

**Regional Workshop  
Swansea, 29 November 1997**

On Saturday, 29 November 1997, a Regional Workshop on *The Spoken Word* was held at the University of Wales Swansea. Organised by Dulcie Engel and Michael Cardy, the Workshop was jointly sponsored by the Association for French Language Studies and the Society for French Studies, the first time the two national groupings for the promotion of French in the United Kingdom have formally combined in support of a scholarly meeting. The programme was as follows:

- David Trotter (Aberystwyth)      “*Faire bele buche*: the spoken word in medieval French literary texts”
- Bruno Martinie (Surrey):      « “Obéis, et tout de suite”: coordinations monoconjointes ou à conjoints mal assortis »
- Rodney Sampson (Bristol): “Liaison, nasal vowels and productivity”
- Aidan Coveney (Exeter):      “Some issues in current research on variation in spoken French”
- J. C. Smith (Oxford):      “Writing the spoken word”
- Kate Beeching (UWE):      “Towards      « une      linguistique      d’ajustements approximatifs »”
- Valerie Minogue (Swansea): “Nathalie Sarraute: the speaking word”

The workshop was attended by 21 colleagues from 10 different institutions, mainly but not exclusively from the south west of England and South Wales. The consensus was that the day had been a very successful one.

⇒ of ideas about topics of research.

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## **The Way Forward for Research into French Language Studies/Linguistics**

On January 16th 1998 AFLS organised a workshop on the above topic in the offices of CILT in London: our thanks are due to all the speakers and to Philippa Wright and her colleagues in CILT for making the workshop so worthwhile. The morning session covered general problems related to research in French language studies/linguistics, with contributions from Prof. J. Green (Bradford) on “The position of language/linguistic research in traditional Modern Language departments” and Prof. G. Corbett (Surrey): “An ESRC perspective on linguistic and applied linguistic research in the Modern Languages”. It emerged that the success-rate for applications in our field for ESRC research funding is relatively high, which should encourage some of our number to be less reticent about putting in applications.

The afternoon session looked more specifically at the lessons of the last RAE for future research in French language/linguistics. Prof. R. Towell (Salford) spoke for the French panel and offered the following set of criteria for the evaluation of research in our field:

1. Broad lines of definition of research:
  - research builds on existing knowledge;
  - research takes place within a definable theoretical framework;
  - research follows a recognisable methodology which allows meaningful statements to be made;
  - good research moves the field forward by providing replicable, verifiable, generalisable results.
2. Characteristics which tend to be present where high quality research is present:
  - (a) there is a well established set of international journals and/or group of international publishers in which the material is published;
  - (b) there is a well established international peer review mechanism;
  - (c) the area has an accessible theoretical and/or methodological base which allows significant generalisation;
  - (d) the individuals concerned have undertaken the 'apprenticeship' of a PhD in the relevant area.
  - (e) there is a critical mass of researchers in that area (either within French or across languages, including English).

It emerged that, in view of the breadth of the field “French language studies/linguistics”, it would be advisable to have more than one 'language person' on the next RAE panel.

Dr. W. Ayres-Bennett (Cambridge) and Dr. E. Esch (Cambridge) spoke on behalf of the European Studies Panel. Dr. Bennett has provided the following summary of her remarks.

The European Studies Panel comprised 11 members under the chairmanship of Professor Kenneth Dyson. Comparison of the outcomes of the 1992 and 1996 exercises shows an overall improvement in the ratings of the submissions: 7 units rose from 2 to 3, 4 from 3 to 4, 5 from 4 to 5; only one unit fell in the ratings.

French language and linguistics were well-represented on this panel by myself, Edith Esch and Leo Hickey (compared to the single language panels which usually had just one language expert). We were also able to refer material across to the Linguistics panel as necessary. The decision was taken from the outset to treat French language and linguistics in exactly the same way as all other fields, that is to judge material against the published European studies criteria. Readers of *Cahiers* might be interested to know that these explicitly stated that CALL material, language materials, readers, resource books, student guides and textbooks all fell within the remit of the panel, with the important proviso “to the extent that they embody research”.

#### Working methods

Each panel member initially formed an independent judgement on each submission; this was followed by intensive reading of the material, and finally, at the end of 6 meetings, an agreed rating for each unit of assessment. While RA2 (the listing of up to four publications) formed the backbone of the assessment, account was taken of all the other quantitative and textual information, in particular of evidence of an “active research culture”, e.g. the fostering of a participatory postgraduate research community, research planning and monitoring mechanisms, research income, etc. While the type of output was considered, the intensive reading meant that each item was judged primarily on its intrinsic merit and not as to whether it appeared in a peer-reviewed journal or in-house journal.

#### General outcomes and advice

Analysis of the final ratings showed clearly that neither the size of the submission nor type of organisational structure were particularly significant to the outcome. It was not at all easy to analyse the submissions according to whether they were primarily “humanities” or “social science” departments, since most submissions had elements of each. However, it should be noted that 64 % of the 5/5\* rated Reports

departments fell predominantly into the humanities/language category. The most important difference was between the performance of “new” and “old” universities, with 10 out of the 11 units rated 1/2 being “new” universities as opposed to only 1 of the 15 rated 4 or 5. It should, however, be noted that 5 “new” universities rose from a 2 to a 3 band 1 from a 1 to a 4. Colleagues are encouraged to be accurate and honest in their submissions. It was surprising just how many items had appeared after the published deadline. The same article published under three different titles also soon emerged given the policy of reading as much of possible of the submissions!

#### French Language and Linguistics

I am excluding from this account discussion of items which were concerned with general, rather than French, linguistics, and the CALL material. A (very approximate) count of items revealed the following pattern of submissions. Of a total of 87 items entered (from 35 individuals), 34 were concerned with language teaching/second language acquisition or were pedagogical grammars. The next largest fields were translation studies (14), sociolinguistics (12) and discourse analysis (8). All the other areas, including syntax, stylistics, phonology and bilingualism were represented by no more than 5 submissions. As regards the type of output this material was published in, the most common type was an article in an edited book (34); this category, however, covered a range of publications including reworked conference papers. The number of articles appearing in refereed (15) and non-refereed or in-house journals (13) was roughly comparable, although, perhaps significantly, a large proportion of the material on language teaching/second language acquisition appeared in the latter type. However, since there was such extensive reading of material, articles in such publications were assessed on their own merit. There were 18 books, including multimedia packages. The submissions in applied linguistics were very uneven in quality. Too many items were, however, simply experiential: while classroom experiences may, of course, generate research material, they are inadequate per se. Rather these need to be informed by clear knowledge of previous literature and show awareness of the methodological and/or theoretical issues raised by the data. In addition citation of primary and secondary sources was often inadequate. Some publications, notably documentary material and certain textbooks, clearly required a scholar to assemble them, but showed little or no evidence of personal research.

#### Reports

As regards the other fields, these typically came from individuals working in non-specialist departments. Individuals who had compensated for this “local” isolation by establishing links with French or other European research groups, and by attending the appropriate international conferences in their field, etc. often performed significantly better. Clearly there is need for more research training, both for postgraduates and people in post. This, however, raises problems of personnel and funding. Perhaps AFLS might work with other interested parties to lobby for funding to kick-start some M.A./M.Phil programmes in French language and linguistics.

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L'Agence Francophone pour l'Enseignement Supérieur et la Recherche (AUPELF-UREF) lance un appel à manifestation d'intérêt dans le cadre du montage de l'*Université virtuelle francophone*.

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