

Introduction

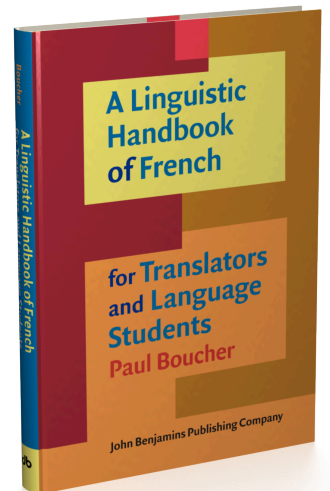
 <https://doi.org/10.1075/z.216.intro>

Pages xiii–xiv of
A Linguistic Handbook of French for Translators and Language Students
Paul Boucher
2018. xiv, 297 pp.

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Introduction

A Linguistic Handbook of French for Translators and Language Students offers an innovative approach to the study of French based on recent theories of linguistics and discourse analysis. Attention is focused on problems like textual coherence and cohesion, anaphora and ellipsis, word order, genre, narrative voice, and so on, rather than on vocabulary or isolated grammatical points such as verb forms, **pronouns** or **sentence** structure. The reader will also find a careful study of some of the problems posed in understanding, writing and translating different types of texts: fiction and non-fiction, newspaper articles, technical and scientific documents. It is thus hoped that the book will appeal to a broad spectrum of readers interested in the French language, although its primary audience would be translators, language teachers and students in graduate level language courses.

While solidly grounded in recent research on language and translation theory, the Handbook tries to keep theoretical discussion to a minimum, in favor of extensive practice in solving specific language problems using actual professional translations as models. The exercises are followed by detailed corrections and advice on understanding the translations in French and English. They assume that the reader has attained a certain degree of fluency in both languages and is able to understand and translate everyday contemporary documents in a variety of genres.

As the reader proceeds through the discussions, exercises and corrections, he or she will discover a certain number of fundamental differences between French and English, which are rarely if ever pointed out in traditional grammars or linguistic handbooks. For instance, the construction of compound nouns, the organisation of complex verbal constructions or the use of the passive voice.

At a more fundamental level, English is shown to depend on “deictic anchoring” in its use of, not only tense and aspect forms, but also of **demonstrative** pronouns, in a way that is quite foreign to French. On the other hand, French has developed a series of “stylistic alloforms”¹ which are unheard of in English. Two striking examples of this are the use of past tense forms and interrogative structures. In the former case, French alternates the *passé simple*, the *présent simple* and the *passé composé* according to stylistic genre: the first being reserved for formal written narrative prose, the second

¹ The term “alloform” is taken from Lambrecht (1994) and refers to “linguistic forms which refer to the same thing but in different stylistic contexts”. By stylistic alloforms, I mean a form which is only used in certain stylistic genres, like the *passé simple*, which is only found in formal written narratives.

for historical narratives and the third used everywhere else, including for journalistic narration. The latter problem concerns the way French distributes various interrogative forms according to register, context and pragmatic necessity. These differences between the two languages affect reader understanding and translation across a whole series of problems, for instance the use of narrative voice or orientation in time and space.

The book is divided into three sections: *Structure*, *Perspective* and *Coherence*, the idea being to take the student step-by-step through a series of problems involved in translating and understanding French. Each section contains four chapters of approximately equal length, followed by a bibliography and a glossary of technical terms. Readers interested in further exploring certain technical points will find the list of works consulted and suggested readings in each area of research.