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Verbalisation Patterns in Modern German: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: The goals of this article were aimed at studying the specificity of expressing the definiteness/indefiniteness category in contemporary German. Through literary analysis, it was found that the problem of verbalisation of this category has not received sufficient attention in the context of the German language, hence further research is needed. The results revealed that in contemporary linguistic studies, the definiteness/indefiniteness category is regarded as a measure of speakers' familiarity with speech objects or a textual category. This category can be considered a linguistic universal characteristic, as it is present in practically all languages. The research also showed that the definiteness/indefiniteness category in the German language has a grammatically expressed character, manifested through the use of articles (definite or indefinite). The function of definite and indefinite articles lies in the identification of the object (definiteness) or inclusion in a class of homogenous objects (indefiniteness). Additionally, besides articles, the definiteness/indefiniteness category in German is also verbalized through pronouns. These findings hold significant importance for further understanding of language structure and speech processes.

Keywords: category of definiteness/indefiniteness, verbalisation, functional semantics, language groups and families.

Introduction

In the current stage of linguistic development, there is an increasing interest within the scientific community in the verbalisation of the definiteness/indefiniteness category across different language groups and families, stemming from the transition of linguistic inquiries into the realm of functional semantics. There are numerous works in linguistic literature that explore the definiteness/indefiniteness category, its semantics, and expression means, conducted on languages with established formal expression tools for this category, namely definite and indefinite articles. However, the specifics of verbalising the definiteness/indefiniteness category in contemporary German have not been adequately studied and require further investigation, underscoring the relevance of this scholarly material.

Research results

The category of definiteness/indefiniteness is an important aspect of investigating the meanings of utterances, including their subjective content. When examining the definiteness or indefiniteness of the articles, pronouns, or other linguistic markers used in a sentence, it is possible gaining insights into how speakers perceive and convey information (table 1):

Table 1

Pronouns playing a crucial role in indicating specific types of reference

Dieser	This pronoun typically refers to something near the speaker, both spatially and temporally. It denotes a close or immediate relationship to the speaker.
Jener	In contrast to "dieser," "jener" refers to something distant from the speaker, either spatially or temporally. It indicates a more remote or removed relationship.
Derjenige	This pronoun is used when referring to a specific person or thing from a group or set. It emphasises individuality within a broader context.
Derselbe	"Derselbe" denotes sameness or identity, indicating that the referent is the same as one previously mentioned or implied. It emphasises continuity or consistency.
Solcher	This pronoun indicates similarity or likeness to something mentioned or implied earlier. It is used to refer to a category or type rather than a specific individual.

Source: authors' own development

In linguistic analysis, definiteness refers to whether the speaker is referring to a specific, identifiable entity or concept, whereas indefiniteness indicates a lack of specificity or identification. This distinction is not only about the presence or absence of a definite article ("the" in English or "der/die/das" in German) but also extends to demonstratives, possessives, and other determiners. Typically, it is regarded as an expression of the speaker's level of knowledge about the referent of the utterance, its object, or subject. According to the definition provided by Fehringer (2019), this category is one of the categories of the semantics of an utterance, and its function is to actualise and determine the noun, showing its individuality in the described situation (definiteness), or expressing its belonging to the class of similar phenomena (indefiniteness). This category is characteristic of most languages and manifests itself in the semantic structure of utterances. When speaking about something, speakers often have specific or general objects or phenomena in mind, which is understandable to communication participants. This indicates the

existence of this category in any language, although the means of its expression may vary significantly. Languages can be divided into those where the obligatory formal expression of definiteness/indefiniteness is achieved by using articles, and those where special markers of this category are absent, and speakers resort to means from different linguistic levels. In the German language, this category has a grammatically expressed nature, and forms of articles are used for its verbalisation (both definite - *der, die, das, die*, and indefinite - *ein, eine, ein*).

The primary semantic function of the article lies in the activation of concepts, namely the capability to convey the meaning of identifying a noun (verbalisation of definiteness category) or the meaning of belonging to a class of homogeneous objects (realisation of indefiniteness category). A distinctive means of expressing the definiteness category in contemporary German nouns is through demonstrative pronouns like *dieser, jener, derjenige, derselbe, solcher*, whose lexical meaning entails indicating a specific type of reference (Pross, 2019). The usage of the feminine demonstrative pronoun *diese* can indicate a specific time for carrying out a planned action.

The findings of the conducted research underscore that the primary semantic function of the article lies in the activation of concepts, namely the capability to convey the meaning of identifying a noun (verbalisation of definiteness category) or the meaning of belonging to a class of homogeneous objects (realisation of indefiniteness category).

The use of demonstrative and possessive pronouns in modern German effectively expresses the definiteness of nouns, making the object of speech understandable to the surrounding context or situation and distinguishing it among others. In contrast, the opposite of this category is indefiniteness, which is more grammatically established. Pronouns that indicate an indefinite person, object, or attribute hold a special place in this context. Researchers argue that pronouns can express general concepts of the physical and mental world and unify different levels of language, providing it with natural integrity.

According to their global semantics, indefinite pronouns in the German language can be divided into groups indicating a person, object (in a broad sense), quality, or property. Compared to definite pronouns, indefinite pronouns form a specific group, limiting the scope of the concept expressed by the noun or establishing the denotative status of the noun or noun phrase. These are pronouns that vaguely indicate an object or its attribute, indicating their indefiniteness and unknown status. For example, in the sentence "*Er lebte seit einigen Jahren in Paris und konnte nachts wenig schlafen; da sah man vieles unterwegs*" (Pross, 2019), the author uses the indefinite pronoun *einige* to not precisely specify the period of time spent by the protagonist in Paris, but simply to indicate the fact of his residence in the city for a certain period of time.

The category of indefiniteness indicates the varying degree of familiarity the interlocutor has with the object of speech: the speaker implies that he has in mind an object not yet known to the interlocutor. Therefore, the interlocutor should not identify it with any known object.

The primary purpose of the indefinite category, articulated through the use of the indefinite pronoun "*welche*," is to generalise by representing an object as emblematic of a broader class of similar objects. This linguistic construction highlights the sudden introduction of an object into discourse, suggesting the lack of prior mentions of the specified object. Indefinite pronouns like "*jemand*," "*irgendjemand*," "*mancher*," and others elucidate the notion of indefiniteness regarding persons, objects, or things. For instance, the use of the indefinite pronoun "*manche*" in this passage underscores individuals unfamiliar to the immediate context, underscoring that the discourse does not involve the present audience (Müller, 2023).

The concept of indefiniteness finds vivid expression through the indefinite pronoun "*jemand*." Pronouns like "*jemand*" and "*mancher*" convey a sense of informal disdain. Additionally, the category of indefinite person in the German language is represented by the pronoun "*man*," which traditionally falls within the indefinite-personal classification. This pronoun establishes broad references, aligning with the German term "*Gesamt-Namenlosigkeit*" (overall namelessness), indicating an indefinite subject meant to broadly encompass a collective of people, including an unspecified number of individuals (Weber, 2023).

Furthermore, the indefinite-personal pronoun "man" identifies individuals or groups known to the speaker (or listener) but intentionally left unnamed for certain reasons. It is also employed to designate one or more unidentified individuals, aligning it semantically with pronouns like "einer" and "jemand." Each of the indefinite pronouns "jemand," "irgendjemand," "mancher," and "man" effectively communicates the concept of indefiniteness, emphasising the unknown quality of the subject at hand (Culicover, 2021). Despite their apparent similarities, these pronouns exhibit nuanced semantic distinctions that are meaningful, preventing them from being considered synonymous pairs.

Indefinite pronouns can also emphasise the uncertainty of person, object, quality, quantity, place, and time of action. Another way to express the category of object indefiniteness is by using the indefinite pronoun "mehrere." The semantics of this indefinite pronoun are unique because it serves to indicate an unspecified number of individuals, objects, and so forth. The pronoun "irgendein" can be used to verbalise the category of indefiniteness for both living and non-living objects. Combining the indefinite pronoun "irgendein" with nouns to denote living and non-living objects presents the object as unknown, similar to others, thus verbalising the category of indefiniteness (Weber & Kopf, 2023). The semantics of the indefinite pronoun "jeder" encompass a generalized meaning of any object it denotes. It is traditionally believed that the use of indefinite pronouns to verbalize the category of indefiniteness is characteristic of colloquial speech style. Research has confirmed that the primary function of the semantics of indefiniteness is generalisation, where the object is regarded as a representative of a whole class of similar objects, not associated in the speaker's consciousness with specific connections to surrounding objects.

Conclusions

In modern German, the category of definiteness/indefiniteness is viewed as an indicator of speakers' familiarity/unfamiliarity with the speech object, as well as a communicative-grammatical characteristic of the text. The primary means of expressing this category are definite (der, die, das, die) and indefinite (ein, eine, ein) articles. Other means of representing the category of definiteness include demonstrative and possessive pronouns. The category of indefiniteness is expressed, besides indefinite articles, through indefinite (einige, jemand, irgendjemand, mancher, mehrere) and indefinite-personal pronouns, among which the pronoun "man" holds particular significance. Further research opportunities in this area lie in comparative analysis of means of expressing definiteness/indefiniteness in German and Italian languages.

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