French language

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French	
	français
Pronunciation	[fʁɑ̃sɛ]
Spoken in	see below
Total speakers	native speakers: 75[1]-110 million[2], total (both native and second language) speakers: 178 million[2]-265 million[1]
Language family	Indo-European ▪ Italic ▪ Romance ▪ Italo-Western ▪ Western Romance ▪ Gallo-Iberian ▪ Gallo-Romance ▪ Gallo-Rhaetian ▪ Oïl ▪ French
Writing system	Latin alphabet (French variant)
	Official status
Official language in	30 countries Belgium Benin Burkina Faso Burundi Cameroon Canada Central African Republic Chad Comoros Côte d'Ivoire Democratic Republic of the Congo Djibouti Equatorial Guinea France Gabon Guinea Haiti Lebanon Luxembourg Madagascar

	Mali Monaco Niger Republic of the Congo Rwanda Senegal Seychelles Switzerland Togo Vanuatu
	14 Dependent entities Aosta Valley Clipperton French Southern and Antarctic Lands French Polynesia Guernsey Jersey Mayotte New Caledonia Puducherry Saint-Barthélemy Saint-Martin Saint-Pierre and Miquelon Wallis and Futuna
	Numerous international organisations
Regulated by	Académie française (French Academy)
	Language codes
ISO 639-1	`fr`
ISO 639-2	`fre (B)` `fra (T)`
ISO 639-3	`fra`
Linguasphere	–

French (*Français*, IPA: [fʁɑ̃sɛ]) is a Romance language spoken as a first language by most people from France, French-speaking Switzerland, Wallonia in Belgium and Quebec in Canada as well as minorities elsewhere. There are also second language speakers in many parts of the world, most second-language speakers of French living in Francophone Africa[3] , where the highest proportions of French speakers are found in Gabon (80%)[3] Mauritius (72.7%)[3] and Côte d'Ivoire (70%)[3]. It is estimated as having 110[2] million native speakers and 190 million second language speakers[1]. French is studied as a foreign language by some 200 million people (making it the second most learnt language in the world - after English).[4]

Regions where it is mother tongue
Regions where it is official language
Regions where it is second language
Regions where it is a minority language

French is a descendant of the spoken Latin language of the Roman Empire, as are languages such as Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Romanian, Sardinian and Catalan. Its closest relatives however are the other langues d'oïl and French-based creole languages. Its development was also influenced by the native Celtic languages of Roman Gaul and by the (Germanic) Frankish language of the post-Roman Frankish invaders.

It is an official language in 30 countries, most of which form what is called, in French, *La Francophonie*, the community of French-speaking countries. It is an official language of all United Nations agencies and a large number of international organizations. According to the European Union, 129 million (or 26% of the Union's total population), in 27 member states speak French, of which 65 million are native speakers and 69 million claim to speak French either as a second language or as a foreign language, making it the third most spoken second language in the Union, after English and German. Twenty-percent of non-Francophone Europeans know how to speak French, totaling roughly 145.6 million people.[5]

In addition, from the 17th century to the mid 20th century, French served as the pre-eminent international language of diplomacy and international

This article is part of the series on:

French language

- Langues d'Oïl
- Dialects
- Creoles
- Francophonie
- History
  - Oaths of Strasbourg
  - Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts
  - Anglo-Norman
- Grammar
  - Adverbs
  - Articles and determiners
  - Pronouns
    - Personal pronouns
  - Verbs
    - Conjugation
    - Verb morphology
- Orthography
  - Alphabet
  - Reforms

affairs as well as a lingua franca among the educated classes of Europe. The dominant position of the French language has only recently been overshadowed by English, since the emergence of the USA as a major power.[6][7][8]

As a result of extensive colonial ambitions of France and Belgium (at that time governed by a French-speaking elite), between the 17th and 20th centuries, French was introduced to America, Africa, Polynesia, South-East Asia, and the Caribbean.

- Use of the circumflex
- Phonology
  - Elision
  - Liaison
  - Aspirated h

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Geographic distribution

Europe

French is the fourth most widely spoken mother tongue in the European Union.[9] It is also the third most widely understood language in the EU, after English and German.

Legal status in France

See also: Toubon Law and Languages of France

According to the Constitution of France, French has been the official language since 1992 [10] (although previous legal texts have made it official since 1539, see ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts). France mandates the use of French in official government publications, public education except in specific cases (though these dispositions are often ignored) and legal contracts; advertisements must bear a translation of foreign words.

In addition to French, there are also a variety of regional languages and dialects. France has signed the European Charter for Regional Languages, but has not ratified it since that would go against the 1958 Constitution.[*citation needed*]

Switzerland

Further information: Languages of Switzerland, Swiss French, and Romandie

French is one of the four official languages of Switzerland (along with German, Italian and Romansh) and is spoken in the western part of Switzerland called *Romandie*, of which Geneva is the largest city. The language divisions in Switzerland do not coincide with political subdivisions and some cantons enjoy bilingual status for example, parts of Biel/Bienne as well as parts of Neuchâtel squaids. French is the native language of about 20% of the Swiss population (in a constant rise since 1970[*citation needed*]) and it is spoken by 50.4%[11] of the population.

Most of Swiss French is mutually compatible with the standard French spoken in France, but it is often used with small differences, such as those involving numbers after 69, there are also slight differences in other vocabulary terms.

Belgium

Further information: Languages of Belgium and Belgian French

Bilingual signs in Brussels.

In Belgium, French is the official language of Wallonia (excluding the East Cantons, which are German-speaking) and one of the two official languages—along with Dutch—of the Brussels-Capital Region, where it is spoken by the majority of the population, though often not as their primary language.[12] French (or German) are not official languages nor recognized minority languages in the Flemish Region, although along borders with the Walloon and Brussels-Capital regions, there are a dozen municipalities with language facilities for French speakers. A mirror situation exists for the Walloon Region with respect to the Dutch and German languages. In total, native French speakers make up about 40% of the country's population, while the remaining 60% speak Dutch as a first language. Of the latter, 59% claim French as a second or third language, meaning that about three quarters of the Belgian population can speak French.[13][14]

Monaco and Andorra

Further information: Languages of Monaco and Languages of Andorra

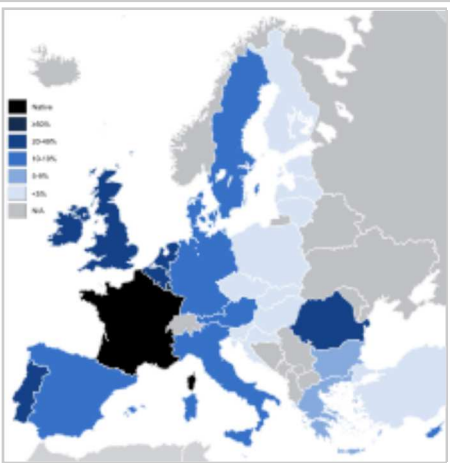
Although Monégasque is the national language of the Principality of Monaco, French is the only official language, and French nationals make up some 47% of the population.

Catalan is the only official language of Andorra; however, French is commonly used because of the proximity to France. French nationals make up 7% of the population.

Italy

Further information: Languages of Italy

French is also an official language, along with Italian, in the small region of Aosta Valley, Italy.[18] Though most non-Italophone people in the region speak Franco-Provençal,[19] they use standard French to write. That is because the international recognition of Franco-Provençal as a separated language (as opposed to a dialect or patois of French) was quite recent.



Knowledge of French in the European Union and candidate countries[15] (Note that around 40% of Belgium's population are native French speakers[16], totalling 88%[17] of the country's population.)

Luxembourg

Further information: Languages of Luxembourg and Multilingualism in Luxembourg

French is one of three official languages of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, alongside German and Luxembourgish, the natively spoken language of Luxembourg. French is primarily used for administrative purposes by the government, and is also the language used to converse with foreigners. Luxembourg's education system is trilingual: the first years of primary school are in Luxembourgish, before changing to German; while in secondary school, the language of instruction changes to French. French is spoken by 97.8% of the population.[*citation needed*]

The United Kingdom and the Channel Islands

Further information: Languages of Jersey, Languages of Guernsey, and Languages of the United Kingdom

French is a large minority language and immigrant language in the United Kingdom, with over 300,000 French-born people in the UK. It is also the most popular foreign language. French is spoken and understood by 23% of the UK population.[20]

Modern and Middle English are largely the result of the mixture of Oïl languages with Old English after the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, when a Norman-speaking aristocracy took control of a population whose mother tongue was Germanic in origin. As a result of the intertwined histories of England and continental possessions of the English Crown many formal and legal words from Modern English have a French root. Thus whilst words such as buy and sell are of Germanic origin, purchase and vend are from Old French.

French is an official language in both Jersey and Guernsey. Both use French to some degree, mostly in an administrative or ceremonial capacity. Jersey Legal French is the standardized variety used in Jersey. However, Norman (in its local forms, Guernésiais and

Jèrriais) is the historical vernacular of the islands.

America

Canada

See also: Canadian French, French language in Canada, Spoken languages of Canada, and Official bilingualism in Canada

The "arrêt" signs (French for "stop") are used in Quebec while the international *stop,* which is also a valid French word, is used in the European French-speaking countries.

French is the second most common language in Canada, after English, and both are official languages at the federal level. French is the sole official language in the province of Quebec, being the mother tongue for some 6.8 million people, or almost 80.1% (2006 Census) of the Province. About 95.0% of the people of Quebec speak French as either their first or second language, and for some as their third language. Quebec is also home to the city of Montreal, which is the world's second largest French speaking city, by number of first language speakers. New Brunswick, where about a third of the population is francophone, is the only officially bilingual province. Portions of Eastern Ontario, Northeastern Ontario, Nova Scotia and Manitoba have sizable French minorities, but its prescription as an official language in those jurisdictions and the level of francophone services varies. Smaller pockets of French speakers exist in all other provinces.

In total 10,170,000 Canadians can speak French as the first language, or 30.6% of the country. Due to the increased bilingual school programs and French Immersion Classes in English Canada, the portion of Canadians proficient in French has risen significantly in the past two decades, and is still rising.

The difference between French spoken in Quebec and French spoken in France is similar to American and British English. In Quebec, where the majority of French-speaking Canadians live, the Office québécois de la langue française (English: *Quebec Board of the French language*) regulates Quebec French and ensures the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101 & 104) is respected. As Québécois live near to English-speaking regions, they are more sensitive about the language situation than the European French speakers are.[*citation needed*]

The Office québécois de la langue française determined that "stop" is a valid French word, however it is observed that stop signs reading "ARRÊT" predominate in French-speaking areas, and "STOP" can be found in majority English-speaking areas.

Haiti

French is one of Haiti's two official languages. It is the principal language of writing, school instruction, and administrative use. It is spoken by all educated Haitians and is used in the business sector. It is also used in ceremonious events such as weddings, graduations and church masses. About 10-15% of the country's population have French as their first language; the rest speak it as a secondary language in varying degrees of proficiency from basic level to fluent. The second official language is the recently standardized Haitian Creole which is spoken by virtually the entire population of Haiti. Haitian Creole is one of the French-based creole languages, drawing the large majority of its vocabulary from French, with influences from West African languages, as well as several European languages. Haitian Creole is closely related to Louisiana Creole and all other French creoles.

French overseas departments and territories in the Americas

French is also the official language in France's overseas departments and territories of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint Barthélemy, St. Martin and Saint-Pierre et Miquelon.

The United States

See also: French in the United States, Cajun French, and Louisiana Creole French

French language spread in the United States. Counties marked in yellow are those where 6–12% of the population speak French at home; brown, 12–18%; red, over 18%. French-based creole languages are not included.

French is the fourth[21][22] most-spoken language in the United States, after English, Spanish and Chinese, and the second most-spoken in the states of Louisiana, Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire. Louisiana is home to many distinct dialects, of which Cajun French has the largest number of speakers, mostly centered around New Orleans. According to the 2000 US Census, there are over 194,000 people in Louisiana who speak French at home, the most of any state if Creole French is excluded.[22] However, the two largest cities which originated as French settlements, St. Louis and Detroit, now only have a slim minority of French speakers.

Brazil

The French language in Brazil was spoken for a brief period during the colonial attempts of France Antarctique and France Ecquinociale. Also, the language was used by the community of French immigrants and expatriates in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, and by the Brazilian public education system.

Today the Karipuna indigenous community (nearly 30,000 people) of Amapá in North Brazil speaks a French creole, the Lanc-Patuá, possibly related to the French Guiana Creole.

Africa

Main articles: African French and Maghreb French

A majority of the world's French-speaking population lives in Africa. According to the 2007 report by the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, an estimated 115 million African people spread across 31 Francophone African countries can speak French as either a first or a second language.[3] This number does not include the people living in non-Francophone African countries who have learned French as a foreign language.[3]

Supermarket sign in French in Dakar, Senegal.

French is mostly a second language in Africa, but it has become a first language in some areas, such as the region of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire[25] and in Libreville, Gabon.[26] The classification of French as a second language in Francophone Africa is debatable because it is often the only language spoken and written in schools, administrations, radio, TV and the Internet. This prevalence of French is noticeable in popular music, in which French is often mixed with the language of the song. It is not possible to speak of a single form of African French, but rather of diverse forms of African French which have developed because of the contact with many indigenous African languages.[27]Furthermore, African French refers mostly to spoken idiomatic phrases that borrow specific words from local languages, but doesn't alter the structure of sentences, and is not accepted in official written documents; thus African French is less distinct from French spoken in France than American English is from British English, for example. In fact, the term African French is a misnomer, as forms are different from country to country, and the root of the French spoken in a particular country depends on its former colonial empire. French spoken in the Benin, for example, is closer to that spoken in France than to French spoken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is rooted in Belgian French.

Countries usually considered as Francophone Africa. These countries had a population of 344 million in 2010.[23] Their population is projected to reach between 684 million[24] and 732 million[23] in 2050.

Countries sometimes considered as Francophone Africa

Countries that are not Francophone but are Members or Observers of the OIF

In the territories of the Indian Ocean, the French language is often spoken alongside French-

derived creole languages, the major exception being Madagascar. There, a Malayo-Polynesian language (Malagasy) is spoken alongside French.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region where the French language is most likely to expand, because of the expansion of education and rapid demographic growth.[28] It is also where the language has evolved the most in recent years.[29][30] Some vernacular forms of French in Africa can be difficult to understand for French speakers from other countries,[31] but written forms of the language are very closely related to those of the rest of the French-speaking world.

French is an official language in many African countries, most of them former French or Belgian colonies:

- Benin
- Burkina Faso
- Burundi
- Cameroon
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Comoros
- Congo (Brazzaville)
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Djibouti
- Equatorial Guinea (former colony of Spain)
- Gabon
- Guinea
- Madagascar
- Mali
- Niger
- Rwanda
- Senegal
- Seychelles
- Togo

In addition, French is an administrative language and commonly used, though not on an official basis, in Mauritius and in the Maghreb states:

- Algeria (see also languages of Algeria)
- Mauritania (see also languages of Mauritania)
- Morocco (see also languages of Morocco)
- Tunisia (see also languages of Tunisia)

Algeria

Most urban Algerians have some working knowledge of French, and a high (though unknown) percentage speak it fluently. However, because of the country's colonial past, the predominance of French has long been politically fraught. Numerous reforms have been implemented in recent decades to improve the status of Arabic in relation to French, especially in education. For this reason, although Algeria is certainly one of the most Francophone countries in the world outside of France, and has perhaps the largest number of French speakers, it does not participate in the Francophonie association.

Egypt

The official language in Egypt is literary Arabic and it's mandatory in all schools. The most used second languages in Egypt are English and French, which are learned by some elements of the Egyptian upper and upper-middle classes, most Egyptians will mostly learn

English and French in addition to Arabic. Private schools have either English or French language as the main instructive language. Egypt participates in La Francophonie. Egypt was colonized by the French and they soon had to learn to be able to communicate with them.[*citation needed*]

French overseas departments and territories in Africa

French is also the official language of Mayotte and Réunion, two overseas territories of France located in the southwest Indian Ocean.

Asia

Lebanon

Arabic is the official language of Lebanon, while a special law shall regulate the use of French. French is considered a second language by the Lebanese people and is used on bank notes (along with Arabic) and on official buildings. French is widely used by the Lebanese, especially for administrative purposes, and is taught in many schools as a secondary language along with Arabic and English.

A Lebanese "mille livres" (thousand-pound) bank note

Syria

Like Lebanon, French was official in Syria until 1943. In contrast to Lebanon, the French language is less used, but it's still spoken to some degree by educated groups, both in the élite and in the middle-class.

Israel

There are a significant number of second-language French-speakers in Israel who trace their origins to the Jewish communities of North Africa and Romania. Also, there has been considerable immigration of native French speakers from France in recent years.

Southeast Asia

French is an administrative language in Laos and Cambodia, although its influence has waned in recent years.[32] In colonial Vietnam, the elites spoke French, and many who worked for the French spoke a French creole known as "Tây Bồi" (now extinct). The language was also spoken by the elite in the leased territory Guangzhouwan in southern China. (See also: French Indochina)

India

French has de-jure official status in the Indian Union Territory of Puducherry, along with the regional languages Tamil and Telugu. Some students of Tamil Nadu opt for French as their second or third language (usually behind English and Tamil).

French is commonly taught as a third language in secondary schools in most cities of Maharashtra, including Mumbai (Bombay), as part of the preparation for secondary school (X-SSC) and higher secondary school (XII-HSC) certificate examinations. Certain high-profile schools affiliated with the CBSE in the NCR offer French as an option as early as grade 4.

French is also taught in schools in Chandannagar (a former French colony in West Bengal). Students also have the option for having French as an additional subject in the secondary school (WBBSE) and higher secondary school (WBCHSE) certificate examinations. Nevertheless, French is taught throughout India as an optional Foreign language and is very popular subject among students.

See also: French India

Oceania/Australasia

French is an official language of the Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu where 45% of the population can speak French.[33] In the French territory of New Caledonia, 97% of the population can speak, read and write French, whereas only 1% has no knowledge of French.[34] In French Polynesia, 95% of the population can speak, read and write French, whereas only 2% have no knowledge of French.[35] In the French territory of Wallis and Futuna, 78% of the population can speak, read and write French, whereas 17% have no knowledge of French.[36]

Dialects

Main article: Dialects of the French language

- Acadian French
- African French
- Aostan French
- Belgian French
- Cajun French
- Cambodian French
- Canadian French
- French-based creole languages
- Guyana French
- Indian French
- Jersey Legal French
- Lao French
- Levantine French (most commonly referred to as Lebanese French)
- Louisiana Creole French
- Mauritian Creole
- Maghreb French (see also North African French)
- Meridional French
- Metropolitan French
- Missouri French
- New Caledonian French
- Newfoundland French
- Oceanic French
- Quebec French
- South East Asian French
- Swiss French
- Vietnamese French
- West Indian French
- French Colonial Empire

History

Main article: History of French

French is a Romance language (meaning that it is descended primarily from Vulgar Latin) that evolved out of the Gallo-Romance dialects spoken in northern France. The discussion of the history of a language is typically divided into "external history", describing the ethnic, political, social, technological, and other changes that impacted the languages, and "internal history", describing the phonological and grammatical changes undergone by the language itself.

Phonology

Main article: French phonology

Although there are many French regional accents, foreign learners normally study only one version of the language, which has no commonly used special name.

This article contains IPA phonetic symbols. Without proper rendering support, you may see question marks, boxes, or other symbols instead of Unicode characters.

- There are 16 vowels in French, not all of which are used in every dialect: /a/, /ɑ/, /e/, /ɛ/, /ə/, /i/, /o/, /ɔ/, /y/, /u/, /œ/, /ø/, plus the nasalized vowels /ɑ̃/, /ɛ̃/, /ɔ̃/ and /œ̃/. In France, the vowels /ɑ/ and /œ̃/ are tending to be replaced by /a/ and /ɛ̃/ in many people's speech.
- Voiced stops (i.e. /b d g/) are typically produced fully voiced throughout.
- Voiceless stops (i.e. /p t k/) are unaspirated.
- Nasals: The velar nasal /ŋ/ can occur in final position in borrowed (usually English) words: *parking, camping, swing* but the palatal nasal often substitute it. The palatal nasal /ɲ/ can occur in word initial position (e.g. gnon), but it is most frequently found in intervocalic, onset position or word-finally (e.g. *montagne*).
- Fricatives: French has three pairs of homorganic fricatives distinguished by voicing, i.e. labiodental /f/~/v/, dental /s/~/z/, and palato-alveolar /ʃ/~/ʒ/. Notice that /s/~/z/ are dental, like the plosives /t/~/d/, and the nasal /n/.
- French has one rhotic whose pronunciation varies considerably among speakers and phonetic contexts. In general it is described as a voiced uvular fricative as in [ʁu] *roue*, "wheel" . Vowels are often lengthened before this segment. It can be reduced to an approximant, particularly in final position (e.g. *fort*) or reduced to zero in some word-final positions. For other speakers, a uvular trill is also common, and an apical trill [r] occurs in some dialects.
- Lateral and central approximants: The lateral approximant /l/ is unvelarised in both onset (*lire*) and coda position (*il*). In the onset, the central approximants [w], [ɥ], and [j] each correspond to a high vowel, /u/, /y/, and /i/ respectively. There are a few minimal pairs where the approximant and corresponding vowel contrast, but there are also many cases where they are in free variation. Contrasts between /j/ and /i/ occur in final position as in /pɛj/ *paye*, "pay", vs. /pɛi/ *pays*, "country".

French pronunciation follows strict rules based on spelling, but French spelling is often based more on history than phonology. The rules for pronunciation vary between dialects, but the standard rules are:

- final consonants: Final single consonants, in particular *s*, *x*, *z*, *t*, *d*, *n*,*f*,*g* and *m*, are normally silent. A consonant is final when no vowel follows it even though one or more consonants follow it. (The final letters *c*,*k*,*q* and *l*, however, are normally pronounced.) For the *r*, usually it's silent when it follows an *e* in a word of two or more syllables and pronounced in other case. The *t* is pronounced when it follows a *c*.
  - When the following word begins with a vowel, however, a silent consonant *may* once again be pronounced, to provide a *liaison* or "link" between the two words. Some liaisons are *mandatory*, for example the *s* in *les amants* or *vous avez*; some are *optional*, depending on dialect and register, for example the first *s* in *deux cents euros* or *euros irlandais*; and some are *forbidden*, for example the *s* in *beaucoup d'hommes aiment*. The *t* of *et* is never pronounced and the silent final consonant of a noun is only pronounced in the plural and in set phrases like *pied-à-terre*.
  - Doubling a final *n* and adding a silent *e* at the end of a word (e.g. *chien* → *chienne*) makes it clearly pronounced. Doubling a final *l* and adding a silent *e* (e.g. *gentil* → *gentille*) adds a [j] sound if the *l* is preceded by the letter *i*.
- elision or vowel dropping: Some monosyllabic function words ending in *a* or *e*, such as *je* and *que*, drop their final vowel when placed before a word that begins with a vowel sound (thus avoiding a hiatus). The missing vowel is replaced by an apostrophe. (e.g. *je ai* is instead pronounced and spelled → *j'ai*). This gives, for example, the same pronunciation for *l'homme qu'il a vu* ("the man whom he saw") and *l'homme qui l'a vu* ("the man who saw him"). However, for Belgian French the sentences are pronounced differently; in the first sentence the syllable break is as "qu'il-a", while the second breaks as "qui-l'a". It can also be noted that, in Quebec French, the second example (*l'homme qui l'a vu*) is more emphasized on *l'a vu*.

Writing system

Alphabet

Main article: French alphabet

French is written with the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet, with four diacritics appearing on vowels (circumflex accent, acute accent, grave accent, diaeresis) and the cedilla appearing in ‹ç›.

There are two ligatures, ‹œ› and ‹æ›.

Orthography

Main article: French orthography

French spelling, like English spelling, tends to preserve obsolete pronunciation rules. This is mainly due to extreme phonetic changes since the Old French period, without a corresponding change in spelling (see Vocabulary below). Moreover, some conscious changes were made to restore Latin orthography:

- Old French *doit* > French *doigt* "finger" (Latin *digitus*)
- Old French *pie* > French *pied* "foot" (Latin *pes* (stem: *ped-*))

As a result, it can be difficult to predict the spelling of a word based on the sound alone. Final consonants are generally silent, except when the following word begins with a vowel. For example, all of these words end in a vowel sound: *pied*, *aller*, *les*, *finit*, *beaux*. The same words followed by a vowel, however, may sound the consonants, as they do in these examples: *beaux-arts*, *les amis*, *pied-à-terre*.

On the other hand, a given spelling will usually lead to a predictable sound, and the Académie française works hard to enforce and update this correspondence.[*citation needed*] In particular, a given vowel combination or diacritic predictably leads to one phoneme.

French writing, as with any language, is affected by the spoken language. In Old French, the plural for *animal* was *animals*. The /als/ sequence was unstable and was turned into a diphthong /aus/. This change was then reflected in the orthography: *animaus*. The *us* ending, very common in Latin, was then abbreviated by copists monks by the letter *x*, resulting in a written form *animax*. As the French language further evolved, the pronunciation of *au* turned into /o/ so that the *u* was reestablished in orthography for consistency, resulting in modern French *animaux* (pronounced first /animos/ before the final /s/ was dropped in contemporary French). The same is true for *cheval* pluralized as *chevaux* and many others. In addition, *castel* pl. *castels* became *château* pl. *châteaux*

- Nasal: *n* and *m*. When *n* or *m* follows a vowel or diphthong, the *n* or *m* becomes silent and causes the preceding vowel to become nasalized (i.e. pronounced with the soft palate extended downward so as to allow part of the air to leave through the nostrils). Exceptions are when the *n* or *m* is doubled, or immediately followed by a vowel. The prefixes *en-* and *em-* are always nasalized. The rules are more complex than this but may vary between dialects.
- Digraphs: French uses not only diacritics to specify its large range of vowel sounds and diphthongs, but also specific combinations of vowels, sometimes with following consonants, to show which sound is intended.
- Gemination: Within words, double consonants are generally not pronounced as geminates in modern French (but geminates can be heard in the cinema or TV news from as recently as the 1970s, and in very refined elocution they may still occur). For example, *illusion* is pronounced [ilyzjɔ̃] and not [il:yzjɔ̃]. But gemination does occur between words. For example, *une info* ("a news item" or "a piece of information") is pronounced [ynɛ̃fo], whereas *une nympho* ("a nymphomaniac") is pronounced [yn:ɛ̃fo].
- Accents are used sometimes for pronunciation, sometimes to distinguish similar words, and sometimes for etymology alone.
    - Accents that affect pronunciation
        - The acute accent (*l'accent aigu*), *é* (e.g. ***é**cole*—school), means that the

vowel is pronounced /e/ instead of the default /ə/.
    - The grave accent (*l'accent grave*), *è* (e.g. *él**è**ve*—pupil) means that the vowel is pronounced /ɛ/ instead of the default /ə/.
    - The circumflex (*l'accent circonflexe*) *ê* (e.g. *for**ê**t*—forest) shows that an *e* is pronounced /ɛ/ and that an *ô* is pronounced /o/. In standard French, it also signifies a pronunciation of /ɑ/ for the letter *â*, but this differentiation is disappearing. In the late 19th century, the circumflex was used in place of *s* after a vowel, where that letter *s* was not to be pronounced. Thus, *forest* became *forêt* and *hospital* became *hôpital*.
    - The diaeresis (*le tréma*) (e.g. *naï**f*** — naive, *No**ë**l* — Christmas) as in English, specifies that this vowel is pronounced separately from the preceding one, not combined, and is not a schwa.
    - The cedilla (*la cédille*) *ç* (e.g. *gar**ç**on*—boy) means that the letter *ç* is pronounced /s/ in front of the hard vowels *a*, *o* and *u* (*c* is otherwise /k/ before a hard vowel). *C* is always pronounced /s/ in front of the soft vowels *e*, *i*, and *y*, thus *ç* is never found in front of soft vowels.
- Accents with no pronunciation effect
    - The circumflex does not affect the pronunciation of the letters *i* or *u*, and in most dialects, *a* as well. It usually indicates that an *s* came after it long ago, as in *île* (*isle*, compare with English *island*). The explanation is that some words share the same orthography, and the circumflex is put here to spot the difference between the two words. For example, *dites* (you say) / *dîtes* (you said), or even *du* (of the) / *dû* (past for the verb *devoir* = must, have to, owe; in this case, the circumflex splits at the plural and the feminine).
    - All other accents are used only to distinguish similar words, as in the case of distinguishing the adverbs *là* and *où* ("there", "where") from the article *la* ("the" fem. sing.) and the conjunction *ou* ("or") respectively.

Some proposals exist to simplify the existing writing system, but they still fail to gather interest.[37][38][39]

Grammar

Main article: French grammar

French grammar shares several notable features with most other Romance languages, including:

- the loss of Latin's declensions
- only two grammatical genders
- the development of grammatical articles from Latin demonstratives
- new tenses formed from auxiliaries

French declarative word order is Subject Verb Object, although if the object is a pronoun, it precedes the verb. Some types of sentences allow for or require different word orders, in particular inversion of the subject and verb.

Vocabulary

The majority of French words derive from Vulgar Latin or were constructed from Latin or Greek roots. In many cases a single etymological root appears in French in a "popular" or native form, inherited from Vulgar Latin, and a learned form, borrowed later from Classical Latin. The following pairs consist of a native noun and a learned adjective:

- brother: *frère* / *fraternel* < from Latin *frater*
- finger: *doigt* / *digital* < from Latin *digitum*
- faith: *foi* / *fidèle* < from Latin *fidem*
- eye: *œil* / *oculaire* < from Latin *oculum*

There are also noun-noun and adjective-adjective pairs:

- thing/cause: *chose* / *cause* < from Latin *causa*
- cold: *froid* / *frigide* < from Latin *frigidum*

It can be difficult to identify the Latin source of native French words, because in the evolution from Vulgar Latin, unstressed syllables were severely reduced and the remaining vowels and consonants underwent significant modifications.

It is estimated that 12% (4,200) of common French words found in a typical dictionary such as the *Petit Larousse* or *Micro-Robert Plus* (35,000 words) are of foreign origin (where Greek and Latin learned words are not seen as foreign). About 25% (1,054) of these foreign words come from English and are fairly recent borrowings. The others are some 707 words from Italian, 550 from ancient Germanic languages, 481 from other Gallo-Romance languages, 215 from Arabic, 164 from German, 160 from Celtic languages, 159 from Spanish, 153 from Dutch, 112 from Persian and Sanskrit, 101 from Native American languages, 89 from other Asian languages, 56 from other Afro-Asiatic languages, 55 from Slavic languages and Baltic languages, 10 from Basque and 144 (about 3%) from other languages.[40]

Numerals

The French counting system is partially vigesimal: twenty (*vingt*) is used as a base number in the names of numbers from 60 to 99. The French word for *80* is *quatre-vingts*, literally "four twenties", and the word for *75* is *soixante-quinze*, literally "sixty-fifteen". This reform arose after the French Revolution to unify the different counting systems (mostly vigesimal near the coast, because of Celtic (via Breton) and Viking influences). This system is comparable to the archaic English use of *score*, as in "fourscore and seven" (87), or "threescore and ten" (70). In Old French (during the Middle Ages), all numbers from 30 to 99 could be said in either base 10 or base 20, e.g. *vint et doze* (twenty and twelve) for 32, *dous vinz et diz* (two twenties and ten) for 50, *uitante* for 80, or *nonante* for 90.[41]

Belgian French, Swiss French and the French used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi are different in this respect. In Belgium and Switzerland 70 and 90 are *septante* and *nonante*. In Switzerland, depending on the local dialect, 80 can be *quatre-*

vingts (Geneva, Neuchâtel, Jura) or *huitante* (Vaud, Valais, Fribourg). *Octante* had been used in Switzerland in the past, but is now considered archaic.[42] In Belgium and in its former African colonies, however, *quatre-vingts* is universally used.

It should also be noted that French, like most European languages, uses a period (also called a full stop) or a space to separate thousands where English uses a comma or (more recently) a space. The comma is used in French numbers as a decimal point: 2,5 = *deux virgule cinq*.

Cardinal numbers in French from 1 to 20 are as follows:

- One: *un*/*une* /œ̃/ or /ɛ̃/ (m) - /yn/ (f)
- Two: *deux* /dø/
- Three: *trois* /tʁwa/
- Four: *quatre* /katʁ/
- Five: *cinq* /sɛ̃k/
- Six: *six* /sis/
- Seven: *sept* /sɛt/
- Eight: *huit* /ɥit/
- Nine: *neuf* /nœf/
- Ten: *dix* /dis/
- Eleven: *onze* /ɔ̃z/
- Twelve: *douze* /duz/
- Thirteen: *treize* /tʁɛz/
- Fourteen: *quatorze* /katɔʁz/
- Fifteen: *quinze* /kɛ̃z/
- Sixteen: *seize* /sɛz/
- Seventeen: *dix-sept* /dissɛt/
- Eighteen: *dix-huit* /diz‿ɥit/
- Nineteen: *dix-neuf* /diznœf/
- Twenty: *vingt* /vɛ̃/

Examples

The "Canadian" audio samples here are not necessarily from speakers of Quebec French, which has distinct regional pronunciations of certain words.

This section includes inline links to audio files. If you have trouble playing the files, see Wikipedia Media help.

English	French	IPA pronunciation (Canadian accent)	IPA pronunciation (Northern French accent)
French	*Français*	/fʁɑ̃ˈsɛ/	/fʁɑ̃sɛ/

English	*Anglais*	/ɑ̃glɛ/	/ɑ̃glɛ/
Yes	*Oui* (*si* when countering an assertion or a question expressed in the negative)	/wi/	/wi/
No	*Non*	/nɔ̃/	/nɔ̃/
Hello!	*Bonjour !* (formal) or *Salut !* (informal) or "Allô" (Canada or when answering on the telephone)	/bɔ̃ˈʒuːʀ/	/bɔ̃ʒuʁ/
Good evening!	*Bonsoir !*	/bɔ̃swɑːʀ/	/bɔ̃swaːʁ/
Good night!	*Bonne nuit !*	/bɔnnɥi/	/bɔn nɥi/
Goodbye!	*Au revoir !*	/ɔʀˈvwɑːʀ/	/ɔʁ vwaːʀ/
Have a nice day!	*Bonne journée !*	/bɔn ʒuʀˈne/	/bɔn ʒuʁne/
Please	*S'il vous plaît* (formal) or *S'il te plaît* (informal)	/sɪlvuplɛ/	/sil vu plɛ/
Thank you	*Merci*	/mɛʀˈsi/	/mɛʁsi/
You are welcome	*De rien* (informal) or *Ce n'est rien* (informal) ("it is nothing") or *Je vous en prie* (formal) or *Je t'en prie* (informal)		/də ʁiɛ̃/
I am sorry	*Pardon* or *Je suis désolé* (if male) / *Je suis désolée* (if female) or *Excuse-moi* (informal) / *Excusez-moi* (formal) / "Je regrette"	/paʁdɔ̃/ / /dezɔle/	/paʁdɔ̃/ / /dezɔle/
Who?	*Qui ?*	/ki/	/ki/
What?	*Quoi ?* (←informal; used as "What?" in English)) or *Comment ?* (←formal; used the same as "Pardon me?" in English)	/kwa/	/kwa/
When?	*Quand ?*	/kɑ̃/	/kɑ̃/
Where?	*Où ?*	/u/	/u/
Why?	*Pourquoi ?*	/puʀkwa/	/puʁkwɑ/
What is your name?	*Comment vous appelez-vous ?* (formal) or		/kɔmɑ̃ vuz‿aple vu/, /kɔmɑ̃ tapɛl ty/

	Comment t'appelles-tu ? (informal)		
Because	*Parce que* / *Car*	/paʀs(ə)kə/	/paʁs kə/
Because of	*à cause de*		
Therefore	*Donc*	/dɔ̃k/	/dɔ̃k/
How?	*Comment ?*	/kɔmɑ̃/	/kɔmɑ̃/
How much?	*Combien ?*	/kɔ̃'bjɛ̃/	/kɔ̃ bjɛ̃/
I do not understand.	*Je ne comprends pas.*	/ʒə nə kɔ̃pʀɑ̃ pɑ/	/ʒə nə kɔ̃pʁɑ̃ pa/
Yes, I understand.	*Oui, je comprends.* Except when responding to a negatively posed question, in which case *Si* is used preferentially over *Oui*	/wi ʒə kɔ̃pʀɑ̃/	/wi, ʒə kɔ̃ pʁɑ̃/
I agree	*Je suis d'accord.* D'accord can be used without *je suis*.		
Help!	*Au secours ! (à l'aide !)*	/o səˈkuʀ/	/o səku:ʁ/
Can you help me please?	*Pouvez-vous m'aider s'il vous plaît ?* / *Pourriez-vous m'aider s'il vous plaît ?* (formal) or *Peux-tu m'aider s'il te plaît ?* / *Pourrais-tu m'aider s'il te plaît* (informal)		
Where are the toilets?	*Où sont les toilettes ?*	/u sɔ̃ le twalɛt/	/u sɔ̃ le twa.lɛt/
Do you speak English?	*Parlez-vous anglais ?*	/paʀle vu ɑ̃glɛ/	/paʁ le vu ɑ̃g lɛ/
I do not speak French.	*Je ne parle pas français.*	/ʒə nə paʀlə pɑ fʀɑ̃sɛ/	/ʒə nə paʁl pa fʁɑ̃sɛ/
I do not know.	*Je ne sais pas.*		/ʒə (nə) se pa/
I know.	*Je sais.*		/ʒə sɛ/
I am thirsty.	*J'ai soif.* (literally, "I have thirst")		/ʒɛ swaf/
I am hungry.	*J'ai faim.* (literally, "I have hunger")		/ʒɛ fɛ̃/

How are you? / How are things going? / How is everything?	*Comment allez-vous?* (formal) or *Ça va?* / *Comment ça va ?* (informal)		
I am (very) well / Things are going (very) well // Everything is (very) well	*Je vais (très) bien* (formal) or *Ça va (très) bien.* / *Tout va (très) bien* (informal)		
I am (very) bad / Things are (very) bad / Everything is (very) bad	*Je vais (très) mal* (formal) or *Ça va (très) mal* / *Tout va (très) mal* (informal)		
I am all right/so-so / Everything is all right/so-so	*Assez bien* or *Ça va comme ci, comme ça* or simply *Ça va.*. (Sometimes said: « Couci, couça. », informal: "bof") i.e. « Comme ci, comme ça. »)		
I am fine.	*Ça va bien.*		/sa va bjɛ̃/

See also

- Académie française
- Alliance française
- Francophonie
- Francization
- French language in Canada
- French language in the United States
- French proverbs
- French-based creole languages
- History of French
- List of countries where French is an official language
- List of English words of French origin
- List of French loanwords in Persian
- List of French words and phrases used by English speakers
- List of pseudo-French words adapted to English
- Louchébem
- Office québécois de la langue française
- Quebec French
- Reforms of French orthography
- Varieties of French

- Verlan

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Flamands connaissent le français ou l'anglais respectivement, seulement 19 % et 17 % des Wallons connaissent le néerlandais ou l'anglais. ... 95 pour cent des Bruxellois déclarent parler le français, alors que ce pourcentage tombe à 59 pour cent pour le néerlandais. Quant à l'anglais, il est connu par une proportion importante de la population à Bruxelles (41 pour cent)".

14. **^** 40%+60%*59%=75.4%
15. **^** Source: EUROPA (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_243_en.pdf) , data for EU25, published before 2007 enlargement.
16. **^** Native speakers of Dutch living in Wallonia and of French in Flanders are relatively small minorities that furthermore largely balance one another, hence counting all inhabitants of each unilingual area to the area's language can cause only insignificant inaccuracies (99% can speak the language). Dutch: Flanders' 6.079 million inhabitants and about 15% of Brussels' 1.019 million are 6.23 million or 59.3% of the 10.511 million inhabitants of Belgium (2006); German: 70,400 in the German-speaking Community (which has language facilities for its less than 5% French-speakers) and an estimated 20,000–25,000 speakers of German in the Walloon Region outside the geographical boundaries of their official Community, or 0.9%; French: in the latter area as well as mainly in the rest of Wallonia (3.414 − 0.093 = 3.321 million) and 85% of the Brussels inhabitants (0.866 million) thus 4.187 million or 39.8%; together indeed 100%.
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26. **^ (French)** "De plus, le français est également devenu la langue maternelle de plus de 30 % des Librevillois et il est de plus en plus perçu comme une langue gabonaise." (http://www.tlfq.ulaval.ca /axl/afrique/Gabon.htm)
27. **^ (French)** "En Afrique, il est impossible de parler d'une forme unique du français mais..." (http://www.cecif.com/?page=la_francophonie#francaisafrique)
28. **^** France-Diplomatie (http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/France-priorities_1/francophony-french-language_1113/french-language_1934/french-language-in-the-world_3441/the-french-language-in-the-world-an-expanding-community_4289.html) "Furthermore, the demographic growth of Southern hemisphere countries leads us to anticipate a new increase in the overall number of French speakers."
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/?page=la_francophonie) "
30. **^ (French)** c) Le sabir franco-africain (http://www.cecif.com/?page=la_francophonie#francaisafrique) : "C'est la variété du français la plus fluctuante. Le sabir franco-africain est instable et hétérogène sous toutes ses formes. Il existe des énoncés où les mots sont français mais leur ordre reste celui de la langue africaine. En somme, autant les langues africaines sont envahies par les structures et les mots français, autant la langue française se métamorphose en Afrique, donnant naissance à plusieurs variétés."
31. **^ (French)** République centrafricaine (http://www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/axl/afrique/centrafrique.htm) : Il existe une autre variété de français, beaucoup plus répandue et plus permissive : le français local. C'est un français très influencé par les langues centrafricaines, surtout par le sango. Cette variété est parlée par les classes non instruites, qui n'ont pu terminer leur scolarité. Ils utilisent ce qu'ils connaissent du français avec des emprunts massifs aux langues locales. Cette variété peut causer des problèmes de compréhension avec les francophones des autres pays, car les interférences linguistiques, d'ordre lexical et sémantique, sont très importantes. (*One example of a variety of African French that is difficult to understand for European French speakers*).
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39. **^ (French)** Ortograf.net writing system proposal (http://ortograf.net/) .
40. **^** Walter & Walter 1998.
41. **^** Einhorn, E. (1974). *Old French: A Concise Handbook*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. p. 110. ISBN 0521098386.
42. **^ (French)** "Septante, octante (huitante), nonante" (http://www.langue-fr.net/spip.php?article202) . *langue-fr.net*. http://www.langue-fr.net/spip.php?article202.. See also the English Wikipedia article on Welsh language, especially the section "Counting system" and its note on the influence of Celtic in the French counting system.

External links

- Fondation Alliance française (http://www.fondation-alliancefr.org/)
- Alliance française Paris Ile-de-France (http://www.alliancefr.org/en/)

- French is spreading, especially in Africa (http://www.english.rfi.fr/africa/20100319-french-language-growing-especially-africa) Radio France Internationale in English (19 March 2010)

Courses and tutorials

- Learn French (http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/french/) *BBC*
- français interactif (http://www.laits.utexas.edu/fi/) *University of Texas at Austin*
- Tex's French Grammar (http://www.laits.utexas.edu/tex/) *University of Texas at Austin*
- French Language Schools in France Directory (http://www.fle.fr/)

Online dictionaries

- Comprehensive list of the best French dictionaries (http://frenchprofessor.org/english-french-dictionaries.htm)

Vocabulary

- Swadesh list in English and French
- A Two-Page PDF Reference Guide of the 681 Most Common French/English Verbs (http://www.dudziak.com/verbs.php)

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