

Lesson 2: Definite Articles

Definite Articles

Where indefinite articles denote a noun that is not specified, definite articles denote a specified noun. For example, when we talk of "the book," we are referring to a specific book. English has only one definite article - "the" - which is used regardless of the noun it defines. Coptic has eight different forms, which are attached directly to the beginning of the noun.

The Coptic definite article depends on the number and gender of the noun, as well as its strength (more on that later) and sometimes the letter it begins with. It is important to use the correct definite article because this gives information about the noun.

Masculine Articles: ⲁ, ⲁⲓ, ⲁⲓⲓ -

Feminine Articles: ⲓⲁ, ⲓⲁⲓ, ⲓⲁⲓⲓ -

Plural Articles: ⲓⲓ, ⲓⲓⲓ -

When to use each article is discussed below.

Plural Nouns

In the vast majority of cases, ⲓⲓ is used as the definite article for nouns. For example: "the hands" would be ⲓⲓ ⲭⲏⲩⲁⲛⲏ.

The article ⲓⲓⲓ is used in constructions involving the word "of" (i.e. "the" <pl. noun> "of" <noun>). For example: "the hands of Aaron" would be ⲓⲓⲓ ⲭⲏⲩⲁⲛⲏ ⲁⲁⲣⲟⲛⲏ.

Singular Nouns

The three masculine articles are equivalent to the three feminine articles.

- ⲁ will follow the same rules as ⲓⲓⲓ
- ⲁⲓ will follow the same rules as ⲓⲓⲓⲓ
- ⲁⲓⲓ will follow the same rules as ⲓⲓⲓⲓⲓ

Strong/Weak Articles

- ⲓⲓ and ⲓⲓⲓ are considered strong articles.

-, -, - are considered weak articles.

The strong articles are used in more specific situations than their counterparts. For example, if you're referring to a specific father, you would say **the father**. However, if you were to say **a father**, you would be understood to be referring to the father who is already known; or considered to be unique or one-of-a-kind. So **the Father** is understood as referring to God the Father. Likewise, **the son** ("the son") would refer to a particular son whereas **a son** refers to "the Son" (i.e. the Son of God). Sometimes this distinction occurs in English with the use of capital letters (e.g. The President).

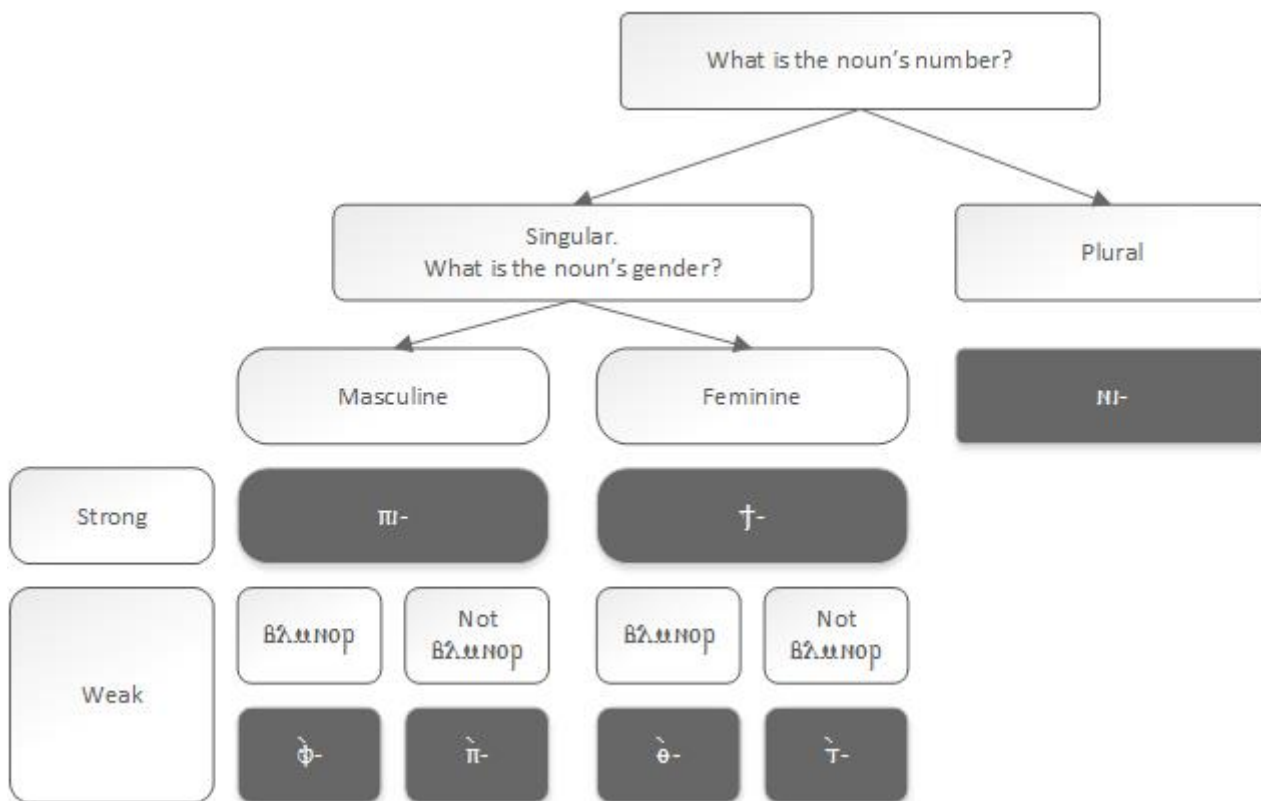
Bilminor Articles

How do you distinguish between the two weak articles of each gender? When would you use *der* or *und* or *or* ? This distinction is based on the first letter of the noun.

If the noun begins with any of the "Bilminor" letters () then` and` are used. If not, then` used.

Summary

The following chart summarizes the rules for the Coptic Definite Article.



Examples

Singular		Plural	
	The man		The men

† 2	The woman	2	The women
	The boy		The children
†	The girl		
	The father	†	The fathers
`	The Father (God)		
†	The mother		The mothers
`	The Mother (St Mary)		
ω	The son	ω	The sons
` ω	The Son (Christ)		
†ω	The daughter	ω	The daughters
` ω	The Daughter (St Mary e.g. ` ω `)		
†g	The old woman	g	The elders
`	The King (Christ)		The kings
	The king		
†	The god	†	The gods
` †	God		
†	The Trinity		
†	The Church		The churches
	The Cross		
†	The dome	`	The domes
†	The tower		The towers
†ω	The censer		
	The body		
` q	The blood		
	The bread		
`	The chalice		

Interesting Cases

- Some nouns seem like they should be using the weak article, but they always seem to use the strong article.
 - Examples: ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓ
 - These nouns are all actually Greek nouns and thus use the strong article (masculine or feminine). The rules above related to strong/weak and gender are only applicable to Coptic nouns.
 - The Coptic equivalent of ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓ, for example is ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓ which uses the weak article
- Nouns that are borrowed from Greek will retain their gender, except when they are neuter in which case they take on a masculine gender in Coptic.
- ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓ means "the King" but in the hymn of ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓ, we translate it as "O King" or "ⲕⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓ" - why is so?
 - This is called the vocative. The vocative refers to when the name of a person or thing is addressed or invoked. We will learn the vocative in a future unit, but one of the ways to express it is with the definite article.
 - In Greek, the vocative is expressed with ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲩⲉⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥⲱⲙⲓ and this is sometimes borrowed in the Coptic
 - You can read more about the Vocative in Nabil Mattar Ch 11, Sameh Younan Ch 2.1.i

Application

Application 1: Singular Articles

This is an excerpt from the priest's prayer during the Offertory. All of the definite and indefinite articles are underlined below, and an explanation for each follows.

<p>..... † ∫ ω` `2 . † x . † ∫</p>	<p>Glory and honor, honor and glory, to the All-Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Peace and edification to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of God. Amen.</p>
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1. - the article is the singular indefinite article. means "glory"
2. - the article is the singular indefinite article. means "honor"
3. † - the article † is one of the singular feminine definite articles. † translates to "the All-Holy." With the prefix ` -, the word means "of the All-Holy"
4. ` - The word means Trinity and ~~not~~ using definite article ` .
5. ` - The article ` - is one of the the singular masculine definite articles. Since ` - is a weak article, this word is referring to the Father who is already well known to the reader - God, the Father. A strong article would have translated to "the father." is used instead of

because the noun starts with **B**, a Bilminor letter.

6. `וּ - The article וּ is one of the the singular masculine definite articles. Since וּ is a weak article, this word is referring to the Son who is already well known to the reader - God, the Son. A strong article would have translated to "the son." ה is used instead of וּ because the noun starts with ו, which is not a Bilminor letter.
7. ה - The article ה is a singular masculine definite article. So the word הֹוֹה means "the spirit." ה full text read הֹוֹה - "the spirit that is holy" - The Holy Spirit.
8. שָׁלָוָה - The article שָׁ is the singular indefinite article. So שָׁלָוָה means "peace."
9. בָּנָה - The article בָּ is the singular indefinite article. בָּנָה is a verb meaning "to edify." It is used here as a noun, so בָּנָה means "edification."
10. הַאֵל - The article הַ is the singular feminine definite article. So הַאֵל means "the one."
11. הָאֵל - The article הָ is one of the the singular masculine definite articles. Since הָ is a weak article, this word is referring to the god who is already well known to the reader - God. A strong article would have translated to "the god." ה is used instead of הָ because the noun starts with א, a Bilminor letter.

Application 2: Single Definite Articles

This is an excerpt from the Anaphora of St. Gregory the Theologian in the Divine Liturgy.

<p>... 1`9 x` `9: 99` :2:919` `99: 9 99: 99 1`</p>	<p>God the Lover of Mankind, the ineffable, the invisible, the infinite, the without beginning, the eternal, the timeless, the immeasurable, the incomprehensible, the unchangeable, the Creator of all, the Savior of everyone.</p>
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1. - God
2. - The Lover of Man
3. - The ineffable: the one that cannot be described
4. - The invisible: the not seen
5. - The infinite: the cannot be counted
6. - The without beginning
7. - The everlasting/eternal: the forever

8. הַ - The timeless: the without time
9. אֵל - The immeasurable: the cannot be measured
10. אֵל - The incomprehensible: the cannot be examined
11. אֵל - The unchangeable: the without change
12. אֵל - The Creator: the one who creates
13. אֵל - The all
14. אֵל - The Savior: the one who saves

Application 3: Plural Definite Articles

These are excerpts from the Third Canticle as it is chanted during the Midnight Praise. All of the plural definite articles are underlined below, and an explanation for each follows.

<u>אֵל</u> בְּרַכְּ אֶתְּ הַיְּמִין אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ	Bless the Lord O you fountains, praise Him...
<u>אֵל</u> בְּרַכְּ אֶתְּ הַיָּם וְהַנָּחַל אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ	Bless the Lord O you seas and rivers, praise Him...
<u>אֵל</u> בְּרַכְּ אֶתְּ הַבָּיִת וְכָל־הַיָּם אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ	Bless the Lord O you whales and all that moves in the waters, praise Him...
<u>אֵל</u> בְּרַכְּ אֶתְּ כָּל־הַעוֹף אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ	Bless the Lord all you birds of the sky, praise Him...
<u>אֵל</u> בְּרַכְּ אֶתְּ הַחַיָּה וְהַבְּהֵמָה אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ	Bless the Lord all you wild beasts and cattle, praise Him...

1. אֵל - The article אֵל is the plural definite article. So אֵל means "the fountains" or "the springs."
2. אֵל - The article אֵל is the plural definite article. So אֵל means "the seas." אֵל is an irregular plural meaning "sea."
3. אֵל - The article אֵל is the plural definite article. So אֵל means "the rivers." אֵל is an irregular plural meaning "river."
4. אֵל - The article אֵל is the plural definite article. So אֵל means "the whales."
5. אֵל - The אֵל here is not an article but rather the word is אֵל, an adjective meaning "every."
6. אֵל - The article אֵל is the plural definite article. So אֵל means "the waters."

7. ⲁⲓ - The article ⲁⲓ is the plural definite article. So ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ means "the birds." ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ is an irregular plural for the singular ⲉⲃ meaning "bird."
8. ⲁⲓ - The article ⲁⲓ is the plural definite article. So ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ means "the wild animals."
9. ⲁⲓ - The article ⲁⲓ is the plural definite article. So ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ means "the beasts" or "the animals."

Exercises

Exercise 1: Translate to Coptic

Translate the following into Coptic:

1. The man and the woman
2. The brother and the sister
3. The boy and the girl
4. The sky and the earth
5. The father and the mother
6. The father and the son
7. The Father and the Son
8. The brothers and the sisters
9. The fathers and the mothers
10. The women and the men
11. The boys and the girls
12. The king and the queen

Exercise 2: Translate to English

Translate the following phrases into English:

1. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
2. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
3. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
4. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
5. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
6. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
7. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
8. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
9. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
10. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
11. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ
12. ⲉⲃⲓ ⲁⲓ

Resources

- Moawad Daoud Lesson 1
- ACTS 2990 Lesson 2A

- Sameh Younan Chapter 2 (2.1.i, 2.1.ii)
 - Nabil Mattar Chapter 2, Chapter 4
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