

THE CAPRETZ METHOD SECOND EDITION PART 1



French in Action

A Beginning Course in
Language and Culture

**Pierre J. Capretz with Béatrice Abetti,
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Part 1

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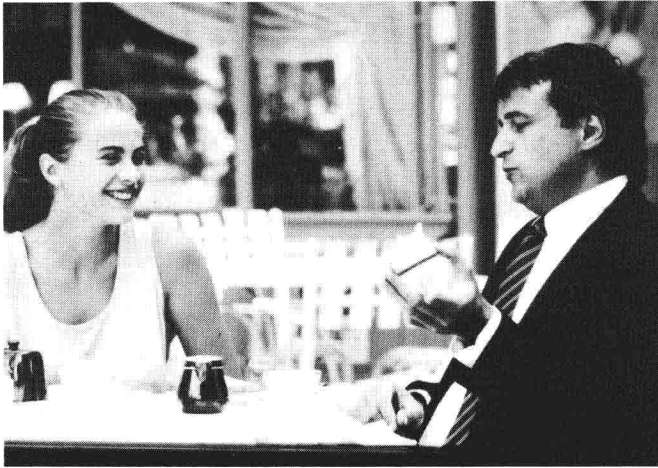
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French in Action



A
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and Culture

Second Edition

Foreword

Laurence Wylie

You are embarking upon the study of a foreign language and culture. Images, sounds, actions, and written words will all play a part in your learning experience. It is the function of this preliminary essay to emphasize that human communication is not through words only. Facial expressions and body language often communicate much more than the actual words spoken, especially in the formal exchanges that we all engage in repeatedly during the course of any given day. And the modes of this nonverbal communication can differ greatly from language to language or culture to culture. To be truly proficient in a second language, one must be schooled in these differences, must note them and practice them in addition to mastering the spoken words.

Let me illustrate what I mean by analyzing what you will see and hear in the first filmed segment (lesson 2) of *French in Action*.

A young woman, Mireille Belleau, comes out of the door of her apartment house and dashes off to attend an Italian class at the Sorbonne. Before she arrives, however, she meets several friends and acquaintances and stops to greet them appropriately. In this very natural way we learn some of the most frequent greetings in French. We hear *Bonjour!* and *Au revoir!* of course, but more often expressions of inquiry and replies concerning each other's health: *Ça va? Salut! Tu vas bien? Vous allez bien?* and so on.

The most common greetings in most languages have to do with inquiries about the state of the health of each individual. If you think a little about this, you are faced with a curious question: Are human beings really so deeply interested in each other's health that they must inquire about it each time they meet? Certainly not. In fact, one definition of a bore is a person who, when you inquire about his or her health, actually tells you! There is an example of this sort of person in lesson 2: Mireille's Aunt Georgette.

The truth is that we do not usually communicate through greetings; greetings only offer us an opportunity to communicate with each other. To understand this we must know the basic meaning of the words *common*, *communicate*, and *communication*. They are derived from two Indo-European stems that mean "to bind together." In this ordered universe, no human being (and perhaps no beings of any sort except for a few single-celled creatures) can live in isolation. We must be bound together in order to participate in an organized effort to accomplish the necessary activities of existence. This relationship is so vital to us that we must con-

stantly be reassured of it. We test this connection each time we have contact with each other.

However, to carry out this kind of test literally each time we see each other would be too tedious. Each culture has developed the custom of greeting, which requires that we pause at least briefly with each other. All cultures I know require that a verbal exchange take place in which we talk about health or the state of the weather or our destination. This exchange takes only a few seconds and the words have no significance in themselves; nonetheless, it is long enough for our amazingly rapid and complex nervous systems to record and process thousands, perhaps millions, of messages about each other that permit us to draw conclusions about one another and about our relationship. This communication, this binding together, is accomplished in many ways—some conscious, most unconscious. We have no special organ for the purpose of communication; we communicate with every means at our disposal. The parts of our body that produce the sound waves we recognize as speech all had other elementary purposes in our evolution: to breathe, to swallow, to bite, and so on. We adapted these body parts to develop speech, but speech is only one means of communication. We utilize our total behavior and environment for communication.

Because of the way the human mind works, however, we cannot rationally grasp totality. To study the whole of a phenomenon, we must analyze it—that is, break it down into component parts. So we break communication down into different channels: speech, writing, symbolic systems, posture, use of the space around us, ritual, facial expression, gesture, manipulation of objects, touch. Some of these have been well studied; others are less well known: rhythm, pressure, heat, odor, chemical reaction, waves of energy, and undoubtedly others of which we are not even aware.

Speech is the most notable achievement of human beings, but it is usually not our most important form of communication, as we've seen in the case of greetings. As Mireille walks from her home to her class, she constantly meets people and exchanges words with them, but the only function of these words is to give her and her acquaintances an opportunity to communicate in many other ways with each other. Through all channels, she and her friends affirm their relationship: shades of social and age difference, friendship and affection, mutual expectations of behavior, and so on. When we watch the videotape at normal speed, we are not aware of the many

events in the episode because they take place so fast that we perceive them only unconsciously. But with the help of the “frame advance” or slow-motion function available on some video playback units, we can slow the movement in order to observe certain kinds of communication that we would otherwise miss. Of course, we will never perceive the totality of behavior on tape or film—for instance, the heat, moisture, pressure, and odor involved in a kiss or a handshake. But there are other areas we can perceive. Perhaps with a bit of patient study in slow motion we can bring out bits of this total communication. By using the slow-motion control on your VCR and by looking carefully several times at each greeting scene, you will begin to get some idea of the basic communication that is going on. The first greeting is short and fairly uneventful: Mireille stops at the corner newsstand to buy a paper. She is obviously a regular customer, for she is handed the paper without even asking for it. Mireille and the woman behind the counter greet each other cordially, with smiles full of feeling. With a certain coyness they cock their heads and close their eyes briefly. The client-vendor relationship is noted as Mireille leaves: she says simply “Au revoir,” while the merchant replies with the same words but respectfully adds “Mademoiselle.” She then lowers her eyes modestly and gives a farewell smile to the young woman she has probably known since childhood.

More interesting is the next encounter, which gives an important lesson in communication with the French. Mireille is looking at her watch when she rounds a corner and does not at first notice her friend Colette sitting with two young men and a young woman at a café table. Colette calls to her. Mireille raises her eyebrows, as we always do when we are surprised, and smiles broadly. She goes toward Colette at once and leans over so the two can kiss each other on both cheeks, as good female friends usually do in France. Colette is a bit more eager; her lips touch Mireille’s cheek, while Mireille does not actually kiss but offers her cheeks to be kissed. She then turns to shake hands with the three other young people, giving each a typical French handshake: one takes the hand of the other, shakes it up and down strongly once, and then on the up-movement the two hands are released. (This shake is shorter and much more vigorous than an equivalent American handshake.) Meanwhile the two people shaking hands look each other in the eye.

The young man on the left is not very cordial. He does not offer his hand until Mireille has extended hers, and his smile is tardy and brief: he seems to prefer looking at Colette! The second man is more flirtatious and holds his gaze and smile on Mireille until she departs. Colette wants Mireille to join the group, but Mireille says she is in a hurry, so she shakes hands again with the three young people, telling them, “Au revoir,” although she has shaken hands with them only five

seconds earlier! She does not kiss Colette again, but they give each other a friendly wave.

All this handshaking is a mystery for Americans. Why are the French so compulsive about shaking hands? I believe that no one knows the answer to that question, but it is definitely a custom you must learn to respect. Of course, one purpose of shaking hands when people are standing has to do with proxemics, the study of the use of space in communication. People in some cultures stand closer to each other than do others. Arabs stand quite close and consider Americans cold for maintaining a wider distance. The French stand somewhat closer than Americans, and when they shake hands the proper distance is regulated. When dealing with the French you should try to stand a bit closer than you normally do among Americans.

The next encounter is with Hubert, whom Mireille later describes to Robert as a childhood friend and the descendant of a distinguished, aristocratic, wealthy family. She tries to reassure Robert that there is nothing between Hubert and her, except that Hubert amuses her. Nevertheless, when the two meet on the street her greeting is more affectionate than with most people. Coquettishly she cocks her head on the side, closes her eyes briefly, then flashes a flirtatious glance into his eyes. She puts her hands on his shoulders as they kiss on both cheeks. He supports her elbows as they embrace. She withdraws her hand slowly but maintains a fond gaze and repeatedly cocks her head on the side. He rather superciliously remarks that he is not going to the *fac* and shows his tennis racket. As they part she gives him an affectionate tap with her hand. As they turn to leave they look at each other intensely.

(Hubert reappears in a later lesson, when he and Robert have dinner with Mireille’s family. Hubert rants about the extravagant tastes of the modern French working class. He is speaking facetiously, of course, playing his role as aristocrat and snob to the hilt, and everyone in the Belleau family smiles indulgently. But the American hero, Robert, does not understand what is going on, and has the poor taste to rant back in defense of the working class and democracy. American viewers may approve of this heroic stand, but in France it is in bad taste. A traditional rule in France is that politics and religion are not discussed at polite gatherings. In almost every other social setting, however, they are common topics, part of the heritage of ideas and ideologies that French intellectuals love to debate.)

Mireille’s next customer is Ousmane, a fellow student with whom she must be fairly well acquainted and whom she greets in a cordial way but with less affection than with Hubert, her childhood friend. There is the usual approach: she perceives him, raises her eyebrows in pleasant surprise, and walks toward him, briefly lowering her gaze. She places her hands not on his shoulders, as she did with Hubert, but

on his upper arms, and when they kiss she turns her head in such a way that the kisses fall less on her cheeks than almost under her ears. After the kisses she leans backward away from her friend, smiling conventionally. As they part, she gives him a sociable tap on the upper arm, then turns away.

The next encounter has less substance. A young man and woman on a motorcycle ride up next to Mireille at the curb and greet her as a pal: "Salut!" Her reaction is usual: she raises her eyebrows in surprise and lowers her gaze coquettishly, then flashes a smile. Amazed to learn that they are going to the restaurant at eleven o'clock in the morning, she wishes them well, and they depart, all three of them exchanging a "Salut!" For American students, the most interesting thing about this exchange is to look in slow motion at the young man's lips when he says, "Nous allons au restaurant." The succession of vowel sounds brings his lips to a very forward, pointed position, one that is almost never observed on an American's face but that is frequent on French faces. To speak good French, Americans must get used to this lip position.

At the beginning of the next encounter you will note the same pursed lips, this time on the professor who addresses Mireille: "Bonjour, Mademoiselle Belleau." You should practice in front of a mirror until your lips get used to pouting in this way when you say such words as *bonjour* and *salut*.

The professor has pushed his bicycle across the street, walking with long, sturdy strides, when he spies Mireille. He speaks first, addressing her formally with her family name as well as with "Mademoiselle." His whole manner shows that he respects the young woman and admires her wholeheartedly. He cocks his head and closes his eyes flirtatiously. He then opens them, flashes a smile, leans toward her, beams admiration, and inquires about her health. With the friendly restraint a young woman shows toward an older admirer, she cocks her head a bit, blinks her eyes, and inquires about his health. As an honest older scholar, he takes the question seriously and reflects for a moment in a very French posture: he shrugs his shoulders slightly, pouts his lips, shakes his head slowly with closed eyes, then replies with a matter-of-fact, "Je vais bien, je vais bien, merci." His reaction seems to indicate that he could tell her plenty about his health, but on the whole he does not want to be a bore. He then says goodbye with the kind of coy little wave an adult gives a small child, and wheels his bicycle away. Amused by this quaint character, Mireille smiles to herself as she walks away.

On this brief walk punctuated with these encounters, Mireille meets another older person, her spinsterish Aunt Georgette. The aunt takes charge. She advances with her arms outstretched and grasps Mireille firmly by the shoulders, saying "Bonjour, ma petite Mireille!" as she and Mireille touch both cheeks. Each purses her lips as in a kiss but

the lips do not actually touch the skin of the other's cheeks in this conventional kinship embrace. Then, with Georgette still holding Mireille firmly by the shoulders, they withdraw their heads and gaze steadily at each other as if to inspect each other while inquiring about health. Respectfully Mireille breaks the gaze by blinking and looking down for a moment, and then she asks about Georgette's health. Georgette is something of a bore. She wants nothing more than to answer the question in detail. She reflects on the question as the professor has just done and makes the same sort of pouting movement with her lips, but then she starts to talk about her health. She says she is not sick but "fatiguée," a popular use of the word *tired* meaning "not up to par." Mireille cuts her off by reassuring her, "I'm sure you're going to be fine soon." (It is obvious that the whole kinship group finds Georgette's worries about her health a little tedious, and they all undoubtedly refer to her as "la pauvre Georgette.") Mireille escapes, saying she is late for class, and they kiss good-bye. But Aunt Georgette is not satisfied, so she asks where Mireille is going. After the reply, there is another pair of kisses, and Mireille flees.

Note that in other social classes or parts of France, there would have been three kisses instead of two. To anticipate the correct number, one must know the customs of the social or cultural group with which one is associating. Later in the course, when Hubert comes to Mireille's apartment for dinner, as a proper aristocrat he kisses the hand of Mireille's mother as she greets him. As you can see with the slow motion control, he does not actually let his lips touch her hand; the kiss is given about one inch above the hand; the formality is fulfilled in this way. Notice, too, that he does not kiss Mireille's hand; one does not kiss the hand of a young, proper, unmarried woman. As a matter of fact, I would advise men not to participate in this formal kissing business until they have well observed the habits of the people they are associating with and understand both their social position within the group and the appropriate techniques. Especially the techniques; there is nothing more embarrassing for an American man than to bump his nose on a woman's hand as he is trying to kiss it.

Finally, after properly greeting these eleven people, Mireille reaches her class at the *fac*. There, of course, she will have the most crucial meeting—with Robert, the American and our hero. We witness a kind of miracle: Mireille and Robert see each other and fall in love at first sight. I shall not comment on that meeting because the scene strikes me as less a reflection of reality than an ironic comment on the genre of soap operas. In any event, I would not call this a common experience for young American men visiting the Sorbonne, and I wouldn't advise a young American man or woman to try to replicate the experience by standing in the courtyard and gazing soulfully at an attractive person. (If

you want to analyze the episode, study especially eye behavior and body movement.)

When Mireille left home, she almost ran down to the street because she was late for class. Her greetings to the eleven people were for the most part brief because she really was in a hurry. Nevertheless, she did not slight the main purpose of the greetings. In each case she took the time to affirm her communication with the person she met. That is,

she affirmed the way in which she was socially bound to each of them. This is a very important lesson for Americans to learn, for our manner of communicating, while just as effective as the French manner, is different. So remember, as Pierre Capretz stresses, "Observez!" You must learn the words and grammar, of course, but do not forget that communication has to do first and foremost with the definition of personal relationships.

Preface to the Second Edition

This second edition of *French in Action* contains a wide variety of new and revised materials that allow learners complete, systematic, and productive access to the linguistic and cultural riches of the fifty-two half-hour video programs around which the course is structured. An enhanced emphasis on reading is reflected in the addition of more than two hundred new documents to the textbooks. Some of these documents are texts, some are illustrations; they range from literary excerpts to up-to-date sociological observations and demographic data on the French people. The variety and intrinsic cultural interest of these documents will stimulate discussion and help develop skills in reading and writing. Most of the new documents are supported by activities that train the learner to uncover meaning by reading contextually. A generous array of accompanying exercises has also been designed to further the learner's ability to communicate effectively in written French.

A new graphic design has given each of the print components of *French in Action* a fresh new look. These design changes reflect changes in content that make the course much easier to use. The number of illustrations used to explain vocabulary from the text has been substantially increased. The progression of learning activities in each workbook lesson has been made easier to follow. A redistribution of grammatical material gives the workbooks better balance, especially in the early lessons. Charts and visual presentations have been revised and clarified. The audio cues for aural/oral exercises, previously printed in the study guide, have been relocated for greater convenience to the workbooks, where they appear next to their corresponding exercises. The use of English for workbook instructions has been extended through lesson 5. Also in the workbooks, the index has been redesigned, and a new series of verb charts allows students to find essential verb conjugations easily in one place. The glossary in the textbook has been expanded to include the vocabulary in the new text documents.

Finally, the instructor's guide, study guides, and audio program have all been thoroughly revised. To the explanatory material in the study guides (story summaries and notes on culture and communication) have been added commentaries on the new textbook documents that are designed to help learners better grasp the meaning of what they read. Where appropriate, these commentaries draw attention to the apparent tone or intent of a document whose style might be opaque to a beginning reader of

French. The audio program has been remastered digitally and expanded to include new sound documents.

Components of the Course

The *texts* for lessons 2–52 in the textbooks present a continuous story structured to permit progressive assimilation of the French language. In Part 1, lessons 2–8, you will meet the characters and become familiar with the basic situation from which this long saga will emerge.

The *video programs* that accompany the text contain 51 episodes of the story of the two students. We strongly urge you to watch the installment of the video program for each lesson—either as broadcast on television or from a video-cassette or videodisc—*before* you read the text of that lesson. Seeing the story will help you to follow the plot and to understand what is going on in every situation. Each video program in this series also includes a section designed to help you figure out the meaning of key words in the story. You should view this section before undertaking the corresponding lesson in the *workbooks* that accompany the text.

The *audio program* for this course, which is available on audiocassettes, is designed to be used as you work with the textbooks and workbooks, either at home or in a language laboratory. The majority of activities in the workbooks require use of the audio recordings.

Study guides in English are also available. They provide step-by-step directions for the effective use of all the components of this course, a statement of the main objectives of each lesson, a summary of each episode of the story, cultural notes, and additional assistance with the various tasks presented in the workbooks.

French in Action is intended to provide the equivalent of two years of instruction (elementary and intermediate French) at the college and university level, whether the course is taught over four semesters or condensed into two intensive semesters. The textbooks, the workbooks, the video programs, and the audiocassettes are elements of an integrated system, and should be used together. The study guides, indispensable for distance learners taking *French in Action* as a telecourse, are optional for on-campus students.

For an intermediate or advanced review course or as supplemental material, the textbooks and the series of thirteen half-hour video programs entitled *Short-Cut to French* may be sufficient, although the workbooks and the audio program would also be desirable.

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Lesson Introduction

Welcome to *French in Action*! Before you enter the world of French language and culture and meet the French-speaking men and women whose activities form the plot of our story, before you watch the video programs, listen to the tape recordings, and plunge into the workbook and this textbook, we would like to tell you, in English, something about the goals of the course, its methods, and its components.

Why Learn French?

There are more than four thousand languages spoken on this planet. So why learn French? After all, you are lucky and already speak English, the world's leading language. You already have access to millions of speakers in hundreds of countries, to the thoughts and deeds of thousands of writers over the centuries. Why spend your time on French?

First of all, and most significant, French gives you access to a wide variety of countries, peoples, and cultures. It brings with it a new way of seeing, of listening, and of thinking. Much of the creative thinking that has shaped the Western tradition has been done in French. French opens the doors to the works and words of many of the world's greatest philosophers, scientists, musicians, painters, and writers. To read their words in their own language is to be able to fathom knowledge that too often disappears in translation. A number of great French writers are represented in *French in Action*: Jean de La Fontaine, Victor Hugo, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Marguerite Yourcenar, and many others. To read these and other noted authors' works in French is to be able to see how the language itself creates possibilities of expression that have become examples of wisdom and beauty throughout the world.

Some people are interested in learning French because of the long and close historical ties that exist between France and the United States. In fact, no nation other than England has played a more decisive role in the making of America. (Were you aware that the first Europeans to settle in North America were French Huguenots who founded a colony in Florida in 1564?) French explorers like Cartier, Champlain, Marquette, and La Salle led expeditions through Canada and the Great Lakes region, and down the Mississippi River; and French colonists settled vast areas of the North American continent. Indeed, you might even live in one of the cities founded by French people: *Detroit*, Michigan, *Fond du Lac*, Wisconsin, *Terre Haute*, Indiana, *Saint Louis*, Missouri, *Baton Rouge*, Louisiana, or *Paris*, Texas, among many others.

French soldiers fought alongside the colonists in the Revolutionary War. Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the first and most perspicacious commentators on the new nation, and his *Democracy in America* is central to the study of American political history. A French architect, Pierre L'Enfant, designed the layout of Washington, D.C. The French gave us the Statue of Liberty, which is perhaps the foremost symbol of the United States. And the French and the Americans fought side by side in the First and Second World Wars.

Many people have practical or professional reasons to want to learn French. They may be preparing for a career in international law or commerce (a French word), in the diplomatic corps (another French word), or in the world of fashion. French, like English, is one of the world's international languages. If you have a United States passport, look at the two languages in which it is written: English and French. French is not only the principal language of France, but is also an official language of Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada. It is the common language of several countries in the Caribbean (Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique) and in Africa (Algeria, Senegal, the Ivory Coast), and it is widely spoken in the Middle East (Lebanon and Egypt). Finally, French is the official language of more than thirty delegations to the United Nations. Wherever you go in the world, you will find educated men and women who speak French as a second or third language. A person who knows English and French is equipped to thrive in almost any country on earth.

From French to English (and back)

It has been said that a person who does not know a foreign language can never truly know his or her own. Whatever your purpose, studying French will enhance your knowledge and control of English. The two languages, in fact, have much in common, and you may be surprised by the amount of French you already speak. If you have ever said "Very chic!" to a friend whose new clothes you admire, you were speaking French. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a barbed criticism and retorted with a gallant "Touché!" that, too, is French. How often have you wished a departing traveler "Bon voyage!"? (With French, you always have *le mot juste* at the ready.) Every aspect of English has felt the French influence, from soldiery ("curfew" = *couvre-feu*) to square-dancing ("do-si-do" = *dos-à-dos*). Your native English is full of French words and expressions; indeed, it has been claimed, not entirely in jest, that 60 percent of the English

language is nothing but mispronounced French. It is a fact that ever since the Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066, which led to a fusion of an earlier form of English with an earlier form of French, the two languages have shared thousands of cognate words, such as “curious” and *curieux*, “marriage” and *mariage*, not to mention “French” and *français*. Some words even returned to French after having migrated to English: the French command form *tenez!* used to announce a serve in a ball game involving nets and rackets appeared in English as “tennis” in the fifteenth century; the French repossessed the word in the early 1800s and have been playing *le tennis* ever since.

Despite the many similarities, it can sometimes be difficult to recognize a French word that has been adopted by English. One reason this is true is that English speakers have habits of pronunciation that are quite different from those of the French. For instance, speakers of French tend to say each syllable of a word with the same intensity. Speakers of English, on the other hand, tend to stress one syllable—often the first one—and to skip over the others. So when French speakers say the word *capitaine*, they stress all three syllables equally: *ca-pi-taine*. But when English speakers appropriated this word they pronounced it in their own way, stressing the first syllable so much that the second syllable disappeared altogether: *captain*. The same thing happened to the French words *cabestan* (“capstan”), *compartiment*, and *gouvernement*, among many others.

French words that have crossed over to English can also be difficult to recognize because they are spelled differently. Differences in spelling often reflect differing habits of pronunciation, but they are due as well to the fact that many French words passed into English centuries ago and kept their original spelling in the new language, while the spelling of the French originals evolved over time. This is true, for example, of many words that now have a circumflex accent (^). In modern French, the circumflex replaces an *s* that appeared in older forms of these words; in their English equivalents, that *s* is still present:

forest (*forêt*), haste (*hâte*), host (*hôte*), mast (*mât*),
coast (*côte*), beast (*bête*), feast (*fête*). . . .

French words ending in *-é* and *-ie* often correspond to English words ending in *y*:

cité, *éternité*, *bébé*; *biologie*, *calorie*, *envie*. . . .

Many French words ending in *-eux* correspond to English words ending in *-ous*:

spacieux, *envieux*, *cérémonieux*, *curieux*, *dangereux*. . . .

French words ending in *-ier* often correspond to English words ending in *-ar* or *-iar* (*familier*, *particulier*) or to words in *-er* (*papier*).

Numerous French words ending in *-e* correspond to English words having no final *-e*:

soupe, *classe*, *adresse*, *Arabe*, *architecte*, *artiste*, *cabine*,
calme, *carrotte*, *crabe*

Other analogues:

-iel often corresponds to English *-ial* (*artificiel*, *partiel*)
-aque to English *-ack* (*attaque*)
-ait to English *-act* or *-ect* (*abstrait*, *parfait*)
-ice to English *-ess* (*actrice*)
-aire to English *-ary* (*anniversaire*, *ordinaire*, *culinaire*,
contraire, *élémentaire*) or *-arian* (*autoritaire*)
-ique to English *-ic* (*fantastique*, *exotique*)
-ret to English *-rete* (*discret*, *concret*)
-ant to English *-ating* (*fascinant*)
-re to American English *-er* (*ordre*, *théâtre*)
-ant to English *-ing* (*amusant*, *intéressant*)
-eur to English *-er* (*boxeur*)
-ment to English *-ly* (*certainement*, *complètement*,
essentiellement, *évidemment*, *exactement*, *finale*,
généreusement)
-eur to English *-or* (*conducteur*, *erreur*, *couleur*, *horreur*,
honneur)
-é to English *-ed* (*décidé*, *équipé*, *fixé*, *forcé*)

All in all, then, there are many thousands of French words that are similar to English words, and this will streamline to some extent the process of learning French. Unfortunately, however, the fact that a French word and an English word are similar does not mean they are the same word; they aren't. Nor does it mean they refer to the same thing; they don't necessarily. When you come across a French word that sounds or looks like a word in English, you may for a moment entertain the possibility that the two are connected and that the things they refer to have some feature in common. But beware: although some English-French cognates do have essentially the same meaning (“rapid” and *rapide*, for instance), the resemblance of others may be quite distant, merely superficial, or even purely coincidental. In fact, the majority of French words that resemble English words differ in meaning. “An injury” is a wound, for instance, but *une injure* is an insult. The French verb *prétendre* refers to making a claim or an assertion, not indulging in make-believe. (The English words “pretense” and “pretentious” are closer to the French original; a pretender to the throne is one who lays a claim, not someone who's play-acting.) The *patron* of an establishment is its owner, never its customer. The verb *demander* is used to make a simple request, not issue an ultimatum. Your *anniversaire* falls on the date of your birth, not the date of your marriage. And so on and so forth.

The result of all this is that you must *not* assume that a French word means the same thing as an English word

because they happen to resemble each other. You may hypothesize—very cautiously—that there *might* be some relationship between their meanings, but you must then check your hypothesis by studying the *context* in which the word is used. Only the context can give you a valid insight into the function of a word in a given situation. In this course we will concentrate a great deal on the situations and contexts in which words appear; they are the real keys to meaning.

How to Learn French

Think for a moment about how a person learns a second language. One means—the oldest known to history—is *total immersion*. This is the “sink or swim” process, whereby immigrants, explorers, or students in a foreign country pick up the language. Without grammar books, textbooks, audio-cassettes, dictionaries, language laboratories, drill sessions, tutors, or teachers, people have learned second, third, or fourth languages from the book of life and the school of experience. The incentive is survival—strong motivation indeed—and the classroom is the world. That is one method, but it is neither the easiest nor the most efficient. In the sink or swim method, you would learn what you needed in order to accomplish the chores of daily life, catch the drift of conversations, and make yourself understood. But you might never pronounce words properly, or progress beyond the speech level of a four-year-old, and you might never learn how to read anything other than street signs and labels.

Another method, one you may have already encountered in school, is the *grammar-translation method*, where you learn endless rules, memorize verb and noun forms in specific orders, and translate word for word from one language to another. Although this method has proven useful for languages that are no longer spoken (Sanskrit, Latin, classical Greek), it is next to worthless for learning a *living* language in which you must communicate with other people. When you meet someone on the street, for instance, in Paris, Dakar, or Montreal, and want to carry on a conversation, you don’t have the time to run through your verb forms: “Shall I have lunch? Will you have lunch? Will he or she have lunch? Shall we have lunch?” By the time you found the phrase you were looking for, your acquaintance would long since have left—to go to lunch. In actual conversations, the grammar book and the dictionary aren’t much use.

French in Action employs a method that is probably quite different from that of any other language course you may know. It gives you the advantages of the immersion method without its chaos by presenting native speakers in vivid situations, in real settings. At the same time, this course

structures the way you learn the language, so that you can learn efficiently. We are going to plunge you into the French language. You are going to hear more French than you can possibly remember. At first you may think you are about to drown. Relax! You won’t. If in the beginning you feel confused, that feeling is perfectly normal and will pass. Rest assured that thousands have done what you are setting out to do. You will learn slowly at first, and you are not expected to understand everything. Little by little, things will become clearer, and then suddenly your knowledge of French will expand exponentially.

The method of this course is to begin with a flood of authentic French in authentic circumstances. The lessons are carefully constructed so that your knowledge of words, phrases, sentences, and situations will gradually build and you will assimilate the language. For example, in lesson 2, you will see and hear our heroine meeting different people on her way to her Italian class at the Sorbonne. You will see and hear her greet a newspaper vendor, several friends, a professor, and one of her aunts, and you will learn different greetings. By the end of the lesson, you will know how to greet people, how to ask how they are, how to say how you are, and how to take your leave—all in French. From the next lesson on, all that you will see and hear in the course will be entirely in French.

The Story

French in Action is more than a traditional textbook providing grammar, exercises, and explanations. It is also a story, a mystery story in fact, and we invite you to follow the characters as they move through Paris, other cities, and the French countryside. Like all good stories, this one has a heroine, a Parisian university student whose name is Mireille Belleau. It has a hero, an American named Robert Taylor. The story has inane characters, such as Jean-Pierre, the pick-up artist, and eccentrics, such as Hubert de Pinot-Chambrun, the young nobleman who plays his aristocratic role to the hilt. It has rivals in romance. It has chases. It has escapes. And it has a dark, shadowy character, the Man in Black, a man of mystery who lurks behind the scenes, silently and relentlessly following Mireille and Robert.

Keep in mind that this is a fanciful story we have invented just for fun. The situations you will see are authentic, but the plot is actually a kind of send-up of soap opera. If you don’t like the story, you will have the chance to reinvent it, to play with it, to rewrite it. You will have repeated opportunities to alter events, to recombine elements, and to tell the story in different ways in class, with a friend, or at home. All this will be part of the game of learning French.

Language and Culture

What you will learn in *French in Action* reflects life in France now. Even though the course is based on a story, what you will hear and see in the various situations that are presented is the real thing: you will encounter living French that has not been simplified or expurgated, the same French you might hear spoken among members of a family, among friends, on the street, on the radio, or on television.

You will see and hear real French men and women. In *French in Action* you will see France: its people, their customs, quirks, clothes, food, cities, homes. And you will see it as the French see it. Who knows, you may even experience a certain amount of culture shock! You may find some things strange, some people odd, and some situations bizarre. You may even be startled by the contrasts between the world you inhabit and the world of the French. Just remember, the French might be equally startled by you!

One contrast you may notice is that French behavior is different from American behavior in the area of relationships between men and women. Male-female relationships are of perennial interest in all cultures, French culture being no exception. In every society, relationships between the sexes are governed by expectations that are culturally conditioned. These expectations are taken for granted by the members of a society, but an outsider unfamiliar with the society's cultural framework may not share its expectations, and may find the behavior in some way peculiar or questionable.

The relationships between people that you will see portrayed in *French in Action* reflect cultural assumptions and notions that are specifically French. But because these assumptions are not identical to American expectations in the same areas, the behavior they underlie may seem unfamiliar, even inappropriate. Let us take one example: in lesson 11, Jean-Pierre, the loser, tries to pick up our heroine, Mireille. In most cultures, including French culture, the pick-up artist is considered a social pest, and indeed Jean-Pierre is portrayed throughout *French in Action* in a negative light, rejected and rebuffed at every turn as a pathetic heel. He tries to strike up a conversation with Mireille, and he ends up striking out. The put-down comes from Mireille herself, who gets rid of him in a way that may seem to make little sense in terms of American cultural assumptions but that is absolutely appropriate in the French cultural system: she totally ignores him. And it works.

Why does Mireille ignore Jean-Pierre's intrusion instead of getting up and telling him off? Aren't Jean-Pierre's actions an outrageous example of aggressive male behavior—of sexual harassment? And isn't Mireille's silence a harmful example of female passivity? While observers can disagree about how much of a threat Jean-Pierre actually is to Mireille

in this episode, it is important to understand that her response to him is appropriate and effective in the terms of her own culture. This is true in large part because silence has a very different social function in France than in the United States. Sociologists who study the two cultures point out that Americans use speech to maintain strangers at arm's length (making small talk about the weather, for instance), whereas in the French cultural system the act of speaking to a stranger suggests the exact opposite: that the speaker wants to create a connection. This is particularly true when the situation involves physical attraction; from the point of view of French culture, a verbal acknowledgment of the other person's presence, even in anger, only sets up a relationship and encourages further communication. As a result, Mireille's silence, which to American eyes can seem passive, even acquiescent, is in terms of her culture the very best way to keep Jean-Pierre at bay.

One thing to keep in mind, then, as you explore *French in Action* is that the situations and relationships it portrays take place in the context of a specific culture, and that projecting American expectations and sensibilities on that context can result in unnecessary misunderstanding. Although it is natural to want to form an opinion of the French from an American point of view, it is also important to perceive them as much as possible from their own point of view. We are different from the French, and the French are different from us, and that variance challenges us to extend our capacity for cultural understanding and communication. So *vive la différence!*

How to Proceed

You may want to focus on a few essential points as you begin your adventure in French.

1. As you watch the video programs and listen to tapes, try to catch the general meaning of the conversations and situations. Watch the story, look at people's expressions, get the gist of what they are saying, catch onto the context. Once you understand the background of a situation, the meaning of various phrases will become obvious. Do not try to retain everything you hear. We want you to get accustomed to listening to conversations you might not understand at first.

2. Give priority to what you hear. Throughout *French in Action* we shall present materials orally at first: you will hear the episodes of the story of Mireille and Robert. It is essential that you start out by getting familiar with the sounds of the language without being confused by the way it is written.

The writing systems of French and English—the use of the Roman alphabet to indicate different sounds—are an attempt at representing spoken language by means of graphic signs (letters). Unfortunately, as you have undoubt-

edly noticed in English, there is no natural or logical correspondence between a letter and a sound that the letter represents. The system of notation is arbitrary. Take the word *business*. We do not pronounce it *bizeeness*, like its two parts, *busy* and *-ness*. We say it as if it were written *bizness*. Moreover, the correspondence of sounds and letters is not only arbitrary. It is also unsystematic. George Bernard Shaw humorously proposed that the word *fish* should be spelled *ghoti*: *gh* to represent the sound /f/ as in *enough*, *o* to represent the sound /i/ as in *women*, and *ti* to represent the sound /ʃ/ as in *nation*. If Shaw's mocking of English spelling seems farfetched, consider the different sounds of *ough* in the words *rough*, *bough*, *fought*, and *though*.

The way in which letters correspond to sounds in the French language is very different from the way they correspond in English. If you yield to the temptation to pronounce French as if it were English, what will come out of your mouth will bear very little resemblance to anything a speaker of French would recognize. Listen to the sounds of French and try to imitate them. Associate the sounds with meaning. The written language is only an approximation of what the sounds express.

3. Don't let English into the picture. We will not use English, because too often translation interferes with comprehension. Translating will slow you down and get in the way of understanding. And in any case, French is not just English with different words. You cannot simply replace a word in one language with a word in another. The lessons of *French in Action* will not give you the meaning of a word or phrase in English. There is a glossary of French words with English equivalents at the end of this textbook, but you should use it only as a last resort. It presents words in isolation, and words taken out of their context often have no useful meaning. We will present words and phrases in different ways, in different combinations, and in different contexts so that you can uncover their meanings by yourself.

For example, in lesson 2 you will hear and read the French phrase "Salut! Comment-vas tu?" If you were to look up each word in the dictionary and literally translate those four words, you would end up with a totally absurd sentence: "Salvation! How go you?" Clearly you will have missed the point. But listening to that sentence in context, seeing and hearing one young person greeting another, you can easily figure out, without opening a dictionary, that "Salut! Comment-vas tu?" corresponds in meaning and in style to something like "Hi, how are you?" You can reach that level of understanding without ever knowing that the word *vas* is a form of the verb *aller* and that the verb *aller* is often used in French in phrases where English uses the verb *to go* or the verb *to be*.

Let's take a closer look at how you can discover meaning from paying attention to the different situations. In lesson 2

you will encounter a teacher saying, "Nous allons apprendre le français." Since this teacher is uttering this sentence at the very beginning of a French course, he must be indicating what he or you will do. But you cannot be sure what it is. Now if you see a young girl looking at her schoolbook and trying to do her homework, and if someone says, "Elle apprend sa leçon," then you will notice that the phrase *Elle apprend sa leçon* has something in common with the phrase *Nous allons apprendre le français*. You will also see a similarity between the classroom situation and the situation of the little girl doing her homework. Then when you hear the phrase *Il apprend à nager* and see a man copying the strokes he sees in a swimming manual, you will notice again the common element *apprend*. You cannot help observing the similarity between the last situation and the first two. And you should be beginning to have some notion of what activity the words *apprendre* and *apprend* refer to. Remember, do not let English enter into the picture. Resist the obvious translation. Associate the French words with the circumstances in which you have observed them, rather than with English words.

4. The activities of listening to a language, speaking a language, reading a language, and writing a language all demand *active* skills. *French in Action* will require your active participation. To learn a language effectively, you must listen with full attention, and you must watch carefully. When you learn a new language, you are assuming a new role. Play it fully! Participate actively by speaking out with the characters. When you listen to the audiocassettes or watch the video programs, copy what you see and hear. Copy with the sound of your voice. Copy with the shape of your mouth. Copy with your gestures. In the video lessons and audio exercises, there are interactive sections of dialogue where you will be given time to respond to questions as if you were one of the characters in the story. Answer clearly, at normal volume and tempo. If you do not have time to respond before the character speaks, simply speak along with him or her.

Do not try to invent, at least for a while. Imitate what you observe. Use the ready-made sentences or phrases you hear. You will be encouraged to recombine these phrases. Both imitation and recombination are vitally important. The object is to be able to respond with an appropriate utterance in a given situation, even if it is something you have heard before and is not at all ingenious or clever.

Saying "Bonjour!" when you meet someone and "Au revoir" when you leave, answering "Ça va" to "Comment vas-tu?" or "Bien, merci, et vous?" to "Comment allez-vous?" might not be original or clever, but it is a big step forward. To be able to give the right response at the right time is a commendable achievement, because you are communicating effectively in French. Before long, you will build up