

FRANCE IN AUSTRALIA AND IN THE PACIFIC (READING SKILLS FOR AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS OF FRENCH)

CAROL SANDERS

1. It is proposed at the Australian National University to work on the production of a series of language-teaching units on themes relating to France in Australia and in the Pacific.
2. Some of the main aims are:
 - to motivate students by providing learning materials that emphasise the link between the foreign language and their own cultural experience.
 - to make Australian students better informed about French – Australian links, and about the legacy of France in the Pacific.
 - to help students understand French language and culture in a wider context than that of metropolitan France.
 - to equip students, for both social and professional purposes, to be able to read and talk in French about their own society.
3. The main, though not exclusive, emphasis will be on reading skills. There is a lack of reading comprehension materials in French which draw on contemporary research on reading. Each unit will centre on a theme, for which there will be a text or texts. For each text the learner will be guided through two readings. The first will be an "entraînement à la lecture rapide" (i.e. how to skim a page, how to get information from titles, how to identify key words in a French paragraph), at the end of which students should have extracted the gist of the passage. This is followed by a second more detailed reading for the study and acquisition of vocabulary and syntax, and for further work on reading skills (e.g. how to work out the meaning of a new word). There will also be some stylistic analysis of the passages, which will be from a wide range of sources, from early travel documents to contemporary journalism.
4. Examples of themes would be:
 - early French landings in Australia
 - early settlements
 - the French and the Gold Rush
 - French exploration in the Pacific
 - France in the Pacific today: a 'TOM' (French Polynesia)
 - France in the Pacific today: a 'DOM' (s'il en reste – in any case, a unit on New Caledonia)
 - the French language in the Pacific

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- French artists and the Pacific
- contemporary French-Australian political and economic ties
- the French-speaking community in Australia today (including Mauritians, etc.)
- impressions of French writers
- images of Australia in France (cf. the recent spate of articles in French magazines)
- France in the world

(13 units x 2 hours for a 26-week course – but flexible)

To resume, there are plenty of civilisation/language books focusing on France, but nothing up-to-date on this region. The advantage of an emphasis on reading comprehension, apart from the lack of such materials, is that they would be suitable not only for French specialists but also for others, e.g. economists, historians, diplomats, businessmen and the interested public.

5. State of play: I applied unsuccessfully to the ANU for a research grant for the project last July. I have, however, now been given some part-time research assistance, starting in June. I would welcome collaboration and a widening of the project. When a draft first unit has been prepared, I could circulate it for comment (e.g. before the August Heads of French Departments meeting?). It could then be decided if this was the right format, and topics could be divided up among collaborators. The ANU could at the moment act as co-ordinator, if that were thought useful.
6. Additional possibilities: If a thematic/unit approach is adopted, it would be feasible to add other components later, e.g. listening comprehension material on videotape. (I originally put in for funds to make a videotape, but this is of course a costly business.) If there were a possibility of video, two New Zealand colleagues, Michael Andrewes and Philippe Petit, would like to be involved.
7. Diffusion: either as a book, or as a number of loose-leaved dossiers. Publisher: local (River Seine?) or French? Mainly directed at Australia (universities, colleges, Alliances, etc.), but wider Pacific orientation could also interest New Zealand, the South Pacific, Japan, etc.
8. Project leader at ANU: Dr Carol Sanders
(author of various university materials, e.g. *Cours de*

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français contemporain: niveau approfondi, forthcoming)

with the collaboration of:

Mrs J. Mayrhofer (author of *A vous maintenant, River Seine*)

Ms P. Blumstein (Maîtrise & Dip.Ed.)

Mrs P. Dopita (Licence & Dip.Ed.)

9. Comments very welcome!

P.S. (3/2/86)

This project is now well under way and draft versions of a number of units have already been produced. For further information contact Dr Carol Sanders.

Australian National University