

Definite and Indefinite Articles: Part I

The difference between definite articles and indefinite articles can be observed in the following two sentences:

Give me the chocolate chip cookie

Give me a cookie, please.

Imagine a plate full of cookies. There are peanut butter cookies, sugar cookies, gingerbread cookies, and one chocolate chip cookie.

The first sentence speaks of a particular (or definite) cookie:

Give me the chocolate chip cookie.

The second sentence speaks of any of a number of cookies (or an indefinite cookie):

Give me a cookie, please.

The difference between the definite and indefinite articles is the difference between talking about a specific cookie, or any old cookie at all.

the cookie..... a cookie

In English, the definite article is the word "the" regardless of whether the noun it introduces is singular or plural.

the cookie..... the cookies

In Spanish, the definite article has 4 forms, depending on whether the noun is masculine, feminine, singular or plural.

el gato the male cat

los gatos the male cats

la gata the female cat

las gatas..... the female cats

NOTE: *The masculine plural definite and indefinite articles (los, unos) are also used to indicate a group of mixed sex. Thus, "los gatos" could refer to a group of 10 male cats, or it could refer to a group of 9 female cats and one male cat.*

The 4 forms of the definite article are:

el masculine singular

la feminine singular

los..... masculine plural

las..... feminine plural

In English, the indefinite article is the word "a," "an," or "some."

a cookie

an apple

some books

In Spanish, the indefinite article has 4 forms, depending on whether the noun is masculine, feminine, singular or plural.

un gato a male cat
unos gatos some male cats
una gata a female cat
unas gatas some female cats

NOTE: Remember, as long as the group of creatures has at least one male member, the masculine plural article is used. Thus, "unos gatos" could refer to a group of 10 male cats, or it could refer to a group of 9 female cats and one male cat.

The 4 forms of the indefinite article are:

un masculine singular
una feminine singular
unos masculine plural
unas feminine plural

Here are the definite and indefinite articles together:

el, un masculine singular
la, una feminine singular
los, unos masculine plural
las, unas feminine plural

Each of the following has a different meaning:

el gato the male cat
los gatos the male cats (or a mixed group)
la gata the female cat
las gatas the female cats
un gato a male cat
unos gatos some male cats (or a mixed group)
una gata a female cat
unas gatas some female cats

"Un" and "una" can mean "one," "a," or "an."

un libro one book, a book
una pluma one pen, a pen
una manzana one apple, an apple