

THE PRINCIPLE OF ASSOCIATION IN THE USE OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE IN ENGLISH AND SWEDISH

ARKADIUSZ BUDZISZEWSKI

ABSTRACT. In the first part of the paper the mechanism of association in the use of the definite article is presented. The author also accounts for the most common types of relations between things associated with each other. In the remaining part, the use of the principle of association in English noun phrases is discussed. The author demonstrates that there is a formal difference between the two languages in the way of expressing the definiteness of a referent.

The aims of this presentation are twofold. The first one is to show the theoretical grounds of the application of the association principle in the use of the definite article in English and Swedish. The second one is to illustrate the fact that both languages in some cases employ different formal means for expressing a referent specific by association ("entailment" – to use the term suggested by Karttunen, 1968). The second part is based on a comparison of two texts: the English original of "The Quiet American" by Graham Greene and the Swedish translation of the book "Den stillsamma amerikanen" by Jane Lundblad.

I

In a communication act:

speaker → referent → listener

the speaker is entitled to use the definite form only when the referent is also known (specific) to the listener. He must therefore estimate the listener's knowledge about the referent in question and according to the conclusion use:

- the definite article for a mutually known (specific) referent
- the indefinite article for an unknown referent (nonspecific) for at least one of the parts in the discourse.

Paul Christophersen (1939), the author of the theory of familiarity, says the following on the subject:

“Now the speaker must always be supposed to know which individual he is thinking of; the interesting thing is that the *the*-form supposes that the hearer knows it too.(...) A condition of the use of *the* is that there is a basis of understanding between speaker and hearer. This basis comprises the subjects and things known by both parties, and the speaker as the active part must consequently adapt his language to the hearer's state of mind. If he wants to be understood it is important that he should not use words and phrases which the hearer is likely to misinterpret”. (Christophersen, 1939:28).

One of the mechanisms resulting in the shared speaker-listener knowledge of the referent is association (the term used by Christophersen is “implicit contextual basis”, *ibid.*, 29f). The mechanism of association functions in the following way – if we in a conversation name a certain thing or phenomenon we can, later on in the same conversation, refer to things which are naturally connected with the phenomenon using directly the definite article. There is no need to introduce them with the indefinite article. We could say that every single thing “triggers” a whole set of other concepts in our imagination, which remain in a certain constant and natural connection with the notion primarily used.

e.g. a book → the author
 the cover
 the plot
 the title page
 the characters etc.

The speaker has to assume that certain knowledge of the connections and associations can be regarded as normal and can be expected from an average listener. This kind of knowledge is acquired and increases during the whole lifetime. In the case of an average listener the associations cannot be too sophisticated and distant and cannot concern specialised areas.

We cannot for example expect that the mere mention of a sailing-boat will enable us to speak of *the jib* or *the sheet of the mainsail*. However our ability of estimating the listener's knowledge increases when the listener is known to us and we know that we can regard his knowledge as more than average in some definite aspects.

To use the same example: talking with an expert on sailing (or a sailor) we can immediately refer to *the jib* etc. after mentioning a sailing-boat.

An extremely interesting case is the situation in which the speaker deliberately uses the definite form although he knows that the listener does not possess the knowledge required for the association principle to begin to work. Roger Brown (1973) gives the following example:

The tenor soloist in Verdi's Requiem(Brown, 1973:347)

The knowledge to which the speaker appeals does not belong to what we consider as average knowledge (not everyone knows that there is always only one tenor soloist in Verdi's Requiem).

The reasons for such behaviour from the speaker's side can be many:

- the choice of the definite article may have an instructive role (the speaker, in a subtle way, gives the listener to understand that he should know something),
- it may be the case of showing off one's knowledge
- or the choice may result from politeness – the speaker pretends not to know about the listener's lack of knowledge.

The most common type of relation between things associated with each other is the whole-part relation. Thus for example the word *car* opens a register of things being a natural part of every car:

a car → the engine
 the steering wheel
 the body
 the back seat
 the windscreen etc.

e.g. Paul's *car* is old but *the engine* is brand new.

There are also other relations that give grounds for association. Here are some of them:

- features (colour, shape, smell etc.) of things,
 e.g. I refused to drink *the coffee* because *the smell* of it was strange.
- equipment, tools, clothes etc.
 e.g. *The teacher* put *the chalk* aside.
- very often association occurs in reference to the subject of a sentence expressed with a personal pronoun (I, he, ...)
 e.g. *I* was going down the street when the wind blew *the hat* off my head.
- even verbal phrase (name of action) can cause certain associations.
 e.g. I was *cycling* through the wood when I got a puncture in *the back wheel*.
 (to cycle → a bicycle → the back wheel).

Many things can be associated with a man and their names can theoretically be used directly in the definite form during a conversation (e.g. parts of body, clothes, etc.)

e.g. It rained heavily and I could not go out as *I* had left *the raincoat* at John's.

II

Both English and Swedish make use of the principle of association when it comes to the use of definite noun phrases. However, it is possible, on the ground of comparison of the two texts mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, to draw the following conclusion: in the way of expressing the definiteness of a referent, based on the principle of association, there is a formal difference between the two

languages. The more natural and common form used for expressing the connection between two associated elements seems to be:

- possessive pronoun + noun in English
- the definite form of a NP in Swedish

This can be particularly often observed when it comes to associating certain things with a man (or with living creatures).

- e.g. He shook *his head*. (possessive pronoun + noun)
 Han skakade på *huvudet*. (definite NP)

In many cases we can of course use the respective forms in both languages:

- e.g. I went down to *my hotel*.
 I went down to *the hotel* (where I lived)
 Jag gick till *hotellet*.
 Jag gick till *mitt hotell*.

Very often, however the use of the possessive pronoun in English is the only acceptable form.

- e.g. I broke *my arm*.
 *I broke *the arm*.

Similarly in Swedish – the use of the definite form seems more natural, the construction *possessive pronoun + noun* being unacceptable.

- e.g. Jag har ont i *halsen*.
 *Jag har ont i *min hals*.

According to the comparison of the two texts it is possible to distinguish 11 semantic groups appearing in the collected material. Here follow the groups with the illustrating examples:

1. *Parts of body, internal organs, physical features (voice etc.).*

- | | |
|---|--|
| - straight over <i>her shoulders</i> | - rakt ner över <i>axlarna</i> . |
| - I opened <i>my eyes</i> | - Jag slog upp <i>ögonen</i> . |
| - I held <i>my arm</i> in the pit of
her arm | - Jag lade <i>handen</i> i hennes armhåla |
| - she shook <i>her head</i> | - han skakade på <i>huvudet</i> . |
| - without lifting <i>my head</i> | - utan att lyfta på <i>huvudet</i> . |
| - <i>his eyes</i> were on a page | - han höll <i>ögonen</i> fasta på en sida |
| - <i>his arms</i> full of books | - med <i>fammen</i> full av böcker |
| - she held the needle in
<i>her hand</i> | - hon satt och höll nålen i <i>handen</i> |
| - <i>his body</i> was found there | - <i>liket</i> hittades där |
| - he put <i>his hand</i> on my arm | - han lade <i>handen</i> på min arm |
| - he turned <i>his wet brown eyes</i> on me | - han riktade <i>de fuktiga bruna
ögonen</i> mot mig |

- he cleared *his throat*
- I shut *my eyes*
- He turned *his back* on us
- having *your throat* cut
- with *her ankles* crossed
- we found the mud in *his lungs*
- *my heart* was in *my mouth*
- there was a note of menace in *her voice*.

- *han klarade strupen.*
- Jag slöt *ögonen.*
- han vände *ryggen* mot oss
- få *halsen* avskuren
- med *fötterna* i kors
- vi har funnit *gyttja* i *lungorna.*
- jag hade *hjärtat* i *halsgropen.*
- det fanns en biton av hot i *rösten*

2. States of mind, feelings, thoughts.

- I found it hard to keep *my mind* on
- I felt *my mind* clear
- they were keeping *their courage* up

- Jag tyckte det var svårt att hålla *tankarna* fästade på ...
- *hjärnan* kändes klar
- de höll *modet* upp

3. Clothing.

- I put on *my tie* and *my shoes*
- I took off *my tie* and *my shoes*
- I saw his hand move towards *his hip pocket*
- he began to play with *his bootlaces*
- he lost *his trousers*
- he began to pull off *his boots*

- jag satte på mig *slipsen* och *skorna.*
- jag tog av mig *slipsen* och *skorna.*
- jag såg hur hans hand rörde sig ner mot *höftfickan.*
- han började fingra på *kängsnörena*
- han hade blivit av med *byxorna.*
- han började dra av sig *kängorna*

4. Food and drinks.

- we had *our tea* ready
- I said over *my beer*

- vi hade *teet* färdigt
- jag sade över *ölglasset.*

5. Place of living.

- I walked back towards *my flat*
- I could tell *my room* had been searched
- I returned to *my hotel*

- jag promenerade tillbaka till *våningen.*
- jag kunde se att *rummet* hade blivit undersökt
- jag kom tillbaka till *hotellet.*

6. Furniture, equipment of the flat.

- he was looking for words on *his desk*
- *my alarm clock* showed twelve-twenty
- he sat down on *his sleeping bag*
- he had a volume open on *his desk*
- they sing on *your pillow*

- han letade på *skrivbordet* efter ord
- *väckarklockan* visade på tjugominuter över tolv
- han satte sig på *sovsäcken.*
- han hade en volym uppslagen på *pulpeten*
- de sjunger på *kudden.*

7. Duties, work.

- | | |
|--|--|
| - I sent <i>my wire</i> | - jag skickade av <i>telegrammet</i> . |
| - what did you say in <i>your cable</i> | - vad skrev ni i <i>telegrammet</i> . |
| - I counted the days of <i>my assignment</i> | - jag räknade <i>tjänstgöringens</i> dagar |

8. Instruments, tools.

- | | |
|---|---|
| - shall I make <i>your pipe</i> again | - skall jag göra i ordning <i>pipan</i> om igen |
| - he stopped cleaning <i>his revolver</i> | - han slutade upp att putsa <i>revolvern</i> |
| - she bent over the flame (...) <i>twirling her needle</i> | - hon lutade sig över <i>lågan</i> (...) och snurrade på <i>nålen</i> |
| - the colonel ran his hand through his hair, flourishing <i>his pointer</i> | - översten strök med handen över sitt hår, svingande <i>pekpinnen</i> |

9. Family, friends.

- | | |
|--|---|
| - she went back to sit with <i>her sister</i> | - hon gick och slog sig ner vid <i>systems</i> bord |
| - while <i>her sister</i> in the next room.... | - medan <i>system</i> i rummet intill.... |
| - photographed with <i>his colleagues</i> | - fotograferad tillsammans med <i>kollegerna</i> |

10. Co-workers, subordinates.

- | | |
|---|---|
| - he began to argue with <i>his driver</i> about the fare | - han började disputeras med <i>kusken</i> om betalningen |
| - trying to explain something to <i>his driver</i> | - försökte förklara något för <i>chauffören</i> |

11. Name.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| - I had never learnt <i>his name</i> | - jag hade aldrig fått veta <i>efternamnet</i> |
|--------------------------------------|--|

As we can observe, the listed groups make out the majority of our everyday life and the world around us. They are connected with our body and its states (1-2), with providing for our biological needs (3-6), with everyday work (7-8) and with people surrounding us (9-10). We can say that all the things are inherent in the conditions in which a man exists and functions and thus are easily associated with him.

The associations that occur here appear among the speakers of different languages - including English and Swedish. The expression of them may however employ various formal means in different languages.

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Arkadiusz Budziszewski
Katedra Skandynawistyki UAM
Al. Niepodległości 4
61-854 Poznań

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