

PRELIMINARY LESSON

Reading Strategies for Vocabulary Recognition

Learning to read a foreign language is not too different from doing detective work: both involve gathering information, looking for clues, piecing things together in plausible ways in an effort to solve a puzzle or to clarify the unknown. Good detectives, like beginning readers of foreign language, often must resort to guesswork and formulate hypotheses based on the evidence at hand—they must learn to rely on their own resourcefulness.

Probably your most valuable asset is your knowledge of English. Because French and English share a common historical link to Latin, there are a number of features of French that are readily recognizable to people who know English. The following listing of cognates (words of similar spelling and meaning in both languages) and affixes (suffixes and prefixes) offers both a strategy and a schematic framework to develop efficient “word detective” skills while reading French without a dictionary. The items given below are not an exhaustive list, nor are they guaranteed to be 100% foolproof, but if you take time to familiarize yourself with them, you will find they are extremely practical aids for vocabulary recognition and fluent reading.

A. *Cognates*: words that have similar or identical spellings in two different languages. There are three broad categories of French and English cognates: 1) complete or *true cognates*, words which look identical or nearly identical and also share exactly the same meaning in the two languages (*président* = president; *national* = national; *voter* = to vote); 2) partial or *near cognates*, words which look identical or nearly identical and have similar meaning *as well as* some different meaning (*spirituel* = spiritual/witty; *hôtel* = hotel/mansion; *défendre* = to defend/to forbid); and 3) misleading or *false cognates*, words which look similar but have completely different meanings in the two languages (*fat* = conceited; *ride* = wrinkle; *attendre* = to wait for). *False cognates* from the readings will be marked with an asterisk and defined in the *Clefs* under the heading *Mots dangereux* (dangerous words).

B. *Prefixes*: similar word beginnings in French and English. There are a number of prefixes of Latin origin which are easy to recognize in French because they correspond closely or exactly to their English counterparts:

1. *CONTRE-* = COUNTER-/CONTRA- (*contrefaire* = to counterfeit; *contrebande* = contraband)
2. *EXTRA-* = EXTRA- (*extraordinaire* = extraordinary)
3. *INTER-* = INTER- (*international* = international)
4. *INTRA-/INTRO-* = INTRA-/INTRO- (*intraveineux* = intravenous; *introverti* = introverted)
5. *MULTI-* = MULTI-/MULTIPLE- (*multicolore* = multicolored; *multi-risque* = multiple-risk)
6. *POST-* = POST- (*post-scriptum* = postscript)
7. *PRÉ* = PRE- (*préfabriqué* = prefabricated)
8. *SOUS-* = SUB-/UNDER- (*sous-titre* = subtitle; *sous-alimenté* = underfed)
9. *SUR-* = SUR-/SUPER-/OVER- (*surmonter* = surmount, to overcome; *surhomme* = superman)
10. *TRANS-* = TRANS- (*transmetteur* = transmitter)

The following prefixes express negative ideas:

11. *DÉ-/DÉS-* = DIS- (*découragement* = discouragement; *désagréable* = disagreeable)
12. *IM-* = IM-/UN- (*impatient* = impatient; *impopulaire* = unpopular)
13. *IN-* = IN-/UN- (*inhumain* = inhuman; *inintelligent* = unintelligent)

The notion of repetition or repeated action is expressed as follows:

14. *RE-/RÉ-* = *RE-/...AGAIN* (*relire* = to reread, to read again; *régénération* = regeneration; *rouvrir* = to reopen, to open again)

C. *Suffixes*: similar word endings in French and English. Many French words ending in *-ION* or *-TION* are true cognates of English (*communion*, *mission*, *multiplication*). The same is true of words ending in *-itude* (*aptitude*, *gratitude*, *attitude*) and those ending in *-age* (*message*, *passage*, *massage*). Other common suffixes to look for are:

1. *-ABLE* = *-ABLE/-IBLE* (*fable* = fable; *responsable* = responsible)
2. *-AIRE* = *-ARY* (*léger* = light; *légendaire* = legendary)
3. *-ÈRE* = *-ERY/-RY* (*mystère* = mystery; *ministère* = ministry)
4. *-EUR* = *-OR* (*gouverneur* = governor)
Note: Some French nouns with final *-EUR* have no special feminine form (*une femme professeur* = a female professor) while others have special feminine endings, *-EUSE* (*chanteur/chanteuse* = singer) or *-TRICE* (*acteur/actrice* = actor/actress)
5. *-EUX* = *-OUS* (*délicieux* = delicious)
6. *-IE* = *-Y* (*fantaisie* = fantasy)
7. *-IEN(NE)* = *-IAN/-IENNE* (*comédien* = comedian; *comédienne* = comedienne)
8. *-IQUE* = *-IC/-ICAL* (*économique* = economic; *économical*)
9. *-ISME* = *-ISM* (*réalisme* = realism)
10. *-ISTE* = *-IST* (*journaliste* = journalist)
11. *-ITÉ* = *-ITY* (*personnalité* = personality)
12. *-MENT* = *-MENT/-LY* (*gouvernement* = government; *intelligemment* = intelligently)
13. *-OIRE* = *-ORY* (*laboratoire* = laboratory)
14. *-RE* = *-ER* (*lettre* = letter)

Practice Exercises

The exercises which follow give practice in word detection and deciphering meaning. They are designed to:

- 1) underscore the large and common origins of French and English
- 2) illustrate some of the types of word clues which are found in the *Clefs* and *Exercices* of each *Bulletin*
- 3) demonstrate strategies which are useful in reading French
- 4) stimulate "educated guessing" based on known or recognizable patterns of form and meaning

I. Cognates (*Mots apparentés*). Write the English equivalent.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. garage _____ | 6. drogue _____ |
| 2. responsable _____ | 7. actrice _____ |
| 3. extraordinaire _____ | 8. optimisme _____ |
| 4. professeur _____ | 9. millionnaire _____ |
| 5. ministre _____ | 10. fantastique _____ |

II. Synonyms (*Synonymes*). Predict the spelling of these pairs of French synonyms.

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|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. agression = str _ ss | 6. revue = m _ gazine |
| 2. f _ rme = compagnie | 7. sp _ rtif = athlétique |
| 3. valise = bag _ ge | 8. car = parce q _ e |
| 4. s _ fa = divan | 9. pr _ fession = carrière |
| 5. voiture = autom _ bile | 10. mode = styl _ |

III. Antonyms (*Antonymes*). Predict the spelling of these pairs of French antonyms.

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|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. maximum \neq m _ nimum | 6. pour \neq c _ ntre |
| 2. pos _ tivement \neq n _ gativement | 7. gr _ nd \neq petit |
| 3. compliqué \neq s _ mple | 8. loin de \neq pr _ s de |
| 4. pe _ _ imiste \neq optimiste | 9. i _ _ térieur \neq extérieur |
| 5. anti- \neq pr _ - | 10. ennemi \neq _ mi |

IV. Word families (*Familles de mots*). Eliminate one from each set.

1. parler à / commencer à / s'adresser à
2. au début / au commencement / à la fin
3. penser / croire / dire
4. nerveux / détendu / irrité
5. patente / valise / bagage
6. chanteur / actrice / étudiant / danseur
7. antique / vieux / contemporain / historique
8. prestigieux / sans importance / trivial / insignifiant
9. compétiteur / compétition / compétitrice / compliment
10. chauffer / froid / chaud / réchauffer

V. Derivatives (*Mots dérivés*). Complete the set.

1. art / _ _ _ _ _ iste / _ _ _ _ _ istique
2. journal / _ _ _ _ _ iste / journal _ _ _ _ _
3. résider / _ _ _ _ _ ence / _ _ _ _ _ ent / _ _ _ _ _ entiel
4. présider / _ _ _ _ _ ence / présid _ _ _ _ _ / _ _ _ _ _ iel
5. jouer / _ _ _ _ _ eur / _ _ _ _ _ et
6. chanter / _ _ _ _ _ eur / _ _ _ _ _ son
7. inventer / _ _ _ _ _ eur / _ _ _ _ _ ion
8. articuler / _ _ _ _ _ ation
9. ignorer / _ _ _ _ _ ance
10. étudier / _ _ _ _ _ ant

VI. Prefixes (*Préfixes*). Write the English equivalent of each of the following words paying close attention to the word beginnings.

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|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. international _ _ _ _ _ | 6. pré-laver _ _ _ _ _ |
| 2. désavantage _ _ _ _ _ | 7. revoir _ _ _ _ _ |
| 3. surévaluer _ _ _ _ _ | 8. ingratitude _ _ _ _ _ |
| 4. anti-féministe _ _ _ _ _ | 9. supersonique _ _ _ _ _ |
| 5. interchangeable _ _ _ _ _ | 10. sous-productivité _ _ _ _ _ |

VII. Suffixes and word endings (*Suffixes et terminaisons*). Write the English equivalent of each of the following words paying close attention to the word endings.

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|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. radiateur _ _ _ _ _ | 6. préparatoire _ _ _ _ _ |
| 2. superstitieux _ _ _ _ _ | 7. secondaire _ _ _ _ _ |
| 3. ignition _ _ _ _ _ | 8. altitude _ _ _ _ _ |
| 4. anatomie _ _ _ _ _ | 9. finaliste _ _ _ _ _ |
| 5. destiné _ _ _ _ _ | 10. logique _ _ _ _ _ |

VIII. Embedded words (*Racines*). Underline the root of each of the following words.

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|------------------|------------------------|
| 1. abandonner | 6. retrouver |
| 2. difficilement | 7. perfectionner |
| 3. exclamation | 8. croissanterie |
| 4. professionnel | 9. impossibilité |
| 5. indispensable | 10. extraordinairement |

IX. Definitions (*Définitions*). Complete the following French words.

1. une semaine = sept j _ _ rs
2. une minute = 60 s _ _ conds
3. 1 an = 12 _ _ ois
4. camion = v _ _ hicule
5. épouse = f _ _ mme mariée
6. habitation = _ _ ésidence
7. concours = comp _ _ tition non-sportive
8. visage = fac _ _
9. lycée = éc _ _ le
10. boisson = _ _ iquide à boire