

Materials Review

...Film/videotape:

Niebla, based on the novel by Miguel de Unamuno. (Films for the Humanities, Inc., P.O. Box 2053, Princeton, N.J. 08540, 1980). (16mm., color; in Spanish, no subtitles; 60 minutes; advanced level; video purchase \$299; film purchase \$975; rental \$65).

In evaluating a filmed screenplay derived from a great novel and destined for use in a classroom or language laboratory, two different factors need to be addressed. These are the faithfulness of the screenplay to the novel and the usefulness of the film/videotape as a teaching device. In the present case particularly, the teacher and language lab director will want to study the following details before signing a purchase or rental agreement.

The FFA version of **Niebla** is by necessity a highly condensed form of Unamuno's complex and innovative novel. A number of cuts and alterations have been made which will somewhat--but by no means excessively--blur the existentialist focus of the book. Victor Goti's Prologue and Unamuno's rebuttle-like Post-Prologue have been eliminated. The Epilogue spoken by the dog Orfeo, whose presence gives rise to important monologues in the rest of the script, does not appear. Some of Victor's conversations with Augusto have been transformed into tension-relieving dialogues between Victor and a third party. Only two of the interpolated stories (those involving Antolin S. Paparrigopulos and the Portuguese **fogueteiro**) have been retained. The various explanations for Augusto's death have been shortened to two. All of these adjustments permit the screenplay to retain the abrupt changes in focus, hilarity, and pathedy of the book, while robbing the story of some detail contributing to the development of motifs. All of the "classic" scenes, however, are not only maintained but brilliantly portrayed.

Some lengthy material has been added at the beginning and at the conclusion of the film in an attempt to present a sketch of Unamuno living in Salamanca and agonizing over questions set forth in the novel. Most teachers and students will probably like these additions, since they supply a wealth of cultural background which the alert class may easily exploit: the architecture of Salamanca, Unamuno's stormy final days at the dawn of the Spanish Civil War, the relationship of **Niebla** to Unamuno's other fiction. All teachers using the film/videotape in conjunction with the book, however, would do well to cue their students as to when the novel "proper" begins and ends.

The film/videotape itself lasts just over 60 minutes, which makes it slightly too long for a typical class. In general the color is good and the sound is clear, but there are notable exceptions. While the actor playing Unamuno presents a magnificent likeness of the author in both appearance and voice, this mimicry causes him to speak with extremely deep shadings and to swallow certain final vowels. This is especially noticeable in the two key sonnets he recites at the beginning and the conclusion. These are numbers 1754 and 1755 in Unamuno's **Cancionero**, and the teacher would do well to teach them in advance. In a number of places the accompanying music is rather garbled, and the momentary surface noise gives the impression that one is listening to a scratched phonograph record instead of an orchestra.

The only really obvious technical flaws occur in the several "outdoor" and "casino" scenes. Here the background of street and dinner place noise tends to obscure some important dialogue between the characters, and students are bound to look to their teacher for help.

All of these potential problems can be reduced to a minimum by preparing detailed lists of idioms and vocabulary, and by transcribing the script in the few cases of background noise. This will take many viewings or considerable patience with the "pause" button. The film's distributors would be wise to supply the entire script to future purchasers and to consider the possibility of offering a second version with Spanish subtitles, which would make the program more usable at the intermediate level. As it is, **Niebla** is linguistically a difficult film and should be used only during the fourth year and above. It is probably the best production ever made available from Spanish television and, aside from its outstanding literary and cinematographic dimensions, can be used to provide a world of insight regarding Spanish homes, courtship, cities, the Don Juan type, and the tensions between certain social classes. It is, in addition to these "weighty" virtues, a very funny movie, with constant humor ranging from the sophisticated to the burlesque.

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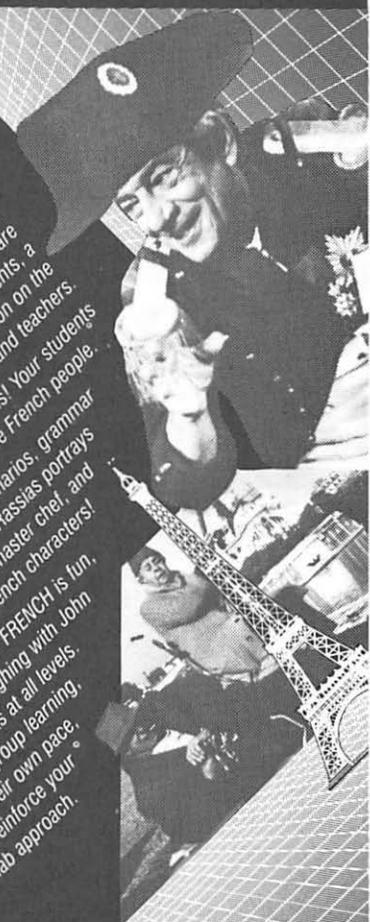
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...Book

Higgs, Theodore, V., ed. **Curriculum, Competence, and the Foreign Language Teacher**. Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1982. Pp 145. \$10.20, paper.

A more appropriate title for the thirteenth volume of the ACTFL Review would be: "Curriculum and the Foreign Language Teacher." A survey of the five articles comprising this book renders the inclusion of the term 'competence' in the title somewhat forced. While competence in communication as well as instruction is an integral consideration, it is the focus of only one chapter. The principle topics could be divided into three categories: textbook adaptation, recognition of individual needs and implementation of unified standards for assessment. These broad areas are loosely joined together as the question of a curriculum suited to the eighties is examined.

The book comprises five chapters; an introduction by the editor and two indices (person and topic). Chapters 1,2 and 4 concentrate on individual needs specific to given situations, where instructional options suited to the learning styles of students are favored. Chapters 3 and 5 advocate a unified, standardized system, the former aimed at measuring communicative competence, the latter to establish a greater measure of continuum in foreign language programs. The conclusion for each chapter occasionally functions to suggest concrete steps for implementation of the advocated program. The bibliography allows the reader further exploration of the respective topic.

Higgs' Introduction urges the foreign language teacher to keep well informed and flexible regarding developments stemming from linguistics (communicative competence) and learning theory (individual needs). Ariew explores the myriad considerations and constraints for writing and marketing textbooks and the limitations these factors define for the implementation in classroom instruction. The solution to textual limitations according to Ariew is teacher preparation. The implication is that the competent teacher's goals can serve as a basis for adapting, deleting from, and supplementing the chosen text. Flynn, on the other hand, stresses familiarity with students' goals and learning styles as a basis for pragmatic adaptation. The textbook is viewed as a total rather than as a dictator of curriculum to be compulsively adhered to. Concrete, step-by-step suggestions are given as to how to suit individual needs through purposeful supplementation.

Higgs and Clifford outline lucidly the origin and evolution of communicative competence vis-a-vis linguistics and examine critically the practical implication it has for the language teaching situation. The ideal is found to be difficult to achieve. The linguistic function and the context in which the function is embedded are singled out as crucial to accurate evaluation (for which the authors detail the language-proficiency rating scale; a proven evaluative book for assessing communicative competence at five levels).

Beyond considerations of the limitations a textbook places on the curriculum, and the need for a standard measure of communicative competence is the vast field of options for curricular design based totally on individual students' needs and learning styles. Crawford-Lange explores the broad scope of alternatives made feasible by the push toward eclecticism. An excellent source for succinct summaries of popular methodologies, this chapter also recognizes the realistic variables that limit the choice of methods or promote a combination of strategies.

Almost in direct contradiction to Crawford-Lange's encouragement of diversification in instruction, stands Lange's call for articulation (i.e. sequencing in curriculum). The stress here is on cooperation between teachers in order to employ parallel methods in classes of the same level. Lange advocates that one standard text be adapted by all schools in a given district and that some continuum be established in the language programs between high school and college to offset discrepancies in the amount and quality of learning of languages. This argument stems from the frustrations consecutive instructors have as students taught by different strategies enter their classes from instructional backgrounds which have stressed divergent skills. The particular forte of this chapter is its elucidation of curriculum theory as it applies to foreign language programs, and its implication for a continuum of instructional policy from class to class and from high school to university.

As disjointed as the title of this volume may seem, so to appears to be the criteria to justify inclusion of the topics treated. The reader is hard pressed to find a unifying theme. Yet each article taken by itself is cogently argued and provides some sense of closure. The intention of each chapter is clearly to help teachers to reevaluate their priorities to mesh with current curriculum theory. Unfortunately Higgs abdicates his editorial responsibility when he does not provide the reader with some manner of synthesis. More specifically, the editor falls severely short of providing an answer to his introductory question of the type of curriculum best suited for the eighties.

The reader may be left with a heightened awareness of issues involved in curriculum planning but with no clear direction to go. On the other hand, professionals with some role in curriculum decision-making can derive great benefit from this up-to-date collection of articles, as can practicing classroom teachers concerned with at least understanding the individual issues.

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Computer software for teaching Beginning and Intermediate French.

SCHOOLHOUSE SOFTWARE Series FR-1A through FR-6B, Basic and Intermediate French. 290 Brighton Road, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007 (312) 526-5027. Each disk costs \$55.

Although the educational application of computer software in foreign language instruction holds great potential, it has proven difficult for many foreign language teachers to have the opportunity to properly evaluate the scope and difficulty of the existing commercial computer language programs. Many programs can not be previewed prior to purchase. The available promotional materials do not give sufficient details for an adequate assessment of the programs' value and adaptability to individual curriculums. Having recently reviewed twelve of Schoolhouse Software's French computer series, made for Apple computers--from Elementary French FR-1A through Intermediate FR-6B--I would like to offer a general critique of Schoolhouse Software's French programs and suggestions for adapting them for use in the classroom, as well as descriptions of each program detailing the exact grammatical content, in the hope that French teachers will find it useful.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

All of these programs share the same basic format: 1) a "Helpful Hints" reference section which provides examples and an explanation in English of specific grammar points, i.e. the *passee compose* with *etre*, followed by 2) a game, usually involving a task to be completed, such as running a race or building a castle, in which the student receives credit for each appropriate response. The programs are self-explanatory with clear and easy-to-follow directions. Upon starting the program, the student has the option of going directly to the game or first looking at the reference material. Once he has begun playing the game, he still has the possibility of returning to the grammar review section but must terminate the game to do so. Unfortunately, there is no method for either moving quickly through the "Helpful Hints" to find the section desired or to exit easily. The student must go through it again completely.

MECHANICS

Most of the games call for the student to retype part of the prompt making the indicated changes, for instance, changing the tense, making agreement or negation, or to supply the equivalent word in French. If the student gives a wrong answer, he has no chance to rectify his mistake. The computer informs him "Vous avez tort," and the correction appears immediately. Moreover, the student is not required to retype the correct answer before continuing the game--a deficiency which has been brought to the attention of Schoolhouse Software. "Vous avez raison" is used as positive reinforcement. In some cases, the student has available an English translation of the prompt, some of which are unnecessarily stilted. The simple present tense in English (i.e. "We close the window.") is often used instead of the more natural-sounding present progressive ("We are closing the window."). Unfortunately, none of the programs offer access to a verb reference list or to a glossary, which could be of considerable help in certain instances. For example, in FR-1B, in which the student must produce the suitable form of the demonstrative or possessive adjective for the noun given in French, the addition of a reference list of the nouns utilized and their genders would facilitate the task since undoubtedly some of the nouns would be unfamiliar to the student. The French teacher could compensate for this lack by drawing up a vocabulary list. As for the question of accents, the programs are designed to produce letters with French accents when the appropriate key is hit, and they will not accept an answer as correct if the accents are missing. Although an explanation of how to type the accents is not included in every game, the accent/key chart is printed on the sleeve of each disk.

GRAPHICS

In regard to the visual elements, they are still a far cry from video games. The graphics, although colorful, tend to be slow, and potentially boring for someone who has played the game before. Some games offer the possibility of having two players, who usually cooperate to win the game. The student is also given the option of having a printout of his score and percentage correct if there is a word processor attached--a nice way to confirm a student's progress.

GRAMMAR CONTENT

Mechanics aside--the grammatical problems covered in the programs are well chosen; they provide additional practice in areas where students often need it, i.e. object pronouns, possessive adjectives, adjective agreement, etc. Their scope tends to be broad, taking in more than one grammatical topic at a time. FR-1A, in particular, encompasses the present tense of regular -er, -ir, -re verbs, imperatives, irregular -ir verbs like "sortir," and the verb "ouvrir." Its large range could reduce its viability for a high school class, which might take a semester and a half to cover all this material, but on the other hand, it would make a challenging review exercise for high school students as well as a good consolidating exercise for college students who often absorb grammar in isolated chunks and need to be able to put it all together.

Although not all the programs are as comprehensive in their choice of a grammar topic, the inclusion of several related grammar points in the same program often poses a problem for the "Helpful Hints" section. The majority of the grammatical explanations are adequate although occasionally sketchy. They are not sufficient for the purpose of self-teaching but serve more as a review--to refresh the student's memory. The grammatical explanations are sometimes awkwardly phrased and unclear. Elements which later are used in the game are not always thoroughly explained. For example, in FR-5A, the non-agreement of the past participle with "en" is never mentioned although it appears in the exercise. However, these discrepancies should not pose a problem if the student already has a fairly good grasp of the grammar involved. It is also assumed that the student knows major grammatical terms in English, such as reflexive verbs, indirect and direct objects, and so forth.

As for the items themselves, the authors have done a good job of restricting the vocabulary to high frequency words likely to be found in most textbooks. However, some of the prompts are repeated in more than one program. The item pool for each game seems large enough so that a student could play several times without having all the same prompts.

I would like to add one comment before starting the individual program resumes. I originally found between three and seven errors in grammar and translations per program in all but two of this series. All of these errors have since been acknowledged and corrected by Schoolhouse Software, who has been most receptive and cooperative. Therefore, I make no specific mention of the individual errors contained in uncorrected copies in this review.

ELEMENTARY FRENCH SERIES FR-1A

This program includes the present tense of regular -er, -ir, -re verbs; an irregular -ir verb group ("dormir, servir, sortir, partir"); the irregular verb "ouvrir" as well as a few imperatives, cued by quotation marks and direct address. In the game, "La Fusee," the student must answer correctly fifteen out of twenty times in order to complete all the stages of preparation in a rocket launch. He is given the infinitive in a dehydrated sentence and must type in only the conjugated verb. The grammatical explanation is adequate although the third person singular -re verb ending is given as "(t)" with no further explanation and "corriger" is cited as an example of a regular -er verb. English translations are provided in the "Helpful Hints" for some, but not all, of the examples, and none are available during the game. The program could be improved by adding a glossary of the verbs with English translations.

ELEMENTARY FRENCH SERIES FR-1B

The student's goal is to build a cage around a giant bug, "la Punaise," by producing the possessive or demonstrative adjective which corresponds to the English cue and agrees in number and gender with the French noun given. For instance, in response to "my...maison," the student should type "ma." Since the prompt is given in English, the program nicely reinforces the correct translation of the possessive adjectives, particularly of "son, sa, and ses" as "his, her," or "its" depending on the context, and of the demonstrative adjectives as both "this" and "that" in the singular and "these" and "those" in the plural. The grammar explanation is fairly good. There is no option to find out the gender of the noun or its meaning, so the teacher might wish to add a reference list.

ELEMENTARY FRENCH SERIES FR-2A

In "L'Attaque," with every correct answer the student's submarine repositions itself for a better shot at destroying an enemy ship. If he fails to get a certain number of right answers, his sub is blown up instead. The competitive format makes this game more interesting to play. "L'Attaque" provides practice with the agreement, but not the placement, of both regular and irregular common adjectives, such as adjectives of color ("bleu, gris, noir"), adjectives describing mental and physical characteristics ("généreux, petit, heureux, large"), and adjectives which precede the nouns they modify ("bon, gros"). The irregular adjectives used in the game ("bon, gros, blanc, beau, nouveau, vieux, canadien, roux, premier, long") are introduced in the reference program and classified in vague and unhelpful categories. It is possible to see an English translation of the prompt, but the student has no way to ascertain the gender of the noun. A glossary would be helpful.

ELEMENTARY FRENCH SERIES FR-2B

"La Tempete" is designed for two players who work together to finish building their cottage in "province" before it is struck by lightning. To succeed, they must correctly conjugate twelve out of fifteen irregular verbs, which include "aler, etre, avoir, faire, pouvoir, vouloir, prendre, surprendre," and "comprendre," in the present tense. The prompt consists of a sentence in French with the verb given in the infinitive. The student may refer to an English translation.

ELEMENTARY FRENCH FR-3A

The premise of "Le Canon" is to advance the cannonball in the direction of its target, a house, with every correct answer. In the case of a wrong answer, the cannonball moves back toward the cannon. The program focuses on the passe compose of first, second, and third conjugation verbs with regular past participles plus the verb "ouvrir." The cue is given in present tense. The student must enter the auxiliary verb and past participle, leaving out the subject, with the exception of "je" (for reasons of elision). The student has access to an English translation of the present tense cue but not to a reference list of the infinitives. Such a list would be helpful for verbs whose infinitive endings are not readily apparent from their irregular present tense forms, such as "dormir" and "servir," as well as for verbs which take accents (since the capitalized cues do not show accent marks.) The "Helpful Hints" section adequately reviews passe compose formation, but it does not explain how to translate this tense into English.

ELEMENTARY FRENCH SERIES FR-3B

"Super Toe," a tic tac toe game designed for two players, drills the passe compose of intransitive verbs of motion (House of Etre verbs), which take "etre" as an auxiliary, excluding "mourir, naitre," and "passer." In addition, it drills past participial agreement with the subject. Students might find this game more fun to play because of the competitive format. As in a regular tic tac toe game, each player first picks a numbered square, and he must answer correctly in order to win that square. The items are composed of a present tense sentence whose verb must be rewritten in the past tense. An English translation of the prompt is available to the student. The grammar review is adequate except for the lack of English equivalents of the passe compose, and the omission of the participial formation rules of -re verbs, of which "descendre" is a prominent example of this inadequacy.

INTERMEDIATE FRENCH SERIES FR-4A

In "l'Atterrissage," a vocabulary expansion and review exercise, the student lights another section of a runway for a plane to land on by entering the antonym of the given French word. The antonym pairs, which include one noun pair, one pair of prepositions, verbs, and mostly adjectives, are cited in the reference program along with their translations. The student can not see the English equivalent before answering, although it automatically appears afterwards with the corrected response.

INTERMEDIATE FRENCH SERIES FR-4B

Of all the programs reviewed in this article, the format of "Grand Prix," which drills direct and indirect object pronouns, is perhaps the most objectionable. The problem does not lie in the premise of the game, a car race between two players, but rather in the construction of the prompt. The student is presented with a sentence containing a blank where the pronoun should be and following the sentence, the word that the pronoun will replace, which could be either a noun or a subject pronoun. For instance, "Ne...parlez pas--je" should evoke the answer "me." This type of construction contributes to the already existing confusion with subject and object pronouns experienced by many students. Since the word to be replaced is necessary to complete the thought but is not grammatically incorporated into the sentence (and indeed, could not be incorporated in the case of subject pronouns), the student must, in effect, guess at the meaning of the prompt. The authors have provided no English translations nor have they included a verb reference list anywhere in the program. Therefore, the student can not verify whether a particular verb takes a direct or an indirect object or both.

INTERMEDIATE FRENCH SERIES FR-5A

"Le Grand Chateau," a game which drills past participial agreement, calls for two players who collaborate to complete the construction of a castle. The students practice making the participle agree 1) with the subject, in the case of intransitive verbs of motion, (i.e. "Mon cousin et moi, nous sommes /aller/...--alles); 2) with the reflexive or reciprocal pronoun if it is the direct object (i.e. "Les filles se sont /coucher/ tres tard hier soir. -- couchees"); and 3) with the preceding direct object, including object pronouns and antecedents of relative clauses introduced by "que" (i.e. "Voila les robes noires que maman avait /faire/.--faites") in the case of verbs conjugated with "avoir." In addition, the students must recognize situations where they can not make participial agreement such as 1) with

reciprocal and reflexive pronouns when the pronoun is considered an indirect object: and 2) with "en," preceding indirect object pronouns, and direct objects which follow the verb when the auxiliary verb is "avoir." The task also requires prior knowledge of common irregular past participles. Although this program does cover a wide range of grammatical material, unfortunately, the "Helpful Hints" do not thoroughly explain all the situations which arise in the game. Also, the somewhat vague grammatical explanation fails to distinguish between "House of Etre" verbs and reflexive verbs and their differing rules of agreement. The student is able to consult the English translation during the game.

INTERMEDIATE FRENCH SERIES FR-5B

"Les Coureurs," which involves negating the *passé composé*, both with and without preceding object pronouns, centers around a race between three bugs. The first two belong to Players 1 and 2, and the third bug, their adversary, advances with every incorrect answer the students give. The prompt presents a sentence in the *passé composé*, and the students must retype the auxiliary verb, either "etre" or "avoir," and any preceding object pronouns plus "ne...pas." English translations are not given. After the student responds, the entire sentence is shown in the negated form. This exercise is very mechanical, but it does provide practice in recognizing subjects, objects pronouns, and the past tense with "etre" and "avoir." The reference program is satisfactory.

INTERMEDIATE FRENCH SERIES FR-6A

In "Le Monstre," the student is required to put the reflexive or reciprocal present tense verb into the *passé composé* and to make agreement when necessary. With each right answer, another part of the monster's body is completed. There is no verb list, but the student can call up the English equivalent of his answer. The "Helpful Hints" contain a brief but comprehensive review of the *passé composé* (except for the continued oversight of -re verb participial formation.)

INTERMEDIATE FRENCH SERIES FR-6B

"Super Toe," another game using the tic tac toe format, is quite similar to FR-5A in that it combines the *passé composé* of intransitive verbs of motion, "avoir" verbs with and without preceding direct objects, reflexive verbs with direct and indirect reflexive pronouns, and therefore, participial agreement. The cues are given in the present tense, and the student is expected to rewrite the verb phrase in the *passé composé*. Therefore, he also must manipulate past tense negation and object pronoun placement. The student has access to an English translation of the prompt, and after acknowledging the

student's response, the program briefly categorizes the sentence as having a direct or indirect reflexive pronoun and so forth in order to explain the participial agreement. The reference program is basically the same as in FR-5A. This difficult game should be reserved for advanced students who have a firm grasp of the grammar involved.

In conclusion, the judicious use of Schoolhouse Software's Elementary and Intermediate French Series as an alternative method of grammar review and drill provides extremely beneficial practice for language students and considerable time-saving advantages for teachers. However, given the variety of grammatical topics and the deficiencies present in certain programs, I recommend evaluating each program on an individual basis to determine its applicability. One more fundamental problem should also be taken into consideration. As of now, it is not permissible to make copies of the disks. In order to derive maximum benefit from the programs, the teacher needs to have at least one extra copy of the disk in case the master becomes inoperable for whatever reason. Although Schoolhouse Software has guaranteed a replacement disk will be sent within three days from date of receipt, the actual delay involved, during which the program would be inaccessible to students, would probably be about two weeks--an unacceptable length of time. How Schoolhouse Software will resolve this problem remains to be seen.

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