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FROM TWENTY QUESTIONS TO THE INTERNET:  
PROFICIENCY EXERCISES FOR THE BUSINESS  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Those who teach a beginning or intermediate Business French course are usually familiar with the contents of the Valise du Français des Affaires circulating from the French Cultural Services that contained a variety of materials useful in expanding upon the Business French course, namely annual reports, videocassettes, slides, and audio cassettes. These materials are still available through industry sources, and coupled now with the bountiful resources of the Internet, can provide a wide variety of proficiency exercises. This study discusses uses of annual reports, slides, accompanying booklets, and other authentic documents published by the Gaz de France, Renault, and the Banco Mundial to provide instruction on various aspects of the natural gas industry, employers' criteria for potential employees, Renault's car of the future, and the World Bank's lending policies.

GAMES

The first activity supposes an intermediate listening and speaking capability and an audience interested in acquiring natural gas industry vocabulary. The utilization begins with the simultaneous viewing of the slides provided by the Gaz de France, listening to the taped script, and reading the accompanying booklet (see Attachment 1 at the end of this article) to familiarize learners with the vocabulary and concepts involved. The following games will then be applied to the vocabulary to stimulate its acquisition. These games constitute an adaptation of those included in the packet presented by Professors Canales, Colville-Hall, Maio, and Smolen at the World Conference on Languages in the Professions held at Ypsilanti, Michigan in March, 1992. The first game requires the identification by the learners of mystery object cards depicting vocabulary or concepts discussed in the preliminary presentation. In this activity, the

student holds a picture of an item or activity described in the initial presentation. He/she gives clues in the target language using ordinary vocabulary or vocabulary acquired in the initial presentation, after which the partner may pose four questions before receiving another clue. The exchange continues until the item has been guessed or until twenty questions have been asked. A variation to this game requires that the pictures be pinned to the learner's back after which the student must identify the picture by asking yes/no questions of partners (Canales, et al. 2).

Learners view the slides provided by the industry and listen to the taped discussion of the booklet accompanying the slides (Attachment 1), and then play the game using the mystery object cards. Each card represents one of the slides (made into a photo and laminated); i.e., a natural gas pipeline, a freighter, the geological strata that contain natural gas deposits, and the like. One person holds the picture of the mystery object and gives a clue describing it using ordinary vocabulary (*Il est grand, rouge, petit, carré, bruyant, utile, sur la mer* [It is big, red, little, square, noisy, useful, on the sea]). The other partner may ask four yes/no questions before receiving another clue until twenty questions have been asked or until the card's object is established (King, "Annual Report" 3).

B. To make the game more exciting, each student may take the name of an object or an action described in the script booklet and announce it to the rest of the class (best done in groups of five to eight). With the students arranged in an arc in front of him or her, the instructor turns up ordinary playing cards in front of each student. When two cards are turned that match, the first student to announce the *other* student's object or action wins the cards. Needless to say, the student with the most cards at the end of the game wins. The element of competition and fun involved in this activity causes students to "forget" that language learning is hard work, and actually allows them to learn faster due to heightened interest.

C. Another variation is to attach one of the filmstrip pictures made into cards to the back of a learner. That person must ask yes/no questions of their classmates to identify the picture.

D. Still another possibility is to have one learner hold six of the pictures; the other learner holds one of the six (unknown to the partner). The person holding all six must guess which picture the other holds by asking him or her various questions. This is probably the easiest activity and the one that should be engaged in first as learners respond more readily

and use more vocabulary when a larger number of ideas and possible questions are obvious to them.

#### ORAL PROFICIENCY EXERCISES

A. Students may describe their mystery pictures to each other and attempt to establish the differences between them. This exercise works best if there are similarities between the pictures. (Canales, et al. 2). This last exercise is particularly good for eliciting comparisons.

B. Students may practice learning the steps in a procedure described in the initial presentation by recounting them to a partner who has not heard them. That partner must then relate back the steps he/she has heard. This activity was adapted to the natural gas industry lesson by having the learners listen to a tape recounting how a natural gas pipeline operates. Using the order established, one learner retells the steps to his or her partner who has not heard the tape, allowing the second student to fill in the procedures on an exercise sheet (King, "Annual Report" 4). An easier variation of this activity entails having students listen to taped instructions, then showing them a list of the instructions arranged out of order. They need to either verbally or manually arrange them in the proper order. The learner might then retell the procedures to a partner. An important news event described in the presentation may be guessed using who, what, when, where questions to obtain the necessary information.

#### READING EXERCISES

After silently reading a company's annual report or other information (the launching of a new product, the opening of a new store) the remaining participants ask true/false statements of the reader to establish the action, players, and other important elements of the event. The important prerequisite to the activity is that the participants have the necessary linguistic ability to construct appropriate interrogations. Encouraging students to paraphrase when they lack vocabulary helps them to develop vital communication skills (Canales, et al. 9). It is possible to construct a news event such as the one adapted from the *Gaz de France's* annual report, 1991:

On a fini la mise en place du gazoduc qui relie la Tunisie à l'Italie via la Sicile. On a soudé ensemble des tubes d'acier. On contrôle ces soudures par radiographies en ultra-sons. On protège les

tuyaux par un revêtement extérieur qui préserve le tuyau contre la corrosion d'origine chimique, électro-chimique ou biologique. La construction de ce gazoduc a exigé une main d'oeuvre très compétente qui offre deux grands avantages—la canalisation est enterrée, ce qui permet de respecter l'environnement. Aussi, aucun obstacle ne l'a arrêté. On a placé la canalisation au fond de la mer entre la Tunisie et l'Italie. (King, "Annual Report" 4)

Questions *où, quand, comment* ("where," "when," "how") are available to intermediate learners to stimulate discussion concerning this event. It is easy to imagine how the event described in the annual report could also be recounted verbally as a radio or TV broadcast, or written as a newspaper story.

Another news event originating from this annual report is the use of fast-heating ovens with light fibrous refractors to equip the thermal cover of the space shuttle. All these activities involve an active use of the industry vocabulary under study.

#### VIDEOS, ANNUAL REPORTS, AND DRAMATIZATIONS

Videocassettes, available from numerous industries and from the Chambre de Commerce, can be used in conjunction with annual reports to stimulate proficiency activities. One video contains interviews with several employers who discuss the type of employee they like to hire and the problems they encounter in those interviewed. An interactive class activity entails glossing unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts contained in these videos, providing short descriptions of the employers' companies using their annual reports, and finally outlining several interview situations that delineate and hopefully alleviate some of the problems discussed.

The script of the video is distributed to students before viewing. It generally addresses the fact that applicants do not display a real desire to learn about a position in depth. It also details the employer's desire that the employee take his or her own responsibility in learning the job. The second page of the script addresses the problem of physical presentation (gum chewing, smoking, attire) and also employees' attitudes toward customers and fellow workers. It indicates management's desire for employees who satisfy customers and get along well with co-workers.

The last segment deals with the overall problem of flexibility and adaptability to a job, whether it be a simple willingness to learn new techniques and technologies when they become available or to relocate to other parts of the country. It implies the need to advance one's education and to develop good communications skills (Chambre de Commerce, "Paroles de patrons" 1–6).

"Synergie," one of the industries represented in the video, might promote some of the same objectives as the EDF or Electricité de France, for which an annual report was available. To highlight the EDF's major objectives for the future, segments of their annual report, *EDF, notre ambition*, were distributed to the students in one class, which required an intermediate language level. The segments were read out loud in class and the necessary vocabulary was glossed. Using the employers' objectives, the students, with the help of the instructor, drew up a list of desirable job qualifications, the type of *baccalauréat* needed, and the kind of university or technical studies necessary to qualify oneself for the position. Then using examples of job interviews given in a number of Business French texts (Danilo and Tauzin's *Le Français de l'Entreprise*, Dablemont's *Le Français pour la profession*, and Girault and Nony's *Situations et techniques commerciales*) the students prepared questions and answers appropriate for a job interview for a position requiring the qualifications outlined by the EDF. Attachment 2 is an example of the lists of job qualifications and the possible dialogue used during an interview.

Several possibilities exist for using a promotional film—Renault—even on a beginning level. First, its avant-garde subject matter and relatively simple vocabulary make it useful for teaching basic vocabulary about the car (Attachment 3). An easy entry into the text would be the *écoute à trous* or guided dictation wherein the student would listen to the film and fill in the underlined segments in the script left blank (Attachment 4). Students would be given the opportunity to listen several times to the segment to fill in their *dictée*. They would then be given the key to fill in blanks they still did not understand. Unknown vocabulary would be glossed.

Another means of easy access into the film would be listening for the "Vocables clés" or strings of key elements. The students would simply listen to the segment and check off strings of words as they heard them.

(Voice of car's alarm system)

- \_\_\_ Qui êtes-vous?
- \_\_\_ Eloignez-vous.
- \_\_\_ Vous déclencherez l'alarme.
- \_\_\_ Je saurai demain obéir fidèlement à la seule voix de mes maîtres.
- \_\_\_ Moteur. Phares.
- \_\_\_ Anti-brouillard.
- \_\_\_ Clignotants.
- \_\_\_ Klaxon. Essuie-glace.
- \_\_\_ les mots correspondants au déclenchement d'un organe de la voiture et je range chaque mot dans ma mémoire.
- \_\_\_ je reconnais sa forme et aussi fidèlement qu'une clé reconnaît sa serrure. (King, "French Video Cassettes" 6)

True/false questions of the following type provide access to the film for beginners.

1. Avec cette nouvelle technologie, le regard du conducteur pourra mieux concentrer sur la route.
2. La nouvelle voiture ne pourra pas prévenir des obstacles sur la route.
3. Le copain d'Isabelle s'appelle François.
4. Seulement Isabelle peut éteindre l'alarme avec sa voix. (7)

Content questions also call for close listening and watching:

1. Quelle station de radio est-ce que le conducteur écoute?
2. Comment est-ce que la voiture peut trouver la meilleure route pour la voiture?
3. Où habite le copain d'Isabelle?
4. Qu'est-ce qu'ils vont boire après son arrivée?
5. Comment s'appelle la nouvelle technologie?

Cultural information may be glossed or provided on many topics, such as France-Inter, one of Paris's major radio stations or Courchevel, one of the sites of the Olympic Games in Albertville, France. The students or instructor can further research this information and locate sites on the map to enhance the cultural content of the material.

## THE INTERNET

Proceeding to the most current technology, multi-media programs and the Internet offer a myriad of opportunities for the use of up-to-the-hour information. On the Internet, a vast array of information from all over the world is instantly available. For instance, with regard to Spanish business information, the World Bank offers updates in both English and Spanish on the status of its lendings and economic conditions of participants. The Bank also offers a full information service in printed matter in both languages, which can be obtained simply by calling. The following is an excerpt from a Business Spanish classroom lecture prepared from the Bank's *Informe sobre el Desarrollo Mundial 1994: Infraestructura y Desarrollo, Resumen*:

Cada año, los países en desarrollo invierten \$200.000 millones en nueva infraestructura, cantidad que representa el 4% de su producto nacional y una quinta parte de sus inversiones totales. El resultado de ello ha sido un aumento espectacular de este tipo de servicios, en sectores como transportes, energía eléctrica, agua, saneamiento, telecomunicaciones y riego. . . .

¿Qué es infraestructura?

El presente Informe se centra en la *infraestructura económica* y abarca lo siguiente:

—Servicios públicos, es decir, energía eléctrica, telecomunicaciones, abastecimiento de agua por tubería, saneamiento y alcantarillado, recogida y eliminación de desechos sólidos, y suministro de gas por tubería. (King, Classroom presentation, 1)

As the students enrolled in this class were generally at a low intermediate level, it was decided to prepare an outline for them as a student handout to serve as an aid in note taking and vocabulary. This enabled better comprehension overall and the possibility of feedback using the follow-up questions. The following is an excerpt from the outline with follow-up questions:

Bosqueo (outline)—El Banco Mundial

- I. Aumento espectacular cada año en nueva infraestructura (4% de producto nacional)

- A. En sectores como transportes, energía eléctrica, agua, saneamiento, telecomunicaciones y riego (irrigation)
  - B. Proporción de unidades familiares con acceso a agua potable se ha incrementado en un 50%
  - C. Número de líneas telefónicas aumentado al doble
  - D. Eleva productividad y mejora niveles de vida
- II. Problemas
- A. Redes de transportes, se deterioran con rapidez
  - B. Poca fiabilidad de suministro de energía eléctrica restringe producción . . .
- III. ¿Qué es infraestructura?
- A. Servicios públicos—energía eléctrica, telecomunicaciones, abastecimiento de agua por tubería (pipe), saneamiento y alcantarillado (sewer laying), recogida y eliminación de desechos sólidos, suministro de gas por tubería

#### Preguntas

1. ¿Qué ha pasado durante los últimos años en cuanto a la infraestructura?
2. ¿Cuáles son algunos problemas que se asocian con estos servicios?
3. ¿De qué manera deben los nuevos procedimientos cambiar para satisfacer a las necesidades?
4. Den una definición de la infraestructura. . . .

This presentation enables the use of information distributed by almost any organization. The same type of information may be downloaded from the Internet and presented, accompanied by pictures if desired. Students may be taught to access the Internet and make similar presentations. The oral proficiency exercises described in the first part of this article may be applied to this information as well.

New technology combined with a little creativity can provide stimulating and informative techniques in the business language classroom.

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**ATTACHMENT 1**  
(Booklet and Tape Program to Accompany Slides)  
**LE GAZ NATUREL**

Le gaz naturel est connu depuis la plus haute antiquité. Les Etats-Unis furent les pionniers dans le domaine de l'exploitation du gaz naturel vers 1930. . . .

2. Les gisements de gaz se trouvant aussi bien sous les continents que sous les fonds marins, les géologues et les physiciens se livrent à une analyse très minutieuse du terrain d'abord par des prélèvements par forages (carottages) aux profondeurs de 1.200 à 5.000 m. Dans le dernier cas, le matériel de forage et de production est installé sur des plate-formes dont certaines pèsent 200 000 tonnes. La durée du forage est en moyenne de 20 jours pour 1.200 mètres de profondeur mais elle peut atteindre un an si le gisement se trouve au-delà de 3.000 mètres. Si la campagne de prospection se révèle satisfaisante, on passe à la phase d'exploitation. . . .

6. L'industrie du gaz est née avec la révolution industrielle en France, au milieu du 19<sup>ième</sup> siècle. En 1946, "l'industrie gazière" et "l'industrie électrique" ont été nationalisées. Le Gaz de France recevait la mission de produire, transporter et distribuer le gaz en France. La Direction de la Distribution, qui regroupe l'essentiel des effectifs, comporte 19 directions régionales correspondant aux grandes régions de France, 101 centres de distribution mixtes E.D.F.-G.D.F. 311 sub-divisiones et plus de 900 districts ou agences qui sont en contact direct avec la clientèle. . . .

9. A chaque voyage, un méthanier de 130 000 m<sup>3</sup> de GNL transporte dans 5 cuves 'équivalent de la consommation annuelle du gaz d'une ville de 200 000 habitants. Il est intéressant de comparer la taille de l'être humain à celle de l'intérieur de la cuve d'un méthanier. L'étanchéité de la cuve est assurée par 2 membranes en acier Invar et par des caissons de contre-plaqué remplis de silice expansé. . . .

La construction de gazoducs exige une main d'œuvre parfaitement compétente et un matériel de pose perfectionné. Parmi ses avantages sont le fait que la canalisation est enterrée, ce qui permet de respecter l'environnement; d'autre part pratiquement aucun obstacle naturel ne l'arrête. Un gazoduc peut être posé au fond d'une rivière ou franchir une montagne. Un gazoduc relie la Tunisie à l'Italie via la Sicilie. Le gaz de la Mer du Nord est acheminé en France, d'abord par un gazoduc sous-marin jusqu'à

la côte allemande puis par une canalisation terrestre (Gaz de France tapescript 1–2)

## ATTACHMENT 2

Les étapes d'un entretien d'embauche

1. accueillir le candidat, le saluer
2. l'inviter à s'asseoir
3. expliquer le but de l'entretien
4. demander au candidat pourquoi il a posé sa candidature
5. présenter le poste le plus clairement possible, en répondant aux questions éventuelles du candidat
6. lui poser des questions sur certains points du curriculum vitae qui vous intéressent
7. lui demander s'il souhaite aborder d'autres points
8. lui fixer un délai pour votre réponse définitive
9. le remercier et prendre congé
10. faire un résumé de ce qu'il vous a dit. (Danilo and Tauzin 8)

### 1. Accueillir, saluer le candidat—Actes de parole

Entrez mademoiselle. Je vous remercie d'avoir répondu  
 monsieur A notre annonce  
 madame d'être venu(e)  
 Bonjour, monsieur. Très heureux(-se) de vous rencontrer  
 madame de faire votre connaissance  
 mademoiselle

### 2. Inviter le (la) candidat(e) de s'asseoir

Veillez vous asseoir.  
 Asseyez-vous

### 3. Expliquer le but de l'entretien

Nous avons étudié votre curriculum vitae et vous semblez correspondre au profil que nous recherchons.  
 Votre âge, vos diplômes d'ingénieur de l'École d'application des hauts polymères . . .  
 Le fait que vous avez le DUES (Diplôme universitaire d'Études scientifiques

le BTS (Brevet de technicien supérieur)  
 le bac Série C (Maths et sciences physiques)  
 le bac Série E (Sciences et Techniques)

que vous êtes agrégé(e) de russe d'anglais  
vous qualifie comme postulant(e) pour notre poste de  
technicien, ingénieur spécialisé, chef de service, contremaître

### ATTACHMENT 3

(Text of film:)

Quand je *détecte* une anomalie, je *préviens aussitôt*. Encore *faut-il* que les ouvriers n'oublient pas de réparer le volant. C'est comment on me dotera de la parole.

(voice of automobile's computer)

—Niveau d'essence *minimum*. Les lumières sont restées allumées. Liquide de refroidissement *niveau minimum*. A *vérifier prochainement* le circuit de refroidissement.

—Vas-y.

—Le frein à main est resté serré.

—Vas-y.

—L'éclairage défectueux. A vérifier . . .

—*Numériser*. Comprimer.

*Cinquante messages vont trouver place* dans deux mille millimètres carrés de ma mémoire.

—A *vérifier prochainement* les plaquets des freins.

—Alerte. *Le moteur chauffe*. Alerte moteur impératif. Pas de remise en auto-moteur avant diagnostique.

—Heureusement, *ma discrétion est grande*. Je suis programmé pour ne pas parer qu'en cas d'extrêmes nécessités. En revanche, *comme j'ai commis à ma mémoire une grande quantité d'information*, je suis prêt à *répondre à toutes les questions*. (qtd. in King, "French Video" 5)