A CASE STUDY OF DEFINITENESS AND INDEFINITENESS IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

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Summary. The definiteness and indefiniteness is an important communicative category. This category is universal and is expressed in different languages by various means. There are no special indicators of definiteness / indefiniteness such as articles in the Russian language. However, these values are expressed by various means related to different levels of the language. Due to this fact, word order is an important and an interesting subject for a linguistic research. As a grammatical means, word order can convey not only information, but also the attitude to this information or communicative situation of the speaker, and also to concretize the content of the spoken message from the point of view of definiteness / indefiniteness. This study focuses on describing the means of expressing the category of definiteness and indefiniteness in Russian and the ways of conveying its semantic shades.

Keywords: Russian, definiteness, indefiniteness, category, article, grammatical means, word order.

For a long time it was believed that the category of definiteness / indefiniteness is not a characteristic of the Russian language, since it lacks a formal grammatical indicator of this category which is the article. Linguistic research on the disclosure of the content of definiteness / indefiniteness was carried out mainly in connection with the study of articles.

Recently, the category of definiteness / indefiniteness has been the subject of special research in those languages which do not have articles. There are a number of works devoted to methods of expressing definiteness / indefiniteness in the Russian language. The researches of E.M. Galkina-Fedoruk, N.S. Pospelova, D.I. Fursenko, T.A. Papenkova, A.V. Bondarko, Yu.A. Rylov, O.B. Akimov, E.M. Nikolaeva, Z.M. Ganeeva, M.V. Horn had proven clearly the existence of the category of definiteness / indefiniteness in the Russian language in which a whole system of linguistic and non-linguistic (facial expressions, gesture) means for expressing it.

In any modern language, there is semantics of definiteness/indefiniteness, which is expressed by various means. The opposition of definite / indefinite of the referent in a number of languages is marked grammatically – with the help of a special lexico-grammatical category of words – articles: definite and indefinite. In other languages, where this category is not grammatical, other categories of the language can serve as means of actualization of the corresponding nouns.
The issue of the existence of the category of definiteness / indefiniteness in the Russian language has been controversial in linguistics for many years. According to Professor A.A. Reformatskiy, this category is “very essential for the grammar of the Romano-Germanic languages and is clearly expressed in these languages by the difference between the definite and indefinite articles, though it is absent in the Russian language, but this does not mean that the Russians cannot have these meanings in their consciousness” (Reformatskiy, 1967).

Means of expressing definiteness / indefiniteness in Russian

The function of determination in modern Russian is expressed by lexical, grammatical, morphological and syntactic means of actualization.

Lexical actualizers include demonstrative and indefinite pronouns, adverbs, possessive pronouns, combinations with particles, phrases with numerals, deicticity, anaphoricity, phrase units with the core of definiteness / indefiniteness, phraseological combinations.

Demonstrative and indefinite pronouns are the most prominent exponents of the category of definiteness / indefiniteness. “The demonstrative pronoun of the modern type is the greatest abstraction, but the abstraction is not empty, but the most valuable, genuine; like any true generalization, the modern pronoun contains all infinite variety separate and single” (Yakubinsiy, 1953). For instance:

E.g. Петя хочет жениться на какой-то студентке (неопределенное имя) (Pete wants to marry a student). Вот та книга (определенное имя) (Here is the book).

The lexical method is a combination of a noun with an indefinite or demonstrative pronoun: этот, тот, кое-кто, кто-то, кто-нибудь и т.д. (this, that, something, someone, etc.):

E.g. Все четыре центра лежат в одной плоскости (The four centres lie in a plane).

Kobozeva I.M. notes that “In the Russian language, the category of definiteness / indefiniteness is not grammatical, the pronouns can serve as actualizers of the corresponding reference statuses” (I. Kobozeva, 2004). It is worth noting that this method is also a characteristic of the English language.

For example, the indefinite article can be expressed in Russian by such words as “некоторый”, “один” (“some”, “one”):

E.g. У него не было ни единого шанса. (He had not a chance).

As for grammatical means of actualization, they include: the category of the type of the verb, the category of the number, modality:


Definiteness / indefiniteness in the Russian language is partly related to the category of numbers: the use of plural forms as markers of indefiniteness. That is to say, the meaning of indefiniteness appears in cases where a noun denoting a single unit is transmitted by the plural of a noun. For instance:

E.g. Осторожно! Здесь гвозди! (человек наткнулся в темноте на гвоздь) (Watch out! There are nails!)
У меня здесь есть друзья (хотя бы один) (I have friends here).
У меня здесь нет друзей (ни одного) (I have no friends here).

The syntactic method is determined by the position of words in the sentence.

E.g. Было обнаружено, что лигнин сосны ладанной легче превратить в волокнистую массу, чем природный лигнин, благодаря эксперименту, который проводили правительственные ученые совместно с учеными различных институтов (A recent collaboration between academic and government scientists has led to the characterization of a lobby pine lignin that is easier to pulp than normal lignin).

Книга лежит на полке and На полке лежит книга (The book is on the shelf).
The interchange of theme (already known) and rhyme (new information) creates an actual division of the text. Since in English there is a fixed word order in a sentence, this way of expressing the category of definiteness / indefiniteness is not relevant. However, there is also the concept of inversion, which emphasizes that rhyme is the subject. In English, for instance, the indefinite article may indicate a rhyme in the sentence, thereby showing what word order is needed when translating. If the subject in the sentence is indefinite (or zero, in the case where the subject used in the plural), then in translation into Russian, it should begin with a predicate or with adverbial modifier:

E.g. В реакции того же типа получен низкий выход диметилхлортиофосфата (In a related reaction a poor yield of dimethyl chlorophosphate was obtained).

The syntactic methods of transmitting indefiniteness in the Russian language include personal-indefinite and impersonal sentences, the construction of “word ending with letter –o pronoun word”.

So, for the expression of the indefiniteness, constructions of the type “неизвестно куда” (“God knows where”) are used. The range of such words is limited, e.g. неведомо, невесть, непонятно, неясно, непостижимо, необъяснимо (no one knows, nobody knows, unknown, incomprehensible, inexplicable). The pronouns and adverbs adjacent to them are: кто, что, какой, чей (who, what, what, whose) in different case forms; когда, как, зачем, куда, откуда, почему, сколько, где (when, how, why, where, where, why, how much, where). For instance:

E.g. Недоизвестно куда, непонятно зачем, неведомо откуда, необъяснимо почему (It is not known where, it is not clear why, it is not known from where, inexplicably why).

Morphological actualizers include: the opposition of the Accusative and Genitive Cases, the full and short forms of adjectives, which serve as the article in Romano-Germanic languages.

With regard to the form of the genitive and accusative cases in the expression of definiteness / indefiniteness, it is believed that at the first mention the noun, in the position of the direct complement, is in the Genitive case and thus conveys an indefinite meaning.

When the same object is mentioned repeatedly in the text, the noun appears already in Accusative Case. For instance:

E.g. Он написал отцу, что матери плохо живется, она болеет, и чтобы отец прислал ей денег на дорогу. Деньги она отдад, вернувшись домой. (He wrote
to his father that his mother is living not well, she is sick, and that he should send some money for the ticket. She will give back the money once she returns home).

Дай воды (воду); Он не ел груши (грушу);
Give water (Give the water); He did not eat pear (He didn't eat the pear).

To sum it up, it must be admitted that to denote determination in modern linguistics, the terms of actualization, quantification, and reference are used. In English, the indicator of determination is the category of articles. The article determines the uniqueness, exclusivity of the object in the described situation, or relates it to the class of similar phenomena or objects.

Thus, in modern Russian, the category of definiteness / indefiniteness is expressed by a whole complex of interacting means belonging to different language levels.

The category of definiteness / indefiniteness does not have a regular grammatical expression, therefore, the considered tools are not universal but they represent the features of the Russian language.

**Data analysis**

1) Russian: «Какое чудо эти звезды, - сказал ей возлюбленный, - и как чудесна власть любви!» (Wilde, 2000:153)

   English: "How wonderful the stars are", he said to her, “and how wonderful is the power of love!”

2) Russian: И он вынул из сундука тот плащ и ту янтарную цепь и показал этой женщине (Wilde, 2000:290)

   English: And he took the cloak and the amber chain from the chest where they lay, and showed them to her.


   English: “Bare he not upon his neck a chain of amber? Was not round him a cloak of gold tissue broidered with stars?”


   English: One night there flew over the city a little Swallow.

5) Russian: Жила давнём-давно одна бедная вдова, и был у нее единственный сын Джек. (Wilde, 2000: 54)

   English: Once upon a time there lived a poor widow who had an only son named Jack.

6) Russian: эта фотография была снята в последний день нашего рокового лета, всего за несколько минут до нашей второй и последней попытки обмануть судьбу. (Nabokov, 1991:32)

   English: The photograph was taken on the last day of our fatal summer and just a few minutes before we made our second and final attempt to thwart fate.

7) Russian: В театре ко мне обратилась одна девушка с просьбой поменяться местами. Эта девушка хотела сидеть рядом с подругой. (Sirota:2019)

   English: In the theater, a girl approached me with a request to exchange places. The girl wanted to sit next to her friend.

**Discussions**

Examples (1) and (2) demonstrate the case when in English the categorical meaning of certainty is expressed by the corresponding article, while in the Russian
language this meaning is conveyed using these demonstrative pronouns “this, that, that”. Thus, it should be noted that in this example in English the meaning of certainty is transmitted morphologically, and in Russian – lexically. In addition to the definite article in the example (2), one can notice that the meaning of certainty is conveyed by the possessive pronoun “her”. In order to render this meaning into Russian, we applied a combination of a demonstrative pronoun “этой” / “this” and a noun “женщине” / “woman” during translation, thereby conveying the meaning of certainty lexically.

The categorical meaning of uncertainty in (3) sentence is expressed by the corresponding article in English, and is transmitted into Russian using a combination of nouns and adjectives in the genitive case.

This sentence (4) is of great interest for analysis, because it clearly shows the categorical expression of uncertainty at the lexical-morphological and syntactic levels. The sentence begins with the numeral “one” that precedes the noun. In this case, “one” has a meaning of pronoun and expresses uncertainty, which finds the corresponding meaning in the Russian equivalent, where the sentence begins with the adverb of time “как-то”. The sentence uses the construction “there flew”, which syntactically expresses the meaning of uncertainty. In this example, the categorical meaning of certainty in English translation is represented by the use of the definite article “the” before the noun “city”, and in the Russian sentence this meaning is expressed lexically with the help of the demonstrative pronoun “тем” preceding the noun in the instrumental case. If we consider the analyzed sentence of the Russian language from the point of view of the actual division of the sentence, we can notice that the new information is expressed using the indefinite article, the translation of the rem is syntactically highlighted by setting the communicative center of the statement, in this case, the noun, at the end of the phrase. If in English translation the transmission of new information (rheme) does not depend on its location in the sentence, due to the stable word order, in Russian, communicatively significant components that carry new information gravitate towards the end of the phrase. Thus, the uncertainty in the English sentence is expressed using the article a, and in Russian by putting a communicatively significant word at the end of the sentence.

Analyzing the translation of sentence (5), it is seen that the use of the adverb of indefinite time “once upon a time”, which is a characteristic of a fabulous text, introduces the reader into an indefinite space of time. This adverb expresses the categorical meaning of uncertainty, which in Russian is also transmitted by the adverb of indefinite time. The expression “a poor widow who had an only son” conveys the meaning of certainty, since we use the conjunctive pronoun “who”, which creates a sentence with the category of definiteness. In Russian, this value is transmitted lexically, with the help of the numeral “one”, which is the determinant of the noun “widow”.

Considering Russian sentence (6) we can observe that the category of definiteness is expressed by the demonstrative pronoun “эта” which is placed before the noun “фотография”. In English translation the definite article “the” indicates the use of a noun in a specifically-nominal sense – that is to denote the existent object, which is in sight, specially allocated or known to interlocutors due to certain circumstances of the objects.
(7) In the first sentence, the numeral “одна” / “one” does not indicate the number of designated objects, but the expression of the categorical meaning of indefiniteness. Thus, we can conclude that in this Russian sentence the numeral “one” is equivalent to the indefinite article. Similarly, demonstrative pronoun “эта” / “this” corresponds to a definite article. In its semantics, the numeral “one” is countable-pronoun: in addition to the quantitative meaning, it has the meaning of a pronoun “some, someone, somebody, anyone, etc.”, thus expressing the meaning of indefiniteness.

Conclusion

Practical analysis and comparison of sentences in three languages: Russian, English, and Arabic showed that in English, the category of definiteness and indefiniteness is more often expressed using the definite article the and the demonstrative pronouns that, this (definiteness), the indefinite article a / an (indefiniteness). In the Russian language, definiteness / indefiniteness is expressed with the help of demonstrative pronouns (this, some, someone, one, etc.), that is, more lexically, or by setting the communicative center (noun) of the statement at the end of the phrase.

References: