

The cover features a large, stylized graphic on the right side. It consists of a red shape that resembles a thick, horizontal arrow pointing to the right. A blue triangle is positioned at the tip of this red arrow, pointing towards the right edge of the cover. The overall design is minimalist and modern, using the colors of the French flag (blue, white, and red).

Advanced
French Grammar

Monique L'Huillier

Advanced French Grammar

This reference grammar, written for advanced students of French, their teachers, and others who want to improve their understanding of the French language, combines the best of modern and traditional approaches. Its objective is not only practical mastery of the language, but familiarity with its structure. Taking into account modern linguistic research, the *Grammar* approaches the French language primarily through the study of syntactic structures, but without excessive emphasis on formalism. It provides a generous number of examples, based on the author's own experience of teaching French to foreigners, to help the student to understand the different meanings of apparently similar syntactic alternatives. The norms of 'correct expression' are given, together with current usage and deviations, and appendixes provide information on the 1990 spelling reforms and on numbers. A substantial index of French and English words and of topics provides easy access to the text itself.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521484251

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First published 1999

Seventh printing 2009

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

L'Huillier, Monique.

Advanced French grammar / Monique L'Huillier.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 48228 3 (hb). – ISBN 0 521 48425 1 (pb)

1. French language – Grammar. 2. French language – Textbooks for foreign speakers – English. I. Title.

PC2112.L485 1999

448.2'421—dc21

98–22110

CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-48228-8 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-48425-1 paperback

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To Dizzy, Lizzy and G-M

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all the friends and colleagues who have given me their support while writing this book, in particular Juliet Laxton, who read the manuscript with the fresh outlook of an enthusiastic student and contributed to the explanations given, Peter Flake, who read the manuscript with a non-linguist's eye and kept the jargon under control, and Dominique Lagorgette, who reminded me that there is more to the pronunciation of French than a Parisian accent.

Most of all I would like to thank Mary-Annick Morel, for her patience and dedication in answering my innumerable questions over the years of the preparation of the book, and Marina Yaguello, whose linguistics seminars at the Institute of Romance Studies in London were an endless source of inspiration.

I would like to thank the following for giving permission to quote:

Le Monde, *Libération*, *The Economist* and *Radio Times* (various extracts); M. Alain Reynaud-Fourton for quoting from his play *Monsieur Amédée*, Editions Gallimard for quoting from Albert Camus, *L'étranger* and *L'exil et le royaume*, Michel Tournier, *Le roi des Aulnes*, Jean Cocteau, *Les parents terribles*, Proust, *Du côté de Guermantes*, Charles Baudelaire, *Petits poèmes en prose*, *Tableaux parisiens* and *L'invitation au voyage*; Librairie Plon for Raymond Devos, *Où-dire*; Editions Christian Bourgois for Georges Perec, *Tentatives d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien*; Chatto and Windus for Richard Hughes, *In Hazard* and Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers*, Editions Albin Michel for Paul Guth, *Le naïf amoureux*; Editions Tallandier for Christian Melchior-Bonnet, *Grand livre de l'histoire de France*; Faber and Faber Ltd for George Steiner, *Language and Silence*.

In addition, permission was obtained from The Society of Authors as the literary representative of the estate of L. P. Hartley to quote from L. P. Hartley, *The Hireling*; from the Estate of Georges Simenon to quote from Georges Simenon, *Maigret et la jeune morte*.

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Introduction

The aim of this book is to be as comprehensive as possible in its coverage of all the points of French grammar normally encountered by undergraduate students in French. It can serve as a textbook but its main purpose is to be a reference book. As it covers all levels from basic to very advanced, it should fill the gaps which may be present in even an advanced student's knowledge.

Many of the examples given to illustrate various points of grammar were inspired by students' essays and proses. The explanations reflect the author's experience of teaching French to English-speakers, and an awareness of their particular problems.

Constant references are made in the book to the terms and concepts explained in the framework chapters, i.e. chapter 1 Parts of Speech, chapter 2 Syntax and Grammatical Functions, chapter 3 Pronunciation, Spelling, Registers, Punctuation, and chapter 4 Introduction to Verbs. Although these chapters provide a useful overview for the advanced student, the beginner should refer to them only when further explanation of a grammatical term is needed.

Whenever possible, equivalent French terminology is given so as to facilitate reference to French grammar books.

The book indicates the 'correct' grammar that an undergraduate is expected to use in written and oral examinations, but also mentions deviations that are used by French writers for literary effect. It is not unusual for a turn of phrase which is deemed 'incorrect' at one time to become the norm later. Hence turns of phrase for which usage is currently shifting (e.g. *c'est* vs *il est*; *après que* + subjunctive vs indicative) are discussed. In the meantime, deviations are identified which have not yet become current usage and which should be avoided by the undergraduate.

The term 'informal French' refers broadly to most spoken French and relaxed writing (e.g. most personal correspondence). The term 'formal French' refers to oratory, careful style in broadcasting, essay or other literary writing, and formal correspondence. Students are normally expected to emulate formal French in their written and oral examinations.

The terms 'speaker', 'interlocutor' and 'discourse' are used throughout the book.

- The discourse is the set of utterances constituting speech or text. Hence a word is used 'in discourse' as opposed to appearing as an entry in a dictionary.
- The speaker is the narrator, whoever says *je* in writing or speaking.
- The interlocutor is whoever is *tu* and reads or listens to the speaker.

Whenever relevant, pronunciation is given using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

The symbols used in the book are:

- a slash / to indicate an alternative
- square brackets [] to indicate an optional part of an utterance, or IPA transcriptions
- an asterisk * to indicate an ungrammatical or otherwise unacceptable utterance in the given context
- a question mark ? at the beginning of an utterance to indicate that it is not immediately acceptable or interpretable, or that the register is not appropriate
- round brackets () to indicate an explanation
- a single underscore _ to indicate ellipsis of a word or a missing letter (e.g. for comparison purposes between the two languages)
- an arrow → to indicate a possible transformation or an implication

The common abbreviations used are:

- sb somebody
- sth something
- *qn quelqu'un*
- *qch quelque chose*

1 Framework

- (iii) They can be simple (*un chou, une fleur*) or compound (*un chou-fleur, un gratte-ciel*).

2.2 Properties

Nouns can be organized in sub-classes with different semantic and syntactic characteristics called lexical features (*traits lexicaux*). They can:

(i) **be common or proper**

- common:

Ex: *un homme; un chat; une table*

- proper:

Ex: *Marie, Médor; la France, la Seine, la rue de Rivoli, Paris; le Conseil d'Etat*

NB(1): The first letter of a proper noun is a capital.

NB(2): Common nouns are generally preceded by an article (*le chat*) whilst proper nouns referring to animates (*Paul*) are generally used by themselves, but see exceptions in chapter 23 Articles.

(ii) **represent animates or inanimates**

- animates (human or non-human):

Ex: *un homme, une femme; un chat*

- inanimates, including concrete or abstract (see below):

Ex: *une table, la natation, la philosophie*

This distinction is important in several contexts, e.g. relative, interrogative and personal object pronouns, or the use of *c'est/il est* (see relevant chapters).

(iii) **be concrete or abstract**

- concrete (can be seen, felt or heard):

Ex: *la table, du vin, le vent*

- abstract:

Ex: *la force, l'amitié, la psychologie*

(iv) **be countable or uncountable**

- countable (can be counted):

Ex: **un** *pain complet* (**a** wholewheat **loaf**)

- uncountable (refer to quantities):

Ex: **du** *pain complet* (wholewheat **bread**)

(v) **be collective or individual**

- collective (refer to groups of the same category):

Ex: *la famille, la vaisselle*

- individual:

Ex: *un père, une assiette*

3 Verbs

According to the traditional definition, verbs express actions (e.g. *marcher*) or states (e.g. *être*). The set of forms that a verb can take is called its conjugation. An introduction to verbs is given in chapter 4.

4 Determiners

The determiner introduces the noun, with which it agrees in gender and number. Determiners constitute a closed or finite class, i.e. new ones cannot be invented or borrowed.

There are seven classes of determiners:

- articles
- demonstrative adjectives
- possessive adjectives
- interrogative and exclamative adjectives
- relative adjectives
- numeral adjectives
- indefinite adjectives

A specific determiner (*déterminant spécifique*) cannot be combined with another.

The specific determiners are:

- articles: **le** chat, **un** chat, **du** lait
- demonstrative adjectives: **ce** chat
- possessive adjectives: **mon** chat

Other determiners (*déterminants complémentaires*) can be combined with another, and with specific determiners according to precise rules (see relevant chapters).

For instance:

- numeral adjectives: **les trois** chats
- indefinite adjectives: **tous mes** chats

The article is the most common determiner of the noun.

Note that the above ‘adjectives’ are also called ‘non-qualifying adjectives’ or ‘determiners’ to distinguish them from ‘qualifying adjectives’ (see 5 below).

4.1 Articles

An article marks the gender and the number of the noun it determines. There are three kinds of articles:

- (i) definite (**le**, **la**, **l’**, **les**)

The use of the definite articles implies that the interlocutor can **identify** that referent, i.e. the ‘object of the world’ the word refers to.

Ex: *Passez-moi le livre qui est sur la table.*

Pass me the book that is on the table.

- (ii) indefinite (**un, une, des**)

Indefinite articles imply the **existence** of a set of referents. They extract one or several elements from that set, without identifying them.

Ex: *J'ai acheté **des** oranges.*
I've bought [some] oranges.

- (iii) partitive (**du, de la, de l'**)

The partitive article is used with uncountable nouns.

Ex: *Voulez-vous **du** fromage?*
Would you like [some] cheese?

The choice of articles depends on whether the noun is concrete or abstract, countable or non-countable, considered in its generic sense, etc. See chapter 23 Articles.

4.2 Demonstrative adjectives

- (i) The **simple** demonstrative adjectives are: **ce (cet), cette, ces**. These can be translated as 'this' or 'that', 'these' or 'those', depending on the context.

Ex: ***ce** livre; **cet** hôtel; **cette** robe; **ces** gens*

- (ii) The **compound** adjectives add **-ci** or **-là** after the noun, to indicate distance from or proximity to the speaker.

– distance from the speaker in time:

Ex: ***Ce** jour-**là**, je ne me sentais pas très bien.*
That day, I wasn't feeling very well.

– proximity to the speaker in space:

Ex: ***Ces** fleurs-**ci** me plaisent.*
I like these flowers.

See chapter 25 Demonstrative Adjectives.

4.3 Possessive adjectives

The possessive adjectives are:

mon, ma, mes	my
ton, ta, tes	your
son, sa, ses	his/her
notre, nos	our
votre, vos	your
leur, leurs	their

They agree in gender and number with the element possessed **and** in person with the possessor.

Ex: *les livres de **Marie**: **ses** livres*
Marie's books: **her** books

*la maison de **Paul et Marie**: **leur** maison*
Paul and Marie's house: **their** house

*la cravate de **Paul**: sa cravate*

Paul's tie: **his** tie

For details regarding possessive adjectives, and their use with parts of the body, see chapter 24 Possessive Adjectives.

4.4 Interrogative and exclamative adjectives

- (i) Interrogative adjectives: *quel, quelle, quels, quelles*

Interrogative adjectives enable one to ask a question about the noun.

Ex: ***Quelle** personne demandez-vous?*

Which person are you asking for?

- (ii) Exclamative adjectives: *quel, quelle, quels, quelles*

Exclamative adjectives are used to express surprise, indignation, joy, fear, etc. Their forms are the same as those of the interrogative adjective.

Ex: *Il ne vous a pas prévenu? **Quel** sans-gêne!*

Didn't he warn you? **What** a nerve!

See chapter 39 Interrogative and Exclamative Structures.

4.5 Relative adjectives

Relative adjectives are constructed with *quel*, preceded by the definite article (→ *lequel, laquelle, lesquels, lesquelles*).

They are used as relative determiners, particularly in literary and administrative styles. The group 'relative adjective + noun' is the equivalent of a relative pronoun (see 7.4 below).

Ex: *Je lui ai envoyé un dossier, **lequel** dossier ne lui est jamais parvenu.*

(= *Je lui ai envoyé un dossier, **qui** ne lui est jamais parvenu.*)

4.6 Numeral adjectives

- (i) Also part of the 'quantifiers' (see 4.7 Indefinite Adjectives below), they are used before nouns which refer to elements that can be counted (see countable nouns above), to specify the number or quantity of elements.

Ex: *Il y avait **cent dix** personnes à cette conférence.*

- (ii) Combinations:

They can be preceded by a specific determiner.

Ex: ***mes deux** chats; **les trois** mousquetaires; **ces six** roses rouges*

4.7 Indefinite adjectives

- (i) As determiners, they generally imply a certain quantity of elements, which may be countable or uncountable (they are also called 'quantifiers').

Ex: **Quelques** personnes viennent d'arriver.

A few people have just arrived.

*J'ai encore **pas mal de** travail à faire.*

I've still got **a fair amount of** work to do.

NB(1): Some indefinite adjectives can be combined with another determiner:

Ex: **tous les** chats noirs; **les quelques** chats noirs

NB(2): Others cannot:

Ex: ***les plusieurs** chats noirs

For further details, see chapter 36 Indefinite Words.

(ii) Some indefinite adjectives are **not** determiners. They express, for instance:

– imprecision:

Ex: *Il lisait une revue **quelconque**.*

– identity:

Ex: *J'ai la **même** robe que toi.*

– difference/contrast:

Ex: *J'ai un **autre** parapluie, si celui-ci ne te plaît pas.*

For further details, see chapter 36 Indefinite Words.

4.8 No determiner

The 'zero article' refers to cases where there is no specific determiner before nouns in French.

Ex: *Elle est **journaliste**.*

***Entrée** interdite.*

See chapter 23 Articles, section 6.

5 Qualifying adjectives

(i) A qualifying adjective expresses a **quality** of the referent of the noun.

(ii) It agrees with the noun in gender and number.

Ex: – masculine or feminine:

*un livre **intéressant**; une **belle** robe*
masculine feminine

– singular or plural:

*une **grande** maison; des gens **importants***
singular plural

Qualifying adjectives form an open class of words, i.e. new adjectives can be created; a recent example: *anabolisant*.

For details on the gender and number of adjectives and of the position of the adjective in relation to the noun, see chapter 28 Qualifying Adjectives.

6 Adverbs

- (i) Adverbs provide extra information about the meaning of a verb, adjective, other adverb or whole clause.
 Ex: *Tu marches **lentement**.*
*Vous êtes **trop** gentil.*
*Il conduit **si** vite!*
***Hier**, je suis allée au cinéma.*
- (ii) Adverbs are normally invariable (but see exceptions in chapters 28 Qualifying Adjectives, 29 Adverbs and 36 Indefinite Words).
- (iii) Adverbs can be simple (e.g. *bien*, *mal*, *vite*) or compound (e.g. *avant-hier*, *tout à fait*). They constitute an extremely varied class from the point of view of their morphology, but the largest category is that of adverbs in *-ment*.
- (iv) Adverbs which modify a clause are optional elements of that clause. They can be moved around according to certain rules (see chapters 2 Syntax, section 2.13 and 29 Adverbs, section 5).

Adverbs of negation (e.g. *Elle **ne** parle **pas***) are treated in chapter 38 Negative Structures. Interrogative and exclamative adverbs (e.g. ***Combien** coûte ce fauteuil?* ***Comme** c'est beau!*) are treated in chapter 39 Interrogative and Exclamative Structures. Indefinite adverbs (e.g. *Il est **tout** content*) are treated in chapter 36 Indefinite Words.

7 Pronouns

In principle, the purpose of a pronoun is to **replace** another element in a text. To this end, they form an essential part of text cohesion. However, they do not all replace something, hence the traditional distinction between 'nominal' and 'representative' pronouns.

- **Nominal** pronouns:
 - Some refer **directly** to their **respective referents** (i.e. not through a noun or anything else). It is the case for the first and second persons of the discourse. Indeed, *je* and *tu* do not refer to anybody else but the speaker and his/her interlocutor.
 - Others do not replace any expressed words either but refer **directly** to an **undetermined referent** (e.g. *quelqu'un*).
- **Representative** pronouns refer to an element already present in the context, called its **antecedent**.
 - This antecedent can be a noun (hence the term 'pro-noun').
 - But it can also be a lengthy noun phrase (see chapter 2 Syntax), another pronoun, an adjective, a verb in the infinitive, a clause or even a whole sentence (which is why some grammarians prefer to call them '**proforms**').

- The antecedent is normally placed **before** the representative pronoun: we have an **anaphor**.
Ex: *Un homme est arrivé. **Il** est entré dans le café.*
- It can sometimes be placed **after** the pronoun, generally for stylistic effect: we have a **cataphor**. However, what is represented by the pronoun is still its ‘antecedent’.
Ex: ***Elle** est vraiment sale, ta voiture.*
‘Elle’ refers cataphorically to ‘ta voiture’.
- The antecedent and its pronoun generally have the same referent, i.e. they refer to the same ‘object of the world’ (*un homme* and *il*, *elle* and *ta voiture*): there is **co-reference** between the antecedent and its pronoun (but see relevant chapters for cases when there is anaphora without co-reference).

There are seven classes of pronouns:

- personal and impersonal
- demonstrative
- possessive
- relative
- interrogative and exclamative
- indefinite
- numeral

In most cases, these can be either nominal or representative, but see relevant chapters for details. Agreement and syntax of pronouns are also treated in the relevant chapters.

7.1 Personal and impersonal pronouns

- (i) Personal pronouns refer to the persons of the discourse.
 - 1st person = the speaker: *je, moi (me); nous*
 - 2nd person = the interlocutor: *tu, toi (te); vous*
 - 3rd person = the one, or what, the speaker and/or interlocutors are talking about: *il, ils, lui, eux, elle, elles, le, la, les*
- (ii) The pronouns of the 1st and 2nd persons refer to or ‘name’ themselves.
Ex: ***Je** pars en vacances la semaine prochaine. Et **toi**?*
- (iii) In contrast, the pronouns of the 3rd person most of the time refer to or ‘represent’ another element with the same referent, expressed previously in the context (this is an example of anaphor).
Ex: *J’ai vu Pierre ce matin. **Il** était très content.*
‘Il’ refers to ‘Pierre’ in the preceding sentence.

The forms of the personal pronoun (clitic, e.g. *je* or tonic, e.g. *moi*) and its functions (e.g. subject, object) are treated in chapter 31 Personal Pronouns.

- (iv) The impersonal pronoun *il* is treated in detail in chapter 19 Impersonal Verbs.

7.2 Demonstrative pronouns

There are two types of demonstrative pronouns, simple and compound.

7.2.1 Simple demonstrative pronouns

celui, celle, ceux, celles (+ the neutral pronoun *ce, c'*)

- (i) These are mostly representative but not 'complete' in the sense that, in most cases, they must be accompanied by a complement (e.g. prepositional phrase, relative clause) which identifies the referent.
 - identification with a prepositional phrase:
Ex: *Vous cherchez un dictionnaire? Prenez celui de Marie.*
 - identification with a relative clause:
Ex: *Vous voulez un dictionnaire? Prenez celui qui est sur l'étagère à droite.*
- (ii) They can also be nominal. They are used by themselves as **animate** introducers to a relative clause with no antecedent.
Ex: *Malheur à celui qui n'aime pas les chats!*
Ceux qui ont fini peuvent partir.

7.2.2 Compound demonstrative pronouns

celui-ci, celui-là, celle-ci, celle-là, ceux-ci, ceux-là, celles-ci, celles-là (+ the neutral pronouns *ceci, cela, ça*)

For details on the opposition *-ci/-là*, and the neutral forms *ce, ceci, cela, ça*, see chapter 34 Demonstrative Pronouns.

7.3 Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns are the nominalized forms of the now obsolete stressed possessive adjectives. The nominalization is made explicit by the presence of the definite article.

le mien, la mienne, les miens, les miennes
le tien, la tienne, les tiens, les tiennes
le sien, la sienne, les siens, les siennes
le nôtre, la nôtre, les nôtres
le vôtre, la vôtre, les vôtres
le leur, la leur, les leurs

Possessive pronouns agree in gender and number with the element possessed, and in person and number with the possessor.

7.4 Relative pronouns

- (i) The relative pronoun has simple and compound forms:
 - The simple relative pronouns are: *qui, que, quoi, dont, où*.
 - The compound relative pronouns are: *lequel, laquelle, lesquels, lesquelles*, which form the basis for further compounds with prepositions, e.g. *à laquelle, sur lequel*, etc.
- See chapter 32 Relative Pronouns.

- (ii) Ordinal numbers are used as adjectives or pronouns.

Ex: *C'est la **troisième** maison à droite.*

adjective

It's the third house on the right.

La troisième! *Vous êtes sûr?*

pronoun

The third one! Are you sure?

See chapter 37 Numbers, section 2.

8 Prepositions

Prepositions are subordinating words. They introduce a new element and place that new element in relation to an element already present in a phrase, clause or sentence. They are invariable. Prepositions can be simple (e.g. *sur, sous*) or compound (e.g. *à côté de*).

- (i) They can be part of a verb and form a prepositional phrase introducing an indirect object:

Ex: *Nous parlons souvent **de** Paul.* (*parler de qn*)

*Nous pensons souvent **à** vous.* (*penser à qn*)

- (ii) They can be part of a noun phrase and form a prepositional phrase introducing:

- another noun *une bague **en** or*
- a pronoun *les besoins **de** chacun*
- a verb in the infinitive *une machine **à** laver*
- an adverb *la vaisselle **d'**hier*

- (iii) They can be part of an adjectival phrase introducing:

- a noun *couvert **de** neige*
- a pronoun *satisfait **de** rien*
- a verb in the infinitive *facile **à** faire*

- (iv) They can introduce a prepositional phrase which modifies a sentence (adverb phrase).

Ex: *J'ai posé les livres **sur** le bureau.*

*Je ne sais pas encore où je vais **pour** les vacances.*

The function of the prepositional phrase depends on its position in the sentence (see chapters 2 Syntax and 26 Prepositions).

9 Conjunctions

Conjunctions are invariable. There are two types of conjunctions.

9.1 Conjunctions of coordination

- (i) Coordination establishes a non-hierarchical relation (addition, opposition, etc.) between the elements which it links together. Conjunctions of coordination in frequent use include: **mais, ou, et, donc, pourtant, cependant, ainsi.**

- (ii) They link terms with the same function (e.g. subjects, objects, whole clauses or sentences).
- Ex: *Il a mangé une pomme **et** une poire.*
 ('et' links two noun objects)
- Mon chat **et** mon chien s'aiment beaucoup.*
 ('et' links two noun subjects)
- J'ai acheté le journal **mais** je n'ai pas trouvé votre magazine.*
 ('mais' links two sentences).
- (iii) Some grammarians make a distinction between conjunctions of coordination and disjunctive conjunctions. The latter express an alternative (e.g. *ou, tantôt . . . tantôt*). For details, see chapter 40 Coordination and Juxtaposition.

9.2 Conjunctions of subordination

- (i) Conjunctions of subordination introduce a **subordinate clause**.
- (ii) Conjunctions of subordination can be:
- simple (e.g. *que, quand, comme, si*)
 - compound with *que* (e.g. *avant que, après que, pour que*, etc., and also *lorsque, puisque, quoique*).
- (iii) The conjunction **que** introduces *que*-clauses (*propositions complétives*).
- (iv) Other conjunctions introduce an adverbial clause (*circonstancielle*) of time, place, aim, consequence, condition, etc.

Ex: **Lorsqu'il** fait mauvais temps, personne ne sort.

See also chapter 2 Syntax, section 3.2.3.

When using a conjunction of subordination, it is important to know which **mood** should be used in the subordinate clause: indicative or subjunctive. This is treated in chapter 12 Subjunctive, section 4.

10 Interjections

Interjections are fixed words or phrases which express a comment made by the speaker.

Ex: *Attention! Au secours!*

See chapter 2 Syntax, section 2.14.1.

11 Synonyms, homonyms, derivation and word class shifts

11.1 Synonyms and homonyms

11.1.1 Definitions

- **synonyms** are different words with similar or identical meanings.
Ex: *redouter, craindre, avoir peur de*
- **homonyms** can be subdivided into:
 - **homophones**, i.e. words which share the same sound (but not the same spelling), and have different meanings (they are unrelated).
Ex: *saint, sein, seing, sain* [sɛ̃]
vin, vain [vɛ̃]
Troie, Troyes, trois [trwa]
au, eau [o]
mer, mère, maire [mɛr]
 - **homographs**, i.e. words with the same spelling but different meanings (they are unrelated).
Ex: *(un boulet de) canon, un canon (de beauté)*

11.1.2 Examples of homographs in parts of speech

(i) **que**

- relative pronoun object; introduces a relative clause; has an antecedent:
Ex: *Je vais vous montrer les photos **que** j'ai prises l'année dernière.*
- conjunction of subordination; introduces a *que*-clause (*complétive*):
Ex: *Il est essentiel **que** vous soyez à l'heure demain.*
*Je pense **que** les Dupont viendront.*

(ii) **leur**

- personal object pronoun (indirect):
Ex: *Elle parle à ses chats → Elle **leur** parle.*
 - possessive adjective; the possessor is plural, the thing possessed is singular:
Ex: *C'est **leur** chat.*
- NB: If the thing possessed is plural, *leurs* is used.
Ex: *Ce sont **leurs** chats.*

Hence *leur* can appear as two different parts of speech in the same sentence.

Ex: *On **leur** a rendu **leur** chat/**leurs** chats.*

(iii) **en**

- preposition:
 - before a noun:
Ex: *C'est une montre **en** or.*
 - before a present participle (gerund):
Ex: ***En** allant au marché, j'ai rencontré . . .*

- personal object pronoun:
 - direct:
Ex: *J'ai acheté des cerises → J'**en** ai acheté.*
 - indirect:
Ex: *J'ai besoin de la voiture → J'**en** ai besoin.*
- adverbial pronoun:
Ex: *Je reviens juste de Paris → J'**en** reviens.*

Hence *en* can appear as two different parts of speech in the same sentence.

Ex: *Ne prenez que quatre comprimés: **en en** prenant plus, vous risqueriez des ennuis.*

(iv) **y**

- personal object pronoun (indirect):
Ex: *Mes prochaines vacances? J'**y** pense souvent.*
- adverbial pronoun:
Ex: *Je vais à Paris demain → J'**y** vais demain.*

(v) **le, la, les, l'**

- definite articles:
Ex: ***le** chat, **la** chèvre, **les** animaux, **l'**asticot*
- personal object pronouns (direct):
Ex: *Mon chat? Je **le** fais garder quand je pars en vacances.*
*Tu as les mains sales. Va te **les** laver.*

(vi) **du, des**

- partitive article (*du*), indefinite article (*des*):
Ex: *J'ai acheté **du** chocolat et **des** bonbons.*
- contraction of preposition *de* + definite article *le*; contraction of preposition *de* + definite article *les*:
Ex: *Le bureau **du** (= de + le) directeur est à votre gauche.*
*C'est le chat **des** (= de + les) voisins.*

11.2 Derivation and word class shifts

One part of speech may derive from another, by proper or improper derivation.

(i) Proper derivation

Ex: noun: *courage* → adjective: *courageux*
verb: *conserver* → noun: *conservateur*
adjective: *conservateur*
verb: *aimer* → adjective: *aimable*

adjective: *beau* → verb: *embellir*

adjective: *jaune* → verb: *jaunir*

In the above cases, the suffixes help to distinguish a verb from a noun or adjective, for example.

(ii) Improper derivation

Ex: verb: *effrayer* → adjective: *effrayant* (from present participle)

verb: *passer* → noun: *un passant* (from present participle)

verb: *percevoir* → adjective: *perçu* (from past participle)

verb: *mourir* → noun: *un mort* (from past participle)

verb: *devoir* → noun: *un devoir* (from infinitive)

adjective: *rouge* → noun: *le rouge*

In the above cases, a given word may be one part of speech or another, depending on the syntactic context.

Ex: *Elle porte un pantalon **bleu**.*

adjective

She's wearing blue trousers.

*Je n'aime pas le **bleu**.*

noun

I don't like (the colour) blue.

NB: In contemporary French and particularly in the world of advertising, there is a tendency to use nouns as predicative or attributive adjectives.

Ex: *des sous-vêtements classe*

un manteau confort

une femme enfant

un cocktail évasion

Elle fait un peu zone.

Ce travail, c'est galère.

See also adjectives used as adverbs or even prepositions in chapter 28 Qualifying Adjectives, section 5.2.

2 Syntax and grammatical functions

1 Introduction

A sentence is a sequence of words linked together in a particular way (**syntax**) in order to produce a meaning (**semantics**). A text consists of one or more sentences.

A simple sentence is an independent clause (*proposition indépendante*), made up of phrases (*syntagmes*), which are themselves made up of words.

A complex sentence is made up of two or more clauses, which are linked either in a non-hierarchical relationship (coordination) or a hierarchical relationship (subordination).

2 The simple sentence

Traditionally, a simple sentence is said to be composed of:

subject + verb + complement(s) [+ adverbs]

Ex: *Le chat boit son lait.*

subject verb complement

However, a subject can take many forms (it can even be a whole clause). Some complements are compulsory, others are not. There are also incomplete sentences.

A sentence can be analysed according to the following basic structure:

– a **noun phrase** (*syntagme nominal*) or equivalent, which represents all the forms which the subject can take: NP/E

plus

– a **verb phrase** (*syntagme verbal*), which represents all the forms which a verb can take (VP), from the verb on its own to the verb followed by several complements. These complements are basically noun phrases (or equivalent) and may be very similar to the noun phrase subject.

plus

– sentence **adverbs** or adverb phrases (*compléments circonstanciels*).

Hence there are three basic constituents in the simple sentence (S):

S = NP/E + VP + [sentence adverbs].

Note:

– the NP/E and VP are usually present

– sentence adverbs are optional

– the order 'NP/E + VP + sentence adverbs' is the norm, but there are numerous exceptions.

There are four **modalities** of the sentence:

- declarative
- interrogative
- exclamative
- imperative

In turn, all these are either positive (affirmative) or negative. Negation is treated in chapter 38 Negative Structures. The syntax of the other modalities is studied in the relevant chapters.

For this study of the simple sentence, we shall concentrate on the **functions** of words in **declarative** sentences. Thus, in this chapter we are going to examine the possible forms that a subject and an object can take, the relations between the subject and the verb, and between the verb and its objects. Then we shall look at sentence adverbs (which modify the whole sentence) and also ‘incomplete sentences’. Finally we shall look at ways of expressing emphasis.

2.1 The noun phrase (NP)

The NP (or equivalent) is the first compulsory constituent of the simple sentence. It can be simple or extended.

2.1.1 The simple NP

Ex: – determiner + noun
le chat, cette philosophie

– [determiner] + proper noun
Paul, la France

2.1.2 The extended NP

Optional constituents or expansions are:

(i) Qualifying adjectives

They agree in gender and number with the noun and can appear in an attached or a detached position:

Ex: *C'est une voiture **puissante**.*
***Satisfait**, Paul ferma son livre.*

Qualifying adjectives can themselves be extended:

- with an adverb: *très jolie*
- with a noun complement in direct construction: *bleu azur, jaune paille*
- with a noun or pronoun complement in indirect construction: *pâle de colère, rouge de honte, satisfait de rien.*

These **adjectival phrases** (*syntagme adjectival*) behave like single qualifying adjectives towards the noun they qualify.

Ex: *Dizzy est **beau comme un ange**.*

See also chapter 28 Qualifying Adjectives, section 2.3.1.

(ii) Noun complements

(a) in direct construction, i.e. without a preposition.

Ex: *l'Avenue **Georges-V**; un crayon **feutre**; un sac **poubelle***

(b) in indirect construction, i.e. with a preposition:

Ex: *le chat **de la voisine****'de la voisine'* is a **prepositional phrase** (*syntagme prépositionnel*) and is itself included in the noun phrase that it completes: ***le chat de la voisine***

(iii) Appositions

(a) Without a determiner, they have a descriptive value, giving a definition to the noun.

Ex: *M. Sagouin, **charcutier**, vend de l'excellent boudin.*

(b) With a determiner

– the indefinite article gives extra information, a property to the noun:

Ex: *Eric, **un ami**, était venu me voir.*

– the definite article identifies the noun:

Ex: *Je vous présente M. Dupont, **le pâtissier** de St-Firmin.*

Note that appositions are not strictly part of the noun phrase, since they are detached from it.

(iv) Relative clauses

The relative clause qualifies the noun which is its antecedent. Hence it is sometimes called *complément de l'antécédent*.

Ex: – attached

*Les conseils **que vous nous avez donnés** étaient excellents.*

– detached

*M. Sagouin, **qui est le charcutier du quartier**, vend de l'excellent boudin.*

Note that all the adjectives and all the nouns in apposition to a noun can be replaced by detached relative clauses, with the same values and the same roles. See also 3 below, The Complex Sentence.

2.1.3 The NP with several expansions

(i) The only limits on the number of *optional* constituents of an NP are set by comprehensibility and style.Ex: *?Le chat de la voisine du troisième étage d'en face qui a déjà deux chiens et trois perroquets dont je ne connais pas les noms bien que la dite voisine me les ait souvent dits n'arrête pas de pourchasser les miens.*

(ii) Since the adjective, the noun complement and the relative clause are syntactically equivalent in the NP, they can be coordinated.

Ex: *Un chat extraordinaire, voleur de bifteck et qui n'avait encore jamais attrapé de souris, débarqua un beau matin.*

Again, questions of style should be taken into consideration. See also chapter 40 Coordination and Juxtaposition.

2.2 Other types of subject

Other words or even clauses can be syntactically equivalent to a noun phrase subject.

(i) Personal pronouns

Ex: **je** mange; **elle** est tombée

(ii) Impersonal pronouns

(See also chapter 4 Introduction to Verbs, sections 7.1(iv) and 7.3.)

– with impersonal verbs:

Ex: **il** pleut, **il** neige

Il s'agit d'un rapport.

– with the impersonal voice:

Ex: **Il** est arrivé deux personnes.

Here, the impersonal 'il' is the apparent or grammatical subject (*sujet apparent* or *grammatical*); 'personnes' is the real or semantic subject (*sujet réel* or *sémantique*). The verb agrees with 'il'.

(iii) Indefinite, possessive and demonstrative pronouns

Ex: **Quelqu'un** vous a demandé.

Rien n'est prêt.

Le tien n'est pas encore arrivé.

Celle-ci vous conviendrait mieux.

(iv) Nominal infinitives

Ex: **Nager** est relaxant.

(v) Relative clauses (see 3 below, The Complex Sentence) without antecedent

Ex: **Qui dort** dîne.

Ce que vous dites n'est pas exact.

(vi) *que*-clauses (see 3 below, The Complex Sentence)

Ex: **Qu'il soit d'accord** me surprend.

2.3 Relation of subject and verb

The subject can be defined as the performer of the action, or the entity about which something is asserted or which undergoes the action.

Ex: **Le chat** boit son lait.

The subject is indispensable → ***boit son lait.**

As a general rule, if there is one subject, the verb agrees with the subject:

– in person:

Ex: **je** marche; **tu** marches

– in number:

Ex: **il** marche; **ils** marchent

– in the case of compound tenses with *être*, in person with the auxiliary, and in gender and number with the past participle:

Ex: **Catherine est venue** nous voir.

3rd person, feminine, singular

If the subjects are different grammatical persons:

- the 2nd person overrides the 3rd:

Ex: *Tôi/Vous et Catherine, **vous** viendrez me voir demain.*

- the 1st person overrides all the others:

Ex: *Tôi/Vous et moi, **nous** allons faire les courses.*

*Paul, Catherine et moi, **nous** allons faire les courses.*

As a general rule, if the verb has several subjects, the verb is in the plural.

2.4 Order of subject and verb in a declarative sentence

The normal order is subject–verb.

Ex: *Le chat miaule.*

subject verb

The order is reversed in the following cases:

- (i) Impersonal constructions (see below)

Ex: *Il est arrivé un accident.*

(= *Un accident est arrivé.*)

- (ii) Reporting clauses (*propositions incises*)

In reporting clauses (to report direct speech), the subject comes after the verb in a **simple** inversion. See chapter 41 Reported Speech, section 2.

Ex: *Il est parti à 5 heures, **a annoncé Marie.***

*Je vais essayer, **dit-il**, d'arranger ça.*

NB: For comment clauses (*propositions de jugement ou de commentaire*), where the speaker intervenes in his own discourse, or with reporting clauses appearing **before** the reported speech, the order is subject–verb.

Ex: *Ce n'est pas, **je pense**, ce qui manque le plus.*

***Marie a annoncé:** 'Il est parti à 5 heures.'*

- (iii) Presence of an adverb of affirmation, doubt or opinion

If the sentence begins with *au moins*, *du moins*, *aussi*, *tout au plus*, *peut-être*, *sans doute*, the order may be reversed in the following cases, depending on the register.

- Formal register: the subject comes after the verb in a **complex** inversion.

The order is: adverb + complex inversion.

Ex: *Au moins vous **a-t-il écouté.***

*Peut-être **Nicolas viendra-t-il** demain.*

Note that if there is another adverb in the sentence, *sans doute* or *peut-être* should come first, if only for stylistic reasons.

Ex: *Sans doute ont-ils finalement compris ce que vous vouliez dire.*

sounds better than:

Ils ont sans doute finalement compris . . .

– Informal register: there is no inversion.

(a) with *au moins, du moins, aussi, tout au plus*

The order is: adverb + comma + subject + verb.

Ex: *Au moins, il vous a écouté.*

(b) with *peut-être, sans doute*

The order is: adverb + *que* + subject + verb.

Ex: *Peut-être que Nicolas viendra demain.*

If the sentence begins with *à peine . . . que* (formal French), the complex inversion is used.

Ex: *A peine Robert avait-il terminé ce travail qu'on lui en a donné un autre.*
Robert had hardly finished that job when he was given another one.

Informal French would be:

Robert avait à peine terminé ce travail qu'on lui en a donné un autre.

(iv) Stylistic choice

It is possible to invert subject and verb (simple inversion), for instance:

– in a relative clause object (see 3.2.2.2 below)

Ex: *La nouvelle maison qu'ont achetée les Dupont fait l'envie de tous leurs amis!*

– in a comparative clause (see chapter 30 Comparatives, section 2.1)

Ex: *M. Dupont est plus riche que ne le pensent les gens.*

– with verbs of movement conjugated with *être*, or a passive with no agent. This device is often used in declarative emphatic sentences (administrative style) with noun or noun phrase subject only (not pronouns).

Ex: *Sont arrivés en premier Messieurs les délégués.*

Sont convoqués pour dix heures Mlle Martin, M. Dupont . . .

This structure is even more commonly used when preceded by an adverb phrase (or *y/en*, implying a link with the previous context) and can then be extended to all intransitive verbs.

Ex: *Sur un fauteuil dormaient deux chats.*

Dans ce laboratoire sont préparées toutes sortes de potions. 'Passe un 96 . . . ; en descend Geneviève Serreau . . .'

Georges Pérec, *Tentatives d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien*

2.5 The verb phrase (VP)

The VP is the second compulsory constituent of the simple sentence and corresponds to the traditional concept of 'predicate'.

The conjugated verb is the essential constituent of the VP. Verbs may be followed by zero, one or two complements. Hence the constituents of the VP can be:

- V
- V + NP/E
- V + PP (prepositional phrase)
- V + NP/E + PP
- V + PP + PP
- V + subject complement
- V + object complement

NB: Unlike in English, the sequence ‘verb + NP + NP’ is only possible in French when the two NPs are co-referential (i.e. refer to the same object of the world). Compare:

He gave Paul a book.

*Il a donné **un livre à Paul**.*

(See section 2.6.6.)

and:

Robert was elected chairman of the Committee.

*On a élu **Robert président du Comité**.*

(See section 2.12.)

2.6 Transitivity

Verbs can be transitive or intransitive, as explained below. This feature can be checked in a dictionary.

2.6.1 Intransitive verbs (verbes intransitifs)

They **cannot take an object**: VP = V.

Ex: *Le chat **miaule**.*

*Nous **partons**.*

but they can be followed by an adverb or adverb phrase.

Ex: *Nous **partons** tout de suite.*

*Le chat **miaule** de toutes ses forces.*

2.6.2 Transitive direct verbs (verbes transitifs directs)

They **can take an object**, in direct construction (the direct object is an NP): VP = V + NP/E.

Ex: *Les manifestants bloquent la circulation.*

subject

verb

direct object

Characteristics:

- (i) They can be made passive.

Ex: *La circulation a été bloquée [par les manifestants].*

- (ii) Most transitive direct verbs **can** also be used without an object (= *verbes à prédication complète*). This is referred to as the ‘absolute’ use of transitive verbs.
– without any change of meaning:

Ex: *Je mange une pomme.*

Je mange.

- with a change of meaning:

Ex: *Il boit de la bière* → He’s drinking beer.

Il boit → either: He is drinking (sth).

or: He has a drink problem.

Elle écrit un roman → She’s writing a novel.

Elle écrit → either: She is writing (sth).

or: She writes (as a job).

- (iii) Some transitive direct verbs **cannot** be used without an object (= *verbes à prédication incomplète*).

Ex: **Je quitte* → *Je quitte mon bureau*.

2.6.3 Transitive indirect verbs (verbes transitifs indirects)

They **can take an object** in indirect construction, i.e. with a preposition (the indirect object is a prepositional phrase): VP = V + PP

Ex: *Catherine a parlé à Paul.*
subject verb indirect object

- (i) Unlike in English, they cannot be made passive.

Ex: **Paul a été donné un livre* [*par Catherine*].

Exceptions: *obéir, désobéir, pardonner* (see chapter 18 Active and Passive Voices, section 6).

- (ii) Some transitive indirect verbs **can** be used without an object.

Ex: *Je pense à Nicole.*
Je pense.

- (iii) Some transitive indirect verbs **cannot** be used without an object.

Ex: *Marie ressemble à sa sœur.*
 **Marie ressemble.*

2.6.4 Transitive or intransitive?

The same basic verb can be intransitive, transitive direct or indirect, with different meanings. Compare:

*J'ai tenu **bon**!* (intransitive + adverb)
 I stayed the course!

*Il tenait **son chapeau** à la main.* (transitive direct)
 He had his hat in his hand.

*Je tenais tant à **ce vieux meuble**.* (transitive indirect)
 I was so fond of that old piece of furniture.

*Je tiens **de ma grand-mère**.* (transitive indirect)
 I take after my grandmother.

*Je **te** tiendrai **l'échelle**.* (bitransitive, see 2.6.6 below)
 I'll hold the ladder for you.

2.6.5 Transitive direct or indirect?

Compare:

*Quelqu'un demande **Anne** au téléphone.*
 (demander qn)
 Someone on the telephone is asking for Anne.
 and:

*Quelqu'un demande à **Anne** si elle est libre.*
 (demander qch à qn)
 Someone is asking Anne if she's free.

This distinction can also depend on the nature of the object, e.g. NP, *que*-clause or infinitive (see also section 2.8 below, Other Types of Object).

Ex: *Il doute **de ma bonne foi**.*

indirect object

*Il doute **que je sois de bonne foi**.*

direct object

*Il apprend **le français**.*

direct object

*Il apprend **à jouer au tennis**.*

indirect object

Unlike the examples quoted in section 2.6.4 above, the above examples show that even with the same meaning, a verb is not limited to one particular construction.

2.6.6 Bitransitive verbs (verbes bitransitifs)

The verb can be followed by a direct object + indirect object, or two indirect objects (the second one is also called *complément d'attribution* or *complément d'objet second*).

Hence: VP = V + NP/E + PP or V + PP + PP

(i) V + NP + PP

– The PP can be introduced by **de**. For instance:

<i>équiper qn de qch</i>	<i>recevoir qch de qn</i>
<i>charger qn de qch</i>	<i>penser qch de qn</i>
<i>couvrir qn/qch de qch</i>	<i>dire qch de qn</i>
<i>menacer qn de qch</i>	<i>éloigner qn/qch de qn/qch</i>
<i>remplir qch de qch</i>	<i>entourer qn/qch de qch</i>

Ex: *Nous allons entourer **le jardin de haies**.*

direct object indirect object

We're going to surround the garden with hedges.

*Que pensez-vous **de lui**?*

direct object

indirect object

What do you think of him?

*J'ai reçu une lettre **de Sylvain**.*

direct object

indirect object

I've received a letter from Sylvain.

*Vous devriez éloigner les enfants **du feu**.*

direct object indirect object

You should keep the children away from the fire.

– The PP can be introduced by **à**. Note that most imply a transference, in a literal or figurative sense, of something to or from someone. For instance:

*donner/laisser/accorder/envoyer qch **à** qn*
*annoncer/communiquer/dire/promettre/avouer qch **à** qn*
*prêter/emprunter/voler qch **à** qn*
*prendre/rendre/vendre/acheter/louer qch **à** qn*

Note: *recevoir qch **de** qn*.

- (vi) Relative clause without antecedent
Ex: *J'ai acheté **ce qu'il y avait**.*
- (vii) Indirect interrogative clause
Ex: *Je ne sais pas **si j'aurai le temps**.*
*Il veut savoir **à quel parti vous appartenez**.*
*Je ne sais pas **de qui il parle**.*

Note that the last three are complex sentences.

2.9 Position of objects in a declarative sentence

- (i) One object: V + NP; V + PP
Ex: *J'ai mangé **deux gâteaux**.*
*J'ai téléphoné **à Pierre**.*
- (ii) Two objects: V + NP + PP
Ex: *J'ai offert **un cadeau** à Frédéric.*

NB: The reverse order is possible for stylistic reasons (e.g. the direct object is longer than the indirect object):

Ex: *Nicolas a donné à Pierre **toute sa collection de timbres rares**.*

- (iii) Two objects: V + PP + PP
The order is optional, but there may be risks of ambiguity.
Ex: *J'ai parlé de mon collègue **au directeur**.*
I spoke about my colleague to the manager.

*J'ai parlé **au directeur** de mon collègue.*

is likely to be understood as:

I spoke to my colleague's manager.

NB: The position of object **pronouns** is treated in chapter 31 Personal Pronouns, section 2.2.3.

2.10 Other verb complements ('measure' verbs)

They express measure, weight, cost, etc. and describe a property of the subject (see 2.11 Subject Complements below). They are in direct construction (no preposition).

Ex: *Ce vin coûte 50F.*
Ces draps sentent la lavande.
Mon chat pèse 10kg.
La cuisine mesure 3 mètres sur 5.

NB: These complements are not objects but adverb phrases. Compare:

*Cette valise pèse **20 kg*** and *Cette valise pèse **lourd***
*Ce vin coûte **200F*** and *Ce vin coûte **cher***
*J'ai dormi **douze heures*** and *J'ai dormi **longtemps***

(see chapter 29 Adverbs). Because there is no object, the sentences cannot be made passive (**10kg sont pesés par mon chat*), except when the measurement, etc. has been carried out by an agent (*Le vétérinaire pèse le chat* → *Le chat est pesé par le vétérinaire*).

2.11 Subject (or predicative) complements (*attributs du sujet*)

Copulas (*copules ou verbes attributifs*) such as *être*, *paraître*, *sembler*, *demeurer*, *devenir*, *rester*, *vivre*, *avoir l'air* and *faire semblant* can take subject complements.

(i) Meaning

- The subject complement generally expresses a quality, a way of being or a property which is attributed to the referent of the subject. The meaning of the subject complement is closely associated with that of the verb. For instance:
 - *devenir* = to go into a state
 - *être*, *rester*, *demeurer* = a continuity in the state
 - *paraître*, *sembler*, *avoir l'air* = an opinion of a state
- The subject complement can also express a place, in particular with *être*, *rester*, *demeurer*.
- Note that some 'ordinary' transitive or intransitive verbs can also be used as copulas. Compare:

*Eric est tombé **malade**.*

subject complement

Eric fell ill.

and:

*Eric est tombé **en courant/en descendant les escaliers**.*

adverb phrases

Eric fell while running/going downstairs.

(ii) Grammatical type

Subject complements can be:

- adjective:

Ex: *Ce village est très **pittoresque**; Paul est devenu **fou**.*
- adverb:

Ex: *Le chat est **là**.*
- PP:
 - with a qualifying value:

Ex: *Cette table est **en chêne massif**.*
 - expressing location:

Ex: *Il est resté **à l'hôtel** pendant une semaine.*
- NP:
 - without article (qualifying value):

Ex: *Françoise est **professeur**.*

- with indefinite article (giving extra information/expressing a property):
Ex: *Paul est **un** bon **docteur**.*
*Le persil est **une** **herbe** à haute teneur en fer.*
 - with definite article (identifying value):
Ex: *Paul est **le** meilleur **docteur** du quartier.*
 - pronoun (with or without article):
Ex: *Elle est **étudiante**.*
*Il est **l'auteur** de nombreux articles.*
- See chapter 35 *C'est/Il est*, section 6.
- nominal infinitive (with or without *de*):
Ex: *Consentir n'est pas **approuver**.*
*L'important est **de savoir**.*
 - subordinate clause:
 - *que*-clause:
Ex: *Le fait est **qu'il a eu raison de partir**.*
 - relative clause with pronoun antecedent:
Ex: *Cette maison est **celle qui me plaît le plus**.*

Note that the last two examples belong to the complex sentence.

(iii) Agreement

- Adjectives, and nouns without a determiner (i.e. with a qualifying value), agree with the subject.
Ex: ***Marie** est **grande**.*
***Ils** sont **ingénieurs**.*
- Otherwise, the subject complement is 'independent'.
Ex: ***Son départ** a été **une grande joie**.*

(iv) Word order

The normal order is: subject + copula + subject complement.

Ex: *Cette route est longue/un désastre.*

Exceptions:

- with the indefinite pronoun **tel**:
Ex: ***Telles** furent ses dernières paroles.*
- in emphatic declarative sentences, where the order is:
subject complement (adjective or adverb)
+ copula
+ subject (NP, not pronoun).
Ex: ***Nombreux** sont les problèmes.*
***Là** est la question.*

NB: Only those adjectives which can appear **before** the noun may be placed before the verb (see chapter 28 Qualifying Adjectives, section 2.3.4).

2.12 Object complements (*attributs du complément*)

With the following verbs:

- *estimer, considérer comme, tenir pour, juger, croire, traiter de, rendre, trouver* + adjective

Ex: *On l'a estimé bon pour le service.*
*Je trouve **ce livre** passionnant.*
*Catherine a traité **Paul** d'égoïste.*
*Marie a rendu **Robert** malheureux.*

- *avoir pour, avoir comme, élire, nommer, appeler, prendre pour, proclamer* + NP

Ex: *Nous l'avons proclamé gagnant du concours.*
*Moi, j'appelle **un chat** un chat!*
*Et dire que je **le** prenais pour un ami!*

- *considérer comme, déclarer* + adjective or NP

Ex: *On l'a considéré comme bon pour le service.*
*On a déclaré **Nicolas** grand gagnant du concours.*

2.13 Sentence adverbs (*compléments circonstanciels*)

Adverbs can modify a verb (*je vais **régulièrement** à Paris; il marche **vite**; je ne me sens pas **bien***), an adjective (***souvent** gai*), another adverb (***extrêmement** lentement*) or a whole sentence.

Two types of adverbs modify the whole sentence: sentence adverbs and sentence connectors (see chapter 29 Adverbs, section 5.3).

Sentence adverbs or adverb phrases can be described as follows:

(i) Characteristics

- optionality:

Ex: *Marie a cueilli les cerises [ce matin].*
J'ai offert un cadeau à Paul [pour son anniversaire].

- mobility:

The 'unmarked' adverb phrase comes at the end of the sentence.

Ex: *Marie a cueilli les cerises **ce matin**.*

Any other place corresponds to a stylistic choice or one of emphasis. The adverb phrase is then in a detached position.

Ex: ***Ce matin**, Marie a cueilli les cerises.*

NB: There can be more than one adverbial structure in a sentence.

Ex: *Frédéric arrive **demain** par le train de 10 heures.*

(ii) Meaning

Sentence adverbs express the 'circumstances' of the action, state, or transformation expressed by the verb. The most common ones express time, place, manner, means, cause, aim, opposition or concession.

(iii) Grammatical type

A sentence adverb phrase can be:

- a noun phrase:

Ex: *Je suis allée en Grèce **l'année dernière**.*

- a prepositional phrase:

Ex: ***Depuis ce matin**, je ne me sens pas très bien.*

- an adverb:

Ex: *Je voudrais bien vous voir **demain**.*

***Lentement**, il s'est approché.*

- a preposition + infinitive:

Ex: *J'irai vous rendre visite **avant de partir**.*

- a participial clause:

Ex: ***La pluie cessant**, ils purent repartir.*

***Tout le monde assis**, le spectacle put commencer.*

- a gerundive clause:

Ex: *Paul s'est coupé **en aiguisant les couteaux**.*

- an adverbial subordinate clause (*proposition subordonnée circonstancielle*):

Ex: *Je terminerai cet article **quand j'en aurai le temps**.*

(iv) Ambiguities

Prepositional phrases can be a great source of ambiguity; it may be difficult to distinguish whether they are noun complements, verb complements or sentence adverbs. This is particularly the case with prepositions *à* and *de* which present one of the great stumbling blocks in automatic translation. In a discourse situation, ambiguities are resolved by the context in which they are found or by the knowledge of certain logical or universal 'truths' (also called 'knowledge of the world') which we bring to our interpretation of sentences.

Ex: *On peut voir les fleurs du balcon.*

either:

→ 'les fleurs du balcon' is the direct object of 'peut voir' and 'du balcon' is the noun complement of 'les fleurs'.

You can see the balcony's flowers (i.e. those which are on the balcony).

or:

→ 'les fleurs' is the direct object of 'peut voir' and 'du balcon' is an adverb phrase of place.

You can see the flowers **from** the balcony.

2.14 Incomplete sentences

2.14.1 No verb

These are sometimes called nominal sentences (*phrases nominales*) even though they are not exclusively made up of nouns.

(i) Interjections and other fixed expressions

They express a comment made by the speaker. In spoken French, the interpretation is conveyed by the intonation.

– only one word:

Ex: *Hein? Déjà?* (question)
Hein! Déjà! (surprise)
Aïe! (pain)
Bof! (indifference)
Heu . . . (hesitation)
Pouah! Berk! (disgust)
Zut! Merde! (annoyance)
Attention! (warning)
Dommage! Hélas! (regret)

– more than one word:

Ex: *A demain!*
Au secours!
Grands Dieux!
Nom d'un chien!
Nom d'une pipe!

(ii) Labels, book titles, advertisements, newspaper headlines, etc.

Ex: *'huile d'olive extra vierge pressée à froid'*
'Vittel, la vitalité à l'état pur'
'la notion de signe'
'Départs en vacances: embouteillages dès ce soir.'

(iii) Semantic ellipsis

Semantic ellipsis is a way of making an utterance shorter, but still understandable to the interlocutor. Ellipsis of the verb or even subject + verb is used in conversation as a matter of course.

Ex: *Tout droit!* (= *Il faut aller tout droit!*)
Autre chose? (= *Vous désirez autre chose?*)
(Qui en reveut?) – Moi! (= *Moi, j'en reveux.*)
Extra, ce gigot! (= *Ce gigot est extra.*)
Intéressant, tout cela. (= *Tout cela est intéressant.*)
Très heureux. (= *Je suis très heureux de faire votre connaissance.*)

NB: Grammatical ellipsis is found in coordination and comparatives, where the rules of syntax allow them (see chapters 30 Comparatives, section 2.1, and 40 Coordination and Juxtaposition, section 5.1).

Ex: *Lizzy attrape des souris et Dizzy [attrape] des oiseaux.*
 Lizzy catches mice and Dizzy [catches] birds.

Robert est plus gentil que [qu'il ne l'était] l'année dernière.
 Robert is nicer than [he was] last year.

2.14.2 No subject

(i) Imperative

In the imperative mood, the sentence appears without an explicit subject. The subject is shown by the **form of the verb** and the sentence ends in an exclamation mark. Hence a sentence could be made up of one word only.

Ex: *Partons!* (1st person plural)

Buvez votre café! (2nd person plural)

Prête ta voiture à ton frère! (2nd person singular)

(ii) Infinitive

– orders, instructions:

Ex: *Ne pas faire de bruit.*

– questions, exclamations:

Ex: *Que faire?*

Comment acheter sans se tromper?

Voir Venise et mourir!

– narrative:

Ex: *‘Et grenouilles de se plaindre.’*

La Fontaine, *Les grenouilles qui demandent un Roi*

2.15 Emphasis (*emphase syntaxique*)

Emphasis is a way of drawing attention to a particular constituent of the sentence.

2.15.1 Focalization (thème et focus)

Consider the following example:

Un homme marchait le long de la rue. **Il** est entré dans un café.

– ‘Il’ in the second sentence is the theme. It appears at the beginning of the sentence, and represents what is already known (*information ancienne*).

– ‘est entré dans un café’ is the focus, and represents new information (*information nouvelle*).

Focalization, i.e. emphasis on the focus, can be achieved in various ways (see below).

2.15.2 Detachment

An adverb modifying the whole sentence can be placed in a detached position, at the beginning or in the middle of the sentence. See 2.13 above.

2.15.3 Presentative forms (présentatifs)

Presentative forms are words or expressions which are used to ‘show’ someone or something in a particular situation. They are: **il y a**, **il est**, **c’est**, **voici**, **voilà**.

Ex: **Voici** mon père.

C’est le chat de la voisine!

Regarde, **il y a** un homme bizarre dans la rue.

Note that:

- **voici** and **voilà** are invariable
- **il y a** can be conjugated in other tenses, but is **always singular**
- **il est** can only be conjugated in the present or the imperfect
- **c'est** can be conjugated in other tenses, and can also vary in number in formal French (**C'étaient d'honnêtes gens.**).

c'est is the most commonly used presentative form. It is also the weakest (it presupposes that what we are talking about is already known), hence it can follow e.g. *il y a* or *voici* but not precede them.

Ex: **Voilà** *M. Durand qui arrive.* **C'est** *notre professeur de français.*
Il y a *dix kilos d'abricots à la cave.* **C'est** *pour faire ma confiture.*

When they are associated with *qui* and *que*, these presentative forms can also be used to perform a focalization with a cleft construction (see below).

2.15.4 Cleft constructions (constructions clivées)

Presentative forms are used to focus on particular NP constituents of the sentence. Whatever its function, the NP is detached and normally placed at the beginning of that sentence. It is introduced by the forms *c'est*, *voilà*, *il y a* and then repeated by the relative pronouns *qui* or *que* (or, less frequently, *dont*). The sentence is called a cleft sentence. Thus presentative forms can be used to focus on:

- the subject:

Ex: *L'argent fait tourner le monde.*
 → **C'est** *l'argent* **qui** *fait tourner le monde.*

- an object, direct or indirect:

Ex: *Paul a vendu sa voiture à Marie.*
 → **C'est** *sa voiture* **que** *Paul a vendue à Marie.*
 → **C'est** *à Marie* **que** *Paul a vendu sa voiture.*

- an adverb phrase:

Ex: *J'ai oublié mon sac dans le train.*
 → **C'est** *dans le train* **que** *j'ai oublié mon sac.*

The focalized element can also be placed at the end of the sentence, in which case it is introduced by a pronoun.

Ex: **Celui qui** *me plaît le plus*, **c'est** *Alain.*
Ce qui *m'ennuie*, **c'est** *que vous soyez toujours en retard.*

2.15.5 Dislocated constructions (constructions disloquées)

In a dislocated sentence, one of the constituents is moved to either the left or right for emphasis. The constituent that has been moved is repeated by the corresponding personal pronoun, in the normal position. Dislocated structures apply to all four modalities of sentences but are normally only used in **informal** French.

(i) **Declarative**

Ex: *Je veux parler à Juliette.*

→ ***Juliette**, je veux **lui** parler.*

→ *Je veux **lui** parler, à **Juliette**.*

Paul a vendu sa voiture à Catherine.

→ ***Sa voiture**, Paul **l'**a vendue à Catherine.*

→ ***Catherine**, Paul **lui** a vendu sa voiture.*

Several constituents can be displaced in this way, which create constructions which some consider as being on the verge of acceptability.

Ex: *On a crevé les pneus de la voiture de mon père.*

→ *?Mon père, sa voiture, les pneus, on lui a crevé.*

(ii) **Exclamative**

Ex: *Qu'est-ce que Marie est bête alors!*

→ ***Marie**, qu'est-ce qu'**elle** est bête alors!*

(iii) **Interrogative**

Ex: *Tu as vu sa voiture?*

→ ***Sa voiture**, tu **l'**as vue?*

NB: In interrogative constructions of the type *Paul est-il venu?*, a tonic pronoun can be added for emphasis.

Ex: ***Paul** est-il venu, **lui**?*

(iv) **Imperative**

Ex: *Va chercher mon manteau!*

→ ***Mon manteau**, va **le** chercher!*

NB: In *Toi, va chercher mon manteau!*, there is no emphasis but an address (*apostrophe*) to the interlocutor.

3 The complex sentence

A complex sentence is a sentence made up of two or more clauses. Whether simple or extended, these clauses (*propositions*) can be linked by coordination, juxtaposition or subordination.

3.1 Coordination and juxtaposition

(i) Coordination:

- the clauses have the same status
- they are linked by a conjunction of coordination
- the conjunction of coordination indicates the type of relation.

Ex: *Il fait beau **et** les oiseaux chantent.* (addition)

*Il fait beau **mais** il fait froid.* (opposition)

(ii) Juxtaposition:

- the clauses have the same status
- they are separated by a comma or a semi-colon:

Ex: *Il est venu, il a vu, il a vaincu.*

The type of relation is implicit and understood from the context.

(iii) Each of the clauses linked by coordination or juxtaposition is autonomous and can therefore become an independent clause.

Ex: *Il fait beau.*

Les oiseaux chantent.

Il est venu.

(iv) The figure of asyndeton (*asyndète*) is the systematic suppression of coordinating words, which creates a juxtaposition.

Ex: *Je te demande, prie, supplie de le faire à ma place.*

Conversely, the figure of polysyndeton (*polysyndète*) is the multiplication of coordinating words.

Ex: *Elle est jeune et belle et intelligente.*

Coordination and juxtaposition apply to various parts of speech, as well as clauses and sentences. For details, see chapter 40 Coordination and Juxtaposition.

3.2 Subordination

(i) Subordination creates a **hierarchical relation** between two clauses, namely a subordinate clause which is dependent on the main clause.

Ex: *Je voudrais bien | que vous m'aidiez.*

main clause

subordinate clause

(ii) A subordinate clause can be subordinated to another:

Ex: *Je voudrais bien | que vous m'aidiez | si vous en avez le temps!*

1. main clause

2. subordinated to 1

3. subordinated to 2

(iii) A subordinate clause can be:

- explicit; the subordinating word can be:
 - a conjunction of subordination:

Ex: *Je sais **que** vous êtes malade.*

Bien qu'il pleuve, je sors.

- an interrogative adverb or pronoun:

Ex: *Elle ne sait vraiment pas **où** elle a bien pu laisser son sac.*

*Elle se demande **à qui** tu as écrit.*

- a relative pronoun:

Ex: *J'ai lu le livre **que** tu m'avais recommandé.*

- implicit

The two clauses are **syntactically** juxtaposed, but unlike genuine juxtaposed clauses (see above), they are not autonomous: they are **semantically** subordinated. Hence the subordination is called implicit or semantic (informal French only).

Ex: *Il me le donnerait, je n'en voudrais pas.*

(= *S'il me le donnait . . .*)

Faut-il donner un coup de main, Paul est toujours prêt.

(= *S'il faut/Quand il faut . . .*)

(iv) There are three main types of subordinate clauses:

- *que*-clause (*complétive* or *conjonctive*)
- relative clause
- adverbial clause (*circonstancielle*)

Other types include:

- indirect interrogative clauses and *que*-clauses belonging to indirect reported speech, treated in chapter 41 Reported Speech, section 3
- infinitive clauses, treated in chapters 15 Infinitive and 12 Subjunctive, section 4.4
- participial clauses, treated in chapters 16 Present Participle, section 4, and 17 Past Participle, section 5
- comparative clauses, treated in chapter 30 Comparatives, section 2

(v) Functions

A subordinate clause can be:

- a modifier of an NP:

Ex: *J'aime les enfants **qui sont sages**.*

The relative '*qui sont sages*' modifies the NP '*les enfants*'.

- an object of the verb:

Ex: *J'espère **que vous allez bien**.*

The *que*-clause '*que vous allez bien*' is the object of '*espère*'.

- a subject of the verb:

Ex: ***Qu'il soit d'accord** me surprend.*

The *que*-clause '*Qu'il soit d'accord*' is the subject of '*surprend*'.

- an adverbial clause:

Ex: ***Lorsqu'il fait mauvais temps**, personne ne sort.*

'*Lorsqu'il fait mauvais temps*' is an adverbial clause which modifies the main clause '*personne ne sort*'.

(vi) Subject–verb agreements

Care must be taken with subject–verb agreements in complex sentences with more than one subordinate clause. Consider the following example:

***Les pouvoirs dont le président dispose** et qui lui **permettent** de maîtriser le jeu politique **sont** les suivants.*

The powers that the president has at his disposal and which enable him to control the political game are the following.

'*le président*' is subject of '*dispose*' but '*les pouvoirs*' is subject of '*permettent*' and '*sont*'.

3.2.1 *que*-clauses (complétives)

These are introduced by the conjunction of subordination ***que***, not to be confused with the relative pronoun *que* (see 3.2.2 below), which normally has an NP (its antecedent) just before it.

- (i) The *que*-clause as an object

This is the most frequent case.

Ex: *Je préfère **que vous veniez la semaine prochaine**.*

The mood of the subordinate clause (indicative or subjunctive) depends on the verb of the main clause.

Ex: *Je pense **qu'il viendra** demain.*

*J'aimerais **qu'il vienne** demain.*

See chapter 12 Subjunctive, section 4.1.

When the verb in the main clause expresses a declaration with verbs such as *dire*, *affirmer*, *prétendre*, *soutenir*, *nier*, etc., or an opinion with verbs such as *penser*, *croire*, *juger*, *comprendre*, etc., the *que*-clause constitutes the indirect reported speech.

Ex: *Il a dit **qu'il serait là demain**.*

See chapter 41 Reported Speech, section 3.

When the verb in the main clause expresses a question, it introduces an indirect interrogative clause (see chapter 41 Reported Speech, section 3.5).

Ex: *Il m'a demandé **ce que je voulais**.*

- (ii) The *que*-clause after an impersonal verb

The subordinate clause is always in the subjunctive.

Ex: *Il faut **que tu sois** là à six heures.*

*Maintenant, il s'agit **que vous fassiez** très attention.*

- (iii) The *que*-clause as a subject complement

The mood depends on the meaning of the subject.

Ex: *Mon avis est **que vous pouvez** mieux faire.*

*Mon souhait est **que vous puissiez** réussir.*

- (iv) The *que*-clause as an adjective or a noun complement

The mood depends on the meaning of the adjective or noun.

Ex: *Je suis sûr **que vous réussirez**.*

*Je suis heureux **que vous ayez réussi**.*

*Il est essentiel **que vous réussissiez**.*

*L'idée **qu'il peut/puisse** encore nous nuire m'effraie.*

See chapter 12 Subjunctive, section 4.1.

- (v) The *que*-clause as a subject

This is always at the beginning of the sentence and always in the subjunctive.

Ex: ***Que Nicolas soit** de bonne foi n'est pas certain.*

'Que Nicolas soit de bonne foi' is the subject of 'est'.

3.2.2 Relative clauses

These clauses are introduced by a relative pronoun. When the relative pronoun has an antecedent – which is the most common case – it represents this antecedent.

Ex: *J'ai acheté le livre **que** Paul m'a recommandé.*

For details of the nature and functions of relative pronouns, see chapter 32 Relative Pronouns. For details of the use of the subjunctive in relative clauses, see chapter 12 Subjunctive, section 4.3.

3.2.2.1 THE RELATIVE PRONOUN AND ITS ANTECEDENT

- (i) Whenever possible, relative pronouns should come immediately after their antecedents to avoid ambiguity or clumsiness. This rule is not followed as strictly in English.

Ex: *Nous avons aussi un certain nombre de problèmes avec le personnel.*

Ces problèmes ne sont pas faciles à résoudre.

→ *Nous avons aussi avec le personnel un certain nombre de **problèmes qui** ne sont pas faciles à résoudre.*

We also have a certain number of problems with the personnel which are not easy to solve.

is better than:

?*Nous avons aussi un certain nombre de problèmes avec le **personnel qui** ne sont pas faciles à résoudre.*

Note that this example is clumsy rather than grammatically ambiguous.

- (ii) However, the relative pronoun can be separated from its antecedent in order to produce a stylistic effect.

Ex: ***Ces gens** ne savaient toujours rien, **qui** retournaient maintenant chez eux.*

3.2.2.2 WORD ORDER

- (i) If the relative pronoun is the subject of the relative clause, the order is:
subject + verb + [complement]

Ex: *Paul a acheté une voiture **qui** + **tombe** toujours en panne.*

- (ii) If the relative pronoun is a direct object and there is no other complement, there is a choice between:

– direct object + verb + subject

Ex: *La voiture **qu'** + **a achetée** + **Paul** tombe toujours en panne.*

– direct object + subject + verb

Ex: *La voiture **que** + **Paul** + **a achetée** tombe toujours en panne.*

Note that only the second construction is possible if the subject is a pronoun:

→ *La voiture **qu'il a achetée** . . .*

- (iii) If the relative pronoun is a direct object, and there is also an indirect object, the order is:

direct object + subject + verb + indirect object

Ex: *la voiture **que** + **Paul** + **a achetée** + **à son ami***

- (iv) If the relative pronoun is an indirect object itself and there is no other complement, there is a choice between:

– indirect object + verb + subject

Ex: *La personne **avec qui** + **discute** + **Paul** est un ami.*

– indirect object + subject + verb

Ex: *La personne **avec qui** + **Paul** + **discute** est un ami.*

The following example shows how the flexibility of this rule can be put to good use.

Ex: *On nous a donné la liste de tous les avantages **dont jouissent** les employés rattachés au Service de la Documentation.*

rather than:

*. . . **dont** les employés rattachés . . .

The long subject and the verb should be reversed here so that the sentence does not end abruptly on the verb.

- (v) If the relative pronoun is an indirect object and there is another indirect object, the order is:

indirect object (rel. pron.) + subject + verb + indirect object

Ex: *La personne **avec qui** + **Paul** + **parle** + **de voitures** est un ami.*

3.2.2.3 THE RELATIVE CLAUSE WITHOUT ANTECEDENT

When the relative pronoun has no antecedent, it refers to an undetermined referent. Constructions with *qui* refer to an animate referent, constructions with other relative pronouns refer to an inanimate referent.

- (i) The relative clause with no antecedent can be introduced by:

– a simple relative pronoun:

Ex: ***Qui** m'aime me suit.*

– an indefinite relative pronoun:

Ex: *J'en ferai part à **quiconque** s'y intéresse.*

– a demonstrative + relative pronoun:

Ex: ***Ceux qui** pensent cela ne sont pas mes amis.*

***Ce que** vous pensez ne me concerne pas.*

– the indefinite pronoun *tel* + relative pronoun:

Ex: ***Tel qui** rit vendredi dimanche pleurera* (proverb)

- (ii) Functions of the relative clause with no antecedent

– subject:

Ex: ***Ceux qui pensent cela** ne sont pas mes amis.*
'ceux qui pensent cela' is the subject of 'sont'.

- complement of the subject:

Ex: *Ces roses rouges sont **celles que je préfère**.*

‘*celles que je préfère*’ is the complement of the subject ‘*Ces roses rouges*’.

- object:

Ex: *Donnez **ce que vous pouvez**.*

‘*ce que vous pouvez*’ is the object of the verb ‘*Donnez*’.

Note that the infinitive relative clause is always an object.

Ex: *Je ne sais pas **quoi faire/à qui m’adresser**.*

- adverbial clause:

Ex: ***Depuis ce que vous avez fait**, tout le monde a peur.*

***Sans ce que Pierre lui donne**, Marie n’y arriverait pas.*

3.2.2.4 FUNCTIONS OF RELATIVE CLAUSES WITH ANTECEDENT

(i) Attributive (*épithète*)

- attached:

Ex: *Elle répète **toutes les histoires** | qu’on lui raconte.*

antecedent of ‘*que*’ – attribute of ‘*histoires*’

– object of ‘*répète*’

- detached:

Ex: *Lizzy, qui mange trop de souris, n’arrête pas d’être malade.*

Jean-Charles, que je connais depuis longtemps, s’est marié récemment.

(ii) Object complement

This is normally found after verbs of perception (*voir, entendre*). (See section 2.12.)

Ex: *Je vois **Paul** qui parle au jardinier.*

‘*qui parle au jardinier*’ is the complement of the object ‘*Paul*’.

*Je **le** vois qui parle au jardinier.*

‘*qui parle au jardinier*’ is the complement of the object ‘*le*’.

(iii) Connective relative clause (*relative de liaison*)

This is always separated from its antecedent by a pause, hence it appears next to the main clause as if in juxtaposition.

Ex: *Elle nous présenta son chat, qui ronronnait très fort.*

→ *Elle nous présenta son chat, il ronronnait très fort.*

3.2.3 Adverbial clauses (*circonstancielles*)

- There are seven main types of adverbial clauses, which are classified according to their meanings: time, cause, consequence, aim, hypothesis and condition, concession and opposition, comparison.
- They are introduced by conjunctions other than *que*.

- The mood in the subordinate (indicative or subjunctive) depends on the conjunction used.

Ex: **Quand** tu rentreras, je serai sortie.

Bien qu'il pleuve, je sors quand même.

NB: The subordination can be implicit (see section 3.2(iii) above).

Ex: Vous me le diriez, je ne vous croirais pas.

(= Si vous me le disiez . . .)

3 Pronunciation, spelling, registers, punctuation

1 Introduction

A phoneme is an abstract unit of sound ('the smallest distinctive unit of the language') which can be heard with a variety of pronunciations but which can be understood despite these variations. There are 36 phonemes in French (46 in standard English), represented by the signs of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). A good dictionary will give the pronunciation of words using this alphabet, which is to be found in square brackets after the word concerned (e.g. *phonème* [fɔnɛm]).

There are three types of sound in French: vowels (*voyelles*), consonants (*consonnes*) and glides, also called semi-consonants (*semi-consonnes*) or semi-vowels (*semi-voyelles*).

Phonetic transcriptions are conventionally written in square brackets. In the tables below, the sounds to be learnt are on the left, followed by illustrative examples and their full transcriptions in the IPA.

2 Vowels

There are 16 vowels, divided into two categories: oral and nasal.

2.1 Oral vowels

[i]	<i>petit</i> [pɛti]; <i>mais</i> [mais]
[y]	<i>voulu</i> [vuly]; (<i>il a</i>) <i>eu</i> [y]
[u]	<i>vous</i> [vu]; <i>goût</i> [gu]
[e]	<i>été</i> [ete]; <i>chez</i> [ʃe]; <i>les</i> [le]
[ɛ]	<i>lait</i> [le]; <i>belle</i> [bel]; <i>mais</i> [mɛ]
[ø]	<i>peu</i> [pø]; <i>gazeux</i> [gazø]; <i>neutre</i> [nøtr]; <i>bœufs</i> [bø]; <i>jeûne</i> [ʒø̃n]
[œ]	<i>beurre</i> [bœr]; <i>peur</i> [pœr]; <i>bœuf</i> [bœf]; <i>jeune</i> [ʒœ̃n]
[ə]	<i>demi</i> [dɛmi]; <i>je</i> [ʒə]
[o]	<i>eau</i> [o]; <i>rose</i> [roz]; <i>mot</i> [mo]; <i>saule</i> [sol]; (<i>le</i>) <i>nôtre</i> [notr]
[ɔ]	<i>pomme</i> [pɔm]; <i>bord</i> [bɔr]; <i>vogue</i> [vɔg]; <i>sol</i> [sol]; <i>notre</i> [notr]
[a]	<i>la</i> [la]; <i>là</i> [la]; <i>patte</i> [pat]; <i>chat</i> [ʃa]; <i>voie</i> [vwa]
[ɑ]	<i>âtre</i> [atr]; <i>pâte</i> [pat]; <i>phrase</i> [fraz]; <i>bas</i> [ba]

NB: The so-called '**mute e**' ('*e*' *muet*) is never stressed, except for emphasis. The way it is pronounced – [ə] – or its absence (see 7 below) is one of the characteristics of the French language.

2.2 Nasal vowels

- (i) There are four nasal vowels in French:

[ɛ̃] *vin* [vɛ̃]; *main* [mɛ̃]
 [ɑ̃] *blanc* [blɑ̃]; *dans* [dɑ̃]; *en* [ɑ̃]
 [ɔ̃] *bon* [bɔ̃]; *pont* [pɔ̃]; *long* [lɔ̃]; *plomb* [plɔ̃]
 [œ̃] *un* [œ̃]; *brun* [brœ̃]; *parfum* [parfœ̃]

Practise saying: ‘*un bon vin blanc*’! [œ̃bɔ̃vɛ̃blɑ̃]

NB: The distinction between [ɛ̃] and [œ̃] (e.g. *vin* and *brun*) is ignored by a lot of French speakers today, who tend to say [ɛ̃] for both sounds.

- (ii) When the vowel is followed in writing by double ‘n’ or double ‘m’, it is not usually nasal.

Ex: *bon* [bɔ̃] but *bonne* [bɔn], *un pan* [pɑ̃] but *une panne* [pan]
ennemi [ɛnmɪ]; *emmental* [ɛmɑ̃tal]
immoral [imɔral]; *immobile* [imobil]

(See also cases when [ɔ̃] and [ɑ̃] are denasalised before a vowel or mute ‘h’ in 5.1 below.)

However, there are exceptions.

Ex: *ennui* [ɑnuɪ]; *enneigement* [ɑ̃ɛʒmɑ̃]; *ennoblir* [ɑ̃nobliʁ]
emmagasiner [ɑ̃magazine]; *emmêler* [ɑ̃mɛle]
emménager [ɑ̃menaʒe]; *emmener* [ɑ̃mne]
immanquablement [ɛ̃mɑ̃kabləmɑ̃]

3 Consonants

3.1 16 or 19 consonants?

[p] *Paul* [pɔl]; *appel* [apɛl]
 [b] *beau* [bo]; *abbé* [abe]
 [t] *tenir* [tənɪr]; *théâtre* [teɑtr]; *attacher* [ataʃe]
 [d] *danse* [dɑ̃s]; *addition* [adisɔ̃]
 [k] *coca* [kɔka]; *chaos* [kao]; *kilo* [kilo]; *quel* [kɛl]
 [g] *gant* [gɑ̃], *Gustave* [gystav], *guérir* [gerɪr]; *aggraver* [agɾave]
 [f] *femme* [fam]; *physique* [fizik]
 [v] *voir* [vwar]; *wagon* [vagɔ̃]
 [s] *sous* [su], *assis* [asi], *ceci* [sɛsi]; *attention* [atɑ̃sɔ̃]; *garçon* [garsɔ̃]
 [z] *oiseau* [wazo] *zéro* [zero]; *deuxième* [døʒjɛm]
 [ʃ] *chat* [ʃa]; *acheter* [aʃte]
 [ʒ] *je* [ʒə], *gèle* [ʒɛl], *girafe* [ʒɪraf]; *Georges* [ʒɔʁʒ]
 [m] *pomme* [pɔm]; *Marie* [mari]
 [n] *nez* [ne], *Nadine* [nadin]; *sonne* [sɔn]; *damné* [dane]
 [l] *la* [la]; *ville* [vil]
 [r] *rue* [ry]; *arrivé* [arive]

[ɛ] *agneau* [aɛo]; *gagner* [gaɛe]; *campagne* [kɑ̃paɛ]

[ɛ̃] *camping* [kɑ̃piɛ]

NB(1): French has in fact three ‘r’ sounds: [r], [ʀ] and [ʁ], which correspond to variant pronunciations of ‘r’ in French. For convenience, only [r] is used here. Hence, although French has 36 ‘phonemes’, it may have more ‘sounds’.

NB(2): – [ɛ̃] is often pronounced [ɛ̃j]

– the English [ɛ̃] is used for words borrowed from English.

Ex: *le parking*, *le camping*, *le ring*.

3.2 ‘c’ and ‘g’

(i) *c+i* or *c+e* is pronounced [s], whereas *c+a*, *c+o* or *c+u* is pronounced [k], hence *cicatrice* [sikatris].

(ii) *g+e* or *g+i* is pronounced [ʒ], whereas *g+a*, *g+o* or *g+u* is pronounced [g], hence *garage* [garaʒ].

See also 8.4 below on cedillas.

3.3 ‘h’

In French, ‘h’ is never pronounced in the way it can be pronounced in English.

– The so-called ‘aspirated h’ (*‘h’ aspiré*) is also called ‘disjunctive h’, since ‘h’ is no longer aspirated in modern French. This means that neither liaison nor elision can take place (see sections 5.2 and 6 below). A disjunctive ‘h’ is shown in phonetic transcriptions by an apostrophe.

Ex: *la haine* [la'ɛ̃]; *hâtive* [a'tiv].

– With a ‘mute h’, on the other hand, there can be a liaison or an elision.

Compare:

l’homme [lɔ̃m]; *les hommes* [lezɔ̃m]

l’hôtel [lotɛl]; *les hôtels* [lezotɛl]

and:

le hibou [lə'iby]; *les hiboux* [lə'iby]

la hache [la'aʃ]; *les haches* [lə'aʃ]

3.4 Glides

Glides are sounds which are near vowels, but they cannot be pronounced on their own, hence they are also called semi-vowels or even semi-consonants, and there are three of them in French:

[u] which is near [y], as in *puis* [puj], *nuit* [nuj], *huit* [ɥit]

[w] which is near [u], as in *oui* [wi], *loi* [lwa], *noix* [nwa]

[i] which is near [i], as in *yoyo* [jojo], *rouiller* [ruje], *hier* [jer], *pied* [pje], *fille* [fij], *abeille* [abej]

4 The syllable

A syllable can be made up of only a vowel but it is generally the result of the association of a vowel with one or more consonants. It is therefore always the **vowel** which plays the central role in a syllable.

NB(1): The **oral** syllable does not always reproduce the **graphic** syllable, depending on the register (see 10 below) used by the speaker and/or the number of ‘mute *e*’ (see 7 below) pronounced. The graphic syllable is used for hyphenation and the oral syllable for poetry, song lyrics, etc.

NB(2): Orthographical apostrophes do not mark the end of a syllable: they are part of a syllable.

Ex: *au/jour/d’hui; d’a/bord*

5 Linking (*enchainement*) and elision

5.1 Linking

Linking is the connecting of a **pronounced** final consonant to the initial vowel of the following word. It is an **oral** phenomenon.

Ex: *cette île; sept îles* [setil]
cinq ans [sɛ̃kɑ̃]
notre arrivée [notrarive]
leur entrée [lœrɑ̃tre]
un bel habit [œbelabi]
la grande armée [lagrɑ̃darme]

Linking is compulsory in French and, unlike liaison (see 6 below), does not entail any modification in the consonants pronounced.

Exception: the ‘*f*’ of *neuf* is pronounced [v] in *neuf heures* [nœvœr] and *neuf ans* [nœvɑ̃] (both linking and liaison).

Note the linking with endings in *-rs*, *-rt* and *-rd*.

Ex: *Ton chien mord encore?* [mɔrɑ̃kɔr]
Je pars en train. [parɑ̃]
Elle l’a toujours aimé. [tuʒurɛmɛ]
Nous sommes fort heureux. [fɔrœʁøʃ]

Exception: personal pronouns after the verb, where there is a liaison.

Ex: *part-il?* [partil]

5.2 Elision

The suppression of the final **written** vowel of grammatical words (e.g. determiners, pronouns, the conjunction *si*) before another word beginning with a vowel, semi-vowel or mute ‘*h*’ is an elision. It is expressed in writing by an **apostrophe**, which is the **orthographical** mark of this elision. For instance:

- (i) Elision of the 'e':

*l'hôtel; l'ouest; je l'ai fait; qu'on me parle! j'aime, je m'habille,
tu t'assieds, elle s'en va, c'est bien, il parle d'argent, je n'ai pas le temps,
les cadeaux qu'ils nous ont offerts; jusqu'à demain, ce qu'on dit*

- (ii) Elision of the 'a':

l'orange; l'habileté; je l'ai faite; l'eau; l'oie

- (iii) Note that there is no elision of
- le, la, je, ce*
- after a verb.

Ex: *Puis-je aller à la Mairie avec vous?*

Est-ce un accident?

Prends-le avec toi!

- (iv) If the word that follows begins with a consonant or a disjunctive 'h', there is no elision.

Ex: *le hibou, je me hâte, de la houille, ce que je veux*, etc.

- (v) Elision and the mute 'e':

The rules above concern **orthographical** elision only. The rules for the non-pronunciation of the mute 'e' still apply (see 7 below).

Ex: *ce que je veux* [səkəʒəvø] or [skəʒəvø] or [səkəʒvø] or [skəʒvø]

- (vi) Elision of the 'i':

The 'i' of *si* is elided only before *il* or *ils*, but not before *elle* or *elles*.

Ex: *s'il vient, s'ils viennent, s'il vous plaît*

but: *si elle vient, si elles viennent*

- (vii) Generally, there is no elision before:

– *un* and *onze*: *le (chiffre) un, le onze, la onzième heure*

– *le oui* (following the model of *le non*)

– names of letters: *le a, le o, le u, le h, le y*, etc.

– certain words beginning with 'y'

Ex: *le yacht, le yoga, la Yougoslavie, le Yémen*

but: *l'Yonne, le duc d'York*

6 Liaison

A liaison means the pronunciation of a syllable made up of the final **mute** consonant of a word and the initial vowel of the following word. Compare:

les [lɛ] and *les orages* [lɛʒɔʁaʒ]

sont [sɔ̃] and *sont-ils* [sɔ̃til]

6.1 Phonetic modifications

Unlike with linking, a consonant can change its nature in a liaison:

- the letters ‘s’ and ‘x’ are pronounced [z]
Ex: *six œufs* [sizø]; *dix hommes* [dizom]
les œufs [lezø]; *les hommes* [lezom]
- ‘d’ is pronounced [t]
Ex: *un grand arbre* [grātarbr]
Prend-il du sucre? [prātil]
- ‘f’ is pronounced [v]
Ex: *neuf heures* [nœvœr]; *neuf ans* [nœvā]
- the nasal vowel [ɛ̃] loses its nasality. Thus adjectives in *-ain*, *-ein* or *-en* are pronounced as if they were feminine.
Ex: *lointain* [lwētɛ̃] but *un lointain ami* [lwētɛnamɪ]
plein [plɛ̃] but *un plein arrosoir* [plɛnarozwar]
moyen [mwajɛ̃] but *le Moyen Age* [mwajɛnaʒ]

However, [ɔ̃] tends to keep its nasality.

Ex: *ton* [tɔ̃] and *ton ami* [tɔ̃namɪ] rather than [tɔnamɪ]
bon [bɔ̃] and *un bon hôtel* [bɔ̃notɛl] rather than [bɔnotɛl]
on [ɔ̃] and *on y va* [ɔ̃niva] rather than [ɔniva]

Exceptions: *le bonheur* [bɔ̃nœr]; *un bonhomme* [bɔ̃nɔm]

The following words also keep their nasality: *un, aucun; en; rien, bien, combien.*

Ex: *un orage* [œ̃nɔraʒ], *en avance* [ānavās], *bien audacieux* [bjēnodasjø]

6.2 Liaison and usage

(i) Current usage

Current usage employs a liaison:

- between the determiner and the noun:
Ex: *mes amis* [mezamɪ]
les animaux [lezanimɔ]
- between the subject pronoun and the verb, and the verb and pronoun in the case of an inversion:
Ex: *Ils ont réussi* [ilzɔ̃]; *Ont-ils réussi?* [ɔ̃til]
Ils étaient en retard [ilzɛtɛ]; *Étaient-ils en retard?* [ɛtɛtil]
- between the verb *être* and the subject complement (or the auxiliary *être* and past participle):
Ex: *Il est enseignant* [ɛtāsɛpā].
Mes amis sont arrivés [sɔ̃tarivɛ].
- between the adjective and the noun:
Ex: *un petit homme* [pətitɔm]
un savant Italien [savāitalijɛ] (a learned Italian)

However, there is no liaison between noun + adjective. Hence:

un savant Italien [savāitalijɛ] (an Italian scholar)

(ii) Liaison and registers

Liaison is optional in all other cases. However:

- the more formal the register (see 10 below), the more frequent the liaisons.
Hence:

Pouvez-vous y aller?

[puvevuziale] or: [puvevuiale]

- inappropriate liaisons can be a source of humour:

Ex: *Allons au zoo!* [alɔ̃zozo] (*Allons, Zozo!*)

- there is no liaison after the conjunction of coordination *et*, even if it implies a hiatus (see 6.3 below):

Ex: *Elle est triste et aigrie.* [ɛlɛtristeeɡri]

6.3 Hiatus

- A hiatus is the juxtaposition of two vowel sounds, the first one at the end of a syllable, the second at the beginning of the next.

Ex: *Ils ont mangé et bu.*

Il va à Paris.

Elle a à apprendre.

- Hiatuses are avoided as much as possible in French because they sound awkward. Hence a consonant is sometimes added (see individual chapters for details).

Ex: *Ira-t-elle?*

Mange-t-il?

Vas-y!

7 The ‘mute e’

At the end or in the middle of a word, ‘e’ without an accent is called ‘mute e’ (*e’ muet*, *instable* or *caduc*). It is not normally pronounced (except in the South of France) unlike the preceding consonant which is. The round brackets used below show that [ə] may or may not be heard.

Ex: *je pense* [pɑ̃s]; *une porte* [pɔʁt]; *lentement* [lɑ̃t(ə)mɑ̃]

Compare with: *un port* [pɔʁ]

NB: *-es* is also mute in verbs and plural of nouns, adjectives, etc.

Ex: *tu penses* [pɑ̃s]; *des portes* [pɔʁt]

Compare with: *des ports* [pɔʁ]

-ent is mute when it is the plural ending of a conjugated verb.

Ex: *ils pensent* [pɑ̃s]

But: *souvent* [suvɑ̃]; *vraiment* [vrɛmɑ̃]; *un agent* [aʒɑ̃]

Think of: *Les poules du couvent couvent.* [lɛpuldykuvɑ̃kuv]

The hens at the convent are brooding.

(i) **Current usages**

- The mute ‘e’ inside a word is pronounced when it is preceded by two consonants and followed by one.

Ex: *aimablement* [ɛmabləmɑ̃]

mercredi [mɛʁkrɛdi]

probablement [pɹɔbabləmɑ̃]; *vendredi* [vɑ̃drɛdi]; *prenez* [pʀɛnɛ]

- In other configurations, the internal mute ‘e’ is not normally pronounced (but see also (ii) below).

Ex: *le petit chat* [ləpɛtiʃa] or [ləptiʃa] or [lpɛtiʃa]

normalement [nɔʁmal(ə)mɑ̃]

samedi [sam(ə)di]

- Hence the number of **graphic syllables** does not always correspond to the number of **oral syllables**.

Ex: *acheter sans se tromper* (a/che/ter/sans/se/trom/per)

[aʃ-te-sɑ̃s-trɔ̃pɛ]

This phrase has seven graphic syllables and only five oral syllables as the mute ‘e’, at least in standard French, is not pronounced in *acheter* and *se* in this particular configuration.

(ii) **Regional accents; formal registers**

- In the south of France, the mute ‘e’ is generally pronounced.

Ex: *Qu’est-ce que vous voulez faire?* [kɛsəkɛvuvulefɛʁ]

- In formal registers (e.g. formal speeches, reading aloud, classical theatre, poetry), the pronunciation of mute ‘e’ is frequent, which entails liaisons which do not occur in current usage.

Ex: *Ils rampent, flagellés par les bises iniques,*

Frémissant au fracas roulant des omnibus,

Et serrant sur leur flanc, ainsi que des reliques,

Un petit sac brodé de fleurs ou de rébus . . .

Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux parisiens*

8 Accented letters, cedillas and diaereses

In written French, accents, cedillas and diaereses either give an indication of pronunciation or they are a distinguishing mark. Hence the temptation to add them at random in a prose or essay – on the grounds that they make the piece look more French – should be strongly resisted! It is better to check their presence or absence in a dictionary and it is best to learn every word with (or without) its accent(s) as an integral part of the spelling.

Ex: *la religion* [ʁəliʒjɔ̃] but *représenter* [ʁəpʀɛzɑ̃tɛ]

Note that accents are frequently omitted over capital letters.

Ex: *en Egypte*

A ce soir!

Regardless of spelling, the phonetic distinctions between [e] and [ɛ], [o] and [ɔ], [a] and [ɑ] may be blurred by native speakers, depending on regional accents and/or registers. What follows is the pronunciation of standard French.

8.1 Acute accent: the sound [e]

An acute accent over an 'e' indicates that 'ê' is pronounced [e].

Ex: *évident*; *le passé composé*; *une clé*, *une poignée*, etc.

Exception: the 'é' of *crèmerie* is pronounced [ɛ].

8.2 Grave accent: the sound [ɛ]

- (i) A grave accent over 'è' indicates that 'è' is pronounced [ɛ]. Note that there is no consonant after the 'è' in the same graphic syllable.

Ex: *pè*/re, *mè*/re, *frè*/re, *Sè*/te, *mè*/tre, *j'a/chè*/te, *en/lè*/ve/ment

- (ii) In the following types of word, 'e' without an accent is also pronounced [ɛ]:

- when the 'e' is followed by an 'x':

Ex: *exemple*, *lexique*, *flexible*, *exorcisme*, *réflexion*, *exclusif*, *exception*, *exécration*

- when the 'e' is followed by a double consonant (it forms a graphic syllable with the first one):

Ex: *un ef*/fort, *de l'es*/sence, *la ter*/re, *je jet*/te

NB: It could be argued that *effort* and *essence* begin with the sound [e], not [ɛ]. However, there is still no accent.

- when the 'e' is followed by a consonant and forms a syllable with it (compare with (i) above):

Ex: *per*/mis, *ber*/ceau, *es*/pé/rer, *per*/cep/tion, *es*/prit, *ec*/zé/ma

- (iii) A grave accent over 'à' or 'u' is a distinguishing mark and does not affect the pronunciation.

Ex: the preposition *à* and the auxiliary *a*
 the adverb *là* and the definite article *la*
 the adverb *où* and the conjunction *ou*
 the adverb *ça* and the demonstrative pronoun *ça*

8.3 Circumflex accent

- (i) A circumflex accent on 'ê' indicates that 'ê' is pronounced [ɛ].

Ex: *une bête*; *la tête*; *la forêt*; *la fenêtre*

Exceptions: *le poêle* [pwal] (stove); *la poêle* [pwal] (frying-pan)

- (ii) A circumflex accent on 'ô' generally indicates that 'ô' is pronounced [o].

Ex: *un pôle* [pol]; *un hôte* [ot]; *une côte* [kot]; *tôt* [to]

Exceptions: *un hôtel* [o(o)tel]; *un hôpital* [ɔpital]

With no circumflex accent, 'o' is generally pronounced [ɔ].

Ex: *une pomme* [pɔm]; *une hotte* [ɔt]

Exceptions: *une zone* [zon], *un clone* [klɔn], *un atome* [atom]

- (iii) A circumflex accent on ‘a’ generally indicates that ‘â’ is pronounced [ɑ].
 Ex: *de la pâte* [pat]; *un âne* [ɑn], *à la hâte* [‘at], *bâtir* [batir], *une tâche* [taʃ];
le hâte [‘ɑl]
 Exceptions: *de la pâtisserie* [patisri], *un château* [ʃato]

With no circumflex accent, ‘a’ is generally pronounced [a], though not always.

Ex: *une patte* [pat], *une tache* [taʃ]; *une halle* [al]; *une panne* [pan]; *une rame* [ram]; *une lame* [lam]; *une bague* [bag]; *une marmite* [marmit]
 but: *un tas* [ta], *las* [la], *bas* [ba]; *rase* [raz], *gaz* [gaz], *phrase* [fraz]

- (iv) A circumflex accent can be found on any other vowel, including the ‘i’ of ‘ai’, ‘ei’ or ‘oi’, and the ‘u’ of ‘eu’ or ‘ou’.

Ex: *une île*; *un abîme*
une flûte
un maître; *il paraît*
une boîte; *un goût*
qu’il eût
le goût; *la moulture*

In those cases, the circumflex accent does not affect pronunciation. It can either indicate a contraction from an earlier spelling (e.g. *goût* from the Latin *gustus*), or it is used as a distinguishing mark in the spelling of words (as in 8.2(iii) above), or to distinguish between tenses. Compare:

crû (past participle of *croître*) and
cru (past participle of *croire*)

dû (past participle of *devoir*) and
du (partitive article)

eût (imperfect subjunctive of *avoir*) and
eut (past historic of *avoir*)

8.4 Cedillas

A cedilla (*cédille*) is placed under a ‘c’ and before ‘a’, ‘o’ and ‘u’ in order to obtain the sound [s].

Ex: *il lança*, *une leçon*, *ça* et là, *un reçu*

Hence none is needed before ‘e’ or ‘i’.

Ex: **ceci**; *merci*; *cette*; *macérer*; *France*

Compare with:

connaître, **Carcassonne**, *le vécu*

where ‘c’ is pronounced [k].

The cedilla plays the same role as ‘e’ placed after ‘g’ to obtain the sound [ʒ].

Ex: *nous mangeons* [mɑ̃ʒɔ̃], *une gageure* [ʒaʒyr], **Georges** [ʒɔʁʒ]

Hence no ‘e’ is needed before ‘e’ or ‘i’ to obtain [ʒ]

Ex: **gérer**, *une girafe*

Compare with:

une gargotte [gargɔt], *une goutte* [gut], **Gustave** [gystav]

If a [g] sound is needed before ‘e’ or ‘i’, a ‘u’ must be inserted between the ‘g’ and the ‘e’ or ‘i’.

Ex: *narguer*; *une guitare*; *St-Guénolé*

Note the pronunciation of *linguiste* [lɛ̃ɡɥist]

See appendix 1 about latest proposals for changes.

8.5 Diaereses

- (i) A diaeresis (*tréma*) over an ‘e’ or an ‘i’ indicates that the vowel is pronounced separately from the preceding vowel: i.e. the two vowels are pronounced in two syllables.

Ex: *ha/ir* [ˈaɪʀ]; *No/ël* [nɔɛl]; *Mo/ïse* [moiz]; *une héro/ïne* [ɛʀɔɪn];
ambigu/ité [ɑ̃bigɥite]

But: *je hais* [ɛ]; *de la moelle* [mwal]; *un moine* [mwan]; *Guignol* [ɡɥɔl]

- (ii) If there are three vowels, the diaeresis is placed on the last vowel.

Ex: *ouïr* [wir] : *j’ai ouï dire* [ʒewidir]

- (iii) Adjectives in *-gu* add a diaeresis on the final ‘e’ of the feminine so that the ‘u’ is pronounced [y].

Ex: *une pièce exigüe* [ɛgzigy]; *une note aiguë* [ɛgy]; *la cigüe* [sigy]; *contigüe* [kɔ̃tigy]

8.6 Sound-based stylistic devices

The following figures of literary style are of interest in that they demonstrate the use of oral phenomena in the written text. It is therefore necessary to recite the texts in order to produce the desired effect.

8.6.1 Assonance

Assonance (derived from the Latin *sonare* – ‘to sound’) is the euphonic effect obtained when several identical or similar vowel sounds appear in the same phrase or clause.

Ex: *métro, boulot, dodo*
les longs sanglots des violons

Assonance can be used as a source of humour.

Ex: *Ce que nous oyons, l’oie l’oit-elle?*
[. . .]
Et qu’a ouï l’ouïe de l’oie de Louis?
Elle a ouï ce que toute oie oit . . .

Raymond Devos, *Ouï-dire, a plus d’un titre*

8.6.2 Alliteration

Alliteration (derived from the Latin *littera* – ‘letter’) is the effect obtained when several identical or similar consonants appear in the same phrase or clause.

Ex: *Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes . . .*

Jean Racine, *Andromaque*

“‘La mort est au bout. Je revois sa griffe grise, sur le visage de Georges Pompidou . . .’ Il répétait ‘griffe grise’ en savourant l’allitération.”

Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, *Le Monde*, 1996

9 Word and sentence stress

9.1 Word stress

In French, the stress falls on the final syllable of an isolated word regardless of how many syllables it may contain.

Ex: (stressed syllables are shown in bold)

*gar**çon***
*portug**ais***
*individ**uel***
*anticonstitutionn**ement***

However, if the final syllable of a word ends in a mute ‘e’, the stress then falls on the penultimate syllable.

Ex: *liv**re***
*petit**e***
*magnif**ique***

In a short phrase, the stress falls on the final syllable of the final word.

Ex: *manteau→ un manteau gris*

In English, however, word stress can fall on different syllables. This sometimes indicates a different meaning. Compare:

record (noun) and *re**cord*** (verb)
contrast (noun) and *con**trast*** (verb)

9.2 Sentence stress

Sentence stress (or ‘syntactic stress’) is placed on a whole word or words within a sentence. In the case of a single-word exclamation or interjection, it can be placed on any syllable. The speaker can use it:

- to place emphasis on a desired word or words
- to contrast or oppose two or more words (‘contrastive stress’)
- to distinguish between semantic differences

The various uses of sentence stress contribute to a more refined production and interpretation of an utterance.

Ex: ***Magnifique!***
*Cet exercice est **infaisable**, vous savez.*
*Je n’ai pas dit **tentacule**, j’ai dit **denticule!***

Compare:

Mon frère revient du Brésil. (i.e. – not **your** brother)

*Mon **frère** revient du Brésil.* (i.e. – not my **sister**)

*Mon frère **revient** du Brésil.* (i.e. – not **going** there)

*Mon frère revient du **Brésil**.* (i.e. – not from **Ecuador**)

10 Registers

The distinction between formal and informal registers is not an easy one to define. Indeed, a term may be tagged as ‘familiar’ in one dictionary and ‘popular’ in another or have one asterisk in one and three in another. Register varies according to many factors, including how comfortable people feel in the presence of one another. Register may shift as a conversation progresses. Finally, the higher the linguistic awareness, the more likely we are to encounter ‘mixed’ registers. For instance, many linguists love to manipulate perfect syntax and ‘gutter’ vocabulary. In other words, nobody ever ‘speaks informally’ all the time, or uses systematically all the features that come under the label ‘informal’. We can also witness this mixing of levels in the media and the world of advertising, where dislocated constructions join hands with subjunctive imperatives. As Françoise Gadet (author of *Le français ordinaire* and *Le français populaire*) often points out, ‘*On pardonnera plus facilement à un étranger de ne pas connaître une expression familière que de faire une gaffe.*’ Students are therefore advised to keep to **formal** French, in their written and oral examinations, as well as in any professional contacts they may have in French-speaking countries.

11 Different types of spoken French

11.1 Authentic language

‘Authentic’ spoken French is that of spontaneous conversation between Francophones. Genuine spoken French has its own specific syntax: repetitions and discontinuities are characteristics of this.

However, authentic spoken French is governed by specific rules and constraints which concern all elements of language, namely:

- phonetic considerations: linking and liaisons, accents and relaxed pronunciation, etc.
- morphosyntactical considerations: the use of moods and tenses, the modalities of the sentence (statement, question, command, exclamation), comment clauses, interjections, incomplete sentences, presentative forms, repetition, ellipsis, etc.
- lexical considerations: all the various registers, specific vocabulary, etc.

11.2 Oratorical language

‘Oratorical’ French is non-spontaneous or prepared speech. It is used in speeches and public readings. This type of spoken French presents several aspects which depend on the degree of spontaneity.

- With a fair amount of spontaneity: this is the speech of lecturers from notes which they develop, radio or TV interviewees, or participants in a public debate. (This is the type of spoken language which **students should emulate for the purposes of oral examinations.**)
- With less spontaneity: this is the speech of actors who deliver memorized lines, the journalists or presenters who read a paper or autocue in front of a microphone or camera, or public speakers who read from a script while trying not to make it sound as if it were literally ‘read’.
- With no spontaneity at all: this is the written rhetorical speech which is ‘performed’ with all the nuances of oratorical art (e.g. Malraux’s speeches).

All these forms of spoken French owe far more to the written form of the language than to the ‘authentic’ spoken form. We could say that this is the ‘oralization’ of the written form.

11.3 Fictional dialogue

Fictional dialogue is the speech which is attributed to characters in a novel (which entails all the variations of reported speech – see chapter 41 Reported Speech) or in a dramatic work, or the speech of the narrator in a first-person narrative work.

12 Punctuation

Punctuation is the system of signs used in writing to clarify the structure of text. Note that many writers (particularly poets) manipulate the rules of punctuation to artistic ends. Note also that French punctuation is **not always** the same as in English and that it is the use of the colon in French which differs most from English usage – closely followed by commas.

The main punctuation marks are:

. the full stop (*le point*)

This marks an important pause at the end of a declarative sentence (including incomplete sentences). See also question mark and exclamation mark.

Ex: *Paul s'éloigna. Soudain, il fit demi-tour. Bizarre.*

, the comma (*la virgule*)

It marks a short pause:

- to separate items in a list (see chapter 40 Coordination and Juxtaposition).

Ex: *Le chat, la belette et le petit lapin sont arrivés ensemble.*

Adieu veau, vache, cochon, couvée.

- exceptionally before *et*, when *et* coordinates two unrelated items in the sentence or two unrelated sentences or parts of sentences.

Ex: *Les femmes sont les premières victimes de licenciements, et peu d'efforts sont faits pour leur remise au travail.*

- to detach a word or group of words, including an adverb phrase (particularly at the beginning or in the middle of the sentence), a noun/noun group, an adjective or relative clause in apposition or a reporting clause (see chapter 2 Syntax).

Ex: *Pour aborder le problème wallon, j'ai donc choisi un Wallon qui nous a fait part de ses opinions et de ses états d'âme en la matière.
'J'ai gagné!', a crié Sylvain.*

NB: Items such as indirect objects, subject complements or adverb phrases which appear in first position in the sentence followed by a **subject–verb inversion for stylistic purposes**, should not be confused with adverb phrases in apposition: the former are **not** isolated by commas.

Ex: *Au travail professionnel s'ajoute le travail ménager.
Par la porte entr'ouverte entraient des senteurs d'herbe fraîchement coupée . . .*

: the colon (*les deux points*)

The colon establishes a semantic relation between what precedes and what follows. This relation can be:

- the introduction of a list of examples:

Ex: *Tout le monde était là: Paul, Catherine, Anne-Marie et Françoise.*

- a relation of cause or consequence:

Ex: *Mets un manteau: le temps s'est refroidi.*

- the introduction of direct reported speech:

Ex: *Il a dit: 'Ce sera prêt ce soir.'*

- an explanation or development:

Ex: *En 1972, la première journée nationale de la femme à Bruxelles récolte un succès inattendu: on dénombre dix à douze mille participantes, parmi lesquelles . . .*

; the semi-colon (*le point-virgule*)

This is a medium pause, a briefer pause than a full stop but longer than a comma. Unlike the full stop, it is internal to the sentence.

Ex: *'A midi, Charles rentrait; ensuite il sortait; puis elle prenait un bouillon . . .'*

Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

? the question mark (*le point d'interrogation*)

This marks an important pause at the end of an interrogative sentence, including incomplete sentences.

Ex: *Quand venez-vous?
Lui ici?*