

The Article

The article in the Greek is more versatile than that of the English. The word article comes from the Latin *artĭcŭlus* meaning “a small joint,” and came to mean “a division,” so the related word *artĭcŭlare* meaning “to articulate,” “to speak distinctly.” I find this etymology humorous since Latin does not have the definite article. The definite article comes to Italian (il, la, & etc), Spanish (el, la, & etc) and French (le, la, & etc) from the Latin demonstrative ille, illa & etc.

As for the indefinite article Dr. Richard Young notes, “Many European languages developed an indefinite article from the number “one,” as English did. There are also traces of this in Koine Greek. Occasionally εἷς (one) and τις (someone) are used in place of an indefinite article (Matt. 8:19, Luke 10:25).”¹ There is, however, no indefinite article in the Greek.

The function of the article is to point out an object, to make an object distinct or draw attention to it. The article has case, gender and number and it always agrees with the noun that it modifies in case, gender and number.

Uses of the Article

To Denote Persons or Things. The article is used to distinguish a particular person or thing from other persons or things. This use is at the heart of the article and the most fundamental sense as it serves to make a noun definite. A definite article points out a person, place or thing that is specific rather than something that is general. It serves to set the thing apart from others of the same class. When the article is present the noun is definite; when it is absent the noun may or may not be definite.² An example is Matthew 3:2: και λεγων μεταοειτε ἡγγικεν γαρ ἡ βασιλεια τῶν οὐρανῶν. (And saying, Repent, for **the kingdom of Heaven** is at hand.)

¹ Richard Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* (Nashville:Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 55

² Ibid, p. 56

To Denote Previous Reference. The article may be used to point out an object whose identity was defined by a previous reference. This is sometimes called an anaphoric³ article. It serves to remind the reader of someone or something previously mentioned in the context. A good example given by Daniel Wallace is John 4:10-11, “Jesus introduces to the woman at the well the concept of living water (ὕδωρ ζῶν). In v 11 the woman refers to the water, saying, ‘Where, then, do you keep *the* living water?’ (ποθεν οὖν ἔχεις **το** ὕδωρ **το** ζῶν). The force of the article here could be translated, ‘Where do you keep **this** living water **of which** you just spoke?’”⁴ (cf. Matt. 2:1,7; Rev. 15:1, 6).

To Denote Abstract Nouns. The article is used sometimes to make the ordinary indefinite abstract quality of a noun definite in some particular aspect. Abstract nouns are propositional attitudes such as truth, love, faith, grace & etc. For example, “truth” means anything in general which presents a character of reality and genuineness, but “the truth” in the New Testament means “that which may be relied upon as really in accord with God’s revelation in Christ.”⁵ The general sense of the abstract noun can be restricted, giving it a particular application by using the article. An example is Eph. 2:8: Γῆ γὰρ **χαριτι** ἔστε σεσωσμενοι δια πιστεως· και τουτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ **το** δῶρον (For **by the grace** you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] **the gift** of God.) (cf. Rom. 12:9)

With Proper Names. The article is sometimes used with monadic⁶ and proper nouns even though by definition these nouns are one of a kind and need no definite article to point them out. But Greek is different, more precise, so the use of the article with proper nouns serves a purpose and the task is to identify the purpose.

1. *With God.* It is common to find the article used with the word God (θεος). In this case, the presence of the definite article seems to point out divine personality, either the Father or the Triune Godhead. Whereas when used without the article it points out divine essence or some attribute of divinity.
2. *Proper Names.* In general the article is used with proper names to emphasize the identity of a well known person to the reader. When the article is absent its purpose is to emphasize an explanatory phrase to the name; to emphasize the name as a designation rather than the identity.

An example is Acts 19:13: ὀρκίζω ὑμᾶς **τον** Ἰησοῦν ὃν Παῦσσει κηρυσσει. (I adjure you by **Jesus** whom Paul preaches).

³ Anaphoric comes from the Greek ἀναφέρειν meaning “to bring back,” “bring up.”

⁴ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan 1996), p. 218

⁵ Dana & Mantey, p. 141

⁶ A monadic noun is one that refers to something that there is only one of. Examples are God, Christ, heaven, earth, & etc.

In the example above Dana & Mantey write, “That is, ‘by the particular Jesus whom one by the name of Paul preaches.’ The thought of definite identity belongs to Ἰησοῦς, but not to Παῦλος. This is to put special stress upon the designation of Jesus.”⁷

Generic Article. The article is used to designate a class or group. It points out a class or group as a single whole and sets it apart from all other classes or groups. An example is Matthew 18:17: ἔστω σοι ὡσπερ ὁ ἔθνικος και ὁ τελωνης. (he shall be to you as **the Gentile** [as a class] and **the tax collector** [as a class]. (cf. Eph. 5:25; 1 Tim. 3:2).

With Pronouns. The article is often times used as a pronoun, either personal (he, she, it), alternative (the one... the other), relative (who, which), or possessive (his, her).

1. *Personal.* John 4:32: ὁ δε εἶπεν αὐτοῖς: ἐγὼ βρωσιν ἔχω φαγεῖν ἣν ὑμεῖς (But **He** said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know). (cf. Matt. 15:26-27; Acts 15:3; Heb. 7:24)
2. *Alternative.* Acts 17:32: Ἀκουσαντες δε ἀναστασιν νεκρων οἱ μεν ἐχλευαζον, οἱ δε εἶπαν ἀκουσομεθα σου περι τουτου και παλιν. (Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, **some** began scoffing, but **others** said, “we will hear you again on this matter.”) (cf. 1 Cor. 7:7)
3. *Relative.* 1 Cor. 1:18: Ὁ λεγος γαρ ὁ του σταυπου τοις μεν ἀπολλυμενοις μωρια ἐστιν, τοις δε σωζομενοις ἡμῖν δυναμις θεου ἐστιν. (For the word **which** [is] of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.) (cf. Matt. 5:16; Acts 15:1)
4. *Possessive.* Matt. 4:20: οἱ δε εὐθεως ἀφεντες **τα** δικτυα ἠκολουησαν αὐτῷ. (And they immediately left **their** nets and followed Him.) (cf. Rom. 7:25; Eph. 5:25)

Special Uses of the Article

Granville Sharp Rule (the article with nouns connected with και). When two nouns are separated by και and only the first noun has an article, the author intends for the reader to connect the two nouns together. This rule is only valid for personal, singular and non-proper nouns⁸. An example is 2 Peter 2:20: εἰ γαρ ἀποφυγοντες τα μiasματα του κοσμου ἐν ἐπιγνωσει **του κυριου και σωτηρος** Ἰησου Χριστου, τουτοις δε παλιν ἐμπλακεντες ἠττωνται, γεγονεν αὐτοις τα ἔσχατα χειρονα των πρωτων. (For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge **of our Lord and Savior** Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning).

⁷ Dana & Mantey, pp. 142-143

⁸ By noun is meant noun, participle, or adjective.

Titus 2:13: προσδεχομενοι την μακαριαν ἐλπιδα και ἐπιφανειαν τῆς δοξῆς **τοῦ** μεγαλου θεοῦ και σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing **of our great God and Savior** Jesus Christ - “our great God and Saviour” not “the great God and our Savior”)⁹.

Absence of the Article

When the article is absent it is referred to as anarthrous. Sometimes the absence of the article is expected and normal. “Other times it deviates from the expected and is therefore exegetically significant.”¹⁰ An example is 1 Thes. 4:15: Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν κεγομεν **ἐν λεγῶ κυρίου**, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπομενοι εἰς την παρουσιαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθασωμεν τους κοιμηθεντας (For we say to you **by the word of the Lord**, that we who are alive remaining until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep).

Hebrews 1:2: ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων **ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ**, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονομον παντων, δι’ οὗ και ἐποίησεν τους αἰῶνας (has in these last days **He [God] spoke to us in Son**, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds). Most translate “by [His] Son.” Westcott says the absence of the article focuses attention on the nature rather than the personality of the Son.¹¹

The Position of the Article

The position of the article is important.

1. *Attributive position.* When the article precedes the adjective it is in the attributive position. For example, Matt. 12:43: Ὅταν δε **το** ἀκαθαρον πνεῦμα ἐξελθῆ ἀπο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, διερχεται δι’ ἀνδρῶν τοπων ζητοῦν ἀναπαυσιν και οὐχ εὑρισκαι. (When **the** unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none.) (cf. Mark 12:37; John 10:11)
2. *Predicate position.* When the article does not precede the adjective it is in the predicated position. For example, 1 Cor. 5:6: Οὐ καλον **το** καυχημα ὑμῶν. οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι μικρα ζυμη ὅλον το φουραμα ζυμοῖ (Your glorying [is] not good. Do you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?) (Cf. Heb. 7:24; 1 Pet. 4:8)
3. *Repeated position.* When the article is repeated with both the adjective and the noun it distributes the emphasis equally between the adjective and noun. An example is John 10:11:

⁹ Richard Young, p. 63

¹⁰ Richard Young, p. 66

¹¹ Richard Young, p. 68

Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός· ὁ ποιμὴν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τιθεὶς ὑπὲρ τῶν προβατῶν· (**I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep).

4. *Participle.* When an article precedes the participle it functions as a qualifying phrase. When there is no article with the participle it functions as a predicate. “Thus ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἔλθων εἰς τὴν πόλιν means *the man who came into the city*, but ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔλθων εἰς τὴν πόλιν means *the man having come into the city.*”¹² For example 1 Cor. 2:7 **ἀλλὰ λαλοῦμεν θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ** τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην, ἣν προωρισεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸ τῶν αἰῶνων εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν (**But we speak a wisdom of God which is hidden,** the hidden [wisdom] which God ordained before the ages for our glory).
5. *Demonstrative pronouns.* Demonstrative pronouns are regularly placed in the predicate position. For example, Luke 14:30: λεγοντες **ὅτι οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἤρξατο οἰκοδομεῖν** καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν ἐκτελεσαι. (Saying, **This man began to build,** and was not able to finish). (cf. John 4:53; 2 Cor. 7:8).

¹² Dana & Mantey, p. 153