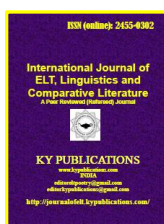RESEARCH ARTICLE

(In) definiteness in Hindi in comparison with English: Grammarians' Dilemma

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ABSTRACT

Noun phrase (NP) beginning with 'the' or 'a/ an' are the prototypical construction for definite and indefinite NP in English. When discussing definiteness, the two main theories that one needs to focus are uniqueness and familiarity. However, in some cases these two theories fail to distinguish the definite and the indefinite NP, therefore, existential sentences have become a major criterion for determining distinction. The expression of definiteness varies from language to language. Definiteness/ Indefiniteness is inherent in all natural languages, though, all such markers might not be present in every language. Translators face similar dilemma if they adhere to word- to- word translation where the semantic interpretation of definiteness in one language becomes indefinite in the other and vice versa. Have constructions in English denote inalienable possession whereas the same construction denotes alienable possession in Hindi and vice versa. The definiteness in English locative existential construction becomes indefinite in Hindi for similar constructions. The NP in Hindi when occurring at subject position get indefinite interpretation but if the locative phrase is fronted then an entirely new interpretation is obtained.

Keywords: definiteness, indefiniteness, noun phrases, English- Hindi dichotomy, Hindi syntax.

1. Introduction

In English, *have* sentences are known to exhibit definiteness effect (DE) (Keenan 1987, Partee, 1999) similar to that found in existential sentences with *there* constructions (Milsark, 1977, Barwise and Cooper 1981, Keenan 1987). The DE is a constraint against "definite" NP in the complement position of *have*, including proper names and also those occurring with "strong" quantifiers (Milsark 1977) such as <u>easy.</u> The goal in this paper is to argue that the DE exhibited by some constructions in English do not hold true for Hindi- an Indo Aryan language so much so that the definiteness in English becomes indefiniteness in Hindi for similar syntactic structures. The paper also highlights the various types definite and indefinite constructions in Hindi that may pose a challenge to English translators. Languages have their own sets of definite and indefinite markers and having an exactly translatable element in the other language is but a bit of a challenge. Lyons (1999, 48) describes the explicit marking of definiteness- whether with an article or a nominal inflection- as an aerial feature which characterizes the languages of Europe and the Middle east in particular, although it can be found elsewhere in the world as well. DE in English is found with different kinds of *have* complement NP, both with NP headed by relational nouns and inalienable possessions as in (i-ii) and ordinary non- relational nouns as in (iii- iv).

i. Prema has two kids.

ii. Srinath has a long nose.

iii. My friend has a beautiful house.

iv. One needs to have a healthy diet for a healthy lifestyle.

For the present discussion the two cases of inalienable possession constructions and the locative existential constructions make thy major part of the discussion. These two cases will highlight the distinction in the semantic interpretation of English and Hindi sentences for syntactically similar constructions. However, a few more frequently occurring indefinite constructions in Hindi too have been discussed as the paper progresses just to emphasize the distinction between the definite/ indefinite interpretation in English and Hindi.

1. a. Definiteness- Indefiniteness of NP: An Overview

The terms "definiteness" and "indefiniteness" are usually applied to a Noun Phrase (NP). In English a prototypical definite NP will begin with *the* (eg: the United States of America, the book which I bought yesterday) but in Hindi- an Indo Aryan language, the same definiteness cannot be demonstrated by any overt linguistic element. One may get confused at this to consider /jo /_ as a definite marker but that will not be the right interpretation as it functions as a demonstrative.

- *jo   kitaab   maine   kal   kharidi   thi*
(?)   book   I. Acc.   Yesterday bring.Past. F   AUX.F

as a definiteness marker but when looked carefully, it turns out to be a demonstrative similar to that in

- *that book which I bought yesterday.*

Literal translations from English to Hindi or Hindi to English do not seem to be very simple owing to the dilemma of definiteness/ indefiniteness in English and Hindi. The following sections deal with various definite/ indefinite constructions of English and Hindi with an aim to bring out the convergence and divergence in their syntactic frameworks.

1. b. Uniqueness- Familiarity- Specificity of definite markers

Using a definite article in English asserts existence of an entity meeting the descriptive content of an NP thereby making it unique. Indefiniteness markers in English do not bring in the element of uniqueness or specificity. An observation of the following sentences clarifies this point.

v. I met an uncle of Sam.

vi. Sam has many uncles and I met one of them.

vii. I met the uncle of Sam.

viii. Sam has only one uncle and I met that person.

Russel (1905) captures the meaning of definite descriptions in a formal language of logic. Uniqueness/ specificity is conveyed in contrastive construction (Abbot 2004).

ix. Did you meet *an* uncle of Sam or *the* uncle?

However, in Stawson (1950) Russels' analysis of definiteness in NP was challenged with an argument that definite descriptions in an NP are referential and uniqueness is only presupposed. Epstein (2002) argues that neither uniqueness nor familiarity provide the necessary conditions for the use of definite article in English thereby proposing a discourse- based framework for the same. Despite contradictions, the theories are in fundamental agreement that *the* is used to pick out a discourse referent. The other major approach concerning the interpretation of definiteness generally cites Chritopherson. He suggested that correct interpretation must also take into account the familiarity/ unfamiliarity of the addressee of the utterance with the referent of the NP. He remarks: "Now the speaker must always be supposed to know which individuals he is thinking of; the interesting thing is that the *the* form supposes that the hearer knows it too." (Christopherson 1939, 28)

This familiarity approach was revived by the work of Irene Heim (1982, 1983). Heim argued that definite descriptions are referential rather than quantificational; however she also argued that indefinite

descriptions are referential as well (Abbot, 2005). Just like English, an indefinite marker is used to introduce a novel subject. For example:

x. *kal   maine   ek   kitaab   padhi.   Kitaab   bahut   achhi   thi*
yesterday I.ERG. one book read.PAST.F   book   very   good.F   AUX.PAST.F
(Yesterday I read a book. The book was very good.)

The article /ek/ (a) is used as an indefinite marker to introduce a novel referent /kitaab/ (book). As the discourse continues one can see that the definiteness is then conveyed through a bare NP. Instead of the noun /kitaab/ a pronoun /who/ (it) can also be used. In continuation with this discussion, Kachru's suggestions in (Kachru 1980, Masica 1991 and Verma 1971) cannot be overlooked. They suggested that 'ek' (a) is used as an indefinite marker in Hindi, along with the indefinite pronoun 'koi' (some). Further, Kachru observes that the generic and the definite are both unmarked in Hindi. Only indefinite is marked with indefinite determiners *ek/ koi.* For example:

xi. ek   samay   ki   baat   hai   sablog   khush   the
  one   time   of matter AUX. all   happy   AUX. PAST
  (Once upon a time all were happy).

xii. koi   kitaab   mere   kaam   ki   nahi   hai.
    Any   book   my   work   of   no   AUX. PRESENT
    No book/s is of use to me.

Such discourses can lead to confusion where /ek/ can also be interpreted primarily as a modifier with quantificational function. But when it is contrasted with the following sentences, the confusion gets clarified.

xiii. *kal   maine   do   kitaaben   padhi.   Dono   Kitaaen   bahut   achhi   thin*
  yesterday I.ERG. two books   read.PAST.F   both   books   very   good.F AUX.PAST.PL.F
(Yesterday I read a book. The book was very good.)

Now the question arises that if /ek/ (which is also a modifier) is used as a quantifier then what will be the discourse type? The following paragraph is an attempt to answer this question.

xiv. *kal   maine   sirf   ek   kitaab   padhi.   Kitaab   bahut   achhi   thi*
  yesterday I.NOM just one book   read.PAST.F   book   very   good.F   AUX.PAST.F
(Yesterday I read just one book. The book was very good.)

The inclusion of /sirf/ (just/ only) before the quantifier emphasizes on the quantificational function of /ek/ and not on its function of an indefinite marker. Such subtle changes in the language have the capacity to change the entire interpretation. In cases (x), (xiii) and (xiv) there are subtle changes in the NPs of the first part of the discourse but the interpretations vary from being indefinite to quantificational in (x) as well as (xiii) and (xiv) respectively.

Specificity/ definiteness in Hindi is also marked by demonstrative elements which are homophonous with third person personal pronouns. Such demonstratives are assigned several semantic functions and are either proximate or remote and occur either in singular or plural forms. (Thakur 2015)

1. c. The puzzle of Locative Existential Construction

In English the *there_EXPL be* locative construction requires NP to be indefinite/ novel. Definite/ familiar NPs are not allowed.

xv. There is a boy in the class.

* There is the boy in the class.

xvi. There are some boys in the class.

* There are the boys in the class.

However, in Hindi there is no *there_EXPL*; and both definite and indefinites can be used freely in such contexts.

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xvii. ladkaa   class   mein   hai
      boy   class   in   AUX.PRSNT.SG

xviii. ek   ladkaa   class   mein   hai
       a   boy   class   in   AUX.PRSNT.SG

xix. class   mein   ek   ladkaa   hai
     class   in   a   boy   AUX.PRSNT.SG

The generalization seems to be that in subject position in Hindi, NPs tend to get more (but not fully) familiar interpretation- referred to as the specific indefinite interpretation in the syntax- semantics literature. If the locative phrase is fronted in Hind (as in xix) then a purely novel interpretation is obtained.

1. d. The *WALA*- Construction in Hindi

In Hindi, there are a number of factors that are seen to be the source for the (in) definiteness of a bare nominal. Singh (1994) argues that the ambiguity of its bare nominal can be resolved by associating it with the nature of the predicate. So essentially bare NPs have indefinite interpretation by default, the definiteness, may however be interpreted extra grammatically (Thakur, 2015). Bare NPs in Hindi received an indefinite interpretation set by Deising's (1992) proposals that it has a null determiner. In such cases 'wala/ *wali*' (masculine/ feminine) constructions bring in definiteness to some extent. The following examples will throw some light on this point.

xx. *lambe   baalon   wali   ladki*
    long   hair.PL   wala   girl
    (the girl with the long hair)

xxi. *bada   wala   makaan*
     big   wala   building
     (the big building)

xxii. *bada   makaan*
      big   building
      (big building)

In both (xx- xxi), the wala- construction adds definiteness equivalent to the English *the.* Interestingly, (xxii) is a minus wala- construction which makes the entire interpretation indefinite and general.

Hindi, in comparison to English has a relatively free- word order patterns both at sentence as well as phrasal levels. The grammatical relation (subject or object) of the nominal is independent of this word order alteration. The shift of an object nominal from its canonical position to the non- canonical positions is associated with definiteness/ specificity (Mahajan 1990; Mohanan 1994; Singh 1994; Kidwai 2000).

Mohanan (1994: 80-81) observes that for Hindi, definiteness is accompanied by specificity. Indefiniteness gets marked only when they are specific by getting mentioned previously in a discourse otherwise it is referential. She then proceeds in her argument by discussing animacy and inanimacy which is not of concern for the present discussion.

1. e. Few More Cases of Indefiniteness in Hindi

There are various discourse factors which determine definiteness/ indefiniteness of an NP. Some of these have been previously discussed in this paper. But there are some more which do act like indefinite markers but have somehow have missed being discussed in existing literature.

(i)   *Koi* – it inflects for case but not for number or gender. Its oblique form is /kisi/.

xxiii. Kal   raat   ghar   mein   koi   ghus   aaya
       Yesterday   night   house   in   someone   enter.PAST   come.PAST
  (Last night someone entered the house).

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xxiv. Kal   raat   ghar   mein   koi   chor   ghus   aaya

Yesterday night   house   in   a**   thief   enter.PAST come.PAST

(Last night a thief entered the house).

Comparing these two utterances it is clear that /koi/ functions as an indefinite marker for the noun /chor/ (thief) in the second utterance (p).

xxv. Mere   bahut   dost   hain.   Koi   ameer   hai   koi   gareeb   hai.

I.GEN   many   friends AUX.PL someone rich   AUX.SG someone poor   AUX.SG.

(I have many friends. Some are rich and some are poor).

Interestingly, in (xxv) the predicate is put as singular in Hindi but becomes plural in its English translation.

(ii)   Kuchh – this has twin roles depending on the type of discourse. It can either function as the marker of an inanimate noun or a quantity marker for the countable/ uncountable nouns.

xxvi. Kuchh   kha   lo.

Something eat   give.

(Eat something).

xxvii. Kuchh   bachche   khel   rahe   hain.

Few   children   play   stay.CONT AUX.PL

(Few children are playing).

One can see that /kuchh/ occurs in place of a noun in (xxvi) functioning as an indefinite marker and in (xxvii) it modifies the countable noun /bacche/ (*children).*

xxviii. Kuchh der   baad   aana.

Some   time   after   come

(Come after some time.)

Interestingly, in (xxviii) /kuchh/ is seen being used for uncountable nouns. /kuchh/ can be used to modify both the countable as well as uncountable nouns. However, in English /kuchh/ gets translated as few/ some depending on whether the noun is countable or uncountable respectively. The interpretation of /kuchh/ rests primarily on the speaker's/ hearer's knowledge of the noun itself. Lack of this knowledge can lead to errors in translation. Two other indefinite markers like /kai/ (several) and /chand/ (few) also exist in Hindi but there is no difference between them and their English in the way they are grammatically realized in an utterance.

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