

## Re: History of French

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**From:** Herman Rubin ([hruhin\\_at\\_odds.stat.purdue.edu](mailto:hruhin_at_odds.stat.purdue.edu))

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In article <q22ek0tf63un73f8rr9ibb4kctbfbut362@4ax.com>, Ruud Harmsen <realemailseesite01@rudhar.com> wrote:  
>14 Sep 2004 09:21:23 -0500: [hruhin@odds.stat.purdue.edu](mailto:hruhin@odds.stat.purdue.edu) (Herman >Rubin): in *sci.lang*:

>>>So you think people learn their native language in school, not in the >>>cradle? Strange.

>>They may START in the cradle, but if they learn it only >>at home and on the playground, they will only have a >>rudimentary understanding of the language.

>I don't think so. Any four year old child already has complete >command, including all the subtle details only native speakers can >fully appreciate, of its own native language. Or of two or three, in >some situations.

Relatively few of the undergraduates at our universities have a reasonable understanding of English grammar.

Nor is the vocabulary of a four year old that great; I knew more French, although I could not speak it quickly, from a one-year course. But then I am always looking for structure and relationships, which is lost by memorization and routine. Some things have to be memorized.

>>It seems >>also that children have an understanding of grammar,

>seems?

>>which seems to be eradicated by the schools.

>>If every set of parents teaches its own language, it >>will not take long for different groups not to be able >>to communicate, which is the purpose of language.

>*I don't understand. It's what happens all the time. What's more, it's  
>very difficult for a child to learn a language properly if the parents  
>would \_not\_ (automatically, not on purpose) teach it their language.*

What does it mean to learn a language "properly"?

Does learning English properly mean that one should be able to understand Shakespeare, or to understand gutter dialect? The current approach seems to prefer the latter.

>>*The  
>>idea of "correct" language seems now to be politically  
>>INcorrect, alas.*

>*Both exist, next to each other. If you haven't already learnt a  
>language as a child, teaching it a "correct" standard language is  
>wasted effort.*

Nonsense. An adult can learn a correct language much more easily, not having to unlearn the confusion which a child encounters. What is not realized is that the child spends far more time learning the language than the adult does.

>>*Understanding grammar makes it easier  
>>to understand vocabulary, not vice versa.*

>*Two senses of "grammar" are getting intermingled here:  
>1) What any native knows and applies automatically  
>2) Studying that grammar in hindsight, and teaching the results of  
>such studies.*

As to "any native" knowing and applying it automatically, my encounters with native Americans who are college students indicate that neither is the case.

Grammar is the structure of a language. Vocabulary and usage fit into the structure, and a good presentation of this makes learning much easier.

There is a book by Gould, *\_Russian for the Mathematician\_*. He claims that if one learns the grammar, the alphabet, the connectives, and 40 Russian roots, one could read mathematical Russian.

Even back when English grammar was taught in grammar school, learning the grammar of a foreign language pointed out parts of English grammar which the school classes did not cover.

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sci.lang: Re: History of French

This address is for information only. I do not claim that these views are those of the Statistics Department or of Purdue University.

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