

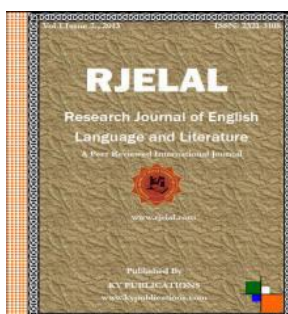
RESEARCH ARTICLE



THE DEFINITE ARTICLE, 'THE': THE MOST FREQUENTLY USED WORD IN WORLD'S ENGLISHES

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ABSTRACT

This paper will highlight on the most frequently used word in the English language of the World. We have many varieties of English language in the world now. There are words which have been used more frequently in all these varieties. Based on the conducted surveys, it is found that the word, 'the', is used most frequently in all these varieties. This paper will describe about the most frequently used word, 'the'.

**Key words:** definite article, frequency, function words, content words

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INTRODUCTION

A language is made up of words. Word is the basic building block of a language. A word can also be defined as the smallest meaningful unit of a language. According to linguists, all the words of a language can be grouped into two categories, one function, another one is content. All the function words are closed group words and all the content words are open group words. Out of these two groups, it is the group of function words which occur more frequently than the content words in a language. Every language has the expression of definiteness and indefiniteness which come under determinatives. In the history of a language, there are words which are used more compared to other words in the same language. In English language, it is the definite article, 'the', which has occupied the top position in the frequency of English words. Whether it is the British English, or the American English, the definite article tops the list. The

definite article developed from the Old-English demonstrative sé, séo, θæt and came into being before 'a' and 'an'.

Discussion

The Oxford English Dictionary is the largest authoritative English dictionary in the world. One good thing happens to this dictionary is its regular updation. There was an analysis of the English corpus which has to determine the frequency of words in English. This corpus includes writings, starting from literary novels and specialist journals to everyday newspapers and magazines, chatrooms, emails, web-blogs etc. This corpus contains over 2 billion words. It is found from this analysis that the first ten most commonly used English words are: the, be, to, of, and, a, in, that, have, I ([http : // www. oxforddictionaries.com /words/ the-oec-facts-about-the-language](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/the-oec-facts-about-the-language)).

All these words are considered function words in Lexicography. These words belong to

article, preposition, conjunction, pronouns. Most commonly used top 100 words in English are function words. 84 out of 100 top commonly used words are function words. The definite article; "the" tops the list. The corpus of contemporary American English in Word Frequency Data shows that the definite article, 'the' has the highest frequency. It has 22038615 numbers in the frequency which tops the list (Word Frequency Data, American English, <http://www.wordfrequency.info>). According to the combined results of British English, American English and Australian English surveys of contemporary sources in English, the definite article "the" ranks the first (World English, <http://www.world-english.org/english500.htm>). In British National Corpus, the definite article, 'the', has the highest frequency. It has 6187267 occurrences in BNC frequency list (<http://www.kilgariff.co.uk/bnc-readme.html>). Simpsons Frequency Dictionary based on open subtitles (one of the tv series dictionaries), the top ranking word is 'the' which has 107946 occurrences. Data collected by wiktionary on the most frequently used words in contemporary fiction and poetry show that the highest ranking word is 'the'. The following comparative table proves that the definite article, "the", has the highest rank in all frequency surveys.

Comparative Frequency Table

Rank	Oxford English Dictionary	Corpus of Contemporary American English	British National Corpus	Simpsons Frequency Dictionary	Lexite ria English Frequency
01.	The	the	The	the	the
02.	Be	be	Be	you	of
03.	To	and	Of	i	and
04.	Of	of	And	a	in
05.	And	a	A	to	a
06.	A	in	In	and	to
07.	In	to (transitive)	to (infinitive marker)	of	was

08.	that	have	Have	it	is
09.	have	to (intransitive)	It	in	for
10.	I	it	to (preposition)	my	as

"The" is used in all contexts and formally as well as informally. This is a word which can be predicted everywhere, at home or outside.

"The" is a function word

In most of the World's languages, this may be a fact that the function words appear more in languages than the content words. So in most of the languages, it is the function word which is used commonly and tops the list of most common words in a language. The definite article, 'the' is a function word. A function word does not stand independently, it always describes something with the content words. A function word does not change over time. It has stability in a language. It is the grammatical relationship in a sentence which defines the function word. The following categories go under the function word:

- A. Articles
- B. Determiners
- C. Conjunction
- D. Auxiliary verbs
- E. Prepositions
- F. Pronouns

'The' and its use in English

The definite article, 'the' belongs to articles and has a number of uses in English. Every ten words in English, one could get the word, 'the'. It is used in the following contexts:

- A. 'The' is used before already mentioned thing in communication.

The mouse is running which you saw on yesterday. We met the boy who was playing on the ground.

'The' is used before both singular and plural noun, when the noun is specific.

Did you see the boys who were playing on the tennis court?

- B. It is used before the unique objects like the Moon, the Sun.

- C. 'The' is also used when there is only one thing mentioned: the President, the Prime Minister. If there is only one hospital or temple in a particular place, we use the before it.
- D. The is also used before the names of the well-known work of art: the Taj Mahal, the Konark
- E. The is used before the names of famous and classical books: the Bible, the Bhagbad Gita, the Quran
- F. Before superlatives and ordinal numbers: the biggest building, the first chapter, the last page
- G. It is used before the adjectives referring to a whole group of people: the American, the old
- H. 'The' is used when we refer a noun in a generic sense: The tiger is a four -legged animal (All tigers are four-legged).
- I. It is used to refer to a part of the body or personal belonging (in place of possessive pronouns like my, your, his/him/her): He was injured in the right leg. She will take me by the hand.
- J. Before the names of geographical areas(names of continents and oceans): the Asia, the Pacific ocean
- K. Before decades or group of years: the eighties, the sixties
- L. We don't use 'the' before names like Raja, Rahim, Stephen, Pakistan, Brazil
- M. We use 'the' when the name includes the words like kingdom, states and republic  
The United States of America, the United Kingdom, the Republics of the Soviet Union
- N. We use 'the' before the names of the mountain ranges, group of islands, rivers, seas, ocean, forests, deserts : the Himalayas, the Atlantic, the Mahanadi, the Canaries, the Sahara Desert
- O. 'The' is used before the names of the newspapers, journals, periodicals: the Times of India, the Hindu, the Indian Express, The Times
- P. The is used before the names of organizations: the University Grants Commission, the English and Foreign Language University
- Q. The is used before the names of the countries who has plural names: the Philippines
- R. 'The' is used before the adjectives which refer to the groups of people: The poor will suffer the most. The rich get richer. The Japanese, the Chinese, the old
- S. We use 'the' before the musical instruments: My niece is learning the guitar.
- T. Before the names of house, restaurant, hotels: the Vintage Villa, the Izmailovo Hotel
- U. Before the names of the families: the Birlas, the Obamas, the Stephens
- V. 'The' is used when referred to the whole of transportation system or communication system: People use the telephone system. We also use the before the means of transport. How long does it take on the bus ? The bus to the city is at 10 am.
- W. When one refers to an object or place, 'the' is used:  
You are going to the church (place). The lunch (object items) is good. But when we talk about the activity, we don't use the definite article: We will have lunch together. Matthew is at church. We use the before human institutions which we attend, use or observe.
- X. 'The' is used before the names of the days, months: the Monday, the Sunday, the August, the December
- Y. 'The' is also used differently in different varieties of English: while referring to a sports team, the British omit the definite article, 'the' but, the Americans uses it: Manchester United (British), the New York Yankees( American)
- Z. 'The' is used as a part of the title : the mayor of a town, the duke of Westminster
- AA. 'The' is used in the sense of enough: I don't have the confidence to meet the target.
- BB. Used before present participles and adjectives when they are used as nouns:

The meeting was successful. The singing bird is there.

CC. It is used when referring to an outstanding person, or event in phrases or titles: man of the match, player of the year, student of the year

DD. 'The' is used before the comparative adjectives or adverbs: The more I talk to you, the more I know you.

### CONCLUSION

From the above-mentioned uses of the definite article, 'the', one can say that all the contexts in which it is used are the more occurring contexts in our day today lives. It is used for any gender and number. This is a word; nothing is added to it or deleted from it. Adjectives may change, verbs may change, but the function word like "the" never changes. According to the Danish grammarian Paul Christophersen, a condition behind the use of "the" is the understanding between speaker and hearer. The article "the" is used when both the speaker and the hearer know about the things they discuss. The pronunciation of 'the' also differs based on whether it is used before a word starts with a consonant or before a word starts with a vowel. If it is used before a word starts with a consonant, it is pronounced as *thuh*: the best, the caretaker; if it is used before a word starts with a vowel, it is pronounced as *thee*: the actor, the umbrella.

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