

Chairman's Report

Duncan Byrne

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

September 2008 sees modern languages teachers across the country embarking on yet another new qualification; Curriculum 2000 has run its course and many tens of hours will have been spent by Heads of Department and colleagues in re-writing schemes of work and familiarising themselves with new resources. Yet we are aware that the coming year will require us to undertake with GCSE the same process of information-gathering and evaluation of different specifications that we have just completed with A Level. Amid constant change, there is the risk that we don't really know where we are. As a representative of the independent sector, I am often asked what languages teachers in independent schools think about certain issues: my opinions tend to be formed from the conversations that I have at the ISMLA Annual Conference and other gatherings, but journalists in particular appreciate some hard facts to back up my hunches. ISMLA has therefore decided to hold a Members' Survey, hoping that the results will not just help to inform ISMLA public pronouncements but also

provide useful evidence for members as they negotiate with senior management in developing language initiatives in their own schools. The survey is online at www.quia.com/sv/181137.html (or via the link on www.ismla.co.uk) and ISMLA would be very grateful if you could find ten minutes to contribute - it goes without saying that such a survey is only of value if a significant number of schools respond to it. ISMLA's last survey was in 2002, and the climate for languages teaching has changed beyond recognition in the last six years. I have been contacted frequently during recent months by ISMLA members concerned about threats to their language exchanges, and the survey contains a particular focus on these, in the belief that our pupils' language learning experiences will be severely compromised if concerns about Health and Safety lead to the demise of the traditional exchange.

I announced in last term's newsletter that ISMLA's 2009 conference will be held at Cheltenham Ladies' College and I can confirm that the date has been set for Saturday 24th January. I am pleased that we will be going to a Girls' School for the first time in several years (particularly such an

iconic one) and also to the West of England, where a number of schools who have been staunchly supportive of ISMLA are situated. I encourage you to put the date into your diary and hope that ISMLA members in the South-East will countenance a slightly longer journey than usual. Details of the conference programme and an application form will be sent at Half Term in October. I'd like to conclude by reminding members that the ISMLA membership subscription falls due in September; renewal forms have been sent over the summer holiday and we'd be grateful for any help in bringing our existence to the attention of those schools who have never been members. We keep the membership cost down to £30 per annum so that no school should feel financially unable to join, but the membership form can easily get lost in the pile of paperwork that hits our pigeon-holes at the beginning of term!

Please do get in touch with members of the committee if you would like information or assistance. Contact details can be found both in the newsletter and all documentation such as membership forms at www.ismla.co.uk.

Geoffrey Plow, as ISMLA Awarding Bodies Liaison Officer, is happy to act as a focus for communication for schools if they feel they have experienced difficulties over public exams at GCSE, AS or A2.

If a school has made an official comment to a Standing Joint Committee, he would be especially grateful to receive a copy of the form sent, so that correlation of any trends across the whole ISMLA membership may be made easier.

Geoffrey is happy to respond at any time to any comment made by an ISMLA member school in relation to public exam matters.

Please keep in touch with Geoffrey at

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Severe Grading - reality or myth?

Duncan Byrne

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

Writing a couple of days before GCSE results are published, I am wondering whether we will see another brutal fall in the number of candidates having taken a GCSE Modern Language this summer. Since the announcement that Modern Languages would become an optional KS4 subject in September 2003, maintained schools have become ever more conscious of the perception that a language is a tough choice for pupils, who believe that they will have to work harder in the language than in other subjects to achieve a comparable grade. The Association for Language Learning (ALL), in the guise of President Helen Myers, has been fighting for some considerable time to have the reality of 'severe grading' accepted, as it is felt to be the single most important factor in the reduction in GCSE Modern Languages take-up over the last three years. Not only do individual pupils elect to 'drop' the language studied in KS3, but school management sometimes takes the unenlightened decision to sideline MFL by blocking them against 'easier' GCSE subjects or by removing them completely, as the lower grades achieved in French or Spanish will affect league table positions.

There is a huge amount of misleading information in the public domain about the relative difficulty of exam subjects. Since 2004, the proportion of GCSE modern language candidates achieving top grades has increased. Some parts of the media have interpreted this as languages being 'easier' than other subjects. However, in doing so, they completely fail to understand that, with KS4 languages becoming optional, the least able pupils have ceased to study them; the ability profile of the GCSE languages cohort has therefore increased considerably but QCA and the awarding bodies have not adjusted grade percentages enough! Indeed, Dr Robert Coe of the CEM centre in Durham (the people who run MIDYIS, YELLIS and ALIS) has published research clearly demonstrating that candidates on average achieve lower grades in modern languages than in their other GCSE subjects and that this difference is so statistically significant that it could not be explained away as the result of poorer quality of teaching.

The Association for Language Learning has been campaigning for a realignment of GCSE grade boundaries and the reality of the severe grading phenomenon was accepted by Lord Dearing in his languages review of a year ago. Regrettably, QCA has rejected the evidence and

the campaign continues. ISMLA has been happy to support ALL's stance, recognising the effect that severe grading has on KS4 languages take-up, but only recently have I begun to look for evidence of severe grading in the independent sector. My hunch was originally that A Level modern languages were considered 'harder' by some students and that this affected Sixth Form numbers; I was less convinced, despite some disappointing grades in my own department, that severe grading at GCSE was a key issue for ISMLA members. Following a meeting with Shadow Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, that I attended with Helen Myers, I was requested to look for data from the independent sector to confirm or deny the presence of severe grading. I am indebted to Jamie Russ of St Albans School for sharing his personal research with me, and to other ISMLA colleagues who patiently responded to my e-mail enquiries.

The responses of colleagues leads me to conclude that the most highly selective schools have not had a problem with severe grading; their pupils seem insufficiently challenged by the GCSE examinations and the vast majority have no difficulty in exceeding the A* grade boundary. Nevertheless, less highly selective schools have witnessed it, and the modern languages department either lags behind the school average in A*/A percentage or has seen depreciation of results over the last two or three years; clearly, either case may lead to an awkward series of conversations with senior management.

ALL has sought to benchmark MFL GCSE results against those achieved by the same pupils in Mathematics, which is often considered the archetypal 'traditional academic' subject. It was quite difficult for me to acquire this data - nevertheless, my first table compares the results of French against Mathematics in seven boys' day schools where French GCSE is compulsory. Five of these seven have quite significant differences in the percentage of boys achieving grades A* or A in the two subjects, even though their examination results indicate that they are very highly selective.

GCSE result percentages 2007

	Maths A*/A%	French A*/A%
School A	70.8%	58.5%
School B	80.9%	63.5%
School C	93.1%	97.9%
School D	94.5%	81.1%
School E	90.4%	81.2%
School F	99.4%	94.2%
School G	98.9%	100.0%

The second measure I looked at was the change in examination results since KS4 languages become optional (2005 exam results were the first year affected). Although my sample size is small, the number of pupils achieving low grades (C and below) appears to have increased significantly in a clear majority of responding schools. My table shows the whole school percentage of bottom grades for purposes of comparison.

GCSE percentage of grades C and below

	French 2004	School av.	French 2005	School av.	French 2006	School av.	French 2007	School av.
School H	8.6%	8%	12.4%	6%	10.7%	6%	21.6%	6%
School I	32%	21%	35.6%	18%	45.6%	24%	58.5%	27%
School J					12.9%	4%	6.1%	6%
School K					20.2%	16%	26.3%	15%
School L					9.6%	6%	13.0%	5%
School M					19.4%	9%	25.9%	12%
School N					0%	6%	6.1%	7%
School O					11.4%	6%	12.0%	8%

There were other interesting results. The A* percentage in a highly selective girls' day school had declined from 49% to 72% in consistent increments since 2004.

The above table shows how the proportion of lower grades in French is consistently higher than the school average. I compared the percentage of C grades and below for twenty independent schools in the 2007 GCSE. In eighteen of these schools, the number of low grades in French was disproportionately high, often by a huge factor. The following table gives a flavour of this evidence.

	French candidates as a percentage of total Exam entry	French grades C and below as a percentage of total number of C grades (and below) in the school
School P	11.5%	32.1%
School Q	5.5%	12.1%
School R	5.7%	13.1%
School S	9.8%	25.0%
School T	9.3%	22.5%
School U	9.1%	18.7%
School V	8.7%	23.3%
School W	9.9%	26.4%
School X	9.8%	21.2%
School Y	9.1%	31.6%

Thus, in school W, although French represents only 9.9% of total GCSE examinations sat, the subject contributes more than 26% of the school's C and D grades.

I apologise if I have drowned you in figures, but I hope that my data helps to confirm that severe grading at GCSE is a real phenomenon for many schools. I reiterate the caveat that highly selective schools appear to be largely unaffected by the problem, but feel that my findings validate ISMLA's stance in backing ALL's campaign for parity of grading. Please do contact me if you would like either to confirm or challenge this research; my e-mail address can be found elsewhere in this publication.



Ofqual, ALL initiatives and ISMLA

Geoffrey Plow
University College School

As many members will know, ISMLA has been supporting for some time the initiatives of the Association for Language Learning to bring to the attention of QCA the long-standing depression of GCSE grades in Modern Foreign Languages by comparison with other subjects in the curriculum.

The work of Helen Myers, now Past President of ALL and Assistant Head at The Ashcombe School, Dorking, Surrey, has been crucial in this regard.

ALL published the following press release on 14 August:

'ALL is delighted to note the contribution that languages has made to boost A-level results and the fact that languages entries overall have increased.

The high number of entrants achieving A grades in languages was especially encouraging and shows that the UK education system can produce excellent linguists.

Helen Myers, President of ALL, said:

"I would like to congratulate both students and teachers for the superb efforts they have made which have resulted in such a positive outcome. Learning languages can be a great deal of fun, but it requires a great deal of sustained commitment to succeed."

We note that the published figures also include numbers for AS level entries, which show a significant drop of around 7% overall. We believe that this is a consequence of the progressive diminution of numbers taking GCSE, not just the overall numbers, but also in terms of candidates who could have gained the required A-C in order to qualify for an AS course. The grading of GCSE languages examinations is still a matter of concern for ALL and we look forward with interest to the publication of the GCSE grades next week.*

We appreciate the efforts currently being made by everyone in the languages community to draw attention to the value of studying languages, not just for personal benefits, but also for the economic health of the country as a whole. Results like these give a boost to all our efforts."

Experience tells me that complaints and comments from the independent sector about GCSE MFL have tended to focus not on subject grades in general but the marking and moderation of individual components.

If I'm wrong -and you *do* sense a disadvantageous disparity in your school between the GCSE grades of your modern language candidates and those they achieved in other subjects - you may be interested in a document Helen Myers has put together to guide colleagues who want to raise the matter formally:

http://www.all-london.org.uk/Resources/severe_grading/Raising%20queries%20about%20GCSE%20grading%20version%202.doc

The document describes the possibility of approaching a new body (with new initials, and hence a new acronym) called **Ofqual** - the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (www.ofqual.gov.uk). This body has emerged as a result of a split in the functions of QCA. Briefly, the 'old' QCA now works solely on the development of the curriculum and of qualifications, while Ofqual regulates qualifications

and monitors national curriculum assessments. Its role is limited to England, and it is a body that does not report to the government.

If you think you may want to pursue any approach suggested in Helen Myers' paper, do please get in touch with me (my details are printed in this newsletter). It is an enormous help, when attempting to speak out against the relative difficulty of MFL GCSEs, to be able to speak for the independent sector as a representative body, and to know what other people are experiencing. And progress in this area, coupled with the latest GCSE reforms, just might help attenuate the 'AS' downturn Helen Myers refers to in the press release.



See on-line for a range of resources and courses

Question paper production at AQA

Patrick Thom

Manchester Grammar School

I represent ISMLA on the AQA Modern Foreign Languages Subject Advisory Committee, and that entitles me to serve as well on the French GCE Question Paper Evaluation Committee. I thought that it might be helpful for colleagues to know the processes by which a question paper is generated, and the levels of scrutiny that it passes through before arriving on our candidates' desks.

There is a Principal Examiner for each unit, formerly 6, now 4 units in the new specification. In the case of the AS and A2 Speaking units, this is the same person. These senior examiners gather materials throughout the year and use them to compose a selection of possible exam questions. Early in the new school year they will submit to AQA a first draft of the question paper and mark scheme, containing more questions than can actually be used in the final paper. These are then circulated to the Chair of Examiners, the Chief Examiner, Reviser and the Principal Examiners for the other units for their scrutiny and comment.

The Reviser for GCE French is a native speaker whose principal role is to ensure that the question paper reflects the defined content of the specification, meets the requirements of the assessment criteria and differentiates appropriately. The proposed mark scheme is also reviewed at this stage. A written report from the Reviser, together with written comments from the other senior examiners is sent to the question paper setter. Later in the autumn term, the Chair of Examiners, Chief Examiner, Reviser, Principal Examiners, together with the Senior Subject Officer from AQA meet for a pre-QPEC (Question Paper Evaluation Committee) meeting. The papers are considered in great detail - some questions will be rejected, others accepted and amendments made as required. On the basis of the discussions and decisions at that meeting, the Principal Examiners then produce a second draft for submission to AQA.

This second draft, together with transcripts of listening material and mark schemes, is then sent to the members of the QPEC, including myself, all serving or very recently retired teachers. We are invited to comment in detail and in writing on what we find. Apart from spotting

infelicities or typographical errors, I try to look at each paper with the eyes of a candidate. What would I find ambiguous, misleading or excessively difficult? I see if I would come up with answers which are not included in the mark scheme, and I compare the papers with those from previous years. I look for consistency across multiple parallel components in those papers which have them, the cards for the Speaking Tests, for example.

All these detailed written comments are submitted to AQA and sent to the Principal Examiners and they are given time to reflect on them before the QPEC meeting itself. At each meeting we set the papers for the following summer and those for the subsequent January (AS only). For the legacy specification with six units, this process took two days. Everything is discussed very fully, often animatedly, until a sufficient measure of agreement is reached under the guidance of the Chair of Examiners and the papers are put into their final form.

I have no doubt that the number of experienced professionals involved and the different mechanisms used to produce

the question papers ensures that the AQA language papers give a fair test without any unpleasant surprises to the candidates.

ISMLA

welcomes any articles,
reports and other
contributions that
would be of interest to
members.

Please contact
Thomas Underwood
for further details
(See inside cover for
contact information).

**Articles for the
Spring Edition of
the Newsletter
should be with the
editor by Thursday
1st January 2009.**



Canning House

Where the UK meets Latin America & Iberia

Canning House Essay Competition 2009

We are pleased to announce the third Canning House Essay Competition that will be running this autumn.

The title of the essay, to be written in Spanish or Portuguese, is "The Latin American I most admire".

1st Prize for Spanish

A cheque for £250 and a return ticket to a Latin American country of the winner's choice

2nd Prize for Spanish

A cheque for £150

3rd Prize for Spanish

A cheque for £100

Prize for Portuguese

A cheque £300

These prizes are partly sponsored by Iberia Airlines and Banco Itaú.

INFORMATION

-The subject of the essay can be a living person or an historic figure.

-All entrants may, of course, consult reference books, the internet, local libraries etc. However, any plagiarism will lead to disqualification.

-All entries will be carefully read. Particular importance will be attached to well structured arguments, correct use of language, original thought and evidence of research on Latin America etc.

-Candidates should ensure their names appear clearly on each page.

-Illustrations can be included if they are relevant to the essay, but no extra credit will be given for presentation or layout.

-The organizers of the competition urge candidates to proofread their essays carefully to avoid being penalised for minor grammatical errors.

-Canning House expects to announce the winning essays by 27th February 2009.

Entry forms are now available on our website:
www.canninghouse.com

For further information or queries please contact us on: Education-outreach@canninghouse.com

RULES AND INFORMATION

RULES

1. The competition is open to all students in the United Kingdom aged between 17 and 19 years on 31st December 2008
 2. The essay must be:
 - a. between 750 and 1,000 words long
 - b. written in Spanish or Portuguese
 - c. on A4 paper.
 - d. handwritten or typed.
 - e. accompanied by a completed entry form (see above)
 - f. posted to the address below and postmarked no later than 12th December 2008:
- Canning House Essay Competition
Att. Larissa Litchfield
2 Belgrave Sq
London
SW1X 8PJ
3. The Judges' Panel will be appointed by Canning House.
 4. The decision of the Judges' Panel will be final.
 5. The Judges' Panel reserves the right not to award the prizes if, in its opinion, none of the essays merits award.
 6. "Latin America", for the purposes of the competition, is defined as the following countries:

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Cuba
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Guatemala
Honduras
Mexico
Nicaragua
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Uruguay
Venezuela

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Travel and Learn with Academia Hispánica, International House Córdoba



Are you looking for ways to inspire your Spanish class? Bring your students to Spain - let them experience the culture and language first hand. We guarantee they will go home with a new 'gusto' to learn (and probably some new friends too)!

Cordoba is a city with something for everyone: a lively festival season, bullfighting, a local wine region, small taverns with live flamenco, hidden patios, winding streets, world famous monuments and regional gastronomical delights. All this combined with friendly inhabitants make our city an ideal place to learn Spanish in Spain.

Academia Hispanica is a part of Cordoba's oldest language school and the original International House location. Since the beginning our founders have been committed to providing quality courses for students from around the world. Our teachers are all native speakers and have undergone thorough training for which International House is recognized. Our school is located in the center of the city of Cordoba, minutes by foot to 'La Mezquita, in a traditional Andalusian house.



Programs for groups in Córdoba can include everything from:

- Spanish classes
- Airport transfer (Seville, Madrid and Málaga)
- Cultural Activities (museums, Sevillanas dance classes, concerts and exhibitions, ...)
- Guided Tours ('La Mezquita,' the Jewish Quarter, carriage rides, ...)

- Excursions (Castillo del Almodóvar, local artisan factories, Sevilla, Málaga, Isla Mágica, ...)
- Accommodation (host family, hotel, hostel, apartments, ...)

As International House Cordoba is also a school that teaches English to local kids we always try to arrange an 'intercambio' so that both our foreign and local students can interact casually in their second language. In the past we have also worked with local schools interested in studying English abroad and have set up international school exchanges.

Planning a class trip shouldn't be stressful. Working with Academia Hispánica we take care of all the details - just tell us what you need!

Contact:
Lindsay MacNeil, +34 657 488 002

marketing@academiahispanica.com



¿Paridad=Igualdad?

María José Eguskiza

Consejería de Educación en el Reino Unido

A pesar de que tradicionalmente la presencia de las mujeres en los centros de poder tanto político como económico en el estado español ha sido muy escasa, en estos momentos hay paridad entre hombres y mujeres en el gobierno de España. Existen diecisiete ministerios, nueve de los cuales están dirigidos por mujeres: M^a Teresa Fernández de la Vega es la vicepresidenta primera, portavoz del Gobierno y ministra de la Presidencia; Carme Chacón es la primera mujer ministra de Defensa; Magdalena Álvarez lo es de Fomento; Mercedes Cabrera, de Educación, Política Social y Deporte; Elena Espinosa, de Medio Ambiente, Medio Rural y Marino; Elena Salgado, de Administraciones Públicas; Beatriz Corredor, de Vivienda; Cristina Garmendia, de Ciencia e Innovación y Bibiana Aído, de Igualdad.

Esta tendencia a la paridad o, al menos a una mayor presencia de mujeres en los órganos de poder, no está presente sólo en el partido del gobierno. Dos mujeres jóvenes han accedido a cargos de gran importancia política en el partido más

importante de la oposición: M^a Dolores de Cospedal es la secretaria general y Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría portavoz parlamentaria del Partido Popular.

¿Quiere esto decir que la sociedad española ha cambiado radicalmente en poco tiempo?, ¿se han transformado definitivamente los roles masculinos y femeninos?, ¿refleja este gobierno el acceso paritario de las mujeres a cargos de responsabilidad en todos los ámbitos de la vida educativa, cultural, social, económica, etc.? O, por el contrario, ¿se trata simplemente de una medida puramente cosmética para tranquilizar a las mujeres haciéndoles creer que la igualdad ya se ha conseguido?

Aunque algunos puedan pensar que esta paridad al más alto nivel político significa que ya se ha conseguido la igualdad, la verdad es que simplemente se trata de una herramienta más para ayudar a lograr los objetivos de los planes de igualdad que se han ido poniendo en práctica durante estos últimos años y cuya finalidad es avanzar hacia una sociedad más justa e igualitaria en la que todos los ciudadanos y ciudadanas asuman los mismos derechos y deberes.

Es también el reflejo de un deseo. La sociedad española se está transformando de manera importante y quiere seguir avanzando hacia cotas de igualdad cada vez mayores. Puede que no refleje la realidad que se vive actualmente pero es la que mayoritariamente se quiere vivir.

Ruta Quetzal 2009

Fecha; para tu agenda

Las bases para la elección del representante del Reino Unido en la Ruta Quetzal 2009 se publicarán en la web de la Consejería de Educación

<http://www.mepsyd.es/external/uk>

en septiembre de 2008.

Los departamentos de lenguas de los centros interesados tendrán hasta el 5 de noviembre para proponer a sus nuevos candidatos

Juvenes Tradutores competition

UK secondary schools can now enrol for the second Juvenes Tradutores (young translators) competition, launched by the European Commission in 2007 to promote language learning and translation. At the end of the registration period (October 20), a number of schools from each Member State will be selected randomly. After the selection, the schools must communicate the names of up to four participating pupils. These pupils will then take on the challenge of the translation contest, to be held on 27 November 2008, thus discovering the challenge of moving text from one language to another.

"The first contest was an excellent opportunity for young people to discover for themselves what it really feels like to be a translator and to try out their language skills," said the European Commissioner for Multilingualism, Leonard Orban. "It was also successful in promoting multilingualism and demonstrating the value of language learning as well as in raising interest in the crucial but often forgotten profession of translation".

Between 1 September and 20 October, any school that wishes to participate in the translation contest has to submit an electronic registration form. The form is available on the contest website <http://ec.europa.eu/translation> in all 23 official EU languages.

After 20 October, a random electronic selection will be made to select a number of schools from among those that have registered from each Member State. The number of schools to be selected will be based on the number of votes that the Member State has in the Council of the European Union multiplied by two.



Language World 2009

University of Leicester.

*Challenge and change – grasping
the nettle*

Friday 3 and Saturday 4 April 2009.

We have a very full and stimulating programme planned with a wide range of speakers from all sectors, special strands on the new secondary curriculum and community languages and a special event for adult education.

We are particularly pleased that for the first time in 2009 we'll welcome British Sign Language colleagues to a special Language World event.

Confirmed plenary speakers include Sir Keith Ajegbo and Terry Lamb.

For more information consult the ALL website (www.all-languages.org.uk) or contact Sheila James now on 0116 229 7454 or sheilaj@all-languages.org.uk

Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis

Pauline Moloney
King Alfred School

Plus de 18 millions d'entrées. Une clientèle d'habitues, mais aussi des spectateurs qui d'ordinaire déserteraient les salles obscures. De tous âges, de toutes catégories sociales. Quelles sont les raisons d'un tel phénomène ?

Le dernier film de Dany Boon, loin de figurer en tête de liste des meilleurs films de tous les temps, a ce don particulier de plaire à tous grâce à des ingrédients indispensables en ces temps de « sinistrose ». Une histoire toute simple : un postier est muté dans le Pas-de-Calais pour faute professionnelle. Comment un Méditerranéen parviendra-t-il à s'intégrer chez les Corons, dans un pays froid, et à la réputation hostile? La réponse sied dans la plume magique de Dany Boon, son humour éclatant et son passé de Ch'ti.

Mais bien au delà de la comédie en soi, c'est le message d'humanité des personnages qui insuffle la bouffée d'air frais dont les Français avaient tant besoin en ce moment. Simplicité, gentillesse et générosité animent le cœur des

personnages principaux, et rappellent aux spectateurs ces valeurs oubliées et qui font si cruellement défaut à nos quotidiens intrépides et stressés.

Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis titille une corde sensible, et nous offre de croire au bonheur. Un luxe inouï au pays des champions du monde des râleurs.



Reviews

So you Really Want to Learn Spanish

Galore Park Publishing Ltd

Mike Bolger

ISBN 1 902984 10 2

The logical and overtly grammatical approach to language learning behind this Galore Park textbook will not fail to impress many language teachers as I can see a number of ways in which a linguist could find such a valuable resource helpful in the classroom. Just like the other language textbooks in the series 'So you Really Want to Learn...' this new Spanish textbook relies more on traditional than communicative teaching techniques. However, this new addition to the Galore Park language textbooks is such a versatile resource, clearly laid out and filled with engaging visuals that it should help to engage learners of all ages and ability levels.

Progression is obvious from the first chapters with pronunciation rules backed up by many grammar exercises to practise. The activities cater for all major skills without an over reliance on the written word as speaking and listening activities are also well represented and imaginative. This textbook is

clearly aimed at the higher ability range with translation activities and long vocabulary revision sections at the end of every unit. The graded level of difficulty also means that you could use several books in one year (as there are three books in the series) and therefore continue to stretch the more able pupils.

However, it also makes sense that 'So, you Really Want to Learn Spanish' could be used in a mixed ability class as a complement to more communicative techniques, to stretch the more able pupils and give them the grammar background they need or simply as a self-assessment method before the end of a term or a year's work. This is an extremely well thought out language learning method for children and adults alike!

This thorough approach to language learning will ensure that the best linguists are stretched from an early age and can very quickly become independent learners.

Patrick Le Berre

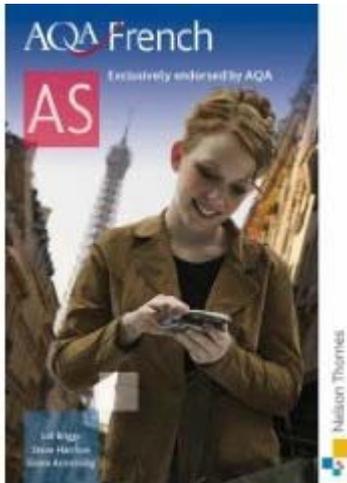
Highgate School

AS French for AQA

Nelson Thornes

Elaine Armstrong, Lol Briggs, Steven Harrison

ISBN 978-0-7487-9807-0



It seems that publishers have been caught somewhat on the hop by the new A Level specifications and Nelson Thornes new AS textbook for AQA arrived on my desk shortly before the end of Summer Term. However, it does appear that considerable thought has been put into producing a modern, attractive resource that will complement existing materials.

I feel that Nelson Thornes have realised that an AS course does not have to be all-encompassing; all Sixth Form teachers supplement a basic coursebook with materials

gleaned from various sources, together with a myriad of exercises developed over many years. The book is split into twelve short chapters, with each double-page spread dealing with a specific issue. As such, it does not seek to provide material on any conceivable sub-topic we might have previously taught, but its chosen focus is modern and, dare I say it, actually quite interesting! What I particularly like about the new book is that it provides a number of short exercises which will be perfect for AS pupils as they gain confidence in dealing with larger chunks of language. Reading comprehension passages are generally short, and will complement the weightier texts from Heinemann's *Zénith* that I intend to continue using. Nelson Thornes has also invested significantly in an online platform that delivers listening passages (both audio and video), extension and reinforcement material and online progress tests. Unfortunately, I haven't had access to this whilst reviewing the book, but understand that the resources are perfect both to delve into with a class, and also to promote independent learning outside the classroom. The huge grammar burden of AS does make an appearance, but teachers should not imagine

that AS French for AQA will provide nearly enough material to drill key grammar points; thank goodness therefore that our existing grammar books will continue to be relevant to the new specifications.

I believe therefore that AS French for AQA may well play a useful role in the AS classroom, alongside existing resources, to provide up-to-date, attractive material which will support learners as they begin to make the significant step up from GCSE.

Duncan Byrne

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

The Chinese Classroom

Lexus

Yuhui Fu

Book 1 ISBN 1-904737-14-5

Book 2 ISBN 1-904737-11-0

This new course published by Lexus comes in two volumes - one which concentrates on developing speaking skills and one on reading and writing. Neither has a specific GCSE focus although ultimately they cover many of the grammar points and vocabulary required.

The speaking volume is accompanied by a CD, which enables the learner to listen and repeat sentences. It takes,

as this might suggest, a rather pedestrian approach to teaching the language, tending to simply present vocabulary and sentence patterns as discrete items with little sense of reinforcement of previously presented material; an approach which becomes rather boring as one works through the chapters. There are frustratingly no chunky listening exercises, with listening being undertaken only to learn correct pronunciation. The Mandarin is however very clear, with attention drawn to the trickier areas such as tonal changes when words are combined, and the CD would undoubtedly be of great value to anyone learning the language independently or without access to a native speaker. There are no explicit grammar explanations nor is there a grammar reference section, which is frustrating for anyone who likes to look up grammar points. Pinyin is used throughout the speaking volume, with no use of Chinese characters at all. Divorcing speaking and reading/writing skills so completely in my opinion is unhelpful and coursebooks which integrate the skills are certainly much more appropriate to GCSE teaching.

The volume which focuses on writing skills is strangely organised. It does not run in parallel with the speaking

volume as one might expect and there is no cross-referencing. The exercises included to practise the characters which it introduces are frequently not very effective and occasionally actually unhelpful. Characters are written slightly wrongly for example or placed next to an incorrect picture and the learner must correct the error. I am not a fan of such exercises as I harbour a suspicion that the brain can be enticed into learning the error itself. The majority of exercises are also so easy that they are rather tedious and there are sadly no chunky reading comprehensions to get ones teeth into.

The twin volumes of "the Chinese Classroom" provide a good introduction to the basics of Mandarin for independent learners, although I have reservations about the way in which the skills are divorced from one another. The lack of grammar reference, GCSE or IB ab-initio focus, teacher resources and meaty reading and listening exercises mean that these are not books I would recommend to colleagues looking for a class text, however.

Andrew Hunt
Whitgift School, Croydon

Clic!

Oxford University Press
Danièle Bourdais and
Sue Finnie
ISBN: 978-0-19-912674-3

The new French Course Clic published by Oxford University Press is a programme for Key Stage 3 pupils. The full programme is composed of the Students' book, the En Solo Workbook with Audio CD, the Teachers' Resource book (these cater for two levels Star and Plus), together with one set of Interactive and Assessment CD ROMs (which cater for both levels). The course claims to enhance communicative skills, develop cultural knowledge and to improve independent learning strategies.

The Students' book is organised into six topics, each followed by sub-sections named Labo-langue, which give grammar explanations, learning strategies and pronunciation practice; Blog-notes, which summarise each topic through interactive video blogs; En Plus, providing further reinforcement activities; Clic.fr, focussing on cultural facts; and finally Vocabulaire and On chante! At the end of the book there is a section named Lecture dedicated to further Reading, a Grammar section, which summarises the main points covered earlier with additional

exercises and then a bilingual glossary.

The layout and appearance of each topic is bright and inviting even if a little over colour-coded. Speaking and Listening exercises seem to dominate. There is a graded application of tasks ranging from the repetition of words to role-play exercises, from counting specific sounds to listening for specific answers and note-taking.

The Reading skill features less prominently in the main body of the topics. Exercises include matching-up tasks, true or false, gap-fills and very few reading comprehensions early on to many more later on in topics five and six. The section Lecture, however, succeeds in providing additional reading tasks and extension work for each topic.

The writing skill seems to feature less prominently altogether. Exercises include matching-up tasks, list-writing, gap-fills and then the Grammar exercises to be found in Labo-langue. By topic three, it is expected for the pupils to write a text of seventy-five words on their school time-table, although this rate of progression does not seem to be upheld in later chapters. Some pupils may also need a more

structured build-up than what is provided here.

The best feature of this course seems to be the En Solo Workbook and its self-study CD. It provides 'fun' exercises corresponding to each topic, covering all skill areas focussing on key grammar and vocabulary revision. The CD will allow independent Listening practice for pupils and this could be ideal for homework.

At first glance, therefore, Clic would appear to achieve its objectives, and the opportunity for self-study with your own CD could reinforce the element of fun in language learning.

Tina Postalian
University College School

Potential Reviewers!

Are you keen to review any new material that we receive from publishers (reviewers may keep the resource for the department)?

If the answer is "yes", please contact the Patrick Le Berre, Reviews Editor or Thomas Underwood,

Magic French Verb Cards

Advance Materials
Jackie Garratt and Pierrette
Macdonald
ISBN 978-0-9547695-3-6

Français! Français! Deutsch! Deutsch! ¡Español! ¡Español!

www.language-factory.co.uk
Carole Nicoll
ISBN 1-905898-00-2 / 978-1-905898-
00-8

Primary French Resource File 2

LCP
Sally Maynard
ISBN 1-905101-36-8

“...à la française”

Authentik Language Learning
Resources
Kristina Tobutt
ISBN 978-1-905275-25-0

Here are four new publications, all of which in their different ways will aid the MFL teacher in delivering the curriculum more effectively at primary level.

Perhaps the least ambitious of the three is the set of so-called ‘Magic Verb’ cards (from Advance Materials, at www.advancematerials.co.uk). These feature sixteen very commonly used verbs (e.g. être, avoir, aller, faire, aimer, vendre, connaître etc.—all the

usual suspects), and sensibly restrict themselves to the present tense only. Each verb is presented on a separate card. First, second and third persons are each characterized by a different and distinctive ‘froggy’ cartoon character. Short but fairly wide-ranging (if not terribly inventive) sentences exemplify the verb in use.



There is a magic red ‘see-through’ cover for each card: the pupil puts this on top of the verb, and, hey presto! the French verb-form magically disappears from its sentence, and so has to be supplied from memory.

One can see this being used as an effective little starter activity, or whenever one needs to revise verbs quickly. The set of cards can be used with individual pupils, with pairs, or even with slightly larger groups, and one can conceive of ways in

which learners might be encouraged to improvise their own original sentences using those provided here as models.

The overall presentation is reliable and unpretentious: it will 'do what it says on the tin', but not much more.

If you are an MFL non-specialist, or a specialist who is intending to focus mainly on speaking skills in French, Spanish, or German, then a series of undeniably useful starter-packs might be Carole Nicoll's Français, Français; Español, Español; or Deutsch, Deutsch (all published by the Aberdeen-based Language Factory (www.language-factory.co.uk, and all definitely geared towards younger learners).



These are discretely topic-based resources (about 30 such topics are covered, closely similar if not quite identical in all three

packs). Each pack consists of a colourful book (perhaps a tad too worthy and workmanlike in terms of its graphic design); some decent electronic flashcards (some of them helpfully colour-coded for gender); and, as each pack's pièce de résistance, a stunningly wide range of songs, raps, and karaoke tracks, together with quirky poems and jokes (mainly recorded by French / Spanish / German schoolchildren, so that they are both authentic and up-to-date). Some fairly basic grammar (e.g. articles, possessives, adjectives, prepositional phrases and basic verbs) is introduced as well. Photocopiable worksheets are provided, together with built-in assessment procedures. Apparently a CD-ROM is also in the pipeline. The accompanying ring-bound books help one find one's way through the different topics and CDs. Everything has been carefully and systematically thought out and the layout is commendably clear and unfussy.

A far more substantial package, however, comes from the ever-reliable LCP: this is the glossy and colourful Primary French Resource File 2 by Sally Maynard (no relation). This is basically a continuation pack that expands on Resource File 1, and it has many virtues, some of which I will attempt to outline.



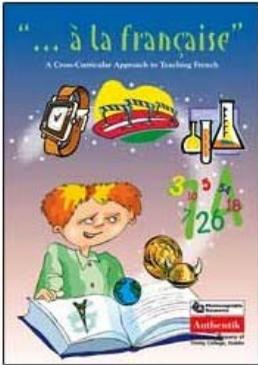
Firstly there are the very cogent and helpful lesson-plans, all linked both to KS2 specifically, and to the overall MFL national curriculum programmes of study framework. In addition there are many cross-curricular links, also very lucidly presented. The new vocabulary to be introduced is provided in list-form at the start of each well-defined and carefully designed unit. All this means that the package is extremely teacher-friendly. What else? Where does one start? Well, the large flip-book that has been provided is handy for stimulating creativity, or for introducing each new topic as it emerges. There is a good set of flash-cards. There are excellent suggestions for learning at home. The material is well differentiated throughout, and there is much good extension work. Starters and plenaries are laid on. The worksheets are simple and practical, and very coherently presented. There is a good range of songs. The topics covered include 'School', 'Sport', 'Clothes', 'Where I

Live' and 'French-Speaking Countries'. There are two accompanying CDs, the first of which contains the flashcards, the interactive flip-book, as well as other versatile resource files, and the second of which contains the French songs, together with a pronunciation guide.

Among the many strengths of this excellent package is its sheer flexibility: it allows individual teachers to play to their strengths, and to employ the teaching styles that best suit them and their pupils. Everything comes in both formats: the traditional printed format and an electronic one. The same content can thus be sampled in several different ways.

These resources are specifically intended for Years 5 and 6, but prep school teachers will doubtless be able to use them with younger pupils as well.

The fourth item under review is what I would regard as a genuine 'top-of the-bill' performer: "A la Française" from Authentik. This truly has star quality. I cannot be the only French teacher who has been dreaming of just such a package for decades—and here it is at last.



What is really exciting about it is that it is based on the sound premise that learning a modern foreign language demands both real content and significant context. Using the language becomes a much more meaningful activity for pupils when it is used as a means to learning some other subject at the same time. The subjects covered here are Maths (numbers up to 100, shapes, mental calculations and currency), Science (comparing animals), Geography (using maps, La Réunion, Europe), Music (recognizing different musical instruments), Art (Matisse, colour and form, designing a model), History (the Vikings in France, and child labour in the 19th century), and P.E. (following instructions).

This would be a valuable pack for both specialists and non-specialists alike, since it is easy to use and highly flexible (one can dip in at any point of entry,

and no particular order is necessarily better than any other). Its cross-curricular credentials are impeccable, and it's inter-cultural as well. There are clear references to the KS2 Framework and to the Languages Ladder. There are explicit and detailed lesson-plans, supported by simple Powerpoints and an audio CD, together with some helpful copy masters. A good range of follow-up activities is provided, as are useful links to websites, and practical suggestions for extension work.

One surmises that the principle behind this praiseworthy enterprise could have been pushed even further in some instances: why just the one French painter, when French art provides so many other worthy candidates? Why not even more paintings? Could the musical content not have been linked with the art content? What about poetry, and the opportunities it would generate for pupil creativity? How about an RS component?

But these are mere quibbles. This is a very welcome addition to the repertoire of anyone teaching French to children aged 5 upwards, and I cannot recommend it more highly.

Evelyne Maynard
Lochinver House School



The French Presidency of the European Union: Celebrating Culture!

Between July and December 2008, France will use the opportunity of its EU presidency to develop cultural projects in conjunction with other member countries, with the aim of promoting cultural diversity and encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

'Paris Calling', a cross-Channel celebration of international theatre arts beginning January 2009, will receive its official launch on 13 October at a special performance of *in-i*, the new piece featuring French actress Juliette Binoche and British dancer Akram Khan, playing at the National Theatre from 18 September to 20 October.

Another joint project, 'DancEUnion', organised under the auspices of the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC), will bring together emerging dancers and choreographers from across the EU for four days of performances at London's Southbank Centre on the 19th - 22nd September.

And on 2 October, a major new international exhibition 'Le Corbusier - The Art of Architecture' will premiere in Liverpool, European Capital of Culture for 2008.

These are just three of many events planned across the UK this autumn. A lively programme of talks, performances and exhibitions will range across artforms and engage with topics as different as multi-lingualism in schools, the legacy of '68, and documentary and the arts.

Laurence Auer

Director of the Institut français



French Presidency of the EU
Cultural programme across the UK
June - December 2008

