A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE USE OF ARTICLES IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN
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Abstract
Article is one of the important things when someone studies a language. In general, articles both in English and German have the same meaning, but different forms and functions will be seen in the sentences. These differences are supposed to be understood. In English, the definite and indefinite articles do not change at all in the gender and the plural forms of the words which follow, as well as in nominative case (as subject), accusative case (as direct object), dative case (as indirect object), and genitive case (as possession). On the other hand, in German, the articles change in the cases mentioned above. After analyzing the articles of both languages, the writer concludes that there are similarities and differences as well in using articles in English and German. The similarities are when we use the articles before the only one subject, for mentioning the second time, before names of group of islands and before superlative adjectives. Meanwhile, in German when we use articles for genders, singular and plural nouns, and cases, it will differ extremely from English.

Key words: articles, use, similarities, differences, English, German,

1. Introduction
In general, articles both in English and German have the same meaning, but different forms and functions will be seen in the sentences. These differences are supposed to be understood. Otherwise, the expressions in the sentence will create a big structural mistake.

Richards (1990) in his book entitled Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, stated that article is a word used with a noun, and which shows whether the noun refers to something definite or something indefinite.

In English, the definite and indefinite articles do not change at all in the gender and the plural forms of the words which follow, as well as in nominative case (as subject), accusative case (as direct object), dative case (as indirect object), and genitive case (as possession). On the other hand, in German, the articles change in the cases mentioned above.

And the comparison will be shown in the similarities and differences of using between the definite and indefinite articles in English and German.

2. Discussions
1. Articles in English and German
   a) The Definite and Indefinite Articles in English
   Article is one of the important things when someone studies a language. It is used to precede
both countable nouns and uncountable nouns. In English, according to the book entitled A Practical English Grammar (1990: 1-6), there are two kinds of articles.

1) The definite article “the”
2) The indefinite article “a/an” and they are accurately described as follows:

1) The definite article “the”
   The forms and functions of the definite article “the” can be defined as follows:
   a) The definite article “the” followed by a singular noun has the same form as “the” followed by a plural noun. There are no changes for the definite article “the” in both cases. For examples:
   - The father is going to the office (singular)
   - The fathers are going to the office (plural)
   b) The definite article “the” is the same for all genders. English does not see genders as influential to the structural components. For examples:
   - the man (masculine)
   - the woman (feminine)

- the car (neuter)

c) The use of the definite article “the” is the same for all cases (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive). For examples:
   - Nominative Case (as subject)
     The boy is buying a book.
   - Accusative Case (as direct object)
     I have bought the book.
   - Dative Case (as indirect object)
     I gave a book to the boy.
   - Genitive Case (as possession)
     The brother of the father has come.

d) The definite article “the” is used:
   - Before nouns of which there is only one, or which are considered as one. For examples:
     the earth, the sun, the moon
   - Before a noun which has become definite as a result of being mentioned a second time. For example:
     I bought a book; the book is red.
- Before a noun which, by reason of locality, can represent only one particular thing. For example: 
  *The boys are playing in the yard. (it means the yard of this school)*
- Before superlatives, used as adjectives or pronouns. For example: 
  *Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Europe.*
- Before names of seas, rivers, and plural names of countries. For examples: 
  *the Atlantic Ocean, the Colorado River, the Netherlands*
- Before a noun made definite by the addition of a phrase or clause. For example: 
  *The boy that I met is her nephew.*
- Before an adjective used to represent a class of persons. For example: 
  *The old and the young should be able to live together.*

2) The indefinite article “a/an”

The indefinite article “a/an” has the forms and functions that can be defined as follows:

a) The form “a” is used before a word beginning with a consonant sound. For examples: *a man, a university.*

b) The form “an” is used before a word beginning with a vowel sound (a/ e/ i/ o). For examples: *an hour, an egg, an owl.*

c) The indefinite article “a/an” is the same for all genders. For examples:

- *a man* (masculine)
- *an actress* (feminine)
- *a car* (neuter)

d) The indefinite article “a/an” is used:

- Before a singular noun which countable when it is mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing. For example: *I see a man behind the tree.*

- Before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of a class of things. For example: *A palm tree is usually very tall.*

- With a noun complement. This includes names of
professions. For example: He is a doctor.
- In certain numerical expressions. For examples: a couple, a dozen, a lot of, a great deal of
- In expressions of price, speed, and ratio. For examples: five dollars a dozen, sixty kilometers an hour

e) The use of the indefinite article “a/an” is the same for all cases (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive). For examples:
- Nominative Case (as subject)
  A girl is carrying a book.
- Accusative Case (as direct object)
  The girl saw a red car in the garden.
- Dative Case (as indirect object)
  He showed the book to a man.
- Genitive Case (as possession)
  The car of a man is stolen.

b) The Definite and Indefinite Articles in German.

In German, the definite and indefinite articles are adjectives that agree in number, gender, and case with the noun they modify. According to the books entitled Deutsch als Fremdsprache (1991: 144-150), Deutsche Sprachlehre für Ausländer (1988: 4-56), and Conversational German in 20 Lessons (1990: 197-205), there are two kinds of articles in German:
1) The definite articles “der/die/das”
   (Der bestimmte Artikel “der/die/das”)
2) The indefinite articles “ein/eine/ein”
   (Der unbestimmte Artikel “ein/eine/ein”)

The forms and functions of the definite articles “der/die/das” can be defined as follows:
a) There are three definite articles which indicate the three different genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter, as seen below:
Therefore, every noun must be learned with its proper article.

b) In German, the noun has three genders. Each of them has four cases expressing the different relationships of the noun and the rest of the words in the sentence. As far as the noun is concerned, these case changes are indicated primarily by case changes in the articles. For examples:

- Nominative Case (as subject)
  
  Der Junge kauft ein Buch.  
  (The boy is buying a book)

- Accusative Case (as direct object)
  Ich habe den Junge in seinem Haus gesehen.  
  (I have seen the boy in his house)

- Dative Case (as indirect object)
  Er gab dem Junge das Buch.  
  (He gave the book to the boy)

- Genitive Case (as possession)
  Die Mutter des Jungen wohnt hier.  
  (The mother of the boy lives here)

c) Declension of the definite articles with nouns. The declension of the definite articles with singular nouns is as follows:

All three genders have the same article declension in the plural. The declension of the definite articles with plural nouns is as follows:
d) The definite articles “der/die/das” are used:

e) With the seasons, the months, and the days of week. For example:

   *In dem Januar ist moistens sehr kalt.*
   *(It is usually very cold in January)*

f) In expressing the date. For example:

   *Heute ist der 22. April.*
   *(Today is April 22nd)*

g) With abstract nouns. For example:

   *Sie kampfen für die Freiheit.*

   *(They are fighting for liberty)*

h) With parts of the body or personal possessions when there is doubt as to the possessor. For example:

   *Sie wusch sich die Hände.*
   *(She washed her hands)*

i) With proper names when they are preceded by an adjective. For example:

   *die arme Marie* *(poor Mary)*

j) After the prepositions “in” *(in, into)*, “nach” *(after)*, “vor” *(before)*, “zu” *(to)*, in such expressions as follows:

   *Sie gehen in die Schule.*
   *(They are going to school)*

   *Nach dem Abendessen.*
   *(After dinner)*

k) If the name of the country is always used in the plural, a plural form of the definite article must precede it. For example:

   *die Vereinigten Staaten* *(the United States)*

l) With names of streets and squares. For example:

   *Er wohnt in der Parkstraße an dem Potsdamer Platz.*
   *(He lives in Park Street on potsdamer Square)*

2) The indefinite articles “ein/eine/ein”
The indefinite articles “ein/eine/ein” have the forms and functions that can be defined as follows:

a) There are three indefinite articles which indicate the three different genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nomina tive</td>
<td>ein Vater (a father)</td>
<td>eine Mutter (a mother)</td>
<td>ein Kind (a child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ein Stuhl (a chair)</td>
<td>eine Schule (a school)</td>
<td>ein Schiff (a ship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) The noun and pronoun have three genders. They are masculine, feminine, and neuter as mentioned above. Each of them has four cases (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive) expressing the different relationships of noun and pronoun and the rest of the words in the sentence. As far as the noun is concerned, these case changes are indicated primarily by case changes in the article:

1. Nominative Case (as subject)
   *Ein Junge kauft ein Buch.*
   *(A boy is buying a book)*

2. Accusative Case (as direct object)
   *Ich sah einen Junge im Zimmer.*
   *(I saw a boy in the room)*

3. Dative Case (as indirect object)
   *Er gab einem Junge das Buch.*
   *(He gave the book to a boy)*

4. Genitive Case (as possession)
   *Ein Buch eines Jungen liegt auf dem Tisch.*
   *(A book of a boy lies on the table)*

c) The declension of the articles with nouns is defined below:

1) The declension of the indefinite articles with singular nouns is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Case</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nomina tive</td>
<td>ein Vater (a father)</td>
<td>eine Mutter (a mother)</td>
<td>ein Kind (a child)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2) In the plural form, all three genders have the same articles declension. The declension of the indefinite articles with negative plural nouns is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender/Case</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominative</td>
<td>keine Väter (no fathers)</td>
<td>keine Mütter (no mothers)</td>
<td>keine Kinder (no children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusative</td>
<td>keine Väter (no fathers)</td>
<td>keine Mütter (no mothers)</td>
<td>keine Kinder (no children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dative</td>
<td>keinen Vätern (to/for no fathers)</td>
<td>keinen Müttern (to/for no mothers)</td>
<td>keinen Kindern (to/for no children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genitive</td>
<td>keiner Vater (of no fathers)</td>
<td>keiner Mutter (of no mothers)</td>
<td>keiner Kinder (of no children)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**d) The uses of the indefinite articles “ein/eine/ein”**

1. When a singular noun which is countable and mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing, the indefinite article is used. For example:
   *Ich sehe einen Mann in dem garten.*
   *(I see a man in the garden)*

2. The indefinite article is also used before a singular countable noun used as an example of class of things. For example:
   *Ein hund ist ein Tier*
   *(A dog is an animal)*
However, there are some expressions **which do not** use the indefinite articles “ein/eine/ein” in the following conditions:

3. In referring to vocation, nationality, and occupation the indefinite articles are not used. For examples:

Er ist Arzt.
*(He is a doctor)*

Mein Vater ist Amerikaner.
*(My father is an American)*

4. The indefinite articles are not used in expressions of price, speed, and ratio. For examples:

*Zweimal die Woche*
*(Twice a week)*

5. In certain phrases, the indefinite articles are not used. For example:

*Ich habe Kopfschmerzen.*
*(I have a headache)*

2. The **Similarities and Differences of Using the Definite and Indefinite Articles in English and German**

2.1. The **Similarities of Using the Definite and Indefinite Articles in English and German**

a. The Similarities of Using the Definite Articles in English and German

1. The definite article is used before nouns of which there is only one, or which are considered as one. For examples:

   English: *the earth*

   German: *die Erde*

   *der Mond*

2. The definite article is used before a noun which has become definite as a result of being mentioned a second time. For examples:

   English: I bought a book; *the book is red*

   German: *Ich kaufe ein Buch; das Buch ist rot.*

3. The definite article is used before a noun which by reason or locality, can represent only one particular thing. For examples:

   English: They are playing in the garden. (= the garden of the house)

   German: *Sie spielen in dem Garten.*

4. The definite article is used before names of group of islands and plural names of
countries. For examples:

**English**: the United States  
**German**: die Vereinigten Staaten

5. The definite article is used before superlatives, used as adjectives or pronouns. For examples:

**English**: Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Europe.  
**German**: Mont Blanc ist der höchste Berg in Europa.

b. The Similarities of Using the Indefinite Articles in English and German.

1) The indefinite article is used before a singular noun which is countable when it is mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing. For examples:

**English**: I see a man behind the tree.  
**German**: Ich sehe einen Mann hinter dem Baum.

2) The indefinite article is used before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of a class of things. For examples:

**English**: A dog is an animal.  
**German**: Ein Hund ist ein Tier.

3) The indefinite article is used in referring to vocation, nationality, and occupation which are preceded by adjectives. For examples:

**English**: He is a good doctor.  
**German**: Er ist ein guter Arzt.

2.2. The Differences of Using the Definite and Indefinite Articles in English and German

a. The Differences of Using the Definite Articles in English and German

The English definite article does not change in order to match the nouns they modify, while the German definite articles will change in accordance with the genders, the
numbers, and the cases of the nouns they modify, as specified below:

b. The Genders

In English there is only one definite article “the”, that is used for all genders, because there are no genders at all for the nouns. For examples:
- the father (masculine)
- the mother (feminine)
- the car (neuter)

In German, three definite articles are selected to indicate the three different genders: masculine (männlich), feminine (weiblich), and neuter (sächlich);
- der Vater (the father) (masculine)
- die Mutter (the mother) (feminine)
- das Auto (the car) (neuter)

c. The Singular and Plural Forms

In English, the definite article “the” for singular nouns is the same as “the” for plural nouns. It does not change at all, as seen below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the father</td>
<td>the fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the mother</td>
<td>the mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In German, the definite articles “der/die/das” for singular nouns are different from those for plural nouns. They all change into “die”.

d. The Cases

In English, the uses of definite article “the” are the same for all cases (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive), so there are no changes for “the”. The form is constant in its various positions. For examples
The boy is buying a book.  
(nominative)

I saw the boy.  
(accusative)

Mother gave a book to the boy.  
(dative)

The uncle of the boy lives here.  
(genitive)

In German, the definite articles are changed according to the cases or the position the nouns take, as seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Case</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nominative</strong></td>
<td>der Vater (the father)</td>
<td>die Mutter (the mother)</td>
<td>das Kind (the child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accusative</strong></td>
<td>den Vater (the father)</td>
<td>die Mutter (the mother)</td>
<td>das Kind (the child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dative</strong></td>
<td>dem Vater (to/for the father)</td>
<td>der Mutter (to/for the mother)</td>
<td>dem Kind (to/for the child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genitive</strong></td>
<td>des Vaters (of the father)</td>
<td>der Mutter (of the mother)</td>
<td>des Kindes (of the child)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Der Vater wohnt in Deutschland.  
(The father lives in Germany)

Peter rief den Vater.  
(Peter called the father)

Herr Schmidt gab dem Vater eine Zigarette.  
(Mr. Schmidt gave a cigarette to the father.)

Der Wagen des Vaters ist gestohlen.  
(The car of the father is stolen)

e. The Other Uses

In English, the definite article “the” is not used for the seasons, the months, and the days of the week, but it is used in German. For examples:

English: It is usually cold in January.
German: In dem Januar ist es meistens kalt.

English: We are going to the country in Summer.
German: Wir fahren in dem Sommer auf das Land

In English, the definite article “the” is not used with proper names when preceded by an adjective, but it is used in German. For examples:

English: little Maissie (=there is only one Maissie)
German: die kleine Maissie

In English, for some nouns, the definite article “the” is not used after the
prepositions such as “in/into (in)”, “after (nach)”, “before (vor)”, “to (zu)”, but it is always used in German in the expressions as follows:

English: They went to school.
German: Sie gingen in die Schule.

English: They are at school.
German: Sie sind in der Schule.

English: After dinner
German: Nach dem Abendessen

2.3. The Differences of Using the Indefinite Articles in English and German.

The English indefinite article does not change in order to match the nouns they modify, but in German indefinite articles must be selected to agree with the genders and the cases of the nouns they modify, as specified below:

a. The Genders

In English, there is only one indefinite article “a/an”, that is used for all genders. Only the forms of “a” or “an” are used alternatively according to the sound of the first letter of the word which directly follows the article. For examples: a man, an orange, a university, an hour

In German, the definite articles are used alternatively according to the genders; “ein”, “eine” and “ein” will respectively precede the masculine, feminine, and neuter genders, as seen below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ein Vater (a father)</td>
<td>eine Mutter (a mother)</td>
<td>ein Kind (a child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ein Stuhl (a chair)</td>
<td>eine Schule (a school)</td>
<td>ein Schiff (a ship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. The Cases

In English, the use of the indefinite article “a/an” is the same for all cases (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive), so there are no changes for “a/an”. It is constant in all positions. For examples:
A girl is buying a bag.
(nominative)
I saw a girl behind the door.
(accusative)
Father gave a doll to a girl.
(dative)
A book of a girl is torn.
(genitive)
In German, the indefinite articles “ein/eine/ein” will change to conform to the cases of the noun, as seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Case</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominative</td>
<td>ein Vater (a father)</td>
<td>eine Mutter (a mother)</td>
<td>ein Kind (a child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusative</td>
<td>einen Vater (a father)</td>
<td>eine Mutter (a mother)</td>
<td>ein Kind (a child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dative</td>
<td>einem Vater (to/for a father)</td>
<td>einer Mutter (to/for a mother)</td>
<td>einem Kind (to/for a child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genitive</td>
<td>eines Vaters (of a father)</td>
<td>einer Mutter (of a mother)</td>
<td>eines Kindes (of a child)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ein alter Vater wohnt hier allein.*
*(An old father lives here alone)*

*Dieser Hemd ist für einen Vater.*
*(This shirt is for a father)*

*Sie gab einem alten Vater das Geld.*
*(She gave some money to an old father)*

*Das Heft eines Vaters liegt auf dem Stuhl.*
*(The note-book of a father lies on the chair)*

c. The Other Uses

In English, in reference to vocation, nationality, and occupation, the indefinite article “a/an” is used, but *in German, such will not occur.* For examples:

*English:* He is a doctor.
*German:* Er ist Arzt.

In English, the indefinite article “a/an” is used in certain phrases, but *in German, such will not occur.* For example:

*English:* I have a headache.
*German:* Ich habe Kopfschmerzen.

In English, the indefinite article “a/an” is used to refer to price, speed, and ratio, but *in German, such case will not happen.* For examples:

*English:* Twice a week he goes to the movie.
*German:* Zweimal die Woche geht er ins Kino.

3. Conclusions

Based on the analysis above, the writer can draw some conclusions, as follows:

a. The similarities of using the definite articles in English and German can be stated that the definite article is used before nouns of which there is only one; before a noun which has become definite as a result of being
mentioned a second time; before a noun which by reason or locality can represent only one particular thing; before names of group of islands and plural names of countries; and it is also used before superlative adjectives.

b. About the similarities of using the indefinite articles for both languages, the writer concluded that the indefinite article is used before a singular noun which is countable when it is mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing; before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of class of things; and also used in referring to vocation, nationality and occupation which are preceded by adjectives.

c. There are some differences of using either the definite or the indefinite articles in English and German, i.e. in the genders (English nouns practically have no genders but German nouns do); in forming singular and plural (in German it deals with genders very much but English does not); the cases (in German cases hold very important roles and strictly in applying them in sentences, on the other hand, English does not)

4. Suggestions to the Readers

There are some suggestions that may be taken into consideration: a. If the learners want to use definite or indefinite articles in sentences correctly, especially in German, they should take care of some steps. They have to consider (a) the gender of the noun, (b) the number of the noun, and (c) the case of the noun. At last they should also consider the other important uses of the language.

b. Learners are recommended to read a lot of English and German books so that they may acquire the proper usage of the articles and consequently, they may also improve in producing the two languages, especially when their main problem is using the articles.

5. Benefit Of The Study

a. Theoretically

The writer hopes that this research can contribute to the German class and it can be used by both the teachers and the learners.

b. Practically

This research can give additional input in
improving the ability of German grammar. Furthermore it can be used as reference for similar research.

**Bibliography**


