

THE ARTICLES IN ENGLISH¹

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ABSTRACT

After considering the history of the label ‘article’, this paper shows how, although *the* and *a(n)* do make up a grammatical system in Modern English (being mutually exclusive), the two articles have quite different roles in the grammar. *The* developed from a demonstrative and is nowadays only sometimes substitutable for one. *A(n)* developed from the number modifier *one* and has diverged far from it. The generic use of the two articles is contrasted, and also what happens when there is an underlying sequence of articles.

1. Introduction

The label “article” was used for a word class in Classical Greek which had two members – what we would call “definite article” (the “preposed article”) and what we would call “relative pronoun” (the “postposed article”). These two grammatical words showed similar morphology, having gender, number and case inflections. The definite article had evolved from a demonstrative. There was nothing corresponding to “indefinite article”. No class of articles was recognised for Latin, nor for Old English.

Modern English (NE) has *the*, which developed from a demonstrative in Old English, and *a(n)*, which developed from a reduction of the cardinal number *one*. Almost every grammarian of NE groups *the* and *a(n)* together, either as part of a major word class (generally adjective, but pronoun and preposition have also been suggested – see Michael 1970: 350-61) or as a separate class.

¹ I have benefited from the most helpful comments on a draft of this paper from Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and Kate Burridge. I have consulted information on articles in many grammars and dictionaries. Christophersen (1939), Jespersen (1949) and Declerck (1991) have been of especial use.

2. Articles as a grammatical system in Modern English

In NE the pre-head structure of an NP with a common noun as head is (Dixon 2005: 26):

- a) an adverb which modifies a complete NP, e.g. *even, simply, really*; or *what a* or *such a*;
- b) a predeterminer, e.g. *all (of), some (of), both (of), one (of), another (of), any (of), one-quarter (of)*;
- c) a determiner, which can be an article (*the, a*), a demonstrative (e.g. *this, those*) or a possessive word or NP (*my, John's, the old man's*);
- d) a superlative (*tallest, most beautiful*), a comparative (*taller, more beautiful*); or an ordering word (*next, last*) and/or a cardinal number (*three*) or a quantifier (*many, few*) or qualifier (*some, any*);
- e) an ordinal number, e.g. *fourth*;
- f) one or more adjectival modifiers;
- g) one or more modifiers describing composition (e.g. *wooden*), origin or style (e.g. *British*), purpose/beneficiary (e.g. *rabbit* in *rabbit food*, *medical* in *medical building*).

Although only one element may be chosen from slots (a), (b), (c) and (e), there may be more than one in the other slots. Examples with two or three selections from slot (d) are: *many taller entrants* and *two next fastest horses*.

It is the custom to group together English *the* and *a(n)* as articles, and to say that they occur as determiners, in slot (c). For *the*, this is the same slot as demonstratives, from which the definite article evolved. And (c) must be the slot for *the* since it can precede a full array of choices from slot (d); for example, *the (c) next (d) two (d) fastest (d) horses*.

Many examples of complex NPs including *a(n)* could be explained equally well whether *a(n)* were in slot (c) or in slot (d). Compare *a taller man* and *a last prayer* with *three (d) taller (d) men* and *one (d) last (d) prayer*. The justification for placing *a(n)* in slot (c) lies in NPs such as *a (c) shorter (d) last (d) prayer*; sentences such as **one shorter last prayer* or **three shorter last prayers* are scarcely acceptable (they could only be produced in the most contrived circumstances).

Note that any of the items in slot (b) can be followed by *the* from slot (c) plus a head noun in plural inflection; for example *all/some/both/one/any/one-quarter of the dogs*. *A(n)* can only be used with a singular noun and so is not possible (save in highly unusual contexts) after most slot (b) items; one would not normally say, for instance, **all/some/any of a dog*. However, fractions may be followed by *a(n)* plus a singular noun, as in *one-quarter of a cake*.

The quantifiers *many* and *few*, in slot (d), pattern with numbers and may be preceded by *the* – see (34-5). However, *some* and *any*, from the same slot, behave quite differently (note that these items are semantically and functionally different from *some (of)* and *any (of)* in slot (b)).

The quantifiers *some* and *any* – as in *I saw some boy(s) in the park, I didn't see any boy(s) in the park* – cannot be preceded by either article. *Some* and *any* are similar to *a(n)* in referring to unspecified member(s) of a set (they differ from *a(n)* in not being restricted to singular reference); we do not get **a some* or **an any*, since this would involve double marking of “unspecified”. And since *some* and *any* represent something which is not identified, they cannot co-occur with *the*.

3. Their meaning and function

Although they are mutually exclusive, which justifies their being placed in one grammatical system, the two articles have quite different roles in the grammar. Their central meanings are:

- *the* indicates that the referent of the NP it occurs in should be identifiable to the addressee;
- *a(n)* refers to one unspecified member of a set of countables (for example, it can occur with *coin* or *ripple*, but not with *money* or *mud*).

Note that quite different factors are involved in the two specifications. That for *the* does not relate to number or countability; an NP with *the* can involve a countable or uncountable noun, and if a countable it may be marked with singular or plural inflection.

Compare

- 1) He's the winner.
- 2) He's a winner.

(1) is incomplete; if it is not clear from the context or preceding discourse, one should specify what he is the winner of; for example *of the two o'clock race*. In contrast (2) is an acceptable sentence without any context being supplied. It would mean, at the least, that he won one thing once; in fact (2) will often be taken to mean that he wins habitually.

There are certain written styles which often omit *the* but in contrast retain *a(n)*. A significant number (but a minority on my shelf) of cookery books find little need for the definite article in their recipes. For example (underlining the

omissions and retentions):

- 3) Clean ___ cauliflower ... Transfer ___ mixture to a soufflé dish ... Bring ___ water to the boil again.

Headline writers in newspapers typically omit *the* and all forms of *be* – whether copula or auxiliary – to save space (they will retain them if space is available). Examples include:

- 4) ___ drug squad __ hit by ___ leader's departure
5) ___ night Africa came alive to ___ magic of Ali

However, as in recipes, *a(n)* is seldom omitted from headlines, as shown by:

- 6) ___ dip in ___ iodine level ___ a worry
7) Parole ___ a distinct hope for prisoner

One sometimes comes across a paradigm of the articles, something like:

	INDEFINITE	DEFINITE
SINGULAR	<i>a(n)</i>	<i>the</i>
PLURAL	\emptyset or <i>some</i>	<i>the</i>

This is misconceived. Firstly, number is not relevant for *the* and it is misleading to refer to it. Secondly, there is no clear non-singular equivalent of *a(n)*; *many* or (*a*) *few* could be suggested just as well as zero or *some*, but none of these is appropriate.

4. The and demonstratives

Demonstratives *this/these* and *that/those* can function as a complete NP or as a determiner, in slot (c). Some occurrences of a demonstrative as determiner may be substituted by *the* with no substantial difference in meaning.

Demonstratives have two kinds of anaphoric function – substitution anaphora and textual anaphora (see Dixon 2003).

a) SUBSTITUTION ANAPHORA. Here the anaphoric NP (which includes the demonstrative) substitutes for a full NP, which could have been repeated in place of the anaphoric constituent. For example (underlining both the anaphoric NP and the NP it is anaphoric on):

- 8) He gets a large salary, but that/this salary doesn't meet all his needs.
 9) She died on Thursday and (on) that afternoon they had a party.

In (8), *the* could be used in place of *that* or *this*. Similarly in (9), but note that with the demonstrative one can say either *that afternoon* or *on that afternoon* whereas with the definite article one must say *in the afternoon*. In versions of (8) and (9) with the definite article, *the salary* and *the afternoon* are uniquely specified – the large salary that he gets, and the afternoon of the day she died, Thursday. In summary, a demonstrative in slot (c), with substitution anaphoric function, can generally be replaced by *the*.

b) TEXTUAL ANAPHORA. This involves an NP with a demonstrative which refers back not to an NP but to a proposition which is typically a clause but could be a lengthy stretch of discourse. For example:

- 10) *He drinks excessively* and for *that reason* Mary left him.
 11) *He doesn't study* and *this behaviour* worries Mary.

The definite article *the* may not substitute for a demonstrative in textual anaphoric function. It appears that only a deictic determiner may be used, referring back to something larger in extent than an NP.

There is plainly considerable variation across different genres of spoken and written English, but examination of a selection of samples suggests that something like half the occurrences of demonstratives as determiners could be replaced by *the*.² For example, many utterances employ a deictic for a uniquely recognisable referent, which could equally well be specified by *the*, as in:

- 12) This (*/the*) suit fits well.
 13) Where did you buy that (*/the*) hat?
 14) Did you get that (*/the*) cheque which I sent?
 15) I chose that (*/the*) solution which I considered most appropriate.
 16) With regard to human observation this (*/the*) world has neither a beginning nor an end.

The demonstrative *that* has a further sense as intensifier with an adjective or adverb, a function which is not open to *the*; for example, *He was that angry*, *I've never seen anyone behave that stupidly*. And, in an appropriate context,

² For example, in the first sentence of the abstract to this paper, *this* cannot be substituted by *the*. A further example is *Our city store is having a sale later this month*.

that or *this* may modify a proper noun with derogatory overtones, as in *Who's this Mrs Smith who wants to see me?* and *I hate that George W. Bush.*

The can be used with a proper name in completely different circumstances, when identifying one of a number of people (or rivers, etc.) that share the same name. For example, *I mean the Murray River just south of Tully, not the big Murray River in the south.*

Whereas about half of the instances of demonstratives as determiners (in the textual samples I examined) may be replaced by *the*, only a very small number – less than five per cent – of the instances of *the* could be replaced with a demonstrative. These include:

- 17) He noticed fossilised fish remains embedded in the rock; *the* (/these) remains suggested that volcanic activity had raised the rock.

Here *the remains*, an instance of substitution anaphora, could be replaced by a deictic anaphora, *these remains*. Another example is:

- 18) He arrived on a Thursday and by *the* (/that) Saturday had settled the estate.

Other instances of possible substitution of a demonstrative for *the* involve a slight addition of meaning. Consider:

- 19) She sat outside in the hot sun.

One could say *in that hot sun*, with *that* adding a deprecatory sense of the hot sun not being a good thing. And in

- 20) The Smiths always vote Republican.

the refers to a particular group of people called Smith. One could, alternatively, say, *Those Smiths always vote Republican*, with *those* implying a negative attitude towards them.

Slot (c) of NP structure involves a choice between an article, a demonstrative and a possessor. In quite a few instances, *the* can be replaced by an appropriate possessor, as in

- 21) She took him by *the* (/his) hand.
 22) How's *the* (/your) family?
 23) How's *the* (/your) wife?
 24) *The* (/my) wife'll be along later.

It is interesting (and surely socially significant) that *husband* could not be substituted for *wife* in (23-24). One can only say *your/my husband*, rather than **the husband*.

Generally, *the* is used to identify the unique referent of the NP in which it occurs, as in *The best (one) of all*, *The first in line*, and:

- 25) After the election, the winning candidate will be the president for the next four years.

Certain abstract nouns (and some adjectives when functioning as NP head) take *the*; for example:

- 26) I think a lot about the future.
27) Don't dream of the impossible!

And *the* can also have generic reference, as in (see also §6):

- 28) The telephone is a mixed blessing.
29) Do you play the piano?

There are some grammatical constructions which require one or more definite articles. These include the correlative comparative, as in *The longer the better*, *The more the merrier* and *The more hours you work the more we'll pay you* as well as set expressions like *(He's) the worse for drink*.

The can be used with a noun at its introductory mention, if a unique referent is understood. For example, *The vicar knocked on the door*, *The boss always reads the paper on the train in the morning*, and *Beware of the dog!*

Generally, if the head of an NP is a common noun then it will take *the* for referential specification. If the head is a proper noun, this should have unique reference, so no article is required. However, a number of common nouns referring to geographical features or buildings are often omitted when modified by a proper name, so that the NP now consists just of the proper noun. An interesting feature is that a definite article which was required by the common noun head is retained when the common noun is omitted. For instance

- 30) *the Atlantic* (ocean) *the Amazon* (river) *the Hilton* (hotel)
 the Louvre (gallery) *the Andes* (mountains) *the Hebrides* (islands)

Another point of interest is that when the common noun is omitted, its plural ending may be transferred to the proper noun, as in *the Shetland islands*, yielding *the Shetlands*.

In Sir William Jones's famous speech of 1786, he mentions *the Sanscrit language* and then just *the Greek* and *the Latin*,³ following the same principle as in (30). During the last two centuries this habit of including *the* before the name of a language has dropped out of use.

The has a further role, indicating that something is the best of its kind. In Classical Greek, the definite article was used in exactly this way, so that "The Poet" was used to refer to Homer and "The Stagirite" for Aristotle (considered the most esteemed person to come from Stagira) (Harris 1765: 223). Similar use of the definite article in Modern English is seen in *This is the life!* and *It'll be the event of the year!* Americans speak of *the president* and everyone on earth refers to *the sun* and *the moon*. The first Sherlock Holmes short story, "A scandal in Bohemia", commences: "To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the woman*" (italics in original).

There is an interesting contrast between the inclusion and omission of *the* before the name of a limited set of institutions. Compare:

- 31) The choirboy is going to church/school.
 32) The plumber is going to the church/school.

In (31) the boy is going to church to take part in a service or to school to take part in lessons, while in (32) the plumber is going to mend a burst pipe. For the plumber, the church/school is simply a building which, like almost all buildings, has pipes that can burst, and so it is appropriate to include *the* in (32). However, *the* is omitted – as in (31) – when someone is going to an institution to take part in the normal, defining business of that institution.

In British English, the definite article can be omitted after an appropriate preposition with a small number of names of institutions. The main ones are

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 33) after <i>to, from, in, at</i> | before <i>school, church, college, university</i> |
| after <i>to, from, in</i> | before <i>town, prison, hospital, theatre</i> (only for operating theatre in a hospital) |

Other dialects of English show variation. For example, in American English, *the* cannot be omitted from before *hospital* (Trudgill and Hannah 1982: 61).

Note that *the* can also be omitted from *He's lying in (the) bed* and *He's getting out of (the) bed* since these are prototypical activities with respect to a bed.

³ "The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident ..." (Italics in original).

But it is not possible to omit *the* from *He's sitting on the bed* or *He loves jumping on the bed*.

In summary, we have seen that:

- the definite article *the* developed from demonstratives;
- many instances of demonstratives in texts can be replaced by *the* with no appreciable difference in meaning (for example, *the* may be used in place of a demonstrative in substitution anaphora, but not in textual anaphora);
- rather few textual instances of *the* may be replaced by a demonstrative; where this is possible, it often involves a certain difference of meaning or emphasis;
- *the* serves to uniquely identify the referent of the NP it occurs in (irrespective of countability or number); it also occurs in set constructions such as *The more he eats the less he speaks*;
- *the* may be dropped from between one of a set of locational prepositions and one of a small set of nouns describing institutions, as in *The elderly patient is still in theatre*.

5 *A(n)* and the number modifier *one*

The indefinite article *a(n)* developed out of *one*, used as a number modifier in slot (d) of NP structure. Indeed, one function of *a(n)* is to be the unstressed equivalent of *one*. Consider an NP *X rabbit(s)*, where *X* is a number or quantifier. We can focus on the identity of *X*, as in column (a) – where the number or quantifier is stressed (shown by ') – or on *rabbit(s)*, as in (b) – where the noun is stressed.

34)	(a)		(b)
	'one rabbit		a 'rabbit
	'two rabbits	}	∅ 'rabbits
	'five rabbits		
	'twenty rabbits		
	'many rabbits		
	'few rabbits		

Regular count nouns in English take an obligatory number inflection, with zero suffix for singular and *-s* for plural. If the actual non-singular number is not to be specified, nothing precedes 'rabbits. With singular number, and stress on 'rabbit, *one* must be replaced by *a*.

Note that any of the expressions in (34) may be identified by preposing *the*, giving:

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 35) | (a) | | (b) |
| | <i>the</i> 'one rabbit | | <i>the</i> 'rabbit |
| | <i>the</i> 'two rabbits | } | |
| | <i>the</i> 'five rabbits | | |
| | <i>the</i> 'twenty rabbits | | <i>the</i> 'rabbits |
| | <i>the</i> 'many rabbits | | |
| | <i>the</i> 'few rabbits | | |

Since *the* simply precedes everything else in (35), we might expect *the a* 'rabbit. However, *the* and *a* make up a single grammatical system and are mutually exclusive, so that we just get *the* 'rabbit (see §7).

One can also place *this/these* or *that/those* or a possessor before each of the NPs in (34), and again *a* is dropped after *this* or *that* or a possessor. Only one choice may be made from slot (c) in NP structure, covering demonstratives, possessors and the two articles.

Note that it is possible to have *the* and *a* in the same complex NP:

- 36) The more than 'two million/'one million/a 'million people who voted for John were disappointed when he did not get elected

But here *more than a* 'million functions as a complex modifier within the NP; *the* and *more than a* 'million are modifiers to *people*. The essential point is that *the* and *a* are not direct members of the same constituent, and they are not contiguous.

Consider the question:

- 37) Could a 'boy lift that plank?

and two possible answers:

- 38) No, (a 'boy couldn't) but a 'man could.
 39) No, ('one boy couldn't) but 'two boys could.

The words in parentheses could be omitted but if included serve to make explicit the contrast – in (38) between 'man and 'boy (each with the unstressed

form *a*) and in (39) between *'one boy* and *'two boys* (with the number stressed). These examples clearly show that *a* functions here as the unstressed variant of *one*.

Examining text samples across different genres, there are just a few instances of *one* in slot (d). For example:

40) You get maybe *'one* authentic talent in every *'hundred* students.

The point of employing (stressed) *'one* here is the contrast with *'hundred* (also stressed); the contrast requires *one*, rather than *a*. Consider also:

41) She said *'one* short word: “Good”.

The emphasis here is on the fact that a single word was given, and stress falls on *'one*. If the focus was on the length of the word, stress would go on *'short* and *one* would be replaced by *a*: *She said a 'short word: “Good”*.

When a single item is to be focussed on, a common means is to use *one of* (slot b) followed by *the* (slot c) in preference to *one* (slot d), as in

42) This is *one* of the assumptions behind the American revolution.

43) It is *one* of the great achievements of my sporting career.

One could substitute *a(n)* for *one of the – -s*, with more felicity in the case of (42) than for (43). Such a replacement simply removes the focus from being on a single item from the full set of items.

There are circumstances in which *a* can replace *one* with little difference in meaning or emphasis. For example:

44) They have four dogs and *one (/a)* cat.

However, there are set expressions where only *one* is possible, such as *one day soon*

Only about five per cent of the instances of *a(n)* in the textual samples were replaceable by *one*. These include:

45) About *a (/one)* third of the way into the debate.

46) He didn't pay him *a (/one)* cent.

47) It was only *an (/one)* hour.

In each instance, when *one* is used in place of *a*, it attracts stress away from the following lexeme.

The great majority of instances of *a(n)* could not, in the textual context in which they occur, be replaced by *one*. Consider first:

- 48) He lives in a palace.
49) An ink that will dry easily.

One could only be substituted for *a(n)* here if a contrast were introduced, as with *one ... another* or *one ... two*:

- 50) He lives in 'one palace and works in 'another.
51) 'One ink that will dry easily and 'two that won't.

However, the great majority of instances of *a(n)* do not implicitly relate to *one*. The indefinite article simply indicates an unspecified member of a set, as in *He is a cheat*, *Is this a red wine?*, *A frown darkened his face*. Note, though, that only nouns which are countable may be preceded by *a(n)*. One can say

- 52) I have a right to know.

since *right* is countable (one can say, *I know my rights*). But one cannot say **He made the offer with a sincerity*, since *sincerity* is not countable. (There are, however, set expressions with *a* plus a non-countable noun, as in *(do it) with a vengeance*).

A(n) also has a somewhat unusual use, preceding a human propensity adjective which modifies a proper name or title, as in

- 53) An emotional Marilyn Monroe came forward to accept the award.
54) A delighted chairman of the board told shareholders there had been a record profit.

In such instances, the article relates to the adjective rather than to the head of the NP; in essence, the chairman was in a delighted mood.

And there are a number of set phrases which include *a(n)*, including:

<i>what a (shame)</i>	<i>a few (of)</i>
<i>such a (disaster)</i>	<i>a lot (of)</i>
<i>many a (slip)</i>	<i>a little (of)</i>
<i>much of a (size)</i>	<i>a bit of a</i>

The indefinite article is used to mean ‘for each’, as in *a dollar a day*, *sixpence a dozen*, and the set phrase *two at a time*.

As pointed out by Jespersen (1933: 177) “while *little* and *few* are negative terms, *a little* and *a few* are positive”. Two of his examples are:

- 55) There are few mistakes in his papers (less than one might expect, i.e. praise).
 56) There are a few mistakes in his papers (there should have been none, i.e. criticism).

In appropriate circumstances, a noun following a number in slot (d) may be omitted, leaving the number as, effectively, head of the NP. For example:

- 57) one man taller than me
 57') one taller than me
 58) two men taller than me
 58') two taller than me

Following the paradigm in (34), we could replace *one man* by *a man* and *two men* by *men*, giving:

- 59) a man taller than me
 60) men taller than me

However, *man/men* could not be omitted from (59-60), as they can be from (57-58); that is, we cannot have an NP **a taller than me* or **taller than me*. That is, *one* can be a modifier as in (57) or a head noun as in (58) but *a(n)* may only be a determiner.

There are two forms *one* which can function as a complete NP: the generic pronoun – as in *One shouldn't do that* – and the number – as in (57') and in *I'll have one but give Mary two* (for these NPs it could be suggested that a following head noun, understood by speaker and addressee, has been omitted).

Such a *one*, which is effectively NP head, can be preceded by *a(n)* if a modifier intervenes:

- 61) a Have one last drink before you go
 b Okay, I'll have *a* last *one*, if you make it *a* small *one*

Sentence (61b) is acceptable in all varieties of English. One can also get *a* plus *one* with nothing intervening in some colloquial varieties. For example:

- 62) You're a one (for the ice-cream)!
 63) He's a one (for making eyes at girls)!

The meaning is 'indulge in it a lot', with jocular overtones. (Note that one would not be likely to say, *I'm a one*.) The adjective *real* may be included: *You're/He's a real one for ...*

Since the indefinite article *a(n)* developed from the number *one*, it would be expected to take some time before *a(n)* became sufficiently grammatically detached for it to be able to occur with *one*. The first stage would be as in (61b), with *a(n)* and *one* separated by another word. The final stage, as in (62-3) with the sequence *a one*, appears to be just being introduced in colloquial speech and will no doubt in due course work its way up into formal (and written) styles.

In summary, we have seen that:

- the indefinite article *a(n)* developed from *one* used as a number modifier in an NP;
- in some occurrences, *a(n)* still functions as an unstressed variant of *one*;
- *a(n)* has a non-contrastive sense; it must be substituted by *one* if there is a contrast such as *one ... two* or *one ... another*;
- in most instances of use, *a(n)* has moved away from association with *one* and simply indicates an unspecified member of a set;
- *a(n)* can still only be used – like *one* – with countable nouns;
- the indefinite article has a special grammatical function in constructions like *A happy Franklin D. Roosevelt accepted the nomination*; and in phrases like *a bit of a muddle*.

6. Generic use of articles

As mentioned in §4, *the* is often used in a generic sense, as in (28-9), *The aeroplane has revolutionised travel* and *I dislike the bagpipes*. In addition, *a(n)*, or just the plural form of a countable (or the unmarked form of a countable), can be used with a generic sense. Compare:

- 64) The fox is a cunning animal [comparing the prototypical fox to other animals].
 65) A fox is a cunning animal [any unspecified member of the set of foxes].
 66) Foxes are cunning animals [the whole class].

The bracketed comments provide an explanation of the meaning of each sentence. But (64), (65) and (66) can have equivalent pragmatic import.

In different contexts, only some of the generic possibilities may be felicitous. For example:

- 67) A cat is more vigilant than a dog.
- 68) Cats are more vigilant than dogs.
- 69) *?The cat is more vigilant than the dog.

It seems that, with respect to vigilance, one can compare unspecified members of the classes of cats and dogs, or the entire classes, but scarcely the prototypical animals.

And compare (with explanations similar to those for 64-6)

- 70) You can't trust a Hun.
- 71) You can't trust Huns.
- 72) You can't trust the Hun.

with

- 73) You can't trust a cat.
- 74) You can't trust cats.
- 75) *You can't trust the cat.

The fact that one can say (72) but not (75) is due to the fact that *the Hun* refers to the entire nation of Huns, meaning that one cannot trust the leaders of this nation. There is no equivalent interpretation of *the cat*. (Note that in each of these sentences *you* has a generic sense, in keeping with the generic nature of the statements. The sentences would not be felicitous if *I* or *she* or *John* were substituted for *you*.)

This would be a fertile field for further research.

7. Underlying sequence of articles

Since *the* and *a(n)* are mutually exclusive, in instances where one might expect a sequence of articles, only one may appear. (This discussion is based on Jespersen 1949: 468-9.)

- i) Underlying *the* plus *a*. As shown in (34-5) of §5, where *the* plus *a* would be expected, we get just *the*.
- ii) Underlying *a* plus *the*. If there are several paintings by Raphael called *The Madonna and Child*, one could say:

76) I looked at a [The] Madonna and Child by Raphael.

In each of (i) and (ii), the first of an underlying sequence of articles is retained: *the a* becomes *the* and *a the* comes out as *a*.

We can also get a sequence of underlying *the the*, as in (78) or *a a*, as in (80), in each instance reducing to just one occurrence.

77) He lives at the end of Bedford Street nearest to The Strand.

78) He lives at the [The] Strand end of Bedford Street.

79) I have a suitcase which is a little heavier than yours.

80) I wish I had a [a] little heavier suitcase.

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