

CALICO Software Review

CALICO Journal, Volume 18 Number 3, pp. 652-664

Dans un quartier de Paris

Chris Andrews - University of Melbourne

Product at a glance

Product type	Interactive multimedia documentary
Language	- French - Level: Intermediate to low Advanced - Activity: Self-directed activities and exercises based on video clips, designed principally to develop cultural knowledge and listening comprehension
Media format	1 CD-ROM
Computer platform	Apple Macintosh 68040 or Power PC Mac OS 7+ 6 MB free RAM 11 MB hard disk space 2X CD-ROM drive
Supplemental software requirements	QuickTime 2.5; QuickTime PowerPlug 2.5; QuickTime Musical Instruments 2.5 (all supplied unless more recent versions are already installed)
Price	CD-ROM package with Teacher's Guide: US \$125.00. Student Activities Workbook: US \$17.50 Lab Pack: 10 CD-ROMs plus one teacher's guide: US \$875

General Description

Dans un quartier de Paris is an interactive multimedia documentary that offers the student a virtual tour of the fourth *arrondissement* of Paris. The tour includes 19 video and 3 audio interviews with a range of people who live in the neighbourhood, 15 video clips capturing the sights and sounds of various locations, and 24 sets of still photos. The focus of the activities is cultural rather than linguistic, as the authors state in the *Teacher's Guide* (TG 24) and *Student Activities Workbook* (SAW 1). Thematically, the interviews are unified by recurrent reflections on the notion of a *vie de quartier*.

Dans un quartier de Paris is remarkable in its reproduction of the look and feel of a Parisian neighbourhood. The video interviews are lively and visually rich. The CD-ROM gives students a great deal of navigational freedom, and allows them to choose an appropriate degree of textual support for the interviews. Although the activities have a cultural focus, in order to complete them, students need to listen to and understand extensive samples of authentic speech. The program thus provides ample opportunity for working on listening comprehension skills. Its effectiveness as a tool for teaching and learning the writing and speaking skills will depend on how the teacher chooses to implement and extend and the activities proposed by the authors in the *Student Activities Workbook*.

pourri" sections often contain photo-rambles: a series of photos taken walking along a street, looking in shop windows. These are a little tedious compared to the "sons et images" sections.

The **People** and **Places** chapters of the guide list the interviewees and all the sites documented in the CD. The **Words** and **Perspectives** chapters are essentially concordancing tools. **Words** gathers occurrences of 10 key words and their cognates in the speech of each interviewee and presents them in sequence without text options. The sequences thus produced lend themselves to a variety of pedagogical exploitations. With "on" and "nous", the student is engaged in the relatively simple exercise of determining the reference of these pronouns as it varies from context to context. With "vivre / vie / vivant" he or she may be encouraged to discover differences of opinion between interviewees as to whether there is in fact a real *vie de quartier* in the fourth *arrondissement*, or to notice how retailer A who presents herself as a good friend of craftsman B, is not mentioned by B when he lists the retailers who bring some community life to the *quartier*.

The **Perspectives** chapter gathers references to "places, time, oneself, others, and so on" (TG 19). It organises and summarises the cultural content of the interviews. Six of the categories are semantic in nature: places (*Espace personnel - les lieux*), time (*Espace personnel - le temps*), self and others (*Soi et les autres*), inside and outside (*Dedans / dehors*), self-image (*Soi-même*), agents of change (*les agents du changement*). There are some overlaps among these categories (most obviously between "self and other" and "self-image"), but they are justified by the practical advantage that results from limiting the number of citations from each interview: this makes it easier to compare what various interviewees say. In addition to the semantic categories, there are three that gather instances of particular discourse forms: lists, anecdotes and generalisations (proverbs, clichés, apothegms). The last two categories could be used to provide models for exercises in oral production.

If the student chooses to use the guide, rather than the map, a mini-map appears beside the window for each place, allowing him or her to explore its environs directly, rather than going back through the guide. Another attractive design feature is the possibility of having a quick glimpse ("premier aperçu") of the interview (without text options) before looking at the place in more detail ("aller voir").



Figure 2

The video clips are presented in a very user-friendly way, allowing the student to go forward or backward frame by frame with mouse-clicks on the step-buttons, in order to freeze and examine a particular gesture if need be. Online help is available in the form of balloons which explain the functions of the volume control, the play button, the play bar and the step buttons. Balloons also appear when the cursor is placed near the "Néant" and "Mots Clés" buttons under the video window: the messages in these balloons, however, relate to the search functions in the glossary, which appears in a separate window.

Dans un quartier de Paris makes good use of the computer's potential to provide semiotically rich documents combining sound, images and text. Hypertext is effectively used in the video transcripts, with underlined words linked to an on-line glossary giving definitions in French, as well as notes on grammar and usage.

The authors have chosen to limit interaction with the computer to pointing and clicking, rather than including on-line exercises in which students type or record answers. The activities they propose are to be done orally and / or on paper. This means that after an initial phase of discovering the relevant information on the CD-ROM, the small-group discussions and whole-class summing-up, suggested by the authors for most of the activities, can be done away from the computers if need be. The decision to limit interaction with the computer has two positive effects: it privileges student-student interaction and makes the CD-ROM a more flexible resource in institutions where it is difficult to secure time in computer laboratories.

The documentary is interactive in that it invites the student to engage in non-linear exploration, but it is not designed to create the illusion that he or she is really participating actively in the world represented (as was the case with Gilberte Furstenberg's earlier laserdisc *A la rencontre de Philippe* (Murray 1999: 297)). This is an appropriate choice given that *Dans un quartier de Paris* is a documentary rather than a fiction. In short, the program uses the computer well to do what the computer does best in the field of language-and-culture learning: flexible delivery of contextualised multimedia documents.

The video interviews are visually rich, giving the student much more to see and interpret than a series of talking heads: backgrounds, gestures and facial expressions have been clearly recorded and provide clues to meaning. The people interviewed interact not only with the interviewer (who does not appear) but also, spontaneously, with passers-by, colleagues, customers and relatives. The camera is not always static, but travels occasionally as well as panning for many of the "sons et images" and "pot-pourri" sections.

Activities (Procedure)

As stated above, the focus of the activities is cultural rather than linguistic. They have been divided by the authors into two types. The A activities (1A, 2A etc), invite the student to explore the neighborhood from his or her own (foreigner's) point of view, while the B activities (1B, 2B etc), encourage the student to adopt a local point of view, the overall objective being to bring about a change of perspective and so to recreate the process of acculturation (TG 24). This is overly ambitious, since only some of the B activities really fulfill their aim, notably 4B and 7B, whose explicit objective is to see the neighborhood from a non-touristic point of view (SAW 37, 52). In other cases, the A and B activities are not different enough in design to produce the desired shift. For example, activity 5A requires the student to choose gifts for people back home, whereas in 5B he or she must choose souvenirs that are representative of the *quartier*. Even if the objects chosen are different, nothing in the instructions guarantees a real change of perspective. In one case the B activity is practically identical to the A activity (11B1 and 11A). The *Teacher's Guide* acknowledges this (TG 113), adding that it is not necessary to make students do both 11A and 11B, but the problem could be solved simply by eliminating 11B1 and turning 11B2 into 11B.

Most of the activities require the student to collect and reorganise items of culturally significant information, presenting them in tabular form. Typically, the student is free to choose his or her itineraries through the material on the CD-ROM on the condition that he or she gathers a certain number of appropriate items. The responses are open in nature and require teacher or peer feedback.

Indeed attentive feedback is important, since students unfamiliar with this type of activity may be initially bewildered by the freedom it offers them. From a linguistic point of view, it would be possible to complete most of the activities with simple enumerations, relying on semantic rather than syntactic processing (Swain 1985). The teacher could limit this tendency by providing extra model responses, or choosing good examples from student work.

The last three sets of activities are different in kind. 13A and 13B require students to interpret gestures and facial expressions (from photos in the *Student Activities Workbook*), relating them to what they remember of the interviews; 14 asks them to compare the images of the fourth *arrondissement* on the CD-ROM to more recent ones published on MIT's polyglot website <http://polyglot.mit.edu/html/Paris/images.html> and in 15 they have the opportunity to present a personal synthesis of what they have seen, heard and thought while exploring the CD-ROM. This last activity is the only one that requires students to produce an extended piece of writing, and thus calls on discourse skills developed elsewhere.

Given the cultural focus of the activities, *Dans un quartier de Paris* is complementary rather than supplementary to a language curriculum. Nevertheless, it does give students intensive and richly contextualised listening comprehension practice. The level of listening comprehension skill required by the interviews depends on how much of the textual apparatus the students choose to view. They may watch without any text, with keywords or with a full transcription. In the latter two cases, the partial or complete transcriptions can be linked to a glossary in a separate window, which gives French definitions of underlined terms, and, in some cases, notes on usage and grammar. This means there are in fact five modes of watching and listening available:

- no text
- keywords without glossary
- keywords with glossary
- transcription without glossary
- transcription with glossary

Students can move smoothly from one mode to another in mid-interview as they encounter problems or find they no longer need textual help.

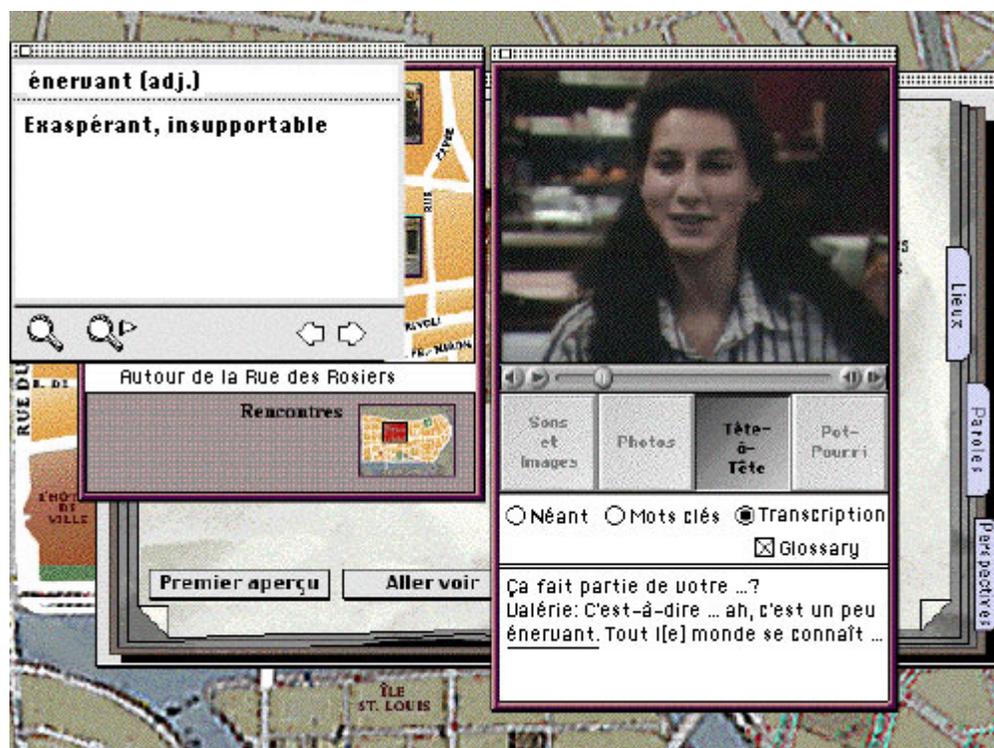


Figure 3

Teacher fit (Approach)

The activities in the Workbook are based on an implicit, acquisition approach to second language learning (which is relatively rare in CALL according to Hubbard (1987: 236)). No use is made of grammatical terminology, and since the activities are open in form and not on line, they do not include overt error correction. Rather they are designed to promote learner-learner interaction in the target language. They could be integrated without difficulty into a content-centred syllabus on French culture, possibly as the first stage of an inquiry into how social space is organised in France and from a French point of view, moving from a particular *quartier* to the nested sequence of oppositions: ville / banlieue; Paris / Province; métropole / DOM-TOMs; France / Francophonie. The program could also be used in a situational syllabus oriented towards conversation, although the activities would need to be modified to bring conversational strategies into focus.

The interviews themselves are highly authentic. The subjects all express themselves in a spontaneous and lively way. The authors have opted for naturalness over neatness in their editing, retaining segments containing redundancies, pauses, self-corrections, false starts, varying word rate and intonation. They have also chosen to retain a few instances of agrammatical speech and non-standard or erroneous usage, providing explicatory notes in the glossary.

The dialogues have been scrupulously transcribed, using ellipses to indicate pauses and placing between square brackets letters that would be pronounced in careful speech but are not in the interviews. There are, however, a few typographical mistakes in the transcriptions, both in the Teacher's Guide and on the CD-ROM:

Interviewee	Page in <i>Teacher's Guide</i>	mistake	should read
L'adjointe au maire	184	"qui prie pendant des heures devant l'hôtel"	"qui prie pendant des heures devant l' autel "
M. Zimmerman	176	"Finkelkraut"	"Finkielkraut"

Une passante (rue St. Antoine)	178	"marchard"	"marchand"
La femme au livre	179	"la belle-saison"	"la belle saison"

The indisputably high degree of authenticity in the interviews does not however fully justify the claims made in the Introduction to the *Teacher's Guide* and on the back cover of the *Student Activities Workbook*: "totally authentic language ... the true reality of a quartier as it is seen and expressed by the people who know it" ["une langue totalement authentique... la vraie réalité d'un quartier telle qu'elle est vue et exprimée par les gens qui le connaissent"(TG 21)]; "students will develop firsthand insights into the neighbourhood" (back cover of SAW). These claims mask the fact that choices have been made (such as the choice of interviewees, discussed below), and that the reality of the *quartier* is mediated by the CD-ROM. What the student discovers is not the unique, true reality of the fourth *arrondissement*, but a necessarily limited set of authentic perspectives on this reality. This may seem an obvious point, but it is one that needs to be reiterated as language-learning products on CD-ROM become more and more seductive in their simulations (Kramsch 1999).

The interviewees are well chosen: they are socially diverse and provide a broad range of oral styles. Only one (Valérie) is of about the same age as the average university undergraduate, but this is refreshing given the tendency of certain language methods to target a young audience by appealing to its presumed concerns and tastes in a way that can easily become condescending and counter-productive.

Twelve of the interviewees are retailers or craftsmen, while only two work in the public sector. It may have been difficult to persuade public servants to participate (the two who did agree only gave audio interviews), but it is a pity the virtual tour does not take in the lycée Charlemagne (mentioned by Mme Izraël and M. Zimmerman). The ethnic particularity of the fourth *arrondissement* ó as a historic centre of Judaism in France ó emerges clearly in a number of interviews. There is no mention, however, of the concentration of gay bars and shops in the western part of the *arrondissement*. This is one of the neighborhood's salient features, and worth knowing about, considerations of political correctness aside.

At the initiative of the interviewer, many of the interviewees reflect on the notions of the *quartier* and the *vie de quartier*. M. Arguence (the luthier), M. Desmarty (the locksmith), Mme Izraël (from the spice shop) and the family interviewed in the Place des Vosges all say that the real *vie de quartier* is disappearing from the neighborhood. This does not invalidate the program's unifying theme, for what constituted a *quartier* may be clearer in retrospect. And by reflecting on the differences between past and present, the interviewees give a historical depth to the program's portrait of the fourth *arrondissement*. Their comments could be used as a starting point for an exploration of earlier reactions to the changing face of Paris, such as Baudelaire's poem "Le Cygne," and a reflection on how nostalgia itself has changed or stayed the same.

Learner fit (Design)

Dans un quartier de Paris is designed to be used by students of varying skill levels. As mentioned above under Activities, students may choose among five levels of textual support for the video interviews. Tunbull (1999) and Wakabayashi and Morishita (1993) have remarked that textual help mechanisms may be counterproductive in listening comprehension exercises if used too early by visually trained learners. *Dans un quartier de Paris* is not exempt from this danger, even though the default option is without text.

Because the glossary aims to accommodate a range of learner levels, it contains very basic vocabulary items (such as *plan*, *plein*, *bâtiment*, *longueur*) as well less frequently used words and locutions. Acronyms (BHV, HLM) and proper names (such as Beaubourg) are also glossed. Some notes explain a potentially unclear reference or allusion ("quatrième: il s'agit du quatrième arrondissement"), while others adduce useful cultural information, for example a note explaining the difference between a garden "à la française" and an English or landscape garden.

In the rare instances of improper usage (the word "prêtresse" used for "abbesse" (l'adjoint au maire, TG 168)) or agrammaticality ("si je n'aurais pas vécu" for "si je n'avais pas vécu" (Mme Volpe, TG 172)), the errors are signalled in the glossary and the correct forms proposed. In one case, a common mistake is even anticipated: "attention! on dit emprunter quelque chose à quelqu'un" (interview with the director of the Bibliothèque Forney).

These efforts to foresee and forestall problems of comprehension and even production are praiseworthy. Unfortunately, the glossary is marred by a number of missing or misplaced links. When the student clicks on the items *quoi* (in the expression "voilà quoi") and *prima*, a "Can't find card" message appears. In the second case there is really no need to define the term in the glossary, as it is immediately defined by the interviewee herself (the director of the Bibliothèque Forney). Occasionally a note pertaining to a particular context appears when the word is used in another context. For example in the interview with the artist, "du coin du pont" (TG, p. 154) is glossed with a note explaining the meaning of the expression "dans son coin" (used in the interview with the anonymous old woman ("Une vieille femme")). Similar problems were encountered with *lycée* in the interview with M. Zimmerman, and *dû* in the interview with the director of the Bibliothèque Forney.

The effectiveness of the glossary could have been increased by including a small number of images. The definition "poutres: une pièce de charpente fixée horizontalement et supportant une construction" may be opaque to a lower level learner, but a photo would make the meaning immediately clear.

Summary

Dans un quartier de Paris makes effective and judicious use of the potential of multimedia to represent the sights and sounds of a Parisian neighbourhood, to introduce students to a range of its inhabitants and encourage them to reflect on the specificity of urban community living in France. It is a rich and attractively designed resource with a primarily cultural focus, but the video and audio interviews, with their multi-level textual support, provide students with ample and adaptable listening comprehension practice. The glossary could be improved by resolving a small number of linking problems and providing some visual content. For students who use the program intensively, then travel to Paris, *Dans un quartier de Paris* could have the curious effect of transforming particular retailers and craftsmen into icons and their shops into landmarks.

In its current form, *Dans un quartier de Paris* is available on CD-ROM for Macintosh computers only and does not support networking, however the publisher is investigating making it available for cross-platform use with networking capabilities (so that it may be licensed for multiple machines). One can only hope that both of these modifications will be undertaken shortly. As it is, the program remains inaccessible to the larger number of institutions and home users equipped with PCs. And while the CD-ROM plus teacher's guide is reasonably priced at US \$125, the 10 CD lab-pack is dear at US \$875. This represents a 30% discount off the list price, but licenses for multiple machines usually allow the purchaser to benefit from more substantial discounts. Finally, since the program is particularly well suited to independent study, it is a pity that no student discounts are available.

Scaled rating (1 low - 5 high)

Implementation possibilities: 4
Pedagogical features: 4
Socio-Linguistic accuracy: 5
Use of computer capabilities: 4.5
Ease of use: 4.5
Over-all evaluation: 4.5
Value for money: 3.5

Producer Details

Authors: Gilberte Furstenberg, Sabine Levet

Developed at the Laboratory for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Published by Yale University Press
Special Projects Department
PO Box 209040
New Haven, CT 06520
USA

Phone: 203/432-0961

Fax: 203/432-8485

Email: specproj.press@yale.edu

WWW: <http://www.yale.edu/yup/books/furstenbergS99.html>

Reviewer Information

Chris Andrews lectures in French at the University of Melbourne. His research interests include project-oriented CALL and culture in the CALL classroom.

Reviewer Contact

Department of French & Italian Studies
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010
Australia

Phone: (61 3) 8344 5186

Fax: (61 3) 8347 2489

Email: c.andrews@language.unimelb.edu.au

References

- Hubbard, Philip L. (1987). Language Teaching Approaches, the Evaluation of CALL Software and Design Implications. *Modern Media in Foreign Language Education: Theory and Implementation*. Ed. W. Flint Smith. Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1987.
- Kramsch, Claire. (1999). Teaching Text and Context through Multimedia. *Language Learning and Technology*. 2.2: 31-42.
- Murray, Garold L. (1999). Autonomy and language learning in a simulated environment. *System* 27: 295-308.
- Swain, Merrill. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. Gass, S. M. and C. G. Madden. *Input in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House. 235-253.
- Turnbull, Jill. Review of *Issues in English*. *CALICO Review*. 12/99.
<<http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/others/calico/review/issueseng00.htm>>
- Wakabayashi, Setsuko and Jun-ya Morishita. (1994). "The Implications for Different Types of Help in Listening Comprehension with the Assistance of a Personal Computer." Conference Proceedings: 19th Congress of the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, University of Melbourne.