

Why not **Knowledges of English*?

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Kwon, Yonghyun. 2005. *Why not *Knowledges of English?* *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 13(1), 47-67. Almost all nouns are either countable or uncountable. However, nouns are not fixed in only one way. They cross over. Whether nouns are countable or uncountable depends on how people perceive situations where nouns are used. This paper is concerned with the process which mass and abstract nouns go through to become what is called countable nouns. Another concern is why some nouns are not allowed to take the plural form even if they have their corresponding singular form. This goes against the general pattern. This paper addresses how the singularity of some nouns does not fully guarantee their plural counterparts.

Key Words: indefinite article, individuation, partitioning, reducing

1. Introduction

Common nouns generally break down into two categories: countable and uncountable¹). This distinction has been supposed to play a central role in whether nouns are allowed to accept the indefinite article or not. Countable nouns include *book*, *pen*, *house*, etc. These nouns normally take the singular or plural form. When they are singular, they take the indefinite article. However, uncountable nouns such as *coffee*, *beer*, *music*, *knowledge*, etc. are not generally allowed to go with the indefinite article.

The division, however, between countable nouns and uncountable

1) For noun classes, see Quirk *et al.* (1985: 247). In that classification the terms *count* and *noncount* are used instead of countable nouns and uncountable nouns. The latter terms are chosen in this paper, because they sound more familiar,

nouns is not that simple. Almost all nouns have dual categories, with some exceptional nouns.²⁾ Countable nouns switch over to become uncountable nouns, and vice versa. The question of reclassification will be discussed later in this paper.

Countable nouns must take either the indefinite article or the plural form. Generally, if nouns are allowed to take the indefinite article, they are open to plurality as well. For example, the general pattern is *a book-books, a pen-pens, a desk-desks*, etc. However, there are some nouns which do not guarantee pluralization even if they are allowed to accept the indefinite article. This type of nouns tends to allow a singular form only. Note the following examples.

- (1) a. I have *a high regard* for them.
- b. Jill has *a good knowledge* of Greek.

Regard and *knowledge* in (1) have switched over to countable nouns through what is called the process of reclassification³⁾. Thus, they come to accept the indefinite article. Does the singular form of the nouns guarantee that *regard* and *knowledge* can take their plural forms?

- (2) a. *I have *high regards* for them.
- b. *Jill has *good knowledges* of Greek.

The sentences in (2) are not correct. The grammatical faults come from

2) Some nouns do not cross over the dividing line between countable and uncountable nouns. They always stay uncountable. For the list of the nouns, see Murphy (2000: 134). For example, nouns such as *advice, information* are always uncountable. However, these exceptional items are not many. They should fall into the category of accidental gaps. There is no systematic reason for their exceptional behaviors. The existence of the accident gaps does not discourage the task of capturing the generality of linguistic behaviour.

3) *Regard* and *knowledge* are normally uncountable, as in the following.

- (i). They have her in high *regard*.
- (ii). *Knowledge* is power.

the fact that *regards* and *knowledges* are pluralized. An important issue raised here is why *a regard* and *a knowledge* cannot be pluralized whereas *a book* and *a pen* can.⁴⁾ This issue is what is going to be tackled in this paper.

On this peculiarity, Huddleston *et al.* (2002: 339) states:

Under restricted conditions, however, *a* can combine with a non-count singular...The effect of the *a* is to individuate a subamount of knowledge, her knowledge of Greek, but this individuation does not yield an entity conceptualised as belonging to a class of entities of the same kind: **Jill has an excellent knowledge of Greek and Liz has another*; **They both have excellent knowledges of Greek*.

Regarding the reclassification, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 252) takes a different view. They point out that even if uncountable nouns do not take the indefinite article, *a/an* is allowed when the nouns are modified. Consider (3):

- (3) a. They are doing *a brisk business*.
- b. *They are doing *brisk business*.

(3a) is correct while (3b) is not. The difference between the two is in the presence or absence of the indefinite article. They say that even if *business* is an uncountable noun, *brisk business* must take *a* because it is modified by *brisk*. *Brisk business* is ruled out because *a* is missing in (3b).

How can *an education* be explained in (4)? *Education* is an uncountable noun. Even though it stands alone, it has accepted the indefinite article before it.

- (4) She has had *an education*.

4) The plural form *regards* and the singular form *regard* are both in use. However, *regards* is not the plural form of *regard*. They have different meanings. The former indicates greetings while the latter means respect or consideration. Therefore, we cannot say that *regards* is the plural derived form of *regard*.

In this regard, they explain that *an education* implies *a good education*. They say that even though the adjective *good* is not overtly present in the sentence, its implicit presence has allowed *an*. They stick to the condition of modification for uncountable nouns to take the indefinite article⁵⁾.

Whether the condition of modification is appropriate as a licenser for the indefinite article to be allowed for uncountable nouns is doubtful⁶⁾, and what's more, the condition cannot account for why some uncountable nouns which are converted into countable nouns cannot be pluralized.

According to Swan (1997: 57), "Many other normally uncountable nouns can have 'partly countable' uses: they do not have plurals, but can be used with *a/an*. This happens when the meaning is particular rather than general."

- (5) a. We need a secretary with *a knowledge* of English.
- b. You've been *a great help*.
- c. I need *a good sleep*.

Following Swan's analysis, nouns such as *a knowledge*, *a help*, *a sleep* in (5) should be treated as 'partly countable', in that they have singular forms but they cannot be pluralized. It just adds another category of partly countable nouns to the two existing categories of countable and uncountable nouns. The addition of another category does not explain

5) Quirk *et al.* (1985: 287) presents the following examples. Nouns such as *education*, *dislike*, *sensitivity*, etc. are uncountable. However, when they are modified they accept the indefinite article, as below.

- (i). Mavis had *a good education*.
- (ii). My son suffers from *a strange dislike of mathematics*.
- (iii). She played the oboe with *(a) remarkable sensitivity*.

6) In fact, there are numerous cases where uncountable nouns take the indefinite article even when they are not modified. This paper is to show that rather than it has to do with modification, the idea of individuation is a decisive factor in the acceptance of the indefinite article.

why the third category of nouns behave in that exceptional way. It is no more than an exceptional treatment.

It is conventionally accepted that the notion of individuation plays an essential part when we take the indefinite article for nouns. However, it will be pointed out in this paper that the notion of individuation does not always guarantee plurality. Before we go into this issue, we will discuss in chapter two that countability or uncountability is not an innate part of nouns in themselves. Rather, nouns stay neutral before they are determined to be either countable or uncountable. And in chapter three we will explore a process of developing neutral nouns into countable nouns. The process is a way of partitioning and reducing. And finally, we will examine in chapter four that whether nouns can be pluralized or not has to do with different types of partitioning and reducing.

2. Is *book* always countable?

We are too used to the traditional classification of nouns: countable nouns and uncountable nouns. In fact, nouns themselves do not intrinsically contain the identification of countable or uncountable status. Whether they are countable or uncountable is not determined on the basis of the characteristics of nouns. Instead, it depends on how people see them. Almost all nouns are, in reality, countable and uncountable. That is a reflection of how people see nouns. People sometimes regard nouns as individual objects or individual instances⁷⁾, and they see the same nouns as masses or abstract ideas at other times. This is a matter of perception of things, not things in themselves. People are often free to have different perceptions of the same things. Let's consider the following examples.

- (6) a. Human beings read *books*.
- b. Insects eat *book*.

7) According to Yule (2004: 30), the notion of individuation, which is the process of classifying as a single unit, is "the key to the use of the indefinite article".

Book is usually regarded as countable, as in (6a). So it can be *a book* or *books*. It is because people usually see a book as a separate existence from a second book, a third book, etc. In this case, a book, another book, or a third book each is given an individual status by people. As a result, they are given the status of being individuals.

People, however, do not always keep looking that way only. So *book* does not always need to be treated as a countable noun. *Book* is uncountable in (6b). In this case, *book* exists as a mass. For insects, whether it is a book or another book, the status of individuality does not matter⁸). A book or another book is the same for insects. They have the same quality in that they are made of paper. That's is why *book*, not *a book*, is chosen in (6b). That suggests that nouns are not predestined to be countable or uncountable. Whether they are countable or uncountable does not have to do with nouns themselves, but rather with how people treat them.

Consider the following.

- (7) a. I eat *an apple* every morning.
 b. There is some *apple* in the salad.

Apple is generally countable. We say an apple, two apples, three apples, etc. Apples generally exist in the form of separate entities. This simply reflects the way we normally perceive apples. However, we can look at them from a different angle. *Apple* is considered as a mass in (7b). The apple in the salad is not *an apple*, but *apple*. The apple in the salad exists as a mass of apple. It has lost the status of individuality. We do not see *an apple* in the salad. What we have in the salad is a mass of apple. The apple in the salad does not have its normal shape. The material remains there. This example also supports the idea that nouns are not predetermined to be countable or uncountable. The users

8) In the examples below, *book* and *cat* are treated as a mass. That is why they do not accept the indefinite article.

- (i). The termite was living on a diet of *book*.
 (ii). There was *cat* all over the driveway. (Huddleston *et al.*, 2002, p. 337)

of nouns treat them as countable or uncountable.

In this sense, nouns are neutral before the users determine their status. *Church* is used as an uncountable noun in (8A), whereas as a countable noun in (8B).

- (8) A: Do you go to *church*?
 B: No. But I go to *a church* to repair the roof.

Church in (8A) does not indicate a church as a building. It refers to Christian religious activities. They indicate the general notion of worshipping God. That is why the speaker A has decided to use it as an uncountable noun. However, *a church* is a church building in (8B). It is one of many separate buildings. That is why the speaker B treats it as an individual entity. So it has gained the indefinite article. Whether it is countable or uncountable is not an innate part of *church*. Much of it depends on the users⁹.

Lunch is generally accepted as an uncountable noun as in (9a). In that case, *lunch* means a mass of lunch. Like other nouns, *lunch* does not necessarily stay fixed in that state only.

- (9) a. I have *lunch* at 12.
 b. I packed *a lunch* for my daughter.

In (9b), *lunch* has gained an individual status. As a result, it takes the indefinite article. *A lunch* does not just indicate the mass of lunch. In addition, it denotes a pack of lunch as well. The fact that *a lunch* is equal to a pack of lunch is implied in the verb *packed*. Before lunch is packed, it stays as a mass. However, when it is packed, it turns into a bag of lunch. A bag of lunch exists as an independent entity, as

9) In the given example below, *school* and *a school* are treated differently.

'We have to have a talk. If I did decide to accept it, it would mean that you would have to leave *school* and all your friends. You would be living in a foreign country where you don't speak the language, and you would be going to *a strange school*.' (Sheldon, 1987, pp. 139-40)

opposed to other bags of lunch. That is how *lunch* switches into *a lunch*. Thus, it will be meaningless if we say nouns are innately either countable or uncountable. They stay neutral until they are determined to be either countable or uncountable by speakers.

Korean, which is the name of the language Korean people speak, is usually uncountable. Korean as the name of a language is unique in that there are no other names used to describe the language. So we do not need to distinguish between Korean and the other names. That is why Korean does not need the indefinite article in (10a).

- (10) a. She speaks good *Korean*.
 b. She speaks *a dialectal Korean*.

Korean, however, is treated as countable in (10b). In this case, the Korean is considered to have more than one peer: a dialectal Korean of Seoul, a dialectal Korean of Kyungsangdo, a dialectal Korean of Chollado, etc. The Korean that the person ('she') speaks is one of them. It is one of the many dialectal Koreans.

As in all the examples above, the status of nouns depends on how speakers perceive the situations. They are not predetermined. The notion of individuation is not an innate quality of nouns, but an additional feature, which is given to nouns by speakers. The indefinite article is used to say that nouns have been treated as an individual entity, not as a mass or an abstract idea.

3. Partitioning and reducing

3.1. Material partitioning

Materials do not exist as separate individuals as they are in nature. For example, *water*, *coffee*, *beer*, etc are materials. People do not see them as separate entities. For example, people regard the water in this bottle and the water in that bottle as the same water, as far as the mass is concerned. Water either in a bottle or in another bottle is not

different from each other. That is why water is usually treated as an uncountable noun in (11a). *Water* as a mass does not accept the indefinite article.

- (11) a. We cannot live a day without *water*.
b. Can I have *a water*?

A water in (11b) has been individualized. It refers to a glass of water. *A water* is a combination of water as a mass and the additional notion of individuation. Individualization is made possible by the use of containers. In this case, the container is a glass. A glass of water is an individual, as opposed to another glass of water or a third glass of water, etc.

Coffee and *tea*, which refer to the materials in (12a), go through the same process of individualization. In (12a), *coffee* and *tea* point to the materials, no matter what type of containers they are in. The speaker ('I') does not take into account whether *coffee* and *tea* are in a cup or not. The material aspect only is in focus.

- (12) a. I like *coffee* better than *tea*.
b. Two *coffees* and three *teas*, please.

Coffee and *tea* have acquired an individual status in (12b). That is why they come to accept the indefinite article. *Two coffees* refers to two cups of coffee, and *three teas* to three cups of tea. In a cafe or restaurant, customers or waiters do not always bother to say two cups of coffee or three cups of tea. *Two coffees* or *three teas* is enough to understand what they refer to. Their status of being individuals is marked by the use of their plural forms as well.

What catches our attention here is that in the expressions *two cups of coffee* and *three cups of tea*, *two cups* and *three cups* indicate that cups are individuals, but that coffee and tea remain the same as masses. When *two cups of coffee* is reduced to *two coffees*, and *three cups of tea* to *three teas*, *coffee* and *tea* come to take the plural marker

'-s' on the surface. However, the plural marker points to the container *cup* in terms of their underlying sense. To put it another way, *a coffee or two coffees*, etc. has two representations. One is that *a* or *two* refers to a cup or two cups. The other is that *coffees*, even if with the plural form, does not indicate more than one type of material, but more than one cup.

Beer indicates a mass and so it is uncountable in (13a).

- (13) a. I drink *beer* once a week.
b. How many *beers* would you like?

Beers denote bottles of beer and so it is countable in (13b). In a bar, everybody understands that beer is sold by the bottle. So to say *how many beers* is good enough to refer to how many bottles of beer. As in other cases, *bottles of beer* is reduced to *beers*. On the surface, *beers* has the plural form, but the plural form indicates the plurality of bottle since a bottle, two bottles, etc. are individuals.

We have seen that mass nouns are individualized when they go through the process of partitioning. For example, water, which is a mass in nature, can be put into a glass, another glass, or a third glass. The water in all these glasses is the same material. However, in the case of a glass of water, a second glass of water, or a third glass of water, each exists as a separate individual. That is a process of partitioning. The partitioned and so individualized material such as a glass of water, a cup of coffee, a bottle of beer is shortened to *a water*, *a coffee*, and *a beer*. The indefinite article in *a water*, *a coffee*, and *a beer* is short for *a glass of*, *a cup of*, *a bottle of*, respectively.

That way, *two glasses of water* turns to *two waters*, and *three cups of coffee* to *three coffees*. Noteworthy here is that when containers such as glass, cup, bottle are individuals, uncountable nouns are allowed to take the plural form when they are plural, as in *two coffees*, *three teas*, even though the plural form does not indicate that the masses are plural, but that the containers are plural.

3.2. Immaterial partitioning

Let's look into how immaterial nouns go through the process of partitioning¹⁰). Action nouns belong to this category.

Talk is a general idea of talking when it does not have the indefinite article, as in (14a). *Talk* in (14a) represents general talk. It has nothing to do with a specific event of talking. That is why it goes without the indefinite article.

- (14) a. *Talk* won't get anywhere.
 b. Can I have *a talk* with you after lunch.

A talk in (14b) is different from *talk* in (14a). *A talk* is an individual instance of talk. It denotes a particular talk between the speaker ('I') and the hearer ('you'). It is restricted to that particular event. The talk happens at a specific time and at a certain place. That is why it takes the indefinite article. Just as water is put into individual glasses and it becomes a water, 'talk' is separated into an individual time span in a sequence of time. This process produces, for example, a talk of yesterday, a talk of today, a talk of tomorrow, etc. Then each talk is *a talk*. *A talk* in (14b) is one of these events of talk.

Let's see how other action nouns refer to individual instances.

- (15) a. After lunch I took *a walk* yesterday.
 b. He gave the door *a push*.
 c. I gave the shop *a try*.

Walk, *push*, and *try* in (15) each refer to an individual instance. *A walk* is an instance of *my walking yesterday* in (15a), *a push* is restricted to the push which I gave the door at that specific time in (15b), and *a try* is confined to the try which I gave the shop at that specific place and time. They all have gone through the same process of partitioning as

10) According to the classification by Jespersen (1924: 198), mass words consists of material nouns, immaterial nouns, and nexus-substantives.

talk has in (14b).

We can understand without difficulty that *a walk* is short for *an act of walking*, *a push* for *an instance of pushing*, and *a try* for *an occasion of trying*. The indefinite article standing before action nouns indicates that the actions each are of an individual. However, the full partitioning expressions such as *an act of*, *an instance of*, *an occasion of* do not always go with action nouns. They are reduced and the indefinite article remains alone. The partitioning expressions can be understood even if they are left out in a given context. The reduction definitely contributes to communicative efficacy. The shorter, the more economical, the more effective,

A kiss refers to an act of kissing in (16). The kiss is an individual instance performed between the two particular people (*he* and *her*). The kiss does not refer to the general act of kissing. That is why the kiss has taken the indefinite article. *A kiss* is short for *an act of kissing*.

- (16) "Morning, darling." He gave her *a kiss*. They walked into the kitchen. "Sweetheart, would you do me a favor?"

(Sheldon, 1987, p. 42)

Disbelief, *pleasure*, *despair*, etc belong to abstract nouns. When they indicate a general state of the feelings, they are uncountable and so they do not take the indefinite article, as in (17).

- (17) a. He had listened in *disbelief*. (Sheldon, 1987, p. 80)
 b. Mary moaned with *pleasure*. "That feels wonderful."
 (Sheldon, 1987, p. 113)
 c. Mary looked around the messy room in *despair*. "Beth, how can you live like this?" (Sheldon, 1987, p. 96)

Abstract nouns as well are not locked up in that particular way only. In (18a), *relief* represents the general feeling of relief. However, in (18b), *relief* gains the quality of individuation.

- (18) a. He grinned in *relief*. (Sheldon, 1987, p. 72)
b. Florence Schiffer took *a deep relief*. "Mary, it's about you."..... "Well, thank God that's all it is." Florence Schiffer breathed *a sigh of relief*. "I thought they were going to lock you up." (Sheldon, 1987, pp. 48-9)

A deep relief is a deep breath of relief in (18b). The individuation is implied in the expression of *a sigh of relief*. *A sigh* indicates an instance of noisy breath. The reducing process turns *a deep sigh/breath of relief* to *a deep relief*.

Shame means a general feeling of shame in (19a) while *a shame* an event of pity in (19b). *A shame* has come out of the process of an *occasion of shame* to *a shame*. *A* in *a shame* indicates *an occasion of*.

- (19) a. Her divorce did not bring *shame* on her.
b. "He had a fatal heart attack this morning."
"That's *a shame*." (Sheldon, 1987, p. 123)

Warmth and *a warmth* are not the same in (20).

- (20) a. I love *warmth*, but I hate coldness.
b. She was a superb teacher, with an easy sense of humor and *a warmth* that made being around her *a pleasure*. (Sheldon. 1987, pp. 33-4)

Warmth is a general feeling in (20a), but *a warmth* is a particular type of warmth in (20b). *A warmth* represents a specific type of warmth which pleases people when they are around the woman ('she'). In addition, *a pleasure* denotes a pleasant event, not the general state of pleasure.

We have seen that abstract nouns, which generally indicate a general state, acquire an individual status through the process of partitioning. When the partitioning expressions undergo the reducing process, all the part units except for the indefinite article are taken off.

4. Three types of reduction

As seen earlier, almost all nouns are free to take the indefinite article when they have gone through the process of partitioning and reduction. Even so, it does not mean that all nouns can be pluralized even if they indicate individuals. Some nouns are allowed to take the indefinite article but not the plural '-s'.

4.1. A matter of how many

We have discussed how *a bottle of beer* is reduced to *a beer*, *two bottles of beer* to *two beers*, *a glass of water* to *a water*, and *three cups of tea* to *three teas*. This process consists of two steps. The first one is the partitioning step of changing *beer*, which is a mass, into *a bottle of beer*, and the second one is the step of reducing *a bottle of beer* to *a beer*. Partitioning is to individualize masses. Reducing is to make the length of partitioning expressions short, as in (21).

- (21)
- a. a bottle of beer : a beer,
 - b. two bottles of beer : two beers
 - c. a glass of water : a water
 - d. two glasses of water : two waters
 - e. a cup of tea : a tea
 - f. three cups of tea : three teas

A beer or *two beers* does not refer to a kind of beer or two different kinds of beer. They are a bottle of beer or two bottles of beer. This means that in this case, *a* or *-s* is the singularity or plurality of bottle, not *beer* itself. Likewise, *a water* or *two waters* does not mean a kind of water or two kinds of waters, but a glass of water or two glasses of water. In this case, what is singular or plural is the glass. *A tea* or *three teas* is the same as the other two.

A beer or *two beers* is an answer to how many bottles of beer, *a water* or *two waters* to how many glasses of water, and *a tea* or *three*

teas to how many cups of tea. *A beer, two beers, a tea, three teas, a water, two waters*, etc. has to do with how many bottles/cups/glasses, etc. The containers such as bottle, cup, glass are countable. People are perceived as having a strong interest in how many containers there are. The psychological setting allows mass nouns to take the plural form even if the partitioning expressions are reduced when they indicate plurality.

4.2. A matter of how often

Unlike *a beer/beers, a water/waters, a coffee/coffees*, action nouns do not tend to have the plural form when they indicate more than one action. The action nouns in (22) denote one individual act. That is why they are allowed to take the indefinite article.

- (22)¹¹⁾ a. After lunch I took *a walk* yesterday.
 b. He gave the door *a push*.
 c. I gave the shop *a try*.

The sentences in (23) show that action nouns do not tend to take the plural form. In this respect, they have a different pattern from mass nouns. This implies that people have a different psychological perception of action nouns. That is why the sentences in (22) are not considered to be correct.

- (23) a. *After lunch I took two *walks* yesterday.
 b. ?He gave the door *two pushes*.
 c. ?I gave the shop *two tries*.

When they are individuals, action nouns tend to be counted in terms of how often, instead of how many. This tendency is proven in (24). For example, we do not say, "**How many walks do you have a week?*".

11) The sentences in (22) are the same ones in (15).

Rather, the typical question is. "*How often do you have a walk a week?*"

- (24) a. After lunch I took *a walk* twice yesterday.
 b. He gave the door *a push* three times
 c. I gave the shop *a try* four times.

Even if *a walk*, *a push*, *a try*, etc. are individual acts, people do not say *two walks*, *two pushes*, *two tries* even when they indicate more than one event. People prefer them to be counted in terms of frequency. This tendency reflects their psychological setting. It is true that people see *a walk* and *another walk* as two separate entities. However, they do not think that the two individual acts are completely different from each other. Rather, they consider *another walk* as a repetition of *a walk*. This is because people see that actions, even though they are separate from each other, happen one after another at different times. One action is not so different from another. Rather, another action is considered to be a repetition of one action. That psychological setting leads people to choose *a walk twice* over *two walks*. Thus, action nouns generally tend to be counted in terms of not how many, but how often.

4.3. A matter of how much

As mentioned earlier, when *beer*, *water*, or *coffee* combines with containers such as *bottle*, *glass*, *cup*, they can afford to be counted in terms of how many. That way, we can produce *a beer*, *two beers*, *a water*, *two waters*, *a coffee*, *two coffees*. However, if they are partitioned and individualized by means of amount, they cannot be counted in the same way of how many. There are a variety of partitioning expressions which indicate amount¹². Consider the list in (25)

12) For information on the distribution of quantifiers, see Biber *et al.* (1999: 277-8). Different quantifiers show different distribution in terms of conversations, fictions, news, and academic writings.

- (25) a. a lot of beer : *two lots of beer
 b. an amount of beer : *two amounts of beer
 c. a great deal of water : *two great deals of water
 d. a number of books : *two numbers of books

A lot of, an amount of, a deal of, a number of, etc. do not follow the same pattern as *a bottle of, a cup of, a glass of*, etc. take. *A bottle of, a cup of, a glass of*, etc. have their corresponding plural forms such as *two bottles, two cups of, two glasses of*, respectively. However, *a lot of* does not allow the corresponding plural form *two lots of*. *An amount of* is possible while *two amounts of* is not, *A great deal of* is acceptable while *two great deals of* is not. *A number of* is correct while *two numbers of* is not.

What is different between the category of *a bottle of* and the category of *an amount of*? A bottle has its peers such as a second bottle, a third bottle, a fourth bottle, and so on. The containers exist as separate individuals. However, an amount does not have its separate peers. Instead, an amount can vary in terms of size. An amount can be large or small. It is possible to say a large amount of something or a small amount of something, but an amount of something is not classified by the phrases 'how many' or 'how often', but by 'how much.' That is why we do not allow *two lots of beer, two amounts of beer, two great deals of water, two number of books*.

Now we have to return to the issues raised at the beginning. The sentences in (26) are correct while the sentences in (27) are not¹³. *Regard* and *knowledge* allow the indefinite article but they do not allow the plural form, as in (27).

- (26) a. I have *a high regard* for them.
 b. Jill has *a good knowledge* of Greek.

13) The sentences in (27, 27) are the same ones as in (1, 2).

- (27) a. *I have *high regards* for them.
 b. *Jill has *good knowledges* of Greek.

A *high regard* is a short form of 'a high amount of regard'. Before it is reduced to a *high regard*, the full partitioning expression is *a high amount of regard*.¹⁴⁾ Just as *a bottle of beer* is shortened to *a beer*, *a high amount of regard* is transformed into *a high regard*. The difference is that even though we can create *two bottles of beer*, we cannot make *two high amounts of regard*. Just as *two high amounts of regard* is not possible, *two high regards* is not possible, either. That is why (27a) is not acceptable. To put it another way, (26a) is not an answer to "**How many regards do you have for them?*" Rather, it has to do with, "*How much regard do you have for them?*"

It is true that *a high regard* is an individual, marked by the use of the indefinite article, but it has a strong tendency to be counted in terms of how much. That is why it does not allow its plural forms. (26b) as well is not an answer to **how many knowledges Jill has of Greek*. Insead, it is to do with *how much Jill knows Greek?*

We can apply the same approach to the following sentences.

- (28) a. We need a secretary with *a knowledge* of English.
 b. You've been *a great help*.
 c. I need *a good sleep*.

Sentences in (28) are correct. The indefinite article is acceptably applied to *knowledge*, *help*, and *sleep*. The indefinite article before the nouns plays a partitive role. *A knowledge of English* stand for *a certain amount of knowledge of English* in (28a). *A certain amount of knowledge of English* goes through the reducing process to become *a knowledge of English*. *A great help* is a short form of *a great amount*

14) The reviewer of this paper suggests that *a high regard* can be short for *a high quality of regard* as well as *a high amount of regard*. In my opinion, it does not matter whether it is quality or amount, because quality and amount have much in common in that they can be measured in terms of how much, not in terms of how many or how often.

of *help* in (28b). *A good sleep* represents *a good amount of sleep* in (28c). The indefinite article in the reduced forms stands in for *a certain/great amount of*.

Knowledge, *help*, and *sleep* are not allowed to be pluralized, as in (29).

- (29) a. *We need a secretary with *knowledges* of English.
 b. *You've been *great helps*.
 c. *I need *good sleeps*.

The reason for their unacceptability is the same as in (27). The sentences in (28) do not indicate how many *knowledges/helps/sleeps*, but how much *knowledge/help/sleep*. That is why the sentences are not acceptable in (29) They tend to be counted in terms of how much. There is nothing wrong with *a certain amount of knowledge of English*. However, *(two) certain amounts of knowledge of English* is impossible. That impossibility makes *knowledges of English* unacceptable. The unacceptability of *great helps* and *good sleeps* comes from the fact we cannot say *(two) great amounts of help* and *good amounts of sleep*.

5. Conclusion

It has been conventionally accepted that nouns are either countable or uncountable, and that they are reclassified one way or another. However, it is suggested in this paper that the countability is not an innate quality of nouns. They stay neutral before their status is determined. The process of partitioning and reducing is involved in the crossover. As a result, the indefinite article which indicates a partitive role is a short form of part units.

Even if nouns are allowed to take the indefinite article, it does not fully guarantee that they can be freely pluralized. This situation makes us treat mass nouns, action nouns and others differently. Mass nouns can accept the indefinite article or the plural form when they are counted in terms of how many.

Action nouns can take the indefinite article when they are regarded to be an individual instance. However, they do not generally tend to be counted in terms of how many. This tendency does not allow the plural form. Instead, they are quantified in terms of frequency. This is because people perceive actions happening one after another at different times. Actions which happen at different times are treated as repeated actions, though they are different entities. This psychological setting leads action nouns to be counted on the basis of how often.

Nouns such as *knowledge*, *regard*, *sleep*, *help*, etc. are allowed to take the indefinite article when they are considered to be individuals. But they do not usually take the plural form. This is because *a knowledge*, *a regard*, *a sleep*, or *a help* is a short form of *a certain amount of knowledge*, *a certain amount of regard*, etc. An amount is measured in terms of how much. An amount can be large or small. But it is not counted in terms of how many. This is the reason why this class of nouns is not pluralized.

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