

## Re: Let's talk about langages (Advice/Help)

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**From:** DeMaisonneuve (*lucr\_at\_me.ca*)

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"Neeraj Mathur" <neeraj.mathur@chch.ox.ac.uk> wrote in message  
news:cg30o5\$9c1\$1@news.ox.ac.uk...

> *Hi,*

>

> *Thanks for your comments – my replies are interspersed.*

>

> *"devil" <devil@attglobal.net> wrote in message*

> *news:pan.2004.08.19.14.54.20.779347@attglobal.net...*

>> *First, on history. I don't think it's really a situation whereby French*

>> *"has diverged." More like, it was born like that.*

>

> *Why would you say that, exactly?*

>

> *Perhaps an example of what I meant would help. In the 12th century, spoken*

> *French had a difference between the 2 sg. 'chantes' and the 3 pl.*

> *'chantent'. This difference was present in the written French of the time.*

> *Since then, however, the written form has continued exactly – we still  
write*

> *'tu chantes' and 'ils chantent' – but the spoken language has diverged  
from*

> *this, and only one form is used, [sat] (with a nasalised vowel – sorry,  
I'm*

> *not an IPA pro yet – have I written that wrong?).*

>

> *In any case, what is important is that there is a distinction in written*

> *French which is not present in spoken French. This makes it difficult for*

> *learners – those who learn spoken French first (Francophone children,*

> *students in immersion classes, etc.) will have difficulty (minute, yes,*

*but*

> *present) learning the written forms, while those who learn both together*

> *(older students learning French as a second language) will have to deal*

*with*

> *the fact that the grammars of the written and spoken languages are*

> *different. These difficulties are not experienced by students of, say,*

> *Spanish.*

>

>> *As to comparing spelling and grammar difficulty in French and in*

English,

- > > *again the comparison is by no means as straightforward as you make it*
- > > *sound. True that French is more structured, that it's much more*
- > > *rule-based, and that it has more redundancies governed by rules. OTOH,*
- > > *it's almost always much more predictable than English. In English, you*
- > > *may not have rules, but you end up having to learn the usage in effect*
- on
- > > *a case-by-case manner. A point that native speakers may have a hard*
- time
- > > *noticing, BTW, because they will typically have learned the cases before*
- > > *reaching an age where you become conscious and aware of your own*
- learning
- > > *process.*
- >
- > *I'm afraid I'm not entirely sure what you're talking about here – would*
- you
- > *mind rephrasing that for me, with an example, so that I can follow you*
- > *better?*
- >
- > > *The point you make about past tenses is very relative. This may be*
- > > *happening, but not necessarily across the board, and you will meet*
- people
- > > *who will claim what you see as a done deal as being just plain wrong.*
- >
- > *Let me elaborate on my point a bit. In Italian, there is a contrast*
- between
- > *'feci' and 'ho fatto'. In Spanish, there is a contrast between 'hice' and*
- > *'he hecho'. In English, there is a contrast between 'I did' and 'I have*
- > *done'.*
- >
- > *In the written French of Voltaire, there is an exactly corresponding*
- > *difference between 'je fis' and 'j'ai fait'. My understanding is that this*
- > *contrast, at that time, was present in the spoken language as well.*
- >
- > *In modern days, however, I have never heard a Francophone use 'je fis' in*
- > *his normal speech. I have instead always heard 'j'ai fait'.*

In French, the simple past tense is very rarely used in spoken language. It is more widely used in writings. The meaning is quite similar to the one of the passe compose. There may be a very slight difference, but it is quite hard to explain.

- > *This is used,*
- > *not only in situations where Voltaire uses it, but also in situations*
- where
- > *the older language produces 'je fis'. This is my experience; if this is*
- > *because of my limited exposure to Francophones, j'invite vous tous qui*
- > *habitez dans des pays Francophones de m'y corriger.*

Bravo, sans aucune faute d'orthographe. Je vois que vous avez atteint un niveau de français élevé. Seul conseil, mais c'est simplement pour rendre

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plus naturelle votre structure de phrase, vous devriez plutôt utiliser la tournure de phrase suivante:

Je vous invite, vous tous qui habitez dans des pays...

ou bien encore:

J'invite tous ceux qui habitent dans des pays...

>

> *Now, we come to the written language. How often do writers today make that distinction? Once again, I invite those with more experience to correct me,*

> *but I believe that the distinction is much more common in written French than in spoken. Regardless, for those who wish to read French literature (whether native speakers or not) it is important to learn both the morphology of the 'fis'-type forms, and the semantics involved, so that they*

> *can properly understand those texts that do use it. At the same time, they must realise that the grammar of the spoken language is different. In other*

> *words, they must learn different grammars for the written and spoken language – a difficulty not experienced with Italian or Spanish, say, where*

> *the grammars of the written and spoken languages are different.*

>

> *Now when you say that it is not a 'done deal', do you mean that both past tenses are still in use in modern spoken French?*

>

>> *Coming back to grammar and structure, in English you still have some remnants of declinations, absent from modern French but still very much there in German and in Russian. In Portuguese and possibly in Spanish, you have future tenses for subjunctives, absent from French. Languages such as German and Dutch have complex rules for sentence construction and*

>> *order of word, with French being much more flexible; some of these are probably still there in English?*

>

> *I do not want to suggest that certain types of language are inherently harder than others – for instance, that analytical languages which rely heavily on word order are easier than inflected languages with several morpho-semantic categories. All I want to argue is that it is difficult for*

> *people to learn a language where the spoken and written forms of the language differ, and that the greater the difference, the greater the difficulty.*

>

> *For instance, take Welsh. The accepted 'literary' Welsh is very different from the spoken varieties of it – thus the literary form of 'I am not singing' is 'Nid wyf fy ddim yn canu', while the (Northern) spoken form is 'dwy ddim yn canu'. This creates a difficulty for the learner. The present method of circumventing this difficulty is to teach the spoken language first, and write it using an informal transcription system that reflects the*

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- > *spoken language very closely; at a later time (if ever) the grammar of the*
- > *written language is learnt. If an attempt was made to teach the formal*
- > *written language and the spoken language together, the difficulty would be*
- > *very great. In French, as the divergence of the spoken and written is*  
less,
- > *both are taught together; the difficulty is less than it would be for*  
Welsh.
- > *In Spanish, the divergence between spoken and written is very low indeed,*
- > *and this source of difficulty is correspondingly miniscule.*
- >
- >> *Being schooled in Canada, I noticed that people of Francophone*
- >>> *backgrounds (or who had had French Immersion primary schooling) did*  
not
- >>> *seem to be particularly advantaged with regards to written French in*
- >>> *French classes; their advantages were solely oral. I take this as*  
proof
- >>> *of the distance between the written and spoken forms of the language.*
- >>
- >> *You should not. You would see a similar situation with any language.*
- >> *Definitely, for instance with Chinese languages. But likely across the*  
>> *board.*
- >
- > *Well, let's test it. Is there anybody here with experience with Spanish or*
- > *Italian Immersion, and who can comment on the abilities of such students*  
> *with regards to the written language?*
- >
- > *Neeraj Mathur*
- >
- >