



## THE CATEGORY OF DEFINITENESS IN ENGLISH AND KARAKALPAK LANGUAGES

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### ABSTRACT

*The concept of definiteness constitutes a fundamental grammatical and semantic category that enables speakers to express whether a referent is identifiable, unique, or previously mentioned within a discourse. This paper presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of how definiteness is realized in English and Karakalpak languages. While English has a grammaticalized article system, Karakalpak conveys definiteness through context, word order, demonstratives, and pragmatic inference. By examining linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions, this study highlights the ways in which both languages encode the relationship between the speaker, listener, and referential world.*

**Introduction.** The notion of definiteness occupies an important position in the study of semantics and pragmatics, as it relates directly to the way languages encode shared knowledge and discourse reference. In linguistic terms, definiteness refers to the degree to which a noun phrase denotes an entity that is assumed to be familiar to both the speaker and the listener. In this respect, definiteness is not merely a grammatical phenomenon, but rather a cognitive and communicative mechanism that reflects how speakers structure their mental representation of the world.

In the history of linguistics, the study of definiteness has been central to understanding the evolution of article systems and reference. According to Lyons and Hawkins, definiteness originally emerged as a pragmatic distinction in speech, later becoming grammaticalized in certain Indo-European languages such as English, French, and German. English, therefore, represents a grammaticalized system, whereas languages such as Karakalpak, Kazakh, Turkish, and Uzbek represent context-based systems that rely on pragmatic inference rather than fixed morphological markers [2;3].

The typological distinction between these languages illustrates a broader principle: languages can express definiteness grammatically, lexically, or contextually. English represents the first type, using the articles *the*, *a*, and *an*. Karakalpak represents the third, where definiteness depends on syntactic structure, information flow, and speaker intention.

In English, definiteness is obligatorily expressed in nearly all noun phrases. The definite article signals that the referent is already known or has been previously mentioned, while *a/an* introduces an indefinite, non-specific referent. For instance:

- The child who sang yesterday is my cousin. (Definite reference — the listener knows which child.)

- A child sang yesterday. (Indefinite reference — a new referent introduced into discourse.) [1, 323-341].

Furthermore, definiteness is also conveyed through other grammatical and lexical means such as possessive constructions (*my book*), demonstratives (*this, that*), and proper nouns (*Paris, Elizabeth*), which inherently denote specific entities. What is particularly striking about English is that definiteness marking is obligatory, even when context alone could suffice for identification. For example, one must say *the sun* or *the sky*, not simply *sun* or *sky*, even though these referents are universally unique. This demonstrates that English tends to encode definiteness grammatically rather than pragmatically, showing a preference for explicitness and structural precision.

In contrast, Karakalpak does not have grammatical articles. Instead, definiteness is determined contextually and syntactically. The position of a noun within the sentence often serves as an indicator of its referential status. For example:

- Kitap stol ústinde tur. (“The book is on the table.”)

Here, *kitap* (“book”) in initial position implies that it is already known to both speaker and listener.

However, if the noun appears after the verb, the interpretation changes:

- Stol ústinde bir kitap tur. (“There is a book on the table.”)

The numeral *bir* (“one”) here functions similarly to the English indefinite article *a*, introducing a new, unspecified referent. Nevertheless, *bir* in Karakalpak has not yet developed into a grammatical article; its use remains optional and context-dependent.

Demonstratives such as *bul* (“this”), *sol* (“that”), and *ana* (“that over there”) are also key indicators of definiteness. For instance:

- Bul bala meniń dostum. (“This child is my friend.”)

The demonstrative clearly identifies a specific entity, functioning like *this* in English.

Hence, definiteness in Karakalpak is pragmatic and relational, relying heavily on context, shared knowledge, and discourse structure. This reflects a topic-prominent linguistic system, where information flow is organized around what is already known (topic) versus what is new (focus).

The comparison between English and Karakalpak reveals deeper cognitive and cultural dimensions. English speakers tend to encode definiteness explicitly, marking distinctions grammatically even in predictable situations. This reflects what linguists call an analytic worldview, where linguistic form mirrors logical structure and precision. Karakalpak, however, represents a synthetic and pragmatic worldview, in which shared situational knowledge reduces the need for grammatical marking.

For example, in a conversation, a Karakalpak speaker may say simply:

- Qız kirip keldi. (“A/The girl came in.”)

Here, the context alone determines whether the girl is definite or indefinite. In English, however, the speaker must choose between a girl and the girl, even before the listener can infer which one is meant.

This difference also shows how linguistic structure reflects cultural communication styles. In English-speaking cultures, clarity and explicitness are valued, requiring overt markers of reference. In Karakalpak culture, mutual understanding and situational awareness play a greater role, leading to a more context-sensitive communication style.

One of the most challenging areas in cross-linguistic communication is translating definiteness accurately. Because English requires grammatical marking, translators working from Karakalpak into English must constantly infer whether a noun phrase is definite or indefinite. Conversely, when translating from English into Karakalpak, the translator may omit articles entirely, relying instead on word order or pragmatic cues.

For example:

- English: The teacher entered the room.
- Karakalpak: Muğallim bólimege kirdi [4].

No article is used in Karakalpak, yet the definiteness is clear from context — the teacher is someone both speaker and listener know.

Such examples illustrate that definiteness is not an absolute grammatical category, but rather a semantic-pragmatic continuum that varies across languages and cultures.

In addition to linguistic and cognitive explanations, definiteness also reflects cultural attitudes toward information and interpersonal relationships. English, influenced by analytical and object-oriented thought, tends to segment and classify reality explicitly. Karakalpak, rooted in an oral and community-centered culture, relies more on shared experience and collective context. Therefore, definiteness in Karakalpak is socially grounded, emerging naturally from conversational context rather than from grammatical obligation.

This cultural dimension can be observed in Karakalpak folklore and oral storytelling, where referents are introduced without formal marking but are understood through narrative continuity. For instance, a tale may begin:

- Bir jigít bar eken... (“There was a young man...”)

Later references to the same person simply use jigít, without needing a definite article, as the listener already recognizes the referent. The continuity of narrative and shared imagination replaces the need for grammatical devices.

The study of definiteness in these two languages has broader implications for linguistic typology and translation theory. It demonstrates that languages encode universal semantic categories through different structural mechanisms. It also reinforces the idea that language and culture are intertwined — grammatical systems evolve not only from structural tendencies but also from communicative needs and cognitive preferences.

Furthermore, understanding how definiteness operates across languages helps in fields such as language teaching, translation studies, and computational linguistics. For learners of English whose native language is Karakalpak, the absence of articles in their first language often causes difficulty in mastering English article usage. Conversely, English speakers learning Karakalpak must learn to rely more on contextual inference rather than grammatical cues.

**Conclusion.** In sum, the category of definiteness reflects both linguistic structure and cognitive perception. English, with its obligatory article system, exhibits a grammaticalized

approach to definiteness that values explicitness and clarity. Karakalpak, lacking articles, expresses definiteness through context, word order, and demonstratives, embodying a more pragmatic and context-dependent worldview. Thus, although both languages serve the same communicative purpose — identifying whether a referent is specific or general — they achieve this goal through distinct grammatical and cognitive pathways. The comparison of English and Karakalpak, therefore, offers a fascinating example of how language diversity mirrors human thought, perception, and culture.

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