Comptes-Rendus de Lecture

Dulcie Engel and Florence Myles (editors)
Teaching Grammar: Perspectives in Higher Education
reviewed by Mary Munro-Hill, University of Hull

This study deals with topical issues and arises directly from the concern expressed by many language-teachers regarding students' lack of grammatical knowledge. The three basic questions posed are addressed by various contributors. Firstly, *What grammar should we teach?* Secondly, *How should we teach grammar?* And thirdly, *Why should we teach grammar?* The majority of contributors deal with aspects of the first two questions, concluding that the grammar taught should not be presented as a separate entity but should be an integral part of a communicative approach. The two who answer the third question (Roger Hawkins and Richard Towell) readily admit that the communicative approach alone, although successful in stimulating interest, fails to impart grammar effectively, except perhaps to very young children.

As is inevitable with this kind of composite study, there is a degree of unevenness arising from the fact that some contributors are dealing with the general and others with the particular. Whereas, for instance, there are chapters treating such specific matters as the presentation of the French subjunctive and the value of using grammatical analysis of comprehension texts as a language-learning exercise, there are contributions dealing with the vast field of error analysis.

Although the conclusions reached are what common sense and experience would have anticipated, in that all the contributors acknowledge the importance of grammar teaching, this little volume of research, echoing as it does the concerns of colleagues in university departments both here and elsewhere in Europe, is bound to enthral all who teach French language and all who (like the contributor Véronique Sanctobin) are looking for a grammar which would be a tool, *un outil utile*, enabling L2 learners to achieve skills as close as possible to those of the native speaker.

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« 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 charactistic 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!

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Gillian Taylor
French Vocabulary through Puzzles

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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.

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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 *appogiatura*); 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.

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!

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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!

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

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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
390FF

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...

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