

[Article]

# Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality: ‘Noise’ in Physical, Type and Temporal Spaces

KODERA, Masahiro

## Abstract

Cognitive linguists analyze the countability of English nouns with the concept of ‘bounding’ in physical, type, and temporal spaces. The noun ‘noise’ is claimed to gain the count use when its referent is temporally bounded (Ishida 2012). This paper will show with the data collected from various linguistic corpora (Google Books Corpus, COCA, BNC, etc.) that physical conditions of noise in objective reality (i.e. type, source location and time) do not influence the choice between the three basic noun phrases of ‘noise’ in terms of countability (zero article singular, indefinite article singular, zero article plural). It is argued: 1) The speaker’s construal of an objective reality is the determining factor in choosing between the three phrases. 2) The zero article singular is chosen when the location of the noise in type or temporal space is irrelevant. 3) The indefinite article singular is chosen when the noise has one location in both type and temporal space and is given a particular meaning. 4) The zero article plural is taken when the noise has more than one location either in temporal or type space.

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show that the three basic phrases the noun ‘noise’ takes in terms of countability, i.e. zero article singular (*∅ noise*), indefinite article singular (*a noise*), and zero article plural (*∅ noises*), represent how the speaker/writer construes what they hear. Cognitive linguists use the concept of ‘bounding’ to explain the count/mass distinction of English nouns. Taylor (2002: 367) says: “The conceptual basis of the count–mass distinction is fairly transparent; it has to do with the distinction between an individuated ‘object’ and an unindividuated ‘substance.’ A noun is count when its referent is construed as bounded in physical space while it is non–count when construed as unbounded. Applying this theory to the noun ‘noise,’ Ishida (2012: 17) claims that ‘noise’ is count and takes an indefinite article or a plural form when its referent (i.e. sound) is temporally bounded while it is non–count when temporally unbounded. With the following two examples (a, b), he explains: The zero article singular (*∅ noise*) denotes a combination of sounds that continues without stopping, while the indefinite article singular (*a noise*) refers to a temporally bounded sound, which starts and then stops instantly, like the sound of something dropped to the floor. He also

claims that the zero article plural indicates that the same sound is repeated over a period of time. (Bold types and underlines in all cited examples are mine.)

- (a) I was annoyed by **noise** outside.
- (b) I was annoyed by **a noise** outside.

In this paper, it is shown with the data collected from various linguistic corpora that physical conditions of noise in objective reality (i.e. type, source location and time) do not influence the choice between the three basic noun phrases of ‘noise’ (zero article singular, indefinite article singular, zero article plural). It is argued: 1) The speaker’s construal of an objective reality is the determining factor in choosing between the three phrases. 2) The zero article singular is chosen when the location of the noise in type or temporal space is irrelevant. 3) The indefinite article singular is chosen when the noise has one location in both type and temporal space and is given a particular meaning. 4) The zero article plural is taken when the noise has more than one location either in temporal or type space.

## 2. Indefinite noun phrases in generic reference

The noun ‘noise’ has both the count and non-count use in English, and it can take any of the three indefinite noun phrases: zero article singular (ZS for short), indefinite article singular (IS), and zero article plural (ZP). In generic reference, ZS (*noise*) means all loud, confused, or irritating sounds as in the example (1), and IS (*a noise*) denotes any one instance of such sounds (2).

- 1) One humorous definition holds that “**Noise** is what your neighbor makes.” Of course, we all make **noise** ourselves, but we especially resent the intrusion of sounds that we do not choose to hear. (*Quieting: A Practical Guide to Noise Control* by Raymond D. Berendt, Edith L. R. Corliss, Morris Ojalvo. p.1)
- 2) “**A noise** is a sound we do not want to hear. It is a signal we do not want to receive, one we try to eliminate.” (*Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* by Christoph Cox, Daniel Warner. p.49)

Being conceptualized in type space (rather than physical or temporal space) as in (3), ZS refers to all types of noise (e.g. car horns, barking dogs), IS to any one type of noise (e.g. thunder), and ZP to more than one type of noise (e.g. *Many noises are loud.*).

- 3) **Noise** is all around us: car horns, barking dogs, crying babies, banging items, and more. Many noises are loud—and the louder they get, the more annoying they become. Any unpleasant sound is **a noise**. Is thunder a noise? Some people hate the sound of thunder. Others enjoy the mighty crashing sounds. Each person decides what he or she thinks is **noise**. That’s why loud music, sirens, and traffic horns can be considered **noise** to many

Mar. 2015

Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality

people. For others, they're music to their ears. (*All About Light and Sound* by Connie Jankowski. p.17)

In the following examples of a verb phrase 'to block out + noise' (4-6), ZS (4) refers to noise in the most general sense, and ZP (5) to various types of noises in the environment. On the other hand, IS (6) does not have a generic sense, but rather it denotes a particular type of sound, which is, in this context, a type of sound you find distracting when you are putting in a game of golf, such as noises from the crowd, flashing cameras, or mobile phones, etc.

#### *to block out + noise*

- 4) Try wearing headphones to block out **noise**. (*Helping Kids and Teens with ADHD in School: A Workbook for Classroom Support and Managing Transitions* by Kate Horstmann. p.82)
- 5) The earpieces block out **noises** in the environment. (*Health Assessment and Physical Examination* by Mary Ellen Estes. p.254)
- 6) Most golfers assume that you must consciously eliminate distractions, but this is the wrong approach. Instead, you need to refocus on the task rather than block out the distraction. For example, when you try to block out **a noise** while you are putting, it only makes you focus more on **the distracting noise**. (*The Mental Game of Golf: A Guide to Peak Performance* by Patrick J., Cohn, PhD. p.60.)

In generic reference, IS usually takes a subject position and it often sounds strange in a predicate position. In the following examples (7-9), ZS (7) refers to noise in the most general sense. ZP (8) also means noises in general, but the speaker has different kinds of noises in mind. IS (9) sounds strange in this general context because it only allows a specific interpretation. To make this sentence acceptable, it needs a concrete context, such as '*I was awakened by a noise coming from the kitchen.*'

- 7) I am a very light sleeper and am easily awakened by **noise**.
- 8) I am a very light sleeper and am easily awakened by **noises**.
- 9) I am a very light sleeper and am easily awakened by **a noise**.

The above examples indicate that the general rules to use the three indefinite noun phrases of 'noise' in generic sense is as follows:

- i) ZS refers to all noises in the most general sense.
- ii) ZP refers to noises in general with some emphasis on different types.
- iii) IS refers to any one type of noise.

Usage of ZS, IS and ZP in specific reference is far more complicated and will be discussed in the following sections.

### 3. Indefinite noun phrases in specific reference

This section will explore what influences the choice between the three specific indefinite noun phrases in a similar context. Examples (10–12) describe a situation in which something is heard in the kitchen. ZS (10) refers to one or more than one type of sound coming from a particular source, 'a girl kneeling on the floor,' with its nature unspecified. IS (11) refers to a sound of a particular nature, 'a little thunk like someone putting a cup down on the kitchen counter' with its source unknown. ZP (12) refers to more than one type of sound coming from two different sources: 'Eden's high, excited voice' and 'Lloyd's deeper one.'

#### *to hear + noise + coming from the kitchen*

- 10) In my dream, I am sleeping but then I awake. I hear **noise** coming from the kitchen, so I get up to see what is going on. I go into the kitchen and there is a girl kneeling on the floor. (*The Dream Document: A Dream Translation Dictionary* by Ken Howell. p.329)
- 11) I hear **a noise** coming from the kitchen, a little thunk like someone putting a cup down on the kitchen counter. (*An Egg on Three Sticks* by Jackie Fischer. p.180)
- 12) There were **noises** coming from the kitchen; Eden's high, excited voice blending with Lloyd's deeper one. (*Breaking the Bank* by Yona Zeldis McDonough. p.76)

These examples (10–12) suggest that:

- a) ZS refers to one or more than one type of sound with its nature unspecified.
- b) IS refers to one type of sound of a particular nature.
- c) ZP refers to more than one type of sound coming from more than one source, each with a particular nature.

Next, it will be examined how the number of noise types and sources influences the choice between the three phrases in a similar context. Examples (13–15) describe a situation where people are coming and going, which causes a combination and series of loud, confused sounds coming from multiple sources. The natures of the noises in all these examples are unspecified but the context implies that more than one type of sound is heard. All three phrases (ZS, IS, ZP) refer to more than one type of sound coming from more than one source.

#### *noise + people coming and going*

- 13) I made my way back to the chair, slumped down. I was empty of emotion. There was **noise** all around me, people coming and going. I was hardly conscious of it. (*Imperium* by Keith Laumer. p.166)
- 14) The judge sits on his bench by the city gate. There is a throng of clamorous people gathering before him, each with his case to be adjudged. At the gate there is **a noise of people coming and going**. Camel-drivers are shouting to their beasts. The donkey-riders are scolding their donkeys. (*The Sunday School Journal*, Volume 22. p.309)
- 15) There were always **noises of people coming and going**, and an air of bedlam and utter

Mar. 2015

Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality

confusion permeated the whole place; so I soon regretted having gone there to live. (*Tales of a Sugar Tramp* by Émile C. Freeland. p.51)

Examples (16–18) also describe a situation where more than one type of sound is coming from more than one source. In these examples, the natures of the noises are specified. All three phrases (ZS, ZP, IS) refer to at least two or three different types of sounds: 'people walking up and down with squeaky shoes' and 'trolleys being pushed around' in (16), 'trees leaning sideways,' 'the road breaking open' and 'the pears falling' in (17), 'a steady, insistent rumbling' and 'a sound like a driving rainfall' in (18).

### ***noise + all around***

- 16) In the morning Jack slowly woke up. He wasn't at home though. There was **noise** all around him. There were people walking up and down with squeaky shoes and trolleys being pushed around. (*Dreamers the Lost Boy* by Constance Hobbs. p.69)
- 17) I was crying for my father to help, but he couldn't hear me because there was a **noise** all around, a **tremendous noise**, biggest noise you can imagine. "Everything was moving. Nothing was the way it was supposed to be. The trees, they were leaning sideways, the road was breaking open, the pears were falling before they were ripe. Nothing would stop moving even for one second, and then everything stopped all at once and the air was filled with dust as thick as smoke. (*In Revere, In Those Days* by Roland Merullo. p.71)
- 18) He heard **noises** all around him, though, a steady, insistent rumbling, and a sound like a driving rainfall. Then bits of rock started hitting him, dropping from the invisible ceiling above. (*Stranger to the Sun* by Jeff Mariotte. p.93)

Following examples (19–21) describe a similar situation, where intruders break into a house and make various noises in the process. All three phrases refer to more than one type of sound coming from a single source (i.e. one intruder or a group of intruders) made in the process of a burglary or a robbery: ZS (19) to the sounds of 'opening the outer door' and 'crashing into the opened door of a nearby medicine chest,' and ZP (21) to 'thumping around,' 'opening cupboards' and 'speaking in muffled tones.' IS (20) refers to the noise that burglars made when braking into 'our house,' which most likely includes more than one type of sound.

### ***to be awakened by + noise***

- 19) Not long after Mrs. Vest had retired for the night, she was awakened by **noise** that she assumed was made by an intruder. She distinctly heard someone open the outer door, then crash into the opened door of a nearby medicine chest. (*Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-century South* by Diane Miller Sommerville. p.50)
- 20) But I wasn't asleep long before I was awakened by a **noise**. Once awake I realized it was the sound of burglars breaking into our house! (*Wilderness Skills for Women: How to Survive Heartbreak and Other Full-Blown Meltdowns* by Marian Jordan. p.131)

21) He hadn't been asleep long when he was awakened by **noises**. In the kitchen there were intruders. Briggs heard them, thumping around and opening cupboards and speaking in muffled tones. (*Gallatin Canyon* by Thomas McGuane. p. 47)

The above examples (13-21) show that the same physical condition, where more than one type of sound is coming from one or more than one source, can be expressed with any of the three phrases. The number of sound types and that of noise sources in objective reality do not influence the choice between ZS, IS and ZP. This suggests that it is the speaker's construal, not objective reality, that determines the noun phrase to be taken. This poses a serious challenge to the learner of English as a foreign language in understanding the count and non-count use of nouns. It is not the question of being grammatically correct or not, but it is a matter of how a speaker construes a particular objective reality.

#### 4. Specific indefinite noun phrases and objective reality

This section will explore what influences the choice between the three phrases of ‘noise’ in six objective realities (listed below as R1-R6) to show that physical conditions of noise have no direct influence in choosing a noun phrase to be taken. Figures 1-6 illustrate the relationship between sound type, noise source and source location. Noise in all six realities is in specific reference; the noise is heard or made by someone at a particular time and place. The noise may continue only for an instant or for several hours, but it starts and ends at a particular time and place.

Six objective realities:

R1: One type of sound from one source at a particular location and time.

R2: One type of sound from more than one source at different locations at a particular time.

R3: One type of sound from one source, repeated intermittently over a period of time.

R4: More than one type of sound from one source at a particular location and time.

R5: More than one type of sound from more than one source at different locations at a particular time.

R6: More than one type of sound from one source that is moving around at a particular time.

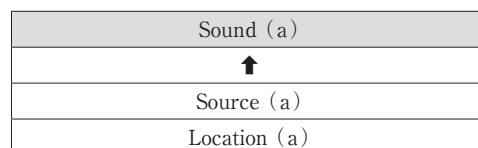


Figure 1. R1: One sound from one source

Sound (a)	Sound (a)	Sound (a)	Sound (a)
↑	↑	↑	↑
Source (a)	Source (b)	Source (c)	Source (x)
Location (a)	Location (b)	Location (c)	Location (x)

Figure 2. R2: One sound from multiple sources

Sound (a)	Sound (a)	Sound (a)	Sound (a)
↑	↑	↑	↑
(Start → Stop)	(Start → Stop)	(Start → Stop)	(Start → Stop)
Source (a)			
Location (a)			

Figure 3. R3: One sound from one source repeated

Sound (a)	Sound (b)	Sound (c)	Sound (x)
↑	↑	↑	↑
Source (a)			
Location (a)			

Figure 4. R4: Multiple sounds from one source

Sound (a)	Sound (b)	Sound (c)	Sound (x)
↑	↑	↑	↑
Source (a)	Source (b)	Source (c)	Source (x)
Location (a)	Location (b)	Location (c)	Location (x)

Figure 5. R5: Multiple sounds from multiple sources

Sound (a)	Sound (b)	Sound (c)	Sound (x)
↑	↑	↑	↑
Source (a)			
Location (a)	→	Location (b)	→
		Location (c)	→
			Location (x)

Figure 6. R6: Multiple sounds from one source moving

**R1: One sound from one source**

ZS and IS can refer to one type of sound that comes from one source at a particular time and location. ZS (22) refers to the sound of someone breaking a glass or a bottle that comes from inside the apartment and the noise is heard just once. It is assumed that the number of noise types and that of sources are one respectively, and the speaker is not sure of the nature or the source of the noise. IS (23) refers to the sound of a branch breaking that comes from ‘he’ behind ‘her.’ The speaker recognizes the particular nature of the noise, but does not know its source at the time she hears the noise. It is assumed that the number of noise types and that of sources are one respectively, and the noise is heard just once. No examples of ZP have been found that clearly refer to one type of sound coming from one source, except for

R3, where one type of sound is repeated over a period of time. ZP may not be used to refer to one type of sound.

Table 1 summarizes the physical conditions of the noise in (22) and (23). The only difference in five physical conditions between (22) and (23) is the nature of the noise, being unspecified in (22) while particular in (23). All the other conditions are the same, which suggests that the number of noise types and that of sources as well as the number of times the noise is heard and the identity of the source do not influence the choice between ZS and IS.

22) As she approached the door, Bailey heard **noise** coming from inside the apartment. It sounded like someone had just broken a glass or a bottle. Startled, Bailey pressed the doorbell and heard nothing. (*Doctor In The House* by Marie Ferrarella)

23) There was a **noise** behind her. A branch breaking. He was there. She turned around. Her fear left her almost straight away. (*Behind the Lines: Stories* by J.T. Wilson by Jason Trevor Wilson. p.101)

Table 1. R1: One sound from one source

#	NOUN PHRASE	TYPE		SOURCE		
		NUMBER	NATURE	NUMBER	IDENTITY	TIME
22	ZS ( <i>∅ noise</i> )	1	Unspecified	1	Unknown	1
23	IS ( <i>a noise</i> )	1	Particular	1	Unknown	1
	ZP ( <i>∅ noises</i> )	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

N/A: Not Applicable

#### R2: One sound from multiple sources

ZS and IS can refer to one type of sound that comes from more than one source at a particular time with each source located at a different place. ZS (24), IS (25) and ZP (27) refer to the sound of footsteps coming from more than one person: ‘the three men’ (24), ‘two people’ (25) and ‘Huang and his family’ (27). Table 2 shows that the difference between ZS (24) and IS (25, 26) is found in the nature of the noise, source number and source identity, and not in the number of sound types or the number of times the noise is heard. This suggests that neither the number of sound types nor the number of times influences the choice between ZS and IS. The difference between IS (25, 26) and ZP (27) is found in either the number of sound types or the number of times.

ZS (24) refers to the general footstep sound of no particular nature. The source of the noise is not known at the time when the sound of the footsteps is heard. Only after ‘some persons entered,’ does the speaker identify the source as ‘the three men.’ IS (25) refers to the noise of a particular nature, the sound of two people walking about in a room above the place the writer is in. In (25), a combination and series of footstep sounds are construed as one instance of noise. This applies to IS (26), where a number of bottles make one type of sound as a single group. ZP (27) refers to the sound of footsteps of a particular nature, which is made



repeatedly by Huang and his family throughout the night (see R3) or it may refer to various sounds accompanying the footsteps, e.g. people’s voices, sounds of kicking something, bumping into each other, etc. Either way, ZP does not refer to one type of sound in type space or a single instance of noise in temporal space.

- 24) At this moment there was **noise** of footsteps outside; the door creaked, and some persons entered. The sick man glanced toward them for a moment, then jumped up with a cry of horror. Selborne turned quickly round, and recognised the three men whom he had seen on the levee. (*Colburn’s New Monthly Magazine and Humorist*, Vol. 87)
- 25) I was sitting quietly reading, but beginning to get rather uneasy at your being out so late, when, at once, about twenty minutes, or it may be half an hour ago, I heard a **noise** of footsteps in the large empty room over this—the noise of two people walking about. (*Chambers’s Journal*, Vol. 41 by William Chambers, Robert Chambers. p.19)
- 26) He fought his way into the cluttered pantry. ‘Come out of there, Clem Cowley-Jones!’ He took no notice of her order. There was a **noise** of bottles falling over and he emerged triumphantly with a bottle of Corona orangeade. (*National Winner* by Emyr Humphreys. p.292)
- 27) Old Rongfu and some other good neighbours hurried to talk to Huang and urged him to flee. The villagers had supper and turned in early, though they lay fully clothed with their eyes open. Not a light flickered. There were **noises** of footsteps, and dogs kept barking all night long. Huang and his family went into hiding. No one knew where they were. As Rongfu passed Huang’s house early next morning, he noticed that the door was wide open. (*Westerly*, Vol. 26–27)

Table 2. R2: One sound from multiple sources

#	NOUN PHRASE	TYPE		SOURCE		TIME
		NUMBER	NATURE	NUMBER	IDENTITY	
24	ZS ( $\emptyset$ noise)	1	General	Unknown	Unknown	1
25	IS ( $a$ noise)	1	Particular	1 <	Specified	1
26	IS ( $a$ noise)	1	Particular	1 <	Specified	1
27	ZP ( $\emptyset$ noises)	1 or 1 <	Particular	1 <	Specified	1 or 1 <

### R3: One sound from one source repeated

All three phrases (ZS, IS, ZP) can refer to one type of sound coming from one source that is repeated intermittently over a period of time. ZS (28), IS (29) and ZP (30) refer to a succession of the same sound. ZS (28) refers to the sound that ‘a giant rat’ makes intermittently in the living room. IS (29) refers to a man’s yelling for help that is repeated over a period of time. ZP (30) refers to the sound of someone banging on the door that comes from the attic and is repeated ‘three or four more times during the night.’ Table 3 shows that ZS (28) and IS (29) are different in all the physical conditions except for the source identity, which is unknown in both. The difference between IS (29) and ZP (30) is found only

in the particularity of the nature, and that between ZS (28) and ZP (30) in the type number and the source number.

ZS (28) refers to noise of no particular nature. The speaker does not know the source and has no specific image of the noise when she hears it for the first time. Only later does she find it coming from a giant rat. The noise in (29) is of a particular nature. The postal worker hears the noise more than one time and recognizes it as a human voice asking for help although she does not know its source at first. ZP (30) refers to the sound that is heard on separate occasions over a relatively long period of time. The speaker is not sure of its exact nature and its source. The same sound is referred to with a singular noun phrase 'the same noise' and a singular pronoun 'it.' ZP is chosen when the noise is conceptualized in temporal space and construed as individual, separate instances, each of which has a different location in temporal space. A singular noun phrase or pronoun is chosen when the noise is conceptualized in type space and refers to one type of noise.

28) I was in the back of the house putting the kids to bed and I kept hearing **noise** from the living room. I kept thinking Jim must have come home, and I would check the living room but no one was there. Finally he came in. "I keep hearing **noise**." I said. We looked up and there was a giant rat on the top of the curtain rod. I didn't know they got that big. (*The Impossible Marriage: Walking with God in Overwhelming Circumstances* by Summer McClella. p.155)

29) Postal worker hears cries for help...

MARSHALLTOWN, Iowa —A postal worker who kept hearing a **noise** last Thursday found a man yelling for help when she peeked around the side of a house, reported The Marshalltown Times Republican newspaper.

30) 'Morning,' Tyler smiled at Lily. 'Sleep well?'

Lily shook her head no. 'I kept hearing **noises** all night. Like the banging we heard the other day.'

'That's odd.' Tyler looked at her curiously. 'I dreamt that I heard **noises** too.'

Lily stared at her with her arms crossed. 'Creepy. Did it sound like it was coming from the attic again?'

Tyler shrugged. 'It didn't seem to be coming from anywhere in particular. Just wherever I was in the dream at the time.'

'Mine was definitely coming from the attic,' Lily said. 'It started just as I was about to fall asleep. I thought I heard someone walking down the hall towards the attic door. But when I went to check, there was no one there. Then when I got back into bed, I heard what sounded like someone banging on the door to be let out. It stopped when I checked the hall again, but I heard the same noise three or four more times during the night.' (*Psyche's Legacy* by Louise Walker. p.34)

Table 3. R3: One sound from one source repeated

#	NOUN PHRASE	TYPE		SOURCE		TIME
		NUMBER	NATURE	NUMBER	IDENTITY	
28	ZS ( <i>∅ noise</i> )	Unspecified	Unspecified	Unknown	Unknown	1 <
29	IS ( <i>a noise</i> )	1	Particular	1	Unknown	1 <
30	ZP ( <i>∅ noises</i> )	1	Unspecified	1	Unknown	1 <

**R4: Multiple sounds from one source**

All three phrases can refer to more than one type of sound that comes from one source at a particular time and location. ZS (31) refers to a combination of confused sounds coming from a single source: the sounds of ‘dishes breaking’ and ‘things being thrown around’ coming from the fighting between a husband and his wife at ‘Leah house.’ The writer does not have a specific image of the noise. IS (32) refers to a combination of sounds of a particular nature, ‘a huge splash followed by a loud gulp’ that comes from ‘near the canoe.’ IS (33) refers to a combination and series of sounds of a particular nature that comes from Vick ‘pulling and pushing wires on the TV.’ ZP (34) refers to the noise coming from a quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Brandon.

Table 4 shows that there is not much difference between ZS (31) and ZP (34) and that only IS (32, 33) has a particular nature. ZP is chosen in (31) probably because the speaker does not want to emphasize the distinctive nature of each sound. In (34), on the other hand, the speaker probably wants to describe the violent nature of the quarrel between a husband and his wife. An argument between two people can be interpreted as one type of sound coming from one source or two different sounds coming from two sources. The speaker takes the latter choice. ZS or IS can be used instead of ZP in this context, but the speaker probably wants to emphasize that two people are yelling at each other and two different voices are heard in order to show the fierceness of the battle. IS is chosen in (32) and (33) probably because the speaker construes a combination of different sounds as one instance of noise and s/he finds a particular nature in the noise.

31) The time was 4:15am. I kept hearing **noise** that was sounding like dishes breaking, and things being thrown around in the living room. I was now feeling upset. This episode reminded me to [sic] much of how things were at home when I [sic] my mother was suffering abuse at the hands of my father. I got up out of my bed. Then I went to the window, I looked across the street at Leah house to see if I saw any lights on. [...] So I just stayed up just listening and was praying that he did not murder this woman. The noise and fighting went on until around 5:50am. Ralph must have left, because I finally heard her tell him to get out. He did not leave right away, but he did eventually leave. At 6:00am I started to get dressed for school. When I went downstairs, I saw Mae was just sitting at the kitchen table. I looked at her face and I saw that she was crying. “Mattie” I’m sorry about **the noise** last night.” she said. (*When Everything Get’s in the Way* by Mattia M. Smith. p.69)

- 32) At 12:20 a.m., I am awakened by a noise near the canoe, which is tied to a dock. It is a strange sound: a huge splash followed by a loud gulp, the kind of thing that makes sailors believe in sea monsters capable of swallowing ships. (*Great Adventures in Florida* by M. Timothy O’Keefe. p. 134)
- 33) The first night in Honolulu in our hotel room, on the fourth floor, with sliding doors opening to a banister balcony, I was awakened by a noise. Vic was pulling and pushing every wire on the TV. “What are you doing?” I asked, in shock. “I am trying to fix the TV,” he said. (*One Woman’s Journey Through a Challenging Century: Her Response to the Challenges With Faith* by Edrel Coleman. p.80)
- 34) Suddenly, there were **loud noises** coming from Brandon’s house. He went to his radio to turn on his CD player. “My mom is home,” he said as if **the loud noises** were nothing. Ashlyn passed the joint to Brandon. “They argue a lot. I can hear them from my house.” “I just tune them out. I try to stay out of the house. They’re different people when they drink,” he said, shaking his head. (*A Lost Soul* by A. A. Briggs. p.82)

Table 4. R4: Multiple sounds from one source

#	NOUN PHRASE	TYPE		SOURCE		TIME
		NUMBER	NATURE	NUMBER	IDENTITY	
31	ZS ( $\emptyset$ noise)	1 <	Unspecified	1	Unspecified	1 or 1 <
32	IS ( <i>a noise</i> )	1 <	Particular	1	Unknown	1
33	IS ( <i>a noise</i> )	1 <	Particular	1	Particular	1 or 1 <
34	ZP ( $\emptyset$ noises)	Unspecified	Unspecified	1	Unspecified	1 or 1 <

#### R5: Multiple sounds from multiple sources

All three phrases can refer to more than one type of sound that comes from more than one source at a particular time with each source located at a different place. ZS (35), IS (36) and ZP (37) refer to a combination and/or series of loud, confused sounds: ‘the roar of the fire,’ ‘the voices of the paramedics,’ etc. (35), various sounds coming from ‘people and cars’ (36), and ‘the calling of loons,’ ‘the hooting of owls,’ etc. (37). Table 5 shows that there is no difference in physical conditions between ZS (35) and ZP (37), which suggests that either ZS or ZP can be equally chosen to refer to more than one type of sound coming from more than one source. In (35), ZP may also be used, but the writer chooses ZS to emphasize that various sounds accompanying the fire are in the background, against which the utterance ‘I love you.’ is heard, and the distinctive nature of each sound is not important. ZP (37) is a typical case of ZP, referring to more than one type of sound, each of which comes from a different source at a different place. The speaker chooses ZP probably because he wants to emphasize the distinctive nature of each different noise. In (36), IS is chosen although the physical conditions are not appropriate for IS. This is probably because the speaker construes a combination of various sounds coming from people and cars through the window as a single instance of noise and s/he finds a particular nature in the noise.

Mar. 2015

Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality

- 35) There was noise all around them. The roar of the fire, the din of the firefighters as they fought the flames for possession of the restaurant. The voices of the paramedics as they were attending to the fire’s survivors, not to mention the noise coming from the onlookers who had gathered behind the barricades. Everything conspired to play a trick on her ears because she could have sworn she heard Jorge say, “I love you.” But she knew that was impossible. That went beyond wishful thinking. That came under the heading of hallucinations. Until she heard it again. And then a third time. (*Plain Jane and the Playboy* by Marie Ferrarella. 193-94)
- 36) The sun had broken through the clouds outside. There was a noise of people and cars in the street. She must have opened the window. And as he lay watching the dust in the sunbeam that fell on to the bed and floor he felt a persistent pressure against the back of his neck. (*Household Ghosts: A James Kennaway Omnibus* by James Kennaway. p.477)
- 37) There were noises all around me: the calling of loons and the hooting of owls and then other sounds from animals I couldn’t tell properly — shrieks and howls and snapping twigs. (*Eye Lake* by Tristan Hughes)

Table 5. R5: Multiple sounds from multiple sources

#	NOUN PHRASE	TYPE		SOURCE		TIME
		NUMBER	NATURE	NUMBER	IDENTITY	
35	ZS ( <i>∅ noise</i> )	1 <	Particular	1 <	Particular	1
36	IS ( <i>a noise</i> )	1 <	Unspecified	1 <	Unspecified	1
37	ZP ( <i>∅ noises</i> )	1 <	Particular	1 <	Particular	1

**R6: Multiple sounds from one source moving**

All three phrases can refer to more than one type of sound coming from a single source that is changing its location from one place to another. Although the nature of the noise is not specified in any of the examples, it can be assumed from each context that ZS, IS and ZP refer to a combination and/or series of sounds made by someone ‘rattling around’ (38), ‘walking through the adjoining room’ (39), and ‘wandering around’ (40). Table 6 shows that ZS (38), IS (39) and ZP (40) share the same physical conditions, which suggests that objective reality has no direct influence in choosing one phrase among the three. The choice of a phrase is definitely influenced by the speaker’s construal of the objective reality.

In (38), ZP can be used, but the writer uses ZS to show that she construes a series of short loud sounds as a combination of undifferentiated confused sounds. In (39), the writer uses IS to show that there is just one person (Sandra) walking and that the noise is of a particular nature. ZP (40) refers to various sounds including the sound of walking made by someone’s wandering around in a room.

- 38) I must have dozed off — maybe they did, too. Anyway, it was dark in the room when I heard noise of someone rattling around in the kitchen, apparently fixing supper. (*Giving Up the Ghost: A Georgia Mountain Mystery* by Heather Olson. p.121)

- 39) There was a **noise** of someone walking through the adjoining room. Sandra appeared in the doorway. (*Workshop of the Second Self* by Gary Wolf)
- 40) During the night Anzia heard **noises** of someone wandering around in the dark of the room. Her first thought was that John, who had been given a bed somewhere upstairs, was searching for her. A match was struck, a candle was lit, and a tall figure slowly emerged from the darkness. It was a woman. (*John and Anzia: An American Romance* by Norma Rosen)

Table 6. R6: Multiple sounds from one source moving

#	NOUN PHRASE	TYPE		SOURCE		TIME
		NUMBER	NATURE	NUMBER	IDENTITY	
38	ZS ( <i>∅ noise</i> )	Unspecified	Unspecified	1 (moving)	Unknown	1
39	IS ( <i>a noise</i> )	Unspecified	Unspecified	1 (moving)	Unknown	1
40	ZP ( <i>∅ noises</i> )	Unspecified	Unspecified	1 (moving)	Unknown	1

The above examples (22-40) show that ZS and IS can be used in all six objective realities and ZP in all but R1 and R2. ‘Noise’ in R1-R3 refers to one type of sound while ‘noise’ in R4-R6 to more than one type of sound, which suggests that the number of sound types influences the use of ZP. ZP is least likely to be chosen when ‘noise’ refers to one type of sound, except in R3, where one type of sound is repeated over a period of time. ZP can be used when the referent of ‘noise’ occupies more than one location in temporal space (R3) or in type space (R4-R6). R1 and R2, where ‘noise’ occupies one location in both type space and temporal space, do not allow ZP.

Both ZS and IS are acceptable in all six objective realities. It is a matter of how the speaker construes a particular reality. A combination or a series of sounds, occupying more than one location in type or temporal space, can be construed as noise in general without any particular nature (ZS), as one type of sound of a particular nature (IS), or as more than one type of sound (ZP). ZP is least likely to be chosen in R1 and R2 since it is hard to construe one type of sound as more than one type.

On the other hand, it is not difficult to construe a combination or series of sounds as one instance of noise. Two sounds are construed as different sounds and expressed with ZP when the speaker recognizes a distance between the two locations, being separate either in type or temporal space. They are construed as one sound and expressed with IS when the speaker recognizes no distance. ZS is chosen when the speaker finds the distance irrelevant.

In the following section, it will be seen how the speaker’s construal and intention influences the choice between ZS, ZP and IS.

## 5. Zero article singular

In specific reference, ZS (*∅ noise*) refers to one or more than one type of sound that comes from one or more than one source, the nature and/or the source of which may or may not

Mar. 2015

Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality

be known. With ZS, the speaker sends a message that they find the distinctive nature of the noise irrelevant, perhaps because they have little or no information about the sound they hear (e.g. source, nature, location, etc.), or they want to keep the nature of the sound vague or unknown.

ZS (41) and (42) refer to one type of sound of a particular nature that comes from a particular source: the sound of 'cutting the hedges' from 'Pops' (41) and 'footsteps' from 'Father LeClair' (42). ZS (43) refers to a combination of sounds with each sound coming from a different source and of a different nature. In all these examples, the speaker does not know the source or the nature of the noise at first, and only after a short while do they find its source and nature. These examples suggest that ZS is chosen when neither the source nor the nature of the noise is known. The examples in the previous section (R1-R6) support this hypothesis except in R5, where a noise of a particular nature coming from a particular source is construed as part of the background noise.

- 41) While I was working in the shop, I kept hearing **noise** in the backyard and on the side of the house. I looked and saw Pops cutting the hedges. (*Is This Time Forever?* by Udine C Fontenot-Powel. p. 358)
- 42) There was **noise** behind him. He recognized the sound of Father LeClair's footsteps coming into the room. (*Deus-X: The Reality Conspiracy* by Joseph A. Citro. p.121)
- 43) We followed her into the house. Inside, there was **noise** coming from everywhere. A stereo was playing, girls were talking, and I could hear someone running down some stairs. This was completely different from my house. (*Something Girl* by Beth Goobie)

ZS also refers to a series or combination of loud, confused sounds as part of the natural background noise. ZS is used in (44) and (45) because the speaker is not fully conscious and paying little attention to the source or the nature of the noise. ZS (46) and IS (47) show a good contrast. ZS (46) refers to the noise, whose source and nature are not clear. The noise is described as 'sounded like the distant braying of a mule' at first, and then after listening intently, the speaker finds it 'more like the cry of a human being in pain.' IS (47), on the other hand, refers to the noise of a particular nature that comes from a particular source: 'angry shouts' coming from 'the crowd of bystanders.' These examples suggest that ZS is chosen when the speaker is not sure of the nature and the source of the noise, while IS is chosen when the speaker has a clear image of the noise about its source and nature.

- 44) I made my way back to the chair, slumped down. I was empty of emotion. There was **noise** all around me, people coming and going. I was hardly conscious of it. (*Imperium* by Keith Laumer)
- 45) We were both very relaxed and for nearly an hour, neither one of us spoke, our minds otherwise engaged on the antics of the people around us. Even though there was **noise** all around, my brain was in a comatose. I could see everything, but was oblivious to any sound, as the tranquillity of freedom and the pleasures of reality combined to lift my



spirits onto a plateau of subliminal ecstasy. (*Battle of the Greyhounds: Australia Part II* by Shaun Donovan. p.223)

- 46) It was just over a week after the burial that Adam Rensberg awoke in the early hours of the morning and became aware of **noise** that at first sounded like the distant braying of a mule. He was in the bathroom when he first heard it. He opened up the bathroom window, looked out and listened intently. The bathroom light—which was always kept on at night, to make it easier for those who needed to visit it in the middle of the night without disturbing the rest of the house—illuminated the ground immediately outside the house, but he could see nothing beyond its edges except for the hilltop silhouetted by a pale moon. **The noise** came again—now sounding more like the cry of a human being in pain. (*Tainted Legacy* by Bernard J. Taylor. p.137)
- 47) Simultaneously she became aware of **a noise** all around her. She had been so concentrating on the debate at the table that she had hardly been aware of the crowd of bystanders, Christians and non-Christians, in their separate groups, who had been watching the proceedings. Now the air was filled with angry shouts. An old woman thrust a bony finger at her and screeched, 'My little granddaughter cries for vengeance. You poisoned her, gave her medicines, and two weeks later she died!' and another man was shouting something about a plague of ringworm in his sheep. (*The Palace of Heavenly Pleasure* by Adam Williams)

In the same way, ZS refers to a series or combination of undifferentiated sounds in the background. Against this background, a figure stands out. ZS (48) refers to the background sounds, 'a chaos of people and cars on the street,' against which 'all his answers' emerges. ZS (49) refers to the background noises of 'the roar of the fire,' 'the voices of the paramedics,' etc., against which the utterance "I love you." comes out. The speaker in (49) recognizes different types of sounds in the background but chooses ZS because the distinctive nature of each sound is not important in this context. What is important is that "I love you." is heard against the loud background noises.

- 48) A man answered the phone; there was **noise** behind him, a chaos of people and cars on the street; there was a surprised pause when the ricksha boy was named, and then a distant shouting. The **noise** in the background continued until the ricksha boy came to the phone and shouted all his answers into it as though he were speaking to someone in another country. (*The Wish Maker* by Ali Sethi)
- 49) There was **noise** all around them. The roar of the fire, the din of the firefighters as they fought the flames for possession of the restaurant. The voices of the paramedics as they were attending to the fire's survivors, not to mention the noise coming from the onlookers who had gathered behind the barricades. Everything conspired to play a trick on her ears because she could have sworn she heard Jorge say, "I love you." But she knew that was impossible. That went beyond wishful thinking. That came under the heading of hallucinations. Until she heard it again. And then a third time. (*Plain Jane and*



Mar. 2015

Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality

*the Playboy* by Marie Ferrarella. 193–94)

These examples (44–49) show that ZS is chosen when neither the source nor the nature of the noise is unknown, or when the speaker wants to keep the nature and the source unknown or vague for some reason, or when the distinctive nature of each sound is not important to the speaker. ZS refers to one type of sound or a combination of sounds that is construed as an undifferentiated mass of sounds, and the individual nature of each sound is irrelevant.

## 6. Zero Article Plural

ZP (*∅ noises*) refers to: i) more than one type of sound coming from one or more than one source; ii) one type of sound repeated over a period of time. ZP (50) denotes more than one type of sound coming from one source: various sounds including two different shouting voices coming from a quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Brandon. ZP (51) refers to more than one type of sound coming from more than one source: ‘the crack of rifles,’ ‘the chatter of machine guns,’ etc. ZP (52–54) refers to one type of sound coming from a particular source that is repeated over a period of time: ‘creaking noises’ from ‘the big bed’ (52), ‘kissing noises’ made by ‘James’ (53), and ‘noises of mud splashing into water’ from ‘my eldest brother’ (54).

The determining factor in choosing ZP is whether the noise is construed as having more than one location in type or temporal space. ZP is used when it refers to more than one type of sound, regardless of the number of their sources. ZP is also used when it refers to one type of sound that is repeated intermittently over a period of time.

- 50) Suddenly, there were **loud noises** coming from Brandon’s house. He went to his radio to turn on his CD player. “My mom is home,” he said as if **the loud noises** were nothing. Ashlyn passed the joint to Brandon. “They argue a lot. I can hear them from my house.” “I just tune them out. I try to stay out of the house. They’re different people when they drink,” he said, shaking his head. (*A Lost Soul* by A. A. Briggs. p.82)
- 51) There were **noises** in the town, first the crack of rifles, the chatter of machine guns, explosions, and then the creaky rambling of armor, lots of armor, heading toward the town, not away from it—Germans—lots of them—attacking. (*GI Ingenuity: Improvisation, Technology, and Winning World War II* by James Jay Carafano. p.190)
- 52) He woke up to **creaking noises**. He strained his ears: was somebody trying to break in somewhere? He got up as quietly as he could, tiptoed between Yakob’s mat and little Yosef’s, and started to go to the door of the house, but then he noticed that **the creaking noises** were coming from the big bedroom. Perhaps his help was needed there. He sneaked up to the curtain between the two bedrooms and silently pushed one of the drapes aside and peered into the big bedroom. At first everything was black, but gradually he could make out dark spots and some areas of very pale light. Creak-creak-creak. He could make out little Miryam’s mat. Creak-creak-creak. Aha—in front of the

parents' bed a screen was standing, that mysterious wooden screen whose purpose he had never understood. Creak-creak-creak. Now he understood at least that the screen was intended to hide whatever was happening in the big bed, that in fact the bed itself was creaking. (*Reluctant Messiah* by Trevor Steele. p.25)

- 53) By the end of this study, children knew that my role in the classroom was that of a researcher. When children asked about my study or what I was writing down in my notebook, I responded truthfully. For instance, one day the children were sitting on the rug listening to Sue read a book. I was seated on the low tables behind them. James was seated next to Laura. He kept leaning toward her, making **kissing noises** into her ear. Laura was smiling and seemed to enjoy this. (*Playing It Straight: Uncovering Gender Discourse in the Early Childhood Classroom* by Mindy Blaise. p.50)
- 54) There were **noises** behind them, **noises** of mud splashing into water. Little Sister looked round, lightly touched her and whispered, "Look! It's him! My eldest brother." (*Miss Sophie's Diary and Other Stories* by Ling Ding, William John Francis Jenner. p.150)

## 7. Indefinite article singular

IS (*a noise*) refers to: i) one type of sound coming from one source at a particular time and location; ii) more than one type of sound heard at the same time, whether coming from one or more than one source. IS (55) refers to the sound of 'a branch breaking' that comes from 'he' who is standing 'behind her.' 'She' does not know what makes the noise until she turns around. IS can be used when the noise is of a particular nature whether the source is identified or not. In the same way, Bessie in (56) does not know what makes the noise when she hears it. Only after looking out of the window, does she find its source, 'a big, green automobile.' IS (56) refers to the noise of a particular nature and 'Bessie' recognizes the noise when she hears it again. It is not the identification of the source but the particular nature of the noise that influences the choice of IS.

- 55) There was **a noise** behind her. A branch breaking. He was there. She turned around. Her fear left her almost straight away. (*Behind the Lines: Stories by J. T. Wilson* by Jason Trevor Wilson. p.101)
- 56) The house was silent, with the silence that broods over a well regulated house at night, when everyone is or ought to be asleep. But then there was **a noise** from outside — **a noise** that came through the windows, from the street. Bessie rushed back into the room and over to the window. She knew now that **the noise** she heard was the same one that had awakened her. And, looking out of the window, Bessie saw what had made the noise — a big, green automobile, that, even as she looked, was gliding slowly but with increasing speed away from the Mercer house. (*The Camp Fire Girls on the Farm* by Jane L. Stewart. pp.38-39)

IS may refer to more than one type of sound heard at the same time, whether coming from

Mar. 2015

Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality

one or more than one source. IS in (57-59) refers to a combination of two different sounds: 'a huge splash followed by a loud gulp' (57), 'rough laughter and shouting' (58), 'planes and helicopters' (59). A combination of sounds is construed as one instance of sound. IS may also refer to one type of sound coming from more than one source at the same time. In (60), the explosion scatters metal in a number of directions, resulting in a series of metal sounds coming from many locations. IS (60) gives a feeling of one big noise coming from the bomb right at the moment of explosion. IS may also refer to one type of sound coming from a particular source that is repeated over a period of time (61-64). IS (61) refers to the sound of 'a prisoner cutting the bars' that 'start and stop again'; IS (62) to the sound of 'a man yelling for help,' or 'cries for help'; IS (63) to the sound of 'he' 'saying my name' 'over and over again'; IS (64) to 'a low little moan interrupted every few moments by a cough or a giggle.' In these examples (61-64), the noise is conceptualized in type space rather than temporal space and IS indicates that a succession of the same sound is construed as one type of sound of a particular nature.

- 57) At 12:20 a.m., I am awakened by a **noise** near the canoe, which is tied to a dock. It is a strange sound: a huge splash followed by a loud gulp, the kind of thing that makes sailors believe in sea monsters capable of swallowing ships. (*Great Adventures in Florida* by M. Timothy O'Keefe. p. 134)
- 58) He went out, leaving them in a bitter silence. Down the stairs, in the hall, a **noise** of rough laughter and shouting arose, and grew. (*Quest for a babe* by Frances Hendry)
- 59) There was a **constant noise** of planes and helicopters passing overhead. (*Phan Rang Chronicles: A British Surgeon in Vietnam, Sept., 1966-May, 1968* by Henry Hamilton. p.7)
- 60) I remember putting the doormat over my head, as the engine mechanism of the bomb stopped right over our house. No time to get to the shelter, there was a **noise** of metal all around us. The final blast was three roads away and demolished about ten houses. (*Oh! sister I saw the bells go down* by Saunders-Veness, Frances)
- 61) On my second night duty, just after two in the morning I heard a **noise** coming from somewhere in the B class. It sounded like someone was cutting the cell bars. It seemed to start and stop again, and I couldn't locate the exact spot it was coming from. As soon as I moved it would stop, convincing me that it was definitely a prisoner cutting the bars. (*The Governor* by John Lonergan)
- 62) Postal worker hears cries for help...  
MARSHALLTOWN, Iowa —A postal worker who **kept hearing a noise** last Thursday found a man yelling for help when she peeked around the side of a house, reported The Marshalltown Times Republican newspaper.
- 63) He stayed right there, making a **noise** over and over again, and I finally realized he was saying my name. (*Betrays* by Lili St Crow)
- 64) She made a **constant noise**, a low little moan interrupted every few moments by a cough or a giggle. (*The Children's Hospital* by Chris Adrian)

IS indicates that the speaker has a particular noise in mind. This usage of the indefinite article applies to some abstract non-count nouns such as ‘sadness’ in ‘*There was a terrible sadness in her eyes.*’ Referring to an instance of noise, ZS or IS may be used depending on whether the speaker wants to emphasize its particular nature. In (65) and (66), ZS is immediately followed by IS, and both ZS and IS refer to the same noise. The speaker chooses ZS first to indicate that s/he wants to keep its individual, particular nature unknown for some reason. Then s/he finds it necessary to describe its particular nature with modification and an indefinite article: ‘a deafening terrible noise’ (65) and ‘a sloshing noise’ (66). IS is chosen when the speaker wants to show that s/he has a particular noise in mind.

Source identification has no influence in choosing IS. The source of ‘a sloshing noise’ (66) and that of ‘a noise’ (67) are identified only after the speaker goes around the side of the house. In (68) and (69), neither the source nor the nature of the noise is specified at first. In (68), the source is identified after a while as the crying sound coming from a shadow of a person sitting in the rocking chair. The source is not specified in (69) as well, and the reader assumes from the context that the source is an earthquake. In (67-69), the writer sends the message with IS that s/he has a particular type of sound in mind but keeps the reader waiting for further description. The choice of IS is determined by the speaker’s (or writer’s) intention, not by objective reality.

- 65) I was going shopping that morning for my mother and suddenly there was a blinding flash and a roaring, rushing sound. I was thrown into the air. There was **noise** all around me, **a deafening terrible noise** that beat against my eardrums and, when I fell to the ground, I curled myself up into a ball to protect myself, and I tried to scream but there was not any air. (*Spitfire Dive-Bombers versus the V2* by Bill Simpson. p.99)
- 66) It’s a nice day, so you decide to pay a visit to your neighbor. You knock on the door, but there’s no answer. Still, you can distinctly hear **noise** coming from within, **a sloshing noise**, which is kind of weird, so you venture around to the side of the house for a peek. Squinting through an open basement window, you see him, up to his knees in water. He is frantically trying to get rid of the flood by using a metal bucket, scooping up as much water as he can, and then pitching it through the window onto your shoes. (*Cool Time: A Hands-on Plan for Managing Work and Balancing Time* by Steve Prentice. p.13)
- 67) Postal worker hears cries for help...  
MARSHALLTOWN, Iowa —A postal worker who kept hearing **a noise** last Thursday found a man yelling for help when she peeked around the side of a house, reported The Marshalltown Times Republican newspaper.
- 68) One night while sleeping, I was awakened by **a noise** or some sort of a mumble. I covered my head with my blankets and tried to go back to sleep. When I finally fell back to sleep I was awakened again by **a loud noise** this time. I could not tell what the noise was, because I was so rudely awakened and still startled. I decided to sneak into my older sister, Veronica’s room and slide into her bed. I fell asleep once again. It happened again for the second time ... **the loud noise**. I pulled the covers from my face and looked down

the hallway where I saw a bright light. I also heard crying coming from somewhere in the house. While I was staring at the bright light in the hallway wondering what **the loud noise** was, I could vaguely see a shadow of a rocking chair. As it became clearer, sitting in the rocking chair was a shadow of a person! It was the shadow crying and the cries became louder. It was just like watching a scary movie! (*More Than Your Eyes Can See: Metaphysical Accounts of the Supernatural* by Christine M. Fleming, p.31)

- 69) I was crying for my father to help, but he couldn't hear me because there was **a noise** all around, **a tremendous noise**, biggest noise you can imagine. "Everything was moving. Nothing was the way it was supposed to be. The trees, they were leaning sideways, the road was breaking open, the pears were falling before they were ripe. (*In Revere, In Those Days* by Roland Merullo, p.71)

The determining factor in choosing IS is the speaker's intention to emphasize the individual, particular nature of the noise. The number of sound types or sources is irrelevant in choosing IS. The speaker chooses IS when s/he has a particular instance of noise in mind and wants to emphasize its individual, particular nature. ZS is chosen when the speaker is not sure of its nature or wants to keep it unknown for some reason, perhaps because s/he wants to keep the reader waiting for further description. The choice of IS or ZS is determined by the speaker's intention whether or not to send a message that s/he has a particular type of sound in mind. Physical conditions in objective reality are irrelevant.

## 8. Indefinite article singular and particular nature

Data collected from language corpuses show that the choice of IS is influenced by the speaker's intention to emphasize the individual, particular nature of a noise. Particular nature is often described with modification, especially adjectives. In this section, the relationship between IS and adjectives is explored. Table 7 shows the number of instances of IS and ZS, found in two large corpuses, BNC and COCA, with 'noise' immediately preceded by one adjective, which may be modified by an adverb but not by any other adjectives. Among the eight adjectives listed in Table 7, 'terrible,' 'strange' and 'funny' are more likely to take an indefinite article than 'low' or 'loud'. Adjectives like 'terrible,' 'strange,' 'funny,' etc. are likely to be used to describe a particular event (or entity) that occurs at a particular time and location. This does not, however, mean that 'noise' takes an indefinite article just because it is modified by these adjectives. As shown in Table 7, 'sudden noise' and 'funny noise' takes either ZS or IS, not to mention ZP. Adjective in and of themselves do not influence the choice of article (Master 1988: 212). An indefinite article is used when the individual, particular nature of the noise is emphasized, and not because of modification.

Table 7. Modification and noun phrases

Adj + noise	CORPUS	IS ( <i>a noise</i> )	ZS ( <i>∅ noise</i> )	Total	IS %
<i>terrible noise</i>	BNC	12	0	12	100%
	COCA	18	1	19	95%
<i>strange noise</i>	BNC	13	0	13	100%
	COCA	32	3	35	91%
<i>funny noise</i>	BNC	5	1	6	83%
	COCA	11	0	11	100%
<i>sudden noise</i>	BNC	9	0	9	100%
	COCA	11	3	14	79%
<i>great noise</i>	BNC	7	0	7	100%
	COCA	11	4	15	73%
<i>big noise</i>	BNC	13	4	17	76%
	COCA	20	5	25	80%
<i>loud noise</i>	BNC	25	8	33	76%
	COCA	133	52	185	72%
<i>low noise</i>	BNC	1	6	7	14%
	COCA	12	20	32	38%

The following examples (70–73) show that ‘sudden noise’ and ‘terrible noise’ take either ZS or IS. ZS refers to a combination and/or series of undifferentiated confused sounds of no particular nature. IS, on the other hand, refers to a single instance of noise with an emphasis on its individual, particular nature whether the noise consists of one or more than one type of sound in objective reality. ZS (70) refers to two different sounds: ‘the hum of an electric motor’ and ‘the clank of rattling metal.’ The speaker’s attention is not focused on the noise. S/he just hears two different sounds as part of the background noise. In (71), on the other hand, two persons focus their attention on the noise, which gives an individual, particular nature to the noise, although they do not know what it is at the time they hear it for the first time. Only later do they recognize the noise is coming from ‘a saddled horse slowly ambling back.’ ZS (72) refers to a combination of undifferentiated confused sounds. The tenant does not focus her attention to the noise, and the particular nature of the noise is not important to her. In (73), Marilyn Monroe’s attention is focused on the noise of ‘bangs and thuds,’ which gives an individual, particular nature to the noise. She does not know what makes the noise when she hears it.

### *sudden noise*

- 70) There was **sudden noise** on the road up ahead: the hum of an electric motor, the clank of rattling metal. Low headlights illuminated the darkness, and the animals ran, the wolf dashing off into the night, the snakes slithering back into the shadows. A golf cart pulled up next to him, and painted on the side, above The Reata’s logo, was the word *Security*. (*The Resort* by Bentley Little)
- 71) “Why the hell don’t they come?” one of them asked in an impatient whisper louder than



Mar. 2015

Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality

a normal tone of voice. “Shut up! Just means there ain’t many of ‘em. Maybe only one or two. Just hush. They’ll come!” There was a **sudden noise** and both turned and looked through their night scopes. It was just one of the horses—a saddled horse, at that—slowly ambling back. (*Children of Flux and Anchor* by Jack L. Chalker)

### *terrible noise*

- 72) Brother Frank moved in on a Monday. On Saturday night, I was awakened by a phone call from a tenant that lived directly beneath Brother Frank. She said that there was **terrible noise** coming from his unit and she could not fall asleep. When I called Brother Frank, I heard a drunken voice on the other end interrupted by the sound of very loud rap music, people shouting and the sound of broken glass. (*The Landlords Bible TM* by Jerry Raczkowski)
- 73) One morning the English couple and I were having breakfast in the kitchen. It was early. Suddenly there was a **terrible noise** on the stairway outside the kitchen. It was the most frightening noise I’d ever heard. Bangs and thuds kept on as if they would never stop. “Something’s falling down the stairs,” I said. (*My Story* by Marilyn Monroe)

Adjectives in themselves have no influence in choosing IS or ZS. As Hewson (1972: 106) says: it is the representation sought by the speaker that causes the use of the article and rules cannot be deduced from the presence or absence of modifiers in the sentence. Berry (1993:21) says more clearly: You don’t have to use the indefinite article with such nouns [abstract noncount nouns] just because of the adjectives; you can still use them without an article if you don’t want to emphasize their individual, particular nature.

## 9. Distinction between IS and ZP and between IS and ZS

IS typically refers to an individual, particular instance of noise and ZP to more than one instance of noise either in type or temporal space. The following example (74) illustrates the distinction between IS and ZP. Each IS (*a noise*) refers to a different type of sound that is heard by a particular person, Reilly, at a particular time and location: the first IS refers to the sound of ‘drip, drip’ coming from the shower faucet, and the second to the sound of ‘voices’ coming from the television. ZP refers to two types of sounds (perhaps more), each of which is heard on a different occasion on a particular night. Reilly does not know the source of the noise when she calls her mother. The identity or the number of the sources does not influence the choice between IS and ZP, let alone ZS.

- 74) Reilly lay in bed. She was supposed to go to sleep, but she kept hearing **noises**. “Mommy,” called Reilly. “I hear a **noise**.” Her mother came to the bedroom and listened. Drip, drip, they heard. Reilly’s mother went to turn off the shower faucet. “Mommy,” Reilly called again. “I hear a **noise**.” Her mother came to the bedroom door and listened. They could hear voices. “I’ll turn down the television,” said Mommy. “Then you won’t hear the

commercials.” (*Little Visits Every Day* by Mary Manz Simon)

The following example (75) shows the distinction between IS and ZS. ‘An unusual noise’ refers to a sound or sounds that the writer thought he heard at a particular time and location. He focuses his attention on the noise and tries to identify its source because the noise may have a special meaning to him. When his efforts fail and he has to conclude that the noise is made by either an animal or wind, ‘an unusual noise’ loses its special meaning and thus its individual, particular nature and becomes ‘ $\emptyset$  noise.’ ZS ( $\emptyset$  noise) denotes part of the background noise, whose individual, particular nature is not important.

The writer hears ‘some noise’ again, which sounded like a low murmuring. It is so faint that he is not sure of its source. He tries in vain to make sense of it, wondering if it is human footsteps, human voice, or something else. When he hears the same noise again, the noise starts to have a special meaning to him again and ‘some noise’ becomes ‘a low and fleeting noise’ of an individual, particular nature. He hears the noise intermittently and feels it coming from multiple sources that he believes moving. The singular form is used under the following conditions where the plural form may also be expected: i) when the noise may consist of more than one type of sound; ii) when the noise is heard repeatedly; iii) when the noise is coming from more than one source; iv) when the source is unidentified; v) when the source is moving. The choice between ZS, IS and ZP is not influenced by the physical conditions of the noise in objective reality: the number of types, that of sources, that of times the noise is heard, source identity, and source location in physical space. The speaker chooses IS because s/he gives a special meaning to the noise and recognizes its individual, particular nature.

75) In a split second, I felt like I heard **an unusual noise**. It was about thirty minutes into the retreat, and by then, I could clearly view trees and shrubs nearby. In reflex, I lowered my body to the ground and tried to identify the source of the noise by carefully surveying my immediate surroundings. Yet I saw nothing but the now-familiar wall of still dark trees and shrubs. I put on my night-vision goggle to make sure. Still I didn’t see anything but the trees. At last I had to conclude that I simply heard **noise made by either an animal or wind**. I resumed my slow upward trekking. In five minutes, I heard again **some noise**: this time, it sounded like a low murmuring. It was not the sound of human footsteps, but it sounded more like human voice. It was so faint that I couldn’t be sure of its origin. I froze my motion instantly and stood still like a tree. In a minute, I heard again **the same noise, a low and fleeting noise**, in wind. It sounded that **the noise** was coming from the northwest direction. Drawing my piston [sic], I began to crawl slowly so that I didn’t make noise over the leaves on the ground. I felt that I was getting closer to the source of noise; I still heard **the low noise intermittently**. For the first time, I felt **the noise had multiple sources**. I again put the goggle on to survey the area, but I couldn’t find a thing that was moving in the forest. Then **the noise** was vanished, seemingly for good. I was not sure if what I heard was real or my active imagination when I didn’t pick up **the noise** again for more than fifteen minutes. Finally, I had to give up the chase and



Mar. 2015

Specific Indefinite Noun Phrases and Objective Reality

slowly resumed my exhausted march toward the high slope. (*Ashes From Last Hell* by Walter Jung, p.206)

## 10. Concluding remarks

In specific reference, both ZS (*∅ noise*) and IS (*a noise*) refer to one or more than one type of sound that comes from one or more than one source, the source of which may or may not be known. ZS typically refers to a series or combination of undifferentiated confused sounds in the background, while IS (*a noise*) to a single instance of sound coming from a particular source at a particular time and location. ZS may or may not have an individual, particular nature, and either way its distinctive nature is not emphasized. IS, on the other hand, indicates an individual, particular nature. ZP (*∅ noises*) refers to more than one type of sound coming from one or more than one source, or one type of sound repeated over a period of time. The identity and the number of sources do not influence the choice between ZS, IS and ZP.

The location in physical space is irrelevant in choosing ZS, IS or ZP. Any phrase (ZS, IS, or ZP) may be chosen whether the noise is coming from one or more than one source in objective reality. On the other hand, the location in type and temporal space influences the choice. ZP is taken when the noise has more than one location either in temporal or type space. ZP refers to more than one type of noise or one type of noise repeated over a period of time. ZS is chosen when the location of the noise in type or temporal space is irrelevant. ZS refers to a noise whose individual, particular nature is not important, typically a combination or series of confused sounds in the background. IS is chosen when the noise has one location both in type and temporal space. IS refers to a noise of an individual, particular nature whether the noise consists of one or more than one type of sound in objective reality. A combination or a series of noise in objective reality may be construed as having one location in type space and takes IS rather than ZP. In the same way, one type of sound that is repeated over a period of time in objective reality may be construed as having one location in temporal space and chooses IS rather than ZP.

## REFERENCES

- Berry, Roger (1993) *Collins COBUILD English Guides 3: Articles*. London: HarperCollins Publishers.  
 Hewson, John (1972) *Article and Noun in English*. The Hague: Mouton.  
 Ishida, Hideo (2012) *Korenara Wakaru! Eigo Kanshi Toreningu* (A foolproof Guide to Understanding English Article Usage). Tokyo: DHC.  
 Langacker, Ronald W. (1987) *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* (Vol.1). Stanford: Stanford University Press.  
 Langacker, Ronald W. (1991) *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* (Vol.2). Stanford: Stanford University Press.  
 Langacker, Ronald W. (1991) *Concept, Image, and Symbol: The Cognitive Basis of Grammar*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.  
 Langacker, Ronald W. (2008) *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.  
 Master, Peter. (1988). 'Teaching the English article system, Parts I and II.' *Forum Anthology: Volume IV (1984-1988)* (pp. 208-221). Washington DC: United States Information Agency.

(2014年11月21日掲載決定)