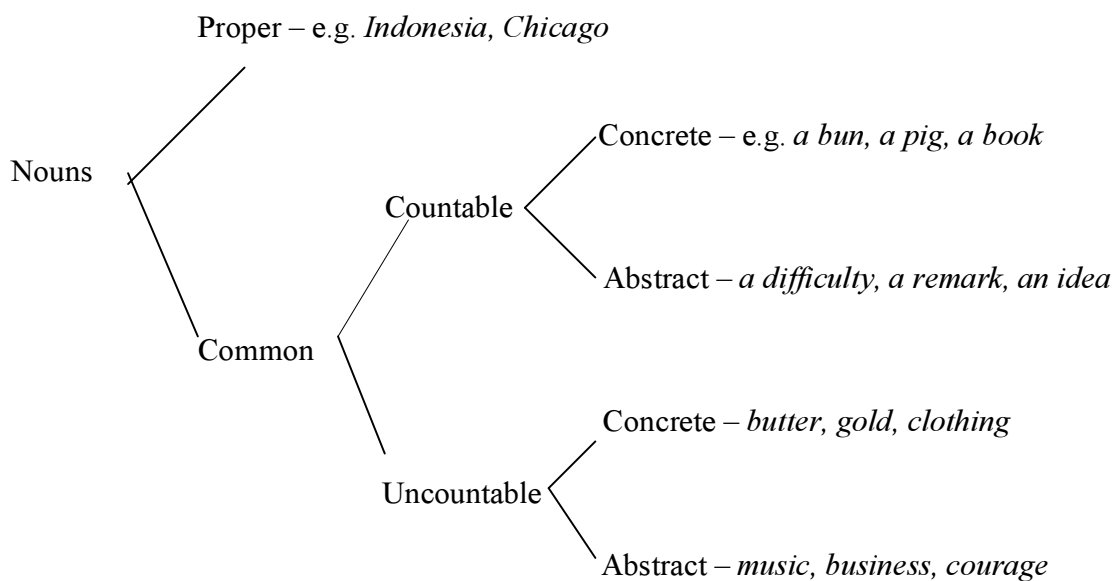


## SEMINAR 1 – NOUNS – INTRODUCTION

**Nouns: proper v. common - countable v. uncountable – abstract v. concrete**

**Partitives: quantity v. quality; Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns**

### I. BASIC DISTINCTIONS



#### **Proper nouns**

- have unique reference – are used for a particular person, thing, place or idea – determiner and number contrast cannot occur
- e.g. personal names – *Andrew, Mr. Smith, President Kennedy*
- forms of address – *Mum, Dad, Auntie*
- geographical names – *Asia, India, Wisconsin*
- place names – *Madison Avenue, Regent Street*
- months, days of the week, festivals and seasons – *April, Sunday, Easter*

#### **Common nouns**

- any noun that is not the name of a particular person, place, thing, etc.
- may be either countable or uncountable or both!

#### **Countable nouns (also called count)**

- we can use *a/an* in front of them - *a book, an envelope*
- they have a plural form and can be used in the question *How many...?*
- can be used with numbers – *one stamp / two stamps*

### Uncountable nouns (also called noncount)

- are not normally used with *a / an* – *Sugar is expensive.*
- do not normally have a plural form and can be used in the question *How much...?*
- are not normally used with a number in front of them

### Concrete nouns

- are accessible to senses, observable, measurable
- can be countable: persons – *a girl, a tulip*  
objects – *a bottle*  
groups – *an army, a crowd*  
units of measurement – *a franc, a kilo*  
parts of a mass – *a bit, a piece, a slice*
- can be uncountable: materials, liquids, gases – *cotton, milk, air*  
'grains' and 'powder' – *barley, rice, dust, flour*  
activities – *camping, drinking, eating*  
languages – *Italian, Turkish*
- some concrete nouns can be used as countable or uncountable:  
e.g. glass - a) substance (material) – *Glass is made from sand. /U/*  
b) a unit made of the substance – *I broke a glass this morning. /C/*  
(i.e. a particular thing)  
  
c) st specific – *I heard a strange noise.*  
d) st in general – *Noise is a kind of pollution*

(for more examples and details see below – the section on Countability)

### Abstract nouns

- nonobservable, nonmeasurable – countable: *a hope, an idea, a situation, a denial;*  
uncountable: *honesty, anger, equality*

## II. COUNTABILITY

- the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns has a **semantic** (=is related to meaning) and **grammatical** (= usage of determiners) **significance**
- **countable** nouns – **must have a determiner** (a, one, this, my...) **in the singular**, it is **not necessary in the plural**: *a book, books* but not *book*
- **uncountable** nouns **do not need a determiner**

The following table illustrates the range of determiners used with nouns:

| Proper                  | Common               |                    |                           |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
|                         | countable            | uncountable        | Count. or Uncount.        |
| a) <del>Mark</del>      | <del>book</del>      | music              | brick ( <i>material</i> ) |
| b) <del>the Mark</del>  | the book             | the music          | the brick                 |
| c) <del>a Mark</del>    | a book               | <del>a music</del> | a brick ( <i>one</i> )    |
| d) <del>some Mark</del> | <del>some book</del> | some music         | some brick                |
| e) <del>Marks</del>     | books                | <del>musics</del>  | bricks                    |

- a) without a determiner
- b) with the definite article
- c) with the indefinite article
- d) with the 'partitive' some
- e) plural without a determiner

**Note:** there are some exceptions:

- a) *the* Chicago of my youth (not *Chicago* in general as in – *He lives in Chicago.*)
- b) *The* Kate I know wouldn't do such a thing. (in special grammatical contexts)
- c) *A* Mrs Tadley is waiting to see you. (= a certain person I don't know)

### Nouns which can be either countable or uncountable

#### A) countable v. uncountable

- as **countable** nouns they are used to refer to **single items, things or *st* specific**
- as **uncountable** nouns they refer to **substances, materials, *st* in general**

C

- a) He ate *a whole chicken*.
- b) I had *a boiled egg* for breakfast.
- c) I broke *a glass* this morning.
- d) I've got *a new iron*.
- e) What do *the papers* say?
- f) *A good education* is expensive.
- g) Try not to make *a noise*.

U

Would you like *some chicken*?  
 There's *egg* on your face.  
*Glass* is made from sand.  
 Steel is an alloy of *iron*.  
*Paper* is made from wood.  
*Education* should be free.  
*Noise* is a kind of pollution.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| h) I need <i>a light</i> by my bed.                    | <i>Light</i> travels faster than sound. |
| i) Are <i>these drawings</i> by Goya?                  | I'm no good at <i>drawing</i> .         |
| j) She has <i>a painting</i> by Turner.                | <i>Painting</i> is my hobby.            |
| k) She gave <i>a reading</i> of her poems.             | <i>Reading</i> is taught early.         |
| l) There's <i>a hair</i> in my soup.                   | She has blonde <i>hair</i> .            |
| m) <i>The lambs</i> were eating quietly.               | There is <i>lamb</i> on the menu today. |
| n) <i>A coal</i> fell from the fire and burnt the rug. | They mine <i>coal</i> in this area.     |

In some cases there is little difference in meaning between the C and U noun  
e.g. The house is *built of brick*.

He used *bricks* to build the house.

**But!** In some cases there is **a notable difference** in meaning:

e.g. I want *an evening paper*, please. (= a newspaper)

Wrap the parcel up in *brown paper*.

Sometimes the distinction is achieved by **separate lexical items**:

| C                | - | U          |
|------------------|---|------------|
| a garment        | - | clothing   |
| a permit         | - | permission |
| a weapon         | - | arms       |
| a suitcase       | - | luggage    |
| a machine        | - | machinery  |
| a chore / chores | - | housework  |
| a job            | - | work       |
| a note / coin    | - | money      |

### **B) normally uncountable nouns (e.g. wine) used as countable**

- if we refer to particular varieties, the noun is often preceded by an adjective - *a nice wine*
- or there is some kind of specification - *a wine of high quality*
- plural is possible here – This region produces *some awful wines* as well as good *ones*.
- many words for drinks are uncountable when we think of them as substances (a) but we can make them plural and use *a / an* to mean 'a glass of...' or use them with numbers (b)

- a) Beer / Coffee / Tea is expensive these days. / Do you want tea or coffee?
- b) A beer / One beer, please.  
Two teas and four coffees, please.  
This is a nice coffee.  
I like Brazilian coffees best.

- C) Nouns not normally countable in English** (are often countable in other languages)  
- the verb is singular, e.g. The news is rather bad today.

accommodation, advice, applause, assistance, baggage, camping, cash, chaos, chess, clothing, conduct, courage, cutlery, dancing, dirt, employment, equipment, evidence, fun, furniture, harm, health, homework, housing, information, leisure, litter, luck, luggage, machinery, money, mud, music, news, nonsense, parking, pay, permission, photography, poetry, pollution, produce, progress, publicity, research, rubbish, safety, scenery, shopping, sightseeing, sunshine, transport, underwear, violence, weather, work

**Note the differences:**

| C   | U  |
|---|--|
| a) He gave her <i>a box of chocolates</i> . | I love <i>chocolate</i> .                |
| b) Don't raise his <i>hopes</i> .           | There's not <i>much hope</i> .           |
| c) There are some <i>differences</i> .      | I don't see <i>much difference</i> .     |
| d) There was <i>a sudden silence</i> .      | We listened <i>in silence</i> .          |
| e) I felt <i>a pain</i> in the knee.        | I didn't feel <i>much pain</i> .         |
| e) These <i>facts</i> show that...          | The story is based <i>on fact</i> .      |
| f) Don't omit <i>a single detail</i> .      | He explained it <i>in great detail</i> . |
| g) She's <i>an old gossip</i> .             | She is fond of gossip.                   |
| h) She was <i>an old love</i> of his.       | <i>Love</i> always forgives.             |

What are the **semantic differences** between the countable and uncountable meaning of the following words? (what are their Czech equivalents?) – use them in sentences:

- | C              | U |
|----------------|---|
| 1. fruit       |   |
| 2. glass       |   |
| 3. paper       |   |
| 4. iron        |   |
| 5. toast       |   |
| 6. matter      |   |
| 7. rule        |   |
| 8. lace        |   |
| 9. work        |   |
| 10. experience |   |

### III. PARTITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

- using 'partitives' we can refer to **a single item** (*a loaf of bread*) or **a part of a whole** (*a slice of bread*) or **a collection of items** (*a packet of biscuits*)
- both countable and uncountable nouns can be used with them
- they may relate to a) quantity  
b) quality
- the partition can be singular or plural – it affords a means of imposing number on uncountable nouns – the partition is expressed by a countable noun (e.g. *piece, item*) + *an of-phrase* (see below)

#### a) Quality partition

- mostly with 'kind' and 'sort', also 'type', 'variety' and 'blend' (e.g. coffee, tobacco)

e.g. *a new kind of computer – several new kinds of computer (s)*  
*one sort of silk tie – two sorts of silk tie (s)*  
*a delicious kind of bread – some delicious kinds of bread*  
*a fashionable sort of wallpaper – fashionable sorts of wallpaper*

*Note: two coffees* might mean a) two cups of coffee  
b) two types of coffee (depending on the context)

#### b) Quantity partition

e.g. a piece of cake - two pieces of cake  
an item of clothing – several items of clothing  
a blade of grass  
some specks of dust  
two slices of meat / bread  
a flock of sheep / pigeons  
a page of a book  
two acts of a play  
a kilo of potatoes  
a yard of cloth

Some quantity partitives are **general** and some are **specific** (more descriptive and restrictive):

#### General

- **a piece of ...** - the most widely used partitive, either with concrete nouns (*bacon, chalk, paper*) or abstract nouns (*advice, information, news, research*)
- **a bit of ...** - generally implies a small quantity – *a bit of rice*
- **an item of ...** - usually with abstract nouns (piece is also possible), it is not generally used with concrete nouns – ~~an item of cake~~ (but *an item of clothing*), *an item of news = a news item*

### **Specific – typical with specific nouns**

- an act of friendliness / mercy / malice
- an atom / a grain of truth
- a bag of flour
- a ball of string
- a bar of chocolate / soap
- a blade of grass
- a book of stamps
- a box of matches
- a burst of applause
- a carton of cigarettes
- a cloud of dust
- a crust of bread
- a cube of ice
- a dash of soda
- a drop of water / rain
- a fit of anger / energy / enthusiasm
- a flash of lightning
- a game of darts, chess
- a grain of rice
- an item of news
- a jar of jam
- a joint of meat
- a jug of water
- a loaf of bread
- a lump of sugar
- a make of car
- a metre of cloth
- a mug of cocoa
- a pair of gloves / jeans / pliers
- a peal of thunder
- a period of calm
- a pile of rubbish
- a pinch of salt
- a pot of tea
- a roll of paper
- a scrap of paper
- a sheet of paper
- a sip of tea
- a slice of bread / meat
- a species of insect
- a speck of dust
- a spoonful of medicine
- a stroke of luck
- a tube of toothpaste

- a wink of sleep
- a wisp of smoke

*collective nouns*

- an army of soldiers
- a bouquet of flowers
- a bunch of flowers
- a bunch of grapes
- a bunch of keys
- a crew of sailors
- a flock of sheep / birds
- a herd of cattle
- a hive of bees
- a mob of hooligans
- a pack of cards
- a panel of experts
- a set of cutlery
- a string of pearls
- a swarm of bees

*measure partitives – denote length, area, volume, weight, etc.*

- an acre of land
- a metre of cloth
- a mile of cable
- a pint of milk / beer