
THE APPROPRIATION OF ORAL/SPOKEN FRENCH BY L2 LEARNERS: VARIATIONAL FEATURES AND EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The expressions ‘oral French’ and ‘spoken French’ are often used as equivalents. However, they have implications that are far from trivial, especially when it comes to teaching the French language. In this article, we will attempt to point out the nuances behind the expressions oral and spoken French, through reflections on the diamesic and the diaphasic variational dimensions. Secondly, we shall present the implications that this perspective may entail when it comes to the teaching of French as a foreign language (FLE). This research on the teaching of spoken French will also allow us to take into consideration some issues and challenges in relation to the implementation of a ‘didactics of spoken French’. The presentation of examples from the fieldwork research will enable us to dig further into these questions.

Keywords: Oral and spoken French, sociolinguistic variation, teaching of French as a foreign language, stylistic variation, sociolinguistic competence in L2

1. Introduction¹²

The undifferentiated use of the terms ‘oral’ and ‘spoken’ French often results in confusion. From a linguistic point of view, however, these two notions can be clearly distinguished as stated by Ravazzolo et al. (2015:20): *“Si tout français parlé prend forcément place dans des situations d’oral,*

¹ This article is largely a reworking of the content of an article published in French (Paternostro 2022), but it is not its simple translation. The original version is available online:

https://www.atilf.fr/wp-content/uploads/publications/MelangesCrapel/Melanges_43_1_5_Paternostro.pdf.

² I would like to thank the reviewers and editors of this article for their very valuable advice and suggestions. They helped me to make my contribution more "readable" and coherent for an English-speaking and international audience.

tout oral ne s'organise pas autour d'un français parlé"³. The distinction between spoken and oral French is thus set up. On the one hand, in the didactic discourse, 'oral French' is most often used along with 'written French' and is considered above all as a 'means' of expression (Cuq 2003:182). It seems to be a 'legitimate' object for teaching, since oral French does not appear as specific or 'deviating' in relation to written French, but rather as its simple 'oralisation'⁴. 'Spoken' French on the other hand, seems to belong to the field of linguistics. The term emphasises the language features that characterise the discourse, and has the virtues – and the shortcomings? – of highlighting that its organisation somewhat differs from written French. In this respect, its interpretation is often restricted to the sole meaning of 'colloquial' French. Eventually, like most non-standard usage, 'spoken' French, in its restricted sense of colloquial French, is often regarded as an illegitimate object for teaching. In the few instances where spoken French is explicitly mentioned in a didactic context, it is because the term is understood as a synonym for oral French and therefore worthy of being taught.

Assuming that the terms oral French and spoken French do indeed convey a different meaning, it is worthwhile to question their respective signification. This is precisely what we seek to clarify in the following sections. After an in-depth reflection on the meaning of the terms oral French and spoken French (1), we will look at their implications in the teaching of French as a foreign language (2). Then, we are going to highlight some of the issues and challenges involved in the implementation of a didactic of spoken French (3). Finally, we shall present some examples from a field study that took place in Ticino, the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland (4), to find out how we can put into practice some of our principles and assertions.

³ "While all spoken French necessarily takes place in oral situations, not all oral is organised around spoken French". Translation is ours.

⁴ Saying that 'oral' French can be considered as the simple oralisation of written French means that a speaker (and therefore a learner) can actualise the French language in writing or in speaking without any adaptation or specificity. This involves taking for granted that the grammar of the written language, by far the only form taught in French as a foreign language (FLE/S courses), is valid in all respects in the oral language, without any possible discussion.

1.1 Oral French

When it comes to oral French, Weber (2016:35) suggests that in the field of didactics the term oral is used as a “*terme générique à visée pédagogique*”.⁵ Indeed, oral is commonly used to designate the ability to understand and be understood orally (Cuq and Gruca 2017:148-154). In this sense, the oral language is considered a homogeneous reality which is constructed in accordance with the standard written language. In other words, it can be considered as a ‘ready to use piece of language’, in which the linguistic principles and features that characterise the oral language are rarely described or questioned. Apart from a few phenomena such as interrogative form without inversion (i.e., “*vous parlez quelles langues*”? “you speak which languages”? instead of “*quelles langues parlez-vous*”? “which languages do you speak”?) or the use of ‘familiar’ terms, which have been integrated in language textbooks since the advent of communicative approaches (see, among others, Le Bougnec et al. 2014), the term oral remains a “*désignation générique d’usages, [...] un objet flou, multiforme et complexe, derrière lequel se cachent des réalités variées*”⁶ (Weber 2013:5).

The way the term oral is considered in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (hereafter CEFR) (Council of Europe 2018) illustrates this point. The term oral appears in the text as an adjective (83 occurrences), to characterise the type of skill in question (comprehension, production, mediation, interaction). It also appears as a noun (65 occurrences), to indicate oral language as a means of expression, in contrast to written language (see above). Furthermore, the oral language is never defined nor characterised within the text because this terminology seems to be taken for granted, as if the user of the CEFR knew exactly what this word refers to. As a result, the “various realities” which lie behind the oral object, as referred to in Weber (2013), are overlooked.

⁵ “Generic term with a pedagogical purpose”. Translation is ours.

⁶ “Generic designation of uses, [...] a blurred, multifaceted and complex object, behind which various realities are hidden”. Translation is ours.

| Sustained monologue: describing experience | |
|---|--|
| C2 | Can give clear, smoothly flowing, elaborate and often memorable descriptions. |
| C1 | Can give clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects. Can give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding them off with an appropriate conclusion. |
| B2 | Can give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to their field of interest. Can describe the personal significance of events and experiences in detail. |

Fig. 1: the CEFR scale concerning narrative and description in speaking (European Council 2018:62).

Ironically, one may argue that the CEFR describes the skills that learners are expected to have orally according to their level of competence, without defining what the oral ‘object’ is. In other words, such as in the above example (see Fig. 1), the CEFR states that a learner at level C2 is able to “give clear, smoothly flowing, elaborate and often memorable descriptions”, while nowhere does it characterise which linguistic forms are appropriate for making such descriptions orally. Moreover, we just cannot see how this descriptor would be specific to the oral language. As a matter of fact, the same formulations can be found in the descriptors for written production (cf. Fig. 2 below).

| Creative writing | |
|-------------------------|---|
| C2 | Can relate clear, smoothly flowing and engaging stories and descriptions of experience in a style appropriate to the genre adopted. Can exploit idiom and humour appropriately to enhance the impact of the text. |
| C1 | Can produce clear, detailed, well-structured and developed descriptions and imaginative texts in an assured, personal, natural style appropriate to the reader in mind. Can incorporate idiom and humour, though use of the latter is not always appropriate. Can give a detailed critical review of cultural events (e.g. plays, films, concerts) or literary works. |
| B2 | Can give clear, detailed descriptions of real or imaginary events and experiences marking the relationship between ideas in clear connected text, and following established conventions of the genre concerned. Can give clear, detailed descriptions on a variety of subjects related to their field of interest. Can give a review of a film, book or play. |

Fig. 2: the CEFR scale concerning creative writing (European Council 2018:67).

Everyone understands that the CEFR's main objective is not to describe the language, or the forms of language, used for the different skills, and that the CEFR must be general enough to be adapted to any language. However, the people involved in language teaching and learning activities have felt the need for a linguistic 'perspective'. Repositories have been published in conjunction with the CEFR in order to complement the descriptors, and to specify the linguistic forms necessary to complete various tasks. North (2015:5), one of the authors of these inventories, argues that:

[...] beaucoup s'interrogent sur la relation des niveaux du CECRL et des objectifs de l'enseignement en classe. En effet, ce que nous enseignons, ce que les apprenants peuvent faire dans la langue et ce que nous mesurons dans les examens ne vont pas toujours de pair. C'est pourquoi cet *Inventaire* [sic] présente de façon claire et accessible les contenus clés de l'enseignement du FLE pour les niveaux A1 à C1.⁷

Admittedly, analysing all the existing archives for French⁸ would have fallen outside the scope of this work. However, repositories such as those of North (2005) try to fill these gaps by proposing tables of linguistic forms which, despite being useful, call for some criticism. On the one hand, the linguistic aspects only appear under the heading of 'grammar' (see pp. 50-53). In fact, the other tables feature the skills, as well as the language acts, and even the communication situations present in the CEFR descriptors, arranging them by levels. However, no further details about the linguistic features are provided. On the other hand, the grammar points presented in the text do not distinguish between oral and written language. They merely present the linguistic forms of the written language as being implicitly valid for oral language as well. This is in line with our analysis above, according to which the term oral is used in the didactic framework in accordance with the norms of the written form. It is thus considered as a mere 'oralisation' of the written language, a ready-to-use piece of language, without mentioning any potential specificity of the oral French.

⁷ "Many people question the relationship of the CEFR levels and the goals of classroom instruction. Indeed, what we teach, what learners can do in the language, and what we measure in exams do not always go together. That is why this Inventory presents in a clear and accessible way the key content areas of EFL instruction for levels A1 to C1". Translation is ours.

⁸ See in this regard: Beacco et al. (2004; 2006; 2007; 2011), Beacco and Porquier (2008).

In addition to the term oral, the term ‘familiar’ is also used ambiguously in the French version of the CEFR. Indeed, familiar (i.e. *familier*, in French) is mostly used as a synonym of a ‘close’ or ‘known’ reality (i.e. the occurrences “familiar words” or “familiar vocabulary”, in the pre-A1 level descriptors on p. 63). The term familiar is thus used as a synonym for “everyday language” only from level B2 onwards (i.e. the occurrences “familiar language” on p. 64, “familiar social context” or “familiar terms” on p. 144). In this sense, familiar is clearly a synonym of colloquial, even though this adjective is not used in the French version. Once again, this distinction is not characterised, and no explanation is provided as to what the authors mean by this term. The interpretation of its meaning (known reality vs. colloquial form of language) is left to the reader.

When confronted with the complexity of the oral language, Weber (2013) contends that the most common reaction is to refer to one's experiences and representations: the oral language is not completely the same as the written one, but one cannot precisely explain what it is; it is a ‘devalued’ version of the written language, a ‘spontaneous’ language, i.e., ‘familiar’, ‘colloquial’ or ‘informal’ (see above), to be learned on the job. To break this deadlock, Weber (2013) suggests the recourse to the notion of ‘orality’ and stresses the need to deconstruct the oral object in order to analyse its constituents (phonetics, prosody, syntax, discourse), so as to foster the awareness that oral French is characterised in interaction and is marked by variation. This deconstruction of the oral object brings the added benefit of highlighting its multidisciplinary and multidimensional character, and requiring the transversal competences involved in the interactional experience, opening the path to the introduction of the notion of spoken French.

1.2 Spoken French

If we take up Ravazzolo's et al. (2015:20) assertion that “*Si tout français parlé prend forcément place dans des situations d’oral, tout oral ne s’organise pas autour d’un français parlé*” (see footnote 2), we can legitimately ask the question: what is the meaning of ‘spoken’ French – a ‘restricted’ or a ‘specific’ version of oral French?

One cannot approach the notion of spoken French without referring to the work of GARS (*Groupe Aixois de Recherche en Syntaxe*). This

marks, in fact, a founding moment in the study of spoken French, which – as Gadet (1997:v) asserts – had until then remained a field researched in a non-systematic manner. According to Blanche-Benveniste (2005:17-18), spoken French is characterised by a close interweaving of *dire* ‘saying’ and *dit* ‘said’, where discourse (i.e. the linguistic elements) and commentary/evaluation (i.e. the epilinguistic ones) are intertwined. It is a discourse that is generally not prepared in advance, and which is produced as and when required. In addition, the signs of this production, which are often not easy to read when transcribed, constitute a real subject of observation and study. Without going so far as to assert the existence of a specific ‘grammar’ of spoken French, different from that of written French (Blanche-Benveniste 2005:17), the author emphasises that the study of spoken French makes it possible to describe and analyse the processes that every speaker uses when he or she speaks, as well as the principles that characterise it, and which cannot correspond in all respects to those of written French.

Gadet (1997:v) includes spoken French in the broader notion of ‘ordinary’ French, which she defines as the language of everyday life, which everyone uses in their daily routines, with a minimum of social supervision. She adds that the study of ordinary language has traditionally been taken into account by sociolinguistics but is not completely fully aligned with it. Indeed, attempting to explain the variations that characterise discourse solely through their social dimensions restricts their field of study, since they fail to account for everything. The comparison of spoken French with ordinary French could therefore lead us to a narrow understanding of the term spoken, whereas ordinary French should rather be understood as simply one of the forms that spoken French can take.

Spoken French may thus result in realisations that differ from those in use in standardised written French – i.e. the ‘ordered’ succession of syntagms in completed ‘sentences’ – but it is not necessarily the actualisation of a non-standard language. In sum, spoken French turns out to be more complex than it seems, as it can make use of very elaborate constructions and bears more obvious signs of the enunciating subject, the context of enunciation, the possibility of self-correction, reformulation, and repetition (Ravazzolo et al. 2015:18). This may partly explain why, didactically, spoken French is often demoted to informal learning or taught to the most advanced learners (see Tyne 2009).

1.3 Towards a different understanding of the distinction between ‘oral’ and ‘spoken’ French

Rooted in the German linguistic tradition and inspired by Coseriu’s previous works (among others, 1981), Koch and Oesterreicher (2001) propose a pragmatic characterisation of the forms of language, which allows the oral to appear in a new light. Oral and written language, commonly and wrongly associated with informal (i.e., colloquial) and formal forms of language, respectively, are in fact only distinguished by their ‘medial’ dimension (phonic vs graphic medium, through which they are actualised). In Coseriu’s terms, this distinction belongs to the “diamesic” axis, pertaining to the medium – oral (phonic) or written (graphic). The formal/informal distinction stems rather from the conceptional level and is actualised on a continuum that extends between the poles of communicative proximity and distance. In Coseriu’s terms, this aspect belongs to the “diaphasic” axis, pertaining to the nature of the communication situation. From this perspective, the ‘standard’ form of language can be associated with the notion of communicative ‘distance’ and is appropriately selected when speakers interact without being able to draw on a common body of knowledge and experience. ‘Non-standard’ forms, on the other hand, can be associated with the notion of ‘proximity’ and lead to the selection of linguistic units that can only be interpreted on the basis of shared knowledge (see Gadet and Guerin 2008).

This affects the way we understand language and has led us to revise the notion of oral/spoken French. As we have seen above, oral/spoken French does not automatically correspond to a ‘spontaneous’ or ‘colloquial’ form of language. This means that it does not de facto entail the actualisation of non-standard linguistic features.

Since oral French has to be understood as a medium, according to Koch and Oesterreicher’s model, the linguistic features that characterise it have yet to be defined. Moreover, these features can only be defined in a contextual manner, based on the parameters governing the immediate-distance communicative continuum.

In this sense, spoken French does belong to oral French, since it is expressed through a phonic medium, but is actualised on the immediate/distance communicative continuum and mobilises linguistic features in relation to the different contextual parameters (communicative

situation, relationship between interlocutors, social and discursive practices, etc.), according to the conceptional level mentioned by Koch and Oesterreicher (2001).

According to Gadet and Guerin's (2008) understanding of Koch and Oesterreicher's (2001) model, oral French refers to the phonic medium and thus to the French language actualised 'orally', without any other connotation and no direct connections with the norms of written French. The main characteristics of this oral French are therefore what Blanche-Benveniste calls linearity, volatility, and multimodality. However, when it comes to 'spoken' French, we refer to the French language that is actualised orally, but that is organised, on the conceptional level, around communicative distance (standard forms) or proximity (non-standard forms). It goes without saying that written French, as a language actualised through the graphic medium, is also organised on the basis of these two poles, because, as we have seen above, the opposition written-formal language vs oral-informal language no longer holds. This is why, from now on, we will then use the term 'spoken French' in the sense of "French actualised through the phonic medium (i.e., orally) and organised according to the poles of communicative distance (standard) or proximity (non-standard), depending on contextual and complex parameters, such as those suggested by Koch and Oesterreicher (2001).

The linguistic challenge in view of the didactic purposes is therefore not only to describe the characteristics of written and/or spoken language, but also to raise learners' awareness and support them in the discovery and appropriation of the mechanisms allowing the organisation of the language, both orally or graphically, according to the poles of communicative distance (standard) and proximity (non-standard).

2. The characteristics of spoken French and its implications for teaching

Spoken French is characterised by a number of features which are likely to make the task more complex for both teachers and learners. Some of them are more linked to the oral dimension (such as linearity, volatility, multimodality, differentiability, or evaluability), others to the spoken one (such as variability or situationality). A synthesis of various works (Gadet 1997; Blanche-Benveniste 2005; Bertot and Hassan 2015; Ravazzolo et al.

2015; Abou Haidar and Llorca 2016) allows us to identify at least six of them, that are of both linguistic and didactic interest.

(a) Linearity: oral language is constructed and produced in real time, which implies the impossibility of revising one's utterance before its externalised production to make changes. From this linear character stems a certain number of specificities such as reformulations, false starts, hesitations, snippets, scoriae, etc. It is now clear that these phenomena are 'unmarked', since they are simply linked to the phonic medium through which oral language is actualised and in no way translate a non-standard form of the language. Even though these phenomena are quite 'natural' and automatic for a speaker whose first language is French, the introduction to these oral features is essential for a speaker learning French as a foreign language because they are sometimes different from those of their first languages. The awareness and planning stages are of particular interest, as they allow for the awareness and also the re-use of these phenomena as well as the implementation of automated processes.

(b) Volatility: oral communication unfolds in the form of sound waves and leaves no lasting traces without the use of technology. The advent of tools allowing audio and audio-visual recording and replay were at the root of experimental phonetics and speech sciences, but it also revolutionised the field of the language learning and teaching (see Galazzi 2002).

(c) Multimodality and situationality: speaking involves public speaking and/or interaction and requires a complex management of different factors (comprehension/production skills, planning and control of discourse, coherence of meaning and form, pursuit of a communicative and interactional goal, adaptation to the context and the interlocutor, multimodality, etc.). Speaking involves the whole person, which is rarely taken into account in teaching and learning. Moreover, these aspects can be a source of stress and have a significant impact on learners' performance.

(d) Variability: spoken language is marked by variation and requires the development of fine analytical skills, both on the part of teachers and learners. These skills should not be relegated to informal learning and should be the subject of explicit teaching and learning. Moreover, understanding the meanings conveyed by variational features is a real learning objective. In the case of an immersion stay or even a more lasting experience in a country where the target language is spoken, production also comes into play. We will return to this point later on.

(e) Differentiability: differentiating between oral as a means of expression and as a learning object is crucial, since spoken language is not only a means of expression, but also an object of learning, which makes all the difference between a learner-responder, who is confined to responding to the teacher's requests, and a learner-speaker, who is capable of expressing himself/herself and interacting in French in multiple and varied contexts and activities.

(f) Evaluability: learning to speak implies the importance of reviewing and/or remembering one's production, understanding one's mistakes and being able to remedy them. Specific didactic devices are therefore necessary, as *in vivo* correction alone does not seem to be very useful. Indeed, learners have difficulty understanding and remembering remarks made by the teacher during the speaking activity. Recording the learner's oral performance and giving detailed and systematic feedback, which takes place following the learner's activity, can be more effective and is a real learning opportunity. From the teacher's standpoint, going back to the 'actual' production of the learners and not relying solely on his/her notes or memory, ensures greater objectivity and quality in terms of evaluation.

Ultimately, reflection on the specific characteristics of spoken French and the search for appropriate pedagogical tools constitute the starting point for the construction of a didactic approach to spoken French.

3. Challenges and issues of teaching spoken French

Teaching spoken French can be a real challenge and involves several issues as well. As Chiss (2011:12) points out, the French (and Francophone, ed.) culture of language is characterised by what he calls a "conflict of representations", i.e. a divide between the uniformity of the norm and the heterogeneity of usage. In this regard, Auger (2007:122) adds that:

L'enseignant est bien en peine de trouver une posture. Il est censé agir en linguiste, en instructeur de la forme décrite ; et, en même temps, en tant que locuteur, il perçoit les marchés linguistiques et mesure l'écart qui existe entre les pratiques de ses apprenants et la norme à enseigner⁹.

⁹ "The teacher is at a loss to find a posture. He is supposed to act as a linguist, as an instructor of the described form of language; and, at the same time, as a speaker, he perceives the linguistic markets and measures the gap that exists between the practices of learners and the standard form that has to be taught". Translation is ours.

The teacher may thus feel a sense of failure when faced with the pedagogical norm, because he or she does not know how to reconcile the description of the language and its variations with a normative vision advocating the teaching of a pure, homogeneous, and unchanging language. Teaching spoken French would mean moving away from teaching oral French, according to the traditional meaning of the term described in 1.1, whose model is based on standardised written French. It would also mean abandoning common representations according to which spoken French is necessarily colloquial French, which would de facto make it a legitimate object for teaching.

Once the initial reluctance to teach spoken French has been overcome, there are still a few knots to untangle, such as the characteristics of spoken French which would be relevant for teaching (3.1), the level at which spoken French should be introduced and whether a progression can be established between its different features (3.2), and the specific approaches, techniques, or activities that may be particularly useful and relevant for teaching spoken French (3.3).

3.1 Some characteristics of spoken French that could be relevant for teaching

Before going into further detail, it is important to bear in mind that it is essential to cease to believe that spoken French is homogeneous and unchanging, just like ‘standard’ French. In that case, one would simply have replaced one norm with another. Spoken French, like any form of language, is essentially non-homogeneous and dynamic, also being subject to the contextual parameters described in 1.2. Therefore, spoken French is itself marked by variations and must be adapted and contextualised, based on the communication situation and the needs of the learners.

Among the characteristics of spoken French, we have tried to select, non-exhaustively, the main features reported in the literature: Blanche-Benveniste (2005); Detey et al. (2010); Gadet (1997; 2007; 2017); Guerin and Moreno (2015); Paternostro (2016a); Ravazzolo et al. (2015); Rossi (1999); Weber (2013). The characteristics listed in point (a) are universally shared with all natural languages. Those listed under the other points, on the contrary, are specific to French.

(a) “Material” specificities of oral:

- Linearity and volatility
- Repetition of grammatical words (*le* ‘the’, *et* ‘and’, *plus* ‘more’, *de* ‘of’, etc)
- Sentence starters (aborted or anticipations of what is said next)
- Unfinished statements
- Incises (more or less long, with the possibility of imbrication)
- Phatic and punctuation (integrated or not into the syntactic structure)
- Hesitations (*eah...* ‘mh’, pauses, vowel lengthening, etc.)

(b) Some phonic and prosodic features, most of which coincide with pronunciation ‘facilitators’:

- Assimilations of sonority (e.g., *je sais pas* [ʃepa] ‘I don’t know’)
- Articulation mode assimilations (e.g., *maintenant* [mɛ̃nɑ̃] ‘now’)
- Vowel harmony (e.g. *surtout* [sɜʁtu] ‘above all’)
- Simplification of complex consonantal groups, within the word (e.g. *quelque chose* [kɛkʃoz] ‘something’) or in the final (e.g. *quatre* [kat] ‘four’)
- Vowel reductions (e.g. *tu as* [ta] ‘you have’, *c’était* [stɛ] ‘it was’)
- Frequent elision of the schwa
- Variability in non-categorical *liaisons*
- Reduction of categorical *liaisons* contexts
- Expressive intonations
- Intonation with syntactic and pragmatic value, closely linked to context (e.g., *niveau vacances / pour moi / c’est toujours la plage* ‘as far as vacations are concerned / for me / it’s always at the beach’)

(c) Some morphosyntactic features:

- Different use of verbal tenses (present perfect vs simple past, periphrastic form of future vs synthetic form of future, etc.)
- Repetition of the subject or detachment (e.g. *les gens ils veulent* ‘people they want’)
- Inversions, especially in questions: (1) total (e.g. *il vient?* ‘he comes?’); (2) partial, with interrogative word at the end (e.g. *d’où tu viens?* ‘where you come from?’, *tu viens d’où?* ‘you come from where?’); (3) in situ (e.g. *je ne sais pas tu veux dire quoi* ‘I don’t know you say what’)
- Use of *on* ‘one’ and *ça* ‘this’

- Use of the short form of negation (only with *pas* ‘not’, *plus* ‘more’, etc.)
- Dislocations: (1) to the left (e.g. *ce mec, il me rend fou* ‘this guy, he drives me crazy’); (2) to the right (e.g. *il me rend fou, ce mec* ‘he drives me crazy, this guy’)
- Cleaved (e.g. *c'est les abats / que j'aime pas* ‘it's the giblets / that I don't like’)
- Pseudo-cleaved (e.g. *le problème aussi / c'est que je ne sais pas si tu connais toutes les étapes...* ‘the problem is also / it's that I don't know whether you know all the steps’)
- ‘Facilitating’ devices:
 - *c'est /c'était* ‘it's/it was’+ adj. (ex. *c'est génial!* ‘it's great!’, *c'était super!* ‘it was great!’)
 - *ça* ‘this’ + verb (ex. *ça fait bizarre* ‘it's weird’, *ça fait drôle* ‘it's funny’)
 - *niveau* ‘as far as’ + nominal phrase (NP) (ex. *niveau logement...* ‘as far as housing is concerned’)
 - word truncations (e.g., *resto U* ‘university restaurant’, *cafet* ‘cafeteria’, *exam* ‘exam’, *fac* ‘faculty’)
- Forms of the query:
 - *je peux* ‘I can’, *je pourrais* ‘I could’, *je veux* ‘I want’, *je voudrais* ‘I would’, *j'aimerais* ‘I would love’, *je souhaiterais* ‘I would like’ + NP or verbal phrase (VP)
 - announcement in the future tense (periphrastic form) + NP (e.g., *je vais prendre* ‘I'm going to have’)
 - announcement of the desired product (e.g., *une baguette* ‘a baguette bread’)
 - obligation with *falloir* ‘to need’ (e.g. *il (me) faudrait* ‘I (to me) need’+ NP (ex. *une baguette* ‘a baguette bread’))

(d) Some discourse features:

- Connectors, discourse particles, punctuators: *quoi* ‘though’, *enfin* ‘eventually’, *quand* ‘when’ *même* ‘even’, *bon* ‘well’, *alors* ‘then’, *donc* ‘so’, *mais* ‘but’, *ben* ‘well’, *ben voilà* ‘well, here it is’, *voilà* ‘here it is’, *puis* ‘then’, *du coup* ‘so’, *finalement* ‘eventually’, *eh ben* ‘and well’, *comme quoi* ‘such as’, *tu vois/tu sais* ‘you see/you know’,

au fait ‘by the way’, *dis-donc* ‘tell me’, *waouh* ‘wow’, *bof* ‘blah’, *hé* ‘hey’, *bouuu* ‘boo’, *beurk* ‘yuck’, *écoute* ‘listen’, etc.

- Priming or extension particles: *ouais* ‘yeah’, *non* ‘non’, *genre* ‘he/she was like’, *ah* ‘ah’, *oh* ‘oh’, *eh* ‘hey’, *et tout ça* ‘and something like that’, *et tout* ‘and all’, *nanana* ‘nanana’, etc.

(e) Some interactional features (regulation of speech in interaction):

- Acquiescence or another phatic element (e.g., *oui* ‘yes’, *hm hm* ‘hm hm’, ...)
- Introduction/closing of the turn
- Overlaps (including their cultural aspects)
- Greetings, thanks, apologies (stereotypical statements with strong relational value)
- Rituals and routines

As mentioned above, this inventory is not exhaustive, but it gives a broad overview of the language features that characterise spoken French and that are likely to contribute to the definition of a didactics of spoken French. However, listing the specificities of spoken French is only the first step of a ‘didactisation’ process that has still to be built.

3.2 Level of introduction of spoken French and possible progression scheme

If we refer to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2018:143-144), the sociolinguistic competence, illustrated by a scale of descriptors called “sociolinguistic adequacy” focuses almost exclusively on social and cultural aspects which are linked to social codes and rules of politeness. Register differences are mentioned but never made explicit, and – in all cases – do not occur before level B2 (see, among others, Falkert 2016a). Should we conclude that spoken French, in all its variations, should not be introduced before this level?

We can begin by stating that ‘understanding’ spoken French constitutes a learning objective at all levels, because the learner, especially in a homoglot environment, is immediately exposed to the language as it is spoken, without possible filters (see Falkert 2016b). As a result, there is no reason to limit contact with features specific to spoken French, because – even if learners do not understand everything – regular contact allows for a gradual awareness. On the other hand, the production of features

pertaining to spoken French is not always a learning objective, and in any case not a priority, especially in an alloglot environment, even though this point deserves to be discussed (see Valdman 2000). Indeed, when it comes to features such as the use of the short form of negation, the assimilation of sonority in phrases such as “*j(e) sais pas*” ‘I don’t know’ or the partial interrogation without inversion with an interrogative word placed at the end (i.e. *tu viens d’où?* ‘you come from?’), it would seem beneficial for beginners or elementary learners to be confronted with them as soon as possible.

In addition, we suggest that, from a didactic point of view, the introduction of spoken French should initially be done as an object of reflection – i.e., through a reflective approach, favouring observation in context and the identification of forms and uses. This means that the learner's attention can be drawn to one or the other form, without this being systematic and, above all, without there being an appropriation goal behind it other than that of an initial awareness. It is only in a second stage that spoken French can be introduced as a teaching object, first in perception, then in production, according to the needs of the learners and the learning contexts. Introducing features of spoken French as a teaching object amounts to drawing the learner's attention specifically to the targeted forms with the aim of linguistic appropriation or even independent reuse, depending on the learner's level and learning objectives.

Nowadays, the teaching and learning of spoken French is directly linked to the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence (see Regan et al. 2009), which should therefore be considered as important as the acquisition of the language as a ‘system’ (i.e., ‘grammar’). Moreover, this competence is based on the knowledge and know-how that every learner already possesses in his or her first language (as well as in the other languages that make up his or her linguistic repertoire), because the learner is never *tabula rasa* when it comes to learning a second or foreign language (see Gadet 2012). From then on, the learner will be able to take advantage of his or her linguistic practices and his or her experience of socialisation in his or her first language when confronted with the learning of spoken French and its ‘social’ value (see 3.2.2.).

3.2.1 Some tools for the teaching of spoken French

Considering what has been said above, we have tried to reproduce a synthetic list of features characterising spoken French in the table below (see 3.1 for a more detailed list). These could be introduced according to the levels of the CEFR with a view to outlining a kind of ‘progression’. It is a pedagogical tool intended to help teachers find their way around, should they wish to start introducing spoken French in their teaching. We have nevertheless tried to put in place some safeguards to avoid our approach being misinterpreted: the organisation of the table by double-levels, as well as the choice of the dotted line, indicate that this list needs to be adapted according to the teaching and learning context, but also according to the needs and specificities of the learners. Some features can, therefore, be (re)introduced earlier or later than the classification made, to avoid any partitioning of linguistic forms and levels.

| Levels | Pronunciation | Morphosyntax | Discourse | Interaction |
|--------------|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| B1-B2 | Simplification of consonantal groups, variability of non-categorical <i>liaisons</i> , restricted use of categorical <i>liaisons</i> , ‘syntactic/pragmatic’ intonation. | Dislocations, cleaved / pseudo-cleaved (more complex forms). | Some more complex connectors and punctuators (<i>comme quoi</i> ‘such as’, <i>quand même</i> ‘as well’, <i>au fait</i> by the way’, <i>en fait</i> ‘in fact’), priming and extension particles in reported speech. | Rituals and routines, overlaps. |
| A2-B1 | Assimilations of sonority / mode of articulation, variability of schwa, vowel harmony, vowel reductions, expressive intonations. | Verbal tenses (past tense), simple forms of dislocations and cleaved/pseudo-cleaved, subject redoubling, <i>On</i> ‘one’/ <i>ça</i> ‘this’. | Some more complex connectors and punctuators (<i>du coup</i> ‘then’, <i>quand même</i> ‘as well’, <i>comme quoi</i> ‘such as’), priming and extension particles (simple use). | Introduction / closing. |
| A1-A2 | Give priority to perception, as this is the stage of ‘construction’ of the L2 basic phonological system. | Interrogatives, verbal tenses (future tense), short negation (only with <i>pas</i> ‘not’, <i>plus</i> ‘more’, etc.), facilitating structures, query forms. | Some simple connectors and punctuators (<i>mais</i> ‘but’, <i>donc</i> ‘so’, <i>ouais</i> ‘yeah’, <i>ben</i> ‘well’, <i>enfin</i> ‘finally’, etc. | Acknowledgements, greetings / thanks. |

Table 1: Teaching of spoken French and CERCL levels.

The distribution of forms in Table 1 deliberately stops at the B1-B2 level because we can consider that, at this level, the learner will have been able to appropriate most of the features characterising spoken French, at least in perception. From level B2-C1 onwards, the work of consolidation and autonomy begins, and perception also leads to production. These different stages are detailed in Table 2, which attempts to illustrate both the stages and the modalities of the work on spoken French divided by level.

| Levels | Phases | Modalities |
|--------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| C1-C2 | Improvement, autonomy | Perception and production |
| B2-C1 | Consolidation, autonomy ¹⁰ | |
| B1-B2 | Deepening, consolidation | From perception to production |
| A2-B1 | First appropriation | |
| A1-A2 | Sensitisation, first contact | Perception |

Table 2: Stages and methods of teaching spoken French.

The A1-A2 level is intended more for sensitisation and the first contact with the features of spoken French, in a pedagogical approach essentially based on perception. At the A2-B1 level, the first appropriation begins, accompanied by a first attempt at producing the simplest features. Level B1-B2 marks the stage of deepening and consolidation, with an even greater focus on production. Level B2-C1 is devoted to consolidation and the beginning of autonomy. Finally, level C1-C2 aims at perfecting and becoming autonomous. Levels B2-C1 and C1-C2 are essentially aimed at production, the features characterising spoken French having already been acquired in perception at the previous levels. Contrary to what the CEFR recommends, according to which the learning of sociolinguistic competence begins essentially at level B2, this organisation advocates the anticipation of work on the acquisition of spoken French at levels A1-B1¹¹, the following levels being intended for the deepening, consolidation and autonomisation of these features, in increasingly fine linkages with more and more diversified communication situations.

3.2.2 Avoiding an ‘essentialist’ drift

It is also essential to consider that the features presented in Table 1 are not univocal, in the sense that they cannot convey a single meaning, particularly in a decontextualised manner. As Eckert (2008) states, variational traits do not carry meaning in themselves. They are ‘situated’, as they acquire their meaning(s) in context, in the speakers' own practices. Thus, the use of a single linguistic trait is not enough to actualise a speech

¹⁰ We refer to Holec's (1991:5) definition of autonomy: « L'autonomie de l'apprenant implique qu'il prenne activement en charge tout ce qui constitue un apprentissage, c'est-à-dire aussi bien sa définition, sa gestion et son évaluation que sa réalisation ». “Learner autonomy means that the learner actively takes charge of everything that constitutes learning, i.e. how it is defined, managed, assessed and achieved”. Translation is ours.

¹¹ See, in this regard, the thinking of Falkert (2016a) and Sheeren (2012).

‘style’: an accumulation of traits is necessary for a socio-variational dynamic to be observed (see, among others, Paternostro 2016). For Eckert (2008), style does not correspond to several ways of saying the same thing, but rather to several ways of being, which include potentially different things to say. It is in this sense that variational features function as ‘resources’ potentially generating ‘meaning’ at the sociolinguistic level. These features are organised in constellations of meanings (i.e., ‘contextualisation indices’, according to the terminology adopted by Gumperz 1982),¹² are ideologically linked to each other and can actualise one or another meaning according to contextual parameters. From an epistemological point of view, this would then suggest the adoption of an approach that could be described as ‘reflexive’ and ‘indexical’, which would mean observing and analysing the features in their context in order to reconstitute the constellation of meanings that they can actualise. From a didactic point of view, this could be translated into a methodological posture that would consist in ‘taking advantage’ of the linguistic features present in the different materials used in class, by encouraging their observation and analysis in context. In other words, any ‘text’ (whether oral, written, or multimodal) would become a ‘pretext’ for observing and reflecting on the functioning of spoken French in context.¹³

4. Some examples from the teaching field

A field study, which took place in 2017-2018 in Switzerland, in the Italian-speaking region of Ticino, helps us illustrate the way in which activities targeting speaking skills can be built around a reflective and indexical approach, as presented above, with the aim of integrating teaching and learning sequences of spoken French.

¹² See, in this regard, the reading made by Boutet (2014).

¹³ Due to space constraints, this article does not address the issue of pedagogical resources for the teaching of spoken French. Nevertheless, it should not be considered as marginal. Therefore, we refer to the large oral corpora of spoken French such as: CLAPI-FLE (<http://clapi.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/FLE/>), FLORALE (<https://florale.unil.ch>), MPF (<https://www.ortolang.fr/market/corpora/mpf>), PFC (<https://public.projet-pfc.net>), etc. Other corpora are also referenced on the www.ortolang.fr platform. Regarding data-driven learning or corpus-based learning, see Boulton and Tyne (2014).

4.1 Context of the study

Our study took place in the context of teaching French as a foreign and second language (FLE/S) to Italian-speaking students at the Cantonal School of Commerce in Bellinzona. The Italian-speaking canton of Ticino has a particular socio-didactic situation (Paternostro 2019). French is one of four Swiss national languages; it enjoys a specific status, not only in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, where it is the first language, but also in the other regions of the Confederation and especially in Ticino, which has close ties with the whole of so-called “Latin” Switzerland. Indeed, French is the “first second language” studied in school, from the third year of primary school, and represents the first contact with linguistic and cultural diversity.

Our study took place in a grade-10 class of 15 students (aged 15-16 years old). In grade 10, students are expected to have reached a level of French equivalent to a B1- level according to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2018). The limited number of students as well as a rather homogeneous level of students undoubtedly contribute to creating a very studious atmosphere, stimulating the motivation of the students and reinforcing their chances of success.

4.2 The didactic activity

The didactic activity presented in this study took place during the first semester. It is fully integrated into the grade-10 program and is therefore not perceived as a separate activity, which helps explain the seriousness with which the students applied themselves to it. The activity targets speaking skills and is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the production of a continuous oral discourse¹⁴, the second on the simulation of a typical everyday interaction, in groups of two or three students (see 4.3).

The didactic work was articulated in several phases, with an alternation between group and individual work. The performances were recorded with audio recorders or smartphones in a separate room and were produced by the students without the presence of the teacher. The students

¹⁴ Due to space limitations, this section will not be presented here. We refer to Paternostro (2020; 2022) for an overview.

uploaded their final production to the Moodle¹⁵ platform so that the teacher could listen to and evaluate it. The teacher's post-production work was done using Audacity¹⁶ software, thanks to which 'contextualised' feedback could be inserted directly into the soundtrack produced by the student¹⁷. When the student listens to his or her production, he or she will have access to the teacher's comments and will be able to come back to them at will, contrary to what happens during 'traditional' speaking activities, carried out without technological support.

4.3 Activity 2 - Production of an oral discourse in interaction (B1)

Activity 2 is based on the simulation of typical everyday interaction situations and lends itself to an intercultural approach, in particular through a comparison between the ways of interacting in the French-speaking world and in Ticino. This activity is based on the interaction topics of the DELF B1¹⁸ oral test. The students choose a topic at random and prepare the 'staging', taking into account the work on orality that we have proposed to them.

4.3.1 Learning objectives

The main learning objectives of Activity 2 can be formulated as follows:

- Producing an oral discourse in interaction, in typical situations of ordinary life
- Varying and adapting one's language and socio-cultural codes to the context and the communication situation (in a 'spoken' perspective)
- Observing, identifying, being able to talk about the differences/similarities between interactions in the French-speaking world (France, French-speaking Switzerland) and in Ticino
- Planning one's speech but also dealing with the unexpected, and developing relevant remediation strategies (from a 'spoken' perspective)
- Looking back on one's production and developing observation and metalinguistic reflection skills

¹⁵ Moodle is an open-source learning platform widely used in education: <https://moodle.org>.

¹⁶ Audacity is a free sound editing software: www.audacityteam.org.

¹⁷ This step is particularly visible in Activity 1, which is not reproduced here. See Paternostro (2020; 2022) for details.

¹⁸ delfdalf.ch/exemples-delf-niveau-b1.

4.3.2 Phases of the learning activity

Activity 2 consists of eight phases, which include, beforehand, a focus on oral features raising sociolinguistic awareness; during the experiment, a focus on the conception/planning phase; and afterwards, a contextualised feedback on the student's production by the teacher. They can be broken down as follows:

| Activity 2 | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Phase | Details |
| (1) Preparation /a | - Viewing/listening to several filmed/recorded interactions (oral corpora, series, film scenes) ¹⁹ - Identification and observation of linguistic forms in context/traits of orality (lexical items, syntactic structures, pronunciation, speech planning, turn management, retorts, etc.) - Distribution of the list of topics, choice of partner, preparation time |
| (2) Preparation /b | - Drawing of a topic - Preparation time (planning one's speech, finding words, thinking about which oral features to include, sequencing one's turns, time management, etc.) |
| (3) Recording /a | Audio recording(s) of one's production (several possible) |
| (4) Regulation | Deferred and contextual feedback from the teacher, with descriptive formulations, in an oral perspective, sensitive to the contextualisation of forms and their diversity |
| (5) Replay/self-assessment | The learner listens to his or her production (at leisure) with contextual feedback from the teacher, then fills in a self-assessment form |
| (6) Remediation | The learner reviews the planning of his or her speech, the choice of linguistic features, the sequence of ideas, etc. |
| (7)* Recording /b | Recording of the second production |
| (8)* Summative assessment | The teacher assigns a grade to the student's production |

*Steps 7-8 can be done as part of another activity or on another theme.

Table 4: Description of Activity 2.

¹⁹ Among the resources used, we can mention: some extracts from the MPF corpus (www.ortolang.fr/market/corpora/mpf), from the CLAPI-FLE corpus (clapi.icar.cnrs.fr/FLE/liste_extraits.php) as well as some scenes from series such as *Plus belle la vie* or from films such as *Un air de famille* by Cédric Klapisch.

4.3.3 Examples of student's productions

Contrary to what was done for Activity 1, the examples in this section do not include contextualised feedback from the teacher, mainly because of lack of space, but also because their content is similar to the previous ones illustrated in Paternostro (2020; 2022). We will therefore limit ourselves to the transcription of the students' interactions and to the analysis of some observed phenomena.

(a) Students 3 and 4 [E3 - E4]

The communication situation staged in this excerpt concerns the difficulties encountered during a language stay. The student has to report his dissatisfaction to the school director and ask to change host families.

- E3 :** *[Frappe à la porte] Bonjour directrice²⁰.*
[Knock on the door] Good morning, director!
- E4 :** *Bonjour (.) comment ça va ?*
Good morning, how are you?
- E3 :** *Euh (.) pas bien (.) parce que j'ai des problèmes avec ma famille d'accueil.*
Hm (.) not so good (.) because I have some problems with my host family.
- E4 :** *Oh non (.) pourquoi ?*
Oh no (.) why?
- E3 :** *Euh parce que le père de famille fume (.) et je déteste la fumée.*
Hm because the family man smokes (.) and I hate smoke.
- E4 :** *Oh (.) y a-t-il autre chose ? d'autres problèmes encore ?*
Oh (.) is there something else? Any other problems?
- E3 :** *Euh oui (.) il n'y a pas de repas réguliers (.) et il(s) ne me parle(nt) pas.*
Hm yes (.) there is no regular meals (.) and he doesn't/they don't talk to me.
- E4 :** *Oui (.) euh (.) bon (.) d'accord (.) tu veux faire quoi maintenant ?*
Yes (.) hm (.) well (.) ok (.) what you want to do now?

²⁰ For easy reading of the following scripts, we explain the transcription conventions: (.) indicates a pause and/or the division into prosodic groups. <> indicate overlapping turns of speech. Comments, laughter, and noises appear in square brackets. Transcription is by standard spelling. Non-canonical forms produced by learners are not 'corrected'.

- E3** *Euh* (.) *je voudrais* (.) *changer de famille*.
Hm (.) I would like to change family.
- E4** : *Je pense que* (.) *c'est possible ça* (.) *mais je dois contrôler des documents* (.) *attends* (.) *une minute*.
I think that (.) it's possible (.) but I have to check some documents (.) wait (.) one minute.
- E3** : *Eh oui*. [...].
Hm yes [...].

In this exchange, a certain communicative distance is established (i.e. use of the polite form *vous* 'you'). A differentiation of hierarchical roles can be observed: the director is on familiar terms with the student and speaks to him in a more friendly tone whereas the student uses a more formal one. A partial interrogative *quoi* 'what' is produced as well facilitating structures such as *c'est possible ça* 'this is possible', also with the use of *ça* 'this'. Contrary to the continuous speech, we notice the presence of phatic marks and hesitations. A realism effect is to be noted, as the sound of the student knocking on the door helps to make the simulation more truthful.

(b.1) Students 5 and 6 [E5 - E6]

Excerpts b1 and b2 concern the simulation of a conflict. When the car lent to a friend is returned, the owner notices a scratch on the door. He claims a refund.

- E5** : *Oh mais* (.) [*nom*] *regarde ici* (.) *tu* <*tu*> *vois* ?
Oh but (.) [*name*] look at that (.) you you can see/you know?
- E6** : <*Où*> *où* ?
Where where?
- E5** : *Il y a une rayure sur la portière côté* <*passager*>.
There is a scratch on the passenger side door.
- E6** : <*Oui*> *oui bah c'est péte*.
Yes yes well it's busted.
- E5** : <*Tu vois*> ? [*très expressif*].
You can see/you know? [in a very expressive way].
- E6** : <*Oui*> *il est vraiment* <*pété*>.
Yes it's really busted.

- E5 :** <Je m'en fous> si c'est péte (.) [très expressif] quand je te l'ai prêtée (.) était nouvelle ma voiture (.) et maintenant (.) il y a une énorme (.) pour moi c'est énorme (.) rayure sur la portière.
I don't care if it's busted (.) [very expressive] when I lent it to you (.) was new my car (.) and now (.) there's a huge (.) for me it's huge (.) scratch on the door.
- E6 :** *mais* (.) <mais>.
but, but.
- E5 :** <Tu vois> ? [...].
You can see/you know?

This interaction is very expressive, especially thanks to the use of prosodic features reflecting surprise, anger, and regret. These features are accompanied by numerous interjections typical of the spoken language and by forms of language that show a high degree of proximity. The use of familiar lexical forms is particularly relevant.

(c) Students 9 and 10 [E9 - E10 + E10' (E10 plays the role of two characters)]

In this excerpt, interaction is about picking up clothes at a dry cleaner. The customer realises that he has unfortunately forgotten the receipt and has to find a solution...

- E9 :** [*Frappe à la porte*] *Bonjour Monsieur.*
[Knock at the door] Good morning, Sir.
- E10 :** *Bonjour Monsieur.*
Good morning, Sir.
- E9 :** *Ça va ?*
How are you.
- E10 :** *Ça va bien et vous ?*
I'm fine and you?
- E9 :** *Bien bien bien.*
Fine, fine, fine.
- E10 :** *Je suis venu ici (.) pour prendre mes vêtements.*
I'm here (.) to get my clothes back.
- E9 :** *Vous avez le ticket ?*
Do you have the receipt?

- E10 :** *Le ticket [très expressif] ? Non (.) je l'ai perdu (.) j'ai j'ai j'ai plus le ticket.*
The receipt [in a very expressive way]? No (.) I've lost it (.) I'ven't I'ven't I'ven't got the ticket any more.
- E9 :** *Je suis désolé (.) mais (.) si tu ne l'as pas (.) je ne peux pas (.) te rendre les vêtements.*
I'm really sorry (.) but (.) if you don't have it (.) I can't give the clothes back.
- E10 :** *Comment ? Je suis votre client (.) depuis longtemps (.) vous me connais (.) toi me connais (.) je vole pas les vêtements des autres.*
What? I'm your customer (.) since a long time (.) you know me (.) you know me (.) I don't steal other people's clothes.
- E9 :** *Je suis désolé (.) vous devez avoir le ticket (.) c'est le règlement.*
I'm sorry (.) you must have the receipt (.) this is the rule.
- E10 :** *Moi je connais le le chef de cette (.) teinturerie (.) appelez-le et (.) on voit ce qu'il (.) ce qu'il vous dit euh (.) je sais pas moi.*
I do know the boss of this (.) dry cleaner (.) call him (.) we'll see what he (.) what he says hm (.) I don't know.
- E9 :** *Ouais ouais (.) c'est bon c'est bon (.) je vais chercher le p- le chef.*
Yeah yeah (.) it's fine it's fine (.) I'm going to look for the b- the boss.
- E10' :** *[Nom] comment ça va ? [check].*
[Name] how are you? [check].
- E9 :** *Ouais mon pote ça va ?*
Yeah my buddy how are you?
- E10' :** *Bien bien (.) euh (.) alors (.) quel est le problème ?*
Fine fine (.) hm (.) so (.) what's the problem?
- E9 :** *Ce Monsieur ne/me veut pas donner mes vêtements (.) ok (.) j'ai pas le ticket (.) mais lui (= le chef) il me connaît.*
This gentleman doesn't want to give me my clothes back (.) ok (.) I don't have the receipt (.) but him (= the boss) he knows me.
- E10' :** *Oh il est mon ami (.) [nom] j'arrive (.) voilà (.) c'est bon ?*
Oh he's my friend (.) [name] I'll be back (.) here it is (.) is that ok?

- E9** : *[Check] Merci beaucoup mon ami.*
[Check] Thanks a lot my friend.
- E10'** : *C'est bon c'est bon (.) ne t'inquiète pas pour le ticket.*
That's fine that's fine (.) don't worry about the receipt.
- E9** : *Ah ok (.) on se voit (.) la prochaine fois (.) ok ?*
Ah ok (.) see you (.) next time (.) ok?
- E10'** : *À la prochaine [nom] à la prochaine [check] (.) au revoir.*
Next time [name] next time [check] (.) bye.
- E9** : *Au revoir.*
Bye bye.

In this last excerpt, the students' choice of interpretation is particularly creative. The same student plays the roles of two characters: the salesman and the boss. The customer, who knows the boss, asks to see him to solve his problem. The role change is marked verbally by the passage from forms marking distance to forms marking proximity, and non-verbally, thanks to the use of the check, a way of greeting between young friends.

4.3.4 Review of Activity 2

Activity 2 allowed us to work on speaking and interaction as objects of teaching/learning and not only as means of communication. The speaking activity is the product of a true co-construction in interaction (see Pekarek Doehler 2006). The degree of student empowerment and responsibility is remarkable as is their attention to detail. Interactional speaking allowed for the actualisation of many features of orality, both linguistic and discursive. Students also demonstrated successful appropriation of variational features. Among the disadvantages, as with Activity 1, Activity 2 is time-consuming, requires a good mastery of technical and technological aspects, but also a high degree of training and expertise on the part of teachers. Finally, it also requires a high level of involvement from the students, both from a cognitive and motivational point of view.

4.4 Discussion

The use of a digital recorder allowed us/them to keep a permanent record of the oral productions of the learners and thus constitutes an effective means to offset the volatility of the oral. Moreover, since the students also

had the possibility to go back over their productions, recording them proved to be a relevant solution to the problem of linearity. In this respect, the results of an evaluation questionnaire distributed to the students at the end of the activities showed that 70% of them appreciated “very much” the possibility of recording their production and 30% “enormously” appreciated it. The opportunity to listen to their recording was “enormously” appreciated by 46% of the students, “very much” appreciated by 30%, and “appreciated” by 24%. The phase of awareness of the variational features of French and the importance given to the planning stage seem to have succeeded in encouraging the emergence and observation of typical oral phenomena in the learners' speech. Thus, most of students acknowledge that recording their production helped them to better prepare and organise their speech, focusing more on the process than on the product.

Students were also able to make their recordings in a separate room and without the presence of the teacher, which significantly decreased their stress about speaking. A total of 77% of the students said they were less stressed than in a traditional test. The choice of a communicative simulation activity proved to be a winning solution, as students were spared the stress of improvisation. On the other hand, work on more realistic, action-type tasks could be proposed later in the semester, once they had acquired a certain degree of confidence. In fact, sooner or later, the learners would have to confront the ‘reality’ of language interactions and learn to manage their complexity.

Moreover, our didactic activities were not limited to mobilising speaking as a means of communication, since focusing on the process had the advantage of shifting the attention to speaking as a teaching and learning object. This was the starting point for work focused on introducing diamesic and diaphasic variational features – as well as linguistic forms – actualised in communicative proximity. The learners were not relegated to the role of ‘respondents’, but became learners-speakers in their own right.

Finally, being able to go back over oral productions was beneficial for the learners. Indeed, they declared that recording their performance helped them to see their mistakes (85%) and to understand them (46%), to listen to themselves again (61.5%), and to correct themselves (31%). As for the teacher's contextualised feedback, the learners stated that it helped them better understand their mistakes (85%).

5. Conclusion and perspectives

At the end of our journey around the teaching of spoken French, we are convinced that broadening one's point of view on oral language, by considering spoken French in all its variations, especially in the diamesic and diaphasic ones, can help teachers adopt a descriptive, 'open' attitude that takes into account the diversity of forms and uses. This new perspective on spoken language would allow them to present a language feature by highlighting all its complexity and diversity, instead of resorting to a univocal and fixed approach. Teachers would obviously have to be given further training to develop a real linguistic expertise that goes beyond mere didactic competence. In turn, such a move would allow teachers to determine precisely 'what' to teach (a more linguistic questioning) to implement 'how' to teach (an essentially didactic questioning).

From the learner's perspective, working on spoken French can bring them closer to the 'reality' of the language and better develop their sociolinguistic competence. By confronting complex situations, the learner – as a social actor and user of the language – will be better equipped to face them, thanks to the development of a capacity for observation/analysis of language features and metalinguistic reflection. The latter, in fact, will help him/her to grasp and interpret more easily the social meaning of his/her actions in and through language, which is, in the end, particularly consistent with the actional perspective advocated by the CEFR.

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