

Teaching and Learning the Translation of English Determiners into French: A New Perspective

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Abstract: *In this work, we examine problems that the translation of English determiners poses to Nigerian students of French. We attempt to: 1) identify difficulties encountered by the students in the translation of the determiner some 2) develop resources for teaching the translation of this determiner and 3) propose a didactic approach for delivering these resources. Fifteen sentences were given to 179 part III students from 18 Nigerian universities to translate into French. It was found that the sentences in which the determiner some is thematised poses a serious problem to the students as only 39% of them translated the sentences correctly. Based on this result, we developed resources for teaching and learning the translation of this determiner. A new approach was also proposed to facilitate the task.*

Key words: *Extraction, Determiners, Didactic approach, Operation of determination, Some..*

I. Introduction

The role of determiners in a sentence cannot be overemphasized. Generally, “a determiner is a term used in some models of grammatical description, referring to a class item whose main role is to co-occur with nouns to express a wide range of semantic contrast such as quantity or number” (Crystal, 1992:91). The determiner *some*, which is the object of this study, is one of the different types of the operation of determination called extraction. Others are the unique extraction and the multiple extraction represented by a/an and the Ø article respectively.

Although determiners are an important marker of competence, they have hardly been the subject of extended study in contexts such as the French-English translation classroom where the goal is precisely to develop the competence of learners in the simultaneous use of both languages. As a result, little exists by way of studies on how to identify points worth teaching and strategies and resources for teaching such points. Culioli (1975), Leonard A. M. (1980), Bouscaren (1980) Adamczewski and Delmas (1982), Bouscaren, Hernau et Lebleu (1984), Guillemen-Flescher (1988), Chuquet et Paillard (1989) Giancarli (1997), Riviera (2001) and Uwajeh (2001) among others, have carried out studies on English and French determiners, but they did not consider the translation classroom context which is the focus of the present research.

we have attempted in this study to: 1) identify the difficulties encountered by the students in translating the determiner *some* 2) develop resources for teaching and learning this determiner, and 3) propose a didactic approach for delivering these resources.

The importance of this study to teachers, learners and to pedagogical translation is undeniable. It will sensitize teachers to the identification of student’s problems in translation. It will encourage them to center their lectures on a given theme. It will also contribute to the improvement of the quality of teachers’ comments. Comments will serve as opportunities for learning rather than being opportunities for sanctions. The traditional comments “not clear”, “bad translation”, etc., can be replaced or accompanied by “cf. operator *some*”, for instance, where exercises, theories and texts related to this operator are found.

II. Theoretical framework

This study is based on Culioli’s (1990) enunciative theory. In this theory, a situation of enunciation is not only determined by the moment of enunciation, but also by an enunciator (a speaker) and a co-enunciator (a co-locutor or interlocutor) who can also become an enunciator (Guillemen-Flescher, 1988; Levy, 1991)). Unlike Austin’s speech act which analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behavior of speaker and hearer on interpersonal communication (Crystal, 1992:285), enunciation theory looks at the imprint that a speaker leaves on the utterance.

With regard to determiners which are the imprints of operations of determination (Levy, 2000:71), three main operations are identified. They are: 1) Reference to notion, 2) Extraction and 3) Fléchage represented in English by the *zéro article*, *a/an/des/some* and *the* respectively. According to Guillemen-Flescher (1988), these opérations of détermination are opérations through which we generalise, particularise and point out. For instance in *water boils at 100°* « l’eau bout à 100°) », English uses the *zero article*, whereas French makes use of the generalising possibilities of the operator *le* which refers to notion. In *John has a handset* «Jean a un

portable», it is about a particular handset, indéfinite (extraction), but when we say *it is the handset of John/John's handset* «c'est le portable de Jean», we identify an already extracted handset, a well known one, in this case John's handset, hence the use of *le* (Fléchage) in French. These few exemples illustrate the threeoperations of determination of the enuntiative theory elaborated by Antoine Culioli.

III. Materials and Methods

Our research population consisted of part three (III) students of 18 Nigerian universities, attending the French immersion programme at the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV), Badagry in June 2004. This population was estimated at 548 students approximately (NFLV, year book 2004). It is expected that having gone through, at least, three semesters of translation, part three students should be in position to translate efficiently. It is worth noting that aside from the aforementioned investigation, other tests administered on part two and three students of the university of Maiduguri over the years have given us the same results approximately.

It should be recalled that the aim of our study is to develop a structured approach to the study and teaching of determiners in translation classes, and our objectives are: (1) to understand difficulties encountered by students in the use of the determiner *some*, (2) develop resources for teaching the translation of this determiner and 3) propose a didactic approach for delivering these resources. To achieve these objectives, two major types of data are required.

- a) Data on students' knowledge of determiners,
- b) Data related to texts intended as exercises.

For data (a) on student's knowledge of determiners, an exercise of fourteen (14) sentences in English was given to students at the Nigerian French Language Village in 2004. They were to translate these sentences into French. This enabled us to test the students' knowledge of the use of determiners. Below are the sentences given to them to translate into French.

1. Malaria is a disease found all over Africa
2. The organization will meet next week in Geneva
3. I saw some children playing outside
4. They have good plans for production
5. Butter is very expensive in this town
6. Ice floats on water
7. Some 6% of Zimbabwean population is affected by AIDS
8. Didi wanted to have spaghetti for lunch
9. The world is becoming smaller everyday
10. She bought two bottles of water and some oranges
11. Dogs are animals
12. I was told that there was bread in the kitchen
13. We bought some butter, but it is not enough
14. Bob is an intelligent boy

For data B which deals with the didactic aspect of our work, pertinent texts have been selected according to corpus linguistics criteria propounded by McEnry and Wilson (1996).

IV. Data presentation and discussion

Below is an overview of the students' performance. Since the focus of this study is the determiner *some*, only sentences in which this determiner is thematised are considered.

Table1: Proposed answers

Operation of determination (Extraction)	Translated sentences	Recorded answers		
		Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Total
Multiple extraction + quantification1	3. I saw some children playing outside 10. She bought two bottles of water and some oranges 3. I saw some children playing outside	Quelques, des, Des/quelques/plusieurs (76%)	Les, certains, article zéro, quel (24%)	100%
Multiple Extraction + Sampling	13. We bought some butter, but is not enough	Du (21%)	Un peu de, certain (s),la, le, les, de la quelques/quelque, zéro article (79%)	100%
Multiple extraction + count	7. Some 6% of Zimbabwean population is affected by AIDS	Environ/quelques (22%)	Les, au moins, certain, presque (78%)	100%

In column one of the Table above, the operations of determination are presented. This is followed by the proposed sentences for translation. The correct and incorrect answers are presented under recorded answer in the last column.

The recorded answers for multiple extraction + quantification indicates that 76% of the students translated sentence 3 (I saw some children playing outside) and sentence 10 (She bought two bottles of water and some oranges) correctly. Only 24% did not render them adequately. This shows that regardless of the type of substantive that follows the multiple quantification (animate or inanimate), it can be said that, although 24% is a significant percentage, this type of extraction poses less problem to students. *Some* is largely translated by *quelques* (indefinite adjective), *plusieurs* (indefinite pronoun) and *des* (indefinite article), the three renderings were accepted, because all of them refer to indeterminate quantification. It should be noted that some students proposed the singular indefinite adjective *quelque* (by commission or omission) which refers to *one* or *a certain number/amount*. Neither *quelque* (singular), nor *certain* (in contrast with) used by some students are appropriate.

Answers for the multiple extraction + sampling shows one of the highest percentage of incorrect answers (79%). Only 21% of the students translated the sentences correctly. Ironically, *some* in the sentence ‘we bought some butter, but it is not enough’ was translated by *des/quelques/quelque*, or even by the definite article (*le, les, la*) just to mention a few. *Some* here refers to an indeterminate (non-countable) extracted quantity which should be translated by the partitive article *du* in French, because “butter” is unquantifiable.

As for the last manifestation of *some*, i.e. the multiple extraction + quantification + count, which is presented in the last row, another high rate of failure was recorded in its translation. The rendering of *some* was a problem for a majority of the students. In fact 78% of them translated this determiner in the sentence ‘Some 6% of Zimbabwe’s population is affected by AIDS’ by the *zero article* which is inappropriate in this context. If the sentence to be translated were simply 6% of Zimbabwe’s population is affected by AIDS’, it would be translated by the *zero article*, but with the determiner *some* before the percentage, a *zero article* cannot be a good choice. Since *some* is always followed by a certain percentage or number of extracted elements in such contexts, (because it refers to a more precise quantification), it should not have even posed any problem of translation. It can here be translated by the adverb of quantity *environ* as well as the indefinite adjective *quelques*’.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that *some* in its different forms poses a serious problem of translation to students as only 39.6% of them translated the three manifestations correctly. Although *some* can be translated by other determiners in French, depending on the context, this study looked at these types only, because it is assumed that they are the most frequently used.

We present below the structure of the proposed didactic programme.

V. Proposal of the Didactic Programme Structure

We propose, in this section, 1) a scheme of work and 2) a didactic approach for teaching the determiner *some* to students of universities and other higher institutions of learning.

5.1 Scheme of work

- **Unit:** The determiner *some*
- **Operation of determination:** Extraction
- **Type:** Multiple extraction
- **Theoretical exposé:** gives a theoretical explanation of the determiner
- **Parallel Texts:** parallel texts in (English and French) enable students to see the use of the determiner *some* in context
- **Text to translate:** Texts of different genres (scientific, literary or general in English and French) are selected for the programme
- **corrected version of exercises**

- **Objectives:** At the end of each lesson the student should be able to : 1) identify contexts in which the determiner *some* is the example of multiple extraction+ quantification for instance, 2) distinguish it from a context where it is used as multiple extraction+ count or sampling 3) translate it correctly

5.2 Didactic programme

Below is a didactic programme illustrating the translation of four different manifestations of the determiner *some*.

5.2.1 Unit I: The determiner *some*

- **Operation of determination:** Extraction
- **Type:** Multiple extraction + Quantification1

The aim of this unit is to:

- a. introduce the determiner *some* which refers to the operation of determination called extraction
- b. present a theoretical exposé on the operation of determination in question
- c. present parallel texts thematizing the determiner.
- d. present a text comprising diverse exercises on the said determiner
- e. present a corrected version of the exercises

At the end of this lesson the student should be able to : 1) identify contexts in which this determiner is an example of multiple extraction + quantification, 2) distinguish it from a context where it is used as multiple extraction+ count or sampling, and 3) translate it correctly.

5.2.1.1 Introduction

The determiner *some* also known as “operator some” refers to the operation of determination called multiple extraction. This determiner is used to quantify countable as well as uncountable things, it can also used to bring a qualitative determination.

After this short introduction, a theoretical exposé is presented to the students in order to throw more light on the determiner in question.

5.2.1.2 Theoretical exposé

Extraction is, according to Chuquet&Paillard, (1989), a complex operation of determination which consists in pinpointing a notion with regard to a particular situation, in order to distinguish quantitatively one or more elements, or certain qualities, and attribute to them a quantitative determination. There are generally two types of extractions: *unique* and *multiple* which are represented by *a/an*, and *zero article* respectively. Besides these two there are sampling and multiple quantification which are also represented by zero article or *some*.

With regard to *some* which is the object of our study, Chuquet&Paillard, (ibid.) affirm that this determiner labeled by Quirk et al. (ibid.) as a ‘light quantitative article’ is used to bring a quantitative or a qualitative type of supplementary determination. In the following example: “I felt some shame for what I had done”, the notion of shame is qualitatively restricted. *Some*, in this case, is translated in French by *un (e)*, *certain (e)*, *un certain degré de* “J’ai senti une certaine honte pour ce que j’ai fait” (Chuquet&Paillard.) According to *Hachette –Oxford* (1994: 1720), when *some* is used as a quantifier to mean an unspecified amount of something, it is translated by the partitive article *du, de, de l’, de la* or *des*. Example: “I’d like some bread” (*je voudrais du pain*); “They bought some candles” (*ils ont acheté des bougies*).

Some is used as *certain* (in contrast to others) either as a determiner or a pronoun, for example: “some shops won’t sell the product” “*certain magasins ne vendent pas le produit*”. Giancarli (ibid) calls the determiner *some* ‘a double extraction’, (like fléchage), because according to him, it is a partitive determiner indicating a part included in a whole *some*

It is worth noting that the term multiple extraction is an appellation used by Chuquet&Paillard (1987). Making use of this term for the sake of homogeneity can be misleading. If we examine many contexts in which the determiner *some* is used, we can see the difficulty to put these occurrences under the section ‘partitive’, as *some* is generally associated with ‘partitive articles’. Let us consider the following data:

- 1) **Some** people came in their cars, others by train.
Certaines personnes arrivèrent en voiture, d’autres par le train.
- 2) He died **some** twenty years ago
Il mourut il y a *Environ/quelques* vingt ans

As can be observed, *some* in the second example is an adverb or an indefinite adjective. Therefore, since many appellations have already been given, we should be careful not to promote any other one we prefer to add the grammatical appellation of these different manifestations of *some* to the existing ones. Thus, *some* translated as *environ/quelques*, for instance, should come under extraction. Though it is not a partitive article, it presents one of the many senses of the determiner *some*.

After this theoretical exposé, the teacher presents parallel texts (short texts) which will enable students to examine the use of the thematized determiner in context.

5.2.1.3 Parallel text

English text: May be some bacon and eggs? Mrs Rice said

French text: Tu veux peut être des œufs au bacon, dit Mme Rice (Chuquet & Paillard, 1987:54)

5.2.1.4 Text to translate

They’ve bought some peaches (Source: Chuquet & Paillard, 1987)

5.2.1.4.1 Exercise: 1) what type of French determiner is required before ”peaches” ? 2) Justify your answer, and 3) translate the text into French

5.2.1.5 Text to translate

I saw some children playing outside

5.2.1.5.1 Exercise: 1) what type of French determiner is required before "enfants" ? 2) Justify your answer, and 3) translate the text into French.

(Answers of these exercises are at the annex)

Units II, III & IV that follow are examples of other manifestations of *some*. It is worth noting that since the aim and objectives as well as the theoretical exposé are the same, only the parallel texts thematizing the determiner in question, the text to be translated, and the exercises will be presented in the three units below.

5.2.2 Unit II: The determiner *some*

- **Operation of determination:** Extraction
- **Type:** Multiple extraction + sampling

After the theoretical exposé, the teacher presents parallel texts (short texts) which will enable students to examine the use of the thematized determiner in context.

5.2.2.1 Parallel texts

English text: do you want some sugar?

French text: voulez -vous du sucre?

5.2.2.2 Text to translate

Yes, I had some chicken and some cheese and a big piece of cake

Source: Chuquet & Paillard, 1989:54

5.2.2.2.1. Exercise 1) What type of French determiner is required before "chicken" and 'cheese' ? 2) Justify your answer and 3) translate the text in French.

5.2.2.2.3 Text to translate

Bernard sat down and seems to think about food then gleefully watching the boarders, he gives his order "two eggs, mama four rashers of beacon and you may fry **some** bread to go with it"

Source. Brian Moore (1955) in Chuquet & Paillard, 1987

5.2.2.2.3.1 Exercise: 1) what type of French determiner is required before "bread"(in bread to go with it)? 2) Justify your answer, and 3) translate the text into French

5.2.3 Unit III: The determiner *some*

- **Operation of determination:** Extraction
- **Type:** Multiple extraction + count

5.2.3.1 Theoretical exposé

Same as in Unit I above

After the theoretical exposé, the teacher presents parallel texts (short texts) which will enable students to examine the use of the thematized determiner in context.

5.2.3.2 Parallel texts

English text: The aliment for food programme was established by the security council on April,14 1995 . **Some** 3.4 billion barrels of Iraqi oil valued at about 65 billion were exported under the programme between December, 1996 and 20 march,2006

Source: Office of the Iraqi Programme Oil for Food Guide Call (online)

French text: le programme pétrole contre nourriture a été initié par le conseil de sécurité alimentaire Le 14 avril, 1995 **environ** 3.4 milliards de pétrole Irakien ont été exporté sur le programme entre décembre, 1996 et 20 mars, 2003

Source: Bureau chargé du programme Iraq "pétrole contre nourriture" Guide Call (online).

5.2.3.3 Text to translate

Some 30,000 Tongans live overseas, mainly in New Zealand, Australia, Hawaii on the North American continent.

Source: African-Caribbean-Pacific (1988) *the courier* N° 108 p.15

5.2.3.3.1 Exercise:1) what type of determiner is required before **30,000 Tongans**? 2) justify your answer and 3) translate the text into French.

5.2.3.4. Text to translate

Swarms of grasshoppers have come to the Tindouf and Adrar areas of Algeria and the Southern border with Mali, affecting **some**100.000 ha.

Source : The courier (1988) No 108 p. xv

5.2.3.4.1 Exercise: 1) what type of French determiner is required before " « **10.000 ha** »)? 2) Justify your answer, and 3) translate the text into French

5.2.4 Unit IV: The determiner *some*

Operation of determination: Extraction

Type: Multiple extraction + quantification²

5.2.4.1 Theoretical exposé

After the theoretical exposé (Same as in Unit I above), the teacher presents parallel texts (short texts) which will enable students to examine the use of the thematized determiner in context.

5.2.4.2 Parallel texts

English text: Human infections ceased following the rapid destruction – within three days – of Hong Kong entire poultry population, estimated at around 1.5 million birds. **Some** experts believe that drastic action may have arrested an influenza pandemic.

Source: WHO (2006) Avian influenza p.3

French text : Les infections humaines ont disparu après la destruction rapide en trois jours de toutes les volailles de Hong Kong....**Certains** spécialistes pensent que cette mesure drastique aurait permis d'éviter une pandémie de grippe

Source: OMS (2006) Grippe aviaire p.4

After the presentation of the theory general as well as specific on the determiner, and the parallel texts that enabled the students to have an idea about the contextual use of the determiner, the text to be translated and the exercises are given to the students.

5.2.4.3 Text to translate

In Eritrea thousand of government critics and political opponents, many of them prisoners of conscience, were detained in secret. *Some* have been sentenced by panels of military and police officers in close proceedings that flouted basic standard of their trial.

Source: Amnesty International (2004) Regional Review p.4

5.2.4.3.1 Exercise: 1) What type of French determiner is required before “ had been sentenced by panels of military and police officers”? 2) Justify your answer and 3) translate the text into French.

5.2.4.4 Text to translate

The main cancer control initiative has been breast cancer screening in women over fifty years of age, and in **some** provinces in women over 40 years of age where a history of breast cancer exists, initiation of a screening program will typically increase the number of new cases for a short period of time., then the number of new cases will level off, or even return to previous levels.

Breast cancer in Canada p.1

5.2.4.4.1 Exercise: 1) What type of French determiner is required before “**provinces**”? 2) Justify your answer and 3) translate the text into French.

(Answers to the exercises are presented at the annex so that students could verify the validity of their answers).

As it can be observed, a fourth example thematizing the determiner *certain* (in contrast with) has been added although a sentence representing it was not among the text meant for translation by the students.

It is worth reminding that although the focus in this study is on the determiner *some*, this does not mean that other parts of a sentence should be neglected. As Antia, (2005) says, we are here referring to a phenomenon in comparison with others in the same text.

It should also be noted that this practical approach has been successfully tested several times (dealing with determiners as well as other language points) in the department of languages and linguistics, Maiduguri and Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua.

VI. Conclusion

From what has been presented, it is obvious that the determiner *some* poses problems of translation to the Nigerian students of French. It is expected that the proposed didactic approach can contribute to the improvement of teaching as well as learning the adequate use of this determiner. This is another way of learning, for it enables the teacher to structure his lessons, and generate more similar examples for his class. It is worth noting that among the many manifestations of the determiner *some*, only four were dealt with. This can be considered as the limitation of this study.

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ANNEX

5.2.1.4.1 Answer: the partitive article "des" is required before " pêches", because it is used as a quantifier referring to an unspecified amount of something. The translation of the sentence should thus be:

Ils ont tacheté des pêches (Chuquet et Paillard, 1987:263)

5.2.1.5.1 Answer: the partitive article "des/quelques/plusieurs" is required before " enfants", because it is used as a quantifier referring to an unspecified number of persons. The sentence should be rendered thus:

J'ai vu des/plusieurs enfants jouer dehors

5.2.2.2.1 Answer: the partitive article "du" is required before " poulet" and "fromage", because it is used as a quantifier referring to an unspecified amount/part of something. The sentence should thus be translated as:

Oui je mange du poulet, du fromage et un gros morceau de cadeau

5.2.2.3.1 Answer: the partitive article "du" is required before "pain", because it is used as a quantifier referring to an unspecified amount of something. The sentence should be translated as follows :

Bernard se mit à table et semble réfléchir sur ce qu'il allait manger. Observant les passionnaires d'un air goguenard il passa sa commande. Deux œufs maman et quelques tranches de bacon. Et tu pourrais dire à Marie de griller du pain pour aller avec. (p.251)

5.2.3.3.1 Answer: the adverb of quantity *environ*, or the indefinite adjective *quelques* is required before '30.000 Tongans' because of the presence of the quantified number 30,000.: The translation of the sentence should be:

environ 30,000, Tongans vivent à l'étranger surtout en Nouvelle Zélande, en Australie, à Haïti, et en Amérique du nord. Source: Afrique-Caraïbes Pacific (1988) *Le Courier* N° 108 p.15

5.2.3.4.1 Answer: the adverb of quantity *environ* or the indefinite adjective *quelques* is required before 10,000 ha, because of the presence of the quantified number. The sentence should be rendered in French thus as follows :

Des essaims de criquets pèlerins sont arrivés en Algérie dans les régions de Tindouf Adrar et à la frontière sud avec le Mali ou ils ont infecté environ 100.000 ha.

Source: Afrique-Caraïbes Pacific (1988) *Le Courier* N° 108 p.xv

5.2.4.3.1 Answer: The determiner 'certains' is required before " had been sentenced by panels of military and police officers", because "some" which here refers to "prisoners" is considered in contrast with others. The translation of the text should therefore be:

En Erythrée des milliers de détracteurs du gouvernement et d'opposants politiques – prisonniers d'opinion pour nombre d'entre eux - étaient détenus dans des lieux inconnus. Certains avaient été condamnés par des jurys composés de militaire et de policiers, à l'issue de procédures se déroulent à huis clos et ne tenant aucun compte des normes élémentaires en matière d'étiquette.

Source: Amnesty International Synthèse régionale 2004, P5

5.2.4.4.1 Answer: The determiner 'certain' is required before 'provinces' because "some" here refers to some 'provinces' in contrast with other provinces. The text should be translated as follows:

En terme de contrôle du cancer, la principale initiative a été le dépistage du cancer du sein chez les femmes de plus de 50 ans, voire dans certaines provinces chez les femmes de plus de 40 ans, lorsqu'il existe des antécédents familiaux de la maladie.