DISSERTATIONES
SERIES THEOLOGICA - LXXVIII

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITAS SANCTAE CRUCIS
FACULTAS THEOLOGIAE

Jackson Johnson

DEFINITENESS OF IDENTIFICATION CLAUSES IN THE GOSPEL AND THE LETTERS OF JOHN

A Linguistic, Grammatical, Exegetical,
and Theological Study of a Few Doubtful Clauses

Thesis ad Doctoratum in Theologia
totaliter edita

ROMAE 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 3
WORD ORDER AND IDENTIFICATION CLAUSES

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the many people who have helped me complete this dissertation.

I am immensely grateful to Rev. Prof. Marco Valerio Fabbri, the supervisor of this thesis, for his scholarly guidance, encouragement, support, and patience. I have profited greatly from his scholarship during my licentiate and doctoral studies. Rev. Prof. James Mwaura Njunge's critical observations and comments have been precious for the betterment of the thesis. I am thankful to Rev. Prof. Giuseppe De Virgilio, the thesis's third supervisor, for his encouragement and support.

Special thanks to the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross authorities and the Prelature of Opus Dei for admitting me to this esteemed university for licentiate and doctoral studies. I sincerely thank all the Biblical theology professors for the academic training I received from them.

I express my gratitude to the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross Foundation, USA, and Aid to the Church in Need for granting me scholarships to pursue licentiate and doctoral studies in Rome. I am indebted to the Rector and the staff of the Collegio Sacerdotale Altomonte, where I resided during my licentiate studies. I am deeply thankful to the Superior and the Sisters of the Villa Maria Assunta for providing me with a pleasant stay and study atmosphere to complete this dissertation.

I would like to express my gratitude to Most Rev. Paul Antony Mullassery, Bishop of Quilon and Most Rev. Stanley Roman, Bishop Emeritus, for their prayers, support, and encouragement. In addition, I thank all the priests of the Diocese of Quilon, especially my batchmates, for their care and concern.

Finally, I am grateful to everyone who directly or indirectly helped me complete this dissertation.

ABBREVIATIONS[1]

א	Codex Sinaiticus
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ABR	*Australian Biblical Review*
AKJV	Authorized King James Version
Amp	The Amplified New Testament
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASV	American Standard Version
B	Codex Vaticanus
BDF	Blass, F., A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago, 1961.
Beck	The New Testament in the Language of Today William F. Beck
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BH	Biblical Hebrew
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 2014.
bis	*twice*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BSE	*Brno Studies in English*
BVC	*Bible et vie chrétienne*
C	Complement
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CEI	Edizione ufficiale della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana (2008)

[1] All abbreviations of ancient literature, academic journals and monograph series follow the forms indicated in the *SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christians Studies* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999).

cent.	century
cf.	*confer*, compare
ch.	chapter
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
cod.	codex
D	Determiner
DA	Discourse Analysis
diss.	dissertation
DP	*Determiner Phrase*
EBib	*Etude biblique*
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by
e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example
et al.	*et alii,* and others
etc.	*et cetera*, and the rest
EHLL	*Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
FoLi	*Folia Linguistica*
FLH	*Folia Linguistica Historica*
FN	*Filología neotestamentaria*
ESV	English Standard Version
GNT	Good News Translation
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.
ICC	International Critical Commentary
i.e.	*id est*, that is
ISV	International Standard Version
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JL	*Journal of Linguistics*
JSem	*Journal of Semantics*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KJV	King James Version

LA	*Liber Annuus*
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek OT)
Ling&P	*Linguistics and Philosophy*
MG	Modern Greek
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text (of the OT)
n.	note
NA28	*Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Barbara Aland, Curt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. Stuttgart, 2012.
NABPR	National Association of the Baptist Professors of Religion
NABRE	New American Bible Revised Edition
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NET	New English Translation
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIRV	New International Reader's Version
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
no.	number
NP	Noun phrase/nominal phrase
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NRSVCE	New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition
NT	New Testament
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
O	Object
Or	*Orientalia*
Orig.	Origen
OT	Old Testament
P	Predicate
P[66]	Papyrus Bodmer II

P[75]	Papyrus Bodmer XV
PN	Predicate Nominative
PNTC	Pelican New Testament Commentaries
REG	*Revue des études grecques*
repr.	Reprinted
rev.	Revided (by)
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
SALT	Semantics and Linguistic Theory
S&Prag	Semantics and Pragmatics
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
ST	*Studia theologica*
SubBi	*Subsidia biblica*
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
trans.	translator, translated by
V	Verb
v(v).	verse(s)
viz.	*videlicet*, namely
vol(s).	volume(s)
vs.	versus
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Identification clauses are a particular type of clauses or constructions found throughout the New Testament (NT). Their occurrence in the Gospel and Letters of John is widespread compared to other books in the NT. We have counted 386 identification clauses in the NT, of which 135 are in the Gospel and Letters of John (34.97%). The extension of the Gospel and the Letters of John is 13.21% in the NT.[2] However, the structure of identification clauses is not the same. For example, S-P-C is the most attested form, which is different than S-C-P, C-P-S etc., to mention a few. Their "strange" structure causes interpretational difficulty for the grammarians and the exegetes alike. An additional problem is that one of the constituents is sometimes not explicit (or understood), thus yielding the structures S-P, S-C, P-C, etc.

Therefore, the objective of the thesis is to study the identification clauses in their linguistic, grammatical aspects and in their exegetical and theological consequences. First, our study is linguistic because we heed the call of the recent trends in biblical studies. Many scholars utilize concepts and terminologies from general linguistics and attempt to apply them to biblical studies. But, of course, this is not positively accepted by all scholars. The second aspect is grammatical because the study involves the grammatical considerations of subject, predicate, and complement and their arrangement in a clause (syntax). Third, it is exegetical because the study of the identification clauses comprises the exegetical analysis of the clauses to determine their definiteness. Finally, it is theological, because interpretations of some identification clauses have a bearing on the theological views of the authors. For example in John 20:31: ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ, the theological view has implications for the purpose of the Gospel.

The above mentioned linguistic, grammatical, and exegetical treatment of identification clauses raises the following three main difficulties in their interpretation:

[2] There are 18,240 words in the Johannine literature and they are distributed as follows: Gospel of John (15, 635), 1 John (2,141), 2 John (245), 3 John (219). Felix Just, "New Testament Statistics," [cited 20 February 2022]. Online: https://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT-Statistics-Greek.htm

1. How to decide whether a particular clause is identification or not. This question concerns the pre-copular and post-copular anarthrous complements although the former is far more numerous than the latter.[3] In the following examples, the complement in (1) is preverbal and anarthrous. Although also in (2) the complement is preverbal and anarthrous, the subject is not expressed. In (3), the complement is post-verbal, but the complement is anarthrous.

(1) John 1:49b: σὺ βασιλεὺς εἶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.
(2) John 10:36: υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι;
(3) John 18:13b: ὃς ἦν ἀρχιερεὺς τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ἐκείνου

2. How to understand the complements of absolute ἐγώ εἰμι sayings? It raises the question of the fundamental constituents of an identification clause. Can a clause be considered an identification clause even without one of the tripartite constituents? What if an element is missing or understood as illustrated in (4)? These questions will be addressed in chapter six in the examination of the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings.

(4) John 8:24: ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ πιστεύσητε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι, ἀποθανεῖσθε ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν.

3. Another difficulty involved is the determination of the subject and the complement in some clauses (e.g., Christological confessions). Unlike the problems mentioned in 1 and 2, these clauses have all three constituents of an identification clause, and the articular complement is post-verbal. However, the difficulty involved is: which is the subject and which is the complement as represented by the example (5). A question is, "is it important to determine the subject and the complement? Does this have theological and translational implications"? In the case of convertible clauses, can they be converted without changing the meaning?

(5) 1 John 2:22a: Τίς ἐστιν ὁ ψεύστης εἰ μὴ ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός;

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Through the title of the thesis, we wish to indicate three limitations of the study. First, we intend to study only identification clauses. This excludes copular clauses and other clauses with finite and infinite verbal forms. Second, our study of identification clauses is limited to a selected number of clauses. The three questions mentioned in the above section represent the three groups of clauses we shall take up in our detailed study. This excludes a detailed study of clear identification clauses. The reasons why a clause is considered an identification clause will be explained in their grammatical study in chapter two. As far as clear identification clauses are concerned, we shall only list them.

---

[3] Some grammarians call the complements "predicate" or "predicate nominative." Throughout the thesis we shall use the functional terminologies such as Subject (S), Predicate (P), and Complement (C). However, we shall also use the terminologies used by a scholar when we deal with their views.

This is valid for clear clauses in the Gospel and the Letters of John and also the whole New Testament. As we will notice in chapter four, some scholars merely give the chapter and the verse of the clauses. It is possible that a verse contains more than one clause and when only chapter and verse are given, we are at a loss to decide which clauses are being referred to in the list. It causes disagreement with their views and affects the total number of clauses when statistical figures are presented. To avoid this, we list all the clear clauses so that it is evident to the reader which clauses we are referring to. Moreover, when there is more than one clause in the same verse, we separate them with alphabetical indications, so as to make the list clearer. Third, we explore only problematic clauses in the Gospel and Letters of John. This excludes clauses from other books of the NT whose definiteness could be ascertained after a detailed linguistic, grammatical, and exegetical investigation.

IMPORTANCE OF GENERAL LINGUISTICS IN THE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Instead of basing our study purely on Greek grammatical and exegetical grounds, we begin with the discussion of general linguistics, particularly by explaining the "definiteness" of the identification clauses. In recent years many grammarians have been trying to integrate the principles of general linguistics in NT grammar. Many positive results have been achieved by those studies. Nevertheless, a small number of scholars are sceptical of applying the principles of general linguistics in NT Greek.

Since the primary function of language is communication,[4] general linguistics with its systematic method is concerned with structure in language.[5] Constantine R. Campbell notes the essential difference between the study of a language and linguistics. When one studies a language, he/she studies the content of a particular language while linguistics is concerned with the phenomenon of language. In other words, linguistics pays attention to methodological issues, the principles of how a language functions etc.[6] The method general linguistics employs is not an exegesis that starts from small units such as words, but larger units such as sentences and pericopes.[7]

Regarding the importance of linguistics in biblical studies, Craig C. Bartholomew observes that "since Christians are 'People of the Book,' the debates about language that continue to be central to philosophy and our cultures should not be considered irrelevant. Moreover, the Bible as the recording witness to God's authority is a linguistic artefact and its interpretation is related

---

[4] Simon C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar. Part 1: The Structure of the Clause* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1981), 4-5.

[5] Stanley E. Porter, "Studying Ancient Languages from a Modern Linguistic Perspective: Essential Terms and Terminology," *FN* 2 (1989): 152.

[6] Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015), 51.

[7] J. P. Louw, "Linguistics and Hermeneutics," *Neotestamentica* 4 (1970): 16.

to how we think about language."[8] Peter Cotterell and Max Turner argue that if language is concerned with the formal study of human language and the Bible is written in a human language, linguistics as a discipline should be relevant to everyone who tries to understand and interpret it.[9]

Campbell criticizes the tradition long followed while studying the Greek of the NT, which is strong on the language-learning side but weak on the linguistic side. He proposes that this approach should be readdressed as the principles of linguistics have relevance to exegesis and translation.[10]

Even though Campbell is critical of the traditional approach, he is aware of the factors that complicate the relationship between linguistics and the NT Greek. First, linguistics is a massive, evolving field of study, and it is difficult to keep abreast of all of its developments. Second, since several different linguistic schools have their own principles and methodologies, one may be lost among many alternatives.[11] David A. Black best expresses the difficulty involved in the study of linguistics in the following words: "The terms used in linguistics are too difficult for me to understand. I could never hope to master all of the topics covered in linguistics. Linguists themselves seem uncertain about their conclusions, and the entire discipline is in a state of flux. Why, then, should I enter this jungle"?[12]

Before concluding this section, we now briefly deal with discourse analysis (DA)[13] and its importance in studying NT Greek. DA has been considered one of the most exciting new research areas related to Greek exegesis. Campbell defines DA as an interdisciplinary approach to understanding how units of text relate to one another to create the theme, message, and structure of a text.[14] It is concerned with discovering linguistic patterns in text, using grammatical and semantic criteria, such as cohesion, anaphora, and inter-sentence connectivity.[15] Discourse analysis explores language features that draw its explanations, not from within the sentence or word, but "extrasententially." Put differently, DA does not limit itself to the study of morphology and syntax, but looks to a broader context. For example, in the case of written material,

---

[8] Craig G. Bartholomew, "Before Babel and After Pentecost: Language, Literature, and Biblical Interpretation," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig C. Bartholomew, Colin D. J. Greene, and Karl Möller; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 134.

[9] Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 9.

[10] Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 52.

[11] Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 52.

[12] David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995), 1-2.

[13] DA is also known as *Textlingusitics* and *discourse grammar*.

[14] Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 148.

[15] David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (6th ed.; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008), 148 in Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 149.

explanations are drawn mainly from the previous sentences of the text.[16]

Although many definitions of DA can be found, most of them stress that it deals with text beyond the level of the sentence, such as the pericope, paragraph, wider units, and the text as a whole.[17] Discourse analysis explores text according to various language levels such as discourse, episode, paragraph, clause complex, clause, word group and word.[18] The unit of study is not a single sentence or part of a clause but a group of sentences, bodies of text that are related to one another somehow.[19]

A difference between traditional grammars and DA is that the former stops at the sentence level when describing the syntax. At the same time, the latter shows how sentences are linked to form paragraphs and how paragraphs are put together to construct a whole discourse.[20] At the same time, it is to be noted that DA does not attempt to replace these more traditional modes of exegesis but is complementary to them. It generally moves from the grammar and syntax of a text to more significant textual concerns.[21] DA aims to provide somewhat objective criteria to address exegetical issues. The traditional exegetical approaches often rely on the interpreter's intuitive insights, which are difficult to assess without a linguistic methodology. Discourse analysis provides a method by which to assess conclusions about the text.[22]

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Apart from a general introduction and a general conclusion, the thesis is divided into six chapters.

In the first chapter, we intend to explore the concept and theories of definiteness. As stated above, this is in line with the modern trend to incorporate some of the concepts and insights from general linguistics to the study of the biblical languages. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the concepts of definiteness, the articles' meaning and uses, and the four theories of definiteness, viz., familiarity, uniqueness, identifiability, and presupposition.

---

[16] Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek* (2d ed.; Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2000), viii.

[17] Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 149.

[18] Andrew W. Pitts, "Greek Word Order and Clause Structure: A Comparative Study of Some New Testament Corpora," in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts; Linguistic Biblical Studies 6; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 343.

[19] Kirk E. Lowery, "Relative Definiteness and the Verbless Claus," in *The Verbless Clauses in Biblical Hebrew* (ed. Cynthia L. Miller; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 244.

[20] Moisés Silva, *God, Language, and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics* (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 4; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 118.

[21] Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 149.

[22] Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 149.

The second chapter, "grammatical analysis of identification clauses," consists of three parts. The first section will analyse the uses, special construction, and absence of the article. The next section will focus on identification clauses in Greek. After considering the structure of a Greek proposition, the rules for identifying the subject will be enumerated. Then, identification clauses in the major Greek grammars will be presented. The final section will concentrate on identification clauses in Hebrew.

The issue of word order is examined in the third chapter. This chapter has five subdivisions. The first section addresses the difference between fixed word order for languages like English and the flexible order for Greek. A general view of word order in Ancient Greek and New Testament Greek is also included in this section. The second and third parts deal with the linguistic concepts of word order in the NT. Markedness and prominence are often put forward as explanations for variations in word order. Although they are related concepts and are interchangeable, we treat them separately in the fourth part. In the last section, we shall briefly comment on word order in Biblical Hebrew. As in Greek, we shall focus on word order in major Hebrew grammars, factors of word order, and relation between word order and the concept of markedness.

The objective of the fourth chapter is to provide a statistical sketch of the identification clauses. The first and second parts will list all the identification clauses in the Gospel and Letters of John and in the NT respectively. In the third section, with the support of various charts, we will illustrate how identification clauses are distributed in the NT. The fourth section will attempt to offer explanations for the variation of the positions of the constituents in the clauses. In the final section, a comparative study with lists of E. C. Colwell, Philip B. Harner, and Paul Stephen Dixon is performed.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to a detailed study of anarthrous complements, which correspond to the first group of problematic clauses mentioned above. Twenty-three clauses are examined in detail to determine their definiteness. In addition to the grammatical, exegetical, and theological analysis, we also include insights from general linguistics to determine the definiteness of clauses.

The sixth chapter is comprised of the second and third groups of problematic clauses indicated above. In the first section, we focus on the division and the detailed study of the "absolute" ἐγώ εἰμι sayings. In the second section, we shall consider the "Christological confessions" and their analysis. The method of analysis for chapters five and six are similar. Translations from the commentaries, grammars, bible versions, and monographs will be listed to compare how they differ in determining the definiteness of a clause by their translations.

In the general conclusion, we shall not attempt to summarise the chapters once again, as we will already do that at the end of each chapter; instead, we will list the main findings of the thesis. The findings which are relevant to the study of the identification clauses will be summarised in eight subsections.

Chapter 1

THE CONCEPT AND THEORIES
OF DEFINITENESS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we intend to provide a background study to the concept of linguistics and to introduce the notion of definiteness in general linguistics. This chapter is organised as follows: in the first part, we introduce the concept of definiteness, exploring its definitions and meaning. The second part will deal with the definite and the indefinite articles, focusing on the main uses of the definite article. The four main theories of definiteness, viz., familiarity, uniqueness, identifiability, and presupposition, will be the focus of the third part.

1 THE CONCEPT OF DEFINITENESS

1.1 MEANING OF DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE

The *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* highlights that definiteness is defined in more recent linguistic studies in terms of previous mention. Accordingly, the referent is conveyed to the hearer as something that was previously mentioned in the text or as previous knowledge. It is achieved by using determiners with noun phrases. An exception to this is proper names which do not require any determiners as they are inherently definite.[1] According to *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar*, the criterion for definiteness is an identifiable or exclusive reference.[2] On the contrary, indefinite is defined as not having or indicating any particular identifiable reference.[3] *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* notes that definite is used in grammar and semantics to refer to a specific, identifiable entity. Definiteness in English is generally conveyed through definite determiners (such

---

[1] Hadumod Bussmann, *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (ed. and trans. Gregory Trauth and Kerstin Kazzazi; London: Routledge, 1996), 282.

[2] Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 110.

[3] Aarts, Sylvia, and Edmund, *The Oxford Dictionary*, 209.

as *this, my*), and primarily through the definite article, *the*.[4] In contrast, indefinite is a term used in grammar and semantics to refer to an entity that is not capable of specific identification. Indefiniteness in English is usually conveyed by using the indefinite article, *a*, or an indefinite pronoun such as *one, some*, etc.[5]

Jirí Krámský defines the term determinedness in the following words: "By the term "determinedness" we understand the fact that nouns are classified according to whether the content expressed by the noun is clear and identifiable in a concrete way or not."[6] The definition Wallace L. Schafe proposes also emphasises definiteness as a discourse-pragmatic notion that is identifiable. A definite referent is one which the speaker assumes that the hearer will be able to identify, i.e., to locate in his mental representation.[7]

In the same line of thought, Klaus von Heusinger and George A. Kaiser view definiteness as a discourse-pragmatic property which indicates that the discourse referent associated with a definite expression can be identified with an already introduced discourse item. But contrary to the other arguments, they propose that definiteness does not express the identifiability of the referent; rather, definiteness expresses familiarity in a discourse structure.[8]

John A. Hawkins opines that a definite noun phrase is used when a speaker presupposes that the expression's referent is accessible to the hearer. In other words, the speaker assumes that there is a unique referent that the hearer can identify, either (i) because the referent is previously mentioned in the context of discourse or (ii) because the referent is part of the interlocutor's shared knowledge, or (iii) because there is enough descriptive content in the sentence to identify the referent and the referent becomes identifiable as the sentence is processed.[9] Fabio Gasparini argues that definiteness signals that a given noun is definite because the speaker believes that the listener has enough information to identify the referent. The linguistic codification of definiteness mainly comes through simple determiners, such as definite articles, or complex determiners, such as determinatives and pronouns. The following examples show how definiteness is marked in different contexts:

[4] Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 133.

[5] Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 241.

[6] Jirí Krámský, *The Article and the Concept of Definiteness in Language* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1972; repr. 2015), 30 in Andrew Chesterman, *On Definiteness: A Study with Special Reference to English and Finnish* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2-3.

[7] Wallace L. Chafe,"Givenness, Contrastiveness, Definiteness, Subjects, Topics, and Points of View," in *Subject and Topic* (ed. Charles N. Li; London: Academic Press, 1976), 28.

[8] Klaus von Heusinger and Georg Kaiser, "The Interaction of Animacy, Definiteness and Specificity in Spanish," in *Proceedings of the Workshop "Semantic and Syntactic Aspects of Specificity in Romance Languages"* (ed. Klaus von Heusinger and Georg Kaiser; Arbeitspapier 113: Fachbereich Sprachwissenschaft; Konstanz: Universität Konstanz, 2003), 44.

[9] John A. Hawkins, *Definiteness and Indefiniteness: A Study in Reference and Grammaticality Prediction* (London: Routledge, 1978; rev. ed. 2015), 167-68.

(1) Open **the door**! (situational use)
(2) **The sun** today is really hot (general knowledge)
(3) A man with a woman walked in. I knew **the man**, but I'd never seen **that woman** before (anaphoric).[10]

According to Cristina Guardiano, a nominal expression is definite when its referent is marked as accessible or identifiable by the hearer based on information available in the extralinguistic or linguistic context or information of general knowledge.[11] Finally, Maria Napoli concludes that the definition of definiteness has been a thorny problem for general linguists, logicians, semanticists, pragmatists. In order to single out the underlying principles of definiteness, different theories have been proposed and developed based on semantic and/or pragmatic notions.[12]

From the above analysis of the definitions from different linguists, we can deduce certain observations. First, almost all linguists opine that definiteness is compatible with the notion of identifiability. Second, they all agree that the referent should be identifiable to the speaker and the hearer. Those who disagree with this view are von Heusinger and Kaiser, who associate definiteness not with identifiability but rather familiarity.

1.2 TYPES OF DEFINITENESS

Maria Napoli divides the concept of definiteness into two viz., logical definiteness and pragmatic definiteness.

1.2.1 Logical Definiteness

Logical definiteness is further divided into inherent definiteness and derived definiteness.

First, we shall deal with inherent definiteness. An example of nouns whose definiteness is logically inherent are definite nouns, i.e., common nouns denoting unique entities and proper nouns. Nouns of unique entities refer to something unique in the world (the Moon, the Sun, etc.) and nouns denoting something unique in a relative world concerning a specific space or time, shared only by a restricted group of people—for example, *the Queen of England*, *the Prime Minister of Italy* etc. Regarding the use of the article with proper nouns, there are variations among languages. Some languages, such as English, do not admit the definite article with proper names. Proper nouns are compulsorily or optionally accompanied by the definite article in other

[10] Fabio Gasparini, "Grammaticalization of Adnominal Demonstratives in Neo-Aramaic," *RiCOGNIZIONI* 1, no. 2 (2014): 98 (emphasis in the original).

[11] Cristina Guardiano, "The History of Greek Articles: A Syntactic Approach," in *The Article in Post-Classical Greek* (Publications in Translation and Textlinguistics 10; ed. Daniel King; Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2019), 60-61.

[12] Maria Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article from Classical Greek to New Testament Greek," in *The Article in Post-Classical Greek* (Publications in Translation and Textlinguistics 10; ed. Daniel King; Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2019), 19.

languages, as in Modern Greek and Italian. Nevertheless, proper names, first or second-person pronouns and unique reference nouns, e.g. *the sun*, *God*, *the Prime Minister,* are inherently definite.[13]

Secondly, nouns whose definiteness is logically derived include generics and abstracts.[14] Generics are defined as common nouns referring not to a specific individual or entity but to a class as a whole, distinguished by some particular properties which makes it "unique." These properties are shared by all its members, differentiating them from members of other classes. For example, in the sentence "dogs bark," the noun "dogs" has a generic reading referring to dogs as a class rather than to some specific dogs.[15] Another case of semantic definiteness arises when a noun is determined by a superlative, an ordinal or polar contrastive attributes (e.g. "the tallest man," "the third occasion," "the other book").[16]

Abstract nouns like "hope," "truth," "virtue," denoting something which is typically "non-observable" and "non-measurable" are regarded as resembling proper nouns, with which they share "unique identifiability." At the same time, like generics, what they identify is not discretely identifiable as an individual unit.[17] Cross linguistically, abstracts may be typically bare, i.e. anarthrous (in English) or typically definite (in Italian and French) where the definite article generally precedes them.[18] Napoli cites an example from Randolph Quirk et al. to show the difference in translation.

> (4) **Happiness** is often the product of **honesty**.
> **La felicità** spesso è il risultato **dell'onestà**.[19]

Napoli concludes that both generics and abstract nouns are not typically indefinite; conversely, they are often denoted by definite noun phrases in languages with articles and/or by bare noun phrases. Their indefinite use generally corresponds to a marked or more restricted use. Differing from proper nouns and nouns of unique entities, which are inherently definite, the definiteness of generics and abstracts is a matter of logical inference since it depends on the fact that this noun represents the typical instance of the unique category to which it belongs.[20]

---

[13] Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 21.

[14] Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 21.

[15] Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 22.

[16] Angelika Müth, "Categories of Definiteness in Classical Armenian," *Oslo Studies in Language* 3, no. 3 (2011): 14.

[17] John M. Anderson, *The Grammar of Names* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 234-45.

[18] Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 23.

[19] Randolph Quirk et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985), 286 in Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 23 (emphasis in the original).

[20] Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 23.

1.2.2 Pragmatic Definiteness

Pragmatic definites acquire unambiguous reference within the particular linguistic or extralinguistic context in which they are used. There are different kinds of pragmatic definiteness. Pragmatic definites are further divided into those dependent on linguistic context and dependent on extra-linguistic context.

Pragmatic definiteness that is dependent on the linguistic context results in anaphoric uses of the definite article. In anaphoric uses, there are direct anaphora and indirect anaphora. In anaphoric processes, the reference of a given element is not established by interpretation of its descriptive content. Rather, it is acquired since it has been previously introduced in general through an indefinite description. When these two elements are co-referential, it is called direct anaphora, as in the following example.[21]

(5) I had a look at a new house yesterday. The kitchen was extra large.

Indirect anaphora is based on the hearer's inferences because a specific referent has been previously mentioned. This inferred relationship allows the speaker to use the definite article when speaking of one of these referents, even though it has not been explicitly mentioned before.[22] This means that in indirect anaphora, the reference of a definite description is still determined by the previous mention of a linguistic element, but the two elements are not co-referential; they are rather connected on the basis of the associative process. Napoli cites an example from Hawkins, who uses the label associative anaphora. If a speaker mentions a book, he can immediately talk about the author, the title, the content etc.[23]

(6) Yesterday I brought a book. The author is Italian.

Nouns can be definite because of the extra-linguistic context in which two types are distinguished. In the first type, the definite noun is an entity physically accessible in the extra-linguistic context, shared by the speaker and the hearer. This is the case in which an object is visible and unique at the moment of speaking in which the definite article is allowed. This means that the article is employed with a deictic force, as in the following example.

(7) This is my friend.

In the second type of extra-linguistic context, the definite noun is an entity not directly accessible. This subtype includes those cases in which the definite noun corresponds to an entity that is neither visible nor physically accessible in the situation of utterance. However, it is identifiable, based on the extra-linguistic context, as its reference is inferred through shared knowledge that both speaker and hearer are aware of a situation in which that spe-

---

[21] Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 24.

[22] Maria Napoli, "Aspects of Definiteness in Greek," *Studies in Language* 33, no. 3 (2009): 572.

[23] Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 25.

cific referent exists. Because it is widely known or of evidence taken from the context itself in which the situation provides the framework for identifying the referent.

(8) The Prime Minister will visit the President tomorrow.[24]

2 DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES

2.1 ORIGIN AND MEANING OF ARTICLES

Paul Christophersen admits that the origin of the articles is obscure.[25] However, there have been many attempts to trace the origin of the article, and as a consequence, various theories have been proposed. According to Walter De Mulder and Anne Carlier, in most cases, the definite article originates from a weakened demonstrative, mostly the distal demonstrative or the 3rd person demonstrative. In contrast, the indefinite article is derived from the numeral "one."[26]

After considering the origin of the articles, we shall now focus on the meaning of the articles. The article is an essential aspect of definiteness. Regarding the etymology of articles, Andrew Chesterman opines that the term article derives from the ancient word *arthron*, which is a term used to denote relative pronouns and originally also personal pronouns.[27]

Paul Wexler makes an interesting observation when he explores the relation between articles and (in)definiteness. For a native English speaker, the absence of an article system in other languages is a wonder and he/she may even consider it a shortcoming. He further adds that the speaker of English may wonder how speakers of "non-article-bearing languages" get along without the tertiary opposition of *man, a man, the man* and the binary opposition *a tree, the tree* or *trees, the trees*.[28]

Mustafa Ali Harb tries to define an article in a simple way: in linguistics, an article is often defined as a word or a determiner used with a noun to indicate the kind of reference made by the noun. It is needless to say that English has the definite article (the) and the indefinite article (a/an).[29] Regarding the nature and uses of articles, Nicholas Catasso opines that an article is a member of the class of determiners that restricts or particularizes a noun indicating

[24] Napoli, "Functions of the Definite Article," 25.

[25] Paul Christophersen, *The Articles: A Study of their Theory and Use in English* (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1939), 19 in Vomlela, "Articles and Definiteness," 5.

[26] Walter De Mulder and Anne Carlier "Definite Articles," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grammaticalization* (ed. Bernd Heine and Heiko Narrog; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 522-35.

[27] Chesterman, *On Definiteness*, 4.

[28] Paul Wexler, "On the Non-Lexical Expression of Determinedness with Special Reference to Russian and Finnish," *SL* 30, no. 1 (1976): 34.

[29] Mustafa Ali Harb, "A Closer Look at the English Article System: Internal and External Sources of Difficulty Revisited," *International Journal of Linguistics* 6, no. 4 (2014): 88.

the type of reference made by it, with very peculiar uses which in usage are to be considered language-specific.[30]

The importance of articles in communication is well expressed by John Hewson when he opines that articles are among the ten most frequent words of English discourse.[31] The importance of articles in communication is highlighted by María Belén Díez-Bedmar and Szilvia Papp when they argue that knowledge of the article system is an essential aspect of both grammatical and communicative competence. The article system is employed to express definiteness and specificity. It is also linked to pragmatic notions such as shared assumptions between discourse participants about their knowledge of and familiarity with a referent or the inferrability, identifiability, salience, and relevance of a referent to them as discourse participants.[32]

2.2 Uses of the Definite Article

John A. Hawkins[33] lists different uses of the definite article. He claims that his classification is found elsewhere in the literature, especially in Paul Christophersen and Otto Jespersen. In the introduction to his book, he issues a warning that several usage types claimed to be different are not different.[34]

1. Anaphoric use: This type of article refers to the definite article functioning as anaphor, referring to a known referent in the noun phrase. In this case, the referent is already known as this is a second mention. For example, the noun phrase "the machine" refers to the referent "a lathe" in:

> (1) Bill was working at a lathe the other day. All of a sudden, the machine stopped turning.[35]

2. Associative anaphoric use: According to Hawkins, this usage is very similar to the anaphoric use. Anaphoric use is somewhat equational and grammatical. For example, an indefinite article equates definite article in almost all situations (a = the in "a lathe" = "the machine," "a book" = "the book"). For example, "fumes," which can be associated with many objects, are associated anaphorically with the head noun "car" in (2):

---

[30] Nicholas Catasso, "The Grammaticalization of Demonstratives," *Journal of Universal Language* 12, no. 1 (2011): 12.

[31] John Hewson, *Article and Noun in English* (Janua Linguarum: Series Practica 104; The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1972), 131 in Harb, "English Article System," 87.

[32] María Belén Díez-Bedmar and Szilvia Papp, "The Use of the English Article System by Chinese and Spanish Learners," in *Linking Up Contrastive and Learner Corpus Approach* (ed. Gaëtanelle Gilquin, Szilvia Papp, and María Belén Díez-Bedmar; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 147.

[33] Hawkins, *Definiteness and Indefiniteness*, 106-49.

[34] For the sake of brevity, we shall not include all the examples here. Where the examples are identical, we shall limit the exposition to one or two.

[35] Hawkins, *Definiteness and Indefiniteness*, 107.

(2) The man drove past our house in a car. The exhaust fumes were terrible.[36]

3. Visible situation use: The visible situation refers to the situation of use in which the referent is visible to both the speaker and the hearer in order for the usage to be operational. It implies that the referent being identified, "the bucket," is visible to both the speaker and the hearer.

(3) Pass me the bucket, please.[37]

4. Immediate situation use: It is similar to the visible situation use in that the referent exists in the immediate situation in which the propositional act of reference is taking place. However, the referent need not be visible to both parties as in (4), and this usage is also commonly found on notices as in (5).

(4) Don't go in there, chum. *The dog* will bite you.
(5) Beware of *the dog*.[38]

5. Larger situation use: this is similar to immediate situation use except that the hearer requires larger knowledge to locate the referent situated in a larger context than that of the immediate context. According to Hawkins, the referent in this category is referred to on the basis of the hearer's knowledge of entities of a larger situation of utterance. Furthermore, this category is sub-divided into (a) specific knowledge in a larger situation and (b) general knowledge in a larger situation. In the specific knowledge in the larger situation, the speaker and the hearer share the same knowledge of the referent. For example, the speaker and the hearer share the knowledge of a town with a gibbet at the top of a street, such that "the Gibbet" in (6) is quickly and accurately identified.

(6) The Gibbet no longer stands.

In other words, the specific knowledge of "the Gibbet" is crucial to process the expression accurately, so this is termed specific knowledge in a larger situation. According to Hawkins, unlike the specific knowledge in the larger situation use in which specific knowledge of the referent being identified is required, the general knowledge in the larger situation use concerns a general knowledge of the existence of certain types of objects in certain types of situations.

(7) Have you seen the bridesmaids?

In the example in (7) said at a wedding ceremony, the hearer and the speaker would exhibit some general knowledge in the larger situation, which implies that they knew some particular bridesmaids and refer to them as "the bridesmaids."[39]

---

[36] Hawkins, *Definiteness and Indefiniteness*, 124-25.

[37] Hawkins, *Definiteness and Indefiniteness*, 110-11.

[38] Hawkins, *Definiteness and Indefiniteness*, 111-12.

[39] Hawkins, *Definiteness and Indefiniteness*, 115-17.

2.3 Indefinite Article

Regarding the development of a grammatical marker for indefiniteness, Christophersen[40] and Givón[41] suggest the numeral "one" as the source for this development. In Romance languages, the indefinite article is the evolution of the Latin quantifier *unus*, meaning "one," "only one," which is grammaticalized to a different extent in the different languages.[42] As an example, Elizabeth Stark observes the case of Italian when she says: "[Italian] seems to be halfway in between the strongly grammaticalized system of French indefinite determiners and the facultative indefinite article of Spanish."[43]

From the following examples, it is evident that in (8a), the indefinite article is used to introduce a new referent into the discourse, whose referential identity is unknown to the hearer. On the contrary, in (8b), the speaker uses the definite article because of the presupposition that the hearer can identify it, that the referent has been previously mentioned or that the referent is part of the shared knowledge of the speaker and the hearer.[44]

(8) a. Yesterday I saw *a dog*.
   b. Yesterday I saw *the dog*.

Regarding the relationship between indefiniteness and uniqueness, we can conclude that, on the one hand, definiteness implies uniqueness because there is only one entity that satisfies the descriptive content of the definite NP.[45] On the other hand, Christopher Lyons opines that an indefinite marker may imply non-uniqueness or may be neutral with respect to uniqueness: "it appears that, while *the* logically entails uniqueness with singular noun phrases, *a* is logically neutral with respect to this."[46]

Napoli observes that (in)definiteness is not universally marked by specialised grammatical means. On the contrary, a large number of languages lack a marker for definiteness and/or indefiniteness.[47] Although articles are the common strategy to mark (in)definiteness, their distribution varies cross-linguistically. Table 1.1 from Matthew S. Dryer illustrates the distribu-

---

[40] Christophersen, *The Articles*, in Maria Napoli, "When the Indefinite Article Implies Uniqueness: A Case Study from Old Italian," *FoLi* 47, no. 1 (2013): 184.

[41] Talmy Givón, "On the Development of the Numeral 'One' as an Indefinite Marker," *FLH* 2 (1981): 35-53 in Napoli, "Indefinite Article," 184.

[42] Napoli, "Indefinite Article," 184.

[43] Elisabeth Stark, "Gender, Number, and Indefinite Articles: About the "Typological Inconsistency" of Italian," in *Nominal Determination: Typology, Context, Constraints, and Historical Emergence* (ed. Elisabeth Stark, Elisabeth Leiss, and Werner Abraham; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 50 in Napoli, "Indefinite Article," 184.

[44] Napoli, "Indefinite Article," 186.

[45] Napoli, "Indefinite Article," 186.

[46] Christopher Lyons, *Definiteness* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11.

[47] Napoli, "Indefinite Article," 186.

tion of indefiniteness markers in a sample of 473 languages.[48] Contrary to the general assumption that indefinite articles generally develop from the numeral "one," Christoph Schroeder has this to say: "most European languages that have an indefinite article have turned the functional difference between the numeral "one" and the indefinite article into formal means of distinction."[49] Thus, to mention an example, English has separate words for the numeral ("one") and the indefinite article ("a") and belongs to group 1 in Table 1.1. In contrast, in Italian the numeral and the article are identical where the accent may distinguish them and only the numeral is stressed. Therefore it belongs to group 2 in Table 1.1.[50]

Finally, regarding the function of indefinite articles, Bernd Heine expresses the difficulty of classifying and interpreting them in the following words: "in spite of the many treatments of indefinite articles over the course of the past decades there is not much agreement on how they should be viewed, defined, or located in grammar."[51]

---

1. Indefinite word distinct from numeral for "one": 91
2. Numeral for "one" is used as indefinite article: 90
3. Indefinite affix on noun: 23
4. No indefinite article but definite article: 81
5. Neither indefinite nor definite article: 188

....
Total: 473

Table 1.1: Indefiniteness markers across languages[52]

3 THEORIES OF DEFINITENESS

In this section, we shall explore, from the point of view of general linguistics, the four main theories of definiteness viz., familiarity, uniqueness, identifiability, and presupposition.

3.1 FAMILIARITY THEORY

In the familiarity view, according to Kyle Rawlings, definite descriptions are felicitous if they refer to a familiar entity.[53] He further adds that the use of a

---

[48] Matthew S. Dryer, "Indefinite Articles," in *The World Atlas of Language Structures* (ed. Martin Hapelmath et al.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 158.

[49] Christoph Schroeder, "Articles and Article Systems in Some Areas of Europe," in *Pragmatic Organization of Discourse in the Languages of Europe* (ed. Giuliano Bernini and Marcia L. Schwartz; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006), 556.

[50] Napoli, "Indefinite Article," 187.

[51] Bernd Heine, *Cognitive Foundations of Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 67.

[52] Dryer, "Indefinite Articles," 186.

[53] Kyle Rawlins, "Possessive Definites and the Definite Article," 1. [cited 14 February 2019]. Online: https://rawlins.io/downloads/various/rawlins_2005_possessive_definites_qp.pdf

definite determiner is a familiar use if and only if there is at least one entity in the discourse model that satisfies the descriptive content of the determiner's nominal complement.[54]

In the same line of thought, Ana Aguliar Guevara proposes that a definite article is felicitous only if the hearer presumably knows the existence of its referent.[55] In the following examples, it is clear that (1a) is infelicitous since no familiarity is established regarding the definite description of "the man." However, in (1b), a familiarity is established between "the man" in the second sentence and "a man" in the first sentence.[56]

(1) a.* The man just left.[57]
    b. A strange man was in the cave earlier, but the man just left.

From the following example (2), it is clear that "the book" in the second sentence refers to the indefinite "a book."

(2) John bought a book and a magazine. The book was expensive.[58]

Christopher Lyons begins to explain his concept of familiarity with the following examples:

(3) I bought a car this morning.
(4) I bought the car this morning.

According to Lyons, "the car" here is in some sense more "definite," "specific," "particular," "individualised," etc. When the speaker uses an indefinite noun phrase, only the speaker can understand what is being referred to, and the hearer cannot. On the other hand, using a definite noun phrase enables both the speaker and the hearer to understand it. In short, "the" signals that the entity denoted by the noun phrase is familiar to both speaker and hearer, and "a" is used where the speaker does not want to signal such shared familiarity.[59]

So far, we have seen that if a definite description is felicitous, it should be familiar to both the speaker and the hearer. A question can be posed here: how are we familiar with the entity in question? Dimitra Lazaridou-Chatzigoga opines that familiarity is assured based on the previous discourse, which includes some explicit mention of the entity. She considers acquaintance with the entity as the basis of familiarity. When such acquaintance is not established, we use an indefinite noun phrase because we lack the information needed for a felicitous use of a definite. She further observes that definites act

---

[54] Rawlins, "Possessive Definites," 3.

[55] Ana Aguilar Guevara, "Weak Definites: Semantics, Lexicon and Pragmatics" (Ph.D. diss., Utrech University, 2014), 11-12.

[56] Guevara, "Weak Definites," 4.

[57] An asterisk is commonly used to indicate linguistic forms that are unattested or grammatically unacceptable.

[58] Guevara, "Weak Definites," 4.

[59] Lyons, *Definiteness*, 2-3.

like an understanding between speaker and hearer and that both interlocutors need to be aware of that understanding. In the following example, if the speaker utters (5) and the hearer does not understand, the immediate reaction would be (6).

    (5) The cat is asleep.
    (6) What cat are you talking about?[60]

This leads Lazaridou-Chatzigoga to conclude that when we use a definite noun phrase, we presuppose that we share with the hearer a common ground, a group of entities that we both know of and to which we can refer via language. Thus, the concept of common ground is that when someone uses a definite noun phrase, he has the intention to refer to the entities shared by himself and the hearer so that they can both identify the referent of a noun phrase. On the contrary, if the speaker utters a definite with no previous context provided, the hearer has no basis for interpreting the definite, so he will not understand what the speaker is referring to.[61]

Major proponents of the familiarity theory are Apollonius Dyscolus, Paul Christophersen, Otto Jespersen, Dwight Bolinger, John A. Hawkins, Ellen Prince, Irene Heim, Hans Kamp and Uwe Reyle, Craige Roberts.[62]

Lazaridou-Chatzigoga argues that familiarity is a notion that has been associated with the use of the definite article since antiquity.[63] Although the hypothesis of familiarity goes back to the work of Apollonius Dyscolus (2nd cent. A.D.), who studied the occurrence of the definite article in Ancient Greek, in the modern times, it received much attention due to work of the Danish grammarian Paul Christophersen. He is generally considered to be the first to present a coherent theory of definiteness based on the notion of familiarity.

In Christophersen's view, what distinguishes definite from indefinite descriptions is whether or not the addressee of the utterance is presumed to be acquainted with the referent of the noun phrase. Thus, Christophersen remarks: "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."[64]

Christophersen uses the concepts of speaker and hearer, the basis of linguistic communication, and bases his analysis on the common ground these individuals (the speaker and the hearer) form together. He argues that the use of the definite article in English directs the hearer to the referent of a noun phrase by indicating that this referent is familiar to the hearer and speaker. He

---

[60] Dimitra Lazaridou-Chatzigoga, "On Definiteness and the Co-occurrence of the Definite Article with other Determiners in Modern Greek" (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 2009), 15.

[61] Lazaridou-Chatzigoga, "On Definiteness," 16.

[62] Lazaridou-Chatzigoga, "On Definiteness," 16.

[63] Lazaridou-Chatzigoga, "On Definiteness," 25.

[64] Christophersen, *The Articles*, 28.

defines familiarity as "the article *the* brings it about that the potential meaning of the word is attached a certain association with some previously acquired knowledge, by which it can be inferred that only one definite individual is meant. That is what is understood by *familiarity*."[65]

Within current linguistic theory, the familiarity approach is revived by the work of Irene Heim.[66] She uses the metaphor of file cards. She takes the basic meaning of definites to be anaphoric and suggests that a new card is started for every indefinite. For every definite, an old card is updated.[67] She posits that definites must be used to refer back to a familiar discourse entity, where familiarity is satisfied when an entity has been either explicitly introduced into the discourse (strong familiarity) or implicitly introduced by the context (weak familiarity).

(7) For every indefinite, start a new card. For every definite, update an old card.[68]

Barbara Abbott generally supports the views of Heim, but, at the same time, opposes some of them. First, we shall see how she supports the concept of familiarity. Consider the following example:

(8) Mary saw a movie last week. The movie was not very interesting.[69]

In (8), the indefinite NP "a movie" introduces a new entity into the discourse context. Subsequently, that entity is referred to with a definite, "the movie." It is possible to refer to the movie in the second sentence of (8) with the pronoun, "it was not very interesting." Heim groups pronouns and definite descriptions together as being governed by a "familiarity" condition: use of a definite is permitted only when the existence of the referred-to entity has been established in the particular discourse. On the other hand, indefinite descriptions are subject to a "novelty" condition: they presuppose that their referent is being introduced into the discourse for the first time. It is easy to see that this will solve the problem of incomplete descriptions.[70]

Abbott gives examples to oppose the theory of Heim. Though the familiarity theory is very plausible for several uses of definite descriptions, there are some cases it does not appear to cover very well. One of these is definite descriptions, where the descriptive content of the NP is sufficient to determine a unique referent, no matter what the context is.

(9) Mary asked the oldest student in the class to explain everything.

---

[65] Christophersen, *The Articles*, 72.

[66] Irene Heim, "The Semantics of Definite and Indefinite Noun Phrases" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1982).

[67] Irene Heim, "File Change Semantics and the Familiarity Theory of Definiteness," in *Formal Semantics: The Essential Readings* (ed. Paul Portner and Barbara Partee; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 227.

[68] Heim, "File Change Semantics,"227.

[69] Barbara Abbott, "Definite and Indefinite," *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* 3:393.

[70] Abbott, "Definite and Indefinite," 3:393-94.