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Lezione 5

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Articles

The indefinite article

The indefinite article indicates something general, undefined or unknown.

Its role is to introduce a person or object in the narrative that the reader is not yet familiar with.

Here is the full declension of the singular indefinite article in German, taking into account the four cases: 1. NOM, 2. ACC, 3. DAT, 4. GEN.

Masculine:

1. *ein Mann*
2. *einen Mann*
3. *einem Mann*
4. *eines Mannes*

Neuter:

1. *ein Kind*
2. *ein Kind*
3. *einem Kind*
4. *eines Kindes*

Feminine:

1. *eine Mutter*
2. *eine Mutter*
3. *einer Mutter*
4. *einer Mutter*

The four cases in German

The nominative case is used for the subject of the sentence, which together with the predicate forms the two essential parts of the sentence.

The nominative answers questions: *Wer?* (Who?) and *Was?* (Was?)

The accusative is often used for the direct object of a transitive verb, directly after the verb without a preposition.

The accusative direct object answers the questions: *Wen?* (Who?) and *Was?* (Was?)

The accusative is also used to indicate direction or movement towards a place. In our story, for example, it indicates the places to which the girl moves as she passes from one dream to another.

The accusative, as a directional complement, answers the question: *Wohin?* (Where to?)

The dative is used for the indirect object of a sentence, answering the question: *Wem?* (To whom?)

The dative can also be used as a locative complement (to indicate where something is), answering the question: *Wo?* (Where?).

The dative can also indicate movement from a place, answering the question: *Woher?* (From where?).

The genitive case is used to indicate possession or specification, answering the question: *Wessen?* (Whose?)

Exercise

Listen to the audio

ein liebes kleines Mädchen (a sweet little girl)

aus einem Traum in einen anderen (leaving one dream just to enter another)

in ein Bergdorf (to a mountain village)

an einen Meeresstrand (to a beach)

in ein wildfremdes Land (to a country far away)

er verwandelte sich in einen fremden Riesenkerl (he became a big ugly stranger)

in einen Zweimetermann (a six-foot giant)

ein armes Würmchen (a poor tiny creature)

ein krankes Engelsgesichtchen (a sweet face like a sick angel's)

der Name eines ausländischen englischen oder amerikanischen Arztes (the name of a foreign doctor, British or American)

Curiosity: the *es gibt* formula

We have seen that the first part of the story introduces the three main characters: a girl, a giant and a poor tiny creature. None of them plays the role of the protagonist, and all three seem to be positioned in a still image without performing any action. If we were to describe this first part in German, we would use *es gibt*, which literally means 'there is, there are'. The formula *es gibt* is always followed by the accusative.

Es gibt in Pirandellos Text ein liebes kleines Mädchen, einen fremden Riesenkerl und ein armes Würmchen.

Es gibt in Pirandellos Text ein liebes kleines Mädchen, einen fremden Riesenkerl und ein armes Würmchen. (In Pirandello's text, there is a sweet little girl, a strange giant of a man and a poor tiny creature.)

The definite article

We have already mentioned that the definite article indicates the gender of a noun, so it is useful to study the definite article alongside the noun.

In the text, the main function of the definite article is to confirm the presence of someone or something with which the reader is already familiar.

Below is the full declination of the definite article in the singular and plural in German, taking into account the four cases:

1. Nominative (NOM)

2. Accusative (ACC)
3. Dative (DAT)
4. Genitive (GEN)

Masculine:

1. *der Mann; die Männer*
2. *den Mann; die Männer*
3. *dem Mann; den Männern*
4. *des Mannes; der Männer*

Neuter:

1. *das Kind; die Kinder*
2. *das Kind; die Kinder*
3. *dem Kind; den Kindern*
4. *des Kindes; der Kinder*

Feminine:

1. *die Mutter; die Mütter*
2. *die Mutter; die Mütter*
3. *der Mutter; den Müttern*
4. *der Mutter; der Mütter*

Imagine a scene (1)

The exercise is to insert the correct definite article in the cases indicated. We are in the second part of the extract. These elements are enough to imagine the room and the two windows. In the room, we see the mother sitting in the chair (dative = locative complement) and then she puts the child (accusative = direct object) on the bed (accusative = directional complement).

Listen to the audio

das Zimmer (the room)

die zwei Fenster (the two windows)

auf dem Sessel (in the armchair)

die Mutter (the mother)

das Kind (the child)

auf das Bettchen (on the bed)

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The possessive article *mein*

The personal pronoun *ich* has the possessive article *mein*. *Ich* represents the person who owns what follows the possessive article *mein*. The gender, number and case are determined by the following noun.

Below is the full declination of the possessive article *mein* in the German singular and plural, taking into account the four cases:

Masculine:

1. *mein Finger* (my finger); *meine Finger* (my fingers)
2. *meinen Finger*; *plurale: meine Finger*
3. *meinem Finger*; *plurale: meinen Fingern*
4. *meines Fingers*; *plurale: meiner Finger*

Neuter:

1. *mein Fenster* (my window); *meine Fenster* (my windows)
2. *mein Fenster*; *plurale: meine Fenster*
3. *meinem Fenster*; *plurale: meinen Fenstern*
4. *meines Fensters*; *plurale: meiner Fenster*

Feminine:

1. *meine Hand* (my hand); *meine Hände* (my hands)
2. *meine Hand*; *meine Hände*
3. *meiner Hand*; *meinen Händen*
4. *meiner Hand*; *meiner Hände*

Imagine a scene (2)

The intimacy between mother and child is suddenly disturbed by the arrival of someone else. The possessive article *mein* reveals the arrival of the ultimate protagonist of every dream (or nightmare): *ich*.

Let's repeat the previous exercise:

Insert either the definite article or the possessive "*mein*", with the cases indicated in brackets.

We will only listen to the audio for the three syntagmas that have been added:

mit meinen Fingern vor meinem Mund (with my fingers in front of my mouth)

bei meinem Hauch (at my breath)

das Kind (the child)

The possessive article *dein*

The personal pronoun *du* has the possessive article *dein*, which declines in the same way as *mein*.

Du represents the person who owns what follows the possessive article *dein*. The gender, number and case are determined by the following noun.

Wo ist dein Mann? Nebenan? 'Where's your husband? In the other room?'

Wo ist dein Mann? Nebenan? (Where's your husband? In the other room?)

The possessive article *sein* (1)

The personal pronoun *er* has the possessive article *sein*, which declines in the same way as *mein* and *dein*. *Er* is the person who owns what follows the possessive article *sein*. The gender, number and case are determined by the following noun.

A key usage in German:

Anything that has to do with one's body or private life is always accompanied by the possessive article in German.

Let's try an exercise to illustrate the correct use of the possessive article.

Listen to the audio

der Riese und seine langen Arme (the giant and his long arms)

der Riese und sein Riesenkörper (the giant and his giant body)

der Riese und sein breites Gesicht (the giant and his broad face)

der Riese und sein Riesenbett (the giant and his giant bed)

In Pirandello's story, the giant is characterised not only physically but also, and above all, morally:

1.) by four nouns *Riesenkerl; Zweimetermann; dein Mann; Riese*

ein Riesenkerl; ein Zweimetermann; dein Mann; der Riese (a big ugly stranger; a six-foot giant; your husband; the giant)

2.) with four adjectives *fremd; dumm; verkommen; sprachlos*, and one idiomatic expression: *zu nichts zu gebrauchen*

fremd; dumm, zu nichts zu gebrauchen und verkommen; sprachlos (strange; dumb, lazy, and depraved; bewildered)

3.) By two phrases that suggest his almost total exclusion from the scene of the room: *nebenan; in der Tür*

nebenan; in der Tür (in the other room; at the door)

The possessive article *ihr*

The personal pronoun *sie* has the possessive article *ihr*. *Sie* refers to the person who owns what follows the possessive article *ihr*. The gender, number and case are determined by the following noun.

Example from the text:

Die Mutter hielt das Kind in ihren Armen. (The mother was holding the child in her arms.)

Die Mutter hielt das Kind in ihren Armen. (The mother was holding the child in her arms.)

The possessive article *sein* (2)

The personal pronoun *es* also uses the possessive article *sein*, as does the masculine form. *Es* refers to the entity that owns what follows the possessive article *sein*. The gender, number and case are determined by the following noun.

Example from the text:

das Kind mit seinem Engelslächeln noch auf seinem blassen Mündchen (the child with his angelic smile still on his tiny, pale mouth)

das Kind mit seinem Engelslächeln noch auf seinem blassen Mündchen (the child with his angelic smile still on his tiny, pale mouth)

The negative article *kein*

The negative article *kein* is declined like the indefinite article.

In our text it appears together with the expression *Recht haben*.

Er hat Recht. Er hat kein Recht. Er hat kein Recht mehr. (He is right. He is not right. He is no longer right.)

Er hat Recht. Er hat kein Recht. Er hat kein Recht mehr. (He is right. He is not right. He is no longer right.)

Rules for using *alle*

Nominative (NOM) or accusative (ACC) plural: *alle* replaces the definite article *die* (all + die = alle).

Dative (DAT) plural: *allen* replaces the definite article *den* (all+den=allen).

Genitive (GEN) Plural: *aller* replaces the definite article *der* (all+der=aller).

Example from the text (third part, last scene):

Die ganze Menschheit? Alle Häuser? Alle Straßen in allen Städten? Und alle Wiesen und Felder und Berge und Meere? Die ganze Erde? (The whole of humanity? Every house? Every street in every city? The countryside, the mountains, the sea? The whole earth?)

The expression 'the whole' is translated into German as '*der/die/das ganze*'.

Elliptical statements and rhetorical repetition:

The selected passage contains elliptical statements that omit many elements expected in the full syntactic structure of a sentence. Without context, the extract reveals neither the subject nor the predicate. However, the rhetorical figure of repetition, known as anaphora, is unmistakable.

Die ganze Menschheit? Alle Häuser? Alle Straßen in allen Städten? Und alle Wiesen und Felder und Berge und Meere? Die ganze Erde? (The whole of humanity? Every house? Every street in every city? The countryside, the mountains, the sea? The whole earth?)

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