SIXTH EDITION

A COMPREHENSIVE
FRENCH
GRAMMAR

Glanville Price

A Comprehensive French Grammar

Blackwell Reference Grammars
General Editor: Glanville Price

The Blackwell Reference Grammars are essential companions for students of modern languages at senior secondary school and undergraduate level. The volumes provide a comprehensive survey of the grammar of each language and include plentiful examples. The series will cover the major European languages, including French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian.

Already published

A Comprehensive French Grammar, Sixth Edition
Glanville Price

A Comprehensive Russian Grammar, Second Edition
Terence Wade
Advisory Editor: Michael J. de K. Holman

A Comprehensive Spanish Grammar
Jacques de Bruyne
Adapted, with additional material, by Christopher J. Pountain

A Comprehensive Welsh Grammar
David A. Thorne

Colloquial French Grammar: A Practical Guide
Rodney Ball

An Introduction to French Pronunciation, Revised Edition
Glanville Price

Grammar Workbooks

A Russian Grammar Workbook
Terence Wade

A French Grammar Workbook
Dulcie Engel, George Evans, and Valerie Howells

A Spanish Grammar Workbook
Esther Santamaría Iglesias

A Comprehensive French Grammar

Sixth Edition

GLANVILLE PRICE

Emeritus Professor of French
University of Wales Aberystwyth

Contents

Introduction

The Noun Phrase

Verbs

The Structure of the Sentence

Adverbs, Prepositions and Conjunctions

Appendix

Preface

This new edition of *A Comprehensive French Grammar* corresponds in most respects to the previous edition (2003). The principal change consists in the addition of a section on 'Register and medium' (13) and of references to these topics here and there throughout the text. Elsewhere in the 'Introduction', the sections on 'Capitals' (4), 'Punctuation' (5) and 'Hyphens' (8) have been substantially modified and expanded. I have also taken advantage of this new edition to update the bibliography and to make a few other modifications to the text. However, apart from the addition of the new section (13) and the consequential combining of the previous sections (13) and (14) as (14), the paragraph numbering and the pagination of the last edition have been retained.

I am grateful to all those colleagues and others from whose comments and advice I have benefited, not least to my wife who has read successive editions in typescript and made helpful observations based on her experience of teaching advanced students of French. Professor Maria Manoliu of the University of California at Davis made a number of suggestions for improving my discussion of points of grammar in the last edition. This new edition has benefited greatly from advice offered by Dr Mari C. Jones of the University of Cambridge. None of these, of course, are in any way responsible for any errors or omissions that may remain.

<div align="right">G.P.</div>

Selective Bibliography

This list of works likely to be of interest to the advanced student of French includes only titles of which the most recent edition is dated 1993 or later.

Grammars

Ball, R. 2000. *Colloquial French Grammar. A Practical Guide.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Baylon, C. and Fabre, P. 2003. *Grammaire systématique de la langue française*, 3rd edn. Paris: Nathan.

Grevisse, M. 1993. *Le Bon Usage. Grammaire française*, 13th edn, recast by A. Goosse. Paris and Louvain-la-Neuve: Duculot.

Hawkins, R. and Towell, R. 2001. *French Grammar and Usage*, 2nd edn. London: Arnold.

Hollerbach, W. 1994. *The Syntax of Contemporary French: A Pedagogical Handbook and Reference Grammar*. Lanham, MD, New York and London: University Press of America.

Le Goffic, P. 1994. *Grammaire de la phrase française*. Paris: Hachette.

Le Querler, N. 1994. *Précis de syntaxe française.* Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen.

L'Huillier, M. 1999. *Advanced French Grammar.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lang, M. and Perez, I. 2004. *Modern French Grammar: A Practical Guide.* London: Routledge.

Pougoise, M. 1998. *Dictionnaire de grammaire et des difficultés grammaticales*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Dictionaries

Atkins, Beryl C. et al. (eds) 1998. *Collins Robert French-English English-French Dictionary.* London: HarperCollins, Paris: Le Robert.

Baumgartner, E. and Ménard, P. 1996. *Dictionnaire étymologique et historique de la langue française*. Paris: LGF.

Carney, F. (ed.) 1993. *Grand dictionnaire français-anglais / anglais-français; French-English / English-French Dictionary*, 1, *Français-anglais / French-English*, 2, *Anglais-français / English-French.* Paris: Larousse.

Catach, N. 1994. *Dictionnaire historique de l'orthographe française*. Paris: Larousse.

Corréard, M.-H. and Grundy, V. (eds) 2003. *The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary*, 3rd edn, ed. J.-B. Ormal-Grenon and N. Pomier. Paris: Hachette, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rey-Debove, J. and Rey, A. 2006. *Le Nouveau Petit Robert*, rev. edn. Paris: Le Robert.

Van Roey, J. Granger, S. and Swallow, H. 1998. *Dictionnaire des / Dictionary of faux amis, français-anglais, English-French*, 3rd edn. Paris and Brussels: Duculot.

General

Ayres-Bennett, W. 1996. *A History of the French Language through Texts*. London: Routledge.

Ayres-Bennett, W. and Carruthers, J., with Temple, R. 2001. *Problems and Perspectives. Studies in the Modern French Language.* London: Longman.

Batchelor, R. E. and Offord, M. A. 2007. *Using French: A Guide to Contemporary French Usage*, 3rd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Batchelor, R. E. and Offord, M. A. 1993. *Using French Synonyms.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Battye, A., Hintze, M.-A. and Rowlett, P. 2000. *The French Language Today*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Catach, N. 1994. *La Ponctuation (histoire et système).* Paris: PUF.

Chaurand, J. (ed.) 1999. *Nouvelle histoire de la langue française.* Paris: Seuil.

Lamy, M.-N. and Towell, R. 1998. *The Cambridge French-English Thesaurus.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lodge, R. A. 1993. *French: From Dialect to Standard.* London: Routledge.

Lodge, R. A. et al. 1997. *Exploring the French Language.* London: Arnold.

L'Huillier, M., Martin, B. and Udris, R. 2000. *French Discourse Analysis.* Dublin: Philomel.

Offord, Malcolm. 2001. *French Words, Past, Present and Future.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Péchoin, D. and Dauphin, B. 2006. *Dictionnaire des difficultés du français.* Paris: Larousse.

Posner, R. 1997. *Linguistic Change in French.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Picoche, J. and Marchello-Nizia, C. 1998. *Histoire de la langue française*, 3rd edn. Paris: Nathan.

Price, G. 1998. *The French Language, Present and Past*, rev. edn. London: Grant & Cutler.

Price, G. 2005. *An Introduction to French Pronunciation*, rev. edn. Oxford: Blackwell.

Rossillon, P. et al. (eds) 1995. *Atlas de la langue française.* Paris: Bordas.

Sanders, C. (ed.) 1993. *French Today: Language in its Social Context.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Warnant, L. 1997. *Orthographe et prononciation en français.* Louvain-la-Neuve: Duculot.

Wise, H. 1997. *The Vocabulary of Modern French: Origins, Structure and Function.* London: Routledge.

Technical Terms and Abbreviations

It is assumed that most users of this grammar will be familiar with the basic traditional terminology for the parts of speech (noun, adjective, verb, etc.) and a few other concepts such as 'clause', 'subject', 'gender', 'tense', 'active', 'passive', etc.

Among the terms (some of which, though now in general use, are not traditional) defined in particular sections of the book are the following (the list is not complete):

impersonal verb	343
indirect object	18, 21
intransitive verb	17
inversion	596
linking verb	518
medium	13
mood	472
mute *h*	3
nominative (case)	15
noun phrase	13
partial interrogation	581
persons of the verb	342
quantifier	320
referent	248
register	13
simple tense	340
total interrogation	581
transitive verb	17

The following abbreviations have been used:

adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
art.	article
compl.	complement
condit.	conditional
conjug.	conjugation
constr.	construction
def.	definite
demonst.	demonstrative
disjunct.	disjunctive
Eng.	English
fem.	feminine
Fr.	French
fut.	future
imper.	imperative
imperf.	imperfect
indef.	indefinite
indic.	indicative
infin.	infinitive
masc.	masculine

obj.	object
part.	participle
past ant.	past anterior
perf.	perfect
pers.	person
pluperf.	pluperfect
plur.	plural
poss.	possessive
pres.	present
pret.	preterite
pron.	pronoun
q. ch.	*quelque chose*
q. un	*quelqu'un*
ref.	reference
refl.	reflexive
rel.	relative
sing.	singular
subjunct.	subjunctive
transl.	translated

Introduction

Alphabet

1 French has the same alphabet as English:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
[a]	[be]	[se]	[de]	[ə,ø]	[ɛf]	[ʒe]	[aʃ]
I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
[i]	[ʒi]	[ka]	[ɛl]	[ɛm]	[ɛn]	[o]	[pe]
Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
[ky]	[ɛr]	[ɛs]	[te]	[y]	[ve]	*	[iks]
Y	Z						
*	[zɛd]						

*The letters *w* and *y* are known as *double v* and *i grec* ('Greek i'). For the values of the phonetic symbols used above to transcribe the names of the other letters, see 2. (Note that *w* is pronounced [v] in *le wagon* '(railway-)carriage' and in a few other, relatively uncommon, words but [w] in other borrowings from English, e.g. *le week-end*, *le whisky*, and in *wallon* 'Walloon'.)

The names of all the letters are now usually considered to be masculine, e.g. *un a bref* 'a short *a*', « *Londres* » *s'écrit avec un s* '*Londres* is written with an *s*', *Le d de* « *pied* » *ne se prononce pas* 'The *d* in *pied* is not pronounced'.

Phonetic transcriptions

2   To indicate pronunciation, we use symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet's follows:

Vowels

[i]	as in *lit*
[e]	as in **été**, *j'***ai**
[ɛ]	as in **bête**, **faites***
[a]	as in *d***ate**
[ɑ]	as in *p***as,** *p***âte**
[ɔ]	as in *b***otte**
[o]	as in *d***os,** *b***eau**
[u]	as in *t***ou***t*
[y]	as in *t***u**
[ø]	as in *f***eu**
[œ]	as in *p***eur**
[ə]	as in *je*, *pr***e***mier*
[ɛ̃]	as in *v***in**, *m***ain**
[œ̃]	as in **un**
[ɔ̃]	as in *b***on**
[ɑ̃]	as in *bl***anc**, *d***en***t*

Semi-vowels

[j]	as in **y***eux*, **p***ied*
[ɥ]	as in *h***u***ile*
[w]	as in **ou***i*

Consonants

[t]	as in **t***out*
[d]	as in **d***ent*
[p]	as in **p***omme*
[b]	as in **b***eau*
[k]	as in **c***amp*, **qu***i*, **k***ilo*
[g]	as in **g***outte*
[f]	as in **f***ou*
[v]	as in **v***ie*
[s]	as in **s***ou*, *fa***c***e*
[z]	as in **z***éro*, *mai***s***on*

[ʃ]	as in **ch**apeau
[ʒ]	as in **j**e, rou**ge**
[l]	as in **l**une
[r]	as in **r**ouge
[m]	as in **m**ada**me**
[n]	as in **n**ez
[ɲ]	as in si**gn**e
[ŋ]	as in parki**ng**

A colon, [ː], after a vowel indicates that the vowel is long, e.g.:

[myːr] *mur*, [pɑːt] *pâte*, [pœːr] *peur*, [mɔ̃ːd] *monde*.

The two varieties of 'H' in French

3   The French *h* is not pronounced. However, some words beginning with *h* (which is always followed by a vowel) function as if they began with a vowel, while others function as if they began with a consonant. These two varieties of *h* are known respectively as 'mute *h*' and 'aspirate *h*' (in French, *h muet* and *h aspiré*).

(i) Mute *h*. Words (most of them of Latin or Greek origin) beginning with mute *h* function as if it were not there, i.e. as if they began with a vowel. (Indeed, in many such words it used *not* to be there but has been introduced under the influence of Latin spelling, e.g. medieval French *erbe* 'grass', *abiter* 'to dwell', *ier* 'yesterday', which have since had an *h* added to them, i.e. *herbe*, *habiter*, *hier*, because it was realized that they came from Latin *herba*, *habitare*, *heri*.) Like other words beginning with a vowel, these words give rise to the processes of elision (see **12**) (e.g. *l'herbe*, *j'habite*) and liaison (see **7**,c) (e.g. *les hommes* [lez ɔm] 'the men'), they take the masculine demonstrative *cet* not *ce* (e.g. *cet homme* 'this man' – see **235**) and the feminine possessives *mon*, *ton*, *son* not *ma*, *ta*, *sa* (e.g. *mon habitude* 'my custom' – see **223**).

(ii) Aspirate *h*. On the other hand, a number of words beginning with *h* function as if they began with a consonant. (In fact, though

the *h* is now silent, it *was* pronounced until perhaps the sixteenth century, and still remains in some provinces.) These are mainly words borrowed from languages other than Latin or Greek and, in particular, words borrowed in the early medieval period from the Germanic speech of the Franks, or, much more recently, from English. Such words do *not* give rise to elision (e.g. *le hêtre* 'beech-tree', *la hache* 'axe', *je hais* 'I hate', *je le hais* 'I hate him') or liaison (*les hiboux* [le ibu] 'the owls'), and they take the masculine demonstrative *ce* (e.g. *ce hachoir* 'this chopper') and the feminine possessives *ma*, *ta*, *sa* (e.g. *ma honte* 'my shame').

Capitals

4   Capitals (in French, *majuscules*) are used at the beginning of a sentence and with proper names (*Jean*, *Paris*), but elsewhere are much less widely used than in English. In particular, small letters (*minuscules*) are used:

(i) for months and days of the week, e.g. *septembre* 'September', *samedi* 'Saturday'

(ii) for adjectives corresponding to proper names, e.g. *la côte méditerranéenne* 'the Mediterranean coast', *un printemps parisien* 'a Parisian spring', *l'ère napoléonienne* 'the Napoleonic era'. This includes adjectives of nationality and also applies when they are used as nouns denoting a language, e.g.:

le gouvernement français	the French government
la langue italienne	the Italian language
Il comprend l'anglais	He understands English
Le russe est une langue difficile	Russian is a difficult language

but, when used as nouns with reference to people, they take a capital, e.g.:

C'est un Espagnol	He's a Spaniard
Les Allemands sont partis	The Germans have left

In English, utterances consisting of a part of the verb 'to be' and an expression of nationality, or other local or ethnic origin, can take

either an adjective, as in 'I am American', 'He is Norman', 'Are you Norwegian?', 'They are not Spanish', or a noun, as in 'I am an American', 'He is a Norman', 'Are you Norwegians?', 'They are not Spaniards'. The French equivalents of the expressions quoted above are *Je suis américain(e)*, *Il est normand*, *Êtes-vous norvégien(ne)s ?*, *Ils ne sont pas espagnols/Elles ne sont pas espagnoles*. Note that the forms in question are adjectives and so take a small (i.e. not a capital) initial. (The convention of taking the words in question as adjectives is, however, sometimes breached and they are treated as if they were nouns, with a capital initial.)

Likewise, with expressions characterizing religion, which in English (especially in the singular) are usually treated as nouns, e.g. 'I am a Buddhist', 'They were Christian(s)', but *Je suis bouddhiste*, *Ils étaient chrétiens*.

After *C'est*, *Ce sont*, *C'était*, etc., however, when the indefinite article is used, the words in question are nouns and take a capital initial, e.g. *C'est un Français* 'He is a Frenchman', *C'était un Allemand* 'He was/It was a German', *Ce sont/C'est des Japonais* (see 251).

(iii) for titles, e.g. *le colonel Blanc, le docteur Dupont, le duc de Bourgogne* 'the Duke of Burgundy', *le président Sarkozy* 'President Sarkozy', *le professeur Mornet* 'Professor Mornet', *la reine Élisabeth* 'Queen Elizabeth', *saint Paul*. Note too *monsieur*, *madame*, *mademoiselle Dupont*, without capitals except (a) when addressing someone, e.g. in a letter (*Mon cher Monsieur Dupont*), (b) when abbreviated to *M.*, *Mme*, *Mlle*.

For capitalization of titles in names of streets, etc., see 8,iii.

In other contexts, usage fluctuates. Note in particular:

(iv) Titles, including preceding adjectives, applied to God, any of the persons of the Trinity or the Virgin Mary, the names of religious festivals, sacred writings, etc., are usually capitalized, though following adjectives are not, e.g.:

> *Dieu* 'God', *le Rédempteur* 'the Redeemer', *le Tout-Puissant* 'the Almighty', *le Saint-Esprit*, 'the Holy Spirit', *Notre-Dame* 'Our Lady', *Noël* 'Christmas', *la Pentecôte* 'Whitsun', *le Nouveau Testament* 'the New Testament', *le Coran*, 'the Qur'an', *le Pentateuque* 'the Pentateuch', *le Rigveda* 'the Rig-Veda', *la Torah* 'the Torah', *l'Écriture sainte* 'Holy Scripture', *Mardi gras* 'Shrove Tuesday'

(v) In names of institutions, organizations, unique events, etc., head nouns and adjectives preceding the noun are usually capitalized (e.g. *la Grande Guerre* 'the First World War', *le Nouvel An* 'New Year'), but following adjectives or nouns linked to the head noun by *de* are usually not capitalized, e.g.:

> *le Sénat* 'the Senate', *la Bourse* 'the Stock Exchange', *la Réforme* 'the Reformation', *la Révolution française* 'the French Revolution', *l'Académie française* 'the French Academy', *la Sécurité sociale* 'Social Security', *la Légion étrangère* 'the Foreign Legion', *l'Institut géographique national* 'the National Geographical Institute', *l'Église catholique* 'the Catholic Church', *la Légion d'honneur* 'the Legion of Honour', *la Cour d'appel* 'the Appeal Court', *le Conseil de sécurité* 'the Security Council' (but notice *la Comédie-Française* [a theatre] and the names of government departments, e.g. *le ministère des Finances* 'the Ministry of Finance', *le ministère des Affaires étrangères* 'the Foreign Ministry', etc.).

(vi) Note the lack of capitals in words for street, road, square, etc., in names, e.g.:

> *la rue de la Paix*, *le boulevard Saint-Michel*, *l'avenue des Champs-Élysées*, *la place de la Concorde*, *le carrefour de l'Odéon*. (In the Channel Islands, capitals are used as in English, e.g. *la Rue des Fontaines*, *la Grève de St Clément* in Jersey, *la Route de la Lague*, *la Pointe de Pleinmont* in Guernsey.)

Punctuation

5   Most French and English punctuation marks are the same:

.	*point*	full stop
,	*virgule*	comma
;	*point-virgule*	semi-colon
:	*deux points*	colon
?	*point d'interrogation*	question mark
!	*point d'exclamation*	exclamation mark

–	*tiret*	dash
-	*trait d'union*	hyphen
. . .	*points de suspension*	three dots
( )	*parenthèses*	round brackets
[ ]	*crochets*	square brackets

However, French makes considerable use in addition of *guillemets*, i.e. « . . . » (see below).

One notable difference between the two languages relates to the use of quotation marks:

(i) The beginning of a passage in dialogue may be indicated either by *guillemets* or by a dash. In either case, each change of speaker is indicated by a dash and *not* by *guillemets*, which, when used, mark only the beginning and end of the complete exchange. Note, too, that there is no formal indication (i.e. neither a dash nor *guillemets*) that phrases such as *dit-il* 'he said', *répondis-je* 'I answered', do not form part of the quotation.

(ii) Passages in direct speech are often broken up, within sentences and even at the end of sentences (including questions), by *points de suspension.*

(iii) Brief quotations incorporated in the text and other items that in English would be enclosed in inverted commas are usually placed between *guillemets* in French (though single or double inverted commas are sometimes used):

These points are illustrated by the following extracts:

(a) *Elle balbutia. Mais lui, comprenant, s'abandonna à une colère épouvantable.*

— Quelle honte ! cria-t-il. Vous voilà voleuse, maintenant ! Et qu'arriverait-il, si l'on vous surprenait ? Je serais la fable de la ville.

— C'est pour toi, Ovide, murmurait-elle.

— Voleuse, ma mère est voleuse ! Vous croyez peut-être que je vole aussi, moi, que je suis venu ici pour voler, que ma seule ambition est d'allonger les mains et de voler ! Mon Dieu ! quelle idée avez-vous donc de moi ?

<div align="right">(Zola, La Conquête de Plassans)</div>

(b) *La réponse vint, catégorique:*

« Non !

— Alors, qui est-ce ? On ne l'a jamais vu dans le pays ! II ne vient pas d'étrangers ici . . .

— Je ne sais pas . . . »

Elle s'obstinait, avec une subtilité instinctive de femme.

« Le maire t'a toujours détesté . . . C'est vrai que tu as dîné chez lui ce soir ? . . .

— C'est vrai . . . »

Elle trépigna d'impatience.

« Mais alors, dis-moi quelque chose ! Il le faut ! Ou je te jure que je vais croire que . . . »

Elle n'allait pas plus loin.

(Simenon, *Le Port des brumes*)

(c) *Au bout d'un moment, il m'a regardé et il m'a demandé : « Pourquoi ? » mais sans reproche, comme s'il s'informait. J'ai dit : « Je ne sais pas. » Alors, tortillant sa moustache blanche, il a déclaré sans me regarder : « Je comprends. »*

(Camus, *L'Étranger*)

(d) *A la lumière du théâtre afghan, quel doit être le rôle de l'alliance atlantique ? A la conception française s'oppose la vision américaine d'une organisation appelée à devenir une alliance « globale », qui se transforme peu à peu en une « communauté des démocraties ».*

(*Le Monde*, 28 November 2006)

Division into syllables

6   (i) The following rules apply to the *written* language:

(a) A single consonant between vowels goes with the following syllable, e.g. *au-to-mo-bi-le*, *ra-pi-di-té*; note that, for this purpose, the groups *ch* [ʃ], *ph* [f], *th* [t], *gn* [ɲ], which each represent one sound, count as single consonants and are never split, e.g. *ma-chi-nal, té-lé-pho-ner*, *ma-thé-ma-ti-que*, *si-gner*.

(b) Except for the groups mentioned under a and c, two consonants occurring together are divided, the first going with the preceding syllable, the second with the following, e.g. *ar-gent*, *por-ter*, *ap-par-te-ment*, *al-ti-tu-de*, *oc-cu-per*.

(c) Pairs of consonants, of which the second is *l* or *r* (except the groups *-rl-*, *-nl-*, *-nr-*) are not divided and go with the following syllable, e.g. *pa-trie*, *li-brai-rie*, *ou-vrir*, *pu-blic*, *rè-gle-ment* (but *par-ler*, *Sen-lis*, *Hen-ri*).

(d) Where three or more consonants come together, the first two usually go with the preceding syllable, except that the groups referred to in a and c above are not of course divided, e.g. *obs-ti-né*, *pers-pec-ti-ve*, *promp-ti-tu-de*, *sculp-teur*, *ron-fle-ment*, *ins-truc-tion*, *con-trai-re*.

(e) Occasionally, the rules set out in c and d are not observed, a division according to etymology being preferred, e.g. *hé-mi-sphère* (cf. *sphère*), *con-stant*, *in-stant* (both from a prefix and the root of the Latin verb *stare*, to stand).

(f) Adjacent vowels that fall into separate syllables in pronunciation are also theoretically in separate syllables in the written language, but see ii,c, below.

(ii) When words are divided at the end of a line, the division is indicated as in English by a hyphen. Note that:

(a) The division should always coincide with a division between syllables, e.g. *cha-ritable* or *chari-table*, not *char-itable*.

(b) A syllable consisting only of one or more consonants and *-e* should never be carried over on its own, so, *pu-blique*, *impos-sible*, not *publi-que*, *impossi-ble*.

(c) Adjacent vowels should never be divided even when theoretically they fall into separate syllables, so *che-vrier* not *chevri-er*; this means that, since both *po-ète*, *thé-âtre* and (in accordance with b above) *poè-te*, *théâ-tre* are unacceptable, words such as these should not be divided.

7   In the spoken language, similar rules apply. In particular:

(a) A single consonant between vowels goes with the following syllable, e.g. [a-re-te] *arrêter*, [te-le-fɔ-ne] *téléphoner*, [vi-la] *villa*.

(b) Pairs of consonants are split except those ending in [l] or [r] (but the group [rl] is an exception to the exception), e.g. [par-ti] *parti*, [ar-me] *armée*, [ar-ʃi-tɛk-ty-ral] *architectural*, [al-tɛr-ne] *alterner*, [plas-tik] *plastique*, [ap-ti-tyd] *aptitude*, [py-blik] *public*,

[a-pli-ke] *appliquer*, [a-gra-ve] *aggraver*, [a-bri] *abri*, [pa-tri] *patrie*, [par-le] *parler*, [ɔr-li] *Orly*.

(c) A final consonant that is normally silent is pronounced in certain circumstances before a word beginning with a vowel, and then counts as part of the following syllable, e.g. [le-za-ni-mo] *les animaux*, [œ̃-le-ʒɛ-rɛ̃-si-dã] *un léger incident*, [œ̃-na-mi] *un ami*. This running on of a final consonant is known as *liaison*.

Hyphens

8 (i) Hyphens must be used when a word is divided at the end of a line, in which case the division must be made at a syllable boundary, e.g. *télé-phone, par-tir* (see **6**,i and ii).

(ii) Many compound words are hyphenated, e.g. *grand-mère* 'grandmother', *semi-conducteur* 'semiconductor', *sourd-muet* 'deaf and dumb', *ci-dessus* 'above (i.e. earlier in the same piece of writing)', *là-bas* 'over there'. There is, however, considerable inconsistency (compare, for example, *au-dessous*, *par-dessous* 'below', *le porte-monnaie* 'purse' and *vis-à-vis* 'opposite, facing', with *en dessous* 'below', *le portefeuille* 'wallet' and *face à face* 'face to face') and few rules can be given. (Note, however, that all adverbial expressions in *au-*, *ci-*, *là-* and *par-* have hyphens.) In case of doubt, consult a dictionary.

Note the use of hyphens in names of streets, avenues, squares, bridges, stations, etc., even when the elements in question (e.g. first name or title + surname, name of monarch, etc. + number) are not normally hyphenated:

> *avenue Albert-1ᵉʳ-de-Monaco*, *avenue Général-Leclerc*, *avenue du Président-Kennedy*, *avenue George-V*, *boulevard Vincent-Auriol*, *gare St-Lazare*, *place Charles-de-Gaulle*, *place de la Reine-Astrid*, *quai Henri-IV*, *rue de l'Abbé-Grégoire*, *rue Paul-Valéry*, *rue du Professeur-Louis-Renault*, *pont Alexandre-III*, *square Charles-Dickens*

Note too that, in street-names, etc., titles are capitalized, contrary to normal practice (see **4**,iii).

(iii) Names of French towns, departments, etc., consisting of more than one word are hyphenated, e.g. *Aix-en-Provence, Colombey-les-deux-Églises*, *Hautes-Pyrénées*, *Saint-Denis*, *Seine-et-Marne*; this does not apply to an initial definite article, e.g. *Le Havre*, *La Ferté-sous-Jouarre*, *Les Andelys*.

Foreign place-names in which a noun is preceded by an adjective are hyphenated, e.g. *la Grande-Bretagne* 'Great Britain', *la Nouvelle-Écosse* 'Nova Scotia', as are *le Royaume-Uni* 'the United Kingdom', *les États-Unis* 'the United States', *les Pays-Bas* 'the Netherlands', but most other names involving a following adjective are not, e.g. *l'Arabie saoudite* 'Saudi Arabia', *la Colombie britannique* 'British Columbia', nor are *le pays de Galles* 'Wales', *l'Irlande du Nord* 'Northern Ireland', *l'Afrique du Sud* 'South Africa', etc.

Note also the hyphen in such Christian names as *Anne-Marie*, *Jean-Pierre*.

(iv) For the use of hyphens with cardinal and ordinal numerals, e.g. *dix-sept* '17', *vingt-deux* '22', *trente-cinquième* '35th', see **178** and **180**. Note in particular that hyphens are not used before or after the conjunction *et* (e.g. *vingt et un* '21') or with *cent* '100', *mille* '1000', or *centième* '100th', *millième* '1000th' (e.g. *deux cent trente-sept* '237', *deux millième* '2000th').

(v) For the combination of personal pronouns with *-même*, e.g. *moi-même* 'myself', see **215**.

(vi) For *-ci*, *-là* with demonstratives, e.g. *cette maison-ci* 'this house', *celui-là* 'that one', see **237** and **238**.

(vii) A hyphen is used with personal pronouns (including *y* and *en*), *ce* and *on* following the verb; if there are two such personal pronouns they are also linked to one another by a hyphen except when the first is an elided form (i.e. *m'*, *t'* or *l'* for *me*, *te*, *le* or *la*), e.g.:

> *Regardez-la !* 'Look at her!', *Donnez-le-moi* 'Give it to me', *Allez-vous-en !* 'Go away!', *Réfléchissez-y !* 'Think about it', *Voulez-vous ?* 'Will you?', *Puis-je vous aider ?* 'May I help you?', *Oui, dit-il,* ' "Yes", he said', *Est-ce vrai ?* 'Is it true?', *Que peut-on dire ?* 'What can one say?', *Donne-m'en trois* 'Give me three of them', *Va-t'en !* 'Go away!'

If one of the pronouns *il*, *elle* or *on* follows a verb ending in a vowel, a *-t-* preceded and followed by hyphens is inserted, e.g.

Où va-t-il ? 'Where is he going?', *Peut-être viendra-t-il demain* 'Perhaps he will come tomorrow', *Oui, ajoute-t-elle* ' "Yes", she adds', *Chante-t-elle ?* 'Does she sing?' *A-t-on le temps d'y aller ?* 'Have we time to go there?'

Accents and the cedilla

9   (i) The acute accent (*accent aigu*) (´) is used only on the letter *e*, e.g. *été* 'summer'.

(ii) The grave accent (*accent grave*) (`) is used:

(a) over an *e*, e.g. *très* 'very', *j'achète* 'I buy'

(b) over an *a* in a very few words, the most frequently occurring being *à* 'to, at' and *là* 'there', which also appears in *voilà* 'there is' and (*au*) *delà* (*de*) 'beyond'; note that there is no accent on *cela* 'that' and its reduced form *ça* (not to be confused with the adverb *çà*, as in *çà et là* 'here and there')

(c) over *u* in the one word *où* 'where'.

(iii) The circumflex accent (*accent circonflexe*) (ˆ) is used with all vowels except *y*, e.g. *tâche* 'task', *être* 'to be', *dîner* 'to dine', *côte* 'coast', *sûr* 'sure'. (In some words, the circumflex, which serves no useful purpose, was introduced in the seventeenth century, though the French Academy did not adopt it in its dictionary until 1740, in place of an *s* that had disappeared from pronunciation several centuries before, e.g. *pâte, fête, maître, île, hôte*, for earlier *paste, feste, maistre, isle, hoste*. Some of these words had passed into English where the [s] remains either in pronunciation, in *paste*, *feast*, *master*, *host*, or, in the word *isle*, in spelling only.)

Accents over capitals are sometimes omitted, in particular with a capital *A* representing the preposition *à* (though even here the accent, *À*, is increasingly found).

10   The letter *c* with a cedilla (*cédille*), i.e. *ç*, occurs only before one or other of the vowels *a*, *o* or *u*, where it indicates that the pronunciation is [s] not [k], e.g. *je commençais* 'I was beginning', *nous commençâmes* 'we began', *nous plaçons* 'we place', *j'ai reçu* 'I have received', *nous reçûmes* 'we received', from the verbs *commencer*, *placer* and *recevoir* respectively.

Note that *c* is *always* pronounced [s] before *e* or *i* and so *never* takes a cedilla before either of these vowels.

Diaeresis

11   The diaeresis (*tréma*) (¨) has three principal functions:

(a) It indicates that the second of two adjacent vowels belongs to a separate syllable, e.g. *je haïs* 'I hated', pronounced [ai] (contrast *je hais* 'I hate' [ɛ]), *Saül* [sayl] (contrast *Paul* [pɔl]), *Noël* 'Christmas' [nɔɛl].

(b) In words such as *ambiguïté* 'ambiguity' it indicates that *-guï-* is pronounced [gɥi].

(c) Over the *-e* of such words as the feminine adjectives *aiguë* 'acute', *ambiguë* 'ambiguous', *contiguë* 'adjacent', it indicates that the pronunciation is [gy]. (Otherwise, *-gue* would be pronounced [g] as in *figue* [fig] 'fig'.)
    It also occurs over an *e* in a few proper names, the best known being *Saint-Saëns* [sɛ̃sɑ̃ːs] and *madame de Staël* [stal].

Elision

12   Elision in French occurs when the final vowel of a word is dropped before another word beginning with a vowel (this term includes words beginning with mute *h* – see 3). The fact that a vowel has been elided is indicated by an apostrophe. Note that, with the exception of the words *la* (see a and b below) and *si* (see f below), the only vowel that can be elided in French is *e*.
    Elision occurs in the following circumstances (for exceptions, see the end of this section):

(a) The *e* of the pronouns *je*, *me*, *te*, *se*, *le*, *ce* and the *a* of *la* are elided before a verb beginning with a vowel or mute *h* and, provided the pronouns precede the verb, before the pronouns *y* and *en*, e.g. *J'ai* 'I have', *Il m'avait vu* 'He had seen me', *Je t'offre*

ce livre 'I am offering you this book', *Il s'est levé* 'He stood up', *Elle l'adore* 'She adores him', *Je l'aime* 'I love her', *J'y habite* 'I live there', *Je l'y ai vue* 'I have seen her there', *Je t'en donnerai* 'I'll give you some'. (Note that the forms *-m'en* and *-t'en* can occur *after* a verb in the imperative, e.g. *Donnez-m'en* 'Give me some', *Va-t'en* 'Go away'.) These words are not elided in writing in other circumstances, e.g. *Puis-je en prendre ?* 'May I take some?', *Dois-je y aller ?* 'Am I to go there?', *Donnez-le à Henri* 'Give it to Henry'.

(b) The vowel of the definite articles *le* and *la* is elided before a noun or adjective beginning with a vowel or mute *h*, e.g. *le grand homme* 'the great man' but *l'homme* 'the man', *l'autre homme* 'the other man', *la petite île* 'the small island' but *l'île* 'the island'.

(c) The *e* of *de*, *ne*, *que* and *jusque* 'up to, until' is elided before a vowel or mute *h*, e.g. *Il est parti d'Amiens* 'He has set off from Amiens', *N'ouvrez pas la porte !* 'Don't open the door!', *Je crois qu'elle viendra* 'I think she'll come', *Il chante mieux qu'Henri* 'He sings better than Henry', *jusqu'alors* 'up till then', *jusqu'en 1984* 'up to 1984', *jusqu'où ?* 'how far?'

(d) The *e* of the conjunctions *lorsque* 'when', *puisque* 'since', *quoique* 'although', is elided before the pronouns *il, elle, ils, elles*, *on*, and the indefinite articles *un* and *une*, e.g. *lorsqu'un enfant naît* 'when a child is born', *puisqu'on ne peut pas partir* 'since one cannot leave', *quoiqu'elle soit malade* 'although she is ill', but *quoique Alfred soit malade* 'although Alfred is ill', *lorsque arrivera le beau temps* 'when the fine weather arrives', etc.

(e) The *e* of *presque* 'almost' and *quelque* 'some' is elided **only** in the words *la presqu'île* 'peninsula', *quelqu'un* 'someone', and the infrequently used *quelqu'un de . . .* , *quelqu'une de . . .* 'one or other of . . .', e.g. *quelqu'une de mes publications* 'one or other of my publications', but *presque impossible* 'almost impossible', *presque à la fin* 'almost at the end', *avec quelque impatience* 'with some impatience'.

(f) The *i* of *si* 'if' is elided **only** before the pronouns *il, ils*, e.g. *s'il peut*, *s'ils peuvent* 'if he (they) can', but *si elle peut* 'if she can', *si Ibsen vivait toujours* 'if Ibsen were still living'.

Note that there is no elision before *oui* 'yes' (e.g. *Ce oui m'a surpris* 'That yes surprised me'), or before the numerals *huit* 'eight', *onze* 'eleven', and their ordinais, e.g. *le huit janvier* 'the eighth of January', *le onze de France* 'the French eleven (= team)', *la onzième fois* 'the eleventh time'. Note too the lack of elision before *un* and *une* meaning 'number one', e.g. *la porte du un* 'the door of (room) number one', *la une* 'page one, the front page (of a newspaper)'.

There is usually no elision (though it is possible) before the names of letters, e.g. *le a*, *le i*, *en forme de S* [də ɛs] 'S-shaped'.

The *e* of *de* is sometimes not elided before the title of a book, periodical, etc., e.g. *un numéro spécial de « Arts et Modes »* 'a special number of *Arts et Modes*', or before a word that is being quoted, e.g. *la première syllabe de « autel »* 'the first syllable of *autel*'.

Medium and register

13   Any description of a language has to take account of the fact that differences, and sometimes far-reaching differences, exist within any language depending on the circumstances in which it is being used. Leaving aside regional differences, which are beyond the scope of this book, we shall need to draw attention to differences depending on **medium** and **register**.

'**Medium**' refers to the fact that language may be either spoken or written. In the case of French, the differences between the two media may be considerable. To take a few simple examples, some forms that are clearly distinguished in writing are invariable in speech, including many masculine and feminine adjectives, e.g. masc. *cher*, *vrai*, fem. *chère*, *vraie* (see **78**, **82**), singular and plural nouns and adjectives, e.g. *(la) grande maison*, *(les) grandes maisons* (see **97**–**98**, **101**–**104**), and various forms of verbs such as *(je) finis*, *(il) finit* (see **359**) or *(je) donnais*, *(il) donnait*, *(ils) donnaient* (see **351**). A striking syntactical difference between the two media is provided by the preterite tense (otherwise known as the 'past historic') (see **405**, **408**, **410**), which has almost disappeared from speech in all but the most formal registers (on this term, see below) but still flourishes in some registers in writing.

'**Register**' is defined differently by different linguists. A broad definition of the term takes it to include what is sometimes termed the 'field of discourse' (e.g. scientific or religious fields), but, more generally, 'register' refers specifically to the degree of formality characterizing a given situation. On the basis of this narrower definition, we shall have occasion to refer to a number of important features of grammar where it is essential to take account of the level of formality involved. (Register can also relate to vocabulary, for example *bouffer* as an informal equivalent of *manger* 'to eat', cf. English 'to chuck' as an informal equivalent of 'to throw'. That, however, is outside the scope of this book.)

There is not, of course, an absolute distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' language. We are faced, rather, with a cline ranging from 'highly formal' to 'very informal' or 'colloquial' (see some examples below).

It is important for non-native speakers of a language to be aware of differences of register, i.e. of what linguistic forms are appropriate to a given social context. To use inadvertently, i.e. not deliberately for purposes of effect, features belonging to an inappropriate register (e.g. to use very colloquial forms on formal occasions or specifically literary forms in familiar conversation) can give rise to highly incongruous (and possibly shocking or amusing) results. It would, for example, be inappropriate to omit the negative *ne* when one is making a serious speech (see 556) or, on the other hand, to use the imperfect subjunctive in a familiar conversation (e.g. *je (ne) voulais pas que tu le fisses* 'I didn't want you to do it', see 496–506). On the other hand, one cannot imagine that, in addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2006, the French President, Jacques Chirac, would have said *Y a pas de fatalité . . .* instead of *Il n'y a pas de fatalité à cette situation* 'There is nothing inevitable about this situation'.

'High register' and 'low register' cannot be totally equated with writing and speech respectively. In other words, the topics of medium and register overlap; one can encounter both 'high register' and 'low register' in either writing or speech. For example, one would normally adopt a more formal style, i.e. use a higher register, not only in writing a report or an article or an application for a job, but also in, say, a letter of condolence or complaint, than one would in letters to close friends or relations. On the other hand, one would normally find a much higher register being used in speeches, lectures or sermons than in everyday conversation and,

in conversation, one would probably use a more informal register when chatting with close friends or relatives than when speaking to strangers.

For comment on some of the more salient register features of French grammar, see, for example, 556 (on the omission of *ne*), 583–595 (on questions), 602 (on dislocation and fronting).

The Noun Phrase

Introduction

14   A noun phrase always includes either

(a) a **noun** (e.g. *book*, *truth*, *elephants*), which may be accompanied by a determiner (see 23) and/or an adjective or adjectives, and/or an adjectival phrase (e.g. 'a *coffee* cup', 'une tasse *à café*') or adjectival clause (e.g. 'the man *who came to dinner*'), or

(b) a **pronoun** (e.g. *I, him, these, mine, someone, nothing, themselves, who?*), some of which may (like nouns, but much less frequently) be accompanied by adjectival expressions, or

(c) a **noun-clause**, i.e. a clause fulfilling similar functions to a noun (e.g. 'I believe *what he says*' = more or less 'I believe *his statement*', '*that he is angry* distresses me' = more or less '*his anger* (or *the fact of his anger*) distresses me').

The functions of a noun phrase in a sentence, as far as English and French (but not necessarily other languages) are concerned, can be classified as follows (15–22). The noun phrase may be: