

การพิจารณาและการสอนคำนำหน้านามของภาษาอังกฤษ ในเชิงอรรถศาสตร์

บทความฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อค้นหาวิธีการสอนการใช้คำนำหน้านามของภาษาอังกฤษอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพโดยยึดตามทฤษฎีโครงสร้างทางอรรถศาสตร์ของวอลเลซ เชฟ เป็นความพยายามที่จะเสนอแนะการพิจารณา *a, an* และ *the* ในเชิงอรรถศาสตร์และการนำทฤษฎีของเชฟมาประยุกต์ในการสอนภาษา

Abstract

Viewing and Teaching the English Articles Semantically

The purpose of this study is to find an effective way to teach the use of the English articles based on Wallace Chafe's framework of semantic structure. The paper attempts to suggest how *a, an,* and *the* may be viewed from a semantic perspective and how Chafe's approach can be applied to language teaching.

Viewing and Teaching the English Articles Semantically

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Introduction

For the Thai learner of English, one of the most problematical English forms is the *article*. The difficulties concerning the use of *a*, *an*, and *the* arise partly from the fact that definiteness is not a necessary property of noun phrases in the Thai language while every English noun phrase must be either definite or indefinite, and also partly from the fact that the traditional rules of using the English articles may be so numerous and so challenging as to seem overwhelming for the Thai student.

This paper constitutes an attempt to provide a new way for the Thai student of English to overcome the problematical *a*, *an*, and *the*. To begin with, common errors in the use of articles made by Thai students are listed, followed by a list of the traditional rules for using the indefinite and definite articles. Next, the semantic points of view towards articles are accounted for. Lastly, this paper examines how significant a role semantics could play in the teaching of the use of the indefinite and definite articles.

A List of Typical Errors in the Use of Articles Made by Thai Students

In order to identify the common errors in the use of articles often made by Thai learners, I asked 40 freshmen of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Arts to complete 25 sentences (to be found in the appendix) by filling in 30 blanks with suitable articles where appropriate. Generally speaking, Arts students are those interested in languages, especially English; therefore, they would be expected to make relatively few errors. Nevertheless, only three of the 40 freshmen made as few as four errors while the average number of errors for the other students was 15.

Below is a list of the typical errors made by the 40 freshmen.

1.	Omission of the a. before unique nouns	Ø Sun Ø Chao Phraya River
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	<p>c. before specific nouns in context</p> <p>d. before superlatives</p> <p>Omission of a Before class nouns defined by adjectives</p>	<p>She is \emptyset mother of that boy. \emptyset solution given in this article</p> <p>\emptyset least expensive model</p> <p>He was \emptyset brave man.</p>
2.	<p>The used instead of \emptyset</p> <p>a. before proper names</p> <p>b. before abstract nouns</p> <p>c. before plural nouns</p> <p>d. before nouns behaving like abstract nouns</p> <p>A used instead of \emptyset</p> <p>a. before plural nouns qualified by adjectives</p> <p>b. before uncount nouns</p>	<p>The Chulalongkorn University The Wednesday</p> <p>The friendship</p> <p>The complex structures</p> <p>After the breakfast</p> <p>A complex structures</p> <p>A friendship A breakfast</p>
3.	<p>A used instead of the</p> <p>a. before plural superlatives</p> <p>b. before unique nouns</p> <p>The used instead of a Before general nouns in context</p>	<p>A least expensive model</p> <p>A sun</p> <p>He was the brave man.</p>

A Set of Rules for Using the Indefinite and Definite Articles

Having listed the common errors in the use of articles made by 40 Arts students, the paper now turns to look at how the use of *a*, *an*, and *the* is traditionally prescribed and proscribed in Sinclair (2001).

A or an is the indefinite article. It is used at the beginning of noun groups which refer to only one person or thing. The form **an** is used in front of words that begin with vowel sounds.

1. You use **a** or **an** when you are referring to someone or something for the first time or when people may not know which particular person or thing you are talking about.
 - A waiter entered with a tray bearing a glass and a bottle of whisky.*
 - He started eating an apple.*
 - Today you've got a new teacher taking you.*
 - I manage a hotel.*
2. You use **a** or **an** when you are referring to any person or thing of a particular type and do not want to be specific.
 - Expensive make-up that we saw being advertised by a beautiful model.*
 - I suggest you leave it to an expert.*
 - Bring a sleeping bag.*
 - ... waiting for a bus*
3. You use **a** or **an** in front of an uncount noun when that noun follows an adjective, or when the noun is followed by words that describe it more fully.
 - The islanders exhibit a constant happiness with life.*
 - He did have a real knowledge of the country.*
 - Baseball movies have gained an appreciation that far outstrips those dealing with any other sport.*
4. You use **a** or **an** in front of a mass noun when you want to refer to a single type or make of something.
 - Bollinger 'RD' is a rare, highly prized wine.*
5. You use **a** in quantifiers such as **a lot**, **a little**, and **a bit**.
 - I spend a lot on expensive jewelry and clothing.*
 - I've come looking for a bit of advice.*
6. You use **a** or **an** to refer to someone or something as a typical member of a group, class, or type.
 - Some parents believe a boy must learn to stand up and fight like a man.*
 - the operation a patient has had.*
7. You use **a** or **an** in front of the names of days, months, or festivals when you are referring to one particular instance of that day, month, or festival.
 - The interview took place on a Friday afternoon.*
 - It was a Christmas when shoppers passed by expensive silks in favor of more practical gifts.*

8. You use **a** or **an** when you are saying what someone is or what job they have.
 - *I explained that I was an artist.*
 - *He was now a teacher and a respectable member of the community.*
9. You use **a** or **an** in front of the names of people as a way of indicating that you do not know them or anything about them and you are saying their name for the first time.
 - *The full address on a stick-on label was that of a Mrs. P. R. Slater of Peterborough.*
 - *A Dr Matthew Owens was reported missing while on an expedition to northeastern Turkey.*
10. You use **a** or **an** in front of the names of people when you want to refer to someone else who has the same qualities or character as the person named.
 - *When I listen to her play I hear a new Nigel Kennedy.*
11. You use **a** or **an** in front of a surname when you want to refer to someone who belongs to the family with the surname.
 - *As far as I can recall, Patti was a Smith.*
12. You use **a** or **an** in front of the names of artists to refer to one individual painting or sculpture created by them.
 - *Most people have very little difficulty in seeing why a Van Gogh is a work of genius.*
13. You use **a** or **an** instead of the number 'one', especially with words of measurement such as 'hundred', 'hour', and 'metre', and with fractions such as 'half', 'quarter', and 'third'.
 - *More than a thousand acres of land.*
 - *... a quarter of an hour.*
 - *The skirts were shortened an inch or two.*
14. You use **a** or **an** in expressions such as **eight hours a day** to express a rate or ratio.
 - *Prices start at \$13.95 a metre for printed cotton.*
 - *The helicopter can zip along at about 150 kilometres an hour.*

The is the definite article. It is used at the beginning of noun groups.

1. You use **the** at the beginning of noun groups to refer to someone or something that you have already mentioned or identified.
 - *A waiter came and hovered. John caught my look and we both got up and, ignoring the waiter, made our way to the buffet.*
 - *Six of the 38 people were Russian citizens.*
2. You use **the** at the beginning of a noun group when the first noun is followed by an 'of' phrase or a clause which identifies the person or thing.
 - *There has been a slight increase in the consumption of meat.*
 - *Of the 9,660 cases processed last year, only 10 per cent were totally rejected.*

3. You use **the** in front of some nouns that refer to something in our general experience of the world.
- It's always hard to speculate about the future.*
 - Amy sat outside in the sun.*
 - He lay in the darkness, pretending to sleep.*
4. You use **the** in front of nouns that refer to people, things, services, or institutions that are associated with everyday life.
- The doctor's on his way.*
 - Who was that on the phone?*
 - You're old enough to travel on the train by yourself.*
 - They have a generator when the electricity fails.*
 - Four executive journalists were detained for questioning by the police today.*
 - He took a can of beer from the fridge.*
5. You use **the** instead of a possessive determiner, especially when you are talking about a part of someone's body or a member of their family.
- 'How's the family?' – 'Just fine, thank you.'*
 - I patted him on the head.*
 - She took Gill by the hand.*
6. You use **the** in front of a singular noun when you want to make a general statement about things or people of that type.
- An area in which the computer has made considerable strides in recent years is in playing chess.*
 - After dogs, the horse has had the closest relationship with man.*
7. You use **the** with the name of a musical instrument when you are talking about someone's ability to play the instrument.
- Did you play the piano as a child?*
 - She was trying to teach him to play the guitar.*
8. You use **the** with nationality adjectives and nouns to talk about the people who live in a country.
- The Japanese, Americans, and even the French and Germans, judge economic policies by results.*
9. You use **the** with words such as 'rich', 'poor', 'old', or 'unemployed' to refer to all people of a particular type.
- Conditions for the poor in Los Angeles have not improved.*
 - ... care for the elderly, and the disabled.*

10. If you want to refer to a whole family or to a married couple, you can make their surname into a plural and use **the** in front of it.
- *A 400-acre farm owned by the Allens.*
 - *The Taylors decided that they would employ an architect to do the work.*
11. You use **the** in front of an adjective when you are referring to a particular thing that is described by that adjective.
- *He knows he's wishing for the impossible.*
 - *I thought you might like to read the enclosed.*
12. You use **the** to indicate that you have enough of the thing mentioned for a particular purpose.
- *She may not have the money to maintain or restore her property.*
 - *We must have the patience to continue to work until we find a peaceful solution.*
 - *Carl couldn't even raise the energy for a smile.*
13. You use **the** with some titles, place names, and other names.
- *the SUN, the DAILY STAR and the DAILY EXPRESS*
 - *the Albert Hall*
 - *The King has already agreed that the President of the Nepal Congress should be the Prime Minister.*
14. You use **the** in front of numbers such as first, second, and third.
- *The meeting should take place on the fifth of May ...*
 - *Marco Polo is said to have sailed on the Pacific on his way to Java in the thirteenth century.*
 - *One ferry operator 'Sealink' said it was now running a full service for the first time in five weeks.*
15. You use **the** in front of numbers when they refer to decades.
- *It's sometimes hard to imagine how bad things were in the thirties.*
16. You use **the** in front of the superlative adjectives and adverbs.
- *Brisk daily walks are still the best exercise for young and old alike.*
 - *The Mayor of West Berlin described the Germans as the happiest people in the world.*
 - *This engine uses all the most modern technology.*
 - *The third girl answered the most audibly.*
17. You use **the** in front of each of two comparative adjectives or adverbs when you are describing how one amount or quality changes in relation to another.
- *The longer you have been in shape in the past, the quicker you will regain fitness in the future.*
 - *The more confidence you build up in yourself, the greater are your chances of success.*

18. When you express rates, prices, and measurements, you can use **the** to say how many units apply to each of the items being measured.
- ❑ *New Japanese cars averaged 13 km to the litre in 1981.*
 - ❑ *Some analysis predicted that the exchange rate would soon be \$2 to the pound.*
19. You use **the** to indicate that something or someone is the most famous, important, or best thing of its kind. In spoken English, you put more stress on it, and in written English, you often underline it or write it in capitals or italics.
- ❑ *Camden Market is the place to be on a Saturday or Sunday.*
 - ❑ *'Olympia is in America, where K Records was founded.' – No! Surely you don't mean THE K Records?'*

A Semantic Look at the Articles

This section accounts for how articles are seen through the eyes of a semanticist. According to Chafe (1973), the definite article *the* is the surface structure representation of *definite*, which is an inflectional unit. Any noun may be inflected as definite. The meaning of *definite* is that the speaker assumes that the hearer knows the identity of a particular member of the class or a particular instance of the substance. Nouns unmarked for definiteness are referred to as *nondefinite* and appear in the surface structure in the company of the indefinite article *a* or *an*. *Nondefinite* communicates the speaker's assumption that the hearer does not already know the particular item or the particular part of a substance that is at issue and that the speaker is introducing this particular instance for the first time.

The definite reference of a noun may arise in a number of ways (Leech 1981). First, it is contextual knowledge that is involved in the interpretation of phrases like *the book* and *the film* in an example given by Leech:

- (1) They have made a film of his latest novel, but after reading *the book*, I found *the film* a great disappointment.

The referents of *the book* and *the film* are clear because a film and a novel have been mentioned earlier in the sentence. However, contextual knowledge does not seem to be involved in the interpretation of phrases like *the Grand Palace* and *the sun*, where it appears that one possible referent can be intended in whatever situation it occurs. Besides contextual knowledge, the unique identification by the speaker and the hearer is understood from private background knowledge which is specific to an immediate situation in which the communication is taking place (e.g. *the door* in *open the door*, which may be said when there is a door nearby), or from the general knowledge shared by a particular community or nation (e.g. the Grand Palace), or ultimately from the general knowledge shared by the whole human race (e.g. the sun). As Thai people, we know that there is a palace called the Grand Palace near the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, and as people on the planet Earth, we know that there is only one sun in our part of the universe. This knowledge enables us to identify unique referents for *the Grand Palace* and *the sun* whenever they occur in a speech situation.

It is clearly seen from this that there are some types of nouns that must always be inflected as definite. They are unique nouns, proper names and bounded sets. *Unique*, *proper* and *bounded* are selectional units in Chafe's framework (1973). A unique noun involves only a single individual, or constitutes a class of one member. Since there is only one member of the class, the hearer automatically knows which member is being talked about; that's why a unique noun must be definite. Nevertheless, while the definite article *the* is the usual surface structure representation of the inflectional unit *definite*, only some unique noun roots allow *definite* to be represented as the definite article, such as *the sun*, *the sky*, *the earth*, and *the sea*; others cause *definite* to be deleted postsemantically, such as *Tony*, *Gary*, *Mary*, and *Janet*.

Like unique nouns, proper names must be definite. Proper names are names of people, places, or institutions. They may be used to refer to objects that are extant, such as *George W. Bush* and *Lake Michigan*, or extinct, such as *Plato* and *Troy*, or fictional, such as *Sherlock Holmes* and *Never-never Land*. Proper names are definite in the sense that they refer to a unique object as far as the speaker and the hearer are concerned. If I say (2), my friends would understand Toni Braxton to refer to the American singer who sings "Spanish Guitar" and not to the dozens of Toni Braxtons in phone books across America.

(2) Will Toni Braxton have a concert in Bangkok?

In general, proper names are not preceded by the definite article *the* because they are inherently definite. That's why it is grammatically wrong to say **the Tony Blair*, **the Chulalongkorn University*, and **the California*. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions. Some proper nouns must be used with *the*, such as the names of rivers, mountains, ships, and erected structures: *the Chao Phraya*, *the Alps*, *the Andaman Princess*, and *the Eiffel Tower*. Moreover, *the* is used with certain proper nouns in special cases, as in *the Alan Smiths* (the family of Alan Smith), *the Paris of the 1920's*, *the New York that everyone knows and loves*, and *the brilliant Professor Einstein*.

The other type of noun that must be definite is a bounded set. *Bounded* is a selectional unit as it selects the choice of a noun. A bounded set designates a class whose boundaries are implicitly known; therefore, the speaker is able to assume that the hearer knows to which members of the class the speaker is referring even when the speaker is talking about the entire class. Usually, if the entire class is being talked about, i.e. the noun is inflected as *generic*, the speaker cannot assume that the hearer already knows to which members of the class the speaker is referring, i.e. the noun is unmarked as definite. Thus, *definite* and *generic* are, in general, incompatible. However, a bounded noun can be definite and generic at the same time, which may be illustrated as follows:

(3) The hippies have long hair.

Obviously, we cannot call every hippie by name, but the word *hippies* has the bounded quality; we seem to know which members of the class are being talked about.

The incompatibility of *definite* and *generic* has been explained. Nevertheless, surface structure representation for both *definite* and *generic* is identical. The definite article *a* or *an* can represent *nondefinite* as well as *generic* whereas the definite article *the* indicates either *definite* or *aggregate*, which is a subspecification of *generic*. The meaning of *aggregate* is that the entire class is being talked about and regarded as an undifferentiated whole. Therefore, nouns accompanied by *a* or *an* and *the* can also be interpreted in a generic way. Thus, the following are ambiguous:

- (4) A koala eats eucalyptus.
- (5) The koala eats eucalyptus.

A koala may be interpreted as a particular koala, or its reference may be the entire class of koala regarded as composed of separate individuals. *The koala* may refer to a particular koala or the entire class of koala regarded as an undifferentiated whole. It may be worth noting that for plural countable nouns and mass nouns, no article is used for indefinite specific reference and that plural nouns can also be generic. The ambiguity of (6) is similar to (4) and (5). *Koalas* may represent particular koalas or all the individual koalas taken together.

- (6) Koalas eat eucalyptus.

To recapitulate, the discussion above suggests that:

1. The definite article *the* typically realizes definite reference. The speaker who makes utterance (7) assumes that the hearer knows to which cat the speaker is referring.

(7) Where's the cat?

2. Certain nouns with definite reference may not be preceded by the definite article *the*.

(8) George W. Bush
(9) Chulalongkorn University

3. The definite article *the* can also represent generic reference. In (10), *the ostrich* refers to the entire class of ostrich, rather than a particular ostrich.

(10) The ostrich cannot fly.

4. The indefinite article *a* or *an* typically realizes indefinite reference but can also be used with a noun with generic reference. Consider (11) and (12):

(11) A shark attacked a diver.
(12) A shark has sharp teeth.

A shark in the first sentence is most likely to be represented as a particular shark in a particular incident. The speaker does not assume that the hearer knows which shark is being talked about. In the second sentence, *a shark* is most likely to be the entire class of shark.

A New Way to Teach the Use of Articles

As we have seen in the earlier section, the contrast between the indefinite and definite articles is of a pragmatic nature. To interpret *a* or *an* and *the*, we have to relate them to a particular speech situation and to assumptions made by the speaker about the hearer. This corresponds to Leech's observation (1981) that although the contrast between definiteness and indefiniteness is a very general semantic phenomenon, the basic contrast between the articles is less like a semantic opposition than a pragmatic one. The use of the indefinite and definite articles must actually be explained in pragmatic rather than in pure semantic terms.

Leech (1981) goes on to explain the use of *a* or *an* and *the* as follows. The definite article *the* is typically used to express definite specific reference with both singular and plural countable nouns and mass nouns. The element of definiteness expressed by *the* conveys the speaker's understanding that there is some referent that is to be identified uniquely in the contextual and/or situational knowledge shared by the speaker and the hearer. Thus, when someone uses the phrase *the cat*, we infer from this that there is some cat that can be uniquely identified as the same cat by both the speaker and the hearer. 'Shared knowledge' means that the speaker who says (13), takes it for granted that the hearer is able to select the one cat concerned from all other cats.

(13) Where's *the cat*?

'Contextual knowledge' means that the selection is determined by background information relevant to a particular speech situation. 'Situational knowledge' means that the selection is determined by general knowledge known to both the speaker and the hearer. On the other hand, the indefinite article, *a* or *an*, is used to express indefinite specific reference with singular nouns. As the name suggests, the indefinite article may be defined by the absence of the feature of definiteness in the meaning of *the*. For example, *a table* is used where the shared knowledge is not present and where there is no situational basis for the use of *the*. Therefore, the use of *a* or *an* is associated with nouns which are previously unmentioned. Utterance (14) suggests that the hearer cannot be expected to know which prize is intended.

(14) I won *a prize* today.

To sum up, the decision to use *the* rather than *a* or *an* and vice versa is a matter of appropriateness to situation.

However, the rules for using *a* or *an* and *the* listed above do not seem to give sufficient thought to situation. Rather, they concentrate on the expression side of language, describing in detail that *the* is used, for example, in front of nouns referring to 'something in our general experience of the world,' 'people, things, services, or institutions that are associated with everyday life,' 'a part of someone's body or a member of their family,' 'nationality adjectives and nouns,'

'numbers such as first, second, and third,' and 'the superlative adjectives and adverbs.' Moreover, the rules do not deal with the meaning of the indefinite and definite articles at all. The learner has to memorize them without being informed why, for instance, the name of a musical instrument must be preceded by *the* when someone's ability to play the instrument is being talked about. The learner then simply has to use the articles the way the learner is told to without knowing why, and for this reason, the learner tends to forget the rules easily. To my way of thinking, if the learner knows when to use *a* or *an* and *the* as well as why a particular article is to be used in a particular situation, the learner will be able to use the articles more accurately.

The semantic units, *definite*, *unique*, *proper*, *bounded*, *generic*, and *aggregate* can be used to expose the learner to the underlying meaning of the articles, thus making the learner aware of the reason why the learner is supposed to use *a* or *an* rather than *the* in some situations and vice versa in others. Actually, the six semantic features may be of even more help; they may be used to provide a new set of more concise and reasonable rules for using the articles.

In the last section, we know that *definite* means that the speaker assumes that the hearer already knows which member of the class is being talked about and that the definite article *the* is the common surface structure representation of *definite*. Thus, it can be said that *the* is used when the speaker thinks that the hearer can recognize which member the speaker is talking about. As in Leech's example cited above (1), repeated here as (15), it can be assumed, or even proved, that the hearer knows which book and which film are referred to since *his latest novel* and *a film* are previously mentioned in the sentence.

(15) They have made a film of his latest novel, but after reading *the book*, I found *the film* a great disappointment.

However, in one of the earlier examples (2), repeated here as (16), the hearer certainly knows who *Toni Braxton* refers to, but the noun is not preceded by *the*. This can be explained when the inherent feature *proper* is taken into consideration. We may simply say that *Toni Braxton* is a proper name and so its definiteness need not be manifested by *the*.

(16) Will Toni Braxton have a concert in Bangkok?

Then, what can be said about proper names like *the Indians* and *the Alps*, which always require *the* in the surface structure? Here, the inherent feature *unique* comes in. If a proper noun is unique, or a class of one member, it is definite in itself, i.e. the definite article *the* is not needed. However, proper nouns that are not unique, like *the Indians* and *the Alps*¹, must be accompanied by *the* in every occurrence. If one remembers that *bounded* means a class whose boundaries are implicitly known, you may recognize that *the Indians* also constitutes a bounded set. In other words, some bounded nouns are proper but not unique (e.g. *the Indians*), and so they must always be preceded by *the* in the surface structure. Other bounded nouns are not proper nor unique (e.g. *the hippies*) but simply definite, and they are also always accompanied by *the*.

¹ There are more than one member in the class of the Indians, and the Alps stretch across several countries, such as Austria, France, Germany, and Switzerland.

Not unlike a proper noun that is not unique, a unique noun that is not proper must also have its definiteness manifested by *the* in the surface structure. For example, *the sun* is a unique noun, i.e. a class of one member as there is only one sun in our part of the universe, but it is not proper, i.e. does not have a name; its definiteness shows up in the form of *the*. As a unique noun that is proper behaves in the same way as a proper noun that is unique in this regard, it is valid to say that a definite noun must be unique and proper at the same time so that it will not need to be preceded by *the*, hence *George W. Bush* and *Tony Blair*. If a definite noun lacks either of the features *proper* and *unique*, its definiteness shows up in the form of the definite article, hence *the Indians* (proper not unique) and *the sun* (unique not proper).

So much has been said about nouns that are definite and the definite article. Now it is time to deal with nouns that are not inflected as *definite*. Such nouns have two possibilities – if there are not *generic*, they are *nondefinite*. *Nondefinite* is opposite to *definite* in the sense that nondefinite nouns cannot be identified as known to the hearer, whether from situation or preceding context. The indefinite article *a* or *an* is the grammatical realization of *nondefinite*. That is to say, *a* or *an* is used when the speaker does not assume that the hearer already knows that particular item which the speaker is talking about as the speaker introduces the particular instance for the first time. For example, a story may begin:

- (17) I was walking along a beach, enjoying the beautiful scenery. A breeze was gently blowing. Several waves crashed onto the beach. From the waves emerged a great white shark ...

The hearer is not expected to know which beach, which breeze, and which shark are being talked about when each of them appears for the first time in the story. That's why *beach*, *breeze* and *white shark* are accompanied by the indefinite article.

If a noun that is not marked as *definite* is inflected as *generic*, it means that the entire class is being talked about. Therefore, the speaker cannot assume that the hearer already knows which member or members of the class the speaker is talking about. *Generic* may show up in the surface structure in the same form of the indefinite article as *nondefinite*. It can thus be added that *a* or *an* is also used when the speaker talks about the entire class of a noun, as in (4), repeated here as (18):

- (18) A koala likes eucalyptus.

Here we come to the last feature that plays a part in the use of articles: *aggregate*. A generic noun may be further inflected as *aggregate*, which means that the entire class is being talked about and is regarded as an undifferentiated whole. *Aggregate* is manifested in the surface structure in the same form of the definite article as *definite*. Again, it can be added that *the* is also used when the speaker talks about an entire class regarded as an undifferentiated whole, as in (5), repeated here as (19):

(19) The koala likes eucalyptus.

To sum up, the rules for the use of *a* or *an* and *the* as seen semantically are as follows:

1. *The indefinite article a or an is used when:*
 - 1.1 *the speaker does not assume that the hearer already knows the particular item that the speaker is talking about as the speaker introduces the particular instance for the first time.*
 - 1.2 *the speaker regards the entire class as composed of separate individuals.*
2. *The definite article the is used when:*
 - 2.1 *the speaker assumes that the hearer already knows which member of the class is being talked about and when nouns are not unique and proper at the same time.*
 - 2.2 *the speaker regards the entire class as an undifferentiated whole.*

It would now be appropriate to apply these two rules to account for the 30 or so rules listed earlier. Some examples from these are grouped together under their labels of the seven semantic features discussed.

1. Definite – the hearer is expected to know exactly who or what the speaker is talking about.
 - ❑ *I patted him on the head.*
 - ❑ *A waiter came and hovered. John caught my look and we both got up and, ignoring the waiter, made our way to the buffet.*
2. Unique – A class of one member, not proper.
 - ❑ *Amy sat outside in the sun.*
 - ❑ *He lay in the darkness, pretending to sleep.*
 - ❑ *The meeting should take place on the fifth of May.*
 - ❑ *It's sometimes hard to imagine how bad things were in the thirties.*
 - ❑ *Brisk daily walks are still the best exercise for young and old alike.*

3. Proper – Names of people, places, and institutions, not unique.

- A 400 acre farm owned by the Allens.*²
- the SUN, the DAILY STAR and the DAILY EXPRESS.³
- Marco Polo is said to have sailed on the Pacific on his way to Java in the thirteenth century.*⁴

4. Bounded – A set whose boundaries are implicitly known.

- Who was that on the phone?*
- Conditions for the poor in Los Angeles have not improved.*
- The Japanese, Americans, and even the French and Germans, *judge economic policies by results.*

5. Nondefinite – The hearer is not expected to know who or what the speaker is talking about.

- He started eating an apple.*
- I explained that I was an artist.*
- The interview took place on a Friday afternoon.*
- A waiter entered with a tray bearing a glass and a bottle of whisky.*
- Expensive make-up that we saw being advertised by a beautiful model.*
- A Dr Matthew Owens was reported missing while on an expedition to north-eastern Turkey.*⁵

6. Generic – The speaker is referring to the entire class.

- I suggest you leave it to an expert.*
- The helicopter can zip along at about 150 kilometres an hour.*

7. Aggregate – The speaker is referring to the entire class regarded as an undifferentiated whole.

- Did you play the piano as a child?*
- After dogs, the horse has had the closest relationship with man.*
- Some analyses predicted that the exchange rate would soon be \$2 to the pound.*

² There are several people in The Allens.

³ There are several issues of the SUN, the DAILY STAR and the DAILY EXPRESS.

⁴ The hearer is not expected to know which particular part of the ocean is referred to.

⁵ The speaker does not expect the hearer to know exactly which Dr Matthew Owens or which particular person is referred to. Otherwise, the speaker would simply say *Dr Matthew Owens was reported missing while on an expedition to northeastern Turkey*, as say *Dr Matthew Owens* is a unique proper name.

Conclusions: Implications for Language Teaching

The Thai learner of English should be aware of the underlying meaning of the articles in order to use them correctly. Although they are grammatical words, i.e. carry little meaning, this little meaning plays a part in determining whether *a/an* or *the* is required in a particular situation. As mentioned earlier, the decision to use *the* rather than *a* or *an* or vice versa is a matter of appropriateness to situation, and the learner should also be aware which meaning is appropriate to which context.

Semantics can help considerably in this matter. The semantic features *definite*, *unique*, *proper*, *bounded*, *generic*, and *aggregate* present in the semantic structure are represented by *a* or *an* and *the* in the surface structure. Therefore, if the learner is acquainted with these features and knows which articles represent which features under which circumstances, it is very likely that the learner will always pick the right article under any given circumstance.

This is far better than memorizing the rules blindly. For example, Rule # 7 says: 'You use **the** with the name of a musical instrument when you are talking about someone's ability to play the instrument.' If the reason why nouns referring to musical instruments are to be preceded by *the* is left unstated, the rule tends to be forgotten by the learner easily. With the approach presented in this paper, it can be readily explained that as the definite article *the* is used when the speaker expects the hearer to know who or what is being talked about and when the speaker talks about the entire class. Thus, when we ask someone whether or not they can play *the violin*, we must use *the* because if they can play a particular member of violin, they can certainly play any violin in the world.

The new set of rules based on the semantic features discussed in this paper directly deals with situations in which *a* or *an* and *the* are needed. Consisting of only two rules, the learner can choose the right article under almost any circumstance. However, the new set of rules is not without its shortcomings. This has to do with the features *unique* and *proper*. It is clear that unique nouns and proper names are definite; the hearer certainly knows what they refer to. It is also valid to say that a noun that is *unique* and *proper* at the same time does not need *the* to represent its definiteness. Unfortunately, there are some exceptions; the names of ships and erected structures must always be used with *the* as in *the Oriental Queen*, *the Empire State*, and *the Golden Gate Bridge*. There are also some special cases where *the* can be used with unique proper names for the sake of emphasis as in (20):

(20) You don't mean **the** William Shakespeare?

Nevertheless, to my way of thinking, as these few exceptions to the new rules can easily be explained to the learner, these new rules should prove a more effective way to teach how to use articles than telling the student to use *a* or *an* and *the* according to the 30 or so rules, especially when most of the rules, for example, Rule #13 for using *the*: You use **the** with some titles, place names, and other names, are of the same nature, i.e. they provide no explanation why it must be *the* rather than *a* or *an* and vice versa. All in all, the new set of rules, although composed of only

two rules with two sub-rules each, provides the learner with an awareness of when to use *the* rather than *a* or *an* and vice versa based on the speaker's assumption about the hearer, not on particular types of words that must be used with a particular article. This should prove a more helpful and more effective way to learn how to use the articles correctly.

Appendix

The 25 sentences used in the questionnaire with answers.

A, AN, THE, or Ø

1. An/The ostrich cannot fly.
2. He was a brave man.
3. Ø friendship is valuable.
4. The sun rises in the east.
5. Shall I pour you a/ Ø coffee?
6. She wanted to be a writer.
7. See you on Ø Wednesday.
8. She is the mother of that boy.
9. After Ø breakfast, he went out.
10. Her face was the color of chalk.
11. The/Ø Germans have a word for this.
12. They drove home through the/ Ø darkness.
13. The Chao Phraya River is always beautiful.
14. You should be able to get a job in Europe.
15. Carbohydrates have Ø complex structures.
16. The solution given in this article is unrealistic.
17. It is confirmed that the weapon was an airgun.
18. A cyclist has to pay when he goes over the ferry.
19. The more I hear about him, the more I like him.
20. It was the first time I saw her since Ø Christmas.
21. They continued walking on the opposite pavement.
22. The least expensive model is still too expensive for me.
23. I wish you could manage the time to come in and talk with me.
24. Ø Chulalongkorn University is the oldest university in Thailand.
25. This is never mentioned in the/ Ø history books or even in the/ Ø newspapers.

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