

DECONSTRUCTING ENGLISH ARTICLES

A CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR APPROACH TO TEACHING ARTICLES IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: *The semantics of the articles is crucial for their proper usage in L2 speakers. However, we believe that for their proper acquisition a pairing of concrete form and concrete meaning must take place. In other words, a schema must be created for various meanings of articles. Therefore, in this paper English articles will be viewed from the aspect of Construction grammar. Working within the framework of CxG we will perceive the noun phrases of the type a/the+ N as lexico-syntactic meaningful constructions where the articles attribute a particular meaning to the noun(s) they determine. Together they constitute Determination (article) Construction. Each particular meaning of the articles can be conceptualized and adequate abstract constructional schemas and subschemas as a schematic pairing of form and meaning can be created. In addition, we will use the Serbo-Croatian semantic equivalents of English articles such as indefinite pronouns neki, poneki, koji, kakav, numerals jedan, ijedan, adverbs nekako and makar, demonstrative determiners onaj, adjectives, negative forms ni, nikakav, possessive pronominals and many more. They will serve as a starting point for offering possible constructional schema models for meaningful constructions a/the +N. Other meanings and usages of the articles will be treated in the same way.*

We believe that by initializing the conceptualization and encouraging schema development in ESL/EFL students whose mother tongue is Serbo-Croatian reasonable strategies for article choice in English can be provided. This is aimed at enhancing their learning process and facilitating acquisition of articles through their understanding and association with concrete lexemes (which would ideally lead to their conceptualization) rather than through abstract concepts of specificity and (in)definiteness as previous studies have done.

Keywords: *article semantics, construction, contrastive Construction Grammar, Determination Construction, schema.*

1. Introduction

Both teachers and students of English as a foreign or second language are well aware of all the difficulties inherent in the (mis)use of articles. Articles constitute one of the knottiest points in English for many foreign speakers, especially the ones whose L1 does not recognize articles as a functional (and semantic) category.

The situation is made even more complicated by the fact that articles can be morphologically marked or unmarked (thus invisible to EFL/ESL students) while they are usually unstressed in speech, so the non-native speakers may find it hard to hear them properly.

Furthermore, beside two formally marked articles which are physically present in a written text or in speech, there are nouns determined by *zero article* which EFL/ESL learners tend to interpret as no article at all. Most native speakers do not know the rules governing article use, but still generate them correctly and notice their lack if omitted.

Investigations have shown that at least one fifth of all mistakes made in compositions written by ESL/EFL speakers/students occur in the use of articles. While errors in articles are expected at elementary levels of language knowledge, such errors are a source of misapprehension of a kind likely to threaten the exactitude of the students' thought and capacity to tell the difference between a general and a particular statement at advanced levels of language proficiency. However, repeated errors in the use of special and advanced patterns may reflect a weakness in elementary fundamentals.

2. Pedagogical Approach to Articles In English

The previous statement results from the way articles are approached and described by grammarians and teachers respectively. Most grammar-books written by native speakers devote very little space to the issue of articles. They typically list different uses of articles (e.g. with countable nouns, with uncountable nouns, proper names etc.) which are followed by several elicitation exercises. The approach is more or less similar irrespective of the language-knowledge level they address. Even some English grammars targeting advanced students studying the structure of English at the university level cannot brag themselves with elaborate material on articles. For example, in their *English Grammar, a University course* Downing and Locke (Downing and Locke, 2006) devote only two pages to the matter, while Carter and McCarthy (Carter & McCarthy, 2006) do not tackle the issue of articles separately but when discussing the categories such as number, pronouns or determiners. One of the possible explanations why articles are treated like this by authors who are native speakers is that they take articles and their comprehension for granted. ESL/EFL students are expected to understand, memorize and make automatic the system of English articles, which is, according to Young, a closed system of mainly unstressed morphemes which encodes notions of existence, reference and attribution, notions of anaphora and context together with syntactic notions of countability and number (Young, 1996: 135).

As seen, in descriptions of English most authors tend to disregard, ignore or understate the semantic properties of articles. On the other hand, articles have enormous effect on meaning. Although in grammatical descriptions of English, articles are classified as functional words, more precisely, as determiners associated with the grammatical category of definiteness and indefiniteness, their complex semantic properties cannot be excluded. The semantics of articles proves to be especially important in EFL/ESL instruction because much of the problem of article acquisition in EFL/ESL learners lies in the complex ways in which meaning is mapped onto form in English article system.

3. Research on the Article Semantics and L2 Learners

The research on the topic of article- acquisition in ESL/EFL learners, particularly those coming from article-less L1 background, has been rather extensive for various languages. In this section of the paper we will take a brief overview of some of the most relevant work on the issue of the semantic properties of articles as a rather important aspect for their acquisition in ESL/EFL speakers.

The importance of semantic component of articles for article acquisition in EFL speakers was noticed by Pitman in the early 1970's. In his book *The Use of the Article* Pittman (1972) based his selection and classification of tasks on numerous and various meanings expressed by articles. The book was designed as a remedial material for advanced learners and the material was grouped into 67 units. The grouping criteria were based on the specific semantics of the articles in the given linguistic and extra-linguistic context(s). Here are some examples of unit titles to illustrate the way they are grouped: Unit 45: to contrast *the* = *the only one* with *a* = *another*; Unit 18: to practice *the* = *the only one* with ordinal numbers; Unit 5 *a* = *any one*; Unit 43 to contrast *identification* = *a* with *recognition* = *the*; Unit 38: the contrast of *a* and *the* in *identification* *the* = *implicit, immediate surroundings*, etc. The elicitation exercises are illustrative and to the point allowing for concrete conceptualization of the meaning of both indefinite article *a(n)* and the definite article *the*.

Somewhat later, during the 1980's and 1990's, the proponents of universal grammar, or the universalists, approached articles as language universals emphasizing their meaning as universal meaning which is realized differently in different languages. Such an approach was first taken by Bickerton (1981) who proposed two universals of NP reference: a semantic and a discourse universal. The discourse universal refers to the speakers' assumption whether the hearer perceives the referent of a particular NP as known or unknown to the hearer. Therefore, the NPs used in a discourse can be classified as either specific (+SR)/or on-specific(-SR) and either known (+HK) or unknown (-HK) to the hearer. Thus each NP used in a discourse can be identified as either [-SR, +HK], [+SR, -HK], [-SR,-HK] or [+SR, +HK]. Such a classification incited a number of studies investigating various levels of ESL/EFL speakers' interlanguage, hypothesizing that if they were true universals the speakers would be able to distinguish the four types of NPs in their mother tongues but not necessarily in the way they are distinguished in English and perhaps in different ways at different stages of interlanguage development. Some of the scholars who conducted studies governed by universalists' approach were, among others, Duškova for Czech (1984), Chaudron and Parker for Japanese (1990), Young for Czech and Slovak (1996), Ionin and Ionin et al. for Russian and Korean (2003, 2004a, 2004b), Ekiert for Polish (2004) and Kupsich et al. for Turkish (2010).

In his research on English article- acquisition and English interlanguage development, Young (Young, 1996:161) paid a special attention to the meaning, form and function of the articles. According to his classification the meaning of the whole NP depends on the meaning of the article by which it is determined. Consequently, NPs can be classified as either hearer unknown [-HK] which include first mentions, existentials, equationals, negatives, or hearer known [+HK] including generics, unique, physically present, anaphoric, specific. In the end, Young's findings indicate that form-function relations largely affect interlanguage development. Learners try to map L1 meanings onto L2 forms, which is particularly difficult when they do not have L1 corresponding forms and do not perceive any consistent meaning for the L2. In the case of anaphoric demonstratives the mapping is highly systematic. It is also systematic when learners map count and number categories onto indefinite articles.

In the past decade or so, one of the most prolific researchers on the topic of acquisition of articles in ESL/EFL learners is Ionin. In her numerous studies (Ionin 2003, 2004a, 2004b and 2010) she studied various aspects of English article acquisition not only in ESL/EFL learners who come from article-less L1 background such as Russian and Korean (2003, 2004) but also who are familiar with article system from their mother tongue such as the speakers of Spanish (Ionin and Motrul, 2010). Ionin also considers article-semantics to be crucial for their acquisition and usage.

Starting from the hypothesis that referentiality plays an important role in article choice in L2 speakers she views the meaning of articles through the rather abstract categories of specificity and definiteness. Consequently, articles can attribute the meaning [+/- specific] and [+/- definite] to the nouns they determine. The results of her studies which included both elicitation and production (translation) tasks show that ESL learners fluctuate between referentiality and definiteness when choosing articles in English as they depend on semantic distinctions governing their use. She further explores how the concepts of definiteness and specificity are discourse related claiming specificity is not wide scope (Ionin et al., 2004a). It is more restricted in that it involves speaker's intent to refer to the individual who exists in the actual world. This helps a speaker establish article choice parameter. For example, a language that has two articles distinguishes them as follows: 1) based on definiteness as in English (a definiteness setting) and 2) based on specificity (a specificity setting).

She also examines learners' capacity to set parameters and build strategies for article choice by exploring to which setting the L2 learners will turn. She hypothesizes that 1) L2 learners have access to universal grammar principles and parameter setting (specificity and definiteness), 2) L2 learners fluctuate between different parameter settings until the input leads them to set the parameter to the appropriate value.

After a series of studies with L2 speakers of different language proficiency Ionin was not quite able to find any obvious regularity or answer how article choice strategies are made, concluding that no strategy building instruction is universally applicable (2004b). However, in her numerous and elaborate early studies on article use in ESL speakers she relies very little on their L1 often disregarding the forms, structures and constructions used in L1 to express the semantic content equivalent to that expressed by articles in English. Only later does she incorporate L1 transfer in her research (Ionin and Motru 2010a, 2010b).

4. Construction Grammar and Contrasting Constructions Across Languages

Vast body of research has been done on the topic of how speakers of different languages perceive and use English articles with the purpose to help ESL/EFL speakers acquire this seemingly abstract system and develop ability to generate and use articles correctly. Despite the amount of research of this type, much of which has been done within the scope of cognitive linguistics, as Ionin claims (Ionin et al. 2004b), no universally applicable strategy-building instruction seems possible. As we have seen, in her work Ionin was primarily interested in the article semantics (the meaning component) while Young focused on the form and function of English articles in the process of interlanguage development, thus making the initial step towards the constructionist approach to the matter.

Although Construction Grammar (CxG) had been around as a framework for language description since the 1980's it was only in the mid-2000's that it became acknowledged by those interested in the ESL/EFL issues. On the other hand, it appears to us that the constructionist approach which takes all three components (meaning-form-function) into consideration to the issue of article usage in L2 speakers might prove to be useful and effective, indeed. As the communicative approach to language teaching has not achieved the desired "quality of production" (Hinkel, 2006), Construction Grammar has offered to teachers some efficient and effective strategies to help their students achieve desired levels of language proficiency and fluency. For some time now CxG with its focus on whole complex units (constructions) has found its implementation and practical application in L2 teaching and learning (Widdowson, 2003, Hinkel, 2006; Ellis, 2013 and O'Donnell et al. 2013). In addition, CxG so far has been

focused mainly on English trying to account for the entire system as a whole of this language. This additionally speaks in favour of using the findings CxG for the purposes of EFL/ESL teaching and learning.

The notion of construction, defined as a pairing of form and meaning and referring to a syntactic pattern in which particular formal properties correlate with specific semantic, plays an important role not only in Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995; Croft 2001) but in a number of recent linguistic models such as Cognitive Linguistics (Langacker 1999), The Simpler Syntax Model (Culicover and Jackendoff 2005, 2006) and Construction Morphology (CM) (Booij, 2010).

In Construction Grammar, the grammar represents an inventory of form-meaning-function complexes, in which words are distinguished from grammatical constructions only with regard to their internal complexity. The inventory of constructions is not unstructured; it is more like a map than a shopping list. Elements are related through inheritance hierarchies, containing more or less general patterns.

(Michaelis and Lambrecht, 1996:216).

By focusing on construction(s) CxG provides a framework for a better understanding of the relation of syntax and the lexicon. A notion of 'construction' is very advantageous as it can be used at both levels without obliterating the differences between the two (Booij, 2010: 1). It can also be very useful when dealing with borderline cases, in other words, with complex forms which linger on the border between the lexicon and syntax.

According to Jackendoff (2008:15) pieces of syntactic structure can be listed in the lexicon with associated meanings, just as individual words are; these are meaningful constructions of the language. In his opinion Construction Grammar makes no principled distinction between words and rules; a lexical entry is more word-like to the extent that it is fully specified and more rule-like to the extent that it contains variables.

5. Contrasting Constructions in L1 and L2

As mentioned earlier in this paper, most studies dealing with the acquisition, generating and use of articles have been focused on L2 speakers coming from the common or similar L1 background. Rare have been the studies with L2 speakers coming from diverse L1 settings (see Ionin 2004a and 2004b for Russian and Korean). In addition, just a few of such studies pay attention to the specific features and properties of L1 but are more focused on the differences in article (mis)use and generating in students who are at different phases of interlanguage.

On the other hand, to adopt a constructional approach in language teaching and learning would mean “to undertake a commitment in principle to account for the entirety of each language” (Kay and Fillmore, 1999: 1).

Since constructionists' studies and research were initially almost solely focused on English, English remains the most thoroughly described language within the CxG framework. (see Fillmore 1986, Lakoff 1987, Fillmore et al. 1988, Zwicky 1994, Goldberg 1995, Michaelis & Lambrecht 1996, Kay and Fillmore 1999, Boas 2003, Goldberg & Jackendoff 2004) As a result, comparative studies into constructions in other languages based on the constructionist description of English have recently emerged (Gurevich for Russian, Hilpert for Swedish, Leino for Finnish, Gonzalves Sylvia for Spanish, Tymiam and Bergen for Thai, Hasegawa et al. for Japanese, see Boas (Ed.) 2010). It is true that cross-linguistic comparisons at the constructional level are difficult to achieve, but it seems possible to systematically identify and analyze equivalent constructions in particular languages (English as L2 in this case).***** Such contrastive and

comparative approach to particular equivalent constructions can indeed prove to be extremely valuable and helpful in ESL/EFL teaching and learning.

Taking into account the most recent constructionist trends with a contrastive approach to describing equivalent constructions in languages and with respect to the contrastive work already done on English and SC, we propose that these two approaches be combined when the matter of articles is tackled for ESL/EFL speakers coming from the SC L1 origin. In the following segments of this paper we will try to show how the constructionist contrastive semantic approach can be highly advantageous for EFL /ESL purposes as a viable tool which can help EFL/ESL speakers make generalizations between the two languages how function and meaning are encoded in the form. Some research (Achard, 2008; Tyler, 2008) show that an understanding of “the item-based nature of construction learning inspires the creation and evaluation of instructional tasks, materials, and syllabi, and how cognitive linguistic analyses can be used to inform learners how constructions are conventionalized ways of matching certain expressions to specific situations and to guide instructors in precisely isolating and clearly presenting the various conditions that motivate speaker choice”. (Ellis, 2013:). In addition, we will make an effort to prove that making generalizations and establishing a relationship between meaning and form in the two languages raises language-awareness in EFL/ESL speakers facilitating the L2 learning/acquisition.

(In)definiteness in SC and SC EFL/ESL speakers

Serbo-Croatian, like most Slavic languages (except for Bulgarian and Macedonian), does not recognize the category of articles as a class of primary determiners. Since English articles are direct markers of the category of (in)definiteness, SC EFL/ESL learners often wrongly assume that these categories do not exist in their L. It is true that definiteness is not clearly indicated in Serbo-Croatian NPs for which reason many L1 speakers are quite unaware of the nature of a particular NP in SC. This by no way means that SC nouns cannot be marked with respect to (in)definiteness. There are several ways, however, to indicate SC noun phrases implicitly as definite or indefinite. This can be done either by

a) definite and indefinite adjectival forms clearly noticeable only in masculine gender nominative case as in (1), while in other inflected forms they are distinguished by the quality rather than the quantity of accent (2).

(1) a) lep buket (indefinite nominative masculine NP) – E **a** nice bouquet

b) lepi buket (definite nominative masculine NP) – E **the** nice bouquet

(2) a) dŕgo bdenje (falling accent indicating definiteness) – E **the** long wake

b) dŕgo bdenje (rising accent indicating indefiniteness) - E **a** long wake

b) by a tendency rather than a regular pattern to start a sentence with what is known and end it with a new piece of information (3a--b) (similar in Czech, see Young, 1996:141).

(3) a) Ušao je (V) **sudija** (N) i sudjenje je moglo da počne.

CAME IN JUDGE AND TRIAL COULD BEGIN

‘A judge came in and the trial could begin.’

b) **Sudija** (N) je ušao (V) i suđenje je moglo da počne.

JUDGE CAME IN AND TRIAL COULD BEGIN

‘ The judge came in and the trial could begin. ‘

However, when told of these ways of expressing (in)definiteness in SC native speakers fail to recognize them and find them most astonishing.

Obviously, definiteness is not the part of the semantics of Serbo-Croatian nouns. The syntactic structure of a Serbo-Croatian NP seems to be of the pattern *nil* + *N* as opposed to English *det*+*N*, which may falsely lead both L2 learners and even some (non-native) EFL/ESL teachers to conclude that English articles have no correspondents in SC, wrongly assuming that for that reason the only way to understand, memorize and make automatic the system of English articles is to learn from pedagogical grammars the sets of rules governing article use.

6. Semantic Equivalents for Expressing the Meaning of English Articles in Serbo-Croatian

The fact that Serbo-Croatian language system lacks articles does not mean that the meaning of English articles cannot be expressed in SC. There are equivalents to most usages found in other categories that correspond with the usage and meaning of English articles. In order to identify such forms in SC the categories of intensive and non-intensive definiteness and indefiniteness (Stanojčić and Popović, 2002) and thematicity/rhematicity exist (see Ivić, 1970).

English articles have always presented a stumbling stone for SC ESL/EFL learners. No wonder then that the matter of articles in English and their equivalents in SC was one of the issues that a number of scholars dealt with in detail (Ivić, 1971; Spalatin, 1976; Mišeska Tomić, 1970/1971, 1974; Hlebec, 1986; Djordjević, 1989.) More importantly, most of these papers is semantically oriented and approach articles in context. When analyzing articles in English and their equivalents in SC they contrasted nominal constructions containing articles in diverse contexts in both languages, thus taking into consideration syntactic, semantic, discourse-pragmatic and functional factors.

A) Semantic equivalents of the indefinite article in SC

The following forms emerge as possible SC semantic equivalents for English indefinite article 'a' denoting what Huddleston and Pullum refer to as quantitative indefinites and existential quantification (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 372):

- indefinite determiners *neki* (some), *ma koji*, *bilo koji*, *ikoji* (any, whichever) and numeral *jedan* (one) correspond to the meaning *a* = *any* and for the first-mentions
 - (4) a) E There was a man standing there.
 SC Neki/jedan čovek je stajao tamo.
 - (b) E Just give me a pen please!
 SC Samo mi daj bilo koju/ ma koju olovku, molim te!
- numeral *jedan* (one) with the quantifying meaning or the meaning of particularization as in (5a-b)
 - (5) a) E. She didn't say a word
 SC Nije rekla niti jednu reč.
 - (b) E He's got the talent of a Beethoven.
 SC Ima talenat jednog Betovena.
- universal determiner *svaki* or adverbs of frequency
 - (6) E Take this medicine three times a day.
 SC Uzmite lek tri puta svakog dana/ dnevno.
- demonstrative determiner *onaj* (that) denoting remoteness and a lower degree of definiteness (7).

- (7) E She lay there filled with a pale, clearer peace.
 SC Ležala je tako ispunjena onim prozračnim, savršenim mirom.
 • indefinite adverbs *nekako (somehow)* (8a) and *makar, barem* + intensive numeral phrase *jedan jedini* (8b).

(8) a) E It was a peculiarly beautiful book.

SC Bila je to nekako čudesno lepa knjiga.

(b) E Couldn't you spare a dollar for the poor?

SC Zar ne možeš da daš makar/barem jedan jedini dolar za sirotinju?

For non-quantitative indefinites found in generic use (9a) and in ascriptive predicative complements indicating simple set membership (9b) no lexical and grammatical equivalents in Serbo-Croatian can be found, although for the latter the numeral *jedan (one)* is possible (9c).

(9) a) E Jill is a doctor.

SC Džil je doktorka.

(b) E As a doctor, Jill should have helped the injured man.

SC Kao doktorka, Džil je trebalo da pomogne povredjenom.

(c) SC Kao jedan doktor, Džil je trebalo da pomogne povredjenom.

B) Semantic equivalents of the definite article in SC

In Serbo-Croatian the following forms can be distinguished as possible semantic equivalents for English definite article THE :

- zero equivalent for THE denoting recognition, identifying, implicit situational, [+HK] reference (10a) and denoting uniqueness (10b) which Huddleston and Pullum refer to as a felicitous use (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 368).

(10) a) E Where did you park the car?

SC Gde si parkirao kola?

(b) E The father of one of my students rang me up last night.

SC Otac jednog mog studenta mi je sinoć telefonirao.

- demonstrative determiners *ovaj (this)* (11a), *taj, onaj, takav (that)* (11b), *toliki/ovoliki (this big)* (11c) expressing intensive definiteness.

(11) a) E I know I have seen the man somewhere.

SC Znam da sam tog čoveka negde sreo.

(b) E Pass me the hammer, please.

SC Dodaj mi taj/ onaj/ ovaj čekić.

(c) E Could you do something about the hum?

SC Možete li nešto da uradite u vezi sa ovom/ovolikom bukom?

- universal determiner *sav (all)* (12b) or zero equivalent (12a) to denote totality.

(12) a) E The bathroom tiles are cracked.

SC Pločice u kupatilu su napukle.

(b) E The milk has gone bad.

SC (Svo) Mleko se pokvarilo.

- personal pronoun (13).

(13) E She was the youngest of the three.

SC Bila je najmladja od njih tri.

Obviously, SC speakers of EFL/ESL have a wider choice of semantic equivalents to express indefiniteness than definiteness, which does not mean, however, that the misuse of indefinite article is less frequent than that of the definite one.

While it is true that the semantic equivalents of English articles in SC are only possible ways of their interpretation not pertaining to be a universal solution for their acquisition and use in SC EFL/ESL speakers, in practical instruction they are almost completely ignored. Instead, SC EFL speakers are referred to grammar books and sets of rules which they have to memorize in order to grasp a rather abstract category of (in)definiteness. From the start they are lead to believe that articles are lexically empty words. SC EFL/ESL speakers can arrive at the point where they can be fairly certain in repeating the rules referring to the individual cases or parts of the article system and even fairly correctly complete elicitation tasks; but, they can never be quite certain how far the system goes and, consequently, feel uncertain when they have to generate a use of the article(s) for which their memory has stored no precedent.

Still, possible semantic equivalents, which may facilitate SC EFL speakers conceptualizing the category of (in)definiteness, are rarely relied on in the process of teaching and learning.

What prompted us to include the actual meaning of English articles and their possible SC semantic equivalents in EFL/ESL instruction practices was the fact that we noticed that the students whose English was at a rather advanced stage of interlanguage development seemed to experience less problems with using articles when they denoted certain meanings and when they bore certain (concrete) references than in other cases when articles were used with generic or implicit references. The results of a statistical analysis of students' essay errors indicate that more than 90% of students correctly used the definite article 'the' denoting superlatives and ordinal numbers (as in '*the largest increase*' or '*the second largest exporter*'), denoting collectives (as in '*the rich*' or '*the Johnsons*'), plural geographical entities (such as '*the EU*', '*the Bahamas*') or in the form '*the end*'. The same trend was noticed with the use of indefinite article when denoting single countable entities and first-mentions (as in '*A man came in.*') or with distributive numeric meaning of 'a' (as in the expression '*three times a day*'). In addition, we noticed a systematic mapping of count and number categories to indefinite article, which is consistent to Young's findings with Czech and Slovak L1 speakers (Young, 1996).

When asked why certain uses of articles seemed less problematic than the others, most students (Serbo-Croatian L1 speakers) explained that they indeed associated the meaning of articles either with a concrete meaning or tended to see articles as an integral part of the meaning of the noun they determined or even the entire NP. In other words, English constructions of the type *det + N* are perceived/conceptualized as Determination Constructions and single semantic units whose elements are interdependent and related. Clearly, what the students did was pair the form with the meaning and discourse function. This was the case with examples such as 'the EU', but particularly with some specific uses of articles in which the meaning of the whole construction appears quite concrete as in (14a-d). In addition, in cases such as in (14a-d) discourse-pragmatic factors play a very important role in their interpretation.

(14a) It was a different Venice from what I once knew.

(14b) There was a brief silence.

(14c) Can you pass me the coffee, please?

(14d) It does look like the young Shakespeare.

Determination Construction in English and Serbo-Croatian

The instances of article use given in (14a-d) perfectly illustrate English Determination Construction in which the determiner slot is filled by an article. According to CxG, constructions are signs whose meaning is not just the simple sum of meanings of their parts and cannot be derived from the meaning of their constituents. (Freid, to be published: 8).

Constructions are defined as objects of syntactic representation that are assigned one or more conventional functions [...] together with whatever is conventionalized about its contribution to the meaning or the use of structure containing it" (Fillmore 1988: 36).

Based on the examples given, we see that Determination (article) Construction(s) have "a meaning in the sense of a specific semantic content" (Fried, to be published: 9). In addition, they represent the combination of a determiner and a noun which denotes a semantically bounded entity. The combination as a whole is bounded, even in situations when its constituents may be in conflict as is the case with phrases in (14a-d).

From examples (4-13) we have seen that the meaning of articles is present in SC NPs despite the fact that Serbo-Croatian grammar system does not recognize the category of articles. Consequently, we can say that SC also has a Determination Construction, which is not identical to English Determination (article) Construction but rather has the form *determiner* + *N*. One may wonder how this pattern can be applied to the examples (9), (10a) and (10b) in which a determiner is physically missing from SC constructions, thus they tend to be perceived as having the structure *nil*+*N* (as mentioned earlier). It has been pointed out that CxG sees constructions as pairings of form-meaning-function, which means that in order to come to the meaning of a construction one must take into consideration its lexical meaning, grammatical function and/or discourse-pragmatic factors. Given all this, our Serbo-Croatian examples from (9), (10a) and (10b) can be seen as Determination (article) Constructions where the discourse and the context (both linguistic and extra-linguistic) determine the nouns *doktor*, *kola* and *otac* as definite (hearer known) or indefinite (hearer unknown). In other words, determination is not expressed by lexical but by pragmatic means, but it is still a present component in SC Determination Construction.

It is important to emphasize that all examples given in this paper as well as the instances of article use which ESL/EFL speakers encounter are actual constructs of Determination (article) Construction. This means that constructs are "realizations of grammar in actual discourse" (Fried, to be published: 8). Therefore, constructions are abstractions, while constructs are their physical, actual, concrete realizations.

Based on the meaning, form and function of such constructs in diverse discourses the ESL/EFL speakers make generalizations about (in our case Determination (article)) constructions, their structure, meaning and function. Thus, the process of language learning/acquisition goes from specific and concrete to abstract. We believe that this process can be facilitated if the ESL/EFL speakers are fully aware of the constructional semantic equivalents in their L1. In the case of article acquisition for SC ESL/EFL speakers this means that in ESL/EFL instruction semantic constructional equivalents of constructs representing English Determination (article) Construction should be highlighted. We have pointed out that SC ESL/EFL speakers make generalizations about the meanings of English Determination (article) Construction, but only at an advanced level of instruction when their language proficiency allows them to use the foreign language associatively and intuitively.

However, even at the very early stages of interlanguage development such generalizations can be made if the ESL/EFL speakers are made aware of the meanings of the constructs

expressing English Determination (article) Construction and their constructional (semantic, structural and pragmatic) equivalents in Serbo-Croatian. ESL/EFL speakers' contact with English articles is via constructs such as those given in (4-14d) which are linguistic expressions expressing certain meaning(s). Such meanings of English constructs are more easily accessed by the ESL/EFL speakers if they are aware of the constructs in SC expressing the (nearly) same or similar meanings. This approach allows them to establish the relation between L1 and L2 by finding the common (semantic) grounds in the way that L1 can facilitate the L2 learning process, instead of impeding it. At lower levels of interlanguage development these common grounds are concrete constructs in both languages allowing for more abstract generalizations to take their place at higher levels. This will be discussed in the following section of this paper.

7. Article Schematization in SC EFL/ESL Speakers

According to Tomasello, language acquisition starts with storing mental representations of concrete cases of language use. Gradually, the language learner will make abstractions across sets of linguistic constructs with similar properties, thus acquiring the abstract system underlying these linguistic constructs. (Tomasello, 2000: 238)

We may assume that our SC EFL/ESL students did exactly that, except that they often relied on L1 constructs in doing so. By conceptualizing and abstracting the concrete, most basic meanings of articles by finding L1 constructs with corresponding semantics they were able to build basic schema(s) for their use.

It was mentioned earlier in this paper that the prototypical, most basic and most general meaning of *a* is to denote 'any', an unspecified, hearer unknown indefinite singular countable noun, whereas *the* is used to mark definite, hearer known recognizable nouns in singular and plural, or as Pittman in his book formulates it 'the only one'. One of the most important properties of schemas is that they represent knowledge at all levels of abstraction. Consequently, it can be presumed that at a very elementary level of instruction, helped by semantic equivalents from SC in the mind of a SC EFL/ESL speaker abstract prototypical schemas of the following (provisional) forms may be formed:

[a [X] N "sg. count."] N 'one, any, hearer unknown entity (N)' - SC *neki, jedan pojam (N)*

[the [X] N] N "particular, that, hearer known, anaphoric, entity (N)" - SC *taj, onaj, odredjeni pojam (N)*

These schemas also imply that articles are category determining, or, more precisely related to the grammatical class of nouns and their meaning. Articles are thus seen as directly attributing semantic content and influencing the meaning of the noun(s) they determine.

Something similar was proposed over half a century ago by Sorensen who suggested that in *art+N* combinations the article is always an integral part of the meaning of the given noun (Sorensen, 1958:82), which is additionally supported by the examples such as *the Andes, the Dutch, the European Union, the Guggenheim Museum, the Economist, the Bible* to denote weak proper forms (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002:517). We have seen that this claim of Sorensen's is in complete accord with the general trend in SC EFL/ESL speakers who obviously conceptualized and stored proper nouns of the above type not as single-word lexemes but as meaningful (syntactic) constructions/units denoting a single entity or phenomenon. Therefore,

NPs of the structure *art+N* qualify as constructions. They are rule-like as they contain a noun which is a variable while at the same time they are word-like as they are fully specified.

Schemas are active process and language- learning is an uphill struggle. As both can be viewed hierarchically, helping students conceptualize and interconnect the meaning of articles with the meaning of nouns they determine via building schemata at early stages of interlanguage development can prove extremely useful at later phases, at higher levels of knowledge and in language situations when they need to generate articles according to both linguistic and extra-linguistic context.

At higher levels of EFL/ESL language proficiency and at later phases of interlanguage development the existing schemas get enriched and elaborated with new information concerning both meaning and function like in the use of *the* with the ordinals and superlatives, the use of *a* with proper nouns or the use of *the* with adjectives. As a result, additional templates for Determination (article) constructions are needed within the general article template. By conceptualizing and association of the meanings of *art+N* Determination Constructions when the semantic content of the whole construction as well as its grammatical properties cannot be derived from the semantics and the syntax of its constituents, the existing prototypical article schemas are of no help to the EFL/ESL speakers. Consequently these schemas need to be further elaborated with additional semantic and/or discourse-pragmatic information. Here are some examples of schema elaboration and subschema development (15a-c) and (16a-d):

(15) a) the intelligent > [the [x] Adj. + descriptive] ↔ [collective N having the property x]

with further elaboration

b) the French > [the[x] Adj. nationality] ↔ [N collective denoting nations and groups of people of x origin]

c) the best > [the [x] adjective + superlative] ↔ [abstract N having the property X]

(16) a) a silence, a knowledge > [a[x] N +abstract] ↔ [a piece of X, an instance of, a subamount of X]

with further further elaboration

b) a pale moon > [a[x] N unique] ↔ [a particular instance of X]

c) a better England > [a[x]N proper] ↔ [a particular condition, shape of X n[+countable]]

d) a screaming Dudley > [a [x]N +proper -countable] ↔ [N +countable, one of many X]

Clearly schema elaborations happen as the stages of interlanguage development progress. The more advanced the phase, the more elaborated article (sub)schemas are.

8. Concluding Remarks

In the previous segment of the paper we have tried to illustrate how the theoretical notions of CxG aided by contrastive approach can find their practical implementation in foreign language teaching. On the example of Serbo-Croatian EFL/ESL speakers we have shown that starting with the basic semantic concept(s) such as singularity and/or (in)definiteness and then contrasting how they are realized in L1 and L2 (first as concrete constructs which are then turned into abstract constructions) it is possible for EFL/ESL speakers to capture the different meanings and

properties of English articles (expressed in Determination (article) Construction) at different levels of semantic abstraction or schematization.

The advantage of subschemas is that they allow us to help EFL/ESL speakers make subgeneralizations about subsets of meanings that Determination (article) Construction expresses and generate such constructions with fewer errors and less doubt. The existence of semantic correspondents in L1 (Serbo-Croatian, in this case) can be helpful to students to establish the correlation between Determination (article) Construction in L1 and L2 by pairing the meaning with form and function and build the adequate schemas and subschemas for such constructions.

Thus they can build and store schemas for Determination (article) Constructions and compare them to the given context. Naturally, EFL/ESL speakers should be guided to recognize and take into account the particularizing factors of a larger environment and context. Finding the right subschema on the map can help them build more proficient article selection strategies and operate along the form-function- meaning continuum instead of memorizing rules governing the use of articles in English. There are a number of advantages of schemas over rules. We have tried to show that while rules are always source-oriented, schemas can also be output-oriented. (Baybee, 1995; Haspelmath, 1989).

By no means do we suggest that schematization is an ideal way for EFL/ESL speakers who come from article-less languages to master articles in English and find their way through a maze of their uses and meanings. We believe that helping students conceptualize, abstract and schematize articles via the meaning, form and function of Determination (article) Constructions aided by possible constructional equivalents in L1 at early stages of language acquisition/learning can facilitate more accurate generating at more advanced levels.

Construction Grammar is a theory of the architecture of grammar and of the relation of the grammar to facts of language use such as the storage and the frequency of different linguistic constructs. It can largely account for complex phenomena on the syntax- lexicon line and structures of the type *art+N* are certainly one such phenomenon. The idea of this paper is to draw attention to the practical applicability of the concepts and notions of CxG in addressing some of the most intricate issues in the process of EFL/ESL learning and teaching .

Semantically and cognitively oriented contrastive CxG approach, therefore, can prove to be of invaluable help to both in the ESL/EFL students and teachers. Contrasting constructions in L1 and L2 within the framework of CxG can be a mighty tool for formal description of constructions across languages but it also offers a first language specific contrastive description for EFL and ESL learners who come from one particular language background. The growing awareness in EFL/ESL teachers of the benefits of CxG implies that the future studies and research will investigate how contrastive constructionist approach to EFL/ESL teaching and learning can be refined, elaborated and used to the best advantage.

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