

# Foreign Language Reading Comprehension as 'Externally-guided Thinking'

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The article presents and justifies an approach to teaching and testing advanced French reading comprehension of expository texts in the Social Sciences field, within a 'communicative-cognitive' framework. Learners (in this case, mostly native English-speakers) are provided with a standard three-part set of instructions to produce a communicative analysis of the texts read, with each part of the instructions corresponding to a level of abstractness with regard to the writer's message. The instructions (and the prior training in their use) encourage the readers to perceive and utilise the writer's overall rhetorical scheme as a conceptual-functional framework within which to integrate the various components of their interpretation of his or her message.

Data from two such communicative analyses are presented and discussed, providing evidence for Säljö's (1975) distinction between 'surface' and 'deep' level processors.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to give substance to a particular view of reading comprehension, in both the native and non-native language, to present and justify a method of teaching and testing this ability in French as a foreign language at the advanced level, and to examine the strategies followed by learners trained to use the method, on the basis of a sample of their communicative analyses of French journalistic texts.

The view of reading comprehension in question is the so-called 'Constructivist' one (cf. Flower, 1987; Spivey, 1987), whereby the reader of an (expository) text actively engages in a negotiation (cf. Nystrand, 1986; Widdowson, 1984) with the writer of his/her message, a negotiation whose outcome is the construction in the reader's mind of a coherent interpretation of the writer's intention in composing the text at hand. Such an interpretation is built up from the contextual clues available in the text, as well as from the reader's prior knowledge, both of the discourse conventions governing the genre of the text being read – and in particular the various rhetorical schemes or plans (cf. Carrell, 1985; Meyer, 1984; Meyer & Rice, 1982) used by writers – and of the particular real-world domain which is its topic.

I shall be concerned here in particular with the higher-order aspects of text processing, that is, the assignment of a particular level of coherence both to the discourse as a whole and to its component parts – in other words, 'global' as well as

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'local' coherence levels. As a teacher of reading comprehension at the University of Kent at Canterbury, U.K., to first-year students in Social Sciences reading French in combination with a Social Science subject, I have only rarely had occasion to notice particular difficulties with 'lower-level', or so-called 'bottom-up' discourse processing in students' reading experience (lexical access, syntactic parsing, the extraction of propositional content from clauses and sentences, and so on). The students in question are advanced learners of French, having a (usually good) GCE 'A' Level or equivalent qualification in the language; thus they will have had somewhere between five and seven years' experience of the language by the time they appear on the course in question. What is more, their recent experience of it will have been primarily in terms of the written rather than the spoken form, since (at least in the case of the traditional British 'A' Level syllabuses) this is the focus of the exam itself, with its emphasis on the close study of a selection of literary works. Thus it is rather the 'top down' or 'knowledge-driven' processing of written texts that is clearly problematic for these readers. As a language teacher, I often come across learners who report having understood each individual sentence in a particular paragraph of a text, but not the particular point or value which that paragraph conveys in the text as a whole. These learners had presumably not hypothesised a clear rhetorical scheme for the text at hand, into which the group of sentences could fit as a functional unit of discourse.

I will start by outlining the framework which informs the approach to advanced-level reading comprehension which I am advocating, and will then present and discuss the 'standard exercise' I have devised for developing and assessing the higher-order reading abilities mentioned earlier. Finally, I will examine a sample of the data regarding learner-readers' interpretative strategies which it has yielded over the years.

## 2. THE NATURE OF READING, AND ITS RELATION TO WRITING

Writing and reading are fundamentally social, reciprocal acts (cf. Nystrand, 1986). A good writer will have taken account of likely readers in framing the discourse (for example, their level of background knowledge on the subject at issue, their potential difficulty in grasping the points or in perceiving the writer's rhetorical plan, their likely objections to the arguments deployed, and so on). The text resulting from this composing process will contain traces of this 'model' of the anticipated reader on the writer's part, traces of which the style in which the text is written is perhaps the most salient one. Indeed, the very act of composing itself creates a dialogue with the anticipated reader.

The reader, in turn, if sensitive to these traces, will interpret the text in the light of a hypothesis as to the intention of the writer, and in the light of the reader's expectations

as well as purpose in reading the text. Each has a 'model', as it were, of the other, and the discourse that is derived through the reader's act of reading is the outcome of a complex kind of negotiation of meaning in context.

However, writers cannot be one hundred percent certain that their readers will adopt the attitude towards them which they have assumed, nor can readers be fully confident that their interpretation of the writer's intentions actually corresponds to what these in fact were. Interpreting a text is thus a probabilistic enterprise, dependent on many variables, and this means that there is no single correct 'meaning' or 'interpretation' of a text. The comprehension of a written text cannot be exhaustively accounted for in terms of a process of 'bottom-up' processing, though clearly bottom-up processing has a fundamental role to play in comprehension.

What kinds of cognitive activities do readers have to engage in, in order to make sense of a written text? They will have to draw inferences in order to connect propositions whose linguistic exponents (the clauses and sentences of the text) may be indeterminate as to the exact nature of the connection intended; they will have to integrate these locally-defined meaning units in terms of some discourse function at a higher level of analysis – and so on, until the highest level of interpretation (what Van Dijk, 1977 calls the 'superstructure') is reached: namely, the writer's hypothesised rhetorical plan as the means by which the overall communicative goal can be attained.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these, the reader of an expository text has to determine what its topic is, and what its writer's attitude or stance is towards that topic and towards the likely reader (in the writer's eyes) of the text. Moreover, the reader will have to determine whether the writer, as well as any protagonists brought into play by the writer, is speaking literally, is committing himself or herself to the truth of the statements made, or whether irony or some other such psychological attitude is being adopted towards the meaning content at issue.

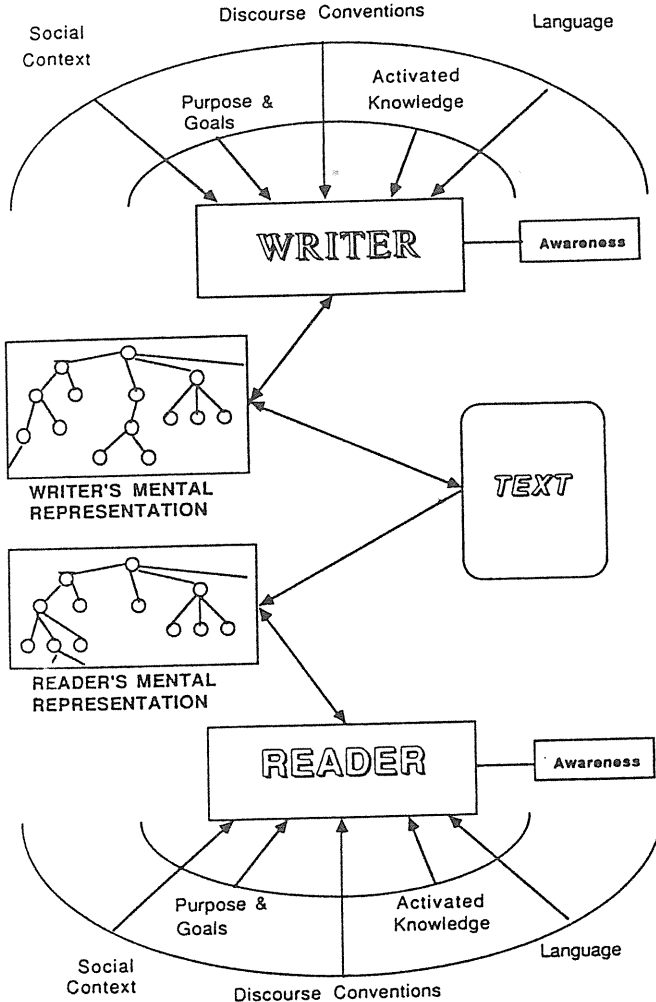
Reading is thus a cognitive, constructive, culturally-situated and social (i.e. reciprocal) activity. Neisser (1967: 136) puts it in a nutshell in characterizing reading as 'externally guided thinking', a phrase which I have adopted in the title of this paper.

What are the variables which affect the outcome of the reading process? They evidently include readers' degree of language proficiency, as well as of reading fluency; their knowledge of the conventions governing the genre of discourse of which the text being read is an instance; knowledge of the topic domain within the target-language culture, and the ability to activate such knowledge; their beliefs, assumptions and attitudes about that topic domain; and other factors such as the goal in reading the text (for pleasure, to pass an exam, to locate and note down

specific items of information, to gain a rapid overview of its content and/or point of view, . . . ), or their degree of attentiveness at the time of reading. It can be seen from this brief review that there are a great many ways in which the message of the text, as intended by its author, can become distorted and transformed in the process of comprehension by its readers.

At this point, it would be helpful to take stock of the situation regarding the parameters involved in the reading and writing processes by means of a diagram taken from Flower (1987: 129).

Figure 1: A conceptual model for discourse construction.



(From Linda Flower, 1987, 'Interpretive acts: cognition and the construction of discourse', *Poetics* 16: 129)

Figure 1 symbolises the parallelism as well as interdependence of the reader's and the writer's roles. The arrows pointing from the two concentric semi-circles towards the writer and reader symbolise the various 'forces' which impinge on their constructive processes: those emanating from the outer semi-circle constitute the 'external' forces, forces which form part of the cultural background of literate language users (social culture, ideology, discourse/rhetorical conventions); while those originating from the inner semi-circle represent the active forces (i.e. the relevant activated knowledge, the particular purposes and goals of both writer and reader in some particular act of composing or reading).

The mental representation of both writer and reader consists of goals, plans and knowledge interconnected by loose associations or by tight explicit relations. The mental representation is much fuller and more determinate than the text on the basis of which it is constructed, since texts are often inexplicit and indeterminate to some degree. The box labelled 'awareness' is intended to represent the degree of conscious awareness of these various forces on the part of writer and reader.

### *2.1 The interaction between 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' text processing*

Let us look now at what fluent readers are doing as they are simultaneously engaging in a higher level of processing – constructing the top layer of structure of a hierarchical meaning representation (that is, the overarching meaning framework into which more specific information will be integrated) – and at the same time, a lower level of processing whereby words are encoded and accessed, the immediate syntactic structure in terms of which they are related is created, and the proposition which the words in a clausal setting express is constructed. The two processes, 'top-down' or context/knowledge-driven processing, and 'bottom-up' or text-driven processing, are interdependent and interactive as well as occurring simultaneously – the latter serving to provide empirical confirmation or otherwise via visual perception of the hypotheses set up via the more cognitive top-down procedure. The top-down procedure can facilitate the guessing of unfamiliar vocabulary (of great importance in non-native reading activities), or can help to rule out contextually implausible but out-of-context possible variant interpretations of words, phrases or clauses.

An interesting example of a processing error caused by the 'wrong' accessing from long-term memory of a topic domain (the influence of top-down processing over the assignment of one sense of a lexeme) occurred recently in my own reading experience:

### “Travellers’ anger over tipping rule

TRAVELLERS in Herne Bay are embroiled in a row with Kent County Council and Canterbury City Council after senior planners launched a blitz on illegal tipping.

Both councils claim the problem has reached epidemic proportions in Kent. But travellers on the Broomfield caravan site want more dumping of top-soil around their homes – to improve quality of life . . . ”

(extract from *Adscene*, 16 August, 1991, p.4.)

As I read the title of this brief article, the lexemes *travellers* and *tipping* together evoked a ‘tourism’ topic domain, in which ‘tipping’ denoted the practice of leaving tips or gratuities in bars and restaurants (the Canterbury area being a thriving tourist area, with many Continental visitors for whom tipping is a more common custom than it is in Britain, and the time of publication, mid August, occurring in the middle of the busy summer season). However, as soon as I reached the predicate of the second sentence of the second paragraph of this piece, an evident difficulty occurred: how to integrate into this topic domain – the superstructure of the text adumbrated by the title, as I had interpreted it – the concept of ‘dumping top-soil round one’s home’? Such an integration would clearly result in interpretative incoherence. However, the fact that ‘dumping’ is clearly a superordinate of ‘tipping’ in the sense of ‘waste disposal’ means that the integration of the meaning of the predicate in question with *this* particular topic domain would be perfectly coherent. I therefore immediately revised my partially constructed discourse superstructure accordingly. The correctness of this revision was in fact confirmed via the very next sentence, beginning the third paragraph:

“They have used waste soil to build a wall, or bund, around their caravans to act as a windbreak and to reduce noise generated by the busy Thanet Way . . . ”

Once the bottom-up processing has applied to yield a propositional representation in a form which still retains traces of the lexical items and syntactic structure of the clause that occurred in the textual sequence, this is taken charge of by the short-term or working memory and later converted (through its integration with the conceptual

structure already created) into a non-linguistic representation for encoding in long-term memory (LTM). This is the hierarchically-structured 'mental model' cf. Johnson-Laird, 1981, 1983) which is capable of being remembered long after the surface textual form of the original message has been forgotten.

## 2.2 Rhetorical structure

According to Van Dijk (1977), listeners and readers use 'schemata' (hierarchically-structured patterns of conventional knowledge of some domain encoded in LTM) to guide their construction of the 'macro-structure' of a discourse. This macro-structure is a sort of semantic scaffolding into which the conceptual content can be integrated. The macro-structure is a network of superordinate propositions which are abstracted from the 'micropropositions' which make up the 'text base', and which together constitute a summary of the discourse. Van Dijk distinguishes the macro-structure (an organisation of the *content* of the discourse) from what he calls its 'conventional superstructure': this latter is a global functional organisation or framework of a text, and relates to its genre. Macro-propositions receive a functional role in this discourse via the superstructure (e.g. SETTING, EPISODE, etc. in a narrative). In similar vein, Meyer & Rice (1982) and Meyer (1984) write of the 'rhetorical schemes' used by writers of expository texts; these would correspond to van Dijk's 'superstructures'.

Meyer isolates 5 major types of rhetorical schemes relating to expository texts (with embeddings of other types possible within one given type): *description*, *collection* or *grouping*, *causation*, *response* (e.g. *problem-solution*, *question-answer*), and *comparison*. Not all of these schemes have the same capacity to hold together the content of the texts to which they apply: the highest degree of integration is achieved via the *causation* scheme, the lowest via the *collection* or *description* ones. This notion of 'degree of integration' corresponds to what I have been calling the 'level of coherence' of an interpretation assigned by a reader.

Though most of the Social Science texts used in the French course I contribute to teaching make use of the *response* scheme ('Presentation of a problem/issue' – 'Expansion via explanation of how it came to be a problem' – 'Suggested resolution of the problem'), in fact the least skilled readers tend to ignore such a scheme (even if it is explicitly signalled in the text at issue, which it invariably is); their procedure is to radically restructure it so as to make it conform to the *description* scheme, understanding it in terms of a list-like sequence of factual descriptions about the issue. This tendency amongst unskilled readers when recalling even highly structured texts has also been noted in other research, as reported by Spivey (1987: 174). I will present examples of this tendency later. The opposite extreme (in terms of the restructuring of texts by readers) is when readers radically restructure the discourse

underlying texts whose message they strongly disagree with (cf. the notion of 'strong reading' discussed by McCormick & Waller (1987)). This approach is also represented in my data on reading.

Reading continuous text, then, involves performing three major cognitive tasks concurrently: (1) processing the clause currently being read, and placing the result of that processing in STM; (2) integrating this interpretation with the higher-level rhetorical scheme (or locally relevant component of that scheme) which is being constructed up to that point; and (3) extending or revising that rhetorical scheme (what Meyer (1984: 5) calls a 'top-level structure') in the light of that integration.

Rhetorical structure is essential as an aid to comprehension: not all the propositions corresponding to clauses or parts of clauses can be handled by the processor at the same level, whether in STM or in LTM. The rhetorical scheme enables some propositions to be discarded in the memory representation (as repetitions of points already established, or as exemplification of a more central issue), or subordinated in terms of relative importance in relation to propositions which are more central in terms of the rhetorical scheme being adopted. That is, the reader's task is to hierarchize the propositions extracted from the text in terms of some coherence relation, thus to select, to re-arrange, and finally to connect and integrate the message units already selected and re-arranged – all this in terms of a hypothesis as to the writer's overall communicative intention or plan. Moreover, rhetorical structure makes possible the *full* understanding of information units at lower levels, including specific arguments deployed by the writer, providing the reader with a means of grasping their 'point' in the overall message, and of checking its plausibility.

### 3. THE 'STANDARD INSTRUCTIONS'

This exercise is an attempt to bring advanced learner-readers' unconscious, perhaps automatic processing strategies to their conscious attention, so that by becoming aware of what may be seen as perhaps less effective strategies, they may take steps to actively improve them. The idea behind it is to get the readers to construct a coherent, systematic interpretation of the message conveyed via the text as produced by the particular writer in question, and to justify that interpretation in terms of the many cues present in the text; however, it also requires readers to go beyond the text itself, to take into account the *context* surrounding the composing and publishing of the text: the identity of the author, the nature of the containing publication, its date of publication, and so on.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2: The 'standard instructions' for a communicative analysis of expository texts in French as a Foreign Language

Read the following text, then:

- (1) Write in ENGLISH three short paragraphs expressing what you think is
  - (a) the author's purpose in writing it,
  - (b) his/her attitude towards the reader, and
  - (c) his/her attitude towards the subject-matter;
- (2)
  - (a) Identify the type of organisational plan (e.g. Comparison-Contrast, Problem-Solution, Description, Cause-Consequence, etc.) you think the author has adopted in the article; and
  - (b) Show how s/he has implemented that plan by defining, in a single sentence for each, the main parts of the article, and by indicating in not more than one additional sentence per main part the role it performs in carrying out the plan;
- (3) State in your own words one or more of the specific arguments used in each of the parts defined in 2(b), in terms of the way they advance the author's goal in the part in question.

After practice in the method of analysis of French journalistic texts on topics within the Social Sciences subject area, students are given a copy of a text prefaced by the standard instructions presented in Figure 2 (these instructions being explained more fully with the aid of a handout). The subject matter of the text presented will already be familiar to the readers, since it will have been introduced via 'overview' lectures in French on the topic, via other texts read in preparation for seminar discussion, and via language laboratory practice on the key vocabulary of that subject area. The lexical dimension of the texts used as a basis for the reading comprehension exercise should not be a major obstacle, since if any lexical items are not already familiar from previous texts read on the subject, they may well correspond to the ones which are glossed (in French) at the foot of the page in the text where they occur. Readers are of course encouraged to make educated guesses, on the basis of context, of the locally-relevant sense of any items still unfamiliar to them. A model analysis of each text presented is issued to students with their marked scripts at the 'hand-back' session (see the sample analysis presented in Appendix B).

These standard instructions constitute a series of interlocking, analytical tasks, the carrying out of each subsequent task depending on the achievement of the previous one(s) (cf. Parisi & Castelfranchi, 1977). The instructions remain constant

whichever text is chosen, so that they constitute a kind of grid, in terms of which the reader can 'plot' a particular text, systematic comparisons amongst different kinds of texts then becoming possible. Readers are thereby in a position to generalise as to the argumentative strategies preferred by French writers within the Social Sciences. In this way, they will (it is hoped) be better prepared to predict the potential development of a given article once the title, introductory paragraph(s) and sub-headings, for example, have been read as a 'sampling' process, in the interests of constructing a provisional rhetorical structure for the text at hand.

Looking now in more detail at the three sets of instructions as presented in Figure 2, the aim of task 1(a) is to pinpoint the topic and the author's macro-goal in dealing with it – that is, to get the reader to construct an explicit model of the author in this respect. Task 1(c) (the author's stance with regard to the issue concerned) is a sub-part of this task.

Task 1(b) is intended to get the learner to construct a model of the reader of the text in question, from the author's point of view. This model will be a function of features such as the tone and style of the text, and the degree of direct or indirect appeal by the writer for involvement of the reader in the writer's discussion, as evidenced in the co-text.

Task 2 is designed to make apparent the 'superstructure' of the text, in Van Dijk's (1977) terminology – that is, its global coherence. 2(a) seeks to determine the particular rhetorical scheme or plan the author has adopted as the integrative framework for the discourse (cf. Meyer's typology given above); while 2(b) is designed to pinpoint the specific implementation of that scheme, that is, the division of the whole into main parts, each performing a specific role within the scheme in question.

Finally, Task 3 seeks to establish the local coherence relations obtaining within each main part, an argument, inevitably, requiring the integration of more than one microproposition from the text base, and sometimes of course requiring the inference of a proposition to fill the 'gap' in the text itself.

#### 4. RESULTS: FOREIGN LANGUAGE READING STRATEGIES

Let us turn now to a consideration of the actual strategies of discourse comprehension used by real readers. I will preface the discussion of the data concerning foreign learners' reading strategies yielded by the method, by a brief outline of a study carried out by the Swedish scholar Säljö (1975) (as presented by Fransson (1984)). In this study, subjects were asked to read a text on the general topic of the world educational crisis, about the disproportion between the number of professionals and 'subprofessionals' (technicians, assistants, etc.) in various

countries. The essential argument of this text is summarized by Fransson (op. cit. pp. 93-4) as follows:

The shortage of persons who can serve as assistants to highly qualified specialists means that the latter cannot make full use of their very expensive training. Instead they are forced to spend a lot of time on duties which could have been done by people with a lower level of training. For society this means that a great proportion of the resources invested in the training of the specialists is wasted since the professionals could, in fact, have carried out most of their job with a less advanced training.

Then subjects were asked the question below, as presented by Fransson (p. 94):

How can the proportion of, on the one hand, highly qualified university graduates to, on the other, technicians and assistants respectively, affect the effectiveness of the educational system in relation to the needs of society?

Säljö classified the answers to this question into three basic types (A, B, and C below), indicating, as he saw it, different levels of understanding (in terms of the degree of informativeness of the answers) of the message of the text in question.

- A. Professionals end up doing the job that should have been handled by sub-professionals.
- B. Professionals need a suitable number of sub-professionals as assistants if the former are to be able to work effectively.
- C. There should be a balance in the number of professionals and of sub-professionals trained.

None of these types of answer is incorrect, yet according to both Säljö and Fransson, they form a hierarchy in terms of informativeness, A being more informative than B, and B than C. It is in this respect that Fransson claims (p. 94) that 'Type A indicates a higher level of understanding than Type C'. However, Fransson tells me (p.c.) that 'in this early text (viz. Säljö 1975), Säljö does not talk about level of understanding', and only does so in his later work.

My personal interpretation of the types of answers given under A-C above is that the hierarchy they represent is the inverse of the one Säljö and Fransson posit – but in terms, not of the criterion of 'degree of informativeness', but rather of *relevance* in relation to the question posed and the coherence of the mental representation underlying the discourse corresponding to the original text. It is true that Type B answers are less specific than Type A ones, and that Type C are less specific than Type B. But what B and C lose in specificity, they gain in abstraction from the

concrete details of the issue, and in relevance. As I see it, Type A answers are explicitly stating the factual situation obtaining in professional contexts, without drawing any kind of conclusion from it, or relating it to the education system (as required by the question). To show that Type A is in fact *less* relevant and coherent than Type B, we can embed them both in an argument structure, with Type A as the premise, and Type B as the consequent, as follows:

*“Given that professionals end up doing the job that should have been handled by sub-professionals (Type A), then it follows that professionals need a suitable number of sub-professionals as assistants if the former are to be able to work effectively” (Type B).*

As can be seen from this relationship, Type B, unlike Type A, is a valid attempt to draw a conclusion from the basic state of affairs described in Type A. Likewise, Type B can act as the premise in an argument structure in which Type C is the consequent (though the opposite relationship would lead to incoherence):

*“Given that professionals need a suitable number of sub-professionals as assistants if the former are able to work effectively (Type B), then it follows that there should be a balance in the number of professionals and the number of sub-professionals educated” (Type C).*

This shows that Type C answers are the most relevant of the three (i.e. show the highest level of understanding), in that they go to the heart of the matter, and relate the issue explicitly to the effectiveness of the education system.

Säljö also analysed his subjects' free recalls of the same text, and according to Fransson (ibid. pp. 95-6), found three distinct ways of handling its content, as follows:

1. The mere *mentioning* of the fact that the author discussed a certain problem or concept in the text.
2. More or less extensive *descriptions* of what was said in the text.
3. Treatments which were *conclusion-oriented*, i.e. subjects drew some kind of conclusion from the specific issues or concepts evoked by the text.

Fransson calls the subjects using the first two types of strategy (*viz mentioning and describing*) 'surface-level processors'. These readers tend to treat the text as some kind of catalogue, where 'correct' answers to comprehension questions are to be found. They also seem to organise the different parts of a text as a sequence of separate pieces of information – that is, they do not integrate them in terms of some higher level of coherence. Those using the last type of strategy (the *conclusion-oriented* readers), Fransson called 'deep-level processors', since they search for meaning in terms of a high level of discourse coherence.

As implied above, these three types of text processing have also been revealed by the 'standard instruction' method I have been using to teach and test advanced-level French reading comprehension. Appendices C1 and C2 each contain a sample communicative analysis by students of a text reproduced in Appendix A. The text in question is

*"L'Europe: le défi des langues".*

For non French-speaking readers, I have included a model analysis of this text in English, in Appendix B.

Let us look first at the analysis in Appendix C1, clearly an instance of 'deep-level processing', in Fransson's (1984) terminology (though, as we shall see, showing some 'surface-level' tendencies as well). The implementation of task 1(a) (*'define the author's purpose . . .'*) is effective: not only does it capture the essence of Decaux's message, in doing so clearly identifying the overall topic, but it also correctly identifies his communicative stance as one of persuasion ('Decaux is trying to promote . . .', ' . . . He stresses the importance of . . .') rather than primarily information. Moreover, this macro-purpose is properly set within the framework of the then imminent arrival of the Single European Market in 1993<sup>3</sup> (though this date is not in fact indicated).

The definition of the stance adopted by the writer towards his anticipated reader, in answer to task 1(b), is a sophisticated one: it correctly highlights the careful, moderate tone of the author, and his anticipation of the reader's likely objections regarding the practicality of his proposal that each young European should speak at least two foreign European languages.

As far as task 1(c) is concerned (*'define the author's attitude towards the subject-matter'*), this reader again shows a certain interpretative sophistication, in that while s/he recognizes the author's passionate concern for the language issue and his faith in the value of his own native language (French), s/he gives due weight to Decaux's insistence that his support for French is not at the expense of the other European languages, which stand or fall together.

The author's rhetorical scheme as *Problem-Solution* (Meyer's *response* scheme) has been correctly pinpointed in answer to 2(a), as have the four main parts which implement this scheme in 2(b). However, of these, only the first has been adequately characterised in terms of its external coherence, its rhetorical function within the whole discourse: not only is the main issue conveyed by this part properly highlighted (an issue which constitutes the 'problem' which is to be addressed in the text as a whole), but also the role of this section in the overall rhetorical scheme is

brought out (cf. the use of meta-discursive terms: 'This acts as a contextualising introduction . . .', 'This section establishes the ground to which Decaux's proposals will try to bring change').

The definitions of the other three parts, however, do not achieve this meta-discursive level of analysis. Instead, they revert to the purely descriptive mode, consisting of a series of descriptive statements (factually correct as far as they go): 'Here, Decaux shows how . . .', 'He states that . . .' are framing expressions which recur frequently throughout the definitions of these parts. However, the definitions of Parts 3 and 4 are prefaced by a statement having a meta-discursive tenor.<sup>4</sup> Yet the long sequence of factually descriptive statements, all at a more local level of analysis, which follows each of these expressions, dilutes their effect, with the consequence that they are reduced to that local level itself.

Finally, the specific arguments within each main part isolated have been very effectively captured, demonstrating this reader's clear ability to integrate the micro-propositions of the text base in terms of their 'internal' coherence relations.

Let us compare now the analysis in Appendix C1 with that in C2. Unlike the author of the former, the reader that emerges through the latter analysis is basically a 'surface processor', though with certain 'deep' touches here and there. The answer to task (1) is clearly along the right lines, but already shows signs of what is a major feature of this reader's processing strategy: a tendency to *mention* as well as *describe* the relevant aspects of the text and its pragmatic context, without really attempting to draw conclusions from them, to interconnect them in terms of some causal or consequential relationship, or even to *justify* them in any way. For example, in answer to task 1(a), the reader states two of the important ingredients of the writer's overall purpose (the essential background to the argument – the imminent unification of Western Europe, and the proposed solution to the problem as outlined – the learning by each European pupil of at least two of the member states' languages), but does not attempt to specify the essential connection between the two; that is, *why* the latter will be necessary in view of the former. The content of the answer to 1(b) is rather inexplicit, and not particularly relevant to the definition of the writer's attitude towards the reader. Likewise, task 1(c) consists of two descriptive statements, of which one is followed by a vacuous attempt at justification.

The answer to 2(a) is correctly given, yet is interspersed with the parts of the answer to 2(b). Regarding the latter, the four main parts of the text are accurately specified in terms of their titles or functions ('**Introduction**'), yet the definitions of their content and discourse function are clearly adopting a *mentioning* strategy. However, even these mentions are not explicit in their own right: Part 1: 'The author

introduces the situation [*in what respect?*] that Europe will be in very soon [*when?*] and lists the different situations [*in what area?*] that exist in terms of language'. Part 2: the *nature* of the language 'problem' that will occur, according to Decaux, is not made explicit. Part 3: the 'solution' advocated here is correctly pinpointed, but no attempt is made to indicate *how* it might be a solution to the problem (which has not even been specified in the prior definition of Part 2). Finally, the definition given for Part 4 is simply a mention of (part of) the relevant content of this main part, at an extremely general level.

As to task 3 ('*state in your own words one or more specific arguments used in each of the parts you have isolated, in terms of the way they advance the author's goal in that part*'), the only adequate re-statement of an argument used in the text is the second one provided for Part 3 (significantly, this is prefaced by the 'argumentative' meta-verb *point out*). The remainder are essentially factual statements unsupported by causes, consequences, reasons or implications which might transform them into actual arguments. Moreover, as in this reader's answers to task 2(b), the restatements of these other 'arguments' are prefaced by meta-verbs of description (*describe* in both arguments given for Part 1, *state* for the first one provided for Part 2, and *describe* and *state* again, respectively, for both arguments chosen for Part 4). Typically, students towards the beginning of the course simply provide factual details (statistics, descriptions, direct quotations from the French) as instances of 'specific arguments' – and indeed, it regularly becomes apparent from year to year that many of them do not know what an argument actually is. However, by the end of the year, the great majority of them are able to recognise and re-phrase a selection of the specific arguments used in the texts read very effectively.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.1 The relevance of 'modal' cues in deep-level processing

A final point worthy of note in the corpus of communicative analyses has to do with the frequent neglect by learner-readers of certain formal, grammatical signals in texts of the author's attitude towards the subject matter, in particular (*viz.* tense, mood and modality markers). For example, the conditional form of a verb in French may signal that the proposition expressed via its complement clause is *alleged* to be true (that is, the author is specifically *not* subscribing to its truth, so that, within the context of the discourse in question, it is not to be taken as a fact). The simple past tense inflection of a verb, however (unless it occurs within the scope of some counterfactual predicate), signals that the proposition it contributes to expressing *is* to be taken as a definite fact. Furthermore, the simple present tense inflection indicates either that its proposition is generically true, or that it is contingently true, or that it is hypothetically true, depending on the context. Misconstrual of such important signals can lead to serious misunderstandings of (parts of) an author's message.

For example, in defining one of the main parts of a text on the social consequences of hasty and tardy town planning in France, many learner-readers listed a set of what were intended by the writer as ways of solving the problems outlined, as specific past time events:

“ . . . many artisans, through pressure on the local authorities, *ensured* that the quality of life within urban areas *was* good and that planning *meant* required (sic) buildings *were* built . . . ”

(my italics)

It might be argued here that the reason for this change in the modal status of the propositions at issue is the perceived rhetorical status of the macro unit containing them (the ‘main part’ in question): no longer the ‘Solution’ slot of a ‘Problem-Solution’ scheme, it is an extension of the ‘diagnosis’ part, with the series of specific past events listed by the reader as exemplifications of this.

In another communicative analysis of a text about the plight of sub-Saharan Africa, one reader interpreted the author as claiming that the then Soviet Union *in fact* controlled in Southern Africa (at the time of publication of the article in question, namely 1984) 98% of the world’s stock of its vanadium, 90% of its manganese, and 69% of its chromium; whereas the author actually asserted that this *would* be the case if this region were to fall under its control. As in the case of the previous example of misapprehension of an author’s propositional attitudes, it is clear that there is an inappropriate ‘frame’ being used here to make sense of this local discourse unit: namely, the reader’s own personal beliefs about the nature and ambitions of the then Soviet Union. Elsewhere in their communicative analysis of this text, this reader stated that the then Soviet Union’s presence and influence in Black Africa constituted at the time (1984) a major threat to the West, ignoring the fact that the author of the article is actually arguing the exact opposite.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that the ‘standard instruction’ method of teaching and testing French reading comprehension outlined above has two main advantages. Firstly, it helps learners to become aware of the ways in which writers of expository French prose take their intended readers into consideration in organising and formulating their message – so that when they themselves come to assume the writer’s mantle in their French essays and dissertations, they are likely to transfer that awareness to the more ‘synthetic’ (as opposed to analytic) process of composing. This has indeed been the case over past academic sessions, where essay marks have been broadly comparable to the reading comprehension results. One major spin-off has been the appreciation by many students of what ‘specific



arguments' are, and of French journalists' argumentative techniques. By the end of the year, almost all the students are able to demonstrate that they *can* appreciate and re-state in their own words a selection of the specific arguments deployed in the texts used in the Reading Comprehension component of the course.

The second main advantage of the method has lain in the detailed record it offers the teacher of, on the one hand, the extent of the students' deep understanding of the texts read, and on the other, of the strategy they have adopted in arriving at that understanding. Hence the teacher is in a much better position to offer specific and relevant help and guidance where it is needed. Such guidance was possible to a much lesser extent at an earlier stage in the course's development, when the traditional Question-and-Answer method was used. This is because the latter method (a) does much of the interpretative work for the reader (in the shape of the presuppositions embedded in the questions themselves), and (b) only serves to reveal the student's understanding of discrete, 'static' chunks of the text, yet not the more dynamic process of interpretation of the message as a whole. Furthermore, as Alderson & Urquhart (1984: 120) point out, it may in fact *encourage* learners to adopt a surface processing strategy, since they are expecting to be tested on the informational content of a text. In support of this view they cite a remark by a student on completing a traditional comprehension test: 'I got 100% on the questions, but I didn't understand the passage'. In contrast, the 'standard instruction' method forces the student to embrace the text as a whole, and to situate it in its particular communicative context.

The ultimate value of the method under consideration is that it encourages learner-readers to become autonomous in their reading and learning, by taking responsibility for the interpretation they arrive at, having to demonstrate and justify it on paper, and to monitor the extent of their understanding of specific texts (cf. also Oakhill & Garnham, 1988: 115-118, 166-8).

Some first-hand evidence for this is provided by students' comments on the Reading Comprehension exercise in their course evaluation questionnaires issued at the end of the year. These include the following: 'Very useful; they [the 'standard instructions'] help you to understand texts far more comprehensively – they force you to look at the ideas behind the words'; 'Very useful: it is an aid to improving your reading ability'.

Finally, to what extent is reading in a foreign language (at an advanced level of language proficiency) any different from reading in one's native language? In the case of my experience of students reading in French as a foreign language, there appear to be few differences at the 'lower' levels of lexical access or syntactic parsing – though clearly there are problems connected with textual cohesion, several of

which we have seen. The differences at this level of proficiency tend to manifest themselves at the higher levels of processing, where there are misapprehensions of the rhetorical scheme adopted by an author, or of specific arguments, or of the use of irony and other rhetorical devices. It has been suggested (cf. Clarke 1988) that many fluent readers in their native language have difficulty in transferring their fluent reading ability to the task of reading texts in a foreign or second language. Hence there will be a tendency for such readers to adopt an exclusively 'bottom-up' strategy in processing FL or SL texts, avoiding predicting meaning on the basis of hypotheses, or sampling, or previewing the text as a whole before they start to read it. For such readers, foreign language texts no doubt take on an aura of mystery, where every word has a sacred, essential quality to it.<sup>6</sup>

Another major difference between native- and foreign-language reading has to do with the cultural differences associated with texts written in the different languages in question. Several readers of the text on the challenge to European languages posed by the imminence of EC integration (see Appendix A) made what McCormick & Waller (1987) call a 'strong reading' of the article, seeing its author, the then minister for Francophonie, as having an ulterior motive in the article at hand: namely, to bring the reader to endorse his real purpose of having French chosen as the single language of the future integrated Europe, from a purely nationalistic standpoint. A 'strong' reading for McCormick & Waller, is one in which the reader has 'gone beyond' the discourse legitimated by the cues in the text and by its contextual configuration, to construct a highly personal interpretation of its point (i.e. its 'sub-text', in that reader's eyes). McCormick & Waller write of such readers 'going against the grain' of the text at hand. The 'strong' reading just mentioned clearly derived from the fact that the readers in question (a small minority in this instance) were reading the article from a British cultural point of view, with all its attendant assumptions and beliefs, rather than placing their reading within the cultural framework assumed by the French author.

With these provisos, however, I would suggest that the similarities between the two kinds of reading (in the native and in the foreign language) are much greater than the differences (at least in the case of two fairly closely related European languages such as English and French).

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## NOTES

- 1 I do not mean to imply here that these various activities are sequential – in fact they are undertaken simultaneously by the reader, though at different levels of processing.
- 2 Scott et al. (1984), and Carrell (1985) describe broadly similar methods of teaching advanced or intermediate level reading comprehension within English as a Foreign language, or English as a Second language.
- 3 This is due to the fact that the Single Market is but the first step towards full economic, and even ultimately political, union of the member states.
- 4 These are as follows: Part 3: 'In this section, Decaux puts forward his proposals for how the practical dissemination of language learning can take place'; and Part 4: 'This outlines the way in which French has had an influence over both Europe and the world and gives the new intentions of France in promoting French'.
- 5 This appreciation is in fact borne out in a productive sense in their following year in French, where students often demonstrate a subtle deployment of relevant arguments in their written essays and dissertation.
- 6 This may explain the over-frequent reliance on the bilingual dictionary rather than on guessing strategies, when unfamiliar words are encountered.

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## APPENDIX A

### Sample French text for Reading Comprehension

#### EUROPE: LE DEFI DES LANGUES

- L'extraordinaire défi que l'Europe s'est lancé à elle-même pour 1993 a donné naissance à un sentiment qui ressemble parfois à de la *fébrilité*<sup>1</sup>. Dans le domaine des langues, tout le monde s'agite, s'inquiète: gouvernements, entreprises, familles, étudiants. La perspective de l'Acte unique européen et de la libre circulation des biens et des personnes incite chacun à se préparer à cette situation inédite. Comment y faire face? Comment communiquer, échanger, vendre dans ce nouvel espace plurilingue, officiellement constitué de neuf langues toutes égales sur le plan communautaire, mais qui, à l'évidence, n'ont pas tous les mêmes chances?
- 5
- 10 Si l'on compare les systèmes éducatifs des douze pays de la CEE, on se rend compte immédiatement de la diversité des situations:
- dans la moitié des pays de la Communauté, une seule langue étrangère est obligatoire;
  - à l'exception des deux pays anglophones (Grande-Bretagne et Irlande),
- 15 l'anglais vient en tête;
- dans la plupart des pays, l'*éventail*<sup>2</sup> des langues apparaît relativement limité. Quatre langues dominent aujourd'hui : l'anglais, le français, l'espagnol et l'allemand. Les autres langues de la CEE sont rarement proposées et peu demandées;

<sup>1</sup> la fébrilité: l'agitation intense

<sup>2</sup> un éventail: un choix

- 20 – l'enseignement des langues étrangères est surtout le fait des classes secondaires. A l'école élémentaire, sauf aux Pays-Bas et au Luxembourg, l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère ne revêt encore qu'un caractère expérimental.

### Langue et culture

- 25 Impossible d'échapper à la question qui agite avant tout les esprits: comment résister au *rouleau compresseur*<sup>1</sup> de l'anglo-américain dont l'hégémonie dans le domaine des techniques, des affaires, de l'audiovisuel est telle que l'ignorance de cette langue en vient aujourd'hui à être ressentie comme un signe d'*analphabétisme*<sup>2</sup>. Certains, comme M. Alain Minc, n'hésitent pas à préconiser l'acceptation résolue de l'anglais comme langue de
- 30 l'Europe, et à renvoyer aux vieilles lunes *babéliennes*<sup>3</sup> les prétentions des autres langues à introduire leur cacophonie dans le concert européen. Un **management** 'efficace et dynamique' passe par une Europe parlant d'une seule voix: *foin des*<sup>4</sup> nationalismes, vive l'Europe anglophone, vive l'Europe du business!

- 35 C'est, bien sûr, aller un peu vite en besogne. D'autres que moi l'ont déjà fait remarquer: une langue ne se réduit pas à un simple code. Elle est une manière particulière d'appréhender la réalité, de la saisir, de l'exprimer. Cette vérité – c'en est une – s'impose dès lors que l'on passe d'une langue à l'autre. Et la pauvreté du code informatique (abusivement appelé langage)
- 40 montre bien que la langue ne se réduit pas à cet aspect mécaniste des choses.

- Si l'Europe ne veut pas perdre son âme, appauvrir sa culture, oublier son histoire, si elle veut s'imposer dans ce vingt et unième siècle naissant comme une nouvelle puissance mondiale, riche de son passé, fécondée par ses
- 45 potentialités, contribuant effectivement, entre l'Est et l'Ouest, entre le Nord et le Sud, à l'équilibre mondial, elle doit prendre en charge son plurilinguisme. Comme l'écrivait récemment, ici même, M. Maurice Allais, dans un article au demeurant ambigu, 'la langue d'un peuple représente une partie de son âme, et un strict bilinguisme risque de compromettre son épanouissement. En réalité, ce
- 50 dont nous avons tous besoin, nous Européens, c'est d'un plurilinguisme, au moins d'un trilinguisme'.

Rendant compte de la mission que je lui avais confiée auprès de nos onze partenaires de l'Europe communautaire, Martine Storti constatait récemment qu'une inquiétude – souvent une angoisse – commençait à *sourdre*<sup>6</sup> d'un bout à l'autre

1 un rouleau compresseur: 'steam roller'

2 l'analphabétisme: l'illettrisme

3 babélien: ayant trait à (la tour de) Babel (= la confusion des langues)

4 foin de . . . !: au diable avec . . . !

5 sourdre: naître

- 55 de notre continent: on redoute de plus en plus que l'accélération de la construction européenne n'aboutisse à une perte d'identité pour chacun des peuples qui la composent et y adhèrent.

### Pour le plurilinguisme

Rien ne devrait plus venir ralentir la création d'une Europe politiquement associée. Rien, sinon justement cette crainte-là

- 60 Seule peut y répondre la défense interactive des langues de l'Europe. Celle-ci passe par une condition nécessaire et suffisante: la maîtrise par chacun des citoyens de la Communauté de deux langues vivantes étrangères.

- Tel est l'objectif que la France propose à la Communauté et sur lequel il est à souhaiter qu'une vaste discussion puisse s'ouvrir bientôt. J'affirme que la  
65 défense de la langue française en Europe passe par la défense des langues de nos partenaires. Le français ne gardera sa place sur notre continent qu'autant que les autres langues la garderont aussi.

- Vouloir que chaque petit Européen apprenne au moins deux langues en plus de la sienne, cette perspective est-elle irréaliste? Nullement, si l'on décide  
70 d'introduire dès l'école primaire l'enseignement d'une première langue étrangère: l'enfant, lors de son passage dans le secondaire, se trouvera disponible pour apprendre une autre langue. Ce qu'il accomplira avec d'autant plus de facilité qu'il aura découvert très jeune les mécanismes d'un tel apprentissage. Tous les Européens apprendraient ainsi à communiquer dans trois langues, l'une d'entre  
75 elles devant, de préférence, appartenir à un autre groupe linguistique que celui de la langue maternelle.

Nous devons donc montrer l'exemple à nos partenaires de la Communauté en brûlant les étapes et en mettant en place sans tarder l'apprentissage d'une première langue étrangère européenne dès l'école primaire.

- 80 Afin de ne privilégier aucune langue, il serait souhaitable que les Douze acceptent un bilinguisme de proximité, encourageant par exemple en France l'enseignement de l'espagnol ou du portugais dans le Sud-Ouest, de l'italien dans le Sud-Est, de l'allemand dans l'Est, etc. Cette solution apparaîtra d'autant plus positive aux familles que celles-ci trouveront dans un tel accord la  
85 garantie souhaitée par nombre d'entre elles: leurs enfants pourront toujours apprendre l'anglais comme l'une des deux langues étrangères inscrites au programme.

- Il va sans dire que le choix des langues proposées ne saurait être inférieur à celui qui est actuellement offert, mais qu'il devrait tenir compte des langues  
90 historiques de la France comme des langues de l'immigration. Et que, par ailleurs, on devrait encourager l'apprentissage d'une troisième langue étrangère dans le second cycle, afin que ne soient pas exclues les grandes langues des pays n'appartenant pas à la Communauté.

### Le rôle du français dans ce nouvel espace

- 95 Le plurilinguisme repose, ne nous y trompons pas, sur une situation fondamentalement inégale: si toutes les langues peuvent, en droit, se réclamer d'une égale et éminente dignité, si elles doivent, à ce titre, être regardées comme des éléments du *patrimoine*<sup>1</sup> général de l'humanité, force est de reconnaître qu'elles ne possèdent pas toutes le même statut, au sein même du pays dont elles expriment la personnalité, et encore moins à l'extérieur de ses frontières.
- 100 Face à cette évidence, l'école a un rôle essentiel à jouer; elle doit faire connaître la diversité et la richesse, non seulement économique, mais sociale et culturelle, de ce nouvel espace. Rôle que doivent relayer sans relâche les médias. Le passé de l'Europe est marqué par un lot de guerres
- 105 et de conflits qui ont engendré des haines et des rancœurs encore tenaces. Chacun redoute plus ou moins consciemment l'impérialisme de l'autre, ou les appétits inavoués de son voisin, et l'exemple de la Belgique est là pour rappeler que l'on aime parfois mieux recourir à l'anglais que de consentir à utiliser une langue nationale rivale.
- 110 Au vrai, l'image du français en Europe demeure très ambivalente. Notre langue souffre ou bénéficie, selon les cas, d'une série de représentations contradictoires, tantôt atouts, tantôt handicaps. D'un côté, elle paie le prix de sa relative hégémonie passée, et apparaît à certains comme une langue de culture socialement intimidante, difficile à apprendre (et à
- 115 enseigner?), reflet d'un peuple qui, en tous les temps, a fait naître ailleurs un singulier mélange de fascination et de méfiance. En revanche, c'est sur elle que reposent aujourd'hui les espoirs de ceux qui ne se résignent pas au monolinguisme. Seule langue romane parlée à la même latitude que l'allemand ou l'anglais, elle permet, au sein de l'Europe,
- 120 d'assurer la liaison du Nord avec le Sud. Langue internationale, elle est partagée par plus de quarante peuples de par le monde qui se sont constitués en 'communauté solide'. Langue de progrès, de développement, mais aussi de culture, elle reste une valeur sûre aux yeux de ceux qui *récusent*<sup>2</sup> l'idéologie utilitariste.
- 125 Voici peut-être l'un des plus évidents paradoxes de la francophonie. Produit d'une histoire marquée *naguère*<sup>3</sup> par d'évidentes volontés d'expansion et de domination internationale, la francophonie, dans son unité et sa diversité, rejette aujourd'hui toute ambition néo-impérialiste. Parce qu'elle

<sup>1</sup> un patrimoine: un héritage, possessions de valeur

<sup>2</sup> récuser: repousser

<sup>3</sup> naguère: autrefois



130 s'affirme résolument plurielle et ouverte, elle donne à la vieille Europe  
une chance et une raison supplémentaire de s'émanciper de toute hégémonie  
culturellement réductrice.

par Alain Decaux  
de l'Académie Française, ministre délégué  
chargé de la francophonie,  
*Le Monde*, jeudi 14 septembre 1989

## APPENDIX B

### Model Analysis of French text

#### EUROPE: LE DEFI DES LANGUES (A. Decaux, *Le Monde*, 14.9.89)

##### 1(i) Author's purpose

To persuade the reader of the absolute necessity of rising to the *linguistic* challenge of the coming unified Europe in 1992 and beyond. The Europe to come will have to consolidate and reinforce its unique personality if it is not to succumb to the centripetal forces of uniformisation (political and economic union, etc.) acting from within, and the 'steam-roller' effect of the international language, English, from without. Trilingualism should become the hallmark of every new generation of Europeans, so that the culture of each member people (or at least of those using one of the four main European languages) can be kept alive and flourishing and can be mutually understood and recognised. Inter-European trade and exchanges of all kinds will be greatly facilitated thereby.

##### (ii) Author's attitude to reader

The author adopts an intelligent, persuasive, relatively 'gentle' attitude towards the reader, being careful not to impose his views on him/her in any way. The tone is moderate throughout, and he is at pains to present both sides of the argument and not to cause offence (an exception to this is his ironic dismissal of Alain Minc's somewhat extreme espousal of English (from a purely economic, practical viewpoint) as the sole future language of Europe (lines 28-34)). There are a number of direct questions posed to the reader, and the first person forms *je* and *nous* are used on occasion. Decaux uses a certain amount of humour and irony, as well as a somewhat literary style (e.g. 'commençait à sourdre', line 54). It is a very well written passage, which succeeds in engaging the reader's sympathy, interest and concern for the issues raised.

### (iii) Author's attitude to subject-matter

Decaux is obviously very concerned about the future of the main European languages (including his own) – though he is not passionate about it: as an historian, he is concerned to give a global view of the issue, and to try to be impartial. (He is also a member of the distinguished French Academy – the traditional guardian of the French language and culture – as well as minister for Francophonie). However, he does not try to 'push' French forward as a 'superior' language, but accords equal importance to the preservation of all the languages of Europe.

### 2(i) Organisational plan

The plan followed by the author is that of **Problem-Solution**.

### (ii) Main parts of the text

1. *The introduction* (lines 1-23). This sets out the 'problem' to be solved in the article: the main European languages will be critical in the increased level of trade and exchanges post 1993 and the Single European market, yet the member countries' education systems are singularly ill-prepared for this purpose.
2. *The intimate relationship between language and culture* (lines 24-57). This part attempts to justify the author's description of the problem outlined in Part 1, by demonstrating that a language is not a mere instrumental code (where one is as good as any other) but the vehicle of a whole culture.
3. *A plea for multilingualism* (lines 58-93). This is the central part of the article, and constitutes the resolution of the problem outlined in Parts 1 and 2: trilingualism in Europe will protect the main European languages against the cultural and linguistic domination by just one (English).
4. *The role of French in such a context* (lines 94-131). As a coda to the argument, Decaux suggests that French could play a pivotal role in this respect, both within Europe and on a world level, providing a focus for resistance to the trend towards monolingualism and its attendant monoculturalism.

### 3. Specific arguments

#### *Part 1.*

At the moment, there is feverish preparation for the coming of the Single Market in 1993 and for the prospect of a politically and economically unified Europe. Yet concern about language issues should be at the forefront of this activity, since otherwise there is a grave danger of uniformisation and the consequent

crushing of the distinct cultural identities of its member societies. To prevent this, and to fulfil the much greater need after 1993 for inter-state communication and trade, fostering the main European languages is vital.

*Part 2.*

A natural language is not simply a 'transparent' vehicle, of value only in fulfilling practical, immediate needs. It is also, and primarily, a means of understanding and expressing different aspects of social *and* physical reality and of conveying and preserving various cultural values. Hence in the case of the Europe of the future, the maintenance of linguistic diversity (in place of the current trend towards linguistic uniformity), can serve to preserve and enhance such cultural contributions to a distinct, European 'personality'.

*Part 3.*

If one learns a first foreign language at primary school level, one will have assimilated the mechanics of language learning at an age when one is attuned to it; it will then be that much easier to acquire a second foreign language at secondary level. Otherwise, it will be far more difficult to start to acquire *two* foreign languages at that stage in one's development.

*Part 4.*

French has a unique role to play in the multilingual Europe advocated by Decaux: it is the only Romance language spoken at the latitude of the Germanic languages, English and German, yet has borders with countries speaking two other main Romance languages, Spanish and Italian. It could thus act as a link or crossroads between the two main parts of Western Europe, thereby acting as a focus of resistance to the threat of cultural and linguistic hegemony by one European language, English.

## APPENDIX C1

### UKC student's Communicative analysis of *Europe: le défi des langues*

#### 1(a) The author's purpose

Here, Decaux is trying to promote the importance of the teaching and learning of languages: this is emphasised due to the imminent changes in the E.C. with the Single Market Act being implemented. He stresses the importance of maintaining an equilibrium amongst countries by their inhabitants' learning other member states' languages – this he believes will enable each country to keep their national identity, history and culture but will also enable the citizens of other countries to understand each other's cultures via a knowledge of their languages.

Decaux stresses that the worries felt by many that they will be 'left behind' in European terms would be virtually eradicated if the member states were to implement such proposals as he puts forward.

### **1(b) The author's attitude to the reader**

Decaux is obviously trying to promote his ideas regarding the learning of several languages by Community members but he does not do so in an unappealing way in this article, he clearly states the advantages of such a policy and he also realises that there will be doubts in some people's minds about the practicalities of implementation. For instance, he sees that people may think that it is unrealistic for European children to learn two foreign languages and so gives a clear and reasonable answer as to how this could be done. Decaux is attempting to show the positive sides to learning other languages and he makes the reader interested and encouraged to do so (sic).

### **1(c) Author's attitude to the subject matter**

As the minister in charge of promoting the cause of the French language, Decaux is obviously involved in and passionate towards the subject. His strong belief (sic) in the French language as an equalising force to those of the North-European languages of (sic) English and German does show through but it is not at the cost of the other Community languages, he is trying to create a pluralism of language learning and comprehension in the Community.

He is optimistic about how worries can be eradicated and problems solved regarding the Single Market but one can sense an urgency in his tone which is perhaps a sign that he is frustrated that such policies have not already been implemented by the member states.

### **2(a) The organisational plan is: Problem-Solution**

### **2(b) There are four main parts to the text:**

#### **(i) Part 1 'Europe: le défi des langues' to 'Langue et culture'**

This acts as a contextualising introduction. Here Decaux explains the worries which some people have about being left behind in the Single Market because of the difficulty of needing to know many languages, and he illustrates the way in which language teaching has been limited to four major languages with English leading the language learning 'race'. This section establishes the ground to which Decaux's proposals will try to bring change.

(ii) Part 2 '*Langue et culture*' to '*Pour le plurilinguisme*'

Here Decaux shows how the English/American language has taken control over Europe and how people tend to regard English-speaking as second nature, even to the point where a lack of knowledge of English has been seen like (sic) a sign of illiteracy.

He states that although some theorists have proposed that English becomes the Community's language, there is a lot more at stake – languages do not just signify the code of words (sic) used for speaking, they determine and express the specific country's culture, history and heritage. Decaux proposes that it is necessary, if for only these reasons although there are others, not to allow one language to dominate – he believes each person should know at least 3 languages.

He states that Europe has a stabilising influence in the world and this could be undermined if the identities of many Community members are undermined by the domination of one language and not a pluralism of languages as he suggests.

(iii) Part 3 '*Pour le plurilinguisme*' to '*Le rôle du français . . .*'

In this section Decaux puts forward his proposals for how the practical dissemination of language learning can take place. He states that each person should know at least two other languages and it is France's wish that this be implemented in order to protect the French language and the languages of its 11 partners.

Decaux shows how by changing the timing of language teaching (i.e. bringing in primary rather than secondary schools) children could easily learn 2 other languages and would hence gain an important insight into other cultures.

He states that Europe should not tolerate the fact that one language dominates since it is an unfair advantage – he believes France should lead the way in implementing such proposals and hence promote the languages not only of its Community partners but of other countries in the world.

(iv) Part 4 '*Le rôle du français . . .*'

This outlines the way in which French has had an influence over both Europe and the world and gives the new intentions of France in promoting French. He emphasises that some languages are more influential than others and this has been shown of French, right through history.

Decaux believes that French needs to maintain its influence to balance the North and South of Europe, equalising the power of German and English.

He states that French is no longer an imperialist-based language but it is founded on a progressive world-wide community of about 40 countries. Decaux emphasises the cultural, social and international rôle which French has to play in the new European and international system.

### 3. Specific arguments

(i) Decaux points out the diversity of language teaching in the 12 member countries – he obviously sees this as possibly detrimental since a regulated Community-wide language teaching system would be more advantageous to Europe as a whole.

(ii) Here, Decaux emphasises the vast influence and importance which a language involves – he dismisses the use of ‘language’ as a term for computer code words (sic) since languages are not just mechanical ways of communicating, they are subtle and are a way of defining (sic) culture, history and heritage. This is why he proposes that people should know at least 3 languages so that they can understand other countries (sic) as well as their inhabitants.

(iii) Decaux shows how language learning can be more practical by using (sic) his proposals than beforehand (sic), because schools could offer relevant languages depending on where they are geographically situated, for instance. Schools in the South West of France could offer Spanish and Portuguese whereas in North Eastern France they could offer say Flemish and German. By doing this it would facilitate business and movement within Europe since regions would then have several languages which could be used there.

(iv) French has suffered mixed fortunes regarding its influence during history – it has been dismissed as culturally and socially intimidating, not to mention very difficult to learn, but it also has had the position of the only Latin-based language to be spoken on a wide scale and so can hence (sic) create a North-South European balance with German and English.

## APPENDIX C2

### UKC student's Communicative analysis of *'Europe: le défi des langues'*

1(a) The author, in view of the unification of Europe, proposes that it will be necessary that everyone learns at least two or three of the most widely-used languages.

1(b) The author appeals to the reader to recognize the importance of knowing more than one language in the future. By asking many questions e.g. in line 6, he makes the reader realize that a (sic) multilingualism (sic) is necessary.

1(c) The author is very enthusiastic about his subject-matter, which is shown by his illustrating his points and appealing to the reader. He is also very devoted to his mother tongue language – French.

2(a) and (b) There are 4 parts:

*Introduction:*

The author introduces the situation that Europe will be in very soon and lists the different situations that exist in terms of language.

*Language and culture: – problem*

The author describes the language *problem* there will be once the 12 countries of Europe will (sic) be unified.

*Multilingualism (sic) – solution.*

The author proposes a solution, namely, for all Europeans to learn at least two foreign languages.

*The role of French:*

The author describes the situation of the French language in Europe and others' views about it.

3. *Part 1 – Introduction*

The author describes the new situation of a unified Europe which makes his appeal to the reader stronger (and puts emphasis on the circulation of goods and people). He also describes the diversity of situations which makes the problem he describes in the following part more evident. (He points out the inequalities that different languages possess).

*Part 2 – Problem*

The author states the problem of having one language (English) as the new language for Europe, he compares it to computer 'language' to show the inadequacies of having only one language. Also, he points out that by having one language, a lot of the culture, history and spirit of the countries of Europe, and with this, the people's identity, would disappear.

*Part 3 – Solution*

The author suggests that all Europeans should be taught at least two foreign languages – this should be introduced into the educational curriculum. It would also be more useful if people were taught the language of the countries closest to them.

*Part 4* – The situation of the French language – The author describes the different (and contradicting (sic)) views about French and the people who speak it. He also states all its positive qualities (line 116 onwards) thereby emphasizing its importance.