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BSc Degree

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English - I (Basic English)
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Articles - Part 1

Welcome to the class. Today, we are going to be talking about Articles. Articles is a closed class element in English. Closed class means a limited number of entities, there are many entities, which are called closed class, many elements in the language are called closed class and many of them are open class. For example, nouns are open class elements because there are a lot of them, verbs are open class elements because they are lot of them, adjectives are open class elements because they are lot of them but prepositions are not.

Same way, what we are going to discuss today articles are not, so, the first thing you can figure out about this discussion is we are going to talk about a small group of elements, which are very significant for understanding a language, for understanding the context and also for expressing ourselves. The use of articles rather appropriate uses of articles is another element which makes our language impressive. When we speak, we place articles properly in the right context gives an impression about our understanding and knowledge of the language.

Same thing happens when we write sentences and we do not misplace articles. We put them in proper places and leading when people write, what we write gives an impression that we understand in a contextually appropriate condition. As a footnote I must add here that intuitive knowledge about appropriate uses of article as a matter of native speaker's intuition, someone who speaks who speaks English, who grew up speaking English, intuitively develops appropriateness about uses of articles.

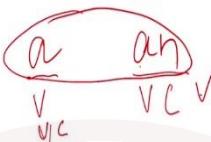
However, by paying proper attention to certain context and certain rules can also lead us to that level of appropriateness. So, in short, it is possible to learn appropriate uses of articles. We are going to look at just a few of those rules, few of those contexts, to give you a discussion on this topic in short. Here are few of them and before that, we need to know what we mean by articles.

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ARTICLES - A, An, and The

- Three types of articles – a/an/the
 - Indefinite articles – a/ an
 - Definite article – the
- Nouns
- Rule: Where 'a' occurs, 'an' doesn't occur.
 - Rule: The article a occurs Infront of consonant sounds; an occurs Infront of vowel sounds.



It is quite clear thing, articles there are three of them in English, they are a, an and the. As you can see here 'a', 'an' and 'the' these three elements are called articles in English, grammatically speaking, they are also called determiners. So, we say there are three types of articles there are only three of them. Articles can be used for definite and indefinite context for identifying definite and indefinite contexts. And hence, they are called indefinite articles and definite articles meaning the ones that are used for identifying indefinite context, they are called indefinite articles and the other class is called definite article. So, as I said, in a grammatical context, they are also called determiners.

As a matter of thumb rule, they precede only nouns. So, these are the identification feature of articles and nouns both ways. Contextually, we need to know that articles can only be used in front of a noun. This is the only context where articles are used. We can say the same thing in the flip side.

We identify nouns when we see an article in front of a word, because by deduction, if there is an article, a following element can only be a noun. So, this is a good piece of information for us to understand other parts of speech. They are used if we have an indefinite noun, we use an indefinite article, if we are using it in a definite context, we use a definite article.

The important part here to understand is how do we know what is definite noun and what is indefinite. And this is what I was trying to underline that some people who grow up speaking this language English here in this context, they develop intuitive understanding of it, like we develop intuition about many other things in the language if we learn it as a child.

In the context of learning as an adult, as a grown-up person, we need to pay attention to few things. Also, as a footnote, it is important to mention here that in some languages, particularly our languages like Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Canada, Bangla, Marathi and many others. We met we do not find an element referred to as article.

We do not have an element like a, an and the, which does not mean that the function that articles perform do not happen in our languages. In other words, we do have techniques and we do have elements in the language that identify indefinite and definite contexts, that requires a completely different discussion.

Right now, we are only going to talk about three articles and two types of them definite and indefinite, for us. Moving on to that, so, as you can see, ‘articles’ occur in front of a consonant sound, so, a occurs in front of a consonant sound, and an occurs in front of a vowel sound. This is an important distinction, when we are talking about the whole class of indefinite article.

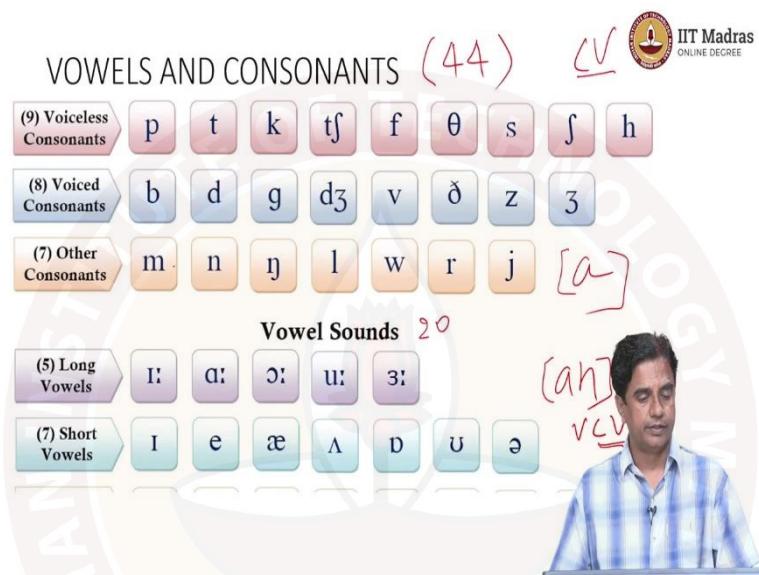
So, anyway, look at the composition of that. It is important to pay attention to this small element ‘a’. Look at this, this is a vowel sound by itself. And when we say an, what is the composition of that, it has a vowel and the consonant sound both. So, we can in a way say, we only have one article for indefinite class, and one article for definite class. That is, there are only two types indefinite and definite.

Within indefinite, we are using two of them and actually, if we pay attention to them, they are not two of them. What happens is, if a noun which requires an article, and if that noun begins with a consonant sound, then we need ‘a’, if it does not begin with a consonant sound, it begins with a vowel sound, then we need ‘an’, why, is a very crucial question. Answer is also equally simple. Look at the composition of it.

It is a vowel and this one is a vowel and consonant. So, when we have a word with a consonant, then that begins with a consonant and we have a vowel in front of it. Then we are making it easier for speaking, easier to pronounce. Same thing happens here, we already have a, if it begins with a vowel, then we need this one, so that two vowels do not come next to one another.

We have an alternation between vowel, consonant and vowel. That is the underlying rule of use of an article that is use of 'an' in front of a noun that begins with 'a' vowel sound. There hence, we need to pay attention to the first sound of the noun to be able to use appropriate indefinite type of article. So, the alternation between 'a' and 'an' has very simple rule. A in front of a consonant, sound that is nouns that begin with a consonant sound, and an in front of a noun that begins with a vowel sound. Simple, you can watch this again and again, you can watch hundreds of examples without any exception for this thing.

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ARTICLES – (A, An, and The)

- Three types of articles – a/an/the
- Indefinite articles – a/ an
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- Rule: The article 'a' occurs Infront of consonant sounds; 'an' occurs Infront of vowel sounds.

a an
VC VCV



We already know about consonant and vowel sounds in English, we have total 44 of them, that is 44 consonant and vowel sound out of which we have 24 consonant sounds like 9 of them voiceless consonants like p, t, k, ʃ, f, θ, s, ʃ, h. And then we have eight voiced consonants like b, d, g, dʒ, v, ð, z, ʒ and some 7 other consonants actually this is written as other consonants and you know their classifications, ‘m’ and ‘n’ and ‘ŋ’ these are nasal consonants, one is a bilabial, nasal, ‘n’ is a dental nasal, and ‘ŋ’ is a velar nasal. ‘L’ is a lateral sound, ‘r’ is a flap, so ‘l’ and ‘r’ together form one class, they are called liquids and ‘w’ and ‘y’ are semi vowels.

So, we know about these vowel sounds, these consonant sounds. So, here we are giving it to you again for clarity in this context, that for all these sounds, we use a as an article there. If a word begins with these sounds, then we use a vowel article, an article that has only a vowel sound in it.

On the contrary, if a word begins with a vowel sound, one of these that are given here, there are 20 vowel sounds, we have only given you 12 of them here, because these are simple monophthong vowels, some long vowels and some short vowels, this list does not include 8 of the diphthongs. So, you can take a look at them, but even a word beginning with a diphthong will have ‘an’ in an indefinite article in front of it, because this gives an alternation of vowel, consonant vowel.

So, the rule is the same consonant vowel, consonant vowel, this must be maintained. That is all about indefinite article. This alternation of consonant and vowel is not true for the definite article, because it may look little bigger, but it has only one sound, the and it does not have such variation, as part of its distinction.

So, whether the noun begins with consonant sound or a vowel sound, the same article is used in front of both of them.

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A few examples:

- Cat - /k/ - a cat (A cat sat on the table).
- Honest - /o/ - an honest (He is an honest man).
- M.A - /em. ei/ - an MA (I have an MA in English studies)
- Europe - /y/ - a Europe (It was a wonderful European trip)
- One - /w/ - a one (It was a one to one match).

Uses of indefinite article a/an

1. Expressions of quantity and number

- I ate a lot of laddus.
- I waited an hour for him.
- She spent a couple of days in Guntur.
- They bought a number of balloons.



So, some of the examples are like, words like cat, you can see and you know that this word begins with the sound k. So, you have a cat. Honest, has the sound a in front of it, hence we use this article. Here is an example. He is an honest man. So, here you have vowel consonant vowel alternation.

Here you have vowel and consonant alternation. M.A say this thing to yourself, the first sound of this word is a vowel; hence we have an MA. I have an MA in English. Europe, it has a consonantal sound in the beginning of it. This one, hence you have a vowel here. It was a wonderful European trip; it was a European. So, we can say Portugal is a European country.

One has again, 'w' a consonantal sound, though the class is known as semi vowel, but it is a continental sound. Hence, we say 'it was a one to one match'. So, here we use this article in front of this word, because as a matter of sound, here you have vowel, and you have a consonant.

Again, when the uses of indefinite article, so the expressions of quantity and number, 'I ate a lot of Laddoos'. So, it is an expression lot of laddoos, expression of quantity, hence, you have indefinite article and appropriate type of indefinite article because this 'a lot' has first sound l, which is a consonant, so, you have 'a'.

I waited an hour for him. Because this begins with a vowel sound, she has spent a couple of days in Guntur, a because this gives you a sense of time, quantity and they bought a number of balloons. So, again, 'a' because these are the examples of expression of quantity and number.

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2. Before a proper noun which is insignificant.
- A Mr. Nikhil came to see you.

3. Before a proper noun in figurative use.

- He wanted to be an Einstein.
- She is a Hitler.

VLC

4. Before a singular class noun to refer to the whole class.

- An owl can see in darkness.
- A camel can live without water for many days.

5. Before a singular class noun which is referred to for the first time and which is not known to the listener or reader beforehand.

- I saw a bird.
- They caught a big fish.
- He left this place an hour ago.



We see other uses where we need to understand it appropriately. Before we can use an indefinite article before a proper noun, where the proper noun is not a very significant thing. So, we can say in the sense of one we say a Mr. Nikhil came to see you. So, when I do not present Mr. Nikhil as any significant person, then I say, a Mr. Nikhil came to see you, we use indefinite article also, before a proper noun, in figurative speech, it becomes a figure of speech, where we can say things like, he wanted to be an Einstein.

So, we are not referring to Einstein as an individual, we are talking about Einstein in a metaphorical context, that he wanted to become an Einstein. Hence, we can use an indefinite article in this context. She is a Hitler. So, we can use again an indefinite article in this context. Again, I do not want to repeat it multiple times, here, it is VC, because the following situation is V. And here you have V, because following a C.

Some indefinite articles are also used before a singular class of nouns to refer to the whole class. So, we can say things like an owl can see in darkness, so, we are using an indefinite article in front of an owl, owl to refer to it as the whole class, because we are talking about its capacity to see in the night. So, when we are using owl, we are referring to all of them, and therefore, it is possible to use an indefinite article in front of it, because we are not talking about the definiteness of it.

So, an owl can see in the night, and therefore, we are using ‘a’ as an indefinite article in front of this. ‘A camel can live without water for many days’; a camel can live without water for many days.

So, we are talking about the capacity of camel, not the capacity of a particular type particular camel but camel has whole class, therefore, a camel and this is categorically giving you an idea that we are talking about nouns and referring to the whole class. We also use in different articles when we talk about singular class nouns, which is referred to for the first time and which is not known to the listener or reader beforehand, so, we can say ‘I saw a bird’.

So, when we are using this for the first time ‘bird’ in the context first time, so we can use ‘a’, I saw a bird. ‘They caught a big fish’, so, we can use another one here modifying big fish. He left this place an hour ago, we can use ‘an’ here in this context. So, these are some of the just 3, 4, 5 simple uses of indefinite article. If you keep just these 5 things in mind, you are done with 60 to 70 percent contexts of uses of articles in our regular speech and writing that is in the context of indefinite articles. Thank you so much for your attention. Wait until next time, we bring something new for you. Thank you.