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# **Assessment of spoken interactions in two conditions: Teacher-to-student *versus* student-to-student**

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## **Abstract**

According to the theory of the social mind and of sociocultural Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Lantolf 2000, 2006, Léontiev 1981, Swain 2000, Wertsch 1985), every form of interaction is situated and strongly depends on the individualities involved, each one speaking from their own universe but also permanently adjusting to their partner's discourse. When it comes to the assessment issue, and more specifically spoken interaction assessment, both Cambridge English and the Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogique (CIEP) exams and certifications include the student-to-student and examiner-student conditions whereas the Goethe-Institut and the Cervantes Institute, which are also exam providers, prefer the teacher-to-student condition – the main argument for the latter being that the teacher's didactic/assessing positioning can better help the student to produce the best possible performance. The purpose of this research is to investigate which of the two conditions is preferable in terms of linguistic and pragmatic performance: teacher-to-learner or peer-to-peer.

Our hypotheses are the following:

1. Evidence of didactic/assessing positioning is not limited to language professionals but can be found in student-to-student interactions as well.
2. The teacher-to-learner condition is not necessarily more favourable to the student than the peer-to-peer one.

This research will deal with the results of a micro experiment completed in 2013 in connection with the Département de l'Évaluation, de la Performance et de la Prospective (DEPP) at the French Ministry of Education in an assessment situation involving A1, A2, B1 students and teachers/evaluators in order to compare the performances of the students doing the same task under two conditions: first with a peer and then a teacher.

## **Introduction**

This paper deals with the results of an experiment in the field of language assessment. It focuses on spoken interaction, a skill that was introduced in the French curriculum for secondary schools not that long ago (2005) in response to the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001). The question raised here is the condition in which students are to be assessed when speaking with others. Two options are available:

- Condition 1: Student-to-student spoken interaction
- Condition 2: Teacher-to-student spoken interaction.

In French schools and for French national exams such as the 'Baccalauréat', Condition 2 is mostly preferred since teachers are considered the experts who are there to lead or scaffold the student's speech. However, for teachers who have to assess their pupils in regular class situations, such a pattern is time-consuming and as a result they often opt for Condition 1. Both the Cambridge English and the Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogique (CIEP) exams and certifications include the student-to-student and examiner-student conditions

whereas the Goethe-Institut and the Cervantes Institute prefer the teacher-to-student condition – the main argument for the latter being that the teacher’s didactic/assessing positioning can better help the student to produce the best possible performance. This research takes its roots in the elaboration of the protocol for the French testing called Cycle des Evaluations Disciplinaires Réalisées sur Echantillons (CEDRE), organised by the Département de l’Évaluation, de la Performance et de la Prospective (DEPP) at the French Ministry of Education. This CEDRE evaluation is performed every six years to assess the knowledge and skills of a large sample of French students. We will deal here with English which is one of the languages taught in secondary school. The participants we are interested in for this study are in their fourth year of secondary education and they are tested in five skills: oral and written comprehension and production as well as spoken interaction. For spoken interaction, the ministry has chosen Condition 2 to assess the students. However, this choice could be questionable since this is not the usual condition chosen by most teachers in normal class situations.

In order to investigate the appropriacy of using Condition 2 for spoken interaction, we organised an experiment to compare the two interactional patterns. Students were given a task to complete: they were provided with a touristic leaflet and had to decide with their partner (first a peer and then a teacher) how they would organise their weekend. The purpose of this research is to show which of the two conditions is preferable: teacher-to-learner or peer-to-peer in terms of linguistic and pragmatic achievements.

### **Theoretical framework**

According to the theory of the social mind and of sociocultural Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Lantolf 2000, 2006, Léontiev 1981, Swain 2000, Wertsch 1985), every form of interaction is situated and strongly depends on the individualities (personality, character, age) involved, each one speaking from their own universe but also permanently adjusting to their partner’s discourse. We believe that both content and form in interactions depend not only on individualities but also on the *social function* as it is perceived by oneself and by the others. Here we are relying on the notion of *social function* which is always a *social fiction* as Sartre puts it in *L’Être et le Néant* (1976) after observing a waiter at the Café de Flore. We also agree with Finkelkraut (1999) who stresses the different ways of behaving according to whether you are a waiter, a doctor or a teacher becoming ‘second nature’. One may also refer to more recent studies on the topic:

Social interaction is the very bedrock of social life. It is the primary medium through which cultures are transmitted, relationships are sustained, identities are affirmed, and social structures of all sorts are reproduced. (Goodwin and Heritage 1990 in Heritage and Clayman 2010:7)

In our experiment, the participants are involved in a difficult task because they have to take up roles that are close to real life experience (CEFR 2001:121) - the students have to act as teenagers on a visit to an English speaking country who want to organise their weekend. The teacher’s role consists of becoming a host family member who will organise the weekend with the student. When engaged in task-based interaction, participants are expected to behave in a certain way and to produce a certain type of discourse as required by the specific assessment purposes (both in terms of linguistic and pragmatic criteria). They are indeed supposed to ignore the institutional context and their actual social role as students or teacher and feel free to express their likes/dislikes or even modify their true personality. We therefore assume that the interaction will depend on their greater or lesser readiness to fit the roles assigned by the task. In order to analyse the results according to the participants’ positioning

in the spoken interaction, we intend to transfer Clot's concept of 'clinical activity' (Clot, Faïta, 2000). Although this framework was originally meant for any work situation, we believe that its methodological approach fits the study of the activity that takes place in the language class. This conceptual tool will enable us to measure the gap between the completion of the task as planned by the designer and the actual activity of the participants, i.e. what really happened.

Our first hypothesis is that the gap between the planned task (what is expected in terms of language and interactional patterns from the teacher) and reality (what learners actually produce) is narrower in Condition 1 (student-to-student) than in Condition 2 (teacher-to-student).

Our second hypothesis is that the wider gap in Condition 2 is due to the teacher's didactic positioning whose social role would overcome the one assigned by the task. In other words, the teacher who is supposed to play the role of a host family member would have difficulties in leaving aside the assessor's position.

Finally, our third hypothesis is that each condition will have an impact on the student's performance both in terms of pragmatic and linguistic behaviour.

## **The protocol**

Our experiment was conducted in February 2014 in three different secondary schools in Paris suburbs. Twelve 14/15 year-old students (A2+/B1 levels) and their three teachers were video-recorded while performing a spoken interaction task in the two conditions. The task was a role-play which slightly differed according to who the students were interacting with. In both conditions, the participants were provided with a leaflet that displayed the pictures and the names of some famous tourist attractions either in London or in New York.

The protocol was as follows:

Step 1 - Spoken interaction task to be performed in Condition 1 (student-to-student): the students were told they were both staying in a host family in a foreign city (London or New York). Their goal was to discuss and agree on the organisation of the following weekend.

Step 2 - Spoken interaction task to be performed in Condition 2 (teacher-to-student): the students were told they were staying in a host family in a foreign city (London or New York, depending on which city had been chosen in Condition 1). The teacher was asked to play the role of the host family mother (all the teachers were female). The two participants had to discuss and agree on the organisation of the following weekend.

In both conditions, the instructions were to make suggestions, to react to suggestions and to reach an agreement on the organisation of the activities of the weekend. The conversations were due to last no less than three minutes and no more than five minutes.

The 18 spoken interactions were video-recorded in a classroom according to the following order:

- student 1 with student 2
- student 1 with teacher
- student 2 with teacher.

Before the peer-to-peer interaction, it was made clear to the students that the video recordings would be used for two purposes: the first one for assessment by their teacher and the second one for research purposes. In Condition 1 (student to student), only the researcher stayed in the classroom (to monitor the video camera) and the teacher waited outside. The students were perfectly aware assessment was involved in both conditions.

After each dialogue with the teacher (Condition 2), the latter was asked to assess the student according to the grid design by the DEPP. In order to evaluate the students' performance in Condition 1, the same teacher watched the videos of the spoken interaction in the peer-to-peer situation. The same grid was used. The grid is divided into two parts: the first

one deals with the pragmatic skills and the degree of achievement of the task (from 1 to 5 that is from the minimum to the maximum fulfilling of the task). The second part assesses the linguistic skills i.e. lexical variety, grammatical and phonological accuracy from A (the lowest) to E (the highest), the final grade being thus a combination of a number and a letter). The grid itself was elaborated by a group of language experts (in English, German and Spanish) relying on both the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) and the French language curriculum.

At the end of the experiment, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire and were interviewed to ascertain their feelings regarding the experiment and their preference for one condition or the other. The questions were as follows:

1. Do you like English?
2. Did you like taking part in the experiment?
3. Who did you prefer performing the task with – your fellow student or your teacher? Which condition was most favourable to you?

The videos of the spoken interactions (amounting to 1 hour and 35 minutes) were transcribed on CLAN software (MacWhinney, 2000) which allows for text and video alignment as well as for some automatic data processing. According to grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990), our coding system was data-driven and allowed for quantitative and qualitative analysis.

### **Analysis**

When designing a task for students to develop their spoken interaction skills, the teacher always thinks ahead and has some specific expectations that would match his/her learning goals. The process is the same when designing a test because the assessor intends to check the knowledge and skills that were acquired by the learners. Some instructions are given to the participants so as to trigger the use of specific language functions. This is what is considered as the planned task and it usually reflects the assessor's goals.

Here are the instructions (in italics) given to the participants followed by the language functions that could be expected. We used the functions listed in the Threshold Level (Council of Europe 1990):

*Where would you like to go? What would you like to see or do?*

Enquiring about/Expressing wants, desires

Enquiring about/Giving factual information

*Make some suggestions*

Suggesting a course of action

*React to your friend's suggestions*

Enquiring about/Expressing like – dislike

Enquiring about/Expressing preference

Agreeing / Disagreeing

*At the end of the conversation, you should agree with your friend about your plans for next weekend.*

The aim of our analysis is to compare which functions were used by students and teachers to complete the task. Since one of our hypotheses is that the gap between the task and the activity is wider in Condition 2 than in Condition 1, we will study the patterns of interaction which emerge from each situation. This should allow for the analysis of the speakers' positioning.

### **Quantitative analysis**

The close study of our data led us to investigate three aspects of the discourse that appeared to be relevant to measure the participants' positioning in the interaction:

1. The number of words uttered by each speaker would give us some information on who takes the floor in an exchange.
2. The use of subject pronouns ('I, you and we') to highlight who talks about whom. These pronouns are potentially a good indicator of the intersubjective positioning of the participants in the task.
3. The number of questions formulated by each participant. The goal of the task was to come to an agreement and therefore, it seems reasonable to think that requesting information or preferences would display a certain positioning in the conversation process.

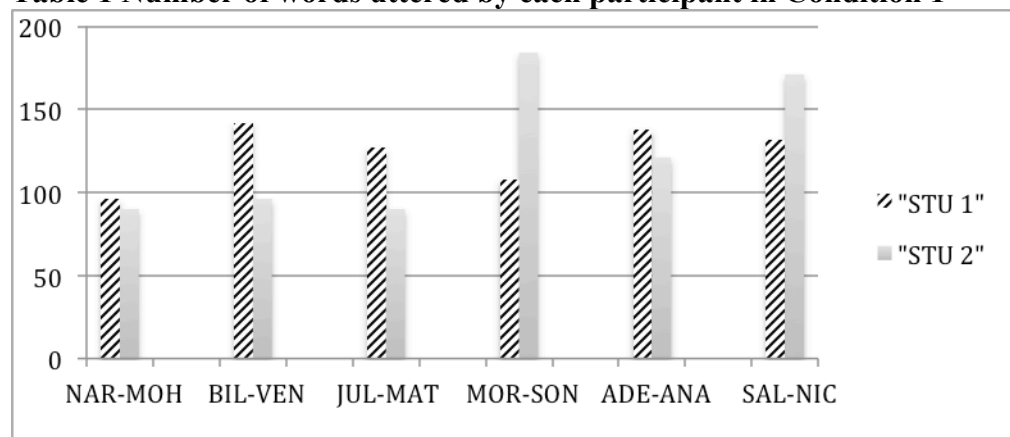
In order to draw conclusions on comparable data, all the quantitative measures were made on the first 3 minutes 20 seconds of each dialogue since it was the length of the shortest conversation. Interestingly enough, the conversations among students were longer on average than the conversations in which a teacher was involved. The teachers were following a question/answer pattern which gave the conversation a quicker rhythm and did not really allow for pauses more frequently noticed in peer to peer conversations.

### 1. Who is the most talkative?

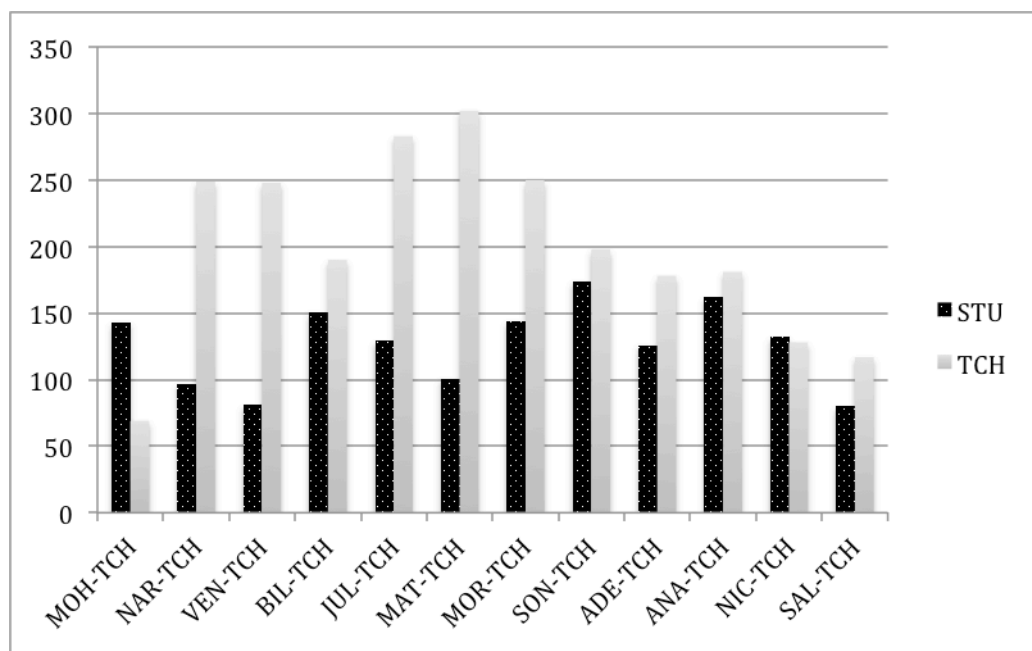
The students who took part in our experiment were A2+/B1 (CEFR 2001). This means a difference in terms of fluency between the teacher and the learner with the former uttering more words per minute than the latter. This raises the question of who talks the most in a situation where the student is assessed by a teacher who is acting in the role-play. In Condition 2, are the teachers/assessors able to stick to their role (the role assigned by the language task in which they were meant to play one of the host family members) and does this role play enable the student to complete the task according to the task designer's expectations?

The following tables show the number of words uttered by each participant in Conditions 1 and 2.

**Table 1 Number of words uttered by each participant in Condition 1**



**Table 2 Number of words uttered by each participant in Condition 2**



In Condition 1, the dialogues between peers show an unbalanced number of uttered words with the more able students being more talkative than the less able ones. However this difference is not a major one and can be explained by the roles assumed by some students who were confronted by their less able peers and who needed to provide vocabulary, to reformulate or to scaffold their partner's speech. When in conversation with the teachers (Condition 2), the difference becomes wider for the less skilled speakers. These students explained that they did not feel confident and did not dare talking and uttered a minimum number of words because they feared the teacher's reaction to their potential errors. As far as more competent learners are concerned, the number of words uttered by each speaker is usually better balanced. The proportions observed in Condition 1 were confirmed and amplified in Condition 2 with less able learners speaking even less with the teacher than with their peer.

There is one exception to this trend: one of the students (MOH) working in Condition 2 completely took the lead in the conversation which turned out to be more a monologue than a dialogue. He never looked at the teacher and was therefore unable to consider her reactions or nonverbal feedback. The teacher let the student speak without interrupting (and without really being able to interrupt) which resulted in an unbalanced exchange until the learner ran short of ideas. During the interview this pupil mentioned that he felt more comfortable with a peer than with the teacher. This position is confirmed by the dialogue in Condition 1, which is well balanced in terms of numbers of uttered words (MOH-NAR).

These data show that even if the teachers tend to speak more than the students, this does not necessarily mean that the learners are disadvantaged. In other words, they do not speak less than with peers. It is only the difference between the two speakers that is bigger in Condition 2 but not the amount of learner speech. If we go back to the core of our subject – assessment – we may wonder how these unbalanced dialogues influence the teacher's perception when evaluating the students. Before examining the results of the assessment proper, we would like to focus on the reason why teachers tend to talk more than students. Does this mean that in Condition 2, the lead is on the teacher's side? More data might help us answer this question.

## 2. Who talks about whom?

One of the prominent characteristics that we discovered in the dialogues among the participants is the differential use of subject pronouns. These referential markers could potentially highlight how the participants position themselves in the dialogue and in the completion of the task.

Table 3 deals with the dialogues in Condition 1. We added the number of subject pronouns used by the 12 students in the course of their 6 spoken interactions. In Table 4, the number of conversations that we took into account doubled since each of the 12 students had a conversation with a teacher (Condition 2).

**Table 3 Total number of subject pronouns used by the participants in Condition 1**

STU-STU		
I	YOU	WE
78	51	30
(49%)	(32%)	(19%)

**Table 4 Total number of subject pronouns used by the participants in Condition 2**

STU			TCH		
I	YOU	WE	I	YOU	WE
152	15	18	19	187	41
(36%)	(3%)	(4%)	(4%)	(43%)	(9%)

The difference in the number of pronouns used in Condition 1 (N=159) and in Condition 2 (N=432) is due to the number of dialogues that we analysed (6 vs 12) therefore we shall only look at percentages. However, it is important to mention that there was also a difference in the structure and length of utterances produced in each condition. In condition 1, what the students utter is often limited to incomplete sentences such as ‘when?’, ‘on Monday’, ‘oh no Saturday’, ‘ah ok’ whereas the conversations with the teachers are more elaborate. The latter would ask complete questions and require full answers. When the student did not provide a full answer, then the teacher usually reformulated it.

In Condition 1, the use of the pronoun ‘I’ (49%) shows that half the utterances are self-referential. Students talk about themselves, they express what they like or what they do not like, what they wish to do, their preference and finally their agreement or disagreement with their partner’s suggestion. However, they also take into account their partner’s point of view when they enquire about the other’s desires, likes or preferences hence the use of ‘you’ (32%) as in ‘Where do **you** want to go next weekend?’. The pronoun is also used because the speaker seeks information as in ‘Do **you** know the MOMA?’ therefore the interaction makes sense since the students collaborate in trying to know a thing or a fact (Council of Europe 1990). We can also notice that, to a lesser extent, students use ‘we’ in their dialogues. This demonstrates how the speakers engage in the task: the organisation of the weekend is meant to be a co-construction in which the role assigned by the fictional situation predominates. The participants were asked to come to an agreement therefore, having expressed their own point of view, they show that they reach an agreement in referring to the two of them as in ‘and **we** will go shopping at Macy’s because **we** have money and **we** want to spend money.’ These ‘we’ are mostly found in the second part of the dialogues. As mentioned before, we only used the first 3 minutes and 20 seconds of each dialogue, therefore, for the longer ones, these pronouns do not appear in our analysis. Thus, it is likely that our figures underestimate the co-positioning of the participants since it appears that the ‘I’ and ‘you’ pronouns progressively change into ‘we’. The dialogicality (Du Bois 2007) of their speech i.e. the interactional structure of the language reflects the *enaction of their personal and social relationships* with one another (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004).



In Condition 2, the use of the subject pronouns differs quite substantially. Whilst the students continue to predominantly use ‘I’ (36%), the teachers, who play the role of the host family member, only use it in 4% of all cases. Conversely, they mostly use ‘you’ (43%) in the conversations as opposed to students who only employ it in 3% of all sentences. This distribution reflects two important aspects of the type of relation that is built up between each pair. First, this shows that the conversation is clearly led by the teachers who tend to ask questions (the types and functions of these questions will be discussed later) to the students about their wants and desires, likes and dislikes or preferences but also on their knowledge of the possible places of interest to be explored. The whole range of questions that teachers generally use when addressing students and prompting them to develop their speech is displayed such as ‘What would you like to visit?’, ‘When would you like to go?’, ‘Are you interested in art?’, ‘Where would you like to have lunch?’. Therefore, it is often the teachers who initiate the topics and suggest possible options. The students tend to respond to suggestions without almost ever offering or suggesting choices.

Second, the instructions given to the participants pointed out that they should enquire about the co-speakers’ wants and desires but they also mentioned making and reacting to suggestions. The very small amount of ‘I’ pronouns used by the teachers and ‘you’ pronouns used by the students suggests that the dialogue serves as a task in which the pupils’ speech is driven and supported by the adult. The interaction appears as highly unequal in terms of co-construction: the teachers talk about the students who in turn, only talk about themselves. If the latter seems to be able to stick to the role assigned by the task, the former tends to be caught up by their social role. Condition 2 favours an unequal positioning in the sense that the role-play is more difficult for the teachers who tend to play their actual social role rather than their fictional *persona*. The task involved a discussion on equal grounds (as far as the relationship between two teenagers could equal that of a student and a host-family parent) but the disproportion between the use of subject pronouns suggests an unbalanced relationship. This view is supported by the very low amount of ‘we’: 4% by the students and 9% by the teachers in condition 2 as opposed to 19% in Condition 1. In Condition 2, the task is clearly not a ‘team’ construction as opposed to Condition 1 where the students tend to come to a co-constructed agreement based on shared points of view rather than a one-way spoken composition. This corroborates our hypothesis that the gap between the expectations raised by the task design and reality is wider in Condition 2 than in Condition 1.

### 3. Who asks questions and how many?

Another striking difference between the two conditions was the use of questions. The design of the task implied that the participants would enquire about their partners’ likes or dislikes, wants and desires or preferences. Seeking information was also part of it. Therefore questions were expected in the participants’ discourse but their number greatly differed from one condition to the other as shown in Tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5 Number of questions asked by the participants in Condition 1**

	STU 1	STU 2
BIL-VEN	9	10
MOH-NAR	9	7
JUL-MAT	2	3
SON-MOR	3	4
ADE-ANA	4	6
SAL-NIC	3	5

**Table 6 Number of questions asked by the participants in Condition 2**

	TCH	STU
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TCH-VEN	32	2
TCH-BIL	20	5
TCH-MOH	4	0
TCH-NAR	28	3
TCH-JUL	17	1
TCH-MAT	22	1
TCH-MOR	14	2
TCH-SON	21	1
TCH-ADE	11	1
TCH-ANA	23	3
TCH-SAL	15	2
TCH-NIC	10	2

In Condition 1 (Table 5), the number of questions asked by the students is evenly shared and ranges from 3 to 10 over a period of 3 minutes 20 seconds. The participants share an equal status and no one seeks to take a leading role. However, in Condition 2 (Table 6), the pattern of the dialogue changed considerably with teachers asking between seven to twenty times more questions than students. The teachers were supposed to play a role in which they engaged in a discussion but the dialogue often took the form of an interview rather than a conversation. One pair (TCH-MOH), once again, appears to be an exception for the reason mentioned before. MOH decided to engage in a monologue and stated all his desires and wants for the organisation of the weekend. As the teacher was not able to speak much, she obviously did not ask many questions. For all the other dialogues, it seems that the teachers were willing to help the learners. The guidance offered by them was made in the form of questions as teachers would usually do. Therefore it appears that, once again, the dialogues in Condition 2 display an unbalanced structure in the exchange that accounts for and replicates the type of hierarchical relationship found in the classroom. As Goffman argued, ‘the syntax of interaction (...) is the place where face, self, and identity are expressed, and where they are also ratified or undermined by the conduct of others’ (in Heritage and Clayman 2010:9). The linguistic and pragmatic choices made by the teachers had thus an impact on the shaping of the participants’ role and on their positioning in the interaction.

These conclusions, and more specifically the status of questions, require a more detailed qualitative analysis so as to understand the positioning of each participant in the interactions according to Conditions 1 and 2.

### **Qualitative analysis**

As they completed the task, the participants came to express their communicative intentions through a certain number of language functions (now LF) that we classified. We used and adapted the typology of the Threshold Level, now B1 in the CEFR (Council of Europe 1990).

#### **1 Imparting and seeking factual information:**

- 1.1 Identifying/defining
- 1.2 Correcting
- 1.3 Imparting/Enquiring about factual information

#### **2 Expressing and finding out attitudes**

- 2.1 Expressing agreement/disagreement with a statement
  - 2.2.1 Stating whether one knows or does not know a thing or a fact
  - 2.2.2 Enquiring whether one know or does not know a thing or a fact
  - 2.2.3 Asking for justification
- 2.3.1 Expressing ability/inability to do something + Expressing inability to SAY something

2.3.2 Enquiring about ability/inability to do something

2.4.1 Expressing wants/desires

2.4.1 Enquiring about wants/desires

2.5.1 Expressing preference

2.5.2 Enquiring about preference

2.6.1 Expressing liking/dislike

2.6.2 Enquiring about liking/dislike

2.7.1 Expressing lack of interest

2.8.1 Expressing approval

### **3 Deciding on courses of action**

3.1 Suggesting a course of action

3.2 Agreeing to a suggestion

3.3 Advising someone to do something

3.4 Requesting assistance

3.5 Offering assistance

These LF were not evenly used by the students or the teachers and the underlying purpose behind some of them also appeared to be different. In Condition 1, the learners resorted to all the above LF to complete the task. They did not often correct their partners but it was not a requirement. Therefore the actual spoken activity displayed by the students is in line with what was expected in planning the task.

Conversely, in Condition 2, not all LF were found. In accordance with what was revealed by the use of subject pronouns, the teachers hardly ever expressed their own wants and desires, their preference or their likes and dislikes. They mostly enquired about what the students thought although the task implied sharing opinions on the subject to come to an agreement. In doing so, they positioned themselves not as co-organisers but as experts in charge of guiding a learner. As Jaffe puts it:

[a] speaker positionality is built into the act of communication. ... **By taking up a position, individuals automatically invoke a constellation of associated social identities. In doing so, speakers project, assign, propose, constrain, define, or otherwise shape the subject positions of their interlocutors.** ... An utterance framed as a performance, for example, positions receivers as an audience; **a speaker who takes up an expert stance to give advice positions receivers as novices** (2009:3-8) [our emphasis]

This hierarchical position is also reinforced when teachers correct students even though the errors do not create a communication breakdown (Manoïlov 2010). It should be noted that the teachers were specifically required not to correct students because the completion of the task (a role play) did not require such discourse moves.

#### Example 1

30 ADE: uh I'd like to go to Time Square too.

31 TCH3: yes why?

32 ADE: uh because I was told there are big screens, large screens and uh with ad.

34 TCH3: ads yes, yes.

In line 34, the reformulation shows that the adult clearly goes back to her institutional role, that of a teacher, since this move does not add anything to the completion of the task.

This aspect is even more obvious in the meta-functions of the questions asked in the dialogues. On the one hand, they had a communicative purpose which was task oriented (example 2) but in some cases they were clearly pedagogical (example 3).

The following example is an extract from an interaction between two students who resort to questioning.

Example 2

- 60 SON: and the MOMA when do we go?  
61 MOR: oh ok.  
62 SON: but when (.) do we go to the MOMA?  
63 MOR: uh the MOMA we can go on (.) uh six hour (.) pm.  
64 SON: we can go uh (.) uh after shopping.  
65 MOR: oh yes.  
66 MOR: err but it 's uh it's [/] uh it's a momu(ment) it's a monument for, for what?  
67 SON: I don't know we should go and then we see.  
68 MOR: ah ok.  
69 SON: (.) because I don't know what is the MOMA so we can go there and see what it is.  
70 MOR: yes.

The two questions asked by SON (lines 60 and 62) are task-oriented. In line 60, she is interested in the organisation of the weekend and asks her partner about the planned schedule (LF10). She has to repeat her question (line 62) because her partner did not understand it. When MOR asks a question (line 66) because she does not know what the MOMA is, she is genuinely enquiring for information (LF13). Seeking information has a communicative function. The whole extract shows that the two students are working towards the completion of the task. The process is a collaborative one, each participant being equally part of the co-construction.

However in Condition 2, some questions had a different intent when they were uttered by a teacher.

Example 3

- 38 TCH3: what about Times Square?  
39 TCH3: what do you know about Time Square?  
41 TCH3: it's famous for, for?  
42 ADE: ben uh for large screens.

In line 38, the teacher's question could be understood as a suggestion but in line 39, she adds 'what do you know?'. Once again we could consider the question as an enquiry to find out information about Times Square but the third move (line 41) clearly displays the teacher's intention. She wants to find out whether the student knows about Times Square not because she is herself ignorant but because she wants to prompt the learner to display her knowledge. Therefore the question turns out to be a didactic one or what we call a 'quiz question'.

LF 12 (Correcting) and LF 13 (Imparting/Enquiring about factual information) were always task-oriented when used by the students. However when used in Condition 2 by the teachers, LF 12 and LF 13 were sometimes task-oriented and sometimes didactic questions. LF 222 (Enquiring whether one know or does not know a thing or a fact) and LF 223 (Asking for justification) were always used by the students with a communicative intent and always used by the teachers with a didactic intention. Therefore we can see that it was sometimes difficult for the teachers to play the role assigned by the task and to forget for a moment their teacher's status. This has an impact on the relationships in the interaction. When interviewed, some of the students mentioned that they were impressed and they did not always feel as confident as when they were talking with a peer. However, this feeling is not shared by all the students. Four of them (one third) declared that they preferred interacting with the teacher who was reassuring. They appreciated the fact that the expert was there to support them. We

can then suppose that there is a correlation between the students' preferring Condition 2 and their own positioning more or less in line with the social role assigned by the task or the one assigned by the institution. In other words, Condition 2 is preferred by students who remain students no matter what.

We shall now turn to the results of the assessments to check if the previous findings had an impact on the teacher's appraisal of the students' performance.

### Results of the assessments: What they tell us

As mentioned before, this experiment was meant to test the conditions in which students could be assessed on their spoken interaction skills. One of our goals was to seek whether one condition would be more favourable to the students than the other. The teachers were asked to evaluate them using the grid designed by the DEPP. The teachers first assessed the students' performance in Condition 2 immediately after their interaction with them. They were then asked to watch the video that had previously been recorded with two students completing the task and, they used the same grid to evaluate them in Condition 1. The grade is composed of two items, the figure concerns the pragmatic skills and the degree of achievement of the task (grade 1: minimum, to grade 4: maximum), and the letter concerns the linguistic skills (grade A: minimum, to grade E: maximum). In the grid, the range of grades for the linguistic skills is wider than the pragmatic skills because it was found that for practical purposes, it would help to have a more detailed description.

**Table 7 Grades assigned by the teachers according to Condition 1 and Condition 2**

		Condition 1 STU-STU	Condition 2 STU-TCH
TCH1	NAR	4C	3C
	MOH	4C	3C
	BIL	3D	4D
	VEN	4C	3C
TCH2	MAT	4D	3D
	JUL	4D	4E
	SON	4E	3D
	MOR	4D	3C
TCH3	ANA	3C	4D
	ADE	3C	4D
	SAL	4D	3C
	NIC	4D	3C

The hatched boxes represent the best grade obtained by each participant. In eight cases out of the 12, the students were given a better grade in Condition 1 than in Condition 2 (66%). The teachers were often pleasantly surprised by the way the students were able to engage in the conversation to complete the task in peer-to-peer interaction. They initiated a lot of interactions, they reacted to their partners' suggestions, they launched new topics, they asked about new information, they organised the weekend in a very efficient manner so as to

complete the task. Conversely, when in conversation with the teachers, they were keener on answering suggestions or questions without initiating any new topics. They followed the teacher's guidelines thus positioning themselves as students and not really as partners in the task completion. This position, which was implicitly imposed by the social identities at stake in the interaction, certainly had an impact on the grading. If we look closely at the results, we can notice that it is almost always the pragmatic grade (i.e. the number) that is better in Condition 1 than in Condition 2. The linguistic one (i.e. the letter) remains the same in both conditions except for one student (JUL) who was deemed more skilled when in interaction with the teacher. This figure evaluated the ability to complete the task and the ability to interact in an efficient manner. It seems that the teacher considered that the communication between the students was more successful and productive when in Condition 1. The equal status enabled and led the students to be more active in the way they engaged in the conversation and in the task. The asymmetrical relationship in Condition 2 led to an unbalanced structured-conversation where the teachers initiated topics through questions which the students answered. Their role was therefore more passive and this could explain the difference between the two grades. However, when in conversation with the teacher some students did better in terms of linguistic skills. This could be explained by the fact that students would concentrate more on the language forms when in interaction with the teacher because they know that teachers usually value this aspect of the language more.

### **Answering our hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1: In the context of spoken interaction, the gap is bigger between the task planned and the activity observed in Condition 1 (TCH-STU) than in Condition 2 (STU-STU)**

The qualitative analysis of the language functions displayed in the participants' speech shows that in Condition 1 there is little difference between what was expected and the actual activity. However, in Condition 2, the gap is bigger because the teachers did not fully adopt their imaginary roles. Their speech was often dedicated to guide the students and they were not involved in opinion sharing. We must point to the fact that the teachers' role was a difficult one that may have biased their production. The creation of roles that would be realistic implies that what the teachers and the students were expected to play was similar but not identical. This should be kept in mind.

**Hypothesis 2: The main reason for this discrepancy lies in the positioning of the speakers, more or less in line with the social role imposed by the task or the social role imposed by the school context**

Our analysis showed that the teachers tend to hold the floor when in conversation with the students, especially the less able ones. The former also oriented the conversation towards the learner in using the second person subject pronoun and in asking a tremendous amount of questions. The unbalanced structure of the dialogue reflects the unequal status between students and teachers that the social fiction imposed by the task is unable to erase. The social function remains strongly significant.

**Hypothesis 3: The positioning of the speakers has an influence on their performances**

The results of the assessments show that 8 students out of 12 were better evaluated by the teachers in Condition 1 than in Condition 2. When in interaction with the expert (i.e. the teacher) their status of learner was more obvious and they behaved in a different manner. The social positioning influenced the pragmatic behaviour of the participants which in turn had an impact on the grades. The teachers found the students more efficient when interacting with

their peers than with them probably because, in Condition 2, the students took less initiative, asked less questions and were not actively involved.

Yet not all students behaved the same in Condition 2. In the interviews we conducted at the end of the experiment in order to ask the students which condition they preferred, their answers were in keeping with the attitudes displayed during the spoken interactions. Interestingly, the students can be placed on a continuum according to their greater or lesser dependency on the teacher as displayed in Table 8.

**Table 8 The institutional-social continuum**

Institutional posture	←————→	Social posture
ANA	ADE BILL VEN MAR MOH MOR SON NAR MAT	JUL

One more proficient student (ANA) performs better with her teacher and clearly prefers this condition because she can draw the best from it. Another more proficient student (JUL) clearly states that scaffolding from the teacher is unfair and introduces a bias in the assessment. She is the most autonomous student. According to her the difference between her language skills and the teachers' in Condition 2 disadvantages students. Most students (9 out of 12) acknowledge the importance of scaffolding (provided by the teacher even in an assessment situation) although they prefer interacting with a peer and very often succeed better in this condition.

## Conclusion

Our study suggests that Condition 1 seems more favourable to students than Condition 2 especially when they feel more comfortable with a peer than with a teacher.

When the task was chosen, the designers' intention was to erase or at least reduce the hierarchical relation that usually exists between a teacher and a student. While in the process of playing their assigned role the participants were meant to perform an ordinary conversation, it appeared that Condition 2 rather favoured institutional talk to the disadvantage of 66% of them (Heritage and Clayman 2010). Thus, it seems that the interactional roles are all the more reinforced by the institutional context which is a source of asymmetrical positioning even before any action is taken or any word is uttered by the participants. Our study shows that when engaged in dyads with students in an interactive assessment task, the teachers' position remains high. This is not only because of their mastery of the language but also because of their social function as teachers that is deeply anchored in them within the institutional context. We also found that the places are collaboratively constructed in Condition 1 enabling the students to position themselves as equals in the conversation, whereas they seem to be imposed upon by the social context in Condition 2 where the teachers keep their dominant position. Although our experiment relies on a limited corpus and as such cannot prove to be generalisable, it tends to show that even with basic or

independent language users (Levels A2-B1) the most favourable assessment condition for oral interaction is peer-to-peer. A larger scale study is now planned to check these results and to take more precisely into account the proficiency levels of the participants. Indeed, it seems necessary to vary the level of each pair with more competent students interacting with less competent ones or pairs of students of equal competence. This study should have consequences not only for the way French teachers evaluate their students but also on the way they teach interactive skills both on a pragmatic and linguistic level.

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