

# **Acquisition And Usage Of Articles In French : A Case Study Of Students Of French Language At Colleges Of Education.**

**OLASEINDE, Felicia Olufemi (Ph.D.)**

*General Studies Department,  
Federal University, Oye - Ekiti*

**SALAMI, Sefiu**

*Department of French,  
Faculty of Arts,  
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State.*

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## **Abstract**

*The study investigates the acquisition and usage of French Articles which are classified under masculine and feminine. The study is a descriptive research of a survey type. The population for the study consisted of 160 part one students of French Language from 4 Colleges of Education in South-West, Nigeria. These include Colleges of Education; Ikere in Ekiti State, Ilorin in Kwara State, Ila – Orangun in Osun State and Adeyemi – Ondo in Ondo State. The sample consisted of 40 students which were randomly selected from each of the 4 departments of French Language in the Colleges of Education selected. Questionnaire tagged Acquisition and Usage of French Articles (AUTA) was used to generate information from the students. These questionnaires were based on the Acquisition and usage of Articles in French. It contained ten (10) questions which was given to the students in order to seek information from them. The results showed that majority of the students could not differentiate the French Articles and they could not use it effectively. It was revealed that those who did not have the knowledge of French Articles are larger in number than those who have the knowledge. The findings of the study also showed that the performance of the students was very low; that is, it was discovered that a very low percentage of the respondents (students) scored above average while the majority fell below average.*

**Keywords:** Acquisition, Usage, French Articles, Colleges of Education, Masculine, Feminine.

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## **I. Introduction**

Articles or determinants are words used in French to identify nouns or nominal groups in sentences in order to mark generic or specific values. In French language, no word or group of words stand alone without the occurrence of the determinants and most students of French language pay little attention to this. Cameron (2001) opines that children learn by doing. If a student is showing positive attitude towards the culture and language of the people who speak the language, that student is learning. The observation is that most students do not make use of articles and when they make use of them, errors are easily noticed. As a result of this, we hear expressions such as ‘je mange banane’ instead of ‘je mange **la** banane’ thus omitting the article ‘**LA**’. As a result of this observation, there is the need to put up this kind of a research with a view to ensuring the correct and effective use of articles among students of French language and other learners.

Brown (2007) defines acquisition as learning which is a conscious process that students are aware of their learning process and what is expected of them. The researcher also felt that the acquisition and usage of articles will go a long way in helping students to achieve better communicative competence. Indeed, articles are just minor components of the whole grammatical structure but their presence gives the noun access into the statement (Boko :2007), there is no coherent text without determinants viz definite and indefinite articles hence, their knowledge and correct usage will facilitate good communication among learners. Kurbegov (2007) declares that French articles indicate whether something is considered masculine and feminine; so by this, the use of articles should be taught right from the secondary school with a view to internalizing the correct applications.

### Articles in French Language

In grammar, 'the use of determinants' can be defined as a process through which a noun or group of words is affected by a determinant that allows it to have a grammatical value in a sentence. According to Riegel (1999) the determinant is defined as : "*le mot qui doit nécessairement précéder un nom commun pour constituer un groupe nominal bien formé.*" (A word which must necessarily come before a common noun in order to form a well constituted nominal group). Thus the determinant is essentially applied to transform a particular word or element into a noun. In French language, there are many categories of determinants such as the possessive pronouns, demonstrative adjectives, indefinite pronouns and even the articles (definite and indefinite) which constitute the focus of this paper.

According to Ade Ojo (2002), articles are words used for presenting or identifying nouns which they precede immediately. Likewise Kurbegov (2002) opines that French articles indicate whether something is considered masculine or feminine. Consequently, in French language, no noun is neutral, that is, nouns are gendered either masculine or feminine. Ellis (2009) said that French articles are required on almost every common noun much more than English. They are inflected to agree in gender (Masculine or Feminine) and number (Singular or Plural) with the noun they determine. Equally, articles can be categorised into generic and specific reference use (Quirk and Greenbaum 2002), hence we have the definite and indefinite articles which come before nouns that are gendered masculine or feminine and numbered singular or plural. This is so, according to Ade Ojo (2002) French articles follow the French language law of agreement, by agreeing in number and gender with the noun and pronoun which any of the articles introduced'.

### The Definite Articles and Their Usage

The definite articles are **le, la, l'et les**. '**Le**' co-occurs with masculine/singular noun. '**La**' co-occurs with feminine/singular noun while '**Les**' applies to both masculine and feminine plural nouns. And '**L'**' accompanies nouns that start with vowels a,e,i,o,u or silent h, whether the noun is masculine or feminine. The definite article is that article that applies to objects or nouns that are known to the speaker and his /her interlocutor (Mauger 2015, Riegel 1999, Pellat 2013). It is therefore an indication of notoriety, for example : **Le** jeune homme est un étudiant meaning : 'The young man is a student'. In the above sentence, it is assumed that 'le jeune homme' is known to both the speaker and the interlocutor. Therefore definite articles LE, LA, L', LES, and determine identifiable objects.

### Indefinite Articles and Their Usage

With regard to indefinite articles they appear in these forms **un, une** and **des**. **UNE** co-occurs with feminine/singular noun while **UN** co-occurs masculine/singular noun and **DES** is used as the plural form of both 'un' and 'une'. Again, in contrast to definite articles which main value expresses what is known to the speaker, the definite article can be said to mark what is not known to the speaker. According to J.C. Pellat (2003) indefinite article introduces an object in a whole of same nature, and not totally precise or identified. For instance :

**Une** fille est dans la voiture meaning : A girl is in the car. In this case, a girl who is not known to both the speaker and his/her interlocutor is being referred to. Therefore, indefinite articles present the noun as a new item and unspecified to the conversation. The noun is introduced in an indefinite manner.

### Omission of Articles in French Language

Omission of articles which is also called 'Determination zero' occurred when a sentence made is without an article. According to Ade Ojo (2002) the indefinite article is not used, whenever the predicate nouns and adjectives are used for the identification of someone : profession, religion, nationality, title. Example : **Il** est professeur. Here the noun 'professeur' is not preceded by any article.

Some other situations when articles are omitted are the following :

- In negative sentence, if the negation is absolute. Example : j'ai des stylos. Toi tu n'as pas de stylos.
- With days of the week and months of the year.
- With proper name except when they are accompanied by a qualifying adjective. Example : le petit Jerome.
- The definite article is also omitted in proverb. Example : ventre affamé n'a point d'oreilles.
- Before the numbers 'cent' (hundred) and 'mille' (thousand). Example : il reprit le même chemin cent fois.

### Statement of the Problem

Observation revealed that ; The problem of teaching and learning of Articles (les Articles) has been a difficult issue for the learners of French Language. It has been observed that students did not have the

knowledge that no word or the determinants are essentially applied to transfer a particular word or element into a noun.

It seems most students do not make use of French Articles ; when they make use of them, there are errors. The students seems not to know that the presence of French Articles (definit et indefini) make them to communicate and access any statement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study investigates the acquisition and usage of articles in French. The study would facilitate good communication among the learners.

## **II. Methodology**

The study is a descriptive research of a survey type. The researcher made use of 160 (past one) students which formed the population of the study of French department from 4 Colleges of Education in Ikere, Ekiti State, Ilorin in Kwara State, Ila – Orangun in Osun State and Adeyemi in Ondo State. 40 students were randomly selected which formed the sample of the study from each of the four departments of French Language in the four Colleges of Education. The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire titled Acquisition and usage of French Article (AUFA), this was used to generate information about knowledge in the usage of French articles. This contained 10 items and the data collected were subjected to simple percentage.

## **III. Results**

**Research Question 1 :** What is the level of the students knowledge about the articles in French Language.

**Table 1:** Summary of the simple percentage showing students acquisition and usage of Articles in French Language.

S/N	ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%
1	I know the French Articles very well	65	9.2199	95	10.615
2	I can make use of the French Articles very well	62	8.7943	98	10.950
3	The use of French Articles are easy	58	8.227	102	11.397
4	It is easy to identify the French Articles	68	9.6454	92	10.279
5	I make use of the Articles while constructing sentences	59	8.3688	101	11.285
6	French Articles help in identifying words	81	11.489	79	8.826
7	French Articles differentiate French words	78	11.064	82	9.162
8	While using French Articles, it makes sentences meaningful	81	11.489	72	8.826
9	French Articles agree in number and gender with the noun or pronoun it introduces.	68	9.6454	92	10.279
10	French has three different types of Articles.	85	12.057	75	8.379
	<b>TOTAL</b>	705	895		
	<b>MEAN</b>	70.5			
	<b>S.D</b>	89.5			

Table 1 showed that 65 (9.2199%) students know the French Articles very well, while 95(10.615%) students do not know the French Articles. 62(8.794%) students can make use of the French Articles very well while 98(10.950%) students cannot make use of the French Articles. 58(8.227%) students declare that the use of French Articles are easy while 102(11.397%) students said that the use of French Articles are not easy. 68(9.645%) students said that it is easy to identify the French Articles while 92(10.279%) students claimed that it is not easy to identify the French Articles. 59(8.285%) students make use of the French Articles while constructing sentences while 101(11.285%) do not make use of the Articles while constructing sentences 81(11.489%) students confirm that French Articles help in identifying words while 79(8.826%) students said that French Articles do not help in identify words. 78(11.064%) students said that French Articles differentiate French word while 82(11.064%) students said that French Articles do not differentiate French words. 81(11.489%) students said that while using French Articles it makes sentences meaningful while 72(8.826%) students believe that while using French Articles it does not make sentences meaningful. 68(9.645%) students understand that French Articles agree in number and gender with the noun or pronoun it introduces while 92(10.279%) do not 85(12.057%) students learnt that French has three different types of Articles while 75(8.379%) do not.

Table 1 shows that the mean and standard deviation of student knowledge about the French Articles are 70.5 and 9.947 respectively. The mean and standard deviation of those that do not have the knowledge of the French Articles in French are 89.5 and 9.947 respectively. The mean is apparently higher on those who do have the knowledge of French Articles.

**Research Question 2:** Did students make use of Articles in French Language ?

**Table 2:** t-test showing mean difference of students using Articles in French.

Variation	N	Mean	SD
Yes	10	70.500	9.947
No	10	89.508	9.947

Table 2 revealed that 44.3% of the students make use of French Articles in French while 56.3% didn't make use of French Articles in French. Table 2 revealed the mean score and standard deviation of students who made use of French Articles in French. The mean score of 70.500 and standard of 9.947 was obtained from those who made use of Articles in French while the mean score of 89.508 and standard deviation of 9.947 was obtained from respondents who do not make use of French Articles in French. This implies that majority of the students do not make use of French Articles in French.

#### IV. Discussion

The table revealed that majority of the students do not have adequate knowledge of articles in French Language. They have the idea that articles in French Language differentiate French words and they believe that it makes formations of sentences meaningful, but they could not make use of the Articles very well.

The findings/result of the study shows that those who could not make use of the French Articles are larger in number while those that can use it are fewer in number.

#### V. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that the students have not acquired adequate knowledge on French Articles in French Language and in Colleges of Education in the South west of Nigeria. It was also discovered that majority of the students learning French language have not been properly taught in the use of articles. The implication of this study therefore from the opinion of the researcher is that the teaching and learning of French articles should be introduced and sustained as soon students come into contact with French Language.

#### VI. Recommendations

- Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the teaching and learning of French Language with the aid of instructional materials would help students to grasp the proper use of the Articles.
- Students must be encouraged so as to be aware of all the rules of gender and number guiding the application of French Articles.
- The teacher should lead French students to adhere to the law of agreement so that they would have the knowledge that articles agree in number and gender with the noun and pronoun that the articles introduced.
- Teaching facilities should be provided for the teaching of French Language.
- Well stocked libraries with current books and other learning materials should be provided.

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