



## FORM-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION IN THE FRENCH L2 CLASSROOM

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**Resum. Instrucció basada en l'atenció a la forma a la classe de francès L2.** Aquest article estudia la integració de la gramàtica en el mètode comunicatiu a la classe de llengua. Considera l'adquisició de l'alternança masculí/femení dels adjectius regulars francesos i argumenta que caldria ensenyar aquest tret gramatical subratllant la regularitat de la concordança de l'adjectiu en francès. Es fa una revisió de dotze llibres de text de primer curs de francès utilitzats als Estats Units, anotant que, amb només dues excepcions, gairebé tots posen èmfasi en una atenció basada *en les formes* (paradigmes individuals) enlloc de *en la forma* (el sistema subjacent a la gramàtica). Es conclou amb algunes suggerències sobre com els llibres de text podrien adreçar de forma més efectiva la dicotomia masculí/femení de l'adjectiu francès.

**Paraules clau:** francès, enfocament comunicatiu, adquisició de L2, concordança de l'adjectiu, llibres de text.

**Abstract. Form-focused instruction in the French L2 classroom.** This paper considers the integration of grammar within the communicative method of second language instruction. It discusses the acquisition of the masculine/feminine alternation of regular French adjectives, arguing that this grammatical feature should be taught to students by underscoring the regularity of adjective agreement in French. It then reviews twelve French first-year university-level textbooks popular in the U.S., noting that with two exceptions, they emphasize a Focus on Forms (individual paradigms) and not on *form* (the system behind the grammar). It concludes with suggestions on how textbooks could most effectively address the masculine/feminine dichotomy of French adjectives.

**Key words:** French, Communicative Approach, L2 acquisition, adjective agreement, first-year college textbooks.



## 1. Introduction

A great deal of recent pedagogical theory advocates a Focus on Form in the L2 (second language) classroom (cf. Ellis 1990, Herschensohn 1990, 1993, 2003, Harley 1993, VanPatten 1996, Ellis and Schmidt 1997, Williams 1999, Lyster, 2004, Smith 2005, Davis 2009, Kim 2009, Lowen and Reissner 2009). To paraphrase Doughty (1998, p. 14), the question for most researchers today, is not *if* grammar should be taught in the L2 classroom, but rather *how* and *when* it should be taught. This is in contrast, however, to the actual practice of many L2 classrooms, which have a largely communicative focus. A review of beginning textbooks at the university level in the U.S., which can often drive L2 curricula, shows that the picture is far more complex, although not necessarily coherent.

This paper begins with a brief overview of the Communicative Approach, followed by a discussion of Focus on Form. We then turn to actual practice in the L2 classroom, by considering a sample grammatical topic introduced early in the first semester of beginning French classes, namely the masculine/feminine forms of adjectives. We consider this alternation because of its importance for beginning French learners, if they are to achieve multilingual competence, in the sense of Cook (2008). Further, this is an area of grammar where there is a disconnect between L1 acquisition of gender and how it is taught in beginning classrooms Lyster (2006, 2004). Finally, a recent study (Arteaga *et al.* 2003) present empirical evidence for the benefits of a form-focused approach to gender in adjectives.

In this work, we base our discussion on twelve first-year French texts to identify the method used for presenting this alternation. The reason for our selection of these textbooks is their popularity in the U.S. at present; these particular texts represents an accurate cross-selection of the most widely used textbooks in the United States. We note that their presentation of adjectival gender agreement is almost uniformly the traditional, orthographic approach, despite the general communicative teaching philosophy of the book in question. Finally, we conclude by suggesting improvements for the presentation of adjective agreement in French.

## 2. Grammatical explanations within the communicative approach

Since the 1980s, the teaching style employed in most L2 classrooms has been the Communicative Approach. The class is largely taught in the target language, so that students are provided with input. The emphasis in communicative classrooms is on *using* the language orally.<sup>1</sup> Syllabi and textbooks emphasize functions, such as “how to apologize”. The focus is on *production*. Typical exercises include role-play, group work, and information-gap exercises. As noted by Cook (2008) among others, the communicative

<sup>1</sup> This is not to say, however, that reading, writing, and listening are not addressed within this approach.

pedagogical model is a configurative one, in that students are expected to learn from each other. Example (1) illustrates a typical communicative exercise:

(1) Continuons! A. Il y a trois ans... Comment était votre vie il y a trois ans? Modèle J'avais quinze ans, j'allais à l'école, j'avais beaucoup de copains<sup>2</sup>. (Heleinman *et al.* 2009, p. 273)

Textbooks espousing the communicative approach have struggled with the question of formal grammar. Early textbooks relegated much grammatical information to footnotes. Indeed, consider the explanation given in *Pas à pas* (Brown 1991) for the use of the subjunctive after the verbs *croire* 'to believe' and *penser* 'to think'. The entire grammar presentation in the text itself regarding the use of the subjunctive after verbs of doubt is given in four words (plus examples), whereas the footnote outlining the mood choice after these two verbs takes up 46 words! Other communicative textbooks, such as *Deux Mondes* (Terrell *et al.* 2009), continue to relegate all grammar to supplemental sections. Classroom time is solely devoted to communication. It would seem, as stated by Doughty (1998, p. 14), that there continues to be "a total taboo on teaching grammar in communicative classrooms". In the next section, we present a more recent approach to grammar presentations, Focus on Form.

### 3. A Focus on Form

How do students learn an L2 with no Focus on Form? The assumption underlying the communicative approach is that students will achieve grammatical accuracy once they receive enough input (cf. Krashen 1981). However, as many researchers have pointed out, mastery of grammar does not, in fact, develop in such a teaching methodology, unless there is a focus on grammatical systems (i.e., *form*) as opposed to individual paradigms (i.e., *forms*). For example, in a series of studies of Canadian immersion schools, researchers such as Harley and Swain (1984), Hammerly (1987), Day and Shapson (1991), and Davidson and Snow (1995), noted that while students in immersion programs fare better than their counterparts in traditional classroom settings with regard to oral fluency and comprehension, they still lack accuracy in their control of grammatical forms, such as nominal gender, aspect, tense marking, and the pragmatic use of *tu* 'you-sg-informal' vs. *vous* 'you-sg-formal/you-pl-informal/formal.'

Given the lack of grammatical competence as reflected in the interlanguage (i.e., their L2 grammatical competence) of many students from communicative classrooms, much recent research in language pedagogy has advocated a form-focused approach, noting

<sup>2</sup> 'Let's continue! A. Three years ago... What was your life like three years ago? Model: I was fifteen, I went to school, I had a lot of friends.'

that input can be tailored to promote acquisition of specific phenomena (Ellis 1990, Herschensohn 1990, 1993, 2003, Long 1991, Harley 1993, VanPatten 1996, Leeman *et al.* 1995, Lee and Valdman 2009, Lowen and Reissner 2005, Lyster 2004, 2009, Davis 2009, Kim 2009). This does not mean, however, that context-based learning is sacrificed in the process. Indeed, Long (1991, p. 44) stresses the importance of grammatical generalizations *vis à vis* specific word forms, so that the emphasis is on communication, or meaning.

Current debate contrasts an implicit vs. an explicit grammar presentation. The former includes input flooding (i.e., presenting students with several examples of the target grammatical point) or recasting (i.e., correcting students' utterances by repeating the correct form). An explicit Focus on Form, on the other hand, directs student attention to the grammatical concept in question. Regardless of what form the input takes, however, it is generally accepted that a Focus on Form is needed for L2 learners to develop grammatical competence. For example, in studies by Doughty (1998), Lyster (2004), Milton (2008), Davis (2009), and Kim (2009), it has been shown that a Focus on Form, whether explicit or implicit, is advantageous over input alone for production. Many researchers also point to the importance of negative feedback in the L2 setting (cf. White 1991). Regardless of the kind of attention to form (implicit or explicit), all research points to the importance of embedding the explanation within a meaningful context.

#### 4. French adjectival morphology

Adjective agreement is a highly important topic in L2 French, given its communicative function, and therefore is presented quite early in the first semester of French. French adjectives are of two main types. One is invariable adjectives like *calme* 'calm' which inflect for number but not gender (masculine [kalm] feminine [kalm])<sup>3</sup>. The other is variable adjectives like *petit*, 'little' which show a difference in both gender and number. From the point of view of the written language, the crucial difference is that in the case of variable adjectives, an orthographic *e* is added to the end, so that the feminine *petite* ends in an *e*, whereas the masculine *petit* does not. This paradigm is illustrated in (2):

- (2) *calme* 'calm' m. [kalm] f. [kalm] mf pl. [kalm]  
*petit* 'little' m. [pəti] f. [pətɪ] m pl. [pəti] f pl. [pətɪ]

From the point of view of the oral language, however, the situation is arguably quite different. Many linguists, including Rigault, (1968) Schane, (1968), Tranel (1981, 1995), Valdman, (1970, 1976), and Herschensohn (1990, 1993, 2003) have argued that there

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, in order to represent pronunciation of adjectival forms in French, the International Phonetic Alphabet, or IPA, is used.

is a morphophonological alternation (i.e., one whose forms are represented in pronunciation) at work here. While the specific analyses of these researchers differ and are beyond the scope of the present paper, they nonetheless share the view that what distinguishes the feminine adjective from the masculine in French is the presence of the final consonant, which must be lexically specified in some way. In other words, it is the final [t] that indicates that [pətɪt] is the feminine of [pəti], just as the final [d] indicates that [almād] ‘German’ is the feminine of [almā] and the final [z] indicates that [frāsez] ‘French’ is the feminine of [frāse]. The consonants that enter into this masculine/feminine alternation are a subset of French consonants, limited to [z], [d], [ʁ], [s], [t], and [j].

The examples in (3) illustrate this morphophonological alternation (examples adapted from Tranel 1981, 1995):

(3) French adjectival morphology

masculine singular		feminine singular		
allemande	[almād]	allemand	[almā]	‘German m/f.’
bavard	[bavaʁ]	bavarde	[bavaʁd]	‘chatty m/f.’
gros	[gʁo]	grosse	[gʁos]	‘big m/f.’
long	[lɔ̃]	longue	[lɔ̃g]	‘long m/f.’
franc	[frā]	franche	[frāʃ]	‘frank m/f.’
heureux	[øʁø]	heureuse	[øʁøz]	‘happy m/f.’
premier	[pʁəmje]	première	[pʁəmjeʁ]	‘first m/f.’
pareil	[parɛ]	pareille	[parɛj]	‘similar m/f.’

As shown in the examples above, while it is possible to arrive at the masculine form, given the feminine form, the reverse is not true. This is because the feminine form, minus the final consonant, yields the masculine form. In other words, while the masculine form may be derived from the feminine, no rule governs the formation of the feminine from the masculine. Importantly, this is a phonological rule and not an orthographic one. In other words, the rule in question is not “dropping the final e”, but rather, dropping the final pronounced consonant of the feminine form. As an example, consider *allemand/allemande* and *franc/franche*. If the speaker learns the masculine forms *allemand* and *franc*, which have the same phonological ending [ā], he or she cannot form the feminine. However, if the language learner memorizes the feminine, through a simple rule, namely final consonant deletion, he or she can derive the masculine form, except for cases like *calme*,

as explained above. In such an analysis, therefore, the fact that *allemande* ends in [d] and *françe* ends in [f] is a lexically specified fact particular to the adjective in question<sup>4</sup>.

The central point here is that for variable adjectives (except those that are patently irregular, like *beaulbel* m. 'beautiful', *belle* f. 'beautiful') the masculine form *is* predictable, as it can be derived from the feminine form.<sup>5</sup> One advantage of such an analysis, therefore, is that adjectives such as *blanche* are no longer considered to irregular. Therefore, in a lesson that incorporates a focus on (phonological) *form*, students would be presented with the morphophonological alternation, with emphasis on the role of the final consonant.<sup>6</sup> This would be contrasted with the traditional presentation, which would instead focus on the individual (orthographic) *forms*, drawing students' attention to the mute *e*, which has no phonological reality. In the latter approach, students would be taught to view French adjective agreement as a completely arbitrary phenomenon. Further, they would come to have the erroneous notion that French spelling is the basis for the alternation, instead of viewing the orthography as a means to reflect the pronunciation.

Arteaga *et al.* (2003) provide empirical evidence that a presentation underlining the regularity of adjectival agreement results in significantly improved student comprehension. In a study of seventy-two first-semester students at the University of Utah, the authors found that when students were presented with a lesson that focused on the morphophonological alternation of French adjectives, using the feminine form as a basis, they scored significantly higher in a posttest, than did students who were taught to attend to the orthographic form (85% vs. 66%). The posttest presented semantically ambiguous lexical items like *Claude*, which can be either masculine or feminine. The first four sentences from the post test are given in (4):

(4) Post test

1. Claude est français. 'Claude is French (m.)'
2. Dominique est anglaise. 'Dominique is English (f.)'
3. Michel est petit. 'Michel is short (m.)'
4. Alexis est allemande. 'Alexis is German (f.)' (Arteaga et al. 2003, p. 70)

<sup>4</sup> An anonymous reviewer raised the question as to how French L1 speakers learn adjectival agreement. Results of recent studies are mixed: Roulet-Amiot and Jakubowicz (2006) argue that a rule similar to the one we have proposed in (4) is operative in children after the age of 4. Royle and Valois (in press), while not excluding this possibility, claim that for children under the age of four, no rule linking the feminine form of the adjective to the masculine form. As these authors state, more studies are needed. However, crucially, both accounts analyze the feminine form as lexically specified.

<sup>5</sup> The form *bel* is used before masculine singular nouns beginning with a vowel, such as *bel éléphant* 'beautiful elephant.'

<sup>6</sup> We leave open the question as to whether the consonant in question is latent, as argued by Tranel (1981, 1995). Such an analysis is in no way incompatible with our claims.

This study points to the importance of phonological form for beginning French students. We next turn to twelve first-year university-level French textbooks to determine whether or not adjectival alternation is based on the oral language (i.e., the feminine form) or on the written one (i.e., the masculine one).

## 5. Textbook treatment

Given the preceding literature review, the question arises whether or not the grammatical presentation in first-year French language textbooks reflects in any measure the current Focus on Form in second language acquisition research. In other words, do textbooks, with their communicative focus, stress the regularity of adjectival alternation, whether implicitly or explicitly? To determine how adjectival agreement is broached, we evaluated the presentation of adjectives in twelve first-year university-level French textbooks, which are popular in the U.S. at present. Despite their communicative focus, virtually all of the textbooks reviewed presented a very traditional analysis of adjective alternation, leading students to focus on the role of the silent *e*. For example, consider the following from the book *Paroles*:

To form the feminine adjective, you most frequently add the letter *e* to the masculine form, français/française, américain/américaine<sup>7</sup>. Because the last letter of a word is usually silent, the spoken masculine form often ends with a vowel sound, and the spoken feminine form often ends with a consonant sound. (Magan *et al.* 2005, p. 70)

This explanation underscores the written form, giving students the false impression that the masculine is the base from which the feminine is derived. Other texts give similar explanations. For example, *Deux Mondes*, a highly communicative text, provides the students with the following, very traditional orthographic explanation of adjective agreement in French:

French adjectives change their endings to agree with the gender of the noun they modify. In many cases, this simply means adding *-e* to the adjective to agree with a feminine noun; in other cases, the adjective has two different forms.

Joël est *petit* et Marise est *petite* aussi. 'Joël is short and Marise is also short.'

François Lasalle est *vieux* et Marie Lasalle est *vieille* aussi. 'François Lasalle is old, and Marie Lasalle is also old.' (Terrell *et al.* 2009, p. 13)

<sup>7</sup> 'French m/f,' 'American m/f'.

The above presentation is especially infelicitous, as it places the adjectives *petit/petite* and *vieux/vieille* in the same category, although the former follow a regular pattern, while the latter do not. Yet these authors combine them in the class of adjectives having “two forms”, which gives students the erroneous notion that both are (equally) irregular, and that adjective agreement in French is follows no discernable pattern.

The presentation in *Horizons* is similar, although it refers to a “base form”:

Adjectives in French have different forms, depending on whether they describe a male or a female, and whether they describe one person or more than one. *The masculine singular form of the adjective is used as the base form.* [emphasis mine] To change the form to feminine, add an *-e* to the masculine form (unless it already ends in unaccented *e*). To make it plural, add an *-s*, unless it already ends in *-s* or *-x*.

singulier		pluriel	
m.	f	m	f
petit	petite	petits	petites
jeune	jeune	jeune	jeunes <sup>8</sup>

(Manley *et al.* 2008, p. 34)

Unfortunately, as we have seen, the use of the term “base form” is misguided in this sense, as it is the feminine that provides the basis for the masculine and not the reverse. A few textbooks do refer, albeit obliquely, to pronunciation, within their traditional focus on orthography. For example, the textbook *Motifs* begins its discussion of adjectives with the traditional explanation:

Adjectives describe people, places or things. In French, they agree in number and gender with the noun they modify... Most feminine adjectives are formed by adding an *e* to the masculine singular form. If the masculine form ends in an *e*, the masculine and feminine forms are identical.

masculine	feminine
Il est fort.	Elle est forte <sup>9</sup> .
Le short est jaune.	La robe est jaune. (Jansma and Kassen 2006, p. 26)

The authors then provide students with the following “pronunciation note”:

<sup>8</sup> ‘Small/msg small fsg’ ‘young m/f singular’ ‘small/mpl’ ‘small f sg/f plural small’.

<sup>9</sup> ‘He is short.’ ‘She is short.’ ‘The pair of shorts is yellow.’ ‘The dress is yellow.’



You can often distinguish between feminine and masculine adjectives by listening for the final consonant. In general, final French consonants are pronounced only when followed by an *e*. Il est grand (*d* silent). Elle est granDe (*d* pronounced). Le bureau est petit. La table est petiTe (*t* pronounced). Le cahier est vert. La robe est verTe<sup>10</sup>. (p. 31)

Such a presentation, while directing students to listen for the final consonant, nonetheless confuses the oral and written forms and relates the feminine to the masculine via orthography, rather than the inverse. *Rendez-vous* (Muyskens and Omaggio 2002, p. 57) has a similar mixed focus. After presenting adjective alternation in a traditional orthographic fashion, the authors tell students to “Remember that final *t*, *d*, and *s* which are usually silent in French are pronounced when *e* is added: intelligent [ā] intelligente [āt]”. A similar explanation can be found in *Vis à vis*:

Most feminine adjectives are formed by adding an *-e* to the masculine form. Exception: adjectives whose masculine form ends in an unaccented *-e*.

Alain est persévérant. Sylvie et persévérante<sup>11</sup>.  
Paul est optimiste. Claire est optimiste.

Remember that final *d*, *s*, and *t*, usually silent in French, are pronounced when *-e* is added. (Amon *et al.* 2007, p. 70)

This pseudo-phonetic explanation is particularly problematic, because many final consonants other than [d] and [t] enter into this alternation ([z], [ʁ], [s], and [j].), as indicated above.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, adjectives whose orthographic form ends in *s* in the masculine end in [z], not [s], in the feminine (*e.g.*, *portugais* [pɔʁtygɛ], *portugaise* [pɔʁtygɛz]). Finally, they continue to present the masculine form as the base form, giving students an explanation for deriving the feminine from the masculine instead of the reverse. Once again, the authors of these textbooks have confused the orthography with the spoken language.

Other textbooks, while advocating a traditional approach, differ in that they begin their presentation with invariable adjectives. For example, consider the following, from *Allons-y*:

In French, adjectives agree in gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular or plural) with the person or thing to which they refer.

<sup>10</sup> ‘He is tall.’ ‘She is tall.’ ‘The desk is small.’ ‘The table is small.’ ‘The notebook is green.’ ‘The dress is green.’

<sup>11</sup> ‘Alan is persevering.’ ‘Sylvie is persevering.’ ‘Paul is optimistic.’ ‘Claire is optimistic.’

<sup>12</sup> See also Walz and Pirou (2002) who give students a long list of adjectives ending only in [d] or [t].

1. Some adjectives have identical masculine and feminine forms<sup>13</sup>:

Il est <i>belge</i> . (Belgian)	Elle est <i>belge</i> .
Il est <i>russe</i> . (Russian)	Elle est <i>russe</i> .
Il est <i>suisse</i> . (Swiss)	Elle est <i>suisse</i> .

2. Many adjectives have a form that consists of the masculine form +e

Il est <i>français</i> .	Elle est <i>française</i> .
Il est <i>anglais</i> .	Elle est <i>anglaise</i> .
Il est <i>mexicain</i> .	Elle est <i>mexicaine</i> . (Bragger and Rice 2003, p. 30)

This explanation is rather confusing, because immediately after indicating to students that French adjectives agree in gender and number, the text proceeds to give invariable adjectives, which do not inflect for gender. Once again, the masculine is presented as the base form. Similar approaches can be seen in *Parallèles* (Fouletier-Smith and Le Zotte 2003) and *Rapports* (Walz and Piriou 2002).

From a linguistic point of view, a grammatical presentation that focuses on the orthography of French adjective inflection is undesirable (Herschensohn 1993). As we have seen, the base form of the adjective is indisputably the feminine form, from which the masculine can be derived by a simple rule. The alternative is simply not learnable, either by children or by L2 (second language) learners (cf. Tranel 1981, 1995). After all, children master French adjectival agreement long before they learn how to spell. French orthography reflects an earlier stage in the language in which final consonants were pronounced (approximately before the fourteenth century), but has no synchronic reality (i.e., in the modern language) in the masculine forms. The reason for this is that the underlying consonant, reflected in the spelling, is not predictable. The fact that this alternation is reflected in the orthography of the masculine form is simply irrelevant for L2 acquisition.

There are some exceptions to this general tendency. Of the twelve textbooks that we reviewed, two had notably different presentations of the adjective alternation. *Entre amis* provides the following explanation:

Most adjectives have two pronunciations: one when they refer to a feminine noun and one when they refer to a masculine noun. From an oral point of view, it is usually better to learn the feminine form first. The masculine pronunciation can often be found by dropping the last consonant sound of the feminine.

<sup>13</sup> 'He is Belgian.' 'She is Belgian.' 'He is Russian.' 'She is Russian.' 'He is Swiss.' 'She is Swiss.' 'He is French.' 'She is French.' 'He is Mexican.' 'She is Mexican.'

Barbara est *américaine*. Bob est *américain* aussi. Christine est *française*.  
David est *français* aussi<sup>14</sup>. (Oates and Oukada 2005, p. 16)

After this initial presentation, the text turns to invariable adjectives:

The feminine adjective always ends in a written *-e*. A number of masculine adjectives end in *-e* also. In this case, masculine and feminine forms are identical in pronunciation and spelling.

célibataire fantastique optimiste<sup>15</sup>. (p. 16)

While this text does allude to the *pronunciation* of adjectives, the presentation is nonetheless not ideal. The authors begin their explanation with *américain/américaine* ‘American (m.sg.)/American (f.sg)’ although the masculine form cannot be directly derived from the feminine without nasalizing the vowel. In other words, if students delete the final consonant of [ameriken], they will erroneously arrive at [amerike] instead of the correct [amerikɛ̃]. Furthermore, the succeeding discussion is rather jumbled and mixes pronunciation and orthography. Nonetheless, it is one of the few textbooks to indicate that the feminine is the base form.

*Chez nous* (Valdman *et al.* 2009), first introduces invariable adjectives (p. 39-40) (cf. Walz and Piriou 2002, Bragger and Rice 2003, Fouletier-Smith and Le Zotte 2003). When it turns to variable adjectives, however, some chapters later, (p. 73-74), it clearly designates the feminine as the base form: “Variable adjectives have masculine and feminine forms that differ in pronunciation. Their feminine form ends in a pronounced consonant. To pronounce the masculine, drop the final consonant sound”. The examples given are the following (p. 72): “Anne est amusante et généreuse. Cédric est amusant et généreux<sup>16</sup>”. To reinforce the importance of the rule linking feminine to masculine, the text crosses out the final consonant (e.g., *t* and *x*) in the previous example.

In our view, while the explanation in *Chez nous* is superior to that of the other textbooks, it could be improved. Firstly, the presentation should begin with variable adjectives. This is because, as pointed out by Herschensohn (1993), variable adjectives have a much higher frequency than invariable adjectives. Secondly, the plural forms should not be given in the same paragraph as the masculine/feminine. Further, the exercise that directly follows the variable adjectives also includes invariable adjectives, which do not follow the same final consonant deletion rule. And finally, the authors should use some format (preferably the IPA) to indicate the *pronunciation* of the feminine consonant.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Barbara is American.’ ‘Bob is also American.’ ‘Christine is French.’ ‘David is also French.’

<sup>15</sup> ‘unmarried’ ‘fantastic’ ‘optimistic’

<sup>16</sup> ‘Anne is amusing and generous.’ ‘Cédric is amusing and generous.’

Suggested refinements aside, the explanations in *Entre Amis* and *Chez Nous* do highlight the importance of the feminine form. Unfortunately, however, they clearly do not represent the norm, nor do they seem to foreshadow a trend. Our evaluation has therefore shown that with respect to the presentation of adjective agreement in French, the vast majority of first semester French textbooks continue to have a Focus on Forms. In other words, they consider only the orthographic alternation between masculine and feminine adjectival agreement, in which the feminine form “ends in” [ə], which has no phonetic reality in Modern French.

Such a presentation considers adjectival forms such as *franclmsg* [frā] and *franchelfsg* [frā] as equally irregular as, say, a highly suppletive form, such as *vieuxl* [vjø] / *vieille* / fsg [vje], although by starting with the feminine form, we can arrive at the masculine form for the former adjective but not the latter. In this way, *franclfranche* is no different from say, *patientlmsg* [pasjā] and *patientelfsg* [pasjāt], which is usually presented as a “regular” adjective. While it is true that in the presentation that we advocate, students will then have to learn how the phonological alternation is reflected in spelling, we nonetheless maintain, based on studies such as that of Arteaga *et al.* (2003), that emphasizing that the lexically specified feminine adjective is the base for the masculine, and not vice versa, allows for a Focus on *Form*. In so doing, we are able to make students aware of the overriding logic behind the various adjectival paradigms.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented an overview of the Communicative Approach, which emphasizes production and the development of interlanguage. We then presented an overview of research that has addressed the question of how best to facilitate student language acquisition, advocating not a return of the Focus on Forms, but rather a Focus on Form itself, embedded within a meaningful context. In other words, our goal must be for students to arrive at generalizations regarding L2 grammar. We considered, as an example, French adjectival alternation, suggesting that it be presented to students along the lines outlined by Arteaga *et al.* (2003), so that they are led to view this grammatical point as a part of a largely regular system. We also examined the treatment of French adjectives within twelve popular first-year college French textbooks to see if their design reflects an emphasis on individual members of a paradigm, or rather on the generalization. We found that with two exceptions, *Entre amis* and *Chez nous*, these textbooks, which purport to have a highly communicative focus, actually present a very traditional, orthographic explanation of the adjectival alternation.

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