

Sounding French

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A. Contrasting English and French

Although French and English often look similar in their written forms, they sound very different. Not only are words pronounced differently, but the overall impression of the languages is not the same.

tenseness	<p>ENGLISH is a very RELAXED language. Vowels are often glided. Some consonants may also be prolonged.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>cafe, cinema, chateau, Michelle</i></p>	<p>FRENCH is a very TENSE language. Vowels are short and clipped: they do not glide. Consonants are short and distinctly pronounced.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">café, cinéma, château, Michèle</p>
rhythm	<p>ENGLISH rhythm is SING-SONGY. Some syllables are short and others are long.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>She's my cousin.</i> <i>Her name is Emily.</i></p>	<p>FRENCH rhythm is very EVEN. Only the LAST syllable of a group of words is longer than the others.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">C'est ma cousine. Elle s'appelle Émilie.</p>
linking	<p>In spoken ENGLISH, words are usually SEPARATED. Your vocal cords may even stop vibrating an instant between words.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hello / Isabelle.</i> <i>She / arrives / at ten.</i></p>	<p>In spoken FRENCH, words are NOT SEPARATED. In fact, within a group of words, all syllables are LINKED or CONNECTED together.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bonjour Isabelle. Elle arrive à dix heures.</p>
syllables	<p>In spoken ENGLISH, many words and syllables end on a CONSONANT SOUND.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>This is Paris.</i></p>	<p>In spoken FRENCH, syllables end on a VOWEL SOUND whenever possible.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Voi-ci Pa-ris.</p>

B. A few problem areas

/y/: say /i/ and feel your tongue against the lower front teeth;
then say /i/ again and round your lips, without moving the tongue [ti - tu]

/r/: repeat /a/, lightly clearing your throat between the vowels

nasal vowels: reverse the syllables [bé - ton - bé - tomber; ses - dents -ses - danser]

"in" "im" "yn" "ym": /ɛ̃/ or /in/, /im/?

C. French intonation patterns

- Regular sentences: voice rises at the end of each group of words, and falls at the end of the sentence.
- Yes/no questions (with and without *est-ce que*): voice begins low and rises on the last syllable
- Standard information questions: voice begins high and falls, with a slight rise on the last syllable
- Casual information questions (ending with questions words): voice begins low and rises on the last syllable
- Commands: voice begins high and falls

D. Some learning suggestions

- Speaking English with a French accent
- Repeated listening to videos (with subvocalization or lip synch)
- Speaking along with the voice on the CD/tape
- Singing along with vocabulary and grammar songs; contemporary music

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