33. GRAMMAR: Expressing Quantity: the partitive article (*article partitif*), negation and the partitive article (*la négation et l'article partitif*); words to express quantities (*expression de la quantité*)

In the section about articles, we already discussed definite articles (*articles définis: le, la, les*) and indefinite articles (*articles indéfinis: un, une, des*). French also has a third article: the partitive article (***article partitif***). This article is used in French to express an indefinite quantity of something. But what exactly is meant by "indefinite quantity"? The following sentence pairs make this clear:

Indefinite quantity	**Definite quantity**
- I drink cola.	- I drink a cola / a glass of cola / a bottle of cola.
- He often eats bread with cheese.	- He eats a loaf of bread / a slice of bread /...

In the first column, you can see that the speaker does not specify how much of something they eat or drink, whereas in the second column, this is certainly the case. You can notice that in English, there is no article for an "indefinite quantity," but French does have an article for this: **l'article partitif** (the partitive article). Below, you can find these partitive articles:

Articles partitifs

- Je bois **du** coca. (*coca* = masculine, singular)
  [I drink cola]

- Elle mange **de la** viande. (*viande* = feminine, singular)
  [she eats (some) meat]

- Tu achètes **de l'**huile ? (*huile* : when a word begins with a **non-pronounced "h",** it is considered to start with a vowel and the partitive article changes to accommodate this.)
  [Do you by oil ?]

- Tu manges **des**[1] légumes ? (légumes= plural)
  [Do you eat vegetables?]

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1. The article **"des"** belongs to both the indefinite articles (*un, une, des*) and the partitive articles (*du, de la, des*) in French.

We use **partitive articles** to express an **unspecified (and often uncountable)** portion of a whole.

Of course, in both French and English, we can also express **specific quantities**, and we do this with expressions such as many (people), few (supporters), a mass (of protesters), a herd (of buffalo), etc. These expressions are either a **noun** (*une troupe / un kilo / une bande / un groupe / une dizaine* …) or an **adverb** (*trop, beaucoup, peu,* …). These expressions are always followed by the article ***DE***.

Nouns that express quantity

- Elle achète 500 **grammes**[1] **DE** fromage
- Elle a vu une **bande**[2] **DE** dealers.
- Il boit une **bouteille**[3] **DE** whisky par jour.
- Il achète un **bouquet**[4] **DE** fleurs.
- Elle achète un **tube**[4] **DE** dentifrice.
- Il boit un **verre**[5] **DE** lait.
- Elle commande une **tasse**[6] **DE** thé.
- Elle veut un **kilo**[7] **DE** fromage /…

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1. a gram 2. a gang 3. a bottle 4. a bouquet (of flowers) 5. a tube (of toothpaste) 6. a cup (of tea) 7. a kilo (of cheese)

Adverbs that express quantity

- *Il boit* ***trop*****[1]** ***de*** *bière* .
- *Elle achète* ***beaucoup*****[2]** ***de*** *vêtements pour sa fille.*
- *Elle a* ***peu*****[3]** ***de*** *regrets*….

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1 *trop* : too much 2. *beaucoup* : much 3. *peu* : little, few

Finally, we need to revisit negation. If the partitive article (*du, de la, des*) or the indefinite article (*un, une, des*) immediately follows a negation, these articles are usually replaced by the article "*de*":

- *Je ne mange pas ~~du fromage~~ →Je ne mange pas DE fromage.*
- *Elle ne veut pas ~~de la viande~~. → Elle ne veut pas DE viande.*
- *Il ne mange pas ~~des frites~~. → Il ne mange pas DE frites.*
- *Elle achète ~~un vélo.~~ → Elle n'achète pas DE vélo.*
- *Elle apporte ~~une pizza~~. → elle n'apporte pas DE pizza.*