

Re: French verb conjugation: "je harcele"? or "je harcelle"?

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On 2008-03-28, Christian Weisgerber wrote:

or am I wrong in thinking that "upside-down-e" means "schwa"?

It does, but the actual French vowel represented by it is different from the one represented by the same symbol in phonemic transcriptions of, say, English or German.

Fair enough.

Regarding the actual phonemic inventory of modern French, the choices offered by the "phonetic" search function of the TLFi site are quite telling:

A Amour
E rEvoir, dEUx
É École, rÊve, AImable
I Innocent
O Obliger, AUrore, burEAU
U Unité
OU OUtre
Y fiLLe, raYé, tuYau

AN ANcre
IN INfini, mais aussi brUN
ON ONctueux

Interesting. (But where I lived in France, "an" and "on" seemed indistinguishable (or nearly), whereas I think "in" and "un" were slightly different.)

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So while French dictionaries still maintain a three-way distinction between the vowels in "peu" and "peur" and the first one in "premier", your average French speaker is rather less certain. Most shocking, I know.

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I worry that 10 or 15 years from now, [my daughter] will come to me and say 'Daddy, where were you when they took freedom of the press away from the Internet?' [Mike Godwin, EFF <http://www.eff.org/>]

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