
Thompson, Chantal P. and Elaine M. Phillips.
Mais oui! Introductory French and
***Francophone Culture.* 4th edition.**

Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2009. Pp. 463. ISBN-10: 0-618-94910-0.

Mais oui! Introductory French and Francophone Culture, now in its fourth edition, is a highly appealing, well-organized first-year college textbook. The twelve main chapters are each divided into four *étapes*, with the fourth, labeled *Intégration*, containing literary excerpts, writing activities, and an engaging section of short texts (*Synthèse culturelle*), in which French speakers of various nationalities explain features of their home culture or their reactions to American culture. The book is framed by a traditional *chapitre préliminaire* with greetings, spelling, classroom expressions, and the alphabet, and an unconventional *chapitre complémentaire* at the end, with readings on immigration and colonialism, a recording of a speech by l'Abbé Pierre, and activities using the present sub-

junctive to express opinions. The textbook contains a French-English and English-French glossary, appendix of verb conjugations, and in-text audio CD. Other components of the package include a Student Activities Manual, text-specific video modules, and student and instructor Websites. Instructors who are already familiar with *Mais oui!* will find in this edition new headings, icons for increased readability, earlier placement of certain grammatical structures, and new readings.

In the preface, the authors state the objectives of providing real-world input, developing critical thinking and reflection, and exposing learners to a wide range of Francophone cultures. The methodology can be characterized as an inductive approach; students are led to observe and understand, through various types of input, how language works and what various cultural concepts (such as vacation or friendship) mean.

One of the strongest features of this textbook is its visual appeal. Many exercises include attractive drawings or colorful photos of real products from catalogues or magazine ads. Photos such as a McDonald's ad with the text "*c'est ça que j'm*" provide up-to-date, fun illustrations of chapter themes. Other visuals include beautifully drawn maps of neighborhood streets (for giving directions), floor plans of houses, a Paris Métro map, and realia such as tickets, menus, schedules, and brochures. Overall legibility of the textbook is excellent; pages are large and spacing good.

The *À l'écoute* listening sections are another strong point, featuring, particularly in later chapters, interesting and substantive material such as interviews with native speakers from Algeria and Chad on the topics of happiness and friendship, and an interview with West African writer Aminata Sow Fall on globalization. The exercises for students to complete before, during, and after listening, which focus primarily on informational content, inferencing of new vocabulary, and pronunciation, are intelligently conceived and varied in format. The *À l'écoute* sections provide a wealth of stimulating material for classroom interaction, including practice in speaking, reading, and writing, based on the listening texts.

Very brief texts in French in the *Notes culturelles* sections touch on a variety of social issues, aspects of daily life, and culture-specific dimensions of communication such as compliments, politeness, and conversational norms. A few less conventional topics include medicine, dating and friendship, and *Le Ramadan*; surprisingly, there is no content relating to media and the arts.

The readings on Francophone cultures in the lengthier (one-page) *Culture et réflexion* sections are of considerable interest. Texts and photos on France and Burkina Faso, for example, offer contrasting visions of home and the notion of privacy. In the chapter on clothing, three different contexts are featured: *la haute couture*, *la coiffe bretonne*, and *le boubou africain*. Texts relating to food in France and the French-speaking world are accompanied by a beautiful photo with a view from above of a circle of men eating couscous with the right hand. The *Synthèse culturelle*, as mentioned earlier, offers viewpoints of French speakers from a variety of countries on personal and cultural topics: the notion of success; odd American eating habits (doggy bags!); childhood memories of school; and so forth. Literary readings represent a wide range of authors from France, Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean.

The number, variety, and intrinsic interest of speaking exercises and activities for classroom interaction are just right. Activity types include *Chassez l'intrus* and matching exercises for vocabulary; true/false listening exercises; sentence completion (*Ouvrez... ...la porte/ la chaise/ l'horloge*); interviews; and role plays. Prewriting activities in composition sections — webbing, list writing, looping — make writing fun; text genres include ads (to practice telegraphic style), narratives, and letters.

In *Stratégies de communication*, students read a short text to identify expressions used to carry out language functions such as giving advice, thanking, and complimenting. This is followed by a chart listing the expressions in French (with no translations, perhaps to students' chagrin), and a brief exercise for practice. Communicative strategies include asking for clarification, hesitating and interrupting for interactive speaking, and brainstorming, listing and keeping purpose in mind for writing.

Explanations of grammatical structures are minimal (e.g., “The simple future in French, as in English, is used to say what *will take place* or what one *will do*” [388]; or “The imperfect is used to describe what things were like in the past, the way things used to be” [277]) and cannot be said to offer much insight. Still, there is a nicely sequenced, informative chapter (appropriately titled *Les souvenirs*) on the extremely important and challenging topic of past narration. In the first *À l'écoute* section, students listen to an oral narrative (a childhood memory) in order to identify basic circumstances and events. The same story is told again twice from the point of view of two other characters, as students complete additional listening and reading exercises. This is followed by grammatical explanations, and activities for speaking practice. The second *À l'écoute* section later in the chapter offers a travel narrative and accompanying exercises. Importantly, the textbook provides ample input, offering exposure to past narration in a textual environment. (Unfortunately, however, the “Ace the test” practice exercises on the student Website provide sentence- rather than text-level practice.) Finally, with respect to grammar, it's good to see that the authors have removed past conditional, past subjunctive, and *futur antérieur* from the traditionally overloaded first-year agenda.

Only one or two minor drawbacks deserve mention. In the preliminary chapter the list of classroom expressions relates only to instructor-student interaction. Expressions for student-student classroom talk (e.g., *Tu peux répéter, s'il te plaît? Merci bien. — Je t'en prie*, etc.) would be a welcome addition. It would be also helpful to have the track number on in-text audio CD next to the earphone icon in the textbook itself, rather than in a separate tracking guide.

Overall *Mais oui!* is an extremely attractive, easy-to-use textbook that provides first-year learners with a user-friendly introduction to spoken and written French, and an exceptionally rich selection of cultural content. The ancillary materials for both instructors and students — including such items as Power Point slides and a wide variety of maps — are substantial. An Ebook version of the complete package is also available.

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