

# THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

The definite article is usually classified by itself as a unique member of a class, its only relative being the indefinite article "a".

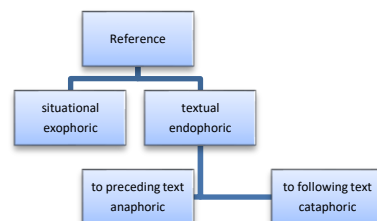
On the other hand, it has important similarities with a whole group of other items, so we need not hesitate to classify it with the determiners; and more particularly the specific determiners, the class which includes the demonstratives and the possessives.

The full set of specific determiners is as follows:

	Demonstratives	Possessives
Referential	<div>Selective      <i>this, that</i> <i>these, those</i></div> <div>Non-selective    <i>the</i></div>	<div>Speech roles <i>my, your, our</i></div> <div>Other roles his, her, their, its</div>
Interrogative	<i>Which</i>	One's Whose

*The* was originally a reduced form of *that* in the same way that *a* is a reduced form of *one*.

*The* reference is either **exophoric** (refers to context of situation) or **endophoric** (reference to text). If it is endophoric it can be either **anaphoric** or **cataphoric**.



## Exophoric

*The* can be exophoric in two ways:

(1) Immediate Situation: A particular individual or subclass is being referred to, and that individual or subclass is identifiable in the specific situation.

eg Don't go the train is coming    Don't go a train is coming

Mind the step    Pass me the towel    The children are enjoying themselves

(2) Larger Situation: The referent is identifiable on extralinguistic grounds no matter what the situation.

First, it may arise because there exists only one member of the class of objects referred to.

eg the sun the universe

Second, it may arise because the reference is the whole class eg: *the stars* or *the snail* in *The snail is considered a great delicacy in France*.

( This type of exophoric reference, which does not depend on the specific situation, has been called **homophoric** to distinguish it from the situationally specific type)

### Endophoric:

Alternatively, the source of identification may lie in the text. In this case there are two possibilities: reference forward and reference backward.

(1) Cataphoric: Here are some example:

The ascent of Mount Everest

*The party in power*

*The people who predicted a dry summer*

What is the significance of *the* in such instances? It is a signal of identity showing the criteria for identifying WHICH *ascent*, WHICH *party* etc is intended are recoverable - in this instance they are recoverable from the nominal group in which *the* occurs. In other words *the* is a signal that the modifying elements are to be taken as defining: we are to understand only such members of the general class named by the Head noun as are specified in the Modifier. The defining elements are *of Mount Everest*, *in power* and *who predicted a dry summer*.

(2) Anaphoric

The clearest and easiest to understand is **direct** anaphoric where the item is actually repeated eg: *hall* in

She found herself in a long, low *hall* which was lit up by a row lamps hanging from the roof. There were doors all round *the hall*, but they were all locked.

Indirect anaphoria can be explained by:

John bought *a bicycle*, but when he rode it one of *the wheels* came off.

Another way to look at this is to say that there is anaphoric and cataphoric reference. *The wheels* above are an elliptical variant of *the wheels of the bicycle* (cataphoric) and *a bicycle* has already been mentioned (anaphoric)

There is a commonly held belief that the typical function of *the* is the anaphoric one. However, in pragmatic speech, *the* is primarily exophoric, and in most other varieties of spoken and written English its predominant function is cataphoric.

SUMMARY: *The* is the definite article. Its meaning is that the noun it modifies has a specific referent, and that the information required for identifying this referent is available. It does

not contain that information in itself; it is the 'definite article' in the sense that its function is to signal definiteness, without itself contributing to the definition. Nor does it say where the information is to be located. It will be found somewhere in the environment. (text or situation) Whenever the information is contained in the text, the presence of *the* creates a link between the sentence in which it itself occurs and that containing the referential information; in other words it is *cohesive*.

#### TRY TO IDENTIFY THE USES OF *THE* IN THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE

Last year we went to Devon for a holiday. *The*<sup>1</sup> holiday we had there was *the*<sup>2</sup> best we've ever had. *The*<sup>3</sup> people we stayed with had four children. *The*<sup>4</sup> eldest girl was about nine. We swam together in *the*<sup>5</sup> sea for hours.

1. Endophoric: Cataphoric & anaphoric. Cataphoric, pointing forward to *we had there* and also anaphoric, referring the second occurrence of *holiday* back to that in the preceding sentence.
2. Endophoric: Cataphoric and anaphoric. Cataphoric because it points forward to *we've ever had*, and anaphoric because it points back to *holiday*.
3. Endophoric: Cataphoric only since there is no lexical relation between *people* and anything in the preceding passage.
4. Endophoric: Cataphoric and anaphoric: cataphoric showing that *eldest* defines *girl* and anaphoric because *girl* is related to *children*.
5. Exophoric: The referent can be identified from the context of situation.

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## SOURCES