The definite article in recent grammatical theory

by

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INTRODUCTION

The definite article is more difficult to define than the native speaker of English might realize. I propose to survey various treatments of the definite article, noting their strengths and weaknesses, in an attempt to reach an understanding of the function and meaning of the definite article in English.

The treatments of the definite article divide themselves into two categories according to their purposes. Those concerned with defining the definite article are primarily traditional grammarians. For these scholars the Latinate rules of English grammar are well defined. Grammarians such as Sweet and Jespersen are primarily concerned with how words function within a grammar that is stable. This group can be subdivided by differing definitions of the definite article. One faction sees the definite article as a deictic, or pointing word. The other camp suggests that THE does not have the strength of a deictic. In this second group, we find such diverse grammarians as the traditionalist Sweet and a modern grammarian James Peter Thorne, who introduces the localist theory of the definite article.

The second large division, which consists primarily of transformational grammarians, is not concerned with the meaning of words. They seek to establish the origin of the words and the rules that translate these words from thoughts to
structured utterances of a language. Because of their purposes in examining the definite article, their treatments are much different from those of the traditionalists.
A TRADITIONAL LOOK AT THE

A traditional grammarian's definition of the articles is found in Paul Christophersen's book *The Articles* (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1939). Christophersen first examines the occurrence patterns of the articles, finding three forms: the the-form, the a-form and the null-form (a non-occurrence). He chooses to separate the singular and plural occurrences in an attempt to establish the meaning of these articles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>singular</th>
<th>plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>null-form</td>
<td>cake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-form</td>
<td>a cake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the-form</td>
<td>the cake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are five possibilities for article-with-substantive (or subject of discourse) occurrences, very few words actually occur in all five categories. Many words do not have a null-form; others have neither an a-form nor any plural forms. Because of the various patterns of occurrences, Christophersen expands his chart to include five different types of words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>plural singular</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>null-form</td>
<td>cake</td>
<td></td>
<td>butter</td>
<td>John</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-form</td>
<td>a cake</td>
<td>a book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the-form</td>
<td>the cake</td>
<td>the book</td>
<td>the butter</td>
<td>the equator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>null-form</td>
<td>cakes</td>
<td>books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the-form</td>
<td>the cakes</td>
<td>the books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second column of words, which Christophersen calls unit-words, can be expanded to include both material (desk, weed, wheel) and immaterial (era, event, week) words. The third column, continuate-words, can be expanded to include material (sand, butter, water) and immaterial (hunger, devotion, song) words also. This distinction will become important later. The two types of words are also known as count (unit) and non-count (continuate) nouns and differ in their occurrences with articles.

With the three articles in mind, we turn to Henry Sweet, a traditional grammarian, for a definition of the definite article. Sweet, in *A New English Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), groups THE, as a demonstrative pronoun, with THIS and THAT. THE is differentiated from the other pronouns in that THE can appear only as an adjective (the article, the one), while THIS and THAT appear as adjectives (this paper, that scoundrel) and as nouns (This is mine. That is true.).

Demonstrative pronouns serve, for Sweet, to describe a subject in space and time (this pronoun, that theory). This suggests that the pronouns hold a meaning of their own that helps, when coupled with a substantive, to shape the potential meaning of that noun. The designation of space and time is added to the meaning of the substantive.

Thus, for Sweet, the demonstratives help to define the substantive as it occurs in a sentence. The demonstratives
themselves are defined by Sweet according to their appearances. These reference pronouns are divided according to the nouns they point, or refer, to. The forward-pointing pronoun appears with a relative clause (The thesis which had begun seemed never to end.). The back-pointing pronoun refers to a subject that has already been introduced or is present "in thought". Sweet sees the reference pronouns as deictics, that is words that point to a subject, while David Michaels, in "Determining with the Definite Article,"\(^1\) presents several situations in which the definite article appears.

1. The first of these is the situational context in which it is the situation that renders the article and substantive definite or understood:

   The thesis has just begun.

   Do you want the thing, or not?

2. The next situation is the linguistic context, coinciding with Sweet's category of back-pointing reference pronouns:

   Sally dropped a note in the aisle.

   The teacher asked John to pick it up.

3. Another situation, Michaels' restrictive adjunct, parallels Sweet's forward-pointing reference pronoun occurrence. This is a sentence-internal linguistic reference while the linguistic context just discussed is a sentence-external linguistic reference:
The woman, writing her thesis, was tired and discouraged.

4. Michaels also recognizes a noun-less phrase:
John always buys the best.
(Obviously, our taste in clothing overlaps.)

5. The definite article also appears in a unique reference:
The sun came up early today.

6. The final situation is a generic one in which the definite article can be either an individual or a generic reference:
The lion eats meat.

Another traditional grammarian feels that THE does not have the strength of a deictic. Otto Jespersen, in Essentials of English Grammar (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1933), finds THE as a weakened form of THAT. It is the demonstrative pronoun THAT which has the deictic quality. The definite article serves "to designate or single out. The is generally," Jespersen continues, "the definite article; a better name would be the defining or determining article" (p. 161). The definite article, for Jespersen, does not have the strength of a deictic. But Sweet and Jespersen do agree on the function of THE; it does help to shape the meaning of the substantive. This view will be countered when we examine treatments of the definite
article by transformational grammarians. For the traditional grammarians THE, whether it is a designator or a deictic, helps to shape the subject (the pain), making it a clearer, more specific reality than an indefinite article could present (a pain).

Philosophy and The

Traditional grammarians are not the only scholars to suggest that THE helps to shape the meaning of a substantive. John Stuart Mill, in A System of Logic (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1868), agrees with this notion. Mill considers the definite article as a symbol, as are all words, that helps to shape the meaning of a single subject. This interest in semantics derives from an interest in truth and error as they are found in propositions or subjects of discourse. In a proposition a predicate can be affirmed (in truth, denied in error) of a subject.

Mill divides names (all words are names) by their functions and then suggests their relation to meaning. For Mill both the subject and predicate are names. They can be distinguished by semantic clues, such as the copula BE with the predicate. THE is also a clue to help distinguish the subject.

Subject names can be divided into general and individual (or singular) names. A general name, says Mill, can be affirmed (in truth, denied in error) of an indefinite number
of things (that is, objects or attributes). An individual name is one that can be affirmed of only one thing. It is the appearance and meaning of singular names that interests us; this is where we find the definite article.

First, we need to consider Mill's definition of meaning as it is found in names. Mill divides names into denotative and connotative names. A name is denotative if it implies either an object (it is then a concrete word) or an attribute (it is then an abstract word). The division of concrete and abstract words parallels Christophersen's division of material and immaterial words. If a name denotes both an object and an attribute simultaneously, it is connotative. It is in connotative names that Mill finds meaning:

A Denotative name denotes an attribute: whiteness
or an object: milk

A Connotative name (white) denotes both an attribute:
whiteness
and an object: milk

According to Mill, connotative and denotative names are either singular or general. It is Mill's treatment of singular connotative names that includes THE as identifying a subject name and helping to shape the meaning of that singular subject. A singular connotative name is affirmable of only one thing; however, we can derive a singular connotative name from a general name. A general name (city manager), which can be
affirmed of more than one individual, can be limited through adjuncts. This will produce a many-worded name (the present city manager of Ames) that can be affirmed of only one individual.

In addition to this adjunct form, Mill suggests that THE can be coupled with a situation or context to render a name affirmable of only one individual. In the proper context, even the same general name can be used to refer to more than one individual with no confusion (The king is dead. Long live the king.).

In either context, the definite article is a semantic clue that helps to identify a subject name as well as to shape the meaning of that subject. For Mill, the definite article designates or singles out a subject (as it did for Jespersen) rather than functions as a deictic pointing out a subject.

But Mill makes no clear distinction between the articles. Presumably the individual denoted by the many-worded name containing a definite article (the only son of Frankenstein) would be the same individual that could be denoted by a many-worded name containing an indefinite article (an only son of Frankenstein). Because there is a difference between the articles, we return to Christophersen for a further look at the meaning of THE.
The Definite Article Conspiracy

Once Christophersen has established the patterns of article occurrences, he begins to unravel a definition of the definite article. Christophersen treats the plural occurrences separately from the singular and the generic use: The beaver builds dams. The lion is the king of beasts. The notion of THE as either a deictic or designator is not sufficient. Christophersen expands what Sweet has called a back-pointing reference pronoun that refers to something "in thought." It is the thought that concerns Christophersen. He suggests that the meaning of THE is one that must include the hearer as well as the speaker. The substantive must be understood by both the hearer as well as the speaker if language is to be used as a means of communication:

It is clear that the form (THE) stands for a particular individual known both to the speaker and hearer (or writer and reader). Now the speaker must always be supposed to know which individual he is thinking of; the interesting thing is that the THE form supposes the hearer knows it, too. For the proper use of the form it is necessary that it should call up in the hearer's mind the image of the exact individual that the speaker is thinking of. If it does not do that, the form will not be understood (p. 28).
The situation is presented by Oliver Grannis in "The Definite Article Conspiracy in English" of a man who has lost his cat. After futilely searching his house, he meets his wife, who has just arrived home. "Have you seen the cat?" he asks.

She has not and the man continues to search for his cat. He wanders into the neighbor's yard where he finds his neighbor. "Have you seen my cat?" he asks.

The neighbor replies that she has not. The man continues his search, soon finding himself in a nearby park. Here he confronts a stranger he finds strolling about. "Have you seen a cat?" he asks.

Whether or not he finds his cat is of no concern to us. What is important is that the man's idea of his cat, the definiteness of his pet, remains the same each time he asks a question. What has changed for each question is the listener and the knowledge and expectations of that listener. Thus definite, as Christophersen has also suggested, is a notion that must exist in the mind of the speaker as well as that of the hearer; this sharing of the notion is what Grannis calls the definite article conspiracy.

Michaels, again in "Determining With the Definite Article," suggests that there is an existential essence in the use of the definite article. What differs in these questions:

Did you see the unicorn in the garden?

Did you see a unicorn in the garden?

seems to be an existential statement about unicorns. If the reply to the first question, Michaels argues, is negative, the
hearer has missed seeing something that is or was there. If the response to the second question is negative, the same sense of loss is not implied. In fact, the existence of unicorns is questioned. For Michaels, the first question defines or determines this existence.

But Michaels' assertion is not necessarily so. If we keep in mind the necessity for common knowledge shared by speaker and hearer for the use of a definite article, what differs in the sentence is the speaker's expectations of the hearer. What doesn't exist in the use of the A is the speaker's assurance that the hearer has seen the unicorn which was or is in the garden. A look at Christophersen's definition of A might clarify this usage.

Christophersen, however, does not accept the designations of definite and indefinite as adequate definitions for the articles. The articles, he suggests, are not parallel in function as these labels imply. Christophersen sees A as an unstressed ONE, a notion that follows, historically, the development of the A in English. For Christophersen, THE is a marker for familiarity while A indicates unity:

It is found that THE has as its special function the marking of FAMILIARITY, while A is the mark of UNITY. This theory can tell us why the generic-continuate words and plurals have no articles. Their very generality and the vagueness of their quantitative delimitation precludes familiarity, or to put it conversely: familiarity
presupposes sharp and precise limits. The fact that they are not divisible into individuals makes A impossible with these words (p. 71).

When THE accompanies a substantive, associations with previous references (whether they be situational or linguistic) are inferred so that only one definite object or individual is understood by both the speaker and the hearer to be the subject of discourse. This unmistakable reference, or common understanding, may be slight. The important thing is that the listener's understanding of the reference is beyond doubt. The use of A does not require familiarity, but neither does it preclude familiarity in an example from Christophersen:

I wonder if you have come across a fellow called James Birch. We were at Eton together.

The speaker has in mind a familiar, definite subject. The A occurs because the familiarity of the hearer with the subject has not been established.

While no familiarity is required for the appearance of the a-form, what is essential in its use is "a single unspecified individual or member of a class" (p. 71). Christophersen stresses not so much the unspecified, which sounds uncannily like indefinite, but the notion of single. When A occurs with a unit-word it merely reinforces the idea of unity that is inherent in the word itself. In the appearance of the null-form no quantitative delimitation, or element of unity, exists. The
The null-form presents a general notion about a continuous subject. These notions of continuous/unital and familiar can be plotted as a pair of coordinates:

1. the-form

2. a-form

3. null-form

4. null-form

If positive 1. is marked as THE and positive 2. as A, each substantive would be marked for two features, depending on the location of the substantive on the graph:
In this graph we can see that three of these occurrences are accurate. But, the first pair, the 1. and 2. quadrant, is projected as an appearance of both THE and A while actually only one of the forms will appear. This graph is invalid because it does not recognize the mutually exclusive quality of the articles.

Christophersen remedies the problem with a further definition of the familiarity of THE. He suggests that an element of unity is also present, to some degree, in the concept of familiarity. The marking for THE needs revision. ("Even water contained in a bucket of water conveys the idea of unity in so far as its boundaries are precise and definite, and yet it is not a unit, i.e. an individual member of a class of similar objects" p. 76). This weaker concept of unity is something Christophersen calls limitation. A new coordinate can now be plotted for familiar and limited, and marked as THE. This will render the articles mutually exclusive:

```
the-form

                       familiar
                           limited

null-form            →  a-form
```

We now turn to transformational generative grammars, to see how Christophersen's notion of familiar, limited and continuous and unital fits into a modern scheme.
TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR: A VERY DEEP THE


(i) Sentence \(\Rightarrow\) NP + VP
(ii) NP \(\Rightarrow\) N + N
(iii) VP \(\Rightarrow\) Verb + NP
(iv) T \(\Rightarrow\) the
(v) N \(\Rightarrow\) man, ball, etc.
(vi) Verb \(\Rightarrow\) hit, took, etc.

With these rules we see that a noun phrase (NP) can be written as a T + N, or as THE + MAN. Chomsky treats THE as an integral part of the NP, as did Mill, but he spends no time in defining the notion of definite. What Chomsky is concerned with is the phrase structure rules that will produce the surface structure which contains the definite article. He is not interested in the semantics of THE. For a closer look at phrase structure rules and the notion of definite, we can turn to Carlota Smith's "A Case of Complex Modifiers in English."³

Smith does not see the articles as demonstratives (as did Sweet and Jespersen) or demonstratives as articles but she does classify predeterminers as articles because they share the notion of definite, or degree of definiteness, with the articles. Predeterminers (each, every, all) as well as prenominal genitives (John's, his, her) become articles because,
as Smith suggests, a speaker uses the notions of definite or indefinite in all noun phrases, not only with phrases that appear with articles. Such an argument counters the idea of the article adding to or enhancing the meaning of the noun. Smith sees the phrase itself as containing the notion of definiteness to a greater or lesser degree. The meaning is integral to the phrase whether or not the articles are present. Smith illustrates a major difference between the traditional and the transformational grammarians. The notion of definite no longer belongs solely to THE. It is now extended to other articles as well, including predeterminers and prenominal genitives. Some of these are, Smith says, even more definite than the definite article.

The suggestion that the notion of definite exists for a noun phrase, whether or not the definite article is present, suggests that the articles take their meaning from the noun; this idea will be reinforced as we continue to survey transformational grammars.

There are, Smith suggests, degrees of definiteness in the speaker's mind. The prenominal genitives are somehow more definite than is the definite article:
Smith finds a correlation between the degree of definiteness and the grammaticality of different types of relative clauses as they appear with subjects that appear with articles. She uses two types of clauses: the appositive (A) clause, a relative clause separated from the subject with a comma, and the restrictive (R) clause which is not separated from its subject with punctuation.

The example sentences which Smith uses are divided into three types: first, those that grammatically accept the R clause only; second, those that grammatically accept both the R and the A clauses; and finally, those that accept the A clause only. "These classes," argues Smith, "correspond to an intuitive classification of determiners as to definiteness; definiteness is associated with A relative clauses, indefiniteness with R relative clauses" (p. 37).

John, who knows the way, has offered to guide us.
*John who is from the South hates cold weather.
They pointed to a dog, who was looking at him hopefully.
They pointed to a dog who was looking at him hopefully.
*Any book, which is about linguistics, is interesting.
The book, which is about linguistics, is interesting.
Any book which is about linguistics is interesting.

In examining the grammatical occurrences, we see that a definite noun phrase will accept an A relative clause. If a noun phrase is indefinite, it will accept, more readily, an R clause. Smith explains the grammatical occurrences with the following NP expansion rules (p. 41):
Noun phrase $\Rightarrow$ Determiner + Substantive  
Proper name + (A)

Determiner $\Rightarrow$ Specified + (R) + (A)  
Unspecified + (R)

Proper name $\Rightarrow$ Zero-form

Specified $\Rightarrow$ Predeterminer + Definite  
Indefinite

Unspecified $\Rightarrow$ A  
Predeterminer$_1$

Definite $\Rightarrow$ THE (+Intensifier$_1$ if no A and no Predeterminer)

Indefinite $\Rightarrow$ A (+Intensifier$_2$ if no A and no Predeterminer)

Predeterminer$_1$ $\Rightarrow$ EACH, EVERY, ALL, SOME, ANY, etc.

Intensifier$_1$ $\Rightarrow$ VERY, etc.

Intensifier$_2$ $\Rightarrow$ MERE, UTTER, PERFECT, REAL, etc.

The selective restrictions dividing intensifiers appearing with determiners are to prevent the slightly ungrammatical occurrences (Smith, p. 42):

A mere child stood before him.

*The mere child stood before him.

The very thought amazed him.

*A very thought amazed him.

From examining Smith's article, we see that not all forward-pointing reference pronouns (from Sweet) with internal linguistic references are necessarily definite. The definiteness can be established if the type of relative clause is determined.
The notion of the article taking its meaning from the noun with which it appears also occurs in Jacobs and Rosenbaum's \textit{English Transformational Grammar} (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell Pub. Co., 1968). In this grammar articles are segments of the noun and are designated only as \((-\text{DEF})\) for the \(a\)-form or \((+\text{DEF})\) for the \(the\)-form. The traditional demonstrative adjectives (from Sweet and Jespersen) become, for Jacobs and Rosenbaum, demonstrative articles which also receive \((+\text{DEF})\) designations. The null-form is seen as the plural of the \(a\)-form when it appears with count nouns. This is a notion that Christophersen's designations of unital/non-unital would support. The articles, for Jacobs and Rosenbaum, are the \(a\)-form, the \(the\)-form, the null-form and THIS, THAT, THESE and THOSE.

The appearance, or absence, of these articles can be written as a phrase structure rule:

\[ \text{NP} \Rightarrow (\text{Art})\text{N} \]

This tells us that a noun phrase (NP) can be rewritten as an optional article with a noun.

Jacobs and Rosenbaum suggest that these articles differ in their meaning and, therefore, their features in the lexicon. The articles are not deep structure constituents as separate entities. They are adjuncts formed in a transformation that affixes articles to nouns, matching the features and the meaning of the article with the noun. This transformation
allows the article to share the features of the noun with which it appears. To derive the noun phrase A TREE, we first begin in the deep structure with a designation for TREE:

```
NP
| N |
  tree
   (+N)
   (-human)
   (-DEF)
   (+singular)
```

A transformation is then applied that adjoins the article to the noun and allows the article to share the features of the noun:

```
NP
   [ (+ART) ]
   [ (-human) ]
   [ (-DEF) ]
   [ (+singular) ]
N
  tree
   (+N)
   (-human)
   (-DEF)
   (+singular)
```

After all transformations have been applied, an A is yielded from the features in the second lexical pass (from the article segment).

The A and the null-form are the articles with the (-DEF) feature. The others are (+DEF). But, THE may be separated from the demonstrative articles because of its ungrammaticality in the following slots (from Jacobs and Rosenbaum):
*THE one pleased John.

THIS one pleased John.

THAT one pleased John.

THESE ones pleased John.

THOSE ones pleased John.

The articles that can grammatically appear in front of ONE are marked (+DEM) and (+DEF). These articles are further divided by their appearance with either ONE (+singular) or ONES (-singular). Still another feature, according to Jacobs and Rosenbaum, of the demonstrative articles is illustrated by their grammaticality in the following slots:

*THAT book here.

THIS book here.

THOSE books here.

*THOSE books here.

These slots suggest the features (+near) and (-near) are applicable. The variations of the lexical features for the demonstrative articles look like this (p. 88):

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{this} & \text{that} & \text{these} & \text{those} \\
(+ART) & (+ART) & (+ART) & (+ART) \\
(+DEF) & (+DEF) & (+DEF) & (+DEF) \\
(+DEM) & (+DEM) & (+DEM) & (+DEM) \\
(+near) & (-near) & (+near) & (-near) \\
(+singular) & (+singular) & (-singular) & (-singular) \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]
The territorial implication in the demonstratives is something we will examine later in this paper in respect to the definite article. Also, the ungrammaticality of THE with ONE will become important. We will see that A is more closely related to the numeral ONE than it is to its fellow article THE.

From Jacobs and Rosenbaum we see how the articles are derived from the nouns with which they appear. The features of the nouns and articles, as constituents of a deep structure, become visible to us. But the definition of the articles is taken no further in a semantic sense than the labels of definite and indefinite can lead us. The distinctions between the definite article and the demonstratives are important. They are distinctions that Jespersen also recognized when he suggested that THE did not have the strength of the demonstrative THAT.

In An Introduction to Transformational Syntax (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971), Roger Fowler suggests that determiners must be marked for the features number and universality. This is a more thorough treatment of the definite article and other determiners than was included in Jacobs and Rosenbaum. In Fowler's grammar the articles do not exist in the deep structure. In the lexicon the articles exist as determiners which are nodes of the noun, much as in Jacobs and Rosenbaum's grammar, sharing the features of the noun with which they appear.
According to Fowler, number and universality are the two mandatory features that determiners must have:

\[ \text{DET} \Rightarrow \underbrace{\text{number}}_{\text{universalitj}} \]

In Christophersen's terms, this would mean that all determiners are either singular or plural and generic or non-generic. In Fowler's grammar number is a binary choice. A noun is either (+plural) or (-plural). While some nouns, (John, butter, meat), occur only as (-plural), others can appear as either (+plural) or (-plural). Nouns must also be marked, in Fowler's grammar, according to their type; (+name) indicates a proper noun, (+count) for count or unit nouns, (-count) for non-count, mass or continuative words.

The feature number is derived for a noun through either one of two sets of transform rules (T-rules). For a (-count) noun (sand, water), or a proper noun (+name) (John, Mary), the T-rules would look like this (Fowler, p. 65):

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Number Universality} + \\
\text{Name Universality}
\end{array} \Rightarrow 
\begin{array}{c}
\text{(-P1) Universality} + \\
\text{Name Universality}
\end{array}
\]

For a (+count) noun, (cake, book), this T-rule will occur (Fowler, p. 65):

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Number Universality} + \\
\text{(-P1) Universality}
\end{array} \Rightarrow 
\begin{array}{c}
\text{(-P1) Universality} + \\
\text{(+Count)}
\end{array}
\]
The feature universal is somewhat like Mill's category of general names. It is the universality of nouns, Fowler suggests, that accounts for the generic use of nouns. (Some boys are mischievous. Man is mortal. All men are equal.) Names (proper nouns) and pronouns are (-universal) because they are specific and limited. The idea of limited is one that we shall see presented again later in this paper. This limitation and specificity is seen in Fowler's T-rule (to produce JOHN, MARY, HE, THIS):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Number Universality} + & \left[ \begin{array}{c}
+N \\
+\text{Name} \\
+\text{Pron}
\end{array} \right] \\
\Rightarrow & \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Number} \\
(-\text{Universality})
\end{array} \right] + \\
& \left[ \begin{array}{c}
+N \\
+\text{Name} \\
+\text{Pron}
\end{array} \right]
\end{align*}
\]

To designate a (+universal) noun (the generic use), (Beavers build dams. The lion is king of the jungle.), this T-rule would appear:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Number Universality} + & \left[ \begin{array}{c}
N \\
(+\text{Count})
\end{array} \right] \\
\Rightarrow & \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Number} \\
(+\text{Universality})
\end{array} \right] + \\
& \left[ \begin{array}{c}
+N \\
(+\text{Count})
\end{array} \right]
\end{align*}
\]

Fowler suggests that unit and continueate words (count and mass nouns) can be either (+universal). If a unit or continueate word is (-universal), (The thesis dragged on), then a T-rule would replace the designation with either a (+DEF) or (-DEF) feature:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Number Universality} + & \left[ \begin{array}{c}
N \\
(+\text{Count})
\end{array} \right] \\
\Rightarrow & \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Number} \\
(+\text{Definite})
\end{array} \right] + \\
& \left[ \begin{array}{c}
+N \\
(+\text{Count})
\end{array} \right]
\end{align*}
\]
Because he sees number and universality as minimal features for all determiners, Fowler suggests that one of the previous five T-rules must always be applied. These rules yield mutually exclusive articles and account for the plural and generic uses of the nouns. We must still be concerned with the use of the (-DEF) and (+DEF) features that distinguish the articles. This distinction again implies a parallel function that Christophersen has suggested does not accurately or adequately describe THE and A.

We can now turn to Paul Postal's "On So-Called Pronouns in English."4 In Postal we are given a demonstration of the rules which transform the deep structure constituents into the surface structure. For Postal, as for Smith, each noun phrase carries the notion of definite or indefinite, whether or not the traditional articles appear in the surface structure. Because he sees the notion of definite (or indefinite) in each noun phrase, Postal suggests that the traditional pronouns (I, we, he, you, they, etc.) are actually articles bearing the features of (+DEF) or (-DEF).

Postal sees each sentence as having two distinct syntactic structures: one an abstract deep structure for semantic interpretation, and the other a surface structure that is phonetically interpretable. Any suggestion that these forms resemble one another is misleading. The sentence forms, says Postal, are related only through a chain of transforma-
tional rules which produce intermediate forms between the deep and surface structures. There are, for Postal, T-rules that produce surface forms that are not present in the deep structure just as there are T-rules that recognize forms in the deep structure that do not appear in the surface structure.

The pronouns, and articles, are introduced in intermediate stages of transforms and exist in the deep structure as features of nouns for Postal as they did for Jacobs and Rosenbaum and Fowler. Each noun phrase is marked as either (+DEF) or (-DEF). This status is usually determined in the surface structure by the appearance of noun phrase segments (the, this, that as definite, and a, an, some and the null-form as indefinite). Postal supports Smith's argument for the predeterminers and other NP constituents as bearing the features of (+DEF) or (-DEF). Postal's nouns are also marked for case in the deep structure. This is a notion we will continue to explore in this paper. Following is a figure from Postal which diagrams a sentence (A boy said he left.). Postal is concerned with the appearance of the definite pronoun (he), which is now called an article. The transformational rules - pronominalization, segmentalization, definitization - will show us how the article is handled at the different levels of the grammar.
Figure 1. Derivation of the sentence: A boy said he left.
from Postal, p. 185.
Postal's treatment concludes a unit on transformational grammar in this paper. Through these treatments we have seen the focus of transformational grammarians. They are concerned with the rules that will explain the derivation and the appearance of the definite articles. The rules of transformational grammar are not as solidly established as were the rules of a Latinate grammar for Jespersen, Sweet and Christophersen. It is this difference, I believe, that accounts for the difference in emphasis in the two schools of grammar.

After surveying the transformationalists, we are still left with the notions of definite (+DEF) and indefinite (-DEF) to define the articles. These features suggest a parallel function that Christophersen has dispelled. We now turn to another modern grammarian, David Perlmutter, to continue with a definition of the articles.

The label "articles" itself has been questioned. Jespersen and Sweet have suggested that the articles are pronouns. Postal has suggested pronouns are articles. Smith has suggested predeterminers and prenominal genitives are articles. Perhaps Perlmutter's treatment of the articles will clarify the definition of an article.
AN ARTICLE IS AN ARTICLE IS AN ARTICLE?

In "On the Article in English," Perlmutter suggests that the indefinite article is closely related to the numerals; it is, as it is historically, an unstressed appearance of the numeral ONE, rather than an article having the same origin in the deep structure as the definite article.

The article A appears as an unstressed numeral in these sentences from Perlmutter (p. 234):

There is only ONE boy in the room, not five.
*There is only one BOY in the room, not five.
There is only a BOY in the room, not any girls.

The ungrammaticality of the second sentence indicates that the ONE must be stressed if it appears with a noun. Perlmutter continues, noting that other grammars have had to derive rules that nullify the indefinite article with non-count nouns. They also include a rule that states that non-count nouns do not appear with numerals:

*one butter
*two butters
*three butters

Perlmutter suggests that treatment of A as an unstressed numeral ONE eliminates the need to state both rules because the rule suggesting non-occurrence of numerals with non-count nouns
would exclude the ungrammaticality of the indefinite article with non-count nouns (a blood). Perlmutter's thesis would explain the use of A in the sentence:

He is a Goethe.

With A as an unstressed ONE, we can paraphrase this sentence as:

He is one who has the genius or characteristics of Goethe.

For Perlmutter the indefinite article is not a special indicator of indefiniteness. Noun phrases (a muskrat) are indefinite for the same reason that numerical phrases are indefinite (twelve muskrats, six muskrats, one muskrat).

"There is," Perlmutter says, "no underlying 'indefinite article' at all, and no special rules to spell it out" (p. 239). If we return to Christophersen, the notion of indefinite does not exist for the numerical phrases. His hypothesis of the a-form indicating unity is remarkably similar to the notion of the a-form as an unstressed numeral ONE.

Perlmutter continues to examine the appearance of the numeral ONE with the definite article. In the examples he cites, THE cannot grammatically appear with the numeral ONE:

The nine men were silent.
The two men were silent.
*The one man was silent.
The man was silent.
Such a rule could be explained if Christophersen's "features" for the articles are considered. The ONE cannot appear with the noun and the definite article because the notion of limited is already existent in the the-form. The appearance of the THE with a ONE or with an A would be redundant.

The suggestion of another traditional grammarian (Jespersen) is important to keep in mind as we turn to James Peter Thorne's "On the Notion 'Definite'."5 Thorne's treatment of the definite article parallels Postal's in that they feel that deep structure constituents are marked for case. Thorne presents what he calls the localist theory of the definite article. Thorne cites Postal's treatment of definite pronouns6 as deriving from an intermediate structure containing a definite article. The intermediate structure which would yield the pronoun IT would appear as such:

```
NP (IT)
  D
\_ the
  Pro-form
    \_ thing
```

A similar treatment in Katz and Postal, An Integrated Theory of Linguistic Descriptions (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1964), sees "all adverbial phrases as deriving from underlying noun phrases" (p. 88). The pronominal adverbs, Thorne continues, THEN and THERE derive from a structure similar to that which produces definite pronouns. The intermediate
structure for the pronominal adverbs differs because it is marked for time or space.

With this theory Thorne includes THERE as a form of the definite article. If THERE is included as a definite article, Thorne says, it is the locative form. The nominative form is THE.

Thorne expands his localist theory to include noun phrases containing THIS and THAT. These forms, for Thorne as for Postal (who has suggested that the deep structure exists for semantic interpretation while the surface structure exists for phonetic interpretation), differ in their surface representations rather than their underlying features. The difference is often only one of stress (Thorne, p. 565):
Just look at the moon.
Just look at THAT moon.
*Just look at THE moon.

This suggests, for Thorne, that the difference between THE and THAT is one of stress. This parallels Jespersen's definite article which was a weakened form of THAT. For these grammarians the difference between THE and THAT is one of stress, a phonological feature, rather than meaning, a semantic distinction.

If we accept Thorne's theory of definite determiners with stressed and unstressed forms, we will follow his suggestions of similarity in meaning of the following sentences (p. 566-567):

There is a Lotus Elan.
(Thing which is there is a Lotus Elan.)

That is a Lotus Elan.
(Thing which is there is a Lotus Elan.)

It is a Lotus Elan.
(Thing which is there is a Lotus Elan.)

If the pronoun IT is marked with a (+DEF) feature and derived from an underlying definite phrase (the thing), the difference between THAT and IT is one of stress. The pronoun, for Thorne, is as definite as the nominative articles THE and THAT and the locative article THERE.
The distinction between articles is one of tense according to Thorne. He cites as support, the following examples:

Here is a Lotus Elan.
(Thing which is a Lotus Elan is here.)

This is a Lotus Elan.
(Thing which is here is a Lotus Elan.)

That was a Lotus Elan.
(Thing which was there is a Lotus Elan.)
(Thing which is there was a Lotus Elan.)

The third sentence is ambiguous because of its two possible paraphrases. Thorne's following example has no ambiguity (for him):

This was a Lotus Elan.

The ambiguity is explained by Thorne with the derivations of the pronouns. THE and THAT derive from the locative phrases, (which is there) or (which was there). They are the nominative forms, THE the unstressed form, THAT the stressed form. THIS, Thorne suggests, can derive only from the phrase (which is here). The distinctions include the features (+near) and (-near) as well as case (nominative or locative) and stress, as (+stress) or (-stress).

Thorne's definite article derives from an underlying deictic (which is there) or (which was there). Presumably
the article would lose its deictic strength when the feature (-stress) were included in the lexicon. If so, we have several grammarians of widely diverse grammars agreeing on the notion of definite. We have seen traditionalists and transformationalists suggesting that THE is a designator or, as it was called by Jespersen and Jacobs and Rosenbaum, a determiner.
THE CONCLUSION

We have seen, in this survey, two schools of grammar, distinct in their purposes. For the traditionalists, the Latinate rules of English grammar were solidly established. What they needed to concern themselves with was, primarily, the semantics and 'usage' of the elements of a grammar, its words. It is from this school, from Christophersen, that we realize the features that lucidly define the articles: (+unital) for the a-form, (+familiarity) and (+limited) for the the-form, (-unital) for the null-form. The feature of familiarity recognizes the definite article conspiracy that must exist between speaker and hearer. This familiarity constitutes existence 'in thought,' (a suggestion for 'definite' from Sweet) whether or not the substantive has a tangible existence (the hope, the dreams and the unicorn?).

For transformational grammarians, the rules are new and dynamic. The focus, at this time, is on producing phrase structure rules, the transform rules, the rewrite and expansion rules, that produce the words in the surface structure. What transformationalists want to know is where does the definite article come from and how does it get where it goes?

For those grammarians both traditional and transformational that are concerned with the semantics of THE there is also a division of focus. The disagreement is over the strength of THE. Does it have the strength of a deictic, or is it a weakened form of a deictic (as Jespersen and Thorne suggest)?
I believe this survey allows us to reach an understanding of the function and meaning of the definite article. THE is a word that must be understood by speaker and hearer. For this understanding to exist, the definite article-with-substantive must be 'defined' by a situation, a sentence-external linguistic reference or a sentence-internal linguistic reference. It is these 'defining' situations which Michaels gives us that 'define' the article-with-substantive. THE does not have the strength without these aids to point to a subject. THE is a weakened form of THAT, as Thorne suggests, leaving the deictic strength to the demonstratives, which may or may not serve as deictics.

The necessary characteristics of the articles and the demonstratives can be represented with lexical 'features' compiled from Christophersen's definition of the articles, Fowler's minimal requisites for deictics, and Thorne's suggestion of case:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>null-form</th>
<th>this</th>
<th>that</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(+familiar)</td>
<td>(+unital)</td>
<td>(-unital)</td>
<td>(+deictic)</td>
<td>(+deictic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(+limited)</td>
<td>(+numeral)</td>
<td>(+plural)</td>
<td>(+near)</td>
<td>(-near)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(+plural)</td>
<td>(-plural)</td>
<td>(-universal)</td>
<td>(+singular)</td>
<td>(+singular)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(+universal)</td>
<td>(+universal)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(+locative)</td>
<td>(+locative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(+nominative)</td>
<td>(-stress)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These lexical features utilize only the features that are applicable for each word. The features (+familiar), (+limited), (+unital) and (-unital) differentiate the articles. The designations (+deictic) or (-deictic) mark the demonstratives.
These lexical features suggest that THE originates within the deep structure, possibly deriving from an article segment attachment rule (as Postal, Fowler, Jacobs and Rosenbaum have agreed). These features render the articles mutually exclusive and distinguish between singular/plural and generic/non-generic appearances. They are semantically more explicit than the designations (+DEF) and (+DEM). Whatever THE is tagged - whether it be an article, an adjective, a pronoun, a determiner - its function and meaning remain unchanged.
FOOTNOTES

1. Language Learning, 18(1968), 211-23.
2. Language Learning, 22(1972), 275-89.
6. Foundations of Language, 8(1972), 562-68.
A LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED


