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# "This is serious": enacting authority during managerial conversations

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**Abstract.** This research aims at understanding how executives and managers interactively accomplish authority relationships through their communicative practices and how these processes give rise to power relationships in conversations. We analyze in depth three conversations in which executives of the French car manufacturer Renault accused three managers of having sold proprietary data to a foreign company. The conversations were recorded by Renault and later were leaked to the press. Following Discursive Psychology, we identify the pattern of discursive devices on which the executives and the managers relied to co-construct authority. Our findings show that the enactment of authority relationships relies on the combination and adaptation of various discursive devices, through which: 1) the executives speak, give information and/or orders, interrogate and/or accuse in the name of the organization; and, 2) the managers react—frequently denying they committed an offense—but never contest the executives' rights to behave like they do. Four main contributions are outlined. First, the study shows how the enactment of authority actually relies on the power struggles that unfold during the conversation. Second, the authority accomplished during the interactions may mean different configurations of rights going from speaking in the name of the organization to interrogating, accusing and even sentencing the subordinates. Third, the enactment of authority does not necessarily fall in the compliance/resistance alternative, but can exhibit more or less alignment between the superior and its subordinate. Finally, the accomplishment of authority relies on a palette of discursive devices, the effects of which cannot be interpreted without taking into account the actual reactions of the participants.

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## INTRODUCTION

On 3 January 2011, three managers from the French car manufacturer Renault were accused of having received large sums of money, allegedly for having sold proprietary data to a foreign company. This was the outcome of several months of investigation conducted discreetly by Renault's security department and supervised by key members of the top management team. The managers were confronted with the charge separately in three simultaneous interviews, each conducted by a high-ranked executive. The interviews, which were recorded, later leaked to the press. During the interviews, the accused

managers were offered the opportunity to quit discreetly, the alternative being a formal complaint and a subsequent police investigation.

Such rare empirical material offers a unique opportunity to explore how authority relationships are accomplished through the communicative practices of superiors and their subordinates. Recent management research conducted on conversation in non-hierarchical teams has underscored how participants together accomplish various configurations of power relationships (e.g. Choi & Schnurr, 2014; Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2005; Whittle & Mueller, 2011). With some exceptions (see Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009), however, research conducted on the communicative practices in hierarchical relations does not consider that participants dynamically co-construct authority, which may lead to different forms of power relationships, going beyond the compliance (in our case confession)/resistance (in our case denial) alternative demonstrated in prior works.

This article aims at contributing to this research, in showing how participants, through their communicative practices, enact authority and accomplish different power configurations. In so doing, our ambition is to add to our understanding of authority in contemporary forms of organizing, where team work, transversal cooperation, shared or distributed leadership coexist with traditional, vertical hierarchical relationships. In a context where autonomy and collaboration are highly valued, the enactment of authority is less liable to fall into the compliance/opposition alternative and may exhibit more subtle forms of power relationships that are yet to be investigated (see also Courpasson & Golsorkhi, 2011). Going into the dynamics of the discursive tactics used to enact authority, this research can also shed light on how authority and power relationships are both conceptually distinct and entangled.

Following classical definitions (Biggart & Hamilton, 1984; Weber, 1978: 220) and recent communicative approaches (see Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud & Taylor, 2014: 180), hierarchical authority has been defined as a potential influence that relies on legitimate rights to command a situation (including giving orders and expecting them to be obeyed, [Milgram, 1974]) and usually implies acts that are “in accordance with existing organizational structures” (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009: 86). While hierarchical authority is rooted in the structure of roles in the organization and “confers on an incumbent the right to act ‘in a defined sphere of competence’ (Weber, 1978: 220)” (Biggart & Hamilton, 1984: 541), it has to be enacted and negotiated, a process that may give rise to different power relationships (from compliance to resistance and opposition, [see Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009]). Power here can be defined as an actual influence on one’s conduct, “a relationship between partners” [...] “in which certain actions modify others” (Foucault, 1982). While hierarchical authority is a potential influence rooted in the structure of roles and rights of the organization, power is an actual influence exercised through participants’ moves and counter-moves during their encounters, which may rely on legitimate rights to exert that influence (e.g. hierarchical, traditional authority) but also on the actualization of discursive or non-discursive components (e.g. knowledge, discipline, material, spatial organization, etc. [see Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer & Thaning, 2016: 278]).

With this distinction in mind, we address the following questions: How are authority relationships enacted through communicative practices during conversations? What power relationships do these practices accomplish?

For this purpose, we analyzed the three interviews that took place on 3 January 2011. These conversations, which were recorded in their entirety, were later leaked to the press and published as audio files.

Relying on Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992), a theory and method derived from Conversational Analysis, we conducted a turn-by-turn analysis of extended conversation extracts from the three interviews, thereby identifying the pattern of discursive devices used by the executives and the managers and the resulting power relationship. Discursive devices are rhetoric tools such as linguistic styles (e.g. emphasis, mitigation, vagueness), the specific use of words and phrases, tropes (i.e. metaphors), figures of speech (i.e. rhetorical contrast, attribution), etc., that participants use to accomplish communicative practices (i.e. blaming, apologizing, etc.) and then produce an effect on others during their encounters (Edwards, 2006).

Our findings show that the enactment of authority relationships relies on the combination and adaptation of various discursive devices, through which: 1) the executives speak, give information and/or orders, interrogate and/or accuse the subordinate in the name of the organization; and 2) the managers react—frequently denying they committed an offense—but never contest the executives' rights to behave like they do. Four contributions are outlined. First, the study shows how the enactment of authority actually relies on the power struggles that unfold during the conversation. Second, the authority accomplished during the interactions may mean different configurations of rights going from speaking in the name of the organization to interrogating, accusing and even sentencing the subordinates. Third, the enactment of authority does not necessarily fall in the compliance/resistance alternative, but can exhibit more or less alignment between the superior and its subordinate. Finally, the accomplishment of authority relies on a palette of discursive devices, the effects of which cannot be interpreted without taking into account the actual reactions of the participants.

The paper is organized around the following four sections. First, we review previous works on authority and power relationships during conversations. Second, we describe the research context and the methods used to analyze the conversations. Third, we conduct a turn-by-turn analysis of three extended extracts from the interviews, and identify the discursive devices used by the executives. Finally, we discuss the contribution of these discursive tactics to the enactment of authority relationships and the resulting power relationship.

## **FROM AUTHORITY TO POWER RELATIONSHIPS DURING CONVERSATIONS**

Since Milgram's (1974) seminal work on obedience to authority, research on the actual accomplishment of authority relationships in organizations has been scarce. It is only recently that some researchers, while investigating how (dis)encouraging participation among organizational members, have reintroduced this managerial dimension in their theoretical framework. Building on Westley's seminal work (1990), scholars consider that a superior's communicative practices may re-enact authority relationships to varying degrees, leading to different power relationships.

When superiors adopt communicative practices that enact authority (i.e. invoking hierarchies, dismissing, undermining, and deploying authority [see Thomas, Sargent & Hardy, 2011: 32]), subordinates are likely to remain silent (Bisel, Messersmith & Kelly, 2012; Rasmussen, 2011); power relationships are asymmetrical, the group complies with the leader's views. Alternatively, though, subordinates may actively resist authority voices (Allard-Poesi, 2015; Patriotta & Spedale, 2009; Thomas et al., 2011),

leading to power struggles and conflict. Conversely, superiors, temporarily at least, may suspend or relax authority relationships through various communicative practices, leading to “facilitative” power relationships (Thomas et al., 2011) whereby all participants may contribute to the conversation and the collective task at hand (see also Choi & Schnurr, 2014; Clifton, 2012).

In this strand of research, superiors’ communicative practices are considered key in the suspension or actualization of authority relationships. Various lists of virtuous communicative practices or discursive strategies have been proposed (e.g. respectful interaction [Weick, 1993]; inviting, proposing, building clarifying and affirming [Thomas et al., 2011]; encouraging participation, developing and expressing information, simplifying definitions, justifying underlying assumptions, and reconciling positions by separating out individuals from issue positions [Kwon, Clarke & Wodak, 2014]). While outlining the communicative practices of the superior and their effects on authority and power relationships, this approach can be criticized in three respects.

First, the communicative practices described either lack empirical content (e.g. deploying authority) or are not specific to the enactment of authority (e.g. dismissing, undermining, etc. [Thomas et al., 2011]).

Second, research on superior/subordinate conversation suggests that the enactment or suspension of authority and the ensuing power relationships rely heavily, if not exclusively, on the communicative practices of the superior, the subordinate having no choice but to comply with or resist his/her superior. Little attention has been paid to the co-constructive aspects of the relationships, i.e. how the shaping of power relationships depends on both the superior’s and the subordinate’s communicative practices (Schneider, 2007). Unless the conversation turns out to be a monologue, however, subordinates react to the superior’s communicative practices, influencing in return the superior’s behaviors. In fact, power relationships are not shaped exclusively by the superior’s behaviors but also result from “the way in which participants design their interactions, because it can have the effect of placing them in a relationship where discourse strategies of greater or lesser power are differentially available to each of them” (Hutchby, 1996: 482, in Schneider, 2007: 188). In fact, Benoit-Barné & Cooren (2009) have shown how the accomplishment of authority during a conversation between a medical coordinator and technicians depends on both the superior’s ability to make either her status or the organization present during the conversation (what they call *presentification*) and on the reactions of the subordinates. The exercise of authority during interactions depends on the superior’s capacity to speak in the name of the organization, telling what the organization is or wants, or to make its status present by giving orders or expressing judgment about the subordinate’s behaviors. The typified, hierarchical double interact (the superior’s order, followed by the subordinate’s action and then the superior’s assessment of the subordinate’s action) shows that such an enactment also depends on the subordinate’s deference or compliance with what is asked of him: The employees allow the manager to criticize their work, do not intervene when she speaks, etc. “They [the employees] are the ones who, in a way, generate[d], or, more precisely, presentify [ied] [her] authority” (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009: 20).

Third and finally, research (including Cooren’s and colleagues’ works) on the enactment of authority during conversation does not take into account the various moves and counter-moves through which such authority is collectively accomplished and negotiated. Prior research conducted on communicative practices during collective encounters in non-hierarchical groups demonstrated that through their discursive devices and rhetorical strategies, some participants are liable to place themselves in a relationship where they can gain access to some resources not available to

others (Schneider, 2007: 189), or where they can achieve some effects not achieved by others, for instance by framing the issue under discussion in terms that are favorable to—or not incompatible with—their own view or interests (Mueller, Whittle, Gilchrist & Lenney, 2013; Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2005; Whittle, Housley, Gilchrist, Mueller & Lenney, 2014; Whittle, Housley, Gilchrist, Lenney & Mueller, 2015). With this mind, we contend that a detailed, processual analysis of the conversational practices of participants during their encounter may reveal more subtle and dynamic forms of power relationships, going beyond the compliance/opposition dichotomy demonstrated in prior works.

While an increasing number of studies follows a co-constructive approach on power relationships in non-hierarchical groups, much less is known on the enactment of authority relationships understood as a situated and collective accomplishment of all participants through their communicative practices. The aim of this research is to take a step towards a better understanding of the co-construction of authority relationships through conversation and the various power relationships they accomplish. How do participants, through their communicative practices, enact authority during conversation? What power relationships do these communicative practices give rise to?

## **RESEARCH SETTING**

When the managers met company executives at Renault's headquarters on 3 January 2011, the investigation about possible misbehavior had been developing for approximately four months. It started with an anonymous letter associating one of the three managers with acts of bribery and alluding to another one. The investigation was conducted by Renault's security department, with the approbation and under the monitoring of top management. An unidentified agent, known only by one member of the security department, provided information consisting of names of banks, account numbers, origins, destinations, and amounts of money transferred, albeit no substantial evidence (e.g. documents, files, or testimonies) had been provided by the agent. Before 3 January, none of the managers suspected of having sold proprietary information had ever been requested to provide information on the matter, either directly or indirectly (Suc, 2013). On 3 January, the managers were simultaneously and separately confronted with the charge in three interviews, each conducted by a high-ranked executive. The interviews were recorded by Renault's security department. Executives were aware of the recording but not the managers. The recordings were later leaked to the press and published by numerous radios and news magazines. Thus, they became public information. We therefore assume that the use of these data for research purposes is not restricted by any deontological consideration.

The interviews with the three managers offer highly relevant material for investigating the enactment of authority relationships for at least two reasons. First, the interviews implied authority relationships, as all three managers held operational positions. While having no direct subordinate relationships with the executives with whom they met (Coudriou, Husson, and Pelata), the three managers (Balthazard, Tenenbaum, and Rochette) held inferior positions in the hierarchy. Two of them, Balthazard and Rochette, held senior management positions (Rochette being Balthazard's deputy), while the youngest one, Tenenbaum, was considered a highly promising manager. Of the three executives, two, Husson and Coudriou, held high-level staff positions as the Heads of Legal Affairs and Managerial Human Resources, respectively. The third executive, Pelata, was the Director General of the company (ranking second and reporting directly

only to the Chairman and CEO, Carlos Ghosn). It has to be noted that Rochette and Pelata had enjoyed a long working relationship together in previous positions.

Second, while the interviews could have been unique opportunities for the participants to share first-hand information and jointly make sense of the case, the careful preparation of the overall setting for the interviews (Suc, 2013) suggests that they were aimed at obtaining either the avowal or the resignation of the managers, thereby increasing the comparability of the conversations. The managers had been asked to attend the meetings on various pretexts, and the interviews were to be conducted separately but simultaneously. Microphones and recording devices in the offices enabled security staff to listen to the conversations from a location some distance away, with the explicit purpose of comparing the answers provided by the managers in real time. Such a setting was intended to enable security staff to interrupt the interview discreetly and communicate instructions and relevant pieces of information to the executives conducting the interviews, so that they could orient the conversation accordingly. The three executives had been briefed about these possibilities (Suc, 2013); however, no such interruption happened, and the executives operated fully on their own initiative.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### DATA COLLECTION

All data concerning the case study were gathered through an analysis of the extensive media coverage of the affair, from its beginning up to the present day (see Davet & Lhomme, 2013; Lecadre, 2012), plus an extensive journalistic investigation published in a book (Suc, 2013). We also consulted two book chapters that were published subsequently by reliable sources (a former police officer, Pellegrini, [2012] and a reporter specializing in intelligence topics, Fansten, [2012]). These data were used as background information on the affair.

The interviews themselves were published in the press as audio files (Laffitte & Pontaut, 2011; Le Point.fr 2011a; Le Point.fr 2011b). Their authenticity has been confirmed by some of the participants (Suc, 2013) and never been contested by any. These interviews were audio-recorded and published on two journal websites in April 2011. Their durations range from 25 to 40 minutes. We transcribed the three interviews, and then we chose one extended extract for each meeting. The chosen extracts correspond to the beginning of the interviews, where the executives expose the reason for the interview and continue until the attitudes of the manager stabilize on denial. While the analysis of either short sequences displaying high similarities in turn-taking is suitable for routinized interactions (i.e. phone answering) and to uncover the use of particular devices (i.e. the asking of "silly questions" in police interrogation, [Stokoe & Edwards, 2007]), lengthy extracts are a preferable dataset for analyzing conversations in non-routine environments and outline how various devices are put into practice and adapted to the behaviors of the audience (Whittle et al., 2014: 9). We carefully checked that the remaining material in the interviews neither contradicts our analyses nor raises any significant issue that would be relevant to our research purpose.

We transcribed the extracts using the Jeffersonian protocol (Silverman, 2006) and conducted the analysis in French (which was the language of the interview). We then translated into English both the extracts and the analysis with the aim of remaining as close as possible to

the spirit of the conversation. Previous research in linguistics has shown that transcriptions lead to multiple errors (O'Connell & Kowal, 2000) and that translation is subject to numerous problems, in particular gaps in interpretation (some anecdotal aspect in one language becoming very important in another, [see Traverso, 2002]). In order to limit such risks, we relied on a simplified protocol to translate the transcripts into English. Simplification was made with the aims of keeping as close as possible to the result of the analysis conducted on the French material and of meeting the research objectives. In this perspective, the transcripts (translated into English and reported in this paper) only contain the features that contribute to the discursive devices displayed by participants during the conversations, namely, overlap in talk (noted []); silence [noted (.) or (0.4)]; and loud voice and stress (via pitch or amplitude; noted Transcribers' comments are indicated by double parentheses [(())].

## DATA ANALYSIS

In order to analyze the discursive devices of the participants, and to appreciate their influence on participants' relationships over time, we relied on Discursive Psychology (DP), (Edwards, 1994, 1995; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 2004), a theory and method derived from Conversational Analysis (CA). DP (like CA) is suitable for investigating talk-in-interaction because it considers that talk is a medium for social action, in that "the analysis of discourse becomes the analysis of what people do" (Potter, 2004: 201). Rather than explaining people's talk by inferring their underlying beliefs, values, states of mind, or implicit goals, DP describes what people are actually doing when talking, for it is through these actions that people fabricate the context of their interactions and display mutual understanding (or misunderstanding).

Another reason why DP is suitable for analyzing talk-in-interaction is that DP is reluctant to embrace the classical micro-macro distinction, on the grounds that social realities and interactions between people are constituted through talk-in-interaction. Institutions (and consequently organizations), exemplified by asymmetrical relationships, prototypical descriptions, or the constraint of people's actions, are envisioned as situated constructions that are made up, attended to, and made relevant by participants during their conversations through their conversational practices (Potter, 2004): "Context' and identity have to be treated as inherently locally produced, incrementally developed and, by extension, as transformable at any moment. [...] Analysts who wish to depict the distinctively 'institutional' character of some stretch of talk must [...] demonstrate that the participants constructed their conduct over its course—turn by responsive turn—so as progressively to constitute (...) the occasion of their talk, together with their own roles in it, as having some institutional character" (Drew & Heritage, 1992: 21, in Silverman, 2006: 221). By extension, DP prefers to analyze naturally occurring talk as the locus of the social construction of institutions and interactions. This approach is consistent with prior communication studies on authority, in particular Communicative Constitution of Organization research which considers that authority has both to be "presented" and negotiated by participants during their interactions (see Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Brummans et al., 2014).

DP pays particular attention to the discursive devices participants rely on to position themselves favorably and to construct asymmetries in a conversation. Participants seek to perform particular communicative practices (i.e. blaming, apologizing, etc.) and to produce an effect on

others during conversations (Edwards, 1994, 1995) through a variety of discursive devices such as linguistic styles (e.g. emphasis, mitigation), the specific use of words and phrases (e.g. the use of “would” by suspects during police interrogation, [Edwards, 2006]), tropes (e.g. metaphors), figures of speech (e.g. rhetorical contrast; attribution, Edwards & Potter, 1992), etc. Following Whittle and Mueller (2011: 114), we contend that discursive devices are part of the everyday methods through which participants in a conversation deal with power struggles. By bringing the discursive struggle to the forefront, DP appears as an adequate approach to gaining a deeper understanding of the enactment of authority and its effects on power relationships during conversation. We follow DP’s analytical commitments in order to analyze the three chosen extracts of conversations that took place between the managers and Renault executives.

We conducted a turn-by-turn analysis of the three extracts in order to understand how the executives and the managers relied on discursive devices and in this way performed authority. According to DP and CA, a person’s turn of talk is usually based on and displays the person’s interpretation of the previous turn of talk made by someone else (Potter, 1996). Through this detailed, turn-by-turn analysis, we can identify what the managers, through their reactions, accepted/rejected from the executives, and so how they interpret the executives’ talk, and how the executives react to these managers’ turns. Taking into account the managers’ reactions to the executives’ talks and *vice versa* allowed us to see how authority is dynamically accomplished and gives rise to different forms of power relationships.

To the best of our knowledge, there is no exhaustive list of discursive devices. The huge number of potential devices would render the task difficult, if not impossible, and importantly, DP analysis does not aim at identifying these devices as such, but rather at investigating how they are variously used and interpreted by participants. When analyzing discursive devices, then, the researcher should not code the linguistic tools used by participants, but should orient his efforts towards understanding how the interlocutor reacts to it; a reaction that is taken as a clue towards its interpretation (see Edwards, 1994, 1995; Silverman, 2006 for more details).

Following past research (e.g. Edwards, 1994, 1995; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Leo, 2008; Potter & Wetherwell, 1987; Whittle & Mueller, 2011), we focused on discursive devices that were either found in three (e.g. vagueness, repetition, rhetorical contrast) or two conversations (e.g. identity ascription), or present repeatedly in one interview (e.g. factive allusion, evidence ploy for instance). This helped us to detail the pattern of devices in each conversation, then identify both similarities and differences between them so as to characterize the dynamics of power relationships. By no means do we pretend that this analysis identifies all devices present in the three interviews. Although it does not include all the details and intricacies of the participants’ behaviors, we contend that our fine-grained analysis of the discursive practices of the executives and the managers permits us to identify different patterns of devices and characterize in some depth how authority is enacted in superior/subordinate conversations. In the following sections, an analysis of the chosen extracts is presented.

## ENACTING AUTHORITY THROUGH DISCURSIVE DEVICES: AN ANALYSIS OF THREE CONVERSATION EXTRACTS.

FIRST CONVERSATION EXTRACT BETWEEN CHRISTIAN HUSSON AND MICHEL TENENBAUM

The exchange that is reproduced in Table 1 is extracted from the beginning of the conversation between Husson (CH) and Tenenbaum (MT).

*((knocking at the door))*

1. CH: yes hello Matthieu
2. *((unclear words from MT ))*
3. MT: how are you
4. CH: take a seat (.5) it's the time of year where we wish people happy new year
5. MT: happy new year
6. CH: well I'm going to wish you er from now on not to make the wrong choices
7. MT: yeah
8. CH: because to be completely straightforward with you er we know that you committed serious
9. serious acts (.) er against the Renault code of ethics *((seats squeaking))* and constituting er legal
10. breaches to be completely transparent *((seats squeaking))* with you at the same time er your
11. partners are being met with in er nearby offices (.) with the same concerns against them (.) so
12. (.) either you play it er
13. MT: hey I just don't see what you're talking [about
14. CH: [yes so either you play it like in Commissaire
15. Moulin the suspect er who denies everything (.) or you get down er you show
16. more judgment (.) er the acts in question er we know it's about corruption we know we know
17. it's it's about er foreign competitors and er (.) probably an organized group (.) and and and and
18. so er it's it's very serious
19. MT: but er
20. CH: you you'll get out of here later with er a suspension
21. MT: but you have to explain or else what this is all [about
22. CH: [you you'll get out here with a conservatory
23. suspension er and er you'll be er you'll be er called in er for an an an interview with Jean-Yves
24. Coudriou on 11 January for er most certainly er a dismissal procedure
25. *((MT: Wait... —unclear))*
26. CH: and and and and so and so er you you have so you have two options well I I can see what
27. what you do either you deny it all and then we get into er into er into a hard er a hard
28. road (.) either you you er show more judgment and er it it gets to a resignation er er let's talk

29. let's talk more like business it's the compliance officer *((in English))* who's in front of you
30. MT: yes
31. CH: and and and and so er I'm not a judge but er I'll say things in a er straightforward way er
32. if you deny it all (.) this is what is going to happen er we are going to launch a serious procedure
33. (.) a criminal procedure
34. MT: mhmh
35. CH er and and with er most certainly serious consequences for you because the the the facts
36. against you as well as against your partners er (.) they imply issues of national security (.) they
37. imply er issues of business intelligence (.) and and incidentally er er to tell you quite honestly
38. er it's likely that in your case the company will react in inverse proportion to the high hopes
39. that your hierarchy placed in you and the compliance officer *((in English))* that I am er er will
40. let your hierarchy and (.) er go *((MT seems to try to speak))* er go all the way all the way with
41. this disappointment that is in inverse proportion to the high hopes that we placed in you
42. anyway so this is the hard way then the hard way it will very certainly come with er er er some
43. encouragements from er the Quai d'Orsay *((French Ministry of Foreign Affairs))* from Bercy
44. *((French Ministry of the Economy))* because it's it's it's it's obviously a matter of corruption
45. and offshore accounts (.) and and and then then it gets very serious
46. MT: but er
47. CH: which means that we'll call Tracfin *((special police unit for tracking financial crime))* into
48. this and and and and the judge and the judge will get into this and possibly take you into custody
49. well the big stuff that's the hard way if of course you play it Commissaire Moulin with me and
50. you deny it all
51. MT: but I don't see what I
52. CH: yes yes you see Matthieu
53. MT: no no
54. CH: we know (.) [we know
55. MT: [but you know what
56. CH: you're guilty [don't waste your time
57. MT: [but I didn't
58. CH: no you didn't *((unclear))* it's only normal that you play it
59. MT: no [I don't play it
60. CH: [you play it like the suspect (.) the suspect (.) the suspect (.) with Commissaire
61. Moulin who denies it all (.) it's it's only normal
62. MT: no I don't play it er
63. CH: I tell you that
64. MT: no
65. CH: Matthieu Matthieu we know *((very calm))*
66. MT: but you know what
67. CH: we know

68. MT: but I don't understand what you can know er so I'm positive the hard way you can er check
69. whatever you
70. CH: it's done
71. MT: and so but er on my accounts you found something
72. CH: we know
73. MT: but you know what
74. CH: between now and 11 January you're going to think hard
75. MT: but I'm going to think super hard but I don't but what is it you're talking about
76. CH: we're talking about acts of corruption for leaking to foreign interests
77. MT: but [you're out of your mind
78. CH: [business secrets
79. MT: but you're out of your mind
80. CH: yes yes yes we're quite fine
81. MT: but
82. CH: [Matthieu
83. MT: [but then you just don't know who I am
84. CH: Matthieu (.) Matthieu (.) Matthieu (*very calm*)
85. MT: but Christian
86. CH: don't play it to me [this way
87. MT: [nah but it's not about playing it
88. CH: if you have if you have if you have as I think you have er if you still have as I think you
89. have er er some judgment (.) even some panache er you take responsibility for what you've
90. done and you think hard between now and 11 January
91. MT: but I can't see what I'm going to think more from [er
92. CH: [well
93. MT: between now and 11 January

In the first turns (l. 1 to l. 12) it is noticeable that CH does not answer MT's casual words of greeting and uses the New Year felicitation to underline the stakes of the interview (l.6 "from now on not to make the wrong choices"), without detailing what exactly is at stake. MT's invitation to pursue (l.7 "yeah") is followed by an accusation formulated in vague, generic terms (l.9 (l.8-9 "you committed serious serious acts (.) er against the Renault code of ethics", l.10 "legal breaches"). Vagueness is a rhetorical device that provides the essential elements on which to found an inference while constituting a barrier to easy undermining (Edwards & Potter, 1992: 162). Conversely, providing vivid detail not only indicates the speaker's particular skills or experience, but it also exposes the speaker to contradiction.

By referring to the code of ethics of the organization and to the law, CH makes the organization and justice present and indicates that the charge is substantiated. When he further stresses the gravity of the accusation, which is also conveyed by the phrase "we know" (l.8), that implies that Renault does have evidence pointing to misconduct, CH not only enacts his right to judge the manager's conduct but also to say what the organization knows. He then insists on his transparent attitude (l.8 "to be completely straightforward with you"; l.10 "to be completely transparent with you")—a discursive device known as *reflexive conceptualization* whereby the speaker reflects on his own (or another's) talk to orient the hearer's interpretation of his (or another's) talk (Auburn, 2005: 701). He then reveals that other accomplices are being interviewed at the same time

(l.10-11 “your partners are being met with in er nearby offices (.) with the same concerns against them”), thereby providing proof of his sincerity and demonstrating his right to say what the organization is doing.

In this rather long turn (l. 1 to l.10), CH combines four discursive devices at least, in order to formulate the accusation: *Use of institutional terms*, *vagueness*, *reflexive conceptualization* on his transparent talk, and *reference to evidence*—a device known as evidence ploy (Leo, 2008). These four sets of discursive devices would be used repeatedly in the remaining part of the extract.

In the following turns (l.13, 19, 21, 25), MT *denies* that he has done anything wrong and expresses surprise (l.13 “hey”; l.19 “but er”, l.21 “but”) and incomprehension with a calm tone (l.13 “I just don’t see what you’re talking [about]”, l.21 “you have to explain or else what this is all [about]”), thereby inviting CH to detail the accusation. *Denial* belongs to the widely used and highly conventional set of rhetorical devices whereby people try to account for their acts such as excuses, justifications or apologies (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: Chapter 4). In denying his having committed an offense and inviting CH to explain what this is all about, MT does not contest the legitimacy of CH’s speaking in the name of the organization, giving him information about the case and accusing him, thereby implicitly recognizing his rights to do so as attached to his authority position.

CH does not allow MT the opportunity to detail his account and immediately *interrupts* him (l.14; 22) and gives an interpretation of MT’s surprise as a denial tactic (l.14-15 “yes so either you play it like in Commissaire Moulin the suspect er who denies everything (.).”). Here, CH uses *reflexive conceptualization* to qualify MT’s attitude and shows that he is not fooled. The reference to *Commissaire Moulin*—a famous detective series which ran from 1976 to 2008 on the main French TV channel—and the use of the familiar expression “you play” creates a *rhetorical contrast*, a device that points towards the difference in moral status of the speakers (see Whittle & Mueller, 2011: 122). While, in CH’s words, his own attitude is that of transparency and earnestness, MT’s answer is constructed as deception and childishness. CH persists with that device when he contrasts MT’s denial with realism (l.15 “you get down”) and discernment (l. 15 “you show more judgment”). Through these two devices, CH exercises his right to express a negative judgment on MT’s actual behavior (see Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009).

When he then details the charge (l.16 “the acts in question”, “it’s about corruption”), he eventually answers MT’s call for an explanation, but above all he presses him not to continue to deny the tacit accusation. This pressure is conveyed through a combined set of devices: The repeated use of the phrase “we know” (l.16) associates *repetition* with the *evidence ploy*, whereby *institutional* expressions (legal terms: l.16 “corruption”, l.17 “foreign competitors’ interests”, l.17 “organized group”) are combined with *vague* and *emphatic* terms (i.e. l.18, “very serious”) to qualify the accusation.

Pressure is maintained in the next turns. CH goes on with enumerating the events to come (l.20 “you you’ll get out of here later with er a suspension”; l.23-24 “you’ll be er called in er for an an an interview with Jean-Yves Coudriou on 11 January for er most certainly er a dismissal procedure”). The use of the future tense and the reference to legal acts make these utterances sound like *sentencing*. The enactment of authority not only means appraising the subordinate’s past and actual behavior, but also condemning him. Then CH again uses *reflexive conceptualization* to simultaneously qualify his own behavior (“I can see”) and MT’s behavior (l. 26-27 “well I I can see what what you do either either you deny it”), and in

doing so he creates a *contrast* between both behaviors. He also demonstrates his awareness of MT's supposed tactic by mentioning again the alternative courses of action open to MT (l.27-28), and then he details the consequences if he denies the accusations.

In the same turn (l. 26-29), after making MT's options explicit, CH qualifies the nature of the conversation in a novel way, more like negotiation (l.28-29 "let's talk let's talk more like business"). For the first time he provides a definition of his own official role in the conversation (l.29 "it's the compliance officer who's in front of you"). Here he uses *identity ascription* (Antaki, 1998), *institutional reference* and *reflexive conceptualization* to make his status present during the conversation. The reference to the compliance officer also falls into the *category entitlements* device, through which specific categories of people are supposed to have particular knowledge and skills (Edwards & Potter, 1992: 160). The combination of these devices has some effect, in that MT stops protesting and just nods (l. 30). Again MT recognizes CH's right to speak in the name of the organization, to formulate an accusation and a sentence—although, ironically, CH mentioned that "he is not a judge" (l. 31).

From lines 31 to 47, in *institutional, legal* terms, CH accumulates details about the consequences of MT's choice to follow the denial option. CH relies on discursive devices already used at the beginning of the extract. In particular he combines *reflexive conceptualization* (l.31 "I'll say things in a er straightforward way", l.37 "to tell you quite honestly") and *identity ascription* (l.31 "I'm not a judge", l.39 "the compliance officer that I am") to convey legitimacy and authenticity. Then he describes in vague, general terms the charge against MT through the use of *legal expressions* (l.36 "issues of national security", l.37 "issues of business intelligence (.)", l. 44-45 "corruption", "off-shore accounts", l.48 "the judge", "custody") and references to state and police institutions (l.43 "from er the Quai d'Orsay from Bercy", l.47 "Tracfin"). Speaking in the name of the organization again, he also constructs *rhetorical contrast* when mentioning the reactions of the hierarchy, in order to underline how they will be disappointed (l.38-39 "the company will react in inverse proportion to the high hopes that your hierarchy placed in you"). This contrast is reinforced through *repetition* (l.41 "this disappointment that is in inverse proportion to the high hopes that we placed in you"), *identity ascription, category entitlement* (l.39 "the compliance officer"), and *emphatic* expressions and tone (l.40 "go all the way all the way", l.42 "this is the hard way then the hard way", l.49 "the big stuff"). In this very long turn, CH relies on a complex set of discursive devices to put pressure on MT through enacting rights to accuse and sentence him in the name of the organization.

In the following exchanges (from lines 51 to 73), CH combines *evidence ploys* and pressure through *repetition, not answering* and *factive allusion*. When MT denies that he knows what CH is talking about (l.51, 53, 75), that he has done something (l.57), that he is playing the suspect (l.59, 62), when he offers transparency about his accounts, (l.68-69, 71), and tries to *interrupt* CH (l. 55, 57, 59), MT never contests CH's right to accuse him and speak in the name of the organization. What he denies is the accusation itself, not CH's rights to do it.

Facing these reactions, CH reiterates "we know" and turning down his offer (l.70 "it's done"). Again, he qualifies MT's denial as a well-known tactic (l. 58, 60-61). When MT asks what they know (l.55, 66, 68), CH *does not answer* and repeats "we know" (l.54, 65, 67, 72), again speaking in the name of the organization.

He then *orders* MT to think hard (l.74) about it, an order that MT first accepts (l.75), indicating that he complies with the pressure exerted by CH,

but then he rejects the proposed option (l.75 “but what is it you’re talking about?”), again contesting the accusation, not CH’s right to formulate it or to order him to “think hard”. CH answers his questions through the use of *institutional, legal terms again* (l.76 “about acts of corruption for leaking to foreign interests”). MT’s repeated familiar expression (l.77, 79 “you’re out of your mind”) is taken as an expression of indignation which CH then tries to calm down through repeating his first name in a calm manner (l.84 “Matthieu (.) Matthieu (.) Matthieu ((very calm))” and asking him to stop playing (l. 86 “don’t play it to me [this way]”). Such a calm and repetitious exchange appears like parent-child interaction, thus again constructing MT’s behavior as childish. When MT again denies he is playing (l.87), he does not rebel against CH’s right to treat him and judge him like that; he just contests he is playing. CH uses *rhetorical contrast* and *reflexive conceptualization* (l. 88-89 “if you still have as I think you have er er some judgment (.) even some panache”) to push MT towards CH’s preferred option. Here CH contrasts his proposed stance against MT (judgment and panache) with the childish behavior just displayed by MT with his increasingly more violent but still vain denials. He again presses him to think hard, an invitation that is rejected by MT (l.91).

Table 1 summarizes the dynamics of discursive devices used by the executive and the manager during their encounters, characterizes the power relationship in terms of opposition (through denial) or alignment (through information request or recognition of the seriousness of the case) and underlines, when relevant, its meaning for the enactment of authority relationship (see Tables 2 and 3 for the analysis of the second and third conversation extracts). As demonstrated in our analysis, compliance, that is confession, was not observed.

To sum up, the conversation is highly dominated by CH, who skillfully combines various discursive devices (institutional references, identity ascription, and rhetorical contrast, in particular) to accuse and sentence MT in the name of the organization. He also resorts to other rhetorical devices to underline the seriousness of the case (in particular *vagueness, emphatic devices*—the use of *emphatic expressions* or *prosody*) and to stop him from defending himself or finding out more information about the case (in particular *not answering, repetition, rhetorical contrast, identity ascription, reflexive conceptualization, ordering, and sentencing*). This set of discursive devices is oriented *towards attacking and putting pressure on*, but MT resists these attacks through consistently *denying* he knows or has done something reprehensible. In so doing he contests that he has committed an offense but never questions or opposes CH’s right to accuse or condemn him, thereby implicitly recognizing his authority. CH also takes every attempt by MT to deny or request more information as an opportunity to reaffirm that “they know” and that MT’s attitude is that of a childish or a guilty person, so that MT’s opposition appears as a platform on which to re-enact authority. In sum, MT’s resistance and contest of the accusation paradoxically recognize and enable CH to exercise his authority. CH and MT accomplish a highly confrontational power relation which both validates and give support for the enactment of authority.

CH	MT	Power Relationship and consequence for authority enactment
Greetings (l. 1, 4.)	Greetings (l. 5)	
Not answering, accusation in <u>vague terms</u> , <u>institutional references</u> , reflexive	<u>Denial</u> that he committed an offense	Opposition Acceptance of CH's right to speak in
Interruption, not answering, reflexive conceptualization on MI response,	Ask for explanation* (l. 21)	Opposition & Tentative alignment
Pressure through sentencing, <u>institutional references</u> , reflexive conceptualization and	Tentative <u>interruption</u> (l.25)	Opposition
Identity ascription about his own role and category entitlement, <u>institutional</u>	Acknowledgment that he understands* (l. 30,	Alignment Acceptance of CH's right to define the
<u>Institutional references</u> , identity ascription, reflexive conceptualization, <u>rhetorical</u>	Tentative <u>interruption</u> (l. 46)	Opposition
Evidence ploys, not answering, <u>repetition</u> , reflexive conceptualization (l. 46-50, 52,	<u>Denial</u> (l. 51, 53, 57, 59, 62, 68-69)	Opposition Acceptance of CH's right to formulate
Sentencing (l. 70)	Information request* (l. 71)	Opposition Acceptance of CH's right to speak in
Not answering, evidence ploy (l. 72)	Information request* (l. 71)	Opposition Acceptance of CH's right to speak in
Not answering, order (l. 74)	Acceptance* then <u>denial</u> (l. 75)	Alignment then opposition Acceptance of CH's right to give orders,
<u>Institutional references</u> (l. 76)	<u>Denial</u> , <u>rhetorical contrast</u> (l. 77)	Opposition Acceptance of CH's right to formulate
Use of a calm tone, <u>rhetorical contrast</u> , reflexive conceptualization (l. 80, 82, 84,	Tentative <u>interruption</u> (l. 81, 85), <u>denial</u>	Opposition Acceptance of CH's right to judge MT's

Asterisk\* signals a communicative practice or move not considered as a discursive device.

Table 1 - Interplay between discursive devices, power relationships and authority enactment during the CH/MT conversation<sup>1</sup>

1. Underlining signals common discursive devices among the executives or the managers in the three interviews.

SECOND CONVERSATION EXTRACT BETWEEN J.-Y. COUDRIOU AND  
M. BALTHAZARD

12. JYC: OK Michel I wanted to see you er because we have rather annoying things
13. relating to you
14. MB: mhmh
15. JYC: rather serious things
16. MB: go ahead I'm listening
17. JYC: close to corruption
18. MB: whoa why
19. JYC: close to er to Renault's interests
20. MB: go ahead carry on yes
21. JYC: er (3.)
22. MB: go ahead I'm listening I'm listening
23. JYC: OK (.) so (.5) all this (.) is quite painful (5.) er (4.) so we heard about serious things
24. MB: mhmh
25. JYC: close to corruption
26. MB: mhmh
27. JYC: with money transfers involving er (.) involving you
28. MB: yes go ahead I'm listening ((*unclear*))
29. JYC: huh er there's a whole system all organized (.) there are other people who at the
30. present time and hour are being interviewed
31. MB: go ahead I'm listening yes ((*MB sniffs*))
32. JYC: er these issues are about the about Renault's interests
33. MB: mhmh
34. JYC: Renault and also links with foreign interests
35. MB: mhmh
36. JYC: and so er (.) that's why we're having this interview today
37. MB: mhmh
38. JYC: to hear you (.5) to ask you if you have things to tell us (2.) what might have happened
39. BM: I know nothing whatsoever about what you're talking about (.5) honestly I really don't
40. know what it's all about (3.) not a clue (.)
41. JYC: OK (.) Michel you have to know (.) huh (.) of course (.) er you have to you you can
42. guess that if I'm here (.) and if we have this kind of talk with you (.) er we're not I don't just
43. happen to be here huh this is not
44. MB: [yes of course I can guess ((*unclear*))
45. JYC: [This is not something we made up overnight you know me I too I too am serious er if
46. we organized this all (.) if we're here (.) er this is because things happened er things that
47. matter (.) we're not playing a game
48. MB: sure no I can guess
49. JYC: so today this is an informal interview
50. MB: no but just try to explain because honestly I don't see what this is about
51. JYC: no no you can see you can see quite well Michel
52. MB: [but no
53. JYC: [this is an interview Michel this is an informal interview er this interview is going to

54. have consequences (.) quite obviously
55. MB: yes of course [well yes yes yes of course yes
56. JYC: [we're ready to listen to you (.) er other people are involved
57. MB: things about money you say (8.)
58. JYC: corruption you know what corruption is
59. MB: yes I can see what corruption is I can see I picture er (.) no honestly I don't see (.5)
60. really can't see
61. JYC: OK er
62. MB: well it bothers me quite a lot of course this is serious I I I look bloody stupid but don't know what it's all about
63. JYC: OK er [still you have to think about it uh
64. MB: [corruption (1.) corruption ((as if he is talking to himself))
65. JYC: about what you would like to tell us or not Michel
66. MB: but I really can't see (.) how old how recent it's (5.)
67. JYC: Michel [things are serious
68. MB: [((unclear)) but I'm well aware that things are serious I'm not
69. JYC: because today's interview
70. MB: I'm a serious person
71. JYC: I know this so am I you can guess I'm not having fun doing this we still have a er you
72. still have a story with Renault (.) you're one of Renault's biggest names well (.) er [today
73. MB: [((unclear))
74. JYC: Michel today er this is an informal interview (.) er the next step after today's interview
75. it's a suspension (.5)
76. MB: yes OK but
77. JYC: meaning that today you leave the company (.) right right away
78. MB: yes OK but
79. JYC: meaning that this is an interview for a suspension (.) meaning that you leave
80. the the company right away (.) meaning that in the legal process (.) today I hand you a letter
81. (.) in which I tell you that you're leaving the company (.) and I call you in the legally defined
82. time (.) for an official (.) interview (.) possibly leading to a dismissal ((in the whole turn JYC
83. gives rhythm to his speech)) (.) meaning that [after this
84. MB: [I get it but I get it but
85. JYC: meaning that after this we (.) we can go to a criminal court (.) to file a complaint
86. MB: yes I get it [yes
87. JYC: [yes that's something criminal you see what it is meaning you meaning your
88. family meaning er your career is finished, over (.) meaning that at the very moment that we
89. leave this office you leave Renault Michel
90. MB: honestly I don't understand really I don't see what I've done but honestly I don't see you
91. you can you tell me a little more I really don't have a clue

93. JYC: it's up to you to tell me a little more to tell us to tell the company
94. MB: but I didn't do anything well I I'm not aware of having done something this is the
95. terrible thing (.) this I can't understand (3.) I can't understand (1.) no I don't know what
96. honestly I know what corruption is what have I messed with (1.) corruption (1.) with a
97. foreign power you said (1.) I don't get it I don't get it (.) no honestly I don't know what it's
98. all about I don't have a clue I I just don't (.)
99. JYC: think Michel think (.) think take your time we have time to talk (19.)
100. MB: no I can't see anything at all

After New Year greetings (not reported above), Coudriou (JYC) introduces in rather *vague* and *generic* terms the reason for the interview (l.12-13 "I wanted to see you er because we have rather annoying things relating to you", l.15 "rather serious things", l.17 "close to corruption", l.19 "close to er to Renault's interests"). Contrasting with Husson, JYC does not directly accuse Balthazard (MB) of having committed an offense against Renault. He also *mitigates* the expression used (l.12 "rather annoying", l.15 "rather serious things") and waits until MB invites him to persist (l.16 "go ahead I'm listening", l.20 "go ahead carry on yes", l.22 "go ahead I'm listening I'm listening", l.24 "mhmh") to explain the reason for the encounter. The discursive devices used here—*mitigation*, *vagueness*, and *pauses*—are taken as expressions of discomfort by MB, who then encourages JYC to speak (l.16, 20, 22 and 24), even if he appears quite surprised (l.18 "whoa why") and anxious to hear to what this all pertains (repetition, e.g. l.22 "go ahead I'm listening I'm listening"). Through this encouragement, MB recognizes JYC's right to speak in the name of the organization and its interests. Whether simulated or not, JYC's unease is confirmed at l.23 when he takes more or less *lengthy pauses* and, through *reflexive conceptualization*, qualifies what he has to say is painful (l.23 "OK (.) so (.) all this (.) is quite painful (5.) er (4.)"), and then *repeats* that it deals with "serious things" (l.23) "close to corruption" (l.25). In the following turns, just like CH did with MT, JYC qualifies the case with *vague*, *generic* and *institutional* expressions (l.25 "corruption", l.32 "Renault's interests", l.34 "foreign interests") and explains that other people are being interviewed at the same time (l.29), thereby confirming his prerogative to deliver important information. He again takes lengthy pauses, leading MB to keep encouraging him to talk (l.31 "go ahead I'm listening yes", l.33, 35, 37 "mhmh"). This involvement is encouraged at l.36 and 38 when, after taking more lengthy pauses again, JYC *invites* MB to speak (l.38 "to hear you (.)5) to ask you if you have things to tell us (2.)").

MB starts a course of vigorous *denial* (using *repetition*, an *emphatic* tone and expressions (l.39 "I know nothing whatsoever," "honestly I really don't know"), thereby denying he has committed any offense, but he does not contest JYC's right to investigate and interrogate him in the name of Renault. JYC attacks his denial (l.41 "OK (.) Michel you have to know (.) huh (.) of course (.)"). Here JYC uses *factive allusion* (Wodak, 2007: 213), a discursive device through which the speaker implies and addresses certain presuppositions, namely that certain facts or actions have taken place. Through this device, he infers not only that MB is lying but also that he has committed the offense (he has to know, because he has committed

it). *Tone emphasis*, *micro-pauses* again, and *repetition* (l.41 "you have to [...] you have to") underline the seriousness of the accusation.

The interview is then qualified as an institutional talk through both *reflexive conceptualization* and *category entitlement* (the "we" on l.42 "if we have this kind of talk with you"). When JYC refers to his own institutional status (l.42-43 "I don't just happen to be here"), he also constructs *rhetorical contrast* between what could be taken as a casual encounter between two high-ranked members of the same company (something just happening) and this important, high-stakes interview.

While MB nods, accepting both JYC's definition of the situation and his right to do it (l.44), JYC interrupts him and combines *identity ascription*, *category entitlement*, *reflexive conceptualization* (l.45-46 "[This is not something we made up overnight you know me I too I too am serious"), *tone emphasis*, and *rhetorical contrast* (l.47 "we're not playing a game", echoing the "I don't just happen to be here," l.42-43) to communicate his authority position and by the same token the seriousness of the case. Facing such insistence, MB nods (l.48), again accepting JYC's definition of the situation and rights. Interestingly, after having constructed contrast between a casual conversation and this high-stakes interview, JYC insists that the interview is informal (l.49). By *alluding* to the possibility of a formal interview to come, he constructs a second contrast between the informal conversation they are having and a formal interview, thus suggesting that the current conversation is an opportunity that MB should seize for his own good.

When MB *denies* the charge again (l.50) and invites JYC to provide more details, he recognizes JYC's having information about the case and, again, his right to speak in the name of Renault. JYC attacks him through the same *factive allusion* he previously used (l.51 "no no you can see you can see quite well"). When MB denies again (l.52 "[but no]"), JYC does not let him speak. By *repeating* that this is an informal interview (l.53) and using *vague terms*, he underlines the weighty implications of the procedure (l.53-54 "this interview is going to have consequences (.) quite obviously") and *alludes* to the magnitude of the case both indirectly (when mentioning the consequences of the interview, l.54) and directly (when mentioning that other people are involved [l.56]). MB stops denying, confirms that he understands (l.55, repeating "yes of course"), and signals that he is now thinking hard in the direction suggested by JYC (l.57 "things about money you say"). He then makes a lengthy pause (8 sec.), suggesting some hard thinking, and complying with JYC's order—and so recognizing his right to interrogate him.

MB's reactions have little effect on JYC, who *interrupts* this silent reflexion with a rhetorical question that resembles what Stokoe and Edwards (2008) call *silly questions* (l.58 "corruption you know what corruption is"). Widely used in police interrogation, such questions, because they call for an obvious answer in the situation at hand, are effective means of first producing alignment between the suspect and the police interrogator and then recording the suspect's version of his state of mind (in particular his degree of intentionality) when committing the incriminated actions. Here, MB escapes the stratagem: he obediently acknowledges that he knows what corruption is (l.59 "yes I can see what corruption is I can see I picture er (.)"); then he insists that he himself has nothing to do with corruption, by combining *emphasis* with *reflexive conceptualization* (l.59-60 "no honestly I don't see (.5) I really can't see") and *denial*.

In the following turns (l. 61 to 66), while JYC seems to hesitate (l.61, 65 "OK er"), MB uses *reflexive conceptualization* and *rhetorical contrast* (l.

62 “I look bloody stupid”) to underline his innocence. He also outlines that he takes the accusation seriously both directly (l.62 “it bothers me quite a lot of course this is serious”) and indicating that he thinks about it through repeating “corruption” as if talking to himself (l.65).

JYC again makes a *factive allusion* to his implication in the case (l.64 “still”; l.66 “about what you would like to tell us or not”). MB again *denies* this and insists that he cannot understand what JYC is talking about, through *emphasis* and *asking questions* about the case (l.67). While denying he has done something prejudicial, he again recognizes JYC’s authority to investigate his past behavior.

By calling MB by his first name and qualifying the case as serious (l. 68 “Michel [things are serious]”), JYC *alludes* to MB’s question and denial and conveys the idea that his attitude is infantile. MB counters this attack, by *emphasizing* that he understands how serious the case is (l.69) and by using *identity ascription* (l.71 “I’m a serious person”), again accepting JYC’s definition of the situation and right to define it. JYC counters this move by using the same *identity ascription* for himself (l.72 “I know this so am I”) and then through *alluding* to MB’s institutional position and his reputation in Renault (l.72-73 “you still have a story with Renault (.) you’re one of Renault’s biggest names”); two devices through which he defines MB’s position and stake in the affair.

In the next turns (from l.75 to 90), JYC details the procedure to come and its consequences for MB, enacting a definition of the present and future definition of the situation. He interrupts MB each time the latter attempts to defend himself (l.85 and 87). He relies on discursive devices previously used: *Short or longer* pauses in talk (l.76 “it’s a suspension (.5)”, l.80 to 84 and l. 86: use of small pauses and rhythmic speech), *institutional-legal references* (l.76 “it’s a suspension”, l.81. “legal process”, l.86 “go to a criminal court (.) to file a complaint”, l.83 “an official (.) interview”), *repetitions* (l.80 to 89 “meaning”), *rhetorical emphasis through* an insistent tone (l.86 “meaning that after this we (.) we can go to a criminal court (.) to file a complaint”), and an *emphatic* figure of speech (l. 89-90 “at the very moment that we leave this office you leave Renault Michel”). The accuracy in this last sentence *contrasts* with the vagueness of the accusation. Altogether, these combined devices put a great deal of pressure on MB through dramatizing the situation at hand and its consequences.

In the last turns (l. 91, 94-98), MB, reiterates his incomprehension (l. 91) and asks for more information, again accepting the definition of the situation given and JYC’s having both information about the case and right to talk in the name of the organization. But JYC (l.93) returns this call back to him by repeating that it is up to MB to give him more information, thereby *alluding* again to his implication in committing the crime. This refusal, together with his insistence on the seriousness of the case, is followed by a rather long turn where MB, through *repetition* and *emphasis* (in voice or lexicon), insists that he has not done anything (l.94-98). MB also asks himself about what he did, as if envisaging that he could have done something (l.94 “well I’m not aware of having done something”, l.96 “what have I messed with (1.)”). Together with *repetitions* (l. 95 “I can’t understand (3.) I can’t understand (1.)”, l.97 “I don’t get it I don’t get it (.)” ), these *denials* express incomprehension and loss of self-control, while simultaneously signaling a cooperative stance and his acceptance of JYC’s authority. Inviting MB to calm down, JYC seems to take this expression as a sign of acceptance and panic (l.99 “think take your time we have time to

talk"). MB accepts this invitation and they both take an exceptionally long pause (19 sec.). However, the reflexive pause yields nothing but a reiterated denial (l.100 "no I can't see anything at all").

To sum up, the superiors JYC and CH combine similar discursive devices, in particular *institutional references*, *identity ascription*, *reflexive conceptualization*, *factive allusion*, and *rhetorical contrast* to enact their right to speak in the name of the organization and underline the *seriousness* of the case and of the interview. They also rely on different discursive tools. While in the first conversation, the superior CH is oriented towards accusing and sentencing MT and judging his behavior during the conversation—through the use of *evidence ploys*, *reflexive conceptualization* and *ordering* in particular, in this second conversation (see Table 5 for a synthesis), JYC is oriented towards defining the situation for MB and interrogating him. He then uses a set of devices that are oriented towards both pressure through *dramatization* and an *invitation to talk*: More or less lengthy *pauses* and *mitigation* that are taken as expressions of *discomfort and hesitation* at the beginning of the interview, then more *pauses*, plus *repetitions*, *factive allusions*, and, to a lesser extent, *silly questions*, which are taken by MB as expressing the gravity of the case and invitation to think and speak. While MT resists CH's pressure and continuously *denies* any offense, so that their interaction resembles trench warfare, MB uses *reflexive conceptualization* to qualify his own attitude as stupid and ignorant, thereby signaling that he progressively aligns with JYC's view, accepts both his right to define the situation and interrogate him, going as far as envisaging that he might have done something wrong. In sum, in this second conversation, the enactment of authority by JYC and MB shows an alternating of opposition where JYC's accusations are followed by MB's denial, and a sort of alignment where JYC's invitation to recognize the gravity of the case and allusions is followed by MB's acceptance and efforts to understand what he might have done wrong, an alternating that signals MB's acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation and interrogate him.

JYC	MB	Power relationship and consequence for authority enactment
<u>Use of vague</u> , generic terms, mitigation (l. 12, 13, 15, 17, 19)	Invitation to persist* (l. 16, 20, 22.)	Alignment Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation, as a legitimate source of information
Use of lengthy pauses, reflexive conceptualization, <u>repetition</u> , <u>vague</u> , <u>generic terms</u> (l. 23, 25, 27, 29-30, 32, 34)	Invitation to persist* (l. 24, 26, 28, 31, 33, 35)	Alignment Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation, as a legitimate source of information
Invitation to speak, <u>factive allusion</u> (l. 38)	<u>Denial</u> (l. 39, 40)	Opposition Acceptance of JYC's right to investigate and interrogate in the name of Renault
Tone emphasis, micro-pauses, <u>repetition</u> , reflexive conceptualization, category entitlement, <u>institutional reference</u> (l. 41-43)	Acknowledgment of the seriousness of the situation* (l. 44)	Alignment Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation

<u>Interruption</u> , identity ascription, reflexive conceptualization, tone emphasis, <u>rhetorical contrast</u> (l. 45-47)	Acknowledgment of the seriousness of the situation* (l. 48)	Alignment Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation
<u>Rhetorical contrast</u> (l. 49)	Explanation request*, <u>denial</u> (l. 50)	Opposition Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation
Attack on denial through <u>factive allusion</u> (l. 51)	<u>Denial</u> (l. 52)	Opposition
<u>Repetition</u> , <u>use of vague terms</u> , <u>factive allusion</u> , <u>ordering</u> (l. 53, 56)	Acknowledgment of the seriousness of the case* (l. 55, l. 57)	Alignment Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation, give him order
Silly question (l. 58)	Acceptance*, <u>denial</u> (l. 59-60)	Opposition
Acceptance, hesitation (l. 61)	Acknowledgment of the seriousness of the case*, reflexive conceptualization, <u>denial</u> (l. 62, 63)	Alignment and Opposition Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation
Order (l. 64, 65)	<u>Denial</u> (l. 67)	Opposition
Not answering, reflexive conceptualization, identity ascription (l. 70, 71-73)	Acknowledgement* (l. 69), reflexive conceptualization (l. 71)	Alignment Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation, to interrogate him
<u>Interruption</u> , micro-pauses, <u>institutional references</u> , <u>rhetorical emphasis</u> , <u>vagueness</u> (l. 75, 78, 80-90)	Acknowledgment and tentative information request* (l. 77, 79, 85, 91-92)	Alignment Acceptance of JYC's right to define the situation, as a legitimate source of information
Invitation to speak (l. 93)	<u>Denial</u> , <u>repetition</u> , lengthy pauses, <u>denial</u> (l. 95-98)	Opposition Acceptance of CH's right to investigate on the case and interrogate him
Order, lengthy pause (l. 99)	<u>Denial</u>	Opposition

Asterisk\* signals a communicative practice or move not considered as a discursive device.

Table 2 - Interplay between discursive devices, power relationships and authority enactment during the JYC/MB conversation<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Underlining signals common discursive devices among the executives or the managers in the three interviews.

As we shall see below, the third conversation develops a similar, even stronger, case of alignment.

THIRD CONVERSATION EXTRACT BETWEEN PATRICK PELATA AND  
BERNARD ROCHETTE

5. PP: same to you (2.) so guess what I I see you for er (1.) because you we found out that you
6. did some serious things (1.) ((PP clears his throat)) and it's rather annoying
7. BR: yeah
8. PP: yeah we found out this er er these last er these last few weeks we (.) er so it's it's
9. serious because it's er it's a legal matter (.)
10. BR: what
11. PP: yes (.) it's it's a matter of business intelligence too (.) for the benefit of er (.) for the
12. benefit of foreign interests (.) so it's er it's still very very annoying (1.) yeah I'm I'm amazed
13. that it's you who would do such a thing if you like
14. BR: nah nah but ((unclear)) I'm sorry but I (1.)
15. PP: there's er it's several people who did this huh (.) we have we have we know we know all
16. these things (.) it's right now there are (.) other interviews with other people who are
17. involved huh (.) Michel Balthazard being one (.) and others (3.) ((PP clears his throat)) (1.)
18. BR: I yes I I I take the blow I I ((unclear)) but I'm sorry I'm not er quite awake this morning
19. but I don't understand huh (1.)
20. PP: listen there's er there's er (.5) it's a case of corruption meaning that er a a foreign
21. company er (2.) gives you money (1.) in an account (.) and er in return for er things we'd like
22. to know precisely huh (.) that we picture a little (.) but that we didn't er we don't know in
23. details and we'd like to know
24. BR: a foreign company
25. PP: yeah (2.)
26. BR: I don't understand er honestly I don't understand (1.) er really er I well I for one this is
27. not what I thought I was coming for but er (.) ((PP clears his throat)) so then I don't
28. understand ((unclear)) really don't (1.) so wait I the foreign companies I may have been in in
29. contact with er by email (.) last year (.) er so it's a long time
30. PP: Michel Balthazard never asked you to give him plans or er (3.5)
31. BR: you're kidding
32. PP: I don't know (1.)
33. BR: wait er I so wait plans that we may have given perhaps for er ((unclear)) via er via er the
34. studies on the various ((unclear)) and the like er maybe we did things like that er except er
35. PP: no no no this is not
36. BR: [this is not
37. PP: [no no it's it's for payment that goes down to an account that you have and er
38. BR: that I have
39. PP: yes

40. BR: I never I frankly don't understand honestly well I there I'm totally er ((*chair rattling*))
41. totally er thrown off here (.5) really I could er really no honestly I don't understand (.) besides
42. I'm not someone who's looking for er this sort of ((*unclear*)) well you must have the
43. evidence the thing is I don't know this account ((*PP clears his throat*)) I don't have any idea
44. about this business (.) I cashed in my stock options three years ago er when ((*unclear*)) I
45. cashed them in at the right time (.) at the highest of the Renault stock I'm pleased with myself
46. apart from that er I can't see what this is all about er huh honestly I have er two accounts with
47. CIC ((*a French retail bank*)) er another one with the Caisse d'épargne ((*another French retail bank*))
48. *bank*) that's been closed for a year now er in Switzerland I don't know any ((*unclear*)) I no
49. honestly I can try to think about the stupid things I would have done out of er being naive or
50. lack of understanding or being careless but now then I (6.) I'm I'm
51. PP: listen there's a lot of money that's been put on that's been put on the table (.) and it
52. involves several people from Renault among which er Michel Balthazard and er (.) you and
53. and others after that and what we're trying to find out is er this is this is serious enough to
54. come down to er a suspension and er and er a ((*unclear*)) dismissal if you like huh
55. BR: I can understand that if it's serious that this might er be considered but I understand
56. neither the role I played in this nor (.) nor the very awareness that it exists well I (1.5) I'm a
57. bit confused to tell you the truth I'm telling you honestly huh because I don't can't defend
58. myself because I don't even know what this is all about so er (.) well unless I'm really totally
59. (.5) er unaware (8.) ((*unclear*)) (.) so the plans they're property er
60. PP: [well it has
61. BR: [they're [Renault's intellectual property
62. PP: [it has to do with the electric car
63. BR: the electric car
64. PP: yeah mhmh

As we also noted with JYC, Pelata (PP) does not directly accuse Rochette (BR) of having committed an offense. He introduces the case by using rather *vague* and *institutional* terms (1.5-6 "because you: we found out that you did some serious things (1.); 1.9 "it's serious because it's er it's a legal matter (.); 1.11-12 "it's a matter of business intelligence too (.) for the benefit of er (.) for the benefit of foreign interests (.)"), thereby exercising his right to speak in the name of the organization. While throat clearing, *hesitating* (e.g. 1.8 "we found this er er these last er these very last weeks we (.) er), and *repeating* (1.8-9 "we found this er er these last er these last few weeks we (.) er"), he tries to make clear that this is an important matter (1.8-9 "so it's it's serious because it's er it's a legal matter (.); 1.11-12 "yes (.) it's it's a matter of business intelligence too (.) for the

benefit of er (.) for the benefit of foreign interests (.)"). The seriousness of the case is further expressed through an *emphatic* style (l.12 "it's er it's still very very annoying"). PP also explains his discomfort as he refers to his surprise and *alludes* to both his past trust in BR and the fact that BR has committed the offense (l.13 "I'm amazed that it's you who would do such a thing if you like"). BR expresses surprise (l.10 "what") and denial (l.14 "nah nah"), and then he *apologizes* before quickly *interrupting* himself (l.14 "I'm sorry but I:

(1.)"), which is taken by PP as an invitation to persist. With additional *hesitation* and *repetitions* (l.15 "there's er it's several people"; l.20-21 "that er a a foreign company er (2.) gives you money (1.) in an account (.) and er in return for er things"), PP *delivers the key information* that other people are involved, in particular MB (l.17).

While PP's pause invites BR to talk (l.17), BR hesitates (l.18 "I yes I I I") and *apologizes* again for his reaction through *reflexive conceptualization*, which is taken by PP as an invitation to expatiate (l.18 "I'm sorry I'm not er quite awake this morning but I don't understand huh"). In so doing, he signals PP's right to speak in the name of the organization, as a legitimate source of information.

With *hesitation* (l.20. "listen there's er there's er (.5) it's a case of corruption"), PP *explains* that the matter pertains to corruption. In this turn, his discomfort is also expressed by *small pauses* and the fact that he defines what corruption means (l.20-21). He goes on by *alluding* to some information he has (l.22-23 "that we picture a little (.) but that we didn't er we don't know in details"), yet admitting that his knowledge is far from complete. When BR asks him to confirm that it deals with a foreign company (l.24), PP just nods (l.25), which is taken by BR as an opportunity to persist. BR denies he knows what the case is about (l.26. "I don't understand er honestly I don't understand (1.) er really er I well"), but then he mentions that he was in touch with foreign companies by email a year ago and then asks when the case happened. PP *does not answer* and *asks a question back*, *alluding* to the fact that he could have given plans to MB. BR *denies* this through *rhetorical contrast* (l.31 "you're kidding").

PP's response "I don't know" combines *mitigation of his own stake* in the accusation (see Silverman, 2006) and of his knowledge of the case. This passage contrasts with preceding turns and the two other conversations analyzed so far where the executives' discursive devices (e.g. *evidence ploys*, *factive allusion*) always enact that they had information about the case. This has positive effects: Though elaborating with difficulty (l.33 "wait er I so wait", "we may have given perhaps for er ((unclear)) via er via er the studies"), BR admits that plans might have been transmitted as part of the R&D process (l.33-34). In so doing, he aligns with PP and shows that he recognizes PP's right to investigate him.

Yet PP quickly *interrupts* him and redirects BR's reflection by insisting on the money side of the case (l.37 "[no no it's it's for payment that goes down to an account that you have and er]"). As compared to JYC and CH, PP *provides rather precise information* on what Renault is supposed to know about the case (and on what they don't know). BR's tone of surprise (l.38. "that I have") is a request to confirm the nature of his own involvement. Being a question and not a denial, it also suggests that he is willing to collaborate with PP and is ready to consider any kind of information, even the most unlikely to his eyes. Again, in so doing, he signals he accepts PP's right to investigate him.

Still, confronted with this accusation of corruption, in the next, long turn, BR *denies* he knows something through *repetition*, *hesitation*, and *reflexive conceptualization* (l.41-43 "I never I frankly don't understand

honestly well I there I'm totally er ((*chair rattling*)) totally er thrown off here (.5) really I could er really no honestly I don't understand (.) besides I'm not someone who's looking for er this sort of", l.43-44 "I don't know this account ((*PP clears his throat*)) I don't have any idea about this business"). Referring to the evidence Renault should have, he also acknowledges the gravity of the case. As PP remains silent, BR *goes on to detail* that he has received stock options and that he has two bank accounts, thereby confirming he is collaborating with PP. His cooperative stance is also displayed through *descriptions of his own disposition* and state of mind (l. 48-50 "I no honestly I can try to think about the stupid things I would have done out of er being naive or lack of understanding or being careless"), which demonstrates efforts at introspection/retrospection. In so doing, he also anticipates potential accusations in excusing himself for misbehaviors. He uses here *attributional discourse* (Edwards & Potter, 1992: Chapter 5), whereby he *denies volition* through apologizing for having possibly committed an offense, however unintentionally (l.49-50 "I would have done out of er being naive or lack of understanding or being careless").

In the next turn, PP insists on the magnitude of the matter at hand through *rhetorical emphasis* (l.51 "listen there's a lot of money that's been put") and reference to the *legal consequences* of the case (l.53-54 "this is serious enough to come down to er a suspension and er and er a ((*unclear*)) dismissal"). The description of these concrete consequences creates *rhetorical contrast* with the *vagueness* of the charge (l.52 "it involves several people from Renault among which er Michel Balthazard and er (.) you"), and BR once again expresses full agreement with PP's definition of the situation and acceptance of his authority to speak in the name of the organization. Yet he symmetrically reiterates his complete lack of knowledge (l.55-56 "I can understand that if it's serious that this might er be considered but I understand neither the role I played in this nor (.) nor the very awareness that it exists"). As in his previous turn, he uses *reflexive conceptualization* to underline how disturbed he is (l.56-57 "I'm a bit confused") and to account for the weakness of his defense (l.57-58 "I'm telling you honestly huh because I don't can't defend myself because I don't even know what this is all about so er (.)"). Again, leaving open the possibility of unintentional misconduct, he mentions that he might have done something wrong and excuses himself through *attributional discourse* (l.58-59 "well unless I'm really totally (.5) er unaware (8)."). At the end of this long turn, BR invites PP to tell him more, an invitation that PP accepts when he *gives information* about the electric car.

In brief, and as Table 3 shows, some discursive devices used by PP in this third conversation are similar to the one used by CH (first conversation) and JYC (second conversation): *Institutional references*, and *rhetorical contrast* in particular through which he exposes the case and what the manager BR is accused of. But he does not rely on *not answering*, *evidence ploys*, *category entitlements*, *identity ascription*, or *reflexive conceptualization* to attack the manager's answers and denials—as CH did. Nor does he use *lengthy pauses* and *rhetorical emphasis* to dramatize his discourse and encourage BR to talk, as JYC did. This does not mean, however, that authority is not enacted during the conversation.

On the one hand, PP's *hesitation*, together with the *institutional references* and the *vagueness* of the discourse used to describe the case, are interpreted by BR as signaling the seriousness of the case just as MT did during his interactions with JYC, a definition that he accepts, as MT did. On the other hand, PP's *allusion*, *questioning*, and providing rather *detailed information* to BR, in combination with his own expressions of discomfort

are interpreted by BR as an invitation to collaborate, an invitation that he also accepts. In so doing he recognizes both PP's right to define the situation and to investigate him. As in the JYC/MT conversation, then, the manager is gradually led to envisage and speak of his possible misbehavior, even if he still *denies* he has done something wrong intentionally. While JYC's/MT's interactions alternate confrontation and alignment, PP and BR enact an authority relation that progressively becomes a collaborative relationship where authority relies on BR's acceptance of both PP's definition of the situation and his right to interrogate him.

PP	BR	Power relationship and consequence for authority enactment
Use of <u>institutional, vague terms</u> , hesitations, <u>repetitions</u> , allusion (l. 5-6, 8-9, 11-13)	Invitation to persist* (l. 7)  Expression of surprise* (l. 10) and <u>denial</u> (l. 14)	Alignment, Opposition  Acceptance of PP's right to speak in the name of the organization, as a legitimate source of information
Provide information about the case, micro-pauses, <u>repetition</u> (l. 15-17)	<u>R e f l e x i v e conceptualization</u> , invitation to explain* (l. 18, 19)	Alignment  Acceptance of PP's right to speak in the name of the organization, as a legitimate source of information
Provide information about the case, <u>factive allusion</u> , micro-pauses (l. 22-23)	Question about the case* (l. 24)	Alignment  Acceptance of PP's right to speak in the name of the organization, as a legitimate source of information
Nodding (l. 25)	<u>Denial</u> , rhetorical contrast (l. 26-29)	Opposition
Question (l. 30)	<u>Denial</u> , rhetorical contrast (l. 30)	Opposition
Mitigation of his knowledge about the case (l. 33)	Acknowledgment* (of having transmitted information, l. 33, 34)	Alignment  Acceptance of PP's right to investigate on the case and interrogate him
<u>Interruption</u> , provide information (l. 35, 37)	Question about the case* (l. 36, 37)	Alignment  Acceptance of PP's right to speak in the name of the organization, as a legitimate source of information
Answering (l. 39)	<u>R e f l e x i v e conceptualization</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>repetitions</u> , micro-pauses (l. 40-50)	Alignment
Provide information about the case, <u>use of vague terms</u> , <u>rhetorical contrast</u> , <u>emphatic tone</u> (l. 51-54)	Acknowledgment of the seriousness of the case*, <u>denial</u> , <u>reflexive conceptualization</u> , request for information* (l. 55-59)	Alignment  Acceptance of PP's right to speak in the name of the organization, to define the situation, and as a legitimate source of information
Provide information (l. 64)		

Asterisk\* signals a communicative practice or move not considered as a discursive device.

Table 3 - Interplay between discursive devices, power relationships and authority enactment during the PP/BR conversation<sup>3</sup>

3. Underlining signals common discursive devices among the executives or the managers in the three interviews.

## ENACTING AUTHORITY AS CO-CONSTRUCTING CONFIGURATION OF RIGHTS

We analyzed three conversations that took place simultaneously in similar organizational and practical settings, and which were part of a broader scheme for pushing individuals to make confessions. Such a context makes similarities and differences especially relevant. More specifically, in the context of these conversations, the executives were supposed to be oriented towards the same objective, making the comparison of their actual behaviors significant. Moreover, the subordinates apparently faced a very straightforward alternative: compliance (in this case: confession) or opposition (in this case: denial). Therefore, these conversations, though extreme in many respects, provide an excellent opportunity to study how authority is accomplished during interactions and what power relations participants' behaviors give rise to. In our analysis of the conversations, we applied specific attention to the discursive devices that informed the participants' communicative practices. More precisely, we identified: 1) the types and combinations of discursive devices used by the authority figures (i.e. the executives) to enact authority towards their interlocutors (i.e. the managers); 2) the reactions of the interlocutors; iii) the various kinds of power relationships that developed through such an iterative interaction.

The analysis of the three extracts from the conversations suggests that, during the interviews, the three executives resort to similar devices (e.g. *institutional references*, *rhetorical contrast* and *vagueness*) to speak in the name of the organization and underline the seriousness of the case. They also rely on a specific combination of various discursive devices, giving rise to different configurations of authority rights.

Through combining *interruptions*, *not answering*, *identity ascription*, and *reflexive conceptualization*, CH orients himself towards judging MT's behavior during the conversation, accusing and sentencing him (see Table 2), while JYC (see Table 1) and PP (see Table 3) are oriented towards defining the situation as serious, on the one hand, and interrogating the managers, on the other. To enact these authority rights, they resort to *factive allusions* but also a different combination of devices, namely *identity ascription*, *reflexive conceptualization* and *ordering* for JYC, *hesitating*, *providing information* and *questioning* for PP. While all the managers repeatedly deny they committed any offense and know anything about the case, they never contest the executives' rights to speak in the name of the organization, to formulate accusation and sentence for CH, to interrogate them for JYC and PP. On the contrary, the managers' opposition through denials or alignment through information requests actually permit, in the next turn, the executive either to formulate judgment on the managers' present or past conduct (e.g. "you are playing", "you know"), or act as a legitimate source of information about the case. So authority relationships are not only co-constructed by participants but seem to rely on the subordinates' reactions and the power relationships they activate, be they opposition or alignment.

## DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This research aims to understand how authority relationships are enacted through discursive devices and what power relationships these communicative practices give rise to. Our research contributes to organizational and communication research on authority enactment in four ways, as we explain below.

### ENACTING AUTHORITY THROUGH POWER DYNAMICS

Firstly, complementing prior communication research on authority presentification (see Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Brummans et al., 2014), our research shows that the enactment of authority does not exclusively rely on making the organization, its rules or participants' hierarchical status present and on the deference or compliance of the subordinates during their interactions. Among other devices, executives resort to legal references and category entitlement but the accomplishment of authority rests on the managers' opposition or alignment to the executives' talks during the conversation. When denying he committed an offense in the first conversation, MB opposes JYC's accusation but does not contest his right to accuse or sentence him, and this denial is used by JYC in the next turn to judge MB as guilty. Similarly, when, in the second conversation, MT aligns with CH to recognize the seriousness of the case and asks questions about the affair, CH relies on this collaborative attitude to invite or order him to speak. Finally, in the third conversation, when BR also recognizes the seriousness of the affair, and asks details about it, PP gives some information and asks questions in return.

All in all, the enactment of authority does not exclusively rely on the deference or compliance of the subordinate to the superior, but may be accomplished through the active resistance to, or the alignment with, the superior's talk, that is, through power relations. These results bring some theoretical refinements to the conceptual distinction between power and authority. While authority is defined as a potential influence of someone over someone else, its full accomplishment is realized through the power struggles (i.e. resistance, compliance or alignment) that are performed during the superior/subordinate encounters. Complementing what was initially hypothesized, the enactment of authority does not lead to power relationships but actually rests on it. This theoretical reversal is in line with Foucault's concepts of power and resistance. For Foucault (1975, 1984), power, that is the ability to influence others' conduct (*la conduite de la conduite*), relies on, rather than leads to, resistance—as the power of the police depends on delinquency. Though not investigating participants' resistance as such, our study empirically shows how the actual accomplishment of authority relies on the more or less active resistance of the managers (from opposition to alignment, which does not equate compliance).

### ENACTING AUTHORITY AS PERFORMING DIFFERENT CONFIGURATIONS OF RIGHTS

Second, our research shows that the accomplishment of authority may actualize different contours and meanings. Although acting in a highly constrained, pre-defined context, participants enact quite different configurations of authority rights. While always implying the right to speak in the name of the organization and being a legitimate source of information (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009), it may also mean investigating

and interrogating a subordinate on his supposed misconduct, expressing negative, prejudicial judgment on his present or past behavior, and formulating accusation and sentence. The accomplishment of authority does not only mean obeying orders that may contradict one's values or moral principles (Burger, 2009; Milgram, 1974), but also accepting behaviors that have more to do with police or a prosecutor's activities than what can be expected from a superior. Further research is needed to get a better understanding of the frontiers of authority in contemporary organizations and what could be done (in law or education) to limit its contours.

#### POWER DYNAMICS: GOING BEYOND THE CONFRONTATION/ COMPLIANCE ALTERNATIVE

Thirdly, adding to prior communication works on authority, the fine-grained, processual analysis conducted in our research demonstrates that the enactment of authority cannot be reduced to the compliance or resistance alternative as usually argued in previous works (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Schneider, 2007; Westley, 1990). Participants can co-construct various power dynamics that may alternate opposition with alignment or accomplish progressive alignment during their encounters. By alignment, we mean neither compliance nor agreement of the manager with the executive's view; only that the manager, while resisting the executive's pressure, considers the concern expressed by the executive as legitimate. In this pattern, the manager actively tries to understand the point of view of the executive without agreeing to it so that the executive and the manager enact an authority relation that may be seen as a collaborative power relationship.

The fine-grained, turn-by-turn analysis conducted on the discursive devices also shows that the enactment of authority is a highly adaptive, situated performance. While lying at the heart of Conversational Analysis and Discursive Psychology (see Fairhurst, 2007), this view of authority as adaptive and flexible is at odds with that of the rigidity conveyed in previous studies, which usually contrast the enactment of authority with that of its suspension (see Courpasson & Golsorkhi, 2011; Thomas et al., 2011; Westley, 1990). Departing from this view, our results bring attention to how the enactment of authority and power manifests as a highly adaptive performance, which may alternate opposition and alignment during the same encounter.

#### ENACTING AUTHORITY THROUGH THE ADAPTATIVE COMBINATION OF DISCURSIVE DEVICES

Fourth and finally, our results show that the enactment of authority relies on a palette of discursive devices—rather than the use of a sole discursive device (Whittle & Mueller, 2011)—the effects of which cannot be interpreted without taking into account the actual reactions of the interlocutor (see also Edwards, 1994, 1995). For instance, in the second conversation, the combination of interruption, institutional references, vagueness and rhetorical contrast by CH was frequently followed by MB's acknowledgement of the seriousness of the case, while the same combination of devices by JYC in the first conversation was generally followed by MT's denial, who then understood JYC's talk as an accusation. These elements confirm DP's hypothesis that the use of a particular device cannot be automatically associated with a corresponding effect, but that it depends on the situated interpretation that the interlocutor will make.

Conversely, while denial is in fact systematically seen by CH as a sign of guilt, it is generally followed by a set of devices that underline the seriousness of the case by JYC and its acknowledgment by MB.

As far as the enactment of authority is concerned then, our results lead us to consider that communicative practices cannot be classified as facilitative or impeding dialogue—or as leading to symmetrical or asymmetrical power relationships—without taking into account both the discursive devices and the immediate context in which they are expressed. For instance, Thomas et al. (2011) defined “deploying authority” as a communicative practice used by senior managers during a conversation around a change project with managers. This category refers to “statements that combine directives that eliminate alternative meanings proposed by other actors” (Thomas et al. 2011: 26). Our results show that this communicative practice may be performed through a large set of various devices that probably will not produce the same effects, depending on their specific combination and interpretation. In a similar perspective, what Thomas et al. (2011) classify as “inviting” practices, i.e. “statements that encourage participation by other actors in negotiation of meanings” (Thomas et al. 2011: 26), and take as the exemplar of a “relational engagement” leading to a generative dialogue and facilitative power relationships (Thomas et al. 2011: 33), appears in quite a different light in the Renault conversations. Such “inviting” practices (see the PP/BR conversation), when relying on the combination of factive allusion, vagueness, and questioning in particular, far from put an end to asymmetries; on the contrary, these practices reinforce them by constructing ways of accusing the managers of having done something wrong. While the executives may see this power relationship as “facilitative”, these manipulative attempts do not entail the true collaborative dialogue that Thomas et al. (2011) meant when referring to “facilitative power relationships” (see Thomas et al. 2011: 34). In sum, seemingly facilitative practices may well be used as tactics which, far from leveling asymmetries, only reinforce the power relationships for the benefit of the authority figure. This is an invitation to reconsider categorizations of communicative practices that do not take into account the subtleties through which authority is exercised.

On the whole, the contributions of the research invite further investigation into the variety of forms and the ways through which authority is practised in organizations. The conversations highlighted in the Renault case cannot be taken as representative of authority relationships in organizations; nonetheless, we believe that the very specific context of the conversations, rather than yielding exotic practices and processes that would be foreign to more mundane, routinized superior/subordinate conversations, magnifies the various ways in which executives and managers enact their roles in conversations. And we suspect that we could find a similar variety of power relationships—from opposition to attenuated forms of collaboration—in everyday situations.

Discursive skills appear as key resources for leaders and managers. Our case study also reminds us that these skills can be used for the better or for the worse. Unpacking the enactment of authority in conversations suggests that one should not expect a clear alignment between certain types of practices or outcomes. In other words, what appears as “good” (e.g. facilitative) communicative practices might as well be used as tricks that disguise the construction of asymmetrical power relationships and fail to initiate collaborative processes.

Epilogue: During the interviews, all managers refused to comply with the executives' accusations. The epilogue of this affair is that, after the interviews, the dismissal of three so-called "spies" quickly went public and gained extensive media coverage. Renault officially filed a complaint and the CEO was forced to address the issue on a major French TV channel. The three managers denied any kind of misbehavior, and in return they each filed a complaint against Renault. The police investigation found no evidence of any kind against the three managers; instead, it revealed that the whole affair was probably a scam designed by a member of the manufacturer's security department. Significant amounts of money had been spent on collecting fake evidence about secret bank accounts allegedly possessed by the three managers in Switzerland and other countries. Renault's CEO reappeared on TV to make a public apology. One of the managers (Tenenbaum) was reinstated. The other two were compensated.

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