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On Hungarian Article-Usage

Abstract

In similarity to most Slavic languages, Serbian does not have articles, which makes it challenging for Serbian learners of Hungarian as a foreign language (HFL) to understand and learn when to use the article(s) in Hungarian (Balla 2016). Furthermore, HFL teaching materials do not address the issue either in a focused or in a contrastive manner (Andrić 2016). The paper considers what grammatical, semantic and pragmatic aspects need to be taken into account when teaching article-usage in Hungarian as a foreign language. We first present the problem in the context of learning HFL and review the approaches and explanations offered by course books, learner's grammars and functional accounts for HFL purposes. Then we discuss the "baseline" meaning of article-usage and non-usage. Finally, we proceed to contrast the various uses of different noun phrases (NPs) with and without an article. The analysis is guided by the following notions: definiteness, specificity, genericity, frame semantics, discourse-boundedness, number, possessive construction, sentence structure. Our major goal is to offer an explanation as to why and under what conditions singular and plural NPs with and without an article are used to express various meanings in text.

Keywords: Hungarian as a foreign language; definite and indefinite article, bare noun phrase; specific, generic, type; discourse, common knowledge.

Introduction

In similarity to most Slavic languages (and others including Chinese, Korean or Hindi), Serbian does not have articles, which makes it challenging for Serbian learners of Hungarian as a foreign language (HFL) to understand and learn when

to use and when to not use the article(s) in Hungarian (Balla 2016). Furthermore, HFL teaching materials do not address the issue either in a focused or in a contrastive manner (Andrić 2016). Although the concept of definiteness/ indefiniteness exists in Serbian – for example, through the use of demonstrative pronouns and the numeral ‘one’ – language learners may find article-usage confusing, or even illogical, in Hungarian sentences like (1)–(9).

(1) Krimít olvasok.

crime.Acc read.Sg1Indef

‘I read crime stories.’ / ‘I’m reading a crime story.’

(2) Egy krimít olvasok.

a crime.Acc read.Sg1Indef

‘I’m reading a crime story.’

(3) A krimít olvasom.

the crime.Acc read.Sg1Def

‘I’m reading the crime story.’

(4) Krimiket olvasok.

crime.Pl.Acc read.Sg1Indef

‘I read crime stories.’ / ‘I’m reading crime stories.’

(5) Szeretem a krimít.

like.Sg1Def the crime.Acc

‘I like crime stories.’

(6) Szeretem a krimiket.

like.Sg1Def the crime.Pl.Acc

‘I like crime stories.’

(7) A krimi izgalmas.

the crime exciting

‘Crime stories are exciting.’ / ‘The crime story is exciting.’

(8) Egy krimi mindig izgalmas.

a crime always exciting

‘A crime story is always exciting.’

(9) Értékelj (a) kedvenc krimidet!

rate.ImpSg2Def (the) favorite crime.PossSg2.Acc

‘Rate your favorite crime story!’

The present paper considers what grammatical, semantic and pragmatic factors need to be taken into account when teaching article-usage in Hungarian as a foreign language. We first present the problem in the context of learning HFL and review the approaches and explanations offered by course books and learner’s grammars. Then we discuss the “baseline” meaning of article-usage and non-usage. Finally, we proceed to contrast the various uses of different noun phrases (NPs) with and without an article. The analysis is guided by the following notions: definiteness, specificity, genericity, frame semantics, discourse-boundedness, number, possessive construction, sentence structure. Our major goal is to offer an explanation as to why and under what conditions singular and plural NPs with and without an article are used to express various meanings in text – see, for example, (1)–(9) above.

Article-usage in accounts of Hungarian as a foreign language

Course books

Course books of Hungarian as a foreign language in general do not put special emphasis on the systematic and explicit discussion of article-usage, and they may leave the learners with a blurred picture of the issue.

Course books generally introduce the definite and the indefinite article – as well as nouns (noun phrases, NP) without an article – early on, in lessons focusing on introducing people, describing things and shopping/ordering. The sentences in

these early course book units feature various NPs with and without an article (10)–(17).

(10) Diák vagyok.

student be.Sg1

‘I’m a student.’

(11) Ez egy szendvics.

this a sandwich

‘This is a sandwich.’

(12) Ez szendvics.

this sandwich

‘This is a sandwich.’

(13) A szendvics finom.

the sandwich nice

‘The sandwich is nice.’ / ‘Sandwiches are nice.’

(14) Mennyibe kerül a szendvics?

how much.Illa cost.Sg3Indef the sandwich

‘How much is the sandwich?’

(15) Szendvicset kérek.

sandwich.Acc want.Sg1Indef

‘I’ll have / I want a sandwich.’

(16) Egy szendvicset kérek.

a sandwich.Acc want.Sg1Indef

‘I’ll have / I want a sandwich.’

(17) Nem szendvicset kérek, hanem buritót.

no sandwich.Acc want.Sg1Indef but burrito.Acc

‘I don’t want a sandwich but a burrito.’

Overt explanation in these books only concerns the given grammatical construction (e.g. nominative sentence, accusative, word order); the use of the article in the different constructions is not explicit, or rather vague. What all books discuss and practice is the choice between the two forms of the definite article: *az* before vowels (*az autó*, ‘the car’), *a* before consonants (*a lámpa*, ‘the lamp’).

As for the choice between the definite article (*a/az*) and the indefinite article (*egy*), most books suggest that when a noun is newly introduced into the discourse, the indefinite article stands before it, and if it is already known, the definite article is used (e.g. Szita–Pelcz 2003: 41). However, this may be confusing given that, for example, in (13) and (14), ‘sandwich’ has probably not been introduced earlier on discourse. In sentences like (13), the speaker may describe something that has not been mentioned in the discourse before: he/she only states his/her opinion about something in general – compare with the English ‘Sandwiches are nice’. Also, in routine-like shopping situations, *Mennyibe kerül a/az ...?* (lit. ‘How much does the ... cost?’) is the customary way to ask for the price of products, in contrast to the also possible *Mennyibe kerül egy ...?* version (lit. ‘How much does a/an ... cost?’).

Furthermore, as far as the role of the presence or absence of the article is concerned, either no explanation is offered, or the information is too broad and may even be misleading. One of the most recent HFL books, the very popular *MagyarOK*, for example, states that the use of the indefinite article is *often optional* and *can* even be erroneous, but it does not contrast, explain or support the various usages in a systematic manner (e.g. Szita–Pelcz 2003:17, workbook). It may well puzzle the language learner what the difference between (11) and (12), or (15) and (16) is, and if there is an indefinite article in (16), why is not there one in (17). Students who have already learnt English or German, may also wonder why there is no indefinite article in (10).

The use of the article in possessive constructions may also confuse the learners. They may first be told that noun phrases with a possessive personal ending always take the definite article (e.g. Szita–Pelcz 2003: 25, coursebook, 2003: 17–18,

workbook), only to find out later that different possessive constructions feature different ways of article-usage (18)–(20).

(18) Ő Anna, a testvérem.
she Anna the sibling.Poss1Sg
'She's Anna, my sister.'

(19) Van egy testvérem.
is a sibling.Poss1Sg
'I have a sibling.'

(20) Van testvérem.
is sibling.Poss1Sg
'I have a/at least one sibling.'

Similarly, course books may feature NPs in existential sentences with the indefinite article and without an article within the same unit, without any further explanation (e.g. Szita–Pelcz 2003: 42, 45) – see (21)–(22).

(21) Van a táskámban egy könyv.
is the bag.Poss1Sg.Iness a book
'There is a book in my bag.'

(22) Van az irodádban nyomtató?
is the office.Poss2Sg.Iness printer
'Is there a/any printer in your office?'

In sum, learners may find that general course books leave them with insufficient guidance on how to acquire article-usage in Hungarian. Grammar books, however, offer more systematically organized and more detailed information on the issue.

Grammar books

In her functional grammar, Hegedűs (2005; a more recent and extended version of this work was unavailable to us at the time of writing this paper) argues that article-usage in Hungarian is a fine interplay of various related factors, namely: known–unknown information, the relative definiteness–indefiniteness of the noun, its specific–generic nature, and also the syntactic role of the noun phrase in the sentence. As a general guideline, the author proposes four baseline cases. 1) When the noun phrase is used to introduce a non-specific new discourse entity, no article is used (23). 2) When the noun phrase is used to represent an already known generic class or type in a new context or interrelation, the definite article is used (24). 3) When the noun phrase is used to introduce a specific but new entity that will be elaborated on in the next section of the discourse, the indefinite article is used (25). Finally, when the noun phrase is used to refer to a specific entity that is already known from the previous text and from reality, the definite article is used (26).

1	(23) <i>Mi az, hogy kutya?</i> 'What is a dog?'	new, generic	no article
2	(24) <i>A kutya idomítható.</i> 'Dogs are trainable.'	known, generic	definite article
3	(25) <i>Találtam egy kutyát.</i> 'I found a dog.'	new, specific	indefinite article
4	(26) <i>Befogadtam a kutyát.</i> 'I took in the dog.'	known, specific	definite article

Table 1: A systematic overview of article-usage in Hungarian (Hegedűs 2005: 282–283).

It is important to note that Hegedűs (2005) uses the term 'specific' in a sense different from how we use it in in this paper. By 'specific reference', we mean that the noun points to a specific thing or a specific set of things rather than meaning things in general. In Hungarian, nouns with the definite article always have specific reference, while nouns with the indefinite article can only be

considered specific in the sense *one of many* (compare *egy kutya* ‘a dog’ – non-specific, and *(az) egyik kutya* ‘one of the dogs’ – specific).

Hegedűs’s (2005) general guidelines are further refined by the syntactic role of the noun phrase: they apply slightly differently to NPs when they are subjects, predicates, objects or adverbial complements in the sentence, or when they appear in possessive constructions. Hegedűs (2005) does not give a full account of all the possibilities; she only mentions what she considers the most important cases (pp. 283–286) – for example, referential (27) vs. predicative (28) nominative sentences, alienable (29) vs. inalienable possession (30), or object–verb relations as single units of meaning (31) vs. verb–object relations with unique, idiosyncratic meanings (32).

(27) János a tanár.

János the teacher

‘János is the teacher.’

(28) János tanár.

János teacher

‘János is a teacher.’

(29) Van (egy) kutyám.

is (a) dog.Poss1Sg

‘I have a/at least one dog.’

(30) Van agyam.

is brain.Poss1Sg

‘I have a brain.’

(31) Tévét nézek.

TV.Acc look.Sg1Indef

‘I watch TV.’ / ‘I’m watching TV.’

(32) Nézem a tévét.

watch.Sg1Def the TV.Acc

‘I watch the telly.’ / ‘I’m watching the telly.’ AND ALSO ‘I’m looking at the TV set.’

Hegedűs’s (2005) account could serve as a reference point for course book writers and teachers both in terms of what general notions guide article-usage in Hungarian, and as regards the idea that article-usage cannot be addressed in a “once-and-for-all” manner: it has to be readdressed again and again, every time a new grammatical construction is discussed.

Learner’s grammars

For a contrastive approach, HFL students may turn to learner’s grammars. A *Practical Hungarian Grammar* (Szita–Görbe 2009), for instance, contrasts English and Hungarian article-usage: it lists cases where there is similarity and where there are differences in article-usage between the two languages. Table 2 summarizes these points.

NB1. Wrongly, the authors claim that the definite article is used both in Hungarian and in English before the names of streets, squares and musical bands: although this is true for Hungarian, it is not true for English – see e.g. *I was walking in Oxford Street. We went to Piccadilly Square. Do you like Abba?* (Note that plural-sounding band names stand with the definite article in English, too: *the Beatles, the Scorpions, the Black Eyed Peas*).

		Hungarian	English	article
similarities	unknown information (i.e. before nouns that are newly introduced)	(33) <i>Találtam egy macskát.</i>	<i>I found a cat.</i>	indef.
	known information (i.e. before nouns that have already been introduced)	(34) <i>A macska fehér.</i>	<i>The cat is white.</i>	def.
	superlatives	(35) <i>a legszebb lány</i>	<i>the most beautiful girl</i>	def.
	defined quantities	(36) <i>egy csésze tea</i>	<i>a cup of tea</i>	indef.
	undefined quantities	(37) <i>Veszek kenyeret.</i>	<i>I'll buy bread.</i>	no
	names of institutions and organizations (NB1)	(38) <i>az Akadémia</i>	<i>the Academy</i>	def.
	names of people (NB2)	(39) <i>Brigitta</i>	<i>Brigitte</i>	no
	names of countries (NB3)	(40) <i>Kanada</i>	<i>Canada</i>	no

differences	generalizations (NB4)	(41) <i>Szeretem a madarakat.</i>	<i>I like birds.</i>	HU: def ENG: indef.
	before members of a category	(42) <i>A villamos jármű.</i>	<i>A tram is a vehicle.</i>	HU: def. ENG: indef.
	before categories and classes	(43) <i>Judy ápolónő.</i>	<i>Judy is a nurse.</i>	HU: no ENG: indef.
	proper names with an adjective	(44) <i>Ez a könyv a középkori Franciaországról szól.</i>	<i>This book is about medieval France.</i>	HU: def. ENG: no
	possessive structures	(45) <i>a házam</i>	<i>my house</i>	HU: def. ENG: no
	nouns with demonstrative pronouns	(46) <i>ez a ház</i>	<i>this house</i>	HU: def. ENG: no
	in expressions answering the question ‘what kind of’	(47) <i>Ez komoly probléma.</i>	<i>This is a serious problem.</i>	HU: no ENG: indef.
	before dates	(48) <i>augusztus 12-e</i>	<i>the 12th of August</i>	HU: no ENG: def.

Table 2. Similarities and differences between Hungarian and English article-usage (Szita–Görbe 2009: 116–118).

As for the use of the definite article before certain proper names, Törkenczy (2002) in his *Practical Hungarian Grammar* provides the following further details: In informal or colloquial language use, personal proper names often stand

with the definite article provided that the speaker knows the person (49)–(50) – i.e. suggesting familiarity (NB2).

(49) (A) Tamás írta?

(the) Tamás write.Past.Sg3Def

‘Did Thomas write that?’

(50) *(A) Napóleon írta?

*(the) Napoleon write.Past.Sg3Def

‘Did Napoleon write that?’

He also provides further details on the use of the definite article before other proper names: it stands before the names of mountains, rivers, seas and oceans, lakes, regions and streets etc.; before the names of countries (NB3) if the name consists of at least two separate words; before the names of newspapers, journals, and books; and before the names of institutions. No article stands before the names of cities, counties and countries whose name consists of one word or more than one word but hyphenated.

In addition, Törkenczy (2002) also finds it important to mention that the article is never stressed – this is important when we contrast the demonstrative pronoun *az* (*that*) with the definite article *az* (*the*), or the numeral *egy* (*one*) with the indefinite article *egy* (*a/an*). The former can be stressed, the latter can never be. The author also mentions that articles never receive case-endings and are never pluralized (unlike, for example, in German).

Regarding (47), Törkenczy (2002), again, calls attention to register: in formal language use, no article stands before a noun when it is used as a predicate in the sentence. In informal language use, however, the indefinite article may be used in this case (51).

(51) Ez egy (komoly) probléma.

this a (serious) problem

‘This is a (serious) problem.’

Note that Törkenczy (2002) takes a descriptive approach to article-usage here, as well as in the case of personal proper names, unlike Szita and Görbe (2009), who claim – in a prescriptive manner – that *Hungarian* (in general) *prefers* the absence of the article.

Finally, Törkenczy (2002) stresses that in generalizations (NB4), the definite article is used in Hungarian both before countable and uncountable nouns – unlike in English (52)–(53).

(52) A gyertya viaszból készül.

the candle wax.Elat be-made.3SgIndef

‘Candles are made from wax.’ (in general)

(53) A bor szőlőből készül.

the wine grape.Elat be-made.Sg3Indef

‘Wine is made from grapes.’ (in general)

In summary, we can see that in certain cases, the presence/absence of the article can be taught tied to specific grammatical structures or lexical categories – as in the case of superlatives, demonstrative pronouns, nouns with possessive endings, quantities, dates, or the different types of proper names. Indeed, we advise that when these teaching points come up, article usage is discussed, and the given constructions are taught and practiced together with the article: e.g. *a leg...-bb* (‘the most ...’); *a/az ...-m/om/am/em/öm* (‘my ...’) etc.

Nevertheless, the more general concepts underlying article-usage are harder to grasp – see (33)–(34), (37), (41)–(43), (47), (51)–(53). The next section tackles the problem posed by these sentences.

Article-usage in descriptive grammars for linguists

The difference between the definite and the indefinite article

Articles have not been paid significant attention in descriptive grammars or course books for Hungarian audiences, either. Earlier grammars take a prescriptive approach: they emphasize when the article should and should not be used (see e.g. Imre 1961). I. Gallasy (1980) notes that a great number of *rules* apply to the usage of the definite article: these are detailed in 27 points under 15 groups in 4 main categories (Bárczi–Országh 1959–1962, ÉrtSz.).

Modern approaches often consider the indefinite article a numeral, and not an article. This is because the distribution of the definite and the indefinite article is different. This can be best illustrated by the possessive construction: as (54) demonstrates, the definite article – unlike the indefinite article and other numerals – cannot appear between the possessor and the possessed.

(54) a/egy fiú (*a)/(egy) könyve.

the/a boy (*the)/(a) book.Poss3Sg

‘the boy’s book’, ‘a book of the boy’, ‘a boy’s book’, ‘a book of a boy’

The arguments for *egy* (‘a/an’) not being an article but rather a numeral are exhaustively summarized in a monography by Kleiber et al. (2018), based on Moravcsik’s 2003 argumentation. Although *egy* alternates with *a(z)* and neither of them receive stress as articles – unlike *egy* as a numeral (*one*) –, *egy* also alternates with other numerals, and it has more restrictions to its use than the definite article does (i.e. it can only stand before singular countable nouns, like numerals). Also, *egy* can be replaced with *egyetlen* (*single*), which *can* follow the definite article.

As a result, many or most modern descriptive grammars use the term *article* only in reference to the definite article. Nevertheless, we believe that for language teaching purposes, both morphemes (*egy* and *a(z)*) can be called articles since this is in line with international practices, and it supports contrastive analysis.

The primary difference between the definite and the indefinite article: identifiability

In regard to the meaning of the definite and the indefinite article, descriptive grammars (e.g. Kleiber et al. 2018) formulate the following major difference: in the case of nouns that stand with the definite article, both the speaker and the listener know exactly what the given noun refers to in the discourse – see (55)–(56).

(55) *A macska beteg.*

the cat ill

‘The cat is ill.’

(56) *A macskák betegek.*

the cat.PL ill.PL

‘The cats are ill.’

(Most examples in (55)–(66) – with slight modifications – come from Kleiber et al. 2018.)

The cat in (55) is a cat that both the speaker and the listener know which one it is (e.g. the speaker’s, the listener’s, the neighbor’s). And in (56), *the cats* refers to a set of cats that all the participants of the discourse can identify.

In an extreme case, *a macskák* (‘the cats’) can also refer to all cats in the world – in a generic sense. This reading applies if either this was the antecedent of the discourse – i.e. the conversation has been about cats in general –, or if there is no cat identifiable in the discourse. In fact, in this latter case, the generic interpretation is the default interpretation (Szilágyi 2004). Access to the generic reading is also influenced by the meaning of the predicate: if instead of *beteg* (‘ill’), we say, for example, that *a macska megszelídíthetetlen* (‘the cat is untamable’), that can more readily be interpreted as something that applies to the whole species of cats. This generalization can also be applied to cases where we refer to well-known entities: since here, too, everyone can identify the referent, we use the definite article (57).

(57) Felkelt a nap.

up-rise.Past.3SgIndef the sun

‘The sun has risen.’

In certain cases, the relevant entities are not identified based on their discourse antecedents or based on the fact that they are well-known entities; instead, the reference of the noun can unequivocally be identified based on the situation – see (58)–(59).

(58) Fel akartam öltöztetni a kisbabát, de a ruhák még nedvesek voltak.

up want.Past.1SgDef dress.Inf the baby.Acc but the clothes still wet.Pl
be.Past.3Pl

‘I wanted to dress the baby, but the clothes were still wet.’

(59) Eladtam a házamat, majd a pénzből vettem egy autót.

away-sell.Past.1SgDef the house.Poss.1Sg.Acc then the money.Ela
buy.Past.1SgDef a car.Acc;

‘I sold my house, and then I bought a car from the money.’

The noun phrases a ruhák (‘the clothes’) and a pénz (‘the money’) are referents introduced by the semantic frames (Fillmore 1977) of the situation of GETTING DRESSED and COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION, which are evoked by the words *dress* and *sell*. As such, they can be unequivocally identified by both the speaker and the listener. And that is why they stand with the definite article. (This also explains the article choice in (13) and (14) at the beginning of the paper.)

Conversely, nouns that stand with the indefinite article refer to entities which cannot be exactly identified by the speaker and/or the listener. Exactness here is a gradable concept: the noun can be a totally new discourse entity – i.e. non-specific (60) – or a non-identified member of an already introduced set – i.e. specific but not definite (61).

(60) Egy férfi áll az ajtóban.

a man stand.3SgIndef the door.Ine

‘There is a man standing at the door.’

(61) Visszatettem egy könyvet az asztalodra.

back-put.Past.1SgIndef a book.Acc the table.Poss.2Sg.Sub

‘I put a book back on your table.’

The difference between the definite and the indefinite article is primarily about background: i.e. the relationship with discourse antecedents, and common knowledge. The definite article *compels* the hearer to look for a mutually known referent in the situation – such as in (62), where *the dog* must somehow belong to the house mentioned previously, or it may belong to Peter who is walking it. In contrast, the indefinite article *compels* the hearer to suppose that the referent is completely new and has no relation to what has been said so far – such as in (63), where the text introduces the barking of a dog as something new, and as something that is not necessarily in relation to Peter or the house; its significance will turn out later on.

(62) Péter elsétált a ház mellett. A kutya ugatott.

Péter walk.Past.3SgIndef the house past. The dog bark.Past.3Sg

‘Péter walked past the house. The dog barked.’

(63) Péter elsétált a ház mellett. Egy kutya ugatott.

Péter walk.Past.3SgIndef the house past. A dog bark.Past.3Sg

‘Péter walked past the house. A dog barked.’

The difference in meaning between what is completely unknown (non-specific) and what is partly known (specific) can well be illustrated by the following examples (64a)–(64c). The examples also highlight the difference between nouns with the indefinite and the definite article, and without an article.

(64a) Keresek egy ceruzát.

look_for.1SgIndef a pencil.Acc

‘I am looking for a pencil.’

(64b) A: Mit csinálsz? B: Ceruzát keresek.

what do.2SgIndef pencil.Acc look_for.1SgIndef

A: ‘What are you doing?’ B: ‘I am looking for a pencil.’ --- *a pencil-type thing*

(64c) A: Mit keresel? B: A ceruzá(ma)t.

what look_for.2SgIndef the pencil(.Poss.1Sg).Acc

A: ‘What are you looking for?’ B: ‘The / My pencil.’

In (64a), the noun stands with the indefinite article (*I am looking for a pencil*). Here, the noun can either be completely unknown by the speaker (non-specific), or it can be an unidentified part of an already known set (specific). Now let us imagine that the listener did not hear properly what the speaker had said. S/he can then ask back: *What are you doing?* If the object of the search is completely unknown, the speaker can answer the question with a noun without an article (64b) – meaning that s/he is looking for anything that can be used as a pencil, i.e. s/he is not specifically looking for a given pencil but rather for a pencil-like or a pencil-type entity. If, however, the object of the search is known, only not named, s/he may answer the question with a noun that stands with a definite article (and even in a possessive construction) (64c). This is because the pencil is already known, it can be identified based on the previous discourse or on the situation, only the speaker had not made the effort earlier (in 64a) to clarify that.

The indefinite article can also be used to express generic meaning but in Hungarian, this often takes on a normative meaning in the sense of ‘this is how things should/must be done properly’ – see (65).

(65) Egy matektanár fejben számol.

a math_teacher head.Ine calculate.3SgIndef

‘A math teacher calculates in his head.’ --- *s/he is expected to, ought to*

This normative meaning does not prevail, though, when the noun with a generic meaning is not the subject of the sentence – see (66).

(66) Egy kutyának hiába mondd, hogy szépen egyen.

a dog.Dat in_vain tell.2SgDef that nicely eat.Subj.3SgIndef

‘It is no use telling a dog to eat nicely.’

In summary, based on descriptive grammars, which are concerned with general rules and tendencies and not with idiosyncratic constructions, we can say that the difference between the definite and the indefinite article does not simply concern whether the referent in question is known or unknown, but rather: how definitively it is identifiable in the common knowledge of the speaker and the listener.

Now let us turn to those cases where the noun phrase must be used without any article.

When the noun stands without an article

In Hungarian, nouns can become arguments to predicates if they have a determiner of some kind. This can be an article or a numeral. A noun without an article can be present in a sentence if it is the predicate of that sentence (67a)–(67c), or if the noun does not point to an entity or a set of entities but provides the *type* of the object of the verb (67d)–(67e). Certain linguists argue that these latter nouns should not be considered as arguments of the verb: instead, they propose that the verb and the article-less noun (bare noun phrase) constitute a single complex predicate (Kiefer 1990–91, Piñón 2001). In such sentences, the noun without the article is always in the verbal modifier (vm) position (like verbal particles). (That is why the subject in (53) stands with the definite article: although

bor ('wine') is a substance-noun, it is in topic and not in *vm*-position, so it must have an article. *Szőlő* ('grape'), however, as a substance-noun in *vm*-position must obligatorily stand without an article.) If the bare noun is plural, that usually means that the statement refers to several types of the given thing – and not merely to several instances of the same thing. Such sentences convey a generic meaning, implying a habit or a regular activity (67f)–(67g).

(67a) Ez szendvics.

this sandwich

'This is a sandwich.' --- *something that can be called 'sandwich'*

(67b) A fiam tanár.

the son.Poss.1Sg teacher

'My son is a teacher.' --- *belongs to the category 'teacher'*

(67c) Ez komoly probléma.

this serious problem

'This is a serious problem.' --- *something that can be classified as 'problem'*

(67d) Újságot olvasok.

newspaper.Acc read.1SgIndef

'I read a paper.' --- *something that belongs to the category 'newspaper'*

(67e) Moziba megyek.

cinema.Illa go.1SgIndef

'I go to the cinema.' --- *some place under the category 'cinema'*

(67f) Újságokat olvasok.

newspapers.Pl.Acc read.1SgIndef

'I read (different kinds of) newspapers.'

(67g) Mozikba járok / ^{??}megyek.

cinema.Pl.Illa attend.1SgIndef / go.1SgIndef

'I go to (different kinds of) cinemas.'

Nouns without articles are also used in the expression of existence and/or possession. Here, the lack of the article refers to the fact that the given entity is available in an unspecified number: the bare noun phrase (bare NP) does not convey how many of the given *type* of entity exists or is possessed, it only says that at least one (but maybe more) of the given type exists (68a)–(68b).

(68a) Van testvérem.

be.3SgIndef sibling.Poss1Sg

‘I have a sibling.’ --- *I have at least one brother or sister.*

(68b) Van az irodádban nyomtató?

be.3SgIndef the office.Poss2Sg.Ine printer

‘Is there a printer in your office?’ --- *Is there at least one printer in your office?*

In some of the sentences under (69) and (70), the indefinite article may also be used, instead of a bare NP. However, the meaning of the sentence changes slightly. If the noun in question is the predicate of the sentence (69’a)–(69’c), the sentence can either be interpreted ironically or non-literally, or the presence of the indefinite article suggests contrast: a strong emphasis against a probable counter-opinion. If the noun in question is the object or an adverb in the sentence (69’d)–(69’g), we can later refer back to it (due to the indefinite article), while this is impossible in the case of bare noun phrases. In other words, while we can say *Egy újságot olvasok, és nagyon tetszenek benne a cikkek* (‘I’m reading a newspaper and I like the articles in it very much’), we cannot follow up on the sentence in the same fashion if the noun stands without an article. Furthermore, the indefinite article cannot be used before plural nouns (similarly to all determiners). If the noun in question is the subject of the sentence (70’a)–(70’b), the indefinite article can be used with it, but in this case, the noun phrase is taken to refer to one single entity, in contrast to the number-neutral nature of the bare noun phrase.

- (69'a) Ez egy szendvics.
 this a sandwich
 'This is a sandwich.' --- *e.g. as opposed to a hamburger*
- (69'b) A fiam egy tanár.
 the son.Poss1Sg a teacher
 'My son is a teacher.' --- *e.g. he acts like a teacher*
- (69'c) Ez egy komoly probléma.
 this a serious problem
 'This is a serious problem.' --- *e.g. as opposed to a small problem*
- (69'd) Egy újságot olvasok.
 a newspaper.Acc read.1SgIndef
 'I'm reading a newspaper.' --- *e.g. and I like it*
- (69'e) ?Egy moziba megyek.
 a cinema.Illa go.1SgIndef
 'I'm going to a cinema.' --- *e.g. that I heard was really good*
- (69'f) *Egy újságokat olvasok.
 a newspaper.Pl.Acc read.1SgIndef
- (69'g) *Egy mozikba járok / ?megyek.
 a cinema.Pl.Illa attend.1SgIndef / go.1SgIndef
- (70'a) Van egy testvérem.
 be.3SgIndef a sibling.Poss1Sg
 'I have a sibling.' --- *one sibling*
- (70'b) Van az irodádban egy nyomtató?
 be.3SgIndef the office.Poss2Sg.Ine a printer
 'Is there a printer in your office?' --- *one printer*

It is important to note that the subject of the sentence can only stand without an article if the sentence expresses its (non-)existence (70a)–(70b) or its creation

(71a)–(71b), and even then, the bare noun must stand in the verbal modifier position. In (70a)–(70b), this position is after the verb because the verb is stress-demanding, while in (71a)–(71b), it is immediately before the verb because the verb is not stressed.

(71a) Énekkar alakult. / *Alakult énekkar.

choir form.Past.1SgIndef / form.Past.1SgIndef choir

‘A choir was formed.’

(71b) Vendég érkezett. / *Érkezett vendég.

guest arrive.Past.1SgIndef / arrive.Past.1SgIndef guest

‘A guest arrived.’

In all other cases, nouns as subjects in a sentence must have an article, even if they have a general, generic meaning. (72a), (72c) and (72e) contain the definite article, while (72b), (72d) and (72f) contain the indefinite article. The first four sentences convey a generic interpretation (with a special intonation these could also be contrastive – e.g. ‘as opposed to comedies, *crime stories* are exciting’). In contrast to the usual generic meaning of sentences with the definite article, (72d) features the indefinite article conveying the idea that things should (or must) be this way. In other words, this sentence yields a normative, prescriptive interpretation. The final two sentences do not have a generic or normative interpretation; the difference between the two questions is that (72e) can be used if all sandwiches cost the same or if I am asking about a concrete sandwich (which I have already chosen), while in (72f), I am interested in the price of all the sandwiches in the shop, i.e. I am not referring concretely to a given sandwich.

(72a) A krimi izgalmas.

the crime exciting

‘Crime stories are exciting.’

(72b) Egy krimi (mindig) izgalmas.

a crime (always) exciting

‘Crime stories are exciting.’ / ‘A crime story is always exciting.’

(72c) A kutya ugat.

the dog bark.3SgIndef

‘Dogs bark.’

(72d) Egy kutya ugat.

a dog bark.3SgIndef

‘A dog barks.’ --- *expectable*

(72e) Mennyibe kerül a szendvics?

how much.1Illa cost.1SgIndef the sandwich

‘How much is the sandwich?’

(72f) Mennyibe kerül egy szendvics?

how much.1Illa cost.1SgIndef a sandwich

‘How much is a sandwich?’

Nouns as objects behave similarly to nouns as subjects. In other words, the noun must receive an article if it is used to refer to a concrete entity or to a member of a concrete set of entities (and not only to a type of entity), or if the speaker intends to refer back to it later in the text, or if the noun – for some reason – does not stand in the verbal modifier position. These statements are illustrated in (73).

The sentences under (73) demonstrate that bare NPs must be in the verbal modifier (vm) position, and the sentences convey that what I found (in the zoo) was ‘something like a cat’ – some cat-like animal, as opposed to something else. The acceptability of (73c) comes from the fact that within existential sentences, the verb is assumed to go before the vm-position where it receives stress, and so the bare NP can stay in the vm-position even if it is pronounced after the verb. (73d) is used in the usual type-meaning sense. (73e) demonstrates that no object with a definite article can be used with verbs that express creation, formation or

the making of something available (see the Definiteness Effect by Milsark 1977 and Szabolcsi 1986). This is because the semantics of such verbs goes against the fact that the definite article is used in reference to known referents. That is why (73f) is grammatical: here, the verb does not entail the creation of something or it being made available to me, but rather that I have found what I have been looking for and what you and I already knew about.

(73a) Macskát találtam (a kertben).

cat.Acc find.Past1SgIndef (the garden.Ine)

‘I found some cat(s) (in the garden).’ --- *I found (one or more) cat-type animal(s)*

(73b)*Találtam macskát.

find.Past1SgIndef cat.Acc

(73c) Találtam már macskát (életemben).

find.Past1SgIndef already cat.Acc (life.Poss1Sg.Ine)

‘I have found a cat/cats (in my life).’ --- *I have found (one or more) cat-type animal(s)*

(73d) Találtam egy macskát.

find.Past1SgIndef a cat.Acc

‘I (have) found a cat.’ --- *one*

(73e) *Találtam a macskát.

find.Past1SgIndef the cat.Acc

(73f) Megtaláltam a macskát.

vp-find.Past1SgIndef the cat.Acc

‘I have found the cat.’

State-verbs are grammatical with objects that stand both with the definite and the indefinite article, but not with bare NP objects (74a)–(74c). This can be explained on the grounds that state-verbs expressing emotion do not have a verbal modifier position, where the bare NP could stand. In existential statements, such

verbs can be grammatical with bare NPs (although it is rather difficult to find appropriate situations for such cases) – see (74c).

Finally, if we contrast (74d)–(74f) with (74a), an important difference comes to light. While (74e) can only mean that I like crime story-type stories, (74f) can only mean one concrete cat that the parties of the conversation know – it cannot mean cats in general. This is not due to the verb *szeret* ('like') but to the characteristics of the nouns *krimi* (crime as a genre) and *macska* ('cat'). The question here is whether certain singular nouns can refer to type or if their meaning to refer to concrete instances is more dominant.

(74a) Szeretem a macskákat.

like.1SgDef the cat.Pl.Acc

'I like the cats.' --- *several concrete ones* OR 'I like cats.' --- *different types in general*

(74b) Szeretek egy macskát.

like.1SgIndef a cat.Acc

'I like a cat.' --- *a non-specific one*

(74c) *Szeretek macskákat. / *Szeretek macskát. / Szerettem (már) macskát.

like.1SgIndef cat.Pl.Acc / like.1SgIndef cat.Acc / like.Past1SgIndef

(already) cat.Acc

'I've liked (one or more) cat(s).'

(74d) Szeretem a krimiket.

like.Sg1Def the crime.Pl.Acc

'I like crime stories.' --- *different types in general*

(74e) Szeretem a krimiit.

like.Sg1Def the crime.Acc

'I like crime stories.' --- *a single type*

(74f) Szeretem a macskát.

like.Sg1Def the cat.Acc

‘I like the cat.’ --- *a concrete one*

The sentences under (75) illustrate the above with a different verb. In (85a), the bare NP appears after the verb, in the verbal modifier position. Here, the verb has been moved forward because of an implied existential meaning (*there will be a scenario where I will buy bread*) or because of an implied promise for the future. In (75c), the Definiteness Effect applies, which prohibits nouns with a definite article to appear with verbs without a verbal particle.

(75a) Veszek kenyeret.

buy.1SgIndef bread.Acc

‘I’ll buy bread.’

(75b) Veszek egy kenyeret.

buy.1SgIndef a bread.Acc

‘I’ll buy a (loaf of) bread.’

(75c) *Veszem a kenyeret. / Megveszem a kenyeret.

buy.1SgDef the bread.Acc / vp-buy.1SgDef the bread.Acc

‘I’ll buy the bread.’

(76) demonstrates those cases where a bare NP is used because of a reference to a type and not to a concrete entity (76a), or because of the possessive construction (76b). The possessive construction makes the NP definite and so – at least in written language – the appearance of the definite article before it is optional. This latter case is explained in detail in Dóla et al. (2017).

(76a) Nem szendvicset kérek, hanem buritót.

no sandwich.Acc want.Sg1Indef but burrito.Acc

‘I don’t want (any) sandwich but (some) burrito.’

(76b) Értékelj (a) kedvenc krimidet!

rate.ImpSg2Def (the) favorite crime.PossSg2.Acc

‘Rate your favorite crime story!’

Returning to the examples at the beginning of the paper, we illustrate the differences in (77).

(77a) entails the reading of a crime-story-type book. (77b) has a similar meaning but the noun with the indefinite article can later be back-referenced; we can continue the text with, for example, detailing the book that we are reading. In (77c), the object-noun stands with the definite article, implying a concrete book which is known by both the speaker and the listener and which they can both unequivocally identify as the specific crime story that the speaker is reading.

(77a) Krimet olvasok.

crime.Acc read.Sg1Indef

‘I’m reading a crime story.’ --- *some crime-story-type book*

(77b) Egy krimet olvasok.

a crime.Acc read.Sg1Indef

‘I’m reading a crime story.’ --- *which was written by Capote*

(77c) A krimet olvasom.

the crime.Acc read.Sg1Def

‘I’m reading the crime story.’ --- *you know which one*

At the end of the section, let us refer to two intriguing Facebook comments:

“Lately, I’ve been saying stuff that I would never had said just a couple of weeks ago, like:”

(78a) Találtam húst az Aldiban.

find.Past1SgIndef meat.Acc the Aldi.Ine

‘I’ve found meat at Aldi.’

(78b) Maszkomat nem láttad?

mask.Poss1Sg.Acc not see.Past2SgDef

‘Have you seen my mask?’

The sentences in (78) contain bare noun phrases. In (78a), the lack of the article is the result of the substance-noun referring to type. In (78b), the article is missing because of the possessive construction (where the article has a higher tendency to disappear at the very beginning of the sentence anyway).

In the second sentence under (79), *ijedtemben* (‘in my fright’, ‘in terror’) is a special construction where the article must not appear for other reasons – see Viszket–Dóla (2019) for further details.

(79) Alíz kezére ma ráesett a szék. Majdnem elájultam ijedtemben.

Alice hand.Poss3Sg.Subla vp-fall.Past1SgIndef the chair. almost vp-

faint.Past.1SgIndef fright.Poss1Sg.Ine

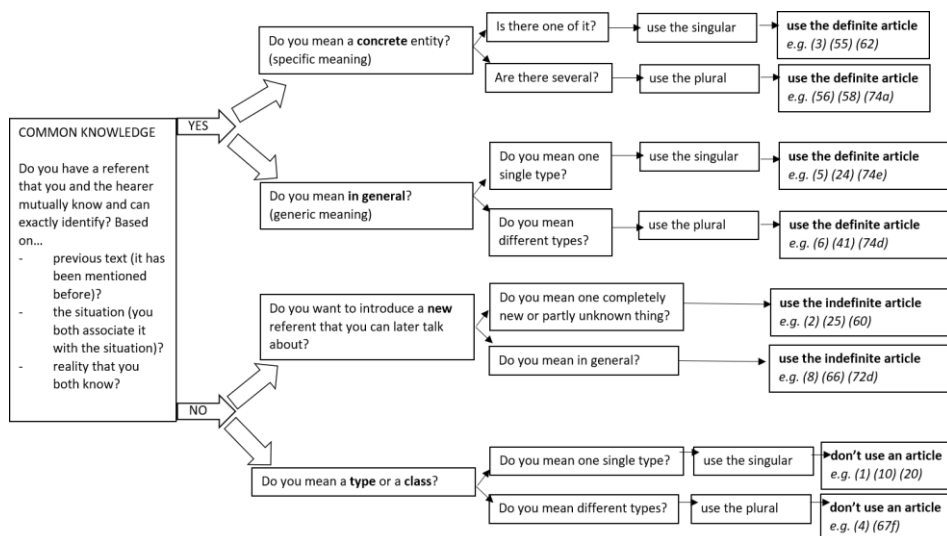
‘The chair fell on Alice’s hand. I almost fainted in terror.’

Conclusions

We demonstrated that in Hungarian as a foreign language (HFL), the teaching of article-usage can present great challenges since it is guided by a fine interplay of grammatical, semantic and pragmatic factors. We claim that – contrary to available course books and learner’s grammars – it is not enough to address the issue in small fragments on the level of individual grammatical constructions, but a general concept should also be provided to learners that they can rely on when they express their meaning in text. This overarching concept should go beyond the generally used known–unknown dichotomy; it should address such issues as identifiability and common knowledge, and specific, generic and type meaning.

Based on our discussion of formal and functional descriptive accounts of Hungarian article-usage, we propose an interactional bottom-up and top-down approach. On the one hand, each time the students encounter a new grammatical

construction (e.g. nominative sentences, verbal modifiers, plural nouns, quantities, existential sentences, possessive structures and constructions, different kinds of proper names, superlatives, dates etc.), the use of the article(s) should be highlighted (see above). On the other hand, an explanation should be given for the underlying concept that guides these choices. For this, we present our proposal in the following flow chart.



We hope this paper has contributed valuable information to HFL as regards the teaching of article-usage in Hungarian.

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Névelőhasználat a magyarban

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Összefoglaló

A szerbben (csakúgy, mint a legtöbb szláv nyelvben) nincsen (határozott és/vagy határozatlan) névelő, ezért a szláv anyanyelvű tanulónak nehézséget okoz a magyar névelőhasználat megértése és megtanulása (Balla 2016), ráadásul a magyar mint idegen nyelvi (MID) tananyagok sem célzottan, sem kontrasztív szemléletben nem foglalkoznak a névelőhasználattal (Andrić 2016). A tanulmány grammatikai, szemantikai és pragmatikai szempontokat érvényesítve tárgyalja a magyar névelőhasználatot. A MID-szempontrú leírások áttekintése után tárgyaljuk a névelősség/névelőtlenység „alapjelentését”, majd elemezzük a határozott névelős, a határozatlan névelős és a névelőtlen főnévi kifejezések különféle használatát. Az elemzés a következő fő fogalmak mentén történik: határozottság, specifikusság, generikuság, keretszemantika, diskurzus-kötöttség, számszerűség, birtokos szerkezet, mondat szerkezet. A tanulmány magyarázattal kíván szolgálni arra, hogy miért, milyen feltételek mellett használunk egyes és többes számú határozott névelős, határozatlan névelős és névelőtlen főnévi kifejezéseket különféle (pl. specifikus, generikus, típus) értelemben.

Kulcsszavak: magyar mint idegen nyelv, határozott és határozatlan névelő, névelőtlen főnévi kifejezés; specifikus, generikus típus; diskurzus, közös tudás.

O korišćenju člana u mađarskom jeziku

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Sažetak

U srpskom jeziku (kao i u većini slovenskih jezika) ne postoje određeni i neodređeni članovi, pa zbog toga maternji govornici slovenskih jezika, koji uče mađarski kao strani jezik (MSJ), imaju poteškoće pri upotrebi, razumevanju i učenju članova (Balla 2016). Štaviše, nastavni materijali za učenje MSJ se ne bave problemom upotrebe članova niti ciljano, niti iz kontrastivne perspektive (Andrić 2016). Ova studija kroz primenu gramatičkog, semantičkog i pragmatičkog pristupa problematizuje upotrebe članova u mađarskom jeziku. Nakon sagledavanja problema sa stanovišta učenja MSJ i osvrta na pristupe učenju i objašnjenja koje nude materijali za učenje MSJ, razmatramo „osnovno značenje” postojanja/nepostojanja članova, a zatim analiziramo različite načine upotrebe imeničkih izraza, sa određenim ili neodređenim članom, kao i bez njega. Analiza se zasniva na sledećim pojmovima: određenost, specifičnost, generičnost, okvirna semantika, ograničenost diskursom, broj, prisvojna konstrukcija, rečenična struktura. Ova studija ima za cilj da objasni zašto i pod kojim uslovima imenički izrazi u jednini ili množini, sa ili bez člana, mogu u tekstu imati različita značenja (npr. specifična, generička, tipska).

Ključne reči: mađarski kao strani jezik, određeni i neodređeni član, čiste imeničke fraze; specifični i generički tip; diskurs, popularni stavovi.