

Zero Article In English and Arabic

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Abstract :

Contrastive Analysis is a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted (i.e. contrastive) two-valued typologies. It is always concerned with a pair of languages and founded on the assumption that languages can be compared (Lado 1980.3).

In this paper we attempt a contrastive study of zero article in English and Arabic. The main objectives of this study are to point out similarities and differences of zero Articles and their properties in the two languages. The study is divided into three sections: The first section deals with zero article in English. It shows the definition, general concept, form and syntactic features of this article with its generic and specific uses.

The second section examines zero Article in Arabic language based on authentic data from contemporary written and spoken Arabic.

Finally, the third section focuses on the similarities and the differences of the two systems followed references .

Section 1

Zero Article in English

1.1 What does article mean?

An article is a word that combines with a noun to indicate the types of reference being made by name and to specify the volume or numerical scope of that reference.

Articles are traditionally considered to form a separate part of speech. Linguists place them in the category of determiners but they are distinguished from other determiners for they can not form phrases on their own.

Article in English is made of three different mutually exclusive subclasses: the specified article, the unspecified article and zero article.

1.1.2 Definition of zero article in English.

Zero article means the absence of an article in a noun phrase i.e. when a noun is used without (the – an – and an). It does not excite or precede the noun. e.g.

1- Carrots are useful for us.

1.1.3 Concept of Zero Article:

The null or zero article is borrowed from mathematical logic (0). It means that the difference between 1 and 10 is zero. So the zero here has a very real part

of the number. At the same way the article is place marker to indicate the position of the article within the noun phrase. So it has a special meaning

2. Ahmed loved many places.
3. Ahmed loved 0 places.
4. 0 cigarettes cause cancer.

1.2 Form and syntactic features:

The null or zero article (0) which acts a place marker for articles that do not appear on the surface (as in the noun phrase boys).e.g.

5. Boys are noisy all time.
6. Tea is my favorite drinks.

But in the deep structure we can see clearly that the class of noun phrase consists of three sub classes- The subclasses (Art, Noun, No) are called “nodes”. And each of the three nodes is broken down into its subclasses.

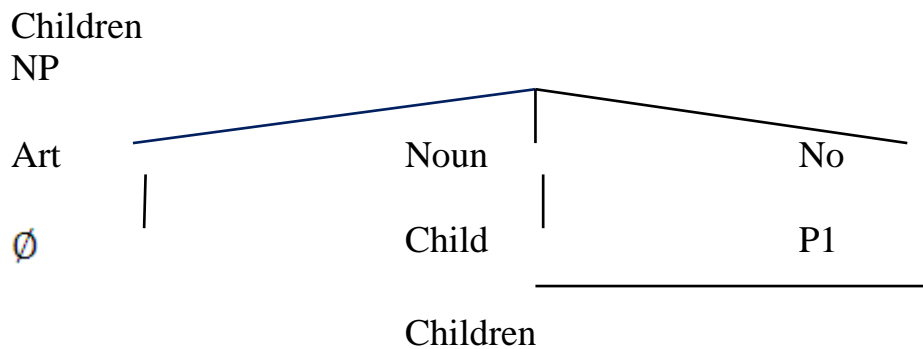
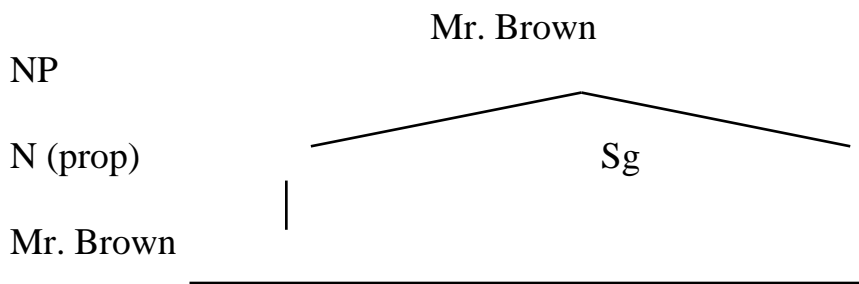


Fig.(1)

This phrase structure tree shows the relation of the parts to each other. But the phrase structure rules do not show proper noun with Article because the proper nouns do not have the same freedom of usage with articles as common nouns.



Mr. Brown

Fig.(2)

In other words proper nouns are considered frozen phrases according to their restricted uses with article, because the names of people and places are singular.

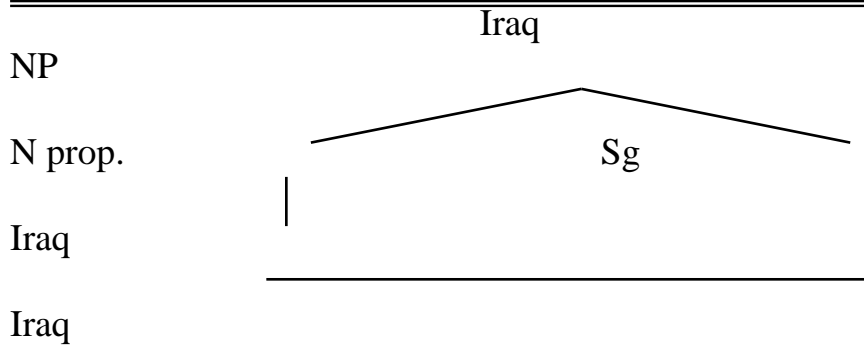


Fig.(3)

Also we have to note that some proper nouns have “the” article which is treated as part of the name itself like the noun phrase “the Alps” i.e. it is not derived from the Article node

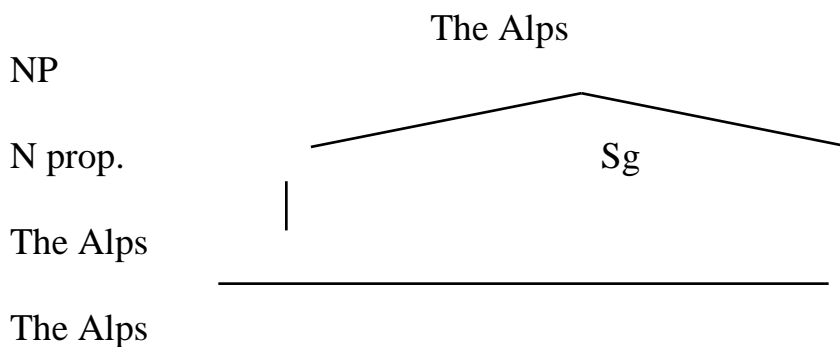


Fig.(4)

1.3 Generic References

Zero Article is used in a general sense before countable nouns and mass nouns. For both concrete and abstract non-count nouns, and plural usually used zero article when they have generic references.

e.g.

7. oil is valuable than gold.
8. books are my best friends pl.
9. Milk is necessary for bones un count.

Zero Article is also used as follows:

1. Zero article is normally used when it is pre modifier with an adjective such as: Dutch milk Swiss watch....
2. It is used before abstract nouns in a general sense. e.g.
 - 10.life is very nice.
 11. love is all we need.
 - 12.we want freedom.
3. Before names of materials used in a general.
 - 13.Butter is made from cream.
4. Before the names of seasons and festivals. e.g.
 - 14.Winter is the best time for reading.
 - 15.Summer is a swimming season.
5. The names of languages.
 - 16.He can speak English.

17. We saw Spanish citizen.
6. Articles are often dropped in the titles of books, movies, music and other works of art.
18. Have you read Hard Times.
7. No article is needed before television as a medium and headlines:
19. We saw our president on TV.
20. Iraqi people wants peace.
8. Article are not needed before the names of games or sports.
21. Luma plays tennis and ping-pong.
22. Football is a colloquial game.
9. No Article is needed for most places consisting of just the name of a person or the name of place followed by a noun or company names, roads, streets, parks, squares or bridges.
Kennedy Airport, McDonalds', Cambridge University etc.
Microsoft, Lufthansa. etc.
Oxford street, Central park, Tower Bridge
Times square etc.

1.4 Specific and Unique references:-

In specific reference zero article can be used with mass and plural nouns as mentioned above:

23-I bought books, sugar and fish .

In addition to that the unique reference is used besides the two main types of reference to express by proper nouns.

e.g. Baghdad, Jordan, Syria.... And uses zero article.

Thus, The proper noun may be personal like Ahmed, Mohammad, Layla and so on or geographical name like Iraq- Europe, Australia, or a temporal name like Feast Day Army Day.

Section 2

Article in Arabic

Overview: This section points out the zero article in Arabic language and its relevant to the noun phrase.

2.1 Article in Arabic

In Arabic system there are two kinds of articles, the definite article "ال" which is prefixed to the noun phrase like البيت – الناس – الوطن.
and zero article that is pre modifier all types of proper and common nouns. e.g.

احمد – وليد – فاطمة –

مدرسة – ساحة – سيارة

Arab Grammarians classify the definite nouns in Arab language into two kinds: The first one is perfect which does need anything to define like proper nouns: e.g. Ahmed- Raad- and Muhammad. And the imperfect nouns that needs something to complete its meaning or to define. e.g.

شط العرب – نخل البصرة

i.e. that the words "shat شَط" and "nakl نخل" need another noun to define and make them (معرفة).

2.2 Zero Article in Arabic

Zero Article in Arabic also like English means the absence of "ال" in a noun phrase i.e. noun can be define without using "ال". But we have to add that the noun phrase in Arabic can't be define in the absence of "ال" in some cases as usual unless it need another words like "ذو" which means "صاحب" or "المنادى "يا" or being in contract "الإضافة" as we mention in the previous section. The noun in this case is called "النكرة" the null. i.e. the noun can't be define without preceding by the above words; in contrast with zero article which can be expressed by merely point to it or mention it like proper nouns and common nouns it does not need gaudiness to complete .e.g.

يا حارس - يا ولد - يا شرطي
ذو مال - ذو مروءة - ذو عمل
شمس الصباح - تاريخ الأدب - موسم الصيف

2.3 From and syntactic features:-

The structure of the basic noun phrase in Arabic is both pre -modification and post-modification. Like:

حقيبتى My bag
حقيبة bag

In Arabic system zero article is a pre-modifier used with all types of common nouns. it means that the proper nouns are usually used in the singular, dual and plural. So in Arabic there is no distinction between count and mass nouns. Both articles can be used with common nouns whether count or mass. e.g.

Money- *money مال- أموال
Water - *waters ماء- مياه
Fortune - *fortunes ثروة- ثروات

So in Arabic some nouns have the "ال" that is treated as part of the name, itself and not as an article. Such as :

God = "الله" لفظ الجلالة

Or

عبد الله = The salve of God

Or nouns like:

ألف → thousand
ألم = ache - pain
آلة → tool

Or borrowed nouns like

ألماني → German
إلكتروني → Electronic
ألبوم → album

At the same time all these words can be used with "ال" except the word "الله" the almighty.

2.4 Generic and specific references :-

Generally, zero article in Arabic can be expressed when the noun phrase has generic reference. And the proper nouns have the same freedom of usage with articles as common nouns in specific references.

مفردات موسيقية
أحلام وردية
لوحات شرقية
بغداد يا بلد الرشيد
سامراء مدينة أثرية
في بابل حضارة عريقة

Section 3

Differences and Similarities

Overview : This section deals with the differences and similarities between zero article in the two systems.

3.1 Differences

The main differences that are founded as follow:

1- zero article in English can be used with plural and mass nouns, whereas Arabic normally uses it with all kinds of the noun phrase. e.g.

sugar—tea—milk---

pens ---- books -----bags

قلم --- كتاب ---حقيقية

اشتريت كتاباً وقلماً وحقيقية

2- In Arabic, nouns have zero article in contrast with English, where the definite article is usually used.

e.g. لبن أربيل The milk of Arbeel

الأدب العربي Arabic literature

3- In Arabic, when the number precedes the definite head, it normally takes zero article. But in English definite article is necessary preceded the number.

e.g. The three boy ثلاثة أولاد

4- in English system zero article and null article express the same meaning within the noun phrase, whereas zero article in Arabic is differ from null article in that the noun phrase can be expressed or defined with zero article.

Null on the other hand needs something like “نو” “يا” and “الإضافة” to complete and define it .Whereas in English system in definite nouns can be preceded by either "a" or " an ".e.g.

رأيت رجلاً

I saw a man.

The word (رجل) is not preceded by article whereas the word (man) is preceded by indefinite article.

3.2 Similarities:

Zero article in English and Arabic is normally used with nouns to express specific reference.

In both systems, unique reference is expressed by proper nouns.

Arabic —————→ Ahmed – Baghdad – Suha.....

English —————→ Easter – Christmas – Independence Day.

So the classification of English nouns is similar of that in Arabic nouns.

For both systems use proper nouns and common nouns with zero article.

e.g.

James Ahmed

Sally Nada

Also before names of materials such as :

Butter زبدة

Wheat حنطة

And when it is pre modifier with an adjective it is normally used in English and Arabic .e.g.

Dutch milk is tasty.

شمس بلادي مشرقة.

Finally everything has an exception and there is a limited uses of definite article before abstract nouns like :

The life we have here is hard.

Or when we talk about somewhere or concrete the definite article is required.

I went to the sea\ sea side to swim .

ذهبت إلى البحر \ بحر للسباحة.

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