

Capturing Variation in the Use of (in)Definite Articles in Native and Nativised Varieties of English

Pascual Cantos,¹ Carlos Balsalobre, Vicenta Rodríguez
and Ana María Fernández

Abstract

Articles exhibit a relatively stable set of semantic/pragmatic meanings in English (e.g. Hawkins 1978) despite the fact that the definition of ‘definiteness’ itself remains a contentious issue (cf. Abbott 2003). In this paper, I examine the existing categories of usage types that have been proposed for ‘the’, ‘a/an’ and ‘θ’ and argue that they are inadequate for the creation of classification schemes for use with corpora of *nativised* (cf. Lowenberg 1986, Kachru 1986) varieties of English. To illustrate, consider the following:

- 1) Why is it that **the** people in general don’t seem to know these I mean from appearance anyway and from what one hear as in these these not the issues that are often front-ended to any discussion <ICE-SIN:S1B-039#75:1:A>.
- 2) And it is time that we forget this sort of, **a** generalizing, and comes out to grasp that another plan of action.... <ICE-IND:S1B-028#106:1:D>.
- 3) Then **θ** mid-term effect is from that scarring tissue which <-/>which heals now there’s a big fibrous or a big colloid <ICE-EA:S1BINT4T>.

While these marked uses of articles are often regarded as erroneous (or at least, improper) by native standards, I will show that their underlying grammar is largely principled and requires a different semantic/pragmatic treatment to allow for more accommodating classification schemes. Towards this end, I will complement the usage types that have been proposed for ‘the’ by Hawkins (1978) and Prince (1981), as well as by Huddleston and Pullum (2002), Biber *et al.* (1999) and Quirk *et al.* (1985) for ‘a/an’ and ‘θ’, with insights from studies on English articles with language contact perspectives (Ionin *et al.* 2004, Gil 2003 and Trenkic 2002). Finally, I will propose new classification schemes to capture the variation in the use of articles in native and nativised varieties of English and present some results of their application in ICE.

¹ *e-mail*: pcantos@um.es