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 non-count in BrE.

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.

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.

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.

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 with which articles are used or not.

The table 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.

Marta Kadorová – Zuzana Ondráčková

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.

* Marta Kadorová, Zuzana Ondráčková

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Science, University of Žilina, Hurbanova 15, 010 26 Žilina, Slovak Republic.
E-mail: marta.kadorova@fpv.utc.sk, zuzana.ondrackova@fpv.utc.sk

https://doi.org/10.26552/com.C.2005.4.69-78
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of illness according to systems of body</th>
<th>Particular illness, disease and disorder</th>
<th>Marked use of articles with illness, disease and disorder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>If there is a specific reason for the anxiety – the generic use of the definite article (the class represented by its typical specimen) an anxiety about being contaminated would be reduced by washing hands, but since the anxiety soon returns – anaphoric ref.- direct the anxiety increases and the patient does what he or she has always done – tries to avoid the anxiety by withdrawing from the situation – a – generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen); the – anaphoric ref.- direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phobia</td>
<td>The commonest phobia – logical use of the definite article Social phobia is also a common phobia - nonreferring use of the indefinite article it is possible to develop a phobia of almost anything – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Neurotic/reactive depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Endogenous depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Psychotic depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Manic depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Mild reactive depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anorexia nervosa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bulimia nervosa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alcoholism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senile dementia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-infarct dementia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-senile dementia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alzheimer’s disease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schizophrenia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obsessional neurosis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hysteria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin disorders and diseases</td>
<td>Xeroderma</td>
<td>Two types of naevus are the Port-wine stain and the strawberry mark. – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anhidrosis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Epidermolysis bullosa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psoriasis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A birthmark/naevus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A mole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dermatitis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Atopic dermatitis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eczema</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Atopic eczema</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contact dermatitis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seborrhoeic dermatitis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lichen simplex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stasis dermatitis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Varicose eczema</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nappy rash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allergic eczema</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impetigo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A boil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erysipelas / Cellulitis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A wart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold sores</td>
<td>Genital ulcers</td>
<td>Shingles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Head lice</td>
<td>- Body lice</td>
<td>- Pubic lice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acne</td>
<td>Chilblains</td>
<td>Ichthyosis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hair diseases</th>
<th>Ringworm</th>
<th>Baldfness/Alopecia</th>
<th>- Male-pattern alopecia</th>
<th>- Alopeica areata</th>
<th>An ingrowing hair</th>
<th>Hirsutism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ulcer starts as a small raised patch - anaphoric ref. - direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tumour grows - anaphoric ref. - direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Disorders of the respiratory system | 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 |
| The main symptom is a persistent chronic cough - the indefinite article with a descriptive role |
| The duration of the cough - anaphoric ref. - direct |

*To kill the lice in them - cataphoric ref.*

*The ingrowing hair can be removed with a needle - anaphoric ref. - direct*
Hiccups
Asthma
  - Bronchitis
  - Chronic bronchitis
Emphysema
Pneumonia
  - Pneumococcal pneumonia
  - Double pneumonia
  - Acute pneumonia
Legionnaire’s disease
Tuberculosis
  - Pulmonary tuberculosis
Pneumoconiosis
  - Coal-miner’s pneumoconiosis
  - Asbestosis pneumoconiosis
  - Byssinosis pneumoconiosis
Lung cancer
  - Adenocarcinoma of the lung
  - Bronchogenic carcinoma
  - Bronchial carcinoma
  - Mesothelioma
Pleurisy
  - Primary pleurisy
    - Secondary pleurisy
Pulmonary embolism
Pulmonary abscess
Bronchiectasis
Pneumothorax

Disorders of the digestive system
Stomatitis
  - Gangrenous stomatitis
  - Aftous stomatitis
Glossitis
Gingivitis
Thrush
Lichen planus
Halitosis
Parotitis
  - Septic parotitis
  - Recurrent parotitis
Salivary calculus
Cleft palate
Dental decay
An abscess
Dysphagia
A peptic ulcer
  - An aduodenal ulcer
  - A gastric/stomach ulcer
  - A oesophageal ulcer
  - A pyloric ulcer
Peritonitis
Gastritis
Heartburn
Pyrosis
Flatulence
Aerophagia
Stomach/Gastric cancer
Pyloric stenosis
  - Hypertrophic pyloric stenosis
  - Adult pyloric stenosis
Hepatitis
- Infectious hepatitis
- Serum hepatitis
- Chronic hepatitis
- Viral hepatitis
Cancer of the liver
Cirrhosis
Gallstones
Cholecystitis
- Chronic cholecystitis
Acute pancreatitis
Chronic pancreatitis
Cystic fibrosis
Cancer of the pancreas
Crohn’s disease
Paralytic ileus
Malabsorption syndrome
Steatorrhea
Coeliac disease
Tropical sprue
A hernia
- An inguinal hernia
- A femoral hernia
- An umbilical hernia
- A hiatus hernia
Appendicitis
Colitis
- Mucous colitis
- Ulcerative colitis
Hirschsprung’s disease
Diverticulosis
Prolapse of the rectum
Haemorrhoids
- Internal haemorrhoids
- External haemorrhoids
Anal fissure
Fistula
Cancer of the colon and rectum
Constipation
Diarrhoea
- Acute diarrhoea
Gastroenteritis
Typhoid fever
Botulism
Dysentery
- Bacillary dysentery
- Amoebic dysentery

### Diseases and disorders of the urinary system
Kidney failure
- Acute kidney failure
- Chronic kidney failure
Glomerulonephritis
- Acute glomerulonephritis
- Chronic glomerulonephritis
Bright’s disease
Toxaemia
Cystitis
Urethritis
Gonorrhoea
Urinary incontinence
- True incontinence
- Stress incontinence

the gallstones may form in the gall bladder
- anaphoric ref. – direct

the hernia formed from part of the small intestine – anaphoric ref. – direct

If the incontinence is caused by an underlying disorder – anaphoric ref. – direct
| Muscle disorders | Paralysis  
|                 | Peripheral neuropathy  
|                 | Flaccid paralysis  
|                 | Progressive spinal muscular atrophy  
|                 | Progressive spinal muscular atrophy of infancy  
|                 | Peroneal muscular atrophy  
|                 | Muscular dystrophy  
|                 | - Duchenne dystrophy  
|                 | - Fascioscapulohumeral dystrophy  
|                 | - Myotonic dystrophy  
|                 | Myasthenia gravis  
|                 | Pigeon breast  
|                 | Osteoarthritis  
|                 | Rheumatoid arthritis  
|                 | Gout  
|                 | Ankylosing spondylitis  
|                 | Bursitis  
| Diseases of bone | Osteoporosis  
|                 | Paget’s disease  
|                 | Osteomyelitis  
|                 | Septicaemia  
| Blood disorders | Anaemia  
|                 | - Iron-deficiency anaemia  
|                 | - Pernicious anaemia  
|                 | - Aplastic anaemia  
|                 | - Haemolytic anaemia  
|                 | Bleeding disorders  
|                 | - Haemophilia  
|                 | - Purpura  
|                 | - Leukaemia  
| Disorders of the | Hodgkin's disease  
| lymphatic system | Lymphoma  
|                 | Lymphangioma  
|                 | Lymphosarcoma  
|                 | Macroglobulinemias  
| Heart disease | Coronary heart disease  
|               | Angina pectoris  
|               | Coronary thrombosis  
|               | (A heart attack)  
|               | (A coronary attack)  
|               | Congenital heart disease  
|               | - Patent ductus arteriosus  
|               | - Septal defects  
|               | - Fallot's tetralogy  
|               | - Damaged valves  
|               | Heart failure  
|               | Pericarditis  
|               | Cardiomyopathy  
|               | Disorders of heart rhythm  
|               | - Extrasystole  

- Temporary incontinence  
- Stones  
- Renal colic  

**If the anaemia is due to bleeding** – anaphoric ref. – indirect  
**If the deficiency is severe it causes an anaemia** very similar to that caused by vitamin B12 deficiency. - the indefinite article with a descriptive role  
**Treatment depends on the cause of the purpura.** – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)  

**the person may survive the heart attack** – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)  
**In a so called “silent” coronary thrombosis** - the indefinite article with a descriptive role  
**to have a very severe attack** – the indefinite article with a descriptive role  
**convalescence after a heart attack depends on the severity of the attack** - a - the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class); the – anaphoric ref. – direct  

**Sometimes the extrasystole is not even noticed.** – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diseases of the blood vessels</th>
<th>Arteriosclerosis</th>
<th>Thrombosis</th>
<th>Embolism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sinus arrhythmia</td>
<td>Atrial fibrillation</td>
<td>Heart block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An aneurysm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varicose veins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fainting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haemorrhage (bleeding)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- External haemorrhage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Internal haemorrhage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotension (Low blood pressure)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension (High blood pressure)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eye disorders</th>
<th>Refractive errors</th>
<th>Hypermetropia</th>
<th>(Long sight)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Myopia (Short sight)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Astigmatism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infections and inflammations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conjunctivitis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Styres and chalazions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trachoma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iritis and iridocyclitis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glaucoma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blindness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorders of the ear</th>
<th>Earache</th>
<th>Otitis externa</th>
<th>Otitis media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hearing loss and deafness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Glue ear”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Otitis barotrauma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chronic otitis media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptive deafness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vertigo and dizziness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diabetes mellitus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypoglycaemia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diabetic insipidus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorders of metabolism</th>
<th>A headache</th>
<th>Meningitis is important cause of severe headache - the zero article disordering condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pressure inside the skull causes headache - the zero article denoting condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Failure of vision associated with headache - the zero article denoting condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A simple, occasional headache - the indefinite article with a descriptive role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If headache is a feature of depression – the zero article denoting condition antidepressant drugs may help the headache – anaphoric ref. – direct to cure a tension headache – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)

Then comes the headache: a severe throbbing pain – anaphoric ref. – indirect to eliminate other causes of the headache – anaphoric ref. – indirect followed by a serious headache – the indefinite article with a descriptive role

Headache is one of the conditions in which alternative therapies have had some success. – the zero article denoting condition

Worry about the migraine can bring on further attacks – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)

A migraine may last several hours – the generic use of the indefinite article (any representative member of the class)

Viruses are a common cause of meningitis. The meningitis may be the only sign of infection – anaphoric ref. – direct

If the patient survives the initial stroke – anaphoric ref. – indirect

Sometimes the allergy can be associated with eating – anaphoric ref. – direct substance that causes the allergy – anaphoric ref. – direct

The common cold can be cause – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)

the severity of the col – the generic use of the definite article (the class as represented by its typical specimen)
Influenza
- Glandular fever
  (Infectious mononucleosis)
- Poliomyelitis
- Rabies (Hydrophobia)
- Smallpox
- Dengue fever
- Lassa fever
- Yellow fever
Rickettsia

Fungi
Common childhood infections
- Measles
- German measles (Rubella)
- Scarlet fever
- Chickenpox
  (Varicella)
- Mumps
- Diphtheria
- Whooping cough

Parasitic animals
- Parasitic protozoa
  - Malaria
- Trypanosomiasis
- Leishmaniasis
- Toxoplasmosis
- Parasitic worms
  - Nematodes
    (Roundworms)
  - Trematodes
    (Flukes)
  - Cestodes
    (Tapeworms)

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.

References: