S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 1

ReCALL **12** (2): 215–225. Printed in the United Kingdom
© 2000 Cambridge University Press

Software reviews

Nuffield French for Science Students. Robin Adamson *et al.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999. Student's Book, xx + 300, 0 340 72527 3, £16.99; Audio-Visual Resource and Teaching Pack, 0 340 75319 6, £75.00 + VAT; Computer Support Software for PC and Macintosh available by email from: nuffield-support@cals.dundee.ac.uk

Overview

It should be said from the start that the production of *Nuffield French for Science Students* (henceforth *NFSS*) was a mammoth undertaking. The course is designed to cover two levels: level 1 is for students with a good GCSE pass, level 2 for students who have studied French to age 18+ and/or who have completed level 1. Both levels are taught from the student's book. There are a number of video recordings for both levels, support software for level 1 and an audio cassette for level 2. Assessment is by a combination of coursework (200–400 words) and exam (a written test of taught grammar and an '*A vous l'honneur*' functional activity).

The teacher's book covers both levels. Its intention, as set out in the publicity material accompanying our copy of the course, is to 'prepare science undergraduates for getting the most out of their year studying abroad and for career mobility in Europe'. This is indeed a laudable aim and one that, to our knowledge, is not met in a satisfactory way by any commercial course currently available. *NFSS* places great demands on both the students and the teacher(s) but, if time (and stamina) can be found to follow the intensive teaching plan closely, it will undoubtedly fulfil its stated objectives.

Course resources

There is an abundance of interesting, pedagogically sound, imaginative and well- targeted materials but, as will be seen from the layout of our comments below, these are organised in a complicated way. This perhaps constitutes the greatest weakness of the course. In order to be able to exploit these resources fully and efficiently, tutors will need to have spent a great deal of time getting to know and preparing for the course. The constraints of time and the lack of flexibility, which so often characterise non-specialist language teaching in higher education, make it rather difficult for most of us to devote such an amount of time to one single course. Another weakness is that the book offers no glossary of scientific terms.

Niveau 1

Each unit represents two weeks' work culminating in a marked written assignment (p. xiv).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 2

Student's Book: Units 1–10

There are ten grammar-based units which are structured 'to take the student from understanding key grammar points to using them in a realistic scientific setting' (cover note). Each unit is divided into five sections: Section A ('*Pour comprendre – Pour vérifier*') checks what students are expected to know already (e.g. present *–er* verbs in Unit 1; Future in Unit 8); section B ('*Pour résumer*') offers explanations of grammar; section C ('*Pour s'entraîner*') comprises grammar exercises; section D ('*Les mots pour le dire*') is vocabulary based, referring students to the texts of that particular unit, and section E ('*A vous l'honneur!*') contains written and oral exercises. Both Niveau 1 and Niveau 2 end with copious '*Travaux pratiques*'.

Several comments can be made about the various sections of the book. In section B the explanations are in French and use technical language (r*adical, pronom démonstratif*…), with no glossary of grammatical terms. Can Post-GCSE science students really be expected to have a sound understanding of either French grammar or grammatical terminology in French (or for that matter, in English)?

Section C contains many good, original resources and exercises that are both practical and interesting: these are the things that the target students really need (descriptions of experiments, cause to effect, and so on). Most students should find the subjects relevant since there is a wide variety of science-based topics generally pitched at a suitable level.

Section D is flawed in its insistence upon classifying vocabulary by function rather than meaning. New vocabulary can be presented – indeed, needs to be presented – in a variety of ways to help students acquire efficient and diverse learning strategies. *NFSS* would certainly have benefited from using such tried and tested strategies as the association of ideas, of antonyms and synonyms; the association of words and illustrations; translations; etc. A further language problem which arises in section D is that most instructions are given in non-user-friendly French.

The exercises of section E are varied, original and fit snugly into the course as a whole. The written tasks ask students to use their imagination (which we found refreshing) as well as their skills, and to apply general French to specific situations. The oral tasks are fine, but often require considerable preparation, and always suppose that the students have completed the whole section in the prescribed way.

Travaux pratiques / Videos

The sixty pages of '*Travaux pratiques*' (TP) are both text- and video-based. Videos 1–10 correspond to units 1–10 (grammatically, not necessarily lexically); videos 11–21 '*n'ont aucune relation directe avec les unités de grammaire, et l'ordre de consultation, comme pour les textes imprimés, est facultatif*' (p. 135).

In theory, students are expected to do much of the TP on their own. There is little or no preteaching of vital vocabulary and no transcripts. For some of the activities, this is not too much of a problem, but elsewhere it appears a considerable oversight. Video 3 ('*La carte de séjour*'), for example, is a potentially useful but largely inaccessible resource for a Post-GCSE student. Some of the videos themselves are good (although the exercises rarely are); others are long, unclear, complicated, difficult to understand and – essentially – very boring. Another example: Video 11 is a monologue by a French university administrator of practically 10 minutes in length, and vital vocabulary such as '*redoublement*', '*bachelier*' and '*troisième cycle*' is not glossed. The ablest and most motivated of students would need to hear the video 4 or 5 times (i.e. spend around an hour) to pick up the most basic outline of the monologue.

The TP written documents are intended to be individual and intrinsically linked to the *REAL/Lire* software. Exercises are always in the following order: Prediction, skim, scan, link, search. The documents are generally good, although some instructions are not very helpful ('*Identifiez d'autres termes utiles*', p. 158).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 3

Software

'Whilst the dedicated CALL element is invaluable, the textbook is complete in itself, and students without access to REAL (for PC) or *Informat* and *Lire* (for Apple Macintosh) are in no way disadvantaged.' (p. xii).

Niveau 2

N2 aims to focus on analytical and presentational skills whilst continuing to introduce new grammar. There are four modules under the title: '*Compétences et savoir-faire pour maîtriser la langue des scientifiques*'. Module 1 is '*La prise de notes*'; module 2 '*le résumé*'; module 3 '*Le rapport*'; and module 4 '*La synthèse de documents*'. These modules lead to a student-managed, group-based science project extending over 3-4 weeks and concluding with verbal reports. A 3–4 page written synopsis is also to be submitted.

It is (somewhat oddly) recommended that students do not begin with module 1. Each module represents 3–4 weeks' work with two hours p/w grammar and two hours p/w TP. The TP comprise fifteen video documents and ten printed documents, all of which are 'substantially longer and scientifically more sophisticated' (p. xviii). The topics cover a broad range of areas (genetics, environment, psychology, mechanics, robotics, to name a few) and the written texts are manageable. There is no CALL assistance and no textual support for written documents. The TP – including six documents by the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) – are all science-related and can be approached in any order; they are intended to 'open the world of postgraduate research to students' (p. xix).

TP videos, although motivating and useful, are generally difficult. Little or no guidance is given as to how to approach them. The teacher is presumably expected to trawl through the videos to track down the useful ones: some sort of summary / transcripts for the teacher would have been a great addition to the course. The videos are also likely to be too difficult for students working independently. They are quite long, do not offer any vocabulary lists and are usually based on an oral presentation made by a scientist (such as a *chercheur* from the CNRS) who is not always sensitive to the linguistic limitations of Post-GCSE/ Post AS-level students. The audio cassette comprises five exercises to accompany module 1.

Layout of Teacher's Guide

1. Setting up the course
2. Assessment
3. *Corrigés* N1 (grammar)
4. *Corrigés* N2 ('compétences et savoir-faire')
5. Transciption, N2 *textes enregistrés* (audio cassette only)
6. 'Saying what you want to say' (presenting a report/presenting information/describing equipment and experiments).

Appendices

1. Maths
2. Mnemonics
3. Conversion/rules for WP in French.

Conclusion

NFSS certainly fulfils its stated aim. Most of the resources are stimulating, if not always user-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 4

friendly. It would, however, be difficult for teachers at other institutions to use it exactly as it was designed. A consequence of this is that adapting and getting to know the materials will be extremely time-consuming. There are few typos and the French is accurate. To sum up: we anticipate that we will regularly dip into NFSS and recommend that others do likewise.

JANINE KOPP, ADRIAN TUDOR
University of Hull

Beginning Chinese – Critical Language Series

Authors: *Professor Dana Scott Bourgerie with Professor Ronald R. Robel*

System requirements: *Windows 95 or 98, or Windows NT 3.51 or 4.0, 486 (or better), 16 Mb RAM minimum, 2x CD-ROM, SVGA (or better), sound card, speaker, and 9 Mb disk space. Microphone recommended.*

Available from: *The University of Arizona Press. http://clp.arizona.edu/cls*

Price: *US$69.95*

Description of software and intended use

This double CD-ROM produced by the University of Arizona provides language instruction for use inside and outside the classroom, either as a supplement or a self-tutorial tool for beginners of Mandarin Chinese. It has 20 lessons and an additional introductory lesson covering some key aspects of Mandarin Chinese and the Chinese writing system. Each lesson consists of a dialogue in text, video and audio format hyperlinked to some grammatical and cultural notes. Also included in each lesson are hyperlinks to cultural capsules, graphics and reference material.

Beginning Chinese is designed to be a flexible learning program and the suggested 'Activity List' guides the user through the different modes available, providing useful information and learning tips.

Ease of use

The CDs start immediately with no installation requirements and are navigated by the use of a mouse. No instruction manual was provided but 'Getting Started' provides the user with some basic information and web reference sites. Each lesson and activity mode within the lesson is accessed by mouse clicking.

Background and circumstances of reviewer

I have been learning Chinese Mandarin 'off and on' for a few years now. Firstly, as self tuition with the BBC tapes and booklet and then in informal classes. I have participated in a Tandem Learning Partner scheme and have visited China five times over the past ten years

Pedagogical content

Introduction

The introduction covered a brief historical background, where Mandarin is spoken today, notes on

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 5

the writing system, the basic structure of Mandarin, basic grammatical features, classifiers/measure words and some common particles. As Mandarin is a tonal language, I felt that the information under the heading 'Sound System' was scant, it would be greatly beneficial for a beginner to hear the tonal sound system. The Introduction also lacked basic instructions on how to write characters.

Video

Each of the 20 lessons follows the same routine of learning. First the user watches the video and is advised, in the introduction, to follow the spoken words with the shape of the mouth, facial expressions and gestures. The video clip is short enough to retain the user's interest and once started plays through. The user may replay the video as many times as required.

After completing the subsequent exercises, the user is advised to watch the video clip again to see how much more is understood.

Text with audio

The video text is the next 'Activity List' option providing the focus for further exercises. This can be viewed solely with characters or with the *Pinyin* (Romanised letters) under the characters, enabling the user to follow the pronunciation. The user can listen to the full text, sentences or individual words, with or without the 'Play translations after native' (in American English) option. From the top menu bar in 'Options' the user has the choice of viewing underlining which shows segments grouping characters and words together indicating which character/s form a word and which words should be spoken as a phrase. I found this option useful to familarise myself with the audio text and later to test myself with the *Pinyin* hidden. Out of the way at the bottom of the text are the hyperlinks to grammatical and cultural notes supplementing the lesson where vocabulary lists relating to the lesson can be found.

Flashcards

Here the user has a stack of cards to browse through. Click on one and simultaneously the character/s appear on screen and the spoken word is heard. Options here include: replay, an example of the word used in a sentence plus translations and the option for the user to discard cards, leaving a remaining pile of words to concentrate on. As the discard pile grows this gives the user a sense of progression.

Multiple choice

This option is to test the user's understanding of the text. A score is kept and the student is given the opportunity to correct wrong answers; the procedure continues till all answers are correct. All the audio options, which the user is probably now familiar with, are available. The score can be used for classroom purposes or an individual user may compete with him/herself.

Cloze

The video text is shown with gaps, and here the student types in the correct character/s or selects a character from a multiple choice list. The answers are scored for accuracy; correct and corrected answers are colour coded, allowing the student the opportunity to see corrected mistakes. Without

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 6

any accompanying documentation it was not directly obvious how to type in the characters. As with the multiple choice option, this exercise was the same each time the program was run, so it became possible to memorise the answers without knowing why they were correct.

Keyboard mapping

A complex system of typing in Chinese characters which I did not manage to master.

Dictation

This was the exercise which I enjoyed the most and stretched my knowledge of sentence building. The screen is a little confusing to begin with, being split in half; the student is presented with a jumbled list of words and grammar marks which form a sentence to be correctly assembled by clicks of the mouse. The sentence is heard once at a fast speed. Here, the scoring system penalises a student for re-listening to the sentence, listening to the sentence at a slower speed, or if the words are re-listed. Any errors are indicated, enabling the user to identify areas of weakness.

Pronunciation exercise

A computer microphone is required for this exercise. The student is able to compare his/her recorded voice with that of a native speaker.

Technical performance

The CD was easily navigated to the six main options in each lesson, but some exploration of the menu bar was required for further options, for example: choice of language; whether the user required the words or phrases underlined to indicate the related characters, and by the end of my time using *Beginning Chinese* I had not really mastered the 'Search' option or the 'Keyboard Mapping'.

Record keeping

Record keeping is in the Cloze and Dictation modes where the user may see how s/he fared on that particular set of exercises. I could find no overall record keeping which could be compared with the next time the program is in use.

Overall performance

Initially I felt that this CD lacked something in the layout of the text modes which are dull and somewhat uninspiring to work with, and that a complete beginner would have difficulty in sustaining periods of concentration. The studio recordings of the video clips appear slightly clinical. The more I used the CD, I became involved in the texts, and this blandness did not bother me.

The main omission from this program, in my opinion, is the lack of a list of the 'initials' and 'finals' in Pinyin and their pronunciation. Pinyin is the method by which a Western student can link the sounds of the Chinese language with the Chinese characters. Also omitted is information on the 'radicals' which is an important feature in the understanding of Chinese characters. There were also no character writing instructions and, as mentioned previously, no recording

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 7

distinguishing the tonal sounds. The Help buttons did not always contain information. On the other hand, *Beginning Chinese* provides authentic Mandarin material which builds up dialogues and vocabulary for everyday situations. The subject matter has been carefully thought through and the texts include a considerable number of grammar points which are not directly obvious to the complete beginner.

I enjoyed using the CD as a supplement to my learning of Chinese Mandarin but as a complete beginner I would have found it difficult to get to grips with.

PRU WELLS
University of Hull

Excel at Academic English, *produced by the Department of Languages, Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge, UK. Distributed by Anglia College Enterprises Ltd. Minimum system requirements: PC 486 SX, Windows 3.1, '95, '98, 8Mb RAM, 4Mb free hard-disk space, 4 speed CD-ROM drive, 256 colours with 'small fonts' selected, SoundBlaster compatible sound card. A microphone is needed to make full use of the speaking exercises.*

This CD-ROM loads without incident, and the user is swiftly brought to the first menu page, from which there is a choice of an introduction, skills units, and self-tests. The introduction provides a helpful guide to using the buttons and navigating through the exercises. The skills units are divided into the four main skills, and there are several practice tests. It gradually becomes clear that the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam has been the model for many of the exercises in each unit.

The reading unit is split into two sections: one focuses on skills for using texts, such as identifying relevant information, while the other practises extracting information from texts, i.e. summarising and note-taking. Exercises in the first section deal with texts at the paragraph level, while the other section contains longer texts which the user scrolls down. The speaking section follows the IELTS interview format with question topics moving from the personal to the distant, and from real situations to hypotheses. The user can record his or her own answers and compare them with the models, and two full length model interviews are included towards the end.

The listening unit contains some impressive content; familiar 'fill-in-the-gaps' and 'complete-the-table' exercises have transferred well to the CD-ROM's click-and-drag format. The designers have taken advantage of the medium to vary the old 'labelling-the-map-while-listening-to-someone-giving-directions' exercise by allowing the user to click-and-drag the starting point to get a new set of directions to a different destination. The quality of the recording and the speakers is of a much higher standard than on some IELTS preparation tapes on the market, i.e. two sleepy EFL teachers sitting in an echoing staffroom bordering a noisy corridor. A slight technical hitch in this section is that the playback stops if the user clicks and holds the text label over the intended release point. In addition, the 'news reports' are read too slowly to sound natural, and the newsreader announces that the England cricket team has lost a 'one day Test'. To lose a Test Match in two days may be regarded as a misfortune, but to lose a match in one seems like carelessness!

The writing section is also split into two parts, again mirroring the IELTS format, featuring discussion essays and data description. There are many useful exercises in this section. One drawback pedagogically is that the unit teaches an 'introduction-body-conclusion' essay structure in that order. Students first plan the whole essay, and then write their introduction, then the main body, and finally the conclusion. However, the fact that an introduction comes as the first paragraph of an essay doesn't necessarily mean that it is the first paragraph to be written. This formulaic structural approach to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 8

essay writing may be fine for English language qualification formats such as IELTS, but has little to do with the academic writing process. Students writing coursework at university follow a much more recursive learning-oriented path to the finished product. Students in university exams often go into the exam hall with a fair idea of the areas of their subject they are likely to be asked to write on, hence a lot of their planning has already been done during their exam revision.

These last points lead to the main criticism of this CD-ROM. According to the back cover, it is first aimed at students who want to improve their English skills (no mention of 'academic' here), then at students who need exam practice, and finally at students "who are studying or intending to study at an English speaking college or university". I would be loath to recommend *Excel at Academic English* to any students in this last group who are already studying at an English speaking college or university. The texts come mostly from journalism rather than academic sources. There are no exercises on using outside sources in writing, synthesising information from more than one outside source, bibliographic conventions, judging writers' attitudes expressed through choice of reporting verbs, and so on. This CD-ROM is a very useful resource for students wishing to prepare for exams such as IELTS, but this to me does not provide sufficient justification for its title.

DAVID OAKEY
University of Hull

The Original Real English interactive, *2 CD ROM Version PC. Produced by The Marzio School and Ipse Communication (http://www.realenglish.tm.fr)*

Hardware requirements

With voice recognition
- Pentium 120 or more; 16Mb RAM
- Windows 3.x, 95 or 98
- Hi-colour graphics card
- CD-ROM drive 2x or faster
- 12Mb available hard disk
- Sound card, microphone, headphones or speakers

Without voice recognition
- 486 DX4 or more; 8Mb RAM
- Windows 3.x, 95 or 98
- Hi-colour graphics card
- CD-ROM drive 4x or faster
- 12 Mb available hard disk
- Sound card, microphone, headphones or speakers

The aim of *Real English* was to provide a means of introducing students of English at a beginners level to a wider range of linguistic utterances than course books might offer, in order that they are better prepared for actually spending time in English-speaking countries. It is not claiming to be anything more revolutionary than this, and there can be no doubt that in those terms it succeeds. It is currently only designed for students in France, Germany or Spain, since installation instructions and grammatical information and translations are given in those languages. There is no option to have these in English.

There are 12 units, which mostly follow the same format. Students are presented with varied responses to a question (the question itself may also vary) in the form of authentic video clips, and given the opportunity to break them down into phrases, listen again, repeat and record themselves, and then compare the sound of the original with their recording. The clips are authentic inasmuch as the people interviewed are not actors and the most natural (but comprehensible) responses were selected for the production of the CD. Whether students are actually able to improve their pronunciation in this way is debatable, since this would be dependent on their ability not only to recognise where the difference lies, but also to rectify the problem. There is no feedback at this

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 9

point, so it is left entirely to the students' judgement.

There then follows a series of exercises, checking comprehension and sound recognition, in which students can choose either to click on the correct answer or to say it into the microphone. The problem with this is that the computer does not always recognise the correct response even from a native speaker using all the required specifications. Since this is one of its unique selling points it is a rather crucial failing.

The vocabulary explanations are simply translations into French, German or Spanish, depending on which version you select, but the grammar notes are also in English and are quite helpful. The word order exercises require students to understand the grammar explanations and then drag and drop words into the correct spaces. They may not be very revolutionary, but they are certainly effective. The final exercise requires students to type in the missing words themselves, so provides a final test of their comprehension of the grammar explanations.

The repeated format in each unit, together with very simple graphics, makes navigation very straightforward, and whilst students are encouraged to progress in a linear fashion through the content, reviewing and previewing are extremely simple. The option of being able to start where they last left off when starting up the program on subsequent occasions makes record-keeping unnecessary.

Drawbacks

There are currently just the two CDs with six units on each, and since the language focused on fails to get beyond the verb 'be', it will probably require a large number of subsequent CDs to cover a wide range of levels.

I found some of the feedback mildly patronising. For example, if you fail to get the answer right the first time but then succeed the second time, a gentle voice tells you: "Now you understand". When you get it right the first time the response is certainly varied, but phrases like "Kawabunga, Dude!" can be a little off-putting.

Conclusion

For a French, German or Spanish student who has plenty of self-study time to support a taught course, and has a good discriminative ear, this could be a useful tool. I would recommend it to private language schools in France, Germany and Spain as a self-access resource, but unfortunately that would be the extent of the market.

REBECCA MURONI
University of Hull

WordPROF French, Improve your French Vocabulary CD-ROM and www.wordprof.com website

Available from: *Zeno IT Limited, PO Box 22333, London, W13 8GU.*

Price: *£29.99*

The aim, as stated by the authors of both the *WordPROF* CD-ROM and website is to help students to extend their knowledge of French vocabulary. The choice of levels provided ranges from absolute beginners to post A-level, catering for GCSE and AS-level too. The 9000 words and phrases used are organised into 350 different topics. In addition, the CD-ROM offers listening and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 10

speaking practice. It introduces a number of common new words and phrases in picture scenes, associating a word in French and the object it describes. The CD-ROM also allows students to have a workbook in order to help them structure their learning. This way, they can keep a log of their work, of the topics covered as well as those requiring revision. The website is a simplified version of the CD-ROM, based on the same vocabulary, but presented solely in text files. Both resources are organised into two parts: lessons and tests. The student can either choose to be taught first, then tested or to start straight away with a test. Both resources correct mistakes and spellings in colour.

The CD-ROM was quickly and easily installed on a machine running on Windows 98, as well as on another, using Windows 95. (Note that the system can be installed, but does not run on NT). The software starts by asking you to create your workbook and provides you with a default study plan. It is possible to set up your own personal study plan thanks to a well-designed study plan wizard, which guides you through the basic changes of parameters (the start and finish dates of the course; the start and finish levels; or the fixed daily limit of new words).

After having clicked on the icon 'Today's new words', the student is faced with a long and varied list of topics to select from. Some of these are picture-based (*au zoo, à la ferme, dans la chambre*, etc.), others, perhaps of a too abstract nature, are word documents. Each picture scene introduces visually and orally around a dozen well-chosen new words. Indeed, as mentioned above, an arrow linking a written word to the object described appears, whilst a spoken version of that word can be heard. An English translation is also available at the bottom of the screen. Commenting on the quality of graphics is always very subjective. I found them a little disappointing and felt that they were above all designed for the younger users of the software, as they are very colourful and reminded me of primary school resources. Having said that, they serve their purpose well, with a few exceptions, though: I struggled to recognise the drink (*la boisson*) and the spoon (*la cuillère*) in the 'At the beach' and the 'In the kitchen' scenes. Also, the grass (*l'herbe*) in the 'On the farm' scene bears very little resemblance to the real thing!

The word documents introducing more complex vocabulary all use the same format: they present each new item by displaying simultaneously on the screen a French word and its translation into English, whilst again, the French spoken version of that word is heard. The same background is used for all topics, which is a little boring. Using different backgrounds linked to each topic would have been a nice asset, as more mature or intermediate / advanced students enjoy visual variety too.

Once a lesson is completed, the student can decide to test his/her knowledge by clicking on the 'vocabulary test' icon. The level of the test is determined by clicking on 'against whole vocabulary' (general tests covering all levels) or 'against one course' (specific levels and examination boards). However, it is not possible at this stage (which is a great pity!) to choose to be tested on a particular topic. Indeed, when in test mode, students are faced with a random computer-generated selection of words, which bear no relation to the ones they have learnt. This is likely to result in students scoring poorly (below 40%) and feeling disheartened, in spite of being tested at an appropriate level and having worked hard.

However, clicking on the 'revision' icon, on the other hand, does allow you to be tested on recently acquired knowledge. I found this feature tremendously more useful and rewarding and felt that if the program advised the students to go from the completed lesson to the revision section before attempting a test, it would be a significant improvement. The methodology used in the test is translation-based: the student is expected to type in the French or English equivalent of the word originally suggested. A tick or cross, accompanied by different sounds, identifies right or wrong answers. Wrong answers are corrected, as previously mentioned. At the end of all tests, *WordPROF* gives you an estimate of the percentage of the words you know; the tests results are kept in the student's workbook and progress graphs may be displayed on request, by clicking on 'tests results'.

Another icon, entitled 'finding words' allows you to search for words or parts of words (be it

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press

S0958344000000926a 13/11/00 4:47 pm Page 11

the beginning or the end of the word) in either language. Once the matching words are displayed, by clicking on them, you can find out which topic areas they relate to. Clicking on these will enable you to bring up the list of all words belonging to these same topics. This tool is a very interesting one, as, apart from helping the student to do what it has been primarily designed for (finding a word he/she only partly remembers) it also helps the student gain a deeper understanding of how the language works. For instance, the suffix *-ly* in English and *-ment* in French generally mark adverbs. Likewise, the prefix re- in French often gives an idea of repetition.

Having dedicated the above paragraphs to the presentation, organisation and mechanics of the software, I feel it is now time to comment on its actual content in terms of French vocabulary. The number of words and phrases introduced by *WordPROF* is impressive and it is fair to stress that selecting them, and compiling them into various subject areas must have been a Herculean task. The French is mostly accurate although I found a few mistakes: *La garde d'enfants* is not a child-minder, but *la gardienne d'enfants* is. *La bain thermale* is wrong and should really be *le bain thermal* Likewise, *les chips* is feminine plural (not masculine plural). *Se planter* for to crash is not wrong, but is very colloquial. No indication of register is given and this may lead the student to use this word in the wrong context. Also, I was particularly puzzled by the choice of the marked term *guenon* (a female monkey) for ape. Ape is a generic term and does not refer to the gender of the animal; *singe*, therefore, would be more appropriate.

Another vocabulary problem comes to light when you work though advanced tests (against the whole vocabulary). No context is given and synonyms are not accepted. This results in the student often giving an answer which is right, in terms of meaning, but wrong according to the software: for example *l'objectif* in French could mean 'aim', 'objective' and 'lens' in English. Likewise, *la rampe* in French could be 'banister' or 'footlights' and 'to settle' in English could be *s'installer* as well as *régler* in French. Furthermore, concentrating on only one meaning of a given word also ignores geographical variations. For instance, *la lavette* is indeed, a dish-cloth in most of France, but it is a face-cloth in Belgium, Switzerland and Alsace. All these examples show that, without specified context, the chances of providing the right answer are rather slim. This is why I would like to advise the authors of *WordPROF* to incorporate changes to future versions of this software, if at all possible, so that all suitable answers to a test question may be accepted. The pedagogical value of the test mode of the software would greatly benefit from such changes.

The website, www.wordprof.com, is a simplified version of the *WordPROF* software. New words and phrases are introduced by translation only; there are no picture scenes or sound files. Like the software, the range of subjects covered is amazing and the classification and organisation by level and by topic is extremely well done. The test mode, however, presents all the weaknesses of the software and the same accuracy problems in French occur on the website.

To sum up, *WordPROF* (website and CD-ROM) provides useful support to French classes, and offers great opportunities for self-study. I would advise younger learners to use the CD-ROM, rather than the website. Indeed, the CD-ROM manages and organises their learning, structures their work and revision and last but not least is much more fun! However, my greatest reservation concerns the potential loss of motivation and enjoyment instilled by regular poor scoring in what is in my eyes a less than helpful test system.

JANINE KOPP
University of Hull

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000210926 Published online by Cambridge University Press