

Ann. Rep. Asahikawa
Med. Coll.
1995, Vol.16, 7~19

On Qualitative Cognition of Information Constitution and Generic Usage of the Articles in English

Masato YAMAZAKI

In Yamazaki(1994), I treat several cognitive verbs having two different prepositions, i.e. *of* and *about*, with contrastive meanings. For example, *dream of* implies that the speaker has a *whole* image of the dream, in other words, he implies an interest in the 'wholeness' of the information, while *dream about* suggests that he is aware of the *total* constitution of the dream, that is, he intends to convey consciousness of the totality of the information. A similar phenomenon is seen in such cognitive verbs as *feel*, *hear*, *know*, *learn*, *read*, *say*, *speak*, *talk*, *tell*, *think* and *write*. This usage of a preposition *of* is thought to derive from the 'partitive genitive' where *of* means 'some of' before some material nouns like liquid and food. Through a process in which the preposition is connected with cognitive verbs, there occurs a change in the speaker's point of view from a quantitative to a qualitative one. The usage of the two prepositions reflects how the speaker recognises information, which is the object of these cognitive activities. The difference depends on constitutional aspects on which the speaker wants to focus in his utterance. The former paper concludes that the usage of the two prepositions is parallel to that of collective nouns in terms of a numerical feature of the language and it shows the difference of cognition by the speaker.

In the present paper, I propose that the idea, 'distinction between wholeness and totality', is applicable to the two generic articles in English.

First of all, we define the difference between the two terms, wholeness and totality, and see how differently the two ideas function because they are used more or less as similar words in ordinary use. 'Wholeness' is the quality of being complete or a single unit and not broken or divided into parts and therefore, it is recognised when the speaker is interested in some principal but qualitatively

limited information. On the other hand, 'totality' is the quality of being added together or counted to the sum, and thus it is realised when the speaker is concerned with more detailed and comprehensive information or knowledge. In other words, the former is thought to be a unit because of its identity, while the latter is thought to be a sum as a result of being added or counted. Based on this difference, these two prepositions make a semantic difference when they follow cognitive verbs. For example, as Wood (1970: 506) explains, *talk of* 'generally implies something less definite (e.g. 'The last time I saw him he was talking of retiring at the end of the year').' and *of* after *hear*, *know* and *read* suggests how the speaker obtains information, that is, they mean that the speaker has acquired the information indirectly such as through hearsay or a printed source, while *hear about* 'is more vivid, and suggests a fuller knowledge of the details (e.g. 'It was not until an hour later that we heard about what had happened').' In short, selection of the prepositions depends on the modality, the speaker's attitude towards the information.

The contrast becomes clearer in comparison where these prepositions are used in negative sentences. Partiality in *of* deriving from the usage of 'partitive genitive' involves relatively strong negation in *not dream of*, *not hear of* and *not think of* as well as *not that I know* and *no/not speak of*, while *about* suggests euphemistic meaning in *I don't know about*.

It is well-known that there are three kinds of generic expressions in English: a singular noun with an indefinite article, a singular noun with a definite article and a plural noun with no article.¹⁾ Generic meaning is expressed when the speaker refers to a class which contains a particular member. For example,

A dog is a faithful animal./The dog is a faithful animal./Dogs are faithful animals.

all these sentences could be interpreted as generic expressions telling of the particular canine animal. Inoue et al.(1985: 456-457) point out that generic usage does not specify grammatical forms and it is not a syntactic feature, in other words, generic use is an utterly semantic phenomenon. Therefore, it is practically impossible to distinguish generic sentences from non-generic sentences by

their appearances.

We shall see a plural noun with no article in generic usage first, because this expression is different from others in that it does not have an article, so strictly speaking it cannot be a subject in the paper. See Koine (1972: 64). This expression is the most common and frequent among the three, because a plural noun in generic use is more or less ambiguous regarding the range of its reference and does not involve unnecessary specification; it seems to be the most natural and neutral as a generic representation for English speakers.

In the following passages, discussion is limited to generic use with articles. It is necessary to consider the two features, definiteness ($[\pm \text{Def}]$) and specificity ($[\pm \text{Spec}]$), when considering the function of articles. Therefore, we shall examine the relationship between generic usage and these features.

According to Inoue et al. (1985: 446), definiteness is one particular feature of the definite article. This feature is common in demonstratives (*this/that, these/those*), genitive noun phrases and unmarked proper nouns. Its function is reference between two items, one of which is an item which has been (anaphora) or will be introduced (cataphora) in the linguistic context or an item in the situation of utterance and in the common situation shared by the speaker and the hearer (exophora), while the other is an item in question.

Hawkins (1978) points out five major functions of the definite article, one of which is called 'Larger Situation Uses'. They refer to items belonging to information of knowledge which the speaker and the hearer both share. Some examples are *the church, the Queen, the Prime Minister*, etc. and *the sun, the moon, the earth*, etc. It is easy for the hearer to understand what these words having the definite article refer to because the speaker presupposes that the hearer shares a certain information or knowledge of the items in the utterance. In this usage there is reference between an item in the utterance and a subject in the linguistic knowledge shared by the speaker and the hearer, not the antecedent in context. This is called an exophoric reference. The generic definite article is thought to be the nearest to the 'Larger Situation Uses'; this usage is marked $[+\text{Def}]$ by definition. In addition, since the generic definite article also refers to the property of a referent, it is $[\pm \text{Def}]$. We shall see this in more detail later.

According to Inoue et al. (1985: 444), specificity is a feature that the speaker shows whether he assumes that the hearer also realises an actual referent of

noun phrases in question. It is impossible to consider an item in generic use to be [+Spec], because it is the principal characteristic of generic usage that it does not refer to a particular entity. On the other hand, in the above usage, the 'Larger Situation Uses', the speaker implies a particular object. This is a crucial difference between the 'Larger Situation Uses' ([+Def, +Spec]) and generic usage ([+Def, -Spec]), although both usages assume information or knowledge shared by users of the language, on which the feature, [+Def], is based.²⁾

The generic indefinite article is another generic expression which is marked as [-Def, -Spec] through comparison to the feature of the generic definite article. One of the common usages of the indefinite article is similarly described as [-Def, -Spec]. Although the feature description falls into the same type, there should be a difference between generic use and the following use: *I'll get a letter from Anna in a day or two.*³⁾ It is generally thought that generic usage assumes a class but not a member of a class, and therefore, no member can be a referent, while a non-specific indefinite noun phrase supposes a member of a class rather than the class itself, and thus no particular member is identified as a referent. In the latter case, the indefinite article can be replaced with an adjective *some*. A decisive difference is which is seen as a referent, the class or the member of the class. This is a fundamental difference between generic and non-generic usage of the indefinite article. Although the speaker uses the same utterance in both usages, there exists the possible alternation of viewpoint in the speaker's consciousness between the two usages.

One of the major differences between definiteness and specificity is that the speaker and the hearer are equally relevant in order to identify an object in the former feature, while only the speaker is crucial in the latter one.⁴⁾

As we have noticed above, [-Spec] is the common feature in generic use of the two articles, and the feature implies a class where elements share the same characteristic. In other words, there must be a common recognition over the situation of utterance between the two language users. For example, in utterances like *A dog is a faithful animal* or *The dog is a faithful animal*, both members must commonly recognise that the aim of the utterance is for a generic purpose, for there is always a possibility of misunderstanding on reference because there is no particular syntactic or morphological feature of the usage. A mutual presupposition that both users of the language share leads to a concept of a 'class'

as a referent. Since a class as a referent is an abstract category that belongs to a different dimension from a particular referent, this is an entity that exists only in shared linguistic knowledge.

Before we proceed to compare the difference in generic usage of the two articles, we shall examine the difference between generic usage and universal quantifiers such as *all*, *any*, *each* and *every*.⁵⁾

There is a common aspect between the two kinds of determiners, but a close examination reveals the difference. For example, an utterance like *A/The dog is a mammal* is interpreted as the same as that *Any/Each/Every/All dog(s) is/are (a) mammal(s)*. But it is impossible to think that *A/The dog barks* and *All dogs bark* share completely identical meaning because there is a possibility that a dog which does not bark for some physical deficiency exists. If so, the sentence with a universal quantifier cannot be logically true, while the sentence having a generic expression is still true in that case. What is the difference?

I would like to suggest that it is the high degree of importance that the speaker thinks to be relevant in generic usage. In generic expressions, the speaker mentions certain information or knowledge which is considered to be of relatively high priority to specify an object, that is, a core in the semantic field. In the above example, the speaker insists that the act of barking is one of the most significant features concerning the species of dog. The probability that a dog incapable of barking exists does not affect the speaker's view on dogs' nature. Inoue et al.(1985: 459) compare *Dogs give milk to their young* and *All dogs give milk to their young*, and the former is true as generic use, while the latter is not true because only female dogs can give milk. I believe the above explanation is applicable to the difference based on the situation of utterance. The speaker utters *Dogs give milk to their young* when he thinks that the nature being a mammal is an important and indispensable property of the animal.

Generic utterance is, therefore, a general statement regarding the nature of an object, and is thought to be true when considered from general knowledge such as *Dogs bark* and *Dogs give milk*. If one says *Man is fallible*, he would imply that forgiveness is important in the situation of this utterance, or rather more directly *Please forgive particular persons* (often including the speaker).⁶⁾ Thus unlike a universal quantifier, generic expressions do not exclude the possibility of counter-examples. In other words, universal quantifiers are used from a

quantitative viewpoint, while generic usage is available from a qualitative viewpoint. This contrast reminds us of the alternation of a viewpoint about the usage of *of* mentioned earlier in this paper; through a process in which the preposition is connected with cognitive verbs, there occurs a change in the speaker's point of view from a quantitative to a qualitative one. Hence an utterance with universal quantifiers and that with generic expressions share the same interpretation only when the speaker is interested in both a quantitative feature and a qualitative one about an object.

Although Quirk et al.(1972: 147) explain that the distinction of definiteness is neutralised since it is no longer relevant for the generic concept, at the same time he notes that there may be a difference in presupposition denoted by the articles in generic use. According to Quirk et al.(1972: 148), the indefinite form implies 'if it exists', while the definite form implies 'extant'. In addition, Quirk et al.(1985: 281) state that whereas *the* keeps its generic function in nonsubject positions in the sentences, *a/an*, and to a lesser extent zero, tend to lose their generic function in these positions. We shall return to these differences later.

The difference between the two articles in generic usage is basically the same as that in non-generic usage: the distinction concerning definiteness. Therefore, we examine what difference occurs when the speaker changes his point of view to express a generic implication, that is, when there occurs the alternation of the speaker's focus from a particular referent to a class as a referent.

Since the fundamental significance of the *a(n)*-form is indefiniteness, it implies the existence of plural entities, and it works as a representative member of a class in generic use. When one says *A dog is a faithful animal*, *one* and *any* dog is picked out from a set of dogs and dealt with as a sample. (But this does not mean that it is a model nor a type, or rather a prototype, which is a function of *the*). This clearly shows in restrictive use of attributive. Abstract nouns such as *admiration*, *anger*, *character*, *education*, *faith*, *fate*, *imagination*, *interest*, *knowledge*, the names of month, *life*, *love*, *silence*, *value*, etc require the indefinite article when these nouns receive modification with adjectives, for example, *a great admiration for*, *a wide knowledge*, *a deep silence* and so on. See Kanaguchi(1972). Addition of adjectives suggests classification and subdivision of an object by means of attribute, e.g. if one refers to 'a great admiration for',

theoretically is it possible to imagine other kinds of 'admiration' for the object, and the utterance implicitly expresses that the speaker talks about one of a number of possibilities. A representative usage of *a(n)* also implies the existence of other members that are in paradigmatic relationship, the other elements in a particular set.

In addition, there is the phenomenon that the indefinite article is needed when the unique existence, e.g. *the moon*, *the sky*, means one particular mode: *a new moon*, *a blue sky*. The speaker refers to a single particular mode out of potentially plural modes of the unique existence.

As we have seen, generic usage has the presupposition of a class as a referent and the idea of a representative member based on a class derives from the total investigation over a set of objects the speaker is referring to. In this point, generic usage in principle shares this feature with specification of nouns having adjectives. However, the difference is that the former is less unambiguous because it relies on the situation of utterance.

Another function of the indefinite article is to embody abstract nouns, for example, *Will you do me a kindness?* or *She is a beauty*. Generic use reflects this function; it conveys concreteness to the hearer. When the speaker says *A dog is a faithful animal*, the hearer would, imagining any dog, assume a set of dogs which share essential qualities of dogginess. This concreteness is based on a real entity, and so is an idea, 'a class'. Therefore, the speaker presupposes that anyone who shares a minimum of information or knowledge of a real object would understand a representative feature of a class. In short, the generic indefinite article works to generalise by means of an inductive method. Similarly, totality, i.e. the total view through generalisation, comes from the total investigation of each element within a set in an inductive thought, and it also suggests the existence of plural entities. I believe that it is possible to say that the essential function of the generic indefinite article is based on total cognition of the information constitution. This will become apparent when it is compared to another article later.

According to Perlmutter(1970: 240), there is an interesting indication that indefinite singular NP's cannot occur in *of*-phrases as in:

* I said of a beaver that it builds dams.

This is not the case with definite singular NP's:

I said of the beaver that it builds dams.

I proposed that *of*-phrases with cognitive verbs imply wholeness, not totality, in the former paper. I think that this is more evidence of the relationship between cognitive expressions having *of*-phrases related to wholeness and those having *about*-phrases relative to totality.

Now we proceed to the generic definite article. The fundamental significance of the *the*-form is definiteness, and according to Hawkins(1978: 166) it should be called inclusiveness. This property is the most clearly shown through comparison with the indefinite article. Definiteness derives from the function of reference such as anaphora, cataphora and exophora, which the indefinite article does not share. As Inoue et al.(1985: 448) point out, the definite article works to express reference relation between a noun phrase and an item which has been or will be introduced. In anaphora, the antecedent exists in the earlier context, while in exophora it does not exist in any linguistic or verbal context but in the situation where the utterance takes place. For example, the speakers can utter *Look at the picture!* even if he has not mentioned the picture before. However, both the speaker and the hearer in the speech must share information to identify the picture. The generic definite article is located in the extension of this usage.

There are two major usages in exophora: the unique article and the typical article. They share the feature with the generic definite article in the point that the speaker implies an entity by referring to a particular attribute. In generic use the speaker recognises that a class as a referent is unique because the class consists of the whole elements sharing a particular feature. For example, when the speaker says *The dog is a faithful animal*, he assumes a class of the animal described by 'the dog' that contains all features necessary to call an entity a dog, that is, a necessary and sufficient condition of the quality of being a dog. With the unique article, the speaker implies uniqueness supported by the situation where the entity exists as a unique existence. When we say *the moon* or *the*

earth, these words denote the sole moon or the sole earth in the situation of utterance, which is the most familiar with the users of the language. This is possible only in the situation where there is the speaker's and the hearer's shared knowledge, and this is the case with the generic definite article. The typical article is more similar to the generic article in that there is an implicit reference to the attribute of an object. In the utterance *Caesar was the Roman general*, the speaker presupposes the property to be a general and he decides that it is Caesar who is worth considering the most representative general, that is, the general of generals. The speaker expects that the hearer also shares his opinion. The generic definite article suggests not only attributes used to identify an object but a class as a referent through these attributes. However, there is a difference with regard to specificity. The generic article treats attributes of the entity without referring to a specific existence; therefore, this usage is more abstract than the typical article.

One of the indispensable functions of the definite article is abstraction, which is in complete contrast to that of the indefinite article. For example, in *The wolf and pig struggled together in his face*. (R. L. Stevenson), the subjects are metaphors for qualities such as fierceness and gluttony. The generic definite article shows this function most strikingly. A class with *the*-form presupposes abstraction in terms of attribute of an entity. The process of abstraction is caused by means of deductive method. Similarly, wholeness, i. e. the whole view through generalisation, comes from the whole investigation of a set in a deductive thought, and it does not suggest the existence of plural entities unlike *a(n)*-form. I believe that it is possible to say that the essential function of the generic definite article is based on the whole cognition about information constitution. This is obvious when it is compared to another article which we have seen.

Quirk et al.(1972: 153) point out that prepositional postmodification by an *of*-phrase usually requires the definite article with a head noun which has limited generic reference: *the wine(s) of France*, *the music of Germany* and *the lakes of Canada* etc. These head nouns are used with zero article unless followed by *of*-phrases. The restrictive property of an *of*-phrase agrees with that of the definite article in the point that they imply the speaker's reference to the attribute of a head noun. Limited generic reference is also represented through a deduc-

tive thought that the speaker recognises a class of an entity as a unit with some modification, that is, he has a viewpoint of wholeness. Unit, here, means a concept sharing inherent features; therefore, nationality words and the names of biological species require the definite article in generic use.

It is said that between the two articles, there is a difference in the degree of sharing of certain information or knowledge on a referent, and therefore, if the hearer is a person who does not have enough information or knowledge, such as an infant, the *a(n)*-form is more preferable than the *the*-form. See Koine (1972: 23). In other words, the use of the generic definite article includes the speaker's presupposition that the hearer shares some preliminary information or knowledge in order to understand attribute of an object. Thus, it is suitable in scientific or philosophical statements like *The dog is a carnivorous mammal* or *The old are wiser than the young*, but it may sound too formal or literary in ordinary speech. For this reason there is the difference of frequency among the three generic expressions.

Wood(1970: 512) explains that the difference between *think of* and *think about* by giving the following comparison: *He thinks too much of himself* (= he has too high an opinion of himself), while *He thinks too much about himself* (= he worries over his health, or his aches and pains, too much). It can be seen that the former, '*thinks too much of himself*', concerns more general, more or less, abstract matters, for example, those concerning his whole personality; in contrast, the latter, '*thinks too much about himself*', concerns more concrete matters, which make up the total image of his personality. The distinction in abstractness and concreteness between *of* and *about* is similar to that between *the*-form and *a(n)*-form in generic usage. In other words, there is a parallel regarding the point where the speaker puts his focus of utterance in the cognition of information constitution, in wholeness or totality.

As I explained in the former paper, the distinction between *of* and *about*, wholeness and totality, has some parallels with collective nouns. Generic usage is entirely a semantic phenomenon, and collective nouns do not represent morphological changes according to their number either: *the audience, which was a large one, was in its place by 7 pm*, while *the audience, who were all waving their arms above their heads, were clearly enjoying themselves*. See Chalker (1994: 69). The difference depends on the speaker's viewpoint concerning whether

the group is considered as a single unit (= wholeness) or a collection of individuals (= totality). I propose that it is the speaker's cognition that brings a semantic difference in generic usage as well as in collective nouns.

We have mentioned that Quirk et al.(1985: 281) explain the difference among three generic expressions regarding their syntactic positions; I shall now explain the difference. To the hearer, the subject of an utterance tends to be given information, while the object tends to be new information, and a class as a referent presupposes the existence of the information shared between the two users of the language. The generic definite article supposes a class as a referent deductively, so that it can keep its generic function no matter where it is put in a sentence. On the other hand, since the generic indefinite article assumes a class as a referent inductively, it is, therefore, likely to lose its generic function in a nonsubject position, where the speaker often introduces new information. Quirk et al.

(1972: 148) also point out a difference in presupposition denoted by the articles: the indefinite article implies 'if it exists', while the definite article implies 'extant'. This also seems to be the difference between induction and deduction. Inoue et al. (1985: 465-466) give examples: **The good porkchop is tender/A good porkchop is tender/Good porkchops are tender. *John believes in the UFO/John believes in a UFO/John believes in UFOs*. What kind of porkchop is good depends on subjective judgement, so it is difficult to define a good porkchop deductively. Because we have not objectively confirmed the existence of UFOs yet, one cannot say that there exists information sharing between the speaker and the hearer regarding the property of the object, so it is also difficult to define a UFO deductively. Unless an object is extant, generally speaking, all users of the language do not necessarily share enough information to define it deductively and it is difficult to suppose a class as a referent. On the other hand, an inductive thought makes it possible to realise a class as a referent about an entity which the speaker assumes, because the generic indefinite article does not refer to its attribute.

In conclusion, it is thought that the speaker's and the hearer's shared presupposition is necessary in generic usage, and that the distinction of totality and wholeness derives from a cognitive mode to the presupposition by the user of the language. Qualitative cognition of information constitution in the situation of utterance is reflected in the choice of the article used.

Notes

1) There are many studies dealing with generic usage of articles. Among them, I have benefited from Hawkins (1978) and Inoue et al. (1985: 456–470) the most, which explain functions of English generic use in detail, and Perlmutter (1970) points out the interesting and contrastive phenomena about three generic expressions.

2) Although Inoue et al. (1985: 439) explain that it is more plausible to consider generic usage semantic interpretation given by context rather than by a semantic feature of articles, I think that generic usage is founded on the basis of semantic features such as definiteness and specificity and that it is useful to refer to the features of generic usage. In addition, Inoue et al. (1985: 444) maintain that all noun phrases with [+Def] are necessarily considered to be [+Spec], however, generic usage with the definite article should be thought to be [+Def, -Spec].

3) This example is taken from Inoue et al. (1985: 444)

4) The range of the speaker's information is crucial in the difference between 'a certain' and 'some'. For example, *He meets a certain woman* implies that the speaker knows who she is, but *He meets some woman* suggests that the speaker does not have enough information to identify the woman. Inoue et al. (1985: 444) consider 'a certain' [+Spec] while 'some' [-Spec].

5) See Inoue et al. (1985: 459–460). Examples for comparison are taken from this article.

6) I believe that this is an interesting point in terms of Speech Act Theory.

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*I would like to thank Mr. Simon N. Bayley very much not only for correcting errors but for his invaluable comments upon the earlier drafts. All errors and inadequacies are my own.