

Chapter 5

Articles Lidwoorden

5.1 The indefinite article Het onbepaald lidwoord

The English indefinite article ‘a/an’ is **een** in Dutch, which is pronounced ‘n and is sometimes written as such in direct speech. The numeral ‘one’ is also **een**, pronounced with a long e and written **één** where ambiguity can arise (see 2.3.1 and 14.1, footnote 1). Occasionally in standard expressions and archaic or poetic style older case forms of **een** are found:

- enerzijds** on the one hand (a standard expression)
het leed ener moeder the sorrow of a mother (poetic style)

5.1.1 Omission of the indefinite article

The indefinite article is sometimes omitted in Dutch where it *is* used in English.

(a) It is usually omitted after the preposition **als** (see 13.0):

Hij gebruikt zijn schoteltje als (een) asbak.

He’s using his saucer as an ashtray.

Ik doe Duits als bijvak.

I’m doing German as a secondary (i.e. non-major) subject.

but

Ze heeft zich als een dame gedragen.

She behaved like a lady. (standard idiom)

- (b) It is commonly omitted after the preposition **zonder**:

Ik zag een lijk zonder hoofd.

I saw a corpse without a head.

Hij ging uit zonder hoed.

He went out without a hat.

- (c) It is usually omitted before professions (when the verb is **zijn**, **worden** or **blijven**), but is always inserted when the profession is preceded by an adjective:

Hij is leraar.

He is a teacher.

Hij is een zeer goede leraar.

He is a very good teacher.

Also:

Hij is vader geworden.

He has become a father.

Hij is enig kind.

He is an only child.

- (d) It is commonly omitted before nationalities (when the verb is **zijn**, **worden** or **blijven**), but is always inserted when the nationality is preceded by an adjective:

Hij is (een) Nederlander.

He is a Dutchman.

Hij is een rasechte Nederlander.

He is a genuine Dutchman.

- (e) It is omitted in various standard expressions:

Het was jammer.

It was a pity.

maag-/kiespijn hebben/krijgen

to have/get a stomach-ache/tooth-ache

oog om oog, tand om tand

an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth

kwart voor/over drie

a quarter to/past three

5.1.2 *Inclusion of the indefinite article*

There is only one notable instance of the indefinite article being used in Dutch where it is not used in English. The exclamation ‘What a + noun!’ is also expressed in Dutch by **Wat een** + noun with the difference that that noun can also be plural in Dutch (see 8.7.3), e.g.

Wat een mooi huis! What a beautiful house!

Wat een dure boeken! What expensive books!

5.2 **The definite article****Het bepaald lidwoord**

The definite article used before singular common gender nouns is **de**, and **het** is used before neuter nouns. Both genders employ **de** in the plural:

**de man, de deur, het kind, het gat – de mannen, de deuren,
de kinderen, de gaten**

There are many remnants of former cases in the definite article (see 13.1). The most common are **der** (genitive singular feminine, or plural), **des** or **'s** (genitive masculine or neuter singular) and **den** (dative masculine and neuter singular). Many case forms of the definite article have been preserved in standard expressions:

in de loop der tijd	in the course of time
Beatrix, Koningin der Nederlanden	Beatrix, Queen of The Netherlands
's morgens	in the morning
in naam des konings	in the name of the king
het Leger des Heils	the Salvation Army
desondanks	in spite of it/that
op den duur	in the course of time

The genitive feminine singular and plural **der** in particular is still productive, but it is rather formal, e.g.

de plannen der regering (= van de regering)
the government's plans (see 8.1.2.3)

Hij is de nieuwe Commissaris der Koningin in de provincie Gelderland. (= van de koningin)

He is the new governor in the province of Gelderland.

Albert is de huidige koning der Belgen (= van de Belgen).

Albert is the current king of the Belgians.

5.2.1 Omission of the definite article

In certain idioms the definite article is omitted where it is used in English:

aan tafel	at the table
op tafel	on the table
op kantoor	at the office
naar kantoor	to the office
op straat	in the street
op zolder	in the attic
in bad	in the bath
in huis	in the house
naar zee	to the seaside
aan zee	at the seaside
op internet	on the internet
met mes en vork	with a knife and fork
in staat van oorlog	in a state of war
op antwoord wachten	to wait for an answer
piano/gitaar enz. spelen	to play the piano/guitar etc.
in eerste instantie	in the first place
ik ben van mening dat	I am of the opinion that
in naam van de koning	in the name of the king

It is also commonly omitted before nouns in apposition:

Bush, (de) president van de VS, is momenteel op staatsbezoek in Japan.

Bush, the president of the USA, is on a state visit to Japan at the moment.

5.2.2 Inclusion of the definite article

There are many more cases in which the definite article is used where it is not in English. Some cases are situations where its use can be defined, others are individual idioms.

(a) It is always used before a variety of abstract nouns:

de mens	mankind
de natuur	nature
de liefde	love
de moderne kunst	modern art
de (vaderlandse) geschiedenis	(Dutch) history
de dood	death
het leven	life
de hemel	heaven
de hel	hell
het paradijs	paradise

De belangrijkste gebeurtenis in de geschiedenis.

The most important event in history.

De natuur is mysterieus.

Nature is mysterious.

Zo is het leven.

Such is life.

(b) It is always used before names of towns and countries when they are preceded by an adjective:

het mooie Amsterdam	beautiful Amsterdam
het toenmalige Duitsland	Germany in those days

(c) It is always used before seasons:

Die plant bloeit in de lente. That plant flowers in spring.

Ze was in de winter in Australië. She was in Australia in winter.

(d) It is always used with meals after the prepositions **na** and **vóór**:

na/vóór het avondeten after/before dinner

tijdens de lunch during lunch

(e) It is always used before the names of streets, parks and squares:

Ik woon in de Hoofdstraat.

I live in Main Street.

Hij woont op de Erasmusweg.

He lives in Erasmus Road.

Ze sliep in het Vondelpark.

She slept in Vondel Park.

De markt wordt op het Waterlooplein gehouden.

The market is held at Waterloo Square.

(f) Religions and names of airlines are always preceded by the definite article:

Hij vloog met de KLM.

He flew with KLM.

Waar is het hoofdkantoor van de Lufthansa?

Where is Lufthansa's main office?

De islam is een godsdienst uit het Midden-Oosten.

Islam is a Middle Eastern religion.

het Christendom door de eeuwen heen

Christianity through the ages

(g) It is used after **meneer** and **mevrouw** when the profession (not the personal name) follows—usually a form of direct address:

meneer de Voorzitter Mr Chairman

mevrouw de President Madame President

meneer De Kat/Hond Mr Cat/Dog (in a fairy-tale)

Sprookjes van Moeder de Gans Mother Goose's fairy-tales

(h) It is used in various idioms:

in de stad in town

naar de stad to town

in de kerk	in church
in de gevangenis	in jail
aan de universiteit	at university
in de praktijk	in practice
onder de zeespiegel	below sea level
in het Nederlands/ Engels/Duits	in Dutch/English/German etc.
uit het Nederlands/ Frans vertalen	to translate from Dutch/French etc.
op het tweede net	on channel two (tv)
de school begint om . . .	school begins at . . .
in de tweede versnelling	in second gear
tussen de 12 en de 15	between 12 and 15 (items or age)
boven/onder de 50	over/under 50 (items or age)
voor de lol	for fun
in het rood gekleed	dressed in red
de een na de ander	one after another, one by one
met de auto/tram etc.	by car, tram etc.
met de hand	by hand
de volgende keer	next time
op het eerste gezicht	at first sight

The definite
article

- (i) In Dutch it is not possible for one definite article to do service for two nouns that follow if they are of different gender; the article should be repeated for each noun. If the same article is required by both nouns, the article can be omitted, as it can be when both nouns are in the plural:

De tafel en het vloerkleed waren ontzettend duur.

The table and floor-rug were terribly expensive.

om de hals en (de) handen

around the neck and hands

de jongens en meisjes van deze klas

the boys and girls from this class