Vietnamese learners mastering english articles
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Chapter 4

USING ARTICLES

In Chapter 3, we dealt with the English articles from an ‘abstract’ point of view, and in this chapter, we will investigate how articles are actually used. However, before getting to the main part of this section, we will briefly discuss which forms should actually be regarded as articles and how nouns can be classified. In each sub-section we will introduce different perspectives again and end with the cognitive grammar view.

TYPES OF ARTICLES

Jespersen argues that there is no doubt about the article status of the and a as a result of their historical origin (see Jespersen 1949: 405-416). However, the status of both unstressed some and ‘no article’ are still controversial. We will first briefly discuss some and then ‘no article’, and we will argue that it would be helpful to include the null form into the final article paradigm, which we will use in analyzing Vietnamese learner errors (in Chapter 5) and which we will use as a basis for the newly written cognitive lessons on article use (in Chapter 6).

With respect to the unstressed some, it has generally been agreed that it has the function of an article even though Christophersen (1939) and Jespersen (1949) did not mention it. Hawkins (1978) mentions it explicitly in his work on definiteness. Palmer (1939: 75) calls it the affirmative partitive article. Quirk et al. (1985: 265) categorize it as indefinite with
respect to specific reference and note that, as a result of its quantitative trait, it is sometimes regarded as a plural article. The reason for its inclusion in the system is its complementary distribution in relation to *a* (Chesterman, 1991: 45), and “closely corresponds in function to the indefinite article” (Palmer, 1939: 75). It can occur before plural nouns and mass nouns, but not singular count nouns. Here are some examples.

(1)  
   a. I’ve just bought a book.  
   b. I’ve just bought some books.  
   c. ?I’ve just bought books.  
   d. I’ve just bought books (but not pens).

In (1b) *some books* is specific and the number is more than one. It corresponds with (1a) concerning number. (1c) is questionable because the notion category is implied, as is seen in (1d), where *some* cannot occur. (See generic zero in Chapter 3.) The fact that the use of a bare plural in (1c) is questionable brings us to the ‘no article’ status in what follows.

Yotsukura (1970) seems to be the first person who suggests adding another category besides the zero article. To Yotsukura, there is distributional evidence suggesting a form other than the zero article. By using a post-modifying restrictive relative clause test, she discovered that the second zero form is found before singular proper nouns and some common nouns. Along similar lines, Sloat (1969: 26) maintains that the second form of the zero article is “a zero allomorph of unstressed the” and it occurs before proper nouns, which comprise a special subclass of common nouns. Quirk et al. (1985: 246) describe a proper noun like *Marjon* as having “no article” and a common noun like *music* as having a “zero article”. Chesterman (1991) and others such as Kaluza (1963, 1968), Seppanen (1986), (cited in Chesterman, 1991) take the same position.
Chesterman suggests using the term *the null form* for the second zero article. Let us consider examples such as the following from Chesterman (1991).

(2)  
a. *I like London that the tourists see.*  
b. I like the London that the tourists see.  
c. I like cheese that is made of goat’s milk.

(3)  
a. *Word has come that the Pope has died.*  
b. *Word that came yesterday was that the Pope has died.*  
c. The word that came yesterday was that the Pope has died. (p. 17)

(4)  
a. What about question seven?  
b. *What about question seven you answered before, then?*  
c. What about the question seven you answered before, then?

(5)  
a. Breakfast is ready.  
b. *Breakfast you asked for is ready.*  
c. The breakfast you asked for is ready.

Through a post-modifying restrictive clause test, it can be seen that there is a difference between a proper noun such as London (with a presumed null article) and a common noun such as cheese (with a presumed zero article). A noun with a zero article can be used with a restrictive clause, but a noun with the null form cannot. In order to ‘identify’ the proper nouns in (2b), (3c), (4c), and (5c), the should be used instead. According to Langacker (1991), the before a proper noun can be explained by the fact that they can also be construed as common nouns. Prototypically, a nominal such as London refers to the unique instance of London, but when used as a common noun, we can construe of London as having many different identities. So, the article the is used when we refer to a particular instance of these identities.

As far as the null article is concerned, Chesterman (1991) notes that the count singular common nouns that can be used with the null form are
those that some grammarians classify as having ‘idiomatic’ structures or fixed phrases (e.g. at church, eye to eye) as well as those in the copular structure (e.g. be captain of the team). Master (1997) supports Chesterman when he regards the null form as the null article. To him, the null article is the most definite of the articles. It is used to name a set (Chesterman, 1991: 84) or a one-member set (Master, 1997: 223). The notion of familiarity is taken into consideration when Master maintains that a singular count noun used with the null article is considered to be more familiar (6a) than that used with the (6b).

(6)  
   a. After dinner, we’ll see a movie.  
   b. After the dinner, we’ll see a movie.

From this presentation, let us see how Langacker (1991) treats these issues from a cognitive linguistic perspective. Langacker also considers unstressed some and the ‘zero determiner’ to have the same status as the articles the and a, which, together with demonstratives, constitute grounding predications. (Grounding is concerned with the relationship between speech-act participants and the designatum. For more detail, see Langacker, 1991: Chapters 2 & 3.) With respect to unstressed some, which occurs with mass nouns (Langacker’s term in denoting both mass nouns and plural nouns), he argues that some expresses a limited quantity. It is different from the zero article in that the noun used with the latter can refer to an unlimited size, even a maximal quantity of the reference mass described earlier.

With respect to the null article and the zero article, Langacker does not explicitly state the distinction as suggested by the linguists mentioned above. To him, maximally general mass nouns, either plural or mass, are similar to proper nouns in that they are semantically unique and one would “not expect an article.” (Langacker, June 2004: personal communication).
However, we believe a distinction between the null article and the zero article is useful in distinguishing between a noun conceived as designating a type and a nominal designating an instance. Also according to Langacker (personal communication 2004), a noun such as *captain* in *He is captain of the team* is a noun, not a nominal, because it specifies a type. And for the current purpose, it is enough to understand that a noun, in cognitive grammar, is conceived as designating a type, and as such it has a bare form (i.e. no article form). Therefore, distinguishing between the ‘null’ article and the ‘zero’ article will help us distinguish between a *noun* (designating a type) and a *nominal* (designating an instance). The distinction, in turn, will be useful in categorizing the errors Vietnamese learners make (see Chapter 5). To conclude, we will take the position that there are five articles: *the, a, some, zero*, and *null*. Because the use of each of these articles depends on the type of noun it is used with, we will now consider noun classes in English.

**CLASSES OF NOUNS**

Traditionally, nouns are divided into two categories: common nouns and proper nouns (Table 1). Common nouns can be subdivided into two classes: count and non-count noun. In each subclass, a further semantic division is made, which results in concrete count/non-count and abstract count/non-count (Quirk et al. 1985: 247).

As Quirk *et al.* admit, such a classification can be problematic because exceptions should be made with nouns having dual membership. A
noun like *cake* can be viewed as both count and noncount as in the following example from Quirk *et al.*

(7) A: Would you like a *cake*?
B: No, I don’t like *cake*.

Table 1. The most important noun classes (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 247)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bun, pig, toy...</td>
<td>Difficulty, remark, ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter, gold</td>
<td>Music, homework, ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common</td>
<td>noncount</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, Paris, ...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chesterman (1991), based on Guillaume (1975) suggests considering nouns in overlapping cases as count or non-count based on their typical use. For example, *furniture* is non-count, because it typically rejects the occurrence of the indefinite article. Similarly, *nature* and *mankind* usually reject the presence of *the*. However, this division between typical and non-typical is not very useful to the L2 learner. How is s/he to know when a noun is used in its typical sense or not? Let us now see how cognitive grammar treats nouns.

Langacker’s (1991) categorization of nouns is generally similar to traditional grammar. He also uses terms such as common nouns, count nouns, non-count nouns and proper names, but what Langacker focuses on is why a noun is considered such a noun and relates the semantic aspects of

*Chapter 4*
these types of nouns to how we conceive ‘the world’. In doing so, he uses
the distinction between noun and nominal, along which some other relevant
distinctions such as type vs. instance, boundedness vs. unboundedness, and
proper names versus nominals.

First, we will see how he explains the differences between a noun
and a nominal. Overly simply put, a noun has no article, but a nominal does.
A noun (e.g. site) and a nominal (e.g. an excellent convention site, the
excellent convention site) share some conceptual properties. A noun or a
nominal profiles (i.e. designates) a thing, which is a region (i.e. set of
interconnected entities) in some domain in our mind (i.e. conceptualization).
Langacker’s noun/nominal distinction is in line with Guillaume’s distinction
(1975) between nom en puissance and nom en effet. Nom en puissance is
concerned with an idea (or a type) and nom en effet with the realization of
an idea (an actual instance).

As far as domain of instantiation is concerned, the noun sand, for
example, makes us think of material substance, and this substance is located
in the domain of space in our mind. The fact that sand is conceived of in a
certain spatial domain in our thought can be illustrated through the
ungrammaticality found in *When is the sand? rather than Where is the
sand? Thus space is the domain of instantiation (i.e. in our thought) for
material substance as profiled by sand. Similar applications can be made to
such nouns as moment, note, or yellow. The domain of instantiation for the
thing profiled by moment is time, note is the musical scale, and yellow is
color.

Although a noun and a nominal have similar conceptual properties,
there are differences between them with respect to their semantic function.
What distinguishes them is what Langacker calls as the type-instance
Chapter 4
property. A noun names a *type*; a nominal designates an *instance* of that type. Thus a noun like *site* may specify various entities as being representative of the same class (i.e. type specification) without connecting it to any particular instance of that class. We can say that a type specified by a noun provides us with a useful tool in delimiting the potential objects in our thought. It confines our attention to a set of things (i.e. *category*) regarded as equivalent in certain respects.

By contrast, a nominal (e.g. *the site* or *an excellent site*) presupposes instantiation (i.e. elaboration) of the type in question. It mentions a thing and to make it a momentary focus of attention. Its main function is to single out particular instances of the specified type by providing additional information. Two kinds of information that it supplies are *quantity* and *grounding*. The information concerning quantity can be either absolute (e.g. *four dogs*) or proportional (e.g. *most dogs; all dogs*). The information concerning grounding has to do with speech-act participants (i.e. speaker and hearer) and the speech event (i.e. discourse). Simply put, a nominal like *the books* reveals that the number of books is more than one (i.e. quantity) and that the hearer and the speaker share their mental contact by identifying them uniquely and maximally (i.e. grounding) in a given discourse space (i.e. context).

To account for countability of nouns in general and to help account for the fact that a noun like *cake* may occur as a count or non-count noun, Langacker introduces the conceptual notion of boundedness, which refers to whether we can conceive of clear boundaries of an entity or not. For example, boundaries are inherent to the typical conception of *a lake* when defined as “a large area of water surrounded by land and not connected to the sea except by rivers or streams.” *(Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary)*
The notion of boundedness can be seen through the expression *surrounded by land*. By contrast, the idea of boundary is not imposed on a quantity of a substance profiled by a mass noun. For example, the noun *sand*, referring to a general substance consisting of many particles that are too small to be perceived individually, does not render any clear boundary in our thought. According to Langacker, an entity that is construed as bounded is expressed as a count noun in English and an entity that is not bounded as a non-count noun.

A noun like *cake* can be conceived as unbounded when it refers to the substance, but bounded when it refers to a specific piece. *Sleep* is construed as unbounded when it refers to the general activity of sleeping, but bounded when it is construed as an event with a clear beginning and end. Thus the notion of boundedness can explain the following sets of examples, in which the same noun can be used as a count or non-count noun.

(8) a. I like to eat cake.
    b. I baked a cake.
    c. All humans need sleep.
    d. My baby needs a sleep.

To account for the dual membership that Quirk et al. (1985) mentions (as exemplified in 7a and b), Langacker introduces the notion of *quality space*, which is defined as “a set of domains supporting the qualitative characterization of a physical or abstract substance” (1991: 551). The noun *wine*, for instance, is typically unbounded as in “I like wine”. It can become bounded, though, if it is conceived of as distinguished from other substances. Conceived in this way, it can be said to occupy a “circumscribed portion of quality space” (Langacker, 1991: 18). For example, in “This is a good wine”, “a wine” actually stands for “a kind of... Chapter 4
wine”. This explanation explains cases as noted by Quirk et al. (1985), in which (9a) is ungrammatical. Sensitivity is usually construed as an unbounded entity in the domain of human emotions, and is therefore usually non-count. However, as illustrated by (9c), within this unbounded domain there can be “a circumscribed portion of quality space” when we construe sensitivity as consisting of various kinds and refer to one of those.

(9) a. She played the oboe with *a sensitivity.
   b. She played the oboe with sensitivity.
   c. She played the oboe with an unusual sensitivity.

Before we end this part, let us see how Langacker explains the semantic aspects of proper names in relation to the distinctions of type vs. instance, and noun vs. nominal. In cognitive grammar, a proper name like Mary Smith has different kinds of information. First, it is construed as having a type specification on the basis of what is conventionally accepted in that Mary Smith suggests a female human. Second, an instantiation is presupposed when a name is taken to be as characteristic of a specific person. As such, quantity is implied because only one person bears the name. Grounding is also incorporated in the name when the name is considered unique and either the speaker or the hearer can identify it easily. Since different kinds of information are thus conflated in it (i.e. type, instantiation, quantity, and grounding), a proper name has the status of a nominal. Although it is a nominal, it is not used with the definite article to avoid redundancy. Proper names thus have their own semantic structure conveying the essential content of the. Therefore, a phrase such as *the Henk Joosten is usually ungrammatical.

Yet, in real life, there are cases in which a name is born by more than one person, or there are people that we know who have the same name.
In these cases, some grounding predications (i.e. articles) are needed. To
distinguish *three Mary Smiths* that we know, the article *the* is used together
with some descriptive expressions as *the Mary Smith who used to play
professional tennis* or *the Mary Smith who married my brother*. When a
name is borne by more than one person, an indefinite article should be used
like *a Mary Smith phoned you while you were out*. In these cases, the names
are grammatically used as a common noun.

Now that we have discussed the different types of articles and noun
classes, we will proceed with the contexts in which articles occur.

**USAGE CONTEXTS**

Quirk *et al*’s classification of usage types (1985) has been well known and
been frequently cited. Their classification is based on notions of reference
and genericity: specific reference and generic reference. Yet, as mentioned
earlier, this taxonomy has provided overlapping cases which are
controversial, notably the relation between genericity and non-specificity.
From a language teaching perspective, this classification has produced lots
of ‘detailed rules’ which can be generalized and re-categorized
(Chesterman, 1991). By contrast, Langacker (1991) does not provide a
detailed account of usage types. However, his ideas can provide a basis for
generalizing the usage rules by Quirk *et al*. In this section, we will start with
a summary of the usage types by Quirk *et al.* (1985) and then get into
Langacker’s account (1991). We will end the section with our suggested
usage types based on Quirk *et al*’s descriptions and Langacker’s cognitive
principles.
Quirk et al.’s classification

As mentioned earlier, definiteness is regarded as the main property that distinguishes the articles. Therefore, in describing usage types, most studies focus on the use of *the*, whose usage is considered a reference point for other articles. This is also the case in Quirk et al’s *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985), who incorporate insights by Hawkins (1978).

Endophoric uses
1. Anaphoric use
   a. Direct anaphoric use:
      (10) John bought a TV and a video recorder, but he returned the video recorder.
   b. Indirect anaphoric use:
      (11) I lent bill a valuable book, but when he returned it, the cover was filthy, and the pages were torn.
2. Cataphoric use:
   (12) The girls sitting over there are my cousins.

Exophoric uses
3. Situational use:
   a. Immediate situation use:
      (13) Have you fed the cat? [said in a domestic context]
   b. Larger situation use
      (14) The Prime Minister; the airlines
4. Logical use:
   (15) This is the only remaining copy.
5. Sporadic use:
   (16) My sister goes to the theatre every month.
6. Body parts reference use:
   (17) Mary banged herself on the forehead.
7. Generic reference use:
   (18) The bull terrier makes an excellent watchdog.

The uses are generalized into two main categories: endophoric use (i.e. textual reference) and exophoric use (non-textual reference) (Halliday,
Endophoric use is found with anaphoric and cataphoric uses because they are concerned with a text or discourse. Exophoric use is found in (13-18) above. It is worth elaborating these uses.

As mentioned, endophoric use is found with anaphoric and cataphoric uses. Anaphoric use can be figured out roughly through the relevant term *second mention*, which has been highly criticized by researchers. Anaphoric use has to do with the backward reference of a definite phrase to a piece of information given earlier in the text or discourse. There are two kinds of anaphoric use: direct and indirect. Direct anaphoric use arises when a definite phrase refers directly to the same noun head that has occurred in the text (10). Indirect anaphoric use lies in association or inference from what has already been mentioned on the basis of the hearer’s knowledge. For instance, after mentioning a book, the author can be used because it can be inferred that a book is supposed to be written by one author. Similarly, each book has one cover, and all the pages belong to a book (11). Cataphoric use (12) concerns the reference of a definite phrase based on what follows the head noun. Although cataphoric use is generally related to postmodification, Quirk *et al.* (1985) note that there is no difference between postmodification and premodification.

Exophoric use lies much in pragmatic knowledge. It is not limited to the information provided by a text or discourse. These are cases in which *the* is used without second mention. First, the basis for the use of *the* may lie in the immediate situation (13) and larger situation (14). When we are in a garden, we can mention *the roses*; or (if we are citizens of a certain country) we can talk about *the Prime Minister* on the basis of the knowledge that each country has one Prime Minister. Similarly, knowledge based on anatomy (17) and the logical interpretation of certain words (15) also give
grounds for the use of *the*. Besides, the use of *the* can be extended to what Quirk *et al.* (1985) call “sporadic use”, which has to do with an institution of human society. Consequently in (16) it is not possible to ask *which theater?* because the reference is made to “an institution which may be observed recurrently at various places and times” (p. 269). In the same line, if reference is made to the whole species as one class, *the* is used as in (18). Because sporadic use and generic use of *the* seem to share some similarities, Langacker (1991) treats them as *types*. We are going to return to this issue in Langacker’s classification.

Before we move on to the uses of the indefinite and *zero* article, it is worth noting that in Quirk *et al.*’s *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, the use of *the* is also treated in the section on proper nouns, which by default take the zero article. *The* is not treated as an exceptional case, but as a kind of in-between form, which is different from the definite description and the ‘frozen’ form usually regarded as a name. Although Quirk *et al.* do not mention the role of ‘familiarity’, we believe this notion can be useful to explain the in-between case in a gradience scale in which a name like *the Oxford Road* can occur:

(i) the Oxford road > (ii) the Oxford Road > (iii) Oxford Road > (iv) Oxford

The Oxford road, being a definite description (i.e. the road to Oxford), has become more familiar in (ii) when Road is capitalized as a sign of conventionalization. The process of becoming a name begins to be obvious when *the* is dropped in (iii) so that Oxford as the purest form of name occurs in (iv). Therefore, in the case of names used with *the*, Quirk *et al.* consider them to be “the in-between” of names (p. 295). Let us now see how Quirk *et al.* describe the uses of *a* and the *zero* article.

*Chapter 4*
The indefinite article *a* and the zero article are also defined in terms of definiteness. The similarity they can have is that the condition for the use of *the* does not obtain, but in some cases the zero article has a definite sense. With singular count nouns, *a* is used, and with plural nouns or non-count nouns, either the unstressed *some* or the zero article is used. A summary of Quirk et al.’s description concerning these two articles is as follows:

**The indefinite article *a*:**

- **Non-definite use**
  - (19) **An intruder** has stolen a vase. (The intruder) …
  - **Non-referring use**
  - (20) Paganini was a **great violinist**.
  - **Numerical use**
  - (21) The Wrights have two daughters and a **son**.
  - **Generic use:**
  - (22) **A bull terrier** makes an excellent watchdog.

**The zero article:**

- **Non-definite use:**
  - (23) a. I’ve been writing (some) letters this morning.
    b. Would you like (some) coffee or (some) tea?
  - **Definite meaning use:**
  - *Copular relation* (e.g. He is captain of the team.)
  - *Sporadic reference*
    - (a) Institutions (e.g. at church)
    - (b) Means of transport and communication (e.g. by bus; by radio)
    - (c) Times of day and night (e.g. at dawn; at night)
    - (d) Seasons (e.g. in (the) spring)
    - (e) Meals (e.g. have breakfast)
    - (f) Illnesses (e.g. influenza; (the) flu)
  - *Parallel structure* (e.g. eye to eye)
  - *Fixed phrases involving prepositions* (at home; on foot)
  - **Generic use:**
  - (24) Bull terriers make excellent watchdogs.

Quirk et al.’s categorization is not quite satisfactory. First, with reference to the use of *the*, it seems that we can blend some uses. For *Chapter 4*
example, sporadic use of *the* is quite similar to a type use (i.e. generic use), and even some cases of larger situation use are quite similar to a generic use. Second, with respect to the zero article, we wonder why those definite meaning uses are not classified under those uses of proper nouns and names. For all the nouns listed in the definite meaning use are singular count nouns. (This is the reason why Chesterman (1991) suggests using the *null* article for those nouns and argues they should have the same status as names.) Let us now see how Langacker describes the use of the articles.

**Langacker’s classification**

Before we start with Langacker again, it is worth remembering that cognitive grammar deals with how we conceive things. As far as the use of the articles is concerned, the focus is on what is happening in our mind on the basis of what our nervous system can capture in our surrounding. Let us begin with the use of *the*.

To Langacker, the condition for the use of *the* lies in the mental contact achieved by the speech-act participants with an instance of a type in the current discourse space. It is through the discourse space (introduced earlier) that the hearer can figure out the instance that the speaker intends. Here is a recapitulation of Langacker’s description of the use of *the*.

“Use of the definite article with type description T in a nominal implies that (i) the designated instance t₁ of T is unique and maximal in relation to the current discourse space; (2) S has mental contact with t₁; and (3) either H has mental contact with t₁ or the nominal alone is sufficient to establish it. (p. 98)

Generally, there are three circumstances engendered from the discourse space. Consider the following examples:
Direct awareness:
(25) a. I bought a palm and a memory stick, but I had to return the palm.
   b. I have seven cats. The cats are very naughty.

Indirect awareness:
(26) I have to sell my motorbike because the engine is almost shot.

Nominal content-based awareness:
(27) The first day of Christmas 2004 was filled with tsunami disaster.
(28) The initial sentences in these examples introduce an instance of dogs.
(29) A fly is on the tip your nose.

Immediate physical context:
(30) Watch out for the crocodile behind you.

Present reality context:
(31) Marjolijn goes to the supermarket every Saturday.
(32) The whale is a mammal.

The first circumstance is direct awareness. Speech-act participants may be aware of a certain instance (i.e. expressed by a nominal) at a given moment in the flow of discourse (25a). And it is worth reminding that if there are many instances, those instances are construed as the most inclusive instance in the discourse space (25b). It can be compared to the direct basis that the discourse space creates for mental contact. This is in line with the direct anaphoric use described by Quirk et al. in that the discourse space creates a direct basis for mental contact. The second circumstance has to do with indirect awareness. For example, mention of a motorbike can create the condition for a mental association with engine (26). The third circumstance is involved with a situation in which the discourse space does not furnish any basis for mental contact to be achieved. That is, no instance is included in the discourse space for the hearer’s awareness. In this case, a domain can still be salient in our mind. It is the domain of present reality or the immediate physical context. This domain “may be adopted as the discourse
space by default” (Langacker, 1991: 97). Hence, mental contact in this case can be achieved based on the content of the nominal. The content may invoke our knowledge concerning logic or human anatomy (27-29). Or if no type description (i.e. pre-modification or post-modification) is found in the nominal, then the immediate situation (arising in our mind) will be the clue (30).

With reference to what Quirk et al. classify as sporadic reference and generic reference, Langacker treats the nominals used in these categories as designating a unique instance of a type. However, depending on the context or “scenario” (Langacker, 2004: personal communication) in which the nominals occur, they can be considered either a member of a type hierarchy (32) or a role having a global status (e.g. the Pope) or a local status (e.g. the Prime Minister; the supermarket; the theater) (31).

Now, let us see how Langacker presents the use of the indefinite article a, the unstressed some, and the zero article. The sharing property of these articles is that “the nominals they ground7 are insufficient to put hearer in mental contact with a uniquely determined instance of a type” (p. 103). Consider the following examples,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-unique instances</th>
<th>Maximal instances</th>
<th>Arbitrary instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(33)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
<td>(35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Maria bought a motorbike.</td>
<td>a. The formula for water is H2O.</td>
<td>a. A beaver builds dams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Maria drank (some) juice.</td>
<td>b. Whales are mammals.</td>
<td>b. He is a teacher.</td>
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<td>c. (Some) cats got into the bedroom.</td>
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7 The notion ground refers to the speech event, its participants, and its immediate circumstances.
The difference among these indefinite articles lies in their function. *A* is used only with singular count nouns, but the other two are used with mass nouns and plural nouns. Again there is a contrast between *some* and *zero*. These two differ from each other in terms of quantity. The instance designated by a nominal used with *some* is of limited size; however, the size of the instance expressed by *zero* is of any size (33b-c). A maximal instance can be achieved if there is no restricted quantity (34a-b).

Other uses of *a* that are worth mentioning again are its generic and non-referring uses as described by Quirk *et al.* (1985). As introduced in chapter 3, in cognitive grammar, generic *a* (35a) or non-referring *a* (35b) are considered to express an arbitrary instance when they occur with a nominal. The speaker does not have any pre-existing contact with it except that it is “conjured up for a particular immediate purpose and has no status outside the special mental space thereby created” (p. 104).

To conclude this section, Langacker’s objective in cognitive grammar is to provide a conceptual framework for the use of the articles. As a result, there are some uses of articles that he does not explicitly deal with. The main aspect that he does not treat is the use of proper names, which can be used with two types of articles: *the* and *zero*. Also, he does not discuss explicitly what Quirk *et al.* consider bare noun phrases with a definite meaning. Therefore, what follows is a classification based on insights from Quirk *et al.* and Langacker. This taxonomy will be the basis for an analysis of article errors and for the design of an approach that can improve the performance of non-native language learners whose language does not have a corresponding system.
Classification of the article environments

The proposed classification is mostly based on Langacker’s account. The purpose is to describe all the uses of the articles with as few subcategories as possible. Overall, the articles are categorized under two headings: definite and non-definite. Under the heading of definite, there are three subcategories: names, a type as one instance, and a unique instance of a type. Under the non-definite heading, there are three subcategories: non-unique instances, arbitrary instances, and maximal instances. The following is an elaboration of this taxonomy.

First, let us consider the components of the definite heading. In the category of names, there are three sub-categories: proper names, pseudo-names, and groups. Under the category of proper names, there are three components: names of people (e.g. Stan Smith), temporal names (e.g. Easter), and place names (i.e. countries, cities, etc.). The reason for treating temporal names like Christmas and place names as Groningen as names is that they share semantic properties with people’s names.

Under the category of pseudo-names, there are two groups with respect to the forms of articles they are used with: the Null-group and The-group. We use the term pseudo-names to distinguish them from ‘true’ names. The null-group, consists of singular nouns that Quirk et al. classifies under the zero article, with a definite meaning. They are nouns related to institutions (i.e. transport and communication), days’ time, season, meals, illnesses, sports, and role (e.g. be captain of the team). The reason for classifying them as pseudo-names is that they seem to be ‘completely familiar’ (Jespersen, 1949: 418; Chesterman, 1991). They can be construed as specifying a type, and as such they have a ‘no-article’ form. Although

Chapter 4
Langacker considers sports names abstract non-count nouns construed with maximal generality, we are inclined to see them as names on the basis of the possibility of construing them as types.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Taxonomy of the use of English articles based on insights by Quirk et al. &amp; Langacker</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Names</strong></td>
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<td><strong>A type as one instance</strong></td>
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<td>Indefinite</td>
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|            | Mass N              | ZERO, unstressed *some* | I bought *cheese*.
|            | Plural N            |                   | I've been writing *letters* this morning.
| Arbitrary instance | An arbitrary member (predicate nominal; generic *a*) | Singular N | A/an | *A beaver* is a mammal.
|            | Plural              | ZERO              | Wombats are mammals.
| Reference mass | Maximal set         | Mass              | Zero      | The formula of *water* is H2O.
|            | Plural              | *Insects* have six legs |
The *the*-group comprises those nouns related to singular nouns that are used with or without modification, hence, such names as geographical names (e.g. *the Huong river*), public institutions (e.g. *the British Museum*), ships and planes (e.g. *the Titanic*), and newspapers (e.g. *the Saigon Times*). These *the*-marked names are what Quirk *et al.* consider in-between or nearly completely familiar.

The third group under the category of names is group-names. These names, marked by *the*, are different from the groups mentioned in that they are plural proper names. Also included in this group are adjectives considered to be nouns. If these nouns are construed as types, they can be considered names in that they are similar to one semantic function of peoples’ proper names, which are also construed as specifying a type. A name like *Bob Higgins* specifies a male human.

The second category under the heading of definite is types as unique instances. In this category, there are two members: the type hierarchy member group (e.g. *the whale*), and the global/local role (e.g. *the Pope; the supermarket*).

The third category under the definite heading is a unique instance of a type. This category subsumes the three circumstances of discourse space described above: direct awareness, indirect awareness, and tenuous awareness, which in turn consists of two sub-groups: nominal content and immediate situation.

The second heading of the taxonomy, non-definite, includes three categories: non-unique instances, arbitrary instances, and maximal instances. Non-unique instances are actual or specific instances in relation to the discourse space. The three forms of nouns are singular, mass, and plural
nouns. These are marked by *a* (i.e. singular nouns) and *zero* or the unstressed *some*.

Concerning the arbitrary instance group, there are two subgroups of nouns: singular and plural. Under this category, there are three members: generic *a*, non-specific *a*, and predicate nominative construction (i.e. nominals as complements of *be*). We are not sure whether or not mass nouns (e.g. *It is water*) should be included in this group because Langacker gives no account of this. For the time being, a case like *water*, will be treated as belonging to the next category: maximal instance. The maximal instance category consists of two groups of nouns: mass and plural nouns. They are used with a zero article.

As can be seen from this classification, the English article system is not easy to capture, but given a language teaching position, we feel that Langacker’s distinction between “type” and “instance” helps account for some uses of articles. We will use this taxonomy in the next chapters to analyze the article errors that Vietnamese learners of EFL make and to form the basis of a cognitive article lesson.