

Horizons



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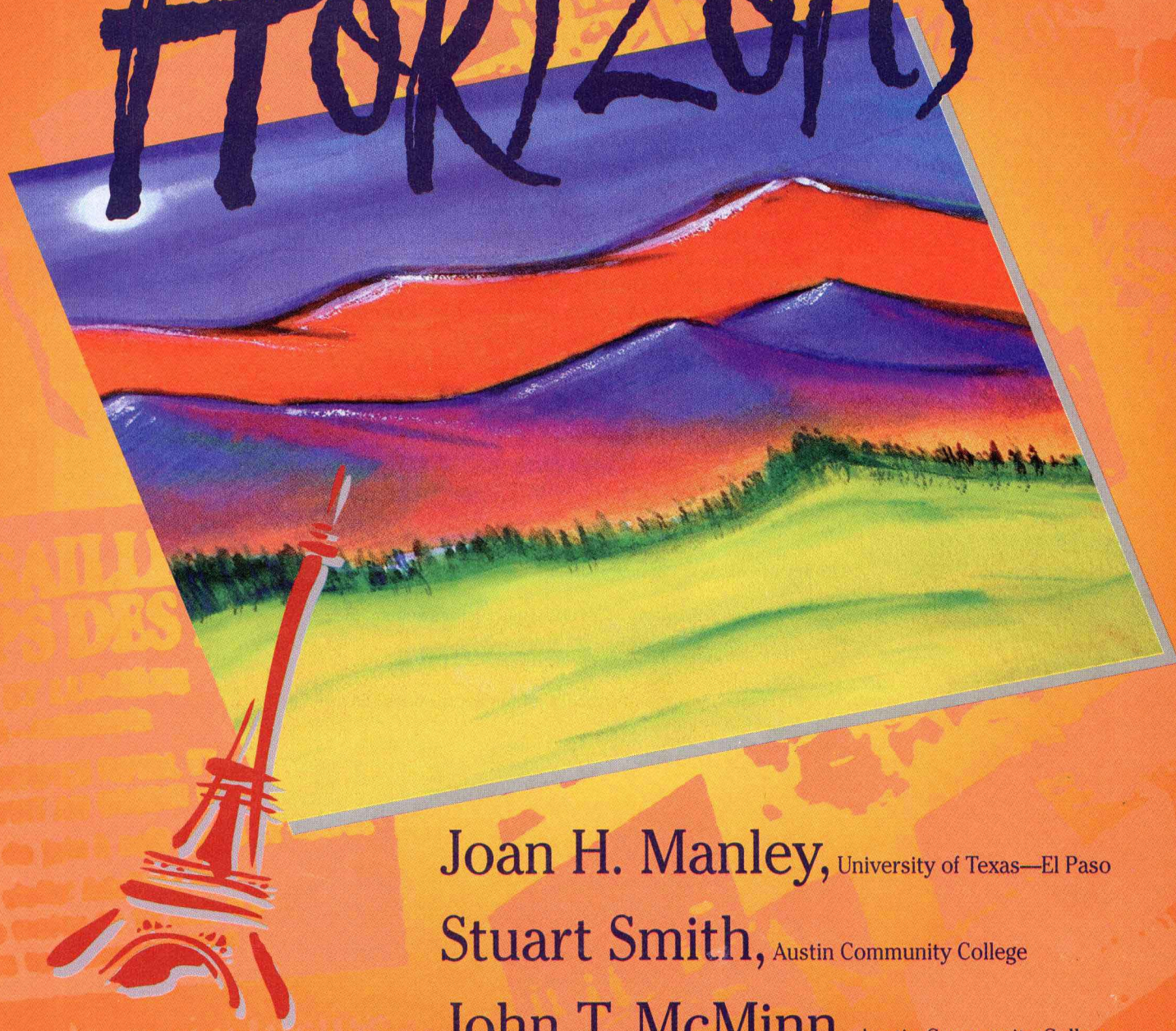
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HORIZONS



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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

	THEMES AND FUNCTIONS	VOCABULARY	PAGE
LE MONDE FRANCOPHONE			
CHAPITRE PRÉLIMINAIRE ON COMMENCE!			2
REGIONAL FOCUS: Le monde francophone			
COMPÉTENCE 1	Greeting people	Les formules de politesse Les salutations familières	6
COMPÉTENCE 2	Spelling and counting	L'alphabet Les chiffres de zéro à trente	10
COMPÉTENCE 3	Talking about your schedule	L'heure Le jour et les devoirs	14
COMPÉTENCE 4	Getting acquainted in class	En classe Un autoportrait	18



<p>SUR LA CÔTE D'AZUR</p> <p>1 À L'UNIVERSITÉ</p> <p>REGIONAL FOCUS: La France</p>	THEMES AND FUNCTIONS	VOCABULARY
COMPÉTENCE 1	Identifying people	Les gens à l'université
COMPÉTENCE 2	Describing people	Les personnalités
COMPÉTENCE 3	Talking about the university	Le campus et les cours
COMPÉTENCE 4	Saying what's in the neighborhood	Le quartier universitaire
Lecture et composition		
COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES		
<p>2 APRÈS LES COURS</p> <p>REGIONAL FOCUS: Nice</p>		
COMPÉTENCE 1	Talking about your free time	Les passe-temps
COMPÉTENCE 2	Telling what you and others do	Le week-end
COMPÉTENCE 3	Talking about your day	La journée
COMPÉTENCE 4	Ordering at the café	Au café
Lecture et composition		
COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES		
<p>BRANCHEZ-VOUS SUR LE FRANÇAIS:</p> <p>French for Study Abroad</p>		

STRUCTURES	CULTURE	LEARNING STRATEGIES, READINGS, LISTENING PASSAGES	PAGE
			24
		Stratégies et lecture: <i>Using cognates and familiar words to read for the gist</i> Lecture: «Qui est-ce?»	28
Les adjectifs Le verbe être et la négation			32
L'article défini Les questions			38
L'article indéfini et il y a C'est ou il est / elle est ?			44
		<i>Deux écoles</i> (publicité)	50
	Les études		52
			56
		Stratégies et compréhension auditive: <i>Listening for specific information</i> Conversation: «On sort ensemble?»	60
L'infinitif Les verbes en -er et les adverbes			64
Quelques verbes à changements orthographiques Les mots interrogatifs			72
Les chiffres de trente à cent Les questions par inversion			78
		<i>Aux Trois Obus</i> (menu)	84
	Le café et le fast-food		86
			90

AU CANADA

3 UN NOUVEL APPARTEMENT

REGIONAL FOCUS: Le Québec

THEMES AND FUNCTIONS

VOCABULARY

COMPÉTENCE 1

Telling where you live

La maison

COMPÉTENCE 2

Talking about your possessions

Les possessions

COMPÉTENCE 3

Describing your house

Les meubles

COMPÉTENCE 4

Giving your address and phone number

Des renseignements

Lecture et composition

COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES

4 EN FAMILLE

REGIONAL FOCUS: Montréal et la ville
de Québec

COMPÉTENCE 1

Talking about your family

La famille

COMPÉTENCE 2

Describing people and things

Les descriptions

COMPÉTENCE 3

Saying where you go in your free time

Le temps libre

COMPÉTENCE 4

Telling what you are going to do

Ce week-end

Lecture et composition

COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES

BRANCHEZ-VOUS SUR LE FRANÇAIS:
French for Business

STRUCTURES	CULTURE	LEARNING STRATEGIES, READINGS, LISTENING PASSAGES	PAGE
		Stratégies et lecture: <i>Guessing meaning from context</i> Lecture: «On cherche un nouvel appartement»	92 96
Le verbe avoir Les adjectifs possessifs mon et ton			100
L'adjectif possessif son/sa/ses et la possession avec de Les adjectifs possessifs notre, votre et leur			106
Les adjectifs quel et ce Les dates et les chiffres au-dessus de cent			112
		<i>Mon pays</i> (poème de Gilles Vigneault)	118
	Le Canada et le Québec		120
			124
		Stratégies et compréhension auditive: <i>Asking for clarification</i> Conversation: «Ma famille»	128
Quelques adjectifs irréguliers La place de l'adjectif			132
Le verbe aller et la préposition à Le pronom sujet on et les suggestions			138
Le futur immédiat Les pronoms le, la, l' et les			144
		<i>Quelle place occupent tes grands-parents dans ta vie?</i> (article du magazine <i>Vidéo-Presse</i>)	150
	La Révolution tranquille		152
			156

À PARIS

5 LES PROJETS

REGIONAL FOCUS: La France

COMPÉTENCE 1

Buying clothes

Les vêtements

COMPÉTENCE 2

Deciding what to do

Le temps et les projets

COMPÉTENCE 3

Saying what you did

Hier

COMPÉTENCE 4

Telling where you went

Le week-end dernier

Lecture et composition

COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES

6 LES INVITATIONS

REGIONAL FOCUS: Paris

COMPÉTENCE 1

Talking about movies

Les films

COMPÉTENCE 2

Planning an outing

Les invitations

COMPÉTENCE 3

Describing childhood memories

Les célébrations

COMPÉTENCE 4

Narrating what happened

Une sortie

Lecture et composition

COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES

BRANCHEZ-VOUS SUR LE FRANÇAIS:

French for Summer Jobs Abroad

STRUCTURES	CULTURE	LEARNING STRATEGIES, READINGS, LISTENING PASSAGES	PAGE
			158
		Stratégies et lecture: <i>Using the sequence of events to make logical guesses</i> Lecture: «Qu'est-ce qu'elle fait?»	162
Le verbe faire et les expressions négatives ne... rien et ne... personne L'impératif			166
Le passé composé avec avoir Les expressions qui désignent le passé			174
Le passé composé avec être Le pronom y et reprise du passé composé			180
		<i>Les week-ends des Français</i> (article du magazine <i>Le Figaro</i>)	186
	Les passe-temps		188
			192
		Stratégies et compréhension auditive: <i>Noting the important information</i> Conversation: «On va au cinéma?»	196
Les verbes vouloir, pouvoir et devoir Le verbe prendre et les moyens de transport			200
L'imparfait			206
Le passé composé et l'imparfait			212
		<i>Un peu d'histoire</i> (article du magazine <i>Jeune et Jolie</i>)	222
	Le cinéma		224
			228

<p>EN NORMANDIE</p> <p>7 LA VIE QUOTIDIENNE</p> <p>REGIONAL FOCUS: La France</p> <p>COMPÉTENCE 1</p> <p>COMPÉTENCE 2</p> <p>COMPÉTENCE 3</p> <p>COMPÉTENCE 4</p> <p>Lecture et composition</p> <p>COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES</p>	<p>THEMES AND FUNCTIONS</p> <p>Talking about relationships</p> <p>Describing your daily routine</p> <p>Saying what you do to and for others</p> <p>Comparing your past and present activities</p>	<p>VOCABULARY</p> <p>La vie sentimentale</p> <p>La vie de tous les jours</p> <p>Les relations</p> <p>La période la plus agréable de ma vie</p>
<p>8 LA BONNE CUISINE</p> <p>REGIONAL FOCUS: La Normandie</p> <p>COMPÉTENCE 1</p> <p>COMPÉTENCE 2</p> <p>COMPÉTENCE 3</p> <p>COMPÉTENCE 4</p> <p>Lecture et composition</p> <p>COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES</p>	<p>Ordering at a restaurant</p> <p>Talking about meals</p> <p>Buying food</p> <p>Choosing a healthy lifestyle</p>	<p>Au restaurant</p> <p>Les repas</p> <p>Les courses</p> <p>La bonne santé</p>
<p>BRANCHEZ-VOUS SUR LE FRANÇAIS:</p> <p>French for Jobs in the Travel Industry</p>		

STRUCTURES	CULTURE	LEARNING STRATEGIES, READINGS, LISTENING PASSAGES	PAGE
			230
		Stratégies et lecture: <i>Using word families and watching out for faux amis</i> Lecture: «Il n'est jamais trop tard!»	234
Les verbes réfléchis au présent Les verbes réfléchis au futur immédiat			238
Les verbes réciproques Les verbes réfléchis et réciproques au passé composé			246
Les verbes dormir, partir, sortir et se sentir Le passé composé et l'imparfait			252
		<i>Tous les matins, je me lève</i> (article de la revue <i>Vogue Hommes</i>)	258
	L'amour et le couple		260
			264
		Stratégies et compréhension auditive: <i>Planning and predicting</i> Conversation: «Au restaurant»	268
Le partitif Le verbe boire et les expressions avec avoir			276
Les expressions de quantité Le pronom en			284
Les verbes en -ir Le conditionnel			292
		<i>Déjeuner du matin</i> (poème de Jacques Prévert)	300
	À table!		302
			306

EN CÔTE-D'IVOIRE

9 EN VACANCES

REGIONAL FOCUS: L'Afrique francophone

COMPÉTENCE 1

Talking about vacation

Les vacances

COMPÉTENCE 2

Making plans for a trip

Un voyage

COMPÉTENCE 3

Discussing your trip

À l'agence de voyages

COMPÉTENCE 4

Making preparations for a trip

Les préparatifs

Lecture et composition

COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES

10 À L'HÔTEL

REGIONAL FOCUS: La Côte-d'Ivoire

COMPÉTENCE 1

Deciding where to stay

Le logement

COMPÉTENCE 2

Giving directions

Les directions

COMPÉTENCE 3

Giving advice

Les suggestions

COMPÉTENCE 4

Finding out about jobs abroad

Un poste à l'étranger

Lecture et composition

COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES

BRANCHEZ-VOUS SUR LE FRANÇAIS:

French for Jobs in Government and
International Organizations

STRUCTURES	CULTURE	LEARNING STRATEGIES, READINGS, LISTENING PASSAGES	PAGE
			308
		Stratégies et lecture: <i>Recognizing the future tense</i> Lecture: «Une lettre de Côte-d'Ivoire»	312
Le verbe venir et les expressions géographiques Le futur			316
Les verbes en -re Les pronoms me, te, nous, vous			322
Les verbes dire, lire et écrire Les compléments d'objet indirect			328
		<i>Les aventures de Yévi au pays des monstres</i> (pièce de Sénouvo Agbata Zinsou)	336
	La colonisation de l'Afrique		340
			344
		Stratégies et compréhension auditive: <i>Anticipating a response</i> Conversation: «À la réception»	348
L'impératif Les verbes voir et croire			352
Les verbes réguliers au subjonctif Les verbes irréguliers au subjonctif			360
Les verbes savoir et connaître Les pronoms relatifs qui et que			368
		<i>Si j'étais un Dieu nègre</i> (poème de Claude-Joseph M'Bafou-Zetebeg)	374
	La négritude		376
			380

EN BELGIQUE CHAPITRE DE RÉVISION UN DRÔLE DE MYSTÈRE REGIONAL FOCUS: La Belgique	Les personnages	CULTURE	LEARNING STRATEGIES, READINGS LISTENING PASSAGES Stratégies et lecture: <i>Recognizing compound tenses</i> Lecture: «Un mystère dans les Ardennes»	PAGE 382
COMPARAISONS CULTURELLES		L'Europe francophone		404

APPENDICE A: L'ALPHABET PHONÉTIQUE **409**

APPENDICE B: TABLEAU DES VERBES **411**

VOCABULAIRE: FRANÇAIS-ANGLAIS **417**

VOCABULAIRE: ANGLAIS-FRANÇAIS **435**

INDEX **449**

CREDITS **453**

STUDENT PREFACE

Do you have a gift for languages?

Have you ever heard people say that they know someone who has a gift for languages? What does that mean? Are some people born with a special ability to learn languages? How do you know if you have a gift for languages? If you understood the sentence you just read, then you have a gift for languages. After all, you have already learned to speak and understand at least one language well—English. Everybody is born with a natural ability to learn languages, but some individuals seem to learn languages more quickly than others do. This is because, over time, we develop different learning styles.

The process individuals use to learn languages depends a great deal on their personality. As with any other process, such as learning a new computer program or writing a composition for English class, individuals can attain similar results, although they approach the task differently. Some language learners like to plan each step before beginning. Others prefer to jump in as soon as they know enough to get started, and continue from there using a hit-or-miss method. Some language learners like to understand in detail why a language works the way it does before they try to use it, whereas others are ready to try speaking as soon as they know only the most basic rules, making educated guesses about how to express themselves.

Both methods have advantages and disadvantages. Some people become so bogged down in details that they lose sight of their main purpose—communication. Others pay so little attention to details that what they say is unintelligible. No matter what sort of learner you are, the most important part of the language-learning process is to constantly try to use the language to express yourself. Always alternate study of vocabulary and structures with attempts to communicate.

Since you now know that you have a gift for languages, you might think of the following pages as a user's manual that suggests how to use your language-learning capacity to learn French efficiently. Some of the learning techniques will work for you, others may not fit your learning style. Read through the following three sections before beginning your French studies, and refer to them later to develop the language-learning process that works best for you.

- **Goals and expectations:** How much French should you expect to learn in your first year of study and how much time and effort will be required of you?
- **Motivation:** How do you motivate yourself to study and practice the language?
- **Learning techniques:** What are some study tips that will facilitate learning French?

Goals and Expectations

Who can learn a language?

Many people believe that, as an adult, you cannot learn a language as well as you might have when you were a child. It is true that children are good language learners, but there is no reason why adults cannot learn to speak a language with near-native fluency. Children learn languages well because they can adapt very easily and they do it willingly. Being able to adapt is very important in language learning. Children are not afraid to try something new, and they are not easily embarrassed if things do not turn out as they expected. Adults, on the other hand, are often afraid of doing something wrong or looking ridiculous. Don't be afraid to experiment, using what you already know to guess at how to express yourself in French. It does no harm if you try to say something and you do not get the expected response. Just try again.

By the time people become adults, they generally learn by analyzing, rather than by doing. They have also grown so accustomed to their own way of doing things that they are reluctant to change. Similarly, adult language learners often feel that the way English works is the natural way. They try to force the language they are learning into the same mold. In fact, languages work in variety of ways, all equally natural. Learn to accept that the French way of doing things is just as natural and valid as the English way.

Another difference in the way that children and adults learn languages is that children spend a lot more time focused on what they are doing. When children learn languages, they spend almost every hour they are awake for several years doing nothing but learning the language. Learning to communicate is their principal objective in life. Most adults, on the other hand, spend just a few hours a week studying a new language, and during this time they are often distracted by many other aspects of their lives. In a classroom setting where small children have contact with a foreign language for just a few hours per week, children do not learn better than adults. In fact, adults have several advantages over children, such as their ability to organize and their longer attention spans. Your ability to develop fluency in French depends mainly on three things: the amount of time you spend with the language, how focused you are, and how willing you are to try to communicate using it.

How well will you speak after a year?

Those of you who are new to foreign language study probably have a variety of ideas about what you will be

doing in this course. People who become frustrated in foreign language study generally do so because they start off with the wrong expectations. Some people begin a foreign language course with a negative attitude, thinking that it is impossible to really learn a language without going to a country where it is spoken. Although it is indeed usually easier to learn French in a French-speaking region, you can learn to speak French very fluently here as well. Once again, it is a question of spending time with the language, while focusing on how to communicate with it.

There are also some students who begin foreign language classes with expectations that are too high, thinking that they will begin speaking French with complete fluency nearly overnight. Learning a language takes time. Even after two years of concentrated study, it is reasonable to have achieved only basic fluency. If you set a goal for yourself to have everyday conversation skills after your second year of study, and if you work hard toward this goal, you will be able to function in most everyday conversation settings; however, you will still frequently have to look for words, you will probably still speak in short simple sentences, and you will often have to use circumlocution to get your meaning across. In *Horizons*, you will learn how to function in the most common situations in which you are likely to find yourself in a francophone region. To illustrate how much you will learn during the first few weeks of study, take out a sheet of paper, and list, in English, the first eight questions you would probably ask in the following situation: Before the first day of class, you sit down next to a student you have never seen before and you begin to chat.

In this situation, students generally ask questions like the following:

- How are you doing?
- What's your name?
- What are you studying?
- Where are you from?
- Where do you live?/ Do you live on campus?
- Do you like it there?
- Do you work? Where?
- When are you graduating?

This is the extent of the conversation that you have with many people you will meet, and you will be able to do this in French after only a few weeks.

How much time and effort must you invest to be a successful language learner?

There are three P's involved in learning a language: patience, practice, and persistence. We have already said that success in learning a foreign language depends on how much time you spend studying and practicing it. You might wonder how time consuming French class will be. The amount of time required depends on your study skills and attention span. However, nobody can be successful without devoting many hours to studying and using the language. Generally,

to make steady progress at the rate that material is presented in most college or university classes, you should expect to spend two to three hours on the language outside of class, for every hour that you are in class.

What is involved in learning to express yourself in another language?

Students studying a foreign language for the first time may have false expectations about what is involved in learning to speak another language. Many people think that you just substitute a French word for the equivalent word in English. Most of the time, you cannot translate word for word from one language to another. For example, if a French speaker substituted the equivalent English word for each French word in the following sentence, it would create a very unusual sentence.

Nous ne l'avons pas encore fait.

**We not it have not still done.*

You might be able to figure out that this sentence means, "We haven't done it yet," but sometimes translating word for word can give a completely wrong meaning. For example, if you translate the following sentence word for word, you would think that it has the first meaning that follows it, whereas it really has the second. This is because the indirect object pronoun **vous** (*to*) you precedes the verb in French.

Je voudrais vous parler demain, s'il vous plaît.

**I would like you to speak tomorrow, if it you please.*

I would like to speak to you tomorrow, please.

You probably noticed in this last example that one word in English may be translated by several words in French and vice versa (**voudrais** = *would like*, **vous** = *to you*, **parler** = *to speak*, **s'il vous plaît** = *please*).

Differences in languages are not due simply to a lack of one-to-one correspondence between words and structures. Cultural differences also strongly affect how we communicate. Culture and language are so interrelated that it is impossible to learn a language fluently without becoming familiar with the culture(s) where it is spoken. For example, in French, a cultural difference that affects the spoken language is that French society is not as informal as ours. Adults generally do not call each other by their first names, and the words for sir and madame are used much more frequently than in English. For example, it is normal to say **Bonjour, monsieur** (*Hello, sir*), whereas English speakers say, "Hello."

Cultural differences affect the spoken language and also nonverbal communication. For instance, when the French speak to each other, they generally stand closer than we do. When we are talking to a French-speaker, we may feel that our space is invaded and back away. The French interpret this as standoffishness. As you can see, learning to communicate in French entails a lot more than substituting French words for English words in a sentence.