Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers

Graduate School

1991

Teaching syllabus : a contrastive analysis of three major first year French texts

Jeri L. Titus
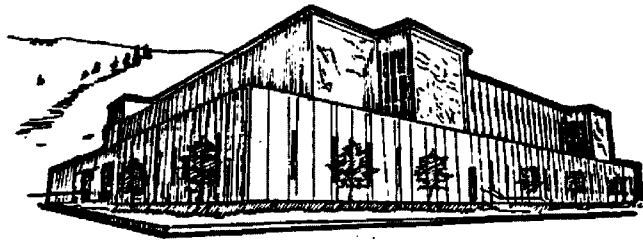
The University of Montana

THE TEACHING SYLLABUS: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE MAJOR

FIRST YEAR FRENCH TEXTS

By

Jeri L. Titus

B.S., University of Montana, 1975

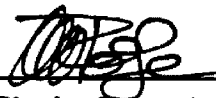Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1991

Approved by:

Chair, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

June 12, 1991

Date

UMI Number: EP39007

UMI

Dissertation Publishing

UMI EP39007

ProQuest

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

&

Titus, Jeri L., M. A., June 1991   French

The Teaching Syllabus: A Contrastive Analysis of Three Major First Year
French Texts (74 pages)

Director: O.W. Rolfe

This study compares and contrasts the approaches taken by the authors of
three university level beginning French textbooks: Thème et Variations by
M. Peter Hagiwara and Françoise de Rocher, Découverte et Création by
Gérard Jian and Ralph Hester, and French in Action by Pierre Capretz et al.

The study begins with an examination of the advantages and
disadvantages of the structural syllabus that the two former texts follow and
continues with the same examination of the latter text, which follows a
notional-functional syllabus. The study also compares and contrasts specific
grammatical topics (the subjunctive mood and the future tense of the
indicative mood), functional topics (invitations), and cultural topics (food) as
well as the general organization of the three texts.

Results show that the notional-functional syllabus and the video approach
used by French in Action exposes learners to a much greater volume and
variety of natural language while at the same time maintaining linguistic
accuracy by the use of grammatical exercises. The presentation of French
culture is also the most complete of the three texts in French in Action,
although the modified audiolingual approach of Thème et Variations offers
learners a strong base in both French culture and the grammatical elements
of the French language. The study found that the third text, Découverte et
Création, was considerably weaker in its presentation of the grammatical,
functional, and cultural aspects of the French language.

The study concludes that a notional-functional approach and the use of
video technology represents the direction in which language teaching
methodology should direct itself, and that French in Action is superior to
other texts in its presentation of culture and natural language in context.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Foreign language textbooks and the approaches used in them are directed by a teaching syllabus. Recently, textbooks have begun to appear that feature a notional-functional syllabus rather than the more traditional grammatical syllabus. For this study, I have chosen three very different first year college French textbooks to compare and contrast. The three texts are Thème et Variations (Fourth Edition) by M. Peter Hagiwara and Françoise de Rocher; Découverte et Création (Cinquième Edition) by Gérard Jian and Ralph Hester; and French in Action by Pierre Capretz, Béatrice Abetti, Marie-Odile Germain, and Laurence Wylie. Thème et Variations is a leading modified audio-lingual text which follows a grammatical syllabus. Découverte et Création, a popular direct method text, also uses a grammatical syllabus. French in Action follows a notional-functional syllabus and uses video cassettes as the primary means of instruction.

Through my research, I will attempt to ascertain the advantages and disadvantages of each kind of syllabus and how, by the use of their respective syllabuses, the texts do or do not meet the commonly stated goals of communicative proficiency. I will compare and contrast each text's presentation of grammatical, functional, and cultural content and the order of presentation of these topics. I will also examine exercises and activities in relation to communicative proficiency and the given text's syllabus. In

1

addition, it is my intention to determine the possible advantages of the video medium in the teaching of a foreign language. Finally, I will explore the possible advantages and disadvantages of altering a grammatical syllabus by the addition of situationally based activities to meet proficiency-based goals.

In a sense, these three texts represent the evolution and the different directions that the foreign language instruction field in the United States has taken over the last forty years. Jack Richards and Ted Rodgers give a good historical sketch of language teaching in their 1986 work, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A Description and Analysis. From this book and also from Alice Omaggio's Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction, I will draw the following historical overview. This background may aid the reader in placing each of the texts under study in a historical and theoretical framework.

Historical Overview of Language Teaching in the Twentieth Century

In both Britain and United States, the study of classical Latin and the analysis of its grammar and rhetoric become the model for foreign language teaching from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. In the eighteenth century, when pedagogical methods for studying modern foreign languages were being defined, students were taught using the same basic procedures that were used for teaching Latin. Texts were based on "abstract" grammar rules, lists of vocabulary and sentences for translation; speaking the foreign language was not a goal of instruction. The structural or grammatical syllabus evolved at this time; chapters of texts were organized around grammar points and eventually this method of language teaching became known as the Grammar-Translation method. This method

dominated foreign language teaching in both Europe and the United States from the 1840's to the 1940's.[1]

A reform movement toward the end of the nineteenth century arose in Europe in response to some of the criticisms aimed at the Grammar-Translation method. This movement eventually gave rise to both the study of applied linguistics and phonetics and the creation of a group of "natural" methods. Proponents of this philosophy, such as Henry Sweet, stressed that speech is the primary form of language as well as the importance of meaning in learning and teaching items in context. Sweet also believed that "sound methodological principles should be based on a scientific analysis of language and a study of psychology."[2] These natural methods provided the foundation for what became known as the direct method and it became quite popular in private language schools such as the Berlitz schools. In that its success depended on native or near-native fluency of the teacher, the direct method never became as popular in the United States as it was in Britain, where the theory behind it provided the foundations for what became the Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching.

The goal of foreign language teaching in the United States continued to be a reading knowledge of a foreign language rather than conversational skills, a philosophy that characterized foreign language teaching here until World War II. The war had a significant effect on language teaching, as the major emphasis changed from teaching short reading passages preceded by lists of vocabulary to developing conversational proficiency for a student population destined to become interpreters, code-room assistants, and translators. The

---

[1] Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A Description and Analysis, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2-3.

[2] Ibid., 7.

theory behind the Army Specialized Training Program was at the origins of the audiolingual method, the main method of foreign language teaching in the United States from the World War II period through the 1960's.[3]

Meanwhile, in Britain, Situational Language Teaching's best aspects were recycled into the theoretical framework of Communicative Language Teaching, also known as the notional/functional approach. In the former approach, basic structures were practiced in meaningful situationally based activities. The very weaknesses that arose from a lack of a theoretical background that brought audiolingualism to an end in the United States also brought an end to Situational Language Teaching in Britain. The very same criticisms were leveled at it by Chomsky, who criticized the structural linguistic theory behind audiolingualism. In the following chapter, I will explore further the historical background of the notional/functional approach.[4]

The conflicts between the proponents of various methods and approaches can be distilled to the age-old conflict between rationalists and empiricists, according to Omaggio. Rationalists believe the bases of language learning are critical thinking, a desire to communicate and meaningful forms. Their theoretical orientation has led to such approaches as cognitive-code, Communicative Language Teaching, Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach.[5]

Conversely, empiricists believe that language learning is based on behavior, conditioned responses and the reproduction of correct forms.

---

[3]Ibid., 44-45.
[4]Ibid., 31-33.
[5]Alice Omaggio, Teaching and Learning in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction, (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1986), 41-2.

Their theory has formed the basis of audiolingualism and the various structural approaches.

Omaggio states that American teachers have given up their search for the "one true way" and have incorporated aspects of the Direct Method, Audiolingualism, Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach into an "eclectic" approach. The diversity found in American methodology does not extend, in general, to the syllabus, which is still the structural or grammatical one.[6]

In contrast, European theoretical work in methodology in recent years has centered on sociolinguistic needs rather than pedagogical ones. The notional/functional syllabus is replacing the more traditional structural one, particularly for adult learners of foreign languages. The last text under study, French in Action, adheres to the theory that sociolinguistic needs are the most essential for communicative competence.

Thème et Variations

The second text, Thème et Variations, is a modified audiolingual text with accurate linguistic analysis. The text features "situationally oriented activities," and each lesson has a "theme-oriented approach." The following are the main characteristics of this text:

---

[6]Ibid., 42.

1. Practice in meaningful contexts
2. Learner-oriented explicit grammar presentation
3. Dialogues to start application activities
4. Theme and variations (a central theme further developed in situational activities)
5. Combined language skills
6. Separate pronunciation lessons
7. Instructor-oriented approach[7]

The breakdown of a typical chapter is as follows: *Conversations, Structures, Applications, Vocabulaire, Compréhension Auditive, Exercices écrits,* and *Exercices de prononciation.* Each chapter has a cultural theme, and most activities in the chapter are in that context. In chapters 1-20, *Conversations* is followed by a section entitled *Différences* (in English), wherein French cultural differences are highlighted. In chapters 8 -11 and 13 -25, the *Lecture* section (in French) features "up-to-date cultural information." An accompanying *Cahier d'exercices* features *Activités Orales* and *Activités Ecrites.* The authors emphasize cultural understanding, both in France and other francophone countries. They say: "We have made an effort to avoid stereotyped portrayals of the French, and to achieve a balance between traditional culture and the daily life of the French."[8]

---

[7]M. Peter Hagiwara and Françoise de Rocher, Thème et Variations: An Introduction to French Language and Culture, Fourth Edition (Annotated Instructor's Edition), (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1989), 1-3.
[8]Ibid., 5.

Découverte et Création

According to its authors, the third text, Découverte et Création, follows a "rationalist direct method."[9] In this method, "oral proficiency and active communication remain the primary goals of Découverte et Création ... at the same time, writing and reading are still very important goals."[10] The direct method is an inductive approach, in which a student sees a number of examples in use and then infers a grammatical rule from these examples.

Découverte et Création follows a grammatical syllabus. All new material is intended to be presented by the instructor in a question and answer form. This takes the form of a *"Présentation"* in which the featured grammatical points are introduced. The *"Présentation"* is followed by *"Explications,"* in which general rules are presented, as well as several examples. Opportunities for oral practice are presented in the *"Exercices Oraux"*. The second part of the chapter, *Création,* presents conversation exercises, reading selections, and improvisational activities. The accompanying *Cahier d'Exercices* presents both the *"Exercices Écrits"* for written practice and the *"Exercices de Laboratoire"* for listening and oral practice.

French in Action

French in Action uses a notional-functional syllabus. It follows a theory of language in which the uses to which a language can be put are the focus of attention, not the structure of the language itself. Meaning rather than form,

---

[9]Gérard Jian and Ralph Hester, Découverte et Création Quatrième Edition (Instructor's Edition), (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), IE 7.
[10]Ibid.

communicative function rather than linguistic function; these are the organizing principles of French in Action. Each chapter focuses on notional-functional topics such as: socializing, disagreeing, processing information or influencing others. Grammar is placed in a context where it can be meaningfully employed, rather than remaining isolated from the body of the language for specific analytical focus.

French in Action, also known as the "Capretz Method", follows many of the precepts of the direct method. The most obvious innovation, other than the notional-functional syllabus, is the use of the video medium. It is this medium which allows a "referential approach," the objective of which is "total language teaching through planned immersion - the presentation of French language and culture in a way that simulates the experience of actually being in France."[11] This approach combines language structure and immersion, and moreover, allows the viewer to see both verbal and non-verbal communication. This includes the realm of "gestures, looks, attitudes, behavior, intonation, and cultural conventions and assumptions."[12] The referential approach also places a high priority on listening skills; both active and passive skills are important. In totality, the Capretz Method exposes the student to much more language than other methods. Russo elaborates: "This distinction between active use and passive recognition makes it possible to give students authentic French from the outset, rather than a simplified textbook version of the language."[13]

---

[11] Adelaide Russo, Thomas Abbate, and Barry Lydgate, French in Action - A Beginning Course in Language and Culture. (The Capretz Method) Instructor's Guide, Part 1, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), viii.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., x.

The course components consist of the 52-program video series, audio cassettes which follow the video "text," the textbook, the workbook, the study guide, and the instructor's guide. Of all the components, only the last two are in English. The textbook differs from a traditional one in that no grammar explanations are given. The main function of the textbook is to offer scripts of the video plays, drawings and photographs related to the story, and a French-English lexicon. In a sense, the video programs replace a conventional text. Workbook exercises reinforce listening, oral, and written skills, teach standard grammatical elements, and they also offer opportunities to recombine elements of the story into new dialogues and stories. The study guide, intended primarily for televiewers isolated from a classroom situation, provides step-by-step directions for completing each lesson as well as "notes on points of culture, gestures and other aspects of non-verbal-communication . . . that transcend vocabulary and grammar."[14]

This brief introduction to each of the texts under study will now be followed by a detailed explanation of the syllabuses used and their theoretical background (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, I will examine each text in detail and compare and contrast their grammatical, functional, and cultural content.

---

[14]Ibid., xvii.

CHAPTER II

SYLLABUS, APPROACH, METHOD, AND PROFICIENCY-ORIENTED INSTRUCTION

One of the major differences between French in Action and the other two

texts centers on the syllabus followed by each text. French in Action follows

a notional-functional syllabus while Thème et Variations and Découverte et

Création each follow a grammatical syllabus (with some situationally based

activities). A brief historical and theoretical background will precede a

discussion of how the theoretical underpinnings of the syllabus dictate the

approach(es) and method(s) used in the classroom; this will be followed by

discussion of the relationship of approach, method and syllabus to both

Krashen's Monitor model and proficiency-oriented instruction.

Syllabus, Approach, and Method

Because confusion exists concerning what an approach is as compared to a

method or a syllabus, a logical point of departure for this discussion is a

clarification of definitions. As a source, I am using Alice Omaggio's Teaching

Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction (1986). This text has

become a standard in foreign language methodology courses and its author is

often cited in articles on foreign language methodology. Her working

hypotheses "provide a base from which a framework for a proficiency-

10

oriented approach to formal language instruction can be developed."[1] She in turn takes her definitions from Westphal (1979):

The *syllabus* refers to the subject matter content of a given course or series of courses and the order in which it is presented; the *approach* is, ideally, the theoretical basis or bases which determine the ways in which the syllabus is treated; a *strategy* or technique is an individual instructional activity as it occurs in the classroom.[2]

Westphal goes on to explain that a *method* consists of combinations of these three factors, although some combinations are more congruent with course goals than others."[3] A great deal of confusion exists, in my opinion, between approach and method, but further clarification is also needed in how the syllabus dictates the gradation and presentation of language form and function in a given text. It seems that a lot of attention has been paid to the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches and methods without paying enough attention perhaps, to the driving force of any method, its syllabus. A recent work by Karl Krahnke, <u>Approaches to Syllabus Design for Foreign Language Teaching</u>, examines six syllabus types, their main characteristics and the advantages and disadvantages of each type.

---

[1]Alice Omaggio, <u>Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction</u>, (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1986), 34.

[2]Patricia Westphal, "Teaching and Learning: A Key to Success," In <u>Building on Experience - Building for Success</u>. Edited by June K. Phillips. (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Company, 1979), 120, quoted in Alice Omaggio, <u>Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction</u>, (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1986), 44.

[3]Ibid.

Syllabus Design

Krahnke feels that one of the most ignored aspects of foreign language teaching has been syllabus design: "While teachers and administrators frequently speak of differences in *method*, differences in the *content* of instruction are examined much less often."[4] He feels that the theory of language that is assumed by a given method is closely related to the syllabus. I visualize the hierarchy as a flow chart that begins at the top with the theory of language, which dictates the theory of language learning, which in turn dictates the choice of syllabus. At the bottom of the flow chart is the method, which is governed by all of the choices above. (Figure 1, page 25.

Janice Yalden points out the different trends in language teaching methodology and theory in North America as contrasted with Europe. In North America, teachers are more used to thinking about methodology than syllabus design. She feels that no matter which 'method' is selected, any syllabus that is produced is essentially based on the same model: the selection and sequencing of linguistic structures alone, the underlying assumption being that learning a language means learning to master its grammatical system (however this may be defined).[5] She introduces the idea of synthetic strategies as opposed to analytic strategies, both of which are discussed at length by David Wilkins in his 1976 work, Notional Syllabuses.

Wilkins observes that the learning of a language is most commonly identified with acquiring mastery of its grammatical system and that most courses have a grammatical organization. For Wilkins, then, a synthetic

---

[4]Karl Krahnke, Approaches to Syllabus Design for Foreign Language Teaching, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Regents, 1987), 1.

[5]Janice Yalden, The Communicative Syllabus: Evolution, Design and Implementation, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983), 20.

language teaching strategy produces a structural syllabus, "one in which the different parts of the language are taught separately and step-by-step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of the parts until the whole structure of the language has been built up."[6] In contrast, in an analytic approach, such as one that would produce a notional-functional syllabus, there is "no attempt at this careful control of the learning environment. Components of language are not seen as building blocks which have to be progressively accumulated."[7] This view relates to one stated by Leonard Newmark: "In natural foreign language learning . . . acquisition cannot simply be additive; complex bits of language are learned a whole chunk at a time."[8]

The Structural Syllabus

The first type of syllabus I will explore in detail is the structural syllabus. A major portion of language teaching over history has been carried out using this model. According to Krahnke, a structural syllabus is "based on the theory of language that assumes that the grammatical or structural aspects of language form are the most basic or useful."[9] Its premise assumes that functional ability arises from structural knowledge or ability, and its content is founded on language form, primarily grammatical form. The structural syllabus is synthetic, thus requiring the analysis of language content. This

---

[6]D. A. Wilkins, Notional Syllabuses: A Taxonomy and Its Relevance to Foreign Language Curriculum Development, (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1976), 1.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Newmark, Leonard, "How Not To Interfere With Language Learning." In Innovative Approaches to Language Teaching, edited by Robert W. Blair, 110-14, (Rowley, MA.; Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1982.)
[9]Krahnke, 15.

analysis requires frequency counts as well as grammatical and discourse analysis. Rules, patterns and grammatical elements isolated from the analysis make up the body of the syllabus.

According to the theory of learning subscribed to by designers of structural syllabuses, they assume the analyzed information is first available to the learner for use in producing utterances while simultaneously checking the accuracy of production. Second, the analyzed information is transformed from conscious knowledge to unconscious behavior.

Structural syllabuses are most frequently associated with cognitive, audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods of language teaching. Cognitive theorists assert that languages are best learned through conscious knowledge of the forms of the language and the rules for their combination.[10] Audio-linguists use a behaviorist learning model, at the heart of which is structural knowledge. Similarly, grammatical forms and patterns are presented explicitly in the grammar-translation method, and the student then practices and applies that knowledge in translating from the native language to the second language, and vice-versa. The selection of instructional content is relatively easy, in that the grammatical structure of a language is usually well-known. In other methods, such as the direct method, "a grammatical point can be presented in a basic or general way, with little detail and few exceptions."[11]

Some of the positive characteristics of the structural syllabus are: first, that "structure or grammar is the most general component of communicative competence"[12] and second, the familiarity and long historical

---

[10]Ibid, 17.
[11]Ibid.
[12]Ibid., 21.

use of the grammatical syllabus offers a wide array of texts using this type of syllabus. In addition, grammatical concepts are more familiar than functional ones and relatively easy to describe. Structural knowledge, in the opinion of Krahnke, is " the most measurable" of the components of communicative competence. However, this may be due to teachers' familiarity with grammar tests to measure students' progress and the ease of making decisions about right or wrong structural usage.

Recent research, most notably that of Higgs and Clifford, also shows that structural knowledge, while not used directly, may prevent fossilization (acquired incorrect communication strategies. In their research, learners who showed high proficiency were also those who had received previous instruction in the structure of the language. Learners who were not able to progress beyond a high-intermediate stage were those who had acquired the language without formal instruction. It must be noted that Higgs and Clifford's hypotheses are preliminary and need to be subjected to "rigorous research," in the opinion of the latter.[13]

Another positive attribute, according to Krahnke, is that structural knowledge can, in some limited situations, serve to check on the accuracy of production and allow the learner to self-correct. This latter observation is based on Krashen's Monitor model, a recent theory in language acquisition that I will discuss at length later in this chapter. Krahnke also feels that instruction in language structure provides teachers with a basis for feedback on students' errors. However, he goes on to say, "this factor is of doubtful value because extensive evidence has demonstrated that such overt error

---

[13]Theodore V. Higgs and Ray Clifford, "The Push Toward Communication", In Curriculum, Competence and the Foreign Language Teacher. Edited by Theodore V. Higgs, (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1981), 76.

correction has no effect on accuracy." [14] He concludes by stating that the grammatical syllabus is "naturally value and culture-free," in that language structures can be taught independently of cultural values. In some situations, the language itself may be desired, "but not the social and cultural values that are associated with it."[15]

Krahnke also explores the negative aspects of structural syllabuses, which center around the usability, applicability and transferability of structural knowledge. The structural syllabus assumes that grammatical knowledge is "learned", but this knowledge does not seem to manifest itself in unmonitored language use. One reason that this knowledge is not used is that language learners following a structural syllabus are not really learning a language, they are learning facts and information about a language.[16] Actual language use is subordinate to the study of the structure of the language. Further problems may arise with the sequencing and grading problems inherent in a structural syllabus. In a strictly controlled syllabus, students are unable to produce structures they have not been taught; teachers must control the students' use of the new language and tolerate the inevitable errors made. These problems have led to the development of "controlled communicative activities" which tend to contain grammatical and lexical items out of sequence.

Yalden also addresses this same weakness in her discussion on situational syllabuses. She says "we can easily 'situationalize' a grammatical syllabus, but that in so doing, we will not have resolved the problem ... of teaching words and sentences as isolates."[17] It is important to point out, as Yalden

---

[14]Krahnke, 24.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid., 26.
[17]Yalden, 39.

does, that regardless of the approach or method used, the goal of all synthetic approaches is the same: mastery of the substance and form of a language - its phonology and lexico-grammatical system, i.e. linguistic competence. This goal differs completely from that of analytic approaches, which is communicative competence.

The Notional-Functional Syllabus

The notional-functional syllabus is an analytic approach and the best known of the newer syllabus designs. It follows a theory of language in which the uses to which a language can be put are the focus of attention, not the structure of the language itself. Noting the increased interdependence of European countries, the Council of Europe, a regional organization for cultural and educational cooperation, saw the need to articulate and develop alternative methods of language teaching. In 1971, a group of experts began to investigate a unit-credit system, a system in which learning tasks are broken down into "portions or units, each of which corresponds to a component of a learner's needs and is systematically related to all the other portions."[18] A preliminary document prepared by Wilkins, served as the basis for further discussion. In it he proposed a functional or communicative definition of language that could serve as a basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching. In a radical departure from the traditional approach in which grammar and vocabulary serve as the focus of study, Wilkins attempted to demonstrate the meanings that lay behind the communicative uses of language. He described two types of

---

[18]Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A Description and Analysis, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 65.

meanings: notional categories (concepts such as time, sequence, quantity, location, frequency) and categories of communicative function (requests, denials, offers, complaints).[19]

In Wilkins' Notional Syllabuses, he has further refined his earlier work and has subdivided meaning of discourse into three areas: semantico-grammatical categories, categories of modal meaning, and categories of communicative function. In the first category, in which we express our perceptions of events, processes, states and actions, the meaning is "ideational" in nature. This latter term is borrowed from Halliday and means "functional diversity in language."[20] In the second category, modal meaning, the speaker expresses his attitude toward what he is saying or writing. The third type of meaning is the function it plays in the larger context in which it occurs. These categories are summarized in Figure 2 on page 26.

In an analytic approach, a much greater variety of linguistic structure is permitted from the beginning of instruction and the learner's task is to match his own linguistic behavior more closely to that of natural language. As Wilkins says in his introduction, "Significant linguistic forms can be isolated from the structurally heterogeneous context in which they occur, so that learning can be focused on important aspects of the language structure."[21]

Although the best known of contemporary syllabus types, the notional-functional syllabus is also the object of misunderstanding. Often referred to as an "approach", it is rather "a type of content of language instruction that can be taught through a variety of classroom techniques."[22] The notional-

---

[19]Ibid.

[20]Wilkins, 21.

[21]Ibid., 2.

[22]Krahnke, 29.

functional syllabus has been closely associated with Communicative Language Teaching, which is "a rather amorphous view of language teaching that has been referred to as a method but is really a collection of different approaches and procedures clustered around notional-functional content."[23]

As with the structural syllabus, the notional-functional syllabus is subject to a variety of interpretations and can be associated with a variety of methodologies. The main difference between the two is that categories of language form the organizing principle of instruction for the former, while categories of language use are the organizing principle for the latter. Another important difference between the two types of syllabuses centers on the question: "What is of primary importance in each syllabus?" The structural syllabus subordinates the use of the language to the study of its structure, while the notional-functional syllabus places the use of the language in a primary role and the study of grammar to a secondary one.

The notional-functional syllabus divides the categories of language use into notions and functions, each of which is associated with language forms. The choice of which notions and functions to include in an individual teaching syllabus involves examining the type of discourse in which the learners are going to engage, noting the notions and functions needed and choosing the forms associated with these notions and functions. The narrowing of focus to a type of discourse specific to the needs of a group of learners demonstrates why the notional-functional approach is often called communicative. Yalden feels that one of the most important steps in implementing a syllabus is the needs analysis, which entails carrying out a survey of the communicative needs of the learners for whom the program is being prepared.

---

[23]Ibid.

The most obvious of the positive characteristics of the notional-functional syllabus is that knowledge about how language is used increases learners' overall ability to function in the new language. "They will have more experience with, and knowledge about, which linguistic forms do what in the new language, and they will have had exposure to at least some real or simulated interaction in the language."[24] Of course, the more communicative and specific the instruction is, the more useful it will be. Many researchers suggest that "acquisition takes place best in a setting in which meaning is negotiated through interaction, so that the student has influence on the message being communicated."[25] The initial analysis of the types of discourse in which the learners will need to engage is the cornerstone of notional-functional syllabus design. If this analysis is an accurate and adequate one, if learners continue according to their plan, "then notional-functional syllabuses have a higher probability of developing effective users of a new language, within a limited domain, in a relatively short time."[26]

Regardless of the possibilities and applications of the notional-functional syllabus, Krahnke does point out several weaknesses. The notional-functional syllabus could remain a simple series of isolated form-function pairings if not synthesized into meaningful discourse. A strength of the notional-functional syllabus, its ties to specific uses, could possibly be a limitation in that the instruction is less generalizable than structural content. Also, if the syllabus limits itself to short utterances or exchanges involving

---

[24]Ibid., 35.

[25]Helena Anderson Curtain and Carol Ann Pesola, Making the Match: Foreign Language Instruction in the Elementary School. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1988), 62.

[26]Krahnke, 35.

functions, there could be significant gaps in structure and students may be unable to handle longer, connected discourse. Krahnke feels another potential weakness "lies in the ease with which notional-functional syllabuses can become primarily a vehicle for teaching what are called "routines" or "patterns" in second language acquisition studies."[27]

One way to avoid some of the above problems is to employ a cyclical syllabus. While not necessarily a feature of the notional-functional syllabus, it is often found in conjunction with it, as with French in Action. A cyclical or spiraled syllabus differs from a linear syllabus in that material recurs again and again throughout the syllabus, each time in greater complexity. This allows for the language to be explored in all its nuances and for students to grasp its meaning and function(s) more fully the second or third time around. This concept differs greatly from the linear syllabus, in which material is "dealt with once, presumably mastered by the students, and never directly taken up again."[28] The notion of the cyclical syllabus is in harmony with new theories in first language acquisition, as in StephenKrashen's research. Krahnke elaborates: "Language regularities do not emerge fully and perfectly formed as a result of an instructional or other experience, but instead form gradually and with an increasing degree of refinement ... a cyclical syllabus ... resembles this process."[29]

Language Acquisition Theory

Language acquisition theory has been influenced greatly in the last decade by Krashen's work, which has in turn been frequently quoted and used by

---

[27]Ibid., 37.
[28]Ibid., 84.
[29]Ibid., 85.

those in the proficiency movement. A brief review of his hypotheses is useful in order to relate the previous discussion to the following discussion of Omaggio's proficiency hypotheses. One of those most important distinctions Krashen makes is between acquisition and learning. He defines acquisition as the subconcious process similiar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language, whereas learning is defined as conscious knowledge of the rules of grammar of a second language and their application in production. Many proficiency theorists believe that communicative (analytic) methods more closely approximate first language acquisition, as opposed to structural (synthetic) methods that use conscious learning of the rules of grammar. Another important hypothesis is his input hypothesis, in which he states that students acquire more language when they are exposed to comprehensible input a little beyond their current level (i + 1). This latter hypothesis supports the theory behind the notional-functional syllabus: learners will learn functions and meanings and learn the structure as well; speaking fluency will emerge naturally over time. The cyclical syllabus agrees with Krashen's theories as well, in that students' skills will expand and improve each time they are exposed to more input.

Omaggio's Proficiency Goals

Omaggio uses some of Krashen's research in her formulation of five working hypotheses. They relate to the way classroom instruction might best be organized when the students' long-range goal is superior proficiency in a second language, which is certainly the goal of all the texts under discussion.

Of special interest to my study are hypotheses one and two:

Hypothesis 1. Opportunities must be provided for students to practice using language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture.

Hypothesis 2. Opportunities should be provided for students to practice carrying out a range of functions (task universals) likely to be necessary in dealing with others in the target culture.[30]

In a structural syllabus, where emphasis is placed on linguistic form, it is very difficult to place exercises and activities in contexts likely to be found in the target culture. One way to do this is to group grammatical activities under a chapter theme or context, but another increasingly popular option is to present situational or communicative activities with the structural content. One of the weaknesses of this option relates to the problem of introducing grammar and lexical items out of sequence. Another difficulty is one inherent in situational syllabuses: that of the restrictiveness of any situational activity. It is next to impossible to anticipate every possible conversational twist and turn a given situation may take. Yalden elaborates on this point: "The absence of the functional component from the situational syllabus is one of the major limiting factors to its capacity to meet the claims that have been made for it, in terms of preparing learners for real life situations."[31]

---

[30]Omaggio, 35-6.
[31]Yalden, 38-9.

THEORY OF LANGUAGE

$\downarrow$

THEORY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

$\downarrow$

(NEEDS ANALYSIS -- LEARNER TYPE)

$\downarrow$

SYLLABUS

$\downarrow$

METHOD
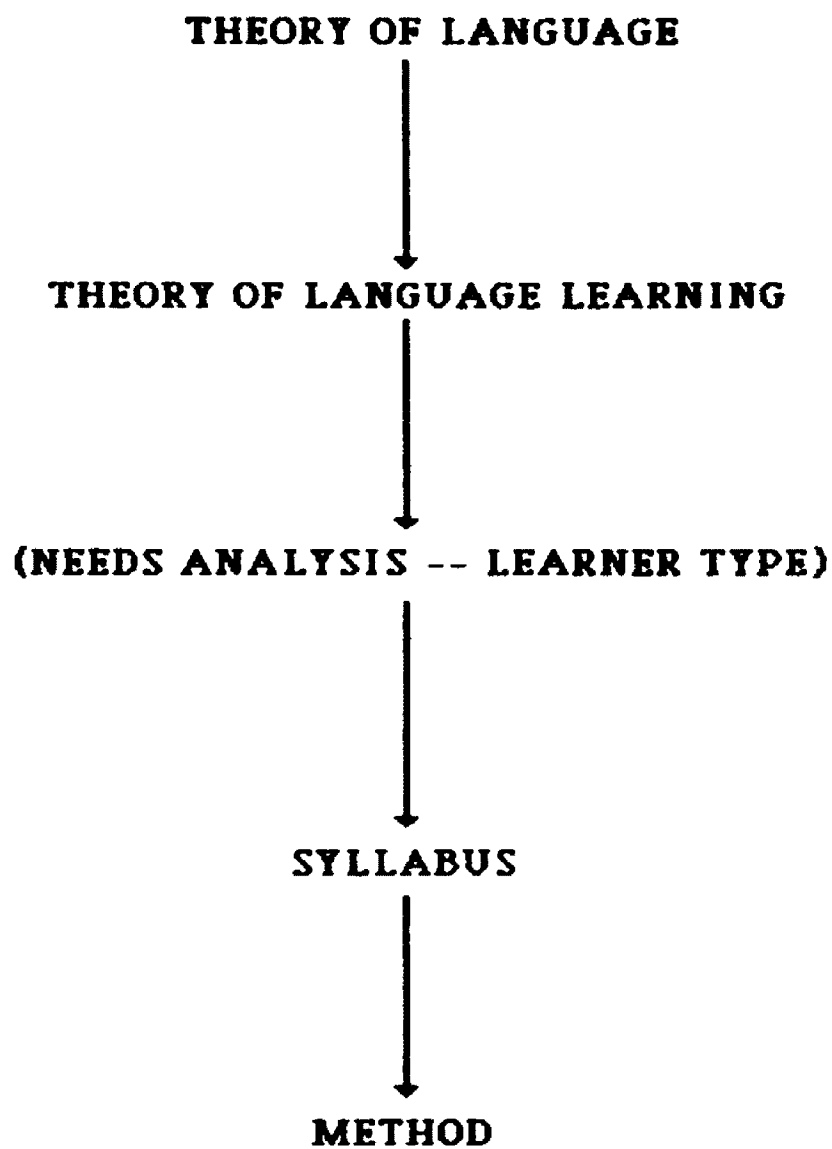
Figure 1. Theory of Language Learning.

Category 1: Semantico-grammatical categories

1. Time
2. Point of time
3. Duration
4. Time relations
5. Frequency
6. Sequence
7. Quantity
8. Divided and undivided reference
9. Numerals
10. Operations
11. Space
12. Dimensions
13. Location

14. Motion
15. Relational meaning
16. Sentential relations
   a. Agent
   b. Initiator
   c. Object
   d. Beneficiary
   e. Instrument
22. Predication and attribution
23. Deixis
24. Time (deitic)
25. Place
26. Person

Category 2: Categories of modal meaning

1. Modality
   a. Scale of certainty
      1. Impersonalized
      2. Personalized
   b. Scale of commitment
      1. Intention
      2. Obligation

Category 3: Categories of communicative function

1. Judgement and evaluation
   a. Valuation
   b. Verdiction
   c. Committal
   d. Release
   e. Approval
   f. Disapproval
2. Suasion
   a. Inducement
   b. Compulsion
   c. Prediction
   d. Tolerance
3. Argument
   a. Information
      1. Asserted
      2. Sought
      3. Denied

   b. Agreement
   c. Disagreement
   d. Concession
4. Rational enquiry and exposition
5. Personal emotions
   a. Positive
   b. Negative
6. Emotional relations
   a. Greetings
   b. Sympathy
   c. Gratitude
   d. Flattery
   e. Hostility

Figure 2 Wilkins' Notional and Functional Categories

Source: D. A. Wilkins, Notional Syllabuses: A Taxonomy and Its Relevance to Foreign Language Curriculum Development, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976)

CHAPTER III

GRAMMATICAL, FUNCTIONAL, AND CULTURAL CONTENT

This chapter examines the three texts with respect to grammatical, functional, and cultural content. After an overview of the approach and organization of each text, I will compare and contrast representative topics. Chosen because of linguistic or cultural interest, these topics are found in all three texts and are an important part of first-year language instruction.

Thème et Variations emphasizes oral and listening skills, a legacy of its modified audiolingual approach. At the same time, its authors offer special reading passages geared to the main theme and the activities in *Applications* build writing skills. The following are the main characteristics of this text, according to its authors:

1. Practice in meaningful contexts. The authors begin with manipulative drills but move rapidly to situationally oriented activities.

2. Learner-oriented explicit grammar presentation. The learners are addressed directly, in English. Grammar explanations are explicit and presented in small steps with abundant examples.

3. Dialogues to start application activities. The mini-dialogues in the *Conversations* section provide a point of departure for the main theme of the lesson. The slightly longer dialogues in the *Applications* section provides opportunities for practice in a natural theme-oriented context.

26

4. Theme and variations. A central theme is further developed in situational activities; most oral exercises deal with the central theme and this theme is further developed in *Situations* and *Expressions utiles*

5. Combined language skills. The four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are combined and thoroughly integrated.

6. Separate pronunciation lessons. The authors have separated pronunciation exercises from the remainder of the book for ease of location.

7. Instructor-oriented approach. The Annotated Instructor's Edition (AIE) offers notes and suggestions both in the margin and in a longer section tailored to each lesson.[1]

Ancillary materials for Thème et Variations include the *Cahier d'exercices* and computer-assisted instruction for the student and a test bank and overhead transparencies for the instructor. The tape program presents listening and speaking activities coordinated with both the text and the workbook. The authors of Thème et Variations do not provide any video accompaniment to their text.

Découverte et Création is divided into twenty-four lessons, each of which is divided into two major sections. The first section, *Découverte*, presents, explains, and practices the structure and vocabulary of basic French, according to its authors. The second section, *Création*, focuses on communicative activities, reading, and composition. Its goal, according to Jian and Hester, is for students to synthesize and put to personal use what they have learned in the *Découverte* section. *Découverte* consists of the *Présentation*, a series of brief conversations that "provide the examples

---

[1]M. Peter Hagiwara and Françoise de Rocher, Thème et Variations: An Introduction to French Language and Culture, Fourth Edition (Annotated Instructor's Edition), (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1989), 1-3.

from which students begin their inductive acquisition of the structure in question." *Explications* follows; recently learned vocabulary and a "wide variety of situations and locations are given along with each point." *Exercices oraux* follow; they provide "immediate practice of the structures and vocabulary just taught."[2] The Création section provides *Exercices de conversation*, a *Lecture*, *Compositions orales/écrites*, *Improvisations*, and *Echanges*. The intention of all of these activities is the synthesis of what students have learned in the *Découverte* section. The authors also intend for students to use personal experience and knowledge as a basis to complete these activities. Ancillary materials for this text include the *Cahier d'exercices*, audiocassettes (which coordinate with workbook activities), the *Télématin* Video program and its accompanying workbook, and Computerized Study Modules.

French in Action subordinates the study of grammatical topics to its notional-functional organization while the videocassette series replaces the functions of a traditional textbook. The videocassettes allow the presentation of natural language at conversational speed where culture is integral to the study of language.

In an article in the AATF National Bulletin, Pierre Capretz discusses at length the "referential approach." During the last twenty years the Capretz method has been tested and revised at Yale and various other institutions. Students using this method, have, in the view of the author, a much better preparation in listening comprehension and oral expression. Those students

---

[2]Gérard Jian and Ralph Hester, Découverte et Création: Les Bases du français moderne, Cinquième Edition (Instructor's Annotated Edition), (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), IAE 3.

who have visited France reported no major difficulty in communicating with native speakers. Capretz goes on to say:

> L'approche référentielle, qui permettait d'obtenir ces résultats, repose sur la constatation très simple que le langage, avant d'être fossilisé sur une page imprimée, est quelque chose de vivant, qui émane de personnes vivantes placées dans les situations concrètes précises, et qu'il faut apporter aux étudiants ces situations vivantes si on veut que le langage qui leur correspond ait un sens.[3]

The video programs are the basis of the "referential approach" and provide unique opportunities in language learning. Each of the 52 half-hour episodes is divided into two parts: the first, a 5-to-10 minute dramatic segment, is a continuing "soap-opera," and the second consists of a pedagogical section. The latter is a series of step-by-step explanations that illustrate and clarify elements of the dramatic segment and serves as the main instrument of language teaching in French in Action. Words, expressions, and situations in the story provide a point of departure for illustrations of items of vocabulary and grammar, and of points of culture. Oral exercises in the accompanying workbook and audiocassettes reinforce the story line and written exercises offer practice with elements of the functional and grammatical content of each lesson. Other course materials include the study guide (for independent study) and the instructor's guide. French in Action's creators do not provide computer-assisted instruction.

---

[3]Pierre J. Capretz, "French in Action: The Capretz Method," American Association of Teachers of French National Bulletin 13 (September 1987): 15.

Grammatical Structure #1: Subjunctive Mood

As the subjunctive mood is an important and complex grammatical topic found in all first year French texts, I chose this topic as representative of one that is usually presented gradually over several chapters.

Subjunctive Mood: Thème et Variations

Thème et Variations presents the subjunctive in Lessons 19 and 20. The theme of Lesson 19 is "A la gare" and among the Lesson Objectives, the Communication Skills include:

1. Expressing opinions for desirability *(one must, it is better not to ...)*
2. Expressing requirements *(it takes, one needs ...)*
3. Expressing opinions *(it is important/time/good/ that you do ...)*
4. Expressing volition about other people *(I want him to do ...)* [4]

The authors first present an extensive explanation of the subjunctive in English followed by sets of substitution exercises for practice. In general, the authors attempt to place these exercises in the context of the general theme of the chapter. The first section, 19.2, explains the concept, gives the present subjunctive for regular verbs and introduces the impersonal expressions that require the subjunctive. The second section, 19.3, gives the present subjunctive for irregular verbs, while 19.4 explains the use of subjunctive after expressions of volition. After each of these sections, the substitution exercises are accompanied by supplementary audio exercises. Additionally, the *Cahier d'exercices* provides an *Activité Orale* and an *Activité Écrite* for each of the *Structures* subsections.

---

[4]Hagiwara and de Rocher, 407.

At the end of the *Structures* section, the *Applications* section takes up the structures previously presented, now in contextualized activities whose context is train travel. Several *Situations* (A) (dialogues) are followed by *Expressions utiles* (B) (vocabulary related to the situations and the upcoming *Lecture*) and *Pratique* (C) which poses questions related to the previous sections. The *Applications* section continues with *Horaire* (D), an activity based on a train schedule, and *Questions* (E) and *Renseignements et opinions* (F), which both deal with the theme of train travel. The *Applications* section and the lesson finish with the *Lecture* (G) entitled "*Les transports*." Three sets of reading comprehension questions test understanding of the above reading passage.

The authors continue the presentation of the subjunctive in Lesson 20 entitled "*Au restaurant*." The communication skill objectives include:

1. Expressing one's opinions and reactions about other people and events *(I'm glad, I'm sorry, I don't think)*
2. Expressing ideas in complex sentence patterns (using conjunctions rather than prepositions)[5]

The general cultural theme of this chapter concerns menu items, restaurants and dining at home. Lesson 20 begins with the section *Conversations*, which deals with both the main theme of the lesson and some of the structures presented therein. The subjunctive is presented as above, in several short descriptive explanatory sections. They consist of: 20.2 (the subjunctive after expressions of emotion), 20.3 (the subjunctive after negation and expressions of doubt), and 20.4 (the subjunctive after certain conjunctions). Discrete-point or substitution exercises follow each *Structure* section. The *Applications* section presents *Situations, Expressions utiles* (in this case, a menu), *Pratique, Mini-composition, Questions,*

---

[5] Ibid., 429.

Renseignements et opinions, and *Lecture ("Les Français et la cuisine")*.

Thème et Variations does not offer any review of the subjunctive mood, but it is found, when appropriate, in the following lessons' *Conversations* and *Lectures*.

Subjunctive Mood: Découverte et Création

Découverte et Création also presents the subjunctive mood over two lessons, following the inductive presentation representative of the direct method. In Lesson 21, the *Découverte* section of the chapter begins with a *Présentation*, which features *il faut + subjonctif* in various sample sentences that are not contextualized. The *Présentation* is followed by *Explications*, wherein the subjunctive is explained in French and conjugation for regular verbs and a group of irregular verbs is given. *Explications* is followed by *Exercices Oraux*, a group of five sets of exercises intended to drill and practice the subjunctive forms just presented. Each set of exercises relates to a different subject, for example: (A) *Pour apprendre une langue*, (C) *Activités du week-end*, or (E) *Mal à la gorge*.

After the presentation of the grammatical aspects of the lesson, the authors incorporate the structures presented in the *Découverte* section into *Exercices de conversation*, which allow students the opportunity to have a structured conversation with a partner. As with the *Exercices oraux*, these conversations do not follow a general theme but they incorporate all of the grammatical structures found in the preceding lesson. The *Lecture* follows; since the individual lessons lack a general theme, the topic of the *Lecture* is a random one: in this case, *"L'Écologie et Nous."* Structures presented in the preceding lesson are not especially highlighted in the reading comprehension

questions, although students are encouraged to *"Employez beaucoup de subjonctifs!"* in the activity that follows, *Compositions orales/écrites*. The lesson ends with *Improvisations*, where students are encouraged to debate several questions based loosely on the *Lecture* topic, a list of vocabulary, and *Echanges*, a situationally based dialogue in which a student asks for college enrollment information.

Lesson 20 continues the presentation of the subjunctive mood in the *Découverte* section with a *Présentation* on *"Autres emplois du subjonctif."* The *Explications* section follows with explanations on the use of the subjunctive in subordinate clauses after expressions of obligation, opinion, volition, preference, emotion, possibility, impossibility, and doubt as well as subjunctive use in negative or interrogative sentences. Seven sets of oral exercises follow; subjects include final exams, cats, and a vacation in Dijon. A second *Présentation* shows the use of the subjunctive mood after certain conjunctions and a corresponding group of oral exercises drills these forms, while the third *Présentation* of the lesson introduces the past tense of the subjunctive. As with the previous lesson, the *Création* section uses open-ended conversational activities to give students practice in the use of the subjunctive. The *Lecture* topic, *"Votre Horoscope par Sophie Sachetout,"* serves as the focus for *Questions sur la lecture* and for one of the three composition choices. *Improvisations*, a list of *Vocabulaire* and *Echanges* end Lesson 22. The situationally based *Echanges* features an exchange between an American student opening a bank account and a bank clerk. Examples of the subjunctive mood are found in the remainder of the text, but the authors do not review or extend use of it.

Subjunctive Mood: French in Action

In keeping with the different syllabus that French in Action follows, it introduces the subjunctive mood in a much different manner than do the other two texts. Since natural, non-filtered language is found from the beginning of French in Action, students will have been exposed at several points to the subjunctive in previous lessons. Some examples include,

"Pourtant, elle n'a pas l'accent portugais, que je sache." (Lesson 23) and *"Il est extraordinaire, mais il faut absolument que je rentre."* (Lesson 24)

The introduction of the subjunctive formally begins in lesson 36. The profile of the lesson found in the instructor's guide lists the notional-functional content, which includes requesting and looking up information, informing, giving and following directions, clarifying and elaborating, and issuing warnings. With this focus, the learner would expect to see grammatical forms in this lesson that would correspond to these notional-functional categories. Subjunctive forms are found throughout the lesson in both in the teleplay section of the video and in oral and written exercises in the workbook. As with other new topics, oral exercises follow a brief written *Observation* in the workbook, then written exercises reinforce the oral practice. After a presentation of the regular forms of the subjunctive, five different *Activations orales* whose themes follow the general context of the lesson reinforce the new material. Only one oral-written exercise appears in lesson 36 in the form of an *Exercice-test*.

Lesson 37 continues the presentation of the present subjunctive and introduces the past subjunctive. As before, both of these structures are found in the teleplay and are reinforced through workbook exercises. The present tense of several irregular verbs is presented in 37.23: *Observation:*

Subjonctifs irréguliers; aller, pouvoir, savoir, avoir, être. Three oral exercises follow, then 37.27: *Observation: Subjonctif passé* is reinforced by two oral exercises. An *Exercice-test* which gives practice in the irregular forms just presented completes Lesson 37.

The presentation of the subjunctive continues through the fiftieth lesson of French in Action. The cyclical presentation of grammatical structures and the notions and functions which require those structures is one of the unique qualities of French in Action. This cyclical presentatation can be seen in Figure 3, found pages 46 - 50. Careful examination of this three-way comparative chart referenced to French in Action shows both the gradual introduction of the subjunctive and the review of it. This contrasts with the comparatively brief presentation of the other two texts under study. The authors of French in Action introduce the subjunctive mood gradually over fourteen chapters, in more detail each time. By Lesson 39, *Révision* and *Extension* of the subjunctive begins and it is a regular feature starting in Lesson 45. *Révision* and *Extension* is a unique quality of French in Action and allows language material to be dealt with repeatedly and in greater complexity each time.

Grammatical Structure #2: The Future Tense of the Indicative

The future tense of the indicative is presented next to show the contrast of a less complex grammatical subject usually found in a single chapter's presentation.

Future Tense: Thème et Variations

Thème et Variations introduces the future tense in Lesson 15, which has the theme of *Les soirées.* Communication skill objectives for this lesson include "Expressing future events and activities." Section 15.2 introduces the future tense for regular verbs and four oral activities follow. Section 15.4 introduces future tense for irregular verbs and its use with *si* and *quand* clauses. The five substitution activities that follow are discrete-point and not in the context of the chapter. In the *Applications* section, both the dialogue and the *Expressions utiles* follow the general theme of the chapter and the *Mini-composition* is to be done in the future tense. The *Lecture* (in the future) describes an upcoming *soirée*. As with the subjunctive mood, Thème et Variations does not review the future tense and it is found only incidentally in the following lessons.

Future Tense: Découverte et Création

Découverte et Création introduces the future tense in Lesson 18. The authors divide the grammatical presentation in much the same way as the authors of Thème et Variations have, in two different presentations. The first, *Le futur*, presents the concept of the future and the formation of it for regular and irregular verbs; it is followed by four sets of substitution activities. The second *Présentation*, *"Précisions sur l'emploi du futur,"* introduces the use of the future tense after *quand, lorsque, aussitôt que, dès que,* and also with *si* Three substitution activities follow: *E. Projets de dîner, F. Projets de voyage,* and *G. Avenir.* Activities which use the future tense in the *Création* section include one predicting the weather and another

which gives practice with *si, quand, lorsque, aussitôt que,* and *dès que.* The *Lecture, "Dans un Café,"* and the questions following it use the future tense as do the *Compositions orales/écrites* and *Improvisions* sections. The latter section includes an activity where one student acts as fortuneteller and the other as her client. As with Thème et Variations, no reentry or review of the future tense is found in Découverte et Création.

Future Tense: French in Action

French in Action does not introduce the future tense grammatically until Lesson 23 in the workbook, although it is used in the teleplay for Lesson 22. As with the subjunctive mood, the preceding lessons do not avoid the future tense, but the authors do not draw attention to it when it becomes necessary to use this tense in the teleplay or in the pedagogical section. The workbook presents the future as contrasted with the present and the immediate future, using a timeline to put the tenses in perspective. (*Observation* 23.19) *Observation* 23.20 extracts several uses of the future from the teleplay to draw attention to the presence of the "r" in all the verbs. *Observations* 23.21 and 23.22 present the regular future formations of *-ir, -er,* and *-re* verbs. The authors then present oral practice with one exercise to discriminate between the present and the future tenses and two others where the immediate future is to be replaced by the future. (*Activations* 23.23 - 23.25)

The authors of French in Action continue their presentation of the future tense in lesson 24, where they begin with a short *Observation* of its use to review what was presented in the previous lesson. They next present the irregular stems of verbs in the future and follow this *Observation* with two

Activations orales (24.17 - 24.18). An *Exercice-test* (24.28) gives students practice in both the regular and irregular forms of the future tense. The future tense disappears at this point (until Lesson 46) from workbook exercises, but it continues to be used in the teleplay and pedagogical sections of the video as well as the print materials. The natural language found in **French in Action** allows re-entry and review of the future tense as well as activities which contrast it with similiar linguistic functions.

French in Action re-introduces the future tense in Lesson 46 of the workbook, wherein *si* sentences and *quand* sentences are contrasted and then reinforced in two *Activations orales* (46.17 - 46.18). The last presentation of the future tense points out the difference between a firm decision (future) and an intention (conditional) and gives practice in this concept. The lesson finishes with an *Exercice-test*.

The comparative analysis of the three texts under study also includes notional-functional content, which is generally presented in a different manner from a grammatical topic.

Notional-Functional Content: Invitations

Both **Thème et Variations** and **French in Action** are indexed by topics of notional-functional content; in the case of the former, communication skills are an important aspect of the learning objectives of the text, while in the latter, notional-functional content is the organizing and sequencing principle of the method. **Thème et Variations** has, in the form of short dialogues, many situational conversations which relate to the theme of a given chapter. These dialogues either begin a chapter *(Conversations)* or serve as practice activities to reinforce structures previously learned *(Applications)*.

Découverte et Création does not have real functional content, although it does have situational and conversational activities. These situational activities are found at the end of each lesson and are entitled *Echanges*.

Each lesson in French in Action's instructor's guide begins with a Profile of the lesson and a list of the notional-functional content found therein. This content serves as the organizing principle of chapter activities and exercises, and the grammatical structures presented in each lesson relate to the notional-functional content of that lesson. The authors have designed French in Action so that the context for both the notional-functional content and the exercises is the unfolding story of Robert, an American college student in Paris and his adventures and friendship with Mireille, a young French woman. The functional aspect that I have chosen to compare in the three texts is inviting, and accepting/declining invitations.

Invitations: Thème et Variations

The first invitation is found in Lesson 4; it is for a tennis date and employs grammatical structures found in this lesson (the verb *faire* and the immediate future). The authors next present invitations in Lesson 15 (*Les soirées*); all three conversations that begin the chapter concern invitations accepted or refused. Most of the situational activities related to invitations in Thème et Variations are found in Lesson 20 (*Au restaurant*). The Communication Skills objectives of this lesson include inviting people to do something together and accepting/declining invitations. A casual invitation for lunch begins the lesson and many activities which drill the subjunctive also take the form of the polite requests and replies found in invitations. An extensive selection of invitations end Lesson 20. The choices include a casual

invitation for a drink, a slightly more formal invitation to a restaurant lunch and a Saturday dinner, a concert and theatre invitation and another to take a stroll. Each short dialogue includes replies for both accepting and declining. When presenting the dialogues, the authors of Thème et Variations also give definitions for new vocabulary in the margin and if necessary, they also furnish cultural or informational footnotes at the bottom of the page.

Invitations: Découverte et Création

While Découverte et Création does not offer functional aspects of language as a feature of its grammatical presentations, some of the *Création* activities offer conversational and situational opportunities to practice this language function. Lesson 4 features a short conversation (an *Echanges*) which is casual invitation to the movies. An activity in Lesson 8 asks students to improvise a date with two persons of very different personalities, while the *Improvisation* of Lesson 11 asks two students to role-play an invitation and dinner date with a foreign student. The *Exercices de conversation* found in each chapter also touch upon this language function from time to time while offering practice in the grammatical content of the given lesson.

Invitations: French in Action

The first time that the function of extending and accepting invitations is found is in Lesson 10, where Jean-Denis asks Mireille and her cousins if they would like to go sailing. Lesson 14 takes place soon after the first meeting of the central characters, Robert and Mireille. Robert then asks Mireille to

accompany her to her home. In Lesson 15, she asks Robert to take a stroll with her in the Luxemburg gardens, and in Lesson 16, he asks to accompany Mireille on a trip to Chartres. In Lesson 18, after spending some time in conversation with Mireille on a park bench, Robert invites her (and she accepts) to have something to drink at a café. In the same lesson, Robert establishes a time with Marie-Laure, Mireille's younger sister, to help her with her English lessons. In the above examples, French in Action provides a wide range of both situations and degrees of politeness, from an arrangement for a casual meeting to a more formal first date.

Issuing, accepting and denying invitations are found again in Lesson 21, where Robert asks Mireille to go out to lunch, and in Lesson 22 where Robert is invited to dinner at the Courtois. In Lesson 23, he suggests that Mireille accompany him to the Courtois, as they are her godparents. In Lesson 27, he invites himself along on Mireille's Chartres trip, and she in turn invites him to dinner at her parents' home. In Lesson 29, he asks about her plans for the afternoon and the next day, but she has previous engagements. In Lesson 36, they make plans for a movie date the next day. After having won the lottery together, Robert then asks Mireille to go on a trip around France with him on their winnings. The projected voyage provides many other opportunities for invitations, from inviting others along on the trip to inviting friends for lunch to announce the lottery win.

As can be seen from an examination of the above analysis of functional content, a text following a notional-functional syllabus offers another way to present and use language in context. Another important aspect of language is its cultural aspects, which will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Cultural Content: Food

In all three texts, references to culture include both "capital C" (Olympian) culture and "small c" (hearthstone) culture. Olympian culture includes the "great" art, literature, music, as well as the history and geography of a given country. Hearthstone culture includes "beliefs, behavior, and values."[6] Given the pervasive and detailed presentation of the cultural aspects of language in all three texts under discussion, Figure 4 (pages 51 - 55) presents a three-way contrast using the cultural content index of Thème et Variations as a reference point.

Cultural information is presented in several ways in Thème et Variations: in *Conversations*, where dialogues show typical conversational encounters, and in *Différences*, a reading selection in English which highlights the contrasts between French and American culture. Each lesson also provides practice with *Applications*, where situational dialogues further explore French customs, and with *Expressions utiles* , which present vocabulary for the compositions and conversations. In addition, photographs and drawings of advertisements and realia give additional cultural information to the student.

Cultural information can be found in Découverte et Création in the situational dialogues, *Echanges*, and in the *Lecture* found at the end of each lesson. In addition, photographs and drawings of advertisements highlight points of culture throughout the text.

French in Action presents culture throughout its materials: First, and primarily through the video; second, in drawings and photographs in the

---

[6] Alice Omaggio, Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction, (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1986), 363.

text; and third, in the form of the *Document* found at the end of every chapter. The *Document* serves to expand and provide more detail on items of interest in each lesson. The video format allows a constant flood of cultural images, from the names and pictures of the kings of France to daily sociolinguistic behaviors such as shaking hands and the *bisou*.

An important aspect of any culture is its food: the names of foods and meals, the role of food in society, and meals in cafés and restaurants. This aspect of culture is especially important in France, which is known worldwide for its cuisine, cheeses and wines.

Food: Thème et Variations

Thème et Variations presents the culture of food principally in three chapters: Lesson 5 *(Allons au café!)*, Lesson 6 *(A table et bon appétit!)*, and Lesson 20 *(Au restaurant!)* The theme-oriented presentations of these chapters expose the student to food related realia in the form of menus and advertisements for cafés and restaurants. In the Applications section of each of these chapters, dialogues offer practice with the accompanying vocabulary. In Lesson 20, the authors also present a *Lecture* that contrasts the changing eating styles of an older, traditional woman, a health-conscious man, and a time-conscious young woman.

Food: Découverte et Création

Découverte et Création presents several *Echanges* related to meals, cafés, or restaurants. In Lesson 9, the authors present an exchange between a client and a waiter in café, in Lesson 10, the same exchange in a restaurant,

while in Lesson 11, *Échanges* presents two conversations, one at the university cafeteria and one in a home. Several *Lectures* are devoted to the culture of food: they are found in Lessons 9 and 15. The first, entitled *Bon Appétit*, describes meals and mealtimes in a "typical" French family. The second, *Deux générations, deux systèmes*, describes the different food shopping styles of an older woman as contrasted with her son and daughter-in-law.

Food: French in Action

The authors of <u>French in Action</u> consider food to be a very important part of French culture, if the frequent occurrence of food and wine images in their materials is any indication. The creators of <u>French in Action</u> realize that food is a subject that students enjoy talking about, and video images of food from advertisements to actual recipes are found from the beginning of the text.

French cafés also play a strong role in the plot and action of <u>French in Action</u>: the central characters use cafés for meetings, places to eat and drink, or to just socialize. Robert and Mireille spend three lessons (19, 20, and 21) at the Closerie des Lilas, a well-known and chic café in Paris. Robert eats a café lunch in Lesson 22, while in Lesson 28, he and Mireille have lunch at a bistro. Formal and informal meals at restaurants are also important in this text: Robert has a restaurant dinner (25) and a formal Sunday lunch (26) as well as breakfast on a tray in his hotel room (25). Formal dinners with different wines for every course are featured in Lesson 24 and Lessons 33 through 36. In each of these lessons, the authors supplement material in the text with video images and commentary on wine and food and the roles they play in society. <u>French in Action</u> also presents regional food specialities as

part of the section on geography in Lessons 49 and 50. The importance of wine in French culture is also presented in Lessons 24 and 26.

Conclusion

French in Action has more entries concerning the subjunctive mood, with over seventy different presentations or activities found throughout fourteen chapters. Thème et Variations has twelve entries in two chapters, and Découverte et Création has nine entries in two chapters. The future tense appears fifteen times in the first text, twelve in the second and fourteen in the third.

French in Action also has more coverage for the notional-functional topic, invitations, with more than twelve entries. Thème et Variations has eleven presentations and Découverte et Création has three dialogues related to this topic.

The cultural topic, food, is covered extensively in more than sixteen chapters in French in Action, and is the central theme of three chapters in Thème et Variations. Découverte et Création has some mention of food in three chapters.

Figure 3: The Subjunctive Mood as Presented in Three First Year French Texts

French in Action		Thème et Variations	Découverte et Création
Lesson	Topic		
36.17	Observation: Introduction au subjonctif	19.2 - Subjonctif après des expressions impersonelles	21.1 - Le subjonctif
36.18	Observation: Formation du subjonctif; formes régulières	19.2	21.1
36.19 - 36.23	Activation Orale: Formation du subjonctif; formes régulières	19.2 - Exercices oraux A, B, C	21 - Exercices oraux A, B, C, D, E
36.29	Exercice-test: Formes régulières du subjonctif		
37.23	Observation: Subjonctifs irréguliers; aller, pouvoir, savoir, avoir, être	19.3 - Verbes irréguliers	21.1
37.24 - 37.26	Activation Orale: Subjonctifs irréguliers	19.3 - Exercices oraux A, B, C	21 - Exercices oraux A, B, C
37.27	Observation: Subjonctif passé	19.3	22.3 - Passé du subjonctif
37.28 - 37.29	Activation Orale: Subjonctif passé		22 - Exercices oraux L, M
37.35	Exercice-test: Subjonctifs irréguliers		
38.22	Observation: Subjonctif irrégulier; faire	19.3	21.1
38.23 - 38.24	Activation Orale: Subjonctifs irréguliers		
38.25	Activation Ecrite: Subjonctifs irréguliers		
38.33	Exercice-test: Subjonctif du verbe faire		

46

French in Action	Thème et Variations	Découverte et Création
39.9 — Activation Écrite: Formes du subjonctif		
39.10 — Observation: Nécessité, obligation	19.2 - Subjonctif après des expressions impersonnelles	22.1 - Autres emplois du subjonctif
39.11 — Activation Orale: Nécessité, obligation		
39.12 — Observation: Subjonctifs irréguliers; aller, falloir, valoir, vouloir (révision et extension)*	19.3	21.1
39.13 — Activation Orale: Subjonctifs irréguliers; aller, falloir, valoir, vouloir		
39.14 — Observation: Réserve; On ne peut pas dire que		
39.15 — Activation Orale: Réserve; On ne peut pas dire que		
39.16 — Observation: Doute	20.3 - Subjonctif après les expressions de doute et d'incertitude / 20.3 - Exercices oraux A, B, C, D	22.1
39.17 — Activation Orale: Doute		
39.26 — Exercice-test: Subjonctifs irréguliers; aller, falloir, valoir, vouloir		
41.17 — Observation: Préférence et subjonctif	19.4 - Subjonctif après les expressions de volonté / 19.4 - Exercices oraux A, B, C	22.1
41.18 — Activation orale et écrite: Préférence et subjonctif		

French in Action	Thème et Variations	Découverte et Création
41.19 Observation: Condition et subjonctif		
41.20 - 41.21 Activation orale: Condition et subjonctif		
41.29 Exercice-test: Préférence, condition		
42.22 Observation: Conditions positive et négative; à moins que, pourvu que	20.4 - Subjonctif après certains conjonctions	22.2 - Les conjonctions de subordination
42.23 Observation: Subjonctif après pourvu que et à moins que	20.4	22.2
42.24 Activation orale: Condition positive; pourvu que	20.4 - Exercices oraux A, B, C	22.2 - Exercices oraux H, I, J, K
42.25 Activation orale: Condition négative; à moins que		
42.26 Observation: Restriction; bien que	20.4	22.2
42.27 Activation orale: Restriction; bien que		
42.35 Exercice-test: Subjonctif après bien que, à moins que, et pourvu que		
43.19 Observation: Superlatif et subjonctif		
43.20 Activation orale: Superlatif et subjonctif		

French in Action	Thème et Variations	Découverte et Création
43.30	Exercice-test: Superlatifs et subjonctifs	
44.14	Observation: Subjonctif indiquant le but	
44.15	Activation orale: Subjonctif indiquant le but	
44.16	Observation: Subjonctif et négation implicite	
44.17 – 44.18	Activation orale: Subjonctif et négation implicite	
44.29	Exercice-test: Subjonctif indiquant le but	
44.30	Exercice-test: Subjonctif et négation implicite	
45.20	Observation: Spécification; emploi du subjonctif dans la proposition relative	
45.21	Activation orale: Spécification; emploi du subjonctif dans la proposition relative	
45.22	Activation écrite: Spécification; emploi du subjonctif dans la proposition relative	
45.29	Exercice-test: Propositions relatives au subjonctif	
46.29	Observation: Nécessité; avoir besoin de + infinitif, il faut + subjonctif (révision)	19.2	21.1

French in Action	Thème et Variations	Découverte et Création
46.30	*Activation orale: Nécessité;* *besoin de + infinitif, il* *faut + subjonctif*		
47.21	*Observation: Mise en doute;* *subjonctif (révision)**	20.3 - *Subjonctif après* *la négation*	
47.22	*Activation orale: Mise en doute*	20.3 - *Exercices oraux*	
47.23	*Activation orale: Mise en doute,* *subjonctif, tout*	*A, B, C, D*	
47.24	*Observation: Nécessité; il faut +* *subjonctif (révision)**	19.2	21.1
47.25	*Activation orale: Nécessité; il* *faut + subjonctif (révision)**		
47.32	*Exercice-test: Mise en doute,* *nécessité*		
48.19	*Observation: Demandes;* *subjonctif (révision)**	19.4	22.1
48.20	*Activation orale: Demandes;* *subjonctif*		
49.21	*Observation: Subjonctif* *(révision et extension)**		
49.22	*Activation orale: Subjonctif*		
49.23	*Activation écrite: Subjonctif*		
50.23	*Observation: Subjonctif* *(révision et extension)**		
50.24	*Activation écrite: Subjonctif*		

* indicates review and/or extension presentation or activity

Figure 4: Cultural Topics as Presented in Three First Year French Texts

Thème et Variations	French in Action	Découverte et Création
Première Leçon		
1. Greeting and leave-taking	2 - Socializing - expressions for greeting and taking leave of others; expressing thanks, surprise. 4 - meeting people 32 - introducing & meeting people (Hubert)	1 - introducing and meeting people (Echanges) (E)
2. Classroom objects and classmates	2, 3 - classroom situations	1 - classroom vocabulary
Deuxième Leçon		
1. Daily activities and schedules		
2. The French university system	12 - La Sorbonne. 13 - French university system. 19 - High school, baccalauréat 35 - Student lodgings in Paris	4 - university life (Lecture) (L) 21 - enrolling at the university
Troisième Leçon		
1. Expression of calendar dates	11 - Seasons and months.	2 - The calendar, Bastille Day (L)
2. Holidays and school vacations	9, 10 - Vacation activities. 45 - fêtes 42 - camping. 46 - summer camp	6 - vacation projects (L), 7 - Paris vacation (L)
Quatrième Leçon		
1. Climate and weather	9, 10 - Weather. 11 - Expressions. 12 - Weather map	8 - Weather expressions seasons
2. Sports activities and events	6, 7 - Sports, leisure activities 9, 10 - Games and sports	12- sports conversation (E)
Cinquième Leçon		
1. Food and drinks in cafés	19, 20, 21 - Closerie des Lilas 22 - telephone jetons, café lunch 28 - lunch at a Café de la Gare.	9 - at a café (E)
2. The role of cafés in French society		

Thème et Variations	French in Action	Découverte et Création
Sixième Leçon		
1. Names of foods and meals	22 - names and times of meals service compris. 24 - Formal dinner (home), French cheese	11 - Au restau-U, à la maison (E) 9 - Bon Appétit (L)
2. Meals in homes and restaurants	25 - breakfast (hotel), dinner (bistro) 26 - Formal Sunday restaurant lunch	10 - Au restaurant (E)
Septième Leçon		
1. Shopping in various stores	15 - tabac 26 - pâtisserie	15 - Au commerçant (E) Shopping styles (L)
2. Specialty stores	43 - department stores	16 - Clothing purchase (E)
Huitième Leçon		
1. Kinship terms	5 - Describing families, age 6 - Describing physical, personal traits 8 - Describing family relationships recounting personal history	5 - Family vocabulary Chez les Fournier (L)
2. Family relations		
Neuvième Leçon		
1. City layout, buildings, and monuments	13 - La Sorbonne (document) 15 - Tour of Paris (document) 23 - Walking tour of Paris (document)	
2. French Canada		19 - Québec (L)
3. The French in the early history of North America		20 - Le Carnaval de Québec (L)
Dixième Leçon		
1. Houses and rooms	32 - apartments, apartment buildings la concierge. 33 - 35 - regional houses 34 - résidence secondaire	5 - Chez les Fournier (L) 17 - renting an apartment (E) 4 - rooms, houses
2. French heritage in Louisiana		

52

Thème et Variations	French in Action	Découverte et Création
Onzième Leçon		
1. Clothes and accessories	11, 13 - names of clothes 37 - descriptions 40 - headgear 44 - buying shoes 45 - buying clothes	2 - clothing vocabulary 16 - Clothing purchase (E)
2. The metric system		
Douzième Leçon		
1. Names of continents, countries, and cities	4 - nationalities	3 - nationalities
2. French-speaking countries of the world	2 - le monde francophone. 51 - Martinique and Guadeloupe	13 - La langue française en Afrique (L)
Treizième Leçon		
1. Routine activities with regard to parts of the body	6, 7 - describing physical traits, personality 32 - review - parts of the body	8 - parts of the body pharmacy visit (E)
2. Personal hygiene and health	12 - health. 25 - grooming. 30 - thermal spas and health	17 - grooming 19 - chez le coiffeur (E)
Quatorzième Leçon		
1. Rooms, furniture, and fixtures	32 - rooms, furniture, floor plans (document). 33 - household appliances 34 - owning, renting, restoring, repairing	5 - Chez les Fournier (L)
2. Hotels and hotel accommodations	25 - hotel room, breakfast. 36 - minuiterie	7 - renting a hotel room (E)
Quinzième Leçon		
1. Social get-togethers	24 - dinner (Courtois) 32 - 35 - dinner (Belleau). 45 - fêtes	
2. Christmas and New Year's festivities		

Thème et Variations	French in Action	Découverte et Création
Seizième Leçon		
1. Visits to monuments	4 - Latin Quarter (document)	7 - En vacances à Paris (L)
	13 - La Sorbonne	
	14 - Jardin du Luxembourg	
	15 - Tour of Paris, L. Quarter (document)	
2. Well-known sites in Paris	23 - Walking tour of Paris (document)	
	29 - Boulevard St. Germain (document)	
	38 - Paris landmarks. 44 - Place Vendôme	
	49 - Catacombs	
Dix-septième Leçon		
1. Urban transportation		
2. Public transportation in Paris	23 - Métro. 27 - carnet de billets, métro light board	14 - Métro (L) (E)
Dix-huitième Leçon		
1. Various kinds of museums and works of art		3 - entry to Museum (E)
2. Well-known museums in Paris	23 - Louvre, Georges Pomipidou visits	3 - La Pyrimide du Louvre (L)
Dix-neuvième Leçon		
1. Means of travel, especially by rail	27- traveling by train, composter, à la gare, grandes lignes, banlieues, tickets. 29 - TGV, train layout, France/U. S. transportation contrasts	6 - Buying a ticket (E)
2. Basic means of transportation in France	2- going through customs, getting from the airport to Paris. 27 - means of transportation, traveling by subway & train. 29- Cars. 30 - Renting a car, French drivers, driving in Paris 31 - En panne - parts of a car	

54

Thème et Variations	French in Action	Découverte et Création
Vingtième Leçon		
1. Menu items	24 - Formal dinner. 25 - dinner - bistro 26 - Formal restaurant lunch 49, 50 - regional specialities	
2. Restaurants and home cooking	24 - Dinner - Courtois 33 - 36 - Dinner - Belleau	9 - Bon Appétit (L)
Vingt et unième Leçon		
1. Postal service	15 - Buying stamps (tabac)	17 - Au bureau de poste (E)
2. Telephone	22 - Telephones (document), telephone booths & cards. 27 - telephone communication. 36 - Minitel	
Vingt-deuxième Leçon		
1. Markets and department stores	25 - Street markets. 43 - department stores	
2. Banking transactions	44, 45 - investing money	22 - opening a bank account (E)
Vingt-troisième Leçon		
1. Television programs	37 - advertisements	
2. Movies and other forms of entertainment	29 - nightclubs. 36 - Pariscope, entertainment in Paris. 37 - cinéma, pourboire 38 - film. 39, 40 - theatre, music halls, film	
Vingt-quatrième Leçon		
1. Different kinds of work	17, 18 - occupations	10 - job interview (L)
2. Job interviews		
Vingt-cinquième Leçon		
1. Printed media: newspapers and magazines	36 - Pariscope, l'officiel des spectacles	

CHAPTER IV

THE TEACHING SYLLABUS, PROFICIENCY GOALS, AND TEXTBOOK FIT

In this chapter, I will consider how well the texts with their respective syllabuses present the grammatical, functional, and cultural topics examined in Chapter 3, and whether or not they meet Omaggio's proficiency goals. A discussion of an informal comparative study done at the University of Montana will corroborate some of the statements made.

The Teaching Syllabus and Textbook Fit

A grammatical syllabus assigns first priority to the teaching of grammatical structures and their use, even though the two texts using it do differ in the order and method of presentation of these structures. In Thème et Variations, lengthy explanations in English are reinforced by oral and written exercises, while Découverte et Création presents less comprehensive explanations, but in the target language. In the presentation of the subjunctive mood (Figure 3 on pages 46 - 50), it can be observed that while grammar receives primary emphasis in these two texts, its presentation is of brief and intense duration as compared to French in Action's presentation. While it may be argued that French in Action assigns a higher priority to the teaching of functional aspects of language (compared to its grammatical aspects), it nevertheless presents a much more extensive view of the

56

subjunctive mood. By means of natural language in context and the cyclical syllabus, this text presents the subjunctive mood throughout the last half of its text. Once introduced, the subjunctive is reviewed with a greater degree of complexity each time it is encountered. In contrast, the other two texts present the subjunctive in several chapters but it is encountered only occasionally after the initial presentation, and its use is not reviewed. In my view, the contextualized grammatical exercises of Thème et Variations offer more opportunities for creative language practice than the non-communicative exercises of Découverte et Création.

The same observation can be made concerning the three texts' presentations of the future tense of the indicative. Thème et Variations and Découverte et Création present the future tense in much the same manner as they do the subjunctive mood: in one to two chapters with no review or extension. French in Action also follows the same model that it did for the subjunctive: with natural language in context, the future tense appears a few lessons before it is formally introduced. The authors then spend considerable time with the future in Lessons 23 and 24; afterward, this tense is found throughout the text, video, and supporting materials with review activities found in Lesson 46.

The cyclical syllabus taken together with natural language in context seems to be the key to successful language learning in French in Action. Immediate mastery of material presented is not of primary importance; material is slowly acquired and grammatical structures can be studied in greater depth whenever relevant.

The cyclical syllabus of French in Action also plays a large role in its presentation of the functional aspects of language. Through consistent reintroduction, learners are able to master a functional cluster and it

gradually becomes active knowledge. The functional aspect, invitations, appears to some degree in more than a dozen chapters in French in Action. Slightly different contexts and different levels of language provide a wide array of practice possibilities. Thème et Variations gives a higher priority to invitations than does Découverte et Création (three occurrences as opposed to one), and each lesson's context aids in creative language use. The lack of functional content in Découverte et Création limits this text's presentation to situational dialogues, which pose problems: sequencing of grammar and vocabulary may be out of order, requiring the teaching of some structures solely as lexical items. In addition, set dialogues lack the flexibility of natural discourse and may not offer enough choices of responses. Clearly, the notional-functional syllabus directing French in Action makes this text far superior to the other two.

French in Action is also superior to the other texts in its presentation of cultural content. It is difficult to separate the notional-functional syllabus from the video text in terms of culture, as both aspects aid in a thorough and pervasive presentation of all cultural items, from art and architecture to sociolinguistic behaviors such as kinesics and gestures. Clearly, the advantages of the video medium are many. O.W. Rolfe states in the MALT Bulletin:

> The teacher is no longer the sole representative of the target language and culture; he or she has an entire staff of French natives to observe, quote, and draw support from, both linguistically and culturally. . . Resistance to target language and culture is reduced as the students become accustomed to contrasting cultural behavior (such as shaking hands or kissing as a greeting).[1]

---

[1]O.W. Rolfe, "French in Action at the University of Montana," The MALT Bulletin 35 (Spring 1990) : 12.

Thème et Variations' cultural focus makes it the very best of the traditional texts I have seen. It offers practical, useful everyday information as well as information on literature, art, music and architecture. Plentiful footnotes, photographs, and realia supplement the detailed cultural presentations in the *Lectures* and *Différences*.

Découverte et Création's Fifth Edition is considerably weaker in its cultural content than the Fourth Edition. The authors have removed the seven *Entractes* which previously presented information on the French language, cuisine, communication and transportation systems, leisure time activities, film, and the French-speaking world. This loss has unfortunately not been replaced by other cultural materials, with the exception of some situational dialogues, leaving the text with a dirth of cultural information.

Omaggio's Proficiency Criteria and Textbook Fit

How well does each of the texts meet Omaggio's goals of communicative proficiency? Her first goal states that students must be offered ample opportunities for contextualized practice, the second goal concerns practice in carrying out a range of functions, followed by the need for linguistic accuracy from the beginning of instruction, and the importance of the affective needs of students. The final hypothesis asserts the need for cultural understanding and preparing students to live in the target-language community.[2]

---

[2]Omaggio, Alice, Teaching in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction, (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1986), 35-36.

Contextualization

Thème et Variations emphasizes active use of spoken language in meaningful contexts. Although the authors begin with manipulative drills, they move rapidly to situationally oriented activities. The contextual approach of each lesson facilitates the learning of vocabulary as well as providing practice in target-culture situations. The authors' focus promotes a feeling of camaraderie that helps to create effective classroom interaction. The theme of the first few chapters emphasizes greeting, leave-taking, classroom objects, classmates, and daily activities. Communicative activities allow students to get to know each other and the instructor quite rapidly. The text provides creative language practice in the *Applications* section of each chapter, where dialogues give students practice in authentic language and situations.

Although **Découverte et Création** claims to be designed to help learners achieve communicative proficiency, the authors' lack of contextual approach reduces most exercises to manipulative drills. The only situational activity the authors provide consists of the optional dialogue, *Echanges*, found at the end of each chapter. The text's lack of coordination provides for random placement of activities; for example, the *Lecture* in Lesson 12 about superstitions is followed by an *Echanges* about the purchase of an item of clothing. Although **Découverte et Création**'s authors say their oral exercises are "*contextualized* either by definition of the circumstances or setting in which the spoken practice might logically take place or else by indication of

context,[3] their exercises are in fact manipulative, discrete-point exercises that do not lead students to express their own meaning orally. The text provides creative language practice only minimally in the *Création* section of each chapter with *Exercises de conversation* and *Improvisions*. Again, the lack of contextualized activities hampers natural communication, leaving both teacher and student with the tendency to communicate in stilted textbook French. The text's lack of recycling basic items throughout the lessons also hampers oral production; each grammatical structure is presented once and is seen rarely afterward.

Because of the nature of the continuing video story of French in Action, set in Paris with a young American college student as the central character, a range of contexts is available to students for creative language practice. The types of activities that Robert takes part in, the types of situations he is met with, are the same types of situations any student might encounter.

Students using French in Action are encouraged to express their own meaning as soon as possible,[4] and the authors encourage the skills of listening and observation from the beginning of the course. Many of the activities involve pair-practice and role-playing, where students are encouraged to talk to each other while adapting elements from the original story line to their own personal situations. French in Action actively encourages creative language practice, especially with the activities *Libération de l'expression* and *Mise en scène et réinvention de l'histoire*, which are found at the end of each lesson. The former divergent activity

---

[3] Gérard Jian and Ralph Hester, Découverte et Création: Les Bases du Francais Moderne. Cinquième Edition, (Instructor's Annotated Edition), (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), IAE 3.

[4] For a complete correlation of French in Action to Omaggio's proficiency goals, see Michael Dufner's, "French in Action: Theory and Practice" (M.A. thesis, University of Montana, 1990) 7-20.

encourages creativity and word play while the latter uses elements from the original story line or new elements to create a different story.

One of the most remarkable features about French in Action is its use of natural, non-filtered language from the very beginning of instruction. In addition, since the video story takes place in France, authentic language is found throughout. From the native speakers used in the video to the shots of billboards, storefronts and signs, teachers find a wealth of authentic materials to choose from. The authors of French in Action supplement the video in the text with the *Document*, which presents readings, photographs or other authentic material from French culture for study and discussion.

Functional Range

Each lesson of Thème et Variations begins with Lesson Objectives that are subdivided into Theme and Culture, Communication Skills, and Structures. In addition, the authors provide a topical and thematic index as well as a grammatical index for easy cross-referencing of structural and functional topics. Although language structure is the first priority in this text, language functions and their relation to the target culture are interwoven with grammatical topics.

In contrast, Découverte et Création offers few opportunities for students to practice a range of language functions necessary in the target culture. Only the optional dialogues, *Echanges*, could be called situational activities, which are not the same thing as language functions. Situational activities, especially when presented without a general theme or context, tend to contain grammatical or lexical items out of sequence.

In French in Action, learning objectives for each lesson include a list of language functions and inductive grammar presentations aid the student in understanding them. Creative, contextualized language complete with body movements, gestures, and facial expressions expose students to a wide range of communicative functions. Although the medium of video allows the above aspect of language learning to play a strong role, careful sequencing and re-introduction of functions and the grammar associated with them provide reinforcement and allow students more opportunities for practice.

Linguistic Accuracy

To address the goal of linguistic accuracy, the authors of Thème et Variations provide learner-oriented explicit grammar presentations in English, for they believe "it is unrealistic to expect students to understand grammar explanations in the very language they are trying to learn."5 In addition, their grammatical explanations emphasize the spoken as well as the written language.

The authors of Découverte et Création present grammar inductively and in French, which is consistent with the direct method. However, this practice may lead to oversimplification or generalizations of structures. Jian and Hester describe their approach as follows:

> The basic procedure of the rationalist direct method requires that all
> new material be presented orally in question-and-answer form before
> students see it written on the board or read it for assimilation and
> review. This approach follows the inductive principle of learning and
> teaches students to comprehend a new form, to use it actively, and

---

5M. Peter Hagiwara and Françoise de Rocher, Thème et Variations: An Introduction to French Language and Culture, Fourth Edition, (Annotated Instructor's Edition), (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1989), 2.

then, under your [the teacher's] direction, to make generalizations from the examples.[6]

The aforementioned weaknesses of Découverte et Création make it difficult for students to use French creatively and in context, which makes learning grammar a matter of memorizing prescriptive rules. The single most important frailty of this text is that the presentations of questions and answers lack any real focus, making it very difficult for students to begin using the structures and to practice them in order to obtain linguistic accuracy.

The authors of French in Action stress the need for linguistic accuracy at the same time that they encourage early production. Through close observation, then through imitation of observed language, French in Action guides students through the early stages of production. The authors pay special attention to the phonological features of the language by providing phonetic alphabet equivalents and a featured phoneme in each lesson. The instructor's guide states:

> Instructors should . . . try to create an atmosphere in which students' natural fear of producing an ungrammatical answer is never allowed to become inhibiting. (Here, especially, only the most egregious errors should cause the instructor to interrupt a student's performance.)[7]

In his research, Krashen proposes that speaking fluency cannot be taught directly, but emerges "naturally" over time, and that early speech is not grammatically accurate, but will develop with more input.[8] Much criticism has been leveled at Krashen for this lack of attention to linguistic accuracy,

---

[6]Gérard Jian and Ralph Hester, Découverte et Création: Les Bases du Français Moderne, Cinquième Edition: Instructor's Manual with Tapescript and Answer Keys), (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), IG 2.

[7]Adelaide Russo et al., French in Action: Instructor's Guide, Part 1, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), xxvi.

[8]Omaggio, 29.

most notably by Higgs and Clifford. The same type of criticism has been addressed to the creators of French in Action, perhaps due to the secondary priority of the teaching of grammatical structures in their material. In a recent French in Action newsletter, this topic was addressed by a teacher who has been using the method for three years:

> I think the way French in Action presents grammar in context is the only way to do it. Otherwise, you have dry, boring, grammar lessons instead of having language lessons. The students absorb the grammar. The workbook is beautifully made; everything in the workbook is meaningful. So many of those other workbooks just look like busy work. [In French in Action] there is this beautiful integration. Everything makes sense. It is like all the parts of the puzzle coming together. And as far as the result, I would say the results you get with French in Action in my experience are superior [to what you get with more traditional methods]. I think that often the students will know the grammar as well [as with traditional methods], and not just because they have memorized some rules, but because they know it has to be *qui* instead of *que*, for instance, because *que* doesn't sound right. They will say it is *qui* instead of *que* because, "Don't you remember Mireille says, *C'est l'homme qui était dans le train,*" or whatever. They are learning grammar the way language is learned, not the way grammar is memorized. That I think is definitely a plus.[9]

Affective Needs

Omaggio considers that the affective needs of students are of equal importance as their cognitive needs; Krashen also addresses this subject in his research with his affective filter hypothesis. It states that "comprehensible input can have its effect on acquisition only when affective conditions are optimal: (1) the acquirer is motivated; (2) he has self-confidence and a good self-image, and his level of anxiety is low."[10] The authors of Thème et Variations take into account the affective filter

---

[9]Lucia Hodgson, ed., "French in Action Newsletter," (April 1991), 3.
[10]Omaggio, 30.

hypothesis by their use of contextualized activities which students can relate to and that they find interesting. Cultural reading in the form of *Différences* and the *Lecture* offer information of interest to college students; photographs and reproductions of realia bring the target culture closer to them. Students may feel intimidated by the sheer volume of material in Thème et Variations, but each section relates to the next and all have the same theme.

Conversely, Découverte et Création's lack of contextualized activities or theme-oriented lessons reduces language learning to rote memorization of rules and classroom activities to boring drills. Research shows that students are most motivated and enthusiastic when they are able to talk about subjects that are near to them: themselves and their daily activities. Découverte et Création's organization lacks focus, the activities found therein often have nothing to do with students' lives, and the photographs and drawings could certainly be more numerous and reflect the culture better.

The creators of French in Action have considered the affective needs of students by encouraging a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. The video is as accessible as a soap-opera; students find Robert's activities interesting and easy to relate to their own experiences. Classroom activities are student-centered, not teacher centered. Through guided activities, students are able to personalize and change the original story line to match their own lives. Capretz advises students in the Introduction:

> Relax! ...If in the beginning you feel confused, you won't be alone. Rest assured that thousands have done what you are setting out to do. You will learn slowly at first, and you are not expected to understand

everything. Little by little, things will become clearer, and suddenly your knowledge of French will expand exponentially.[11]

Cultural Understanding

The authors of <u>Thème et Variations</u> consider cultural understanding vital and necessary for the learning of French. Up-to-date cultural information is found throughout this text, and the *Applications* activities "explore a particular aspect of France in some depth, such as family life, food, transportation, the arts, entertainment, Paris, and cultural heritage."[12] They live up to their own description of their text.

<u>French in Action</u> fills the need for cultural understanding admirably by locating the learning situation in the target culture, with the exception of the first few lessons where an on-screen professor and students set up the elements of the story. As mentioned in the first section, <u>French in Action</u>'s video medium and notional-functional approach make it the best choice of the three texts, and <u>Découverte et Création</u> the worst choice. By looking at Figure 4 on pages 51 - 55, certain cultural omissions, however, can be found in <u>French in Action</u>. Among them are: presentations on other francophone countries, extensive information on the museums of Paris, names of continents, countries, and cities, and information on holidays. In addition, some people have criticized the "bourgeois" presentation of the French people, especially the central character, Mireille, her family, and friends. It is true that few minorities can be seen in the videos. Another criticism often directed at <u>French in Action</u> is that its grammatical presentations are weak and give students a poor foundation for further study.

---

[11] Pierre Capretz et al., <u>French in Action: A Beginning Course in Language and Culture</u>, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 2.

[12] Hagiwara and de Rocher, 5.

Comparative Study Results

In answer to this criticism, I offer the informal findings of Dr. O.W. Rolfe of
the University of Montana, who administered the Educational Testing
Service's College Board French Achievement Test to his third quarter French
in Action students. For comparison, in both instances (June 1989 and June
1990) he also administered the same test to a teaching assistant's class as
well. In June 1989, the French section at the University of Montana had not
yet adopted French in Action; Dr. Rolfe was at that time teaching a pilot
section of French in Action while the other members of the French section
(including the teaching assistant whose class was tested) was still using
Découverte et Création (Fourth Edition). In June 1990, the entire French
section was using French in Action (including the teaching assistant's class).

The June 1989 results show that the performance of the class using
French in Action was superior to that of the class using Découverte et
Création. The results show more clustering near the top end of the scale and
fewer low scores in the former, while in the latter, scores clustered near the
low end of the scale and there were fewer high scores.

The June 1990 results show approximately the same performance with
both of the classes using French in Action. Scores compare favorably with
those of the previous year's French in Action class in range and distribution.
The second year's testing of both a professor's and a teaching assistant's
classes was undertaken by Dr. Rolfe to see if the results showed any great
difference. In fact, the scores were slightly higher in the teaching assistant's
class, which could lay to rest a criticism which is sometimes heard about

French in Action: that it is only a successful for an experienced teacher and a fluent speaker of French.

The results of this informal study are especially interesting in view of the fact that the College Board Test has a greater focus on grammatical items. As mentioned in Chapter 4, another criticism directed at French in Action has been its lack of emphasis on grammar. In my conclusion, I will address some of the other criticisms that have been directed at French in Action.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After a detailed examination of the three texts in this study, it becomes quite obvious which texts meet the goals of the proficiency movement. The notional-functional syllabus and the innovative video technology of <u>French in Action</u> make it decidedly superior to the other texts studied, given current proficiency goals. However, the "eclectic" or modified audiolingual approach of <u>Thème et Variations</u> makes it a strong second choice. The authors of <u>Thème et Variations</u> have combined the best of many approaches to provide a text with a strong grammatical and cultural emphasis. Detailed grammatical explanations will please those professionals who feel that students are unable to acquire language without this component, while the cultural component is the best I have seen in any college text. The text's essential weakness is its lack of a video component.

In contrast, <u>Découverte et Création</u>'s presentation of grammatical, funtional, and cultural content does not meet oral proficiency goals as currently interpreted, in spite of the claims of the authors Its most prominent weaknesses are the lack of contextualized activities, opportunities for creative language practice, and cultural emphasis. The *Présentations* at the beginning of each chapter, designed by the authors to illustrate grammatical points, are not contextualized. Research shows that students are motivated by contextualized activities that relate to their lives. These

70

activities lead naturally to more open-ended creative language practice and acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary.

One of the difficulties encountered in the analysis of these three texts is the problem of comparing a text with a notional-functional syllabus and a video "text" with two relatively conventional texts. It would have been perhaps more just to compare a traditional notional-functional text with the video "text" of French in Action. The problem with this scenario is the lack of college texts that follow a notional-functional syllabus. Textbooks governed by notional-functional syllabuses are just now appearing on the market, offering teachers more flexibility in teaching approaches.

In as much as the proficiency movement and its goals are directing language teaching methodology in the United States, French in Action represents the way that foreign language textbook creators should direct their efforts. Most teachers and students are very enthusiastic about the method, while preliminary findings suggest that students' progress is more rapid and comprehensive than with grammatically-based texts.

Teachers surveyed recently[1] gave many reasons to adopt French in Action, most of which related to the video technology found in this method. The exposure to authentic language, the cultural presentations, the context provided by a continuing storyline, and the desire to improve students' interest and motivation were all given as positive attributes of French in Action. In my opinion, video technology represents the future in language teaching and French in Action the best method available today for teaching natural language in context.

---

[1]Michael Dufner, "French in Action: Theory and Practice," (M.A. thesis, University of Montana, 1990) 25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Capretz, Pierre J., Béatrice Abetti, Marie-Odile Germain, and Laurence Wylie. French in Action: A Beginning Course in Language and Culture. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Capretz, Pierre J., Thomas Abbate, Béatrice Abetti, and Frank Abetti. French in Action: Workbook, Parts 1 and 2. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Capretz, Pierre J. "French in Action: The Capretz Method." AATF National Bulletin 13 (September 1987): 15-16.

Curtain, Helena Anderson and Carol Ann Pesola. Making the Match: Foreign Language Instruction in the Elementary School. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1988.

Dufner, Michael. "French in Action: Theory and Practice." M.A. thesis, University of Montana, 1990.

French in Action: A Beginning Course in Language and Culture. Videocassette series. Produced by Yale University and the WGBH Educational Foundation, in association with Wellesley College. 52 lessons.

Guntermann, Gail, and June K. Phillips. Functional-Notional Concepts: Adapting the Foreign Language Textbook. Language in Education: Theory and Practice Series, no. 44. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1982.

Hagiwara, M. Peter and Françoise de Rocher. Thème et Variations: An Introduction to French Language and Culture, Fourth Edition. (Annotated Instructor's Edition). New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1989.

————. Thème et Variations: An Introduction to French Language and Culture, Fourth Edition: Cahier d'exercises. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1989.

Higgs, Theodore V., ed. Curriculum, Competence, and the Foreign Language Teacher. Lincolnwood, Ill.: National Textbook Company, 1981.

————. Teaching for Proficiency, the Organizing Principle. Lincolnwood, Ill.: National Textbook Company, 1984.

Hodgson, Lucia, ed. "French in Action Newsletter." (April 1991).

James, Charles J., ed. Practical Applications of Research in Foreign Language Teaching. Lincolnwood, Ill.: National Textbook Company, 1983.

————. Foreign Language Proficiency in the Classroom and Beyond. Lincolnwood, Ill.: National Textbook Company, 1985.

Jian, Gérard and Ralph Hester. Découverte et Création: Les Bases du Français Moderne, Quatrième Edition. (Instructor's Edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985.

————. Découverte et Création: Les Bases du Francais Moderne, Cinquième Edition. (Instructor's Annotated Edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

————. Découverte et Création: Les Bases du Français Moderne, Cinquième Edition: Cahier d'exercises. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

————. Découverte et Création: Les Bases du Français Moderne, Cinquième Edition: Instructor's Manual with Tapescript and Answer Keys. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

Johnson, Keith. Communicative Syllabus Design and Methodology. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982.

Krahnke, Karl. Approaches to Syllabus Design for Foreign Language Teaching. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Regents, 1987.

Lane, Elaine. "The Notional-Functional Approach: Teaching the Real Language in Its Natural Context." M.A. thesis, George Mason University, 1985.

Lydgate, Barry, Sylvie Mathe, Norman Susskind, John Westlie, and Laurence Wylie. French in Action: Study Guide, Parts 1 and 2. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Neff, Roger. 1990. Review of French in Action by Pierre Capretz, et al. In Modern Language Journal 74 (Spring): 100-01.

Newmark, Leonard. "How Not to Interfere with Language Learning." In Innovative Approaches to Language Teaching, edited by Robert W. Blair, 110-14. Rowley, MA.: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1982.

Omaggio, Alice C. Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction. Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1986.

Phillips, June K., ed. Building on Experience - Building for Success. Lincolnwood, Ill.: National Textbook Company, 1979.

Richards, Jack C. and Theodore S. Rodgers. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A Description and Analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Rolfe, O.W. "French in Action at the University of Montana." The MALT Bulletin 35 (Spring 1990): 11-13.

Russo, Adelaide, Thomas Abbate, and Barry Lydgate. French in Action: Instructor's Guide, Parts 1 and 2. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Shewmake, Antoinette. 1990. Review of French in Action by Pierre Capretz et al. In French Review 63 (May): 1092-94.

Wilkins, D.A. Notional Syllabuses: A Taxonomy and its Relevance to Foreign Language Curriculum Development. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Yalden, Janice. The Communicative Syllabus: Evolution, Design and Implementation. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983.