The Expression of Indefiniteness in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study

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Abstract
Indefiniteness is a semantic feature expressed by grammatical devices to be used linguistically depending on pragmatic factors. So, the present study deals with indefiniteness syntactically, semantically and pragmatically. These levels are related to each other and it is not easy to draw lines between them. The study aims at (1)Pointing out how the concept of indefiniteness is expressed grammatically in English and Arabic, and show the role of articles in expressing the concept.(2)Showing the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic uses of the indefinite expression in English and Arabic.(3)Identifying the similarity and difference between the two languages at the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels which may help to get a common core that contributes to the belief in the existence of language universals. The procedures followed in this study include an introduction about the concept of indefiniteness, and a brief survey of indefiniteness in thirty-one languages to show how this concept is expressed in them. Then, indefiniteness in English and Arabic is dealt with at the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels. This is followed by a contrastive analysis to point out the similarities and differences between the two languages.
The study has come to the conclusion that, in English, the indefinite feature exists in the noun, not in the article, and the article has a syntactic function rather than a semantic one. The study shows also that, semantically, indefiniteness in English and Arabic is almost the same, and its function is internal to the language system. Syntactically and pragmatically, indefiniteness in Arabic is more powerful and active than it is in English. Syntactically, the indefinite item is obligatory in certain positions to perform different functions. Pragmatically, the indefinite item acquires additional meaning from the context in which it occurs.