French: A Linguistic Introduction

French is used on every continent, spoken not only in France but also in Belgium, Switzerland, North America, the Caribbean, Polynesia and Africa. This is a comprehensive and accessible guide to the structure of French, suitable for those with little prior knowledge of linguistics or of the French language. It clearly introduces the language's history, phonetics (pronunciation), phonology (sound system), morpho-syntax (how words and sentences are formed), pragmatics (how speakers express meaning), and lexicology (the study of word composition and derivation) – with each chapter showing how these aspects are subject to regional and social variation. English translations are provided for all examples, and the book contains an extensive bilingual glossary of linguistic terms, and numerous exercises and essay questions in every chapter. French: A Linguistic Introduction will be welcomed by advanced language learners, and by linguists studying the structure of this important language.

**Zsuzsanna Fagyal** is Assistant Professor of French Linguistics at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, specializing in phonetics, phonology, and the sociolinguistics of contemporary Parisian French. She is the author of numerous conference papers and journal articles on sound change and variation in contemporary spoken French.

**Douglas Kibbee** is Professor of French Linguistics at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, whose research and teaching focuses on the history of French language, language and the law, and the history of linguistic theories. He is the author of four monographs and edited volumes on sixteenth-century studies of French grammar, language legislation, and most recently a translation of folk tales from Côte d'Ivoire.

**Fred Jenkins** is Associate Professor Emeritus of French Linguistics at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and for eighteen years was Executive Director of the American Association of Teachers of French. His research has dealt with many different areas of contemporary French, and since his retirement he has remained actively involved in working with his colleagues in French and linguistics.
Linguistic Introductions available from Cambridge University Press

Yaron Matras Romani: A Linguistic Introduction
Neil G. Jacobs Yiddish: A Linguistic Introduction
Milton Azevedo Portuguese: A Linguistic Introduction
Antonio Loprieno Ancient Egyptian: A Linguistic Introduction
Chao Fen Sun Chinese: A Linguistic Introduction
Paul Cubberley Russian: A Linguistic Introduction
Jose Ignacio Hualde, Antxon Olarrea, Anna María Escobar Introducción a la lingüística hispánica
Zsuzsanna Fagyal, Douglas Kibbee and Fred Jenkins French: A Linguistic Introduction
French

A Linguistic Introduction

Zsuzsanna Fagyal
Douglas Kibbee
Fred Jenkins
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of figures</th>
<th>page x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of tables</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Defining the object of study  
1.1 French is plural  
1.2 Prescriptivism and the idea of ‘standard’ French  
1.3 Francophonie  
1.4 Variation ‘omnibus’  
1.4.1 Geographical variation  
1.4.2 Social variation  
1.5 Looking ahead  

2 Phonetics and phonology  
2.1 Preliminaries  
2.1.1 Sounds, spelling, and the IPA  
2.1.2 Phonetic symbols  
2.1.3 Phonetic values of letters and letter sequences  
2.1.4 Phonemes, minimal pairs, and allophones  
2.2 Vowels and glides  
2.2.1 Oral vowels  
2.2.1.1 Laxing  
2.2.1.2 Devoicing  
2.2.1.3 Mid vowels  
2.2.1.4 Diphthongs  
2.2.1.5 Open vowels  
2.2.2 Nasal vowels  
2.2.2.1 What is nasalization?  
2.2.2.2 Northern Metropolitan French  
2.2.2.3 Southern French and French in North America  
2.2.2.4 On the phonological status of nasal vowels  
2.2.3 Glides  
2.2.3.1 What are glides?  
2.2.3.2 The general process of gliding  
2.2.3.3 The front and back rounded glides /q/ and /w/  
2.2.3.4 The palatal glide /j/
## Contents

2.3 Consonants 39

2.3.1 Phonation types 39

2.3.2 Places of articulation 40

2.3.3 Manners of articulation 42

2.3.3.1 Stops and fricatives 43

2.3.3.2 Affricates 44

2.3.3.3 Trills and approximants 46

2.3.4 Assimilatory processes 47

2.3.4.1 Voicing assimilation 47

2.3.4.2 Place assimilation 49

2.3.4.3 Other assimilatory processes 49

2.3.5 Lengthening 50

2.3.6 Geminates 51

2.4 Beyond the segment 52

2.4.1 From phonemes to syllables 52

2.4.1.1 The internal structure of syllables 52

2.4.1.2 Distributing segments in syllables 54

2.4.2 From syllables to phrases 55

2.4.2.1 The foot 56

2.4.2.2 The phonological word 56

2.4.2.3 The clitic group 57

2.4.2.4 The phonological phrase 58

2.4.2.5 At the top of the hierarchy 58

2.4.3 The schwa 59

2.4.3.1 Why call the schwa a schwa? 59

2.4.3.2 Schwa and dialect 60

2.4.3.3 Phrase-final schwas 60

2.4.3.4 Phrase-medial schwas 61

2.4.3.5 Phrase-initial schwas 62

2.4.3.6 Schwas and morphological alternations 63

2.4.4 Liaison and enchâinement 63

2.4.4.1 From forward syllabification to liaison 63

2.4.4.2 Liaison and h-aspiré 65

2.4.4.3 Liaison and syntax, morphology, and the lexicon 66

2.4.4.4 Liaison without enchâinement 69

2.5 On stress, accent, and intonation 70

2.5.1 Stress and accent 70

2.5.2 A phonological model of French intonation 70

2.5.3 Notes on stress clash 73

2.5.4 Intonation 73

2.6 Exercises 77

3 Topics in morphology and syntax 79

3.1 Preliminaries: words and morphemes 79

3.2 Topics in inflectional morphology 83

3.2.1 The morphology of the verb 83

3.2.2 The morphology of other morpheme classes 89

3.3 Topics in syntax 91

3.3.1 Definitions 91

3.3.2 Surface and deep structures 91
Contents

3.4 The verb 93
  3.4.1 The arguments of the verb 93
  3.4.2 Verb types and complements 95
  3.4.3 Adverbials as modifiers 97
  3.4.4 Clauses as modifiers and complements 98

3.5 Noun phrases 100
  3.5.1 Expanding the NP 100
  3.5.2 Post-head position in the NP 101
  3.5.3 Pre-head position in the NP 103
  3.5.4 ‘Determiners’ 106

3.6 Pronouns 108
  3.6.1 Subject pronouns of être 108
  3.6.2 Impersonal il and ce 111
  3.6.3 Clitic pronouns 112

3.7 Adverbs 115
  3.7.1 The intensifiers si, tant, and tellement 115
  3.7.2 Sentence and VP adverbs 118

3.8 Negation 120
  3.8.1 Negatives and their positions 120
  3.8.2 Meaning and scope 122
  3.8.3 Negatives and style 125

3.9 Passive ‘voice’ 126
  3.9.1 Types of passive construction 126
  3.9.2 Tense and aspect in passives 127
  3.9.3 Passive verbs and their complements 128

3.10 On interrogatives 130
  3.10.1 Yes-no questions 130
  3.10.2 Partial questions 132
    3.10.2.1 The atypical pourquoi ‘why’ 132
    3.10.2.2 Simple inversion and the complements of verbs 132
    3.10.2.3 Questioning the subject 133
    3.10.2.4 Questioning the object 134
  3.10.3 Questions, styles, and register 134

3.11 Exercises 136

4 Lexicology and derivational morphology 139
  4.1 Preliminaries 139
  4.2 Analyzing the meaning of words 140
    4.2.1 Semic analysis 141
    4.2.2 Prototypes and stereotypes 144
  4.3 Semantic relations 146
    4.3.1 Synonyms and antonyms 146
    4.3.2 Hierarchical relations 147
  4.4 Homonymy and polysemy 150
  4.5 Change of meaning 152
    4.5.1 Metaphor 153
    4.5.2 Metonymy 153
    4.5.3 Synecdoche 154
  4.6 Word formation 155
viii  Contents

4.6.1 Derivation 156
  4.6.1.1 Derivation by affixation 157
  4.6.1.2 Deverbal nouns 158
  4.6.1.3 Deadjectival nouns 161
  4.6.1.4 Denominal nouns 161
  4.6.1.5 Derivation by prefixation 163
  4.6.1.6 Parasynthetic nouns 164

4.6.2 Truncation 164
  4.6.3 Conversion and reduplication 164

4.7 Compounding 165

4.8 Borrowing 168

4.9 Lexical variation 170
  4.9.1 Regional variation 170
  4.9.2 Social variation and word games 172

4.10 State intervention in French vocabulary 176
  4.10.1 A case study: the feminization of professional titles 179

4.11 Exercises 180

5  Pragmatics 183

5.1 Preliminaries 183

5.2 Referring and indexing 185
  5.2.1 Indexical expressions 186
  5.2.2 Deictic reference 187
  5.2.3 Other types of references 188

5.3 Speech acts and models of communication 190
  5.3.1 The Code Model of communication 190
  5.3.2 Inferential models of communication 192
  5.3.3 The Maxims of conversation 194
  5.3.4 Applying the Maxims 196
  5.3.5 Beyond the Model Speaker 199

5.4 Politeness 200
  5.4.1 Bold-on-record 201
  5.4.2 Positive politeness 203
    5.4.2.1 Informal tu and formal vous 204
    5.4.2.2 Generic tu, vous, and on 205
  5.4.3 Negative politeness 207
    5.4.3.1 Indirect speech acts 207
    5.4.3.2 Hedging and indirectness 208
  5.4.4 Discourse particles 212
  5.4.5 Off-record 217
  5.4.6 Politeness: in the eye of the beholder 217

5.5 Exercises 218

6  Historical perspectives 220

6.1 Preliminaries 220

6.2 Latin and the linguistic prehistory of French 221
  6.2.1 Phonology from Latin to Early Old French 222
    6.2.1.1 Vowels 222
    6.2.1.2 Consonants 223
    6.2.1.3 Accentuation 227
Contents

6.2.2 Morphology and syntax from Latin to Early Old French 227
  6.2.2.1 The morphology of nouns 227
  6.2.2.2 The morphology of adjectives 231
  6.2.2.3 Personal, demonstrative, and relative pronouns 232
  6.2.2.4 The morphology of verbs 233
  6.2.2.5 Syntax and word order 235
6.2.3 Vocabulary from Latin to Early Old French 240
  6.2.3.1 Non-Latin elements in the vocabulary of Latin 241
  6.2.3.2 Adverb formation 242
6.2.4 Pragmatic aspects of language use from Latin to Early Old French 245
  6.2.4.1 Forms of address 245
6.2.5 Summary 246
6.3 Old and Middle French 247
  6.3.1 Phonology in Old and Middle French 249
    6.3.1.1 Vowels 249
    6.3.1.2 Consonants 252
  6.3.2 Morphology and syntax in Old and Middle French 255
    6.3.2.1 Nouns and adjectives 255
    6.3.2.2 The syntax of the noun phrase 256
    6.3.2.3 Word order 260
    6.3.2.4 Negation 261
    6.3.2.5 Interrogatives 264
  6.3.3 Vocabulary in Old and Middle French 266
  6.3.4 Pragmatic aspects of language use in Old and Middle French 267
6.4 French in the modern world 269
  6.4.1 Phonology in Classical and Modern French 272
    6.4.1.1 Vowels 273
    6.4.1.2 Consonants 275
  6.4.2 Morphology and syntax in Classical and Modern French 277
    6.4.2.1 Auxiliary selection: être ou avoir? 277
    6.4.2.2 Types of interrogative and ne deletion 279
  6.4.3 Vocabulary in Classical and Modern French 283
  6.4.4 Pragmatic aspects of language use in Classical and Modern French 287
6.5 Conclusions 289
6.6 Exercises 290

Glossary 293
References 312
Name index 328
Subject index 332
### Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Map of francophone countries</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Map of France with the isogloss separating the ‘Oc’ and ‘Oil’ dialects</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Principal places of articulation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Oral vowels of French</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Counter-clockwise (a) and clockwise (b) shift of nasal vowels in Parisian (a)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Vocal fold positions and opening of the glottis in different phonation types</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Vocal fold positions and opening of the glottis in different phonation types</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>A model of the hierarchy of prosodic constituents (following Nespor and Vogel)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Schematic sentence structure and obligatory, optional, and forbidden liaisons</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Realizations of AP in IP- and utterance-initial positions</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Disambiguation of syntactic structures via phrasing and intonation.</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Examples of the intonation contours of a canonical yes-no question (a), wh-question (b), declarative (c), imperative (d), and stylized calling (e)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Schematic syntactic tree of Pierre ramasse son sac. ‘Peter picks up his bag.’</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Schematic syntactic trees of the two meanings of le monde privé des ouvriers: (a) ‘the private (non public) sphere of workers’, (b) ‘the world deprived of (left without) workers’</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td>xi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Schematic syntactic tree of the only possible meaning of <em>ce studio de Chicago spacieux</em> ‘this spacious studio (situated) in Chicago’</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Schematic diagram illustrating the order of several pre-head modifiers (NB: The interpretation of <em>jeunes filles</em> as a compound noun is also acceptable.)</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Schematic syntactic tree of <em>Aujourd’hui Paul a/va vite mangé/manger son gateau</em>. ‘Today Paul quickly ate/will quickly eat his cake.’</td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tables

2.1 IPA symbols for oral vowels in French  
2.2 IPA symbols for nasal vowels in French  
2.3 IPA symbols for consonants in French  
2.4 IPA symbols for glides in French  
2.5 Mid vowels in closed (CVC) and open (CV) syllables in northern Metropolitan French  
2.6 Three-way opposition of nasal vowels in northern Metropolitan French  
2.7 French consonants by place (horizontally) and manner (vertically) of articulation  
2.8 Contexts of assimilation in three varieties of French  
3.1 Written and oral forms of the verb *chanter* ‘to sing’  
3.2 ‘Standard’ and ‘non-standard’ verb forms (following Marty 2001, Martinet 1969)  
3.3 Sentence functions, syntactic expressions and lexical manifestations of three arguments of *mettre* ‘to put’ in the sentence *Marie met son sac par terre* ‘Mary puts her bag on the floor.’  
3.4 Order of clitics before the finite verb in declaratives (following Jones 1996:253).  
3.5 Possible syntactic structures of different question types with a subject NP (*Paul*) in written and formal ‘standard’ spoken French  
4.1 Possible semes for a componential analysis of French words denoting ‘drinking establishments’  
6.1 Spelling and pronunciation of vowels in Early Old French based on examples from the *Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie* (ca. 880 CE), cited in Berger and Brasseur 2004: 108–131  
6.2 Spelling and pronunciation of consonants in Early Old French based on examples from the *Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie* (ca. 880 CE, cited in Berger and Brasseur 2004:108–131)
List of tables

6.3 The most common cases of Classical Latin and their grammatical functions 228
6.4 The five declensions in the singular and plural of Classical Latin 229
6.5 The reduction of the Latin declension system in Old French 230
6.6 Irregular forms of adjectives in Classical Latin and Modern French 231
6.7 Oral and written verb forms in Classical Latin and Modern French 234
6.8 Spelling and pronunciation of vowels in Old and Middle French 249
6.9 Paths of changes taken by preconsonantal /l/ from Latin to Middle French (NB: Allophones of ‘r’ varied historically, and are variable today.) 253
This book makes the perhaps audacious presumption that it is possible to write an accessible, and yet state-of-the art, introduction to the structure of French for a motivated public of non-specialists.

As instructors in the French linguistics program of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, we have long been confronted with the need for teaching graduate students of French and linguistics a highly technical literature about the structure of French, and simultaneously having to make ourselves understood by undergraduate students who, although having a sound knowledge of French, are not specializing in linguistics. Thus, upon an inquiry from Kate Brett from Cambridge University Press about writing such a book, we set out to combine our lectures notes, newspaper clippings, various technical and non-technical readings, and writing into a single book to be used to teach basic concepts of linguistic analysis through a panoramic tour of the defining characteristics of the French language.

As one of the volumes published in the Linguistic Introduction series of Cambridge University Press, this book provides a linguistic, i.e. relatively technical, overview of several fields of French linguistics. Its novelty resides in its pluralistic approach to French and its presentation of domains of linguistic analyses, e.g. pragmatics, that are rarely, if ever, discussed in similar works.

Chapter 1, Defining the object of study, lays out the concept of language and linguistics which we advocate and teach in our classes, namely that French is plural and multiform. Therefore a presentation of its structural characteristics must encompass a wide variety of features, ranging from highly standardized written forms to peculiarities of spoken regional and social dialects. Thus, we chose not to have a separate chapter dedicated to sociolinguistics. We examine the structure of French by definition ‘from within’ its social, geographic, and individual variation, discussing the degree of variability of each aspect of the language virtually everywhere in the following five chapters of the book.
Preface

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the sounds of French from both a physical and a structural point of view, which explains the double heading Phonetics and phonology. Chapter 3, Topics in morphology and syntax, aims to accomplish a similar goal with respect to word formation and sentence structure: building on insights and issues in inflectional morphology it analyzes the ways and means in which the word-size ‘building blocks’ of language can be assembled in various syntactic structures.

Chapter 4, Lexicology and derivational morphology, combines analyses in derivational morphology, including word games such as verlan, along with presentations of contact-induced borrowings, and state intervention in vocabulary. Chapter 5, Pragmatics, examines how speakers and listeners ‘make meaning’ with words and utterances in context in French, by introducing concepts such as reference, implicature, and politeness. Chapter 6, Historical perspectives, intentionally put at the end of the volume, is destined to provide the preceding analyses with a historical context. It shows continuity and rupture between well-known characteristics of the language, while also revealing new aspects of its history, such as proper name formation and use.

We could never have written this book without the unfailing support and patience of Kate Brett, Helen Barton, Alison Powell, Adrian Stenton and Caroline Murray at Cambridge University Press, and the help with proofreading and comments from our colleagues Peter Golato (UIUC), Noël Nguyen (Université de Provence, Aix-en-Provence), Elisabeth Delais-Roussarie (Université de Paris VII, Aix-en-Provence), and our current graduate student, Elizabeth Blount. We also thank our former graduate students Samira Hassa (Rockford College, IL), Viviane Ruellot (Western Michigan University), and Frédérique Grimm (Colorado State University) and our colleague Jeffrey Chamberlain (George Mason University) for having tested the usefulness of manuscript versions of this book in their undergraduate and graduate teaching. But most of all, we would like to thank our undergraduate students who agreed to learn from earlier versions of these pages, told us to translate all French examples and quotes to English, to pick examples ‘from real life’, and overall to show French as it works in all its forms and manifestations around the world. We can only hope that these ‘long lecture notes’, as technical as they still might appear to them, will ease them into the fascinating world of French linguistic variation and change as we have learned to see and appreciate it.

Note to the reader
Throughout the book we have used italics to show example words and phrases. Glosses or translation equivalents are shown in ‘single quotes’. Technical terms
Preface

which appears in the Glossary are shown in **bold**. “Double quotes” are used for direct quotations from sources.

Zsuzsanna Fagyal-Le Mentec
Douglas Kibbee
Fred Jenkins

*French Department*
*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*
*Les États-Unis d’Amérique*