

The Impact of Duality of Definiteness and Indefiniteness in Arabic on Arabic Sentence Structure with Reference to English

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Abstract

This study deals with the duality of definiteness and indefiniteness in language and its impact on the Arabic sentence structure on the assumption of the adaptation of the abstract mental thought and actual utterance according to the rules of the Arabic syntax since these rules usually differentiate between the definite and the indefinite by grammatical position and function.

Arab grammarians say that the indefinite is stronger than the definite because things are indefinite and then, become definite. This paper tackles definiteness and indefiniteness in English as well their effects on English sentence structure by grammatical position, expansion and function .

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Finally, it is shown that the duality of definiteness and indefiniteness plays an important role on the Arabic and English sentence structure by grammatical position, sentence expansion and grammatical function.

Introduction

English and Arabic belong to different families of languages. The concept of the duality of definiteness is similar or almost similar in all languages, but the methods of expressing it differ from one language to another (Nahhla, 1999:11). The present paper deals with the impact of definiteness and indefiniteness on the Arabic sentence structure with reference to English.

Definiteness and Indefiniteness in Arabic

The duality of definiteness and indefiniteness in language is linked with the duality of the known and unknown inherent in the mind of the speakers of a certain language or specific and the common. However, the common thing among languages is that they express the indefiniteness in a way different from expressing the definiteness whether at the semantic or structural level.(Nahhla, 1999: 13).

Aim of this paper is studying the effect of definiteness on the structure of the Arabic sentences; that is to say, we shall concentrate

on the structural side only based on the assumption of the adaptation of the abstract mental thought and actual utterance according to the rules of the Arabic syntax since these rules usually differentiate between the definite and the indefinite by grammatical position and function.

The Marked and Unmarked.

Arab grammarians studied definiteness according to the origin of things (i.e. Which come first), a case in our view far away from the descriptive method, but what they meant by it was to explain a number of judgments on which they based their rules, the Basrah grammarians state the indefinite is the rule. Therefore, Sibawayhi suggests that the indefinite is easier than the definite and it is unmarked for the definite comes first the something happens to make it definite (Sibawayhi, n.d: 1/22). He says also the indefinite is stronger than the definite because things are indefinite and then, become definite.(Sibawayhi, n.d: 1/22). Therefore, the indefinite is the rule and definiteness is alien to it (Ibnu l-Anbari, 1999:241). Thus, they believe that every definite has an indefinite origin (Ibnu Yayish, n.d: 5/85).

The reason behind this idea is that they have based their ideas on a grammatical rule which states that distinctive morphemes are found in the branches; the stems are not marked. For example, the

masculine is a stem so it is not marked, but the feminine is a branch so it carries a mark. Likewise, the indefinite is a stem so it does not carry a mark, whereas the definite is a branch and, therefore, carries a mark. Therefore, Al-Nahhas(died 698 A.H.) states that we say:

رأيت رجلاً.

I saw **a** man.

which does not need a mark, but if we want to make it definite we shall introduce a mark to say:

رأيت الرجل.

I saw **the** man.

So, a mark is added to the branch known as the definite, not the indefinite (Al-Sayutti, n.d: 1/257), because it is the stem which doesn't need a mark. Kufa grammarians and their followers, state however, that there is not a stem relation between the definite and the indefinite(Abu Haiyan n.d:1/459). Every type is independent of the other due to the difference in the judgment of each lexeme since some are originally definite only like the pronouns. In any case the stem- branch relation between the definite and indefinite was not acceptable among modern linguists and they were right. (Afifi, 1999: 58)

However, Arabic has many tools for the distinction between the definite and indefinite, the most prominent of which is that some nouns are definite by themselves so that they do not need a definite article. Examples of such nouns are the proper nouns, pronouns, demonstratives and the relative pronouns. nouns which need a suffix or an antecedent. The ones that take a prefix are of two types: the first type is those which take the definite ال (the); the second type takes a separate morpheme before them namely the vocative يا for the called object is definite in Arabic.

The nouns that need a cataphoric referent are nouns like the Mudhaf (genitive nouns) as in the sentence:

هذه مدرسة المتميزين.

This is **the** school of brilliants. (Afifi, 1999: 26)

Likewise, grammarians distinguish the indefinite nouns by different signs: Tanween, but it does not always mark indefiniteness (Nahhla, 1999: 159). There is **Tanween Altankeen** which is affixed to proper nouns. Therefore, grammarians look for means of recognizing the indefinite nouns. They have noticed the presence of a number of particles at the beginning of the sentence which are only followed by the indefinite (i.e. they depend on the grammatical position in their diagnosis). They noticed, for example,

that **لَا**، **مِنْ**، **كَمْ**، **رَبِّ** are preceded indefinite nouns only which makes the noun after them indefinite (Nahhla,1999: 143).

They also noticed that the morphological form can sometimes be a method for judging a linguistic unit as indefinite if they do not find a definite particle. Al-Mubarid (died in 285 A.H.) states that " the dual and plural of proper nouns make it indefinite. (Afifi,1999: 187).

In fact, the Arab grammarians managed to differentiate between the definite and indefinite by various means, but their treatment of the effect of definiteness on the structure of the Arabic sentence is scattered in the different grammatical chapters, which makes difficult for researchers to have a comprehensive look at it. They justify it by the different schools of grammar, but all of them stem from the theory of linear effect, the reason for which our subject is scattered among the chapters of grammar books.

1.The Grammatical Position

The system of sentence structure dictates that the position of word has regulating rules taking into consideration that the Arabic sentence is characterized by an internal free movement due to the inflectional markers which signals its function. Despite this fact, any change in the norms, restored for rhetorical reasons or for a grammatical reason which require a change in positions represented

by the indefinite only since definiteness has a role in the stability or change in the grammatical position of lexemes within the nominal sentence. So, if the subject is definite and the predicate is indefinite, then the sentence must follow the stem i.e. what the utterance should be by pre-posing the subject and post-posing the predicate like saying:

الكتاب مفيد.

The book is useful.

In accordance with this, Ibnu l-Sarraaj (died 316 A.H.) says" if two nouns, definite and indefinite, go together, that means the definite functions as the subject and the indefinite is the predicate (Ibnu l-Sarraaj,n.d: 1/72):

But if the subject is indefinite and the predicate is a phrase (an adverbial or prepositional phrase), then the predicate should precede the subject i.e. the subject loses its basic position in the sentence and the predicate occupies its position such as:

*عندك كتاب.

*you **a** book

*على رف كتاب.

*on **the** shelf a book

and should me say:

كتاب عندك.

You have A book .

كتاب على الرف.

There is A book is on the shelf.

For the subject here is indefinite and judging the unknown is meaningless according to the rules of grammar because it doesn't benefit the addressee. Therefore, grammarians and Arabs agreed on disallowing that, which makes the last two sentences ungrammatical except in one case when they come as an answer to a question (Ibnu Aqeel,1964: 2/256).

Also grammarians believe that the rule for the subject is to be definite, but it may be indefinite on condition that a positional change takes place where the predicate precedes the subject like:

زارني مسرعاً صديقي.

My friend visited me quickly.

The word صديق (friend) is the subject which should be definite and should be possible that it comes as indefinite for the positional change that took place where it came after the predicate (Ibnu Aqeel,1964: 2/256).

2. *Expansion (Imtiddad)*

Grammarians noticed a relationship between definiteness and the length of sentence elements (Afifi,1999: 7). We mentioned earlier that the indefinite subject loses its frontal position in the sentence for predicating unknown noun is meaningless, but Arabic allows that subject to keep its position in the conditional clause on condition it makes sense which is presented in various forms quite often tackled by grammarians, the most prominent of which is the expansion of the sentence by adding antecedent to the subject, which does not only affect the meaning of the subject but also the sentence as a whole since it is acceptable in Arabic to start with an indefinite on condition that this indefinite is preceded by a negator such as:

ما جهد ضائع.

no effort is lost.

or an interrogative:

هل ضيف عندكم.

Do you have a guest.

or non – interrogative كم (how many/ much):

كم صديقٌ زرتَه فأفادني.

Many a friend I visited who benefited me.

or لولا

لولا رجل لغرقت.

If it were not for a man, I would have drowned.

or initial

لرجل قائم.

A standing man.

or ف

إن صرف ديناراً فدينار بالجيب.

If he spent a Diner, he would keep another.

or و

قطعت الصحراء ودليل يرشدني.

I crossed the desert with the help of a guide.

and also if the predicate is indefinite:

أحسن الحكام من أسعد الناس.

The best ruler, is that who makes people happy.

or post-modifier noun:

نوم مبكر أحسن من سهر شهر.

A sleep early is best than a month waking late.

or to be predicated by a definite noun:

صيف وصديق كريم حاضران.

Summer and a generous friend are present. (Ibnu Aqeel,1964:1/216- 226)

One the types of expansion is where an indefinite noun is preceded by a preposition obligatory or optional : Optional prepositions are such as **من** or **بـ** :

ما من اله إلا الله.

There is no God but Allah.

and obligatory positions such as **رب** :

رب أخ لم تلده أمك.

There may be a brother who your mother did not bear.

It is clear that the presence of these prepositions led to an expansion in the sentence as far as the number of words is concerned; besides the semantic change is caused by this expansion.

We said previously, that the subject is definite and it may be indefinite if it comes after the predicate. It can keep its position on condition that it is expanded by the presence of a preceding or following element. The preceding element is realized by a negator such as:

ما فشل طالب مجدداً.

no student failed again.

or imperative:

لأتشرب في إناء مكسور.

Don't drink in a broken glass.

or interrogative:

هل ترضه عن أم قاسياً قلبها.

Do you like a hard- hearted mother?

The expansion by a following element is realized by modifying the indefinite subject :

هل شفقت على طفلة صغيرة تائهة؟

Did you take compassion for a lost daughter.

or modified by a predicate :

حافظت على أثاث الغرفة منسقاً.

I kept the room furniture tidy.

or by a participle:

افرح بناظم شعراً مبتدئاً.

○A novice poet makes me happy.

or by coordination:

ذهب رجل ومحمد مسرعين.

Muhammad and a man went quickly.

(Hassan,1968:1/346)

We should like to draw your attention that the reasons for making the subject of a nominal sentence similar to the reason that makes the subject indefinite in Arabic, regarding position or expansion. A mother example of expansion is that Arabic does not allow the exception of the indefinite singular noun in the affirmative sentence unless the indefinite noun expanded by an indefinite noun is expanded by an adjective or predicate. Ibnu-Al-Sarraj suggests that it is not possible to except an indefinite in the positive. So do not say:

جاء في قومي إلا رجلاً.

Came in my people except a man.

for it is useless to make this exception , but if you added an adjective or made it specific it becomes possible (Hassan,1968:1/259).

3- The Grammatical Function

Definiteness affects the assumption of a linguistic unit of a certain function in the sentence. So, the circumstantial phrase or specification that can be indefinite. Ibnu Al-Sarraaj also states that "the circumstantial phrase can be indefinite since it is an addition in the predicate and meaning" (Hassan,1968:1/346). He adds that " the nouns which are put in specification accusatives case can only be indefinite with a generic reference "(Hassan,1968:1/269). Abu l-Barakat (died 577 A.H.) explains this by stating:

"if it said why should specification be indefinite? The answer is" because it explain what preceded it, and due to its similarity with the circumstantial phrase, it has to be indefinite" these two functions are not realized by definite nouns and if such a thing is to be found, then it is interpreted as indefinite(Ibnu l-Anbari,n.d:155). Another function is to be added. As long as the circumstantial phrase and a specification are indefinite, then it is not possible that they occupy the function of subject of a passive. Ibnu-l-Sarraaj says "the circumstantial phrase and specification can not occupy the position of the subject". If you say:

سر بزید قائماً

Walk with Zaid standing.

تصبب بدن عمر عرفاً

Zaid's body streamed with perspiration.

It is not possible to put *عَرَفًا* and *قَائِمًا* in the position of the subject because they can only be indefinite. The subject and any noun that takes its position is hidden and the hidden nouns can only be definite (Ibnu l-Anbari, n.d:152).

There are some grammatical functions that can only be occupied by a definite noun and the indefinite such the manhood (Inbu l-Sarraj, n.d: 1/436) *ورجلاه يارجلاه* for nudba can only be by a well known noun, which is linked social state by grammarians. Ibnu l-Anbari comments on the limit of nudba to the definite nouns to be a an excise him, they will share his sorrow so it lessens his pain. (Ibnu l-Anbari, n.d : 183)

It is also necessary that for the linguistic unit which occupies the adjective function to follow the head noun in definiteness :

مررت برجل كريم.

I passed by a generous man.

مررت بزید كريم.

I passed by the generous Zaid.

The adjective is indefinite in the first sentence and definite in the second to follow the head noun, but if we say:

مررت برجل الكريم.

I passed by **the** generous man.

مررت بزید کریم .

I passed by generous Zaid.

Then we are producing ungrammatical sentence.

(Ibnu Aqeel,1964: 3/192)

It is worth saying here that it an indefinite noun in the same sentence, that will affect the function of the noun that comes after it which will not be considered as an adjective but as the circumstantial phrase. Sibawyah comments on this if we say,

هذان رجلان وعبد الله منطلقين.

These are two men starting with Abdullah.

The word **منطلقين** is accusative because it can't be an adjective for عبد الله nor an adjective for the two. Since this is not acceptable it is considered as such as if you are saying :

هذا عبد الله منطلقاً .

Here is Abdullah heading fast.

i.e. the word منطلقين does not function as an adjective because of the difference in definiteness between the two nouns, which gives it the status of the circumstantial phrase.

Definiteness in English

The English definite determiner is **the** article. **the** is a correct article for both countable and uncountable nouns. (Master, 1988: 4).

Halliday & Hasan, (1976: 74) claim that in case presupposed information is not in the extra-linguistic world, "the presence of **the** creates a link between the sentence in which it occurs and that containing the referential information." However, it is not the case that English uses **the** with nouns only, and that the definite correlates with old information.

In grammatical theory, **definiteness** is a feature of noun phrases, distinguishing between entities which are specific and identifiable in a given context (definite noun phrases) and entities which are not (indefinite noun phrases). (Lyons, 1977: 655). In English, the definite article is used with all the three types of nouns, e.g. **the** book, **the** books, **the** water. (Aziz, 1989: 95).

A noun is considered **definite** if it refers to something specific that is known to both the writer/speaker and the reader/listener. For example, if somebody needs to drive somewhere, he might ask his father:

May I use **the** car?

He uses the definite article **the** because both he and his father know which car John is referring (to the family car). (Hawkins, 1978).

Using Articles with Proper Nouns

Proper nouns may be a personal name, a geographical name, a temporal name. Some proper nouns are preceded by a definite article because these nouns lack article contrast e.g. **The** Hague. The proper nouns take the definite article **the** when noun is considered specific, e.g. (Aziz, ,1989:99)

The Baghdad of 1980's is different from that of 1970's.

Proper nouns are names of particular people, places, and things (John F. Kennedy, New York City, Notre Dame Cathedral), and for that reason they are inherently definite. Nevertheless, the definite article is not used with most singular proper nouns. For example, if someone is referring to someone's friend Paul, he would not say:

The Paul and I went to a movie last night.

The only times **the** is used with a name like this are:

- a. when you want to be emphatic, as in **the** Elizabeth Taylor" (to emphasize that you are talking about the famous actress, and not about another woman with the same name).

b. when you are actually using the name as a common noun, as in:

The Paul that I introduced you to last night.

The real meaning of this phrase, "**the man named** Paul". plural names, are always preceded by **the**: **the** John' sons, **the** Bahamas, etc.

Singular geographical names are very irregular with respect to article usage. For example, singular names of continents (Asia, Africa), mountains (Mount Fuji), and bays (San Francisco Bay) do not take the article **the**, but regions , deserts (**the Sahara**), and other geographical entities do.

The use of articles with singular proper nouns is complex as well as difficult to learn, as indicated by the following examples .

The United Nations (the U.N.).

For this reason, the best thing to do is to memorize whether the proper nouns that you use frequently are used with or without **the**.

(Hawkins, 1978)

The source of definiteness in some uses of the definite article is not necessarily textual, but is to be sought in an assumption (by the speaker) of existential presuppositions in the speaker's mind (for the hearer to attain). (Triki ,1989 : 172).

Definiteness Sources

There are five reasons which make a noun definite:

- a. The noun has been previously mentioned.

I saw **a** funny-looking **dog** yesterday.

When it saw my cat, **the dog** ran away.

The first mention is indefinite but the second mention is definite.

- b. A superlative or ranking adjective makes the noun's identity specific.

The tallest boy in the class is 190cm tall.

Please, read **the second** paragraph on page 4.

Today is **the most important** day of my life.

- c. The noun describes a unique person, place, or thing.

The Sun shines in the east.

- d. A modifying word, phrase, or clause **follows** the noun and makes it clear which specific person or thing is being referred to. But not every noun that is modified in this way is definite; it depends on the situation and on what you can reasonably expect your listener/ reader to know about.

Do you remember **the** girl who went camping with us?

e. The context or situation makes the noun's identity clear. For example, you might ask someone to:

Close **the** door.

You would use **the** because it would undoubtedly be clear to both of you which door you were referring to. (Hawkins, 1978)

Indefinite determination

The indefinite article, thus, correlates with new information whereas the definite correlates with old information. Along the same line of thought, Halliday, (1985: 274) shows the overlap between grammatical structures and informational structures, claiming that "information is a process of interaction between what is already known or predictable and what is new or unpredictable."

Thorne, 1982: 481) argues that the indefinite article is used "to indicate that something is of the kind that can be counted," and therefore "denotes not a class but a member of a class." To put it cognitively, it "implies that the nominal alone is not sufficient to put the hearer in mental contact with a uniquely determined instance of the category". A complication of the situation has to do with the fact that the indefinite article admits both a specific and a non-specific (or generic) interpretation.

Indefinite article could be claimed to signal extreme disengagement on the part of the speaker by being experientially at two removes from its referent, as compared to the referent of a definite article, to which it is at one remove, and explains this by contending that the referent of a generic descriptor only exists in the mental world or space of the speaker , according to (Langacker, 1991:103-105).

At the level of enunciation, "the occurrence of the indefinite article in an utterance acts as a presence-indicator since it is indicative of the speaker's attitude towards the referent." As such, it is "a convenient means to obscure personal judgments by distancing them from ego and attributing them to a bigger and less tangible entity" (Triki, 1989: 177).

Uses of The Indefinite article

In English, the indefinite article is used with count nouns in the singular. (Aziz, 1989:95). The indefinite is just the opposite of the definite article, the indefinite articles are **a**, **an**, **some**, **any** etc. that are **indefinite** because they do not refer to a particular thing as **the** does, but simply refer to an individual or individuals of the noun in a broad sense. For example, if John says to his friend Bill:

I saw **a** funny-looking dog today.

He uses the indefinite article *a* because he knows which dog he saw, but Bill doesn't. (Hawkins, 1978)

To achieve better understanding of the distinction, picture the following scenario in my mind and ask myself which one expresses my intent most clearly:

I point to a bookshelf full of short stories and say,

Give me **the** short story.

pointing to the largest short story on the shelf or I point to a bookshelf full of short stories and say,

Give me **a** short story.

waving my finger only in the general direction of the top shelf.

In the second scenario, you are free to pick any short story that might be on the bookshelf because **a** does not refer to a particular short story . However, in the first scenario, it is clear that I'm referring to a particular short story because of the word **the**. (Maalej, 1984).

Zero Determination

What makes determination somewhat problematic is the "dual class membership" of some nouns, which may belong in countable and uncountable semantic categories as in the following examples:

She was **a beauty** in her youth.

She had great **beauty** in her youth.(Maalej, Zouhair, 1984).

The zero article is no less of a clue in the identification of the speaking voice. The zero article tends to co-occur either with the plural, or with mass nouns or with abstract nouns, signaling thus ego's limitations:

I can't make it out. (Quirk et al.,1985)

Triki, 1989:183) discussed that the co-occurrence of zero article with the plural could be accounted for in terms of the obscuring effect of the plural, which does not cohere well with the definiteness of the definite article or the singularising tendency of the indefinite article. The affinities of the zero article with mass nouns could be accounted for in terms of the difficulty to quantify them numerically, i.e. difficulty to use the indefinite article. The relevance of these affinities is their close association with basic acts of perception. In English, zero article is used with plural count nouns and mass nouns e.g. books, water. (Aziz, 1989:95)

Finally, the affinities of the zero article with abstract nouns could be accounted for by their very abstraction which is not always compatible with the indefinite article that made it clear that there is more to the use articles than just grammatical and textual considerations. The use of articles is inseparable from the speaker's attitudes towards the substantives they determine. Triki, 1989: 183)

Countability

Countable nouns refer to people, places, or things that can be counted (one house and two houses). Countable nouns can be made plural by adding or some other the plural ending, for example, student(s), countri(es), child(ren). A few words are the same in both the singular and plural forms (deer, sheep).

Uncountable nouns often refer to food, beverages, substances, or abstractions (meat, tea, steel, information); **some** uncountable nouns (but not the abstract ones) can be made countable by adding a **count frame** in front of them (two **gallons** of milk, six **blocks** of ice, a **bar** of soap, a **bunch** of celery).

Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut distinction between countable and uncountable nouns. Some nouns can be both countable and uncountable even without adding count frames. For example, as an uncountable noun, experience refers to abstract knowledge or skill that can be gained by observing or participating in events. As a singular or plural countable noun (experience/experiences), the word **experience** refers to a particular instance (or instances) of participation in events. Similarly, the uncountable noun **glass** is a substance made from silicates; **a glass** (singular) is something you drink from; and **glasses** (plural) are frames containing lenses that correct imperfect vision.

There are other exceptions to the countable/uncountable distinction as well. Moreover, a noun that is countable in your native language may be uncountable in English, and vice-versa. For example, **soap** is countable in Spanish but uncountable in English. However, as long as you are aware of these differences they probably will not cause you much difficulty.

(Hawkins, 1978)

Some Common Uncountable English Nouns

- **Food and Drink:** bacon, beef, beer, bread, , sugar, tea, water, and wine.
- **Nonfood Substances:** air ,cement, coal, and dirt.
- **Abstract nouns:** advice, anger, and beauty.
- **Others:** biology, clothing, equipment, furniture, transportation, violence, weather, and work. (Hawkins,1978)

Conclusion

The results obtained show that the duality of definiteness and indefiniteness plays an important role on the Arabic and English sentence structure by grammatical position, sentence expansion and grammatical function.

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الملخص

اثر التنكير والتعريف في بناء الجملة في اللغة العربية

مع إشارة إلى اللغة الانكليزية

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تناول البحث ثنائية التنكير والتعريف وأثرهما في بناء الجملة، استناداً إلى كون تلك الثنائية أمراً عقلياً مشتركاً، وإن اختلفت طرائق التعبير اللغوي عنها.

لقد تناول النحاة العرب مسألة الأصالة بين التعريف والتنكير، منطلقين في ذلك من قاعدة أن الفروع تُعلم في حين أن الأصول لا تُعلم. وكذلك تناول البحث التعريف والتنكير في اللغة الانكليزية وأثره في بناء الجملة.

وقد اتضح أخيراً أن لهذه الثنائية دوراً بارزاً في بناء الجملة من خلال الموقع النحوي للوحدة اللغوية، والامتداد في بناء الجملة. إذ إن للتنكير والتعريف علاقة وطيدة بامتداد عناصر الجملة أو قصرها، وكذلك من خلال الكشف عن علاقة الوظيفة النحوية بالصيغة في اللغتين العربية والانكليزية.

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