

Teaching Grammatical Terminology: A Content Analysis of Popular French Textbooks

Alison Clifton
Roanoke College

Abstract

Even in this digital age, as educational technologies are increasingly integrated into teaching and learning, textbooks continue to play a significant role within language classrooms. Many textbooks maintain a traditional approach to presenting grammar, including using grammatical terminology. However, students seem to have little knowledge of these terms, which may make grammar explanations difficult to comprehend. This investigation examines data from eight widely-used beginning-level French textbooks to investigate how grammatical terminology is employed. The findings confirm that grammar explanations in beginning-level French textbooks feature a large number of grammatical terms and many of these terms are not defined. An instructional approach that allows for the use of a simplified set of grammatical terminology is proposed.

Key words: *French, grammar, materials development, second language education, terminology*

Background

Grammar instruction has played a vital role in classroom second language teaching for many years. This tradition has been maintained and is apparent in the grammar explanations that are present in many of the foreign language textbooks used in language classrooms today. Many language textbooks have upheld a traditional approach to presenting grammar, including using metalinguistic, or grammatical, terminology in explaining grammatical features of the target language. However, it appears that students in the United States are entering language classrooms with little or no knowledge of the meaning of these terms (Clifton, 2013; Vande Berg, 1999), which may make these grammar explanations difficult to comprehend. Thus, this paper examines how grammar is presented in first-year language textbooks and the extent to which those presentations are well defined for student comprehension.

The Utility of Grammatical Terms

Previous studies on second language grammar instruction have revealed disagreement over how necessary grammatical terminology is to second language teaching. Some studies have made a case against employing grammatical terminology in second language education. For example, Mohammed (1996) argues that these grammatical terms simply encumber the learning process because students must be familiar with the terminology in order to understand the grammar rules that will then help them to practice and learn the language. In this way, learning becomes a

three-step process: (1) learn the meanings of the grammar terms, (2) learn the grammar rules, (3) apply those rules in order to communicate in the language. Mohamed concludes that informal pedagogical grammar may be the most effective form of grammar instruction because in this approach, grammar is reduced in scope and is explained using a minimum of grammatical terms. Bourke (2005) identified six criteria of effective pedagogical grammar, including clarity, which he defines as being characterized by “explaining and exemplifying in plain English and not obfuscating by unfamiliar metalanguage” (p. 85).

Another argument against using grammatical terms in second language teaching is situated in the question of the relationship between awareness of a rule and the capacity to use it in production. Stephen Krashen (1985), for example, rejected the idea that explicit knowledge of grammar rules increases second language fluency. This view is known as the ‘non-interface position’ and states that learned language rules do not become the acquired language rules that lead to fluency. With the growth in popularity of communicative and proficiency-oriented approaches to language learning and teaching, which stress the importance of being able to use the target language to communicate in authentic contexts and to produce spontaneous output (Brumfit, 1984; Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Savignon, 1997), questions were raised concerning the importance of explicit grammar instruction and terminology use in the foreign language classroom.

However, many scholars support the use of grammatical terms in second language learning and teaching. Berry (2008), for example, argues that grammatical terminology is important because it provides learners and teachers with a quick and easy way to denote grammatical elements: “There will be situations where terminology is not appropriate, as with less advanced, younger or less mature students, but if the classroom focus is on form it appears to be an essential shorthand” (p. 20). Although acknowledging that the use of metalanguage is not suitable for all language learning contexts, Berry nevertheless maintains that grammatical terminology offers a simple way for instructors and students to communicate about language when students’ attention is directed to language form. In addition, Carreira (2016) contends that being familiar with a foreign language involves being familiar with the terms used to describe it: “In the foreign languages, disciplinary literacy includes knowledge of grammatical terminology” (p. 163). For Carreira, then, language study also encompasses a familiarity with metalanguage.

Research on grammatical terminology (Berry, 2009; Elder & Manwaring, 2004) has also uncovered positive correlations between familiarity with terminology and second language proficiency. Indeed, contrary to the view espoused by Krashen (1985, 1993) that form-focused instruction is capable of contributing only to learned, explicit knowledge, Ellis (2002) offers evidence that form-focused instruction contributes to both learned and acquired knowledge. Ellis concludes that the noticing of target structures plays a central role in second language learning by affecting both explicit and implicit knowledge. Many authors agree that grammar instruction and the development of grammatical competency can help to develop students’ language skills and communicative competence. Haight, Herron, and Cole (2007) suggest that grammar instruction that directs learners’ attention to form is most successful: “In general, research suggests that focusing on form in a communicative language class-

room is a more effective technique for teaching grammar than focusing on form alone or focusing purely on communication” (p. 290). Thus, instruction that directs learners’ attention to form can lead to an increase in grammatical proficiency.

Grammatical Terms in Language Textbooks

One of the functions of beginning language textbooks is to present vocabulary terms and grammatical constructions with the aim of improving learners’ language proficiency. Learning the language rules that beginning language students must come to know to be able to converse in a second language is a difficult task. This undertaking becomes problematic when students are unfamiliar with the grammatical terminology used in their textbooks. Consequently, this paper focuses on how grammar is presented in textbooks because these materials have the potential to encourage or hinder language learning. Specifically, do beginning language textbooks employ grammatical terminology in presenting grammar? The purpose of this investigation is to explore the way in which grammatical terminology is presently used in textbooks. This paper will examine the terminology used in the grammar presentations concerning the French relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* provided by eight different introductory French language textbooks.

The present study examines the following questions in the content analysis of textbooks:

1. Do the eight beginning level French textbooks surveyed use grammatical terminology to explain grammatical language features? If so, how many grammatical terms are used in a given explanation?
2. Which grammatical terms are used?
3. Do the textbooks provide explanations as to the meaning of these terms?

Textbook Analysis

Eight widely-used US French texts were chosen for the content analysis. The textbooks examined were *Chez Nous* (Valdman, Pons, & Scullen, 2006), *Contacts* (Valette & Valette, 2009), *Deux Mondes* (Terrell, Rogers, Kerr, & Spielmann, 2005), *Entre Amis* (Oates & Oukada, 2006), *Horizons* (Manley, Smith, McMinn, & Prévost, 2006), *Mais oui* (Thompson & Phillips, 2011), *Motifs* (Jansma & Kassen, 2011), and *Vis-à-vis* (Amon, Muyskens, & Omaggio Hadley, 2011). Following Fernández (2011), the choice of textbooks was determined by how many editions of the books had been produced. Textbooks with several editions are generally more well-known and more widely-used by language educators than textbooks that have undergone only one printing. For this reason, only books in their fourth edition or above were chosen for the content analysis. Finally, all textbooks chosen for analysis were published by major publishing companies (Heinle-Cengage, Houghton Mifflin, McGraw-Hill, Pearson-Prentice Hall, and Thomson-Heinle).

The grammar presentations concerning the French relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* provided by these eight textbooks were examined for the content analysis. These presentations were chosen for two reasons. First, relative pronouns are a grammatical feature of French that is introduced in the beginning and intermediate levels.

Second, a brief evaluation of the first-year French textbooks established that the explanations of relative pronouns tended to be typical of explanations of other grammatical targets in terms of the number of grammatical terms included in the explanations. The goal of the content analysis was to examine (1) the amount and (2) the type of grammatical terminology contained in the presentation of a target linguistic form (i.e., relative pronouns) and (3) the degree to which these terms are explained in the presentation. The analysis is based on careful inspection of a corpus of the presentations on relative pronouns in eight first-year French textbooks. The major focus here is to review the grammatical terms as they are used and defined in the explanations on relative pronouns. Definitions provided in a glossary are noted when applicable.

The first textbook chosen for analysis was *Chez Nous*, an introductory French textbook published in 2006 by Pearson Education. *Chez Nous* provides deductive grammar instruction by presenting students with explanations of essential French grammatical concepts. The grammar is presented in English with examples given in French. Activities are included after the grammar explanation in which students advance from “skill-developing to skill-using activities” (Valdman et al., 2006, p. xi). That is, students begin with several form-focused practice exercises and then proceed to activities that are increasingly meaning-focused, thereby integrating the development of communicative competence.

In its presentation of the relative pronouns *qui* and *que*, the text employs several grammar terms. For example, the presentation of the relative pronoun *qui* begins by explaining: “Relative pronouns allow you to introduce a clause that provides additional information about a person, place or thing. When the relative pronoun **qui**, equivalent to the English *who* or *which/that*, is used to introduce this information, it is always followed by a verb” (Valdman et al., 2006, p. 369). This explanation provides a functional description of the relative pronoun. The book then provides two example sentences with the relative pronoun *qui* highlighted in boldface. While the book does employ techniques such as these to draw students’ attention to important concepts, it never defines the terms *clause* and *verb* in its presentation of relative pronouns.

The explanation of the relative pronoun *que* offered in *Chez Nous* differs from the book’s presentation of the relative pronoun *qui* in terms of the number of grammar terms present in the explanation. The longer description of the relative pronoun *que* begins with a general review of the function of relative pronouns: “The relative pronoun connects the clause that provides additional information to the main clause. In the example below, the clause that provides additional information, called the subordinate clause, is set off by brackets” (Valdman et al., 2006, p. 370). The book then supplies the example, first as two independent clauses and then as a complex sentence containing a relative pronoun. The relative pronoun is printed in boldface and the subordinate clause displayed within brackets. In this explanation, the textbook employs twelve grammatical terms: *relative pronoun*, *clause*, *main clause*, *subordinate clause*, *subject*, *verb phrase*, *direct object*, *past participle*, *number*, *gender*, *direct-object pronoun*, and *noun*.

In *Contacts*, a textbook designed for use in first-year French classes, grammatical patterns and rules are presented explicitly and are textually enhanced using bold text, text boxes, color-coding, italicized text, and text in uppercase to help students more easily identify important features of the language. The grammar is presented in Eng-

lish with examples given in French and English. For practice, *Contacts* includes various conversational activities from directed exercises to more open communication.

The book's discussion of the relative pronoun *qui* includes nine grammatical terms: *relative clause*, *clause*, *relative pronoun*, *pronoun*, *antecedent*, *noun*, *subject pronoun*, *subject*, and *verb*. In the lesson itself, there is an explanation of the meaning of three of these terms: *relative clause*, *relative pronoun*, and *antecedent*. The lesson begins with a *Note linguistique*, providing definitions for the three aforementioned terms, all of which appear throughout the lesson. However, these definitions include grammatical terms that are not explained within the lesson: *clause*, *pronoun*, and *noun*. For example, the textbook defines a relative clause as "...a clause that is introduced by a relative pronoun..." (Valette & Valette, 2009, p. 344). This definition succeeds in explaining that a relative clause begins with a relative pronoun, but fails to explain the meaning of the term *clause*.

Below the *Note linguistique*, examples are provided, and students are asked to observe the way in which two example sentences can be combined into one using the relative pronoun *qui*. The examples of the relative pronoun and its antecedent are highlighted in boldface: "J'ai **des amis**. **Ils** habitent à Paris. → J'ai des amis **qui** habitent à Paris" (Valette & Valette, 2009, p. 344). The grammar explanation then resumes, stating: "The RELATIVE PRONOUN **qui** (*who, that, which*) is a SUBJECT pronoun" (p. 344). This explanation differs from the one offered in *Chez Nous*, as it serves to distinguish between the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* by describing the grammatical function of the pronoun within the clause. However, this description does not explain the meaning of the term *subject pronoun*. In fact, of the nine grammatical terms introduced, only three are defined in the lesson: *relative clause*, *relative pronoun*, and *antecedent*.

The book's presentation of the relative pronoun *que* follows a similar format, using a total of eleven grammatical terms in its explanation: *relative pronoun*, *direct-object pronoun*, *direct object*, *verb*, *direct-object relative pronoun*, *pronoun*, *relative clause*, *past participle*, *gender*, *number*, and *antecedent*. Apart from the three terms defined prior to the lesson on the relative pronoun *qui*, none of the additional terminology is defined in the presentation.

The introduction to the beginning-level French textbook, *Deux Mondes*, states that the book follows a communicative approach. According to the authors, the textbook offers opportunities for students to expand their ability to communicate through "guided and free conversation, interviews, information gap activities, role-plays, writing, and other kinds of activities that are theme-based, not grammar-driven" (Terrell et al., 2005, p. xi). Although the text maintains the structural syllabus as a general organizing principle, the grammar presentations and self-study exercises are provided as a means to reinforce the development of students' ability to communicate in French. Grammar is presented explicitly and in English with accompanying examples in both French and English. The grammar explanations are intended to be easy to understand so that students can study the grammar individually, outside of class.

In this text, fewer grammatical terms are employed as compared to the other textbooks examined, but explanations as to the meaning of those terms are still lacking. The text employs a total of eight grammatical terms in its presentation of the relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont*: *relative pronoun*, *noun*, *subject*, *verb*, *direct ob-*

ject, preposition, relative clause, and possessive (construction). However, of the eight terms used in the grammar presentations, only the term *relative pronoun* is defined as part of the explanation. For example, in a description of the grammatical function of the relative pronoun *qui*, the book states: “**Qui** is used when the preceding noun is the *subject* of the following verb” (Terrell et al., 2005, p. 217). Although two examples are provided to illustrate this concept, the text makes use of the terms *noun*, *subject*, and *verb* without explaining their meaning in the lesson. The explanation of the grammatical function of the relative pronoun *que* is similar: “**Que** is used when the preceding noun is the *direct object* of the following verb” (Terrell et al., 2005, p. 218). These definitions describe the relative pronouns by referring to their grammatical function within a relative clause. The distinction between the grammatical function of the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* is critical, yet there are no definitions provided for the terms *subject* and *direct object* in these explanations.

The beginning French textbook *Entre Amis* aims to provide learners with opportunities to develop their communicative ability in the course of meaningful interaction with others. Each of the grammar explanations contained in the textbook provides an explicit presentation of the grammar in English as well as several examples in French and English of the grammatical structure in question. Practice exercises are found at the end of each lesson and range from exercises that center on simply manipulating a particular grammatical feature to exercises that focus on both grammar and meaning. This textbook also contains a glossary of grammatical terms employed in each of the grammar presentations. Included in each glossary entry is a grammatical term in French along with its English equivalent and the page numbers on which the term is used, a definition of the term in English, and a number of examples of the structure in French.

The relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* are introduced explicitly in Chapter 9, and the lesson is reviewed and expanded in Chapter 14. The lesson offered in *Entre Amis* makes use of a small number of grammatical terms, relative to the number of terms used in many of the other texts surveyed. Among those used in the lesson are the terms *relative pronoun*, *clause*, *subject*, *object*, *relative clause*, *preposition*, *past participle*, and *direct object*. Similar to *Contacts* and *Deux Mondes*, the lesson starts with a brief description of the grammatical role of relative pronouns within a sentence: “Relative pronouns like *who*, *whom*, *which*, and *that* relate or tie two clauses together. They refer to a word in the first clause” (Oates & Oukada, 2006, p. 260). The book then provides two sets of example sentences combined into single sentences with the relative pronouns *qui* and *que*. Contrary to the other textbooks examined, of the eight grammatical terms used in the lesson, five of those terms are defined, either in the lesson itself or the glossary of grammatical terms: *relative pronoun*, *subject*, *preposition*, *past participle*, and *direct object*. Only the terms *clause*, *object*, and *relative clause* lack definitions.

The introductory French textbook, *Horizons*, introduces vocabulary and grammar appropriate to the particular functions of the language contained in each chapter. In each grammar lesson, *Pour vérifier* sections give learners the opportunity to test their understanding of new structures. In addition, *Résumé de grammaire* segments at the end of each chapter present a review of the grammar contained in the chapter. The reviews offer definitions, language examples, and explicit grammar rules. Prac-

tice activities begin with controlled tasks designed to help students identify how the language feature in question works and then move to less-controlled tasks that ask students to use the language creatively.

Horizons provides an explicit presentation of the French relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* with illustrative examples. The lesson begins with an explanation of the function of relative pronouns along with a few brief definitions of some of the terms used throughout: *relative clause* and *relative pronoun*. The description opens: “Sometimes you need to use a whole phrase to clarify which person or object you are talking about. The phrase that describes the noun is the relative clause. The word that begins the phrase, referring back to the noun described, is a relative pronoun” (Manley et al., 2006, p. 288). This explanation offers some information concerning both the usage and the grammatical function of relative pronouns in French. Note that the book offers an explanation of the terms *relative clause* and *relative pronoun*. Following this description, one example sentence is given for each of the three relative pronouns. Each of the relative pronouns is highlighted in boldface and the relative clauses are set apart from the main clause by a bracket. The lesson continues in this format, providing grammatical rules followed by examples. Although the book begins with definitions of two important terms used frequently throughout the lesson, it does not provide an explanation or review of the other terms used within the lesson itself: *subject*, *verb*, *direct object*, *preposition*, *object*, *noun*, *past participle*, *pronoun*, *number*, and *gender*.

Mais Oui! uses an inductive approach to grammar. The text employs a carefully sequenced series of tasks entitled *Observez et déduisez* and *Confirmez* in order to guide learners to discover the grammar and how to use the language for themselves. In this approach, learners are invited to consider examples of the language and then figure out the grammatical rules that govern those language samples. The authors explain that the grammar lessons are “designed to engage students’ critical thinking and to teach them to predict meaning, form, and function by responding to specific questions and hypothesizing about language samples” (Thompson & Phillips, 2011, p. AIE-9). The *Observez et déduisez* segments include a brief, authentic reading followed by questions designed to focus learners’ attention on particular grammatical forms in the reading. The *Confirmez* segments clarify the rules governing these forms and offer examples. The grammar lessons end with a variety of both controlled and more open-ended exercises.

The lesson concerning the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* follows the inductive approach discussed above. First, contextualized examples of the relative pronouns are provided in the form of a short paragraph. Then the examples are followed by a few questions which ask learners to identify certain grammatical elements within the paragraph. Finally, a brief explanation of relative pronouns is provided. The amount of grammatical terminology used in the explanation is minimal, as is apparent in the lesson’s guiding questions: “In the preceding paragraph, what kind of word follows the pronoun **qui**: a subject or a verb? What kind of word follows the pronoun **que** (**qu’**)?” (Thompson & Phillips, 2011, p. 287). The text employs a total of six terms in the lesson: *pronoun*, *subject*, *verb*, *relative pronoun*, *noun*, and *object*. However, as has been the tendency among the other first-year French textbooks examined, this book generally does not provide an explanation or a review of the meanings of the

grammatical terms in its grammar presentations. Specifically, the book defines the term *relative pronoun* by explaining both the usage and grammatical role of relative pronouns in French: “Relative pronouns are used to relate (link) two sentences and to avoid repetition...The pronoun **qui** is used as a *subject* and is usually followed directly by a verb...The pronoun **que** is an *object* and is followed by a subject and a verb” (Thompson & Phillips, 2011, p. 287). However, the text does not review the meaning of any of the other terms in the lesson.

The elementary French textbook *Motifs* splits its grammar component into two sections: the first section (*Thèmes and Pratiques de conversation*) is designed for practice in the classroom, with the second section (*Structures utiles*) designed to help students prepare the grammar outside of the classroom. *Structure* notes in the in-class component draw students’ attention to pertinent grammar and also guide them to the *Structures utiles* section, which presents the grammar along with examples and practice exercises. The *Activités* included in each *Thème* provide contextualized communicative practice, varying in format from controlled to open-ended, and afford students a variety of opportunities to communicate with one another. In this way, the text encourages interaction in French in the classroom and out-of-class reading of the grammar lessons.

In the in-class component, *Thème*, three grammatical terms (*relative pronoun, clause, and antecedent*) are employed, and two of these terms are defined in the lesson: “...relative pronouns...are used for joining clauses to form complex sentences... The words they replace are called their antecedents” (Jansma & Kassen, 2011, p. 233). In keeping with the text’s intended design, most of the in-class component is devoted to practice activities that encourage communication among students. In contrast, the out-of-class *Structures utiles* features explicit instruction of the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* along with more grammatical terms: *relative pronoun, clause, noun, antecedent, subject, verb, and direct object*. The lesson begins with general information about relative pronouns. Namely, the text comments on the function of relative pronouns and defines a number of important terms, including *relative pronoun, clause, and antecedent*: “Relative pronouns enable you to create complex sentences and avoid repetition by combining two sentences, or clauses. The noun referred to by a relative pronoun is called its antecedent (**antécédent**)” (Jansma & Kassen, 2011, p. 249). Then, the lesson examines each pronoun individually.

Two grammatical terms (*subject and verb*) are used in the book’s explanation of *qui*, but neither term is defined as part of the explanation. Although these terms are rather basic, the concepts they represent are crucial to understanding the difference between the relative pronouns *qui* and *que*. However, the explanation does offer two sets of examples with the subject and verb in each sentence labeled to demonstrate how two sentences can be joined with the relative pronoun *qui*. By labeling the relevant elements in the example sentences, the text helps to provide students with a visual representation of what the terms denote. The explanation of the relative pronoun *que* follows a similar format, using three terms (*direct object, subject, and verb*) in its description, and offering labeled examples to demonstrate the role of the relative pronoun.

The final textbook I examined for the content analysis is the beginning French textbook *Vis-à-vis*. This text focuses on developing students’ listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in French. In this textbook, grammar presentations be-

gin with contextualized examples of the target structure in the form of grammar dialogues. Comprehension questions help to guide students through the reading of the dialogues and direct their attention to the target structure. Then, the book offers an explicit presentation of the grammar, using rules, examples, and charts. An array of exercises from form-focused to communicative gives students the opportunity to practice using the target structure. The book also contains a glossary of grammatical terminology, which acts as a supplement to the grammar lessons, and includes terms employed in those lessons. Each entry consists of a grammatical term in French, along with its English equivalent, a definition of the term, and two examples in French with English translations.

This text employs a number of grammatical terms in its lesson on relative pronouns: *relative pronoun*, *dependent (relative) clause*, *main clause*, *subject*, *conjugated verb*, *object pronoun*, *object*, *preposition*, *direct object*, *past participle*, *verb*, *possessive adjective*, and *definite article*. The explanation begins with a general presentation of the function of relative pronouns before moving on to more specific presentations for the pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont*. In its entirety, only two grammatical terms (*relative pronoun* and *dependent (relative) clause*) are defined in the lesson itself. For example, the explanation begins with the following statement: “A relative pronoun (*who*, *that*, *which*, *whom*, *whose*) links a dependent (relative) clause to a main clause. A dependent clause is one that cannot stand by itself – for example, the italicized parts of the following sentences: The suitcase *that he is carrying* is mine; There is the store *in which we met*” (Amon et al., 2011, p. 392). In this example, the book offers a definition of the terms *relative pronoun* and *dependent (relative) clause*, but does not define the term *main clause*. Although this term is defined in the book’s glossary, students may have difficulty locating it, as the term is used only in English in the lesson, but entered under its French form (*proposition principale*) in the glossary.

Findings

Table 1 displays a summary of the grammatical terms used in the presentations of the French relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* across the eight textbooks surveyed.

Table 1

Metalinguistic Terminology in the Grammar Explanations of Eight French Textbooks

	<i>Chez Nous</i>	<i>Contact</i> s	<i>Deux Mondes</i>	<i>Entre Amis</i>	<i>Horizons</i>	<i>Mais Oui</i>	<i>Motifs</i>	<i>Vis-à-vis</i>
relative pronoun	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *
subject	✓	✓	✓	✓ **	✓	✓	✓	✓ **
direct object	✓	✓	✓	✓ **	✓		✓	✓
verb	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓ **
noun	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
dependent (relative) clause		✓ *	✓	✓	✓ *			✓ *
past participle	✓	✓		✓ **	✓			✓ **
clause	✓	✓		✓			✓ *	
object				✓	✓	✓		✓
preposition			✓	✓ **	✓			✓ **

gender	✓	✓			✓			
number	✓	✓			✓			
pronoun		✓			✓	✓		
antecedent		✓ *					✓ *	
direct object pronoun	✓							
main clause	✓							✓ **
possessive (construction/adjective)			✓					✓ **
conjugated verb								✓
definite article								✓ **
direct-object relative pronoun		✓						
object pronoun								✓ **
subject pronoun		✓						
subordinate clause	✓ *							
verb phrase	✓							

✓ = Term employed in grammar explanation

* = Definition of term provided in grammar explanation

** = Definition of term provided in glossary

Among the eight textbooks chosen for analysis, a total of 24 grammatical terms were counted. All the textbooks employed at least six different terms in their grammar explanations, with the average number of terms used across the textbooks numbering 10.25. The maximum number of grammatical terms included in an explanation was 15. In the eight textbooks examined, many of the same grammatical terms were included in the explanations of French relative pronouns. For example, all the textbooks employed the terms *relative pronoun* and *subject* in their lessons. However, *relative pronoun* was the only term that was explicitly defined in all the textbooks. Furthermore, out of all of the terminology used in the explanations, only five concepts (*relative pronoun*, *clause*, *subordinate clause*, *dependent (relative) clause*, and *antecedent*) were defined in the lesson of at least one of the textbooks. All other grammatical terms were never explicitly defined within the lesson. Table 2 summarizes the counts of grammatical terms used and defined in the lessons across all eight beginning level French textbooks.

Table 2

Summary of Count Data across Eight French Textbooks

	Grammatical terms used in the lessons	Grammatical terms defined in the lessons
Total	24	5
Minimum	6	1
Average	10.25	1.875
Maximum	15	3

Discussion

Regarding the first research question, “Do the eight beginning level French textbooks surveyed use grammatical terminology to explain grammatical language features? If so, how many grammatical terms are used in a given explanation?”, the findings from the content analysis demonstrate that (1) all the textbooks use grammatical terminology in their grammar explanations and (2) the number of grammatical terms used in the explanations on relative pronouns ranges from 6 to 15. These results show the pervasiveness of grammatical terminology in beginning French language textbooks.

This pervasive presence of grammar terms may cause confusion among learners unfamiliar with terminology. As Berry (2008) argues, these labels add to students’ learning load. Therefore, it is important to evaluate materials based on the amount and type of terminology that will be most useful for learners. Materials that minimize grammatical terminology use may make grammar explanations easier to understand for all learners.

With reference to the second question, “Which grammatical terms are used?”, the examination of textbooks shows a total of 24 grammatical terms used across the eight books. Moreover, the findings indicate that the textbooks contain a number of different grammatical terms in their explanations of relative pronouns. For example, *relative pronoun* and *subject* are the only two terms common to all eight textbooks. Only 10 grammatical terms are shared among at least four of the eight textbooks: *relative pronoun*, *clause*, *verb*, *subject*, *direct object*, *past participle*, *noun*, *dependent (relative) clause*, *preposition*, and *object*. These findings suggest that textbooks use a wide range of grammatical terms, rather than a simplified common set of terms.

A judicious and consistent use of terminology in language materials can be mutually beneficial to educators and students by providing an uncomplicated means of drawing students’ attention to linguistic form. Furthermore, materials that make use of a common set of grammatical terms are valuable for both classroom use and as a support for students working independently outside the classroom.

Finally, concerning the last research question, “Do the textbooks provide explanations as to the meaning of these terms?”, the findings confirm that none of the textbooks defines all the terms in the lesson. The only term defined by all eight textbooks is *relative pronoun*; in fact, among the eight textbooks, the average number of terms defined within the lesson itself is 1.875. Even among the two textbooks containing a glossary of grammatical terms, not all the terms used in the lesson on relative pronouns are included in the glossary (see Table 1).

This pattern of not defining terms, along with heavy use of grammatical terminology, is a feature of all the textbooks. Jansma and Kassen (2011) acknowledge that, “Students typically know little formal grammar, so they are learning many of these labels for the first time” (p. AIE-15). Understanding the meaning of these terms is critical to understanding the grammar explanations. If, as the authors suggest, students do not know the meaning of these terms, they may have difficulty working through the descriptions of the language rules and learning the grammar. Undefined grammatical terminology can complicate textbook grammar explanations, thereby puzzling and causing problems for language learners. Minimizing the number of grammatical

terms, while also providing definitions for those terms, either in the lesson itself or a glossary, is key to fostering learners' understanding of grammar explanations.

When interpreting the results of this study, some limitations must be taken into account. It is important to note that this investigation's findings relate only to metalanguage used in textbook explanations of one specific grammatical target (i.e., relative pronouns). The results might not be generalizable to lessons on other aspects of grammar. Furthermore, this investigation focused only on beginning-level textbooks of French, and its findings may not generalize to grammatical terminology use in textbooks for other languages or levels. Finally, the data on terminology use were gathered from a limited sample of texts currently available in the educational market. Future investigations are necessary to analyze the use and treatment of grammatical terminology not only in a greater number of grammar lessons, but also in textbooks created for a variety of languages and levels.

Conclusion

The current paper examined the use of grammatical terminology in textbooks designed for beginning learners of French. Do textbooks use grammatical terminology to explain grammar? If so, how many and what kinds of grammatical terms are used, and are these terms defined? In order to answer these questions, I examined grammar explanations on relative pronouns in eight beginning French textbooks. In summary, the extensive use of undefined grammatical terminology is evident in the results from the eight widely-used beginning French textbooks chosen for analysis. These textbooks not only introduce a number of grammar terms, but they also fail to define many of those terms. While terminology offers a straightforward way to discuss structural elements of a language, the amount of terminology used often complicates textbook grammar explanations and can cause difficulties for learners.

Although many terms are available to talk about language, reducing the use of terminology in textbooks to a limited set of the most essential terms may benefit language learners at all levels. Familiarity with a simple set of grammatical terms would enable learners to understand and engage with the grammar explanations contained in their textbooks. There are multiple ways of directing learners' attention to language form and supporting their comprehension of descriptions of that form. For example, in addition to limiting the use of grammatical terminology, textbook authors can use textual enhancement (e.g., bold-faced type and highlighting) to direct students' attention to language form. Indeed, many of the textbooks surveyed made use of this kind of implicit technique to enhance the input and encourage noticing among learners. Textbook authors can also use guiding questions or prompts to direct students' attention to target grammatical features, as in the textbook *Mais Oui!*. Techniques such as these can be used to induce learners to pay attention to key aspects of grammar with the goal of encouraging comprehension and learning.

Textbook grammar explanations may appear intimidating and impenetrable to students who are not comfortable with grammatical terminology. A lack of understanding of terms may cause confusion and discouragement among learners. By using a narrower set of terms along with techniques such as textual enhancement and guiding questions to direct learners' attention to linguistic form, textbook authors and teachers may be able to promote learning at all stages of second language development.

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