

Searching for Articles in Linear A

In the Minoan script Linear A, prefixes are well attested but poorly understood. Despite attention within Linear A scholarship for more than two decades, little is known about how these prefixes function. Monti suggests the prefixes *a/ja-* and *i/j-* may function as articles, but little research has been done to address this theory (Monti 2022, 113). The definiteness of a noun is usually determined by its uniqueness or the familiarity of both the speaker and listener with that noun (Schwartz 2019, 3). Generally the definite article expresses either that uniqueness, salience, existence, identifiability, or inclusivity (König 2019, 168). Examining the definite article in a language allows for the quick identification of noun phrases (Auwera et.al 2019, 181).

Meanwhile, bare nouns, nouns without articles, can be interpreted as definite or indefinite based on context (Despic 2019, 263), but cannot be as easily identified without translating the language. If it is determined that the prefixes *a/ja-* and *i/j-* were not used as articles, it would impact on how scholars should identify Linear A noun phrases in the future. Additionally, it would have important implications for future attempts at translation, suggesting that the script should be compared to other articleless languages. Finally, ruling out articles as the function of the prefixes would narrow down their possible purposes and further research on how they should be interpreted.

In this paper I apply Lauren Becker's criteria for identifying definite articles to prefixed terms both outside of a syntactic context in the case of isolated terms and lists on tablets, and in the syntactic context of the libation formula. Becker outlines three criteria for identifying definite articles based on function, form, and distribution, where the term or prefix must be systematically distributed, serve a referential function, and appear alongside nouns (Becker 2018,

10). Applying this standard to instances of the *i/j*- and *a/ja*- prefixes reveals that although they appear to be attached to probable nouns, they are not distributed frequently enough to be interpreted as prefixes. Additionally, attestations of sequences, both with and without the prefix attached, appearing as isolated terms on objects (AR Zf 1, AR Zf 2, KY Za 2) makes it unlikely that the prefix is serving a referential function in these contexts, and thus does not function as an article.

This paper also examines Linear A tablets inscribed with the gendered terms for total, KU-RO and KU-RA, and similarly finds the prefixes are distributed too sparsely within the inscriptions to be interpreted as articles. Additionally, it determines there is no observable correlation between each term, KU-RO and KU-RA, and any one prefix, indicating that different prefixes do not reflect different genders of nouns.

From these observations this paper concludes the Linear A script does not use definite articles, and these prefixes must be interpreted as indicating some other quality than definiteness. Through this analysis this study provides insight into the process of noun phrase identification in Linear A. In addition, understanding that Linear A implements bare nouns provides a specific feature of the script which can be used as a point of comparison between it and known languages, benefitting future attempts at translation.

Works Cited

- Auwers, Johan van der, Frank Brisard, Tanja Mortelmans, and Daniël Van Olmen, eds. 2019. *Aspects of Linguistic Variation*. Trends in Linguistic Studies and Monographs 324. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Becker, Laura. 2018. "Articles in the World's Languages." PhD diss., University of Freiburg.
- Despić, Miloje. 2019. "On Kinds and Anaphoricity in Languages Without Definite Articles" in *Definiteness Across Languages* edited by Ana Aguilar-Guevara, Julia Pozas Loyo, and Violeta Vázquez-Rojas Maldonado, 259-292. Studies in Diversity Linguistics 25. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Ekkehard König. 2019. "Definite Articles and Their Uses." *Definiteness Across Languages*. Trends in Linguistic Studies and Monographs 324. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton: 165-184.
- Monti, Orazio. 2022. "Some Observations on the Language of Linear A." *Kadmos* 61 (1–2): 107–16.
- Schwartz, Florian. 2019. "Weak v.s Strong Definite Articles: Meaning and Form Across Languages" in *Definiteness Across Languages* edited by Ana Aguilar-Guevara, Julia Pozas Loyo, and Violeta Vázquez-Rojas Maldonado, 1-37. Studies in Diversity Linguistics 25. Berlin: Language Science Press.