Two indefinite articles in Uzbek*

Udo Klein and Klaus von Heusinger

Syntax of the world’s languages III

1 Introduction

In this paper we provide converging evidence both from a corpus study as well as from an online questionnaire that, contrary to claims that Uzbek does not have definite or indefinite articles, modern Uzbek has two indefinite articles bir and bitta. Based on the results of the corpus analysis and the questionnaire, we hypothesise that bitta has been spreading in contemporary colloquial Usbek to the expense of bir. Moreover, the acceptability judgements on sentences containing bitta in predicative constructions show that the use of bitta is in the process of spreading to the last stage of development into an indefinite article.

2 Two indefinite articles

As pointed out in Beckwith (1998), Uzbek numerals higher than ‘one’ require a numeral classifier. (1) provides an example of a classifier, (2) is an example of a mensural classifier, and (3) contains the generic classifier “ta” (glossed CL:GENERIC). See Aikhenvald (2000, 116-120) for criteria distinguishing these types of classifiers.

*We would like to thank our informant Dildora Niyazmetowa for annotating the Uzbek corpus which we used and for her help with the questionnaire, as well as Jaklin Kornfilt for discussion of an earlier version of this paper. All remaining errors are, of course, our own.

The present work has been carried out as part of the project C2 “Case and referential properties” of the collaborative research centre SFB 732 “Incremental specification in Context” of the German Science Foundation, whose financial support we would like to acknowledge.

1See Bodrogligeti (2003, 55).
The only numeral which can occur without a classifier is bir (one), as illustrated in (4).

(4) Bir zamon-lar bir schoh bu’l-ib u’t-gan ekan...
    a time-PL a(=one) king be-GER be-PTCP apparently
    Once upon a time there was a king...

In this example bir is used to introduce a new participant which (i) is presumed to be unknown to the hearer and which (ii) is the subject of further specification in the subsequent discourse. According to Heine (1997, 66-82), this is the second stage in the development of an indefinite article from a numeral. Sentence (5) illustrates that bir can be used to introduce a new referent without picking this referent up in the following discourse (Heine’s stage III); sentence (6) illustrates that bir can be used without introducing a specific referent (Heine’s stage IV); and sentence (7) shows that bir can be used in predicative constructions (Heine’s stage V). The following sentences are from two novels (see next section).

(5) Eshpolatov ichkari-da bir erkak-ni kor-gan. Hayron
    Eschpolatov inside-LOC a man-ACC see-PRF wonder
    bol-ib zavod-ga bor-gan.
    be-GER workshop-DAT walk-PRFT
    Eshpolatov saw a man inside. Bewildered he walked into the workshop.

(6) Uch-av-lar-i ham bir narsa-ning xayol-i-ni
    three-together-PL-AGR also a thing-GEN think-AGR-ACC
    sur-gan-dek kor-i-nar edi-lar.
    do-PTCP-as.if see-AGR-PROG be-PL
    The three looked as if they were thinking about something.
(7) Hurmat-i zor bol-sa boshqa-lar-ga zor, sen bilan honor-AGR strong be-COND other-PL-DAT strong 2SG with men-ga u bor-yo’g’i bir oshna. 1SG-DAT 3SG be-just a friend
If he is very honorable, then only for the others. For you and for me he is just a friend.

We therefore conclude that bir has reached the fifth stage of development into an indefinite article.

Uzbek differs from other Turkik languages, e.g. Turkish which also uses the word bir as an indefinite article (Kornfilt, 1997, p. 106), in that in addition to bir it has developed a second indefinite article, namely bitta. (Bodrogligeti (2003, p. 456) suggests that bitta derives from the suffixation of bir with “ta”.) The following sentences illustrate that it has reached the fourth stage of development into an indefinite article. In (8) it is used to introduce a new referent which is then picked up again in the following discourse (stage II), in (9) it is used to introduce a new referent which is not picked up again (stage III), and in (10) it is used without introducing a specific referent (stage IV). In the contemporary novel which we analysed we found no use of bitta in a predicative construction (see next section):

(8) Ammo bitta shart-i-m bol-a-di:
but a condition-AGR-1SG be-FUT-3SG
singl-i-m-ni bun-dan buyon qimor-ga
little.sister-AGR-1SG-ACC now-ABL from game-DAT
tik-may-san.
put-NEG-2SG:FUT
But there will be a condition; from now onwards you will not bet my little sister.

(9) Bitta shahar-da ikki-ta imom-domla bol-gan ekan. It bilan a city-LOC two-CL imam-priests be-PRF EVID dog with mushuk murosa qil-sa qil-arkan-ki, bu-lar cat agreement make-COND make-EVID-CONJ DEM-PL
ittifoq bola ol-ish-mas ekan-lar.
agreed be take-NOM-NEG EVID-PL
In a city there were two imams. Even dogs and cats could agree, but these two could not.

(10) Katta-ng-ga bor-ib ayt: men-ga bitta samolyot
big-2SG:AGR-DAT go-GER say.IMP 1SG-DAT a plane
bilan bir million pul kerak.
with a million money need
Go to your boss and say: I need a plane and a million.

In some contexts, the competition between the two indefinite articles is exploited in order to distinguish between non-specific and neutral uses of NPs. In (11) the direct object NP must be interpreted non-specifically, whereas in (12) this is not the case.

(11) Professor bir student-ni tekschir-moq’-chi.
    professor a(=one) student-ACC examine-want-3SG
    The professor wants to examine a student. [non-specific]

(12) Professor bitta student-ni
    professor a(=one-CL: GENERIC) student-ACC
    tekschir-moq’-chi.
    examine-want-3SG
    The professor wants to examine a student. [specific, non-specific, numeral]

From a diachronic perspective there is evidence that the use of bitta has increased significantly, at least in written literary language. In the next two sections we will provide evidence for this, both from a corpus study and from a questionnaire.

3 Corpus study

We compared the use of bir/bitta in Tohir Malik’s novel Shaytanat (published in 2001, part four) with the use of bir/bitta in Abdulla Qodiriy’s novel Otgan kunlar, which was published in 1926.

In the old novel, we anotated the first 150 occurences of bir, bitta, birisi, bittasi. bir has been employed in all types of usages, from numeral to predicative constructions. However, in the old novel we did not find bitta used as an article (we only found one use of bitta as a numeral).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Occurences</th>
<th>human</th>
<th>inanimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bir</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bir</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bir</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bir</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td></td>
<td>113</td>
<td>49 (43%)</td>
<td>64 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitta</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitta</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitta</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitta</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Use of bir/bitta in the old novel

In the new novel we annotate the first 200 occurrences of bir, bitta, birisi, bittasi. The use of bir and bitta in the new novel (first 200 occurrences) is summed up in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Occurences</th>
<th>human</th>
<th>inanimate</th>
<th>narrative</th>
<th>direct speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bir</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bir</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bir</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bir</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>15 (12%)</td>
<td>66 (53%)</td>
<td>62 (50%)</td>
<td>19 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitta</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitta</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitta</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitta</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13 (10%)</td>
<td>31 (25%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
<td>40 (32%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Use of bir/bitta in the new novel

Conclusions from corpus study

- By 1926 the use of bir has already spread to predicative constructions (stage V in the development from numeral to indefinite article). By 2001 bitta has reached at least stage IV.

- There is a clear increase of the use of bitta in written language: In the old novel bitta was used only once on the first 85 pages, whereas in the new novel bitta was used 44 times on the first 65 pages.
• Out of 66 occurrences of indefinite articles in the speaker’s narrative, 62 were occurrences of bir, and only 4 were occurrences of bitta. From this we can conclude that there is a strong preference for bir in the speaker’s narrative. On the other hand, out of 59 occurrences of indefinite articles in direct speech, only 19 were occurrences of bir, compared to 40 occurrences of bitta. This indicates that in direct speech there is a preference for using bitta.

• Our data does not motivate a choice between the two following possibilities regarding the emergence and spread of bitta:
  
  – In 1926 bitta was not in use, neither in written nor in spoken language. It started being used after 1926, and spread since then until today to the fourth stage.
  
  – In 1926 bitta was in use in spoken language but not in (some registers of) written language.

Open questions

• The absence of evidence from our corpus study that bitta has reached stage V in the development from numeral to indefinite article is not evidence that it has not reached this stage. Is bitta really ungrammatical in predicative constructions, or is it just a coincidence that we have not found any such occurrences?

• Has the increasing use of bitta led to a decreased/marked use of bir? How good is bitta compared to bir in modern Uzbek?

• Does the use of bir/bitta depend on stage II to V?

To answer these questions we designed and performed a questionnaire, the results of which will be presented in the next section.

4 Results of questionnaires

The purpose of the questionnaires was to elicit acceptability judgements about sentences containing the two articles in different usages.

• Independent factors: (i) bir/bitta, (ii) human/inanimate, and (iii) five usages

• Dependent factor: acceptability judgement on a scale from 2 (very bad) to 5 (very good)
• 45 participants

• Analysis of variance – the basic idea behind an ANOVA is to estimate how likely or unlikely it is for a given difference in judgements to be due to chance. If it is unlikely that the difference is due to chance, then the difference is called statistically significant. This estimation is based on comparing the variance between two (or more) sets of judgements (e.g. the set of judgements of sentences whose indefinite article is bir with the set of judgements whose indefinite article is bitta) with the variance within these sets of judgements.²

There is a significant interaction between the usage type, article and animacy, as the following two charts show:

Interactive between usage type and article, split by animacy

- bir is clearly preferred in predicative constructions
- bitta is better for humans in stage II to IV

²If the variance between the sets of judgements is high while the variance within the sets of judgements is low, then the difference is likely to be statistically significant. If on the other hand, the variance between the sets of judgements is low, while the variance within the sets of judgements is high then the difference is likely to be due to chance.
• with inanimate referents, there is no clear preference for bir or bitta, except again at stage V

• while it makes no statistically significant difference whether bir or bitta is used to introduce a human referent which is then picked up again in discourse (stage 2), it makes a significant difference if a human referent is to be introduced, whose referential identity is unknown to the speaker (stage 4) for this usage bitta is significantly better than bir. We interpret this as evidence that the use of bitta with human referents has begun to impact on the use of bir, to the effect that bitta is preferred to bir, resulting in the use of bir for human referents starting to be less acceptable than it used to be (at least in some contexts of use).

5 Conclusion

• In modern Uzbek there are two indefinite articles, bir and bitta

• the comparison of two novels, of which the first appeared in 1926 and the second in 2001, shows (i) that at least in (certain registers of) the written language bitta was not used in the past, whereas now it is used both in written and in colloquial language, and (ii) that bir occurs much more frequently than bitta in written literary language, whereas bitta occurs much more frequently than bir in colloquial language.

• bir has reached the fifth stage in the development from numeral to article already in 1926, whereas the use of bitta appears to be in the process of spreading to the fifth stage in contemporary colloquial Uzbek

• bitta is preferred for humans at stage II to IV

• both bir and bitta can be used for inanimate arguments, except for the predicative construction in which bir is used

• in some contexts the competition between the two articles is exploited in order to express semantic distinctions (e.g. in order to distinguish between non-specific and neutral readings)

References


8

