

**A Study of the Countability of Some Usually Uncountable Nouns
in British English from the 16th Century to the Present Day**

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Tämän tutkielman aiheena ovat laskettavat (countable) ja ei-laskettavat (uncountable) substantiivit englannin kielessä. Useimmat substantiivit englannin kielessä luokitellaan joko laskettaviksi tai ei-laskettaviksi. Näitä luokituksia löytyy esimerkiksi sanakirjoista. Useimmiten kyseessä on kuitenkin kyseisen sanan tietty merkitys, jota käytetään tietyllä tavalla. Monesti vieraan kielen opiskelijoille nämä luokitukset saattavat tuottaa ongelmia, sillä niin sanotusti samaa tarkoittava sana saattaa eri kielissä olla luokiteltu eri tavalla. Tästä hyvänä esimerkkinä toimii esimerkiksi tässäkin tutkielmassa tutkittu sana *advice*, joka englannin kielessä luokitellaan useimmiten ei-laskettavaksi, mutta sanan suomenkielinen vastine, *neuvo*, on laskettavissa oleva sana. Erityisesti tässä tutkielmassa kiinnitetään huomiota sellaisten sanojen käyttöön laskettavina sanoina, joita yleensä kohdellaan ei-laskettavina sanoja.

Tässä tutkielmassa esitetään ensinnäkin erilaisia teorioita joita substantiivien laskettavuudesta on esitelty, ja näiden yhteydessä tuodaan esiin myös laskettavuuteen liittyvien eri termien kirjo. Teoriaosuudessa käsitellään muun muassa sitä, mitä kriteerejä sanan käytön tarvitsee täyttää, jotta se luokiteltaisiin laskettavaksi tai ei-laskettavaksi, ja miten sama substantiivi voidaan muuntaa yhdestä luokasta toiseen. Myös aikaisempaa tutkimusta ”epätavallisista” laskettavista sanoista esitellään.

Tämän tutkielman suurimman kokonaisuuden muodostaa korpus-tutkimus yhdestätoista englanninkielisestä substantiivista, jotka yleensä luokitellaan ei-laskettaviksi. Nämä sanat ovat *weather*, *rain*, *snow*, *thunder*, *advice*, *education*, *evidence*, *information*, *knowledge*, *fiction* ja *research*. Materiaalin lähteenä toimivat kolme eri korpusta, joista näiden sanojen käyttöä laskettavina sanoina etsitään. Korpuksista kaksi sisältävät historiallista materiaalia, toinen proosa (the LION Corpus) ja toinen ei-fiktiivistä materiaalia (Internet Corpus). Molemmat sisältävät materiaalia 1550-luvulta 1900-luvun alkupuoliskolle asti. Kolmas käytettävä korpus on *The British National Corpus*, joka sisältää materiaalia 1950-luvulta eteenpäin. Tämän korpuksen kirjallinen materiaali on jaoteltavissa informatiiviseen ja proosaan, jolloin tulokset ovat vertailtavia historiallisten korpusten kanssa. Korpusanalyysin peruselementteinä käytettiin sanan esiintymistä epämääräisen artikkelin (esimerkiksi *a rain*) tai monikon (esimerkiksi *knowledges*) kanssa. Löytyneet esimerkit jaoteltiin viidenkymmenen vuoden ajanjaksoille. Normalisoidut frekvenssit laskettiin jokaiselle ajanjaksolle, jotta esiintymien vertailu ja johtopäätösten tekeminen laskettavien esimerkkien lisääntymisestä tai vähenemisestä olisi mahdollista, sillä korpusmateriaalit eri ajanjaksoilla olivat eri suuruisia.

Korpusmateriaalin lisäksi tässä tutkielmassa tarkasteltiin viittä eri yksikielistä sanakirjaa ja niiden antamia määritelmiä tutkittavien sanojen laskettavuudesta. Neljä näistä sanakirjoista kuvastaa nykyajan kielenkäyttöä, ja viides (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*) tarjoaa myös historiallisen näkökulman.

Eräänä tämän tutkielman tavoitteista oli tutkia Denisonin (1998) hypoteesin, jonka mukaan 1800-luvulla olisi tapahtunut systemaattinen muutos joidenkin sanojen kohdalla ei-laskettavista laskettaviksi, paikkansapitävyyttä. Tämän tutkielman tulokset osaltaan tukivat tätä väitettä, osaltaan eivät. Vaihtelua esiintyi sekä eri korpusten että epämääräisen artikkelin ja monikon käytön välillä. Vahvimmin Denisonin hypoteesia tukivat *knowledge*, *evidence*, *fiction*, *education* sekä *research* ei-fiktiivisissä teksteissä. Proosateksteissä nämä sanat sen sijaan eivät tukeneet Denisonin hypoteesia. *Rain*, *advice* ja *information* eivät tukeneet Denisonin hypoteesia tässä tutkielmassa käytetyssä korpusmateriaalissa.

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1. Introduction

Nouns are normally divided into countable and uncountable nouns, meaning nouns one can count (*chair, car*) and nouns one cannot count (*honesty, power*). For example dictionaries usually label nouns as either countable or uncountable. However, the division is not that simple: different senses of the same word might be used differently, and there are numerous possible ways of using the same noun, whether it be categorized as countable or uncountable.

The topic of my pro gradu –thesis is unusual countable nouns, meaning nouns that are usually classified for example in dictionaries as being uncountable, but are still used in a countable manner. An example of this would be *education*, usually labelled as uncountable, but still found used as a countable like in *I wanted her to get a good education*.

I have already looked into this subject when I was writing my BA thesis. I compared the dictionary entries of certain words (and the labels the dictionaries gave the words) with actual usage on the basis of data taken from the British National Corpus. My findings were that first of all, the labelling of the same word in different dictionaries had much variation, and secondly, the actual usage was sometimes very different than the usage given by the dictionary labels.

My aim in this thesis is to look at diachronic variation more closely. I will look at some of the words that I used in my BA thesis and also add a few new words, and compare the data from the BNC with data from two other corpora that have material from earlier centuries. These two corpora are Internet corpora, the other including historical non-fiction prose and the other historical fiction prose. One of my main aims will be to investigate the accuracy of Denison's claim (1998, 96) that in the nineteenth century some nouns have gone through a systematic change from being used as uncountable to being used as countable. My purpose is to compare the corpus data including a certain word from different time periods and study if

the usage has changed somehow, and also look at normalized frequencies to see if the usage has increased or decreased.

2. Materials studied

The main materials for the analysis part of this thesis are three different corpora. Two of these are historical corpora and the third one represents the present-day usage. Using two historical corpora alongside with the present-day corpus allows a useful comparison of the frequencies found with the words examined, thus allowing conclusions about the increasing or decreasing of countable usages.

The first historical corpus used is a collection of non-fiction texts compiled by Mark Kaunisto for his doctoral dissertation in 2004. This corpus is later on referred to as ‘the non-fiction texts examined’. This corpus includes 318 texts from 1550-1950 and they are all written by British authors (Kaunisto, 2004, 20). The total word count of the corpus is approximately 8,640,000 words, which was divided into fifty-year periods when analysing the results. Naturally, the word count is not equal in all the time periods, and the different word counts are shown in Table 2.1.

time period	word count
1550-1599	564,000
1600-1649	1,265,000
1650-1699	2,016,000
1700-1749	488,000
1750-1799	1,640,000
1800-1849	1,222,000
1850-1899	1,060,000
1900-1950	385,000

Table 2.1. The division of words into different time periods in the non-fiction texts examined. (Kaunisto 2004, 21)

One has to take into account the different sizes of the corpus in different fifty-year periods when analysing the results, and this is why normalized frequencies for the instances found are calculated to make them more comparable.

The second historical corpus used is the Chadwyck-Healey *Literature Online* collection (LION), which includes works from both British and American English. For this study, only

the part including British prose fiction works was examined. This was done because the non-fiction texts examined were also only from British English, and therefore the instances that could have been found in the American English sections could not have been compared with the other instances found. The corpus material examined included texts from 1514 to 1903, and the total word count was approximately 61,157,000 words. The texts were divided into fifty-year periods as with the non-fiction texts examined, and the word counts in different time periods can be seen in Table 2.2 below. Since the amount of words in different time

time period	word count
1514-1550	68,000
1550-1599	3,130,000
1600-1649	2,566,000
1650-1699	4,214,000
1700-1749	5,526,000
1750-1799	9,828,000
1800-1849	13,698,000
1850-1903	22,127,000

Table 2.2. The word count in the LION Corpus when divided in to fifty-year periods. (The numbers are from Kaunisto 2004, 18)

periods varies quite significantly, in the analysis of the findings normalized frequencies were calculated to give a correct view, as was with the non-fiction texts examined.

The corpus used to represent the present-day usage was *the British National Corpus* (hereafter the BNC). It includes a 100 million words, and the texts included are both fiction and non-fiction texts. The corpus material is from the later part of the 20th century, and it includes both written and spoken English. In this study, the latest edition, *the BNC XML Edition* (released in 2007) was used, and it was accessed via the BNCweb. Since the historical corpora examined only include written language and not spoken, the spoken part of the BNC was excluded in this study. The written language section is divided into ‘imaginative prose’ which includes 16,496,408 words and eight different categories of informative texts (natural and pure sciences, applied science, social science, world affairs, commerce and finance, arts, belief and thought, and leisure) which include altogether 71,407,163 words.

For the discussion of theory written about the subject of this thesis, different grammar books were consulted to see how they describe the phenomenon of *countability* and if they have any kind of mention about the unusual countable uses of certain words. The list of the different works consulted can be seen in the bibliography.

Different dictionaries were consulted to see how they label the words examined. Four contemporary dictionaries were used: *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (2006; COBUILD), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2000; OALD), *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2003; CALD) and *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2005; LDCE). All the dictionaries chosen are learner's dictionaries because they are more likely to offer information about the countability of a word than general-purpose dictionaries. In the early phases of this study some general-purpose dictionaries were consulted to check whether something relevant could be found in them, but there were hardly any markings on countability, so they were excluded. In addition to these, the *Oxford English Dictionary* online version (hereafter OED Online), which is a historical dictionary, was used to look at different uses in the earlier time periods as well as the present-day usage. The OED Online is very appropriate for this purpose, since it also gives nowadays rare or obsolete usages, and offers various examples from different time periods.

3. Methods used

The words that were examined in this study were *weather, rain, snow, thunder, advice, information, education, knowledge, evidence, research, and fiction*. The words were chosen on the basis of their meaning, the goal being to have words from different semantic areas. Almost all of the words are also found in lists of uncountable nouns in different grammars, for example in *Collins COBUILD English Grammar* (1990, 9) which lists 8 of the 11 words examined. The words were divided into three groups according to their meanings: words related to weather phenomena (*weather, rain, snow and thunder*), words related to information possessing (*advice, information, education, knowledge and evidence*) and other words (*research and fiction*).

In the analysis section, each word was dealt with separately. Firstly, the word was looked up in the dictionaries consulted to see if there were any senses where the word could be used in a countable manner. After this the searches in the corpora were made to see if these two views (one given by the dictionaries, the other by the corpora) agree.

The word examined was searched for in all three corpora. With each corpora, the searches were made for the word used with the indefinite article, allowing one modifier in between (for example *an _ information*, both indefinite articles *a* and *an* were taken into account) and for the word used in the plural. The plural instances and the examples with the indefinite article were analysed separately. With the instances from the historical corpora, the instances were divided into fifty-year periods according to the year the text was published and then the instances in a given time period were calculated. After this, the instances were compiled to a table and normalized frequencies were calculated for each time period, thus enabling easy comparison between different time periods to see whether the usage is increasing or decreasing. Two different kinds of searches were made in the BNC: firstly the search for the word examined was made only in the 'imaginative prose' section of the BNC written

language (hereafter referred to as the BNC prose texts) and secondly, the searches made included the informative texts in the written language section of the BNC (hereafter the BNC informative texts). Since the searches in the BNC were divided into prose and informative texts, the results are more easily comparable with the non-fiction texts examined and the LION Corpus. The division of instances between different time periods was not necessary with the BNC, since the material in the corpus is only from the latter half of the 20th century.

There are several different terms or labels that are used when discussing countability, for example *uncountable* an *countable*, *uncount noun* (or *non-count*) and *count noun* and the relation of *mass noun* with these. The usage varies greatly between different dictionaries and grammar books and will be discussed in more detail later on in Section 4.3. I will use the terms *countable* and *uncountable* in my own analysis.

4. Countable and uncountable nouns

As stated earlier in Chapter 1, nouns (or more precisely their individual meanings) are divided into countable and uncountable nouns. As the names imply, countable nouns are those one can count and uncountable nouns are those one cannot count. In this section I will look at different factors influencing the identification of countable and uncountable nouns, converting of uncountable nouns into countable nouns, different labelling policies that dictionaries have and also previous work done on the unusual countables.

4.1 Identifying countable and uncountable nouns

Why are some words countable and some uncountable? Biber et. al (1999, 242) point out that countability does not derive from the real concrete world we live in. Things that are very concrete in our world can be uncountable (for example *furniture*) and abstract things can be countable (for example *rule*), which means that one cannot predict the countability of a word based on its denotation (Biber et. al 1999, 242-243). There are, however, some types of meanings or categories that are commonly uncountable listed by Biber et. al (1999, 243): substances (*air*), emotional and other states (*love*), qualities (*importance*), events (*arrival*), relations (*contact*) and abstract concepts (*feedback*). The example words in different categories were also provided by Biber et. al (1999, 243). Quirk et al. also point out that although not all abstract nouns are uncountable nouns, “there is a considerable degree of overlap between abstract and noncount” (1985, 247). Biber et al. (1999, 242) also suggest that based on their text samples, there are much more countable nouns than there are uncountable, “and it is likely that this relationship holds for English texts generally.”

Quirk et al. (1985, 251) note that some nouns that are uncountable in English are often used as countable nouns in other languages. These include nouns such as *information*, *money*

and *work*. The list of words that Quirk et al. (1985, 252) give includes five of the words discussed in this thesis: *advice, education, evidence, information* and *research*. To complement this list, they discuss the possibility that some uncountable nouns in English can take the indefinite article when they are modified, as for example in (Quirk et al. 1985, 252):

They are doing *a brisk business*.

They also say that in some cases modification is not even always necessary if it is implied as in the following example:

She has had *an education*.

According to them, this sentence implies that the person has received ‘a good education’ (Quirk et al. 1985, 252). There is also an interesting remark in their notes on this section, where they say that “some nouns, like *weather*, are neither count (**a weather*) nor noncount (**a lot of weather*), but these nouns share features belonging to both classes” (1985, 252).

According to them, *weather* has some features that belong to uncountable nouns (such as premodifiers) and some that belong to countable nouns (such as the plural, an example being the phrase *go out in all weathers*; Quirk et al. 1985, 252). This statement resembles their categorization of nouns having ‘dual class membership’ (1985, 247) which is discussed later on in this section.

There are certain factors that lead us to interpret the noun as either countable or uncountable, as Huddleston (1988, 89) points out. He mentions three factors that are the most important: number, determiners and inherent properties of the noun.

The first criterion, number, means that when a noun has a plural form, it is usually interpreted to be countable. There is an exception to this, which is the group of nouns that have a plural-looking form, but are still uncountable nouns. These are nouns that frequently refer to activities (*aerobics*), subjects of study (*mathematics, physics*), diseases (*measles, rabies*), and games (*darts, billiards*), as *Collins COBUILD English Grammar* (1990, 11)

notes. The verb is in the singular when such a noun is the subject, as illustrated by COBUILD's example: *Measles is in most cases a relatively harmless disease* (1990, 11). Huddleston also notes that plural forms such as *remains* and *earnings* are always uncountable, in spite of their plural number (1988, 89). The verb in these cases is in the plural form, unlike in the previous series of words. Huddleston and Pullum (2005, 86) also add that they can be distinguished as always being non-count, because they cannot take cardinal numerals as dependent: **one remain, *one earning* whereas count nouns can: *one chair, one corpse*.

When talking about the second factor, determiners, Huddleston (1988, 89) divides them into two categories: those that “force a count interpretation” and those that force an uncount interpretation. The ones that force a count interpretation are *one, a* or *an, another, each, every, either, neither* (Huddleston 1988, 89), and uncount determiners are *enough, much, most, little* and unstressed *some* or *any*. Huddleston and Pullum (2005, 88) note that if a common noun occurs without a determiner in the singular, it is almost always a case of an uncount interpretation. They say that “[c]ount nouns are found without determiners only in a very limited range of special syntactic constructions” (2005, 87). These include prepositional constructions such as *in bed, by train, etc.*, which I will not discuss further here.

The third factor mentioned by Huddleston, inherent properties of the noun, refers to the fact that some nouns are always uncountable and some countable. For example, *information*, which is uncountable, has no plural form, and it does not allow determiners that force a count interpretation (1988, 89). But, as Huddleston notes (1988, 89) it should be kept in mind that most nouns can be both countable and uncountable, even though one use is usually more normal than the other. These “odd” uses will be discussed further on in this thesis, my main criteria being indefinite articles and plural.

Downing and Locke (1992, 422-428) present a system of degrees of countability that divides nouns into different categories. They note that countability is not a binary system,

instead there is “a scale of varying degrees of potentiality for countness and massness” (Downing and Locke 1992, 422). They distinguish eight countability markers that make a noun either countable or mass, the mass nouns have three different markers and the countable nouns have five markers (Downing and Locke 1992, 421-422). The markers of mass nouns are:

- 1) the singular form with zero determiner, as in *I always take coffee with milk*
- 2) the singular form preceded by *all*, as in *I say this in all sincerity*
- 3) the singular form quantified by *much*, *little* or *a little* as in *There isn't much room in our apartment so we have little furniture* (Downing and Locke 1992, 421).

And the grammatical markers of countable nouns are:

- 4) the singular form determined by *a(n)*, as in *I'm looking for a new job*
- 5) the singular form determined by *each*, *every* as in *We go there every year*
- 6) with number contrast marked on the noun, *lion/lions*
- 7) invariable or plural form of the noun preceded by a plural determiner, *many choices*
- 8) plural number concord with verb or pronoun, as in *People like to be happy, don't they?* (Downing and Locke 1992, 422)

They give six different categories of countability based on which markers of countability the group admits:

- (A) fully mass; some occasionally with *a(n)*
 - (B) fully mass, some occasionally with *a(n)* or pluralized
 - (C) fully mass; fully count
 - (D) never mass; partially count
 - (E) never mass; fully count except number contrast on the noun
 - (F) rarely mass; fully count
- (Downing and Locke 1992, 422)

They say as well that these six categories are only one possible way to present countability in English nouns, and that many more categories would be needed to fully describe the phenomenon and all the possible alternatives (Downing and Locke 1992, 422-424).

The Type A noun (fully mass; some occasionally with *a(n)*) is said to refer to numerous fully mass nouns that are basically never used in a countable manner (Downing and Locke 1992, 424). Some of the example words belonging to this category are *drinking*, *luck*,

economics and *sincerity*, and also three of the words examined in this thesis are listed in this category: *weather*, *thunder* and *information* (Downing and Locke 1992, 424). Downing and Locke (1992, 424) state that “we do not say **a weather*, **each information*”. However, they also say that sometimes the indefinite article is allowed in the sense of ‘a kind of’ something when the reference is very specific and not general, as in *You don’t meet a courage like hers everyday* (Downing and Locke 1992, 424). Regarding the pluralisation of the words in this category, Downing and Locke say that it “is exceptional but may occur in set expressions such as: *Fishermen go out in all weathers*” (1992, 424).

Downing and Locke’s (1992, 424) type B noun category (fully mass; some occasionally with *a(n)* or plural) is said to include both abstract and concrete nouns that allow individuation with indefinite article when referring to ‘a kind of’ or ‘an instance of’ something more easily than type A nouns. Some example words in this category are *water*, *butter*, *happiness* and *money*, and also three of the words examined in this thesis are mentioned: *rain*, *knowledge* and *education* (Downing and Locke 1992, 424). They also note that these usages referring to ‘a kind of’ or ‘an instance of’ are especially common when a modifier is added, as for example in the example sentence they give: *You’ll need a good knowledge of English for that job* (Downing and Locke 1992, 424). They also add that some of the words in this group admit singular determiners (*one*, *another*), as in their example: *One sand is never exactly the same as another* (Downing and Locke 1992, 424). Some of these words can also be used in the plural with the sense of ‘instances of’ or as a mass collective, such as in *constant rains*, but they do not allow numerals to be used in front of them (Downing and Locke 1992, 424-425). Downing and Locke (1992, 425) also have an interesting remark about a tendency in American English to pluralise mass nouns. They give an example from *New York Herald Tribune*:

It would seem, then, that **our formal educations** should equip us with at least **reading knowledges** of those major European languages that do not find their way into the curriculum for specialist treatment.

Downing and Locke say that these uses are “non-standard forms which most people would not use and which we recommend should not be imitated” (1992, 425).

The type C nouns, according to Downing and Locke (1992, 425) are both fully mass and fully count. They say that these are nouns usually referring to “actions, relationships, states, emotions, concepts, materials” and it is possible to use them with all the markers of countability, with varying frequencies (Downing and Locke 1992, 425). Some examples words that they give in this category are *killing*, *friendship*, *failure*, *hope*, *metal* and *darts* (Downing and Locke 1992, 425). None of the words examined in this thesis are listed in this category. Downing and Locke (1992, 425-426) say that the basic reference with these words is usually mass, but the countable usage tends to represent “individual manifestations” of the mass reference, for example with *killing*, the plural *killings* denotes an individual instance of killing. They also note that when used in a countable manner, most of these nouns can be pluralized and individuated, but some cannot be counted, for example *his many writings* is possible, but **six writings* is not (Downing and Locke 1992, 426).

The type D noun given by Downing and Locke (1992, 426) represents nouns that are partially count and never mass. It is further stated that type D includes four small sets of nouns that denote collections of things, some of the example words being *the young*, *people*, *goods*, *earnings*, and *trousers* (Downing and Locke 1992, 426). All of these words have plural reference and plural concord with verbs, pronouns and determinatives, although some of these words have invariable singular form and some invariable plural form (Downing and Locke 1992, 426). Because of this they are never thought of as mass entities although their occurrences with markers of countability are limited, for example they do not admit singular determiners and cannot be enumerated (Downing and Locke 1992, 426).

The next category, type E, includes two small sets of words that are invariable in their form but the singular and plural can be otherwise expressed with all other markers of countability, and this is why the category is named “never mass; fully count, except number contrast on the noun” (Downing and Locke 1992, 427). Some of the example words are *sheep, aircraft, means, series* and *crossroads* (Downing and Locke 1992, 427).

The last category, type F (rarely mass and fully count), includes nouns that are most often used in a countable manner, such as *car, deed, library* and *advantage* (Downing and Locke 1992, 426). Since the countable usage is normal with these words, no “unusual” countable usage can be found.

4.2 Converting uncountable nouns into countable nouns

Leech and Svartvik (2002, 43) say that words that are usually uncountable can be “converted” into countable nouns, and point out two main uses of mass nouns (meaning here the same as uncountable nouns) used as countable nouns: 1) the countable use refers to a certain amount of the mass noun, as in *Two more coffees, please*, meaning two cups of coffee, and 2) when talking about some limited area of the mass noun, for example *Current London auctions deal with teas from 25 countries*, meaning different kinds of tea.

According to Leech and Svartvik (2002, 43), this usage is quite frequent. Actually, this conversion can be made with almost any noun referring to a substance. For example, *beer* can be used in both ways mentioned above. COBUILD gives the following examples of the use referring to a serving of beer (a) and to different kinds of beer (b):

- (a) Would you like **a beer**?
- (b) We have quite a good range of **beers**.

The same thing applies also to substance nouns that are not related to food, which can be exemplified by the word *detergent*:

- (c) Try **a** phosphate-free **detergent** such as Sainsbury's Greencare. (B1M 813)
- (d) AUTOMATIC dishwasher **detergents** are an unrecognised hazard to children. (A48 16)

In both (c) and (d), the count use refers to different or certain kinds of detergent.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 334) treat this usage as a case of polysemy, meaning that a word has more than one sense, and the different senses are used either in a countable or uncountable manner. Whereas Leech and Svartvik (2002, 43) stated that this conversion is usual with any nouns denoting substances, Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 336-337) mention six categories where this usage occurs:

- 1) Drink/food substances and servings
- 2) Foods and varieties
- 3) Animals and food
- 4) Abstracts and event instantiations
- 5) Abstracts and results
- 6) Nonce substance interpretations of primarily count nouns

The first category, drink/food substances and servings, was already exemplified by Leech and Svartvik earlier in this chapter with the examples of *beer*. The second category, foods and varieties, is quite similar to the first category, the examples given by Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 336) are as follows:

We're having **cheese** for lunch. (the substance)

These are two of my favourite **cheeses**. (different kinds of cheese)

The third category is also food related, when the word is used as an uncountable noun it refers to a food substance, where as the countable usage refers to an animal (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 337):

We're having **salmon** for dinner. (uncountable)

I was lucky enough to catch **a salmon** today. (countable)

Rest of the categories do not refer to substances, but to something more abstract. The fourth category, abstracts and event instantiations, includes nouns that denote abstract concepts when they are used in an uncountable manner, and events or instances of the abstract meaning when used in a countable manner (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 337). An example of this category is:

Full **discussion** of the land question is vital. (uncountable)

Two discussions of the land question took place. (countable)

The fifth category listed by Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 337) includes nouns that denote results. The uncountable usage refers to the abstract concept and the countable usage denotes the actual results, as in:

Necessity is the mother of **invention**. (uncountable)

Edison was honoured for **three** separate **inventions**. (countable)

The last category includes nouns that are primarily countable, but can be “converted” into an uncountable noun, and then the meaning is usually something of a substance and not individuals (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 337). Two examples given by Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 337) are:

The termite was living on a diet of **book**.

There was **cat** all over the driveway.

Instead of considering these kinds of nouns (for example *cake*) as having two separate senses that are used in a different way, as suggested by Huddleston and Pullum above, Quirk et al. (1985, 246) suggest that these nouns can be classified “as a lexical class of noun which combines the characteristics of count nouns and noncount nouns.” They also state that this type of analysis is especially “convenient for nouns like *brick* and *cake* with little difference in meaning between count and noncount uses” (1985, 246). These kind of nouns are said to

have ‘dual class membership’, meaning that they might be said to belong to both classes (1985, 246-247). An example of this usage given by Quirk et al (1985, 247):

He’s had several odd *experiences*. (countable)

He hasn’t had much *experience*. (uncountable)

They also note that in some cases, the countable/uncountable word pair can be “realized by different lexical items” (1985, 248). These include words such as *a permit – permission, a suitcase – luggage, a laugh – laughter* and *a job, a task – work*. In these word pairs, the first word represents the countable usage and the second word the uncountable usage.

Quirk et al. (1985, 298-299) do, however, also say that in addition to some noncount nouns that can be reclassified, some nouns, “particularly those denoting natural phenomena” can be used in the plural. They exemplify this with some sentences:

Let’s play on the *sands*.

I have serious *doubts/grave fears*.

As one can see, the second example is not related to natural phenomena, but can still be used in this sense. They also note that “[s]ome plurals express intensity, great quantity or extent, and have a literary flavour” (Quirk et al. 1985, 299). A couple of examples of this:

the *snows* of Kilimanjaro

sailing on the great *waters*

When considering dictionary entries and this kind of usage, Huddleston (1988, 90) says that the lexical entry “often contain[s] a mixture of basically mass meanings and basically count meanings”, but he also points out that the distinction between the count and non-count usage is not always mentioned, because general rules can cover some of the variation. For example, with some words that have “a basic mass meaning”, the count use is predictable, as with *coffee*. This means that if *coffee* is labelled uncountable, it can be expected that these two

usages, referring to a serving and to different kinds of *coffee*, are still found in normal usage although there may be no mention of them in the dictionary.

4.3 Differences in the labelling policies of dictionaries

Different dictionaries and grammars use different terms related to countability. When referring to countable use, the term is usually the same, *countable* (or in some cases, *count nouns*). When discussing the uncountable use, the terms vary. Dictionary A uses *non-countable*, dictionary B *uncountable* and dictionary C *mass*. *Non-count noun* or *uncount noun* are also possible. However, not all these words mean exactly the same thing. For example COBUILD makes a difference between uncountable nouns and mass nouns. When it uses the term *uncountable* (N-UNCOUNT) it means “things that are not normally counted or considered to be individual items” (COBUILD 2003, xvii) and therefore have no plural form and so forth. The meaning of mass noun (N-MASS) is different, and is described as follows:

A **mass noun** typically combines the behaviour of both count and uncount nouns in the same sense. It is used like an uncount noun to refer to a substance. It is used like a count noun to refer to a brand or type, e.g. *Rinse in cold water to remove any remaining detergent... Wash it in hot water with a good detergent... We used several different detergents in our stain-removal tests*. Other examples of mass nouns are: *bleach, butter, shampoo*. (COBUILD 2003, xvi)

COBUILD also uses a fourth type of label, N-VAR, (the third one being the countable use, N-COUNT) or a variable noun, which is however very close in meaning to N-MASS, and perhaps somewhat ambiguous. The differences in meaning between the terms used in COBUILD and in other dictionaries and grammars will be discussed and compared in more detail in this section. The terms I will be using throughout the text are usually *countable* and *uncountable* noun (and when the situation so requires, the specific terms used in each dictionary or grammar).

Svensson (1998, 21) presents different terms for countable and uncountable nouns appearing in a chronological order, also giving the authors who use them:

“Count nouns”	“Mass nouns”	Authors
Thing-words	Mass-nouns	Jespersen 1924
Bounded nouns	Unbounded nouns	Bloomfield 1933
Unit-words	Continue-words	Christophersen 1939
Countables	Uncountables	McCawley 1975
Individuated	Non-individuated	Mufwene 1984
Count nouns	Noncount nouns	Quirk <i>et al.</i> 1985

Table 4.1. Different term-pairs represented in a chronological order (Svensson 1998, 21).

Clearly all the different terms have similar references, but he also says that they are not always synonymous. He suggests that the best labels to use would be *countable* and *uncountable*, since *mass noun* can be “slightly problematic, since not all members of this class seem to refer to masses”, as for example *furniture* (Svensson 1998, 12). However, he does say that in most occasions, these terms can be used interchangeably.

I consulted the five dictionaries used in this study to find out how they handle these kind of words. Three of these dictionaries, namely OALD, CALD and LDCE distinguish only between uncountable and countable by using the labels [U] and [C]. In the case where both uses are possible, the label is simply [C or U]. However, COBUILD goes somewhat further. In its terminology, N-COUNT refers to the countable usage, N-UNCOUNT means basically the same as uncountable [U] in the other dictionaries, but N-MASS (a mass noun) has a slightly different meaning, as stated earlier in this section where the definition of the label was given. Following this terminology, COBUILD labels the words *beer* and *detergent* as mass nouns, and this is rational since these words can be used in an uncountable way when referring to a substance and in a countable way when referring to a certain type or brand of the substance. However, the word *cake*, which behaves quite similarly to the other example words, is labelled N-VAR (a variable noun), which is yet another term COBUILD uses. It is also explained to combine “the behaviour of both count and uncount nouns in the same

sense”, like a mass noun, but then it is said that when some variable nouns are used like an uncount noun, they refer to abstract things (such as *hardship* and *injustice*; COBUILD 2003, xvii). When used as a count noun, they refer to “individual examples or instances of” the thing in question (COBUILD 2003, xvii). COBUILD also mentions that there are other words that are used in this way, such as *potato* and *salad*. There are, however, some inconsistencies in this policy. Firstly, at least in my opinion, *cake* is also a substance, and should therefore be labelled N-MASS, but still it is labelled N-VAR. Secondly, the dictionary says that in the N-VAR usage, the uncountable usage refers to abstract things (COBUILD 2003, xvii). Surely *cake*, *potato* and *salad* are not abstract, and on the other hand *hardship* and *injustice* could be said to be always abstract, regardless of whether used as countable or uncountable. So, on the basis of these definitions, it might be understood that the greatest difference between N-MASS and N-VAR is that when the countable sense refers to a brand or type, it is N-MASS and when to an individual instance, it is N-VAR. This makes sense with *cake*, since *cakes* does not necessarily refer to types of cake, but rather to individual instances, but with one of their other example words, *salad*, this is once again rather incoherent, since *salads* can also refer to different types of salads, and not just individual instances of it. All in all, COBUILD’s labelling policy is somewhat confusing and leaves much to be desired. In my opinion, the definitions for these different labels should be rethought and written more carefully.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 340) also say that “non-count nouns are often called ‘mass’ nouns.” They themselves prefer the word *non-count* for two reasons: firstly, they use the occurrence with cardinal numerals as the main test for countability, and this term reflects this test very well, and secondly, because they think that *mass* is not always appropriate with all non-count nouns (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 340). They say that with words denoting substances (such as *water* and *coal*), *mass* would be quite appropriate, but with abstract non-

count nouns (for example *knowledge*, *spelling* and *work*) “it is less evident that it applies transparently” (2002, 340).

Leech and Svartvik (2002, 44) also talk about abstract nouns and concrete nouns. They note that abstract nouns “can more easily be both ‘count’ and ‘mass’ than concrete nouns” (here “*mass*” means the same as *uncountable*). According to the authors, abstract nouns that refer to events and occasions (such as *meeting*) are normally countable, but there are also nouns that can be either one, like *talk*:

I had *a long talk* with her. (count)

In the country we now hear *talk* of famine. (mass)

These are examples given by Leech and Svartvik (2002, 44). They also note that there are other abstract nouns that usually are only uncountable, like *honesty*, *applause*, *homework* and *information* (the last-mentioned will be discussed later in more detail). It seems that it is not possible solely on the basis of a word being an abstract noun to make generalizations about its use as both countable and uncountable.

OED Online does not label its words in the way the other dictionaries do; instead, the possible countable or uncountable uses have to be retrieved from the example sentences. Occasionally there are markings such as *pl.* which give specific information of the words countability, but these are rather rare. Later on in the thesis when discussing OED Online’s examples and their countability, the classification is derived from the example sentences. If there is an additional label of plural or singular use, it will be said that the word is used in the plural or with the indefinite article.

4.4 Previous work on unusual countables

In this section I will present some earlier work done on countable instances of normally uncountable words. Some studies have focused on a certain time period, for example

Rozumko (2002) has written about countability in the early eighteenth century English, and some studies have focused on different aspects and usages in Present-Day English, offering different kind of models of countability, as for example Svensson (1998) has done in his work. The first two studies that I will present here, namely those of Denison and Rozumko, are the most important ones for this thesis, since they are the basis of my own research and I will compare my results with the results found in these studies.

4.4.1 Denison in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*

Denison (1998) discusses countability in nouns in the “Syntax” chapter of *The Cambridge History of the English Language*. In his discussion of differences between countable and uncountable nouns, he states that “[i]t seems very likely that there is a systematic process of change from noncount to count for some nouns” in the nineteenth century (1998, 96). He illustrates this by comparing the countable and uncountable instances of *acquaintance*, using the nineteenth-century quotations in the OED as a corpus. He does, however, say that “full evidence is not yet available” of this change (1998, 96) and gives no further examples besides *acquaintance*.

Denison also states that there is an obvious difference between American English and British English that might be a sign of the change of the classification of some nouns recently (1998, 97). He says that there are a number of nouns which are treated as uncountable in British English, whereas in American English they can be countable. He uses the word *value* as an example of this:

You’ll find excellent *value* all around the shop. (British English)

You’ll find excellent *values* all around the store. (American English)

Denison says that the latter example could be said to be impossible in British English, and that this usage seems to be more recent (1998, 98). He states that “English has long had a

tendency to allow the abstract (often noncount) noun *X* to be used as a concrete noun meaning ‘instance of *X*’, and suggests that this is actually an instance of this kind of usage (1998, 98).

4.4.2 Rozumko: “Countable, Uncountable and Collective Nouns in the Early Eighteenth Century English – An Overview”

Rozumko (2002, 131-159) represents her study related to the countability of some nouns in the early eighteenth century in her article “Countable, Uncountable and Collective Nouns in the Early Eighteenth Century English – An Overview”. She presents Denison’s view of the systematical reclassification of some nouns in the course of Late Modern English, which was already discussed in Section 4.4.1 above. She notes that in her study, the usage with articles was one of the most suitable criteria for determining whether a noun is countable or uncountable in a given instance, because the usage of articles does not differ in a remarkable manner between the eighteenth century and Present Day English (Rozumko 2002, 132). She also notes the idea presented by Rissanen that there was one difference in the usage of articles, and that is 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” (Rozumko 2002, 132).

For the analysis of the results, she presents the categorization of uncountable nouns into *singularia tantum* and *pluralia tantum* employed by Graband in 1965; uncountable nouns correspond quite well with the category called *singularia tantum*, which includes all nouns that have no plural form (Rozumko 2002, 133). This group is further divided into *konkreta* and *abstrakta*. The first group, *konkreta*, includes nouns referring to concrete things such as *sugar*, *money*, *wheat* and the second group, *abstrakta*, includes nouns with an abstract denotation, for example *music* and *beauty* (Rozumko 2002, 133). She, however, notes the possibility that the same word can be used either as countable or uncountable. She discusses

Denison's statement that "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'" (Rozumko 2002, 133), and notes that this usage normally occurs when the noun refers to food or some other commodity. She also says that "[i]n Present-Day English abstract nouns can be used with an indefinite article when a particular event or state is in focus" (Rozumko 2002, 133) and notes that Rissanen has claimed that this usage was also possible in New English. Regarding New English, she also presents Schlauch's statement of the countability of abstract nouns. Schlauch (1959, 95) says the inflectional scheme of nouns in New English is almost the same as that of nouns in Modern English, with one exception: abstract nouns, which in Modern English do not appear in the plural, were regularly used in the plural "in a distributive sense" in New English. This usage was found, for example, in Shakespeare's texts, one of the examples is (Schlauch 1959, 95):

We'll make our *leisures* to attend on yours' (*Merchant of Venice*, I)

Schlauch (1959, 95) also notes that in today's language, abstract nouns are usually "regarded as indivisible", and she exemplifies this with the word *information*, stating that "the plural of *information* is not *informations* but *pieces of information* (1959, 95).

As Rozumko represents Denison's work on the matter (as discussed in Section 4.4.1 in this thesis), she also notes that there are no comprehensive studies of countable and uncountable nouns in the eighteenth century that she is aware of (Rozumko 2002, 134).

The main results of her study were that "[t]he majority of nouns in the corpus can be decidedly classified into countable, uncountable and collective" (Rozumko 2002, 157). There were, however, several nouns that were used both as countable and uncountable. Some of the abstract nouns that are used as uncountable in Present Day English were used as countables in her corpus, such as *applause* and *understanding*. Uncountable *konkreta* nouns were invariably used as uncountable, no countable instances were found (2002, 135).

The part of her study discussing nouns that did display variation in their usage also included some words that are discussed in this thesis. Rozumko says that these nouns could not “be classified in a clear-cut way, most likely because their usage was in the process of change” (200, 142). The words that she discusses that are also found in this thesis are *advice*, *evidence* and *information*. *Advice* was found eight times as countable and fifteen times as uncountable in her corpus, and she states that “[t]he overall tendency seems to be in favour of the uncountable variant” (2002, 148). One of the countable examples of *advice* was:

They are most of them histories, or **advices** of publick transactions ... (*The Guardian* vol. 1, 4)

Evidence was used quite equally: five instances of countable usage and four instances of uncountable usage. She notes, however, that all the uncountable instances came from one single text, meaning that they might simply show “the individual preference of the author”, or possibly be the early signs of a new kind of usage because the text in which these instances were found was the latest text in the corpus (Rozumko 2002, 152). One of the countable instances of *evidence* was:

... an indeed this opinion is **an evidence** and clearness ... (*The Guardian* vol. 1, 40)

Information was found seven times as an uncountable noun and four times as a countable noun, so the uncountable usage was more common. She notes that three of the four countable examples were from letters (Rozumko 2002, 155). One of the instances was:

There were .. others who returned to us **informations** of people yet shorter than themselves. (*The Spectator* vol. 11, 37 a letter signed Bob Short)

Rozumko states that this study is just a brief overview on the subject, and that she plans to further examine the countability of nouns in the early eighteenth century English (2002, 157).

4.4.3 Svensson: *Number and Countability in English Nouns*

As was already discussed in the previous sections, countability is not a binary feature. This is also the viewpoint Svensson adopts in his academic dissertation, in which he aims to “provide a coherent theory of nominal number, in particular the count-mass distinction in English” (1998, 1). His study includes an extensive corpus study, and the notion of embodiment is attached to the analysis, as he says that “[t]he fundamental hypothesis of the present work is that embodiment serves as the basis for how we form categories and thus for much of language, and that the notion of embodiment can be used to shed light on the linguistic classification of nouns into count and mass” (Svensson 1998, 85). He assumes that countability is rather motivated, instead of being arbitrary or predictable. He adds to his corpus study a theory called “the radial category”, and on the basis of these, he states that most nouns can be used both in a countable and uncountable manner, but a noun will usually have a strong preference to one of the categories (1998, 117). He identifies some major nominal subgroups on the basis of his analysis, such as *plurale tantum* nouns, binary object nouns and plurals of extension.

His corpus study included 110 nouns, which were partly selected randomly, partly on purpose, for example because the word was regarded as problematic or interesting (Svensson 1998, 40). Of the words examined in this thesis, his study included five: *advice*, *information*, *knowledge*, *research*, and *snow*. *Snow* was selected to represent a prototypical mass noun, the other four words were part of a stratified random sample from *The Collins Cobuild Grammar*, where these words represent nouns that are uncountable in English but are often considered countable in other languages (Svensson 1998, 40-42).

Based on his analysis Svensson discusses seven different nominal groups: prototypical count nouns, prototypical mass nouns, collective nouns, *plurale tantum* nouns, binary objects nouns, plurals of extension, and superordinate terms (1998, 133-158). Of the five words also

discussed in this thesis, *advice*, *research*, *information* and *snow* are discussed with prototypical mass nouns (1998, 136-138). *Snow* is, however, also discussed under “Plurals of extension.” It is said to be a prototypical mass noun, and can occasionally be used as a countable noun to refer to quality, as in the following example sentence (Svensson 1998, 151):

A light snow is falling on the village of Berrien Springs, Michigan. [BoE, British Magazines]

However, Svensson notes that also another type of plural exists, which is used when “[t]he plural number is associated with multiplicity and in some cases, the plural form may be used to designate great expanses of substance” (1998, 151). This plural usage is called the plural of extension. He exemplifies this with the following sentence:

Intellectually it is sustainable, economically it is not,” he argued as his black brogues churned through **the snows of remote Glenturret**, which harbours Scotland’s oldest distillery (1717). [BoE, *Guardian*]

Other words that function like this are said to be for example *sand*, *woods* and *surroundings*. Svensson suggests that the plural of extension functions in many cases in a relatively generic way, and that most of the nouns included in this category are nouns with a concrete reference (1998, 151). He adds, however, the suggestion by Zandvoort that this category can include abstract nouns as well: “[t]he plural of some abstract and material nouns may be used to express intensity, great quantity or extent” (quotation from Zandvoort 1962, 98). Svensson (1998, 152-153) also represents two examples given by Zandvoort:

Against his express wishes.

Tossed between hopes and fears.

In addition to his corpus analysis, Svensson, also discusses reclassification of nouns from countable to uncountable and the other way around, for example mass and count senses of words are discussed (1998, 159-177). These matters have already been discussed in this thesis

in Section 4.2, and will not be discussed further here. One other aspect that he discusses in his work is reification, which he explains by quoting Talmy (1992, 130-131):

Semantically, a noun prototypically refers to a physical object or mass. Other types of referents (e.g. actions, abstract ideas) are subject to **conceptual reification** toward these prototypes – e.g. the reified actions in *John gave me {a call/some help}*.

In this section dealing with reification, Svensson discusses firstly concrete and abstract nouns, and after that abstract nouns and their countability (1998, 179-183), discussing the word *risk* as an example case. His main point in this section seems to be that “because the abstract domain is a motivated extension of the concrete domain, referents of abstract nouns can also be counted and measured” (1998, 181). He says that since abstract nouns are somewhat “less distinct and precise” than nouns denoting concrete entities, the differences in meaning between different constructions are not always as clear as with concrete nouns, but regardless of this, he states that “[t]his should not be taken to indicate that the classification of nouns is arbitrary or random” (Svensson 1998, 181). In his opinion, such a statement would be totally false. He also points out that when discussing the possible countable and uncountable uses of a certain word, it is not enough merely to say that a certain usage is possible. Instead, one should often consult some kind of frequency information about the different alternatives. With this suggestion, he notes that “abstract count nouns tend to be less countable than concrete count nouns” (Svensson 1998, 182), exemplifying this with the word *kindness*. Although both countable (*kindnesses*) and uncountable (*kindness*) forms are possible, the frequencies of these usages are very different in his corpus material: 1600 hits for *kindness* and only 48 for *kindnesses* (1985, 182). He also states that most of the abstract nouns can be classified as both countable and uncountable, “and while there are many fine distinctions and some unclear cases, there can be no doubt that we quantify and measure abstract entities in the same way as we quantify and measure concrete entities” (Svensson 1998, 193).

4.4.4 Logan: “The Plural of Uncountables”

Logan (1941, 170-175) discusses in his article “The Plural of Uncountables” some abstract, usually uncountable words, that are used in the plural. He introduces Jespersen’s idea that many words can denote something countable and uncountable, depending on the situation, and this is why the division to countables and uncountables with some abstract words is necessary. He also notes Curme’s suggestion that abstract nouns and nouns denoting substances occur in plural when they refer to different kinds or instances of the matter in question (Logan 1941, 170). Based on his own observations from newspaper articles and literature, Logan states that “there is an increasing willingness, even on the part of careful writers, to adopt the needless (and often confusing) plural form” (1941, 171). He says that usually the plural form “adds nothing to the clarity of the statement” and is therefore unnecessary (1941, 171). He gives several examples of these unnecessary plural forms, for example with words such as *breath*, *death*, *youth* and *memory*, listing also a number of other words of which single instances with the unneeded plural were found. A couple of examples given by Logan are:

‘Best that you be here,’ he repeated; ‘you are as concerned as if it were your own *dooms* to be decided. For, my comrades, you must share my doom as you have shared so much else with me. . . .’ –William Brown Maloney, in *In High Places*, Knopf, 1939.

Let’s get together and renew our *youths*.

5. Findings

The analysis of the gathered data will be discussed below. I will first briefly look the diachronical division of the countable usages of *acquaintance*, since that was the word Denison (1998, 96) used as an example to support his hypothesis. After this, I will analyse the words chosen for this thesis. The words studied have been divided into groups according to their semantic fields, and each word will be discussed separately. The discussion of a word has been divided into two parts, first the dictionary entries and then the corpora findings. A note on the corpora findings will have to be made here: the numbers of instances found of the various usages are the numbers of relevant instances. The irrelevant instances, such as the word being used as a modifier (*a weather report*) or as a verb (*it rains outside*, the verb usage was excluded from the search but still some instances were found in the results) have been excluded.

Denison (1998, 96) stated that there was a systematic change in the 19th century for some words from uncountable to countable. He used *acquaintance* as an example of this. The countable instances for *acquaintance* in the corpora used in this thesis can be seen in Table 5.1 below. Quite many countable instances were found, and all in all the frequencies seem to be diachronically increasing, except with the indefinite article in the LION Corpus, where the highest frequency of this usage was found already in the latter half of the 18th century. Some examples found in the corpora of the countable usage:

- 1) He would have said that he had as reasonable **an acquaintance** with sorcery as anyone in Ireland. (Rebel angel, 1985-93; BNC prose texts)
- 2) Party discipline in the Senate is even weaker than in the House; several powerful senators have **a better-than-nodding acquaintance** with the petrochemical industry; and the Senate Finance Committee, which starts looking at the bill on June 7th, has a Democratic majority of only 11 to nine. (The Economist, 1985-93; BNC informative texts)
- 3) Six **acquaintances** he had met unexpectedly in London, and two at Portsmouth. (Charlotte Yonge: The Daisy Chain, 1856; LION Corpus)

	<i>acquaintance</i> with the indefinite article (non-fiction)	<i>acquaintances</i> (non-fiction)	<i>acquaintance</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>acquaintances</i> (LION)	<i>acquaintance</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informative)	<i>acquaintances</i> (BNC, informative)	<i>acquaintance</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>acquaintances</i> (BNC, prose)
1550-1599	-	-	3 (0,958)	-	-	-	-	-
1600-1649	2 (1,581)	1 (0,791)	3 (1,169)	5 (1,949)	-	-	-	-
1650-1699	11 (5,456)	1 (0,496)	35 (8,306)	9 (2,136)	-	-	-	-
1700-1749	1 (2,049)	-	132 (23,887)	11 (1,991)	-	-	-	-
1750-1799	11 (6,707)	5 (3,049)	274 (27,880)	36 (3,663)	-	-	-	-
1800-1849	9 (7,365)	2 (1,637)	293 (21,390)	193 (14,090)	-	-	-	-
1850-1899	11 (10,377)	8 (7,547)	249 (11,253)	415 (18,755)	-	-	-	-
1900-1949	11 (28,571)	1 (2,597)	(1 inst., incl. ab.)	(5 inst., incl. ab.)	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	94 (1,316)	174 (2,437)	67 (4,061)	109 (6,607)
Total	56 (6,481)	18 (2,083)	989 (16,171)	669 (10,939)	94 (1,316)	174 (2,437)	67 (4,061)	109 (6,607)

Table 5.1. The amount of hits for the countable usage of *acquaintance* in the corpora, the amount of instances per million words given in brackets.

The normalized frequencies do suggest that the countable usage of *acquaintance* has increased in the 19th century: in the non-fiction texts the usage with the indefinite article is 7,365 instances per million words in the first half of the 19th century, 10,377 instances per million words in the latter half of the 19th century, and as high as 28,571 instances per million words in the first half of the 20th century. The plural in the non-fiction texts examined increases in the 19th century as well, but is not as high in the first half of the 20th century. In the LION Corpus, the plural also increases in the 19th century, but the usage with the indefinite article actually declines: 21,390 instances per million words in the first half of the 19th century, but only 11,253 instances per million words in the latter half of the 19th century.

The frequencies in present-day usage are smaller: 1,316 (with the indefinite article) and 2,437 (in the plural) in BNC informative texts, and 4,061 (with the indefinite article) and 6,607 (in the plural) in the BNC prose texts, so this usage is not as frequent nowadays as it was in the 19th century.

5.1. Words related to weather phenomena

In this section, I will analyse the words that are related to weather phenomena. These include *weather*, *rain*, *snow*, and *thunder*.

5.1.1 *Weather*

5.1.1.1 *Weather* in dictionaries

When looking at the OED Online for the possible historical countable usage of *weather*, some instances were found. It says that *weather* can be used with the indefinite article to mean “[a] kind of weather; a spell of a particular kind of weather” and that this usage is nowadays obsolete (OED Online, s.v. *weather*, n. sense 1d). The last example they give is from 1618:

- 4) Their storme was chang'd into a fayre calme **weather**. (OED Online, s.v. *weather*, n. sense 1d)

The OED Online gives also another sense of the word used as countable, this time with the plural, in the sense of ‘kinds of weather’, and this is also said to be rare nowadays, except in the phrase (*in*) *all weathers* (s.v. *weather*, n. sense 1e). There are many examples of this, the latest being from 1865:

- 5) **All weathers** saw the man at the post. (OED Online, s.v. *weather*, n. sense 1e)

The last example without the phrase *all weathers* is from 1862:

- 6) It was impossible to pass round the promontory on horseback in the best of **weathers**; now doubtly so. (OED Online, s.v. *weather*, n. sense 1e)

From the contemporary dictionaries, COBUILD has no mention of any kind of countable usage, and the others mention only one possibility of using the word in a countable manner: the phrase *in all weathers* meaning “in all types of weather, even when it is very hot or cold” (LDCE, s.v. *weather*¹, sense 3). OALD adds to this that this usage is typical of British English (s.v. *weather*, sense 2).

5.1.1.2 Corpus findings

The findings from the corpora are summarised in Table 5.2.

	<i>weather</i> with the indefinite article (non- fiction)	<i>weathers</i> (non- fiction)	<i>weather</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>weathers</i> (LION)	<i>weather</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informati ve)	<i>weathers</i> (BNC, informati ve)	<i>weather</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>weathers</i> (BNC, prose)
1550- 1599	-	-	1 (0,319)	10 (3,195)	-	-	-	-
1600- 1649	-	4 (3,162)	-	1 (0,390)	-	-	-	-
1650- 1699	1 (0,496)	1 (0,496)	-	8 (1,898)	-	-	-	-
1700- 1749	-	2 (4,098)	2 (0,362)	6 (1,086)	-	-	-	-
1750- 1799	-	1 (0,610)	-	15 (1,526)	-	-	-	-
1800- 1849	-	-	-	11 (0,803)	-	-	-	-
1850- 1899	-	-	1 (0,045)	33 (1,491)	-	-	-	-
1900- 1949	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	0 (0,000)	38 (0,532)	1 (0,061)	18 (1,091)
Total	1 (0,116)	8 (0,926)	4 (0,065)	84 (1,374)	0 (0,000)	38 (0,532)	1 (0,061)	18 (1,091)

Table 5.2. The amount of hits for the countable usage of *weather* in the corpora, the amount of instances per million words given in brackets.

There were no instances of *a weather* in the non-fiction texts examined, and only three instances in the LION Corpus. One of the instances was:

- 7) Dodd flew to the helm, and with his own hands put it hard **a weather**, to give the deck guns one more chance, the last, of sinking or disabling the Destroyer. (Charles Reade: *Hard Cash*, 1863)

Even this example does not refer to the most common sense of *weather*, meaning the different kind of weather phenomena, for example sunshine, rain and so on. Instead it seems to somehow relate to ships. The other two examples were from a similar context.

With a modifier, both corpora yielded one example each:

- 8) ...to sell a peece of an olde Cow for a chop of a yoong Oxe, to wash your old meat that hath hung weltring in the shoppe with new blood, to trusse away an olde eaw instead of **a yoong weather**, and although you knowe it is hurtfull and forbidden by statutes to flea your hides, skins, and backes, with cuts and slashes to the impouerishing of the pore shoemaker when he buies it... (LION, Robert Greene: *Qvip for an Vpstart Courtier*, 1592)
- 9) ...for before we came near this Island, we perceiv'd a kind of weather, which is neither rain nor mist, and continued with us sometimes four or five dayes together, which the Seamen call **a Heysey weather**, and rises to such a height, as though the Sun shine out bright, yet we cannot see his body, till nine a clock in the morning, nor after three in the afternoon. (non-fiction, Richard Ligon: *A True & Exact History*, 1673)

These seem to correspond to the 'kind of weather' usage given by the OED Online.

The plural usage, *weathers*, was slightly more common than the usage with the indefinite article: 8 hits in the non-fiction corpus and 84 in the LION corpus. Of these, 4 in the non-fiction corpus and 76 in the LION corpus were of the phrasal use *all weathers*:

- 10) If this Plan of Nursing were literally pursued, the Children kept clean and sweet, tumbled and toss'd about a good deal, and carried out every Day **in all Weathers**; I am confident, that in six or eight Months time most Children would become healthy and strong, would be able to sit up on the Ground without Support, to divert themselves an Hour at a time, to the great Relief of their Nurses... (non-fiction, William Cadogan: *Nursing*, 1749)

The rest of the instances, excluding one instance in the LION Corpus, referred to different kinds of weather, in the sense that there are more than one type of weather, that the weather changes:

- 11) As for Nobility in particular Persons; It is a Reuerend Thing, to see an Ancient Castle, or Building not in decay; Or to see a faire Timber Tree, sound and perfect: How much more, to behold an Ancient Noble Family, which hath stood against the Waues and **weathers** of Time. (non-fiction, Francis Bacon Essays, 1625)
- 12) This complication of **weathers** being uncommon, was all the more to be feared. (LION, Thomas Hardy: Far from the Madding Crowd, 1874)

The last instance seems to have a very concrete meaning, where *weather* is apparently used to refer to ‘sheep’:

- 13) The second thing that doth even nobilitate our little Parish, is their Wooll--- Now you know what a splutter formerly there was about this Subject: An honest Fellow had got him a couple of fat **Weathers**, and to keep 'em safe, secur'd 'em in a Garden, just o' the outside of 's House--- but all wou'd n't do, for the Argonauts, a company of Sheep-stealers as they were, having smelt out where they graz'd, seiz'd upon 'em all, and for what Reason or Cause but the excellency of the Wooll, as well as the sweetness of the Mutton---on both which Accounts they were call'd---The Golden-Fleece. (John Dunton: Voyage Round the World, 1691)

As was the case in the historical corpora, the usage with the indefinite article in the BNC is rare: there were no examples in the informative texts, and only one instances in the prose section:

- 14) there is **a certain weather**, and it is grey, so you know (For now, 1985-93)

When one investigates this example more closely, it is found that it comes from poetry, and thus does not represent the “real” use of language.

The search for the plural in the informative texts yielded 38 instances, all of which had the phrase *in all weathers*. In the prose section, 18 instances were found, and nearly all of them also had the phrase *in all weathers*, or something very close to it, as in:

- 15) **EVEN IN THE BEST OF WEATHERS** the view from the officers' mess of 16th Division's Cambridge Barracks was dispiriting. (A land not theirs, 1985-93)

On the basis of the corpora material and the dictionaries, the only countable usage of *weather* that could be said to be in present day use is the phrase *in all weathers*. The comparing of the normalized frequencies shows that the plural usage has been declining. In

the non-fiction texts examined the highest frequency with the plural was found in the first half of the 18th century (4,098) and in the LION Corpus in the latter half of the 16th century (3,195), after which the usage has declined. The frequency in the BNC for the plural in the informative texts was 0,532 and in the prose texts it was 1,091 instances per million words. On the basis of this, one could say that the plural has decreased more in non-fiction texts than in prose texts, and that in present-day language the plural *weathers* is more common in prose texts. The usage with the indefinite article has been rare throughout the corpora and the instances found were so few that no conclusions of the possible declining/increasing usage can be made.

5.1.2 *Rain*

5.1.2.1 *Rain* in dictionaries

The OED Online gives several senses of *rain* used in a countable manner. There are three different senses in which *rain* is used in the plural. The first one refers to “[f]alls of rain; episodes or periods of rainfall” (OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 2a). Examples of this are found already in Old English and all through to an example from 2006:

- 16) For three months past have not had above **six Rains**, and not one of those to wet 3 Inches in the Ground. (1762; OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 2a)
- 17) The current Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) south of the Equator is likely to bring about more good **rains** over the country during the next three weeks. (2006; OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 2a)

The second sense where plural is used when referring to a season of much rain which occurs annually, with an interesting remark that this is especially used to refer to the rains in India (OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 2b). Examples are found from 1615 to the present day:

- 18) I had sav'd the few Ears of Barley and Rice..and now I thought it a proper Time to sow it after **the Rains**, the Sun being in its Southern Position. (1719; OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 2b)

The third sense relates to “[a]n area of the Atlantic Ocean, in which rain is particularly frequent”, this sense is however labelled obsolete, and the examples are from 1687 to 1867 (OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 2c). One example of this usage from the OED Online (s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 2c):

- 19) **Rains**, in the Sea Language, is all that Tract of Sea to the Northward of the Equator, between 4 and 10 Degrees of Latitude; and lying between the Meridian of Cape Verde, and that of the Eastermost Islands of the same Name. (1728)

The OED Online gives also one sense when *rain* is used with the indefinite article. This is when the word refers to “[a] fall of rain; a period, episode, or (specified) amount of rainfall” (OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 3). There is also a remark that nowadays this usage is mainly North American (OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 3). There are examples from the 14th century till the present day, one of the examples being:

- 20) **A rain**, the first the earth had been blest with for some time, fell on that day. (1833; OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 3)

Examples of the use with the indefinite article are also found under the sense of “[a] descent or liberal bestowal of something immaterial; [a]lso of material things: a large or overwhelming quantity or supply” (OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 4b). Two of the examples are as follows:

- 21) When it pleases God to take any of His children to Himself..He usually sends **a gracious rain** upon the survivors. (1774; OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 4b)
- 22) There was **a constant rain** of optimists pouring through this trade. (1925; OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.¹, sense 4b)

The OED Online has also another entry for *rain* with a completely different meaning: “[a] strip of land, a ridge; a division between fields or between strips of land in a field” (s.v. *rain*, n.², sense 1) and in this sense the word is used as a countable:

- 23) Followinge **a certaine rayne** or hedge devydinge Gomersall and liversedge. (1608; OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.², sense 1)

It is also noted that this usage is nowadays found mainly in the northern parts of England (OED Online, s.v. *rain*, n.²).

Of the contemporary dictionaries, CALD has no mention of any possible countable usage of *rain*, whereas COBUILD mentions the possibility of using *the rains* to refer to rain that falls only in certain seasons (s.v. *rain*, sense 2). OALD adds to this the usage with the indefinite article to refer to a certain fall of rain, its example being:

24) **A light rain** began to fall. (s.v. *rain*, sense 1)

OALD also states in s.v. *rain*, sense 3, that used in the singular followed by *of* something, it refers to “a large number of things falling from the sky at the same time: *a rain of arrows / stones*”. LDCE gives the same senses as OALD.

5.1.2.2 Corpora findings

The findings in the historical corpora are summarised in Table 5.3 below. As one can see, there were a few instances of usage with the indefinite article found: altogether seven in the non-fiction texts examined and even as much as 71 in LION. The instances found in the non-fiction texts examined represented the sense of ‘a rainfall’, as in:

25) The water broke out of the drain again at No. 8, and overflowed the kitchens, during **a heavy rain** on August 2nd. (John Snow: Cholera, 1855)

The instances found in the LION Corpus were of two types: some denoting ‘a certain kind of rain’ and the others represented the figurative use of ‘a large amount of objects falling from the sky’. The division of these instances diachronically was more unified than the findings from the non-fiction texts examined: all but two instances were from the 19th century, and the last two being from 1666 and 1790. Some examples of these instances:

26) ...thinking he was about to strike her, she dashed the basket of buttons in his face, and they flew right and left over him, against the head of Black Bess, **a rain of** fragments of mirror, brass, steel, mother-of-pearl, and bone. (Sabine Baring-Gould: In the Roar of the Sea, 1892; the figurative use)

- 27) The day had clouded over, and **a drizzling rain** set in at sunset. (Mary Shelley: The Last Man, 1826; a certain kind of rain)

	<i>rain</i> with the indefinite article (non-fiction)	<i>rains</i> (non-fiction)	<i>rain</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>rains</i> (LION)	<i>rain</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informative)	<i>rains</i> (BNC, informative)	<i>rain</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>rains</i> (BNC, prose)
1550-1599	-	-	-	1 (0,319)	-	-	-	-
1600-1649	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1650-1699	3 (1,488)	6 (2,976)	1 (0,237)	5 (1,187)	-	-	-	-
1700-1749	-	1 (2,049)	-	31 (5,610)	-	-	-	-
1750-1799	1 (0,610)	10 (6,098)	1 (0,102)	13 (1,323)	-	-	-	-
1800-1849	1 (0,818)	10 (8,183)	23 (1,679)	52 (3,796)	-	-	-	-
1850-1899	-	5 (4,717)	46 (2,079)	53 (2,395)	-	-	-	-
1900-1949	2 (5,195)	1 (2,597)	-	-	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	21 (0,294)	110 (1,540)	19 (1,152)	47 (2,849)
Total	7 (0,810)	33 (3,819)	71 (1,161)	155 (2,534)	21 (0,294)	110 (1,540)	19 (1,152)	47 (2,849)

Table 5.3. The amount of hits for the countable usage of *rain* in the corpora, the amount of instances per million words given in brackets.

The plural form was far more common in both corpora: 33 instances in the non-fiction texts examined and 155 in the LION Corpus. There were instances from both ‘periods of rain’ and of ‘rain that falls in a certain season’:

- 28) **Rains** had covered the karroo with a heavy coat of green that hid the red earth everywhere. (LION, Olive Schreiner: The Story of an African Farm, 1883)
- 29) I do not remember I have left unsaid any thing, that conduces to the work of Sugar-making, unless it be, sometimes after great **rains**, (which moisten the aire more then ordinary) to lay it out upon fair daies in the Sun, upon cloaths, or in the knocking room, and sometimes to bring in pans of coals... (non-fiction texts, Richard Ligon: A True & Exact History, 1673)

There was also one instance representing a kind of figurative use in the LION instances:

- 30) vertue, either I haue hithertoo had but a shadowe of thee, or thou thy selfe art but a shadow: but seeke Moderna, seeke to asswage this flame and to quench this fire, which as it commeth without cause, so it wil consume without reason, if thou wilt thus giue the **rains** of thy libertie to thy franticke affections, medicine will come to late when the disease will grow incurable: but can I deny, what the destinies haue decreed, is it in my power to peruert that which the Planets haue placed, or to resist that which the starres haue ordained: what need I vse so many words, I am not the first, neither shall I bee the last, that haue beene thus wroong with this... (Barnaby Rich: Brvsanvs, 1592)

The search with the indefinite article provided altogether 21 instances in the BNC informative texts. The instances of *a rain* all represented the figurative use, ‘a large amount of objects falling’, as in:

- 31) You can think of solar radiation as consisting of **a rain** of tiny bullets moving outwards from the Sun at the speed of light. (The solar system, 1985-93)

On the other hand, the instances with a modifier were mostly referring to ‘a certain kind of rain’ or ‘a shower of rain’:

- 32) **A light rain** began to fall, so with a wave to Mulverin, we were off. (Jaunting through Ireland, 1985-93)

In the prose texts in the BNC, 19 instances of *rain* with the indefinite article were found, and the division into different senses was quite similar to the division in the informative texts.

The search for the plural in the BNC yielded 110 instances in the informative texts and 47 instances in the prose texts. Of these, two senses were found: ‘periods of rain’ and ‘rain that falls in a certain season’:

- 33) General Alexander and his troops carried out a magnificent fighting retreat and held up the Japanese advance until **the rains** broke, thus saving four months' valuable time in which preparations could be made to repel the Japs if they attempted to invade India. (Unfinished: George Appleton remembers and reflects, 1985-93; informative texts; ‘rain that falls in a certain season’)
- 34) She had crossed it once before, but she knew it would be much more risky today, because **the recent heavy rains** would have made the surface gluey, and if she slipped or made a false step she might find herself caught and held

in the treacly morass of the marsh. (The Challenge book of brownie stories, 1985-93; prose texts; 'periods of rain')

One thing worth noting is the frequent use of the definite article *the* with the plural: from the 110 instances in the informative texts, 62 were directly preceded by *the*, and from the 47 plural instances in the prose texts, 33 were directly preceded by *the*. Many of the remaining instances had a modifier between the definite article and the plural form. This is in accordance with the dictionaries since most of the dictionaries that mentioned the possible plural form also noted the use of the definite article.

When comparing the normalized frequencies one can see that the plural instances were more common in all the corpora examined compared with the indefinite article. In the instances with the indefinite article, the highest overall frequency was found in the prose texts of the BNC: 1,152. Diachronically, the usage with the indefinite article seems to have been increasing, the highest frequency being in the first half of the 20th century in the non-fiction texts examined (normalized frequency 5,195). However, in the informative texts in the BNC the normalized frequency was only 0,294, so this usage seems to have declined very rapidly. Usage in prose texts has not declined that much: the last frequency in the LION Corpus is 2,079 and in the BNC prose texts it is 1,152.

The plural usage seems first to have been increasing, until the first half of the 18th century in LION (normalized frequency 5,610) and the first half of the 19th century in the non-fiction texts examined (normalized frequency 8,183), after which it has been declining, at least in the informative texts, where the present-day usage frequency in the BNC is 1,540. However, in the prose texts the usage shows a slight tendency of increasing again: the last frequency in the LION Corpus is 2,395, whereas in the BNC prose texts the frequency is 2,849.

5.1.3 *Snow*

5.1.3.1 *Snow* in dictionaries

The OED Online gives some countable uses for *snow*. The first possible one it gives is when it is used to refer to “[a] fall of snow; a snowstorm”, and this sense is marked to be nowadays rare (s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 2a):

- 35) We had only **two snows** and sledding but about three weeks. (1740)

Another possibility to use *snow* as a countable is when it refers to ‘a time period’, usually a winter:

- 36) **Thirty snows** had not yet shed Their glory on the warrior’s head. (1825; OED Online, s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 2b)

A third possibility is to refer to “[a]n accumulation, mass, expanse, or field, of snow” and it is noted that this sense is not always easily distinguished from sense 2a which was already discussed above (OED Online, s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 3a). An example of this usage:

- 37) **The snows** of that Mont Blanc which we saw together. (1820; OED Online, s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 3a)

The OED Online also gives one sense which is noted to be restricted to the plural form only: “[t]he regions of perpetual snow; the Arctic regions” (s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 3b). The OED Online has only one example of this, which might mean that this usage is not very common:

- 38) To men legislating for the area betwixt..**the snows** and the tropics. (1844; OED Online, s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 3b)

The OED Online gives also other meanings to *snow*; one of them being related to cooking:

- 39) Recipes for the following **snows** will be found under their respective headings. (1887; OED Online, s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 5)

This sense refers to “[a] dish or confection resembling snow in appearance” (OED Online, s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 5). Another figurative usage is the sense denoting “[t]he white hair of age”, which is said to be used in the plural as well:

- 40) Thy fragrant Odours on my Head More than **the Snows** of Age have shed. (1743; OED Online, s.v. *snow*, n.¹, sense 6a)

The OED Online has also another entry for *snow*: this sense refers to a certain type of a ship, which resembles a brig (s.v. *snow*, n.²). The examples are found between 1676 and 1881, one of them being:

- 41) Majestick navies in her harbours ride, Skiffs, **snows** and frigates anchor by their side. (1784; OED Online, s.v. *snow*, n.²)

The contemporary dictionaries offer a far more limited view on *snow*: all of them give the first entry as uncountable, this being the sense referring to the actual matter. OALD, COBUILD and LDCE give another sense, this one being used in the plural meaning ‘snow in a certain place or at a certain time’ (OALD, s.v. *snow*, sense 2) or “a large amount of snow” in a certain place (LDCE, s.v. *snow*¹, sense 3). OALD also notes that this usage is *literary* (s.v. *snow*, sense 2). Some of their examples are:

- 42) the melting of the winter **snows** (LDCE, s.v. *snow*¹, sense 3)
 43) **the snows** of Everest (OALD, s.v. *snow*, sense 2)
 44) ...the first **snows** of winter (COBUILD, s.v. *snow*, sense 2)

In addition to these senses, CALD labels the sense referring to “a single fall of snow” as countable, their example being:

- 45) We haven’t had many heavy **snows** this winter. (s.v. *snow*, sense 2)

LDCE gives a matching sense, also labelled countable: “a period of time in which snow falls” (s.v. *snow*¹, sense 2).

5.1.3.2 Corpus findings

The findings for *snow* in the corpora can be seen in Table 5.4 below. In the non-fiction texts examined, there were no relevant instances of *a snow*, and only three instances with a modifier. One of these examples referred to a vessel, the other two referring to ‘a time period’ and ‘something falling like snow’:

- 46) Of them two were 64 Gun ships, the other **a large Snow** and the fourth which still remains a frigate. (Joseph Banks: Endeavour Journal, 1771; a vessel)
- 47) ...the authoritie of the one, and the Counsell of the other, maketh so many seeming, and sonburnt ministers as we haue, whose learning is gotten in a sommer heat, and washed away, with **a Christmas snow** againe: who neuerthelesse, are lesse to be blamed, than those blind bussardes, who in late yeares, of wilfull maliciousnes, would neyther learne themselues, nor could teach others, any thing at all. (Roger Ascham: Scholemaster, 1570; refers to a time period)
- 48) By a long digestion some part of the gold will fall to the bottom like **a white snow** and may with borax, tartar, and salt nitre be melted into a white metal as heavy as gold and, afterwards with antimony, may recover its yellow color again. (John French: Art of Distillation, 1651; something falling like snow)

	<i>snow</i> with the indefinite article (non- fiction)	<i>snows</i> (non- fiction)	<i>snow</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>snows</i> (LION)	<i>snow</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informati ve)	<i>snows</i> (BNC, informati ve)	<i>snow</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>snows</i> (BNC, prose)
1550- 1599	1 (1,773)	-	1 (0,319)	-	-	-	-	-
1600- 1649	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1650- 1699	1 (0,496)		1 (0,237)	-	-	-	-	-
1700- 1749	-	-	-	1 (0,181)	-	-	-	-
1750- 1799	1 (0,610)	1 (0,610)	1 (0,102)	14 (1,425)	-	-	-	-
1800- 1849	-	2 (1,637)	2 (0,146)	21 (0,652)	-	-	-	-
1850- 1899	-	2 (1,887)	7 (0,316)	30 (1,356)	-	-	-	-
1900- 1949	-	-	-	(1 inst, incl. above)	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	3 (0,042)	49 (0,686)	6 (0,364)	21 (1,273)
Total	3 (0,347)	5 (0,579)	12 (0,196)	66 (1,079)	3 (0,042)	49 (0,686)	6 (0,364)	21 (1,273)

Table 5.4. The amount of hits for the countable usage of *snow* in the corpora, the amount of instances per million given in brackets.

So, no instances with the indefinite article referring to actual snow were found in the non-fiction texts examined. The plural hits, however, refer to ‘snow in a certain place’ or ‘a mass of snow’:

- 49) The periodical flood is occasioned by the melting of **the snows** on the Rocky Mountains, and the plains at their feet. (John Bradbury: Travels, 1819; snow in a certain place)
- 50) It requires the constant exercise of a desperate resolution to carry on the cure amid such **snows** and ice. (Benjamin Colby: Guide to Health, 1846; a mass of snow)

The LION corpus yielded three examples for *a snow*, two referring to ‘a snow storm’ and the last one’s meaning being somewhat vague, it might refer to a vessel, since the context is sailing-related, but one cannot be sure:

- 51) I broke with them at last, for what they did on board of a bit of **a snow**---no matter what it was---bad enough, since it frightened me---I took French leave, and came in upon the proclamation, so I am free of all that business. (Walter Scott: Redgauntlet, 1824; meaning somewhat unclear)
- 52) He said that he had known a frost beginning, just as this had done, with a black east wind, after days of raw cold fog, and then on the third night of the frost, at this very time of year (to wit on the 15th of December) such **a snow** set in as killed half of the sheep, and many even of the red deer and the forest ponies. (RD Blackmore: Lorna Doone, 1869; a snow storm)

Eight relevant instances with a modifier were found in the LION corpus, all of them referring to ‘a certain kind of a fall of snow’, an example of this being:

- 53) The wind raved in the trees and hedges---the sleet was almost thickened into **a blinding snow**, insomuch, that, when the company reached the house, the greater number of them were so chilled that they stood in need of another service... (John Galt: The Entail, 1823)

The search for the plural in the LION corpus yielded altogether 66 relevant examples. All most all of these referred to ‘snows in a certain place or time’ or ‘a mass of snow’, as in:

- 54) Elinor struggled in vain for the renewal of this life of cold mediocrity,---she thirsted for it as one who, in the deserts of Afric, expiring for want of water, would wish for the moment to be an inmate of Lapland, to drink of their eternal **snows**,---yet at that moment wonders how its inhabitants can live among SNOW. (Charles Maturin: Melmoth the Wanderer, 1820)

There were three instances denoting the sense of ‘white hair that comes with age’, as in:

- 55) ...tempered by a strong trait of benevolence; which, like a glory, irradiated a broad expansive brow; a mouth, on which even yet the spirit of convivial enjoyment seemed to hover, though shaded by two large whiskers on the upper lip, that still preserved their ebon hue; while time or grief had bleached the scattered hairs, which hung their **snows** upon the manly temple. (Lady Morgan: *The Wild Irish Girl*, 1806)

The BNC gave 3 relevant hits for *snow* with the indefinite article in the informative texts.

Two of these represented ‘a certain kind of fall of snow’, as in:

- 56) **A light snow** is falling on the village of Berrien Springs, Michigan. (Esquire, 1985-93)

The remaining example denotes a figurative usage, ‘something resembling snow’:

- 57) To the layman they all look pretty similar: crisp emerald weed buoyed up in the stream and then, in July, **a snow** in summer of glistening white flowers, which spill over the water in a way that seems to spell out the brief abundance of midsummer. (Taming the flood, 1985-93)

In the prose texts in the BNC, altogether 6 instances were found with the indefinite article.

Two of these denoted the figurative usage, ‘something resembling snow’ and four referred to ‘a certain kind of fall of snow’.

The search for the plural *snows* yielded 49 instances in the informative texts in the BNC and 21 instances in the prose texts. The majority of these referred to ‘snow in a certain place or time’ or ‘a mass of snow’, as in:

- 58) **The snows** in Wales had lain long, and the spring rains had been heavy and protracted; the Comer drank, and grew quietly mad. (City of gold and shadows, 1960-74; prose texts)

One can note also the plural form *rains* in this example. There was one example denoting a vessel in the prose texts and one using the word as meaning ‘a time period’ in the informative texts, in this case a year or a winter:

- 59) Gabled houses fringed one side of the quay; on the other the river was thick with ships, **snows**, brigs, schooners — cutting into the heart of the city. (The first of midnight, 1975-84; a vessel)

- 60) I was a boy of about **thirteen snows** when my parents sent me away into the hills ... to find my Wyakin. (Chief Joseph: guardian of the Nez Perce, 1985-93; a time period)

Comparing the amounts of hits per million words, one can see that *snow* with the indefinite article is not that common in any of the corpora examined, and the normalized frequencies between time periods vary from 0,042 to 0,610, with the exception of the latter half of the 16th century in the non-fiction texts examined, where the frequency is 1,773. In the informative texts, the usage with the indefinite article is rare, especially in the BNC: only 0,042 instances per million words. In prose texts this usage seems to be slightly increasing; the last frequency in the LION Corpus is 0,316 and in the prose texts in the BNC it is 0,364. The plural seems to be increasing on the basis of the normalized frequencies, the highest frequencies are found in the latter half of the 19th century in both historical corpora (1,887 in the non-fiction texts examined, 1,356 in the LION Corpus). However, the present day usage frequency, represented by the BNC, is lower than the instances of the 19th century in the historical corpora, but the usage in informative texts has declined more heavily (from 1,887 in the non-fiction texts examined to 0,686 in the BNC informative texts) than the usage in prose texts (from 1,356 in the LION Corpus to 1,273 in the BNC prose texts).

5.1.4 *Thunder*

5.1.4.1 *Thunder* in dictionaries

The OED Online gives several different senses where *thunder* can be used in a countable manner. The first one of these is the referring to “a thunderstroke or ‘thunderbolt’”, and it is mentioned that this usage appears with both the indefinite article and the plural, and that this usage is nowadays restricted to only poetic or rhetoric use (s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 1b). The last example that the OED Online has of the countable usage is from 1460:

- 61) Thise **thoners** and levyn downe gar fall..Castels and towres. (s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 1b)

The next sense that is said to be used with the indefinite article or the plural is the sense referring to “[a] peal of thunder, a thunder-clap”, and this is also said to be nowadays used only in poetic or rhetoric use (OED Online, s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 1c). One of the examples given is:

- 62) As they were returning from Westminster-hall, there was very terrible **Thunders**, when none expected it. (1665; OED Online, s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 1c)

Another sense that can be used in a countable manner, with both the indefinite article and the plural, refers to “[a] thunderstorm” (OED Online, s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 1d). This sense is said to be nowadays obsolete, except in dialectal use (OED Online, s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 1d). It is not stated, however, which dialect still uses this sense. One example of this sense given by the OED Online is:

- 63) It seemed to him, that in **a thunder** the bolt fell vpon his Fathers House. (1623; s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 1d)

Yet another sense that can be used with both the indefinite article and the plural is said to be the sense denoting “[a]ny loud deep rumbling or resounding noise” (OED Online, s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 2), as in:

- 64) The great organ..rolling thro’ the court **A long melodious thunder**. (1847; s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 2)

The OED Online gives also a figurative sense where *thunder* can be used either in the singular or plural: “[t]hreatening, terrifying, or strongly impressive utterance; awful denunciation, menace, censure, or invective, ‘fulmination’; vehement or powerful eloquence” (s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 3a). One of the examples in plural is:

- 65) He directed the **thunders** of the church against heresy. (1781; OED Online, s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 3a)

Of the contemporary dictionaries, COBUILD and CALD give no possible countable usage for *thunder*. LDCE gives one sense where it can be used in the singular, meaning “a loud deep noise” (s.v. *thunder*¹, sense 2) and CALD has nearly the same sense used in the singular, with the meaning of “continuous loud noise” (s.v. *thunder*, sense 2). No relevant examples were offered by either dictionary.

51.4.2 Corpora findings

The results from the corpora can be seen in Table 5.5 below. In the non-fiction texts examined, there were only two instances of *thunder* with the indefinite article, and none with a modifier added. Both these examples referred to the figurative usage, ‘a loud noise’:

- 66) The Athenians, being suddenly touched with a sense of the Spartan virtue and their own degeneracy, gave **a thunder** of applause; and the old man cried out, The Athenians understand what is good, but the Lacedemonians practise it. (John Millar: *Distinction of Ranks*, 1806)
- 67) This was met by **a thunder** of applause, not only from the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, but also from a part of the Bolsheviki. (John Reed: *Ten Days*, 1922)

In the LION Corpus, 18 instances of *thunder* with the indefinite article were found. Four of these referred to the actual weather phenomenon and the rest were of a figurative use, referring to ‘a deep or loud noise’:

- 68) ...and with his angry Arme made passage through the thickest of their troupes, as though that death had beene commaunder of the battell: he caused Crownes and Scepters to swim in bloud, and headlesse Steedes with ioyntlesse men to fall as fast before his sword, as drops of raine before **a thunder**, & euer in the greatest danger, he encouraged his Souldiers in this maner: Now for the fame of Christendome, fight, Captaines, bee nowe triumphant conquerours, or Christian Martyrs. (Richard Johnson: *Seuen Champions of Christendome* 1, 1608; actual weather phenomenon)

He liked to live within himself, as he phrased it; and he was never more so than when the sky lowered overhead, and the sullen or defiant roar of the waters came, as now, like **a deafening thunder** all round him. (William Barry: *The New Antigone*, 1887)

	<i>thunder</i> with the indefinite article (non- fiction)	<i>thun- ders</i> (non- fiction)	<i>thunder</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>thun- ders</i> (LION)	<i>thunder</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informa- tive)	<i>thu- nders</i> (BNC, informa- tive)	<i>thunder</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>thun- ders</i> (BNC, prose)
1550- 1599	-	-	1 (0,319)	6 (1,917)	-	-	-	-
1600- 1649	-	1 (0,791)	1 (0,390)	4 (1,559)	-	-	-	-
1650- 1699	-	11 (5,456)	2 (0,475)	-	-	-	-	-
1700- 1749	-	-	-	2 (0,362)	-	-	-	-
1750- 1799	-	-	-	14 (1,423)	-	-	-	-
1800- 1849	1 (0,818)	-	4 (0,292)	25 (1,825)	-	-	-	-
1850- 1899	-	7 (6,604)	10 (0,452)	12 (0,542)	-	-	-	-
1900- 1949	1 (2,597)	-	-	(1 inst, incl. above)	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	3 (0,042)	2 (0,028)	4 (0,242)	0 (0,000)
Total	2 (0,231)	19 (2,199)	18 (0,294)	63 (1,030)	3 (0,042)	2 (0,028)	4 (0,242)	0 (0,000)

Table 5.5. The amount of hits for the countable usage of *thunder* found in the corpora, the amount of hits per million words given in brackets.

The search for the plural yielded 19 instances in the non-fiction texts examined. Nine instances of these had the phrase *the seven thunders*, which is apparently a biblical reference, as in:

- 69) The Revelation of Revelations, an Essay towards the Unsealing, Opening, and Discovering of the Seven Seals, **the Seven Thunders**, and the New Jerusalem State. (Jane Lead: Message, 1696)

Five instances referred to the actual weather phenomenon, as for example in:

- 70) They realized that the price of liberty was to be eternal vigilance, that "no more truly do rising clouds and rumbling **thunders** foreshadow gathering storms," than did the indications on every side speak of an approaching national tempest. (DW Belisle: Independence Hall, 1859)

The remaining five instances referred to a certain kind of utterance that was mentioned by the OED Online, a “[t]hreatening, terrifying, or strongly impressive utterance; awful denunciation, menace, censure, or invective, ‘fulmination’; vehement or powerful eloquence” (s.v. *thunder*, n., sense 3a). One example of this from the corpus is:

- 71) In France, the **thunders** of the Vatican with regard to long curly hair were hardly more respected than in England. (Charles Mackay: *Extraordinary*, 1852)

In the LION Corpus, the search for plural yielded 63 hits. 36 of these denoted the actual weather phenomenon, as in:

- 72) And when the shaking **thunders** roll, And lightnings strike athwart the gloom,
We shelter in the cedar's bole, And revel 'mid the rich perfume!
(Ann Ward Radcliffe: *The Romance of the Forest*, 1791)

22 of the instances found were of the figurative usage, referring to ‘a loud or deep sound’.

One example of this is:

- 73) The lad grinning pointed to the culprit against whom the Doctor was pouring out the **thunders** of his just wrath ---Major Pendennis could not help laughing. (William Thackeray: *History of Pendennis*, 1849)

There were also four instances of ‘a certain kind of utterance’ and one instance of *the seven thunders*:

- 74) The hat caught Grace's eye at the moment of her entrance, and she felt that all the **thunders** of the Church were contained within it. (Anthony Trollope: *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, 1867)
- 75) Lord love 'ee, neither court-paying, nor preaching, nor **the seven thunders** themselves, can shake a woman when 'twould be better for her that she should be shaken. (Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 1891)

The search for *thunder* with the indefinite article in the BNC informative texts yielded only three relevant examples, all of them referring to ‘a loud or deep sound’:

- 76) From the narrow seat behind there was **a sudden thunder** of sound as the two Omanis began playing drums. (*Mother without a mask*, 1985-93)

In the prose texts in the BNC, four instances of *thunder* with the indefinite article were found, and they represented the figurative usage of ‘a loud or deep sound’ as well.

The search for the plural in the informative texts in the BNC gave two possibly relevant instances. The first one represented the sense of ‘a certain kind of utterance’:

- 77) When St Bernard was instructed by the pope to preach the Second Crusade in 1146 he chose Vézelay for the site of his chief gathering — for it was the greatest centre of tourist traffic in his world; and there again, from the pulpit of the abbey church, St Thomas Becket chose to utter his choicest **thunders** against the counsellors of King Henry II of England in 1166 — for it was the meeting place of all the peoples of Europe, the ideal centre for a great gesture of propaganda. (Europe in the central middle ages, 1960-74)

The second possible one is somewhat ambiguous, since the sentence given by the BNC was:

- 78) Below the **thunders** of the upper deep (Myths, gods and fantasy: a sourcebook, 1985-93)

A more detailed look at the context around this sentence reveals that this sentence is from poetry, although it is found in a text classified as informative. No instances of the plural was found in the prose texts in the BNC.

All in all, the instances found in the BNC were very scarce compared to the historical corpora, the normalised frequencies being very small in the BNC. *Thunder* with the indefinite article was equally rare between different time periods when comparing the normalized frequencies, with the exception of the first half of the 20th century in the non-fiction texts examined, where the frequency was as high as 2,597.

In both the historical corpora, the plural was noticeably more common. In the non-fiction texts examined, there were two time periods where the frequencies were quite high: the latter part of the 17th century (frequency 5,456) and the latter part of the 19th century (frequency 6,604), where as in the other time periods there were hardly any instances. The frequency of the plural in the BNC informative texts is extremely low, only 0,028 instances per million words. In the LION Corpus the plural was the most common in the latter half of the 16th century with the normalized frequency of 1,917 instances per million words. After this the plural usage seemed to decline until the 18th century, when the frequencies start to rise again, achieving another peak in the first half of the 19th century, when the frequency is 1,825. After

this the instances start to decline again, and there were no instances of the plural found in the BNC prose texts.

5.2 Words related to information and its possession

In this section I will analyse the words relating to information and its possession. These words are *advice*, *information*, *education*, *knowledge*, and *evidence*.

5.2.1 *Advice*

5.2.1.1 *Advice* in dictionaries

The OED Online gives some senses of *advice* that can be used in a countable manner. The sense referring to ‘an opinion’ is exemplified with a countable example among the uncountable examples:

- 79) All things..joyn with **one advise** To honour thee. (1633; OED Online, s.v. *advice*, sense 1)

This sense is said to be obsolete (OED Online, s.v. *advice*, sense 1). Another sense denoting “[o]pinion given or offered as to action; counsel” is also exemplified with a countable example:

- 80) These are so many **advices** which it is easy to give, but difficult to follow. (1761; OED Online, s.v. *advice*, sense 5)

Advice can also refer to “[a] decision of a deliberative body; an act”, as in:

- 81) The **advices** of Constance conceived by the Deputies of the German Nation in that Council, against some special abuses of the Pope..The **advices** of Ments made and concluded in that City by the States of the Empire. (1661; OED Online, s.v. *advice*, sense 7)

This example was the only one given of this sense, and this sense was labelled obsolete and rare (OED Online, s.v. *advice*, sense 7). There was also a sense where *advice* is said to have a special meaning in the plural, referring to “communications from a distance” (OED Online, s.v. *advice*, sense 8). This was exemplified by:

- 82) **Advices** came down to him that many thousands of the citizens had been enrolled as volunteers. (1849; OED Online, s.v. *advice*, sense 8)

OED Online also gives one very concrete sense of *advice*, which is used to refer to an ‘advice-boat’, some sort of a vessel (s.v. *advice*, sense 9). There is only one example of this sense:

- 83) We took a frygotte which was **an advice** of the kinge’s [of Spain]. (1595; OED Online, s.v. *advice*, sense 9)

The contemporary dictionaries consulted do not give any kind of possible countable usage for *advice*.

5.2.1.2 Corpora findings

The results from the corpora can be seen in Table 5.6 below. The search for *an advice* yielded three instances in the non-fiction texts examined. Two of these were from the 17th century, both with the meaning of ‘an opinion offered as guidance’:

- 84) Last, and never too oft remembred, whether this be a Command, or **an Advice**, we must look that it be so understood as not to contradict the least point of moral Religion that God hath formerly commanded, otherwise what do we but set the moral Law and the Gospel at civil War together? and who then shall be able to serve these two Masters? (John Milton: *Divorce*, 16a)
- 85) **An advice** to the CHURCH OF ENGLAND. (Elinor James: *Vindication*, 1687)

The third instance found also represented this meaning:

- 86) affluent, a dear friend who attached himself to me from my first arrival at Bristol, who has continued my friend with a fidelity unconquered by time or even by my own apparent neglect; a friend from whom I never received **an advice** that was not wise, or a remonstrance that was not gentle and affectionate. (Samuel Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*, 1817)

This example is from 1817, and it is the only example of any kind of countable use of *advice* found in the non-fiction texts examined that is not from the 17th century.

	<i>advice</i> with the indefinite article (non- fiction)	<i>advices</i> (non- fiction)	<i>advice</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>advices</i> (LION)	<i>advice</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informati ve)	<i>advices</i> (BNC, informati ve)	<i>advice</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>advices</i> (BNC, prose)
1550- 1599	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1600- 1649	2 (1,581)	-	1 (0,390)	-	-	-	-	-
1650- 1699	2 (0,992)	5 (2,480)	6 (1,424)	11 (2,610)	-	-	-	-
1700- 1749	-	-	2 (0,362)	19 (3,438)	-	-	-	-
1750- 1799	-	-	3 (0,305)	19 (1,933)	-	-	-	-
1800- 1849	1 (0,818)	-	4 (0,292)	19 (1,387)	-	-	-	-
1850- 1899	-	-	3 (0,136)	11 (0,497)	-	-	-	-
1900- 1949	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	3 (0,042)	4 (0,056)	0 (0,000)	0 (0,000)
Total	5 (0,579)	5 (0,579)	19 (0,311)	79 (1,292)	3 (0,042)	4 (0,056)	0 (0,000)	0 (0,000)

Table 5.6. The amount of countable instances of *advice* found in the corpora, the amount of hits per million words given in brackets.

The search with a modifier gave two relevant instances in the non-fiction texts examined.

One was of the sense of ‘a decision given by a deliberative body’:

- 87) The Royal Glory should be pure, and yet transparent, suffering not the least eclipse or shadow; which appears visibly defective, when it is wholly led by a **single advice** never so grave and weighty: let the projection, if it be entertained, have the teste of a Council; but let the act and glory be solely the Kings, which adds to the belief of his ability, and more assures his greatness. (Elizabeth Cary: LifeReign and Death, 1680)

The other one represented the sense of ‘an opinion given as guidance’:

- 88) Gotefridus Viterbiensis, striking rather at the roote then at the branches of this enterprise, affirmes not Francos Zachariae paruisse decreto, sed acquievissse consilio [the Francks did not obey Zacharias' decree, but heeded his advice], though the difference be as great as betweene an absolute injunction and a **politicke advice**. (Gunpowder trial, 1606)

The search for *advice* with the indefinite article in the LION corpus yielded 19 relevant examples. All but two of them denoted the sense of ‘an opinion given as guidance’, as in:

- 89) 'I wont have him defended; I never thought to be so deceived; but you all worshipped the boy as if every word that came out of his mouth was Gospel truth, and you've set him up till he would not condescend to take **an advice** of his own father, who little thought what an upstart sprig he was rearing; but I tell him he has come to the wrong shop for domineering ---eh, mamma?' (Charlotte Yonge: *The Heir of Redclyffe*, 1853)

The remaining two instances denoted ‘communications from a distance’, one of the examples being:

- 90) I shall therefore desire you to obliterate the Forgetfulness of the Transcript of **a fresh Advice** from the Exotic Regions of learning within the Sphere of Activity of the Sedentary and Peripatetic Universities, and the Inoculations of transcendent Posteriors of the City Wits, those will be royal, and despotic Disvertisements here in this rural, and contiguous abode. (Charles Gildon: *Post-boy robd of his Mail*, 1692)

The search for the plural in the non-fiction texts examined yielded five instances. All of them represent the sense of ‘communications from a distance’, which was stated to be used especially in the plural by the OED Online (s.v. *advice*, sense 8). One of the examples is:

- 91) According to our **advices** from Alsatia, Monsieur de Turenne continued still in his Quarters at Deswieler, having had advice, that a party of 1000 Lorrain Horse had fallen upon two Squadrons of the Arrierban of the Province of Anjou, between Luneville and Blamont, that the Marquis de Sable, who Commanded those Squadrons, was wounded, and with many others taken prisoner. (*London Gazette*, 1674)

The search for the plural in the LION Corpus yielded 79 instances. Of these, 28 represented the sense of ‘communications from a distance’, as in:

- 92) Sybil enquired, with much agitation, whether they had themselves seen the people, and they replied that they had not, but that **advices** had been received from Mowbray of their approach, and as for themselves they were hurrying at their utmost speed to a town ten miles off, where they understood some yeomanry were stationed, and to whom the Mayor of Mowbray had last night sent a despatch... (Benjamin Disraeli: *Sybil*, 1845)

There were also seven instances of the sense of ‘a decision given by a deliberative body’, one of them being:

- 93) He told me that my arrival had caused great excitement throughout the country, and that I was to be detained a close prisoner until the receipt of **advices** from the Government. (Samuel Butler: *Erewhon*, 1872)

Rest of the instances represented the sense of ‘an opinion given as guidance’:

- 94) Now what I have to warn you against, Mary, is the sin of ever listening to any of her **advices**. (Susan Ferrier: *Marriage*, 1818)

The BNC gave three relevant instances of *advice* with the indefinite article in the informative texts. All of them were of the sense of ‘an opinion given as guidance’, as in:

- 95) The case of the two-storey extension, that as a result of **an Architects advice**, became a single storey extension with internal rearrangements at 60% of the budgeted cost illustrating the point. (Adkin. *Moving in Oxfordshire*, 1985-1993)

No examples of *advice* with the indefinite article were found in the BNC prose texts.

The search for the plural in the informative texts in the BNC yielded four relevant instances, and they all were of the ‘an opinion given as guidance’ sense as well:

- 96) We give them **advices** about the way to go, the correct prices, many things. (Old serpent Nile. *A journey to the source*, 1985-1993)

As with the indefinite article, no relevant instances were found in the BNC prose texts.

When comparing the amount of instances with the normalized frequencies, it is noted that the frequencies in the BNC are fairly lower compared to the historical corpora. In the non-fiction texts examined the countable instances of *advice* occurred only in the 17th century (with the exception of one instance). The results from the LION Corpus also suggest that the countable usage of *advice* is declining. The highest frequency with the indefinite article was found in the latter half of the 17th century (1,424) and with the plural in the first half of the 18th century (3,438). After these the usage has declined, and there were no relevant instances of countable usage of *advice* in the BNC prose texts. In the informative texts in the BNC the frequencies were extremely low (0,042 with the indefinite article and 0,056 in the plural), so it could be argued that in present-day language this usage is almost inexistent.

5.2.2 *Information*

5.2.2.1 *Information* in dictionaries

The OED Online gives some senses where *information* can be used in a countable manner.

The first one refers to “formation or moulding of the mind or character, training, instruction, teaching; communication of instructive knowledge” (OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 1a).

This sense is said to be nowadays rare or obsolete, and of the examples given by the OED Online, only one represents a countable usage:

- 97) To lead them to the light by **a faithful information** of their Judgments. (1663; s.v. *information*, sense 1a)

The OED Online also gives a sense which is labelled to be used with the indefinite article and in plural, meaning “[a]n item of training; an instruction” (s.v. *information*, sense 1b). This sense is said to be obsolete (OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 1b). One of the examples given by the OED Online is:

- 98) Paines taking here to enriche themselves, with **enformations** of virtue. (1553; s.v. *information*, sense 1b)

The last example of this sense is from 1760. Another sense where *information* is stated to be used with the indefinite article or plural is when referring to “[a]n item of information or intelligence; a fact or circumstance of which one is told” (OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 3b). This sense is also labelled obsolete, the last example being from 1845:

- 99) Great changes in our notions, **informations**, in our relations to the Life of Schiller. (OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 3b)

OED Online also gives a sense meaning “[t]he action of informing against, charging, or accusing” (s.v. *information*, sense 4) and it is noted that this sense is the origin of the following sense listed, which is related to English law. This sense means “[a] complaint or charge against a person lodged with or presented to a court a magistrate, in order to the institution of criminal proceedings without formal indictment” (OED Online, s.v. *information*,

sense 5a). The examples of sense 4 range from 1480 to 1613 and the examples of sense 5a from 1467 to 1898. An example from both senses:

100) **An informacion** and Peticion against the oppressours of the pore Commons of this Realme. (1550; OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 4)

101) The objects of the other species of **informations**, filed by the master of the crown-office upon the complaint or relation of a private subject, are any gross and notorious misdemesnors, riots, batteries, libels and other immoralities of an atrocious kind, not peculiarly tending to disturb the government. (1769; OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 5a)

There were also other law-related senses with minor distinctions, one relating to “[a] complaint of the Crown in respect of some civil claim” (OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 5b) and also senses relating to other legal systems, as in civil law:

102) **Informations** are arguments urged before the Judge by the Advocates on both sides, after the Pleadings and Proofs are concluded. (1774; OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 6a)

There was also a sense relating to Scottish Law, denoting “[a] statement or complaint in writing”, as in:

103) No person can be imprisoned in order to trial for any crime, without a warrant in writing, expressing the cause, and proceeding upon **a signed information**. (1754; OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 6b)

It is also said that this sense can be applied to “similar proceedings in foreign systems of judicature, ancient or modern” (OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 6c), as for example in:

104) The terrors of **a malicious information**, which might select them as the accomplices, or even as the witnesses, perhaps, of an imaginary crime, perpetually hung over the heads of the principal citizens of the Roman world. (1781; OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 6c)

The OED Online gives still another sense, referring to “[t]he action of ‘informing’ with some active or essential quality” (s.v. *information*, sense 7). This sense is said to be obsolete and is exemplified by:

105) There does not seem any limit to these new **informations** of the same Spirit that made the elements at first. (1870; OED Online, s.v. *information*, sense 7)

None of the contemporary dictionaries consulted give any kind of possible countable usage for *information*. CALD and LDCE even give a warning on the usage of *information*:

“Information is an uncountable noun. Do not say ‘informations’ or ‘an information.’” (LDCE, s.v. *information*).

5.2.2.2 Corpora findings

The findings for *information* in the corpora can be seen in Table 5.7 below.

	<i>information</i> with the indefinite article (non-fiction)	<i>informations</i> (non-fiction)	<i>an information</i> (LION)	<i>informations</i> (LION)	<i>information</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informative)	<i>informations</i> (BNC, informative)	<i>information</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>informations</i> (BNC, prose)
1550-1599	-	-	-	2 (0,639)	-	-	-	-
1600-1649	7 (5,534)	-	1 (0,390)	2 (0,779)	-	-	-	-
1650-1699	16 (7,937)	10 (4,960)	18 (4,271)	20 (4,746)	-	-	-	-
1700-1749	-	-	12 (2,172)	16 (2,895)	-	-	-	-
1750-1799	2 (1,220)	1 (0,610)	22 (2,239)	21 (2,137)	-	-	-	-
1800-1849	-	-	12 (0,876)	6 (0,438)	-	-	-	-
1850-1899	1 (0,943)	1 (0,943)	6 (0,271)	2 (0,090)	-	-	-	-
1900-1949	1 (2,597)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	16 (0,224)	10 (0,140)	0 (0,000)	0 (0,000)
Total	27 (3,125)	12 (1,389)	71 (1,161)	70 (1,145)	16 (0,224)	10 (0,140)	0 (0,000)	0 (0,000)

Table 5.7. The amount of countable instances of *information* found in the corpora, the amount of hits per million words given in brackets.

In the non-fiction texts examined, the search for *information* with the indefinite article yielded 27 relevant instances. Six of these represented the sense denoting ‘accusing’, as in:

106) THomas Becket of Canterburie, that opposed himselfe so obstinately against his anointed King heere in England, about some liuings which he pretended to belong to the Sea of his Archbishoprick appealing to the Pope from his Countrys Censure, exhibited **an Information** before Apollo, against his antient Friend Walter de Mapes Arch-deacon of Oxford, for withstanding the Popes Legat, that came to London with a strict Decree to command all the Clergie men in England to put away their wiues. (William Vaughan: Golden Fleece, 1626)

All six examples denoting this sense were from the first half of the 17th century. There were also 15 instances representing the sense of ‘an item of information’, as in:

107) How the bare patterning out of the Exterior figure of an object, can give us **an information** of its Interior nature? (Margaret Cavendish: Observations, 1666)

Seven of these instances had the phrase *a true information*:

108) Neither can all sorts of Heat and Cold be expressed by Wind, Air and Water, in Weather-glasses; for they being made by Art, cannot give **a true information** of the Generation of all natural heat and cold; but as there is great difference between Natural and Artificial Ice, Snow, Colours, Light, and the like; so between Artificial and Natural Heat and Cold; and there are so many several sorts of heat and cold, that it is impossible to reduce them all to one certain cause or principle, or confine them to one sort of Motions... (Margaret Cavendish: Observations, 1666)

Five instances seem to refer to a wider amount of information than just ‘an item of information’, but still could be said to represent the same sense. One example of these:

109) Next, although I allow that there are particular, both rational and sensitive figurative motions in every part and particle of the body; yet the rational being more observing and inspective then the sensitive, as being the designing and ordering parts, may sooner have **a general information** and knowledg of all other rational parts of the composed figure, and may all unitedly work to the conceptions or thoughts of the musing and contemplating man; so that his rational motions in the pinched part of his body, may work to his interior conceptions, and the sensitive motions of the same part, to the exterior perception... (Margaret Cavendish: Observations, 1666)

The last remaining instance is somewhat hard to classify, but it might also be regarded as ‘an item of information’:

110) A Declaration and **an Information** from us the People of God Called Quakers (Margaret Fell: Declaration, 1660)

An interesting thing to note is that of the 27 instances of *information* with the indefinite article in the non-fiction texts examined, 13 were from the same text, Margaret Cavendish's *Observations* from 1666.

The search with the indefinite article in the LION Corpus gave 71 relevant examples. 26 of these have to do with the court of law, meaning 'a statement or complaint', as in:

111) But it is out of all reasonable rule for a magistrate to take **an information** from a felon, except against his accomplices. (William Godwin: *Things As They Are*, 1794)

The remaining 45 instances denoted 'an item of information', as in:

112) Gifford had received but **an imperfect information** of the state of my health during the latter part of July. (William Godwin: *Fleetwood*, 1805)

It is an interesting difference between the non-fiction texts examined and the LION Corpus, that in the searches with the indefinite article, there were no examples in the non-fiction texts examined of the legal context, whereas in the LION Corpus approximately one third of the results had to do with the court of law.

The search for the plural in the non-fiction texts examined gave 12 relevant instances.

Three of these had to do with the legal context, one of the examples being:

113) **Informations** were exhibited in the Star Chamber against two persons, named Priest and Wright, for being engaged, as principal and second, in a duel, on which occasion he delivered a charge that was so highly approved of by the Lords of the Council, that they ordered it to be printed and circulated over the country, as a thing "very meet and worthy to be remembered and made known unto the world." (Charles Mackay: *Extraordinary*, 1852)

The remaining nine examples denoted 'an item of information', as in:

114) In chapter 17, we are told "of secret and swift **informations** by the species of sound. (Edward Somerset: *Century of Inventions*, 1663)

The search for the plural in the LION Corpus yielded 70 relevant examples. Thirteen of these were related to the court of law, as in:

115) Learned **informations** (written arguments) on the import of the verdict, which must be allowed a very mild one in the circumstances, were laid before the High Court of Justiciary. (Walter Scott: *Rob Roy*, 1817)

The remaining 57 instances are examples of the sense of ‘an item of information’, one of them being:

- 116) Having had these **Informations**, I began to look on Monfredo with a jealous Eye, and observ'd his Actions very narrowly; and found often an intimacy discover it self betwixt 'em, in spite of all their cunning dissimulation.
(Anon: Players Tragedy, 1693)

In the informative texts in the BNC, the *information* with the indefinite article yielded 16 relevant examples. All but two of these were related to the court of law, an example being:

- 117) A defendant's costs order may also be made in the following circumstances: (1) by a magistrates' court where **an information** has been laid before magistrates but not proceeded with; or where the magistrates' court inquiring into an indictable offence as examining justices determines not to commit the accused for trial; (2) by the Crown Court where the defendant is not tried for an offence for which he or she had been indicted or committed for trial; or the defendant who has been convicted of an offence before a magistrates' court appeals against conviction or sentence and, in consequence of that appeal, the conviction is set aside or a less severe punishment is awarded; (3)... (The modern English legal system, 1985-93)

One instance referred to 'a briefing':

- 118) Anne and I went to **an information** last week held by the Archbishop.
(Personal letters and other ephemera, date unknown)

The remaining example denoted ‘an item of information’:

- 119) Finally, as liver failure was predominant in at least 16 of the 29 patients dying within six weeks and as our score gives **an objective information** about the outcome of the patient (unlike the classical Child-Pugh classification which is subjected to changes after improvement of the patient's status) cirrhotic patients with their first, potentially lethal, variceal bleeding should be early stratified as candidates or not for liver transplantation and the decision to proceed to transplantation should be considered in the high risk group defined by us. (Gut: Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, 1985-93)

No relevant instances for *information* with the indefinite article were found in the BNC prose texts.

The search for the plural in the BNC informative texts yielded 10 examples. All but one of these were related to the court of law, as for example in:

120) He claimed to have taken the **informations** of over a hundred witnesses, English and Irish. (The Dictionary of National Biography: Missing persons, 1985-93)

The last instance referred to a name of a faculty of information studies:

121) The scheme is run by the Faculty of **Informations** at the University of Ulster in conjunction with Nistro, the Northern Ireland Science and Technology Regional Organisation. (The Belfast Telegraph, 1985-93)

In the BNC prose texts, no relevant examples of the plural were found.

When comparing the normalized frequencies between different time periods, one can see clearly that in both historical corpora the highest frequencies are found in the latter half of the 17th century, varying from 4,271 to 7,937 instances per million words. After that, the frequencies decline heavily, and the numbers from the BNC are extremely low compared to the highest frequencies, only 0,224 (with the indefinite article) and 0,140 (in the plural) instances per million words in the informative texts and no relevant instances in the prose texts. There was also an interesting division of the senses: although the frequencies were quite similar in the historical corpora examined, there are hardly any examples of the legal context usage in the non-fiction texts examined, where as in the LION Corpus the legal context examples were quite common. Since no examples were found in the BNC prose texts, no conclusions can be made about the division of senses in the present-day language.

5.2.3 *Education*

5.2.3.1 *Education* in dictionaries

The OED Online gives some senses where *education* is used in a countable manner. The first one refers to “[t]he process of ‘bringing up’ (young persons) ... with reference to social station, kind of manners and habits acquired, calling or employment prepared for” and this usage is said to be nowadays obsolete (OED Online, s.v. *education*, sense 2). One example given by the OED Online of this sense is:

122) Their..handy crafts, and **educations**, are much like them in that part of Virginia we now inhabite. (1624; s.v. *education*, sense 2)

Also the sense referring to “systematic instruction, schooling or training” is exemplified with countable as well as uncountable examples (OED Online, s.v. *education*, sense 3). One of the countable examples is:

123) Many of our sergeants were, with good **educations**, substantial freeholders in our own country. (1812; OED Online, s.v. *education*, sense 3)

There was also another sense of *education* with a countable usage, denoting “[t]he rearing of silkworms; *concr.*, a number of silkworms reared at one time” (OED Online, s.v. *education*, sense 1b). The only example given by the OED Online is from 1888:

124) For large ‘**educations**’ a room is fitted with shelves. (s.v. *education*, sense 1b)

Rest of the senses of *education* given by the OED Online were exemplified with uncountable examples only.

The contemporary dictionaries consulted also had countable uses mentioned. LDCE says that *education* in the sense of “the process of teaching and learning, usually at school, college or university” can be either in the singular or an uncountable noun (s.v. *education*, sense 1). It also gives an example with the singular:

125) She also hopes her children will get a **good education**. (LDCE, s.v. *education*, sense 1)

CALD gives this same view, and COBUILD also labels this sense as N-VAR (s.v. *education*, sense 1). OALD also gives this sense in the singular or as an uncountable, but it mentions another sense as well, referring to “a particular kind of teaching or training” (s.v. *education*, sense 2). This sense is said to be used either in the singular or as an uncountable, but there are no countable examples given, the only example is *health education* (OALD, s.v. *education*, sense 2). COBUILD mentions this same sense, but they label it N-UNCOUNT (s.v. *education*, sense 2).

LDCE gives yet another sense where *education* can be used in the singular: to refer to “an interesting experience which has taught you something – often used humorously” (s.v. *education*, sense 4). The example given by LDCE is:

126) Having Jimmy to stay has been quite **an education!** (s.v. *education*, sense 4)

This same sense is also given by OALD, s.v. *education*, sense 5.

5.2.3.2 Corpora findings

The results for *education* in the corpora can be seen in Table 5.8 below.

	<i>educatio n</i> with the indefinit e article (non- fiction)	<i>educatio ns</i> (non- fiction)	<i>educatio n</i> with the indefinit e article (LION)	<i>educatio ns</i> (LION)	<i>educatio n</i> with the indefinit e article (BNC, informat ive)	<i>educatio ns</i> (BNC, informat ive)	<i>educatio n</i> with the indefinit e article (BNC, prose)	<i>educatio ns</i> (BNC, prose)
1550- 1599	1 (1,773)	-	-	1 (0,319)	-	-	-	-
1600- 1649	-	1 (0,791)	-	-	-	-	-	-
1650- 1699	5 (2,480)	-	12 (2,848)	5 (1,187)	-	-	-	-
1700- 1749	3 (6,148)	-	82 (14,839)	4 (0,724)	-	-	-	-
1750- 1799	6 (3,659)	-	118 (12,007)	7 (0,712)	-	-	-	-
1800- 1849	6 (4,910)	-	63 (4,599)	3 (0,219)	-	-	-	-
1850- 1899	35 (33,019)	-	85 (3,841)	2 (0,090)	-	-	-	-
1900- 1949	31 (80,519)	-	(5 inst., incl. above)	-	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	407 (5,700)	6 (0,084)	59 (3,577)	4 (0,242)
Total	87 (10,069)	1 (0,116)	360 (5,886)	22 (0,360)	407 (5,700)	6 (0,084)	59 (3,577)	4 (0,242)

Table 5.8. The amount of countable instances of *education* found in the corpora, the amount of hits per million words given in brackets.

In the non-fiction texts examined, the search for *education* with the indefinite article yielded 87 instances. Almost all of these represented the sense of ‘the process of teaching and learning’, and usually in a school environment, as for example in:

127)The college was designed by its founder to provide **an education** similar to that given in the English universities, and for the purpose he left about £100,000. (GB Clough: History of Education, 1904)

There were a couple of instances referring to ‘up-bringing’, one of them being:

128)We never see or perhaps make sport with the ill Effects of **a bad Education**, till it comes to touch us home in the ill conduct of a Sister, a Daughter, or Wife. (Mary Astell: Marriage, 1700)

In the LION Corpus, 360 instances with the indefinite article were found. As in the non-fiction texts examined, almost all of the instances were of ‘the process of teaching and learning’. One example of this is:

129)Rewarded by the succès fou of this accomplishment, she proceeds to exhibit several others, not included in the curriculum of **an ordinary education**; the most admired among which is that one---not so widely known as its simple ingenuity deserves ---of crossing the fore and middle fingers, and slowly passing them down the bridge of the nose, thereby discovering a chasm of great depth, apparently parting the nose into two. (Rhoda Broughton: Belinda, 1883)

There were also a few examples referring to ‘up-bringing’, one of them being:

130)"Ay, more's the pity," cried Mrs. Belfield, "for as to young ladies waiting and waiting, I don't see the great good of it; especially if a proper match offers; for as to a good husband, I think no lady should be above accepting him, if he's modest and well-behaved, and has been brought up with **a genteel education**." (Frances Burney: Cecilia, 1782)

There was also one instance referring to ‘an interesting experience that has taught you something’:

131)I assure you that it is **an education** to visit it. (Oscar Wilde: Picture of Dorian Gray, 1891)

The search for the plural in the non-fiction texts examined yielded only one example, which was from 1640:

132)27When we, whom they stile by the name of weaker Vessells, though of a more delicate, fine, soft, and more plyant flesh, and therefore of a temper most capable of the best Impression, have not that generous and liberall **Educatitions**, lest we should bee made able to vindicate our owne injuries, we are set onely to the Needle, to pricke our fingers: or else to the Wheele to spinne a faire thread for our owne undoings, or perchance to some more durty and deboyst drudgery: If wee be taught to read, they then confine us within the compasse of our Mothers Tongue... (Mary Tattlewell: Sharp Revenge, 1640)

The search for the plural in the LION Corpus yielded 22 relevant examples, and all of them referred to ‘the process of teaching and learning’ in one way or the other. One of the examples is:

133)It now became necessary that your **educatitions** should take a somewhat different direction; I wished to fit you for a commercial line of life; but the ardor you discovered for science and literature occasioned me some perplexity, as I feared it might unfit you for application to trade, in the pursuit of which so many talents are swallowed up, and powers wasted. (Mary Hays: Memoirs of Emma Courtney, 1796)

There was even one instance with a numeral:

134)A classical education, he said, was a very admirable thing, and one which all gentlemen should enjoy; but Coningsby would find some day that there were **two educatitions**, one which his position required, and another which was demanded by the world. (Benjamin Disraeli: Coningsby, 1844)

The search with the indefinite article in the BNC informative texts yielded altogether 407 relevant instances. Nearly all of them represented the sense of ‘the process of teaching and learning’, as in:

135)The assumption was that, with sufficient care, pupils could be selected at the age of eleven on the basis of a prediction of their success in pursuing **an academic education**. (A generation of schooling, 1985-93)

There were also some instances of ‘an interesting experience that has taught you something’, one of the examples is:

136)We had just finished the Card Trio in Act 3 with Leontyne and the two other gipsy girls in splendid voice, while Karajan's accompaniment had been **an education** in itself. (Conversations with Karajan, 1985-93)

In the BNC prose texts 59 instances were found with the indefinite article, and as in the informative texts, the majority represented the sense of ‘the process of teaching and learning’, and there were also some examples of ‘an interesting experience that has taught you something’.

The amount of plural instances found in the BNC was significantly smaller than with the indefinite article in both informative and prose texts: only 6 instances in the informative texts and 4 instances in the prose texts were found. All of them represented the sense of ‘the process of teaching and learning’, although one of them could be said to mean ‘what one has been taught’:

137) Here at least my disparate **educations** converged. (My idea of fun, 1985-93; prose texts)

When comparing the normalized frequencies in Table 5.8, one can see in the case of the non-fiction texts examined that *education* used with the indefinite article would seem to be increasing, the highest frequency is found in the first half of the 20th century with the normalized frequency of 80,519. The frequency in the BNC informative texts was 5,700 hits per million words, which is significantly smaller than the frequency in the non-fiction texts examined, but still it is considerably high. The LION Corpus, however, gives quite a different view on the matter: the highest frequencies occur in the 18th century (14,839 and 12,007), after which they decline. The frequency in the BNC prose texts (3,577 instances per million words) is approximately on the same level as that in the latter half of the 19th century in the LION Corpus (3,841), so there has been only a slight decrease lately.

The plural was quite rare in all the corpora examined, and the contemporary dictionaries did not mention plural uses for the most common sense of *education*, ‘the process of teaching and learning’. The highest normalized frequencies with the plural usage were found in the LION Corpus. Diachronically, when comparing the normalized frequencies of the plural instances in the LION Corpus, it seems that the plural usage has been declining ever since the

latter half of the 17th century, which had the highest normalized frequency (1,187). In the BNC prose texts, the normalized frequency is 0,242, which is a little higher than the last frequency in the LION Corpus (0,090), so there might be a slight tendency of increasing, but still the frequencies are comparably small.

5.2.4 *Knowledge*

5.2.4.1 *Knowledge* in dictionaries

The OED Online has several different senses given for *knowledge*, and some of them are used in a countable manner. The first one mentioned to be used in the plural, although nowadays rare, is the sense referring to “[i]ntellectual acquaintance with, or perception of, fact or truth; clear and certain mental apprehension; the fact, state, or condition of understanding” used in the construction *knowledge of* something (OED Online, s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 9b). The only plural example given by the OED Online is:

138) They do it by the **Knowledges** that they have of Nature. (1670, s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 9b)

Also the sense denoting “mental apprehension; a perception, intuition, or other cognition” is said to be used in the plural, but it is also labelled as rare (OED Online, s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 9c). One of the examples given by the OED Online is:

139) To have **a knowledge** of the power and divinity of God. (1563; s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 9c)

The OED Online also gives the sense of “[a]cquaintance with a branch of learning, a language or the like; theoretical or practical understanding *of* an art, science, industry, etc.” with the mention of this sense being rarely used in plural (s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 10). The OED Online gives only one plural example:

140) With scarce more **knowledges** than these He earns a guinea every day with ease. (1782; s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 10)

There is another sense that is labelled to be used in the plural: the sense denoting “[a] branch of learning; a science; an art” and this is marked to be rarely used in the singular (OED Online, s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 14). One example of this usage given by the OED Online is:

141)The mathematics, which are the most abstracted of **knowledges**. (1605; s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 14)

The last sense of *knowledge* has quite a concrete meaning: “[a] sign or mark by which anything is known, recognized, or distinguished; a token” (OED Online, s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 15), and thus it is quite naturally used in a countable manner:

142)They deuised..circumcision, because thei would haue **a notable knowledge** betwene them and other nacions. (1555; OED Online, s.v. *knowledge*, n. sense 15)

This sense is marked to be obsolete, and the last given example is from 1555.

Of the contemporary dictionaries consulted, COBUILD has no mention of any kind of possible countable usage (s.v. *knowledge*). CALD and OALD label *knowledge* as either an uncountable noun or as used in the singular, referring to the sense of ‘information or understanding about a subject’, and both give an example of the usage with the indefinite article:

143)He has **a limited knowledge** of French (CALD, s.v. *knowledge*, sense 1)

144)He has **a wide knowledge** of painting and music. (OALD, s.v. *knowledge*, sense 1)

OALD also mentions that *knowledge* is usually used with the construction *of* or *about* something (s.v. *knowledge*, sense 1). LDCE also gives the sense of ‘information or understanding about a subject’, but they label this sense as uncountable (s.v. *knowledge*, sense 1). However, their examples in this entry do exemplify a countable usage:

145)**An in-depth knowledge** of accounting is not necessary as training will be given. (LDCE, s.v. *knowledge*, sense 1)

146)Someone with **a background knowledge** of engineering (LDCE, s.v. *knowledge*, sense 1)

5.2.4.2 Corpora findings

The findings for *knowledge* in the corpora can be seen in Table 5.9 below.

	<i>know- ledge</i> with the indefinite article (non- fiction)	<i>know- ledges</i> (non- fiction)	<i>know- ledge</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>know- ledges</i> (LION)	<i>know- ledge</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informat ive)	<i>know- ledges</i> (BNC, informat ive)	<i>know- ledge</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>know- ledges</i> (BNC, prose)
1550- 1599	4 (7,092)	12 (21,277)	7 (2,236)	6 (1,917)	-	-	-	-
1600- 1649	10 (7,905)	7 (5,534)	5 (1,949)	16 (6,235)	-	-	-	-
1650- 1699	22 (10,913)	52 (25,794)	33 (7,831)	5 (1,187)	-	-	-	-
1700- 1749	8 (16,393)	1 (2,049)	34 (6,153)	-	-	-	-	-
1750- 1799	29 (17,683)	-	100 (10,175)	-	-	-	-	-
1800- 1849	56 (45,827)	-	140 (10,220)	-	-	-	-	-
1850- 1899	66 (62,264)	5 (4,717)	174 (7,864)	-	-	-	-	-
1900- 1949	49 (127,273)	1 (2,597)	(5 inst., incl. above)	1 (0,045)	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	722 (10,111)	22 (0,308)	56 (3,395)	0 (0,000)
Total	244 (28,241)	78 (9,023)	493 (8,061)	28 (0,458)	722 (10,111)	22 (0,308)	56 (3,395)	0 (0,000)

Table 5.9. The amount of countable instances of *knowledge* found in the corpora, the amount of hits per million words given in brackets.

The search for *knowledge* with the indefinite article yielded 244 instances in the non-fiction texts examined. Majority of these represented the sense of ‘acquaintance with a branch of learning’, an example of this being:

147) That they have however besides these operations of Preistcraft **a knowledge** of Medecine not to be despis'd we were abundantly convinc'd of by the following fact. (Joseph Banks: Endeavour Journal, 1771)

The remaining examples (approximately on third of the instances) denoted the sense of ‘mental apprehension or a perception’. One example of this is:

- 148) Their superiority over the country gentleman is, not so much in their knowledge of the public interest, as in their having **a better knowledge** of their own interest than he has of his. (Adam Smith: *Wealth of Nations*, 1789)

In the LION Corpus, the search for *knowledge* with the indefinite article 493 examples. On the contrary to the non-fiction texts examined, the majority of the instances represented the sense of ‘mental apprehension or a perception’ and the rest of the instances represented the sense of ‘acquaintance with a branch of learning’. Examples from both senses are:

- 149) B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, ney, bottinney, noun substantive, **a knowledge** of plants. (Charles Dickens: *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839; acquaintance with a branch of learning)

- 150) ...the difficulty she would be placed in when she began to think on what she had done, and found herself incumbered with documents of whose nature she was utterly ignorant; and the comparative ease with which somebody, with **a full knowledge** of her position, obtaining access to her and working upon her fears, if necessary, might worm himself into her confidence, and obtain, under one pretence or another, free possession of the deed. (Charles Dickens: *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839; mental apprehension or a perception)

With the indefinite article (whether with a modifier or not), the division of the instances into two different senses in the LION Corpus is quite the opposite compared to the division in the non-fiction texts examined. In the LION Corpus, the sense of ‘mental apprehension or a perception’ is more common, whereas in the non-fiction texts examined the majority of the instances represent the sense of ‘acquaintance with a branch of learning’.

The search for the plural *knowledges* in the non-fiction texts examined yielded 78 instances. Interestingly, 51 of these instances are from the same text, Margaret Cavendish’s *Observations* from 1666. One example of the instances found in this text is:

- 151) Indeed it is with these parts as it is with particular creatures; for as one man is not another man, nor has another mans knowledge, so it is likewise with the mentioned parts of matter; and although the animate parts have an interior, innate self-knowledge, and an exterior, perceptive knowledge; yet these are not double **knowledges**; but perception is only an effect of interior self-knowledge, occasioned by self-motion. (Margaret Cavendish: *Observations*, 1666)

The instances in this text could be classified under the sense of ‘mental apprehension or a perception’ or perhaps expressed in another way, ‘the condition of knowing’. There were also 18 instances in other texts representing this same sense. The remaining nine instances represented the sense related to ‘acquaintance with a branch of learning’, but some of them could be perhaps said to denote the sense of ‘a branch of learning’:

152) He that standeth in the myddst of the Globe signifieth NATURE: whereuppon in the first point, is the use and practise of this work: That is to say, as concerning the first part, for it is sayde: The boke conteyneth Three kinds of **knowledges**. (John Dee: Heptarchia Mystica, 15b)

The search for the plural in the LION Corpus yielded, 28 instances, which were all from late 16th century or from the 17th century, with one exception: one instance was found from the beginning of the 20th century:

153) He was a man of many small **knowledges**, and each of them dangerous. (Samuel Butler: The Way of All Flesh, 1903)

The instances mostly referred to ‘mental apprehension or a perception’ or to ‘certain pieces of information’, as for example in:

154)... his accoutrement seemed almost as strange to their fancies, as the quality and condition of the party did to their **knowledges**; for he was mounted upon a coal black horse, that pretended in appearance to a settled strength, more governed by age or use, then inclinable to any hot fireriness in shew, as if the destinies had intended a kinde of a fatal difference in the Champions designs, seeing they had made an opposition, both in the colours and deportments of their horses... (Sir Percy Herbert: Princess Cloria, 1661)

155)...yet faire Princesse, inasmuch as I know your wisdom is neuer vnaccompanied with Vertue, and that Vertue now inflamed with a desire of vnreuealed **knowledges**; to giue some satisfaction both to your wisdom, vertue, and desire, constantly behold this myrror or glasse of diuine prouidence. (Gervase Markham: English Arcadia Part 1, 1607; certain pieces of information)

The search for *knowledge* with the indefinite article in the BNC informative texts yielded as much as 722 relevant instances. The majority of these, approximately two thirds of the instances, were related to the sense of ‘acquaintance with a branch of learning’, as in:

156)92399 Introduction to the Travel Industry The student will gain a **knowledge** and understanding of the travel industry and its technology as well as hands-on experience of BTTS/Prestel. (Scotvec reports, 1985-93)

The remaining instances were of the sense related to 'mental apprehension or a perception', one of the examples being:

157)Did the children gain a **deeper knowledge** and appreciation and love of the mass? (Shrewsbury Diocesan Catholic Voice, 1985-93)

In the BNC prose texts, 56 instances of *knowledge* with the indefinite article were found, and as in the informative texts, the majority of the instances represented the sense of 'acquaintance with a branch of learning'. There were also examples of 'mental apprehension or a perception'.

The results for the search for the plural in the BNC were quite surprising when compared with the results for the searches with the indefinite article: only 22 instances were found in the informative texts and none in the prose texts. Interestingly, 9 of the instances in the informative texts represented the sense referring to 'a branch of knowledge', one of the examples being:

158)Others have adopted a more holistic approach but in the form of an ecological reductionism which turns its back on science and technology, stressing traditional craft means of production and prescientific **knowledges**, such as astrology and alchemy (which are imbued with a deeply humanistic Utopianism — noticeably absent from contemporary science and technology). (Design and society, 1985-93)

Rest of the instances represented a sense which could be said to mean 'amount of information' or 'certain pieces of information', as for example in the following two examples:

159)Despite his programmatic emphasis in the Archaeology on the discursive formation as a means of making intelligible those **knowledges** that are formulated through their institutional components, Foucault turned away from this kind of historical enquiry because it was too 'clean, conceptually aseptic' — in other words, too apolitical. (White mythologies: writing history and the West, 1985-93)

160)In the panics over the declining birth-rate and the continuing high levels of infant mortality, medics campaigned around these new **knowledges** to shift

emphasis away from environmentalism towards close scrutiny of the health of the mother. (Dangerous sexualities, 1985-93)

Based on the corpora examples, *knowledge* seems to occur very often in the construction *knowledge of* something. This was evident in all the corpora examined, regardless of whether the search was with the indefinite article or in the plural.

All in all, *knowledge* was used comparatively often in a countable manner. Comparing the normalised frequencies of the instances found, one can see that in the non-fiction texts examined, *knowledge* used with the indefinite article has been increasing remarkably throughout the corpus, reaching the normalized frequency of 127,273 instances per million words in the first half of the 20th century. In the BNC informative texts the frequency is 10,111, which is still a high frequency although it is significantly lower compared with the frequencies in the non-fiction texts examined. In the LION Corpus, the highest frequencies with the indefinite article are found in the latter half of the 18th century (10,175) and the first half of the 19th century (10,220). After that the usage declines, and the frequency found in the BNC prose texts is 3,395 instances per million words.

The situation is some what different with the plural usage: in both historical corpora the highest frequencies are found in the latter half of the 16th century and in the 17th century. The frequencies are altogether higher in the non-fiction texts examined than in the LION Corpus, but the frequency of the plural in the BNC informative texts is much lower than that in the non-fiction texts, only 0,308 instances per million words. In the BNC prose texts, no instances of the plural were found.

5.2.6 Evidence

5.2.6.1 Evidence in dictionaries

The OED Online gives several sense where countable uses are found. An obsolete sense referring to a “[m]anifestation; display”, is exemplified with a countable example (OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 2):

161) Doblottes of glass yeue **a gret evidence**, Thyng countirfet wyl faile at assay. (1430; s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 2)

The last example of this sense is from 1611. The OED Online gives also the sense of “[a]n appearance from which inferences may be drawn; an indication, mark, sign, token, trace” (s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 3). This sense has several countable examples, one of them being:

162) **A plain Evidence** that this God and that Angel of Jehovah were the same Person. (1681-6; OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 3)

The OED Online gives also a sense where *evidence* with the indefinite article is given a specific meaning: “something serving as a proof” (s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 5b). This sense is labelled to be obsolete, and the last example is from 1704:

163) Cato Major..has left us **an evidence**, under his own hand, how much he was versed in country affairs. (OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 5b)

There is also a specific use of *evidence* related to Christianity, in the phrases “*Evidence or Evidences of Christianity, of the Christian Religion*, or simply *The Evidences*” (OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 5c). One of the examples given is:

164) There is no reasonable objection to examining an atheist in **the evidences of Christianity**. (1859; OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 5c)

Evidence is also used in a legal context, with the meaning of “[i]nformation, whether in the form of personal testimony, the language of documents, or the production of material objects, that is given in a legal investigation, to establish the fact or point in question” (OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 6). OED Online also states that *evidence* is used with the indefinite article to mean “a piece of evidence” (s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 6). An example of this:

165)The person he had sent to Mitchell gave **a full evidence** of the promises he had made him: but Sharp denied them all. (1714; OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 6)

Related to the legal context is also the obsolete sense meaning “[o]ne who furnishes testimony or proof; a witness” (OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 7). An example given by the OED Online is:

166)The Lady Lawley was sentenced to be imprisoned one month for spiriting away **an evidence**. (1731; s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 7)

The last example given of this sense is from 1823. OED Online also gives a sense closely related to the previous, where *evidence* is used to refer to “[a] spy” (s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 7b). This sense is labelled obsolete as well, and the OED Online gives only one example, which is from 1691:

167)Get you gone then, like **an Evidence**, behind the hangings. (s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 7b)

The last sense of *evidence* is said to denote “[a] document by means of which a fact is established” (OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 8). This sense is labelled to be obsolete, and it is also noted that in the 15th and 16th centuries, this sense was often used in a collective sense, and sometimes even with a numeral, “as if mistaken for an actual plural” (OED Online, s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 8). An example of this sense given by the OED Online:

168)Writings vnder seale, as Charters and Deeds, and other writings without seale, as Court Rolles, Account, and the like..are called **Evidences**. (1628; s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 8)

The last example of this sense is from 1875.

Of the contemporary dictionaries consulted, COBUILD, CALD and LDCE give no possible countable uses for *evidence*. However, OALD labels the sense denoting “the facts, signs or objects that make you believe that sth is true” as either U or C (s.v. *evidence*, noun, sense 1). No countable examples are given of this sense. The sense referring to a legal context is labelled to be uncountable (OALD, s.v. *evidence*, noun, sense 2).

5.2.6.2 Corpora findings

The results from the corpora for the countable uses of *evidence* can be seen in Table 5.10

below.

	<i>evidence</i> with the indefinite article (non-fiction)	<i>evidences</i> (non-fiction)	<i>evidence</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>evidences</i> (LION)	<i>evidence</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informative)	<i>evidences</i> (BNC, informative)	<i>evidence</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>evidences</i> (BNC, prose)
1550-1599	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1600-1649	2 (1,581)	5 (3,953)	1 (0,390)	7 (2,728)	-	-	-	-
1650-1699	11 (5,456)	8 (3,968)	13 (3,085)	23 (5,458)	-	-	-	-
1700-1749	2 (4,098)	1 (2,049)	27 (4,886)	16 (2,895)	-	-	-	-
1750-1799	5 (3,049)	2 (1,220)	27 (2,747)	26 (2,656)	-	-	-	-
1800-1849	6 (4,910)	15 (12,275)	28 (2,044)	66 (4,818)	-	-	-	-
1850-1899	14 (13,208)	33 (31,132)	7 (0,316)	72 (3,254)	-	-	-	-
1900-1949	3 (7,792)	12 (31,169)	-	(3 inst, incl. ab.)	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	4 (0,056)	27 (0,378)	1 (0,061)	3 (0,182)
Total	44 (5,093)	77 (8,912)	103 (1,684)	210 (3,434)	4 (0,056)	27 (0,378)	1 (0,061)	3 (0,182)

Table 5.10. The amount of countable instances of *evidence* found in the corpora, the amount of hits per million words given in brackets.

As can be seen from the table, the search for *evidence* with the indefinite article yielded 44

instances in the non-fiction texts examined. Almost all of these represented the sense of

‘something proving that something is true’, one of the examples being:

169) It is pleasing as **an evidence** of the existence of some of the best and purest affections of our nature; it is pleasing, also, from the mere view of the healthy addition thus made to that surest stay of a state, an industrious and frugal population. (John Rae: *New Principles*, 1834)

There was one instance where *an evidence* was used to refer to ‘a witness’:

170) But they were dear Lodgers to me and mine, and to the Girl that is deceased, and when I was at Elisabeth Holtons House, which is the Girls Aunt, one Cardom a Bailiff, one as I think a little fears the Lord, caused me to be taken and brought to this horrid place, or else I had been **an Evidence** against John Sadler, and this Girl which Swore against me, Rebecka Clifford, Cryed by me and said, She knew that I was innocent from the Fact for which I now dye, to the World... (Letitia Wigington: Confession, 1684)

There were also two instances related to religion, one of them being:

171) As a further demonstration might be given hereof, from One that had a **particular evidence** and assurance given by the Lord Christ himself; that so loved him and possest him, while living in the Body, that Death should not divide him from the Participation of his presence: And (as making a renewed Affirmation to such a Soul;) saying, "Where I am, there you shall come with me, to be sharing with me in the same Glory and Joy that the Father hath invested me withal. (Jane Lead: Funeral Testimony, 1702)

In the LION Corpus, the search for *evidence* with the indefinite article yielded 103 relevant examples. The great majority of these referred to the sense of ‘something proving that something is true’, as for example in:

172) It was not merely calm and composed, but fixed and rigid, as though the violent effort which had summoned that composure beneath her father's eye, while it mastered all other thoughts, had prevented even the momentary expression they had communicated to the features from subsiding, and had fastened it there as **an evidence** of its triumph. (Charles Dickens: Nicholas Nickleby, 1839)

There were some instances of other senses, as for example three instances related to religion, one of them being:

173) If he cannot enumerate dates, and recapitulate feelings, he can and does produce such evidences of his improvement, as virtuous habits, a devout temper, an humble and charitable spirit, 'repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;' and this gives **an evidence** less equivocal, as existing more in the heart than on the lips, and more in the life, than in the discourse. (Hannah More: Coelebs in Search of a Wife, 1809)

Some instances representing the sense of ‘a witness’ were found as well, as for example in:

174) He wrote me word that he had procured witnesses of the criminal conversation of my wife and her paramour in Merionethshire; he had even been so fortunate as to meet with **an evidence**, to whom Mary had expressly

confessed, that the child with which she was great, was the child of Kenrick. (William Godwin: Fleetwood, 1805)

There were also a couple of instances that were related to the court of law, one of the examples being:

175) The track of blood, however, corroborated my report, and **a farther evidence** confirmed my innocence. (Mary Robinson: Walsingham, 1797)

When searching for the plural *evidences* in the non-fiction texts examined, altogether 77 relevant instances were found. The majority of these (approximately two thirds of the instances) represented the sense of ‘something proving that something is true’, as in:

176) Though it would be hardly considered indiscreet or audacious to hazard the conjecture that the unrevealed history of their rise to power would exhibit, if possible, greater **evidences** of human depravity than what has been brazenly exposed to the public gaze. (William McDonald: Two Rebellions, 1865)

14 of the instances were related to religion, and some of the instances had the phrase *evidences of Christianity* that was mentioned by the OED Online (s.v. *evidence*, n., sense 5c).

There were also six examples referring to a title of a book that had to do with religion.

Examples of these senses:

177) A student of philosophy would be the better for being able to stand an examination both in Locke and in Kant, whichever of the two he takes up with, or even if with neither: and there is no reasonable objection to examining an atheist in **the evidences of Christianity**, provided he is not required to profess a belief in them. (JS Mill: On Liberty, 1869)

178) Title: Natural Theology; or, **Evidences** of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity / by William Paley (William Paley: Natural Theology, 1809)

179) Nay, it has been whispered to me, Gentlemen, that in this University some such process of memorising in verse has been applied by bold bad irreverently-minded men even to the **Evidences** of our cherished Paley. (Arthur Quiller-Couch: Art of Writing, 1916)

There were also seven instances that had to do with the court of law, as for example in:

180) These Examinations and some others were taken and charily preserved for the contriving of sufficient **evidences** against them, and when the Judges of Assise came downe to Lincolne about the first weeke of March, being Sr. Henry Hobert, Lord chiefe Justice of the Common Pleas, and Sr. Ed: Bromley one of the Barons of the Exchequer... (Anon: Wonderful Discoverie, 1619)

There was also one instance denoting the sense of ‘a piece of information’:

181)... I do remember two memorable **Evidences** out of Histories, of which one is, That at what time the State of France, during the desolation of that Countrey by the English Wars, did grant unto the King the Gabel of Salt, and the Impost upon Wine, they did particularly Covenant, That for such a space the King should not alter the standards of his Coin. (Rice Vaughan: Coin and Coinage, 1675)

The search for the plural in the LION Corpus yielded 210 relevant instances. The majority were of the sense referring to ‘something proving that something is true’, one of the examples being:

182)Reisenburg has certainly kept pace with the spirit of the time: nobody can deny that; and I confess to you that the more I consider the subject, it appears to me that the happiness, prosperity, and content of a State, are the best **evidences** of the wisdom and beneficent rule of a government. (Benjamin Disraeli: Vivian Grey, 1826)

There were also 13 instances related to the court of law, as for example in:

183)After a full and minute investigation of the **evidences**, my claim was ultimately established. (William Godwin: Fleetwood, 1805)

Seven of the instances were related to religion, and the three instances had the title of the book, which was also found in the non-fiction texts examined. One example from both:

184)It procures a good degree of respect and commendation; but it is not attended by the silent train of the Christian graces, with that 'joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,' which are the fruits of the spirit, and the **evidences** of a Christian. (Hannah More: Coelebs in Search of a Wife, 1809)

185)A carpet-bag held now his linen and the few needments for his toilet and studies,---his Bible, his Greek Testament, his favourite Horace (it was too ragged to sell), his Paley's **Evidences**, and his Jeremy Taylor's Liberty of Prophesying. (George Sala: Seven Sons of Mammon, 1862)

The search for *evidence* with the indefinite article in the BNC prose texts yielded only one relevant example, and it represented the sense of ‘something proving that something is true’:

186)She had thought the quantities of gilt (never did she credit that it might be real gold) **an evidence** of shocking vulgarity, had sneered at the bad taste of the ornate picture frames, at the ridiculous excesses of the pictures themselves, and had felt a solid, suburban scorn for the frayed and patched tapestry chair seats and the faded hangings: she had wondered why, if so rich, they did not

throw out their tatty Persian coverings, and buy themselves a good bit of fitted Wilton or Axminster in a good plain colour. (Jerusalem the golden, 1960-74)

In the informative texts in the BNC four examples of *evidence* with the indefinite article were found. Three of these denoted the sense of 'something proving that something is true'. The remaining instance was related to religion:

187) Our marriage is now to him, and a true Christian family is **a tangible evidence** of his kingdom, or kingly rule, on earth. (In search of happiness, 1985-93)

The search for the plural *evidences* in the BNC informative texts yielded 27 relevant examples. Four of these were related to religion, and there was also one instance of a name of a book which was related to religion:

188) Paley, William (1743–1805) Though highly skilled as a lecturer in mathematics and ethics, Paley is best-known for his **Evidences** of Christianity, published in 1794, and for his Natural Theology published in 1802. (Does God exist?, 1985-93)

Two of the instances found were directly related to the court of law, one of the examples being:

189) 'It is to be noted in the instant case that no suggestion was made by defence counsel that there was any discrepancy or inconsistency between the **evidences** which the witnesses had given in court and the statements given to the police. (The Weekly Law Reports 1992 Volume 3)

There were also six instances where *evidences* occurred in the same sentence with *premises*, and these examples could also be classified as belonging to the court of law. An example of this is:

190) The premises provide the framework of thought and so satisfy creative reason; the **evidences** provide the facts within the framework and so satisfy critical reason. (Doubt, 1975-84)

The remaining instances represented the sense of 'something proving that something is true', as for example in:

191) Perhaps here and there the old man would have found some **evidences** of the former world: the windmill of his younger days still standing in the corner of a new field, though now derelict and forlorn, or the traces of the former strips

in the ridge-and-furrow of the new pastures, but not much else. (The making of the English landscape, 1985-93)

In the BNC prose texts, only three instances of the plural were found. Two were of the sense denoting ‘something proving that something is true’, and the last one was related to religion.

All in all, when comparing the normalised frequencies, one can see that the countable usage of *evidence* has been increasing in the non-fiction texts examined: the highest frequency with the indefinite article is found in the latter half of the 19th century (13,208) and in the plural the highest frequencies are found in the latter half of the 19th century as well (31,132) but also in the first half of the 20th century (31,169). As one can see, the frequencies with the plural are significantly higher than with the indefinite article in the non-fiction texts examined. However, the frequencies found in the BNC informative texts are much lower: only 0,056 with the indefinite article and 0,378 in the plural.

The LION Corpus gives a somewhat different view of the countable usage of *evidence*; the highest frequency with the indefinite article is found already in the first half of the 18th century (4,886), after which the frequencies decline. With the plural the highest frequency is found in the latter half of the 17th century (5,458), after which the usage starts to decrease until it increases again in the latter half of the 19th century (4,818). As was with the informative texts in the BNC, also in the BNC prose texts the frequencies are considerably smaller: 0,061 instances per million with the indefinite article and 0,182 instances in the plural. Based on the normalized frequencies found in the BNC, the countable usage of *evidence* is nowadays comparatively rare compared with the historical corpora.

5.3 Other words

In this section, two additional words will be looked at that did not quite fit into the other semantic groups discussed in previous sections. These words are *research* and *fiction*.

5.3.1 *Fiction*

5.3.1.1 *Fiction* in dictionaries

The OED Online gives some senses where *fiction* can be used in a countable manner. A very concrete sense that it mentions is the sense referring to “[t]hat which is fashioned or framed; a device, a fabric” (s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 1c). This sense is said to be obsolete, and the last example was from 1784:

192) Renounce the odours of the open field
For the unscented **fictions** of the loom.
(OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 1c)

Another sense of where *fiction* can be used in a countable manner is when referring to “something that is imaginatively invented; feigned existence, event, or state of things; invention as opposed to fact” (OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 3b). An example given by the OED Online:

193) Few real men have left such distinct characters as these **fictions**. (1847; s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 3b)

Closely related to this sense is the following sense, which denotes “[a] statement or narrative proceeding from mere invention” (OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 3c). This sense also has countable examples, one of them being:

194) Such an anecdote may be rejected as **an improbable fiction**. (1781; OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 3c)

The OED Online also mentions a sense meaning “[a] work of fiction; a novel or tale” (s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 4b). There are only two examples of this, and both of them are in the plural:

195) They read nothing but **fictions** and levities. (1875; OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 4b)

196) By contract he’s supposed to publish my next three **fictions**. (1939; OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 4b)

OED Online also mentions that this sense is nowadays mainly used in a depreciatory way (s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 4b).

There is also a sense related to the court of law which can be used in a countable manner, meaning “[a] supposition known to be at variance with fact, but conventionally accepted for some reason of practical convenience, conformity with traditional usage, decorum, or the like” (OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 5). One example of this sense is:

197) It is a certain rule, that **a fiction** of law shall never be contradicted so as to defeat the end for which it was invented, but for every other purpose it may be contradicted. (1775; OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 5a)

The OED Online also states that this sense can be used generally as well, as for example in the following instance:

198) By **a like pleasant fiction** his single chamber was always mentioned in the plural number. (1840; OED Online, s.v. *fiction*, n. sense 5b)

The contemporary dictionaries consulted all label the sense of *fiction* meaning “a type of literature that describes imaginary people and events, not real ones” (OALD, s.v. *fiction* noun, sense 1) as uncountable, with the exception of COBUILD mentioning that it can also be “N in pl”, meaning a noun in the plural (s.v. *fiction*, sense 1). However, even COBUILD does not offer any kind of countable examples. All the dictionaries consulted label the sense denoting something that “is not true, although people sometimes pretend that it is true” (COBUILD, s.v. *fiction*, sense 3) as countable, and COBUILD even gives an example with the indefinite article:

199) The idea that the United States could harmoniously accommodate all was **a fiction**. (s.v. *fiction*, sense 3)

5.3.1.2 Corpora findings

The findings from the corpora can be seen in Table 5.11 below. In the non-fiction texts examined, *fiction* was found with the indefinite article altogether 38 times. The majority of these instances represented the sense of ‘something that is invented, not true (usually

something people believe in)'. There were also a couple instances of the sense related to the court of law. Some examples:

200)The cir- cumstances of the murder were evidently false, and invented by Henry to discredit Perkin; and the time of the murder is absolutely **a fiction**, for it appears by the roll of parliament, which bastardized Edward the Fifth, that he was then (33) alive, which was seven months after the time assigned by More for his murder. (Horace Walpole: Historic Doubts, 1768; 'something that is invented, not true')

201)Land, like everything else, might be captured by occupancy (occupatio) subject to what the Romans called post-liminius, a legal rule which is generally described as embodying **a legal fiction** under which a citizen who should after captivity return to his country, or property which after capture should fall again into the hands of the restored owner, reverts to his or its antecedent position. (Henry Maine: International Law, 1887; related to the court of law)

The search with the indefinite article yielded 112 instances in the LION Corpus. As with the non-fiction texts examined, the majority of the instances represented the sense of 'something that is invented, not true', as for example in:

202)Alas! 'twas but **a fiction** of his fevered brain; every one of his friends had a locket of hair, and Andrea, who had no love until now, had clipped this precious token from the wig of a lovely lay-figure, with cast-iron joints and a card-board head, that had stood for some time in his atelier. (William Thackeray: A Shabby Genteel Story, 1840)

This sense is very close to the sense of 'a narrative proceeding from invention' and they can not always be distinguished from each other on the basis of the corpora material. However, there were examples that clearly referred to 'a narrative proceeding from invention':

203)Before that time, we sit listening to a tale, **a marvellous fiction**; delightful sometimes, and sad sometimes; almost always unreal. (Charlotte Bronte: Shirley, 1849)

There was also one instance of *a fiction* denoting 'a work of fiction, a novel':

204)'Indeed I must thank you for recommending the book,' said Guy; 'how beautiful it is.' 'I am glad you entered into it,' said Philip; 'it has every quality that **a fiction** ought to have.' 'I never read anything equal to the repentance of the nameless man.' (Charlotte Yonge: The Heir of Redclyffe, 1853)

	<i>fiction</i> with the indefinite article (non- fiction)	<i>fictions</i> (non- fiction)	<i>fiction</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>fictions</i> (LION)	<i>fiction</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informat ive)	<i>fictions</i> (BNC, informat ive)	<i>fiction</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>fictions</i> (BNC, prose)
1550- 1599	-	2 (3,546)	5 (1,597)	7 (2,236)	-	-	-	-
1600- 1649	1 (0,791)	7 (5,534)	4 (1,559)	13 (5,066)	-	-	-	-
1650- 1699	2 (0,992)	13 (6,448)	20 (4,746)	22 (5,221)	-	-	-	-
1700- 1749	4 (8,197)	3 (6,148)	15 (2,714)	4 (0,724)	-	-	-	-
1750- 1799	6 (3,659)	6 (3,659)	7 (0,712)	30 (5,429)	-	-	-	-
1800- 1849	2 (1,637)	3 (2,455)	20 (1,460)	20 (1,460)	-	-	-	-
1850- 1899	9 (8,491)	9 (8,491)	41 (1,853)	20 (0,904)	-	-	-	-
1900- 1949	14 (36,363)	11 (28,571)	-	-	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	90 (1,260)	117 (1,638)	7 (0,424)	7 (0,424)
Total	38 (4,398)	54 (6,250)	112 (1,831)	116 (1,897)	90 (1,260)	117 (1,638)	7 (0,424)	7 (0,424)

Table 5.11. The amount of countable instances of *fiction* found in the corpora, the amount of hits per million words given in brackets.

There were also a couple instances related to the court of law, one of them being:

205) This is the only case in which they have confounded mental and physical diseases, and they do it even here as by **an avowed legal fiction**. (Samuel Butler: *Erewhon*, 1872)

The search for the plural in the non-fiction texts examined yielded 54 instances. As with the indefinite article, the majority denoted ‘something that is invented, not true’. A few instances of the legal usage were also found, and one instance that referred to ‘a work of fiction, a novel’. Examples of these:

206) It is easy to maintain sacred **fictions** in a community to whom every letter is an occult symbol; in a community to whom the printed word has become a common tool, no fiction is shielded from the scrutiny of the people, not even the divinity which hedges kings. (CE Ayres: *Theory of Economic Process*, 1944; ‘something that is invented, not true’)

207) It is one of those **fictions** of law in which Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence has been absurdly and injuriously prolific. (Edgar Masters: New Star Chamber, 1904; related to law)

208) Among these we may reckon some of his Marvellous **Fictions**, upon which so much Criticism has been spent as surpassing all the Bounds of Probability. (Alexander Pope: Preface, 1715; 'a work of fiction')

The search for the plural in the LION Corpus yielded 116 relevant examples. Most of these represented the sense of 'something that is invented, not true', as in:

209) You have given utterance to different **fictions** on the subject, **fictions** that you now confess to be such; how am I to be convinced that what you say at this moment is not dictated more by a regard for my tranquillity, than by the simplicity of conscious truth? (William Godwin: St Leon, 1799)

There were also some instances denoting 'a work of fiction, a novel', as for example in:

210) It is the refuge of barren authors, only, to crowd their **fictions** with so great a number of events, as to suffer no one of them to sink into the reader's mind. (Mary Wollstonecraft: The Wrongs of Woman, 1798)

There were also instances where it was difficult to distinguish whether the sentence is referring to 'a work of fiction' or 'a narrative proceeding from invention', one of these cases being the following:

211) The best **fictions** in the book are Oriental, and are known to have been current in Persia and Arabia eight hundred years and more before the dates the Church assigns to them as facts. (Charles Reade: The Cloister and the Hearth, 1861)

Some instances relating to the legal context were also found in the corpus, an example of this being:

212) There were conflicting rumours on the subject; but the prevalent opinion was that she was a phantom of Mrs. Gamp's brain---as Messrs. Doe and Roe are **fictions** of the law---created for the express purpose of holding visionary dialogues with her on all manner of subjects, and invariably winding up with a compliment to the excellence of her nature. (Charles Dickens: Martin Chuzzlewit, 1844)

The search with the indefinite article in the BNC informative texts yielded 90 relevant instances, and as in the other corpora, the majority of the instances were of the sense denoting ‘something that is invented, not true’, as for example in:

213) Every individual's speech is different from any other's; it follows from this that no one speaker can be taken to represent a particular accent or dialect, and it also follows that the idea of a ‘standard Received Pronunciation’ is a **convenient fiction**, not a scientific fact. (English phonetics and phonology, 1974-84)

There were also instances of the legal contexts, one of them being:

214) As a matter of English law ‘The Crown’ has no legal personality, but is a **legal fiction** denoting the executive branch of government which equally is devoid of legal personality: see *Town Investments Ltd. v. Department of the Environment* [1978] A.C. 359, 380–381. (The Weekly Law Reports 1992 Volume 3)

There were also some instances referring to ‘a work of fiction, a novel’, as in:

215) C. P. Snow had been a scientist at Christ's College, Cambridge before he turned to fiction; William Golding, a Salisbury schoolteacher who gave up teaching with the success of *Lord of the Flies*, has never exactly written an **academic fiction**, but *The Spire* (1964) is about the enclosed scholastic world of medieval architecture. (British literature since 1945, 1985-93)

216) If a novel is no more and no less than a verbal artefact, there can be no separation of the author's creation of a **fiction** of plot, character, social and moral life, from the language in which it is portrayed. (Style in fiction, 1985-93)

In the BNC prose texts, only seven instances with the indefinite article were found. They all referred to ‘something that is invented, not true’, as for example in:

217) Although Garvin was shown as his formal superior in terms of the office organization chart, that was to some extent a **convenient fiction** and the Mamur Zapt had his own lines of communication to the powers that were. (The Mamur Zapt and the girl in the Nile, 1985-93)

The search for the plural *fictions* in the BNC informative texts yielded 117 relevant instances. Contrary to the previous searches, the majority of these instances represent the sense of ‘a work of fiction’, as for example in:

218) It is not easy to know how far Kafka's **fictions** can be thought to answer descriptively to the historical realities of his time, let alone to those which his fictions are often thought to have predicted. (Authors, 1985-93)

There were some instances referring to 'something that is invented, not true', but these instances were clearly a minority. One example of this:

219)... the crisis today is that we have **fictions** which no one admits to be fictions, whereas before people had myths, people had religions, and so on, and a lot of it was believed in as a matter of faith, whereas now everything is presented as real, and it is no more real than the myths of before. (Christine Brooke-Rose and contemporary fiction, 1985-93)

Also a few instances of the legal usage were found, one of the examples being:

220) To explain the nature of legal change Stone offers a model that suggests first, that clients revealed the gap between current values and the law; second, that this was followed by the attempt of lawyers and judges to narrow the gap, often by inventing **legal fictions** or effectively changing the law by judicial re-interpretation (the changing definition of legal cruelty provides one example of this); and third, that all this culminated eventually in legal change when the 'level of duplicity and hypocrisy became intolerable to law lords and legislators alike' (pp. 19–20). (Twentieth century British history, publication date unknown)

There was also one interesting instance where *fictions* could be said to represent the type of literature:

221) There are 11 categories of books to choose from: **fictions**, humour, children's, arts, sports, food and wine, gardening, travel, reference, biography and nature. (She, 1985-93)

This sense was labelled by all the contemporary dictionaries consulted as *uncountable*, and the contemporary dictionaries did not even mention the sense of 'a work of fiction, a novel', which was found very often in the plural search in the BNC and there were also instances in the other corpora.

In the BNC prose texts, only seven instances of the plural were found. Most of them referred to 'something that is invented, not true', but there were also a couple of instances of 'a narrative proceeding from invention' or more simply 'a story':

222) Nowadays there is no one left to repeat such **fictions**; and no one to believe them either. (Flaubert's parrot, 1985-93)

When comparing the normalized frequencies in Table 5.11, the altogether frequencies are much higher in the non-fiction texts examined than in the other corpora. Diachronically, the frequencies increase in the non-fiction texts, the highest frequencies are at the latter part of the 19th century (36,363 with the indefinite article and 28,571 in the plural). These frequencies are by far the highest in the results for *fiction* in the corpora examined, and they give a somewhat different picture of the situation than the LION Corpus and the BNC. In the informative texts in the BNC, the frequencies are much lower: 1,260 with the indefinite article and 1,638 in the plural. In the LION Corpus the normalized frequencies are the highest in the 17th century, after that they seem to be diminishing, with the exception of the latter part of the 18th century with the plural, where the frequency is higher again. In the 19th century, the frequencies in the LION Corpus are smaller (1,853 with the indefinite article and 0,904 in the plural), and the frequencies in the BNC prose texts are even lower: 0,424 with the indefinite article and 0,424 in the plural. The countable usage of *fiction* is more common in informative texts than in prose texts in present-day language based on the BNC examples, but still even in the informative texts there has been a heavy decline in the countable usage if one compares the present-day frequencies with those in the non-fiction texts examined.

5.3.2 *Research*

5.3.2.1 *Research* in dictionaries

The OED Online has some senses where *research* is used in a countable manner. The first one refers to “[t]he act of searching (closely or carefully) *for* or *after* a specified thing or person” (s.v. *research*, n.¹, sense 1). In the examples of this sense, *research* is used in the plural as for example in:

223) I carefully avoided the habitation..lest it should..furnish a clue to the **researches** of my pursuers. (1794; OED Online, s.v. *research*, n.¹, sense 1)

The OED Online also mentions a sense that is said to be used usually in the plural, meaning “[a] search or investigation directed to the discovery of some fact by careful consideration or study of a subject; a course of critical or scientific inquiry” (s.v. *research*, n.¹, sense 2a). One of the examples given is:

224) Our most profound **researches** are frequently nothing better than guessing at the causes of the phenomena. (1799; OED Online, s.v. *research*, n.¹, sense 2a)

The OED Online also gives another entry for the noun *research*, meaning “[a] second or repeated search”, and this sense is said to be rare (s.v. *research*, n.²). There are only two examples given, one of them being:

225) They wandered up and down in vain searches and **researches**. (1878; OED Online, s.v. *research*, n.²)

Of the contemporary dictionaries consulted, COBUILD, LDCE and OALD say that *research* is an uncountable noun, but can also be used in the plural when used to refer to “a careful study of a subject, especially in order to discover new facts or information about it” (OALD, s.v. *research*). OALD also adds to this that the plural usage occurs especially in British English (s.v. *research*). One example of this sense given by the CALD:

226) His **researches** (=research) in the field of disease prevention produced unexpected results. (s.v. *research*)

None of the contemporary dictionaries give any possible uses for *research* with the indefinite article.

5.3.2.2 Corpora findings

The results for the countable uses of *research* can be seen in Table 5.12 below. The search for *research* with the indefinite article yielded four instances in the non-fiction texts examined.

All the examples were from the late 19th century or from the very beginning of the 20th century. All the instances represented the sense of ‘a careful and probably scientific study’

One of the examples was:

227) Six investigations are under way: (1) **An extensive research** upon attention and the influence and interference of various sensations and ideas upon one another. (William Krohn: Facilities, 1894)

The same search in the LION Corpus yielded six relevant examples. These examples were not all of ‘a scientific study’, for example the following sentence has a slightly different meaning:

228) I resolved to conceal myself during the day, but to employ the early part of every night in **a research**, which interested my heart far more than the dread of personal captivity. (Mary Robinson: Walsingham, 1797)

In this sentence, it is not a question about ‘a scientific study’, but about ‘a very careful investigation’.

	<i>research</i> with the indefinite article (non-fiction)	<i>researches</i> (non-fiction)	<i>research</i> with the indefinite article (LION)	<i>researches</i> (LION)	<i>research</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, informative)	<i>researches</i> (BNC, informative)	<i>research</i> with the indefinite article (BNC, prose)	<i>researches</i> (BNC, prose)
1550-1599	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1600-1649	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1650-1699	-	1 (0,496)	1 (0,237)	-	-	-	-	-
1700-1749	-	1 (2,049)	-	2 (0,362)	-	-	-	-
1750-1799	-	14 (8,537)	2 (0,204)	44 (4,477)	-	-	-	-
1800-1849	-	33 (27,005)	3 (0,219)	89 (6,497)	-	-	-	-
1850-1899	3 (2,830)	44 (41,509)	-	38 (0,582)	-	-	-	-
1900-1949	1 (2,597)	66 (171,429)	-	-	-	-	-	-
1950-	-	-	-	-	4 (0,056)	181 (2,535)	0 (0,000)	28 (1,697)
Total	4 (0,463)	159 (18,403)	6 (0,098)	173 (2,829)	4 (0,056)	181 (2,535)	0 (0,000)	28 (1,697)

Table 5.12. The amount of countable instances of *research* found in the corpora, the amount of hits per million words given in brackets.

In both historical corpora, the plural *researches* was much more common. This is not very surprising, since the dictionaries consulted all gave plural uses for *research*. In the non-fiction texts examined, 159 instances were found and 173 instances in the LION Corpus. Both senses referring to ‘the act of searching’ and ‘a careful or a scientific study/investigation’ were found in both corpora, and there were even some examples with a numeral. Some examples from these:

229) Glass's experiments have been carried out with the greatest care, but the fact that **four researches** on the same subject have all given discordant results, leads us to suppose that something must be wrong in the methods used. (non-fiction texts; James Cattell: Leipsic, 1888; ‘a careful study’)

230) Touchwood had scarcely extricated himself from this impediment, and again commenced his **researches** after the clergyman, when his course was once more interrupted by a sort of pressgang, headed by Sir Bingo Binks, who, in order to play his character of a drunken boatswain to the life, seemed certainly drunk enough, however little of a seaman. (LION; Walter Scott: St Ronans Well, 1823; ‘the act of searching’)

231) However, the Roman camp had long been an object of their desires, and Margaret was glad that the last day should have a brilliancy, so she would not hear of anyone remaining to keep her company, talked of the profit she should gain by a leisure day, and took ardent interest in everyone's preparations and expectations, in Ethel's **researches** into county histories and classical dictionaries, Flora's sketching intentions, Norman's promises of campanula glomerata, and a secret whispered into her ear by Mary and Harry. (LION; Charlotte Yonge: The Daisy Chain, 1856; ‘a careful study’)

The search for *research* with the indefinite article in the BNC informative texts yielded 4 relevant examples. All of these referred to ‘a study’, one of the examples being:

232) On behalf of Wolverhampton Community Care Forum and as part of a **research** for an Open University course, I am investigating examples of local codes of practice on contracting for services negotiated between voluntary and statutory sectors. (Community Care incorporating Social Work Today, 1985-93)

In the BNC prose texts, no examples with the indefinite article were found.

The search for the plural in the BNC informative texts yielded 181 instances. As in the historical corpora, both senses of ‘the act of searching’ and ‘a careful (scientific) study/investigation’ were found:

233) Reviewing Henry Adams's Autobiography in 1919 he attacked the Bostonian world and, covertly, himself, as he savaged Boston Unitarianism along with Adams who 'abandoned lecturing at Harvard', and whose **researches** into primitive mythology 'turned to ashes in his mouth'. (The savage and the city in the work of T S Eliot, 1985-93)

234) During my **researches** for material to complete this book I have found that railwaymen in particular have been reluctant to allow their names to be used in a story, and have sometimes insisted that even the name of the location be changed; perhaps they fear leg pulling from their workmates! (Railway ghosts and phantoms, 1985-93)

In the BNC prose texts, 28 instances with the plural were found, and as in the informative texts, both senses of 'the act of searching' and 'a careful (scientific) study/investigation' were found.

When comparing the normalized frequencies, one can see that *research* with the indefinite article was more common in the non-fiction texts examined where the frequencies of different time periods are 2,830 and 2,597 where as in the other corpora the frequencies are remarkably smaller. In the BNC informative texts the frequency is only 0,056 and no instances were found in the BNC prose texts, so one could say that *research* with the indefinite article is nowadays almost inexistent. However, the biggest differences are found in the plural hits: all in all the frequencies in the non-fiction texts examined are much higher than in the other corpora, and the highest frequency is found in the first half of the 20th century: 171,429, which is significantly higher than any of the other frequencies. Diachronically, the plural usage of *research* has been constantly growing if one looks at the results from the non-fiction texts. However, the frequency found in the BNC informative texts is only 2,535 instances per million words, which is significantly smaller. The results from the LION Corpus suggest that the plural usage of *research* has been the highest in the first half of the 19th century and has since declined. The frequency found in the BNC prose texts is, however, somewhat higher than the last frequency in the LION Corpus: 1,697 as opposed to 0,582, which could suggest that the plural usage is increasing.

5.4 Discussion of the results

The view that dictionaries give of the countability of certain words was quite diverse. With all the words examined, the OED Online offered several senses which had countable examples as well as uncountable examples, where as the possible countable usages were much more rare in the contemporary dictionaries. This is actually quite understandable since the OED Online has a wide diachronic range of material, so senses that are nowadays obsolete or rare and not found in the contemporary dictionaries, are still mentioned in the OED Online.

Some of the words examined in this thesis were not given any possible countable usages in the contemporary dictionaries, although examples of them were found in the corpus analysis. These include for example *advice* and *information*, that were labelled ‘uncountable’ in all the contemporary dictionaries. Also *thunder* had no possible countable usages in COBUILD and CALD, and *evidence* had possible countable usage mentioned only in OALD. However, one must keep in mind that if one compares the frequencies of the countable and uncountable usage for example for *information* in the corpora, the result would most probably be that the countable usage is only a very small minority of the different uses of the word, and therefore it is understandable that these minor usages are not always mentioned in dictionaries, since they have limitations as well.

Sometimes there were some contrasting labels and examples in the contemporary dictionaries, for example with the word *knowledge* as was discussed in Section 5.2.4.1. LDCE had labelled this word as ‘uncountable’, but still there were examples with the indefinite article in the definition. The differences between different dictionaries were sometimes quite interesting. For example *rain* (as discussed in Section 5.1.2.1) was labelled and classified quite differently by CALD, COBUILD and OALD. Different dictionaries listed different senses and gave different information on the countability of some senses.

All in all, no clear-cut tendency of whether the countable uses of normally uncountable words are increasing or decreasing, can be found in the analysis of the corpus material. Instead, the situation is different with each word, and even with different corpora. There are also differences between the indefinite article and the plural, meaning that if the plural was found quite frequently, it does not necessarily mean that the word would also be used frequently with the indefinite article. One example of this would be *weather*, which was found quite frequently in the plural, but had scarcely any instances with the indefinite article. The situation can also be the other way around: *education* was frequently found with the indefinite article, but the plural instances were scarce.

Those words that show a tendency of increasing countable usage are *rain* (with the indefinite article), *snow* (in the plural), *thunder*, *education* (with the indefinite article, in the non-fiction texts examined), *knowledge*, *evidence* (in the non-fiction texts examined), *fiction* (in the non-fiction texts examined) and *research* (in the non-fiction texts examined).

On the other hand, the words that had a declining tendency with the countable usage were *weather*, *rain* (in the plural), *advice*, *information*, *education* (in the LION Corpus), *knowledge* (in the plural), *evidence* (in the LION Corpus) and *fiction* (in the LION Corpus). There was a slight tendency between the two historical corpora: many words that seemed to be increasing through out the non-fiction texts (such as *evidence*, *fiction* and *education*) were first increasing in the LION Corpus as well, but then started to decline somewhere around the 19th century.

One of the main hypotheses tested in this thesis was Denison's (1998, 96) claim that in the nineteenth century, some nouns underwent a systematic change from uncountable to countable. His example word in his discussion was *acquaintance*, which was briefly looked at in this thesis before discussing the other words. The findings in the corpora examined for this thesis also supported Denison's hypothesis, with the exception of the usage with the indefinite

article in the LION Corpus, which declined in the 19th century. When one looks at the tables in each section which show the normalized frequencies of instances in different time periods for the words examined for this thesis, one can see that some nouns do show this change, while others do not. A more detailed comparison of the tables shows that in the non-fiction texts examined, the countable instances of *knowledge*, *evidence*, *fiction*, *research* and *education* (with the indefinite article, since the plural usage was nearly inexistent) show a major change in the 19th century, meaning that the countable instances increase significantly. In the LION Corpus, the situation with the same words is quite different since the normalized frequencies diminish in this time period, and this does not therefore support Denison's hypothesis. Regardless of which corpus one looks at, the countable usage of *weather* (in the plural) and *thunder* (in the plural) seem to have become slightly more common in the 19th century, and also the countable usage of *snow* shows some increase in the time period. However, *rain*, *advice* and *information*, and also *thunder* with the indefinite article have decreased in the 19th century, which means that Denison's theory is not supported at least with these nouns. So, Denison's hypothesis seems to be accurate with only some of the nouns examined, and almost only in the non-fiction texts examined.

In Section 4.4.2, Rozumko's (2002) study was discussed. She had studied the countability of some nouns in the early 18th century and suggested that some nouns could not be classified neatly as countable or uncountable, because they might have been in a process of change. There were three words in her study that were also discussed in this thesis: *advice*, *evidence* and *information*. Rozumko (2002, 142-157) suggested with *advice* and *information*, the uncountable usage was more predominant. *Evidence* was found quite equally as both countable and uncountable, but she wondered if the uncountable usage was just the preference of a certain writer, since all the uncountable examples were from the same author, or if it was a tendency that was appearing, since the text where the uncountable instances were found was

the latest in her corpus material (Rozumko 2002, 152). The material analysed in this thesis would point to the same direction with Rozumko about *advice* and *information*: their countable usages seem to have been declining ever since the 18th century, which means that the uncountable usage is the more dominant one. With *evidence* the situation is somewhat different, depending on which corpus one bases the analysis on. In the non-fiction texts the countable usage of *evidence* has actually increased since the 18th century, where as in the LION Corpus (and especially with the indefinite article), the countable usage has decreased, which would suggest that the uncountable usage has increased.

The frequency of different words in different time periods varied, some of the words were more common in some time periods, where as others were not. For example in the latter half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century, the countable usage of some words was almost inexistent (*rain*, *snow*, *advice* and *education*) and there were no instances for *research* in those time periods. However, for example *fiction*, *information* (especially with the indefinite article in the non-fiction texts examined), *thunder* (in the plural) and *evidence* (in the first half of the 17th century) were quite common. The countable usage of *knowledge* was clearly the most common of the words examined in these time periods.

When comparing the usage in present-day language on the basis of the results from the BNC informative and prose texts, one can see that the words grouped together in ‘words related to weather phenomena’ are all more common in the BNC prose texts than in the informative texts. The instances of *weather* with the indefinite article (only one instance in all the BNC written texts) and *thunder* in the plural (only two instances in all the BNC written texts) were almost inexistent. On the other hand, the words grouped in ‘words related to information and its possession’ and the two additional words (*fiction* and *research*) are all more common in the informative texts. The plural forms of *education*, *knowledge*, and *research* were quite common in the prose texts as well, but the instances in the informative

texts were even higher. One explanation for this interesting division could be the fact that ‘words related to weather phenomena’ are more common in the prose texts already on the basis of their semantic field. The words in ‘words related to information and its possession’ and the two additional words denote such matters that one could more readily expect to be discussed in informative, non-fiction texts, so the division seems quite natural.

The division between the historical corpora was not as straight-forward as that with the BNC instances. Some words were more common in the non-fiction texts examined, while others were more common in the LION Corpus, and some had approximately equal frequencies. The division did not follow the semantic groupings. For example, the words that were more common in the non-fiction texts examined were *rain*, *knowledge*, *fiction* and *research*, and also *thunder* in those time periods where the countable usage was found (the division of the countable instances of *thunder* was more even in the LION Corpus, but the frequencies were smaller). *Weather* and *advice* were more common in the LION Corpus, and *education* was more common in the LION Corpus all the way to the 18th century, but from the latter half of the 19th century onwards it was more common in the non-fiction texts examined. Words that were quite equally frequent in both historical corpora were *snow*, *information* (which was more equally divided into different time periods in the LION Corpus than in the non-fiction texts examined) and *evidence*, with the exception of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century in the non-fiction texts examined where the frequencies were higher.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis I have first looked at different grammars on what they say about countability, discussed the different terminology used in this area (especially in dictionaries) and after these I have discussed some previous work done on the subject, especially on “unusual” countable usages. For my own analysis, I first looked at some dictionaries to find out how they classify the words examined in this thesis, and after that I conducted a corpus study. The corpus data was gathered for 11 words: *weather*, *rain*, *snow*, *thunder*, *advice*, *information*, *education*, *knowledge*, *evidence*, *research* and *fiction*. The instances where these words were found in the plural or with the indefinite article were analysed. Since two of the corpora examined were historical corpora, the instances found were divided in to time periods of fifty years, and normalized frequencies were calculated in order to see whether the countable usage of a certain word had increased or decreased. These results were then compared with Denison’s (1998, 96) statement that there had been a change from uncountable to countable in the 19th century with some words. The results varied depending on the word in question, the corpus in question, and whether the plural or the instances with the indefinite article were discussed. Those words that seemed to support Denison’s theory clearly were *knowledge*, *evidence*, *fiction*, *education* and *research* in the non-fiction texts examined. In the LION Corpus, the countable usage of these words seemed to be declining. *Weather* and *thunder* in the plural (in all the corpora) also showed a slight increase in their countable usage. There were also some words that did not support Denison’s hypothesis at all. These were *rain*, *advice*, *information* and *thunder* (with the indefinite article, since the plural had actually been increasing).

These results are naturally the outcome of the study of these certain words in these certain corpora, and the results might have been different, had I chosen other words or used some

other historical corpora for the analysis. This thesis has also had only British English corpus material and British English dictionaries, and a study like this in American English could also provide interesting (and perhaps contrasting) results. All in all, I believe that it is useful to see that although a word might be labelled under a certain label in a dictionary, such as 'countable', the real life usage is much more complex and depends largely on the context, and all kinds of usages do appear. It is still understandable that the dictionaries can not cover all the minor varieties of possible language usage, since they have limited space and usually aim to represent the most common usage in order to provide some guidelines on how certain words are used.

There are many possibilities for further research with this topic. As I already mentioned above, this type of study with American English could be very interesting. Adding new words and other corpus material could also give a deeper insight on this matter, as well as further analyzing the increasing/decreasing of certain senses of a word diachronically. This was not possible to do in a thesis of this size, since there simply was not enough space, although in the analysis section the different senses found in the corpora were discussed.

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