

Broady, Elspeth *Colloquial French 2. The next step in language learning.* London: Routledge. 2003. ISBN 0 415 26647 5, 267pp. Cassette and CD available.

This is a self-study course intended for adult learners with a basic knowledge of French, whether acquired through the beginners' volume *Colloquial French* to which it is a follow-up or by other means.

The book consists of 12 units, a grammar reference section (pp. 216-232), a key to the exercises and brief indices to the grammar points and topics covered. The themes chosen cover a fair range of situations likely to be encountered by non-native adults who have mastered the café, restaurant, post office and shop *saynettes* that are the stuff of beginners' courses and wishes to take their study of the language a stage further whether for social or professional reasons.

Each of the 12 units opens in English with a check list of the communicative skills and topic knowledge that will be acquired, e.g. for Unit 2 the student will learn about France and its main towns; talking about figures; giving reasons using *grâce à, à cause de, parce que* and *puisque*; using colloquial phrases such as *alors, donc, c'est ça*; describing places; using reflexive verbs. Typically there are two input texts, two dialogues with vocabulary presented either before as preparation or afterwards as a check. There are between 9 and 12 exercises in each unit, which are designed to develop the language of the inputs, with one or two additional 'language points' and some background information in English. Each unit ends with a 'bilan', i.e. a set of exercises designed to review points of language presented in the section.

The overall impression is pleasing. The written texts are well chosen and commendably some attention is paid to teaching the student how to learn, e.g. trying to deduce the meaning of unknown words (p. 50) and the giving of advice such as 'take every opportunity to practise listening in "dead time" such as driving in a car or waiting for a bus'. Some of the dialogues are authentic but all give the impression of appropriately tidied up idiomaticity, dealing with up-to-date material and topics, while steering well away from controversy. The exercises are varied and a fair number might be classed as guided composition enabling students, for instance, to write appropriate New Year greetings (Unit 1), brief business letters and e-mails (Unit 4) and at the same time exposing them to a wide range of interesting material of an appropriate level of difficulty.

Of course, as those of us involved with self-study programmes are all too well aware – and to be fair the author spells this out – such courses cannot enable students to achieve fluency but can provide a useful base from which fluency can be achieved more easily because interaction with native speakers can be entered into more quickly. The publishers offer supplementary service on their webset, where students can find exercises for further practice and links to other sites about things French and language learning in general.

Altogether Elspeth Broady is to be congratulated for an extremely competent piece of work. The one possible omission is the lack of an end-of-volume glossary, although this is minimised by the regularly interspersed vocabulary lists with idiomatic translations. You may be wondering whether the material is suitable for classroom-based courses. I would say definitely, although the inputs and exercises might have to be broken up in a different order with the support material indispensable for lone students at least temporarily removed, although other AFLS colleagues have provided us with ready-made solutions at this level, for instance, in the Palsgrave series.

References

Beeching, K. (2001) *Foundations French 2*. Basingstoke: Palsgrave.
<http://www.routledge.com/colloquials/french>

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Rosenthal, Saul H. *The rules for the gender of French nouns. Why your arm is masculine but your leg is feminine, and other mysteries of the French language.* Tucson, Arizona: Hats Off Books. 2004. ISBN 1 5873 6257 0, 115pp. \$11.95.

The covering letter that came with this book appears to promise solutions to a thorny problem in the acquisition of French as second or foreign language. The reality, on the author's own admission, is rather different, since he claims rather more modestly that this is work in progress that will continue even after publication. The volume thus falls rather uneasily between a personal voyage of discovery and a teaching tool. The introduction addresses both French speakers who are curious about their language and foreign learners who need to know 'the rules', which will enable them to recognise the gender of newly encountered nouns with the highest possible degree of certainty.

The main part of the book (pp.7-94) presents the 35 rules ‘empirical’ rules that the author claims to have discovered in the course of reading and speaking French. Unlike the rules formulated by Rigault (1971) which state the statistically higher degree of predicability of gender based on the last one, two or three or more sounds, Rosenthal’s rules are based purely on orthography. The degree of certainty varies from 100%, as with Rule 1, which states that nouns ending in *-t* are masculine, save, of course, for listed examples like *forêt*, to Rule 18 which states that ‘nouns ending in double consonant followed by *e* are feminine with the exception of *-mme* and *-rre*. Nouns ending in *-mme* and *-rre* are mixed’. The final section (pp. 94-97) lists nouns that ‘follow no rule’, such as those ending in *-x* and where unfortunately *le faux* and *la faux* are confused.

As on a number of occasions, the author refers to the lack of explanation of gender rules in grammar books, (although there is no bibliography) I turned to Monique L’Huiller’s *Advanced French Grammar* (1999) to find (pp. 389-403) a clear and, where appropriate, semantically motivated presentation of gender, which was superior on every account, including those where Rosenthal is arguably strongest, such as compound nouns. Moreover, the comparison brings to mind areas of weakness, such as the failure to gloss relatively unusual words such as *gymnote* and to deal systematically with dual gender nouns such as *livre*.

As the book progresses, the target readership, i.e. foreign learners becomes more apparent as the author repeatedly exhorts ‘I’m counting on you to remember’. Whether it is a descriptive or pedagogical work, it could have and should have been more succinct. The inchoate and unsatisfactory character of the volume leaves one wondering whether there is a place for a kind of *Bescherelle* for the grammar of nouns or indeed whether the ‘rules’ could be not be developed as a basis for CALL exercises. As it stands, the book requires considerable reworking as it contains too many indications that it was not shown to a competent reader before going to press.

In short, I shall not be mentioning it, let alone recommending it, to our students. Far better that they invest in one of a number of grammars published in recent years by members and friends of AFLS and a decent dictionary.

References

- L’Huiller, M. (1999) *Advanced French grammar*. Cambridge: CUP.
 Rigault, A.(ed.) (1971). *La grammaire du français parlé*. Paris: Hachette.

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***Access French, A first language course* Bernard Grosz and Henriette Harnisch, Hodder and Stoughton Educational, 2003. Book and Cassette ISBN 0340856378 £29.99. Also available *Access French: Cassette Set and Transcript* ISBN 0340856386 £19.99 and *Access French: Student Book* 034085636X £14.99.**

Le défi est grand: rendre accessible le français, la langue la plus difficile après le chinois. Pour cela, la méthode adoptée sera double : donner un cadre moderne à une tâche qui doit être ludique ; et revenir aux plus sûres des valeurs, les 3R : « Reading », « wRiting » and « Replying » (où l'on rangera « Listening » et « Speaking »). Que l'on ne s'y trompe pas pour autant : cet ouvrage est destiné aux adultes, voulant parler français pour des vacances ou leur travail, et à ce titre, le parti pris de l'efficacité et de la débrouillardise est évident. Il s'agit de s'armer au plus vite pour faire face au plus pressé : un hôtel, un menu, un plan de ville, les appels téléphoniques et même les réparations sur la voiture.

Divisé en dix chapitres, l'ouvrage procède à chaque fois par étapes repérables grâce à des logos : en tête les objectifs des pages à suivre, puis des exercices écrits, des dialogues, des questions de compréhension sur des documents (guide de vacances, carte de menu...). Pour soutenir des exercices souvent présentés comme des jeux à pratiquer en groupe, des tableaux appelés « language focus » expliquent les points de grammaire. Par ailleurs, en marge des pages, des « learning tips » ponctuent les leçons : y sont expliquées la distinction entre *tu* et *vous*, les nuances de politesse dans les demandes, et - joli clin d'œil - y sont donnés les petits surnoms « assez inhabituels » dont les Français affublent leurs bien-aimés : traduits littéralement, « my rabbit », « my cabbage », « my flea » ou encore « my cork ». Plus sérieusement, les auteurs de l'ouvrage souhaitent prendre par la main leur lecteur débutant ; ils donnent donc des bilans très réguliers sur les connaissances dernièrement acquises par des cadres « ready to move on ? » en cours de chapitres, et des « looking forward » en ouverture.

Le fonds technique semble développé et fouillé: pour combattre une des bêtes noires des étrangers apprenant le français, les auteurs ont pris soin d'insister sur l'emploi des articles définis et des partitifs. De plus, en fin d'ouvrage, un récapitulatif grammatical (« language summary ») sous forme de tableaux et

d'exemples confortera les bases apprises. Enfin, chaque chapitre présente une liste d'une centaine de mots ; un lexique récapitule tout ce vocabulaire en une « wordlist ».

L'ouvrage cherche à ouvrir les horizons de son lecteur. A cette fin, deux éléments : le recours systématique au Web, support moderne par excellence qui offre de nouveaux exercices pour chaque « unit », et des liens à des pages françaises suivant les thèmes – www.accesslanguages.com assure un relais aisé qui doit faire partie des sites « préférés » des bons lecteurs. Il peut seconder aussi l'enseignant qui se sert de l'ouvrage, en lui proposant de nouveaux exercices d'application. Par ailleurs, une page culturelle est consacrée dans chaque chapitre à la francophonie où l'on retrouvera le Canada, la Belgique, Haïti, la Réunion, et où l'on pourra aussi découvrir Coluche et les Restos du cœur.

L'ensemble est dynamique et attrayant. Les illustrations et encadrés, très colorés, sont peut-être un peu trop nombreux, et peuvent gêner la lecture en cherchant à distraire. Toutefois, la méthode de base paraît solide. Seul un manque mériterait d'être signalé : l'expérience prouve que les étrangers ont de grosses difficultés à employer correctement les pronoms personnels (ex : je donne un livre à Pierre, je lui donne un livre, je le lui donne...). La gymnastique est laborieuse et pourtant paraît indispensable pour se faire comprendre. Elle ne trouve pas ici d'explication, mais il est compréhensible qu'elle dépasse les premières étapes dans le complexe apprentissage du français.

Comme le souligne le premier chapitre, Internet encourage une « immigration » de l'Anglais et de l'Américain vers la langue française ; ils ont trouvé avec ce livre une solide, première « terre d'accueil ».

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Campbell, Dougal, and White, Patrick, *Berets and Beaujolais*. Edinburgh: Chambers, 2003, unpaginated. 0 550 10134 9

A sub-title on the cover says '40 French stereotypes explored', and after epigraphs from Robert Morley (echoing a joke well-liked in Belgium, with the date 1974 to

explain why students have never heard of him) and Marge Simpson, we start with ‘surrender monkeys’: refuted by reference to the Resistance, and rated down at the ‘False’ end of the stereotypicality range. The other entries follow a similar pattern of exposition, discussion with examples, and rating: the French hate British and Americans, are patriotic, French women are sexy (but hairy), the French are great lovers, are chic (but wear berets, stripy jumpers, and carry onions), are always on holiday or on strike, and anyway arrogant, unruly and snobbish. The people, the language (only two trivial entries), food (why the fuss about horsemeat? I remember a horsemeat butcher in Praed Street) and drink (useful tips on how to order coffee as you like it), customs (shrugging, kissing, smoking, hypochondria), sport (no mention of Jeannie Longo under cycling), and music (no reference to Jean-Jacques Goldman or that famous rocker and film buff Eddie Mitchell). A shorter section deals with aspects of how the French see us (our food, our tea, our hooligans). The tone throughout tends to the jocular, with even overtones of prejudice here and there. This is not a serious book: the typography and the lack of page numbers, let alone index and bibliography, proclaim it. But for beginning students or non-specialists (and at £3.50) it could serve as a basis for discussion or to correct some of their misconceptions. It is however too brief for complete accuracy: surely *courriel* is Canadian? Under ‘The French are great lovers’, I would not expect the name of the cardinal who made famous the word *épectase*, but I would object that Félix Faure died in his own bed. His friend Meg Steinheil, whose part in his demise earned her the unfortunate sobriquet of *pompe-funèbre*, was the one playing away.

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