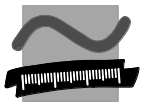

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Papiere zum Spracherwerb und zur Grammatik

ENGLISCH

I

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Nouns and articles in English

THE ARTICLE IN ENGLISH

basic rules
predication and reference
generic and specific uses

1 BASIC RULES

There are several basic types of nouns:

- proper nouns, e.g. *London, Ford, John, Smith*
- nouns with unique reference, e.g. *the Sun, the Moon, the sky, the Pope*
- singular uncountable/mass nouns, which basically refer to masses which we cannot think of as individual items, e.g. *sugar, coffee, glass, furniture, beauty*
- plural uncountable nouns, which only exist in the plural:
  - summation plurals refer to pairs or sets of objects – *scissors, glasses*
  - "pluralia tantum": *mains, premises, surroundings, outskirts*
- countable/count nouns, e.g. *table, computer, boy*

Proper nouns and nouns with unique reference refer to individual things or people. With proper nouns there are two groups: those that have only one reference and refer to things that only occur once, like place names: *Shrewsbury*. In contrast, other proper nouns can refer to a number of different individuals, such as the names of people like *John* or *Smith*. However, both groups behave in the same way. Nouns with unique reference denote things or people of which there is only one. This can be restricted in time, e.g. *the Pope*, which has **temporary** unique reference. In everyday situations we also find temporary unique reference:

1. *The postman* hasn't come yet.
2. Have you already bought *the paper* today?

Countable nouns refer to *kinds* which have individual forms which are defined, which can be distinguished from each other and are thus countable. They may be concrete – *the table, the cat* – or abstract – *the idea, the plan*. They also include certain **collective** nouns such as *the team, the group*.

Singular uncountable nouns include nouns which denote concrete perceptible materials or substances – *water, iron* – but also abstractions such as *love*, *beauty*, *courage*. Singular uncountable nouns cannot be used in the plural, since they do not have a defined form, they cannot be distinguished in any way and are thus uncountable.

The distinction between countable and uncountable nouns can be imagined as follows. If you take an object denoted by a countable noun such as 'chair' and take away the back, the seat and the legs, then at some point you do not have a chair any more, but only 'wood'. However, if you cut up 'wood' into bits, the parts are still 'wood'. In the same way, 'water' remains water down to the last drop.

If we want to talk about individual items of uncountable nouns, we need to add an expression which 'chops' them up into individual 'things' such as *an item of, a piece of* or quantifies them using a unit of weight or measure such as *a kilo of, a glass of*.

For each basic type of noun we formulate the following rule:

RULE 1

With proper nouns we generally use no article or zero article: ∅.

RULE 2

Nouns with unique reference always take the definite article "the".

RULE 3

Singular uncountable (mass) nouns take either zero article or the definite article "the":

- ***∅ water***
- ***the water***

Singular uncountable nouns cannot:

- **take the indefinite article "a"**
- **take the plural "-s"**

RULE 4

Plural uncountable nouns take either zero article + plural) or the definite article "the" (+ plural):

- ***∅ scissors, ∅ surroundings***
- ***the scissors, the surroundings***

RULE 5

Countable (count) nouns take both definite and indefinite articles in the singular and in the plural either the bare plural or with the definite article: *a table, the table, tables, the tables*. However they cannot take zero article in the singular: *∅table.

EXAMPLES

3. I've just come back from *London*.
4. *The Earth* orbits *the Sun*.
5. *Sugar* and *coffee* are basic commodities.
6. *Ford* is building *a new car*.
7. *Furniture* is getting more expensive nowadays.
8. He bought *a table* and two chairs.
9. *The books* are on *the desk*.
10. I bought *jeans* at the store.
11. *The hotel* is located in beautiful *surroundings*.

We can summarise the use of the zero article ∅, indefinite article *a*, the definite article *the* plus the singular form of the noun, the bare plural (zero article plus plural) and the definite article with the plural form as follows:

Figure 1

	zero article ∅	**indefinite article *a* (+ singular)**	**definite article *the* + singular**	**bare plural (zero article ∅ + plural)**	**definite article *the* + plural**
countable		a table, an orange	the table, the orange	∅ tables, ∅ oranges	the tables, the oranges
uncountable (singular)	∅ water, ∅ information		the water, the information		
uncountable (plural)				∅ scissors, ∅ surroundings	the scissors, the surroundings
proper noun	∅ London, ∅ Ford				
unique			the Moon, the Pope		

Notes

→ *a/the*

The indefinite article *a* becomes *an* before a vowel: *an orange, an interesting book*
The definite article *the* changes pronunciation before a vowel: *the* /i:/ *orange*

→ *countable nouns*

Some countable nouns which can be used with collective meaning to refer to a group of people are used in the singular form but take plural agreement. Typical examples are: *the army, the police, the government, the administration, the staff*:

12. *The police* **have** arrested the suspect./ *The American administration* **have** signed a new agreement./ *The staff* **are** really friendly.

The same applies to certain collective nouns like *cattle*, *poultry, livestock*: *the cattle* **were** grazing in the field.

→ *London, Ford*

Proper nouns are generally used without an article. If they do have an article, then the article is ***part*** of the proper noun. Here are some typical cases where the article is part of the proper noun:

- names of certain countries, e.g. *the United States, the Netherlands*
- names of rivers, seas and oceans: *the Thames, the Rhine, the Atlantic (Ocean), the Baltic (Sea)*
- names of geographical regions, e.g. *the Himalayas*
- names of institutions, e.g. *the British Museum, the House of Commons*
- names of newspapers and magazines, e.g. *The Guardian, The Times, The Observer, The Economist*

→ *Smith*

Note that names, both first names and surnames, are always used without an article: "Is Smith there already?". The same applies to titles: *Mr. Smith, Dr. Jones, President Obama*, both when we refer to them and address them directly:

13. I saw *Mr.* Smith and *Dr. Jones* yesterday.
14. Good morning, *Mr. Smith*.

→ *the Sun, the Moon*

Many nouns with unique reference are frequently written with an initial capital.

→ *nature, man…*

The noun *nature* in English is an exception. It seems to be unique, but it never takes an article (in contrast to German: "die Natur"). It is an abstract concept in English, used to refer to the entirety of natural phenomena and contrasted in some contexts with *civilisation*. In biological contexts it may be contrasted with *nurture*. It has other meanings, of course, such as the essential qualities of something.
In concrete contexts we use *the natural environment, the natural world*, or (*the open*) *countryside* to translate the German "die Natur". This also applies to other abstract uncountable nouns like *man* in the sense of "mankind": we cannot say *the man*, only *man*[1].

→ *sugar, coffee...*

We can subdivide singular uncountable nouns into different groups:

- substances, e.g. *metal, fish, meat, fruit*
- liquids, e.g. *water, tea, milk*
- gases, e.g. *air, smoke, oxygen*
- certain abstractions, e.g. *space, time, power, history*
- certain collective nouns, e.g. *machinery*
- others, e.g. *money, furniture, traffic, luggage*

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[1] This usage is considered by many to be unacceptable, as it is not gender-neutral: it is preferable to use *humankind* or *human beings* nowadays.

We cannot say:

15. *[2]I bought some furnitures at the sale.

We need to add an expression which quantifies the singular uncountable noun, such as "item(s) of", "piece(s) of", and turns the entire noun phrase into a countable noun phrase:

16. I bought some **items** of furniture at the sale.

However, see the next section on reclassification for apparent exceptions. The quantifying expression that is added varies depending on the noun, e.g. with liquids we can add an expression like "a litre of", with solids (including powders) "a kilo of", etc.
Summation plurals cannot be used in the singular:

17. *I bought a scissor at the store.

We need to add an expression of the form "a pair of":

18. I bought *a pair of scissors* at the store.

→ *sugar, coffee...*

There is also a distinction between countable and uncountable nouns in terms of certain **quantifiers** which are used with them:

- *much* with (singular) uncountable nouns: → *much money*
- *many* with countable nouns: → *many friends*
- *little* with (singular) uncountable nouns: → *little money (less – least)*
- *few* with countable nouns: → *few friends (fewer – fewest)*

The quantifiers *some, any* and *no* can be used with both countable and uncountable nouns → *some friends, some time, any money, no furniture.* This also applies to similar quantifiers like *a lot of, lots of.* A quantifier like *several*, however, can only be used with countable nouns.

Most countable nouns take a regular plural form by adding –s to the end of the singular form or –es to those singular forms that end in a sibilant sound (/s/, /z/, /ts/…): *bed/beds, box/boxes*. However if the singular ends with –y and there is no vowel before it the –y changes to –i and the plural is then –ies: *country/countries, company/companies*. There are in addition some irregular plurals:

- some nouns that end in –f or –fe are changed to –ves in the plural: *leaf/leaves, knife/knives, life/lives*
- some nouns change the vowel sound ('mutation'): *man/men, tooth/teeth, foot/feet, mouse/mice*
- some old English plurals: *child/children, ox/oxen*
- completely irregular plurals: *person/people*
- some nouns ending in –o take –s as the plural, while others take –es: *zoo/zoos,* but *potato/potatoes*
- some nouns do not change at all: *sheep/sheep, fish/fish, deer/deer*
- there are some "foreign" plurals with words mainly from Latin or Greek: *formula/formulae* (mathematics and chemistry), *nucleus/nuclei* (physics and biology), *appendix/appendices, analysis/analyses, phenomenon/phenomena, criterion/criteria, axis/axes*
- nouns with equivocal number (which can be treated either as singular or plural): *data, headquarters, works*

Notes

→ *person/people*

This is a completely irregular plural: *people* is the plural of *person*, e.g. "*there was one person/several people in the room*". The noun *people* has a second meaning, in the sense of a 'nation'. In this case, *people* is the singular

[2] * means that a sentence is unacceptable.

form of a countable noun (in the sense of the German "Volk"), its plural being *peoples*, as in *the English-speaking peoples*. The plural *persons* is used in a legal context: *person or persons unknown*.
The word *folk* has a number of different meanings: it can be used to refer a group of people (*country folk*); it can be used to refer to the traditions of a country (*folk music*); it may in some cases be used as a casual or colloquial synonym for *people*, especially in its plural form: *some folks believe in conspiracies*.

→ *appendix*

Note that the noun *appendix* has two meanings: one meaning is that of additional material at the end of a book or report, and the plural is *appendices*. The other meaning is an organ or part of an organ projecting from the large intestine (German: "Blinddarm"), and here the plural is more regular: *appendixes*.

→ *data, headquarters, works*

The noun *data* is originally derived from the Latin singular *datum* and was thus originally a plural form. Over the course of time it has come to be considered to be a singular uncountable noun and generally takes the corresponding form of the verb: *the data is being collected, how much data did you collect,* etc.. This is not accepted by all speakers, however: magazines such as The Economist insist on considering the noun *data* as a plural and would therefore say: *the data are being collected*[3].
The noun *headquarters* is also equivocal in number and may be used either as a plural form – *our company's headquarters are in Dublin* – which is more common, or in the singular, as in: *our headquarters has approved the new project.*
The noun *works* means a factory or plant and can be considered either singular or plural (usage varies).

Some nouns are singular uncountable in English which are countable in German. They include the following:

advice	Ratschlag	*industry*	Industrie
business	Geschäft	*information*	Information
damage	Schaden	*knowledge*	Kenntnis, Erkenntnis
equipment	Geräte	*machinery*	Maschinen
evidence	Beweis	*news*	Nachricht
experience	Erfahrung	*research*	Forschung
progress	Fortschritt	*training*	Ausbildung
education	Bildung	*homework*	Hausaufgabe

Notes

→ *information*
The noun *information* is perhaps the prototypical example of a noun which is singular uncountable in English but countable in other languages like German. It can never be used as a countable noun!

→ *business*
The noun *business* is singular uncountable in its basic meaning, the activity of buying and selling goods, but it can be **reclassified** (see below), with a change in meaning and noun class.

→ *experience*

The noun *experience* has two meanings. The meaning above is active participation in activities, leading to increased skills or knowledge (e.g. *teaching experience*), and the noun is singular uncountable. However, the noun *experience* has a second meaning, something personally lived through, e.g. "I had a strange *experience* last week". Here, the noun *experience* (German: "Erlebnis") is a normal countable noun, and thus takes the plural: "We had some really terrible *experiences* on holiday last summer".

→ *damage*
Note that there is a noun *damages* which is plural uncountable and has a different meaning: it means "compensation for injury etc." (see below).

→ *machinery, equipment*

[3] See for example the following discussion in the Economist: https://www.economist.com/johnson/2011/03/14/data-versus-stadiums-and-the-single-panini [accessed 2 September 2018].

These nouns are **collective** nouns. The former refers to machines or machine systems collectively, while the latter refers to a set of tools or devices.

1.1 Plural uncountable nouns

There are two groups of uncountable nouns which only exist in the **plural**, for example *trousers* or *arms* ('weapons'). Here you can only say *trousers* or *the trousers*, but not *a trouser**. Those that typically consist of pairs are called **summation plurals**: articles of clothing – *jeans, trousers, shorts, trunks, pyjamas* – and tools and instruments such as *glasses, scales, scissors, binoculars, tongs.* To talk about one individual item or more than one item we have to add an additional expression, typically 'a pair of': *a pair of jeans, two pairs of scissors.*

There is a second group of plural uncountable nouns called **pluralia tantum** (singular **plurale tantum**). Here are some typical examples:

customs	premises	thanks	minutes	earnings
regards	troops	goods	remains	wages
looks	outskirts	savings	particulars	spirits
damages	clothes	contents	mains	surroundings

These pluralia tantum only exist in the plural. Thus there are no singular forms of these nouns such as *clothe**, *outskirt** or *surrounding**.

Notes

→ *premises, customs*
The nouns *premises* refers to a piece of land and the buildings on it. The noun *customs* refers to the taxes on imported goods or the governmental agency that collects these taxes. There may seem to be a related singular countable form, but these are actually different (countable) nouns with a different meaning: *premise* has a logical meaning (a premise is one of the propositions in a deductive argument), and *custom* means 'habit'.

→ *damages*
Note the difference between *damage* (singular uncountable, as mentioned above) and *damages* (plural uncountable): the latter means money legally required to be paid as compensation for an injury or wrong.

→ *clothes*
The noun *clothes* (pronounced as one syllable) is collective (as is its synonym *clothing*, which is however singular uncountable), and refers to articles of dress. It is etymologically derived from the noun *cloth*, which can mean 'fabric' and is singular uncountable, or 'a piece of fabric', where it is countable (e.g. a *dishcloth*).

→ *minutes*
The noun *minutes* means an official record of a meeting and is not related in meaning to the unit of time *minute*.

→ *mains*
The noun *mains* means the main distribution network for electricity, gas or water.

2 SPECIAL CASES

I. Street Names

Normally the names of streets do not take an article:

19. I was walking down ∅ *Cyprus Avenue* the other day.

Notes

→ *Cyprus Avenue*

The one exception to this rule is *the High Street*. This expression is used to mean the main shopping area of a town or city but is also used in an extended sense to mean the retail market in general.

II. Institutions

We can think of certain institutions as abstract entities, as periods of education for example, and they are then treated as (singular) uncountable nouns. Typical examples are:

school	*university*	*college*	*church*	*prison*
hospital	*class*	*government*		

These are distinct from the actual individual institutions, which remain countable. Thus we say:

20. There is *a university* in Coventry.

Here we mean the individual institution. Compare that with the following:

21. Mary left ∅ *school* and went **to** ∅ *university*.

In this example, *school* and *university* are used to refer to **a period of education**, rather than to an individual institution (this is a case of reclassification, see below).

In the following sentence, the meaning is not that John is simply in one of the institution's buildings, but rather that he is receiving **treatment** in an institution of this type:

22. John is **in** ∅ *hospital*. He was taken **to** ∅ *hospital* yesterday after falling ill suddenly.

The same applies to *prison*:

23. Peter is **in** ∅ *prison.* He is serving a six-month sentence for assault.

Note that this means that the person is serving **a prison sentence**. If I said "Peter is in the prison" this would be ambiguous: it could mean that he is visiting someone, that he is working there, etc.

There are typical combinations with the prepositions *at* and *in* and the zero article:

- ***at*** ∅ *school*, ***at*** ∅ *university*, ***at*** ∅ *college*
- ***in*** ∅ *hospital*, ***in*** ∅ *prison*, ***in*** ∅ *government*, ***in*** ∅ *church*, ***in*** ∅ *class*

The verb *to go* is generally in combination with these institutions is used with the preposition *to* and the zero article:

- *to go* ***to*** ∅ *school*, ***to*** ∅ *university*, ***to*** ∅ *class*, ***to*** ∅ *hospital*, ***to*** ∅ *prison*, ***to*** ∅ *church*

Notes

→ *at* ∅ *school*

These cases can all be considered as examples of **reclassification** (see the section on reclassification below).

III. Transport

Forms or means of transport can also be expressed in different ways:

24. The *train* is full.

25. I took the *train* to London.

In 24. we mean the concrete vehicle or rather line of coaches or wagons, while in 25. we are talking about the means of transport as an abstract entity or *generally*. In the latter case we use the **definite** article in the **singular**.

Means of transport (for both passengers and freight) expressed in terms of vehicles are often used in combination with the preposition *by*, and then we use the zero article:

by ∅ *car*, ***by*** ∅ *bus*, ***by*** ∅ *train*, ***by*** ∅ *ship*, ***by*** ∅ *plane*, ***by*** ∅ *lorry/truck*, ***by*** ∅ *bicycle/bike*...

Means of transport expressed more abstractly are also used in combination with the preposition *by*, and again we use the zero article:

by ∅ *air*, ***by*** ∅ *sea*, ***by*** ∅ *rail*, ***by*** ∅ *road*…

IV. Media and communication

Certain media can also be thought of not only as concrete, countable objects but also as abstract and thus uncountable: *radio, television, CD*. When we are talking about the real objects, of course, they

are countable. We can talk about *television* being a bad influence on children, or equally buy *a television*, meaning *a television set*.

When we talk about means of communication, we find that here again we often have two uses. Typical examples are *radio, telephone, post/mail, satellite, e-mail*. Again, we use the preposition *by* with zero article to expression how we communicate: we communicate ***by*** *phone, e-mail, post, satellite.*

Notes

→ *television*

Note the standard combinations of the following media with prepositions:
on (the) TV, on the radio, on ∅ CD, on ∅ DVD.

V. Days of the week, months

The ***days of the week*** *Monday, Tuesday,...* and the ***months*** *January, February...* are basically used without an article. If they refer to the conversational situation, they can be used as proper nouns:

26. I will be back **on** ∅ *Wednesday*.

If they are used with reference to another point in time, they take the definite article:

27. *The Monday* after Easter is a bank holiday.

Here the day is being used as **countable** noun (see *reclassification* below):

28. I always do my washing on *a Monday.*

They can also be used *generically* (see *generic reference* below):

29. I don't like ∅ *Mondays*.

VI. Forms of entertainment

Forms of entertainment can also be used in a general sense, usually expressed in the singular with the definite article *the*:

30. We go to *the theatre/the opera/the ballet/the cinema* twice a month...

Here we do not mean a particular theatre, for example, but the theatre as a form of entertainment. Many of these nouns denoting forms of entertainment can also be used as *uncountable* nouns (a case of *reclassification*, see below):

31. As ∅ *theatre* the play was superb. It was an excellent piece of ∅ *theatre*!

3 RECLASSIFICATION

There are apparent exceptions to the basic rules concerning the use of articles with noun classes. This can be accounted for as follows.

Nouns may be shifted from one class to another by means of conversion, a phenomenon called *reclassification*. This happens to simple **everyday** words such as "cheese", and may involve a singular uncountable noun becoming countable:

32. I'd like to buy some *cheese*. UNCOUNTABLE

33. We sell 40 different *cheeses*. COUNTABLE

Here, the uncountable noun *cheese* has been reclassified, with a corresponding change in meaning, to a countable noun, meaning 'type of cheese'. We also find reclassifications in **technical** language:

34. Engineers transform *energy* for a variety of purposes.
35. Particles have a range of different *energies*.
36. John works in *industry*.
37. Traditional heavy manufacturing *industries* have given way to new high-tech industries.
38. *Steel* is iron containing from 0.1% to 1.5% carbon.
39. The properties of different *steels* vary according to the percentage of carbon and of metals other than iron present.

40. *Income* appears in the theory of consumer choice as the factor which constrains the consumer in his choice of consumption pattern.
41. The number of households whose annual *incomes* fall within each size class are found.
42. The edible *fats* and *oils* consist of hydrocarbon-like molecules that are esters of long-chain fatty acids and glycerol.
43. Hydrogen bonding dominates the physical properties of *alcohols.*
44. *Salts* are ionic compounds in which the positive ion is a metal ion or any other positive ion except H^+...

Reclassification varies from language to language; English allows quite a lot of reclassification, which explains the large number of apparent exceptions to the rules given in this paper.

RULE 6

Some uncountable nouns may be shifted to another noun class, becoming countable. The rules of that class apply accordingly.

This is not the only type of reclassification. In theory, nouns can be moved from any class to any other class. In the next example the shift is from countable to (singular) uncountable:

45. We had *fish* for dinner.

Note the following special features of the noun *fish*. As a countable noun its plural is the same as its singular form (i.e. zero plural):

46. We caught five *fish*.

It can also be reclassified from countable to countable!

47. There are twelve *fish* in this aquarium, representing five *fishes*.
(http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Fish)

The second use of *fish*, with the plural form *fishes*, means the **species '**fish'. There are thus five species of fish in the aquarium.

Proper nouns can be reclassified as countable nouns:

48. *The London of the nineteenth century* was a much more violent place than *the London of the twenty-first century*.

Here we mean the London **of a particular period**. We could also talk about different views or different aspects of London:

49. Years ago, on my arrival in the capital I had not realised how many *Londons* there were…
(http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/the_high_flyer-excerpt.asp)

Some nouns with unique reference can also be reclassified, becoming countable:

50. Jupiter has far more *moons* than was previously thought.

Uncountable nouns may also become countable in the following way. Compare the following two sentences:

51. I've bought some *beer* for the party.
52. I ordered two *beers* in the pub.

There is obviously a change in meaning when we reclassify: in 51. we are talking about *beer* as a liquid, whereas 52. is an example of **metonymy** – for *two glasses/pints of beer*. In other words, we are using the CONTENT for CONTAINER + CONTENT. This use of *beer* to mean 'a glass of beer' is **lexicalised** in English, i.e. it is part of the lexicon of the language.

A further example of reclassification of *beer* is:

53. *German beers* are renowned the world over.

In this case *beer* has been reclassified to mean "kind of beer". The noun *glass* itself, which is basically singular uncountable in the sense of the material, can be reclassified in different ways. It can be used to mean 'a container made of glass', and is thus reclassified as a countable noun:

54. There are several *glasses* in the cupboard.

It can be used metonymically (like *beer* above) to mean CONTAINER + CONTENT in phrases like "he drank a glass", meaning "a glass of wine".
It can also be reclassified as a plural uncountable noun (summation plural), meaning a device used to correct defective vision using two glass lenses mounted in a frame:

55. I bought new *glasses* at the opticians.

Proper nouns can also be reclassified as countable nouns:

56. The museum has bought *a relatively unknown Renoir*.
57. He thinks he's *a real Einstein*.

56. is an example of **metonymy** – *a painting by Renoir* – while 57. is a case of **antonomasia**: it does not mean that he is Einstein, but that he thinks he is a person possessing the typical qualities of Einstein, that he is highly intelligent, a great scientist, etc. Normally the person whose name is used must be well known.

There are also some at first sight unusual reclassifications:

58. This car is pure *car*.
59. Terminator is all *machine*, Robocop is part *machine*, part *human*.

In these two examples, where a countable noun is reclassified as uncountable, the meaning is the **essence** of 'carness', of 'machine'.

Note that there are some specific cases of reclassification in **idioms** such as:

60. He has *a* good *knowledge* of Japanese.
61. We solved the problem *step by step*.
62. It's a *dog-eat-dog* world.
63. They don't see *eye to eye*.
64. You have to learn it *by heart*.
65. The company won't *play ball*.
66. He needs to be *brought into line*.
67. We need to take *advantage* of the situation.

EXERCISE I.

A. INDICATE WHAT TYPE OF NOUNS THE FOLLOWING ARE, AND THE COMBINATIONS OF ARTICLE AND SINGULAR/PLURAL THAT ARE POSSIBLE WITH EACH:

a)	information	b)	Moon	c)	furniture
d)	table	e)	Berlin	f)	beauty
g)	pork	h)	pig	i)	energy
j)	training	k)	news	l)	sky
m)	Times	o)	knowledge	p)	atmosphere
r)	carbon	s)	wind	t)	shorts
u)	shears	v)	clothes	w)	damages

B. IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF RECLASSIFICATION IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES**:**

(1) Tribal <u>societies</u> still exist in some parts of the world.
(2) We had <u>lamb</u> for dinner yesterday.
(3) The film opens in <u>the New York of 1846</u>.
(4) The stars we see in the sky are distant <u>suns</u> which may have their own <u>solar systems</u>.

C. COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES WITH THE CORRECT PREPOSITIONS AND ARTICLES:

(1) I came ___ ___ bike this morning.
(2) I've bought myself ___ new bike.
(3) My son is ___ ___ school. He enjoys ___ school a lot.
(4) The soundtrack to the film is available ___ ___ CD. I heard some of it ___ ___ radio the other day.
(5) John is ___ ___ hospital. He was taken to ___ hospital in ___ York Street ___ ___ ambulance.

4 USES OF THE ARTICLE

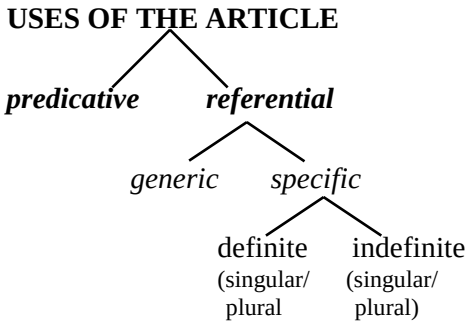
First of all, we distinguish between two basically different uses of the article: *predication* and *reference*. The former means that we say something about the subject of a sentence, whereas the latter means that we say something about a thing or a person to which we refer. The following examples illustrate this.

68. John is a student.
69. John met a student.

Sentence 68. is predicative, in that we are *attributing a predicate* to John, namely that he *is a student*; this sentence only involves one person. We could also say: *John studies*, or *John is at university.* Sentence 69., on the other hand, involves two people. The function of the expression 'a student' function is referential, i.e. it *refers* to a separate individual. The complete sentence thus refers to *two* people: *John* and a *student*.

Referential use can be further subdivided into *generic* use, i.e. to make generalised statements, and *specific* use, which refers to individuals. Figure 2 outlines the uses of the article, which we will examine in more depth in the rest of this paper:

Figure 2



1.1 Predicative use

Let us look at predicative use first.

70. John *is a student.*

In general, cases of predicative use usually involve the verb *to be* or similar verbs such as *to become*:

71. Mary became *a teacher*.

Sentences which involve constructions with "as" like the following also involve predicative use, as does apposition:

72. He is training *as an engineer*.
73. *As a student* I know my way around the university.
74. John, *a teacher*, comes from Liverpool.

We can further divide predicative uses into those uses where something or someone is **identified** – 75. – and where someone or something is **qualified** (76.):

75. John is *a teacher.*
76. She is *an internationally recognised scientist.*

In both cases we use the indefinite article in English, in contrast to German.

This rule also applies in cases where the subject refers not to individual things or people but to **kinds**:

77. **The whale** is *a mammal*.

We return to this phenomenon in generic reference below (p. 15).

RULE 7

Predicative use in English is generally with the indefinite article "a".

With **superlatives** we use the definite article:

78. This is *the best beer* I've ever tasted.
79. This car is the *most economical car* I've driven so far.
80. These are *the biggest apples*.

Notes

→ John *is a student.*

As we said above, in 70. we are attributing a predicate to "John", and the predicate is *"is a student"*. This is similar to the use of verbs ("John *studies"*).

→ He *is training as an engineer.*

This kind of sentence differs from German, where we normally leave out the article; this is done in cases where an *occupation* or *profession* is attributed to a person.

1.2 Referential use

We have seen that referential use means referring to a person or object or state of affairs. A vital distinction in the referential use of the article is that between *generic* and *specific* uses of the article. Generic use of the article means that we refer to "species" or "kinds"; thus we can make generic statements about *"horses"* for example. Specific use, on the other hand, means that we refer to individuals or to defined classes of individuals. The following examples show the difference:

81. *The computer* has broken down again.
82. *The computer* has become an essential tool in modern society.

Although superficially similar, sentence 81. is specific, i.e. we are referring to one single identifiable computer, whereas in 82. we are talking generically about the species "*computer"*. This is shown by the fact that the latter can be paraphrased as follows with virtually no change in meaning:

83. *Computers* have become essential tools in modern society.

With 81. no other use of the article is possible. Here we have a *specific definite singular* reference because we are only talking about *one* computer. On the other hand the reference is *specific definite plural* in the following example:

84. *The computers* you bought yesterday have a defective processor inside.

It is easy to see that in 85. and 86. we have two *specific indefinite* references, the first being singular and the second plural:

85. I bought *a computer* yesterday.
86. There are *computers* in our library.

You should also realise that 87. is an example of *generic* use whereas in 88. a *specific indefinite* reference is made:

87. I really like *onions*.
88. Did you buy *onions* at the supermarket?

EXERCISE II. IDENTIFY THE USES OF THE ARTICLE IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES:

(1) John is a geography student.
(2) I was talking to a geography student before the lecture.
(3) Dogs bark.
(4) I can hear dogs barking.
(5) The dog that lives next door is very bad-tempered.
(6) The computers in the library are often out of order.
(7) A computer is an electronic device that can accept data, process it and supply the results as information.
(8) Limestone consists mainly of calcite.
(9) I've bought carrots for dinner.

Oh no. I hate carrots!

Let us now look at generic reference in more detail.

5 PROBLEMS OF GENERIC REFERENCE

There are different ways of expressing generic meaning in English, and these different ways can be explained according to the predicate used in each case.

All in all, there are three different basic ways of expressing generic reference with countable nouns:

- using the **bare plural** (i.e. without an article)
- using the **singular** with the **definite** article *the*
- using the **singular** with the **indefinite** article *a*

The first option, the bare plural with zero article, is the default option in all cases. The second and third options are possible in some cases but not in others, as discussed below.

Notes

Because sentences like:

89. *The teachers on our staff* are looking for a pay rise.

are always specific and refer to a class of individuals defined by a particular trait, they can never be generic. This will be discussed later in the section on specific reference.

RULE 8

We can never use the definite article "the" with the plural to express generic meaning.

The way in which generic reference is expressed depends on the *type of predicate* involved, as we will see. Also, we will give the standard use of the article with that type of predicate, while indicating what other uses are possible.

1.1 Definitional and typical use

The following sentence illustrates the basic generic use of the article:

90. *Cats* are mammals that have soft fur, oblong eyes and whiskers.

Here we are talking about the species *"cat"* and assigning it to a genus: "mammals". The rest of the sentence expresses the differentiating features that distinguish "cats" from other species of mammals. This type of generic use may be called *definitional*, as the sentence expresses a standard definition.

RULE 9

With definitional predicates we normally use the plural without an article, the "bare plural".

Notes

→ *cats are mammals...*

This sentence forms an analytical definition. An analytical definition consists of the following:

- the species (S)
- the genus on the next level (G)
- typical properties of the species being defined, the differentiating or distinguishing features (D_1... D_n).

91. *Cats* (S) are animals (G) that have soft fur (D_1), oblong eyes (D_2) and whiskers (D_3).

The distinguishing features are typical features of the species that enable us to distinguish this species from all other species belonging to the particular genus.

Here is another example of a full definition, this time more scientific:

92. *Whales* (S) are large (D_1) cetacean (D_2) mammals (G) with flippers (D_3), a streamlined body (D_4) and a horizontally flattened tail (D_5)...

→ *cats are mammals...*

Another way of expressing a definition is using the indefinite article "a":

93. *A cat* is a mammal that has soft fur, oblong eyes and whiskers.

→ *cats* are mammals...

Note that "fur" is uncountable in English.

Everyday definitions, on the other hand, often leave out the genus, expressing only the typical features:

94. Cats have soft fur...

Notes

→ *cats have soft fur*

The features expressed must be *typical* for the sentence to be generic, as the following examples illustrate:

95. *A swan* is white.

This sentence is generic and the feature expressed in the predicate *is white* is a typical feature of swans. Compare this with the next sentence, which is impossible:

96. **A bird* is white.

A further type of predicate is the *analytical* predicate: here the typical features are left out and only the genus is expressed:

97. *Whales* are mammals.

Notes

→ *whales are mammals*

Interestingly, we tend not to say:

98. ?*A whale* is a mammal.

This sentence is felt to be incomplete as it stands. Only a standard or everyday definition can take the indefinite article *a.*

1.2 Existential use

The next type of generic use of countable nouns can be seen in the following sentence:

99. *The giant panda* is in danger of extinction.

Here we are not talking about the individual panda, but about the species "panda". This use of the generic is called *existential*.

RULE 10

With existential predicates we generally use the definite article "the" with the noun in the singular.

Notes

→ *the giant panda...*

It is important to realise that in such examples we are talking about the *species* as such, and not simply about all the members of the *class* of pandas, as the next example shows:

100. *The rabbit* is in danger of being wiped out by a virus in Australia.

We are not talking here about the class of rabbits (i.e. *all* members of the 'class of rabbits') – which would not make sense in this context – but about the ***species*** 'rabbits'. We call predicates like *to be in danger of*

being wiped out, to be introduced or *to be widespread* **existential** or **kind** predicates. Another common example would be:

101. *The American oak* was introduced to Europe in 19..

The indefinite article is either impossible in such instances or involves a complete change of meaning:

102. **A rabbit* is in danger of extinction.
103. **An American oak* was introduced to Europe…

1.3 Possible and potential use

The difference between possible and potential use can be seen from the following examples:

104. *A building* may be white.

This statement is generic and possible.

RULE 11

We tend to use the indefinite article "a" to express that something is possible.

Notes

→ *a building...*

If I say *the building*, it is no longer generic but specific:

105. *The building* may be white.

In this case, the person uttering the sentence means that "the particular building you are looking for is possibly white, or it may be a different colour".

One could also use the plural without the article to express generic meaning:

106. *Buildings* may be white.

These sentences may be contrasted with the following sentence:

107. *The human being* is capable of language.

This kind of predicate is typical and potential, i.e. not yet necessarily realised.

RULE 12

We generally use the definite article "the" with a singular countable noun when talking about a typical and potential predicate.

Notes

→ *the human being...*

It would be unusual in this sentence to say *a human being...,* tending to suggest a specific reading, although *human beings* would be perfectly acceptable.

1.4 Appreciative use

Another generic use is to express appreciation of a species:

108. *Hamsters* are popular nowadays as pets.

RULE 13

With appreciative predicates we normally use the bare plural.

Notes

→ *hamsters are popular...*

The predicate *are popular* is not a typical feature of hamsters, but rather is used to evaluate the species in some way, in this case the fact that many people like them as pets. One could also say:

109. *The hamster* is popular nowadays as a pet.

In this case you cannot use the indefinite article:

110. **A hamster* is popular nowadays as a pet.

1.5 Normative/deontic use

Generic statements may take on a normative or deontic aspect, suggesting that this is the way that things should be or ought to be:

111. *A citizen* has responsibilities towards the state.

RULE 14

In such normative sentences we tend to use the indefinite article "a".

Notes

→ *a citizen...*

If we use the plural without an article in the above sentence the sentence becomes more neutral and loses its normative value, that is it is possible to object to 112. with single counter-examples, but not to 111. in the same way:

112. *Citizens* have responsibilities towards the state.

The following table summarises the main points concerning the generic use of the article:

Figure 3

PREDICATE	the Ns	Ns	the N	a/an N
definitional	-	+	+	+
typical	-	+	+	+
analytical	-	+	+	-
existential	-	+	+	-
possible	-	+	-	+
potential	-	+	+	-
appreciative	-	+	+	-
normative	-	+	-	+

N = noun

The next chart gives a list of predicates with standard examples:

Figure 4

PREDICATE	example sentence
definitional	*cats are mammals that have soft fur*
typical	*cats have soft fur*
analytical	*cats are mammals*
existential	*the giant panda is in danger of extinction*
possible	*a building may be white*
potential	*the human being is capable of language*
appreciative	*the hamster is a popular pet*
normative	*a citizen has responsibilities towards the state*

1.6 Generic use of uncountable nouns

We still need to mention singular uncountable nouns, which may also be used generically. There is only one possibility for generic use, namely the zero article ∅:

113. ∅ *Research* plays a vital role in modern science.

114. ∅ *Water* is a liquid.

RULE 9

Uncountable nouns are also used generically, without an article and always in the singular (no plural ending is possible with uncountable nouns).

Singular uncountable nouns may also be used specifically:

115. There is ∅ *milk* in the fridge. SPECIFIC INDEFINITE

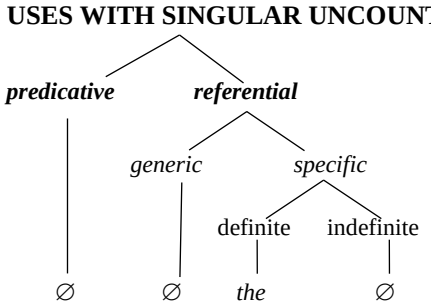
116. *The information* that I received was useless. SPECIFIC DEFINITE

Finally, singular uncountable nouns can be used **predicatively** in generic reference with zero article:

117. Skimmed milk is ∅ *milk* from which the cream has been removed.

The use of singular uncountable nouns in English can be diagrammed as follows:

Figure 5



1.7 Generic use of plural uncountable nouns

Plural uncountable nouns may also be used generically. With a plural uncountable noun like *scissors* we have generic uses such as the following (note the plural form of the verb) using the zero article:

118. ∅ *scissors* are used for cutting paper, hair etc. GENERIC

Plural uncountable nouns can also be used specifically:

119. There are ∅ *hedge shears* in the garden shed. SPECIFIC INDEFINITE

120. *The premises* of this company are in the east of the city. SPECIFIC DEFINITE

It is also possible to use these plural uncountable nouns **predicatively** in generic reference:

121. Pruning shears are *scissors* for use on plants.

EXERCISE III. IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF GENERIC SENTENCE IN THE FOLLOWING:

(1) Otters are common in northern Germany.
(2) Soldiers never abandon an injured comrade.
(3) Thermometers are instruments used for measuring temperature.
(4) I like cats.
(5) Beavers build dams.
(6) Cats can have completely black fur.
(7) Whales are mammals.
(8) Red squirrels are in danger of extinction in England.
(9) Swans are white.
(10) Crows are capable of using tools.

EXERCISE IV. WHAT COMBINATIONS OF ARTICLE AND PLURAL ARE POSSIBLE IN THE FOLLOWING GENERIC SENTENCES? MAKE ANY CHANGES THAT ARE NECESSARY.

(1) (Owl) (hunt) at night.
(2) (Child) (not interrupt) while its parents are speaking.
(3) (Sycamore) is/are (maple tree) found in Britain and America.
(4) (Horse) came to America with Columbus.
(5) (Guinea pig) is/are (popular pet) for children.
(6) (Otter) is/are common in northern Germany.
(7) (Computer) is/are (device) that take(s) information, process it and output new information.

(8) (Hawk) is/are (bird of prey).

(9) (Student) have/has obligations as well as rights in the classroom.

(10) (Dog) is/are able to hear very high frequencies.

6 SPECIFIC REFERENCE

1.1 Definite specific reference

Specific noun phrases refer to individuals or classes of individuals. The normal use is called **definite**:

122. Where's *the book* I bought yesterday? *The book* is on the table.

This is called a **definite description**, which – like proper nouns or nouns with unique reference – is used to uniquely identify a single person or object:

123. *The tall man over there with the hat and glasses* is a friend of mine.

124. *The woman who wrote Harry Potter* is now a famous author.

Definite descriptions of this kind thus include the definite article and a countable noun plus optionally adjectives, prepositional phrases, relative clauses and participial clauses. Definite descriptions may also involve the use of a deictic (pointing) expression (e.g. the demonstrative adjective *this*), a possessive adjective or genitive, but without an article, or a proper name:
***This** computer…/ **My** neighbour…/**John's** teacher…/the President of **the Republic of Ireland**…*

RULE 15

The definite article is used with specific noun phrases when the person or object referred to is known. With definite descriptions we either use the definite article followed by a countable noun or a possessive adjective without the article.

Notes

→ *The book is on the table*

This kind of use is also called **situational**, to distinguish it from **textual** use (which we will deal with later), and it means that the object referred to can be identified from the immediate situation.

1.2 Indefinite specific reference

Indefinite specific reference can be seen from the following example with a countable noun:

125. *A man* walked into a bar.

RULE 16

Use the indefinite article "a" to express indefinite specific reference with a countable noun.

Notes

→ *a man walked...*

This is perhaps the original, basic meaning of the indefinite article "a".

Indefinite specific reference with a singular uncountable noun always involves the zero article:

126. I've cooked *fish* for dinner.

1.3 Common predicates

In other sentences we have a class limited by a definite description whose members have a common property (as mentioned at the beginning of the previous section on generic reference):

127. *The children in our neighbourhood* are very rowdy.

This predicate, "*are very rowdy"*, is the trait which applies to the **class** 'the children in our neighbourhood', i.e. to *each* child belonging to this class.

RULE 17

With common predicates we use the plural with the definite article "the".

Notes

→ *the children...*

Note that we cannot say *children*, i.e. use the plural without an article, in this context:

128. **Children in our neighbourhood* are very rowdy.

However, if the scope of the definite description becomes wider (e.g. *in the north of England*), then there is the increasing possibility that a new species/kind can be formed: *children in the north of England*:

129. *Children in the north of England* are more likely to experience a deprived childhood than their southern counterparts, according to a recent survey.

1.4 Specific definite use of uncountable nouns

Singular uncountable nouns can also be used with specific definite meaning, as can plural uncountable nouns, as we mentioned above:

130. *The water* in the pot is boiling.
131. *The scissors* are on the table.

RULE 18

Singular and plural uncountable nouns used specifically in definite use take the definite article "the".

1.5 Unspecified reference

We often talk about people or things who or which we do not know yet:

132. We're looking for *an engineer* who should be able to speak English.
133. Is there *a company here which carries out geological exploration*?

This use is called *unspecified* because the engineer or the company we are looking for have not yet been specified at the moment of speaking.

RULE 19

We always use the indefinite article "a" when the reference is unspecified, that is specific but unknown.

7 THE ARTICLE IN TEXTS

In texts we only need to make a simple distinction between *known* and *unknown* to explain the use of articles:

134. Yesterday *a man* walked into a bar. *The man* had a beard and glasses.

The first mention is when something is introduced in a text; it is unknown and is marked with the indefinite article "a". When it is referred to again, the definite article "the" is used, i.e. it is known. This is an example of **anaphora**, i.e. the fact that we refer back to persons, objects or states of affairs mentioned previously in the text.

RULE 20

Use the indefinite article when you introduce something unknown in a text. When it is known, use the definite article.

This also applies to uncountable nouns:

135. I bought *beer* yesterday. *The beer* is in the fridge.

This is also the kind of situation where we use personal pronouns like *he, she, it, they* to refer back to persons and things previously introduced:

136. Yesterday *a man* walked into a bar. ***He*** had a beard and glasses.

It is also possible to move up and down the hierarchy of concepts in the language:

137. *A soldier* walked into a bar. *The soldier/private/sergeant/officer/military man/man…*

Finally in this section, we should have a look at the phenomenon of **associative anaphora**:

138. We arrived in a village. *The church* was on a hill.

A village (in Europe at least) **typically** has a church – this is part of our knowledge of the world. This is known to us, so we use the definite article. This sentence thus involves a relation of **typicality** which is implicit. The following involve further relations of different kinds:

139. A book was lying on the table. *The cover* was leather and *the paper* had gold edges.

140. A house was on fire down the street. *The heat* was unbearable.

141. I asked her a question. *The answer* came immediately.

Example 139. involves a relationship of **inclusion** (we know that a book is composed of or includes a cover and leaves made of paper), while 140. is **causal**: fire causes heat. 141. involves **correlative concepts**, in that for example every answer presupposes or involves a question, i.e. answers are correlated with questions.