

Full Length Research Paper

The role of localized materials in learning of FFL students

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Investigating the role of localized materials in foreign language learning contexts is far from comprehension. This research was an attempt to investigate the effects of localized materials on students' comprehension in a French foreign language context. 30 male and female Iranian learners of French were asked to read stories written by a native French author, Anna Gavalda and an originally Iranian story by Zoyâ Pirzâd translated into French. Upon reading, they were asked to answer three different types of reading comprehension questions (replication, synthesis, and inference). Results revealed that learners performed better when reading localized materials. Based on the results, incorporating localized materials in classroom syllabus is strongly recommended.

Key words: French foreign language (FFL) context, localized material.

INTRODUCTION

No matter the types of materials used in a language learning context, a large proportion of the learning that takes place depends on the materials used which might range from handouts, listening, and even videos. The role of culture in materials used in the language classrooms has long been on the mind of scholars in the field of language pedagogy. There are numerous scholars in the field who emphasize the significance of culture in language pedagogy (Chastain, 1988; Rivers, 1981; Stern, 1983, 1992). These scholars strongly hold the belief that culture and language are inseparably bound and as Kramsch et al. (1991) puts it they constitute "a single universe or domain of experience". They believe that the learning of language is barely imaginable without considering the role that culture plays. Throughout the literature of language teaching, culture has always been considered a crucial aspect of foreign language teaching programs. For example, Adaskou et al. (1990) suggest that semantic and pragmatic senses of culture "are in some degree necessary to the learners' achievement of a measure of communicative competence". These statements along with others mentioned elsewhere (Byram, 1989, 1991; Mckay, 2002; Stern, 1992) account for the

inclusion of a cultural element in foreign language programs. It is believed that the inclusion of culturally rich materials (target culture) can affect the cultural identity of learners. As Sumaryono and Ortiz (2004) indicate, "English language learners could become invisible in the mainstream classroom or even disconnect from the learning process if the teachers do not display sensitivity toward their cultural identity". Due to this phenomenon, there appears the issue that learners' cultural identity is overshadowed by exposure to materials which solely focus on the culture of the target language and leave the learner's native culture unnoticed. In order to investigate whether the inclusion of materials that contain a degree of localization and aspects of the native culture of the learners is beneficial to them, a program was designed to expose learners to such materials and measure their significance. Therefore, a study was designed in an FFL context (French foreign language) in which participants had four short stories to read in order to answer ten open-ended comprehension questions which were divided into three groups of replication, synthesis and inference. Two of these stories were written by a French writer (Gavalda) and the other two were written by an

Iranian writer, Pirzad.

In the present study we intended to explore the following research questions:

- 1) Was there any significant difference between the responses given to questions of the French writer's stories and the Iranian writer's stories?
- 2) Regarding the type of question (replication, synthesis, and inference), which author's story received more accurate responses?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study were 30 male and female adult students with average age of 25 who were studying French as a foreign language in a private language institute (Bayan Salis) in Tehran, Iran. They were mostly university students who were members of two intact classes. According to ACTFEL guidelines they could be placed at advanced low level and they had been studying French for two years prior to when the study was conducted. Both classes consisted of 15 students.

Procedure

First, it was made sure that the participants can be placed at advanced low level (according to ACTFEL guideline) after having two raters evaluate their French. The experiment was conducted some time during the participants' regular class time which was two 105-min sessions a week for a total of 9 weeks.

At the end of the second session in the first week, students were given a short story and were asked to read it during the weekend. The following session has 10 questions comprising 4 replication questions, 3 synthesis questions, and 3 inference questions. The questions that were written by the researcher herself were revised later by a colleague for their accuracy and relevance. A sample of one of the stories together with the questions is present in the appendix. Students were required to answer the question in 20 min. The answers were then collected by the teacher. The Iranian short stories were both written by Zoyâ Pirzâd and were extracted from her book "Comme tous les après-midi" published in 2007. The book was a translation of a book entitled "مثل همه ی عصرها" which was published in Persian in 2001. The French short stories were extracted from "Je voudrais que quelqu'un m'attende quelque part" written by Anna Gavalda in 1999. The reasons behind selecting these 2 books were: first, because both were written by female writers; second, because they had very similar topics and themes and they both had heroines in their stories; and third, because both books were very much appreciated by the readers and each received different prizes. Following the quiz session, students were given the next story and the same procedure followed for the rest of the stories. It is to be noted that the first story was the one written by the Iranian author and the second one was the story written by the French author. The same was implemented for the next two stories.

Scoring procedure

One point was given to each correct answer and no point for incorrect answers and each test had maximum 10 points. Overall each student could get maximum of 40 points if they answered all questions correctly. Throughout the correction phase, grammar,

vocabulary and spelling were not taken into consideration and as far as the participant gave a response relevant to what the researcher had in mind, they were given a point.

Data analysis

A paired sample *t*-test was run to compare the mean scores of responses for the Iranian author's stories and the French author's stories. Another 3 *t*-tests were run to compare the mean score for each type of question which would eventually show, regarding the type of question, the questions from which author's story received more accurate responses.

RESULTS

As mentioned earlier the data were analyzed using a paired sample *t*-test because it was within subject comparison and the scores on both conditions were related. Data tabulated in Table 1 represents the mean score for overall performance of students for each author. There is statistically significant difference between the overall answers given to comprehension questions of each author. As the table illustrates the scores for Pirzad's comprehension questions were $M = 17.06$, $SD = 1.72$, while the scores for Gavalda's comprehension questions were $M = 14.50$, $SD = 2.48$, $t = 5.78$ ($p < 0.0005$). The eta squared statistic (0.535) indicated a large effect size. Therefore, the answer to the first research question would be positive.

Data tabulated in Table 2 represents the mean score for overall performance of students for each author in synthesis questions. There is statistically significant difference between the overall answers given to synthesis questions of each author. As the table illustrates the scores for Pirzad's synthesis questions were $M = 5.51$, $SD = 0.63$, while the scores for Gavalda's synthesis questions were $M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.003$, $t = 3.81$, ($p < 0.0005$). The eta squared statistic (0.333) indicated a large effect size.

Data tabulated in Table 3 represents the mean score for overall performance of students for each author in replication questions. There is statistically significant difference between the overall answers given to replication questions of each author. As the table illustrates the scores for Pirzad's replication questions were $M = 7.70$, $SD = 0.46$ while the scores for Gavalda's replication questions were $M = 7.33$, $SD = 0.80$, $t = 2.62$ ($p < 0.0005$). The eta squared statistic (0.191) indicated a large effect size.

Data tabulated in Table 4 represents the mean score for overall performance of students for each author in inference questions. There is statistically significant difference between the overall answers given to inference questions of each author. As the table illustrates the scores for Pirzad's inference questions were $M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.15$, while the scores for Gavalda's replication questions were $M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.19$, $t = 5.96$, ($p < 0.0005$).

Table 1. The mean score for overall performance of students for each author in synthesis questions.

		Paired samples statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean				
Pair 1	Test 1	17.0667	30	1.72073	0.31416				
	Test 2	14.5	30	2.4879	0.45423				
		Paired samples test							
		Paired differences		95% confidence interval of the difference			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Tests 1 - 2	2.56667	2.43088	0.44382	1.659	3.47437	5.783	29	0

Table 2. The mean score for overall performance of students for each author in synthesis questions.

		Paired samples statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean				
Pair 1	Tests 1	5.5172	30	0.63362	0.11766				
	Tests 2	4.6897	30	1.00369	0.18638				
		Paired Samples Test							
		Paired differences							
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Tests 1 – 2	0.82759	1.16708	0.21672	0.38365	1.271527	3.819	28	0.001

The eta squared statistic (0.550) indicated a large effect size. As for the second research question, it should be mentioned that the result revealed that students answered the questions for Pirzad's stories more accurately regardless of the type of question.

DISCUSSION

The overall mean of the two groups reveal that

students performed significantly better when they responded to questions given for the Iranian story which was translated into French. As expected, the participants answered replication questions better than the other two types of questions. Participants' performance decreased as the questions became more difficult and required a deeper analysis of the stories. For example, inference question in both groups of stories received fewer correct responses. However, it is to be noted that when each category of questions

was considered individually, the responses to the questions from Iranian author's stories were more accurate and correct.

One major reason why participants' scores were higher in Pirzad's stories can be due to the familiarity of the participants with the atmosphere in which the stories take place. This could have ultimately influenced participants' comprehension and acted as a major reason why students could connect with the stories more to remember them while answering the comprehension questions.

Table 3. The mean score for overall performance of students for each author in replication questions.

Paired samples statistics									
		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean				
Pair 1	r 1	7.7	30	0.46609	0.0851				
	r 2	7.3333	30	0.8023	0.14648				
Paired samples test									
Paired differences									
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	r 1 - 2	0.36667	0.76489	0.13965	0.08105	0.65228	2.626	29	0.014

Table 4. The mean score for overall performance of students for each author in inference questions.

Paired samples statistics									
		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean				
Pair 1	i 1	3.9667	30	1.15917	0.21163				
	i 2	2.4333	30	1.19434	0.21805				
Paired samples test									
Paired differences									
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	i 1 - 2	1.53333	1.4077	0.25701	1.00769	2.05898	5.966	29	0

The characters in the Iranian author's stories could have been another reason why participants gave more accurate responses to comprehension questions. Since characters were all from participants' native culture, they could have been of importance to them which could eventually lead to being more eager to follow the story and connect with it on different levels.

The translated stories of the Iranian author may have played an important role in simplifying the text and syntax of the stories. This very

simplification could also play a role in making it more comprehensible to participants since the authentic nature of the French author's texts could add further to the complexity of the stories and eventually make them harder to either understand or connect with.

Another reason for Pirzâd's stories being more appealing to students might lie behind the fact that in reading Pirzâd's stories students feel that they are using another language to read and understand and value their own culture and traditions;

thus, the uninviting element of target culture material is eliminated and student's motivation increases.

Another point worth mentioning here is that the gender of participants was not taken into consideration in this experiment. However, it is believed that if we had gender differentiation, female participants would show greater results than male participants simply because they would better understand the heroines of the stories and their emotions would help them to become more

involved with the story. Thus it might be a good idea to conduct a further research in which gender will be looked at as an independent variable.

Conclusion

It could be inferred from the research that localization of materials would be beneficial to learners as it would make the materials more familiar and thus more enjoyable for them. We are not arguing for necessarily a complete source culture material, as Cortazzi and Jin (1999) propose, but some degree of localization of materials would indeed be beneficial. Byram and Morgan (1994) state:

learners cannot simply shake off their own culture and step into another [...] their culture is a part of themselves and created them as social beings [...] learners are 'committed' to their culture and to deny any part of it is to deny something within their own being.

Therefore using localized materials is like valuing and appreciating the cultural and social identities of the students. Students will indeed understand this appreciation and their motivation to learn the language will increase. Consequently, they can understand the contents better and their performance on reading comprehension is enhanced. Smith (1976) maintains that in the acquisition of an international language: a) learners do not need to internalize the culture norms of native speakers of the language, b) the ownership of an international language becomes 'denationalized', and c) the educational goal of learning the language is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and cultures to others. Considering French as a well-established international language it can be said that the important thing for learners is to be able to communicate their ideas and cultures to others in French and teaching this language with the help of source of culture seems to be a very effective teaching technique that permits a more fruitful learning. As it was brought to the attention of the teacher on different occasions during the research, the students' motivation increased when reading the stories of the author from their own native language since their cultural identity was more valued in the context of learning a foreign language. The participants could make use of the connection with some of the elements in the

materials and increase their level of understanding.

Therefore, it can be said that localized materials can function as bridges to learning foreign languages with the aid of elements taken from their own native language. Thus, it is believed that local educators should be responsible for developing a pedagogy that is appropriate to the local context and can best help students learn a foreign language.

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Appendix

Madame F. est une femme heureuse ! C'est ce que tout le monde dit. Tous les samedis matin, la mère de madame F. fait brûler de l'*esfand*¹ en lui disant du fond du cœur : « Pour que crèvent les yeux jaloux ! » Elle croit que ça porte bonheur.

Madame F. est mariée à monsieur F. depuis vingt-cinq ans. C'est un homme très bon. Enfin, c'est ce que tout le monde dit. Il est employé au ministère de l'Éducation. Mais il n'est pas enseignant, il tient les registres des salaires du personnel enseignant de l'arrondissement. Il sait avec exactitude ce que gagne chaque enseignant, qui a été promu ou qui ne l'a pas été.

Tous les mois, après avoir préparé et distribué la paie, monsieur F. se verse ses propres émoluments et court les confier à madame F. Le premier jour du mois, quand il rentre chez lui vers la fin de l'après-midi, madame F. l'attend avec une tasse de

1. *Esfand* : rue sauvage ; considérée en Iran comme une plante bénéfique.

thé fraîchement infusé, lui lance un « bonne santé ! » et se met à compter ses sous. Elle sait parfaitement combien son mari gagne par mois, jusqu'au dernier toman, au dernier rial, et pourtant tous les mois, elle compte et recompte. On dirait qu'elle y prend un certain plaisir.

— Tu sais très bien combien ça fait, lui répète son mari, alors pourquoi recomptes-tu ?

Mais lui aussi prend plaisir à regarder le tas de billets qui se défait d'un côté pour se refaire de l'autre. Il regarde les billets en riant et boit son thé en racontant les derniers potins du bureau : qui a eu sa promotion, qui ne l'a pas eue...

Madame F. écoute avec une grande curiosité. Si quelques jours plus tard, elle aperçoit dans la queue à la boucherie la femme d'un enseignant promu qui arbore un foulard neuf, elle ne s'en étonne pas et comme elle n'est pas d'un tempérament jaloux, elle lui fait ses compliments. Si, en revanche, elle aperçoit la femme d'un enseignant non promu chaussée de souliers neufs, elle s'étonne et même si elle n'est pas d'un naturel jaloux, elle ne fait aucun compliment.

Après avoir compté l'argent, madame F. se lève et va le ranger dans un coin secret — qu'elle croit être la seule à connaître mais que toute la maison a repéré en faisant mine de ne rien savoir. Ensuite, elle prépare le dîner.

Après le dîner, quand elle a fini sa vaisselle et que tout le monde dort, madame F. se sert un thé, s'assoit à la petite table de la cuisine, prend une

feuille de papier et compte les dépenses du mois suivant : la viande, les fruits, le riz, une paire de bas pour Yasmina, la traite de la télévision, des sous-vêtements pour monsieur F., la réparation du réfrigérateur, des pelotes de laine pour tricoter une écharpe à Bardia. Puis, elle fait les comptes du mois précédent. Si les dépenses sont égales au salaire de monsieur F., elle est contrariée. Elle boit son thé à contrecœur. Elle tapote nerveusement la table de ses doigts légèrement boudinés en regardant fixement les fleurs de la toile cirée. Elle se lève, éteint la lumière de la cuisine puis va se coucher. S'il arrive, mais c'est très rare, que les dépenses du mois soient supérieures au salaire de monsieur F., madame F. repousse sa tasse de thé comme si elle ne la méritait pas et plonge sa tête dans ses mains. Pendant des jours, elle est triste. Elle écoute avec la plus grande attention les programmes de cuisine à la radio ou lit les recettes dans la presse féminine qu'elle emprunte à ses amies et ses voisines (madame F. n'achète jamais de magazines). Elle s'ingénie alors à concocter une cuisine pas chère. Quel bonheur quand, sans l'aide des revues ni de la radio, elle invente une soupe en ajoutant un peu d'eau, quelques oignons frits et un reste de viande dans le riz pilaf aux lentilles de la veille ! Quand elle pose son plat sur la table, tout le monde s'écrie : « Quelle soupe délicieuse ! » Madame F., tout sourire, se dit : « Voilà un dîner pas cher ! »

Certains mois, mais ils sont rares, quand les dépenses sont inférieures au salaire de son mari, madame F. arbore un sourire satisfait. Alors son thé semble être sa récompense ; elle le boit jusqu'à la dernière goutte. Les mains sous le menton, elle observe la cour par la fenêtre de sa cuisine. À cette heure tardive, il fait sombre, elle ne voit pas grand-chose et n'a pas envie de voir quoi que ce soit. Elle est tout simplement heureuse.

Le lendemain est un beau jour. Peu importe qu'il neige ou que la chaleur soit étouffante. L'important, c'est que madame F. aille à sa banque déposer en deux sommes égales les économies réalisées le mois précédent sur les comptes épargne qu'elle a ouverts au nom de ses deux enfants. En chemin, elle fait des châteaux en Espagne. Elle ne sent pas la neige qui pénètre par le trou de sa chaussure. Tout ce que la chaleur lui inflige, ce sont deux auréoles humides et malodorantes sous les bras. Madame F. ne sent ni ses pieds mouillés ni la sueur. Elle réfléchit, calcule, planifie. « Avec cet argent, peut-être pourra-t-on plus tard envoyer Bardia poursuivre ses études à l'étranger. Quand Yasmina se mariera, on lui fera un beau trousseau. »

L'agilité de son esprit lui permet de défier les lois du temps et de passer allègrement d'un avenir radieux aux souvenirs anciens.

Son fils Bardia était né par une chaude journée d'été. C'était un beau bébé, un vrai costaud de quatre kilos. Il avait une layette complète qui

consistait en douze chemisettes, douze culottes, douze bavettes qui s'attachaient avec une épingle bleue ; sur chacune étaient brodés un lapin, une souris, des pigeons, d'autres animaux encore. La mère de madame F. s'était surpassée. Il y avait aussi deux douzaines de couches en mousseline brodées d'une rose et une série de couches jetables qu'on commençait alors tout juste à utiliser. Ces dernières étaient affreusement chères mais les regards ébahis de la famille de monsieur F. et des voisins méritaient bien ce sacrifice. Ces couches jetables – dont madame F. n'a jamais pu retenir le nom –, qu'elle n'a jamais utilisées non plus, elle les conserve encore dans une grande valise marron où elle garde tous les petits trésors de sa vie : sa robe de mariée, les premiers souliers de Yasmina, les premiers cahiers de Bardia et de sa sœur, enfin toute une foule d'objets divers.

Leur maison est petite, il n'y a pas beaucoup de place. Mais chaque fois que Bardia et Yasmina lui disent en ronchonnant « Jette donc cette vieille valise », madame F. résiste. À force d'ingénieux calculs, elle finit par trouver de la place pour les livres de Bardia et les affaires de Yasmina. Et la vieille valise reste dans la petite maison.

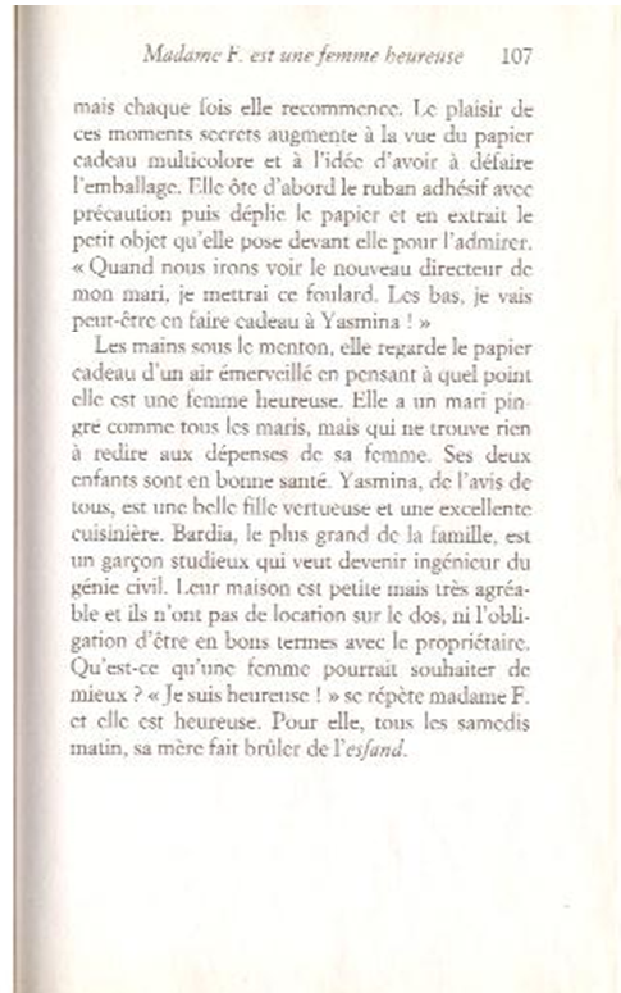
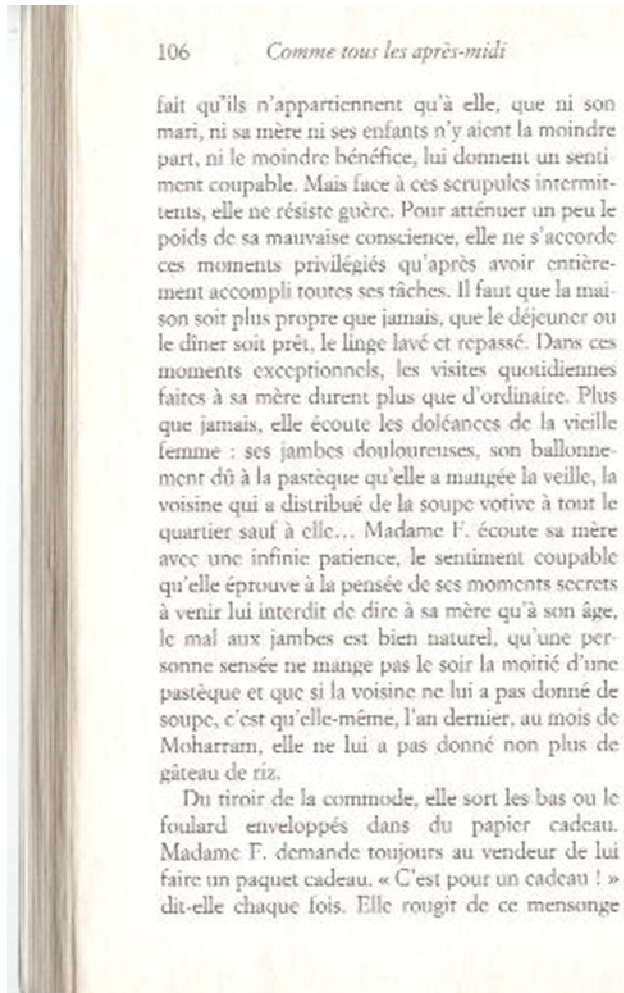
Madame F. se dirige vers la banque dans la neige ou sous le soleil brûlant en faisant rouler dans sa tête ses rêves futurs, ses souvenirs passés. Elle serre fermement son sac noir sous son bras car la poignée n'est plus très sûre et avec tous ces voleurs qui courent...

Quand elle arrive à sa banque, il lui semble qu'elle est chez une vieille amie. Elle connaît depuis longtemps la directrice, madame Taghizadegan ; depuis ce jour où elle est venue ouvrir le compte épargne de Bardia. À cette époque, madame Taghizadegan n'était qu'une modeste employée, une jeune fille mince et affable. Elle a toujours ce caractère agréable mais sa taille a un peu forci. Madame F. constate toujours avec le même bonheur la maestria dont fait preuve la directrice dans la gestion de la banque et du personnel ; d'autant qu'elle sait qu'elle a une fille et un garçon un peu plus jeunes que Yasmina et Bardia. La banquière l'accueille comme une amie chère, lui fait servir du thé, demande des nouvelles de ses enfants et lui en donne des siens. Pendant cet échange tout maternel, elle trouve le moyen de répondre au téléphone, de signer le courrier et de donner ses ordres au personnel.

En rentrant chez elle, madame F. se demande comment madame Taghizadegan réussit à gérer sa maison, son mari et ses enfants en plus de ses hautes responsabilités. « Ce n'est peut-être pas si difficile que cela, se dit-elle. Si moi aussi j'étais restée dans l'Éducation nationale, à l'heure qu'il est je serais certainement directrice de département. » Mais elle sait bien qu'à cette époque elle n'éprouvait aucun intérêt pour son travail, que le jour où monsieur F. l'avait demandée en mariage, en insistant pour qu'elle s'arrête de travailler, elle s'était empressée d'accepter. Ce souvenir ne suffit

pourtant pas à chasser de son esprit une certaine forme de jalousie. « La femme qui travaille à l'extérieur, se dit madame F. en introduisant la clé dans la serrure, ne s'occupe jamais tout à fait bien de son mari ni de ses enfants. » Satisfaite de l'argument, elle ouvre la porte et s'abandonne au calme de sa maison toujours impeccablement tenue.

Parfois – parfois seulement – quand elle rentre de la banque, madame F. garde dans son sac une partie des économies du mois. Après de longues journées d'hésitation, de combat intérieur, elle se décide enfin à utiliser cet argent pour s'acheter quelque chose, une paire de bas nylon ou un foulard. Chaque fois qu'elle est aux prises avec sa conscience, qu'elle cherche à se disculper de sa dépense, elle s'en justifie auprès de son mari, de sa mère, et même de ses enfants. Après avoir acheté ce qu'elle désirait, elle se met dans des états qui ne souffrent aucun témoin. Les jours où elle passe le balai et qu'elle a mal aux reins, elle pense à ses achats et, telle une poupée mécanique dont on aurait remonté le ressort, elle se met à balayer à toute vitesse. Quand elle fait la queue à la boulangerie ou à la boulangerie et que ses jambes la font souffrir, la pensée de ses emplettes suffit à calmer la douleur. Elle finit de balayer, rentre des courses, se lave les mains, se passe un coup de peigne, puis elle se dirige tout doucement vers le tiroir de la commode ou vers le placard, l'oreille aux aguets de peur que quelqu'un ne la surprenne. Ces moments rares sont les seuls secrets de sa vie. Le



- 1) Il y a combien de temps que madame F. et monsieur F. se sont mariés?
- 2) Où est-ce que monsieur F. travaille?
- 3) Depuis quand est-ce que madame F. connaît la directrice de banque?
- 4) Qu'est-ce que madame F. pense à propos des femmes qui travaillent à l'extérieur?
- 5) Est-ce que madame F. a continué de travailler après qu'elle s'est mariée? Donnez une explication pour votre réponse.
- 6) Pourquoi madame F. ne dit rien à sa mère quand sa mère lui explique ses doléances?
- 7) Est-ce que la raison que madame F. donne au vendeur pour qu'il lui fasse un paquet cadeau est vraie ou fausse ? Pourquoi?
- 8) A votre avis pourquoi madame F. veut le foulard dans un paquet cadeau?
- 9) A votre avis est-ce que madame F. est quelqu'un qui pense à soi-même avant les autres ou non? Justifiez votre réponse.
- 10) A votre avis est-ce que madame F. est inquiète pour l'avenir de ses enfants? Justifiez votre réponse.