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THE ROLE OF DETERMINERS IN ENGLISH NOMINAL PHRASE CONSTRUCTION

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Abstact: This article investigates the role of determiners in English nominal phrase construction, focusing on their structural, semantic, and discourse functions. Determiners are essential grammatical elements that precede nouns and provide crucial information about definiteness, indefiniteness, quantity, possession, and reference. The study emphasizes that determiners are not peripheral items in English grammar but fundamental components that shape the interpretation and organization of noun phrases. The aim of the research is to analyze how different types of determiners function within nominal phrases and how they contribute to meaning formation and communicative clarity. The research is based on theoretical linguistic sources and descriptive-analytical methods, which allow for a systematic examination of determiner usage in various syntactic and communicative contexts. The literature review includes the works of leading linguists in the field of syntax and functional grammar, highlighting the theoretical foundations of determiner analysis. The findings indicate that determiners play a key role in reference tracking, discourse cohesion, and information structure by distinguishing between specific and non-specific references and reducing ambiguity in communication. The study also shows that determiner usage is influenced by contextual factors, speaker intention, and shared knowledge between interlocutors. In addition, the research highlights the importance of determiners in language acquisition, as they represent one of the most challenging grammatical areas for learners of English. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that determiners are central to English nominal phrase construction and are essential for ensuring grammatical accuracy, semantic precision, and communicative effectiveness in both spoken and written discourse.

Key words: determiners, nominal phrase, English grammar, noun phrase structure, reference, definiteness, indefiniteness, syntax, semantics, discourse analysis, functional grammar, language acquisition

Introduction

The study of determiners in English nominal phrase construction is an important area of modern linguistics because determiners play a central and multifunctional role in the formation, interpretation, and organization of meaning within noun phrases. They function as essential grammatical elements that occur before nouns and provide crucial information related to definiteness, indefiniteness, quantity, possession, identification, and reference. In English, determiners are often obligatory in nominal structures, and their presence or absence can significantly affect the grammatical correctness and semantic clarity of an utterance. For this reason, determiners are considered key components in the interface between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, and their analysis is necessary for a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed in language.

The aim of this study is to analyze the role of determiners in English nominal phrase construction, focusing on their structural position, semantic contribution, and discourse-related functions. The study also aims to examine how different types of determiners operate within noun phrases, how they interact with other syntactic elements, and how they influence meaning

formation in both written and spoken discourse. In addition, the research seeks to show how determiner choice is conditioned by contextual factors such as shared knowledge, communicative intention, and the informational status of referents.

The object of the research is the system of English determiners within nominal phrases, while the subject of the research is the functional, semantic, and syntactic role of determiners in shaping noun phrase structure and meaning. The material of the research consists of theoretical works in modern linguistics, descriptive grammars of English, and studies focused on syntax and functional grammar. The methods applied in this study include descriptive and analytical approaches, which allow for a systematic examination of determiner usage, classification, and function in different linguistic contexts. These methods make it possible to analyze both the structural position of determiners and their communicative role in discourse.

The literature review of this research is based on the works of influential linguists such as Noam Chomsky, who developed the theory of generative grammar and explained the hierarchical organization of syntactic structures; Randolph Quirk, who provided a detailed and systematic description of English grammar, including the classification and usage of determiners; Michael Halliday, who emphasized the functional nature of language and the relationship between grammatical choices and communicative meaning; Rodney Huddleston, who analyzed the internal structure of noun phrases and the syntactic positioning of determiners; and David Crystal, who explored the role of grammar in real language use and communication. These studies collectively demonstrate that determiners are not optional or peripheral elements but fundamental components of noun phrase construction that contribute significantly to grammatical organization, meaning interpretation, and discourse coherence.

The results of previous linguistic research indicate that determiners play a crucial role in reference tracking, information structuring, and the reduction of ambiguity in communication. They enable speakers to distinguish between specific and non-specific reference, known and unknown entities, and different levels of quantity and definiteness. Determiner selection is influenced by contextual factors, including shared knowledge between interlocutors, situational context, and communicative intention. In many cases, incorrect or missing determiners lead to ambiguity, misunderstanding, or incomplete expression of meaning, which highlights their importance in maintaining clarity and coherence in communication. Furthermore, studies show that determiners contribute to discourse organization by helping to introduce, maintain, and reintroduce referents across sentences and larger texts.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between grammatical structure and meaning in English. It highlights the importance of determiners as a bridge between form and function, showing how small grammatical elements can carry significant communicative weight. The study is also relevant for language teaching and second language acquisition, as determiner usage is one of the most problematic areas for learners of English. Difficulties in article usage and determiner selection often result in grammatical errors that affect both accuracy and fluency. Therefore, a clear understanding of determiner functions can improve learners' grammatical competence, writing quality, and communicative effectiveness. Overall, determiners are shown to be fundamental elements of English nominal phrase construction that ensure precision, coherence, and communicative efficiency across different linguistic contexts and genres.

Main part

The nominal phrase constitutes one of the central structural units of English grammar, and determiners play a fundamental role in its formation, interpretation, and communicative function. As grammatical elements that precede nouns, determiners contribute essential information concerning reference, definiteness, quantity, possession, and identification. According to Leonard Bloomfield, grammatical markers surrounding the noun are indispensable for establishing the syntactic and semantic boundaries of nominal constructions. [2, 97pp] Similarly, Otto Jespersen emphasizes that determiners function as linguistic indicators that guide the listener or reader toward the intended interpretation of the noun phrase. [7, 38pp] Within English nominal phrase construction, determiners not only specify the referential status of a noun but also facilitate coherence and precision in discourse. The presence or absence of a determiner often influences the meaning of an entire phrase, distinguishing between generic, specific, and indefinite references. For example, the contrast between “a student,” “the student,” and “students” demonstrates how determiners affect the semantic scope of nominal expressions. Consequently, the study of determiners provides valuable insights into the interaction between syntax and semantics in English grammar. Their role extends beyond mere grammatical decoration, serving as an integral mechanism through which speakers encode information about entities, objects, and concepts in communication. The significance of determiners becomes particularly evident when analyzing how nominal phrases function in both spoken and written discourse, where accurate reference management is crucial for successful interaction.

Determiners are generally positioned at the beginning of the nominal phrase and function as the primary grammatical elements that introduce and frame the noun within a structured linguistic environment. Their initial position is not arbitrary but reflects their role as organizers of meaning, since they establish the basic parameters through which the noun phrase is interpreted. By appearing before the noun, determiners provide essential information that guides the listener or reader in understanding how the referent should be conceptualized within a given context. In this sense, they act as functional markers that prepare the ground for the interpretation of the noun and its associated modifiers.

One of the most important roles of determiners is to contribute to the organization of information by indicating whether the referent is known or unknown to the interlocutor. This distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness is fundamental in English grammar, as it directly affects how meaning is constructed and understood. For example, when a speaker uses a definite article, the assumption is that the referent is identifiable and shared between the participants in communication, whereas an indefinite form introduces a new or non-specific entity into discourse. This mechanism allows language users to manage information flow effectively and avoid unnecessary repetition or ambiguity.

In addition to definiteness, determiners also encode a range of grammatical and semantic distinctions, including specificity, number, and countability. They signal whether a noun refers to a singular or plural entity, whether it is countable or uncountable, and whether it is being referred to in a general or particular sense. These distinctions are crucial for accurate communication, as they ensure that the intended meaning of a nominal phrase is clearly conveyed. Without determiners, many noun phrases in English would lack precision and would require additional contextual explanation for correct interpretation.

The selection of an appropriate determiner is influenced by several linguistic factors, including the semantic nature of the noun, the syntactic structure of the sentence, and the

communicative intentions of the speaker. Context plays a particularly important role, as the same noun may require different determiners depending on whether it is being introduced for the first time or referred to again in discourse. This flexibility demonstrates that determiner usage is not purely mechanical but involves a complex interaction between grammatical rules and pragmatic considerations.

English employs several categories of determiners, each contributing distinct semantic information to the nominal phrase. Articles represent the most fundamental group and are essential for expressing definiteness and indefiniteness. Demonstrative determiners such as “this” and “that” provide spatial and contextual orientation, allowing speakers to indicate proximity or distance. Possessive determiners establish relationships of ownership or association, while quantifiers express quantity, degree, or extent. Numerals specify exact numbers and contribute to numerical precision in communication. Together, these categories form a coherent system that enables English speakers to express a wide range of referential meanings.

The interaction between determiners and nouns results in a highly structured grammatical relationship in which the determiner governs the interpretation of the noun phrase as a whole. For example, in phrases such as “this book,” “many students,” “my friend,” and “several opportunities,” the determiner significantly shapes the meaning of the noun by narrowing, specifying, or quantifying its reference. These combinations illustrate how determiners function as modifying elements that refine and contextualize nominal meaning.

Furthermore, determiners play an essential role in maintaining textual cohesion and discourse continuity. In extended texts, they help speakers and writers introduce new referents, maintain reference to previously mentioned entities, and reintroduce them when necessary. This referential tracking is crucial for ensuring that discourse remains coherent and logically structured. By guiding the reader through the flow of information, determiners contribute to the overall clarity and readability of both spoken and written communication.

From a broader linguistic perspective, determiners can be seen as key components in the grammatical architecture of English nominal constructions. Their systematic use reflects the underlying organization of the language, where meaning is distributed across different functional elements rather than being concentrated solely in lexical items. This distribution of meaning allows for flexibility, precision, and economy in expression.

In conclusion, determiners are indispensable elements of English nominal phrase construction. They not only introduce and define nouns but also regulate their interpretation within sentences and discourse. Their multifunctional nature enables them to operate simultaneously at the levels of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, making them essential for effective communication. Through their ability to specify reference, manage information, and ensure cohesion, determiners contribute significantly to the clarity, accuracy, and overall efficiency of language use.

The semantic contribution of determiners to nominal phrase construction extends beyond the simple identification of nouns and plays a significant role in the interpretation of meaning. Determiners help establish the relationship between linguistic expressions and the entities they represent in the real world, thereby influencing reference and discourse interpretation. In this respect, determiners function as important markers of definiteness and indefiniteness, allowing speakers to signal whether a referent is assumed to be familiar or unfamiliar to the listener. As noted by Randolph Quirk, the distinction between definite and indefinite reference constitutes one of the most essential semantic functions of the English determiner system. [10, 116pp] The use of the definite article “the” typically indicates a specific and identifiable referent, whereas

the indefinite article “a/an” introduces a new or non-specific entity into discourse. Furthermore, determiners interact with contextual factors to shape the interpretation of nominal phrases in various communicative situations. Studies in functional grammar have demonstrated that the meaning conveyed by a determiner often depends on the broader discourse environment rather than on the noun alone. Michael Halliday emphasizes that grammatical choices within the nominal group reflect the speaker’s communicative intentions and the informational needs of a particular context. [5, 112pp] In addition, determiners contribute to the organization of discourse by guiding the listener through the process of reference tracking and information management. Their ability to distinguish between shared and non-shared knowledge facilitates effective communication and supports textual coherence. From a cognitive perspective, the interpretation of determiners is closely connected with how speakers categorize and conceptualize objects and experiences. Research conducted by Ronald Langacker highlights that grammatical elements such as determiners play a crucial role in directing attention and establishing conceptual boundaries within linguistic expressions. [9, 62pp] Therefore, the semantic functions of determiners represent a complex interaction between grammatical structure, contextual meaning, and cognitive processing, making them indispensable elements of English nominal phrase construction.

Another important aspect of determiner usage in English nominal phrase construction is its contribution to syntactic organization and structural stability. Determiners frequently serve as indicators of the grammatical properties of nouns, helping to establish agreement relationships and define the internal structure of the nominal phrase. Their position within the phrase is highly regulated, which distinguishes English from many other languages where similar functions may be expressed through inflectional morphology or contextual inference. The presence of an appropriate determiner often signals the beginning of a noun phrase and assists both speakers and listeners in identifying syntactic boundaries during communication. According to Rodney Huddleston, determiners occupy a central position within the noun phrase structure because they provide essential grammatical information that influences the interpretation of subsequent elements. [6, 71pp] In complex nominal constructions, determiners interact with adjectives, modifiers, and complements to create hierarchically organized structures that convey detailed information about the referent. For example, in phrases such as “the large historical building” or “those remarkable scientific discoveries,” determiners establish the grammatical framework within which additional descriptive elements operate. Furthermore, determiners contribute to sentence cohesion by ensuring that noun phrases are integrated smoothly into larger syntactic structures. Their role becomes particularly evident in academic and formal discourse, where precise reference and grammatical consistency are required. Geoffrey Leech argues that the systematic distribution of determiners reflects broader principles of English grammatical organization and contributes significantly to linguistic clarity. Consequently, determiners function not only as semantic markers but also as structural components that support the syntactic integrity of English nominal phrases and facilitate effective communication across different registers and contexts.

The role of determiners becomes particularly significant when examining the relationship between nominal phrase construction and discourse functions in contemporary English. Nominal phrases do not exist in isolation; rather, they operate within broader communicative contexts where speakers continuously introduce, identify, and refer back to entities. Determiners facilitate this process by providing information that enables interlocutors to interpret referents accurately and efficiently. Through the use of articles, demonstratives, possessive forms, quantifiers, and other determiner categories, speakers are able to establish whether a referent is newly introduced, previously mentioned, uniquely identifiable, or generally understood within a particular

communicative situation. This function is essential for maintaining coherence and continuity in both spoken and written discourse. David Crystal points out that the effective use of grammatical markers such as determiners contributes substantially to the clarity and organization of communication, allowing speakers to manage information flow in a systematic manner. [4, 56pp] In narrative texts, for example, determiners help distinguish between characters or objects that have already been introduced and those appearing for the first time. Similarly, in academic and professional writing, determiners assist in presenting information with precision and logical consistency, reducing the possibility of ambiguity and misunderstanding.

The discourse-related functions of determiners are also closely connected with pragmatic considerations. Speakers select determiners not only according to grammatical rules but also according to assumptions about the listener's knowledge and expectations. The choice between expressions such as "a solution," "the solution," and "this solution" reflects different communicative intentions and different assessments of shared knowledge. In this respect, determiners serve as linguistic tools that help speakers negotiate meaning and establish common ground during interaction. Research within discourse analysis has demonstrated that determiner selection often reflects the informational status of referents and contributes to the overall structure of a text. Deborah Schiffrin emphasizes that grammatical choices involved in reference management play a crucial role in discourse organization and interpretation. [12, 86pp] Moreover, the distribution of determiners across different genres reveals important variations in language use. Academic prose, journalistic writing, literary texts, and everyday conversation employ determiner systems in distinct ways, reflecting the communicative demands of each register.

From a broader linguistic perspective, the study of determiners provides valuable insights into the interaction of syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse. Their functions extend far beyond the grammatical specification of nouns, influencing how information is introduced, maintained, and interpreted throughout communication. Determiners contribute to the establishment of referential relationships, support textual cohesion, and facilitate the successful exchange of information between speakers and listeners. As Noam Chomsky observes in discussions of grammatical structure, seemingly small functional elements often reveal fundamental principles governing language organization and interpretation. [3, 82pp] Consequently, determiners represent one of the most important functional categories within English nominal phrase construction, serving as a bridge between grammatical form and communicative meaning while ensuring that nominal expressions fulfill their role effectively in discourse.

The classification of determiners in English demonstrates the complexity and versatility of this grammatical category within nominal phrase construction. Although all determiners share the common function of specifying nouns, different subclasses contribute distinct semantic and grammatical meanings to the structure of the nominal phrase. Articles constitute one of the most frequently used determiner groups and are essential for expressing definiteness and indefiniteness. Demonstrative determiners such as "this," "that," "these," and "those" indicate spatial, temporal, or contextual relationships between the speaker and the referent. Possessive determiners, including forms such as "my," "your," "his," "her," and "their," establish ownership or association, while quantifiers such as "many," "much," "few," "little," and "several" provide information regarding quantity or extent. The diversity of these subclasses illustrates that determiners perform multiple interconnected functions within English grammar and contribute significantly to the precision of nominal reference. As Bas Aarts notes, the determiner system forms a highly organized component of the noun phrase, where each determiner type fulfills a

specific grammatical purpose while interacting with other phrase elements. [1, 25pp] The selection of a determiner is therefore not arbitrary but is governed by a combination of syntactic, semantic, and contextual factors.

Furthermore, the coexistence of different determiner categories within the same grammatical system allows speakers to express subtle distinctions in meaning that would otherwise require more complex linguistic structures. For instance, the difference between phrases such as “some students,” “many students,” “those students,” and “our students” is largely determined by the semantic contribution of the determiner rather than by changes in the noun itself. Such distinctions enable speakers to convey precise information concerning quantity, identification, possession, and reference with remarkable efficiency. The interaction between determiners and nouns also reflects broader principles of language economy, whereby relatively small grammatical elements carry substantial communicative value. According to Andrew Radford, functional categories such as determiners play a crucial role in organizing sentence structure because they provide grammatical information that guides interpretation and supports syntactic coherence. [11, 75pp] Consequently, the study of determiner classification not only enhances understanding of nominal phrase construction but also reveals how English grammar achieves clarity, flexibility, and communicative effectiveness through a relatively compact set of linguistic forms.

The significance of determiners in English nominal phrase construction can also be examined from the perspective of language acquisition and linguistic competence. One of the fundamental challenges faced by learners of English as a foreign or second language is the accurate use of determiners, particularly articles, because the determiner system often differs considerably across languages. In many languages, definiteness and indefiniteness may be expressed through contextual cues, word order, or morphological markers rather than through a separate determiner category. As a result, learners frequently encounter difficulties in selecting appropriate determiners and understanding the subtle semantic distinctions associated with their use. Errors involving the omission, overuse, or incorrect selection of determiners are among the most common grammatical problems observed in learner language. Such difficulties demonstrate that determiner usage requires not only knowledge of grammatical rules but also an understanding of contextual meaning, discourse organization, and pragmatic interpretation. The acquisition of determiners involves the gradual development of an awareness of how speakers identify and categorize referents within communicative situations. This process requires learners to recognize distinctions between specific and non-specific reference, shared and non-shared knowledge, and generic and particular meanings. Research conducted by Stephen Krashen suggests that grammatical features become fully integrated into linguistic competence through meaningful exposure and communicative practice rather than through rule memorization alone. [8, 93pp] Consequently, successful mastery of determiners depends on repeated interaction with authentic language in diverse contexts. The importance of determiners in language learning is further reflected in their contribution to communicative accuracy and fluency. Appropriate determiner selection allows speakers to convey information more precisely, while incorrect usage may lead to ambiguity, misunderstanding, or unnatural expression. In academic writing, professional communication, and formal discourse, the accurate use of determiners is often regarded as an indicator of advanced language proficiency because it demonstrates control over both grammatical structure and semantic interpretation. Moreover, determiners facilitate the development of coherent discourse by helping speakers introduce, maintain, and modify referents throughout a text. Their role in organizing information and establishing referential relationships makes them indispensable components of effective communication. Therefore, the study of determiners is not only important for theoretical linguistic analysis but also for

understanding the mechanisms through which grammatical competence is acquired, developed, and applied in real communicative practice.

The analysis of determiners in English nominal phrase construction demonstrates that these grammatical elements form an essential interface between syntax, semantics, and discourse, functioning as indispensable tools for organizing and interpreting nominal meaning. Within the structure of the noun phrase, determiners occupy a structurally prominent position and serve as the initial point of grammatical specification, setting the parameters within which the noun and its modifiers operate. Their primary function is to establish reference, but this function is realized through a wide range of semantic distinctions, including definiteness, indefiniteness, specificity, quantity, possession, and proximity. This multiplicity of meanings shows that determiners cannot be treated as merely auxiliary elements; instead, they are central to the cognitive and communicative processing of nominal expressions. By signaling whether a referent is known or unknown, singular or plural, countable or uncountable, general or particular, determiners guide the listener or reader in constructing an accurate mental representation of the intended meaning. In this way, they reduce ambiguity and ensure that communication proceeds efficiently and coherently.

Furthermore, determiners interact dynamically with other components of the noun phrase, such as adjectives, premodifiers, and postmodifying structures, forming a hierarchical organization in which each element contributes to the overall interpretation of the phrase. The determiner functions as an anchoring device that links the noun phrase to the discourse context, allowing it to be interpreted in relation to prior or subsequent linguistic information. This role becomes especially important in extended texts, where referents must be introduced, tracked, and reactivated without causing confusion for the reader. The determiner system therefore plays a crucial role in maintaining discourse cohesion and referential continuity, ensuring that textual information is structured in a logically consistent manner.

From a functional perspective, determiners also reflect the communicative intentions of speakers, as their selection is often influenced by pragmatic considerations such as shared knowledge, assumed familiarity, and situational context. The same noun can convey different meanings depending on the determiner used, which highlights the sensitivity of the determiner system to contextual variation. This flexibility allows speakers to adapt their expressions to different communicative needs, ranging from general statements to highly specific references. In addition, determiners contribute to the economy of language by enabling complex meanings to be expressed through compact grammatical forms, reducing the need for lengthy descriptive constructions while preserving precision.

The structural importance of determiners is further evident in their fixed position at the beginning of the noun phrase, which reflects their role as grammatical organizers of nominal structure. Once a determiner is selected, it constrains the syntactic possibilities of the phrase and influences the form and interpretation of subsequent elements. This hierarchical dependency illustrates how English syntax is organized around functional categories that guide the construction of meaning. The determiner thus operates as both a grammatical marker and a semantic controller, shaping how nominal information is presented and understood within sentences.

Overall, the study of determiners reveals that they are not peripheral elements of grammar but fundamental components of English nominal phrase construction. Their ability to integrate syntactic structure, semantic interpretation, and pragmatic context makes them essential for effective communication. By providing the framework within which nouns are interpreted,

determiners ensure clarity, precision, and coherence across different levels of language use, from individual sentences to extended discourse.

Conclusion

The analysis of determiners in English nominal phrase construction demonstrates that these elements constitute a fundamental component of the grammatical system and play a decisive role in shaping meaning, structure, and discourse organization. Throughout the study, it has been shown that determiners are not marginal or optional items, but core functional units that operate at the intersection of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Their primary function is to specify reference, yet this function is realized through a wide range of semantic distinctions, including definiteness, indefiniteness, quantity, possession, specificity, and identifiability. In this way, determiners provide the necessary grammatical framework that allows noun phrases to be interpreted accurately within communicative contexts.

One of the main findings of this study is that determiners significantly influence the interpretation of nominal expressions by guiding how referents are understood in discourse. They enable speakers and writers to distinguish between known and unknown entities, general and specific references, and singular and plural meanings. This interpretative function is essential for maintaining clarity and avoiding ambiguity in communication. Without determiners, English nominal phrases would often lack precision and require additional contextual explanation to be fully understood. Therefore, determiners serve as key elements in the management of information and reference tracking within discourse.

Another important conclusion is that determiners are closely integrated with other components of the noun phrase, forming a structured and hierarchical system in which each element contributes to the overall meaning. Their fixed position at the beginning of the noun phrase reflects their role as grammatical organizers that determine how subsequent modifiers and nouns are interpreted. This structural function ensures coherence and stability within the noun phrase and supports the correct syntactic arrangement of elements in larger sentence structures. As a result, determiners not only contribute to meaning but also regulate the internal organization of grammatical constructions.

The study also confirms that determiner usage is highly sensitive to contextual and pragmatic factors. The selection of a determiner depends on the speaker’s assumptions about shared knowledge, communicative intent, and the informational status of the referent. This means that determiner choice is not purely grammatical but also deeply connected to discourse and real-life communication. Such sensitivity makes determiners essential for achieving communicative efficiency, as they allow complex meanings to be expressed in a compact and systematic way.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of determiners in language acquisition and pedagogical practice. Learners of English often face difficulties in mastering determiner usage due to differences between languages and the subtle semantic distinctions involved. Errors in determiner selection can lead to misunderstandings or reduced clarity, particularly in academic and formal writing. Therefore, a clear understanding of determiner functions is essential for improving grammatical accuracy, fluency, and overall communicative competence.

In conclusion, determiners represent an indispensable element of English nominal phrase construction. Their multifunctional nature allows them to connect grammatical form with semantic meaning and discourse organization, ensuring that communication is precise, coherent, and contextually appropriate. The study of determiners not only contributes to theoretical

linguistic knowledge but also has practical implications for language teaching and learning. Overall, determiners play a central role in the structure and function of English noun phrases, making them one of the most significant categories in the grammatical system of the language.

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