

[Review]

The Language Market - French, Stage A

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Brisbane: Go print and Queensland Language Department, 1998.
Distributed in Australia and New Zealand by Intext Book Company Pty Ltd
Price: AUS\$ 250.00 with full site licence available

The Language Market is an exciting innovation in interactive multimedia format - CD-ROM - for the teaching of languages other than English. There are six language versions: Chinese (PC only), French, German, Indonesian, Italian, and Japanese (PC only). Although the format and content are similar across all six languages, this review pertains specifically to French.

The CD-ROM, accompanied by the essential User's Guide (32 pp) offers us sixteen units of work, each of which includes up to twelve discrete if interrelated activities.

While the disclaimer indicates a possible lack of cultural authenticity of characters, situations, and environments, the blurb does profess the program to be an easy-to-use authentic series of language programs, addressing a variety of learning skills and levels. These assertions, I believe, are true.

The topics covered are those that one would expect in a language course for beginners: identity, age, numbers, introductions (of the family), habitat, pastimes, clothes, pets, situations, descriptions, current activities, celebrations, and significant calendar events. The major innovation, however, is the fully sequenced and contextual nature of the activities provided within the interactive, captivating multimedia format. As such, it would be an invaluable adjunct to existing courses.

While the program would address the interests and learning styles of primary age learners, those in the secondary years of schooling - and adults - would also find the program a boon to language learning. The browsing facility and cumulative scoring would also facilitate self-paced and autonomous learning, which makes the Language Market a useful tool in the classroom with a range of abilities (ie every classroom).

The program is fully structured and sequenced through the sixteen units but with the option for the teacher to move around the activities to overview all content and plan student tasks related to the syllabus in place. For the students, however, progression to the next activity or unit is premised on successful completion of the preceding task with ongoing comments on performance. Units 9, 13, and 16 allow for revision and consolidation. Printed certificates, including score, are available upon the successful completion of each unit's final consolidation activity and a full detailed scoreboard of all activities attempted. The scores and times for completion may be printed for assessment and accountability at any time. There is also the potential to cut out of activities if desired.

The colourful animation is absorbing and the characters captivating - including the 'Spy' who provides full translation of the language used, but with a penalty imposed for

seeking the translation. The “Teacher” provides English language clues to possible answers or pathways and gives the students pointers about anomalies or grammar rules which assist in more fluent learning processes and concept development. The music and other sound effects are amusing and motivational, supportive of the concentration and the learning process while facilitating the impression of fast progress - denying boredom. The icon functions are clearly explained in the User's Guide, with on-screen appearance highlighting (through flashing) the next move to take to further learning.

While the priority of the program is to motivate language learning - which it does admirably - other skills are also reinforced: retention and recall, language fluency in (authentic) listening and reading; and eye-hand coordination of the mouse. The near-exclusive use of the target language reflects current thinking in language pedagogy.

Specific activities covering listening, reading and writing skills, are characterised by variety, contributing to a sustained positive attitude ... and continued progress. Tasks include: matching oral French statements with text in French or English; image-utterance matching; letter clues for identifying the correct characters with statements; situating statements heard within a specific context; games; the matching of spoken statements with text, with visual cues; true/false responses; text completion or construction; and the invitation (in French) to repeat tasks to improve scoring and learning.

Topical slide shows are slotted in through the language activities providing activities integrating language and culture. The commentary is in basic French with an option for the student to pull down a screen giving more detailed information in English.

Overall, I have found the Language Market in French an excellent program to motivate and facilitate initial and continued language learning and would recommend it for use with learners of French of all ability levels irrespective of age.

Note

The Language Market can be obtained from Intext Book Company Pty Ltd, 825 Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn 3122, Australia. The email address is: mail@intextbook.com.au and further information can be obtained from the Intext homepage at www.intextbook.com.au