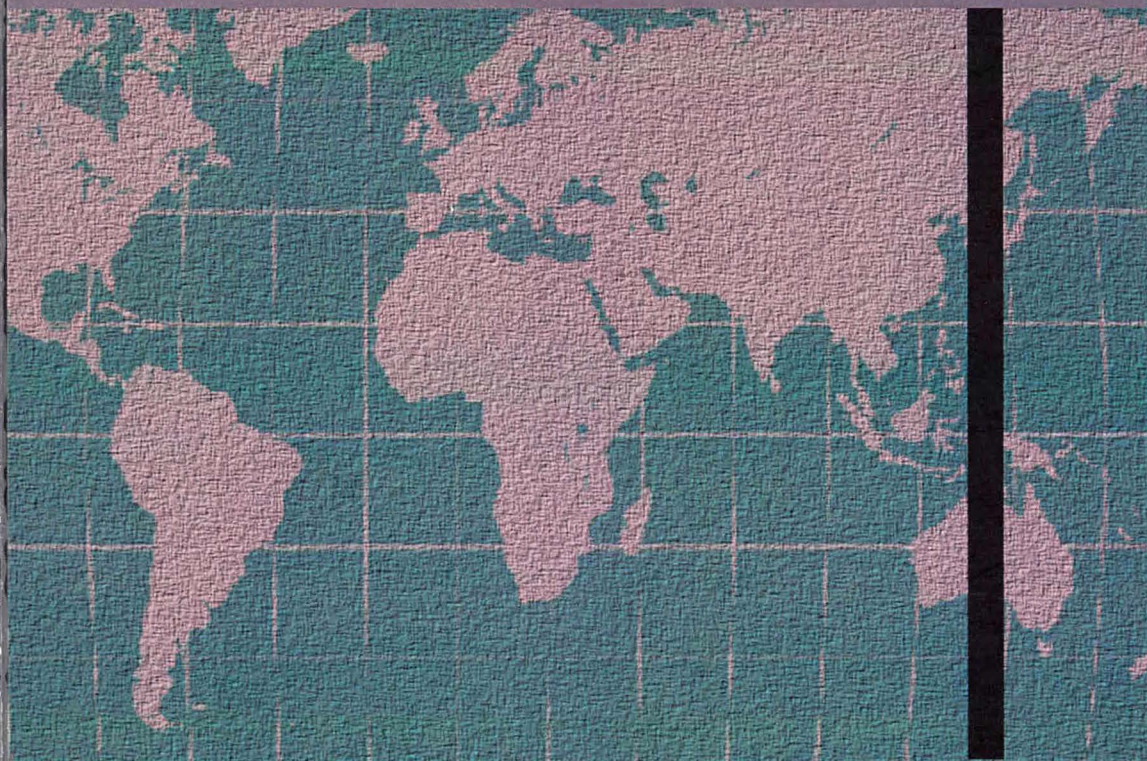


# CROSSING BOUNDARIES



**Musings on Language, Literature  
and Culture**



IIUM Press

Edited by Md. Mahmudul Hasan

# **Crossing Boundaries**

## **Musings on Language, Literature and Culture**

Edited By

**Md. Mahmudul Hasan**

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International Islamic University Malaysia



**IIUM Press**

**INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA**

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## CHAPTER 8

## On Membership of the Class of Articles in English

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**Abstract:** The unequal positions occupied by *the* and *a/an* in the determiner phrase in English occasionally raise questions about the legitimacy of their grouping as articles. This paper aims to justify this traditional view and tease apart the roles that they share as determiners. Based on grammaticalisation accounts, it argues that the morphemes that should properly form the class of articles are the definite article *the*, the indefinite article *a/an* and the phonologically null article, zero or  $\emptyset$ . This grouping excludes unstressed *some*. Following Chesterman (1991) it will show that the phonologically null article can be further divided into two – zero and null.

**Keywords:** *English articles, definiteness, grammaticalisation, syntax, semantics*

**Introduction**

In Modern English, articles precede the head of a noun phrase (NP) and are part of a class of such pre-head words called determiners. Because the ‘determining’ function can also be carried out by words not belonging to this group (for example, a genitive NP in *Ali’s glasses*), the specific name for such words, including articles, is *determinative* (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 365). There are three classes of determiners i.e. predeterminers, determiners and peripheral modifiers. For the purposes of this paper, suffice it to say that articles are determiners.<sup>3</sup> This position is illustrated in:

1. Not *even*      *half*      *the*      *land* will be yours.

peripheral modifier predeterminer determiner head

A question that some linguists ask in regard to articles is why these morphemes are classed as articles at all. For example, it has been pointed out that *the* and *a* are not syntactically equal as determiners (Klinge, 2006), necessarily leading to the different meanings between them (Trenkič, 2007). Their inequality can thus complicate certain analyses of their behavioural patterns. The following are some cases to illustrate:

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<sup>3</sup> Quirk et al (1985, p. 261) classify articles as ‘central determiners’ in relation to predeterminers and postdeterminers. The latter “follow predeterminers or central determiners (if such determiners are present) ... but they precede any adjectives and other premodifying items”. In Huddleston and Pullum et al. (2002), the central determiners appear to be the determinatives themselves.