



Computerising and Intellectualising an Action-Based Approach for University Language Courses

Snejina Sonina (University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada)

FLORENCE

JUNE 29-30, 2023

Re-evaluating the action-based approach (ABA) for university

- ▶ Development of ICT (information and communication technology) = new teaching tricks
- ▶ Popularization of AI (artificial intelligence) = questions the importance of writing, now well performed by machines, as an indicator of language proficiency.
- ▶ Both issues concern the proportion of **theory to practice** in the curriculum & **fluency to accuracy** in teaching goals

Action-based approach (ABA)

- ▶ Inherited from the previous century
- ▶ Favours fluency at the expense of accuracy
- ▶ Favours incidental learning and shuns explanation in L1
- ▶ Promotes slow-paced learning (each level of [CEFR](#): A1—80h, A2—+160h, B1—+160h, B2—+240h, C1—+240)
- ▶ Requires close supervision in small classes (feedback in form of recast)

In *Research-Driven Pedagogy: Implications of L2A Theory and Research for the Teaching of Language Skills* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020) most authors concluded that **explicit teaching provides comparatively faster and more solid results.**

Experiment

practice

theory

TAP

(Cf. Valenzuela, H. *Linguistics for TESOL Theory and Practice*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

- ▶ ABA or PPP (traditional presentation-practice-production) ?
- ▶ My answer was the **task-based actualisation of the presentation stage**: my students still learn through activities, but these activities involve and build **linguistic knowledge first**, then reinforce it through **e-exercises with ICT**, before they then proceed to **action- or task-based assignments** in which both fluency and accuracy are assessed.
- ▶ My students thus become aware of the three main components of linguistic form: phonetics, lexicon, & morpho-syntax,
- ▶ I will outline my novel practices for each component and support my account with the results of an end-of-term survey from my last Introductory French course in the fall of 2022. The survey had 98 participants, but its results exhibit the typical percentage for the past three years.

Phonetics

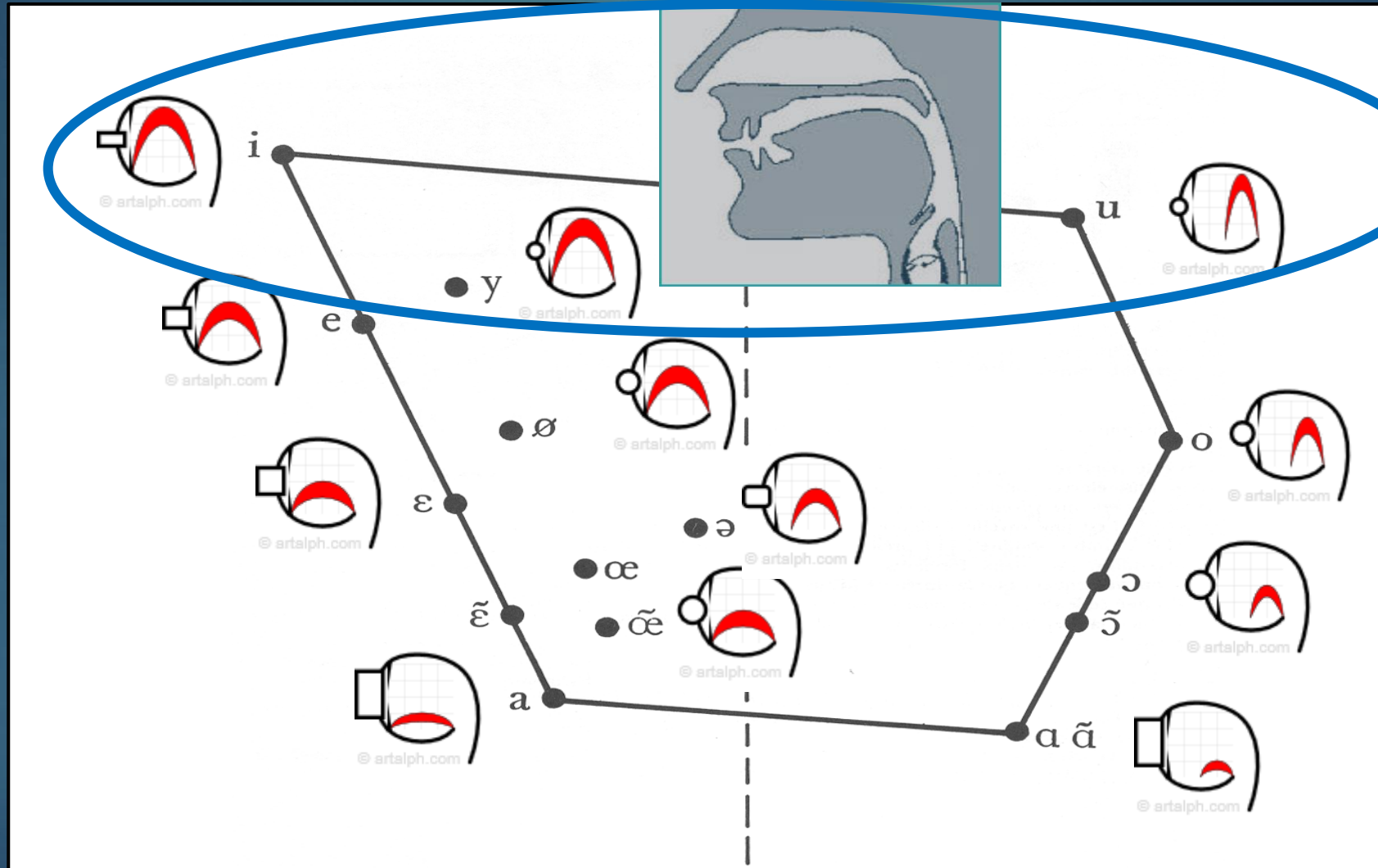
- ▶ ABA – incidental acquisition
- ▶ TAP – conscious acquisition of the following linguistic knowledge & practical skill:
 - ▶ the main prosodic particularities of French, e.g., rhythmic groups
 - ▶ all French phonemes including their articulatory specificities
 - ▶ all the signs of IPA used in French
 - ▶ all reading rules

Importance of Phonetics

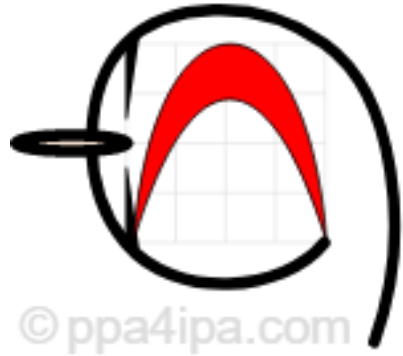
- ▶ Quel aspect du cours vous semble le plus important ?

Answer Text	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents selecting this answer
la prononciation, (Correct answer)la prononciation	17 respondents	17 %
le vocabulaire, (Incorrect answer)le vocabulaire	4 respondents	4 %
la grammaire, (Incorrect answer)la grammaire	9 respondents	9 %
tous les aspects, (Incorrect answer)tous les aspects	68 respondents	69 %

French close vowels



Close vowels: Front /i/ & /y/ vs Back /u/



/i/

1



/y/

2



/u/

3



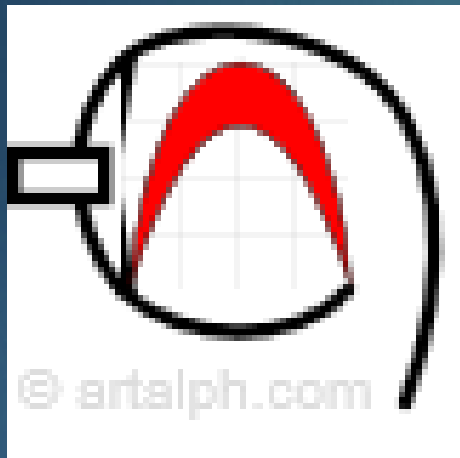
Pictographic Phonetic Alphabet:

<https://ppa4ipa.com>

- ▶ Est-ce que les pictogrammes de la bouche (APP) vous aident à bien articuler les **voyelles** (=vowels) françaises comme ou=/u/

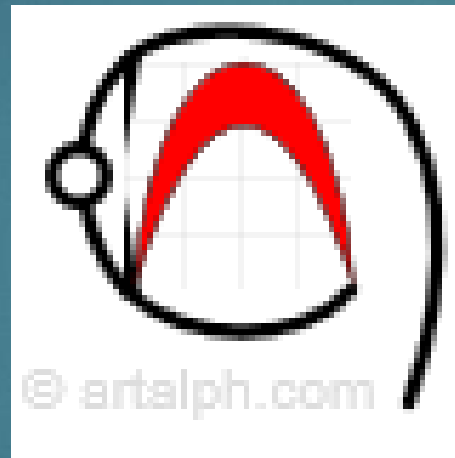
Answer Text	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents selecting this answer	Answer Distribution
Oui, beaucoup, (Correct answer)Oui, beaucoup	37 respondents	38 %	
Oui, assez souvent, (Incorrect answer)Oui, assez souvent	31 respondents	32 %	
Oui, parfois, (Incorrect answer)Oui, parfois	21 respondents	21 %	
Non, pas vraiment, (Incorrect answer)Non, pas vraiment	7 respondents	7 %	
Je ne les regarde pas, (Incorrect answer)Je ne les regarde pas	2 respondents	2 %	

Unrounded vs Rounded Vowels



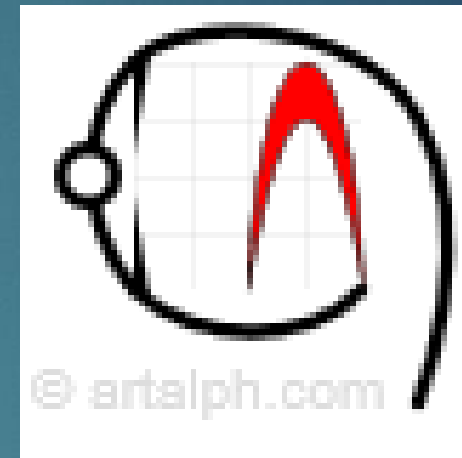
/i/
/e/
/ɛ/

Front



/y/
/ø/
/œ/

vs



/u/
/o/
/ɔ/

Back Vowels

Prononciation: french front and back vowels



TUTorial

- Prononcez !
- / i - y - u / Il amuse tous !
- / e - ø - o / Ses vœux sont beaux !
- / ε - œ - ɔ / Elle pleure comme une fontaine !

Pictographic Phonetic Alphabet:

<https://ppa4ipa.com>

- ▶ Est-ce que les pictogrammes de la bouche (APP) vous aident à bien articuler les **consonnes** françaises comme /t/ dental ?

Answer Text	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents selecting this answer	Answer Distribution
Oui, beaucoup, (Correct answer)Oui, beaucoup	25 respondents	26 %	
Oui, assez souvent, (Incorrect answer)Oui, assez souvent	37 respondents	38 %	
Oui, parfois, (Incorrect answer)Oui, parfois	27 respondents	28 %	
Non, pas vraiment, (Incorrect answer)Non, pas vraiment	7 respondents	7 %	
Je ne les regarde pas, (Incorrect answer)Je ne les regarde pas	2 respondents	2 %	

/ t/d / anglais vs / t/d / français

▶ aspirated + alveolar

unaspirated + dental

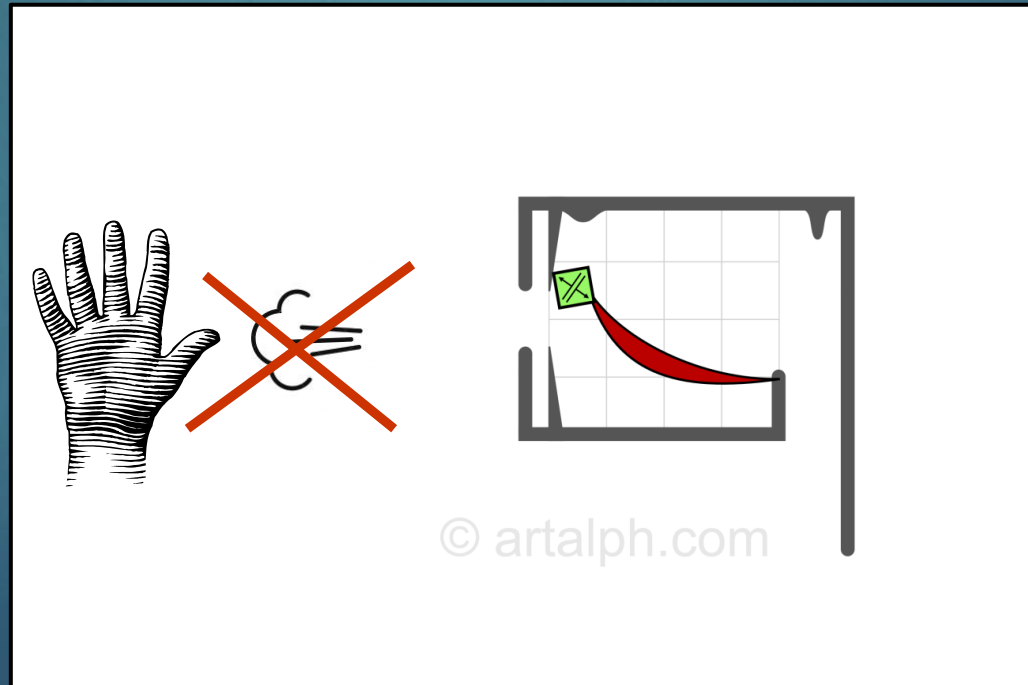


/ d/t / = dental & **un**aspirated



TUTorial

► Tes **d**ents **d**onnent **d**u travail au **d**entiste!



Reading rule: La lettre < ç > est nécessaire pour garder (=keep) la lettre < c > étymologique mais prononcer /s/

- ▶ France, franç^çais;
- ▶ glace, glaç^çon;
- ▶ garce (vulgar, offensive), garç^çon;
- ▶ lecture, Leç^çon;
- ▶ commencer, commenç^çons

Reading rule: l'accent circonflexe < ^ >
souvent remplace un < s > étymologique

- intérêt
- fête
- bête
- honnête
- enquête
- forêt
- pâte(s)
- mât
- hâte



Traduisez

Lexicon

- ▶ ABA – incidental acquisition
- ▶ TAP – conscious & incidental acquisition
 - ▶ ability to recognise cognates;
 - ▶ ability to recognise and interpret words built on the same stem or with the same affix
 - ▶ awareness of false friends;
 - ▶ awareness of semantic fields, synonyms, & antonyms

Déjeuner ou dîner (lat. DISJUNARE)

18

- ▶ « Dîner » et « déjeuner » ont la même origine étymologique, puisqu'ils sont tous deux dérivés du latin populaire *disjunare* signifiant « rompre le jeûne » (=break (the) fast)

Moyen âge

- Dîner
- Souper

Vers XIX et au Québec

- Déjeuner
- Dîner
- (Goûter)
- Souper

France contemporaine

- Petit déjeuner (Petit-déj)
- Déjeuner
- (Goûter)
- Dîner
- (Souper)



Encerclez ce que vous entendez

Encerclez l'antonyme



Virtues
and vices
according
to Aristotle

Form the
feminine

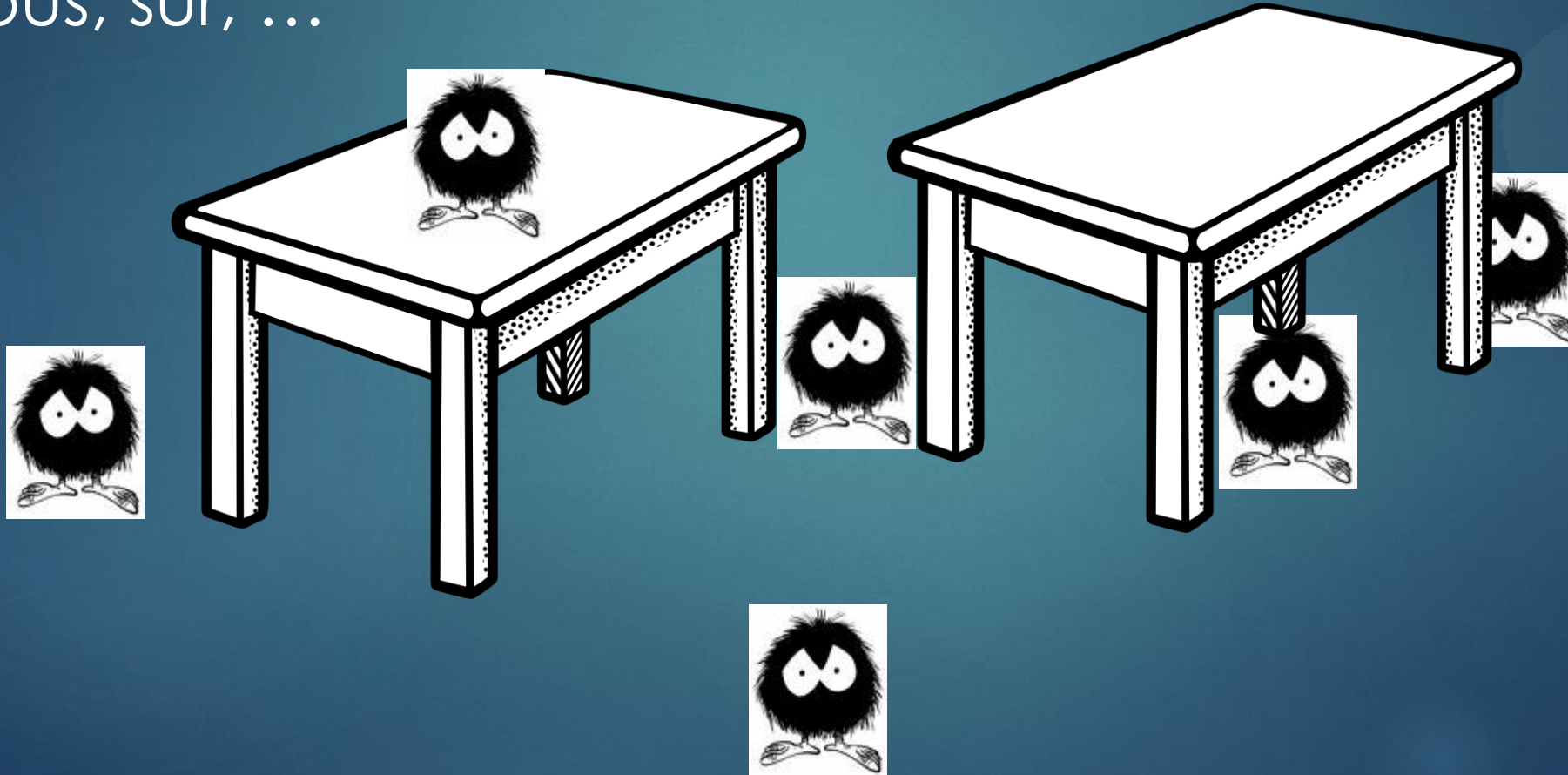
un manque	un juste milieu	un excès
avare	généreux	gaspilleur, gâcheur
indiscret, vulgaire	modeste	timide
lâche	courageux	audacieux, téméraire
taciturne, taiseux	éloquent	bavard
paresseux	travailleur, studieux	zélé, un geek /gik/
égocentrique	attentionné	surprotecteur
introverti	sociable	extraverti
indifférent / flegmatique	équilibré / tranquille	inquiet / cholérique
passif / inerte	énergique / actif	hyperactif
perfectionniste	organisé	spontané
célibataire	compagnon ? copain ?	marié

- ▶ According to Aristotle, strength or virtue represents a right balance, the middle, between two extremes: a lack and an excess of the same quality.

Prépositions

Où est la Boule ? - --- la table / --- les tables

À côté de, devant, derrière, entre, près de,
sous, sur, ...



Cf. **cognates**

Coast

Pre-scribe

Avant-garde

(Arrière-
garde) =
rear

inter-
national

Sub-tropical

Super-strong

Prépositions with countries, continents, provinces

m.	m./f. plural	m. w/vowel	f.	f. w/vowel
au	aux	en	en	en

▶ Find an example for each case that speaks to you !

▶ Au Canada ! = Oh Canada

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfBLfHV8sdQ>

Le Colisée est Italie, Rome



TUTorial



Je vais aller ...



Je vais aller ...



Je vais aller ...





Je vais aller ...

Cognates

- ▶ Est-ce que les mots apparentés (=cognates) vous aident à apprendre le vocabulaire et à comprendre les textes?

Answer Text	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents selecting this answer	Answer Distribution
Oui, beaucoup, (Correct answer)Oui, beaucoup	51 respondents	52 %	
Oui, assez bien, (Incorrect answer)Oui, assez bien	32 respondents	33 %	
PLUS ou MOINS, (Incorrect answer)PLUS ou MOINS	9 respondents	9 %	
Non, pas vraiment, (Incorrect answer)Non, pas vraiment	6 respondents	6 %	

Morpho-syntax

- ▶ ABA – incidental acquisition
- ▶ TAP – conscious acquisition of main features
 - ▶ Knowledge of the linguistic terminology
 - ▶ Familiarity with all phenomena taught in the high school curriculum
 - ▶ Understanding the logic of morphological change (often based on historical data: verbal conjugation, plural & feminine of nouns, etc.)
 - ▶ Recognition of similarities & differences in French & English syntactic patterns

Stem-changing verbs + the boot

29



Conjuguons : répéter



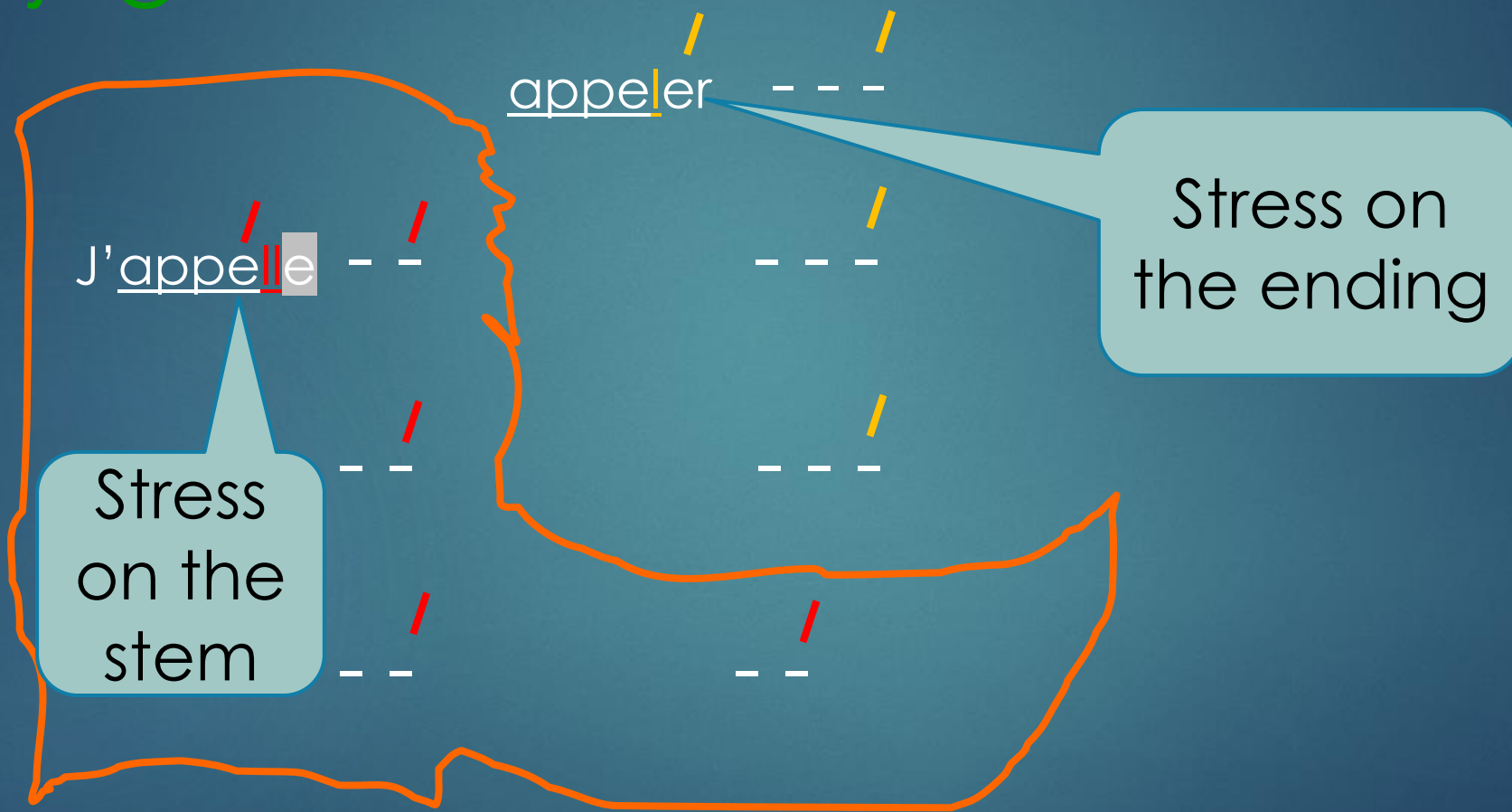
Marquez les syllabes :

Je répète Nous répétons

Tu répètes Vous répétez

On répète Ils répètent

La règle de botte & stress pattern: *Conjuguez*



Stress pattern

V[/]oir

Stress on
the stem

je vo[/]is

nous voy[/]ons

Cf.:

rece[/]voir

Stress on
the
ending

je reço[/]is

nous rece[/]vons

Est-ce que l'accent tonique est sur le **radical** ou sur la terminaison?

SVO languages
= Subject – Verb – Object

- ▶ Marie cuisine des plats français.
- ▶ Mary cooks French dishes.

Qu'est-ce qui est similaire ?
Qu'est-ce qui est différent ?

La place de l' **Adjectif**

Adj accompagne un nom, décrit qch/qn (What kind?)

- ▶ Adjectif = adjacent

≠anglais

- ▶ Une cuisine **locale** (N + Adj)
- ▶ Une **bonne** cuisine (Adj + N) = short & frequent Adj

=anglais

La place de l'Adverbe

Adv accompagne un verbe, décrit un processus (How?)

- ▶ Adverbe = ad verbum

≠anglais

- ▶ Il cuisine **souvent** (V + Adv)
- ▶ Il cuisine **très bien** (V + Adv)

=anglais

Linguistic reasons

- ▶ Est-ce que vous trouvez que les explications **du sens des règles de la grammaire** vous aident à apprendre plus vite ?

Answer Text	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents selecting this answer	Answer Distribution
Oui, beaucoup, (Correct answer) Oui, beaucoup	56 respondents	57 %	
Oui, assez bien, (Incorrect answer) Oui, assez bien	37 respondents	38 %	
Non, pas vraiment, (Incorrect answer) Non, pas vraiment	5 respondents	5 %	

Historic and cultural facts

- ▶ Est-ce que les faits historiques et culturels vous aident à comprendre et à mémoriser le matériel (e.g. le sens des noms des jours de la semaine, les repas français, les lettres disparues etc.)?

Answer Text	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents selecting this answer	Answer Distribution
Oui, beaucoup, (Correct answer) Oui, beaucoup	37 respondents	38 %	
OUI, (Incorrect answer) OUI	37 respondents	38 %	
PLUS ou MOINS, (Incorrect answer) PLUS ou MOINS	19 respondents	19 %	
NON, (Incorrect answer) NON	5 respondents	5 %	

Personal learning goal

- ▶ Quelle affirmation correspond le mieux à votre but personnel concernant le français?

Answer Text	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents selecting this answer	Answer Distribution
Je voudrais comprendre les règles du fonctionnement du français, (Correct answer)Je voudrais comprendre les règles du fonctionnement du français	64 respondents	65 %	
Je préfère étudier par répétition, sans comprendre la logique, (Incorrect answer)Je préfère étudier par répétition, sans comprendre la logique	34 respondents	35 %	

Theory to practice ratio in TAP

- ▶ **Theory** : since the incidental learning is delegated to machines, the **lecture** time is devoted to explicit and active work on the linguistic knowledge necessary for the acquisition of L2 through tasks and games (**24 hours**, ca. 100 students)
- ▶ **Practice : tutorials** consist of ABA-like communicative tasks levelling linguistic awareness (**12 hours**, 25 students)
- ▶ **Practice : individual consultations** provide corrective personalised feedback (ca. **1 hour** per student)
- ▶ **Practice** : spaced repetition in **500 e-exercises** accompanied by authentic sound texts and videos for life-like language exposure (about **30 hours** per semester)

Elementary		Independent			Advanced					
A1 Breakthrough	A2 Waystage	B1 Threshold	B2 Vantage		C1 Advanced					
80h	160h	160h	240h		240h					
A1	A2.1	A2.2	B1.1	B1.2	B2.1	B2.2	B2.3	C1.1	C1.2	C1.3
INSPIRE 1	INSPIRE 2		COSMOPOLITE B1		COSMOPOLITE B2			COSMOPOLITE C1		

CEFR & action-based approach

VERY SLOW PROGRESS

Evalang test results

- ▶ Students who took the test at the end of the second semester of « Le français pour les futés » (72 hours in class + 1h of individual consultations)

A1	1
A1+	3
A2	2
A2+	9
B1-	2
B1	2
B2-	2
total	21

Learned a lot ?

- Pensez-vous que vous avez fait beaucoup de progrès en français pendant ce trimestre ?

Answer Text	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents selecting this answer	Answer Distribution
beaucoup, (Correct answer) beaucoup	48 respondents	49 %	
assez, (Incorrect answer) assez	45 respondents	46 %	
pas assez, (Incorrect answer) pas assez	5 respondents	5 %	

Course evaluation questions

- ▶ Overall, the quality of my learning experience in this course was:
- ▶ The course provided me with a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
- ▶ Compared to other courses, the workload for this course was:
- ▶ I would recommend this course to other students.

Course evaluations 2022-23

(Department / division = UTSC)

Course (respondents)	Overall, the quality of my learning experience	Course inspired me to think about the subject matter outside of class	Compared to other courses the workload	I would recommend this course to other students
FREA96 F-2021 (52)	4.0 (3.8/3.7)	4.2 (4.2/4.1)	3.9 (3.0/3.3)	4.0 (3.9/3.8)
FREA96 S-2022 (17)	4.1 (4.2/3.8)	4.4 (4.4/4.2)	3.9 (3.1/3.3)	4.1 (4.2/3.8)
FREA96 F-2022 (37)	4.2 (3.8/3.7)	4.4 (4.2/4.1)	3.5 (3.0/3.2)	4.2 (3.9/3.8)
54 in 2022	(/)	(/)	(/)	(/)

Course evaluations 2022-23

(Department / division = UTSC)

Course (respondents)	Overall, the quality of my learning experience	Course provided me with a deeper understanding of the subject matter	Compared to other courses the workload	I would recommend this course to other students
FREA97 W-2023 (17)	4.4 (4.0/3.7)	4.6 (4.3/4.1)	3.9 (3.1/3.3)	4.3 (4.1/3.8)
FREA97 S-2022 (15)	4.6 (4.2/3.8)	4.5 (4.4/4.2)	4.0 (3.1/3.3)	4.6 (4.2/3.8)
FREA97 W-2022 (21)	4.3 (4.0/3.8)	4.4 (4.2/4.1)	3.8 (3.1/3.3)	4.3 (4.0/3.8)
53	(/)	(/)	(/)	(/)

Practical outcome

- ▶ a new intensive curriculum for beginner French courses adapted to large classes and online or hybrid teaching
- ▶ an electronic textbook, ***French for the Smart***, comprising ca. 1,000 exercises with ten questions each always accompanied with a soundtrack or video

Meaning for the theory of L2 didactics

- ▶ The TAP method confirmed the **efficiency of the explicit instruction** and especially, of the instruction **in L1**, which is still not favoured in ABA even though the research* did demonstrate that L2-L1 codeswitching is beneficial for language learning.
- ▶ Most importantly, the experiment confirmed not only the **effectiveness** of deeper linguistic understanding for language learning but also its **attractiveness** to students.

* *Research-Driven Pedagogy: Implications of L2A Theory and Research for the Teaching of Language Skills*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2020.