

REVIEWS

Phil Turk, Geneviève Garcia Vandaele

***Action grammaire* (2000)** (Hodder & Stoughton) **£14.99 ISBN: 340772026**

The goal of this book is aptly advertised by its title. It clearly aims to encourage an interactive approach to the learning of French grammar, emphasising its link with usage and communication, through the practice of both written and oral skills, whilst accommodating the possibility of private or one-to-one study. The practical step-by-step structure adopted by each chapter (from the explanation of rules, through phrase-based exercises, to autonomous and creative practice) is user-friendly for students and teachers alike, and can cater for varying pedagogical situations and levels of ability. It does not, and this may be deemed regrettable, provide any text-based reading material helping to place relevant areas of French grammar within a broader context. In this, it fails to provide a grammar-oriented answer to the myriad of books providing texts with accompanying grammar notes. One might also have hoped that the choice of examples and activities would be less exclusively designed for school-age readers (although the authors claim to address a wider audience, most of the content would hardly be suitable in higher education and beyond). Despite these drawbacks, *Action grammaire* provides a refreshingly dynamic approach to a notoriously intimidating aspect of language learning.

Claudine Tourniaire, University of East Anglia

Dounia Bissar, Helen Phillips, Cécile Tschirhart

***French 1* (2001) Palsgrave Foundations ISBN 0-333-91992-0 (book) £14.99; 0-333-91993-9 (tape) £55.32**

If, like my colleagues and myself, you have now bitten the bullet and started to teach beginners' French, finding suitable material off the shelf is more difficult than it may appear at first sight. To be sure, there is no lack of books aimed at adult beginners but not necessarily those studying at an HE institution. *French 1* has been devised to fill that gap by providing a book of appropriate length fitting nicely into the university year of two semesters of 11 or 12 weeks, usually available for an Institution-Wide Language Programmes.

The book is made up of 10 units with broad situational titles such as *Les autres*, *La Routine*, *Vacances et Loisirs*. Each begins with a brief summary of the learning outcomes couched in communicative terms "When you have completed this unit, you will be able to..." The core material consists of 12 to 18 bite-sized gobbits which are clearly labelled *Ecouter*, *Lire*, *Lire et Observer*, *Traduire* interspersed with brief grammar summaries as the need arises. Each unit is completed by a section called *Extra!* consisting of supplementary and slightly more difficult material followed by a grammar section, grammar exercise, new vocabulary and pair work exercises. At the end of the book there are supplementary exercises for each unit, followed by a glossary of grammatical terms, a full grammar section, a French-English vocabulary and the key to the exercises, an index and an overview of communicative competences acquired – all in a slim volume of under 200 pages which also includes (pp. ix to xii) some sound advice to students on how to learn a language.

The book can certainly be said to be fit for purpose. There is enough material to fill a year and the *Extra!* and supplementary exercises build in flexibility. The authors deliberately avoid the pitfalls of courses for adult beginners which have too much on touristy themes but specify learning outcomes of the type now used in university course descriptors.

My only quibble is that the tapes are a tad pricey.

Tim Pooley

(London Guildhall University)

Angela Aries, Dominique Debney

***Façon de Parler 1* 3rd edition (2000) Hodder and Stoughton ISBN 0-340-77234-4 (book) £12.99; (Complete Pack) £32.99.**

This French course for adult beginners is competing in a crowded market place and therefore has to be considered in comparison with its competitors. It consists of a course book containing texts, exercises and grammar explanations which is accompanied by two cassette tapes and a support book containing the answers to the exercises and the texts of the tapes.

It is the stated aim of the series that the user will achieve a standard of GCSE or above after completing this book and its sequel. The progression appears a little slow in volume one, only reaching the present tense of the *-er* verbs in unit 8 (there are 21 units in total), a rate of progression more suitable to FE than to the time scales expected in HE. Having said this, however, the approach is solid and thorough with plenty of dialogues, exercises and role plays and indeed, if there is a criticism, it is in that very solidity which could become stodgy if used just for self study. The grammar explanations are clear, although they seem a little divorced from the other material, almost apologetic. Earlier editions were more grammatically based and this was part of their strength.

The course appears to be aimed very much at the would-be tourist and takes an external observer's view of French life. Given the importance of cultural references in language, this is regrettable and undermines the book's usefulness by comparison with the better of its competitors such as Stephanie Rybak's "Breakthrough French" series.

While, therefore, it may be a trifle too dull to be used for self-study or distance learning, the large number of examples and exercises would make it very useful for supplementary use in classroom work.

Steve Cushion

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Angela Aries, Dominique Debney

***Façon de Parler 2* 3rd edition (2001) Hodder and Stoughton ISBN 0-340-77237-9 (book) £12.99; ISBN: 0340772387 (Cassette Set & Transcript Book) £19.99, ISBN: 0340772395 (Complete Pack) £32.99.**

This is the second part of a course for adult beginners in French aiming to attain GCSE standard and beyond, or if formal qualifications are not a concern to reach a creditable level of communicative competence for travel in francophone countries. The authors can be fairly credited with having provided a complete 'off-the-shelf' course for beginners who have covered the basics presented in

Book 1 (see review) or possibly 'faux débutants'. The pack consists of a students' book, two cassettes with all audio input material and some listening exercises, an accompanying booklet with a transcription of listening material plus a key to the exercises. For good measure practice and assessment material in photocopiable form is provided in *Façon de Parler Plus!* (£29.99).

The course consists of 18 units each containing at least 3 pieces of input material (written but mostly spoken) each with vocabulary lists (Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire?), comprehension questions (avez-vous compris?), written practice material (à Vous) with role plays and speaking practice. Most dialogues are broken up into bite-size portions as in Unit 3 *un nouveau logement* followed after flagged word-list and comprehension questions by *un nouveau logement* (suite) which is then similarly garnished.

This is followed by a grammar section and some grammar exercise and each unit is completed by a listening exercise or reading passage and sometimes a quiz. After every three units there is a revision section (Faites le point) to go over vocabulary and grammar points. The book ends with a 37 page overview of the grammatical points which the student have acquired.

While I am not entirely convinced that the purported communicative presentation which hides a solidly structurally based method (more overtly so in previous editions) is really necessary, there is undoubtedly a good deal of interesting material a little of which I have tried with a first year group with highly satisfactory results. That said, the book is clearly aimed at FE and colleagues working in this sector tell me that it works well with learners of average ability. Progression is probably too slow for HE and despite its great length it does not really seek to cater for students working alone. Nonetheless I shall be glad to have it on my shelf to supplement LGU's in-house material for first year teaching.

Tim Pooley
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