

Șerban HARTULAR¹

THE USAGE OF DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

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Abstract. Although the roles of the definite and indefinite articles in English and Romanian are broadly similar, when examined in detail, their usage in these two languages differs in ways that can be puzzling to the non-native speaker. This paper examines the differences between the uses and non-uses of the definite and indefinite articles in English and Romanian with the purpose of comparing how each language maps determinacy and definiteness to meaning. While some differences are syntax-driven, the focus of the paper is on semantic differences. Since the use of articles (and determiners in general) is subject to various restrictions in the case of uncountable nouns, this paper examines several semantic classes of nouns: countable concrete nouns, mass nouns, and post-verbal and post-adjectival abstract nouns.

The most obvious differences in the use of articles in English and Romanian arise when it comes to reference to kind (Carlson 1980 [1977]), which is achieved in English by using bare nouns and in Romanian by using nouns with definite articles. A more subtle difference is driven by the association in Romanian between bare nouns and situations where nouns have predicative readings. Based on these findings, the paper concludes that the fundamental typological difference between English and Romanian insofar as the usage of articles is concerned lies in how each language exploits the contrast between determined and undetermined (bare) nouns to convey meaning: English uses this contrast to distinguish between reference to entities and reference to kind, while Romanian uses it to mark the predicative (rather than referential) use of nouns.

Keywords: reference to kind, definite article, bare nouns, English, Romanian

¹ University of Bucharest, hartular@gmail.com.

1. Introduction

The roles of the definite and indefinite articles in English and Romanian are broadly similar: the definite article indicates that the noun it determines refers to an entity that the addressee is expected to be able to identify (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 368; GBLR: 90), while the indefinite article indicates that the noun it determines refers to an entity that the addressee is *not* expected to be able to identify (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 371; GBLR: 90). Nevertheless, when examined in detail, the uses of the definite and indefinite articles in these two languages differ in ways that can be puzzling to the non-native speaker. In fact, the misuse of the definite article is a typical mistake that Romanian native speakers make when translating from Romanian to English (Blănaru, Romanic 2018: 20).

This paper proposes to describe the differences in the usage (and non-usage) of the definite and indefinite articles in Romanian and English, with the purpose of comparing how each language maps determinacy and definiteness to meaning.

One important reason for the differences between the uses of definite and indefinite articles in Romanian and English is that *reference to kind* (Carlson 1980 [1977]) is achieved by different means in these two languages. However, the choice of article can also be influenced by the noun's number and by whether the noun in question is countable or uncountable. Consequently, this paper will examine several semantic classes of nouns. Differences in the usage of articles in English and Romanian also derive from the association that exists in Romanian (but less so in English) between bare nouns and nouns with predicative readings.

Following a brief description of each language's inventory of articles in Section 2, Section 3 will present those situations where the use or omission of an article is dictated by syntactic considerations. Section 4 will deal with differences between the use of articles in Romanian and English that arise when nouns have predicative readings, *i.e.*, when they are used to denote a quality of an entity. Section 5 will cover the use of articles with concrete countable nouns, this being the most common, "prototypical" type of noun (GALR I: 103). Section 6 will examine mass nouns, as uncountable concrete nouns *par excellence*. This section will also examine the mechanisms that allow non-countable nouns to become countable, and

how the transformation from non-countable to countable impacts the use or omission of the article. Section 7 concerns post-verbal and post-adjectival abstract nouns. Section 8 will summarize the paper's findings.

2. Indefinite and definite articles in Romanian and English

Articles in Romanian inflect according to gender (masculine, feminine), number (singular, plural), and case (nominative-accusative, genitive-dative). The article agrees with the noun it determines in gender, number, and case, with the observation that neuter nouns take masculine articles in the singular and feminine articles in the plural. While the indefinite article is a separate prenominal word, Romanian is a suffixal definite article language: the definite article is enclitic, and its form can be subject to phonetic modifications. Tables 1 and 2 below follow GBLR (88-89).

Table 1

Indefinite articles in Romanian

	Singular		Plural
	Masculine	Feminine	
Nom.-Acc.	un	o	niște
Gen.-Dat.	unui	unei	unor

Table 2

Definite articles in Romanian

	Singular		Plural	
	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine
Nom.-Acc.	-(u)l, -le	-a, -(e/i/u)a	-i	-le
Gen.-Dat.	-lui	-i	-lor	-lor

The form of the article is vital for determining the case of the noun, since in Romanian, the inflection of the noun itself often provides no information regarding its case.

English is a prenominal article language. It has one definite article, *the*, for both singular and plural nouns. The indefinite singular article is *a(n)* and there is no dedicated plural form (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 371),

however, excluding its partitive uses, the indefinite quantifier *some* best corresponds to the Romanian indefinite plural article.

3. Syntactic considerations

While this paper will mainly address the use of articles from a semantic perspective, the use of articles is also subject to certain syntactic restrictions that are not identical in English and Romanian. Syntax-driven differences in the use of articles in these two languages arise in possessive constructions, prepositional phrases, syntactic roles that require the genitive or dative case in Romanian, and where noun adjuncts are concerned.

3.1. Possessive constructions

In English, nouns with a possessive determiner or a possessive attribute formed with a possessive “s” cannot not take a definite article but are nevertheless interpreted as definite. However, nouns with definite interpretations in Romanian do take a definite article when followed by a possessive attribute (this being the possessive’s typical, unmarked position).

- (1) *calul* *meu*
 horse.DEF mine
 “my *the horse / horse”
- (2) *casa* *Mariei*
 house.DEF Mary.GEN
 “Mary’s *the house / house”

If, in Romanian, the possessor precedes the noun, the noun will be bare, but the possessor is used with the special genitive marker *al/a/ai/ale* (GBLR: 61) that agrees in gender and number with the possessed noun, and the noun will be interpreted as definite:

- (3) al Mariei băiat
 AL.M.SG Maria.GEN boy.M.SG
 "Mary's boy "
- (4) a băiatului mașină
 AL.F.SG boy.DEF.GEN car.F.SG
 "the boy's car"

3.2. Prepositional phrases in Romanian

Most prepositions in Romanian require nominals in the accusative case. In prepositional phrases headed by accusative prepositions, nouns with a definite interpretation must be used bare (as in example 0 below) unless they have modifiers (as in example 0 below) (GALR II: 126).

- (5) Eu pun cartea pe masă / *masa.
 I put book.DEF on table / table.DEF
 "I put the book on *table / the table."
- (6) Eu pun cartea pe masa verde / *masă verde.
 I put book.DEF on table.DEF green / table green
 "I put the book on the green table / *green table."

An exception to this rule in Romanian occurs in prepositional phrases headed by the preposition *cu* 'with' that name an instrument. In this case, the noun will be used with a definite article (GALR II: 127).

- (7) Băiatul mănâncă cu lingura / *lingură.
 boy.DEF eats with spoon.DEF / spoon.
 "The boy eats with a spoon."

Prepositional phrases headed by prepositions that require the dative and genitive cases will be covered in the next subsection.

3.3. Genitive and dative nouns in Romanian

In Romanian, nouns in syntactic roles that require the genitive or dative case cannot be bare – they must be used with an article or some other determiner (GALR I: 76). Consequently, nouns in the role of possessor and indirect object are used with a definite article in Romanian in situations where they are used bare in English.

- (8) Ion admiră frumusețea naturii / **naturi*.
 Ion admires beauty.DEF nature.DEF.GEN / nature.GEN
 “John admires the beauty of **the nature / nature*.”

- (9) Moș Crăciun le dă copiilor / **copii* cadouri.
 Old-man Christmas CL.DAT.3PL gives children.DEF.DAT / children.DAT presents
 “Santa Clause gives **the children / children* presents.”

Likewise, nouns in prepositional phrases that require the genitive or the dative case will take articles in situations where they are bare in English. In the examples below, the preposition *împotriva* ‘against’ requires the genitive, and the preposition *mulțumită* ‘thanks to’ requires the dative.

- (10) Poporul s-a răsculat
 people.DEF CL.REFL.ACC.3SG=AUX.PERF.3SG rebel.PPLE
 împotriva tiraniei / **tiranii*.
 against tyranny.DEF.GEN / tyranny.GEN
 “The people rebelled against **the tyranny / tyranny*.”

- (11) mulțumită oamenilor / **oameni* din toată lumea
 thanks-to people.DEF.DAT / people.DAT from all world.DEF
 “thanks to **the people / people* from around the world”

3.4. Noun adjuncts in English

English allows the formation of composite nominals (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 448), where nouns that precede the head noun can function as its attributive dependents, e.g. *television* in *television screen*, or *sword* in *sword fight*. These noun adjuncts are always bare. Romanian does not allow

ecran	de	<i>televizor</i>	luptă	cu	<i>spada</i>
screen	of	television	fight	with	sword.DEF
<i>"television screen"</i>			<i>"sword fight"</i>		

4. Predicative readings of nouns

(12) Ion este un *intrigant*.
 Ion is an intriguer
 "John is a *schemer*."

Nouns with predicative readings can appear bare in Romanian (GBLR: 26), even in situations where they are used with an indefinite article in English. For instance, the noun *escroc* 'swindler' can be used as a predicative nominal either bare or with an indefinite article in Romanian. In English, however, it cannot be used bare:

- (14) Vânzătorul este escroc / un escroc.
 salesman.DEF is swindler / a swindler
 "The salesman is *swindler/ a swindler."

When a noun indicates the category that an entity belongs to, it must be used bare in Romanian (GALR II: 274):

- (15) Ion este jurnalist / doctor / *un jurnalist / *un doctor.
 Ion is journalist / doctor / a journalist / a doctor
 "John is *journalist / *doctor / a journalist / a doctor."

It has been observed that bare singular nouns can also appear in Romanian as the direct objects of verbs selecting relational nouns (e.g. *a căuta* 'look for', *a găsi* 'find', *a vrea* 'want', *a dori* 'wish'), of verbs of possession and acquisition, and of verbs imposing strong selectional restrictions (e.g. *a purta* 'to wear') (Tănase-Dogaru 2014: 66).

- (16) Patronul caută secretară / bucătar / o secretară / un bucătar.
 proprietor.DEF seeks secretary / cook / a secretary / a cook
 "The boss is looking for *secretary / *cook / a secretary / a cook."
- (17) Ion are prietenă / mașină / o prietenă / o mașină.
 Ion has girlfriend / car / a girlfriend / a car
 "John has *girlfriend / *car / a girlfriend / a car."
- (18) Maria poartă uniformă / pălărie / o uniformă / o pălărie.
 Maria wears uniform / hat / a uniform / a hat
 "Mary wears *uniform / *hat / a uniform / a hat."

The fact that nouns may be used bare in Romanian in these situations can also be explained as being the result of a predicative reading. In example 0, the direct object denotes a property that the person the boss is looking to hire must possess. In examples 0 and 0 the direct object does not denote a property by itself, but does denote a property of the subject when read together with the verb – that John is in a relationship / is a car owner, or that Mary is in uniform / is the kind that wears hats. The exact identity of the direct object's referent is unimportant, its mere existence being sufficient to convey a property of the subject.

It should be noted that the bare nouns in these examples can be considered referential, given that they can serve as antecedents of a pronoun (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 400).

- (19) Patronul caută *bucătar*_i. Acesta_i trebuie să aibă experiență.
owner.DEF seeks cook this-one must SĂ have.SUBJ.3SG experience
“The boss is looking for a cook_i. He_i must be experienced.”

- (20) Ion are *mașină*_i / *prietenă*_i și chiar una frumoasă.
Ion has car / girlfriend and even one nice
“John has a car_i/a girlfriend_i, and a nice one_i, too.”

- (21) Maria purta *pălărie*_i, dar i-a
Maria wore hat but CL.DAT.3SG=AUX.PERF.3SG
furat-o_i cineva.
steal.PPLE=CL.ACC.F.3SG somebody
“Mary used to wear a hat_i, but somebody stole it.”

Thus, since the existence (desired in 0, actual in 0 and 0) of an entity can be inferred based on the clause they appear in, these bare nouns can be referred to by a pronoun. However, within the clause they appear in, their purpose is to convey, together with the verb, a property of another entity (rather than refer to an entity themselves). This explains the fact that they can be used bare, as nouns with a predicative reading can. There are similar constructions where the bare noun cannot be referred to by a pronoun, its role being strictly predicative:

- (22) Unele studenți au *prieteni*_i. *El_i e
some students.F have boyfriend he is
frumos. / *El_i sunt frumoși.
handsome / they are handsome
“Some students have a boyfriend_i. *He_i is handsome. / *They_i are handsome.”

While in English most nouns with predicative readings appear with an indefinite article in the singular, they appear bare when they are interpreted as denoting an entity's role, part or position (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 409), e.g. *president* (as in example 0), *treasurer*, *deputy leader of the party*, etc.

In summary, Romanian allows the use of bare nouns when the noun has a predicative reading (*i.e.*, it serves to convey a property of an entity) and requires the noun to be bare when it names the category an entity belongs to. In English, similar constructions use nouns with indefinite articles unless they specify an entity's role, in which case they are also bare.

The following sections concern the non-predicative referential uses of several semantic classes of nouns: concrete countable nouns, mass nouns, and post-verbal and post-adjectival abstract nouns.

5. Concrete countable nouns

Concrete countable nouns are the most common, “prototypical” class of noun (GALR I: 103), that are used to refer to countable entities or groups of entities. They have both singular and plural forms and can combine with definite and indefinite articles, quantifiers and numerals (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 334-336; GALR I: 62).

5.1. Reference to kind

As stated in the introduction, in both English and Romanian, a noun used with an indefinite article typically refers to an entity (or group of entities) whose identity is not expected to be deduced by the addressee based on the context, while a noun used with a definite article typically refers to an entity (or group of entities) whose identity is expected to be deduced by the addressee based on the context. These two types of reference will be referred to as indefinite, respectively definite reference. In both Romanian and English, indefinite reference is marked by the use of the indefinite article (and certain other determiners, such as indefinite quantifiers), and definite reference is marked by the use of the definite article (and certain other determiners, such as demonstrative determiners).

- (23) Maria a văzut la zoo *un elefant* / *niște elefanți*.
 Maria AUX.PERF.3SG see.PPLE at zoo an elephant / some elephants
 “Mary saw *an elephant* / *some elephants* at the zoo.”

- (24) Maria a hrănit *elefantul* / *elefanții*.
 Maria AUX.PERF.3SG feed.PPLE elephant.DEF / elephants.DEF
 “Mary fed *the elephant* / *the elephants*.”

In the first example, the exact identity of the elephant or elephants is unknown. In the second example, it is assumed that the identity of the elephant or elephants in question can be inferred.

A third type of reference, where differences between Romanian and English arise, is *reference to kind* (Carlson 1980 [1977]). Carlson (1980 [1977]: 37-46) observed that sentences like the following:

Cats are mammals.
 Dogs bark.
 Shoplifters are prosecuted in criminal court.

are considered true even though, strictly speaking, the extent to which they are true varies: all cats are mammals, most but not all dogs bark (Basenjis, for instance, do not), and most shoplifters are never caught (but those who are caught do face criminal prosecution). Rather than treat bare plural nouns as being subject to an implicit and oscillating quantification, Carlson proposes that they constitute a different type of reference – that, in English, “bare plurals are the names of kinds of things” (Carlson 1980 [1977]: 57), for instance of species (as opposed to an individual animal or a discrete group of like animals), of a professional class (as opposed to individual members of that class), of a type of object, etc.

In Romanian, reference to kind can also be achieved by using a plural noun, but the plural noun must have a definite article. In the following examples, the nouns that refer to kind are in the subject position.

- (25) *Câinii* / **Câini*, ca specie, latră.
 dogs.DEF / dogs as species bark
 “**The dogs* / *Dogs*, as a species, bark.”
- (26) *Mașinile* / **Mașini* au devenit foarte fiabile.
 cars.DEF / cars AUX.PERF.3SG become.PPLE very reliable.
 “**The cars* / *Cars* have become very reliable.”

A direct object that refers to a kind is also used with a definite article.

- (27) Leii omoară *hienele*.
 lions.DEF kill hyenas.DEF
 "Lions kill *hyenas*."

It must be noted, however, that the same sentence is grammatical in Romanian when the direct object is bare, but the reading is slightly different.

- (28) Leii omoară *hiene*.
 lions.DEF kill hyenas
 "Lions kill *hyenas* [among other things]."

Sentence 0 implies that it is a rule governing the relationship between lions and hyenas that a lion will kill a hyena whenever it has the chance. Sentence 0 implies that hyenas are simply one of several kinds of animals that lions kill. When both subject and direct object are definite, the statement establishes a specific relationship between the two kinds. When the direct object is bare, the statement serves to say something primarily about the subject.

The nature of the second reading can be made clearer by examining an example where the direct object names a kind, but cannot be used with a definite article in Romanian:

- (29) Fabrica din Mioveni produce *mașini* / **mașinile*.
 factory.DEF of Mioveni produces cars / cars.DEF
 "The Mioveni factory makes *cars* / **the cars*."

It is a defining characteristic of the Mioveni factory that it makes cars, but it is not a defining characteristic of cars that they are manufactured in the Mioveni factory (cars are made in many factories around the world). The direct object names the kind of item the factory produces, but the statement does not say something about cars as a kind. In this situation, the noun cannot be used with a definite article (unless to refer to a previously known batch of cars) and must be bare in Romanian as well as in English.

Thus, the uses of the bare plural in examples 0 and 0 can be seen as predicative in the manner described in Section 4. The statement *Fabrica din Mioveni produce mașini* 'The Mioveni factory makes cars' conveys a property of the factory (that it is a *car* factory), but not say anything about cars as a kind. Similarly, *Leii omoară hienă* 'Lions.DEF kill hyenas.BARE' primarily conveys a property of lions, while *Leii omoară hienele* 'Lions.DEF kill hyenas.DEF' conveys not the property of one kind, but a relationship between two kinds. When used with a definite article, the direct object is not part of the semantic predicate that conveys a property of the subject – instead, it is an argument of a semantic predicate that establishes a relationship between it and the other argument (the subject).

In summary, reference to kind by using plural nouns is achieved by using the bare noun in English and the definite noun in Romanian. However, in Romanian, a noun that names a kind can be bare if it participates in a predicative reading, *i.e.*, if it serves primarily to convey a property of another entity.

Reference to kind can also be achieved by using the singular noun with either a definite or an indefinite article, in both English and Romanian:

- (30) *Leul este un animal de pradă.*
 lion.DEF is an animal of prey
 "The lion is a beast of prey."

- (31) *Un doctor trebuie să respecte jurământul lui Hipocrate.*
 a doctor mus Șă respect.SUBJ.3SG oath.DEF LUI.GEN Hippocrates
 "A doctor must respect the Hippocratic oath."

However, there are contexts where the use of the singular to refer to kind is not felicitous. In the examples below, the definite and indefinite singular nouns are more readily interpreted as referring to a distinct entity than to kind:

- (32) **Doctorul este ocupat. Doctorii sunt ocupați.*
 doctor.DEF is busy doctors.DEF are busy
 "The doctor is busy." "Doctors are busy."

- (33) **Un leu este / Leii sunt pe pragul dispariției în Asia.*
 a lion is / lions.DEF are on verge.DEF disappearance.DEF.GEN in Asia
 “*A lion is / Lions are on the verge of extinction in Asia”

The unrestricted, “universal” means of achieving reference to kind involves the plural form of the noun in both English and Romanian, and this is where differences between these two languages appear.

We can therefore propose a simple scheme that maps the use of articles with nouns in Romanian and English to types of reference (excluding those situations where the noun has a predicative reading). In the table below and in others like it, *def* refers to the use of the definite article, *indef* to the use of the indefinite article or an indefinite quantifier, and *bare* to the use of the bare noun.

Table 3

Preliminary scheme for the use of articles

Reference \ Number		Kind	Indefinite	Definite
Singular		<i>indef</i> ^t / <i>def</i> ^t	<i>indef</i>	<i>def</i>
Plural	<i>English</i>	<i>bare</i>	<i>indef</i>	<i>def</i>
	<i>Romanian</i>	<i>def</i>		

^tsubject to restrictions

However, this scheme suggests that nouns cannot be used bare in Romanian, and in English only as plurals that refer to kind. There is data that shows this is not true. The use of bare countable nouns in other contexts is restricted, but possible, in both languages, even excluding their predicative use in Romanian.

5.2. Other referential uses of bare nouns

In Romanian, but not in English, singular countable nouns can be used bare in contexts where the existence or non-existence of an entity is in question. The most common examples are of nouns as subjects of existential verbs (Tănase-Dogaru 2014: 64).

- (34) E *copiator* pe hol?
 is copy-machine on hallway?
 "Is there **copy machine* / *a copy machine* in the hallway?"
- (35) *Bărbat* bun se vede foarte rar / nu există.
 man good CL.REFL.IMPERS see very rarely / not exists
 "Good *man* / A good *man* is seldom found / doesn't exist."

In English, singular nouns with existential uses must have a determiner.

Plural bare nouns can be used in both Romanian and English, both as subjects and as objects, to refer to an indeterminate number of entities.

- (36) Zburau *păsări* în toate direcțiile.
 flew birds in all directions.DEF
 "Birds were flying in every direction."
- (37) Am cumpărat *covrigi*.
 AUX.PERF.1SG buy.PPLE pretzels
 "I bought *pretzels*."

These are not references to kind, since they refer to a certain group of birds or pretzels, not to bird- or pretzel-kind. Nor are they predicative, since they don't describe a property of another entity. They can be interpreted as (*some unknown number of*) *birds* / *pretzels*. They are indefinite, implicitly quantified plural nouns, where the number of items is indeterminate.

5.3. Summary

Based on these findings, the scheme describing the use of articles with referential count nouns (excluding predicative readings) can be summarized as follows:

Table 4

Uses of articles for countable nouns

Reference \ Number		Kind	Indefinite	Definite
Singular	English	indef [†] /def [†]	indef	def
	Romanian		bare (exist.), indef	
Plural	English	bare	bare, indef	def
	Romanian	def		

[†]subject to restrictions

The differences between the uses of definite and indefinite articles with concrete countable nouns in Romanian and English are the following:

1. Reference to kind is achieved by using a bare plural in English and a plural with a definite article in Romanian
2. Romanian allows the use of bare singular nouns when the (non)existence of an entity is in question
3. Romanian allows nouns to be used bare when they participate in predicative readings in contexts where an indefinite article is required in English.

6. Mass nouns

Mass nouns denote a physical substance, e.g. water, milk, soil, hydrogen. Inherently, they are not physically bounded and cannot be divided into discrete entities (GALR I: 106), and therefore “there is no individuation by non-count nouns of this type, hence no basis for counting” (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 335). This makes mass nouns uncountable nouns *par excellence*.

From a morphosyntactic point of view, mass nouns, as uncountable nouns, differ from countable nouns in the following respects (GALR I: 107-109; Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 334-340):

- they have no plural forms;
- they do not combine with the singular indefinite article;
- they do not combine with cardinal numerals;

- they do combine with the plural indefinite article and other indefinite quantifiers, with the following difference between English and Romanian: in English, there are dedicated quantifiers for mass nouns as opposed to countable nouns, e.g. *much* vs. *many*, *little* vs. *few*, etc.; in Romanian, the same quantifier is used in the singular with mass nouns (e.g. *mult lapte* ‘many.SG milk’) and in the plural with countable nouns (e.g. *multe creioane* ‘many.PL pencils’).

Nevertheless, many nouns that name a substance systematically allow countable interpretations (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 336; GALR I: 107), where they do possess plural forms and can combine with indefinite articles and cardinal numerals. The reverse is also true, where “concrete nouns whose primary sense is count can be ‘coerced’ into a non-count use” (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 337). Since the use of determiners is restricted in the case of uncountable nouns, it is necessary to take the countable/uncountable status of a noun into account when comparing the use of articles with mass nouns in Romanian and English.

6.1. *Transitions between countable and uncountable status for mass nouns*

It has been observed that mass nouns can be used in the plural to denote varieties of a substance, or discrete objects/portions of that substance (GALR I: 107). As a thought experiment, these uses of mass nouns can be seen as the outputs of two theoretical machines that take mass nouns and turn them into countable nouns. The first is the “Universal Sorter” (Bunt 1985), a theoretical machine that takes a substance and outputs varieties of the substance, which are countable nouns. In the next example, the mass noun *bere* ‘beer’ is used to refer to varieties:

- (38) Avem trei *beri* la draft: Carlsberg, Tuborg și Ursus.
 have.1.PL three *beers* at draft Carlsberg Tuborg and Ursus
 “We have three *beers* on tap: Carlsberg, Tuborg and Ursus.”

The second is the “Universal Packager” (Pelletier 2012), a theoretical machine that outputs discrete packages of a substance, which are countable nouns.

(39) Dă-mi o bere.
give.IMP.2SG=CL.DAT.1SG a beer
“Give me a beer.”

(40) Maria pune mult *cartof* în mâncare.
 Maria puts much.SG potato in food
 “Mary puts a lot of *potato* in her cooking.”

However, the application of these theoretical machines to a noun cannot be excluded *a priori* given the possibilities of figurative language. A noun denoting an animate individual would seem a very poor candidate for the Universal Grinder, and a proper noun identifying an individual human even more so, given that animacy and individuality are not at all characteristic of physical substances. Nevertheless, upon seeing a very large dog, someone may say, "That's a lot of dog." Similarly, fictional character Horace Rumpole, who was overweight, was exasperated by his wife's insistence that "there was too much Rumpole" (Mortimer 1988: 162). These are not grammatical errors, they are grammatically constructed metaphors. By using singular nouns (*dog* and *Rumpole*) with

the quantifiers *a lot of* and *too much* – a usage that is forbidden with singular countable nouns but permitted with mass nouns – the speaker is implicitly likening the metaphor’s primary subject (Hills 2024) to a bulk substance, thereby conveying the impression of great mass.

The fact that mass nouns can be rendered countable and vice versa does not make the distinction between mass (or more generally uncountable) and countable nouns meaningless. On the contrary, as the examples above illustrate, the existence of this distinction can be deliberately exploited to convey meaning. However, this semantic flexibility makes it necessary to approach the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns as a functional rather than a lexical distinction – that is, as different manners of using a noun rather than intrinsic properties of a given noun, even if a noun’s basic meaning may predispose it to countable or uncountable status.

6.2. Mass nouns and their articles

As they name substances, mass nouns inherently refer to kinds in the singular. However, just as in the case of countable concrete nouns (see above §5.1), there are differences between Romanian and English in how reference to kind is achieved: in Romanian, the noun is singular with a definite article, while in English the noun is singular and bare.

- (41) *Apa* / **Apă* este inodoră, incoloră și insipidă.
 water.DEF / water is odorless colorless and insipid
 “*The water / Water is odorless, colorless, and tasteless.”

Again, as in the case of count nouns, the noun that names a kind of substance can appear bare in Romanian if it participates in a predicative reading. In both examples below, the noun *apă* ‘water’ is the subject of the clause, but in one example it is bare in Romanian, and in the other it is definite.

- (42) Din robinete curge apă.
 from faucets flows water
 “Water flows from faucets.”

- (43) *Apa* dizolvă zahărul.
 water.DEF dissolves sugar.DEF
 “Water dissolves sugar.”

Semantically, example 0 says something about faucets rather than about water – that faucets have the property of having water flow from them. Therefore, the noun *apă* ‘water’ is part of the semantic predicate that says something about faucets and is used bare. Example 0 establishes a solvent-solute relationship on two kinds of physical substances (water and sugar), and therefore both mass nouns, subject and direct object, are used with a definite article in Romanian.

In both languages, a mass noun with a definite article can be used to refer to an identifiable chunk of the substance it refers to:

- (44) Nu pot mânca sendvișul ăsta, *untul* e rânced.
 not can.1.SG eat sandwich.DEF this, butter.DEF is rancid
 “I can’t eat this sandwich, *the butter* is rancid.”

- (45) Am fost la mare și *apa* era rece.
 AUX.PERF.1SG be.PPLE to sea and water.DEF was cold
 “I went to the seaside, and *the water* was cold.”

In these situations, what precise chunk of butter or water is in question can be inferred by the addressee – it is the butter within the sandwich that is rancid, and the water at the seaside that was cold. Therefore, these are definite references. It should be noted that they are not outputs of the Universal Packager, since they do not refer to physically bounded, countable items, but rather to amounts of a substance that, in the given context, are identifiable.

Using a mass noun with a singular indefinite article will trigger a count interpretation, either a variety (Universal Sorter) as in 0, or a portion (Universal Packager) as in 0.

- (46) A comandat *un* *vin* foarte bun.
 AUX.PERF.3SG order.PPLE a wine very good
 “He ordered *a* very good *wine*.”

- (47) *O supă* are doar 300 de calorii.
 a soup has only 300 of calories
 “A soup only has 300 calories.”

Likewise, using a mass noun in the plural, bare or with a cardinal numeral, will trigger a count interpretation, either a variety, or a package.

- (48) Aici se fac *vinuri* bune / două *vinuri* bune:
 here CL.REFL.IMPERS make wines good / two wines good:
 un merlot și un cabernet.
 a merlot and a cabernet
 “Here they make good *wines* / two good *wines*: a merlot and a cabernet.”

- (49) Am comandat trei *fripturi* /
 AUX.PERF.1SG order.PPLE three *steaks* /
fripturi pentru toată lumea.
 steaks for all world.DEF
 “I ordered three *steaks*/ *steaks* for everyone.”

When plural mass nouns denote varieties, they can become references to kind and follow the pattern of taking a definite article in Romanian and being bare in English.

- (50) **Mătăsurile* / *Mătăsurile* chinezești sunt scumpe.
 silks / silks.DEF Chinese are expensive
 “Chinese *silks* / **The Chinese silks* are expensive

Using a singular mass noun with the plural indefinite article or some other indefinite quantifier can be interpreted as referring to a previously unknown chunk of the substance it denotes, *i.e.* it is an indefinite reference.

- (51) Am turnat niște / un pic / multă *miere* în borcan.
 AUX.PERF.1SG pour.PPLE some / a little / much honey in jar
 “I poured some / a little / a lot of *honey* in the jar.”

Just like the bare plural of a count noun, the bare singular mass noun can refer to an indeterminate quantity of the substance it denotes.

- (52) Țâșnea apă prin toate găurile.
 gushed water through all holes.DEF
 “Water was gushing through every hole.”

- (53) Apoi am adăugat făină.
 then AUX.PERF.1SG add.PPLE flour
 “Then I added *flour*.”

Two conclusions can be drawn from this data. The first is that, in terms of the use and non-use of definite and indefinite articles, uncountable mass nouns in these two languages behave identically to plural countable nouns, down to the differences between the two languages. The second is that uncountable nouns, as a functional category, do respect the restrictions enumerated at the beginning of this section (they have no plural form and cannot combine with the singular indefinite article or with cardinal numerals). Whenever the (felicitous) use of a mass noun violates one of these restrictions, it triggers a countable interpretation.

The usage of definite and indefinite articles with uncountable nouns as a function of reference type is summarized below.

Table 5

Usage of articles for (uncountable) mass nouns

Reference		Kind	Indefinite	Definite
Number				
Singular	<i>English</i>	bare	bare, indef	def
	<i>Romanian</i>	def		

7. Post-verbal and post-adjectival nouns

Post-verbal and post-adjectival nouns are abstract nouns derived from a verb or adjective that denote actions, activities, states or qualities (GBLR: 386-389; GALR I: 114).

In terms of the use of articles in English and Romanian, post-verbal and post-adjectival nouns often exhibit behavior that is similar to that of mass nouns. Consider the use of the mass noun *unt* ‘butter’ and the

abstract noun *mânie* 'anger, wrath'. In the first pair of examples, the mass noun is used to refer to kind and the abstract noun is used generically:

- (54) *Untul* / **Unt* este moale.
 butter.DEF / butter is soft
 “*The butter / Butter is soft.”

- (55) *Mânia* / **Mânie* este periculoasă.
 anger.DEF / anger is dangerous
 “*The anger / Anger is dangerous.”

Here, where they are used generically, both the mass and the abstract noun require a definite article in Romanian, and both must be bare in English. In the next pair of examples, the same nouns are used in a specific manner: the noun *butter* refers to a particular chunk or amount of butter, and the noun *anger* refers to a particular situation:

- (56) Nu pot mânca sandwichul ăsta, *untul* e ranced.
 not can.1.SG eat sandwich.DEF this, butter.DEF is rancid
 “I can’t eat this sandwich, the butter is rancid.”

- (57) *Mânia* lui Ahile le
 anger.DEF LUI.GEN Achilles CL.DAT.3PL
 aduse aheilor multe amaruri.
 brought Achaeans.DEF.DAT many sorrows
 “The anger of Achilles brought the Achaeans many sorrows.”

Again, the behavior of the abstract noun mirrors that of the mass noun: a specific reference requires a definite article in both Romanian and English.

Mass nouns’ uncountability is explained by their homogeneity (GALR I: 106): an amount of a substance (e.g. butter) can be divided into several parts, but these parts will also be amounts of that substance, and this lack of individuation is what renders them uncountable. A similar homogeneity obtains in the case of nouns like *anger*, which denote states of being: if anger is felt around the world, then what is felt in Asia is also anger, and so is what is felt in Africa. The singular noun *anger* names a

kind of state of being, just as the singular noun *butter* names a kind of substance. In order for the noun to be a definite reference, it must name a particular, identifiable state of being (in the example above, that anger of Achilles which occurred on the plain before Troy in the ninth year of the war).

7.1. Countable and uncountable post-verbal and post-adjectival nouns

Post-verbal and post-adjectival nouns exhibit a high degree of polysemy. While in the previous examples they referred to states of being (e.g. happiness, anger), they can also refer to activities (e.g. *alergat* 'running'), events (e.g. *cădere* 'fall'), or the results of activities/events (e.g. *sediment* 'sediment'). In the following examples, the same noun, *invention*, is used as the name of an activity, to refer to an event, and to refer to the result of an activity, in English.

Necessity is the mother of *invention*.

The *invention* of the light bulb dates to 1879.

John's *invention* doesn't work very well.

However, a given noun's ability to change its meaning in this manner is not regular or predictable (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 337) and furthermore varies cross-linguistically. For instance, the noun *vânătoare* 'hunt' can be used in Romanian to refer both to an event and to an activity. In English, the noun *hunt* can refer to an event, but when referring to the activity, the noun *hunting* is preferred.

- (58) *Vânătoarea* de ieri a fost un succes.
 hunt.DEF of yesterday AUX.PERF.3SG be.PPLE a success
 "Yesterday's *hunt* was a success."

- (59) *Legea* interzice *vânătoarea* de urși.
 law.DEF prohibits hunt.DEF of bears
 "The law prohibits *bear *hunt* / bear *hunting*."

The countable/uncountable status of a post-verbal or post-adjectival noun is tied to its interpretation: nouns that name states of being or activities are typically uncountable, while nouns that name events and the results of activities are typically countable (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 337; GALR I: 103-104).

It should also be noted that a post-verbal noun that names the result of an activity can be concrete (rather than abstract) if the result of that activity is a concrete object, and will behave like a mass noun if the result of the activity is a substance. For instance, the noun *scuipat* 'spit', derived from the supine form of the verb *a scuipa* 'to spit', can refer both to the activity of spitting, as in 0, and to its result, which is a substance, as in 0, where it is used with the plural indefinite article *niște* 'some'.

- (60) *Scuipatul* este interzis.
 spit.DEF is prohibited
 "Spitting is prohibited."

- (61) Văd niște *scuipat* pe jos.
 see.1.SG some spit on down
 "I see some *spit* on the ground."

Thus, even more than in the case of concrete nouns, an abstract noun's countable/uncountable status is less an intrinsic lexical property and more a function of the manner in which it is used within an utterance.

7.2. Post-verbal/adjectival nouns and their articles

Post-verbal and post-adjectival nouns broadly follow the same patterns as concrete nouns in the use and non-use of articles, depending on their countable/uncountable status. When they are uncountable, they cannot be used with the singular indefinite article or with cardinal numerals – such uses trigger a countable interpretation. In example 0 below, the noun *conversație* 'conversation' names an (uncountable) activity and, as a reference to kind, follows the pattern of being used with a definite article in Romanian and bare in English. In example 0, the same noun used with the singular indefinite article or a cardinal numeral refers to events.

- (62) *Conversația* este o artă.
 conversation.DEF is an art
 “*Conversation* is an art.”
- (63) Noi am avut o *conversație* /
 we AUX.PERF.1PL have.PPLE a conversation /
 două *conversații* pe această temă.
 two conversations on this theme
 “We had a *conversation* / two *conversations* on this subject.”

Using an abstract noun in the plural will also trigger a count interpretation. In example 0 below, the plural *infidelități* ‘infidelities’ refers to specific, countable events.

- (64) *Infidelitatea* distruge relații.
 infidelity.DEF destroys relationships
 “*Infidelity* destroys relationships.”
- (65) *Infidelitățile* Regelui Ludovic au fost numeroase.
 infidelities.DEF King.DEF.GEN Ludovic AUX.PERF.3PL be.PPLE numerous
 “*The infidelities* of King Louis were many.”

Unlike mass nouns however, uncountable abstract nouns in Romanian cannot typically be used with the plural indefinite article *niște* (GALR I: 105), while English allows their use with the indefinite quantifier *some*.

- (66) Maria simți *niște / un pic de *fericire*.
 Maria felt some / a little happiness
 “Mary felt some / a little *joy*.”

The interdiction against using an abstract noun with the indefinite plural article in Romanian can be exploited to trigger a metaphorical reading, as in the example below, where happiness is likened to a commodity:

- (67) Îmi puteți vinde niște *fericire* de 50 de lei?
 me.CL.DAT can sell some happiness of 50 of lei?
 “Could you sell me 50 lei’s worth of *happiness*?”

In both Romanian and English, uncountable abstract nouns can be used bare in the singular when, rather than referring to a kind of state or activity, they have predicative readings, *i.e.*, they serve to say something about another entity:

- (68) Ion are *curaj* / **curajul*.
 Ion has courage / courage.DEF
 "John has *courage* / **the courage*."

This predicative use of abstract nouns is very common in Romanian in impersonal constructions involving the verb *a fi* 'to be' that have no direct equivalent in English:

- (69) Lui îi e *frică* / *foame* / *somn*.
 him.DAT CL.DAT.3SG is fear / hunger / sleep
 "He is *afraid/hungry/sleepy*." (lit. 'to him is fear/hunger/sleep')

Due to polysemy, the same noun may have a countable and an uncountable interpretation, and may be used to refer to kind in either case – in the singular if interpreted as being uncountable, in the plural if interpreted as countable. In both cases, however, they follow the pattern of taking the definite article in Romanian and being used bare in English.

- (70) *Dezamăgirea* / **Dezamăgire* poate afecta
 disappointment.DEF / disappointment can affect
 personalitatea.
 personality.DEF
 "*The *disappointment* / *Disappointment* can affect one's personality"

- (71) *Dezamăgirile* / ??*Dezamăgiri* pot afecta personalitatea.
 disappointments.DEF / disappointments can affect personality.DEF
 "*The *disappointments* / *Disappointments* can affect one's personality."

However, when they are used to refer to identifiable events, as definite references, they are used with a definite article in both English and Romanian:

- (72) *Dezamăgirea* / **Dezamăgire* de pe fața lui era comică.
disappointment.DEF / disappointment of on face his was comic
“The disappointment / *Disappointment on his face was laughable.”
- (73) *Furiile* / **Furii* lui Adolf Hitler erau notorii.
rages.DEF / rages LUI.GEN Adolf Hitler were notorious.
“The rages / *Rages of Adolf Hitler were notorious.”

7.3. The definite article and noun adjuncts

The existence of compound nominals (see above §3.4) introduces a complicating factor in the choice between a bare abstract noun and the same noun with a definite article in English. Consider the following examples:

- (74) a. Music can influence the *development* of the brain.
b. Music can influence brain *development*.

Even though the meaning of the two examples is essentially identical, the noun *development* takes a definite article in (a) and is bare in (b). It should be noted that using the noun bare in construction (a) is only marginally acceptable, and using the noun with a definite article in construction (b) is not acceptable:

- (75) a. Music can influence ?*development* of the brain.
b. Music can influence *the brain *development*.

Further examples can be given where an abstract noun with the same modifier is: a) definite if the modifier is a postpositional modifier, and b) bare if the modifier is a noun adjunct:

- (76) a. The *drinking* of wine was incorporated in many religious rituals.
b. Wine *drinking* was incorporated in many religious rituals.
- (77) a. The *production* of transistors increased by 25%.
b. Transistor *production* increased by 25%.

An explanation for the presence of definite articles in examples of type (a) is that the postpositional modifier acts as a restrictive attribute, *i.e.* it restricts the possible denotations of the noun to a degree that makes the identity of its referent inferable. In examples of type (b) on the other hand, the entire compound nominal is interpreted as naming a kind of activity, and is therefore used bare.

It should be noted that this is a tendency, not a rule. It is possible to use bare abstract nouns with postpositional modifiers in English:

(78) He gave thought to what constitutes (*the) *love* of country.

Adjunct nouns can also be interpreted as being restrictive, for instance *blame* in the composite nominal *blame game*, which requires a definite article:

(79) Playing the *blame game* doesn't actually help.

Expressions like those in examples (78) and 0 do not have equivalents where the modifier appears in the other syntactic position – that is, one cannot say **country love* instead of *love of country*, or **the game of blame* instead of *the blame game*. When it is possible for a modifier to appear in either position (both as a noun adjunct and as a postpositional modifier), there is a preference for using the composite nominal bare and the noun with a postpositional modifier with a definite article. This gives rise to a difference in terms of the use of the definite article between English and Romanian: in Romanian, the equivalent of either construction will involve a definite article.

(80) Muzica poate influența dezvoltarea / *dezvoltare creierului.
 music.DEF can influence development.DEF / development brain.DEF.GEN
 "Music can influence *the development* of the brain / brain *development*."

(81) Producția / *Producție de tranzistori a crescut.
 production.DEF / production of transistors AUX.PERF.3SG grow.PPLE
 "The *production* of transistors / transistor *production* has grown."

8. Conclusions

Syntactic considerations aside, the present comparison of the uses of articles in English and Romanian revealed several typological similarities between these two languages. Both languages mark the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns (concrete or abstract) by imposing essentially the same restrictions on the uncountable noun's capacity to combine with certain determiners and quantifiers. Insofar as the use of indefinite and definite articles in particular is concerned, the behavior of uncountable nouns mirrors the behavior of plural countable nouns in both languages. The mechanisms that allow a noun to transition from countable to uncountable status or vice-versa are also analogous, albeit subject to word-specific restrictions that may differ from one language to the other.

With respect to the way each language maps determinacy and definiteness to meaning, the contrast between the indefinite and the definite is likewise similar: in both languages, a definite determiner indicates that the identity of the noun's referent can be inferred, and an indefinite determiner indicates that it cannot. The differences in the use and non-use of articles in Romanian and English derive from the way each language exploits the contrast between determined and undetermined (bare) nouns to convey meaning. Broadly, in English it is used to differentiate between reference to entities and reference to kinds, whereas in Romanian it is used to differentiate between referential and predicative uses of the noun.

As a result, reference to kind generally takes different forms in the two languages: in English it involves a bare noun, while in Romanian it involves a noun with a definite article (since the identity of a kind, as opposed to an entity, cannot be in doubt). However, in Romanian, nouns that participate in predicative readings (*i.e.*, where they serve to convey a property of an entity) can, and sometimes must be used bare, while in English nouns in the same context often require an indefinite article in the singular.

The following list summarizes the specific differences between the uses of definite and indefinite articles in English and Romanian:

1. Reference to kind is achieved by using bare nouns in English and nouns with a definite article in Romanian (the noun being plural for countable nouns and singular for uncountable nouns).
2. Romanian allows the use of bare nouns where they participate in predicative readings, while English most often requires singular nouns to have an indefinite article in the same situation.
 - a. Romanian absolutely requires the noun to be bare when it is used to indicate the category that an entity belongs to, while in English the category must be named by an indefinite noun (e.g. He is *a doctor*).
 - b. However, both English and Romanian use bare nouns to name roles (e.g. He was elected *president*).
3. Romanian allows singular nouns to be bare when the existence of the entity they refer to is in question.
4. Romanian does not generally allow the use of the plural indefinite article *niște* with uncountable abstract nouns, while English allows the use of the indefinite quantifier *some* in the same situation (e.g. He felt *some sadness*).
5. In English, abstract nouns that are modified by noun adjuncts (e.g. brain *development*) tend to be treated as indeterminate, while abstract nouns that are modified by postpositional modifiers tend to be treated as determinate (e.g. the *development* of the brain) and take a definite article. In Romanian, the equivalent of either construction will take a definite article.

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