

Developing Materials for Teaching French as a Foreign Language: The Use of Authentic Data from Instagram

Eriko Taniguchi¹ Mariko Takahashi²

¹ Faculty of International Studies, Tenri University, ² Faculty of Foreign Studies, Setsunan University

^aeriko.taniguchi1603@gmail.com, ²mariko.takahashi@ilc.setsunan.ac.jp

1 Introduction

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is an educational approach that has gained popularity in recent years, especially in Europe. According to Mehisto et al. (2008), CLIL is defined as “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (p. 9). There are two types of CLIL approaches: hard CLIL and soft CLIL. Hard CLIL is the original, content-led approach, which is “a set of methods that could help subject teachers support the language needs of their students” (Ball et al., 2015, p. 27). Soft CLIL, on the other hand, is the language-led approach whose main goal is the development of skills in the target language, with the development of the content knowledge as the auxiliary objective (Ikeda, 2013, p. 32). In Japan, the CLIL approach has been adopted primarily in English education (Brown, 2015, p. 1).

In French education, an overview of university-level French as a foreign language (FFL) textbooks in Japan indicates that the mainstream teaching approach is currently based on the structural syllabus or the notional-functional syllabus. This is probably because the majority of French learners in Japan start to study French for the first time after they enter university. However, research in Europe has suggested that the CLIL approach can be advantageous in French education as well (e.g., Pérez et al., 2016). Baten et al. (2020) has further shown that students can learn vocabulary in French CLIL classrooms as effectively as in English CLIL classrooms. These studies in Europe were based on the hard CLIL approach, but the soft CLIL approach may potentially benefit FFL learners in Japan because it enables them to connect linguistic knowledge with various contents. For instance, the use of visual information is effective in teaching

grammar in an introductory French CLIL course (Hiroyasu & Kitamura, 2019).

In designing materials for CLIL, the authenticity of the texts should be maintained by “manipulat[ing] the task or the procedure” (Ball, 2018, p. 228). In English education, instructors teaching soft CLIL courses tend to cover topics related to today’s society as can be seen in CLIL textbooks in Japan (e.g., Nakaya et al., 2020). In FFL, the topics are likely to relate more to French cultures and daily life at least for first-time learners even if the CLIL approach is adopted because they first need to become familiar with vocabulary and linguistic forms.

The present study aims to develop activities for use in FFL with a soft CLIL approach that are applicable to various contents and that can target basic linguistic features including vocabulary and word classes. In order to prepare materials based on authentic data, Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/>) was used as the data source. Instagram is an application for sharing pictures and videos worldwide, and the number of its users is expected to reach 900 million in 2021 (Clement, 2020). People post pictures of diverse genres on Instagram, and since hashtags and captions are often posted with the visual information, Instagram can be a useful source for language teaching and learning. This study has two purposes: 1) to compile preliminary lists of French hashtags on Instagram across 10 categories and analyze the hashtags linguistically to investigate how they can be used for FFL activities and 2) to propose communicative language learning activities based on the data and implement them in FFL classrooms.

2 Methodology

In order to extract French hashtags from Instagram, the following procedure was taken. First of all, we decided on the target categories referring to the textbook *Spirale*

(Crépieux et al., 2008) as well as main genres of Instagram. Ten categories were selected: *tourisme* (travel), *nature* (nature), *gastronomie* (food), *vie quotidienne* (daily life), *culture* (culture), *paysage* (landscape), *sport* (sport), *beauté* (beauty), *mode* (fashion), and *animal* (animal). In the following, the first letter of each category (boldfaced) is indicated when longer examples are mentioned.

Second, a keyword was chosen for each category. Based on the hashtags that had between one million and four million hits on Instagram, we selected a keyword both of us agreed as a representative concept of that category. The following hashtags were selected as key hashtags: #toureiffel (Eiffel Tower, category: t), #fleur (flower, n), #gateau (cake, g), #maison (house, v), #noël (Christmas, c), #montagne (mountain, p), #courseapiéd (jogging, s), #maquillage (make-up, b), #pantalon (pants, m), and #chaton (kitten, a).

Third, we extracted relevant hashtags to the key hashtag by using two methods. On Instagram, up to 30 hashtags can be added to a post. The first method was to use the automatic hashtag generator TagsFinder (French version: <https://www.tagsfinder.com/fr-fr/>) to retrieve *hashtags associés* (related hashtags) and *hashtags similaires* (similar hashtags) to the search word. *Hashtags associés* were defined on TagsFinder as 30 hashtags which appeared most frequently in the same post as the search word, and *hashtags similaires* were defined as 30 suggested hashtags which contained the search word. The second method was to search for posts on Instagram which contained the target hashtag. The search was conducted by one of the authors on her smartphone during a specific period. In order to keep the search as systematic as possible, the search results were sorted in the order of popularity and top 10 posts whose hashtags were at least 30% in French were extracted. This criterion was adopted because popular posts tended to contain hashtags in English or several languages. There were posts with captions in addition to hashtags, but only the hashtags were included for the purpose of this study. The hashtags retrieved by these two methods became the initial list of hashtags for each category.

Fourth, as the lists still contained hashtags in other languages, we extracted French hashtags from each list. In addition to hashtags all in French, hashtags which mixed French and another language (mostly English; e.g.,

#lookdujour) as well as those in the same spelling as another language (e.g., #france, #decoration) were treated as French data in this study. This list of French hashtags was developed for each key hashtag.

3 Results and Analysis

In order to investigate how the data can be applied for teaching French, the data were analyzed from two perspectives: 1) vocabulary and expressions and 2) grammatical features.

3.1 Vocabulary and Expressions

For each key hashtag from each category, an average of 95 French expressions were obtained. Table 1 shows five selected hashtags frequently observed with the key hashtag. Two things should be noted. We used Tagpop (<https://instatool.nu/tagpop/>) for counting the frequency of hashtags. The frequency obtained by Tagpop is based on the search on entire posts on Instagram and not genre-specific (e.g., #photo can occur with any genre). As such, the frequency data were used as reference, and Table 1 only indicates the hashtags which we judged as closely relevant to the category. In addition, the hashtags whose spelling exactly overlapped with English hashtags (e.g., #paris #voyage #minimalism) are not included due to limitations of space.

As the examples on Table 1 illustrate, for each category, Instagram posts provided relevant vocabulary and expressions along visual information. The majority of hashtags were nouns and both singular forms (e.g., #cadeau) and plural forms (e.g., #cadeaux) were observed. Different types of nouns such as common nouns (e.g., #jardin), proper nouns (e.g., #montblanc), and abstract nouns (e.g., #bonheur) were on the list. Words in different word classes were also observed including adjectives (e.g., #fleuri #naturel) and verbs (e.g., #gouter #briller) though they tended to occur with nouns or in sentences (e.g., #chatonmignon; see 3.2 for more details). In addition, coined words (e.g., #blogueusebeaute), abbreviated words (e.g., #deco) and hybrid words with English (e.g., #montagnelovers) occurred as French hashtags. Moreover, words with diacritics were observed (e.g., #forêt, #randonnée) although they were left out in some of the posts (e.g., #noel rather than #noël). The lists this study compiled were not intended to be comprehensive

vocabulary lists of French Instagram posts of the categories, but students are likely to be able to learn relevant vocabulary starting with the words on the lists. On Instagram, people creatively combine more than one word to form common expressions (e.g., #joyeuxnoël) or produce phrases with more information (e.g., #biendanssoncorps) within one hashtag. The next subsection is about this latter type of phrases used as hashtags.

Table 1. Examples of French Hashtags

<i>tourisme</i>	<i>nature</i>	<i>gastronomie</i>	<i>vie quotidienne</i>
#parismonamour	jardin	chocolat	decorationinterieur
#parisienne	printemps	miam	chalet
#concours	plante	pâtisserie	changement
#capitale	fleuriste	faitmaison	appartement
#voyageursdumonde	bouquetdefleurs	recette	nouvellevie
<i>culture</i>	<i>paysage</i>	<i>sport</i>	<i>beauté</i>
#bonheur	neige	bienetre	palette
#cadeau	hiver	courir	mariage
#cadeaux	randonnée	runneuse	makeupdujour
#lumiere	forêt	coachsportif	coiffure
#joyeuxnoël	montblanc	fractionné	influenceuse
<i>mode</i>	<i>bijoux</i>	<i>animal</i>	<i>chat</i>
#boutique	vetement	animaux	chatstagram
#couture	sac	princesse	tropmignon

3.2 Grammatical Features

French hashtags on Instagram often consisted of more than one word. In order to investigate which types of combination were used, we labelled all the elements of the hashtags based on their word class. All the word classes (nouns, pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, adjectives, verbs, determiners, conjunctions) were identified, and there were 52 combinations in total. The examples (1) to (10) illustrate 10 of these combinations along with hashtags from the list.

(1) noun + noun

#recettegateau (category: g) #couturetoulouse (m)

(2) noun + adjective

#reservenaturelle (n) #maquilleuseprofessionnelle (b)

(3) adjective + noun

#nouveaudepart (v) #petitbiscuit (g)

(4) noun + preposition + noun

#chatdamour (a) #lacedmontagne (p)

(5) noun+ preposition+ determiner (article)+ noun

#gateauauchocolat (g) #jardindesplantes (n)

(6) noun+ preposition + noun + preposition + noun

#fetesdefindannee (c)

(7) adjective + preposition + verb

#fiersdecourir (s)

(8) adverb+ preposition +determiner (article)+ noun

#biendanssoncorps (s)

(9) verb + noun

#vivreparis (t) #goutermaison (g)

(10) sentences

#jaimemonchat (a) #jecoudspourmoi (m)

The examples indicate that Instagram hashtags can indeed consist of various word classes. In reality, there are more combinations and longer phrases and sentences, but Instagram hashtags can be used for demonstrating some of the possible combinations of word classes to form French phrases and sentences. It should of course be noted that hashtags need to be written as one “word” on Instagram, and it will require some practice before students can divide the hashtag into individual words by themselves. Another notable grammatical feature observed in the hashtags was the use of determiners, or articles more specifically. On Instagram hashtags, indefinite articles (*un/ une/ des*) and partitive articles (*du/ de la*) before a noun (e.g., #sac #animaux) were not included; however, definite articles (*le/ la/ les*) were sometimes included (e.g., #latou Eiffel #lefooding #lesfleurs) as well as in prepositional phrases or in contractions (e.g., #maisonsouslaneige #tenuedujour #jardindesplantes). Correct agreement of adjectives was also observed (e.g., #fleurbleue #gateauxorientaux). Verbs were conjugated only in sentences; they were in the infinitive if they did not have a subject (#parisjetaime #gouter #vivreparis). The number of sentences and sentence structures in the lists was limited but grammatical (e.g., #jaimemonchat #noëlapproche #çafaitdubien #jecoudsmagarderober). As such, the lists may be useful for teaching short French sentences because visual information can be presented with the hashtags.

4. Educational Applications and Discussion

The analysis above has demonstrated that the preliminary lists of French Instagram hashtags can be utilized as a resource for FFL instruction. For example, instructors can prepare a subset of hashtags based on the lists compiled in this study and ask students to select a hashtag and search for it on Instagram. That way, students can easily connect the target word with visual information. Students can also work in groups to find pictures that best represent the hashtag. They can then find five additional hashtags accompanying the post and share them with other groups. As Instagram posts are authentic materials including those posted by non-French speakers, students may choose hashtags that are not grammatical. In that case, the teacher can ask or work together with the group to edit the hashtag to make it grammatical after explaining that the language use in reality may sometimes differ from what students learn in the classroom.

Alternatively, teachers can present several hashtags at the same time and ask students to try to take pictures that reflect the hashtags – the group who takes the best picture which most accurately reflects the assigned hashtags wins the game. Instructors can also use hashtags to explicitly or implicitly teach how to construct phrases in French. They can explain grammar using the authentic examples or ask students to notice and identify grammar patterns in the hashtags of a post. In a course with a soft CLIL approach (or even with other approaches), teachers can use these activities at the beginning of the class to get students' attention and to provide necessary language support for understanding the following contents.

A more communicative and output-oriented activity is to have students write hashtags for the picture of their choice. For first-time French learners, it may be better for the instructor to prepare the picture so that all the students share the same picture. This activity was implemented in an introductory FFL course one of the researchers taught in the fall semester of the academic year 2020. As there was a rule against pair or group work because of the pandemic, the instructor had to ask students to work individually. After showing examples of hashtags for a picture of a cat, students were asked to write four hashtags for a picture of the Eiffel Tower. Most of the 14 students chose #latoureiffel #paris and #france as the first three

hashtags but they showed some creativity for the fourth hashtag by adding a variety of adjectives such as #joli #belle and #grande. This activity would be more engaging as pair or group activities with a time limit rather than the limit on the number of hashtags because students can work together with their partner or group members to come up with as many creative hashtags as possible within the time limit. The hashtags they produced can then be compared with those by other groups and also with the list of hashtags the instructor had prepared beforehand based on the lists in this study or based on their own search on Instagram. The difficulty level of the activities can be adjusted according to the class level and the time allocated for the activity.

These educational applications are possible because Instagram contains a wide range of French hashtags with various word classes as this study has shown. As Ball (2018) observed, “the text,” or French hashtags on Instagram in this case, “need not be manipulated, but the designer can manipulate the task or the procedure at will” (p. 228). By designing activities closely based on authentic materials on Instagram, French hashtags can be utilized as activities in FFL courses, especially in courses with a soft CLIL approach.

5. Conclusion

This study has compiled preliminary lists of French hashtags across 10 categories based on Instagram posts and demonstrated if and how they can be applied to teaching French as a foreign language in Japan. Although the search on Instagram was conducted in a systematic manner, it was not possible to fully quantify the data because decisions regarding the key hashtag and the posts included a degree of arbitrariness. It would be necessary to expand the scope of search and add more key hashtags to present a more comprehensive list for each category. In addition, comparison with other French corpora would be required to investigate whether Instagram hashtags actually represent vocabulary and expressions frequently used in French conversations. As Instagram is popular among university students at least for the time being, French hashtags are likely to stay as a good resource for FFL courses with a soft CLIL approach.

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Appendix

1. Hashtag list of *tourisme* (key hashtag #toureiffel)

#130anstoureiffel	#latoureiffel	#quefaireaparis
#58toureiffel	#latoureiffelilluminée	#reflet
#58toureiffelrestaurant	#legrandpalais	#restauranttoureiffel
#architecture	#lescomperes	#secretsdeparis
#architecturephoto	#letoureiffel	#seine
#baladedujour	#modele	#selectionphoto
#baladeparisienne	#monumenthistorique	#selfietoureiffel
#briller	#museeorsay	#seulementparis
#brume	#paris	#sortiraparis
#capitale	#paris_maville	#super_france
#champdemarstoureiffel	#parisamour	#surprise
#concours	#parisarchitecture	#toits
#concoursfrance	#pariscapitale	#toitsdeparis
#concoursinstagram	#pariscartepostale	#toureiffel
#damedefer	#parisestmagique	#toureiffeldenuit
#demandeenmariage	#parisfrance	#toureiffell
#effetmiroir	#parisgram	#toureiffelmonamour
#eiffel	#parisien	#toureiffellofficiel
#eiffellofficielle	#parisienne	#toureiffellofficielle
#europe	#parisjetaime	#toureiffelparis
#explorer	#parismaville	#toureiffelpasloin
#facade	#parismonamour	#toureiffelfr
#france	#paristoureiffel	#vieparisienne
#francetourisme	#paristourisme	#villedelamour
#francetrotter	#parisvillelumiere	#vivreparis
#ibistoureiffel	#passionphoto	#vivresesreves
#illumination	#photo	#voyage
#instatoureiffel	#plusbellevilledumonde	#voyageurfrancais
#jaimelatoureiffel	#pontdesarts	#voyageursdumonde
#jeuconcours	#pullmanparistoureiffel	#vuesurlatoureiffel

2. Example of an FFL activity



Essayez ! Maintenant, vous postez cette photo sur Instagram.
Écrivez 4 hashtags pour cette photo en français!

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