

Comptes-Rendus de Lecture

Le français en faculté – Cours de base
 Scottish Universities French Language Research Project
 Hodder & Stoughton, 3rd Edition. ISBN 0 340 72118 9
 reviewed by David Hornsby, University of Kent

This is a welcome updated edition of a book first published in 1980, produced by largely the same editorial team (Adamson, Coleman, Hare, Lang, Lodge, and Wakely) with two new francophone colleagues (Hug, Royall). The authors start from the reasonable premise that “the level of grammatical awareness and competence of students entering first year is now considerably below what it was in the 1970’s”, and set out to provide a bank of materials suitable for advanced learners with 5–6 years’ French behind them.

The 12-unit structure of the book remains unchanged, although of 21 texts included, 14 are new. The choice of topics is lively and topical and avoids many of the clichés of contemporary language courses. The texts are drawn from a wide variety of sources, from Maupassant to *Marie-Claire*. An electoral address is exploited in Unit 10 *La Vie Politique*, while a transcript of a radio programme is used to explore written representations of spoken French in Unit 11 *On se parle*. While each unit stands alone, they are tightly structured in three parts, for preparation, reinforcement and exploitation. Part A, *Préparation du Texte*, containing annotated texts, a *Commentaire grammatical* and comprehension questions is designed for independent work by the student in advance of the seminar. The *Exercices de renforcement* in Section B reinforce new material by encouraging students to discover grammatical and lexical regularities for themselves within the texts.

There is a good range of lively exercises for oral work, including role-plays (*saynètes*), debates and *exposé* topics linked to the theme of each Unit. Written exercises include focussed *thèmes* and *versions*, essays, and *résumé* questions which prevent unreflective copying of source material by posing a specific question relating to the text, or requiring comment from a given viewpoint.

The gap between spoken and written, formal and informal French is consistently flagged and explained in the grammar sections (Part C), which dovetail neatly with the *Commentaires grammaticaux* and represent the most impressive aspect of this book. The presentation is refreshingly clear (see for

example the lucid explanations of *depuis* tenses (p. 44) and the *il est/c'est* distinction (p. 15)), and work from A-Level basics before addressing the complexities. The presentation is user-friendly and economical, using bullet-points and an unfussy cross-referencing system to flag grammar points. A glossary of grammatical terms is provided at the end. The amount of switching between French and English is, however, a little disconcerting, as the authors acknowledge. While English is mostly restricted to grammatical explanations, the convention of using quotation marks to indicate occasional translations in the *Vocabulaire* sections is not explained, and left this reviewer momentarily trying to pronounce *à la française* words like “scrapie” and “gratuitous”, and wondering if “cable lengths” were a new *franglais* term he’d not encountered. Generally, however, the book avoids unnecessary complication and meets a pressing need for good accessible first-year language teaching materials. Used as the authors advise, it will help plug grammatical gaps among weaker students while challenging the more able. All the major problem areas I hoped to find were addressed in the Grammar sections, and I learned one or two new things myself.

A final advantage of this book is that the contemporary material selected will not “date” for some time. A possible exception is the first text of Module 3: *La vache folle vue par les médias*. Or is that just wishful thinking on my part?

Anne Akyüz et al.

Exercices de grammaire en contexte. Niveau débutant

Hachette Livre, 2000. ISBN 15 5133 2

reviewed by Helen Wright

Heathfield School, Ascot and University of Exeter

As its name suggests, this is not so much of a grammar reference book as a grammar practice book; it is laid out essentially as a workbook, with gaps to fill in missing endings, words and phrases. Answers are in a separate booklet, with the exception of the answers to the five *évaluations* to be found at the end of the book, summary tests which are of interest in their own right as revision of any basic French grammar course. While the book is not photocopyable, it has a place in resource centres of institutions where French is taught *ab initio*, and is worth considering as a basic grammar book for the first term of a beginners’ course.

The authors, all from Eurocentres in Paris, have drawn on their expertise in the teaching of *Français langue étrangère* to adolescent and adult learners and have created a clear, flexible and accessible book that is suitable for study in class or (with the answers) as a self-study resource. The fifteen chapters cover standard basic grammar areas from the present indicative of *avoir* and *être* to the *passé composé*, and from expressions of time and place to partitive articles and relative pronouns; what makes this book attractive, however, is the layout of the chapters and the level of clear and non-fussy learner support. Each chapter is peppered with discreet tables illustrating the main grammar points and additional support — subject pronouns, for example, are drawn together in the first chapter on *avoir* and *être*. Grammatical descriptions and explanations are almost entirely avoided, and a useful heading to each chapter gives an indication of the function of the grammatical concept presented and practised — functions that are drawn together in a final index after the main grammatical index.

This book abounds with exercises for beginner French — practical exercises that often draw on, and are relevant to, experience of French culture. It is to be recommended.

Marie-Hélène Corréard

Oxford French Cartoon-Strip Vocabulary Builder

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 80 pp.

ISBN 0 19 860267 7. £6.99

reviewed by Tim Pooley, London Guildhall University

The idea of using Claire Bretécher's *Agrippine* cartoon strips as language teaching material must have occurred to many of us but by giving explanations of certain difficulties, providing extensive French-English vocabulary lists this book not only takes much of the donkey work out of preparation but makes them accessible to less advanced students (At London Guildhall we use Bretécher BDS in unannotated form with final year students).

The major selling point of the volume is that it gives examples of French as it is really spoken but in written form with the cartoons reducing the need for vast amounts of explanation. While the sociolinguist in me balks at such claims, the language teacher accepts the legitimacy of the book's main pedagogical aim, which is to extend students' knowledge of colloquial vocabulary through the Comptes-Rendus de Lecture

enjoyable stimulus of Agrippine cartoons which tackle basic topics such as “describing people, greetings, going out” and more advanced themes such as “art and literature, education, the Earth, health, television” set by examination boards.

The book is set out in thirty two-page spreads with the first page showing the Agrippine comic strip and the second giving vocabulary lists in three sections: 1) understanding the text which gives English translations of every word students may not know; 2) key structures, which explain and translate selected phrases used in the text; 3) thematic extensions giving vocabulary potentially useful in a more general discussion, for instance, on health and education. Some sections have bubbles giving basic cultural background information, e.g. the French school system, geographical locations, how to say telephone or multi-digit numbers.

At the end of the book are two useful helps: a five page French-English glossary followed by a seven page mini-*Bescherelle*. The guide to pronunciation (p.7) is too much of an exercise in concision to be really useful. You may not agree but personally I find it sociolinguistically incongruous to think of Agrippine and her friends saying [p^œk] *Pâques*, and I cringe just a little at the idea of a well-meaning colleague telling students that /^œ/ is “*an/am* with a nasal twang”.

Of course this book will prove mainly useful as a source of off-the-peg supplementary material. I have used it with pleasing results in Open University tutorials and language assistants could be given the book as a basis for oral work with first and second year students. In short, this is by no means a “must-have” item for French language teachers but one which I shall be glad to have on my shelf for the next few years. Our German and Spanish colleagues might be pleased to know that OUP is also publishing similar volumes in their respective languages.

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Regardez donc la p^ute binette.
Sourire? Alors, merci beaucoup.
Grimace? Eh bien, rappelez-vous
Qu'il faut payer !