**Mustansiriyah University**

**College of Arts**

**Translation Department**

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**FUNDAMENTALS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR**

**First Year/ Morning Classes**

**Lecture # 8**

**Articles**

**ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN USE**

**R. MURPHY**

## Using Articles

**An article is an adjective. Like adjectives, articles modify nouns.**

English has two articles: (**the)** and **(a/an)**.

**1. The indefinite article (a/an)** is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns.

2. **The definite article (the)** is used to refer to specific or particular nouns.

For example,

If I say, "Let's read **a** book," I mean any book rather than a specific book.

if I say, "Let's read **the** book," I mean a specific book.

Let's look at each kind of article a little more closely.

#### Indefinite Articles: a and an

"A" and "an" signal that the noun modified is indefinite, referring to any member of a group. For example:

1. My daughter really wants **a** doll for her birthday.
2. Somebody call **a** policeman.
3. When I was at the zoo, I saw **an** elephant.

#### Remember, using a or an depends on the sound that begins the next word.

1. **a** + singular noun beginning with a consonant: ***a*** boy; ***a*** car; ***a*** bike; ***a*** zoo; ***a*** dog
2. **an** + singular noun beginning with a vowel: ***an*** elephant; ***an*** egg; ***an*** apple; ***an*** idiot;***an*** orphan
3. **a** + singular noun beginning with a consonant sound: ***a*** user (sounds like 'yoo-zer,' i.e. begins with a consonant 'y' sound, so 'a' is used); ***a*** university; ***a*** unicycle
4. **an** + nouns starting with silent "h": ***an*** hour
5. **a** + nouns starting with a pronounced "h": ***a*** horse

Remember, too, that in English, the indefinite articles are used to indicate membership in a group:

* I am **a** teacher. (I am a member of a large group known as teachers.)
* Brian is **an** Irishman. (Brian is a member of the people known as Irish.)

#### The Definite Article: (the)

The definite article is used before singular and plural nouns when the noun is specific or particular. **The** signals that the noun is definite, that it refers to a particular member of a group. For example:

"**The** dog that bit me ran away." Here, we're talking about a specific dog, the dog that bit me.

"I saw **the** elephant at the zoo." Here, we're talking about a specific noun. Probably there is only one elephant at the zoo.

#### Countable and Uncountable Nouns

**(The)** can be used with uncountable nouns, or the article can be omitted entirely.

* "I love to sail over **the** water" (some specific body of water) or "I love to sail over water" (any water).
* "He spilled **the** milk all over the floor" (some specific milk, perhaps the milk you bought earlier that day) or "He spilled milk all over the floor" (any milk).

"A/an" can be used only with count nouns.

* "I need **a** bottle of water."
* "I need **a** new glass of milk."

Most of the time, you can't say, "She wants a water," unless you're implying, say, a bottle of water.

#### Geographical use of the

There are some specific rules for using **the** with geographical nouns.

Do not use **the** before:

* names of most countries/territories: Italy, Mexico, Bolivia; however, the Netherlands, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, the United States
* names of cities, towns, or states: Seoul, Manitoba, Miami
* names of streets: Washington Blvd., Main St.
* names of lakes and bays: Lake Titicaca, Lake Erie except with a group of lakes likethe Great Lakes
* names of mountains: Mount Everest, Mount Fuji except with ranges of mountains like ***the*** Andes or ***the*** Rockies or unusual names like ***the*** Matterhorn
* names of continents (Asia, Europe)
* names of islands (Easter Island, Maui, Key West) except with island chains like **the** Aleutians, **the** Hebrides, or **the** Canary Islands

Do use ***the*** before:

* names of rivers, oceans and seas: ***the*** Nile, ***the*** Pacific
* points on the globe: ***the*** Equator, ***the*** North Pole
* geographical areas: ***the*** Middle East, ***the*** West
* deserts, forests, gulfs, and peninsulas: ***the*** Sahara, ***the*** Persian Gulf, ***the*** Black Forest, ***the*** Iberian Peninsula

#### Omission of Articles

Some common types of nouns that don't take an article are:

* Names of languages and nationalities: Chinese, English, Spanish, Russian (unless you are referring to the population of the nation: "**The** Spanish are known for their warm hospitality.")
* Names of sports: volleyball, hockey, baseball

Names of academic subjects