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ILLNESSES AND DISEASES: ARTICLE OR NOT? THAT'S QUESTION!

The paper analyses the use of articles with the names of illnesses, diseases and disorders in the English language. The paper is divided into three parts. The first one summarizes rules about the articles and illnesses in prescriptive grammar books. The second one contains a table which aims to present the list of illnesses, diseases and disorders with corresponding articles. The final one focuses on the results of the research which was based on the comparison of the theoretical background and the actual use of articles with the names of illnesses, diseases and disorders in The Family Medical Reference Book.

1. Introduction

In general, the functioning of articles in the English language is far from being clear. One of the most controversial areas and at the same time the least dealt with is the use of articles with illnesses and diseases. This is the main reason why we have concentrated on this field of research.

2. Various approaches to the use of articles with the names of illnesses

Studying the essential prescriptive grammars of the English language only the following information has been found:

A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (2004, p. 279) suggests the zero article for the following illnesses: *anaemia, appendicitis, diabetes, influenza, pneumonia*. However, the definite article alternates with the zero article for infectious diseases: *(the) flu, (the) measles, (the) mumps, (the) chicken pox, (the) hiccups*. The article is not normally omitted with *the/a plague, the bends, the jitter, the/a bellyache, a cold, a fever, and a temperature*. The fixed expression catch cold is an exception. Nouns formed from ache are non-count when they denote a condition. On the other hand, when they denote a single attack, they are count in AmE and noncount in BrE.

According to Alexander (1998, p. 61), the indefinite article is obligatory in these instances: *a cold, a headache, a sore throat, a weak heart, a broken leg*. We can use or omit the indefinite article in these expressions: *catch (a) cold, have (a) backache, (a) stomach-ache, (a) toothache, (an) earache*. Articles are not used with illnesses which are plural in form: *measles, mumps, shingles* and with illnesses which are considered as uncountable: *flu, gout, hepatitis, high blood pressure*. But at the same time it is possible to combine the definite article with *flu, measles and mumps*.

Hais (1991, p. 62) introduces articles in the cases of: *a headache, (the) toothache, (the) measles, (a) flu*. An article is not placed before the names of the following illnesses: *pneumonia, bronchitis, influenza, fever, cancer, lumbago, sunstroke*. If the illness is described in more details, we use the article.

A Grammar of Contemporary English (1984, p. 158) recommends the zero article in the following expressions: *appendicitis, anaemia, diabetes, influenza*. However, some names of illnesses can be preceded by the definite article: *the plague, (the) flu, (the) measles, (the) mumps*.

A University Grammar of English (1975, p. 74) gives the same rules with the same examples for the use of articles with the names of illnesses.

According to Advanced Learners' Grammar (2003, p. 274) we do not use any article with illnesses: *He's got lung cancer. She's had German measles*.

There is no mention about the use of articles with illnesses and diseases in Grammar of Spoken and Written English (2000).

3. The overview of illnesses, diseases and disorders with corresponding articles

THE FAMILY MEDICAL REFERENCE BOOK has been chosen to verify the above mentioned concepts and, at the same time to provide us with the possibility to work out a more complete overview of the use of articles with illnesses and diseases which have not been taken into consideration yet. The following table aims to present the list of illnesses, diseases and disorders

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Class of illness according to systems of body	Particular illness, disease and disorder	Marked use of articles with illness, disease and disorder
Mental illness	<p>Anxiety</p> <p>- Chronic anxiety</p> <p>Phobia</p> <p>- Agoraphobia</p> <p>- Social phobia</p> <p>Depression</p> <p>- Neurotic/reactive depression</p> <p>- Endogenous depression</p> <p>- Psychotic depression</p> <p>- Manic depression</p> <p>- Mild reactive depression</p> <p>Suicide</p> <p>Anorexia nervosa</p> <p>Bulimia nervosa</p> <p>Alcoholism</p> <p>Senile dementia</p> <p>Multi-infarct dementia</p> <p>Pre-senile dementia</p> <p>Alzheimer's disease</p> <p>Schizophrenia</p> <p>Obsessional neurosis</p> <p>Hysteria</p>	<p><i>If there is a specific reason for the anxiety</i> – the generic use of the definite article (the class represented by its typical specimen)</p> <p><i>an anxiety about being contaminated would be reduced by washing hands, but since the anxiety soon returns</i> – anaphoric ref.- direct</p> <p><i>the anxiety increases and the patient does what he or she has always done</i> – tries to avoid the anxiety by withdrawing from the situation</p> <p>- a – generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen); the – anaphoric ref.- direct</p> <p><i>The commonest phobia</i> – logical use of the definite article</p> <p><i>Social phobia is also a common phobia</i> - nonreferring use of the indefinite article</p> <p><i>it is possible to develop a phobia of almost anything</i> – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</p>
Skin disorders and diseases	<p>Xeroderma</p> <p>Anhidrosis</p> <p>Epidermolysis bullosa</p> <p>Psoriasis</p> <p>A birthmark/naevus</p> <p>A mole</p> <p>Dermatitis</p> <p>- Atopic dermatitis</p> <p>Eczema</p> <p>- Atopic eczema</p> <p>Contact dermatitis</p> <p>Seborrhoeic dermatitis</p> <p>Lichen simplex</p> <p>Stasis dermatitis</p> <p>Varicose eczema</p> <p>Nappy rash</p> <p>Allergic eczema</p> <p>Impetigo</p> <p>A boil</p> <p>Erysipelas / Cellulitis</p> <p>A wart</p>	<p><i>Two types of naevus are the Port-wine stain and the strawberry mark.</i> – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</p> <p><i>The eczema usually begins as red pimples on the face</i> – anaphoric ref. – direct</p> <p><i>The eczema usually clears up by the second year of life</i> – anaphoric ref. – direct</p> <p><i>the doctor is usually able to remove the wart with chemicals</i> – anaphoric ref. – direct</p>

	<p> Cold sores Genital ulcers Shingles Chickenpox Thrush / Monilia Athlete's foot Ringworm Scabies Lice - Head lice - Body lice - Pubic lice Fleas A tumour Rodent ulcers Solar keratosis Squamous cell carcinoma Malignant melanoma Acne Chilblains Ichthyosis Urticaria / Nettle rash / Hives Pruritus - Pruritus vulvae - Pruritus ani Jaundice </p>	<p><i>to kill the lice in them</i> – cataphoric ref.</p> <p><i>the ulcer starts as a small raised patch</i> – anaphoric ref. – direct</p> <p><i>the tumour grows</i> – anaphoric ref. – direct</p>
Hair diseases	<p> Ringworm Baldness/Alopecia - Male-pattern alopecia - Alopecia areata An ingrowing hair Hirsutism </p>	<p><i>the ingrowing hair can be removed with a needle</i> – anaphoric ref. – direct</p>
Disorders of the respiratory system	<p> Rhinitis Hay fever Perennial rhinitis Vasomotor rhinitis Allergic rhinitis Sinusitis - Acute sinusitis - Chronic sinusitis - Maxillary sinusitis - Ethmoid sinusitis - Frontal sinusitis - Sphenoid sinusitis Laryngitis Pharyngitis Scarlet fever Whooping cough Overgrowth of the adenoids Tonsillitis A sore throat A cough A sneeze Choking Croup - Catarrhal croup Laryngotracheobronchitis </p>	<p><i>The main symptom is a persistent chronic cough</i> – the indefinite article with a descriptive role</p> <p><i>The duration of the cough</i> – anaphoric ref. – direct</p>

	<p>Hiccups</p> <p>Asthma</p> <p>Bronchitis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acute bronchitis - Chronic bronchitis <p>Emphysema</p> <p>Pneumonia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pneumococcal pneumonia - Double pneumonia - Acute pneumonia <p>Legionnaire's disease</p> <p>Tuberculosis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pulmonary tuberculosis <p>Pneumoconiosis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coal-miner's pneumoconiosis - Asbestosis pneumoconiosis - Byssinosis pneumoconiosis <p>Lung cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adenocarcinoma of the lung - Bronchogenic carcinoma - Bronchial carcinoma - Mesothelioma <p>Pleurisy - Primary pleurisy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secondary pleurisy <p>Pulmonary embolism</p> <p>Pulmonary abscess</p> <p>Bronchiectasis</p> <p>Pneumothorax</p>	<p><i>until the hiccups die away</i> - anaphoric ref. - direct</p> <p><i>to find the cause of the asthma</i> - the generic use of the definite article (the class represented by its typical representative)</p>
Disorders of the digestive system	<p>Stomatitis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gangrenous stomatitis - Aphthous stomatitis <p>Glossitis</p> <p>Gingivitis</p> <p>Thrush</p> <p>Lichen planus</p> <p>Halitosis</p> <p>Parotitis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Septic parotitis - Recurrent parotitis <p>Salivary calculus</p> <p>Cleft palate</p> <p>Dental decay</p> <p>An abscess</p> <p>Dysphagia</p> <p>A peptic ulcer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An duodenal ulcer - A gastric/stomach ulcer - A oesophageal ulcer - A pyloric ulcer <p>Peritonitis</p> <p>Gastritis</p> <p>Heartburn</p> <p>Pyrosis</p> <p>Flatulence</p> <p>Aerophagia</p> <p>Stomach/Gastric cancer</p> <p>Pyloric stenosis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hypertrophic pyloric stenosis - Adult pyloric stenosis <p>Hepatitis</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infectious hepatitis - Serum hepatitis - Chronic hepatitis - Viral hepatitis <p>Cancer of the liver Cirrhosis Gallstones</p> <p>Cholecystitis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chronic cholecystitis <p>Acute pancreatitis Chronic pancreatitis Cystic fibrosis Cancer of the pancreas Crohn's disease Paralytic ileus Malabsorption syndrome Steatorrhea Coeliac disease Tropical sprue A hernia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An inguinal hernia - A femoral hernia - An umbilical hernia - A hiatus hernia <p>Appendicitis Colitis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mucous colitis - Ulcerative colitis <p>Hirschsprung's disease Diverticulosis Prolapse of the rectum Haemorrhoids</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal haemorrhoids - External haemorrhoids <p>Anal fissure Fistula Cancer of the colon and rectum Constipation Diarrhoea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acute diarrhoea <p>Gastroenteritis Typhoid fever Botulism Dysentery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bacillary dysentery - Amoebic dysentery 	<p><i>the gallstones may form in the gall bladder</i> - anaphoric ref. - direct</p> <p><i>the hernia formed from part of the small intestine</i> - anaphoric ref. - direct</p>
Diseases and disorders of the urinary system	<p>Kidney failure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acute kidney failure - Chronic kidney failure <p>Glomerulonephritis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acute glomerulonephritis - Chronic glomerulonephritis <p>Bright's disease Toxaemia Cystitis Urethritis Gonorrhoea Urinary incontinence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - True incontinence - Stress incontinence 	<p><i>If the incontinence is caused by an underlying disorder</i> - anaphoric ref. - direct</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temporary incontinence Stones Renal colic 	
Muscle disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paralysis Peripheral neuritis Flaccid paralysis Progressive spinal muscular atrophy Progressive spinal muscular atrophy of infancy Peroneal muscular atrophy Muscular dystrophy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Duchene dystrophy - Facioscapulohumeral dystrophy - Myotonic dystrophy Myasthenia gravis Pigeon breast Osteoarthritis Rheumatoid arthritis Gout Ankylosing spondylitis Bursitis 	
Diseases of bone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Osteoporosis Paget's disease Osteomyelitis Septicaemia 	
Blood disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anaemia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Iron-deficiency anaemia - Pernicious anaemia - Aplastic anaemia - Haemolytic anaemia Bleeding disorders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Haemophilia - Purpura - Leukaemia 	<p><i>If the anaemia is due to bleeding</i> – anaphoric ref. – indirect <i>If the deficiency is severe it causes an anaemia</i> <i>very similar to that caused by vitamin B12 deficiency.</i> – the indefinite article with a descriptive role</p> <p><i>Treatment depends on the cause of the purpura.</i> – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)</p>
Disorders of the lymphatic system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hodgkin's disease Lymphoma Lymphangioma Lymphosarcoma Macroglobulinemias 	
Heart disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coronary heart disease Angina pectoris Coronary thrombosis (A heart attack) (A coronary attack) Congenital heart disease <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patent ductus arteriosus - Septal defects - Fallot's tetralogy - Damaged valves Heart failure Pericarditis Cardiomyopathy Disorders of heart rhythm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extrasystole 	<p><i>the person may survive the heart attack</i> – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen) <i>In a so called "silent" coronary thrombosis</i> – the indefinite article with a descriptive role <i>to have a very severe attack</i> – the indefinite article with a descriptive role <i>convalescence after a heart attack depends on the severity of the attack</i> – a – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class); the – anaphoric ref. – direct</p> <p><i>Sometimes the extrasystole is not even noticed.</i> – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sinus arrhythmia - Atrial fibrillation - Heart block 	
Diseases of the blood vessels	<p>Arteriosclerosis</p> <p>Thrombosis</p> <p>Embolism</p> <p>An aneurysm</p> <p>Varicose veins</p> <p>Fainting</p> <p>Haemorrhage (bleeding)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - External haemorrhage - Internal haemorrhage <p>Hypotension (Low blood pressure)</p> <p>Hypertension (High blood pressure)</p>	<p><i>An air embolism - a bubble of air in the veins - the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</i></p> <p><i>blockage in the lungs - a pulmonary embolism - the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</i></p> <p><i>The condition can lead to a potentially fatal pulmonary embolism - the indefinite article with a descriptive role</i></p> <p><i>Often the individual is not aware of the aneurysm - the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)</i></p> <p><i>If the aneurysm is detected - anaphoric ref. - direct</i></p> <p><i>blood which leaks from the aneurysm - anaphoric ref. - direct</i></p> <p><i>In a varicose vein - the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</i></p> <p><i>A single large haemorrhage will not cause anaemia - the indefinite article with a descriptive role</i></p> <p><i>Treatment is needed to relieve the hypertension in these cases. - cataphoric ref.</i></p>
Eye disorders	<p>Refractive errors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hypermetropia (Long sight) - Myopia (Short sight) - Astigmatism <p>Infections and inflammations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conjunctivitis - Styes and chalazions - Trachoma - Iritis and iridocyclitis <p>Glaucoma</p> <p>Blindness</p>	
Disorders of the ear	<p>Earache</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Otitis externa - Otitis media <p>Hearing loss and deafness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Otitis barotrauma - "Glue ear" - Otosclerosis - Chronic otitis media - Perceptive deafness <p>Vertigo and dizziness</p>	
Disorders of metabolism	<p>Diabetes mellitus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hypoglycaemia - Hyperglycaemia <p>Diabetes insipidus</p>	
Diseases and disorders of the nervous system	<p>A headache</p>	<p><i>Meningitis is important cause of severe headache - the zero article disor-denoting condition</i></p> <p><i>Pressure inside the skull causes headache - the zero article denoting condition</i></p> <p><i>failure of vision associated with headache - the zero article denoting condition</i></p> <p><i>A simple, occasional headache - the indefinite article with a descriptive role</i></p>

	<p>Migraine</p> <p>Congenital malformations of the nervous system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spina bifida - Hydrocephalus <p>Infections of the nervous system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encephalitis - Meningitis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neuritis <p>Apoplexy (A stroke)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A major stroke on the right side of the brain - A stroke in the left side of the brain - A mild stroke (A transient ischaemic attack) - Cerebral haemorrhage - Subarachnoid haemorrhage - Cerebral thrombosis <p>Epilepsy</p> <p>Cerebral palsy and spasticity</p> <p>Parkinson's disease</p> <p>Multiple sclerosis</p> <p>Mental handicap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Down's syndrome 	<p><i>If headache is a feature of depression – the zero article denoting condition</i> <i>antidepressant drugs may help the headache – anaphoric ref. – direct</i> <i>to cure a tension headache – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</i> <i>Then comes the headache: a severe throbbing pain – anaphoric ref. – indirect</i> <i>to eliminate other causes of the headache – anaphoric ref. – indirect</i> <i>followed by a serious headache – the indefinite article with a descriptive role</i> <i>Headache is one of the conditions in which alternative therapies have had some success. – the zero article denoting condition</i> <i>Worry about the migraine can bring on further attacks – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)</i> <i>A migraine may last several hours – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</i></p> <p><i>Viruses are a common cause of meningitis. The meningitis may be the only sign of infection – anaphoric ref. – direct</i></p> <p><i>If the patient survives the initial stroke – anaphoric ref. – indirect</i></p>
Disorders of the immune system	<p>Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)</p> <p>An allergy and hypersensitivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anaphylaxis 	<p><i>Sometimes the allergy can be associated with eating – anaphoric ref. – direct</i> <i>substance that causes the allergy – anaphoric ref. – direct</i></p>
Infections and Infestations	<p>Bacterial infections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anthrax - Cholera - Typhoid fever - Paratyphoid fever - Tetanus (Lockjaw) - Plague - Leprosy - Leptospirosis - Psittacosis <p>Viral infections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Colds 	<p><i>The common cold can be cause – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)</i> <i>the severity of the col – the generic use of the definite article (the class</i></p>

		as represented by its typical specimen) <i>Colds are commoner in winter</i> – the generic use of the zero article <i>There is no specific cure for colds</i> – the generic use of the zero article
	<p>Influenza</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Glandular fever <p>(Infectious mononucleosis)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poliomyelitis - Rabies (Hydrophobia) - Smallpox - Dengue fever - Lassa fever - Yellow fever <p>Rickettsia</p> <p>Fungi</p> <p>Common childhood infections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measles - German measles (Rubella) - Scarlet fever - Chickenpox (Varicella) - Mumps - Diphtheria - Whooping cough <p>Parasitic animals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parasitic protozoa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Malaria - Trypanosomiasis - Leishmaniasis - Toxoplasmosis - Parasitic worms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nematodes (Roundworms) - Trematodes (Flukes) - Cestodes (Tapeworms) 	<p><i>The flukes burrow through the liver</i> – anaphoric ref. – indirect <i>The oriental lung fluke</i> – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen) <i>The commonest infection is by the dwarf tapeworm</i> – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen) <i>infection is caused by the adults of the beef tapeworm, the pork tapeworm and the fish tapeworm</i> – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen) <i>The fish tapeworm, which absorbs vitamin</i> the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen) <i>A drug to kill the worm may be prescribed.</i> – anaphoric ref. – direct <i>final host of the liver fluke</i> – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)</p>

4. Conclusions

There have been found several differences between the use of articles with illnesses and diseases as suggested in the grammar books and their actual use in *The Family Medical Reference Book*. *Plague* could serve as a typical example of such a difference: while in the grammar books the definite or indefinite article is recommended, it has not occurred in any instance in the analysed text. Many other examples are even more ambiguous.

Where the article with a particular illness is considered as unmarked, it is placed in the second column of the table. On the other hand, where the use of article is felt as marked, it is given in the third column with a suggested explanation.

As found in the analysed text, if an illness is understood as uncountable and 'abstract' the zero article is preferred. On the contrary to this, if an illness or disorder is countable and somehow visible or touchable, the indefinite article is used (*a mole, a wart, a hernia, an aneurysm, an allergy*).

When the combination of the definite or indefinite article with an illness represents the whole class or any representative member the reference has been classified as generic.

If the name of an illness or disorder is mentioned earlier in the context or specified later in the context it is taken as a typical example of anaphoric (direct, indirect) or cataphoric reference.

In the instances where an illness is described in more details, the indefinite article is used and it is felt as nonreferring and have a descriptive role.

In the specific case of *headache* when it denotes a condition it is used with the zero article but when it denotes a single attack the indefinite article is preferred.

This was just an attempt to analyse the use of articles with the names of illnesses, diseases and disorders based on the content of *The Family Medical Reference Book*. We understand that the topic has not been covered in its full range and requires further investigation. This will hopefully be found in subsequent papers.

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