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The French Language Today, by Adrian Battye & Marie-Anne Hintze. Routledge: London and New York, 1992. Pp x + 374. \$24.95. ISBN 0-415-07814-8 (pbk).

Teachers of French language and linguistics are always searching for that elusive text that will present the fundamentals of French phonology and morphology without straying to the limits of dinosaurian descriptivism on the one hand or incomprehensible gobbledygook on the other. In this book, the British authors have put together five chapters, as follows:

1. External History of the French Language (1-65)
2. The Sound System of French (57-146)
3. French Word Structure (147-202)
4. The Sentence Structure of French (203-296)
5. Varieties of French (297-356)

Of these the first chapter, while it contains a valuable range of information, may have to be omitted if the course is to be completed in one semester, or may be left to the students to read on their own. In either case they should be warned that there are all kinds of inaccuracies; just to take the Canadian data on page 5, for example, we are told that the British North America Act dates from 1887 (twenty years late!), that Bill 101 made French the 'sole official language' of Quebec (should be *working* language, since English is still official, guaranteed by the BNA Act), and that the Meech Lake Accord was rejected 'by the provinces of Manitoba and New Brunswick', when history will also lay the blame on the intransigence of Clyde Wells of Newfoundland.

The second chapter on the sound system also has serious problems of inaccuracy. The nasal consonants are described as stops (81), for example, because of the buccal closure. But these sounds are not released through the nose; the air passage is not stopped, and the resulting sound is a continuant. They should be classed as *sonorants* (the word is not to be found) along with [l] and [ʀ], consonants that are missing from the classification table on p. 75. We are also told that the apico-alveolar [r] is heard in Quebec (82), whereas the normal pronunciation in the Quebec City region has always been uvular, and today the rolled [r] of the Montreal region is swiftly disappearing, replaced by the uvular approximant [ʁ].

There is also a lack of sufficient generalisation, so that the student is given details to learn without being aware of their coherence. There is for example a low level phonetic rule whereby vowel lengthening takes place in stressed syllables closed by a voiced fricative, which includes [ʀ]. The authors simply list the consonants concerned without any indication that these sounds form a class.

The whole question of syllable structure is dealt with in a way that takes no account of important work done in the last twenty years. And the related question of gliding, where for example the vowel /u/ can be reduced phonetically to [w] before another vowel, so that /lue/ (*louer*) may be reduced in speech to a monosyllable [lwe], is dealt with as a mass of confused detail. How can one deal with such variation and never mention the word *allophone*, which never appears once in the whole book? In fact everything is phonetics, put in square brackets, and the word *phonology* is also conspicuous by its absence.

This chapter too has its inaccuracies, since the authors claim (129) 'there are no examples of words whose meaning is distinguished by the alternation of [u] and [w].' On the same page they give both *trois* [trwa] and *trouer* [true]; the preterit of this latter, *troua* [trua], forms of course a minimal pair with *trois*, contradicting the authors' claim. This pair is in fact discussed at length in Grundstrom 1983, which although it was published nine years earlier, does not appear in the authors' bibliography, and references in the text tend rather towards such items as Schane 1968 and Martinet 1969.

There are unnecessary confusions in the following chapter on morphology as well. The morpheme is defined (following Lyons 1968) as 'the minimum unit of grammatical analysis' (p. 150), which leaves a few unanswered questions. Then in a diagram at the bottom of the page we are informed that the gender morpheme is marked by *-e-*, and the plural morpheme marked by *-s*. Quite apart from the problem of dealing with marking at the level of the orthography (we have a whole page (158) to tell us why you don't make *triste* feminine or *gris* plural), one would understand from this that morphemes do not mark meanings such as plural but are (?) the meanings.

The paradigms taken from Martinet in this chapter are quite useful, but the authors' introduction that precedes it has its problems. Their paradigms, which they claim are given 'in full' (166) consistently leave out the conditional, without comment, although it is mentioned in the list of abbreviations, and turns up, of course, in the paradigms from Martinet. Even worse, the *formes composées* are reduced to three (167): *ai donné, avais donné, aurai donné*, and there is no mention of the *formes surcomposées*, which are not introduced for another hundred pages (280) and even then in a less usual form: *J'ai eu fait cela*. The paradigmatic contrasts between tense, mood, and aspect, which may be found in most school grammars in France are totally ignored, and the only mention of aspect concerns the imperfect (294), which paradigmatically appears as part of the tense system, as the following paradigm (from Curat 1991: 53) shows.

Table 1

	SIMPLE	COMPOSÉ	SURCOMPOSÉ
Infinitive	aimer	avoir aimé	avoir eu aimé
Pres. Participle	aimant	ayant aimé	ayant eu aimé
Past Participle	aimé	(eu aimé)	
Subjunctive 1	aime	aie aimé	aie eu aimé
Subjunctive 2	aimasse	eusse aimé	eusse eu aimé
Present	aime	ai aimé	ai eu aimé
Imperfect	aimais	avais aimé	avais eu aimé
Passé Simple	aimai	eus aimé	eus eu aimé
Future	aimerai	aurai aimé	aurai eu aimé
Conditional	aimerais	aurais aimé	aurais eu aimé

This layout contrasts moods (vertical blocks), tenses (vertical sets) and aspects (horizontal), and shows how aspect typically affects every tense form, as is the norm for aspect systems.

Unfortunately in this text there is no sense of system, everything is atomistic, and when we come to examine syntax and tense usage in Chapter Four, we are greeted with such tenses as (282):

passé récent: *nous venons de donner*
 futur proche: *nous allons donner*

as standard forms in the tense system. If you do this kind of thing, of course, there is no sensible limit to the number of constructions one can describe as tenses. And if we expect these forms to behave as regular tense forms, we should be able to derive *nous sommes venus de donner, nous avons été venus de don-*

ner, nous sommes allés donner, nous avons été allés donner, nonsense form which demonstrate the incoherence of this approach, and lack of any rigour that might be described as linguistic, let alone scientific. To proceed in a coherent fashion, we let the evidence speak for itself, as in the paradigm from Curat.

There are some good sections in the chapter on syntax, however, and some useful structures and notions introduced. But there does not seem to be a very good sense of judgment as to what should be introduced at this level, since on p. 287 we have the verbs of motion introduced, and are told that they use the auxiliary *être* in their compound forms: this is studied in Junior High School. The section on the subjunctive is also very brief, dealing only with the generalities to be found in any standard grammar, and on p. 293 we read '...whether the subjunctive can be viewed as a meaningful verbal category or simply as an extra marker of subordination in Modern French is a distinctively difficult question to decide.' The meaningfulness of the subjunctive is in fact not in question, since there exist clear cut minimal pairs with meaningful contrast, as one would hope all university students of French are taught:

<i>Je comprends qu'il a acheté une auto.</i>	I understand he bought a car.
<i>Je comprends qu'il ait acheté une auto.</i>	I understand why he bought a car.
<i>Je suis d'avis qu'il a une auto.</i>	I agree that he has a car.
<i>Je suis d'avis qu'il ait une auto.</i>	I agree with his having a car.

The final chapter on varieties of French also has much interesting and valuable information, but is spoiled by several weaknesses, the major one being the failure to distinguish between social and regional levels of usage. The whole section on the morphology of Canadian French on p.314, for example, lists items that are *français populaire*, not Canadian French, and are heard in France as well as in Canada. If we were to take this section at its face value, we would end up believing that no one speaking French in Canada ever uses *ne* with negative forms of the verb! Also on Canadian French, there is never any mention of the regional difference between Acadian and Québécois, and on p. 315 a passage from *La Sagouine* is quoted to illustrate Canadian French! *T'as qu'à ouère!*

The bibliography is brief and not particularly rich on French linguistic authors: no Damourette et Pichon, whose seven volumes should be known to every student of French, no Imbs, no Guillaume, no Benveniste, no Pottier, no Moignet, no Culioli, nothing from Fuchs, Gaatone, Joly, Klinkenberg, Martin, Wilmet, and others who have contributed so much to the description and discussion of the linguistic categories of French in recent years.

The book is described on the flyleaf as 'an introduction to the techniques of linguistics as applied to the French language and a reference work for the more advanced student'. I cannot imagine a reference work with a bibliography of this

kind, and the application of linguistic techniques is equally lacking in substance. A mountain of work would have to be done on a rewrite before it could be recommended for use as a university text. The authors should start by reading Grundstrom, a text in the same market, but not in their bibliography.

Finally this is a difficult book to read because it is difficult to keep it open. The binding is made of very rigid plastic, which requires both hands to be constantly occupied. Readers should let the publishers know that this kind of binding may be the latest in technology and may be inexpensive, but is certainly neither recommendable nor acceptable.

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