes a potential message. If the redirection of a reference is successful, the message will be successfully comprehended. If not, it may lead to a misunderstanding between the communicants.

The following example is a good illustration of how one and the same word may have different contextual references for the sender and the recipient and lead to misinterpreting the message:

"...even Stigang, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable –

"Found *what?*" said the Duck.

"Found *it,*" The Mouse replied rather crossly: "of course you know what "it" means."

"I know what "it" means well enough, when I find a thing," said the Duck: "it's generally a frog, or a worm. The question is, what did the bishop find?"

Lewis Carrol. "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,"

Signet Classic, USA, 2000:34

The first participant in the dialog attributes to the word "it" the role of a formal element in a Grammar structure ("found it advisable"). However, the second dialog participant interprets the same word as a substitute for a name of some Referent that he has in mind, and supports his background knowledge with the phrase "I know it when I find it," illustrating the Referent he has in mind by some additional information parameters: "It is usually a frog or a worm."

In order to make words organized into sentences to carry communicative information which would redirect their meanings (change their references) from **Designates** to **Denotata** (objects or events standing out for their quality of belonging to the Designate named) or to **Referents** (concrete objects the sender has in mind and has chosen for communication), specific text signals are used, supporting the speech communication process and making it more effective. Different Cultures use different means for the purpose. In the English-speaking Culture, the Articles seem to be one of the most important communicative tools assisting the sender in re-directing word meanings and thus backing up the speech communication process.

Articles as tools of redirecting noun references in texts. Articles, on their own, do not refer to any Designata, like names, and their "meaning" can only be deduced from the context, which offers grounds for the conclusion that they cannot be considered any Lexical Category at all. They are certain information signals that are used in speech with the only purpose of redirecting noun references from designates registered in dictionaries as word meanings, to certain referents senders have in mind while performing speech acts. In other words, articles load words used in speech communication with communicative information and become a part of the message verbalized in a text. The Zero Article, the Indefinite

Article and the Definite Article are very different information signals, each performing its own task.

The zero article. Grammar books usually state that the Zero Article (a meaningful absence of an article before a noun) is just another form of the Indefinite Article preceding uncountable nouns. The explanation, however, does not always work – e.g. the Zero Article precedes countable nouns in the plural form, too.

The usage of the Zero Article in speech communication seems to have a very simple explanation. Word meanings registered in dictionaries, no matter whether they are such nouns as “water”, “air”, “money”, “fruit”, “health,” or such as “book”, “table,” “dog,” are never preceded by any article – and this is because in the dictionary they are registered as names of Designates, or of abstract notions.

Absence of any article before a noun **within a text** is always meaningful, no matter what kind of noun is to follow –an uncountable noun or a countable one in the singular or in the plural form. Absence of an article before any noun used in a text is a signal of a very specific kind of communicative information the noun is loaded with. The absence of an article before a noun informs the recipient that the noun in question is used in its direct reference to its Designate. It signals that the name is used by the message sender in order to name a Conceptual Category which is going to be the subject-matter of his/her message (e.g.: “Man is the king of the Universe”).

Designates are constructs, and therefore they cannot have any time, space or any other information parameters allowing their verbal simulations as of objects or events existing in time and space parameters. Therefore, nouns representing them in texts do not acquire any new references compared to the ones they have in the dictionaries. Whether

used in a dictionary or in a text, nouns preceded by the Zero Article refer only to Designates:

"Sissy flounced on, **thin as bone, brittle as glass**, wearing a gray taffeta strapless dress..."

"We caught up **on gossip**, exchanging **news** on **mutual friends**."

In the above example both uncountable nouns ("bone," "glass," "gossip" and "news,") and the countable noun "friends" (in the plural form) refer the recipient to abstract notions. None of these nouns are accompanied by any information parameters allowing their simulating as a referent.

The reference of words to Designates allows mutual understanding of the sender and the recipient because, sharing the same Culture, they share a certain amount of background knowledge common (though not identical) for people of the same Culture. This knowledge allows the recipient to identify the Designates verbalized by the sender in the text. Lack of such knowledge makes interpreting the text (getting its message) impossible. Thus, in the famous story of Harry Potter about the world of magicians, presumably existing in some parallel space, next to our world, the Magic School offers a course "Introduction into the Art of Transformation." Harry, being new to the School, cannot understand what the Course is about – until he comes to class and learns that "The Art of Transformation" is the art of turning objects and creatures into some other objects or creatures (e.g. teaching how to turn a saucer into a frog, a human into a rat, etc.). The Designate named "The Art of Transformation" here is a construct created by the author's imagination, but it is supposed to be part of the cultural knowledge of the book characters backing up their mutual understanding in communication.

Countable nouns in the plural form, when used in texts preceded by the Zero Article, also have reference to Designates, and not to any Referents:

"Dogs are most common human pets nowadays."

(However, when the reference of such nouns is channeled to a **Denotatum**, not to a Designate, they are preceded by some other text signals, like "several", "a few," "three", "a dozen' etc., e.g. " My friend keeps three dogs in his house," and such words as "much," " a little," " little," etc." with uncountable nouns, e.g. "I want a little sugar with my coffee," etc.). .

The Indefinite Article. The indefinite article preceding within an utterance a countable noun in the singular form plays the role of the information signal indicating that the reference of the noun to follow has been chosen by the sender to be redirected to a **Denotatum**. It means the communicative information the noun is loaded with in this context is a certain qualitative characteristics of some Referent the sender has in mind, namely, the characteristics of being one of many objects possessing the same quality and belonging to the same **Designatum** (one of many objects of the same kind).

When the sender loads a noun with this kind of communicative information, his/her communicative intent turns the noun into one of the information parameters of the Referent either simulated in the previous context, or being simulated in the utterance, or already known to the recipient from other sources. Even personal names may be preceded by the indefinite article in such cases (they are also often preceded by an adjective, too): She packed a red bugle – beaded Bob Mackie slit to the thigh; a silver lace chiffon Nolan Miller went in...", or "In the mirror she saw a new, changed Angelica."

The indefinite article before personal names in the above examples signals that these nouns play the role of attributing some Referent already known to the recipient the qualitative characteristics of a Denotatum, an object belonging to a certain Designate as one of many of the kind.

Due to the communicative intent of the sender, the information carried by such nouns makes them become one of the mandatory information parameters of the Referent already introduced into the text.

Later in the text, the Denotatum may turn into a new Referent if the sender wishes it so. This will happen if the Denotatum is attributed all the mandatory information parameters necessary for its identification by the recipient. In this case, the reference of the noun preceded by the indefinite article will be redirected again – from “one of many of the kind” to a name directly referred to a new Referent being introduced by the sender.

A traditional fairy-tale beginning may serve a good illustration: “Once upon a time there lived a king. The king was handsome and happy. He had a wife and three daughters.” Because of the indefinite article preceding the word “king” in the first utterance, the word becomes a qualitative characteristics of a person presumably existing in certain time and space parameters, even if rather indefinite. (“once upon a time,” “there,” “lived”, where the verb “live” contains the seme of existence, and the verb’s past form refers us to some period in the past). Even such indefinite information parameters indicate that the reference of the noun “king” has been redirected from its Designate, first to its Denotatum, “a king,” and then, in the next utterance, to its Referent named “the king.”

If the mandatory information parameters are not provided, there is no redirection of a noun from its Denotatum to a verbally simulated referent. E.g. in the next utterance to follow, “He had a wife and three daughters,” there is no information allowing the recipient to redirect the reference of the nouns “wife” from its Denotatum to a concrete woman existing in certain time, space and other mandatory parameters, hence the noun “wife” (with reference to its Denotatum) remains just a qualitative

characteristics of the king – he was going to marry. The same is true of the phrase “three daughters.” The numeral “three” before the plural form of the noun “daughter” redirects its meaning from its Designate “daughters” to the new Denotatum also attributing a new quality to the Referent “the king” – as of a married man with children. But if the text spreads on, e.g. “The wife was beautiful, the girls were spoiled...,” in the utterances to follow new Referents, “the wife’ and “the daughters” appear, etc.

It is evident that the indefinite article used before a noun in a text signals that the noun meaning refers to a certain Denotatum, which means that the noun carries communicative information of the qualitative characteristics of belonging to a certain group of similar objects. It may either characterize the Referent introduced into the text earlier, or, if the utterance contains all the mandatory information parameters simulating a new Referent, its meaning is redirected from the Denotatum to the new Referent being simulated in the utterance.

The definite article. It is also evident from the examples above that the definite article preceding a noun in an utterance is the information signal that the reference of the noun to follow has been already redirected to a certain Referent and the noun is used as the Referent’s name.

The definite article is supposed to revive in the sender’s mind the information parameters mandatory for identification of the Referent and its revival as a lingual-psychic simulation in the recipient’s mind. Verbal presence or absence of these parameters in the utterance is not important, as long as they are available in the recipient’s background knowledge.

The presence of the definite article before a noun indicates that the sender is sure that the recipient has enough information in order to identify the noun with a Referent previously simulated in the text.

This approach makes it unnecessary to memorize various categories of nouns that are traditionally presented by grammar books as certain noun categories requiring the definite article, which should be memorized in order to avoid making mistakes.

There is, in fact, only one noun category – nouns which in any text represent a Referent previously verbally simulated by the sender and extracted from the text by its recipient with enough background information to identify it, i.e. to redirect the noun reference from its Designate or its Denotatum to the verbally simulated Referent.

We usually say “the police”, “the army”, because we know which referent we all, as a society, have in mind. The referent, in this case, is part of our mutual social knowledge. We say, “go to the bank, to the post-office, or to the airport,” because we usually know where exactly we keep our money, which airport we use to fly from, etc. The definite article signals that the information components of the Referent’s verbal simulation constitute some shared knowledge of the communicants.

This is why statements like “The definite article is used before unique names” seem meaningless. Names, on their own, cannot possess the quality of uniqueness. Names are only symbols of generalized knowledge. They possess only one quality –of reference to their Designates. Being unique or not unique is a quality attributed to segments of non-lingual reality that the sender chooses to be simulated as Referents and for which he/she selects words to name them.

E.g.: the noun “sun” is defined in Grammars as “a word with unique meaning.” But the word itself only names a certain Designate – a space

body offering warmth and light to planets orbiting the body. As our Solar System has only one object of the kind, there is an illusion that the Designate named Sun includes only one object, and therefore the word "sun" has only one meaning (one reference).

However, this is not exactly so. Unique is the space body in our Solar system, and not the meaning (the reference) of the noun "sun". Other Galaxies have their own similar objects possessing similar qualities.

Therefore, in the following utterance, "The Earth rotates around the Sun," the noun "Sun" represents the Referent familiar to everyone – the Sun of our Solar System (the uniqueness of the Referent is underlined by capitalizing the noun). General information parameters of its existence are present in the minds of all literate recipients of English, and not only English, texts.

However, the same word may have other Referents if the sender wishes it so. Thus, there is a sci-fi story the author of which created an imagined world where there is a planet rotating around six Suns. One of the Suns appears in the sky at night, the remaining five – in the daytime (resulting in day and night not being distinguished by the coming of darkness). Since the author verbally simulated six Referents possessing some similar qualities, and named them with one and the same word, "the sun," neither of them can be viewed as unique. In this imagined world presented in the text as a real world, the Designate of the word "sun" has six Denotata (the information is introduced by the author of this article for recipients who are not familiar with the story and will not get the message of the utterances below without it).

In the story one of its characters, after recovering from a shock caused by a natural calamity, says: "I see a sun in the sky. Then it must be mid-night now!" In the story context the indefinite article before the word

“sun” offers information that the word’s reference is to its Denotatum. However, the background knowledge of the Planet inhabitants allows them to identify it as a Referent (only one sun in the sky means to them that it is night time there).

The articles have nothing to do with the words specifics. They indicate whether the noun refers to a Designate, a Denotatum, or a Referent, a psycho-lingual simulation of what the sender had in mind while creating his/her text message.

The definite article precedes personal names in the plural form, if the Referent’s name refers to several referents bearing the same name. Thus, the name “the Smiths,” introduced into the text as one referring to the Referent, indicates there are several persons bearing the same name and united as a family. The family members may be either known or unknown to the recipients, but the definite article offers the information they exist as a family. (Out of any context, the name “the Smiths” would remain just a family name, and would not refer to any Referent – any concrete family bearing the name.)

If a Referent is presented by a personal or a Geographic name, there is no necessity in the definite article, as the name offers the necessary information, and, if the mandatory information parameters (verbalized or not verbalized) are known, the name itself is enough to identify a Referent encoded in the text as a capitalized name.

Of course, there are exceptions caused by some traditional habits in the usage of the articles. (Thus, some Geographic names representing well-known Referents within a Culture, traditionally keep the definite articles, and some don’t; compare “the Bronx”, but “Manhattan”, “the Ukraine”, the Crimea”, but France, Canada, etc.)

The above examples confirm that the function of the definite article in an utterance is to indicate that the noun to follow (geographic and personal names included), be it in the plural or in the singular form, refers to a verbally simulated Referent the mandatory information parameters of which are already familiar to the recipient.

Compare "There are dogs in the garden" and "The dogs are in the garden." In the first utterance the zero article indicates reference to some Denotation, whereas in the second – to the Referent already known to the recipient.

On the other hand, uncountable nouns may also refer to a Referent, if the sender wishes so, which in such a case is indicated by the definite article. Compare: "Water boils at 100 C" и "The water in my glass is not cold enough." The water in my glass is a portion of water, a Referent supposedly known to the communicants. The informational parameter "in my glass" may not be necessarily verbalized, but the sender will get the message due to the definite article preceding the word "water."

What has been said above leads to the following conclusion: the articles are certain information signals that assist the recipient in determining the communicative role of the nouns chosen by the sender for a particular message.

The zero article serves as the information signal that the noun **refers to a Designate**.

The Indefinite Article indicates that the noun to follow carries information about being **referred to a Denotatum** (a certain qualitative characteristics of a Referent). Before uncountable nouns the same information is carried by some words restricting the amount of quantity.

The Definite Article signals that the chosen noun **refers to a Referent** already simulated and known to the recipient from the previous context. The mandatory condition for identifying the name with a Referent (both countable and uncountable nouns) is the presence of all the mandatory informational parameters, explicitly or implicitly present in the text or in the background knowledge of the recipient. (If the Referent's name is an uncountable noun referring not to a certain amount of matter the sender has in mind – of substance, of liquid, etc., information parameters would offer such information, explicitly or implicitly.)

As articles redirect noun references in texts the way the sender desires it and thus realizing his/her communicative intent, they can be viewed as one of the most important text instruments assisting in creating a text message.

Articles as indicators of thematic and rhematic information. An utterance may consist of a single word or several sentences, depending on which informational parameters of the simulated referent are verbalized, and which are not.

The information parameters of a mental referent simulation, not necessarily fully verbalized in a text, are also not necessarily linear. But the lingual referent simulation has to be represented as a linear chain of language symbols. The choice of a linear succession of verbalized information parameters depends on their communicative functions within the utterance (i.e. whether they carry the core information of the message (**Rhematic information**) or some background information assisting in grasping the core information of the message (**Thematic information**)).

It is already common knowledge that any message encoded in a text contains two different kinds of communicative information, Thematic and Rhematic.

These terms are widely used, though their interpretation may vary. There is more unanimity in defining what Rhematic information is. It is usually defined as the gist of the message, its subject matter. It is the essence of the information that is supposed to be delivered to the sender in the message. It is often called the logical center of the message. Any information component of a message contained in an utterance can be Rhematic, as well as a whole message (though the latter is not very often the case).

It is more difficult to define what Thematic information is, and it is in its definition that opinions vary most. Its interpretation as an essential part of a Referent verbal simulation allowing the recipient to extract the Rhematic part of the message seems to offer a proper explanation of what it is.

As the sender builds his/her message counting on a certain amount of the recipient's background knowledge, he/she has to take into account how much his own knowledge differs from that of the recipient, in order either to add the information parameters of referents that the recipient may be lacking or to just trigger off the information potentially available in the recipient's mind.

This requires certain verbal actions from the sender which broaden the amount of transmitted information. Additional, Thematic information is added to the Rhematic information to be transmitted in a message, in order to provide for the interaction of a lingual simulation of the message with the background knowledge of the recipient and hence – for a better mutual understanding between the communicants. Specific language means are used to this end, indicating which information in the utterance is the subject-matter of the message and which is introduced into the text as some extra without which the message cannot be deciphered. This extra information is what is called Thematic information.

Different languages use different sets of language means for indicating which words in the linear chain of language symbols carry Thematic or Rhematic information, and for performing the following important operations:

- 1) To indicate whether a noun to be used in an utterance is a name of previously simulated referent, or it introduces a new information parameter of that referent, or an information parameter introducing a new referent.
- 2) To indicate which part of the utterance information is known to the recipient from the previous experience, and which is supposed to be new for him/her (whereas all the message information is known to the sender anyway).

The English articles belong to the major instruments for performing these tasks.

Most of English utterances, if they are not emotionally tinted, use the Theme-Rheme linear order of placing information within an utterance (the same is typical of many other languages).

As the majority of English sentences has strictly fixed Grammatical word order, with the Subject opening a sentence, the Predicate in the second position, with adverbial modifiers of space and time ending the sentence, the Thematic information contained in such sentences is most often verbally shaped as a noun in the grammatical function of the sentence Subject. The definite article preceding the Subject noun is a direct indicator of the Thematic quality of information carried by the Sentence Subject, in addition to its initial, Thematic position. E.g.: "The boy entered the room" (with the phrase "entered the room" containing Rhematic information).

Words or phrases in the final utterance position carry Rhematic information, irrespective of their grammatical shape or the presence of the definite article. Thus, the phrase "entered the room" in the above example carries Rhematic information.

However, there is a serious deviation from the Theme-Rheme information distribution in the linear order. When a new referent is being introduced into the text message via an utterance in which most of its information parameters carry new information, the referent's name becomes the Rheme, as the most important information in the utterance. In such cases a reverse order of linear spreading of information is used, with the Rheme opening an utterance and the Thematic information ending it.

In this case the indefinite article before the noun in the initial position is the signal of Rhematic quality of the information the noun carries. This can be illustrated even by very simple examples.

If the utterance "The boy entered the room" mentioned above is a Theme-Rheme one, the following one, "A boy entered the room," contains information of quite a different quality. The indefinite article before the Subject is not the only difference. It is a Rheme-Theme utterance, and the indefinite article preceding the Subject signals that the word 'boy' is the Rheme, though it does occupy the initial, Thematic position in the grammatical function of the sentence Subject. It introduces the name of a new referent the information parameters of which are also present ("entered the room" is also a new information parameter – a qualitative characteristic of a new Referent being introduced in this utterance).

Thus, the second, and a very important function of English articles is their role in indicating Thematic or Rhematic quality of information within a text message.

Their role in this function is determined by the position of nouns they precede.

If the noun to follow is **in the initial position** in the utterance:

- **The preceding definite article** signals that the noun to follow, grammatically shaped as the sentence Subject, carries Thematic information and refers to a referent known to the recipient (The boy entered the room).

- **The indefinite article** in the similar position signals that the information carried by the noun to follow is **Rhematic**, and that the information in the utterance has reverse order of placement, not typical of English utterances.

If the noun to follow is **in the final**, typically **Thematic position** in the utterance:

- Both **the definite and the indefinite articles** signal that the preceded noun, grammatically shaped as a complement or an Object, carries **Rhematic information**. **The indefinite article** indicates rhematic quality of the noun by default, occupying the typically Rhematic final position. In case it is the definite article, additional language means are applied, in order to strengthen the Rhematic quality of the noun to follow, such as lengthening the rhythmical group of words in the final sentence member, e.g.: "I saw the boy, not his father."

- **The zero article** preceding a noun in any syntactic function testifies to only one thing – that the noun is used by the sender as the name of a designate. Its Rhematic or Thematic quality is generally determined only by its initial (Thematic) or final (Rhematic) position in the utterance

(compare "Physics was never my favorite subject at school," and "He majored in Physics"), though there are some specific language means, such as inversion, allowing to attach Rhematic quality to such words in the initial position ("It was Physics that changed his whole life").

Thus, it is possible to say that articles have one more and very important function – they are additional information signals testifying to the quality of communicative information encoded in the text.

Conclusions. The English articles are specific speech tools which, being devoid of lexical meaning, can be viewed not as language elements, but purely as information signals assisting in producing text messages.

Their **first function** described above is re-addressing words references in a certain way intended and chosen by the sender, thus assisting in building verbal simulations of referents that carry the sender's personal evaluation of the information to be verbalized, i.e. of his/her ideas encoded in the text as its message.

Their **second function** is to help the recipient to distinguish what kind of information, Thematic or Rhematic, is carried by the words and word phrases in the text. Thematic or Rhematic quality of information encoded in the text as its message is also a certain quality of the sender's communicative intent.

By performing these two functions, the articles assist in transmitting to the recipient the sender's communicative intent partially or fully verbalized in text messages.