

## REVIEW OF *ADVANCED FRENCH: INTERACTIVE VIDEO LANGUAGE LEARNING WITH "AU COEUR DE LA LOI"*

<b>Title</b>	<i>Advanced French: Interactive Video Language Learning with "Au coeur de la loi"</i>
<b>Platform</b>	Mac OS 8.6+; Windows 98/2000
<b>System requirements</b>	PC: Pentium, 200 Mh; 64MB RAM; DVD ROM drive; 800x600, 16 bit color display; 50MB free disk space; Soundcard Mac: G3 or G4 processor (e.g. DVD iMac); 128MB RAM; DVD ROM drive Microphone is needed to record one's voice
<b>Publisher / contact information</b>	EuroTalk Ltd. 315-317 New Kings Road London SW6 4RF Tel: 44 (0) 207 371 7711 Fax: 44 (0) 207 371 7781 <a href="http://www.eurotalk.co.uk">http://www.eurotalk.co.uk</a>
<b>Support offered</b>	<a href="http://www.eurotalk.co.uk/ETWebPages/Products/DVDF.html">http://www.eurotalk.co.uk/ETWebPages/Products/DVDF.html</a> "Help" screens are provided within the program Printed instructions are inside cover of product
<b>Target language</b>	French (English, German, Italian, and Spanish programs also available)
<b>Target audience</b>	Intermediate or Advanced French (suitable for university and high school levels)
<b>Price</b>	34.99 GBP, according to ordering information on Web site ( <a href="http://www.eurotalk.co.uk/ETWebPages/Orders/orderF.html">http://www.eurotalk.co.uk/ETWebPages/Orders/orderF.html</a> )
<b>ISBN</b>	1-862-21403-4

Reviewed by Susan Carpenter Binkley, The Five Colleges of Ohio Consortium

### OVERVIEW

*Advanced French* is a new DVD-ROM in a series of advanced language lessons produced by EuroTalk Interactive. Each DVD in the series, which includes Advanced English, Spanish, German, and Italian as well as French, is based on an episode from a television program in the target language. *Advanced French* is based on an episode of *Au coeur de la loi* (*At the Heart of the Law*), a French television series which features a female detective and her male colleagues in Paris.

### DESCRIPTION

The main menu of *Advanced French* presents users with six choices: Video and text, dictionary, word search, activities, record your own voice, and quiz. There are no directions explaining where or how to begin the program, although the "video and text" button does receive prominence at the top and center of the screen (see [Figure 1](#)). This button takes the user to the heart of the DVD: the 50-minute video episode of *Au coeur de la loi*. While it is possible to begin with the activities, these are all based on the video, and thus users who are unfamiliar with the episode will likely become confused.



Figure 1. Main menu

After viewing the video, users can consult the reference tools and complete the activities largely in the order they see fit. However, the quiz should probably be done last, as it includes information from the other activities.

### Video and Text (Vidéo et texte)

Clicking on *Vidéo et texte* takes the user to the video and transcript. *Au coeur de la loi* plays within a television-like frame, with the French transcript appearing as subtitles below the television frame (see [Figure 2](#)).



Figure 2. Video and text screen

It is also possible to view the video at full screen size (without subtitles, icons, or menu items) or to scroll through the episode's transcript in its entirety. In this mode, clicking on any line of dialogue will cause the video to jump to the corresponding section of the episode.

There is also a scene menu from which the learner can easily jump to any part of the video without scrolling through the dialogue or using the somewhat difficult to control fast-forward and reverse buttons.

### Dictionary (Dictionnaire)

The dictionary consists of an alphabetical list of objects and characters seen in the video. Rather than providing a definition, clicking on a given word displays a frame from the video with the corresponding object circled while a voice-over provides a pronunciation model. The dictionary is accessible only from the main menu and is not hotlinked from any other activity in the program.

### Word Search (Recherche de mots)

*Recherche de mots* is similar to the dictionary, but instead of listing objects seen in the video, it lists the words spoken in the dialogue. Clicking on a word plays the scene in which that word was uttered. No translations or definitions are provided. Instead, the student must rely exclusively on context to determine the meaning.

### Activities (Activités)

The activities section consists of four different types of exercises which focus on vocabulary, listening comprehension, and spelling. For all four activities, *Advanced French* includes both untimed "practice sessions" (*entraînement*) and timed "tests." In the practice sessions, users can eliminate one incorrect answer by clicking the question mark icon at the bottom of the screen. Some of the timed tests allow only several seconds to respond, and those several seconds seem to go by rather quickly. The spelling activity in particular requires a fair amount of clicking and dragging in a short time (see [Figure 3](#)).

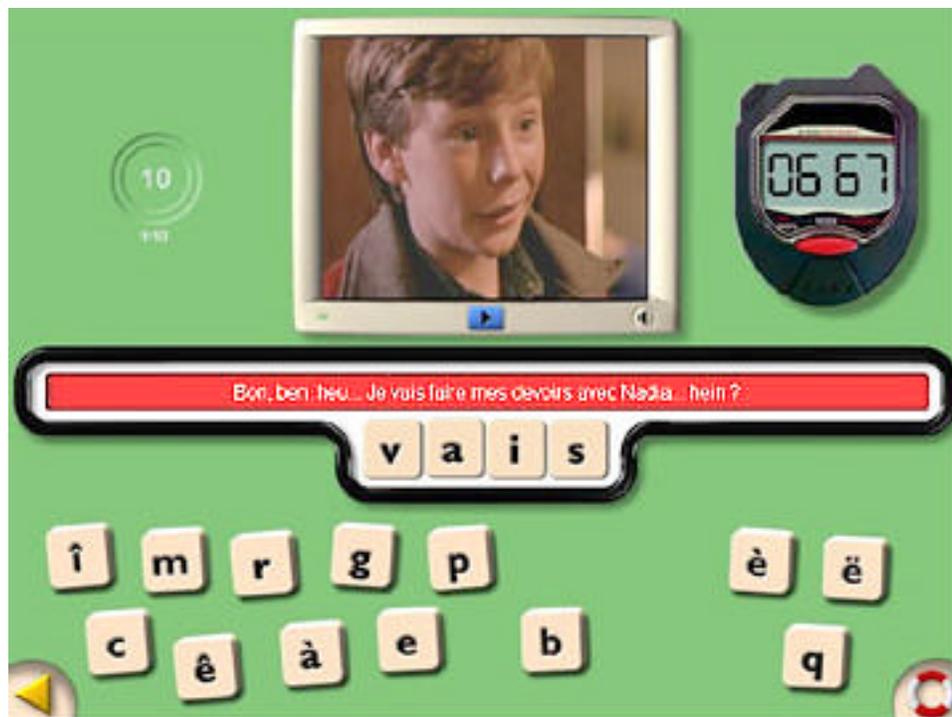


Figure 3. Spelling test

Feedback for both correct and incorrect answers is provided, with the exact form of the feedback varying by activity. In both practice and test modes, the user's score, based on the total number of questions in the activity, is reported.

The vocabulary activity (*vocabulaire*) is a multiple-choice exercise based on the objects in the dictionary. For each item, learners see and hear a single word and then click on the corresponding image, out of six that are displayed (see Figure 4). Many of the targeted items are often covered in beginning level texts (e.g., "le pied" (*a foot*), "une ceinture" (*a belt*), and "une voiture" (*a car*)).



Figure 4. Vocabulary activity

*Mot perdu* is a fill-in-the-blank exercise based on brief scenes from *Au coeur de la loi*. As learners view the scene, the transcript is provided with one word missing. Learners click on the missing word from a list of 10 choices.

The spelling activity (*épeler*) is also based on a short clip from the video. This activity is similar to the fill-in-the-blank exercise, in that the transcript appears with one word missing. However, here learners click and drag letters to spell the missing word, rather than choosing from a list of choices.

Finally, "What is the next line?" (*Quel [sic] est la prochaine réplique?*) is perhaps the most difficult of the four activities. Learners first view a very brief clip -- consisting of just one line of dialogue -- and then must choose the next line of dialogue from a list of three possibilities. In this activity, unlike most of the others, a transcript of the scene is not provided, so users must rely solely on their listening ability.

### **Record Your Own Voice (Enregistrez-vous)**

The speaking component is located in the *Enregistrez-vous* section. Here, after users choose a character, a scene with that character is shown. Learners repeat each line of dialogue, recording their own voices. They do not need to memorize the line, since a written transcription is provided. However, users must keep pace with the original video, which can be quite challenging, since the actors speak quickly. After individually recording about five lines of dialogue, learners can play the entire scene with their own voice inserted into the proper places.

### Quiz (Quizz Vidéo)

The *Quizz Vidéo* provides a game show format with a virtual competitor named Mathieu. A short clip from the video is shown, and a multiple choice question based on that clip appears and is read by the voice of a game show host. These questions cover a range of information, from vocabulary and grammar ("Quel est l'impératif présent du verbe *réfléchir*?" / What is the imperative of the verb *to reflect*?) to comprehension of the storyline ("Pourquoi est-ce que l'agent de police arrête la voiture?" / Why does the police officer stop the car?). Unfortunately, if the learner doesn't respond correctly, there is apparently no way to learn the correct answer: "Mathieu" hits a button and receives the points, but it is not clear which answer he chose.

### Help Features

Upon launching the DVD, users are given the opportunity to choose the language for the instructions on the help screens. English is the default language for the instructions, but one can also choose French, as well as a variety of other languages. Subsequently, whenever users click on the small red and white life preserver at the bottom right of each screen, they can read instructions in that language.

Users sign in when they begin, and the program keeps track of their progress for each use by indicating the date of the previous use, the number of sessions practiced, and the running score for any tests taken. It does not, however, bookmark partially completed exercises, nor does it return the users to point where they left off on the previous use.

### EVALUATION

*Advanced French* is appropriate for individual, self-guided work in an intermediate to advanced language class. If the instructor has a regular "lab day" incorporated into the class schedule, this DVD would work nicely. It would require, however, several days work to get through most of the activities because the video alone, played without interruption, is about 50 minutes. However, it could be challenging to incorporate this DVD into a class lesson and/or evaluate students' progress because of the absence of units or clearly divided segments. Questions in the various exercises are posed in apparently random order and do not move chronologically through the storyline. Thus, if learners watch the first 30 minutes of the video, and then attempt to complete some of the exercises, they could become frustrated, since the exercise questions will not necessarily reflect that portion of the video. This lack of segmentation is perhaps the biggest drawback for the teacher wishing to integrate *Advanced French* into a course syllabus.

Of the four basic skills, *Advanced French* is strongest on listening and reading, rather than speaking or writing. However, the comprehension questions do not require learners to use any higher-order skills such as reasoning. Instead, the questions tend to be straightforward and fact-oriented. Moreover, none of the activities are based on communication; the speaking exercises consist only of repeating lines of dialogue, and the real challenge is to repeat the lines very quickly, before the recording function shuts off. It is therefore questionable whether the program lives up to the producers' billing as "interactive" since learners do not interact with other speakers. Holliday (1999) has noted this shortcoming of supposedly interactive software. In most cases, he writes, "the learner is in reality not interacting with another speaker ... and all of the computer's supposed interactive responses are in fact drawn from a limited data bank of preprogrammed, pre-audio-recorded or pre-video-recorded items" (p. 186). *Advanced French* provides even less than a "databank of preprogrammed responses"; the only response to the learner's recorded voice is the next line of dialogue.

An instructor could, however, create oral and written activities to serve as a follow-up to the video in order to encourage oral and written communication. In fact, the video addresses many current social issues that could form the basis for further discussion in class. For example, the storyline involving Aziz, a rehabilitated delinquent, alludes to problems of racism in the workplace, particularly towards those of

North African descent. The main character, Béatrice, juggles several different -- and often competing -- relationships with her mother, son, and boyfriend. The activities created by EuroTalk do not elaborate on these pertinent topics or coax the learner to explore them in more depth.

### SUMMARY

Many students will likely find it interesting to watch a recent television episode created for native speakers of French, rather than a film produced specifically for pedagogical purposes. Thus, the use of *Au coeur de la loi* is one of the most attractive aspects of *Advanced French* in that it offers exposure to authentic French. Although learners may at first feel overwhelmed by not being able to understand all of the spoken dialogue in the film, the exercises are likely to alleviate this frustration by requiring much simpler language skills. However, the lack of opportunities for meaningful communication in these exercises provided means that instructors will likely want to supplement the DVD with various additional activities.

---

### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Susan Carpenter Binkley has a PhD in French from the Ohio State University. She currently serves as Language Technology Specialist for the Ohio Five Foreign Language Project (The College of Wooster, Denison University, Kenyon College, Oberlin College, Ohio Wesleyan University), supported by a grant from the Mellon Foundation. Her current research focuses on instructional design for foreign language Web activities, and the use of digital video for second language acquisition.

E-mail: [binkleys@kenyon.edu](mailto:binkleys@kenyon.edu)

### REFERENCES

- Dickinson, L. (1987). *Self-instruction in language learning*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. \*\*\*
- Omaggio Hadley, A. (1993). *Teaching language in context*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle. \*\*\*
- Holliday, L. (1999). Theory and research: Input, interaction, and CALL. In J. Egbert & E. Hanson-Smith (Eds.), *CALL environments: Research, practice, and critical issues*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP. \*\*\*