

COUNTABLE, UNCOUNTABLE AND COLLECTIVE NOUNS IN THE
EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH – AN OVERVIEW

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1. Introduction

The inflectional pattern of nouns in Early and Late Modern English is almost identical with today's. One interesting exception is the treatment of abstract and mass nouns which in Present-Day English have no plural form and are considered indivisible. In Early Modern English they were regularly used in the plural (Schlauch 1959: 95) and in the course of Late Modern English they seem to have been systematically reclassified (Denison 1998: 96). The paper provides a synchronic analysis of selected countable, uncountable and collective nouns in the early eighteenth century English. The study is based on a corpus comprising five language registers: newspaper articles, letters, plays, novels and military documents. It outlines the overall tendencies in the treatment of certain nouns as countable, uncountable and collective in the corpus, as well as points out the discrepancies in their usage in different language registers. The study forms a part of my research into the development of countable and uncountable nouns in New English.

1.1 The corpus

The corpus consists of texts which both resemble and complement one another in terms of their range of vocabulary. The military documents differ from the rest in the choice of lexis, which makes them difficult to compare with the other texts, however, they also contribute to the completeness of the language picture, by indicating possible register-based differences.

The corpus materials are:

- *Moll Flanders* (1722) by Daniel Defoe,
- *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700) by William Congreve,
- *The Spectator* (1711-1712, vol. I and II),
- *The Guardian* (1713, vol. I and II),
- battle accounts (1690-1712),
- letters published in *The Guardian* (vol. I and II),
- letters published in *The Spectator* (vol. I-IV).

2. Classification of nouns – the criteria

2.1 Countable versus uncountable nouns

The category of countable nouns comprises all the nouns which show plural marking (both regular, such as *book-books*, and irregular *child-children*) as well as a group of unmarked plurals (*sheep, deer*) which nevertheless behave syntactically like the former. Uncountable nouns semantically refer to an undifferentiated mass, they have no number marking and always take singular verbs. Singular countable nouns require a determiner to form a grammatical NP, whereas uncountable nouns do not (Denison 1998: 96), e.g.:

countable: **Book* is cheap.
 uncountable: *Bread* is cheap.

Countable unmarked plurals behave similarly in this respect, e.g.:

countable: A *sheep* is grazing in the field.
 uncountable: **A furniture* is expensive.

The use of articles with nouns seems to be an applicable criterion in the analysis of their countability in the eighteenth century, as the usage did not differ remarkably from that of Present-Day English. One difference is, according to Rissanen (1999: 191), that abstract nouns were used without an article more often than today, particularly when the marking of (in)definiteness or reference was of little importance. Rissanen quotes an example from the Helsinki Corpus:

‘Nay sweete Hodge say *truth*, and do not me begile.’
 ([HC] *Gammer Gurton* V.ii)

Uncountable and countable nouns also differ in the choice of indicators of quantity, *much* and *many*. *Much* is used with the singular of mass nouns (*much sugar*), whereas *many* is used with the plural of countable nouns (*many dogs*). This modern distributional pattern was already well established in the eighteenth century (Marckwardt 1970: 52). Strang (1974: 139) maintains that the eigh-

teenth century is a period when *a great deal of* started to be used exclusively with mass nouns. Other indicators of quantity used with uncountable nouns are *the amount of* and *little*, in the cases where countable nouns take *the number of*, *several*, *few*.

The category of uncountable nouns corresponds largely with the category of *singularia tantum* as employed by Graband (1965). He includes in this group all the nouns, which have no plural form. Graband divides such nouns into *konkreta* which include such nouns as *money, honey, milk, garlic, mint, sugar, wheat, rye*, etc., and *abstrakta* consisting of *youth, music, beauty*, etc. The only point of discord between the two classifications is the treatment of *news*, which, according to Graband, belongs to the group called *pluralia tantum* on the grounds of the ‘-s’ ending. *News* behaves syntactically like *abstrakta* and is semantically close to it, therefore it is discussed alongside this category in the present study. Some nouns may be used in either mass or countable sense, for example:

countable: Have one of these *cakes*.
 uncountable: Have a piece of my birthday *cake*.

In this case the distinction is to some extent based on semantic grounds: a big *cake* which can be divided into portions functions as a mass noun, whereas a small *cake* – an indivisible unit – functions as a countable noun. English has for a long time displayed the tendency to allow mass nouns to be used as countables, meaning ‘a portion of’, ‘a variety of’ or ‘an instance of’ (Denison 1998: 98). Such a situation often occurs as regards nouns referring to food or other commodity, such as ‘a variety of’ or ‘a portion of’:

‘What *breads/coffees/flours/milks* can you get in the local supermarket?’
 ‘I’ll have two teas, please.’

In Present-Day English abstract nouns can be used with an indefinite article when a particular event or state is in focus. Rissanen (1999: 192) claims that this kind of usage was also acceptable in New English. One of his examples from Helsinki Corpus is:

‘I would never have any one eat but what he likes and when he has *an appetite*’
 ([HC] Locke 46)

2.2 Collective nouns

Collective nouns (also called group nouns) describe a set or group of people, animals or things, for example a *flock* (of sheep), a *team* (of players). Collective nouns can be both singular and plural. The difference between collective nouns and other countable nouns is that after a singular group noun (especially in Brit-

ish English) there is often a choice between a singular and plural verb, for example:

‘The *crowd* was/were delighted by the actor’s performance.’
(Leech 1989: 167-8)

Other nouns of this kind in Present-Day English include *army*, *audience*, *government*, *committee*, etc.

3. Countable, uncountable and collective nouns in New English

Most language historians tend to omit the aspect of countability or treat it marginally in their works on morphological and syntactic behaviour of nouns in New English. Schlauch (1959: 95) states that abstract and mass nouns which in Present-Day English have no plural form and are considered indivisible, were used regularly in the plural in Early New English, for example in Shakespeare. Some of the examples she gives are:

‘We’ll make our *leisures* to attend on yours’ (*Merchant of Venice*, I i)
‘your better *wisdoms*’ (*Hamlet*, I ii)

Denison (1998: 96), who studied the usage of countable and uncountable nouns in the nineteenth century, claims that some nouns seem to have been subject to a systematic process of change from uncountable to countable in the period. The example he analyses is *acquaintance*, whose countable variant gained popularity in the course of the nineteenth century. Denison admits, however, that full evidence for this change is not available. I am not aware of the existence of any comprehensive study of countable and uncountable nouns in the eighteenth century.

Collective nouns have received far more attention from language historians. Wright (1924), Ekwall (1975) and Wełna (1998) devote large sections of their works to unmarked plurals and group nouns in New English. The only historically true unmarked plurals in the period are *deer*, *sheep* and *swine*, however, other nouns used collectively are often treated as plurals. Ekwall (1975: 91) claims that unchanged plural gained ground considerably throughout the period. Names of animals such as *fish*, *fowl*, *salmon* were often unchanged in the plural. Names of weapons and projectiles, like *cannon* or *cartridge*, were also treated collectively, and so were names of materials (*brick*, *pearl*) and measure, weight, time and price expressions.

4. Countable, uncountable, collective: the overall tendencies in the corpus

4.1 Countable nouns in the corpus

The majority of countable nouns can be easily distinguished in the texts: they are common nouns, which have both singular and plural forms. In the singular they require a determiner to form an NP, and in the plural they are used with numerals or indicators of quantity, such as *many*, *several*, *few*, *a number of*. Such nouns in the corpus include *man-men*, *hour-hours*, *day-days*, *thing-things*, *ditch-ditches*, *child-children*, *father-fathers*, *addition-additions*, and many others. The examples are:

- (1) ‘... that he wondered to see so *many men* of Sense so very serious upon Fooleries.’ (*The Spectator*, vol. I, 126 Addison)
- (2) ‘I found ... *several other things* of value.’ (*Moll Flanders* 226)
- (3) ‘... he could not bring his own field-pieces to bear against them on account of *many ditches* and other impediments...’
(The Battle of Blenheim 5)
- (4) ‘There are Fathers that have *many Children*, and there are Children that have *Many Fathers*...’ (*Love for Love* 296)
- (5) ‘A very sumptuous *Table*, agreeable Company, and kind Reception were but so *many* importunate *Additions* to the Torment I was in.’
(*The Spectator*, vol. I, 179 an anonymous letter)

However, some abstract nouns, treated in Present-Day English as uncountable, are used as countables in my corpus. These include *applause* and *understanding* (knowledge). The corpus examples are:

- (6) ‘... a British audience may vie with the Roman theatre in a virtue of their *applauses*.’ (*The Guardian*, vol. I, 253)
- (7) ‘... to polish our *Understandings* and neglect our Manners is of all things the most inexcusable.’ (*The Spectator*, vol. I, 25)

4.2 Uncountable nouns – *konkreta*

Uncountable *konkreta* include names of liquids, substances, materials, and other concrete objects. Some examples from the corpus are *gold*, *lace*, *baggage*, *timber*, *money*, and *furniture*. They are invariably treated as uncountable in the corpus.

4.2.1 The names of substances, materials include:

- (8) ‘... the sort of people ... are seldom troubled with *much gold* in their pockets, as I see you are.’
(*Moll Flanders* 298)
- (9) ‘... they made a barricade with waggons and with pieces of *timber* laid across to cover their retreat ...’
(The Battle of Blenheim 5)

4.2.2 Concrete things referring to an undifferentiated mass comprise:

Baggage

- (10) ‘... Indians were laden with the *baggage* of the Spaniards ...’
(*The Guardian*, vol. I 31-32)
- (11) ‘All the *baggage* was sent back to Riedlingen ...’
(The Battle of Blenheim 3)

Money

- (12) ‘He’s reckoning his Money – my *Money it was*.’
(*The Way of the World* 323)

Furniture

- (13) ‘My governess ... came down herself to the ship, bringing me, in the first place, a sea-bed, as they call it, and all its *furniture*...’
(*Moll Flanders* 339)
- (14) ‘The Lady seemed to set an unspeakable Value upon these several *Pieces of Furniture*.’ (*The Spectator*, vol. I, 13)

4.3 *Abstrakta*

This group comprises names of abstract ideas, represented in the corpus by: *courage, time, glory, justice, zeal, mercy, capacity* and many others. *News* will be considered here as well though it does not belong to Graband’s category of *abstrakta* (cf. 2.1)

Courage

- (15) ‘... The Elector of Bavaria was seen riding up and down, and inspiring his men also with fresh *courage*’. (The Battle of Blenheim 8)

Time

- (16) ‘... I had so *much time* given me for reflection upon what was past ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 305)

- (17) ‘... such Tricks in Writing as required *much Time* and *little Capacity*.’
(*The Spectator*, vol. I, 223 Addison)

Mercy

- (18) ‘... I doubt you will find but *little mercy*.’ (*Moll Flanders* 310)

Justice

- (19) ‘... he told his story with a *great deal of justice* and moderation...’
(*Moll Flanders* 296)

News

- (20) ‘... my country customers ... will, perhaps, look upon it as a strange piece of news.’
(*The Guardian* 304)
- (21) ‘Well, I’ll tell you *News* ...’
(*Love for Love* 214)
- (22) ‘Merciful, no *News of Foible* yet?’
(*The Way of the World* 347)

4.4 *Uncountables* treated as countables.

Some uncountable nouns in the corpus are treated as countable with the meaning ‘a variety of’ or ‘a kind of’, ‘an instance of’, for example:

Wine

Whenever *wine* refers to the type of drink in general, it is treated as a uncountable noun, when a particular kind of wine is discussed, then it is countable.

uncountable:

- (23) ‘... a Fellow who has been laying out his Money, ever since he was born, for the meer Pleasure of *Wine*, has bethought himself of joining Profit and Pleasure together.’
(*The Spectator*, vol. IV, 53 a letter signed Roger de Coverley)

countable:

- (24) ‘... no Steward’s Table can be without it, that it strengthens Digestion, excludes Surfeits, Fevers, and Physick, which Green *Wines* of any kind can’t do.’ (*The Spectator*, vol. IV, 53 letter signed Roger de Coverley)

Beauty

Beauty is used in the abstract sense as a uncountable noun:

- (25) ‘... if a young woman have *beauty*, birth, breeding, wit ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 21)

Its countable variant is employed when it means a beautiful woman or thing:

- (26) ‘... *Beauties* who have Charms enough to do and say what would be dis-obliging in any others but themselves.’ (*The Spectator*, vol. II, 24 Steele)
- (27) ‘... the whole Dress has a thousand *Beauties* in it, which I would not have as yet made too publick.’
(*The Spectator*, vol. IV, 98 a letter signed Teraminta)

Youth

Youth is used as an uncountable noun to mean the time in a person’s life:

- (28) ‘When Life itself is a Feaver, as it is licentious *Youth* ...’
(*The Spectator*, vol. II, 258 Steele)

However, when it refers to a young person, or a particular group of young people, it is treated as countable:

- (29) ‘... she has all the Devotion paid to her by a Crowd of *Youths* who are un-acquainted with the Sex ...’
(*The Spectator*, vol. IV, 68 an anonymous letter)

Hair

Hair is uncountable when it refers to all the hair on a person’s head:

- (30) ‘They let the *Hair* of their Heads grow to a great Length ...’
(*The Spectator*, vol. I, 187 Addison)

and countable when it refers to individual hairs:

- (31) ‘... the good man that had one Wife who took a Dislike to his grey *Hairs*, and another to his black, till by their picking out of what each of them had an Aversion to, they left his Head altogether bald and naked.’
(*The Spectator*, vol. I, 126 Addison)

Imagination

The uncountable variant is preferred when *imagination* is used in a general, abstract sense, whereas the countable one dominates in expressions referring to the imagination of particular people. Such distinction is observed in all the texts where the noun is to be found.

- (32) ‘*Imagination* and reason should go hand in hand.’
(*The Guardian*, vol. I, 167)
- (33) ‘Why Faith, I have a good lively *Imagination* ...’ (*Love for Love* 261)

4.5 Collective nouns

Collective nouns seem to be typical for military language in my corpus, as most of the examples of this kind come from battle accounts or references to battles in newspapers and letters, both in literal and metaphorical sense. The non-military group nouns include *audience*, *mankind*, *public*, *youth* and *world* (with reference to people). The corpus examples are:

- (34) ‘... a British *audience* may vie with the Roman theatre in a virtue of *their* applauses.’ (*The Guardian*, vol. I, 253)
- (35) ‘This inclination of the *Audience* to sing along with the Actors, so prevails with *them*...’ (*The Spectator*, vol. I, p. 115)
- (36) ‘... *mankind* are no less in proportion, accountable for the ill use of their dominion over creatures of the lower rank of beings...’
(*The Guardian*, vol. I, 260, an anonymous letter)
- (37) ‘For the *publick* always reap greater advantage from the example of successful merit...’ (*The Guardian*, vol. I, IV)
- (38) ‘He has made the *world* merry, and I hope *they* will make him easy so long as he stays among us.’ (*The Guardian*, vol. I, 291)
- (39) ‘...Funeral of those Athenian young Men who perished in the Samian Expedition ... That the Loss which the Commonwealth suffered by the Destruction of his *Youth* ...’
(*The Spectator* vol. IV, 218 an anonymous letter)

4.5.1 Collective nouns in military documents

Horse

Horse is used collectively in the majority of cases in my military documents (15 occurrences in this sense out of a total of 21) and once in the letters published in *The Spectator*. *Horse* is used collectively when

- (a) it refers to the whole military unit:
- (40) ‘The *horse* and dragoons were obliged to charge four or five times.’
(The Battle of Blenheim, Marlborough 1)
- (41) ‘Our general the next Day sent a Party of *Horse* to reconnoitre them from a little Hauteur...’ (*The Spectator* vol. II, 305 an anonymous letter)
- or
- (b) to soldiers on horses:

- (42) 'About forty *horse* came down from the town, which was all...'
(Storming the Gibraltar 1)

Horse is used as a regular plural when it refers to individual animals or a certain group of animals, not the whole cavalry:

- (43) '... they all ran away killing nothing but one of our dragoon's *horses*.'
(The Battle of the Boyne 1)
- (44) 'They battered to such a degree that a coach and *horses* might have gone through in several places.' (Schellenberg 1)

Enemy

Enemy is used collectively throughout the military documents (81 occurrences), it also appears in this sense in *The Spectator* (10 such occurrences out of 43). It is used with verbs in the plural or as an antecedent of the personal adjective *their* or *them*. There is one instance in the corpus where the personal adjective referring to the *enemy* is *his*:

- (45) '... our whole attention was fixed on the *enemy* and *his* movements...'
(Schellenberg 1)
- (46) 'About eleven at night an express arrived from his Highness that the *enemy* were marching directly towards him.' (The Battle of Blenheim 1)
- (47) 'At last *the enemy* ... were obliged to relax *their* hold.' (Schellenberg 1)

Enemy is used collectively also in *The Spectator* (10 such cases out of 43).

literally:

- (48) 'When the Romans were pressed with a foreign *Enemy*, the Ladies voluntarily contributed all their Rings and Jewels to assist the Government...'
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 6 Addison)

or in 'military metaphors':

- (49) 'Whether or not the Ladies retreated hither in order to rally their Forces I cannot tell; but the next Night they came in so great a Body to the Opera, that they outnumbered the *Enemy*.'
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 5 Addison)

Cannon

It occurs 15 times in battle accounts and once in *The Spectator*, always as a collective noun in the singular:

- (50) 'They likewise brought forward their *cannon*, and planted several batteries along the hill ...'
(The Battle of Blenheim 4)
- (51) '... The Duke of Marlborough ... caused a battery of *cannon* to be brought forward ...'
(The Battle of Blenheim 7)
- (52) '... at the first firing of our dragoons and three pieces of *cannon* that marched with us, they all ran away...'
(The Battle of the Boyne 1)

Artillery

There are 4 occurrences of *artillery* in the documents, all used collectively.

- (53) '... his Grace immediately sent orders to Gen. Churchill to march as soon as it was light with the twenty battalions and the train of *artillery* ...'
(The Battle of Blenheim 2)

Infantry

Infantry appears 20 times in the documents, always collectively.

- (54) 'The battalion of English Guards and Rowe's brigade of *infantry* were commanded to file off to the left of all ...'
(The Battle of Blenheim 2)
- (55) 'I ... became aware of several lines of *infantry* in greyish white uniforms on our left flank.'
(Schellenberg 2)

Foot

Foot is used collectively when it refers to a group of soldiers (infantry). There are 15 such occurrences in my military documents.

- (56) '... the right wing, consisting of twenty-four squadrons of horse and dragoons and six regiments of *foot*.'
(The Battle of the Boyne 1)
- (57) 'His Grace ordered General Churchill to draw up the two lines of *foot* ...'
(The Battle of Blenheim 5)

Sword

Sword is used 3 times collectively in the battle accounts (4 being the total) meaning the kind of weapon in general:

- (58) '... the English squadrons charged up to them *sword* in hand ...'
(The Battle of Blenheim 6)

The regular plural form is also possible in a similar context, but here the attention is drawn not so much to the kind of weapon but the actual swords held by the soldiers:

- (59) '... the rest, screwing their *swords* into their muskets, received the charge ...'
(The Battle of the Boyne 1)

5. Nouns which display variation in their usage

There are some nouns in the corpus which cannot be classified in a clear-cut way, most likely because their usage was in the process of change. They include *accommodation*, *acquaintance*, *advice*, *assistance*, *damage*, *entertainment*, *evidence*, *fish*, *fruit*, *information* and *mischievous*.

5.1 Accommodation

Accommodation is used in two senses in the corpus, (a) the settling of a disagreement (b) a place to live or work.

5.1.1 *Accommodation* meaning the settling of a disagreement is clearly countable wherever it occurs in the corpus. It is used with the indefinite article 'an' or with the plural marker '-s'. It appears in this form in *Moll Flanders* (3x), *The Spectator* (1x), and a letter from one of the readers published in *The Spectator* (1x).

- (60) '... he brought my attorney to this, that he promised he would not blow the coals, if I inclined to *an accommodation*, he would not hinder me, and that he would rather persuade me to peace than to war ...'
(*Moll Flanders* 273)
- (61) 'At last, in order to *an Accommodation*, they agreed upon this Preliminary; That each of them should immediately dismiss his Privy-Counsellor.'
(*The Spectator*, vol. I, 207 Addison)
- (62) 'I ... should be glad, if it might lie in my Power, to effect *an amicable Accommodation* betwixt two faces of such different Extremes, as the only possible Expedient, to mend the Breed, and rectifie the Physiognomy of the Family on both Sides.'
(*The Spectator*, vol. I, 194 a letter signed Hugh Goblin)

5.1.2 *Accommodation* meaning a place to live or work shows variation in usage. It is used as a uncountable as well as countable noun, the ratio being 5:6 in the corpus as a whole. The usage of *accommodation* in *The Spectator* illustrates this balance well, as it contains 1 occurrence of *accommodation* as a countable noun and 1 as a uncountable noun. *Moll Flanders* has 4 uncountable examples out of the total 7. In *The Guardian*, *accommodation* is always countable (2 occur-

rences). In the other texts *accommodation* is not used. My figures may imply that there was a choice between the countable and uncountable version in the period under discussion. The preference for the countable treatment of *accommodation* in *The Guardian* may be idiosyncratic to the editor of the newspaper, who seems to be the author of all the texts (Nestor Ironside, Esq.). The tendencies in the usage of *accommodation* may be illustrated by the table:

Table 1 *Accommodation*

Source	Number of occurrences	Countable	Uncountable
<i>The Spectator</i> 1711	2	1	1
<i>The Guardian</i> 1713	2	2	—
<i>Moll Flanders</i> 1722	7	3	4
Letters 1711-1713	—	—	—
Battle accounts 1690-1712	—	—	—
Plays 1695, 1700	—	—	—
Total	11	6	5

5.1.2.1 The uncountable instances of *accommodation* in the corpus are as follows:

- (63) '... I made no doubt but there would be very good inns and *accommodation* enough; ...'
(*Moll Flanders* 158)
- (64) 'Our Reckonings, Apartments, and Accommodation, fell under Ephraim ...'
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 183)

5.1.2.2 The countable instances are:

- (65) '... I did not doubt but her *accommodations* were good.'
(*Moll Flanders* 180)
- (66) 'The humour so prevailed among the virtuous of this reign, that they were actually making parties to go up to the moon together, and were more put to it in their thoughts how to meet with *accommodations* by the way, that how to get thither.'
(*The Guardian*, vol. II, 150)
- (67) '... the better the Host was, the worse generally were his *Accommodations* ...'
(*The Spectator*, vol. II, 163)

5.2 Acquaintance

Acquaintance occurs in all the texts in the corpus except the military documents. It is used in the sense of (1) a person or people whom one knows, (2) knowledge obtained through personal experience.

5.2.1 *Acquaintance* designating a person or persons whom one knows displays a slight variation in its usage. The plural form *acquaintances* appears only once in the corpus, in *Moll Flanders*, whereas the singular form occurs 43 times, both with reference to one person (7x) and to a group of people (36x). The only plural occurrence is:

- (68) ‘... though my new *acquaintances* knew nothing of me, yet I soon got a great deal of company about me ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 69)

Moll Flanders is chronologically the latest of the texts under analysis (1722), which may suggest that the use of *acquaintance* with the plural marker portends the beginning of a new usage, although the occurrence of only one such form is not sufficient to allow any conclusive statements.

If we apply the modern criteria in the classification of all the singular occurrences of *acquaintance*, it seems most likely that it is used collectively or treated as an unmarked plural (analogously to the already discussed *horse* or *enemy*). When *acquaintance* refers to one person in the corpus, it takes an indefinite article, and when it refers to a group of people it is often preceded by such indicators of quantity as *few* or *many*, which excludes it from the category of uncountable nouns. All the occurrences of *acquaintance* in this sense in the corpus can be summarised as follows:

Table 2 *Acquaintance*

Source	Number of occurrences	Singular referring to 1 person	Singular used collectively	Plural
<i>The Spectator</i> 1711	17	3	14	—
<i>The Guardian</i> 1713	10	1	9	—
<i>Moll Flanders</i> 1722	11	2	8	1
Letters 1711-1713	—	—	—	—
Plays 1695, 1700	6	1	5	—
Battle accounts 1690-1712	—	—	—	—
Total	44	7	36	1

5.2.1.1 The occurrences of *acquaintance* referring to one person are:

- (69) ‘She gave me the like cue to the next house, naming another name that was also an *acquaintance* of the gentlewoman of the house.’
(*Moll Flanders* 224)
- (70) ‘I am Truth and hate an Old *Acquaintance* with a new Face.’
(*Love for Love* 279)
- (71) ‘He ... pretends to be an intimate *acquaintance* of Tim Tuck.’
(*The Guardian* vol. II, 102)
- (72) ‘... he was met very luckily by an *Acquaintance*, who had the same Curiosity.’
(*The Spectator*, vol. I, 21 Addison)

5.2.1.2 *Acquaintance* referring to a group of people is used in the following way:

- (73) ‘He is with all his *acquaintance*.’ (*The Guardian* 54)
- (74) ‘... the next day being with *some of his* inns-of-court *acquaintance*, resolved ... to entertain *them*.’
(*The Guardian* vol. I, 173)
- (75) ‘All her *Acquaintance* congratulate her upon her Chance – Medley, and laugh at that premeditating Murderer her Sister.’
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 122 Steele)
- (76) ‘He generally found himself neglected by his new *Acquaintance*, as soon as they had Hopes of growing great ...’ (*The Spectator*, vol. I, 288 Steele)
- (77) ‘.. the woman ... lived always in town, having a good store of *acquaintance* ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 329)
- (78) ‘I was entirely without friends, nay, even so much as without *acquaintance* ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 115)
- (79) ‘... I can show you your own Picture, and *most of your Acquaintance* to the Life, and as like as at Kneller’s.’
(*Love for Love* 215)
- (80) ‘... To wear what I please, ... to have no obligation upon me to converse with Wits that I don’t like, because *they* are your *acquaintance* ...’
(*The Way of the World* 357)

5.2.2 *Acquaintance* used in the sense of knowledge of the world or skill occurs 2 times in the corpus, one example comes from *Moll Flanders* and the other one from *The Guardian*. It is uncountable in this context:

- (81) 'He had too much spirit to hold his tongue in company; but at the same time so *little acquaintance* with the world that he did not know how to talk like other people.' (*The Guardian* vol. I, 95)
- (82) '... I had now got into a little vein of work, and as I was not at a loss to handle my needle, it was very probable, as *acquaintance* came in, I might have got my bread honestly enough.' (*Moll Flanders* 221)

Acquaintance in the sense of familiarity (friendship) with people appears in all the texts (barring the military documents in which the word is not to be found at all). It is used 7 times as a countable and 9 times as an uncountable noun. The context does not seem to play a significant role in determining if the noun should be treated as countable or uncountable, which suggests that there might have been a relatively free choice between the two variants. The countable examples are mostly in the singular. The only plural cases (2x) are from *Moll Flanders*, which, when added to the use of *acquaintance* with the plural marker discussed above (section 4.2.1) might support the argument for the beginning of a new tendency in its usage.

Table 3 *Acquaintance* ('familiarity, friendship with people')

Source	Number of occurrences	Countable singular	Countable plural	Uncountable
<i>The Spectator</i> 1711	1	–	–	1
<i>The Guardian</i> 1713	3	2	–	1
<i>Moll Flanders</i> 1722	8	2	2	3
Letters 1711-1713	4	1	–	3
Plays 1695, 1700	1	–	–	1
Battle accounts 1690-1712	–	–	–	–
Sample total	16	5	2	9

Countable occurrences:

plural:

- (83) '... I found it was absolutely necessary not to revive former *acquaintances* ...' (*Moll Flanders* 115)
- (84) '... all the particular *acquaintances* a woman can expect to make ...' (*Moll Flanders* 116)

singular:

- (85) 'I had made *an acquaintance* with a very sober, good sort of woman ...' (*Moll Flanders* 71)
- (86) 'I contracted *an acquaintance* with a woman in whose house I lodged ...' (*Moll Flanders* 116)
- (87) 'She made *an acquaintance* with him ...' (*The Guardian* vol. I, 194)
- (88) '... he naturally falls into *an acquaintance* with those of his own city or country who chance to be in the same place.' (*The Guardian* vol. II, 163)
- (89) 'She ... received the Addresses of a Gentleman, whom, after a long and intimate *Acquaintance* she forsook ...' (*The Spectator* vol. I, 58 Addison)
- (90) 'I can't have met with a great number of 'em, nor indeed it is a desirable *Acquaintance* ...' (*The Spectator*, vol. III, 281 a letter signed Constantia Feild)

Uncountable occurrences:

- (91) 'Here I ... contracted *some unhappy acquaintance* ...' (*Moll Flanders* 115)
- (92) '... I had no particular *acquaintance* with any midwife ...' (*Moll Flanders* 176)
- (93) '... where I not only had no manner of business, but not so much as the least *acquaintance* with any person in the town or near it.' (*Moll Flanders* 195)
- (94) '... others ... by degrees took occasion to break off all *acquaintance*.' (*The Guardian* vol. I, 114)
- (95) '... people take Advantage of one another by this means, and break off *Acquaintance* ...' (*The Spectator*, vol. III, 152 a letter from Mary Meanwell)
- (96) 'I ... have contracted more *acquaintance* than it is suitable to my age.' (*The Guardian* vol. I, 243-4, a letter signed T.L.)
- (97) 'But I hope, after a time, I shall break my mind – that is, upon further *acquaintance* [with a woman].' (*The Way of the World* 371)

5.2.3 *Acquaintance* occurs also in such expressions as “the lady of my *acquaintance*” where it used as a fixed phrase and occurs with personal adjectives (my, your, his, her, our, their) which makes it irrelevant from the point of view of my classification.

5.3 *Advice*

Advice is used both as a countable (8x) and uncountable (15x) noun in the corpus. The overall tendency seems to be in favour of the uncountable variant, which is to be found in all the texts except the military documents. There are no countable examples in *Moll Flanders* and in the plays, there is only one in *The Guardian*, two in *The Spectator* and two in the military documents. The greatest number is used in the letters and even here the ratio of countable to uncountable forms is 3:5. There are 15 cases in the corpus of *advice* used with personal adjectives (‘my/your, etc. *advice*’), which are impossible to be analysed in terms of their countability, therefore they have to be disregarded in this study.

Table 4 *Advice*

Source	Number of occurrences	Countable	Uncountable
<i>The Spectator</i> 1711	6	2	4
<i>The Guardian</i> 1713	2	1	1
<i>Moll Flanders</i> 1722	4	–	4
Letters 1711-1713	8	3	5
Plays 1695, 1700	1	–	1
Battle accounts 1690-1712	2	2	–
Total	23	8	15

5.3.1 The instances of *advice* used as a countable noun are:

- (98) ‘They are most of them histories, or advices of publick transactions ...’
(The Guardian vol. I, 4)
- (99) ‘... I am glad to hear by my last Advices from Oxford, that there are a Set of Sighers in that University, who have erected themselves into a Society in Honour of that tender Passion.’ (The Spectator vol. I, 110 Steele)
- (100) ‘Brunetta could not endure these repeated Advices ...’
(The Spectator vol. I, 304)

- (101) ‘... tho’ our freshest Advices from London make no mention of any such Fashion ...’ (The Spectator, vol. III, 28 vol. a letter signed Jack Modish)
- (102) ‘... I would willingly give you a little good Advice ...’
(The Spectator, vol. IV, 11 a letter signed Lydia)
- (103) ‘... the Duke ... being in hourly expectation of receiving further advices from Prince Eugene of the motions of the enemy.’
(The Battle of Bleinheim 1)

5.3.2 The uncountable cases of *advice* are as follows:

- (104) ‘... it is a *piece of advice* that has a great many mortifications in it to me ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 40)
- (105) ‘... inclination to give good *advice*.’ (The Guardian vol. II, 67)
- (106) ‘... if she has stolen the Colour of her Ribbands from another, or had *Advice* about her Trimmings, I shall not allow her the Praise of Dress ...’
(The Spectator, vol. I, 18 Steele)
- (107) ‘... let these People know, that to give any Body *Advice*, is to say to that person I am your Betters.’
(The Spectator, vol. III, 127 a letter signed Susan Civil)
- (108) ‘...our Brother Tremble having lattely given thee wholsom *advice* concerning tuckers ...’
(The Guardian vol. II, 193, vol. II a letter signed Ruth Prim)
- (109) ‘... tis so dull to act always by *Advice*, and so tedious to be told of one’s faults ...’
(The Way of the World 344)

5.4 *Assistance*

Assistance occurs in two sources: *The Spectator* and *Moll Flanders* (21x). In 2 cases it is clearly countable and in 1 case clearly uncountable, in the remaining 18 cases it is used with personal adjectives in constructions such as ‘your/his *assistance*’, which makes them irrelevant for this study. The countable examples come solely from *The Spectator*. The two occurrences of the countable variant may signal the existence of two competing forms in usage, or simply the individual preference of the writer as both cases come from the article of Addison.

countable:

- (110) ‘There may be a proper Season for these several Terrors; and when they only come in as Aids and *Assistances* to the Poet, they are not only to be excused but to be applauded.’ (The Spectator vol. I, 161 Addison)

- (111) ‘... our Climate of it self, and without the *Assistances* of Art., can make no further Advances towards a Plumb than to a Sloe ...’
(*The Spectator*, vol. I, 262 Addison)

uncountable:

- (112) ‘... to qualify him to apply proper advice and *assistance* to me ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 316)

5.5 Damage

Damage is used 11 times in the corpus in the form which makes it possible to classify as countable or uncountable. In 5 cases it is clearly uncountable, in 1 clearly countable and in 5 cases it is used with the plural marker but behaves rather as a uncountable noun syntactically. It is used in this way in the context of law as the money ordered by the court to be paid for causing damage, as such it takes *much* as an indicator of quantity. The countable examples come exclusively from *The Guardian*, which may illustrate the individual preference of the editor or indicate a more general trend.

Table 5 *Damage*

Source	Number of occurrences	Uncountable damage	Uncountable damages (money)	Countable
<i>The Spectator</i> 1711	2	–	2	–
<i>The Guardian</i> 1713	2	–	1	1
<i>Moll Flanders</i> 1722	2	–	2	–
Letters 1711-1713	1	1	–	–
Plays 1695, 1700	2	2	–	–
Battle accounts 1690-1712	2	2	–	–
Total	11	5	5	1

5.5.1 Damages – money ordered by court to be paid for causing damage:

- (113) ‘... no court would give much *damages*, for the reputation of a person of such a character.’
(*Moll Flanders* 272)
- (114) ‘... he did not question but that a jury would give very considerable *damages* on such an occasion ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 273)

- (115) ‘... that might be pleaded in abatement of what *damages* a jury might be inclined to give.’
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 247)

- (116) ‘His head is full of Costs, *Damages*, and Ejectments.’
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 147 Addison)

5.5.2 The countable occurrence of *damage*:

- (117) ‘... it often happens that the choleric inflict disproportional punishments ... seek proper and adequate reparation for the *damages* that they have sustained.’
(*The Guardian*, vol. II, 174)

5.5.3 The uncountable examples are:

- (118) ‘... the British nation received more *damage* in their trade from the port of Dunkirk than from almost all the parts of France.’
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 172 an anonymous letter)

- (119) ‘... when the pieces of steel fall they do *great damage*.’
(*The Defense of Gibraltar* 2)

- (120) ‘O Madam, if you knew but what he promis’d me, and how he assur’d me your Ladyship shou’d come to no *damage*!’ (*The Way of the World* 389)

5.6 Entertainment

Entertainment occurs 25 times as a countable noun in the corpus, mostly with the plural marker, and only 3 times as an uncountable noun. It does not appear in *Moll Flanders*, the plays or the military documents. The countable variant was clearly favoured by all the writers of the newspaper articles and the letters.

Table 6 *Entertainment*

Source	Number of occurrences	Countable	Uncountable
<i>The Spectator</i> 1711	13	12	1
<i>The Guardian</i> 1713	8	8	–
<i>Moll Flanders</i> 1722	–	–	–
Letters 1711-1713	6	4	2
Plays 1695, 1700	1	1	–
Battle accounts 1690-1712	–	–	–
Total	27	25	3

5.6.1 The uncountable instances are:

(121) 'As Fortune was in his Power, he gave himself constant *Entertainment* in managing the mere Followers of it with the Treatment they deserved.'
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 289 Steele)

(122) '... it would be no unacceptable Piece of *Entertainment* to the Town ...'
(*The Spectator* vol. III, 199 an anonymous letter)

5.6.2 The countable examples include:

(123) 'I shall here communicate to the World a couple of Letters, which I believe will give the Reader as good an *Entertainment* as any that I am able to furnish him with.'
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 31 Addison)

(124) 'In the mean time, I have related this Combat of the Lion, to shew what are at present the reigning *Entertainments* of the Politer Part of Great Britain.'
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 52 Addison)

(125) 'The knight ... was in high humor at an *entertainment* with ladies ...'
(*The Guardian* vol. I, 70)

(126) 'Hence I regard our publick schools and universities ... as places designed to teach mankind the most refined luxury ... give it a taste for those *entertainments* which afford the highest transport without the grossness of remorse that attend vulgar enjoyments.'
(*The Guardian* vol. I, 269)

(128) '... I ... fear this Abuse of it may make my Parish ridiculous, who already look on the singing Psalms as an *Entertainment* ...'
(*The Spectator* vol. III, 140 a letter signed R. S.)

(129) '... thy shall have it sent home to thy House and make an *Entertainment* for all the Philomaths and students ...'
(*Love for Love* 225)

5.7 Evidence

Evidence is used 5 times as a countable in the corpus and 4 times as a uncountable noun. (The expressions which cannot be analysed in terms of their countability are left out). It occurs in *Moll Flanders* and *The Guardian*. The only uncountable instances come from *Moll Flanders*, which might result from the individual preference of the author (Daniel Defoe) or point to the emergence of a new trend in the usage, as it is the latest of all the texts in the corpus.

5.7.1 The countable instances of *evidence* are:

(130) '... and indeed this opinion is an *evidence* and clearness ...'
(*The Guardian* vol. I, 40)

(131) '... my husband desired to see this Mrs. Flanders that knew him so well, and was to be an *evidence* against him ...'
(*Moll Flanders* 325)

5.7.2 The uncountable cases of *evidence*:

(132) '... and they wanted *evidence* for some time to convict them.'
(*Moll Flanders* 324)

(133) 'He told me that they had no *evidence* against him ...'
(*Moll Flanders* 330)

5.8 Fish

Fish is too poorly evidenced in the corpus to allow any definite conclusions about its usage. It is used 6 times: 5x in *The Spectator* and 1x in the plays (*The Way of the World*). 2 instances are countable, 3 collective, 1 (figurative) uncountable. Such proportion may imply the preference for the collective treatment of the noun. The countable occurrences are:

(134) 'He ... stood upon the Banks of it some time to look upon an Angler that had taken a great many Shapes of *Fishes*, which lay flouncing up and down by him.'
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 210 Addison)

(135) '... Thou art both as drunk and mute as a *Fish*.'
(*The Way of the World* 378)

The collective instances:

(136) '... think of them no farther, as Insects and several Kinds of *Fish* ...'
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 138 Addison)

(137) '... the *Fish* betook themselves to the Streams ...'
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 240 Addison)

The uncountable (figurative) usage:

(138) '... his Son had sent him a Letter which was neither *Fish*, Flesh nor good red Herring.'
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 306 Addison)

5.9 *Fruit*

Fruit is used 9 times as a regular countable noun with singular/plural distinction and 6 times collectively. It does not occur in *Moll Flanders* and the military documents. The other texts differ in the treatment of *fruit*. It is always collective in the plays, perhaps because it used figuratively there, which may have some impact on its syntactic behaviour, although *The Spectator* contains *fruit* with a plural marker in an analogous expression. The rules for the usage of *fruit* seem to have been lax or at the time, though the proportion 9:6 may suggest the dominance of countable variant.

Table 7 *Fruit*

Source	Number of occurrences	Countable	Collective
The Spectator 1711	6	4	2
The Guardian 1713	4	4	–
Moll Flanders 1722	–	–	–
Letters 1711-1713	3	1	2
Plays 1695, 1700	2	–	2
Battle accounts 1690-1712	–	–	–
Total	15	9	6

5.9.1 Countable occurrences of *fruit*:

- (139) ‘... presents his mistress with oysters instead of *fruits* and flowers.’
(*The Guardian* vol. I, 114)
- (140) ‘... she gave him a delicious Repast of *Fruits*, and led him to a Stream to slake his Thirst.’
(*The Spectator* vol. I, 44 Steele)
- (141) ‘As the First *Fruits* of those Joys and Consolations which you may expect from the Life you are now engaged in.’
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 302 a letter signed Francis)

5.9.2 Instances of *fruit* treated collectively:

- (142) ‘I treated her with a basket of *Fruit* last Summer ...’
(*The Spectator* vol. III, 183 anonymous letter)
- (143) ‘... I’m none of those, none of your forc’d Trees, that pretend to Blossom in the Fall, and Bud when they should bring forth *Fruit*.’
(*Love for Love* 286)

- (144) ‘... when the Seamen are thrown upon any of the unknown Coasts of America, they never venture upon the *Fruit* of ant Tree ...’
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 142 Addison)
- (145) ‘Plants and vegetables are cultivated into the production of fine *Fruit* than they would yield without that Care ...’
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 273 Steele)

5.10 *Information*

Information is used as a uncountable noun 7 times in the corpus as compared with 4 instances of the countable variant. 3 of the four countable examples are from the letters, 1 from *The Guardian*. *The Guardian* and the letters each have 2 uncountable occurrences, *The Spectator*, *Moll Flanders* and the military documents each have 1. *Information* is not used in the plays. The uncountable form seems to have been favoured by most writers.

Table 9 *Information*

Source	Number of occurrences	Countable	Uncountable
<i>The Spectator</i> 1711	1	–	1
<i>The Guardian</i> 1713	3	1	2
<i>Moll Flanders</i> 1722	1	–	1
Letters 1711-1713	5	3	2
Plays 1695, 1700	–	–	–
Battle accounts 1690-1712	1	–	1
Total	11	4	7

5.10.1 The countable occurrences are as follows:

- (146) ‘Those who have a mind to give the state any private intelligence of what passes in the city ... convey into it a paper of such private *informations* as any way regard the interest or safety of the commonwealth.’
(*The Guardian* vol. I, 304)
- (147) ‘There were ... others who returned to us *informations* of people yet shorter than themselves.’
(*The Spectator* vol. II, 37 a letter signed Bob Short)

5.10.2 The uncountable instances were used in the following way:

(148) ‘... I received particular *information* in what places any of note among the besiegers, or the besieged, received any wound ...’

(*The Guardian* vol. I, 211)

(149) ‘A little inquiry furnished me with *information* that Mrs. - , that is my mother was dead’

(*Moll Flanders* 352)

(150) ‘... the design of this Paper is to give you *Information* of a certain irregular Assembly which I think falls very properly under your Observation ...’

(*The Spectator* vol. I, 32 a letter signed T. B.)

(151) ‘... I have lately received *Information* of a Club which I can call neither ancient or modern.’

(*The Spectator* vol. I, 273 Addison)

(152) ‘... his Grace ... sent Col. Cadogan to bring him exact *information* of the Prince’s progress.’

(*The Battle of Blenheim* 5)

5.11 *Mischief*

Mischief occurs 10 times as an uncountable noun and 2 times as countable in the corpus, which suggests a considerable dominance of the uncountable variant. The noun is not to be found in the letters and in *The Guardian*. The countable forms occur in *Moll Flanders* (1x) and *The Spectator* (1x), though not exclusively but as an alternative to the uncountable one.

Table 10 *Mischief*

Source	Number of occurrences	Countable	Uncountable
<i>The Spectator</i> 1711	6	1	5
<i>The Guardian</i> 1713	—	—	—
<i>Moll Flanders</i> 1722	2	1	1
Letters 1711-1713	—	—	—
Plays 1695, 1700	2	—	2
Battle accounts 1690-1712	2	—	2
Total	12	2	10

5.11.1 Uncountable instances of *mischief*:

(153) ‘... had he been brought upon the Stage another time, he would certainly have done *Mischief*.’

(*The Spectator* vol. I, 50 Addison)

(154) ‘... I went in daily dread that that some *mischief* would befall me ...’
(*Moll Flanders* 215)

(155) ‘... we all retired into a trench behind us, where we lay safe while much *mischief* was done to other regiments ...’ (The Battle of the Boyne 1)

(156) ‘It is of evil portent, and bodes *Mischief* to the Master of a Family.’
(*Love for Love* 219)

5.11.2 *Mischief* as a countable noun:

(157) ‘... they may learn from it to guard themselves against the *mischiefs* which attend an early knowledge of their own beauty.’ (Moll Flanders 25)

(158) ‘... my Friend ... gave me a particular Account of the *Mischiefs* they do in the Country ...’ (The Spectator vol. II, 175 Addison)

6. Conclusion

The majority of nouns in the corpus can be decidedly classified into countable, uncountable and collective. The countable nouns include proper nouns which show plural/singular distinction (*man-men, thing-things*), and few abstract nouns which are used similarly (*applause, understanding*). The uncountable category comprises nouns which show no plural marking and are used with verbs in the singular. They can be divided into *konkreta* – *furniture, baggage, wine*, and *abstrakta* – *courage, time* (Graband 1965: 88). Collective nouns refer to a group of people or things (*audience, enemy, cannon, horse, youth*), and similarly to unmarked plurals, are not inflected for number even when they are used with plural forms of verbs.

A considerable number of nouns, however, display variation in their usage. Some nouns appear as both countable or collective, for some of them the collective variant is predominant (*acquaintance*), for others the countable form is favoured (*fish, fruit*). Some nouns seem to have been used equally often as countable and uncountable, these include *accommodation* and *evidence*. Others were treated more often as countable (*entertainment*) or more frequently as uncountable than countable (*advice, damage, information, and mischief*).

There are no marked differences in the treatment of the nouns in the texts, the exception being *Moll Flanders* (1722), the latest source, which displays some innovations or sporadic idiosyncrasies in usage (plural occurrences of *acquaintance*, always uncountable *advice*). Occasional differences are also to be found in *The Spectator* which contains the only two countable occurrences of *assistance*. Whether these different forms are innovations, relics or merely idiosyncrasies of the author I shall try to examine in my further study. The military documents have a specific range of vocabulary, which distinguishes them from

the rest of the corpus. Nevertheless, they provide a good illustration of the usage of collective nouns (*cannon, cavalry, enemy*) that cannot be found elsewhere, which makes the study more comprehensive.

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