

Comptes-Rendus de Lecture

T. W. Knight

Living French new edition revised by Muriel Marty

Hodder & Stoughton: Headway 1952, revised 1994
319 pages Pb £5.99 ISBN 0 340 59669-4
reviewed by Elaine Williams, Spelthorne College

Living French is an established intermediate level course book for the adult learner. First published in 1952, it has been revised and updated by Muriel Marty. The book contains grammar explanations, vocabulary, reading material in the form of story, dialogue or letter and questions for speaking practice and grammatical and translation exercises. The most obvious improvement on the original edition is the layout. It is more visually appealing in that it now has illustrations, tables and diagrams. The presentation is therefore less dense and easier to read. A key to the exercises has now been added.

The new edition comprises a full but concise introduction to the structure of the French language. It is a carefully structured coursebook which systematically serves to build grammatical concepts and vocabulary. The grammatical points are introduced in a logical order, interspersed with texts designed to encourage the acquisition of vocabulary. The grammatical explanations are clear and enforced with examples which relate to the exercises. This textbook contains many details frequently omitted by the modern coursebook and the emphasis is clearly on grammatical accuracy. The translation exercises serve to enforce the vocabulary and the grammatical aspects covered. The progression of difficulty is consistent throughout the book.

Although the book has been revised and updated, it is still somewhat old-fashioned in its approach. The changes in the Modern Languages examination syllabuses since the date of the original publication have not been taken into account. If this book were to be used as a coursebook in Adult Education, a Further Education college or a 6th form college to prepare students for examinations at the appropriate level, it would have to be supplemented with a great deal of authentic reading and listening material as well as imaginative role-play exercises to meet the demands of

the current GCSE, Institute of Linguists or City & Guilds Modern Language syllabuses, where the emphasis is now on the use of authentic resources, conversation, simulation and role-play in the target language.

The balance of French and English leans very much towards English. Some adult students working independently may consider this an advantage. However, in a classroom situation a resource with more text in the target language would be highly advantageous to encourage discussion and conversation in French in the classroom.

The reading passages cover a wide range of subjects but are much as they were in the 1952 publication. They have not been modified to make them more compatible with those of the current modern language exam syllabuses, or current usage for that matter. The relevance of the topics « La chasse au canard » or « Les collectionneurs de timbres » is questionable. They are not authentic texts. They were written by the author to reinforce the grammatical concepts and provide the learner with some vocabulary, but would do little to stimulate interesting discussion in the target language without the use of supplementary course materials or authentic resources. The questions for the reading comprehensions are in some cases quite dull. Many of the exercises designed for writing assignments severely lack imagination, such as « Write in French a short conversation about a proposed visit by car or bicycle to some person or place » (71) or « Write in French a short account (using the perfect tense) of how you spent yesterday » (154). These exercises are likely to inspire only the highly motivated student, as would some of the translation exercises, such as the one on page 126, where Monsieur Dubois is discussing the benefits of Swedish and French matches with the tobacconist.

As a practising teacher, I find it much more logical and palatable to the student if the grammar comes out of the authentic texts, rather than as it is in *Living French* with its contrived reading passages after the grammatical explanation.

Due to its conciseness, clarity and detail, it could be a useful choice for the intermediate learner wishing a comprehensive coursebook for independent study. It would also be a welcome addition to any French teacher's library for the provision of additional grammar exercises to supplement other teaching materials, where improvement of written

communication is the objective. The combination of the grammar, translation, reading and thematically linked vocabulary lists and writing exercises could provide an opportunity for students to consolidate their grasp of the essentials. The book could be useful for those who seek an organised course which pays careful attention to the systematic building of vocabulary and grammar and teachers who are looking for additional exercises to supplement course materials may find this book of value. However, as a stand-alone textbook for the present day modern language class, it is not exactly what is required for either the current examinations or the non-examination classes, where students expect the language to be brought to life; but despite its title, *Living French* does not quite do this.

Larousse French Grammar

Paris & London 1995

255 pages Pb £3.99 ISBN 2-03-430980-4

reviewed by Stephen F. Noreiko

You get of course what you pay for and this cheap grammar is small: 10ü 14.5ü 1cm, it slips into a shirt pocket and its portability could be an asset. It is well laid out and though the index is thin, the table of contents and summary at the head of each chapter make navigation fairly easy (numbering could have been extended up and down to cover chapters and sub-sections). There is nice attention to detail (page numbers appear in figures at outer corners and in French spelt out in full at the inner margins), and the *Guide to Spelling and pronunciation* not only explains phonetic symbols but takes the student through the alphabet letter by letter. Its target audience of GCSE and A level students will surely find it comforting and it may well appeal to others. But if one accepts that grammatical explanations are better given in English and understood, a lot of what is given in this grammar is not explanation but recipe and rule of thumb. How disappointing to read in a grammar that Past Historic forms are « unpredictable » (131); the table of endings then goes on to give only the series in *-a-* and *-i-* ! One can find much else to criticise and I would not suggest it be used by advanced students. On the other hand, it is cheap, handy and friendly enough to be a useful companion for those whose needs are more circumscribed.

J'avais tassé les pages pour ne pas dépasser les 48; je me suis résigné à aller jusqu'aux 52 — que je ne remplis pas tout à fait, tout en refusant de la copie parce qu'elle m'aurait mené vers les 60! Cherche apprentie-rédactrice ou apprenti-rédacteur sachant compter. Amour de la chose imprimée et sens de l'humour souhaitables, patience inlassable et oeil vigilant essentiels, beaucoup de peine et peu de récompense; s'adresser au journal qui transmettra. Je pourrais évidemment refaire toute ma mise en page, mais je préfère tartiner un dernier paragraphe pour que ce bas de page ne m'accuse plus de sa blancheur désespérément vide. Une autre fois je vous entretiendrai de mes problèmes d'yeux.

Phil Turk and Geneviève García Vandaele
« Action Grammaire! »: a new French Grammar
Hodder & Stoughton, 1996
365pp; ISBN 0-340-63166-X
reviewed by Alan Hersh, Brunel University

« This new communicative grammar of French will provide the support needed by students at A-Level and Higher Grade, and by those aiming at the higher levels of the National Curriculum and Standard Grade. Each chapter deals with a specific grammatical point and is divided into three sections: *mécanismes* — clear explanations in English with examples in French; *mettez-vous au point!* — reinforcement exercises to practise what has been explained, with a self-check key; *...et en route!* — open-ended communicative activities to encourage and develop the creative use of language using the grammar point in question. There is also a section on French spelling and a verb reference table. »

The above description, on the back cover of this new French Grammar, would be sufficient in itself to attract the attention of teachers of French at most stages beyond GCSE, including (sadly!) the undergraduate post-A level stage, where weaknesses in grammar and orthography which should have been ironed out at secondary school still persist in a disconcertingly high proportion of students of the language. The purpose of this review is to assess whether the book succeeds in its aim of providing support for the categories of learner specified, and whether, in the context in which afls members normally operate, it is appropriate also at undergraduate level.

Chapter 1: « Grammar — What is it? » sets an admirable standard of realism by defining in plain, simple English the most important grammatical terms, including *grammar* itself as « really nothing more than a framework which is used: to try to define language and how it works, and to provide rules and patterns to help you, the language learner. » Terms such as *noun*, *verb*, *phrase*, *clause*, etc. are explained from first principles. The authors are, however, obviously concerned not to insult the intelligence of the adult learners at whom their book is directed. The first sentence of Chapter 1 says, in fact: « You may already be well-versed in all the grammatical terms that you need, and their meanings. If so, skip this chapter. » In my view, though, anyone conceited enough to skip this chapter

would miss some useful concepts, not least the paragraph on style and register which is concise and clear.

Chapters 2 to 13 deal with nouns, adjectives, pronouns, adverbs, numerals, etc., chapter headings being in both English and French, a simple way of painlessly introducing the French grammatical terms for future use. Chapters 14 to 46 all come under a general title of *Verbs*, reflecting the overwhelming importance of these, particularly in French where, unlike English, the subordination of the preposition (Chapter 40) to the verb in conveying meaning is a characteristic feature. Chapter 47 is on French pronunciation and spelling.

With the exception of the first one, all chapters follow the format indicated: *mécanismes, mettez-vous au point!* and *...et en route!* Instructions for the last two are in French and appear to rely on the supposed previous learning pattern as followed by students at school, using various forms of the communicative or « direct » method. Paradoxically, the authors, who show little confidence at the outset in their readers' theoretical linguistic knowledge, are perfectly happy that their, sometimes complex, rubrics will be readily understood. Their underlying analysis of the learners' situation is, I believe, correct. The material is generally interesting and appropriate, making good use of humour and as much topicality as one could expect in such a publication. As already hinted, good advice is given throughout, as prompted by the linguistic point being studied, about the different levels of formality in French which must be observed to avoid social gaffs.

There is nothing particularly new, in this book, in the actual content, be it grammatical terms and definitions, practice exercises or communicative activities, either individual, in pairs or in groups. What is refreshing is the totally realistic appreciation of the effect on a whole generation, perhaps even two or more generations, of language learners who have missed out on formal grammar in school, including that of English. *Action Grammaire!* sets out to redress this sorry anomaly in our educational provision. I believe it has largely succeeded — and about time, too!

Gillian Taylor
French Vocabulary through Puzzles

(Second Edition) Hodder & Stoughton, 1996

reviewed by

Ann Barnes & Liam Murray, University of Warwick Language Centre

This updated photocopiable resource for Key Stage 3 pupils or, indeed, beginners of any age or as a revision aid for post-beginners, has been updated to incorporate rubrics and instructions in the target language. This is a welcome change, as much of the vocabulary used to explain the task will be learnt and revised at the same time as those items being practised more overtly.

The topics covered (the classroom, household objects, clothes, France, basic shopping items, and food and drink) are appropriate to the target learners and are mainly relevant to Area of Experience A of the National Curriculum. Within the topics, the vocabulary items are, on the whole, sensible and useful, although it may have been wise to update some of the items at the same time as the rubrics, perhaps *l'ordinateur* in the classroom section, *video recorder* for household objects and *des baskets* in the section on clothes. The selection of items is, therefore, on the whole fairly traditional. This said, the illustrations are sufficiently clear (albeit a little old-fashioned).

There is a reasonably wide variety of puzzles, some requiring much more thought and language manipulation than others, enabling the teacher to differentiate or grade them appropriately for particular learners. The puzzles range from straightforward labelling activities to codes, anagrams and puzzles with target language « clues » and revision of numbers is also built in to many of them. Some are fairly intriguing and having tried them out on a twelve year old who was « on task » without complaint, they would appear to be motivating. The claim that the activities can be used unsupervised seems to be valid, as examples are provided to back up the target language instructions, and the layout is mostly very clear. Grammar is only considered with regard to differentiating between singular and plural forms — a basic point perhaps, but an area where students often require further practice.

Each topic is introduced by a full page illustrating all the vocabulary needed for the six to eight activities on those particular words. This works well, and we can envisage these vocabulary sheets being used as supplementary vocabulary pages for lower ability Key Stage 3 pupils or, when enlarged, used for classroom

display and reference. The same pages could also be used successfully on the overhead projector for revising the vocabulary with the whole class if appropriate.

The publishers suggest the resource is ideal for cover-lessons, homework, revision and tests. We would concur, with the proviso that photocopying costs would be substantial and with the obvious limitation that only Attainment Targets 3 and 4 (reading and writing) can be practised with ease, although the vocabulary sheets themselves could be used for simple pairwork and speaking and listening activities. The photocopiable answer section lends itself to using the resource for independent learning, perhaps on reuseable wipe-clean cards as an extra activity at the end of a lesson.

A reasonably priced resource which fulfils its stated aims well and would be a useful addition to a department.

Larousse Unabridged Dictionary on CD-ROM
Oxford Hachette French Dictionary on CD-ROM
reviewed by J. Noreiko, UCL

Both PC CD-ROM, requiring multimedia PC or compatible, with respectively:

L: 386SX or higher processor, CD-ROM drive, VGA or higher-resolution monitor; 4Mb of RAM, 2Mb disk space for space-saver installation, 25Mb for complete installation; MS-DOS Version 5.0 or later, Microsoft Windows Version 3.1 or later; Mouse or other pointing device.

O: 486SX, CD-ROM drive, VGA or higher-resolution monitor; 4Mb of free RAM, 0.6Mb disk space; MS-DOS Version 3.3 or later, Microsoft Windows Version 3.1 or later; Mouse or other pointing device

Review machine was Pentium, Windows 95.

Disk space, full install: *L*: 23.5Mb, *O*: 30.9Mb

Both dictionaries are comparable in terms of words; *L* tends to give more examples of words in context: for *head* *L* gives « she has a lovely head of hair/elle a de très beaux cheveux; or une très belle chevelure », even « Sea Biscuit won by a head [in horseracing]/Sea Biscuit a gagné d'une tête ». *O* comes marginally ahead in beat-the-dictionary stakes: the recent (it has *techno*, but not *Switch* card); specialised language (both give *champ* for [force] *field* but neither has *corps* for [algebraic] *field*; only *O* has *appoggiatura*); and obscure (*L* has two meanings of *pi* other than 3.14, *O*

none). Back-translation shows why neither makes much use of hypertext links to follow up words through more than one translation (in the way one can with an online thesaurus): both translate *cabane* as *shed*, but *shed* gives *remise, abri, appentis, and hangar* — anything except *cabane*.

The elements on-screen are similar: *O* has three toolbars to *L*'s one, below which is an entry box into which words are typed. *O* has a list of all headwords on the left, which scrolls through as a word is typed; *L* guesses ahead and offers a list of close matches in a pop-up window, which can easily be accessed using the keyboard. *L* can spot verb conjugations (*mangeaient, [que j']allasse*) and agreement forms of adjectives (*endormie*) — these all stump *O*, which suggests *mangeaille, alléchante* and *endormir*. As for the layout of the actual entry: *O* uses indentation to separate meanings, but lists examples and translations together in a single paragraph; *L* has no indents, which makes it harder to scan down the text (to find *slack* as a noun, adjective or verb, for example), but uses a new line for each translation. *O* makes more use of colour to make elements stand out, but only *L* allows the user to suppress this option for monochrome monitors. Both allow the user to choose font size.

At first glance, *L* is ahead of *O*, at least until phonetic transcription of a word is needed: *O* gives this with the headword as in a paper dictionary, *L* gives phonetics in a pop-up window which must be called from the toolbar and then dismissed; this could be tiresome for a user requiring frequent consultation.

Both dictionaries have a conjugation feature: this can be called up from the toolbar; entries for verbs in *O* have a clickable link that does the same. *L*'s presentation is easier to navigate and makes it easy to look at different tenses of a verb. *L* also has the advantage of giving all verbs; whereas *O* reduces to principal cases: *aimer, payer, partir* — leaving it to the user to concoct the required verb from the root and the endings. *O* however gives English verbs too, and has a clickable link in entries for verbs to call up the conjugation table.

L has a small window beneath the entry for cultural notes, which explains *Grande Ecole* and *Restos du Coeur* amongst others (*O* simply translates *Restos du Coeur* as *soup kitchen*). *O* on the other hand has several sections apart from the main dictionary: examples of advertisements (*petites annonces* — with tool-tip style translations for all abbreviations) and correspondance (letters to the bank, accepting a wedding invitation and so forth) and also a large section of lexical

usage notes on subjects as varied as shoe sizes, forms of address, illnesses and French departments, which are also featured on a map. In this respect, *O* has much more information than *L*, but its general layout and ease of use are poor, and neither dictionary makes a good transition to electronic format. Conclusion: out of the gimmick category, but only just.

Jacqueline Bidard-Gibson and Marie-Thérèse Villamana

Ligne Directe

Listening activities for learners of French

London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1996

128 pages; ISBN 0-340-648244

accompanied by a cassette set; ISBN 0-340-64825-2

reviewed by Athena Rogers, Liverpool John Moores University

In an arena which seeks to address the needs of increasing numbers of adult and non-specialist language learners, *Ligne Directe* offers a comprehensive and reliable approach to the development of listening skills within an independent learning framework. Of mutual benefit to both students and teachers, the course of study supplements student learning through a variety of stimulating, problem solving oriented tasks thereby minimising teacher input and educates the student in effective listening technique. Aiming at the beginner and false beginner, students, as a prerequisite, are assumed to have acquired approximately one year of regular language study.

As an imaginative and lively approach to the development of listening skills, *Ligne Directe* stretches limited student knowledge through active problem solving exercises within a clear, logical and well-structured framework. Comprising a student book divided into three parts: four topic-based units centred around themes of general interest (travel and tourism; hotel and catering; daily life; and the world of business); complete transcripts of recordings and a « Check your answers » section, together with two thirty minute audio cassettes, the course gently guides the student through multiple choice, gap filling, yes/no, aural discrimination, form filling, matching and reordering exercises of increasing difficulty.

Aimed to « confidence-boost » in an era of limited resources, *Ligne Directe* develops student understanding of the spoken word in day-to-day and semi-

professional scenarios through the context of interviews, conversations and telephone messages. Learners are encouraged to develop independent learning skills, demonstrate tenacity in problem solving activities, reinforce their dictionary searching abilities and stretch, revise and consolidate essential vocabulary in a fun and novel way — a really useful approach!

Mark Stroud

Matières Premières

Advanced topics on modern France

London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996

120 pages; isbn 0-340-64827-9

accompanied by one C60 cassette

reviewed by Athena Rogers, Liverpool John Moores University

A flexible, topic-based approach ideal for use as a two year course on a modular, diploma or applied languages course. Aimed at intermediate and advanced level learners, *Matières Premières* is ideal in helping prepare students for higher level examinations of the RSA, Institute of Linguists, London Chamber of Commerce and NVQS. Relevant in a climate where NVQ accreditation for languages is increasing within modularised course frameworks, this collection of dossiers related to contemporary French life is particularly applicable to the more vocationally oriented and business related courses.

Matières Premières comprises twelve dossiers based on themes relevant to current issues in France, with emphasis on the commercial, industrial and economic life of the country. With the objective of exercising all four language skills, each dossier includes an introductory text for close study and translation, a longer comprehension text, an interview with a prominent or representative figure for aural comprehension, a theme for translation and vocabulary elicitation and suggestions for presentation work and debates. In addition, transcriptions of the interviews and a useful glossary of acronyms is included.

This selection of texts promotes a high level of student participation, encouraging the acquisition of a range of vocabulary styles and expressions relevant to contemporary French life. The inclusion of interview transcripts and model translations, supports students in independent learning. As confidence in each theme is gradually acquired, learners are encouraged to progress from individual study through to pairwork and group presentation and debate, thus

stimulating target language oral discussion. As a pleasant and time-saving spin-off for the language teacher, all the effort involved in exploiting relevant and valuable newspaper and magazine material has been done for you!

E. Broady & M.M. Kenning (eds.),
Promoting Learner Autonomy in University Language Teaching
CLT 1996

reviewed by Marina Mozzon-McPherson, University of Hull

In the last decade, there has clearly been a trend towards urging teachers to consider the needs of the learner — not only in the area of content but also in approaches to the learning process. This book attempts to provide a wide and varied collection of practical examples of learner training and attempts to shift the emphasis to issues linked to the promotion of autonomy. Perhaps in this context one should talk of « learning for autonomy », since the book often remarks on the fallacy of assuming that students who use self-study — or pass with flying colours — are autonomous learners.

In more than one occasion cost-effectiveness (in response to the current educational constraints imposed by modularisation, semesterisation and staff and resource cuts) gets mentioned as one of the reasons for implementing learner autonomy. Ironically, the outcomes of most of the projects described in the book seem to subvert that goal. The majority in fact emphasise the need for more teacher training, the emerging role of advisors/counsellors to support effective learner training, more effort and work in terms of time and resources to allow effective integration of learner training in the teaching and learning practice.

The articles in the book can be divided into three sections: the first three articles deal primarily with social strategies and emphasise the important issue of learning as a social interaction and the concept of social autonomy versus individualism (Carpenter, Marshall, Dickson).

The second group of articles deals with the potential of new technology in promoting autonomy, in particular: the integration of CDROMS and other didactic software for language learning (Kenning, McKee, Guillot), the organisation of structured tandem learning programmes via e-mail (Lewis *et al.*). Finally the third batch of articles debates the issues of motivation, learning styles and cultural differences in relation to autonomy. (Broady, Beeching, Toro & Jones, Press)

A common conclusion is the desperate need for teacher training and awareness of counselling skills, the need to learn how to interpret learners' needs, their language learning assumptions, the ability to instigate a learning conversation. In a word, the clear perception of a shift in the role of the teacher as a promotor of autonomy rather than a distributor of knowledge (Dickson and Beeching).

The contributions show that promoting autonomy is no easy or simple task and requires a lot of support, preparation and interaction between teacher, learners and resources.

It reconfirms that learner autonomy implies both changes in the learner's part and in the role and skills of the teacher. It also highlights that although the new modular system and current state of education create more and more the need to find other approaches to learning, (open learning — being now part of most courses' syllabuses), it highlights the constraints on the institution in accepting such an approach. Although we want to create autonomous learners, the current structure is very much guided and sets the syllabus, the assessment and leaves open only the approach. (Toro & Jones)

The book argues, therefore, that what teachers can do is try to promote and foster autonomy through activities and projects which allow the development of strategies and skills as well as the reflective process necessary to foster autonomy.

It is correct to say that the book talks of learner-oriented approaches within an overall imposed framework. In any case, it seems clear from the articles that such empirical research is still based on individual case studies and the need for a unifying theory is still to be accomplished. The case studies in the book seem to show that we are still dealing with a generation of learners who need support if they are to increase independence.

There are some debatable interpretations of autonomy in relation to technologies, in particular CDROMS, which, to this reviewer's opinion, are to include in the category of the « guided learning resources » rather than « self-study ». Good examples of applications are given but, again, they highlight the need to define what we mean by interaction, and with whom such interaction is taking place — with the computer (didactic software), around and through the computer (e-mail tandem learning), at the computer (peer collaboration at the computer), in relation to the computer? More research needs to be carried out on the issue of interaction, technology and deep learning.

All in all, it is an enjoyable collection rich in hints for further development and discussions. It allows the reader space to reflect on issues linked to autonomy in language learning: from the social aspect of learning, to the individualised learning through a clear understanding of learning styles and learning assumptions, to the analysis of the potential of technology in fostering autonomy to the investigation of autonomy and cultural issues. It provides some useful suggestions for anyone interested in the implementation and integration of learner autonomy in their courses. It raises the question of extending learner autonomy in language learning to other more generic skills which — if absent — can affect the promotion of autonomy and language learning (planning, setting goals, collaborating etc.).

nous signalons avec plaisir:
Wendy Ayres-Bennett & Philippe Caron
Les **Remarques** de l'Académie française
sur le **Quinte-Curce** de Vaugelas
Presses de l'Ecole normale supérieure
(45 rue d'Ulm 75230 Paris Cedex)
Collection Etudes et Documents en Histoire de la langue française
Paris, 1996
390^{FF}

également un Tutor Pack
Making the Most of the Experience Abroad
édité à la fac de Leeds
(projet « Making Links », au sein du service des carrières)
mais c'est des radins qu'envoient même pas un service de presse
alors...