Investigating The Use Of Naturally Occurring Spoken French In Adult Foreign Language Learning

Thesis

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Abstract

This study explores the feasibility and desirability of introducing samples of naturally occurring spoken French to adult language learners at an early stage of the learning process to develop perception and listening skills.

The literature review examines the status of the spoken language, the notion of authenticity of materials, and the development of listening skills in the context of past and present language teaching methodologies, including recent ecological and data-driven approaches. Linguistic theories and descriptions of the spoken French language are also reviewed.

The research is based on an experimental study, set in the context of distance language learning at the Open University, and makes use of mixed methods. Students were asked to work with experimental teaching materials comprising self-study activities based on recorded samples of naturally occurring spoken French matching the topics and structures of the Open University beginners' French module. A test was then administered to participants and their performance was compared to that of members of a control group. Their reaction to the experimental approach was gauged using semi-structured interviews. The data analysis demonstrates that the students were able to engage with the speech samples and related tasks, and with their specific linguistic features. It also reveals that students found the approach challenging but useful in developing listening skills.

Taking into account cognitive, affective and contextual dimensions, and bearing in mind the constraints inherent to the typically mixed context of adult language learning, the study concludes that naturally occurring spoken French and activities aimed at developing awareness of its features should be introduced as part of a mix of materials, striking a balance between ecological and reductionist approaches, offering students a chance to exercise choice between types of materials and providing tools they can reuse when exposed to naturally occurring spoken French autonomously.

for Jan and Oscar

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The broad research goal of this study is to investigate how the specific linguistic features of naturally occurring speech can be taken into account in the teaching of foreign languages.

At the outset, the project aimed to bring together observations that I had made in the course of my previous studies and research investigating the syntactic and prosodic features of spontaneous spoken French and English, during my experience as a foreign language teacher of English and of French and as a university lecturer with a particular focus on linguistics, and more recently as a designer of French course materials for the Open University (OU) and of English language textbooks for secondary school pupils in France (Martin-Cocher et al. (2006-2009) and Martin-Cocher et al. (2011-2012)).

There is a paradox in the fact that for over half a century, language teaching and learning methodologies have put the emphasis on speech, as opposed to writing, as

the aspect of language students should learn from and should learn to reproduce. But more often than not speech has not been considered as a system in its own right; instead what students are frequently given to hear and to imitate, as part of published language packs for example, is oralised written language. Yet for many years there have been advocates of the fact that the spoken language cannot be considered in relation to the written language, for example Sauvageot (1972, p.10):

> *La vraie langue parlée est celle qui est utilisée par le sujet parlant spontanément, sans référence à une forme écrite quelconque.*

> (The real spoken language is the one that is used spontaneously by the speaker, with no reference to any written form.)[1]

What most courses are doing is, in Rebecca Hughes's words, 'teaching a language through speaking' rather than 'teaching the spoken form of a language' (2002). It seems self evident that if languages students are aiming to *speak* a new language, they should be taught about the characteristics of its spoken form, yet this is rarely the case, as is highlighted by many researchers such as, for example, Harmegnies et al. (2005, p.266):

> *la question du traitement pédagogique de l'acquisition des processus de gestion de la matière phonique a largement été scotomisée et souvent cantonnée dans un rôle subsidiaire.*

> (The issue of the pedagogic treatment of the acquisition of how to process acoustic content has been widely ignored and often considered of secondary importance.)

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[1] A translation from the original French is provided for all long citations in accordance with EdD regulations (section 3.1 of document EX11) which state that 'brief quotations may be made in foreign languages'. For this purpose 'brief' has usually been taken as being about a line of text. All translations from French texts are my own.

As an OU Lecturer, and tutor on OU residential courses in France, I have become more interested in how we can try and help students understand naturally occurring speech. Discussions with students have shown that they are often very eager to practise comprehension and pronunciation, but that they seem unable (or they seem to perceive that they are unable) to transfer the knowledge and skills acquired through comprehension and pronunciation activities to the context of a real interaction with fluent speakers, or of listening to authentic speech samples. Indeed the difficulty of making sense of connected speech delivered at normal speed in a foreign language can be a great source of frustration.

One possible reason for this is that there is a great difference between the type of oral language that students are given to listen to in the context of pronunciation and perception activities (generally simplified speech or recorded scripted materials, isolated words and slowed down utterances) and the type of language that they aim to understand and imitate, which is naturally occurring speech. This has implications, because the phonological model that they are given does not match that of spontaneous speech, for example because slow elocution modifies the nature of some sounds and removes some features of spontaneous speech such as elisions, assimilations, etc. It often also removes discourse features which are characteristic of spontaneous speech (for instance repetitions, false starts, pauses) and which can actually make the comprehension of such speech easier. Simplifying the language makes it easier to isolate particular sounds for students to recognise and repeat, but it does not provide an opportunity to practise understanding connected speech; the student's ear therefore gets trained to recognise sounds which are not familiar in his/her first language, but it does not get trained to recognise these sounds when they appear in connected speech, and when they get realised slightly differently in various phonological contexts.

When writing textbooks aimed at teaching English grammar and pronunciation to school pupils, I did informal research on different methodologies used over the course of the previous century and noticed a great discrepancy between the evolution of the teaching of these two aspects of the language: grammar has been taught through several different methodologies (from teaching it through translation to learning by rote through behaviourist drills to integrating it into a communicative approach, for example), but the teaching of pronunciation has not been through such an evolution. Different tools have been used (from language labs to personal audio cassettes to digital recordings) but the fundamentals have not changed. While the whole field of second language teaching was slowly evolving from an object-centred approach to a constructivist approach focusing on the subject (Puren, 2008) seeing the learner as an individual able to make sense of a linguistic system and to internalise and reuse it (through a cycle of observation, deduction, appropriation, reuse), in the meantime the teaching of speech features did not much move away from the basic (behaviourist) principle of listen and repeat drills. As Jones (2002) puts it: 'most commercially produced course books on pronunciation today present activities remarkably similar to the audiolingual texts of the 1950s'. Whilst for a long time this could be explained by the fact that it was not practically feasible to get students to work independently on speech because recordings were either non existent or too cumbersome to use, this is no longer the case and ICT (information, communication and technology) tools could now provide many opportunities to display and manipulate speech, as shown by Jenkins (2004).

Current practice is that the difficulty of the language samples students are exposed to in language courses is rigorously graded; as a result, beginners' French textbooks often only contain simplified texts and slow pre-scripted recordings, and samples of naturally occurring texts and speech are held back until higher levels. By contrast, the

following hypothesis can be formulated: 'language students would benefit from being introduced to and taught about naturally occurring spoken French earlier than is currently practised to develop listening skills'. In this research project I therefore investigate if students can be profitably exposed to samples of naturally occurring speech in the initial stages of their learning, and how they can best be taught to understand and engage with such samples.

Part

I

Literature review

Introduction to Part I

The working hypothesis which serves as a starting point for the study described in this dissertation is that language students would benefit from being introduced to and taught about naturally occurring spoken French earlier than is currently practised to develop listening skills. The first task, to investigate this, was to conduct a review of any literature that was relevant to the question. The aim was to position this study in relation to existing research, to provide a context for the study, to verify the validity of hypotheses formulated as the outcome of previous observations, and to identify areas for further reflection and investigation.

As the introduction has shown, the reflections from which the investigation sprang were rooted in my previous studies and experience. These happen to have had a wide span: my studies and research involved different disciplines (English and French) and different dimensions (language teaching and linguistic description), and my professional experience developed in a range of contexts (distance teaching and traditional universities, adults and younger learners, textbook design and classroom teaching), and across three different countries (France, the US and the UK). The study consequently relates to an array of domains and contexts and hinges on a range of theories and pedagogical approaches. The working hypothesis was used to delineate the scope of the literature review and identify the areas to be investigated, as shown in Figure 1.
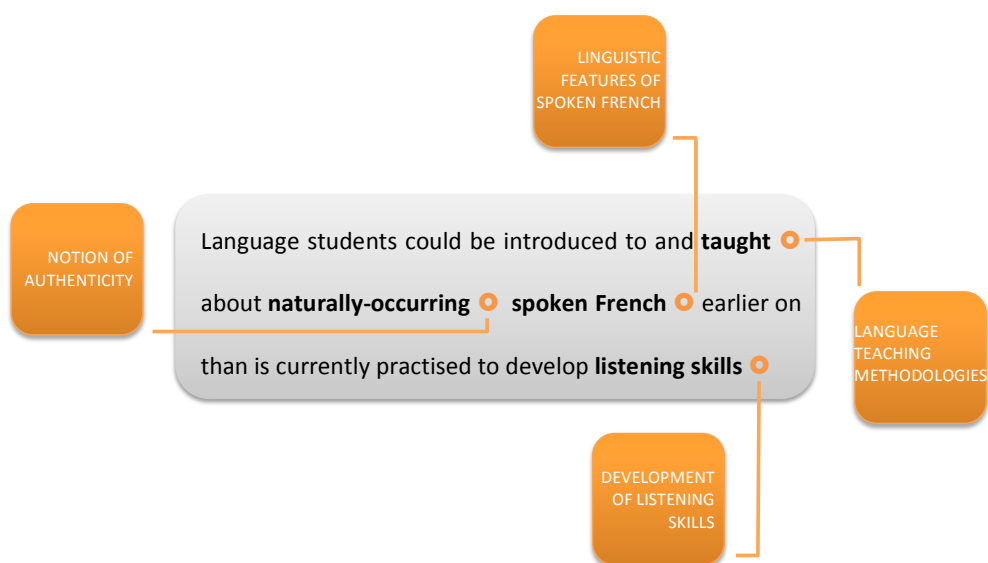
Figure 1: Identifying domains for the literature review

Because of the particularly wide range, a different chapter is dedicated to each area. Chapter 1 below starts by looking at the evolution of language teaching methodologies and at the status of the spoken language within them.

1

The status of the spoken language in language teaching

This chapter examines the evolution of second language teaching methodologies in France and in the UK through several centuries. It focuses mainly on approaches which have been relevant to the teaching of the French language, and more particularly on the status of speech within these methodologies.

1.1 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The history of language teaching and the development of language teaching methodologies is well documented, for example by Mackey (1965), Stern (1983), Puren (1988), Germain (1993) and Richards and Rodgers (2001). Besse (1985) is particularly relevant to this study because the volume focuses on the development of different approaches to the production of French teaching materials, or *méthodes*. In his historical overview of language learning in British schools, Whitehead (1996) also describes trends in the materials used in modern languages classes and gives an interesting insight into the cross-fertilisation between approaches to language teaching in France and to the teaching of French in the UK. The approach chosen by Coleman (2004) is different: he gives a polemic account of the position of modern languages in British Higher Education. His overview is relevant though because it highlights the enduring prominence given to literary studies within modern languages studies in UK universities and therefore the widespread slant towards study of the written language at all stages of language learning. What all of these

overviews point to is a development of language teaching methodologies which evolved from traditional object-centred approaches mostly based on texts and the study of grammar ('la méthode traditionnelle' i.e. the grammar-translation method) to learner-centred approaches giving speech and the development of communication skills greater and greater importance.

Yet it is not true that the further back we look, the less attention is given to the spoken language in the teaching of languages. Kelly's survey (1969) shows that the development of approaches to language teaching was not linear, and that some themes recur at different periods. Puren (1988) also sees the progress of teaching methodologies as a circular phenomeon, describing it as 'un espace […] sphérique' (p.394). Teachers and theorists have always given thought to the role of speech in foreign language learning, even in the early days when languages were essentially studied through texts. For example, speech was the medium through which a language was meant to be acquired when the natural method was applied, as experienced, for example, by Montaigne who was taught to speak Latin by his Latin-speaking tutor, as described by Rey et al. (2007, p.582). Piaget explains that Comenius advocated frequent speaking practice as part of his own conception of language teaching as he believed in learning through action: 'let the pupils learn to write by writing, to speak by speaking […]' (Piaget, 1993, p.5). In the late 18th century Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (1781) looks at the relationship between humankind and language; in this work (p.51), Rousseau acknowledges the place of the spoken language in language learning:

> *Pour savoir l'anglais, il faut l'apprendre deux fois; l'une à le lire, et l'autre à le parler.*

(To learn English you must learn the language twice: once to read it, and a second time to speak it.)

Similar principles re-emerged when the direct method was theorised in the late 19th century. Later, the Reform Movement, in the 1880s, was born of the new ideas about language teaching put forward by a group of linguists (Sweet, Viëtor, Passy, and Palmer, among others) who concurrently established phonetics as a discipline and founded the International Phonetic Association, as described by Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.9). They had a lasting influence: the most widely used textbooks in French classes in UK schools up to the 1970s came with their own *Phonetic Introduction* (Whitmarsh, 1947a, 1947b). Yet the approach was extremely traditional and communication in informal French was not its primary goal.

Puren (1988) reports that from the 1920s to the 1960s the official foreign language teaching methodology in use in French schools was called the 'méthode active' (MA); it was a mixed approach with features from both the traditional method and the direct method (MD):

> *A la suite de la MD, la MA donne au travail en classe la forme d'un dialogue oral permanent; mais ce dialogue est principalement commentaire de textes, cet oral essentiellement un mode pédagogique d'assimilation des formes écrites, lesquelles restent considérées comme les seules autorisées face à une langue parlée tenue comme fugace, imprécise et changeante. La priorité à la langue orale en classe n'est qu'une priorité chronologique. (p.238)*

> (After the MD, the MA turned work in the classroom into a permanent spoken dialogue; but that dialogue was mainly a commentary on texts, and that spoken language was essentially a pedagogical medium to help the assimilation of written forms, which were still considered as the only

authorised ones whereas the spoken language was seen as transient, imprecise and changeable. The spoken language only came first chronologically.)

Banathy and Sawyer (1969) summarise the evolution of the position of speech in language teaching with humour and, perhaps, sarcasm:

> For three hundred years […] there has always been a prophet touting a new method based on the absolutely new discovery that language is a spoken phenomenon. And beside, and usually opposed to him, has always been a larger group who have viewed language as mainly the carrier of literature, as an object of philosophical investigation, as a tool for magic or persuasion, as a form of mathematics, or what have you. (p.544)

Coleman (2004), Hughes (2002) or Harmegnies et al. (2005) would argue that things seem to have changed little since 1969.

Coste (1994) gives an account of the development of the French approach to the theorisation of language teaching 20 years after its inception (in France); in his introduction he highlights the fact that research into the spoken language has been instrumental in the development of language teaching: 'les études portant sur l'oral ont eu un rôle non négligeable' (p.7). The primacy of the oral language in the theorisation of the teaching of French by French researchers came about with the design of *Le français fondamental* (Gougenheim et al., 1964) and the development of the *méthode structuro-globale audio visuelle* (SGAV), as used in *Voix et images de France* (Guberina, 1970) for example. Galazzi (2008) describes it thus:

> *À ce moment-là, la langue parlée émerge de nouveau avec force à l'horizon de la didactique grâce à la convergence de plusieurs événements: la place accordée aux discours parlés dans les enquêtes sur le Français fondamental*

et la rencontre entre l'école normale de Saint-Cloud et l'équipe de Zagreb.

(p.23)

(At that time, the spoken language burst back onto the language teaching scene thanks to the simultaneous influence of several factors: the place devoted to speech in the Français fondamental surveys and the encounter between the École Normale de Saint-Cloud and the Zagreb team.)

This development followed the emergence of the audiolingual method in the US in the 1940s; as Besse (1985) points out, the importance of speech and the prioritising of the spoken language is what the two approaches have in common: 'elles donnent l'une et l'autre la priorité à la langue parlée' (p.40). In the English-speaking world this development was linked to the advent of applied linguistics, and in France it was concurrent with the formation of a new discipline, *la didactique des langues* (cf. Véronique, 2009b). For Puren (1988) the distinguishing characteristic of SGAV is the unique conjunction of projected images on slides and associated sound tapes as the main teaching aids: 'l'unique critère technique de l'intégration didactique autour du support audio-visuel' (p.284). SGAV is also of particular interest because the methodology was based on a new approach to pronunciation teaching, to which it gave great prominence: *la méthode verbo-tonale de correction phonétique*, introduced and described by Renard (1971). But Galazzi (2008) points out that although SGAV was revolutionary because it established the spoken language as the type of language that should be taught to and learnt by languages students, the outcome was less positive:

> *[SGAV permet] de réaliser concrètement, tout au moins en partie, le rêve des véritables pionniers de l'oralité, mais pour arriver à un résultat qui est, paradoxalement, très éloigné de la langue parlée. (p.24)*

([SGAV allowed] the dream of the real pioneers of speech to become a reality, at least partly, but the outcome was, paradoxically, very remote from the true nature of the spoken language.)

Whilst SGAV developed in France, in the UK applied linguists such as Palmer and Hornby were also concerned with language teaching, and the methodology that resulted from research which started in the 1920s also attempted to give the spoken language prominence, so much so that it became known as 'the Oral Approach'. It is described by Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.38) who explain that teaching begins with the spoken language, which is introduced situationally. The authors show that one of the principles of the approach was the teaching of 'the underlying sentence patterns of the spoken language' (p.38). Richards and Rodgers state that 'The Oral Approach was the accepted British approach to English language teaching by the 1950s' (p.38), but no confirmation was found in the literature of whether it also applied to the teaching of French in the UK in the same period. The Oral Approach later became known as Situational Language Teaching or SLT. When its principles were first questioned in the 1960s, it led to the development of Communicative Language Teaching in the UK.

In France the methodological approach to teaching and learning French that followed SGAV was also the communicative approach which 'saw the need to focus in language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures' (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p.153). It advocated a different choice of input, described by Besse (1985) as 'plus proche de [la langue] réellement utilisée par les natifs' (p.46), a phenomenon confirmed by Valdman (1998):

la poussée du courant méthodologique privilégiant l'acquisition de la part des apprenants d'un certain niveau de compétence communicative conduit à

réduire l'importance de textes écrits reflétant un usage rigoureusement norméé au profit d'un échantillon extrait d'interactions verbales naturelles, donc, montrant au départ une grande variabilité. (p.177)

(the development of a methodological approach favouring the acquisition by learners of a certain level of communicative competence led to the diminished importance of written texts representing a strictly normative usage of the language in favour of samples of natural verbal interactions demonstrating great variability.)

However, Besse continues with a statement revealing his scepticism, saying that

il y a souvent loin du projet méthodologique à sa réalisation dans les manuels et dans la classe (p.50)

(there is often a large discrepancy between a pedagogical project and the way it is implemented in textbooks and in classrooms).

The next section examines the methodological approaches currently advocated by theoreticians or institutions, for use in classrooms and other language learning contexts.

1.2   CURRENT METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

In the early 2000s the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages* (CEFR) was published (Council of Europe, 2001), and is currently shaping language teaching in most European countries. Its primary aim was to provide a tool to describe stages and objectives in language learning with a view to unifying the way language proficiency is measured across Europe and across languages. A detailed mapping of skills at all levels for the French language is found in Beacco and Porquier (2007) (for level A1, for example) and Chauvet (2008). The CEFR gives equal

prominence to all skills, but it innovated in introducing a third skill, rather than the usual two (listening and speaking) related to the spoken language: 'speaking in interaction', thereby giving increased prominence to speech and to its social dimension. Although the CEFR does not constitute in itself a methodology for language teaching, it does contain principles intended for teachers and course designers which have been interpreted as a recommended approach.

Bearing in mind that the CEFR sprang from a political statement from the Council of Europe promoting plurilingualism and mobility in Europe, it is not surprising that the approach defined by the CEFR is strongly underpinned by social principles and that the learner as a social agent is at its centre:

> The approach adopted [by the CEFR], generally speaking, is an action-oriented one in so far as it views users and learners of a language primarily as 'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning. […] The action-based approach therefore also takes into account the cognitive, emotional and volitional resources and the full range of abilities specific to and applied by the individual as a social agent. (Council of Europe, 2001, p.9)

This approach, and its very wording, strongly echoes a methodology which, at least in the UK, pre-dates the CEFR and which is still common nowadays: task-based language teaching (TBLT). It was developed because of shared feelings amongst language teaching specialists that the move to a communicative approach had been merely theoretical and had not resulted in enough changes in teaching practice. TBLT

was therefore introduced as a means to take one further step towards achieving 'real' communication in the language teaching classroom. As Van den Branden et al. (2009) explain:

> In the 1980s, the term was coined, and the concept developed, by SLA researchers and language pedagogues, largely in reaction to a broad consensus that had emerged around what were seen as shortcomings in teacher-centered, form-oriented second language classroom practice. (p.1)

The first authors to define TBLT were Long (1985) and Prabhu (1987). Candlin (1987) articulated the idea that tasks should be the building blocks of syllabus design, soon followed by Long and Crookes (1992). The principles of TBLT are summarised by Nunan (2004); they include 'the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation'. Many different definitions of the notion of 'task' are found in the literature, for example in Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004). Van den Branden (2006) points out that tasks are not only an organising principle for language teaching but also the means through which language can be acquired:

> From a task-based perspective [...] people not only learn language *in order* to make functional use of it, but also *by* making functional use of it.

This echoes the principles of the direct method, whereby speech was not just the *what* of language acquisition but also the *how*.

TBLT was mostly influential in UK teaching. In France however the shift away from the communicative approach, as evidenced by the statements of language textbook authors and publishers, was subsequent to the CEFR and directly influenced by it. It has given way to a new approach labelled the 'approche actionnelle' or action-oriented approach (AOA) (Council of Europe, 2001, p.9). France shares this with many other European countries where the CEFR is implemented and has become

part of official national language policy documents defining a national syllabus, for example.

The AOA is also essentially task-based (it's sometimes referred to as 'l'approche par les tâches'). As Bourguignon (2006) explains: 'Au niveau de la perspective actionnelle, la communication est au service de l'action' (p.64). And for Bourguignon, tasks are also the fundamental components on which a language teaching syllabus can be built: she uses 'learning scenarios' as building blocks. What distinguishes the AOA is the added explicit socio-political dimension of the CEFR which is not a feature of TBLT. Puren (2006) shows that the approach entails a move from tasks based on communication ('agir sur l'autre par la langue') to tasks based on interaction and collaboration ('agir avec l'autre, par la langue ou autrement') (p.37). This social dimension is so central to the AOA that both Puren and Bourguignon have coined new terms to describe this new theoretical concept: Puren (2004) calls it '*la co-action*' and Bourguignon (2006) '*la communic'action*'.

Fundamental to AOA is the idea that the aim of learning a language is to be able to use it immediately in real social exchanges. Speech is not to be given more prominence than the written language but the notion of spoken interaction is pivotal, and suggests that learners should be trained to be able to take part in such verbal exchanges.

Van Lier's definition of ecological linguistics and its reference to 'language as relations between people and the world' (2004, p.5) strongly mirrors the AOA. Van Lier takes an emergentist rather than a linear view of the process of learning:

> [Ecological linguistics] regards language learning not as gradual linear acquisition, but as emergence. Emergence happens when relatively simple elements combine together to form a higher-order system. The whole is not

only more than the sum of its parts, it is of a different nature than the parts. The new system is on a different scale, and has different meanings and patterns of functioning than the simpler ingredients had from which it emerged. (p.5)

This emergentist view is also taken by authors who advocate a 'data-driven' approach to language teaching, deriving from corpus linguistics. In their presentation of a new large corpus of spoken French, ciel-f, Gadet et al. (2012, p.41) explicitly link the constitution and analysis of corpora to the notion of ecology in terms which are reminiscent of the CEFR's action-oriented approach:

une langue est ancrée de manière multiple dans une société ou une culture, et ces ancrages se manifestent d'une manière ou d'une autre dans les discours, dans les interactions et les échanges vivants. Une approche écologique permet de préciser cette idée de base, donc de comprendre ces relations […]

(a language is rooted in a society or a culture in multiple ways, and the roots manifest themselves, in one way or another, in discourse, in interactions and in live exchanges. Through an ecological approach, this basic idea can be specified and therefore these relationships can be understood […])

In data-driven language teaching, corpus data is used to identify the linguistic structures that should be taught (where the corpus is used by course designers as an alternative to prescriptive grammars) and/or to implement a teaching approach based on the exploration of real data by students to observe patterns and derive rules (where the corpus is used directly by learners, guided by teachers). Overviews of the approach and literature reviews can be found in McEnery and Wilson (1997), Mukherjee (2006) and Reppen (2011). For a long time, such a method could only

have been based on written texts as the only corpora that were available were written corpora. But in the past decades progress in technology has made it possible to collect a corpus of spoken data, and an ecological or data-driven approach to language teaching can, and does, now include the study of speech—an example of how this can be implemented is presented by Carter et al. (2011).

Figure 2 overleaf summarises the information presented in Sections 1.1 and 1.2. It is based on a table designed by Puren (2004), but contains additional information (noted in italics). The last row synthesises information related to the status of the spoken language in each methodology.

Methodology	TRADITIONAL	DIRECT	ACTIVE	AUDIO-LINGUAL	ORAL APPROACH / SITUATIONAL LANGUAGE TEACHING	AUDIOVISUAL	COMMUNICATIVE	ACTION ORIENTED (& TASK-BASED)
Period	1840-1900	1900-1910	1920-1960	1940-	1950-1980	1960-1980	1980-1990	2000-
Countries applied	Many	France via Germany, and others	France	Originated in the US	UK	France	Many	European countries (mainly UK)
Main domain	Grammar	Vocabulary	Culture	Sentence patterns	Sentence patterns	Communication	Communication	Action (task)
Typical activity	Comprehension, production	Observation, description	Analysis, interpretation, extrapolation, reaction	Repetition, imitation, drills	Presentation through situation. Listening, repetition / response	Reproduction, expression	Information (informing oneself, informing others)	Action (task) and interaction
Organising principle	Examples, isolated sentences	Images and texts	Texts	Drills	Graded structural syllabus; drills.	Audiovisual strips, dialogues	Any documents, inc. realia	Scenarios and projects (projects or tasks)
Status of the spoken language	Incidental: teaching is based on texts.	Speech is the sole medium of instruction and the learning objective.	Speech is used in the first phase of a lesson, as a way into texts. In terms of status, it is secondary.	Language is learned and practised orally. Use of the language lab is systematic.	Structured are taught orally first. Pronunciation practice is an important part of lessons.	Teaching is based on audio-visual teaching aids. Pronunciation practice is central to the methodology.	Speech as the primary form of communication. Pair-work dialogues as the archetype.	All skills given equal status but new emphasis on spoken interaction for AOA. Collaboration and interaction as the archetype.

+ object centered → + learner centered

Figure 2: The status of the spoken language throughout the evolution of methodologies

1.3 CURRENT EXAMPLES: ANALYSIS OF BEGINNERS' FRENCH TEXTBOOKS

Has the evolution of the conception of language teaching mapped in the previous sections been translated into innovative approaches employing activities and materials which teach skills related to speech? Only partly: with due respect to Coste (1994), the lasting impact of the speech-based language teaching methodologies pioneered in 1960s France is not immediately evident in terms of the materials and methods published. Some years before Coste, Walz (1986), studying French language textbooks in use in the USA, claimed that 'French textbooks have not changed despite a generation of emphasis on the speaking skill' (p.18). But one may wonder whether these views are a true reflection of the content of textbooks currently found on the French and UK markets.

Hagège (1985) acknowledged that debates around differences between the spoken and the written languages are not new: 'la relation entre l'oral et l'écrit se trouve être un objet d'antiques et incessantes controverses' (p.89). It seems that one of the reasons why there is no consensus around what form of the spoken language to use in language teaching is that it is often seen as a one-dimensional entity rather than as a complex set of phenomena. In fact there are different dimensions to the spoken language, and different uses for it as part of language teaching. In the natural and direct methods, the spoken language was a mode of acquisition: being consistently spoken to in a foreign language was the way you were meant to acquire it. In the audiolingual and SGAV methodologies, it was presented as an alternative to learning from the literary classics: it meant learning to speak as well as learning to read and translate; at the same time it meant focussing on a different style and register, i.e. on everyday informal speech rather than on formal and stylised literary language. But there was a strong focus on learning structures, including phonetic principles. With

the advent of the communicative approach, the focus was on *communication*, not solely on speech. This was a move from learning forms to learning how to produce and understand meaning, whether in speech or in writing. Finally in the AOA advocated by the CEFR the new dimension of *interaction* was introduced; this refers to producing meaning as part of a group of speakers, in a multi-channel exchange, rather than in a monologue. There are therefore many different dimensions to the spoken language, and, necessarily, different ways it comes into language teaching.

This can be confirmed by analysing what use is made of audio materials in currently available French textbooks and courses. To do this, sample units from a number of beginners' French packs have been examined (the list is provided in Appendix B) to prepare an inventory of all the uses that are made of audio recordings. Two main facts have emerged.

Firstly, audio recordings are exploited in a variety of ways as part of language courses and to fulfil many different objectives. For example, audio recordings serve as input for learning structures (i.e. as a corpus which demonstrates or illustrates a language point), as an object with which to practise listening or sound perception, as a stimulus or a model for speaking practice, as a model for imitation in pronunciation drills, as a document with cultural content which can be reflected upon to teach culture or intercultural competence, or as a document from which information can be extrated to complete a task. In further cases, the spoken word is not a learning object but the mode of instruction. Figure 3 presents these different uses in diagrammatic form.

Type of use	Typical audio content	Typical associated activity	Example
To introduce and illustrate the use of a new **language** point	Recorded dialogue or monologue	Listen and note the structures used for…	*Alter Ego 1+,* dossier 5 p98: to introduce structures used to ask for information *Mobile A1* p.26: écouter et relever les mots pour dire…
To practise **listening comprehension**	Recorded dialogue or monologue	Listen and answer questions	*Mobile A1* p.26: écoutez les dialogues. Qui parle? Où sont-ils?
To practise **perception** (of sounds or prosodic patterns)	Recorded words or recorded sentences	Listen and select answer	*Alter Ego 1+* p.83: écoutez et comptez les syllabes *Echo A1* p.73: écoutez et dites si les adjectifs sont au masculin ou au féminin.
To practise **pronunciation**	Recorded words or recorded sentences	Listen and repeat	*Agenda 1*, p.73: j'écoute et je répète les phrases.
To practise speaking, as a **model for production**	Recorded dialogue or monologue	Use vocabulary and structures from the audio to prepare your production	*Get started in French* p.73: now it's your turn to practise (…). Use the text above as a model… (N.B. the text is the written version of an audio dialogue.)
To teach **culture**	Recorded dialogue or monologue	Listen and extract / notice / reflect on information	*Libre Echange 1* p.126: audio introduces main monuments and sights in Paris *Version Originale 1* (unité 3, piste 16) a dialogue presents the main features of Paris.
As a **mode of instruction**	The course is entirely recorded (in L1 with reference and examples in L2)	Listen	Michel Thomas, Paul Noble, etc.
To extract information as part of a step **to complete a task** (AOA)	Any audio document that is relevant to the task and true to a real situation.	Listen so as to do…	*Latitudes 1* p.89: téléphonez à votre ami… [ensuite] utilisez vos notes et dessinez le plan pour aller chez votre ami.

Figure 3: Typology of use of audio documents in beginners' French courses

Secondly, the observations have revealed that in a great number of cases, a single audio document will be exploited as part of different activities and to achieve different learning objectives. This can be easily understood as authors have to compromise and be pragmatic and they have to take their own constraints, and those of teachers, into account when producing a course. But this raises the question of whether each audio item is perfectly suited to all the functions that it is supposed to serve. For example, when an audio document is used as a model for production, it needs to be at a level that is comparable to the learners' productive capacity to be usable and to constitute a realistic model for them. But if a listening comprehension activity is based on the same document, does it present enough of a challenge for learners to develop listening skills which are transferable to real situations?

Examining the development of the teaching of perception and listening skills and of the use of audio materials in French language teaching has demonstrated that in spite of theoretical and methodological evolutions, in practice materials and stimuli have not changed in beginners' French textbooks and packs. The review of the debate about the importance of the spoken language in language teaching has suggested that there is some ambiguity about its status, which in turn explains why there has been no agreement about the type of speech samples to include in language teaching materials and little innovation (in textbooks at least—classroom observations would perhaps tell a different story).

The Open University's beginner's French materials, on which this work focuses, contain scripted audio dialogues recorded in a studio using mostly simplified language and slow delivery, and this in spite of claims that they adhere to a communicative approach to language teaching and that they are matched to the

Common European Framework of Reference for languages. This thesis will examine the feasibility of reconciling theory and practice and giving the spoken language a status that is more in line with current methodological approaches through the use of more naturalistic audio materials. This relates to the notion of the authenticity of language teaching materials, which Chapter 2 reviews.

The notion of authenticity in language teaching

The notion tested in this study is whether naturally occurring spoken French could be introduced to beginner learners of French earlier on than is currently commonly done. It hinges on the notion that there is a benefit to introducing students to authentic language samples. Whether this is true or not has been debated widely in the literature, and is the focus of this chapter.

2.1   AUTHENTICITY: DEFINITIONS

Just as advocating the use of spoken language in teaching is no new thing, neither is the call for more authenticity in the documents used. Amongst the goals of the Reform Movement, for example, was the improvement of language teaching, and one of the principles it advocated was the study of the spoken language and the use of conversation texts. Sweet (1899) argued that 'the great advantage of natural, idiomatic texts over artificial 'methods' or 'series' is that they do justice to every feature of the language' (p.178)[2]. He therefore introduced an opposition between 'natural' and 'artificial' input in language teaching.

In her summary of past approaches, Mishan (2004, p.18) suggests five criteria for authenticity: provenance and authorship of the text, original communicative and

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[2] 'Text' is used here in its broad sense, as a sample of language, and not necessarily as a written sample.

socio-cultural purpose of the text, original context, learning activity engendered by the text, and learners' perceptions of and attitude to the text and activities pertaining to it. In this study it is the first of these criteria that is relevant: provenance, i.e. the fact that the speech samples were produced spontaneously by speakers engaged in real communicative situations which had nothing to do with language teaching. In this it follows the definition given by Abe et al. (1979) of an authentic document as a:

> *document produit à des fins autres que l'apprentissage d'une langue seconde. […] énoncé produit dans une situation réelle de communication. (p.2)*

> (document produced for a purpose other than second language teaching and learning. […] utterance produced in real situations of communication.)

Gilmore (2007) lists eight different possible definitions of authenticity in language learning found in the literature. He gives a wide-ranging account of previous definitions of authenticity. His approach is to focus on interaction, which explains why the definition of authenticity that he favours is based on the authenticity of the source of the materials. But other researchers and practitioners have different objectives in mind, for example the acquisition of intercultural skills, the development of learner autonomy, or the implementation of a task-based approach to language learning, to name only a few. To reach these objectives, they will call on 'authentic' documents of different kinds.

2.2 THE CASES FOR AND AGAINST AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS

This section examines the arguments brought forward by advocates of the use of authentic documents in language teaching and those of their opponents in the debate.

Peacock (1997) argues that the use of authentic learning materials increases student motivation. Mishan (1997) reviews more evidence of this from the literature. Mishan (2004) considers the relationship between authenticity and affect, and states that the influence of authentic texts can either be negative or positive, based on findings that the difficulty can create more anxiety or result in higher confidence if it is overcome. The 'affective filter'—a term coined by Krashen (1982, pp.30-32)—is defined as the influence of affective phenomena such as emotions or attitudes on language acquisition:

> For language acquisition to be promoted, the teacher has to consider how the learners' affective filters will react to the texts they interact with in class (Mishan, 2004, p.27).

For Dörnyei, as far as language learning materials are concerned, it is the notion of relevance rather than that of authenticity that is key to learner motivation (Dörnyei, 2001a, pp.62-66).

Other researchers make a case for authentic texts based on different views, for example Abe et al. (1979, p.4):

> *ils permettent donc aux apprenants d'avoir un contact direct avec l'utilisation réelle de la langue*

> (they enable learners to have direct contact with the language as it is actually used).

Of fabricated documents, they assert that:

> *en réduisant la richesse et la complexité des productions langagières*
>
> *authentiques, ces textes retardent, quand ils ne l'empêchent pas, le contact*
>
> *avec la langue réelle. (ibid)*
>
> (by reducing the richness and complexity of authentic language utterances,
>
> these texts delay, or indeed prevent, contact with the real language).

Holec (1990) refers to a cognitivist model of language learning (p.67) and sees a benefit to exposing students to authentic texts, calling it 'la fonction d'exposition' and explaining:

> *leur authenticité accroît la probabilité qu'ils offriront bien à l'apprenant les*
>
> *moyens d'acquérir les savoirs dont il aura besoin pour fonctionner*
>
> *langagièrement en situation 'réelle'. (p.68)*
>
> (Their authenticity increases the probability that they will provide the learner
>
> with the means to acquire the knowledge that he/she will need to function,
>
> linguistically, in a 'real' situation.)

For van Lier (2004), an ecological approach avoids excessive reductionism, defined as follows:

> Reductionism is the idea that complex things must be explained in terms of
>
> more elementary things. […] Sometimes such reductions or bracketing of
>
> parts of the object under investigation are useful or even necessary.
>
> However, the study of the part should never be confused with the study of
>
> the whole, and at some point whatever is said about the part must be
>
> reconciled with the whole. (pp.23-24)

Approaches to beginner learning habitually practise reductionism in one form or another, since selection and grading are key features of conventional (i.e. linear) syllabus design at this level. As an alternative to this, van Lier proposes an ecological

paradigm, which 'sees language as patterns of patterns, and systems of systems' (p.5). This suggests that language should be presented in a way that does not dissimulate its complexity and argues in favour of the use of authentic texts. There are numerous examples in the literature of how this has been done with written corpora; implementations have been described in the literature, for example by Johns (1991) or Chambers (2005); St.John (2001) reports on a experiment using a corpus and concordancer for beginner language learners. The use of spoken corpora in data-driven teaching makes this ecological approach a possibility for the spoken language too, as Carter et al. (2011), for example, demonstrate. Arguments in favour of such an approach are put forward by Duda and Tyne (2010) as one aspect of their consideration of authenticity in language teaching.

The case put by Holec, van Lier or Duda and Tyne relies on the premise that appropriate input must be provided to learners on which they can base their acquisition. The case for authentic texts in language teaching therefore lies in the claim that if learners are to understand and imitate a certain type of language they need to be exposed to it. But possible negative consequences need to be considered.

Cases against the use of authentic documents in language teaching are based either on the unsuitability of the content that is to be taught or on affective factors concerning the learner.

Krashen's input hypothesis (1982, p.21) takes the notion of difficulty into account in language teaching, and proposes that

> a necessary (but not sufficient) condition to move from stage i to stage i+1 is that the acquirer understand input that contains i+1, where "understand" means that the acquirer is focussed on the meaning and not the form of the message.

This suggests that authentic texts may be too difficult for some students, especially beginners. But the lack of empirical evidence in support of this hypothesis has meant that it has largely lost currency. Proponents of the interaction hypothesis found that conversational tactics and collaborative efforts in interaction contribute positively to language learning:

> Modification of the interactional structure of conversation… is a better candidate for a necessary (not sufficient) condition for acquisition. The role it plays in negotiation for meaning helps to make input comprehensible while still containing linguistic elements, and, hence, potential intake for acquisition (Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, p.144) also cited by Mitchell and Myles (2004)).

There are claims in the literature that a form of simplification useful to language learners is a reduction in the speech rate of spoken samples, for example by Ellis (1994), but there are also opposite claims, e.g. from Blau (1990). Cauldwell (1996), Gallien (2001) and Kamber and Skupien (2009) provide further arguments on the issue.

Holec (1990, p.71), the originator of interest in learner autonomy, disagrees with the suggestion that speech or texts should be simplified:

> *Une objection souvent faite à l'utilisation de documents authentiques pour l'apprentissage des savoir-faire est que ce sont des supports inutilisables avec des débutants parce que trop 'difficiles'; et l'on préférera alors travailler sur des textes rendus plus 'faciles' en diminuant le débit du locuteur, en augmentant la clarté de son élocution, etc.*

> (An objection often raised about the use of authentic documents to learn skills is that they are unusable with beginners because they are too 'difficult';

what is then favoured is work on texts which have been made 'easier' by slowing down the speech delivery, increasing the clarity of elocution, etc.)

For him what needs to be adapted is the type of tasks given to students, rather than the type of input:

Le problème pédagogique n'est donc pas tant celui de la difficulté du document authentique que celui de la difficulté des tâches que définissent les consignes: avec des débutants, il conviendra de commencer par des tâches simples à réaliser sur des documents authentiques plus courts et plus accessibles. (p.72)

(The pedagogical problem is not so much the issue of the difficulty of an authentic document as that of the difficulty of the tasks defined by instructions to students: with beginners, one ought to start with easy tasks based on authentic documents which are shorter and more accessible.)

Lam (2002) also suggests that real speech samples can be used in the classroom to teach about their particular features.

In summary, arguments against the use of authentic documents in language teaching are of two types: they are either articulated around the notion of (in)comprehensible input in language acquisition and are therefore related to the content a learner needs to be exposed to in order to acquire structures, or they revolve around the notions of affect and motivation. In both cases, the underlying assumption is that going beyond a certain level of difficulty becomes detrimental to learning. In the first case, the barrier is external to the learner (the teaching content) and linked to cognitive factors; in the second case the barrier is internal (the learner's attitude) and linked to psychological factors. Arguments in favour of authenticity counter the

former by denying the assumptions linked to the cognitive factors and the latter by advancing that the psychological factors are actually positive rather than negative.

Having considered theoretical positions related to the notion of authenticity of language learning materials, we move to consider practical applications and examples in the next section.

2.3   THE AUTHENTICITY OF TEXTBOOK AUDIO MATERIALS

A number of publications report on research investigating the differences between the spoken language found in course materials and 'authentic' language. Walz (1986) looked at French language textbooks used in the US. He examined the goals expressed by the authors, the representation of phonology in the books, and the morphological and syntactic forms taught. He concluded that they are not adequate to teach oral proficiency. Myers-Scotton and Bernsten (1988) applied the concepts of conversation analysis to dialogues found in textbooks used to teach American English, and they show that the textbook dialogues differ greatly from authentic dialogues. O'Connor di Vito (1991) reached similar conclusions focussing on grammar and syntax in French texts. Gilmore (2004) conducted a comparison between service request dialogues found in textbooks to equivalent naturally occurring dialogues (in English) and found several discrepancies. Bento (2008) examined the type of spoken language found in a range of intermediate French textbooks published in France, the UK, Spain and Portugal, comparing it with the description of spoken French provided by linguists—mainly Gadet (1996a), Blanche-Benveniste (1997) and Léon (1992). She found that the oral texts that she examined lack many of the features that characterise authentic oral texts, including phonological features. This highlights a rift between advances in linguistics and teaching practices as they are reflected in textbooks. Bento did not conduct a direct comparison between two types of texts

like Gilmore, and that gap is one that can be filled as part of the current research project, as will be evident in Part II.

2.4   AUTHENTICITY AND THE NOTION OF PURPOSE

Arguably, the notion that enables us to understand the debate around the concept of authenticity is that of *purpose*. The type of language to be taught, and therefore the type of texts to be used, depends on the purpose of language teaching in any given situation. The grammar-translation method, as described, for example, by Besse (1985), Puren (1988), Germain (1993) and Richards and Rodgers (2001), was used to teach students a literary version of a foreign language, mirroring the goals and approach used in the study of Classics. The literary texts that were used were authentic; what now strikes us as inauthentic is the *use* that was made of the foreign language, but it was true to its purpose. When the audio-visual methodology was developed in France, the purpose was to enable students to learn language that was more authentic through the use of the *français fondamental* survey (Gougenheim et al., 1964), but the language samples used for teaching were wholly constructed. With the advent of the communicative approach to language teaching, the debate around authenticity took a new turn. For Widdowson (1979) authenticity is a notion that needs to apply to a process rather than an object, i.e. to a task rather than a text. The purpose of language learning became the ability to *communicate* in the target language, and this was to be achieved by creating situations that elicited authentic communication in the classroom. Widdowson (1978) introduced a distinction between 'authenticity', which characterises the relation between a text and the reader, between language and the use that is made of it, and 'genuineness' which is an intrinsic quality of a text or a language sample. Very similar views have been expressed in more recent publications, for example by Badger and MacDonald (2010)

who claim that 'authenticity is to be found in the degree of similarity between the text process in its original context and the text process in the classroom' (p.581). Breen (1985) contends that 'authenticity is a relative matter' (p.60) and mentions four different types of authenticity found in the language classroom, which can possibly come to be in contradiction: authenticity of the input, of the learners' interpretation, of the tasks and of the classroom situation. Lee (1995) suggests a distinction between 'text authenticity' and 'learner authenticity', arguing that inauthentic texts can be perceived as authentic by learners if they are presented appropriately, and that what matters is to get a positive response from learners. Like Widdowson's distinction between authenticity and genuineness, and unlike previous approaches, this signals a move from an object-centred approach to a learner-centred approach to language teaching. For people like Kramsch (1993), the purpose of language teaching is to learn about culture as well as about language, as both are inseparable, and language learning takes place through exposure to cultural content and texts. But the relativity of cultural values renders the very notion of authenticity relative too, and instead of this term, that of 'appropriateness' is favoured (Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996). Duda and Tyne (2010) discuss data-driven learning, and explain that this constitutes 'authentic data' presented in 'a highly 'inauthentic' manner' (p.96), but that to them it serves the useful purpose of getting students to familiarise themselves with the structures which are typically found in naturally occurring language.

The debate about whether the use of authentic materials is desirable in language teaching and learning is not new and it is not closed. The 'forum' section of the *Applied Linguistics* journal has recently seen heated intellectual exchanges on the topic. Waters (2009a) argued against the use of authentic texts by opposing 'ideological belief' to 'pedagogical value' (p.138) and by blaming the trend on a

critical theory perspective (p.140) which he argues has become 'a form of intellectual hegemony' (p.141). Simpson (2009) opposed that view in terms which are resonant of an ecological approach to language learning:

> to hold back potentially confusing language knowledge points both to a distortion of the teacher role and to a denial of the tight relationship between language taught in class and language knowledge required for daily life. (p.431)

He concluded that 'there are ways in which applied linguistics can mediate critical theories into appropriate and workable pedagogies' (p.433). This is in turn refuted by Waters (2009b).

To summarise this chapter, Figure 4 (overleaf) repeats some elements of Figure 2 and gives an overview of the status of authenticity in language teaching methodologies from the grammar-translation method to the action-oriented approach.

Beyond the ideological stances, what transpires from the various definitions and debates about the concept of authenticity is the notion that the materials used should fit the intended purpose of the approach that is followed. And since most of the recently published beginners' French courses claim to follow the recommendations of the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages*, it should follow that their approach to language learning would be more ecological than was previously the case, and that, to fulfil this purpose, the materials included should somehow reflect the complexity of authentic language.

Methodology	TRADITIONAL	DIRECT	ACTIVE	AUDIO-LINGUAL	ORAL APPROACH / SITUATIONAL LANGUAGE TEACHING	AUDIOVISUAL	COMMUNICATIVE	ACTION ORIENTED
Period	1840-1900	1900-1910	1920-1960	1940-	1950-1980	1960-1980	1980-1990	2000-
Status of the spoken language	*Incidental: teaching is based on texts.*	*Speech is the unique medium of instruction and the learning objective.*	*Speech is used in the first phase of a lesson, as a way into texts. In terms of status, it is secondary.*	*Language is learned and practised orally. Use of the language lab is systematic.*	*Structured are taught orally first. Pronunciation practice is an important part of lessons.*	*Teaching is based on audio-visual teaching aids. Pronunciation practice is central to the methodology.*	*Speech as the primary form of communication. Pair-work dialogues as the archetype.*	*All skills given equal status but new emphasis on spoken interaction. Collaboration and interaction as the archetype.*
Authenticity	*The aim of instruction is not real language use but academic study. The literary texts translated are authentic.*	*Instruction was meant to simulate immersion in the language. The everyday spoken language becomes the norm. But the language taught and produced is inauthentic and based on prescriptive approaches.*	*Uses the principles of the direct method to achieve the same pedagogical aims as the traditional method. The aim of instruction is not real language use but academic study.*	*The aim of instruction becomes real language use. But the language taught is based on sentence patterns, the approach is structural not based on authentic productions.*	*The aim of instruction is real language use. The language taught is based on authentic surveys; but sentences and dialogues used in the classroom are fabricated.*	*The aim of instruction is real language use. The language taught is based on authentic surveys; but the samples used for teaching are fabricated.*	*Authentic communication is the objective. But the use of realia fakes authenticity and the situations of communications used in the classroom are artificial.*	*Language use is subordinated to the completion of real social actions, based on real collaboration and interaction. Learners must learn to cope with real language in real situations.*

Figure 4: The notion of authenticity throughout the evolution of methodologies

From this review of literature about the notion of authenticity of language teaching materials it emerges that the definition that best matches the purpose of this study is the one provided by Abe et al. (1979, p.2), that refers to utterances produced in real situations of communication ('*énoncés produits dans une situation réelle de communication*'). As was shown above, within a communicative approach to language teaching this matches Widdowson's notion of 'genuineness', rather than of 'authenticity' (Widdowson, 1978). In this work, the type of spoken French to be included in the experimental study to evaluate a new approach will be referred to as 'naturally occurring spoken French' in order to unambiguously refer to the authenticity of the situation of its production.

This thesis will test the hypothesis that learners, at least adult learners, can be presented with samples of naturally occurring spoken French so as to be exposed to the reality of its complexity. In this it follows the position taken by van Lier (2004) who suggests that learners cannot grasp the complexity of a linguistic system through exposure to simplified samples. The objective is to help learners familiarise themselves with 'real' language, as Duda and Tyne (2010) propose. This hinges on the further hypothesis that this can be done as long as the learners are supported appropriately, echoing the stance taken by Holec (1990) who claims that the difficulty of a learning activity springs from what is done with the materials rather than from the materials themselves.

This thesis will therefore explore how materials can be produced that can present learners with an accurate picture of the complexity of the spoken language and that can support them in engaging with and learning from naturally occurring spoken French. The next chapter explores what linguistic features make up that complexity.

Describing and analysing naturally occurring spoken French

The notion that naturally occurring speech should be introduced to students as early as possible is based on the recognition that the spoken and the written languages are, in many respects, different linguistic systems, and that naturally occurring speech displays different linguistic features from oral texts which were scripted and read out. Chapter 3 reviews the literature of linguists who described and analysed naturally occurring spoken French.

3.1   THE SPOKEN AND THE WRITTEN LANGUAGE AND THE NOTION OF VARIATION

Much research has been dedicated to the differences between speech and writing; in the case of French, the interest in the spoken form of the language is recent, as confirmed by Blanche-Benveniste (1983): 'Pendant longtemps, le 'français parlé' a été peu étudié' (p.23). In the same volume, Culioli (1983) attempts to explain this and he suggests that the causes are institutional (linked to the prestige of written texts in the French academic tradition), cultural (written French being a factor of unity and coherence within French culture) and subject-related (as linguists have traditionally endeavoured to search for regularity and homogeneity in language patterns and use). They both acknowledge, however, that Damourette and Pichon were precursors in that they did include the spoken language in their exhaustive

description of the French language, *Des mots à la pensée* (Damourette and Pichon, 1911-1936).

Some authors have theorised the opposition, or similarity, between speech and writing. Halliday (1985) provides an overview of differences between speech and writing based on the English language. His work attempts to draw out generic differences between the two modes. Halliday's description rejects the idea that there is a hierarchy between speech and writing. Instead it shows that producing language in two different modes implies organising it in different ways. For example this is what Halliday says about complexity:

> The complexity of the written language is static and dense. That of the spoken language is dynamic and intricate. Grammatical intricacy takes the place of lexical density. (p.87)

Later he concludes:

> speech and writing impose different grids on experience. There is a sense in which they create different realities. Writing creates a world of things; talking creates a world of happening. (p.93).

For Biber (1991), speech and writing need to be seen as two ends of a continuum:

> there is no single, absolute difference between speech and writing in English; rather there are several dimensions of variation, and particular types of speech and writing are more or less similar with respect to each dimension. (p.199).

A published version of round-table discussions (Blanche-Benveniste et al., 1992) involving several eminent French linguists shows that the debate is also relevant to the French language. Berrendonner's position (2004, p.250) brings speech and writing back together:

> *il n'y a qu'une grammaire du français, mais des différences d'opportunité*
>
> *pragmatique et cognitive entre ses structures, selon qu'on s'en sert à l'écrit*
>
> *ou à l'oral.*

> (There is only one grammar of French, but there are differences between
>
> pragmatic and cognitive opportunities of use between its structures,
>
> depending on whether they are used in writing or in speaking.)

Carter and McCarthy have published extensively on what they call 'spoken grammar', and their work has informed second language teaching. Unlike Berrendonner, they argue that there are clear grammatical differences between speech and writing in the English language. They provide examples regarding ellipsis, left dislocation, the tail slot and indirect speech (Carter and McCarthy, 1995) which at least partly mirror features of spoken French. They suggest that these differences should be taken into account in language teaching (McCarthy and Carter, 1995) and provide tools to do so (Carter and McCarthy, 1997). Timmis (2005) also offers examples of how this can be done in the classroom.

The difference between speech and writing is one type of linguistic variation; this is why spoken French has been a focus of interest for some sociolinguists. Interestingly, the first lines of the very first issue of the journal *Recherches sur le français parlé* journal (Branca, 1977), published by the Groupe Aixois de Recherches en Syntaxe which was to lead research on spoken French in France for many years, claims that the publication falls within the scope of sociolinguistics: 'Les études regroupées dans cette brochure s'inscrivent dans ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler la sociolinguistique' (p.1).

Gadet (1996b) has written an extensive review of research on French variation, and she cites a plethora of studies on spoken French. She also provides an explanation

about why there are wide differences between the written and the spoken French language:

> *le français est l'une des langues les plus standardisées du monde. Les effets sur les locuteurs sont le goût pour une image de la langue unifiée et homogène, le respect des formes de prestige, le rejet des 'fautes' […], la mobilisation pour la 'défense' de la langue […] et la prégnance du modèle de l'écrit […]. Parce que la standardisation concerne avant tout l'écrit, la distance est grande entre langue écrite fortement codifiée, et langue orale diversifiée. (p.76)*

(French is one of the most standardised languages in the world. The effects this has on speakers are that they like an image of French as a unified and homogeneous language, that they will respect prestigious forms, reject 'mistakes' […], they will join forces to 'defend' the language […] and the written language remains the point of reference. […] Because standardisation affects first and foremost the written language, there is a vast difference between a strongly codified written language and a diversified spoken language.)

Gadet has done extensive research on the phonology and syntax of colloquial French (Gadet, 1996a). Carton has described in detail regional variations in spoken French in the North of France, but he has also researched the history of the pronunciation of French (Carton, 2000) and recent developments in the prosody and syntax of spoken French (Carton, 2007). Lodge has also looked at variation from a historical perspective, in particular at the notions of dialect and standardisation (Lodge, 1993). Valdman (1979) has researched the French language as spoken outside France, and

especially outside Europe. He has also examined the notion of linguistic norm in relation to language teaching (Valdman, 1998).

However, Blanche-Benveniste (1983) objects to equating spoken French and colloquial French, and insists that it should be considered as a different mode rather than as a different type of language:

> *La désignation de 'français parlé' comporte, quelques précautions qu'on prenne, une équivoque fondamentale: les habitudes courantes font qu'on identifie 'français parlé' et 'français familier'. Il est pourtant évident que le type de réalisation, écrite ou orale, n'a rien à voir, techniquement, avec le 'niveau' de langue, et qu'on peut écrire du français que les puristes appellent 'relâché', tout comme on peut oraliser du français académique. (p.24)*

> (The phrase 'spoken French' is, whatever precautions one might take, fundamentally ambiguous: ordinary usage is such that 'spoken French' and 'colloquial French' are seen as one and the same thing. Yet it is obvious that the mode of production, written or spoken, has nothing to do, technically, with the language 'register', and that the type of French that purists call 'colloquial' can be written, just as academic French can be used in speaking.)

Her last volume provides, to date, the most recent overview of research and description of all aspects of spoken French, including phonetics, phonology and intonation, morphology, vocabulary, syntax and text analysis (Blanche-Benveniste, 2010).

From the debate about the differences between the spoken and the written mode of a language, it emerges that there are three areas of particular interest when it comes to the observation of spoken French: the first relates to the vocal nature of spoken French, the second to syntax and utterance structure, and the third to the structure

of discourse in light of the fact that the spoken language is, more often than not, dialogic. These areas are examined below.

3.2 THE SEGMENTAL AND SUPRASEGMENTAL ACOUSTIC FEATURES OF SPOKEN FRENCH

The most obvious, and best-recognised, area of difficulty for beginner learners of a new language is recognising sounds (and other acoustic features) that either don't exist in their own language or that are realised differently in the new context of a different language. That area is the focus of this section.

As Halliday (1985) puts it: 'Writing does not incorporate all the meaning potential of speech: it leaves out the prosodic and paralinguistic contributions.' Perhaps because this is the most obvious difference between speech and writing—as Culioli (1983) points out: '*En premier lieu*, excusez la lapalalissade, *le français parlé* est nécessairement *oral'* (p.293)—the sounds and suprasegmentals of French have long been the focus of description and research. This section only refers to works which provide general overviews of segmental and suprasegmental acoustic features of the French language; there are of course many more publications dedicated to specific aspects of this domain.

Passy was one of the founding members of the International Phonetics Association at the end of the nineteenth century, and the first linguist to attempt a phonetic description of the language (Passy, 1887). From the outset he applied his scientific work to the practical aim of language learning (Passy, 1886). Gougenheim (1935) and Martinet (1956) provided early accounts of the phonology of French. Pronunciation and phonetics were the focus of overviews by Martinet (1945) or later by Léon (1992). There were also early volumes dedicated to pronunciation instruction for language learners, for example Delattre (1951) and Léon and Léon (1964), (1997).

Pierre Léon has also shown how acoustic phenomena are related to the expression of style and expressivity in the French language; he called this 'la phonostylistique' (Léon, 1993). Coveney (2001) deals with variation issues in relation to pronunciation. The approach taken by Detey et al. (2010), which is based on the *Projet Phonologie du Français Contemporain*, uses corpus analysis to offer descriptions of variations in the phonology of French. Violin-Wigent et al. (2013) base their volume, written for language learners, on such findings about the phonological features of varieties of spoken French.

Overviews of the intonation of French are given by Hirst and Di Cristo (1998) who describe the features of the intonation of standard French rather than spontaneous occurrences, and Martin (2009) who reviews different theories used to describe the intonation of French. Lacheret-Dujour and Beaugendre (1999) give a thorough state-of-the-art account of research about prosody; they include past and present work and cover a range of dimensions for analysis, interpretation and processing of the prosodic features of French speech.

Morel (1995) and Morel and Danon-Boileau (1998) analyse the prosodic features of spoken French within the theoretical framework of Culioli's '*théorie des opérations énonciatives*' (Culioli, 1991), and suggest there are some invariant values to intonation traits in French. They also demonstrate that there is a link between intonation and syntax—the focus of the next section.

3.3   THE SYNTAX OF SPOKEN FRENCH

Another issue faced by beginner learners of French is how to segment the flow of continuous speech into constituents that they can recognise and make sense of. Whilst in some languages it is mainly an issue at the micro level of phonemes, morphemes and lexical items, in others, including French, there are also issues at the

macro level of utterances because the syntax of spoken French has been shown to differ significantly from that of written French. This is also particularly relevant to this study as there are suggestions, among second language acquisition specialists, that 'it is through participating in conversations in a SL[3] that we learn the SL syntax' (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991, p.130).

The particular grammatical forms and syntactic structures found in spoken French, as opposed to written French, are now well documented, mainly due to the richness of approaches and findings derived from the work of the *Groupe Aixois de Recherches en Syntaxe* (known as GARS) in which Blanche-Benveniste was a central figure. The *Festschrift* dedicated to her (Bilger et al., 1998) is evidence of her far-reaching influence. What was pioneering in the work of the group was the belief that research on syntax should include research on spoken French, and that all descriptions should be based on a corpus of naturally occurring samples.

Although this work included some contributions on micro-syntactic features and on morphological aspects of spoken French, it is fair to say that it was work on the macro-syntax of spoken French that was the most innovative, especially research into the effects of formulation and hesitation on the syntax of speech, and on a visual representation of these phenomena on syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes ('*l'analyse syntaxique en grille'*) which helped make sense of false starts and repetitions and also made it clear that there is order and coherence behind the apparent chaos which emerges from transcripts of spontaneous speech.

Morel is the other prominent linguist who has studied the syntax of naturally occurring spoken French. She refined the description of regular syntactic patterns found in conversational French and proposed the concept of '*paragraphe oral*' as the

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[3] 'SL' refers to 'second language' in that volume.

basic unit of analysis of the macro structure of spoken French. She showed that the basic components of that paragraph are a '*rhème*' and a '*thème*' (Morel, 1992) (later on adding '*post-rhème*' as the third element of the paragraph). She then researched the interaction between syntax and intonation in the structure of French conversations, showing that the two dimensions were interdependent and complementary (Morel, 1998) and (2000). Morel and Danon-Boileau (1998) joined forces to define the distribution of functions between syntax and three prosodic markers (intensity, fundamental frequency, time) which they found have invariant values across languages. This was articulated as a new theoretical framework, '*la théorie de la co-énonciation*', related to Culioli's '*théorie des opérations énonciatives*'. In more recent work, Morel has added a dimension to her research by examining the role of gestures and other non verbal signals in conversations (Morel and Bouvet, 2002) and in the structure of oral paragraphs (Morel, 2003). The role of silent pauses within speech turns, as a marker of structure and hierarchy between constituents within a paragraph, was analysed by Candea (2000) and further developed by Campione (2004). These features are of course also relevant to the analysis of the structure of oral interactions, which is examined in the next section.

3.4   THE DISCOURSE FEATURES OF CONVERSATIONS IN FRENCH

In the majority of cases, the situations in which beginner learners will need to understand naturally occurring spoken French will be in the context of interactions: at level A1 of the CEFR, for example, the focus is on uses of the language in everyday situations which consist mainly of simple exchanges with friends and simple transactions with unknown people. This section is dedicated to literature about conversation analysis and examines discourse features which are typical of conversational exchanges in French.

The introduction to *Décrire la conversation* (Cosnier and Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1987) explains that in France, conversation analysis was born as an extension of the field of discourse analysis. That particular volume shows how different linguists and other researchers from related disciplines can go about analysing the same corpus of three conversations. It describes phenomena linked to structure, formulation, intonation or turn-sharing. Cosnier et al. (1988) have edited another book which brings together contributions from different fields around the theme of conversation, including cognitive linguistics. Kerbrat-Orecchioni's background is semantics, and her analysis of conversations focussed on subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and speech acts (Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1996) and (1998)). The framework underpinning the descriptions provided in Traverso (1996) and (1999) is pragmatics, and allows the analysis of phenomena such as conversation rituals; Traverso acknowledges the influence of ethnomethodology, through the research of Sacks and Schegloff, over her own work. Indeed Sacks et al. (1974), although not focusing on French, is a very helpful reference to define speech turns and analyse turn-taking and turn-sharing in French conversations. Both Kerbrat-Orecchioni and Traverso also describe their research as falling within the field of 'interaction analysis'.

Another aspect of conversation and discourse analysis, which is related both to the structure of utterances and dialogues and to acoustic features of the language is marks of hesitation or formulation. They have to do with the cognitive process of expression, and they are typical of unplanned, unscripted speech. They have been listed and defined by a number of linguists working on spoken French, notably Gadet (1996a, pp.35-36) and Candea (2000, pp.21-34 and 448-451) or by researchers exploring the notion of fluency, or disfluency, for example Guillot (1999) and André and Tyne (2012) who both consider the notion in relation to second language teaching. Some linguists consider these as manifestations of hesitation, whilst others,

like Candea, prefer to refer to the notion of formulation (in French: *'travail de formulation'*). Candea (2000) offers an exhaustive overview of all markers of formulation; she provides data on their relative frequency (p.34-39) and shows that the most frequent marker, at least in her corpus, is the use of a filled pause (typically *'euh'*), followed by final vowel lengthening, then repetitions and finally self-corrections. She considers silent pauses separately because these have more possible functions than hesitation / formulation (cf. section 3.3).

The literature reviewed in Chapter 3 has shown that in recent decades technological advances have made possible new interest in describing naturally occurring spoken French and that it is a multi-faceted linguistic system. Researchers have shown that naturally occurring spoken French displays very specific linguistic features, which implies that if language students are not exposed to this type of language they will not become familiar with its features. The literature has also shown that linguists looking at naturally occurring spoken French from a variety of angles have developed theoretical tools to describe it. This suggests that, once adapted to become accessible to non-specialists, these conceptual tools should form the starting point of any attempt at developing materials to teach students about the features of spoken French. It also points to the desirability of building bridges between theory (of language description) and practice (of language teaching) and of reflecting about the relationship between these two dimensions.

Each of the areas explored in the review presented in this chapter raises potential teaching points to support learners in engaging with the features of naturally occurring spoken French. This therefore includes: segmental and suprasegmental features such as variations in the production of some phonemes, as described by Detey et al. (2010), or intonational patterns described by Hirst and Di Cristo (1998) and Martin (2009); features of the syntax of utterances such as the impact of

hesitations and restarts on the macro-structure of utterances described by Blanche-Benveniste (1990) or the use of dislocations in the theme/rheme structure described by Morel (1992) and Morel and Danon-Boileau (1998); and discourse features such as the marking of changes in speech turns or the use of pauses investigated by Candea (2000).

The theoretical frameworks described in this chapter will therefore all need to be considered when samples are selected and analysed to inform the design of supporting tasks. As the approach is deliberately data-driven, their relevance will be determined by the actual content and nature of the samples rather than through a choice of theoretical stance. The methodology followed in selecting the features and designing the tasks will be described in Chapter 6.

The next chapter moves away from linguistic theory and turns to literature about the development of listening skills.

Developing listening skills

Broad overviews of issues related to the teaching of listening comprehension are found in Ur (1984), Rost (1990), Scarcella and Oxford (1992), Cornaire (1998), Rost (2002) and Flowerdew and Miller (2005). Byrnes (1984) provides a literature review of research on the topic, as well as Witkin (1990), Oxford (1993) and Rubin (1994). Based on those, a number of themes emerged which helped shape further explorations of the literature and have provided a structure for this part of the literature review: theoretical models of perception and comprehension, methodological approaches to listening instruction, the choice of input materials, and testing and assessment.

4.1   THEORETICAL MODELS OF PERCEPTION AND COMPREHENSION

Several definitions of the notion of 'listening' can be found in the literature, but one stood out because it was referred to frequently and because it encompasses many others: 'listening is the process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural stimuli' (Wolvin and Coakley (1985, p.74) – cited by Scarcella and Oxford (1992)). Byrnes (1984, p.318) defines listening as a 'highly complex problem-solving activity'. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) add that in most situations listening occurs in conjunction with speaking: 'listening interacts with speaking in the aural-oral communication feedback system' (p.139). They also show that different factors feed into listening proficiency: grammatical competence, strategic competence,

sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence (p.141). Together these definitions highlight the multidimensional nature of listening, as a skill requiring the mobilisation of several different competences including acoustic perception and cognitive functions.

Cornaire (1998) and Rost (2002) list and explain several theoretical models of listening comprehension. Different processes are involved at different levels, from neurological processes involved in hearing to cognitive processes linked to perception (defined by Scarcella and Oxford (1992, p.143) as 'distinguishing the significant stimuli from the stream of sound or noise') and to the linguistic, pragmatic and psycholinguistic processing of the aural information. Cole (1981, p.94) proposes a model for the perception of fluent speech, based on three assumptions:

> 1. Words are recognized through the interaction of sound and knowledge. […] 2. Words are recognized in order. […] 3. The sounds in a word are used sequentially to suggest and then eliminate word candidates.

Caron (1989) describes the interface between cognitive and linguistic processes and linguistics and details the different layers of processes involved in understanding verbal communication, from identifying meaningful phonological units within a verbal flow to making sense of a whole text or interaction, or in other words from perception to comprehension. Details of different psychological models of speech perception are described by Diehl et al. (2004).

Authors such as Nagle and Sanders (1986) look at listening as related to second language acquisition. They examine notions like memory, input-processing, attention ('the application of mental energy to processing tasks' p.17) and list factors leading to the breakdown of the comprehension process as '(a) too much attention given to details, (b) system overload, or (c) anxiety about failure.' (p.21).

The main question raised by models of listening comprehension is whether there is a hierarchy between the different dimensions involved, and whether there is any sequencing in the processing of aural data, for example whether linguistic information (such as phonological or grammatical data) is more important in comprehension than non linguistic information, and whether listeners approach the information from form to meaning (bottom-up) or from meaning to form (top-down). Caron (1989) suggests that the two processes take place in parallel. In first language acquisition the question is unimportant, but in second language learning it is highly significant because the answer should determine the best approach to teaching listening by defining which processes to develop. Gremmo and Holec (1990) sum this up by differentiating between two models of listening comprehension. They label the two approaches '*sémasiologique*' and '*onomasiologique*'; these terms are equivalent to 'bottom-up' and 'top-down'. They break up the former into the following phases: discrimination, segmentation, interpretation, synthesis, and the latter into two phases, '*prévision-vérification*'. The hypothesis phase relies on a combination of sociolinguistic, socio-psychological, discursive, linguistic, thematic and cultural knowledge. Gremmo and Holec dismiss the first model and favour the second model, labelling it more efficient ('*plus performant*').

Another dimension considered in relation to listening comprehension is affective factors. Meyer (1984, p.343) shows that anxiety 'prevents [the students'] transferring even the most basic first language coping skills to the second language.' Gremmo and Holec (1990) note that non-native listeners are impeded by the fact that they try to understand messages in their entirety: '*cette attitude de 'sur-correction' […] lui fait perdre son initiative d'auditeur*'. Cornaire (1998) considers the influence of affect on comprehension, and lists a number of research studies on the subject, which suggest that self-confidence is a criterion that bears on listening performance and that

apprehension can be lowered by high exposure to the language. Kamber and Skupien (2009) examine the notion of the perceived difficulty of oral texts by students and how subjective it is. This is an area that will need to be explored further, especially in relation to the use of naturally occurring samples with beginners.

4.2   METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO LISTENING INSTRUCTION

Authors seem to agree that for many years listening was not considered a skill worth developing in itself. Brown and Yule (1983, p.54) declare that '[i]n the last ten years listening comprehension has begun to be taken seriously'. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) say that it was frequently viewed as an enabling skill not worthy of attention of its own. They explain that, for many, listening was the mechanism through which grammar was meant to be internalised, as argued by Byrnes (1984), or through which cultural information was conveyed. They are critical of Krashen's model of 'comprehensible input', which they claim was an exhortation to provide extensive quantities of comprehensible input without offering any special instruction to learners on how to deal with this input. Gremmo and Holec (1990) also refer to listening comprehension as a neglected skill ('*l'aptitude oubliée*'). Field (1998) advocates a methodological switch from simply providing listening practice to actively teaching the skill. All these authors argue that listening comprehension cannot be acquired naturally but that it needs to be actively taught. Morley (1995) reviews four instructional models of listening comprehension which have been used for the past 50 years or so: 'model 1—pattern matching: listening, imitating, memorizing', 'model 2—processing discrete-point information: listening and answering comprehension questions', 'model 3—processing text: functional listening—language use and language analysis tasks' and 'model 4—interactive communication: critical listening, critical thinking, effective speaking'.

The approaches to listening instruction found in the literature reflect the debates about models of listening comprehension: some consider mainly linguistic phenomena while others include cognitive processes. We first look at research into the linguistic and acoustic aspects of the process.

Byrnes (1984, pp.323-324) explains the issue of interference from first language patterns (new inventory of phonemes, different meanings for prosodic features, different forms for the syllable, different morphological markings). Teaching about phonology, suprasegmentals or other linguistic aspects of the spoken language as part of teaching listening is the focus of Cutler et al. (1986) and Cutler (1994) who look at segmentation issues, Griffiths (1991) who looks at pauses, De La Batie and Bradley (1995) who consider word boundaries, and Cutler et al. (1997) who provide a literature review on prosody and its role in the comprehension process. Guimbretière (2001) identifies the prosodic features which she advocates should be included in the linguistic elements to be taught as part of listening comprehension instruction: accent, rhythm, intonation, speech rate, segmentation (empty and filled pauses), accentuation (emphasis) and intonation (fundamental frequency, or F_0). For her it should be demonstrated to students how all these features are combined to fulfil two different functions in speech: the segmentation of the flow of speech, and the bringing of some elements into focus. Billières (2008) gives an overview of the status of intonation at different historical stages and in different language teaching methodologies. He concludes that progress has been made in integrating the dimension of intonation in speech production, but that to this day little is known about the perception of intonation, and how to integrate it into listening pedagogy:

> *il n'existe pas encore de modèle intonatif de parole spontanée dont on peut se demander comment il pourrait permettre de mieux travailler l'oral et l'oralité en L2 dans une perspective de communication authentique (p.35).*

(There is still no model of the intonation pattern of spontaneous speech which might feasibly be applied to studying the L2 spoken language and learning L2 speaking skills within an authentic communicative framework.)

Derwing et al. (1998), Jenkins (2004) and Jones (2002) are more concerned with pronunciation than with listening, but claim that there is an overlap between the two skills.

Other authors have researched broader approaches to listening instruction, which look at dimensions other than the linguistic ones. One of these is the development of strategies. For Brown and Yule (1983, p.57) the aim of a listening comprehension exercise should be for the student to arrive successfully at a reasonable interpretation, and not process every word, and not to try to work out *all* that is involved in the literal meaning of the utterance. Vandergrift (2004) reviews previous work on the theme of 'listening instruction', arguing that 'students need to 'learn to listen''. Amongst other aspects, the author looks at the combined importance of bottom-up processing—defined as 'segmentation of the sound stream into meaningful units to interpret the message' by Vandergrift and Goh (2012, p.18)—and top-down processing—'the application of context and prior knowledge to interpret the message' (*ibid*.)—and suggests that students can and must also be taught listening strategies, an approach labelled as learner-oriented. In the latest stage of the development of their thinking about listening instruction, Vandergrift and Goh theorise a holistic approach to teaching listening which they call a metacognitive approach. They define metacognition as 'the act of thinking about thinking' and suggest that it 'refers to the ability of learners to control their thoughts and to regulate their own learning' (*ibid*. p.5). They show that approaches to listening instruction have moved, through different eras, from text-oriented to communication-oriented and finally to learner-oriented. Their metacognitive

approach is meant to go beyond those by combining all the elements of previous approaches. They propose a theoretical model to account for this, which they base on the model for speech production developed by Levelt (1989). They also suggest that there are three types of factors that influence listening success: cognitive factors (e.g. linguistic knowledge or prior knowledge), affective factors (e.g. anxiety or motivation) and contextual factors (e.g. whether listening takes place in an interaction or not). The three dimensions will have to be considered as part of this research.

Other key issues mentioned in the literature are the notion of progression in listening comprehension, the interaction between listening and speaking skills, and the use of different tools in listening instruction. Gremmo and Holec (1990) advocate that there should be two phases in the development of L2 listening skills: a systematic phase during which students are led to acquire a range of knowledge and skills involved in listening comprehension (in this phase the teaching activities do not have to be related to situations of natural communication), and a communicative phase during which learners become listeners able to use their knowledge and skills in situations of interaction. Lynch (1996) studies the interaction between listening and speaking practice, suggesting they should be taught together. Parpette (2008) examines the link between listening in the classroom (where the materials and task provide artificial segmentation and repetition of the input) and putting the skill into practice in a real situation and advocates a change of practice to reflect natural listening situations.

Cauldwell (1996), Lhote et al. (1998) and Poussard (2000) investigate the use of technology to develop listening skills. The use of video is the focus of other work. Brown and Yule (1983, p.84-85) stress the importance of visual support for comprehension: 'an enormously important extra dimension of information'.

Research reported by McDonald and McGurk, cited by Caron (1989, p.50), suggests that visual clues also have a role in the perception of syllables. The paper by Herron et al. (1995) describes an experiment which compared text-based and video-based instruction and the effect of the two approaches on different skills. It was found that video-based instruction had positive effects on listening skills and that it was not to the detriment of other skills. In a published interview (Capelle and Bigot, 2005), Capelle explains the difficulty of using videos not specifically intended for language learners with beginners. For him, beginners can benefit from videos if the visual dimension helps with the comprehension of the audio track, but in authentic videos the reverse tends to be true:

> *dans un film destiné à des locuteurs natifs […] on joue sur les deux canaux – visuel et auditif – pour enrichir la communication (p.143).*

> (in films aimed at native speakers, both channels—visual and auditory—are exploited to enrich communication)

Another focus of reflection on listening pedagogy is the selection of appropriate tasks for listening instruction and practice. A detailed review of possible activities for listening is provided by Ur (1984). Gremmo and Holec (1990) list four types of listening attitudes or objectives: '*l'écoute sélective*', '*l'écoute globale*', '*l'écoute détaillée*', '*l'écoute de veille*', the first three of which can be matched to types of listening tasks. Based on their model of listening comprehension, Carette (2001, p.136) proposes a typology of listening comprehension tasks for three possible stages of learning, '*découverte*', '*systématisation*', '*utilisation*'. The types of tasks include identifying items, answering questions, working with transcripts, working with summaries, note taking, reordering items, doing tasks (which include matching tasks,

gap-filling, being active and decision making). Rost (2002) also dedicates a chapter to instructional design.

To our knowledge, Cauldwell (2013) is the only author to date who has addressed extensively the issue of the features of naturally occurring speech in relation to listening skills instruction; however his volume concerns English only, not French.

4.3 THE CHOICE OF MATERIALS: SIMPLIFIED OR AUTHENTIC INPUT?

As in other areas of language teaching, there is a debate about whether to use authentic materials, and if so about how early in the learning process these can be introduced. Krashen's input theory (Krashen, 1982) was responsible for the predominance of simplified documents for many years. The theory has been frequently challenged since, but simplified documents are still the norm in most language courses for beginners. Much research has looked at which acoustic and linguistic features influence comprehension and can therefore be modified to simplify a document, but most of it relates to the English language. Griffiths (1990, 1991, 1992) shows that speech rate, pauses and hesitations influence comprehension. But there is conflicting evidence about how they do so, as, for example, Blau (1990) found that sentence structure and speed of speech should be disregarded, unlike pauses, which she found to enhance comprehensibility significantly. Cervantes and Gainer (1992) show that syntactic simplification and repetition both help comprehension. The great majority of research reviewed by Rubin (1994) suggests that hesitation phenomena are a positive factor in comprehension, but the only study reviewed which looked at spontaneous speech came to the opposite conclusion.

Instead of fabricating simplified input, Brown and Yule (1983) suggest grading materials by carefully selecting amongst naturally occurring samples, for example by

choosing naturally slow speakers (p.81), favouring monologues or using narratives and instructions which are easier to understand than abstract content (p.85). To counter the possible criticism that such materials lack interest, they suggest that 'the emphasis should be moved from attempting to provide intrinsically interesting materials, which we have just claimed is generally impossible, to *doing interesting things* with materials' (p.83). This can be contrasted to the approach of Porter and Roberts (1981) who favour authentic activities over authentic materials.

Many authors discuss the positive effect of using authentic listening materials. Gremmo and Holec (1990, p.7) are in favour of authentic listening materials:

> *Il apparaît donc évident que les documents utilisés dans les activités d'apprentissage de compréhension orale, doivent être, dans la mesure du possible, des documents authentiques.*

> (Thus it seems obvious that the documents that are used in learning activities designed to develop listening comprehension should be, insofar as is possible, authentic documents.)

Bacon and Finnemann (1990, p.469) also conclude their experiment by stating that

> the curriculum must be designed to convince students to be willing to deal with authentic input. […] such input first must be an early and important part of instruction.

They also consider the relationship between authentic materials and affect, pointing out that there is little empirical research on the subject. They suggest that motivation is an important variable: 'The type and degree of motivation likely will affect the learner's disposition toward authentic input situation' (p.460). In subsequent papers (Bacon, 1992a, Bacon, 1992b), they describe strategies used by students of Spanish faced with authentic materials. Herron and Seay (1991) show that listening

comprehension improves with increased exposure to authentic speech: 'Students working with authentic texts gain valuable practice in the specific skill of making sense of speech 'on-line'' (p.494). Their findings are based on the result of an experimental study conducted with intermediate students of French. Oxford (1993) explicitly rejects the use of simplified speech: 'By and large, simplified input is not useful as a long-term L2 instructional strategy.' Miller's paper (2003) also investigates the use of authentic materials for listening practice. Vandergrift (2004), citing another of his papers (Vandergrift, 2003) reports that university students of French at beginners' level 'found it motivating to learn to understand rapid, authentic texts and responded overwhelmingly in favour of this approach' (p.9). Kamber and Skupien (2009) reach the interesting conclusion that, in their experiment, teachers overestimated the difficulty of authentic audio documents more than their students.

4.4   TESTING AND ASSESSING LISTENING

Overviews of issues related to the assessment of listening skills can be found in Brown and Yule (1983), Underhill (1987), Buck (1993), Cornaire (1998) and Rost (2002). The latter contrasts achievement tests (which assess whether students have mastered something taught) and proficiency tests which give a more holistic view of a subject's listening abilities (pp.169-170). He lists 6 different types of tests: discrete item tests, integrative tests, communicative tests, interview tests, self-assessment and portfolio assessment (pp.172-173). Rost also points out the difficulty of assessing listening as an isolated skill and concludes that 'it should be recognised that virtually any listening test will involve testing of other skills and traits, and that for most learners scores on their listening proficiency tests will correlate highly with scores on other tests' (p.172). Language diagnostic tools in general, and the DIALANG diagnostic test in particular, are the topic of Alderson's book (2005). That test is

based on the CEFR criteria (Council of Europe, 2001) which offer 'can-do' statements that are currently widely used as a tool for the self-assessment of language proficiency.

The review of models of listening comprehension and instruction reveals that there is consensus around the fact that two types of processes are involved—a bottom-up and a top-down approach—but no agreement on sequence or hierarchy. What is certain is that listening is a complex activity and therefore a complex skill to learn in a second language, which requires training in a range of skills. There is enough evidence that the use of naturally occurring materials is desirable, given the right tasks and taking into account affective factors, but what approach should be taken in the specific case of teaching distance learners of beginners' French remains to be determined. It seems indisputable therefore that this research project should add to existing knowledge on the subject.

Rost (1990) and Cornaire (1998) have demonstrated that listening involves neurological, cognitive, linguistic, pragmatic and psycholinguistic processing. Caron (1989) is specifically concerned with the interface between perception (a cognitive process) and comprehension (a linguistic process). This interface, between what students hear, what sounds they recognise and what they understand when they are confronted with naturally occurring spoken French, will be central in the experimental approach tested in this study. The metacognitive approach described by Vandergrift and Goh (2012) aims to reunite a variety of approaches previously considered separately. Importantly, it considers multiple dimensions in the development of listening skills, namely cognitive, affective and contextual factors. This multidimensional view of listening instruction will be the one that underpins this thesis.

Conclusion to Part I

The areas investigated through the literature review presented in the first four chapter of this work derived from the hypothesis formulated at the start of the research project (cf. Figure 1). Figure 5 below represents the domains examined in the literature review and illustrates how themes for further reflection have emerged from the review and will need to be considered in this study. This informed the methodological choices made to conduct the project, which Part II presents.
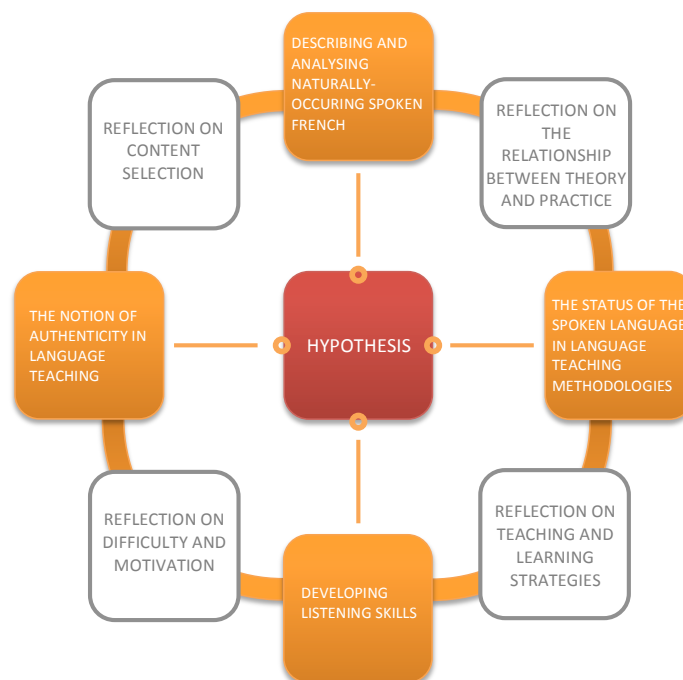
Figure 5: Areas for reflection emerging from the literature review

Methodology

Introduction to Part II

Whilst Part I was dedicated to reviewing previous research done in the domain investigated in this study, and to understanding the multiple dimensions involved, Part II explains what steps were taken to set up the actual investigation. It shows how research questions were derived from the literature review, defines the methods identified and presents the materials and instruments created for the investigation. Finally it describes the data that was collected and the methods of analysis selected to answer the questions.

Research questions and method

Chapter 5 examines the issues that have emerged from the literature review, defines research questions for this study and describes the research methods selected to investigate these questions.

5.1   ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review has examined four areas of linguistics and language learning and teaching which are central to considering the initial hypothesis from which this project sprang. Issues have emerged, from all four areas, which need to inform the approach taken within the scope of this research study.

The evolution of the status of spoken French in language teaching methodologies has highlighted the fact that the spoken language has been at the centre of debates and of the development of theories on language learning and teaching for at least a century. It has also been shown that the phrase 'spoken language' in fact covers, in different methodologies, many different aspects of this complex linguistic object: from the medium of instruction to the main teaching aim, the accepted linguistic norm or the desired mode of communication in the classroom and outside. However what successive methodologies have shared, since the end of the grammar-translation approach, is a belief that a greater focus on the spoken language is desirable. But an analysis of the audio content and activities of currently available

courses, in which recently-developed teaching approaches are implemented, has shown that the development of new language teaching methodologies has not resulted in many changes in teaching practices (as reflected by published materials), and that there is therefore scope for investigating different methods.

Previous research on the notion of authenticity shows that there is no unified definition of the term, and neither is there consensus on whether the use of authentic documents is desirable or not, which confirms that there is validity in testing this in the particular context of this research project. It has emerged that current teaching methodologies, whether they are an implementation of the Council of Europe's CEFR (such as the action-oriented approach) or a more general application of ecological and related principles (such as an emergentist approach making use of corpus data in teaching), place language authenticity at their core and make naturally occurring French, whether spoken or written, the archetype of the language that needs to be mastered by learners. It therefore seems timely to consider how this may be done in practice. But the review of previous research has also emphasised that there are issues linked to student motivation and affect to be interrogated if learners are to be confronted with content deemed to be difficult at an early stage of the learning process. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) provided the most recent overview of the various dimensions that need to be considered in relation to the listening process and according to them, cognitive, affective and contextual factors must all be explored and taken into account.

One of the notions that emerged as key from the literature review was that of purpose. At lower levels of proficiency, learners are supposed to be using language as part of everyday tasks and to discuss day-to-day matters. This is evidenced, for example, by the wordings used to describe level A2 in the table presenting the global scales of the Common Reference Levels of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, p.24),

e.g. 'areas of most immediate relevance' and 'familiar and routine matters'. It follows that learners aiming for level A2 competence should be learning to understand and to produce the type of spoken language that fits this purpose and these situations, which in the case of 'familiar and routine matters' is most likely to be the informal conversational French commonly used in straightforward transactions. This highlights a discrepancy in current practice, where in terms of subject matter learners are first exposed to everyday themes, vocabulary and situations, but not to the corresponding type of spoken French and to its features and structures. Indeed the literature review has also brought to light the fact that there has been much recent linguistics research into spoken French, and in particular into naturally occurring spoken French, and that its features are now well-known and documented. But the literature about the content of textbooks and other language learning materials has shown that these advances in knowledge are not yet fully reflected in the content of textbooks and published courses. For learners the spoken language is reduced to a different set of linguistic competencies (listening, speaking, and—more recently—speaking in interaction), to the disembedded practice of pronunciation skills through traditional listen and repeat activities, or to points of language relevant to the difference between formal and informal registers. And if learners are to be trained to understand naturally occurring spoken French, they will need to be provided with adequate tools and strategies to achieve this. Now that theoretical tools exist as part of linguistics, the process of transferring and transforming them into tools that are usable as part of language teaching should start. Focusing the present research on beginner learners will contribute to the debate about how early this can possibly be done.

The review of research into the development of listening skills has demonstrated that perception, listening and comprehension are complex cognitive processes and that there exist different frameworks to describe them and to teach them. No approach has emerged as universally accepted, however, which hints at a need to continue testing a variety of approaches. Amongst the factors that need to be considered with an open mind are whether a top-down or a bottom-up approach should be favoured, or whether a mix of both approaches would be desirable. The balance between the teaching strategies and the teaching knowledge required to assist the comprehension of speech is a related issue that also needs to be examined.

This review has allowed this study to be positioned more distinctly in the context of previous research, and it has provided a clearer direction and methodology for this research. The next section demonstrates how the emerging issues described above have informed the wording of research questions for the project.

5.2   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The hypothesis formulated at the very start of this research project was that:

> Language students would benefit from being introduced to and taught about naturally occurring spoken French earlier than is currently practised to develop listening skills.

This hypothesis had emerged from prior observations gathered in the course of my career, as a teacher and a lecturer in contact with students, and as a designer of course materials addressed to various types of students and devised for various types of contexts.

This project investigates the following main research question:

How can samples of naturally occurring spoken French be used successfully in listening activities in a beginners' French course, and what is the impact on learners?

To help address the main question, two further sub-questions will be explored:

To what extent is it possible for early language learners to engage with naturally occurring spoken French and its linguistic features?

and

What is the students' reaction to the integration of naturally occurring speech samples into a beginners' French course?

The formulation of these questions was the outcome of an iterative process since the start of this research project: initial research questions were refined, influenced by readings for the literature review, closer analysis of existing teaching materials, feedback received and the completion of a pilot study (described in section 7.1.1). Figure 6 represents the way in which the research project took shape, from informal questioning to a hypothesis and to the formulation of detailed research questions.
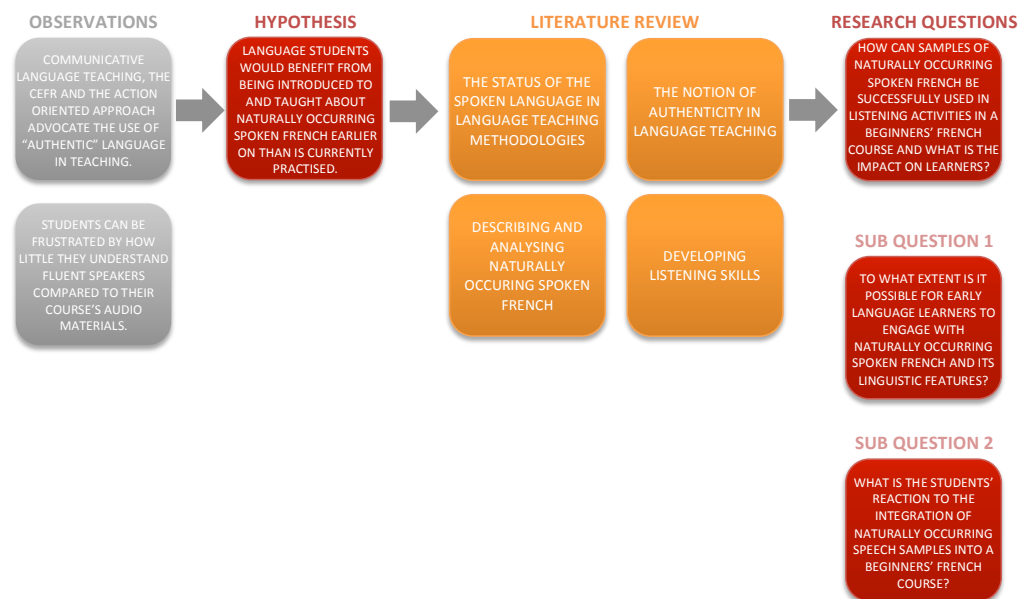
Figure 6: Defining research questions

The questions have to do with the content and progression of a beginners' French syllabus, and the possible outcome of a change of approach. The working hypothesis is that if you give students more practice in listening to and understanding naturally occurring spoken French, they should get better at it. An experimental set up was chosen and developed to test this hypothesis, as described in Section 5.3.1. The questions also aim to gauge how a change of approach would be received by students. Even if it is shown that being exposed to and working with samples of naturally occurring speech is beneficial to students' learning, it might not be perceived as something that is positive, for instance because it might be seen as too much of a challenge. Or on the other hand it might be seen as a factor that increases motivation.

To answer this range of questions, an appropriate research method had to be selected. It was felt that this should be empirical and appropriate research instruments had to be designed to collect data as part of an experimental study. This is what the next section describes.

5.3 RESEARCH METHOD

This section demonstrates how a research method was selected to answer the research questions formulated above and shows why it is appropriate to this research project. It positions the approach within the framework of educational and applied linguistics research methodologies, it defines the various components of the study and describes its successive stages.

5.3.1   An experimental study

As shown through the selection of research questions, the aim of this study is to test a new teaching approach (exposing beginners to naturally occurring speech in listening activities) and to assess the outcome of its implementation (checking whether beginners can engage with the materials and do the activities and how they react to the approach). In a presentation, Lathlean (2010) described what she called four 'types' of research: experimentation, survey, case study and action research. Burgess et al. (2006) define these as 'approaches'. Lathlean visualised these as the four corners of a matrix whose axes go from generalisation through social science theory to generalisation through probability theory, and from attempt to influence reality to no attempt to influence reality. Following this framework, the present study could best be defined, overall, as experimental. This is confirmed by Gass's definition of experimental research as 'a way of determining the effect of something on something else' (Gass, 2010, p.7). The choice of approach for this research project is illustrated by Figure 7.

HYPOTHESIS
LANGUAGE STUDENTS WOULD BENEFIT FROM BEING INTRODUCED TO AND TAUGHT ABOUT NATURALLY OCCURRING SPOKEN FRENCH EARLIER ON THAN IS CURRENTLY PRACTISED.

RESEARCH QUESTION
HOW CAN SAMPLES OF NATURALLY OCCURRING SPOKEN FRENCH BE SUCCESSFULLY USED IN LISTENING ACTIVITIES IN A BEGINNERS' FRENCH COURSE AND WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON LEARNERS?

EXPERIMENTAL STUDY
TEST A NEW APPROACH AND ASSESS THE OUTCOME

Figure 7: Choosing an experimental approach

Gass shows that experimental research implies a number of components:

> a specific and precise research question, […] a set of explicitly stated variables [… and] a randomly selected group of participants who are randomly assigned to various treatment conditions and/or control groups (Gass, 2010, pp.8-9).

The research question investigated was defined above. The selection of research participants and the process of assigning them to groups is discussed in Section 7.2 below. What remains to be stated explicitly is the different variables implicated in the experiment. To define variables, the categories presented by Gass have been used:

> In experimental research, there are essentially two primary variables of concern: independent variables and dependent variables. Independent variables are the object of investigation. They are those variables that the researcher is investigating in order to determine their effect on something else. […] Dependent variables are those variables that the independent variable is having an effect on. […] In addition to these variables are extraneous variables; these variables are independent variables that the researcher has not controlled for. (*ibid*. p.11)

Based on these distinctions it can be seen that in this research project, the independent variable being investigated is the exposure of beginners to naturally occurring spoken French through the use of experimental materials. The dependent variables examined are (i) the performance of students in listening activities based on samples of naturally occurring spoken French, and (ii) their reaction to the materials. The single constant variable involved is the fact that all students are registered on the same beginners' course. Extraneous variables that have to be taken into account when interpreting the data include the students' previous knowledge of the French language, any exposure to spoken French other than through their current French course and through the experimental materials, or the students' level of confidence and attitude to learning, for example.

5.3.2 Mixed methods

The previous section suggests that to help address the main research question, two sub-questions needed to be formulated. To address the two sub-questions, different types of information need to be collected. With the first sub-question, the aim is to make an objective judgment about whether students can engage with the approach being evaluated by measuring their performance. To do this, a method making use of quantitative information is best suited. By contrast, the purpose of the second research question is to make a judgment on subjective information collected from students to assess their personal reaction to and assessment of the approach. The most appropriate way to do this is to make use of a qualitative method. To address both sub-questions, the project therefore must resort to a mix of 'methods', which Burgess at al. define as 'techniques, tools, instruments and even sub-methods' (2006). As Burgess et al. state, 'The multiple use of methods and thereby the mixing of paradigms therefore depends on the phenomena and questions under investigation' (2006). In this research project, the choice of a mixed method derived directly from the questions being investigated, as illustrated by Figure 8.
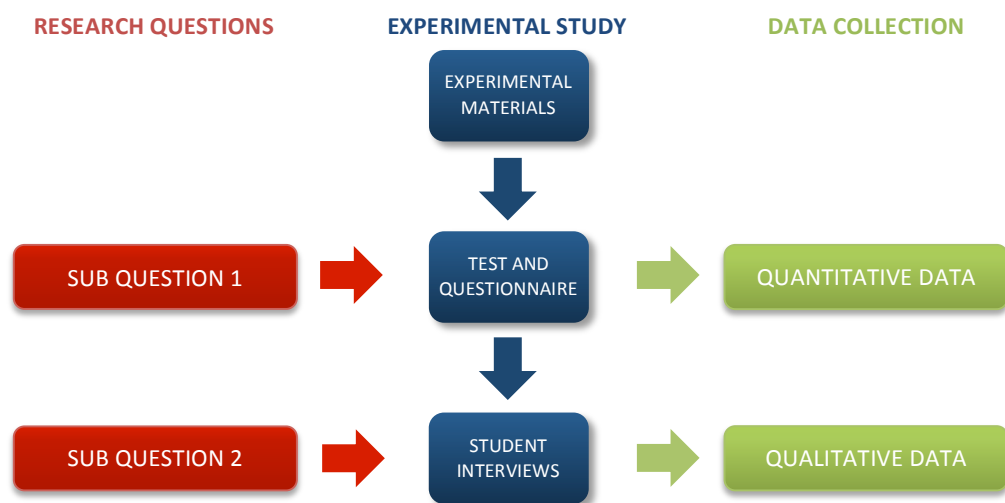
Figure 8: Mixed methods

5.3.3   Triangulation design

Ivankova and Creswell (2009) describe the principles of mixed methods research in applied linguistics. They show (p.138) that the three main characteristics that need to be considered to define a specific approach are timing (the sequencing of the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, which can be either sequential or concurrent), weighting (the balance, in importance, between the quantitative and qualitative data), and mixing (the relationship between the two dimensions, i.e. whether one needs to explain the other, or if both need to be compared). They then describe the four principal mixed method designs: explanatory design (where qualitative findings explain or extend quantitative results), exploratory design (where qualitative data is sought to explore an area before a quantitative study), triangulation design (where qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously and compared), and embedded design (where a secondary research question is answered using a type of data that is different from the data collected for the main research questions). According to this categorisation, this research project makes use of a triangulation design, where both quantitative and qualitative data are used and analysed together to answer the main research question. In terms of sequence, the quantitative data is collected before the qualitative data in this project, and they are initially analysed separately; however the analysis isn't sequential but concurrent, to allow for comparisons and for the two sets of data to shed light on each other, thus leading to an informed discussion of the outcome of the entire experimental study. This pattern therefore falls under the triangulation design category, as shown in Figure 9. Yet because each type of data will need to be analysed separately first, and because it was shown in Section 5.2 that it will be necessary to answer the two sub-questions first to help answer the main research

question, the two sub-questions will be addressed before the main question when findings are presented and discussed in Chapters 9 and 10.
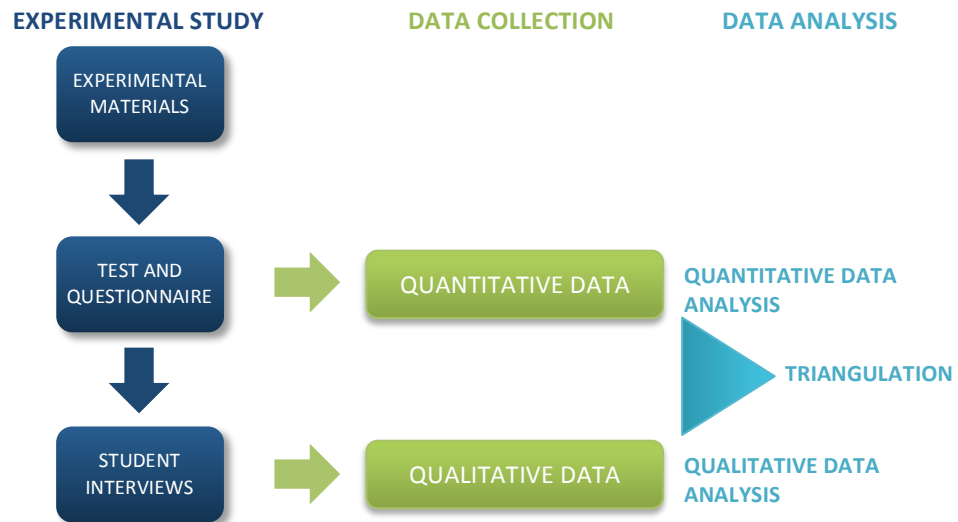
Figure 9: Triangulation

5.3.4   Use of treatment and control groups

The principle of an experimental design in a research project is to test a new approach and to assess the outcome of its implementation. Through the experiment, it therefore needs to be demonstrated that the idea or process being tested caused an effect on observed subjects (or it can be demonstrated that no effect was caused). The recognised scientific approach to check whether an effect is caused by a process is to compare the performance of two groups of subjects, one that is submitted to the process being tested, the treatment group, and one that is not submitted to it, the control group. This is explained by Creswell (2003) in these terms:

> When one group receives a treatment and the other group does not, the experimenter can isolate whether it is the treatment and not the characteristics of individuals in a group (or other factors) that influence the outcome. (p.154)

For this project two groups were therefore needed as part of the experimental design, so that the data for each group could be compared. This was implemented in this experimental study, as illustrated by Figure 10.

EXPERIMENTAL STUDY
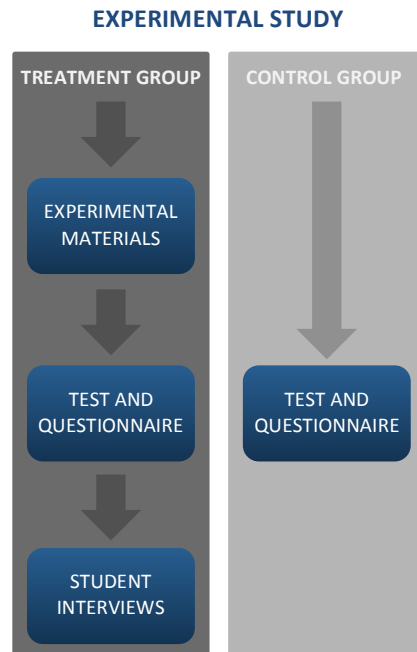
Figure 10: Use of treatment and control groups

As the figure shows, the control group was only involved in the quantitative part of the experiment. This was the result of careful deliberation; whilst it was likely that involving students from the control group in the qualitative phase of the research by interviewing some of them would have brought additional qualitative data that would have been invaluable, practical considerations and the tight time frame for the project meant that this would have had to imply reducing the number of interviews with students from the treatment group. It would also have placed greater demands on students from the control group. Given the limited time and resources available, it was ultimately decided that it would be more profitable to secure more qualitative data from the treatment group and none from the control group rather than share the time available for interviews between the two groups. This decision had advantages but also limitations which are hereby acknowledged.

A rich picture should emerge from the implementation of the research approach described above. It allows for the data obtained to be analysed along several axes, with comparisons between a treatment and a control group on the one hand, and comparisons between quantitative data and qualitative data through triangulation on the other hand. The use of experimentation and mixed methods should therefore provide a way to account for complex processes and thoughts.

The next section presents the specific context in which the research project was designed to take place.

5.4   THE OPEN UNIVERSITY LANGUAGES CONTEXT

The experimental study was set up within a specific context—that of an Open University language module, i.e. in the particular context of adult open and distance higher education. This section discusses practical and conceptual implications for the research design and for the relevance of the data and findings.

5.4.1   Using Open University students as participants

In the introduction to this dissertation, I indicated that the source of this research project lies in my background as a student, as a researcher and as a lecturer and materials designer. It is therefore as firmly linked to an ongoing process of reflection on my professional practice as it is rooted in theories related to my subject specialism. My current professional context is that of distance teaching of languages at the Open University, and it therefore felt highly appropriate to use that setting as the context for my experimental research.

This had practical implications, as it enabled me to make use of the infrastructures and systems that facilitate research in my institution. It also ensures that the findings and conclusions derived from the research will feed straight back into my professional practice and that of my colleagues and therefore contribute to the

development of our collegial educational practice and professional knowledge. At the same time, care will be taken to derive conclusions whose relevance go beyond our immediate context.

The French language modules offered at the Open University, the way they are designed and the nature of the student experience have been described by Coleman and Vialleton (2011). The beginners' French module is entitled *Bon Départ*, although it is commonly referred to using its module code, L192, by staff and students. It assumes no previous knowledge of French and takes students to level A2 of the CEFR in the course of 12 months' studies. The students who took part in this project had started in November 2010 (pilot study) and November 2011 (main experimental study); they were therefore all registered on the first edition of the module, which has since been discontinued and replaced by a new edition.

Open University students are both a very varied population and one that has characteristics that are often different from students at other institutions. Most are mature students who study part-time. Although the landscape of Higher Education has since changed profoundly, which has also affected languages studies at the OU, in 2010 and 2011 the majority of students enrolled on L192 were not registered for the OU's Language Studies degree. While many students used to take the course as a standalone module, it was designed as part of a university academic programme leading to the award of a degree.

The most important feature of the students who took part in this research as participants is however the fact that they were all adult learners.

5.4.2 Adult language learners

Andrew (2012) shows the complexity of the notion of age in foreign language learning, and suggests that it needs to be seen as a social construct rather than as a biological fact. McKay and Tom (1999) mention the typical characteristics of adult language learners. In a section entitled 'What do adult learners bring to a class?' they list the key features as being

(i)   language (adult learners all already master at least one language),

(ii)   background knowledge:

adult students bring background knowledge and experience of their own and other cultures as well as knowledge and experience gained from work or home (p.2)

(iii)   expectations:

Learners with prior language learning experiences are also likely to bring with them expectations of how language classes should be organised and taught (p.3)

(iv)   a range of learning styles,

(v)   confidence (or lack thereof),

(vi)   motivation, and

(vii)   personal circumstances.

This will have to be considered in the context of this study.

Herschensohn (2007), who studied the notion of age in second language acquisition in depth, examines, amongst other things, which areas of language learning are more affected by differences in the age at which they are acquired, and concludes:

Phonology is the area where L2 learners fare most poorly, perhaps because it is first learned in L1A[4], whereas in L2A it is nearly subsidiary to morphosyntax and lexicon. Perceptual acuity is necessary to L2 phonology as to L1, but often secondary learners misanalyze the new language in making it conform to the native one. (p.234)

This links to the topic of this research and shows that phonological features are one area of particular interest in second language learning, which might be especially relevant for adult learners.

5.4.3   The distance learning context

A review of the literature about foreign language teaching at a distance can be found in White (1997). White (2003) shows that one of the main differences faced by distance language learners is that

Within the distance learning context, the language learner is faced with the task of internalising and gaining control of the language without the same degree of input, interaction, and support provided by conventional face-to-face classes. (p.22)

But if distance language teaching was for a long time a pioneering concept which attracted much scepticism, it has since been shown to be effective, and it is an area which is now well documented. The pedagogical principles for modern foreign language teaching in a distance context, in the specific context of the OU, are presented in Hurd (2005), detailed principles in OU language course design are examined in Hurd et al. (2001), issues related to the use of a mix of delivery modes are addressed by Nicolson et al. (2011) and the evolving role of technology in the delivery of modules is the focus of a study by Hampel and de los Arcos (2013). The

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[4] In Herschensohn's book, L1A stands for 'first language acquisition', and L2A for 'second language acquisition'.

experimental materials created for the experimental study as part of this project are therefore only experimental insofar as they make use of a different type of audio materials; in all other aspects they have been created with respect to what is now well-established practice in the design of distance language learning materials. The next chapter describes the process of their creation.

Experimental materials design

The aim of this research is to test a new teaching approach and assess the outcome of the experiment. This chapter describes the content and materials that were selected or created to implement the teaching approach to be evaluated.

6.1   PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE TEACHING APPROACH

As the previous chapters have shown, the present study is concerned with how adult distance learners of beginners' French can be supported to engage with and learn from samples of naturally occurring spoken French. Within the broad field of second language acquisition (SLA), the aspects investigated in this work are related to cognitivist theories. As Macaro et al. (2010) show:

> questions on how language is learnt, how knowledge of language is represented and retrieved from memory, how language is produced and understood are prominent issues in Cognitive Psychology (p.45)

Ellis (1994, p.483) mentions the 'centrality of cognitive aspects of L2 acquisition in SLA' as well. But Ellis also shows that cognitivism is not the only way to account for SLA: he suggests that sociocultural theory is:

> [another] approach to explaining L2 acquisition that draws on a very different set of metaphors and affords an alternative account of both how L2 knowledge is conceptualized and the ways in which it is developed. (p.517)

He adds that sociocultural SLA 'advances very specific claims about how social context and interaction mediate language learning' (p.518). This dimension is reflected in a communicative approach to language teaching, which places social interaction and the ability to communicate with others at the heart of its approach.

Languages modules at the Open University are explicitly described as following a communicative approach, and sociocultural principles do underpin the methodology used to teach languages. But the distance teaching of languages at the OU is done through the combination of multiple components, such as the independent study of printed and audio-visual materials, the provision of tutorials involving a teacher ('Associate Lecturer' or AL) and a group of students, and teaching through assessment, whereby students are given very detailed feedback and advice on regular assignments corrected and commented on by teachers. In relation to the learning theories mentioned above, it can be asserted that the tutorials provide opportunities to develop skills for social interaction in the target language, whilst the independent study of the course materials and the teaching through feedback attend to cognitive dimensions of second language learning, the former in a generic way and the latter being personalised.

The materials designed to form part of the experimental study fit within the cognitivist dimension of the overall teaching approach of an OU language module: they were designed as an additional set of resources and activities for students to work with independently. More specifically, because the emphasis is on linguistic features which are specific to naturally occurring spoken French, the experimental materials can be described as developing 'focus on form', as defined by Long (1991). This refers to a phase in communicative lessons where the focus shifts from communicating meaning to others to paying attention to particular forms or structures of the language, usually to fill a gap in the students' knowledge. This is not

unusual in the communicative approach; as Macaro et al. (2010, p.48) explain, many proponents of the approach:

> advocate the explicit presentation of language structures […] during a 'pre-communicative' phase of teaching.

Within such a framework, the experimental materials devised for this study form part of that 'pre-communicative' phase in the overall learning design of the OU beginners' French module. They are better described in cognitivist terms, although they are only one of the components of an approach which, overall, relies on socio-cultural and constructivist principles.

6.2   INTEGRATION WITH L192 CONTENT

There are two parameters to consider in relation to the teaching content of the experiment: the linguistic content and structures of L192 which the experimental materials are intended to mirror, and the teaching objectives of the materials as regards the features of naturally occurring spoken French. This section explains the principles followed in deciding on the former.

Because the project relied on the participation of L192 students, and since those students have very limited time available, it was necessary to design the experimental materials in a way that would be consistent with their L192 studies and that they would offer a coherent added-on component. It was also crucial to ensure that the intervention would be very targeted and that the workload associated with it would be as limited as possible.

To be coherent with L192, the choice was made to design the experimental materials as an additional pack of self-study materials which students would be sent at predetermined dates and that they would be asked to study by a certain deadline; in effect the aim was for the pack to be studied as if it was an additional section of the

module. This gave students flexibility as to when and how to fit the additional work into their schedule, avoided the issue of finding times that were suitable for several people (which would have been a problem if a classroom session had been planned, whether it had been face to face or conducted online through teleconferencing) and also avoided involving further parties such as Associate Lecturers—the teaching staff who, at the OU, are in charge of delivering tutorials.

The choice of themes and structures for the materials was primarily influenced by the timetable dictated by the expected progress of the experimental study combined with the scheduling of units in the L192 module and the demands that it was reasonable to make of the participants so as to interfere as little as possible with their general studies. It was felt that the intervention should not be scheduled at the very start of the module when students are busy adapting to their new status as language students and possibly as distance learners, but it could not be left too late or the research project would be too delayed. There were also times that had to be ruled out to avoid the risk of students being distracted at key points of their studies, for example near assessment periods.

The outcome was that it was decided to split the experimental materials into two sections which would each be studied concurrently with or at the end of a unit of L192; the two units that were selected were unit 2 and unit 4 (out of a total of 12 units) and the key learning points chosen within these were the functions 'understanding and asking for directions' and 'talking about hobbies'. It was felt that it would be easy to find audio samples of naturally occurring spoken French that fitted those themes, and also that they complemented each other because they would illustrate slightly different speech types, transactional dialogues for the first one, and more monologic and personal accounts for the second one.

The next step was to find audio recordings that could be used as stimuli for the activities of the experimental study pack.

6.3 THE AUDIO CONTENT: NATURALLY OCCURRING SPOKEN FRENCH SAMPLES

The starting point of the design of the experimental materials was necessarily the audio content, since the whole research project revolves around the inclusion of a particular type of spoken French in teaching materials.

Because several are now available, and published online, existing corpora of naturally occurring spoken French initially seemed like the best source of audio samples to use. The website *Corpus de la parole* (Ministère de la culture et de la communication, no date) was used to identify existing online corpora which include spoken French. Others were located through publications. Amongst the corpora examined and considered were Blanche-Benveniste's published corpus *Choix de textes de français parlé* (Blanche-Benveniste et al., 2002), the C-ORAL-ROM corpus (Cresti and Moneglia, 2005), CLAPI (*Corpus de langues parlées en interaction*) (Laboratoire ICAR, no date), and PFC (*Projet phonologie du français contemporain*) (Durand et al., 2010). The ciel-f corpus, now available online (Corpus international écologique de la langue française, 2012) and presented by Gadet et al. (2012), had not yet been published when the design of my experimental materials started. None of the above were found usable for reasons such as poor audio quality, length of the samples or unsuitability of the thematic and/or linguistic content for beginners.

Instead of resorting to samples from an existing corpus, a new *ad hoc* corpus of speech samples recorded on location was therefore collected. This was done on site in France, in Paris and in Caen. The paragraphs below show what strategies were

used to ensure that the new corpus would contain samples that would be suitable for use in this project, unlike the samples found in existing corpora.

The recording sessions were prepared carefully to make sure the speech samples would both be real examples of naturally occurring spoken French and a good match for the existing content of L192 so that they could be used by students as an add-on. A list of questions was prepared, corresponding exactly to those used in L192 recorded dialogues, to try and elicit naturally occurring responses which would match the vocabulary and the structures of the module. Table 1 lists the questions extracted from L192 dialogues for each function covered.

Asking for and understanding directions	Talking about hobbies
Pour aller à X s'il vous plaît?	*Qu'est-ce que vous aimez faire pendant vos loisirs?*
Je cherche X s'il vous plaît?	*Vous allez souvent au cinéma / au restaurant?*
S'il vous plaît, X, c'est loin?	*Qu'est-ce qu'il y a comme activités possibles dans la région?*
Je voudrais aller à X s'il vous plaît.	*Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire ce soir?*
Pour X s'il vous plaît?	*Vous avez des projets pour ce soir / pour les vacances?*
X c'est où s'il vous plaît?	

Table 1: Questions extracted from L192 audio transcripts

These questions were then used to genuinely ask fluent speakers for directions or about hobbies on site in France, and the resulting interactions were recorded. The total outcome was about 27 minutes of audio recordings; a selection and editing process reduced this to short chunks comparable to L192 dialogues.

The orthographic transcripts of all the recordings used to design experimental materials are available in Appendix C.1.

6.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCRIPTED AND NATURALLY OCCURRING RECORDINGS

To establish empirically what the differences between naturally occurring and scripted and recorded interactions (such as those found in L192 and in other beginners' French courses) are, and what features of naturally occurring speech it might therefore be worth teaching beginners if they are to take part in and understand such interactions, a contrastive linguistic analysis of the data collected was undertaken. This section describes key findings; further details are found in a joint publication by Vialleton and Lewis (in press) provided in Appendix E.

The transcripts and the audio recordings of teaching sequences dedicated to 'understanding and asking for directions' (or equivalent) found in 17 different beginners' French courses published in the UK and in France since the year 2000 (listed in Appendix B) were analysed to ascertain what linguistic differences could be found between these audio materials and the newly recorded audio corpus. The analysis was done partly manually (e.g. determining the speech rate in each sample, or identifying instances of latching), and partly using the ELAN software[5]—developed by the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics (The Language Archive, Nijmegen, The Netherlands)—to detect some features (e.g. silent pause detection), measure them (e.g. average length of silent pauses) and to annotate the audio component of the corpus (transcript). Principles of annotating multimedia files with ELAN are described by Brugman and Russel (2004). Although intonational patterns were not analysed systematically, the Praat software (Boersma and Weenink, 2014) was used to generate pitch curves for the samples.

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[5] The software can be downloaded from http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/ (page last visited on 02/10/2012).

Table 2 below lists the categories and specific features that were analysed and annotated examples. A fully annotated sample of the corpus and conventions used to transcribe it are provided as Appendix C.2.

Features		Examples
Recording site	on location or studio recordings	new corpus is all recorded on location
Cognitive process of formulation	filled pauses ('euh')	alors vous continuez euh tout droit aloʁ vu kɔ̃tinɥe **œ**ː tu dʁwa
	vowel lengthenings marking hesitation	c'est vraiment au au fond sɛ vʁɛm**ɑ̃**ː o o fɔ̃
	false starts	tout droit vous allez v- euh arrivez à rue de Rivoli tu dʁwa vuz‿ale **v** œː aʁive aː ʁy də ʁivɔli
	repetitions	non non non c'est vraiment au au fond de de la rue **nɔ̃ nɔ̃ nɔ̃** sɛ vʁɛmɑ̃ː **o o** fɔ̃ **də də** la ʁy
Speech turn and interaction management	silent pauses between turns	combien (de) temps / je sais pas (à) peu près dix minutes un quart d'heure kɔ̃bjɛ̃ tɑ̃ **(0.6)** / ʃə pa pø pʁɛ di minyt‿ɛ̃ kaʁ dœʁə=
	latching	excusez-moi pour le métro s'il vous plaît / Euh tout droit skyze mwa puʁ lmetʁo sil vu plɛ**=** / **=**œː tu dʁwa
	overlap between turns	de rien / au revoir də **[ʁjɛ̃]** / **[ɔʁ]**vwaʁ
	back-channelling during turns	euh tout droit / oui œː tu dʁwa / **wi**
Segmentation	speech rate	see data in Table 6
	silent pauses within speech turns	Excusez-moi pour le métro s'il vous plaît skyze mwa **(0.6)** puʁ lmetʁo si vu plɛ
Articulation	elisions	/ʁ/ vous prenez sur votre gauche vu pʁəne syʁ **vɔt** goʃ /ə/ (un) petit peu quand même **pti** pø kɑ̃ mɛm
	assimilations	je sais pas **ʃə** pa

Table 2: Linguistic features analysed

Markers of hesitation and formulation such as filled pauses, vowel lengthenings, false starts and repetitions were all found to be much more frequent in the corpus of naturally occurring interactions than in the textbook samples, as shown in Table 3.

	textbooks	own corpus
hesitation filled pauses	61%	83%
hesitation lengthening	24%	86%
false starts	6%	33%
repetitions	0%	33%

Table 3: Percentage of recordings showing at least one occurrence of each feature

The data presented in Tables 4 and 5 below shows that there are significant differences between the two corpora in the way speech turns and interactions are marked and managed. More speech turns are marked by a silent pause in textbook dialogues, and the average length of silent pauses between speech turns is longer. Latching, overlaps and back-channelling are all more frequent in the naturally occurring interactions.

	textbooks	own corpus
silent pauses	90%	46%
latching	7%	27%
overlap	3%	27%

Table 4: Percentage of speech turns showing each feature

	textbooks	own corpus
back-channelling	12%	100%

Table 5: Percentage of recordings showing at least one occurrence of back-channelling

Table 6 shows a significant difference in speech rate between the two corpora, with a higher average speed found in the naturally occurring dialogues. The difference is such that it is also easily perceivable by ear in a large number of the textbook recordings. The speech rate measured in the naturally occurring corpus is consistent with the average rate of 4 to 5 syllables per second measured for 'la parole spontanée ordinaire' by Léon (1992), cited by Bento (2008).

	textbooks	own corpus
speech rate	3.25	4.78

Table 6: Speech rate (syllables per second)

Table 7 shows that the average length of silent pauses within speech turns is longer in the speech samples from language courses than in the naturally occurring

interactions, and that silent pauses represent a larger proportion of the total length
of recordings in the language courses.

	textbooks	own corpus
average length of pauses	0.55s	0.37s
% pauses in recordings	29%	17%

Table 7: Silent pauses within speech turns

It was found that there is a clear preference for pronouncing 'de', 'je' and 'le' without
elision or assimilation in the textbook dialogues (79%), and a smaller but significant
preference (65%) for the reverse in the naturally occurring dialogues, as shown in
Table 8 (the data is based on over 150 items). This therefore represents an area of
strong divergence between the two types of spoken texts.

	textbooks	own corpus
with elision or assimilation	21%	65%
without elision or assimilation	79%	35%

Table 8 : Pronunciation of 'de', 'je', 'le'

The analysis clearly demonstrates that some linguistic features, which are typical of
naturally occurring spoken French, cannot be taught based on scripted recordings.
The next step was therefore to identify which of these features should be selected to
be taught as part of the experimental study.

6.5   CHOICE OF TEACHING POINTS

Before teaching notes and tasks were designed for the experimental materials, and
to complete the contrastive analysis presented in the previous section, details of the
teaching points that were to be included in the experimental materials had to be
decided.

The process of selecting the latter was iterative and the selection followed a bottom-up approach. Based on the features identified through the contrastive analysis described in the previous section, the samples of naturally occurring spoken French collected were re-examined and directly compared to similar but scripted audio recordings extracted from L192. The aim was to identify key differences, i.e. features which were recurrent or particularly prominent in the naturally occurring samples, and absent from the scripted dialogue, and to select differences that would be the most striking for students.

The conclusion was that the key differences were related to the speed of elocution and occurrence of elisions and assimilations on the one hand, and to markers of formulation such as hesitations, repetitions and restarts on the other hand. These two main aspects were therefore chosen as the focus of the teaching notes and activities in the experimental materials.

The next section shows how the teaching notes and activities were designed to teach the selected teaching points.

6.6   TEACHING NOTES AND TASKS DESIGN

As explained above, there was a deliberate choice to follow the teaching approach which is implemented in all OU languages modules: the materials were meant to be studied independently, at a distance. General principles of instructional design for distance learning are described, for example, by The Commonwealth of Learning and Asian Development Bank (1999), and the tenets of the specific approach implemented at the Open University are defined by Hurd et al. (2001): the teaching is done through a combination of teaching notes (the OU's trademark 'teacher's voice in print') and of activities with detailed model answers and feedback. As is commonly done in OU language modules, the teaching notes were used to introduce new

language points ('How are sounds modified in naturally occurring spoken French?' and 'The structure of conversational French'), and they were followed by activities providing practice. The typology of tasks was the same as in most OU languages modules: there was a mix of multiple-choice questions, gap-fill tasks, and some open-ended questions. The objective was to replicate the tone and style of L192 content to ensure that the extra materials provided for the experiment would be coherent with L192 and would blend in as much as possible.

The next principle that was applied to the design of tasks was to provide a mix of activities focussing (a) on the content and structures of the L192 units, which were meant to provide practice in recognising known forms (i.e. forms learnt in L192) in the new context of naturally occurring speech (e.g. prepositional phrases used in directions like *au bout de*, *à côté de*, or vocabulary to describe types of films), and (b) on the acoustic and structural features of naturally occurring speech (e.g. fast elocution, the position of pauses, repetitions, elisions, assimilations), which were meant to provide an introduction to the specificities of that type of speech. The idea was to strike a balance between showing that the language taught in L192 *is* relevant to understanding naturally occurring spoken French, and showing that there are linguistic features that are specific to it, which students need to be aware of.

Finally, a mix of top-down activities (focusing on meaning) and bottom-up activities (focusing on forms) was included, with a view to testing whether students could cope with one type better than with the other when it was replicated in the test.

All the documents of the experimental materials, shown in Figure 11, were sent to students by email.

TREATMENT GROUP	CONTROL GROUP
INTRODUCTION	INTRODUCTION
STUDY PACK U2	
STUDY PACK U4	
TEST	TEST
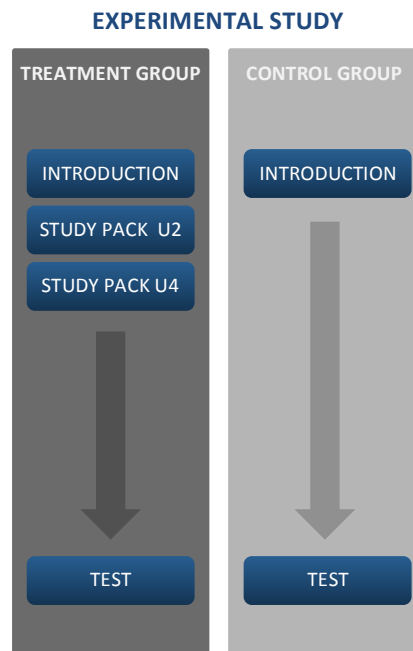
Figure 11: Documents sent to students

An introduction (document 1) explained what to do and when and provided contact details if help was needed. The study materials (document 2 for unit 2 of L192 and document 3 for unit 4 of L192) contained teaching text and practice activities about some features of naturally occurring spoken French, and a link to download all audio files. The audio extracts were used to illustrate the teaching notes and to form the stimuli for the listening tasks. Feedback materials, model answers, further explanations and full transcripts were provided in the study pack. The last document was a test, described in section 7.1.2. Documents 1–4 are provided in Appendix D.

7

Experimental study design

This chapter reports on the theoretical considerations and practical steps involved in the development of materials and processes designed to evaluate the experimental teaching approach tested in this research project.

7.1   DESIGN OF THE DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

7.1.1   Pilot study

An important phase in the design of the experimental study in general and of the data collection instruments in particular was the preparation of a pilot study, a year before the main study took place. Running a pilot experiment was a way of trialling several aspects of the research method and of the research design before the main study, and it allowed for principles and processes to be refined before the main phase of data collection and analysis took place. The detailed objectives of the pilot study are shown in Table 9:

• Testing Open University procedures for securing authorisation to involve students in a research project and for complying with ethics and data protection policies.
• Testing the design of some experimental teaching materials, including naturally occurring speech samples.
• Testing the design of three data collection instruments: a test, a questionnaire and interview questions.
• Testing the overall student response rate to an invitation to participate in an experiment, and the attrition rate between different stages of an experiment composed of different phases.
• Testing methods for processing and analysing quantitative and qualitative research data.

Table 9: Pilot study objectives

Creswell (2003) stresses the importance of testing data collection instruments before an experimental study:

> [Pilot testing] is important to establish the content validity of an instrument and to improve questions, format and the scales. (p.158)

The pilot study was a small-scale run of the main study: the experimental materials were shorter and there were fewer participants. The pilot confirmed that the design of the experimental materials was adequate for the study and that they could be extended using the same format and following the same principles. Minor changes to the data collection instruments were applied after the pilot to refine them. The issues faced in the recruitment and retention of a sample for the experiment were arguably the most informative aspect of the pilot study. Out of 30 students invited to participate, 6 returned a consent form, 3 returned the test and 2 agreed to take part in an interview. This translates as a 20% response rate for the return of consent forms, a 10% response rate for the return of the test, and a 6% response rate for interviews. These figures were used to determine the number of students who should be contacted in the first place to ensure that enough participants were recruited for the main run of the experiment.

7.1.2   Test design

The objective of the 'test' element of the experiment was to collect quantitative data to check whether students were able to engage with activities based on naturally occurring speech in a beginners' French module, and to measure whether the students from the treatment group, who would work with the self-study pack and be taught about some features of naturally occurring spoken French, were better able to complete the test than the students from the control group, i.e. whether the teaching element made any difference with respect to student performance.

The test was designed using activities based on further newly recorded naturally occurring interactions, as in the experimental study pack. The activities were very similar to L192 activities and similar to activities included in the experimental self-study pack to ensure that the main variable between the activities students were used to and the activities included in the test was the type of audio content that these related to.

The activities were based on the same units of L192 as those of the experimental materials.

The balance between different task types (focus of general or detailed meaning, focus on forms, focus on metaknowledge) was kept the same. This was designed with the aim of collecting information about how students cope with different approaches. Most of the activities in the test were worded as closed questions—in the main multiple-choice or gap-fill questions. This made the test easier to complete for students and easier to process and score afterwards. However four open-ended questions were included in activity steps which tested whether students could engage with a freer approach.

The final element included in the test is that for each activity students were asked to record how many times they listened to the audio extracts. The objective of collecting this information was to establish whether there were patterns in the way students listened to audio samples multiple times, or patterns in the type of activities that might require multiple listening. It was also meant to act as a prompt so that the topic could be discussed with interview participants.

Like the other documents which formed part of the experimental materials, the test was produced as an electronic text file with references to external sound files in each activity. The document was sent to members of the treatment group and of the

control group by email. At the top of the document an internet link was provided. It automatically directed students to an online page where they could download the sound files. To complete the test, students simply had to type their answers in the original test document and to return that by email.

Designing a test that was fully available online was an option that was carefully considered. In the end it was not implemented because the edition of the L192 module on which participants in this research project were enrolled did not include any quiz-like online activities: all activities were still book-based, and it felt more appropriate to mirror that approach in the experimental materials to reduce differences that were not related to content as much as possible.

The complete test is available for reference in Appendix F.

7.1.3   Questionnaire design

Dörnyei (2003) provides an explanation of the difference between a test and a questionnaire:

> a test measures how *well* someone can do something. In contrast, questionnaires do not have good or bad answers; they ask for information about the respondents (or 'informants') in a non-evaluative manner. (p.7)

This justifies the fact that they are accounted for as two different research instruments in this project, even though in practice the test and the questionnaire were presented as one document and administered at the same time.

Dörnyei shows that three types of data can be collected through questionnaires: factual, behavioural and attitudinal (*ibid*. p.8). In this research project, the aim of including a short questionnaire at the end of the test was to collect some factual information about the participants, and some attitudinal information about how the test was perceived by members of both treatment group and control group, knowing

that only a small number of students were going to be interviewed. These trends could then be explored in depth through interviews.

One important consideration was taken into account in the design of the questionnaire: because it was meant to be used to collect some additional information rather than to gather the key data in the study, it needed to be simple to complete and short—most of the time that participants were ready to spend taking part in the experimental study should be dedicated to using the experimental materials (for the treatment group), completing the test and participating in interviews. This factor took precedence over others, such as reliability, in the design of the content of the questionnaire, as explained below. It is also the reason why only closed questions were used.

Two questions were dedicated to collecting factual information. As it is known that students registered on the OU beginners' French module have a wide range of previous experience and proficiency, and the system for selecting cohorts did not permit restricting the call for participants to complete beginners, information was collected about the level of French of each student. It was done on the basis of self-declaration: each participant was asked to describe him- or herself as a 'complete beginner', 'near beginner' or 'not a beginner', and also using brief descriptors related to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001).

The rest of the questionnaire focussed on attitudinal information. To do this, it is usually thought that a single item (i.e. a single question) is not sufficient to collect reliable information on a single topic, as Dörnyei (2003) explains:

there is a general consensus among survey specialists that more than one

item is needed to address each identified content area, all aimed at the same

target but drawing upon slightly different aspects of it (p.34)

This methodology, commonly applied to ensure reliability, is known as 'multi-item

scales'. Because the questionnaire was designed as an add-on to the test and not as a

key instrument in the collection of data to answer the research questions, the

principle of the multi-item scales was not applied so as to keep the questionnaire

short and to make it less time-consuming for participants to complete. Instead only

one question was asked about each of the areas investigated, as shown in Table 10:

A.	How difficult did you find each of the questions above?
B.	How much do you agree with the following statement: 'I felt prepared to do this activity'?
C.	How much do you agree with this statement: 'I found this study pack interesting'?
D.	How much do you agree with this statement: 'I found this study pack challenging'?
E.	How much do you agree with this statement: 'I found that this study pack complemented my L192 studies'?
F.	How much do you agree with this statement: 'I found that I learnt something valuable from this study pack'?
G.	How much do you agree with this statement: 'I found that this study pack was appropriate to a beginners' French course'?

Table 10: Questionnaire items eliciting attitudinal information

For each question, closed options were given to participants to choose from, using

the Likert scale technique, as described, for example, by Dörnyei (2003, pp.36-38). In

questions A and B, which elicited responses related to each activity in the test, there

were sub-items (one per activity) with the Likert scale provided for each of them.

The entire questionnaire is provided for reference in Appendix F at the end of the

test.

7.1.4 Interview schedule design

Interviews consist in a verbal exchange with an informant; it is a form of data

collection whereby questions are used to obtain information (i.e. qualitative data)

from an informant. Although any interview can be placed somewhere along a continuum, three main interview types are commonly identified: open interviews at one end of the spectrum, structured interviews at the other end, and semi-structured interviews in between. According to Richards (2009), a semi-structured interview

> is one where the interviewer has a clear picture of the topics that need to be covered (and perhaps even a preferred order for these) but is prepared to allow the interview to develop in unexpected directions where these open up important areas. (p.186)

The semi-structured interview is the type that was used to collect qualitative data for this research project: a list of questions was prepared to guide the process, ensure that a number of important themes were included in all interviews, and to allow for some comparisons between students, but during the interview process room was left for students to volunteer different information or for the interviewer to explore any new theme brought up by the student.

The interview schedule designed for the main experiment was broadly the same as the one that had been designed for the pilot experiment. The questions covered three main areas as shown in Table 11:

1.	**Background as a learner of French and as a language learner**	
	prior experience, general exposure to the language, objectives as a learner, importance of understanding naturally occurring spoken French, areas of difficulty	
2.	**Experience of using L192 course materials and opinion about them**	
	opinion of their authenticity and their effectiveness in fostering the understanding of naturally occurring spoken French	
3.	**Reaction to the experimental materials**	
	perceived effectiveness, usefulness, level of interest and influence on motivation, opinion about whether such materials can be introduced to beginner learners, how and when	

Table 11: Main areas covered by interview questions

In the first part of the interview, the aim was to build a more complete picture of the background of students who enrolled on L192 and took part in the experiment so it could shed light on their reaction to the experiment. The objective of the second area was to understand what aspects of the Open University module students appreciated, or not, and why, with a particular focus on materials and activities that were designed to develop listening skills and that included audio tracks. It was also hoped that students might come to compare the two different approaches taken in the OU materials and in the experimental materials and comment on the differences. The last area was designed to be the main part of the interviews, concentrating on the experimental materials and exploring the students' take on the experience in depth so as to gain a clearer picture than that provided by the short questionnaire.

The full list of questions used for the interviews is available as Appendix F (at the end of this dissertation).

7.2   SAMPLING

The selection of participants to take part in a research project is often known as 'sampling': it consists of choosing or identifying a limited number of individuals from an entire potential population. In the context of this project, the potential population was any student enrolled on the OU L192 beginners' French module at the time of the experimental study. To collect data for the main experiment it was decided to use students who started the L192 module in November 2011. The pilot study had run earlier in 2011, with a sample of students selected from 2 tutor groups who had started in November 2010. On the basis of the information about response and attrition rates that emerged from the pilot, it was decided to approach as many L192 students as possible for the main experiment. The application to the OU Student

Research Project Panel (SRPP) therefore requested approval to contact the entire cohort, or 1273 students.

The application to SRPP was approved, although the cohort that was released for the study consisted of only 975 students because a number of L192 students had already been approached by the University to take part in other surveys or research projects, or had previously indicated that they did not wish to take part in such activities. Together with the students' contact details, information about the courses they had previously studied at the OU was requested. This showed that some students had taken French courses other than L192 in the past. Because they could not be considered as beginners, all the students from the cohort who had previously passed intermediate, upper-intermediate or advanced French modules were removed, and 910 students remained. They were all invited to take part in the experimental study: an invitation was sent to them by electronic message, as well as a consent form that they were to return if they agreed to take part. In total 84 consent forms were subsequently received, representing about 9% of the 910 students invited.

A treatment group and a control group were formed from the 84 participants. Two principles were applied: the treatment group was to be larger than the control group as it was felt crucial to secure a large enough treatment group to collect meaningful data, and the distribution between the two groups was done randomly. The outcome was a treatment group of 46 students and a control group of 35, with 3 early withdrawals. At the next stage, 18 students from the treatment group returned the completed test, and 24 from the control group, representing an overall total of 50% of the students involved. From the treatment group, interviews were arranged with 9 students, i.e. 50% of those who had returned the test, or about 1% of the original cohort invited to take part in the study. Figure 12 summarises the number of students involved at different stages of the project.
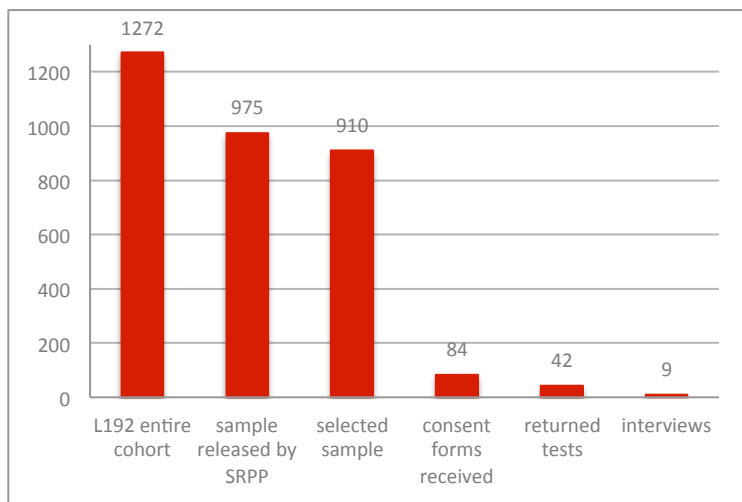
Figure 12: Sampling – student numbers at various stages of the experimental study

7.3   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues were considered at several stages of the experimental design and data collection process. They were related to four main areas: inviting students to participate and seeking their consent for participation, recording informants and interviewees, the specific issue of becoming L192 module team chair after the start of the research project, and the general issue of data protection and student anonymity.

7.3.1   Seeking University approval and student consent

The Open University is keen for its academic practice and for factors influencing the student experience to be based on sound research, and at the same time the institution takes the care of its students very seriously. It therefore has very robust systems to ensure that there is a limit to how often students can be approached to take part in research projects, and to guarantee that when they are approached, they are provided with all the information they need to be in a position to give informed consent for taking part. This section describes the steps that were taken to comply with the University's procedures for seeking approval for students to be approached, and how, once approval was granted, students were invited to take part.

Before seeking University approval, the researcher must prepare some key documents which need to be included in the application. The first of these documents was the invitation letter that would be sent to students once the project had been approved. It provides information to students on what the project is about, explains what their involvement would be if they agreed to take part, makes it explicit that participating or not participating in the project would have no effect on their Open University studies, and provides instructions about what to do next. The invitation, designed to be sent to students as part of a mass electronic mailing, contained a link to download a consent form that was based on an Open University template form and tailored to the project. By signing and returning the form students formally signalled that they agreed to take part in the project and for any data collected about them to be used for the research, anonymously. A sample of the materials to be sent to students, and a draft interview schedule was also prepared as part of the application. This was completed with the submission of an Open University data protection form and, because this project was part of an EdD, a document confirming the main supervisor's approval.

The Student Research Project Panel (SRPP) is the body that considers applications for research projects involving OU students; it can grant approval for these, and selects and releases student samples when projects have been approved. A standard form is used for the application, together with all the documents described above, and in the case of this project that was submitted in October 2011. As there were some queries about the size of the sample requested the process took longer than expected but a sample of 975 students was released in December 2011. The list of OU modules previously taken by the students was provided too. Following this an invitation was sent to 910 students in January 2012. 84 consent forms were received by the start of the experimental study and made up the student sample for the project, although a

few students exercised their right of withdrawal later on. The application documents referred to above are provided for reference in Appendix G.

7.3.2   Recording informants

Because the research project examines aspects of using naturally occurring speech on the one hand, and because the research method chosen involves the use of interviews to collect data, on the other hand, ethical questions revolving around the issue of recording participants had to be considered twice in this study.

The main ethical issue connected to recording informants to collect a spoken corpus was whether to ask people for permission before recording them. Although ensuring informants consent to contributing to a research project is a normal step to take, in this particular case there were academic reasons why this required careful consideration. The whole project relies on the idea that naturally occurring speech has linguistic characteristics which are different from planned or scripted speech. There were therefore reasons to fear that if informants were stopped and told that they would be recorded, the linguistic content of their response might change. This scientific argument for not divulging to people that they were being recorded had to be balanced with ethical principles. As a consequence, two different decisions were made for each of the recording phases. In the first phase, people were going to be asked for directions to nearby locations. The exchanges were always to be very brief, and their content was never to be personal. It was therefore decided that it was acceptable not to ask for consent prior to recording. It had been planned to tell people that they had been recorded after the exchange and to check whether they were happy for the recording to be used but this proved impossible to implement, due to the setting and nature of the recordings: when people are stopped to be asked for directions they are prepared to give a brief answer but do not expect to stop for any length of time, and they were usually on their way before it was possible

to engage in further discussions. In the second phase of the corpus recording, the same principles were considered again and a different decision was reached, based on the fact that people were going to be asked more personal questions requiring longer answers. There were reasons to predict that such questions may bring the participants to express personal opinions or to talk about personal aspects of their lives. For this reason those informants were asked for their consent before they were recorded. As a result, the speech samples collected are possibly less 'spontaneous' than the other set of recordings—for example the speech rate was, on average, lower. However it would be difficult to establish whether that was due to the different context of the conversations or to the fact that speakers knew that they were being recorded. In any case the recorded exchanges still displayed some of the linguistic features that were to be taught and they were therefore used in the experiment.

Dealing with ethical issues ahead of recording interviews was more straightforward. Only students who had indicated that they would agree to take part in interviews on their consent form were approached after they had returned their test. When they were approached, the message that was sent to them was worded as an invitation again. It explained that interviews would be taking place on the phone and would be recorded, and gave them a chance to decline. For those students who did take part, consent for recording the phone conversation was sought explicitly again at the start of each interview.

7.3.3 Conflict of interests: being a module team chair and a researcher

The third ethical issue arose from the fact that between the start of this project and the start of my experiment I became module team chair of the L192 module. This created a conflict of interests because a module team chair needs to approve research projects involving students from their modules. The solution found to this

problem was that approval was sought from the Head of Department instead. This was communicated to SRPP who did not raise any objection. I was also conscious of the fact that because of my position as module team chair I could be perceived as being in a position of authority in relation to the students I wanted to interact with as part of my research. To resolve this issue it was made very clear in all communications to students about this research that their participation or non-participation would have no consequence for their L192 studies. The invitation and consent form were sent by my main supervisor rather than directly by me to allow students to contact him if they had questions or concerns. Finally, I also created a new private email address which I used instead of my institutional address to communicate with students about this project, so as to replicate electronically a split between my two roles and keep my communications with students about the module and about the research as separate as possible. This strategy seems to have been successful and I am not aware of any concerns voiced by students about the arrangements.

7.3.4   Data protection

The final issue was that of data protection and anonymity. All the data provided by SRPP and subsequently collected from students was stored electronically in spreadsheets. The spreadsheet that contains personal student information (e.g. OU Personal Identification numbers or contact details) was password protected, following the procedure used by SRPP when they release such information. On that spreadsheet, each participant was allocated to a group and was given a student number for the purpose of this research. In the other spreadsheets, which contain the quantitative data collected during the experiment (e.g. test scores or questionnaire answers), the participants are only identified through their student number. No spreadsheet contains both personal data and data collected for this

study, and the spreadsheets that are not password protected therefore only contain anonymous data.

The qualitative data collected was also anonymised. The audio files were identified with the same student numbers as in the quantitative data spreadsheets. They are not completely anonymous because the recordings do contain some information that can be traced back to the student (e.g. usually the student's first name). However when the interviews were transcribed the data was fully anonymised. When the help of a transcriber was sought to transcribe some of the interviews, a confidentiality agreement was signed and exchanged before the start of the work, in line with data protection guidelines. All the analyses undertaken as part of this project were carried out using the transcripts and are therefore based on anonymous data.

8

Data

Once the research methods had been selected, the experimental materials designed and the data collection instruments created, the project entered its implementation phase. This chapter describes this and presents the methods used for the analysis of the data.

8.1   PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the entire project has been summarised in Figure 13. It illustrates the different stages of the project and presents its timeline. The information provided in the third and fourth columns (in yellow and green) shows how and when data was collected. The nature of that data and the methods chosen to analyse it are described in Sections 8.2 and 8.3.
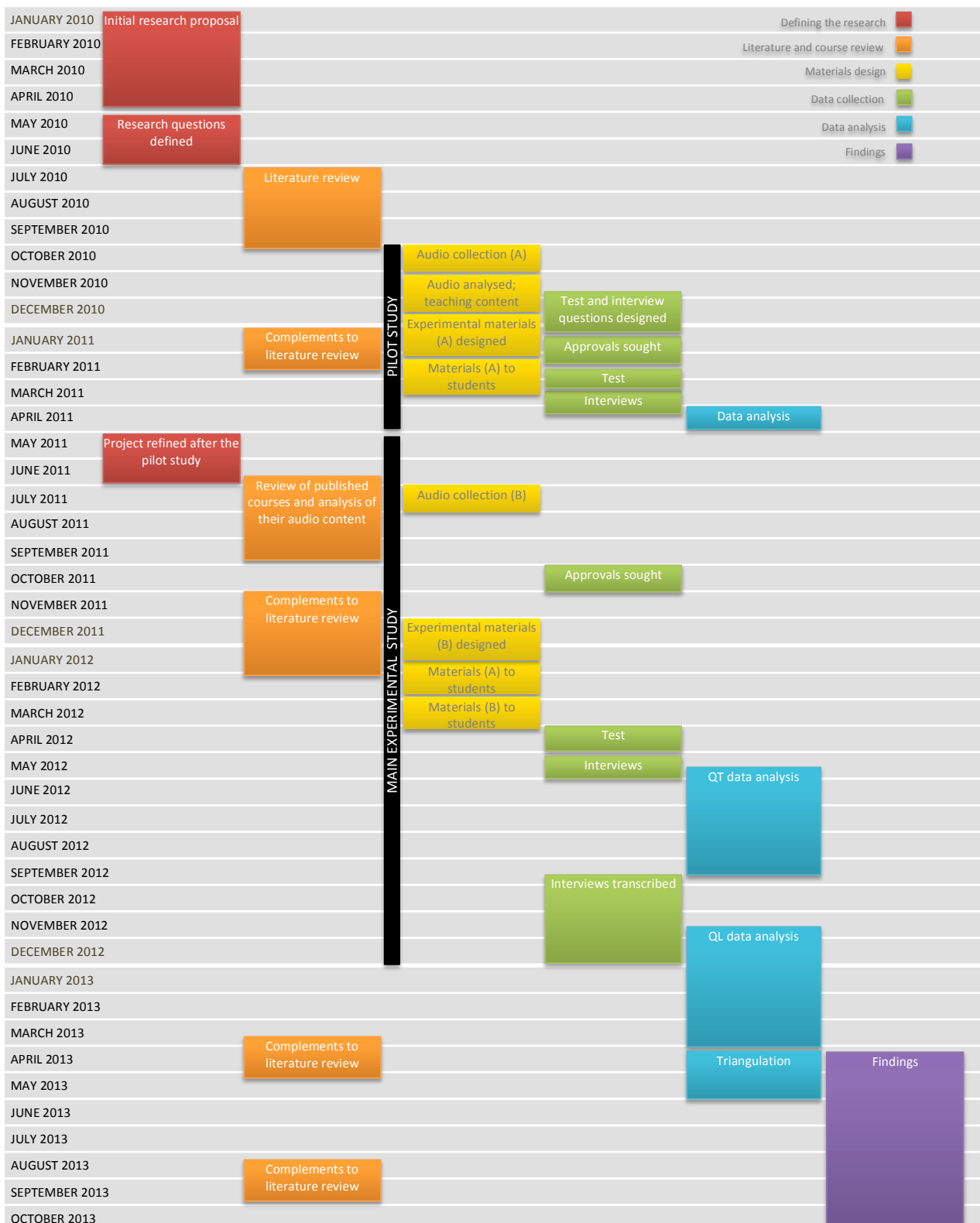
				Defining the research	
				Literature and course review	
				Materials design	
				Data collection	
				Data analysis	
				Findings	

JANUARY 2010 — Initial research proposal
FEBRUARY 2010
MARCH 2010
APRIL 2010
MAY 2010 — Research questions defined
JUNE 2010
JULY 2010 — Literature review
AUGUST 2010
SEPTEMBER 2010
OCTOBER 2010 — Audio collection (A)
NOVEMBER 2010 — Audio analysed; teaching content — Test and interview questions designed
DECEMBER 2010 — Experimental materials (A) designed
JANUARY 2011 — Complements to literature review — Approvals sought
FEBRUARY 2011 — Materials (A) to students
MARCH 2011 — Test
APRIL 2011 — Interviews — Data analysis
MAY 2011 — Project refined after the pilot study
JUNE 2011
JULY 2011 — Review of published courses and analysis of their audio content — Audio collection (B)
AUGUST 2011
SEPTEMBER 2011
OCTOBER 2011 — Approvals sought
NOVEMBER 2011 — Complements to literature review
DECEMBER 2011 — Experimental materials (B) designed
JANUARY 2012
FEBRUARY 2012 — Materials (A) to students
MARCH 2012 — Materials (B) to students
APRIL 2012 — Test
MAY 2012 — Interviews — QT data analysis
JUNE 2012
JULY 2012
AUGUST 2012
SEPTEMBER 2012
OCTOBER 2012 — Interviews transcribed
NOVEMBER 2012 — QL data analysis
DECEMBER 2012
JANUARY 2013
FEBRUARY 2013
MARCH 2013
APRIL 2013 — Complements to literature review — Triangulation — Findings
MAY 2013
JUNE 2013
JULY 2013
AUGUST 2013 — Complements to literature review
SEPTEMBER 2013
OCTOBER 2013

PILOT STUDY

MAIN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

Figure 13: Project timeline

8.2 QUANTITATIVE DATA

8.2.1 Quantitative data collected

The test and questionnaire were the instruments which enabled the collection of quantitative data. They were completed by 18 students from the treatment group and 24 students from the control group.

The students' answers to the test had to be turned into numerical data: a system was devised to obtain scores for each student. From numerical scores (total of points), percentage scores were calculated for each question and for the whole test. This data was entered into spreadsheets so it could be displayed, sorted and analysed. A similar process was used to capture the information about how many times students had listened to each audio track (or group of tracks) when doing each activity, and for the answers to the short questionnaire. The detailed data for the treatment and control groups was entered into separate worksheets, but key information was brought together in a single worksheet to prepare for a contrastive analysis of the data for the two groups.

This method for recording the data made it easy to obtain a clear overall picture of the data, but further statistical work was needed for conclusions to be drawn from it. The methods used to do that are presented in the next section.

8.2.2. Method for quantitative data analysis

As Cramer (1994) puts it,

> Statistics play a vital role in collecting, summarising and interpreting data designed to evaluate a principle empirically. (p.1)

Standard statistical measures and calculations were done to analyse the data and check its validity and reliability. A number of publications were used to decide on appropriate methodological and statistical tools for the particular context of this

research project: two books providing pointers about the use of statistics in language study, written by Woods et al. (1986) and Muller (1992), as well as Dörnyei (2007), and two documents about the use of statistics which form part of the teaching materials of an Open University Master's module (H809) on Practice-based research on educational technology, written by Richardson (2008a), (2008b). The statistics were computed using Microsoft Excel as described in two video tutorials published online by RStatsInstitute (2011a), (2011b).

Most of the statistical tools used in this research project fall under the category of descriptive—rather than inferential—statistics as defined by Richardson (2008a) and (2008b). Measures of central tendency (average scores), of variability (standard deviation) and of frequency of distribution have been applied to test scores. These are measures which Blaikie (2003) labels as being part of 'univariate descriptive analysis', used 'to represent the characteristics of some social phenomenon' (p.29). A measure of correlation, the Pearson r correlation coefficient, has also been used to ascertain whether there is a statistically sound relationship between two sets of data (for example, to establish whether the level of proficiency of students had an influence on their test scores). This falls under the 'bivariate descriptive analysis' category, which

> involves either establishing similarities or differences between the characteristics of categories of objects, events or people, or describing patterns or connections between such characteristics (Blaikie, 2003, p.29).

One inferential statistics tool has been used to analyse data: an independent groups t-test, which is a probability test which can show how likely it is that a difference between two sets of data is due to a different variable or how likely it is to be due to chance. Dörnyei (2007, p.215) stipulates that independent groups t-tests

are for research designs where we are comparing the results of groups that are independent of each other (for example, Class 1 and Class 2). (p.215)

In this case, the test was used, for example, to examine whether the difference in scores between the treatment group and the control group can be reliably attributed to the difference in treatment or whether it is as likely to be due to chance.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the quantitative data, using the methods described above, are presented in Chapter 9. The next section describes the qualitative data that was collected.

8.3   QUALITATIVE DATA

8.3.1   Qualitative data collected

The qualitative data described below was gathered in the second phase of data collection, at the interview stage. Out of the 18 students from the treatment group who returned the test, 9 volunteers were selected for interviews. They were chosen to reflect a range of abilities in the group, and in the L192 student population as a whole. The interviews were conducted by telephone at pre-arranged times. The interviews were recorded onto a digital voice recorder using a 'telephone pickup' earpiece microphone. The resulting digital audio files were transferred to a personal computer and backed-up to a secure server. The interviews ranged in length from 27 minutes to 62 minutes, lasting for about 40 minutes on average. The total length of the audio recorded is approximately 6 hours.

Table 12 provides an overview of the characteristics of the students and the interviews (the information about levels being the outcome of a self-evaluation by participants).

Interview	Student	Level	Level (CEFR)	Male/ female	Interview date	Audio length (min)	Transcript length (words)
interview 01	student 111	beginner	A1	female	21/05/12	57'	9320
interview 02	student 108	near beginner	A2	female	21/05/12	25'	4170
interview 03	student 109	near beginner	A2	male	22/05/12	62'	9760
interview 04	student 113	beginner	A1	female	22/05/12	35'	6530
interview 05	student 102	not a beginner	A2	female	24/05/12	31'	4300
interview 06	student 101	not a beginner	B2	female	24/05/12	27'	4080
interview 07	student 104	beginner	A1	male	24/05/12	42'	6450
interview 08	student 112	not a beginner	A1	female	28/05/12	39'	6920
interview 09	student 115	near beginner	A1	male	28/05/12	40'	5300

Table 12: Basic interviewee information

8.3.2 Interview transcription

Before the interviews could be analysed in any detail, the audio recordings had to be transcribed. Indeed, according to Dörnyei (2007), 'The first step in data analysis is to transform the recordings into a textual form' (p.246). Dörnyei goes on to point out the problematic aspect of transcriptions: 'No matter how accurate and elaborate a transcript is, it will never capture the reality of the recorded situation' (*ibid.*). This is because of the difficulty of transcribing the non-verbal elements of a conversation. This shortcoming is unavoidable for any researcher working from audio rather than video recordings, and when, as in the present study, the focus is on content rather than form, it is less of an obstacle. However it does make it essential to carefully choose and describe conventions for the transcription and to acknowledge its limits.

In this project the transcription is a word for word representation of the content of the interviews, but it excludes most marks of hesitation or repetition, coughs or external noises, whenever they were not essential to the content of the exchanges. These were often noted but not verbatim, as it would have increased the transcription time considerably. This was deemed to be acceptable as the objective of the transcription was to allow for detailed content analysis but not for a linguistic

analysis. Any parts of the interviews which were inaudible or unclear were signalled in the transcript, with a time code to allow reference back to the audio file if required. The data was anonymised during the transcription process: no version of the transcripts exists that contains confidential information or information that can lead to the participant being identified. In total, the nine interviews represent almost 57,000 words of transcript. Appendix H provides a sample interview transcript for illustration.

8.3.3   Method for qualitative data analysis

Dörnyei (2007) explains that qualitative data analysis is characterised by the following main principles:

> (a) the language-based nature of the analysis, (b) the iterative process, (c) the tension between formalization and intuition, and (d) the tension between being methodology-bound and methodology-independent. (p.243)

He acknowledges that 'the initial raw qualitative dataset is likely to be "messy" if not chaotic' (p.244) and shows that it is through an iterative process of coding and interpreting that sense can progressively be made of it.

There is one major choice to be made by a researcher setting out to analyse qualitative data: he or she must decide whether to follow a predetermined methodological framework for the analysis, or resort to intuition to derive a framework or categories suited to the data. The approach taken in this project is the latter; such an inductive approach is usually labelled 'qualitative content analysis', as Dörnyei explains:

> when scholars do not wish to affiliate themselves too closely with a specific methodology, they often use the broad term of 'qualitative content analysis'

to characterize the collection of generic qualitative analytical moves that are applied to establish patterns in the data. (p.245)

This method of analysis is inductive and depends greatly on the nature and content of the data, but it does follow some general steps. For Dörnyei there are four main phases in the process:

(a) transcribing the data, (b) pre-coding and coding, (c) growing ideas—memos, vignettes, profiles and other forms of data display, and (d) interpreting the data and drawing conclusions. (p.246)

The first of these phases was described in the previous section. The last one will form the outcome of this work and will be presented in Section 9.2. The next paragraphs present the two intermediate phases, phases (b) and (c).

Pre-coding can be defined as the very initial stage of reflecting on the data collected with a view to deciding on a method and on categories for coding it. Dörnyei refers to it as 'deliberation' (*ibid*. p.250). In this project, the first stage of deliberation was mostly dedicated to deciding whether to make use of specific software for computer-aided qualitative data analysis (known as CAQDAS) or to analyse the data manually. Manual analysis was opted for as the quantity of data was limited enough to allow it.

Once the decision to proceed with manual coding and analysis was made, a method was devised. The first two transcribed interviews were read several times to start identifying common themes, beyond those explicitly elicited by the questions, and areas of divergence. This was followed by multiple readings of the whole set of interviews, first sequentially to gain an understanding of the facts and opinions expressed by each participant, and then question by question to observe and compare the reactions of all students for given questions or areas. It was felt that this double entry into the data, following two axes—one defined by each speaker and

one by each sub-theme—was an important feature of understanding the data and that it should be incorporated in the way the data was coded and displayed.

After the preliminary readings, the coding *per se* could start. Dörnyei defines coding as

> [a technique] aimed at reducing or simplifying the data while highlighting special features of certain data segments in order to link them to broader topics or concepts

and a code as

> a label attached to a chunk of text intended to make the particular piece of information manageable and malleable. (*ibid*. p.250)

Coding was done in two stages: first the attribution of codes and/or making of notes (what Dörnyei calls 'memos') associated with parts of the data on a hard-copy version of the transcript, and then the reduction of the data, done concurrently with a phase of 'data display' defined by Miles and Huberman (1994), as 'an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action' (p.11, cited by Dörnyei (2007, p.256)). This was done by making use of a series of spreadsheets. The first one was used to note background information on the interviewees and on the interviews; four more were each dedicated to one of the main areas explored through the interviews: language learning background, views on spoken French, views on L192 materials, views on experimental materials. Each spreadsheet included a column for each of the interviews, whilst rows were used to summarise the key data provided by each interviewee for sub-themes identified during the pre-coding phase. Most of the information was summarised but some key quotes were also copied verbatim. Extra rows were used to note comments or any incidental information provided by interviewees that might prove relevant. New rows

were also added for any new sub-themes that were identified at that stage. An example spreadsheet is provided in Appendix H.2. When this was complete, the spreadsheets were printed out, further analysed and annotated, and most of the information was coded again row by row, making use of notes and colours (as shown in the sample shown in Appendix H.3). For example, in the page about 'views on spoken French', a row was used to record reasons mentioned by students to explain why they find naturally occurring spoken French difficult to understand. Codes were used to indicate whether the reasons given were related to (a) grammar/morphology/syntax, (b) vocabulary/register or (c) phonological or acoustic features. A full list of the codes that were used is given in Appendix H.4. In other sections, colours were used to contrast negative and positive reactions. Annotations complement the coding throughout the spreadsheets. Finally, more colours and symbols as well as some summaries of key points were used to link data belonging to a common theme across rows of data or across different spreadsheets and represented a first step towards a deeper analysis of the data. One example of this would be annotations to mark all instances of the expression of a feeling of frustration by students, or all items linked to the idea of progression in a syllabus.

In the following stages of the reflection, the spreadsheet summaries were used as a starting point for the analysis and interpretation of the data, but with constant reference to the original transcripts to keep the verbatim version of the interviews in mind so as to avoid oversimplification.

Conclusion to Part II

It has been demonstrated that the research questions formulated for this study were strongly informed by the literature review presented in Part I, and that the research methods used were carefully selected and applied to yield the type of data which, once interpreted, will provide answers to the research questions, as illustrated by Figure 14. The research findings, obtained after analysing the data using the methods described in the previous chapters, are the focus of Part III.
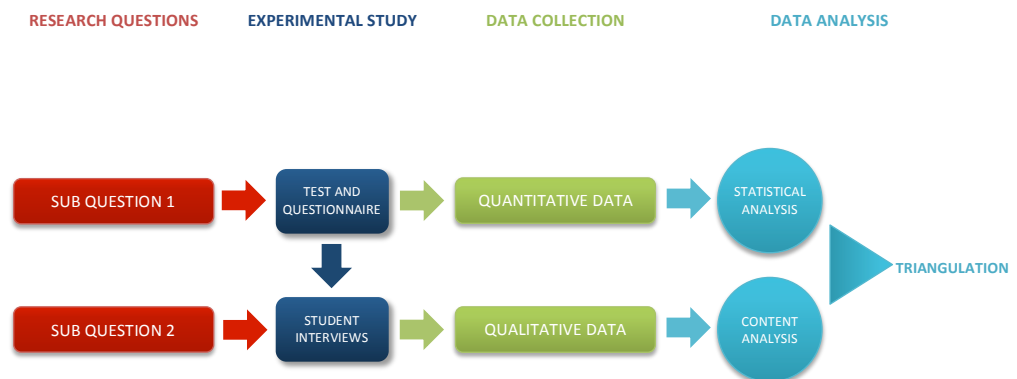

Figure 14: From research questions to data analysis

Part

III

Analysis and findings

Introduction to Part III

Part III presents the conclusion drawn from the analysis of the data collected and described in Part II and expounds findings for the research project. The quantitative and qualitative data are first considered individually in Chapter 9, and then brought together to provide answers to the research questions in Chapter 10. The first three themes for reflection identified at the end of Part I following the literature review (content selection, difficulty and motivation and teaching and learning strategies) will also be referred to in Chapter 10. Reflections related to the theory and practice of language teaching (the fourth theme identified at the end of Part I), as well as implications and scope, are then all considered in Chapter 11.

9

Data analysis

The previous chapters have shown what methods were used to collect data during the experimental study, and have described the data that was collected. Previous sections have also explained the methods selected to analyse the data. This chapter is dedicated to the outcome of the analysis.

9.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Before considering the quantitative and qualitative data together, so that the two dimensions shed light on each other, different sections report on each type of data separately. Here the focus is on the quantitative data.

9.1.1 Student level

The data revealed that real beginners are in a minority in the sample: they represent only 17% of all the participants, with 48% of near beginners and 36% who are not beginners. Figure 15 provides a breakdown of this data by group.
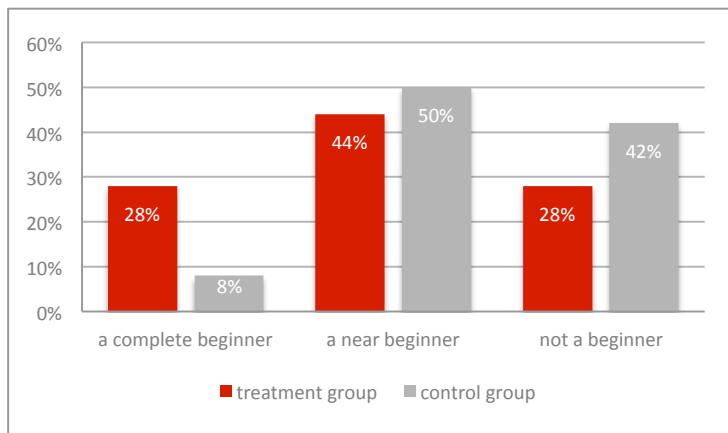
The data also shows that there is a discrepancy between the treatment and control group, with higher levels of previous knowledge of French in the control group than in the treatment group.

The data using the CEFR levels is presented in Figure 16. This shows a similar proportion of students describing their proficiency as matching level A1 in the two groups, but more students at levels A1 and A2 in the treatment group and more students at a higher level of proficiency (B1 + B2) in the control group than in the treatment group. This needs to be taken into account in the analysis.
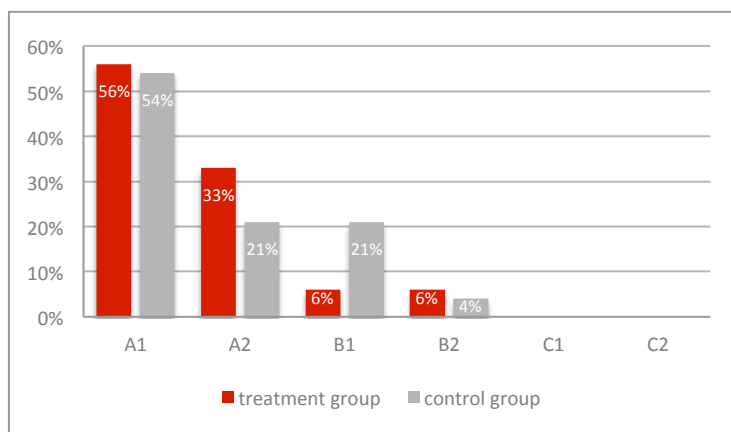
9.1.2 Student performance

Table 13 below summarises the data about student performance, showing the average percentage score of students in each group (treatment and control), the range of results (minimum and maximum scores) and the variability of results, expressed through the standard deviation (*SD*) of scores.

	treatment	control
mean	83.61	78.75
minimum	65	45
maximum	100	100
standard deviation	9.52	12.36

Table 13: Student scores

The data shows that the scores of the treatment group are on average 4.86% higher (at 83.61%) than those of the control group (78.75%), that the range of results is narrower in the treatment group, and that there was also less variation in scores in the treatment group (*SD* = 9.52) than in the control group (*SD* = 12.36). Figure 17 below shows that across the two groups, the distribution of scores is as would be expected, i.e. that it is close to a normal distribution, as indicated by the shape of the histogram which, apart from a peak at 90, displays overall the shape of a gaussian curve.
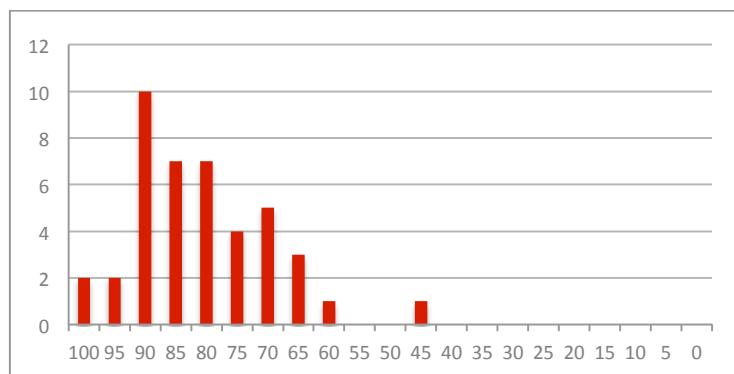

Figure 17: Distribution of scores (both groups)

The data in Table 13 above describes how the students from both groups performed overall in the test. Statistics were then used to determine what conclusions could be drawn from this data. The first set of calculations was done to ascertain whether the self-declared level of proficiency of students had an influence on their score. The Pearson *r* correlation coefficient was calculated using the level of proficiency and the score of each student as variables. It was first calculated across all groups. The outcome ($r = .52$) is inconclusive: $r = 0$ would show no relationship between proficiency and scores, $r = 1$ would show a perfect correlation between proficiency and scores, but for our data the result is that there is a medium correlation between the two variables. The squared coefficient $r^2 = .27$ shows that 26% of the results could be explained by the initial level of proficiency of the participants. If the two groups are considered separately, the results show that the correlation is higher for the control group ($r = .62$) than for the treatment group ($r = .40$), showing that 39% of the scores might be explained by the level of proficiency in the control group, compared to 16% in the treatment group. What we can conclude from these calculations is that there might be a relationship between the scores achieved by students and their level of proficiency, especially in the control group, but that this relationship is not very strong and should therefore be treated with caution.

The next statistical test that was performed was an independent group t-test, which is designed to compare the means of two different samples (in this case, the mean score of two samples of students: the students from the treatment group and those from the control group). This is a test of probability, which gives an indication of whether a difference in means between two samples (i.e. the higher mean score of the students from the treatment group compared to the control group) is likely to be due to the intervention that differentiates the two samples (i.e. the fact that the treatment group worked on self-study materials before taking the test) rather than

to chance. The t-test was calculated for the students across the range of proficiency levels, and for students who assessed their own level as A1 only. In the first case, it returned a value of $p = .070$, and in the second of $p = .173$. Any value below .05 would show that there is a statistically significant difference between the scores of the two samples examined. However because both of the values found for both of the tests are higher than .05, we must conclude that the difference between the two samples is not statistically significant, and that it is as likely to be due to chance as to an intervention. In other words, statistics do not prove that there is a link between the treatment in the experiment and the higher mean score achieved by the treatment group. This does not show a negative link either, it simply indicates that the results of the experiment are not robust enough to be statistically significant— perhaps because the number of participants was too small, perhaps because of the test design, or indeed because the treatment did not actually make a difference.

9.1.3 Tasks

The experiment was designed to include different types of tasks reflecting different approaches to testing listening skills. Some required students to understand a recording in order to answer a question about its meaning; these activities tested a top-down approach to listening. Within these, some focused on general meaning and others on details. Other activities demanded of students that they identified words or structures present in the dialogues; they focussed on forms and tested a bottom-up approach to listening. The final question in the document tested not listening skills but the ability of students to describe some features of the naturally occurring speech exemplified in one recording (although it was included in the statistical analysis above because a numerical score was assigned to students for this question, as with all the other questions). This was designed to test the students' awareness of specificities of such speech and their ability to express them, so as to check if the

students from the treatment group had benefited from the teaching notes in the self-study pack by becoming more aware of some features of naturally occurring speech than the students from the control group. It therefore focussed on metaknowledge.

The average percentage score awarded for each question or task was recorded and is displayed in Figure 18, which reveals large variations between tasks.
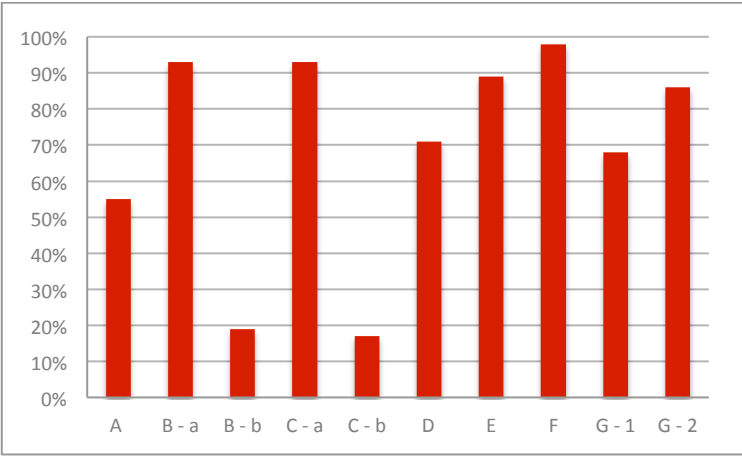

Figure 18: Average percentage score per question (both groups)

Figure 19 shows that scores produced by each question were comparable across the two groups.
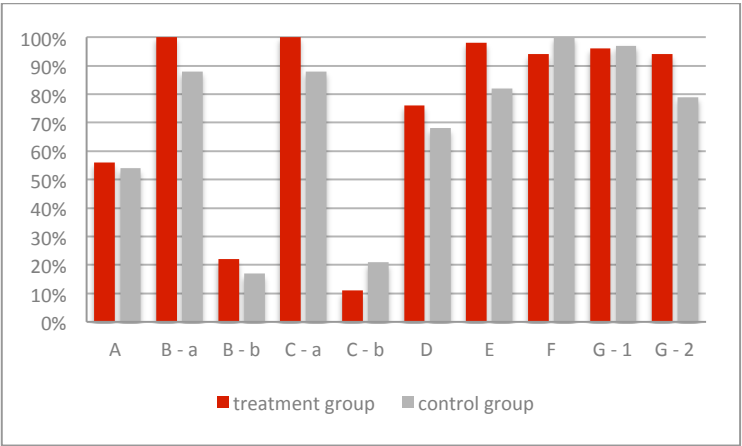

Figure 19: Average score per question in each group

Questions were then considered type by type, as follows (Table 14):

top-down (focus on general meaning)	A, B-a, C-a, F
top-down (focus on detailed meaning)	B-b, C-b
bottom-up (focus on form)	D, E, G-1
focus on metaknowledge	G-2

Table 14: Question types

Table 15 presents the means of scores for each task type for each group and Table 16 shows the breakdown between general and detailed meaning within the top down category.

	treatment	control
top-down	64	61
bottom-up	90	82
metaknowledge	94	79

Table 15: Mean score for each type of task

	treatment	control
top-down (general meaning)	88	82
top-down (detailed meaning)	17	19

Table 16: Mean score for each type of top-down task

What this shows is that for most task types the treatment group had higher mean scores. The mean was higher for bottom-up tasks than for top-down tasks, which is explained by the particularly low scores for top-down tasks focusing on detailed meaning. The largest difference was between the scores of the treatment and control groups in the question that required metalinguistic knowledge about the features of naturally occurring speech, where members of the treatment group achieved higher scores than those of the control group, indicating that the treatment, i.e. learning about the features of naturally occurring spoken French, may well have had an effect on the students' ability to identify and describe these features.

9.1.4 Number of times students listened to each recording

The number of times each student listened to each audio track[6] was recorded, and from that information a total and average number has been calculated for each student and for each track, overall and for each group of students.

Table 17 provides a summary of the data:

	treatment	control
mean	4	4
minimum	1	1
maximum	20	15
standard deviation	3.29	2.96

Table 17: Number of times students listened to recordings

Looking at students, the first finding is that the average number of times each student listened to all tracks is identical across groups, with an average of 4, but the relatively high *SD* reveals variations between students and/or between tracks.

Figure 20 illustrates that the total number of times each track (or group of tracks) was listened to also shows variations.

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[6] The data is presented differently from previous tables here, showing main question numbers (A to G) and not sub-questions (e.g. B-a and B-b) because whenever there were sub-questions, they were based on the same audio tracks and students were only asked to record the number of times they listened to a track overall. In some cases a single question was based on two audio tracks and the data available is for the two tracks combined. There was missing information in the data collected, when some students forgot to keep track of it for some questions. It is acknowledged that, as a result, the data presents several limitations.
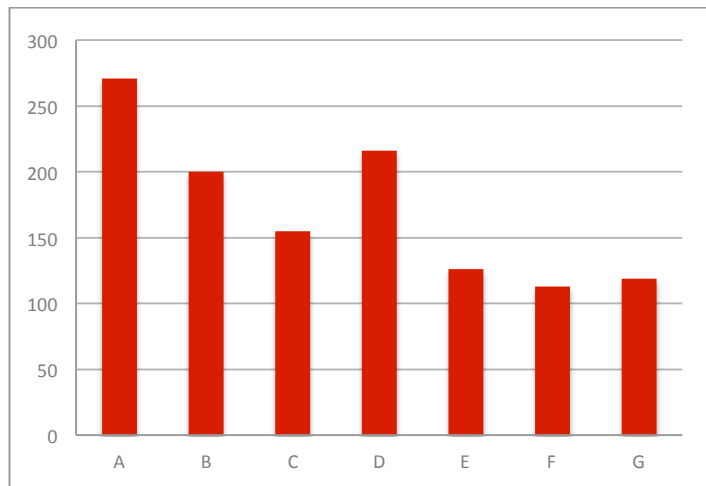
Figure 20: Total number of times recordings were listened to in each activity (both groups)

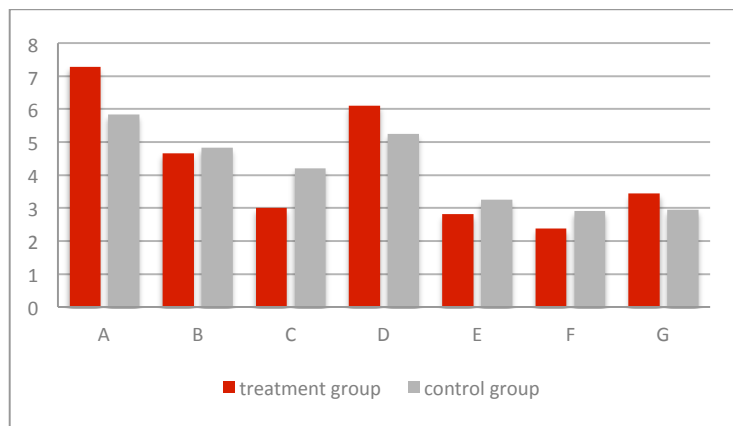The data (averages) can also be compared group by group (Figure 21) but this shows similar trends.

Figure 21: Average number of time recordings were listened to in each activity

Correlation (Pearson r coefficient) was calculated to find out if there was a relationship between the number of times a student listened to clips and his or her score in the test. The result (r = -.15 for all students, r = -.31 for the treatment group and r = -.08 for the control group—the minus sign indicating a negative correlation) shows that any correlation found is weak or almost null: for all students, r^2 = .02, meaning that there might be a (negative) relationship between the two variables in less than 0.2% of cases.

It was also checked whether there was a correlation between the level of proficiency of students and the number of times they listened to recordings. Here too the Pearson *r* test shows only weak correlations: *r* = -.21 for all students, *r* = -.34 for the treatment group and *r* = -.15 for the control group.

Overall, it is difficult to draw any conclusion from the data collected about how many times students listened to audio clips, because of the number of variables involved (e.g. difficulty of the tasks, intrinsic difficulty of the audio clips, varying levels of proficiency). No clear correlation was found between the data and the variables that are measurable.

9.1.5   Perceived difficulty of questions and preparedness of students

When all questions are considered together, the data about how difficult students found them shows that the overall perception of the two groups was identical, as illustrated by Table 18:

	treatment	control
very difficult or difficult	41%	41%
neither	29%	29%
easy or very easy	30%	30%

Table 18: Perceived difficulty of all questions

In both groups more students found the activities difficult than easy, but there was a large proportion of 'neither' answers too. Looking at the breakdown between questions for both groups (cf. Figure 22) shows that there were only minor variations between the two groups, with the biggest differences shown for question D (found more difficult by the control group) and G (found easier by the control group).
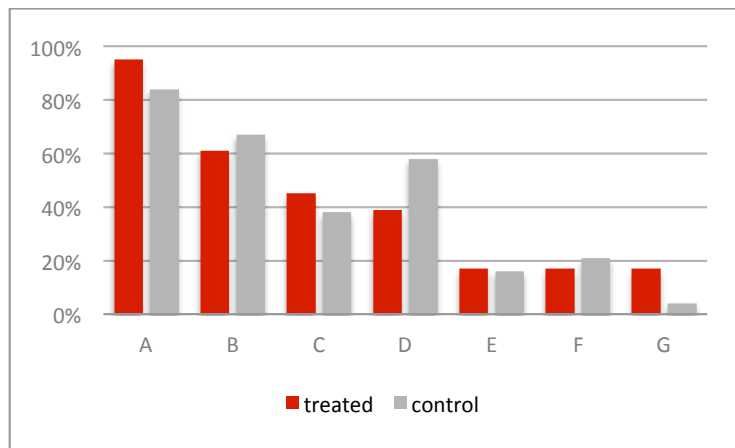
Figure 22: Percentage of students finding questions 'very difficult or difficult'

Comparing questions with each other shows that for both group, questions A-D were perceived as more difficult than questions E-G.

Further calculations using the Pearson r correlation coefficient show a strong relationship between score and perceived difficulty: for the treatment group $r = -.86$, and for the control group $r = -.80$. The negative values show that the relationship is negative, i.e. that a higher score is correlated to a lesser degree of perceived difficulty. This would indicate that, on average, students' perceptions of the difficulty of each task accurately predicted how well they performed it.

The perceived difficulty of tasks grouped according to their type (i.e. whether they require a top-down or bottom-up approach to listening) was also scrutinised. Table 19 shows the percentage of tasks perceived as 'very difficult' and 'difficult' for each type of task and for each group. This reveals that the level of perceived difficulty for each type is almost identical in each group, and that for all students top-down type tasks were perceived as being twice as difficult as bottom-up tasks.

	treatment	control
top-down	54	52
bottom-up	26	26

Table 19: Percentage of questions found 'very difficult or difficult'

The questionnaire also asked students to report how prepared they had felt for each of the activities of the test. The data for all questions taken together is shown in Table 20:

	treatment	control
definitely agree or agree	65%	60%
neither	10%	20%
disagree or definitely disagree	26%	20%

Table 20: Answers to 'I felt prepared for activity x' (all activities, both groups)

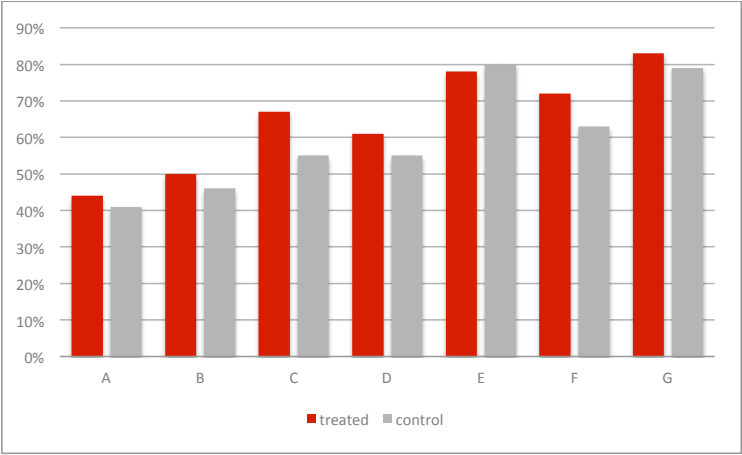Figure 23 shows a breakdown by question for each group.

Figure 23: Percentage of students who definitely agree or agree with 'I feel prepared for activity x'

As with the perceived level of difficulty of each activity, there is little variation between the answers of each group regarding how prepared students had felt to tackle the different activities.

These answers were compared with the data showing the perceived difficulty of each question. The statistics show that there is a very strong (negative) relationship between the two sets of data: the more difficult students found a task, the less prepared they felt to tackle it. The correlation coefficients calculated to show this are $r = -.96$ for the treatment group and $r = -.94$ for the control group. And as a correlation had been shown between the degree of difficulty of questions and the

scores achieved for them, logically a relationship was also found between the degree of preparedness expressed and the scores (r = .83 for the treatment group and r = .76 for the control group). This shows that there is consistency in the way students assess the degree of difficulty of a task and how prepared they feel for it, and that this correlates with their performance.

9.1.6   Opinion about the materials

The following Figures (24 to 28) illustrate answers to the last questions asked in the questionnaire, which aimed to gauge whether students had found the pack of materials sent to them (i.e. the experimental self-study materials and the test for the treatment group, and the test only for the control group) interesting, or challenging, whether it had complemented the L192 materials, whether they had learnt something valuable from it and whether they found it was appropriate to a beginners' French course.
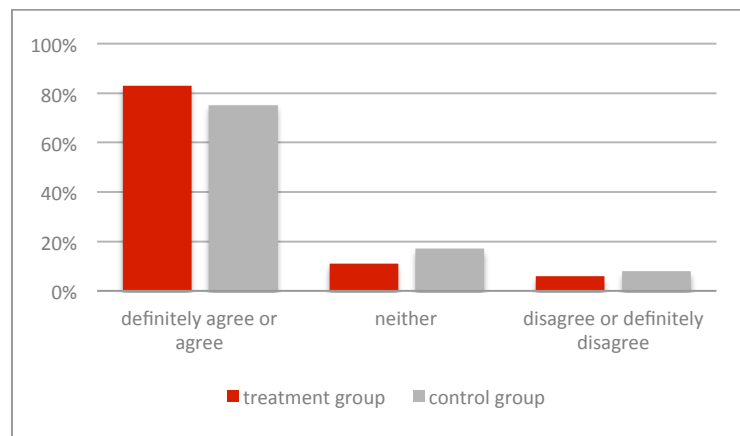

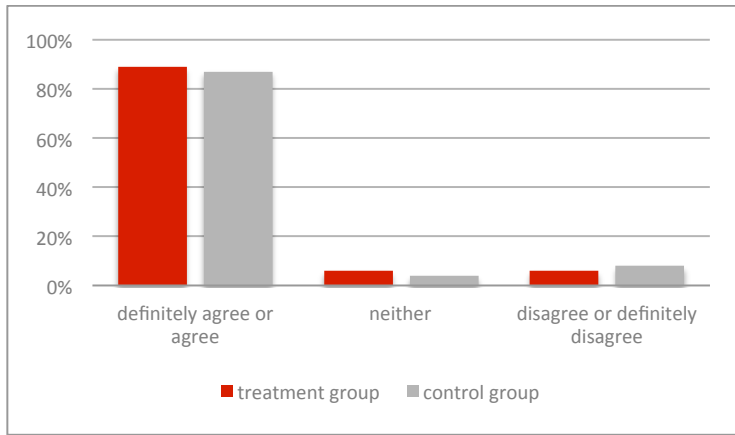Figure 24: Answers to 'I found the pack interesting'

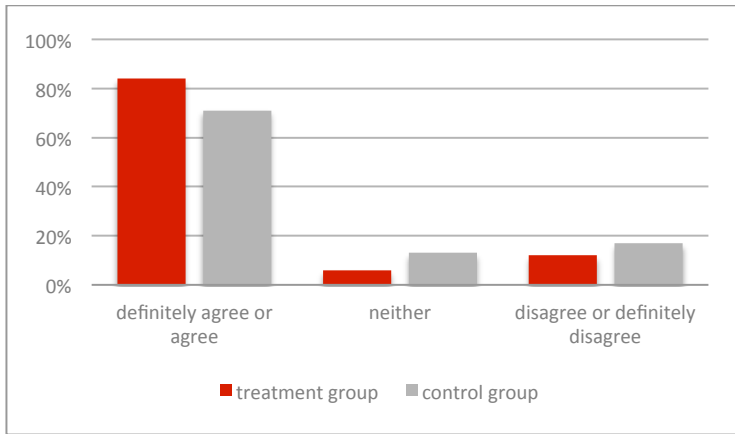Figure 25: Answers to 'I found the pack challenging'

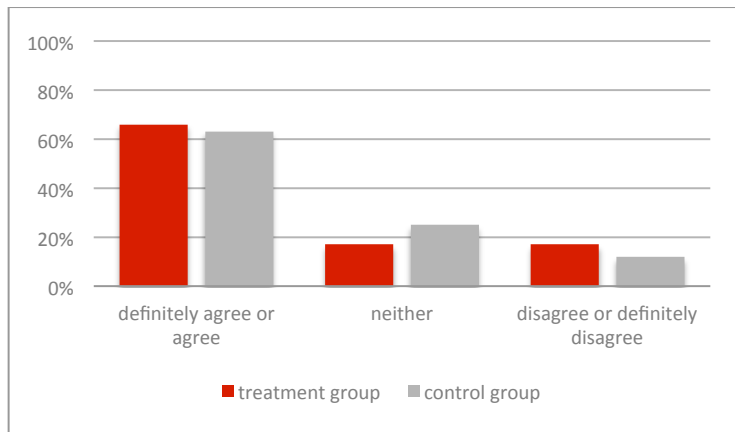Figure 26: Answers to 'I found that the pack complemented L192'

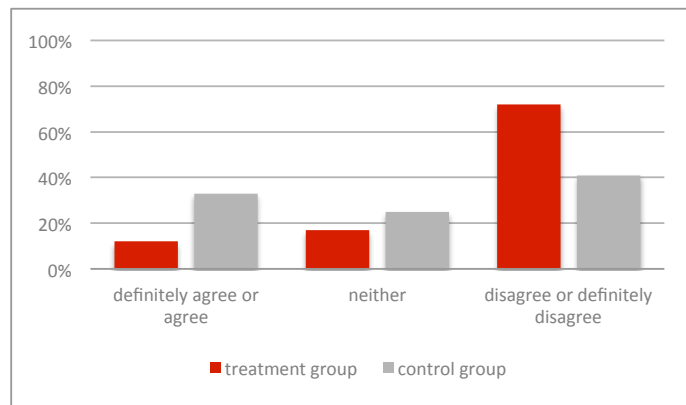Figure 27: Answers to 'I learnt something valuable'

Table 21 summarises the data, showing the combined percentage of answers given as 'definitely agree' and 'agree'.

	treatment	control
I found the activities interesting	83%	75%
I found the activities challenging	89%	87%
I found the activities complemented L192	84%	71%
I found that I learnt something valuable	66%	63%
I found the activities appropriate to a beginners course	12%	33%

Table 21: Percentage of students answering 'definitely agree' and 'agree'

The data shows that the opinions expressed by the two groups reveal similar trends: ranking the statements from those with which students agreed the most to those with which they agreed the least would provide the same sequence in both groups. Broadly, they agreed quite strongly that the activities were challenging, interesting and that they complemented L192 (although the treatment group agreed more strongly with these). They mostly agreed that they learnt something valuable from the activities. They both largely disagreed that the activities were appropriate to a beginners' course, and interestingly the students from the treatment group, who had worked with self-study materials teaching them about the features of naturally occurring spoken French, disagreed more strongly with the statement that the activities were appropriate to a beginners' course.

This information takes the form of quantitative data because it was collected through a questionnaire, but it relates to qualitative statements, to judgments which are not easy to unpick based on statistics alone. It will have to be reconsidered in the light shed by the qualitative data collected through the interviews conducted after the tests, which is the subject of the next section.

9.2   QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis provided in this section is divided into a number of sub-themes that were identified through the data coding process and which give an account of the information that is congruent with the students' testimonies.

9.2.1 Background as language learners

The first area explored provided detailed information about the background of each student as a language learner in general and as a learner of French in particular.

One of the first implications of the interview data was just how difficult learners find it to assess their own level of proficiency. The sample of students selected for interviews had been chosen with a view to achieving a balance between beginners, near-beginners and participants who were not beginners, and also to have a balance in terms of self-declared CEFR levels (based on questionnaire answers). But the interview data shows more homogeneity as regards previous exposure to learning French than the self-declarations had indicated.

When asked whether they had ever studied any French before starting the L192 module, only two of the nine interviewees declared that they had not done so at all, and only one of these two had described themselves as 'a real beginner'. Six students had studied French at school and the remaining student had had French classes at work. The difficulty for participants in deciding whether their previous experience

was relevant to their proficiency might well be linked to the fact that their previous experience was, in most cases, remote: it was over 40 years ago in four cases, over 30 years ago in one case, and over 20 years ago in one more—this reflects the particular nature of the OU student population, which is mostly made up of mature students. It is also clear that in most cases their depiction of language learning at school is rather negative. One student said that they were 'very put off from [their] experience at school', another mentions 'a lack of interest' and failing O-level French twice, another 'I didn't get on with it at school at all'. Only one student describes being 'passionate' about French at school—but that student said she was 'not a beginner'. This would indicate that students coming to L192 with prior experience tend to describe themselves as beginners or near beginners when their previous experience was remote and /or not positive.

When asked if they had ever visited a French-speaking country, only one student said they had not (but the information was provided by only 8 students). Two students had worked in France for a short period in their careers and one spent 3 to 6 weeks in France on a yearly basis. This confirms that very few of the students were absolutely new to French.

Seven students out of nine explained that they are exposed to a certain amount of spoken French outside the L192 module. In most cases this is through watching French films (5 students), French language television (3 students), French radio (3 students), listening to online audio resources (1 student) or conversing with French friends online (1 student).

Six of the nine students have learnt modern foreign languages (MFL) other than French in addition to their first language: four students had one other MFL (German, Dutch, Spanish and Italian respectively), one student had two other MFLs (German

and Japanese), and one had four (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and English—their first language was Romanian). Three of the students lived in a country which was not their country of birth: the Romanian student lived in the UK at the time of the study, and two British students lived abroad, one in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, and the other in Italy. This shows that many of the interviewees had a broad experience of learning languages.

The students' motivation for learning French was diverse: two students mentioned that they were studying for a degree, for academic or professional reasons. The remaining seven students were doing it for reasons which can be categorised as personal: two were learning French for practical reasons, because they lived or wanted to live in a French speaking country, and the last five were learning French 'as a hobby' or 'for pure pleasure'. Only one student (aiming for a degree) stated that her main objective was to develop reading skills in French.

All the information above seems to paint a picture of students who are not necessarily very advanced French learners but who all have either previous experience of learning French or of visiting French-speaking countries or of being frequently exposed to French culture and to spoken French in one way or another.

9.2.2   Views about spoken French and authentic materials

Following on from the topic of the students' motivation for learning French, they were asked whether understanding French *as it is spoken by fluent speakers* (this wording, as well as the phrase 'fluent French', was deliberately used with students during interviews to refer to naturally occurring spoken French in a way that avoided specialised vocabulary and that was therefore, it is hoped, less threatening) was important. The only student who stated that it was 'not ultra important' to them was the student whose main objective was to develop reading skills. All the other

students described it as 'important', 'quite important', 'very important' (3 students), 'incredibly important' or 'essential'. The reasons that they invoked are related to their desire to be able to have a conversation with French speakers; one said they wished to 'blend in', another one to 'integrate', and one mentioned that they feel 'embarrassed' when they don't understand somebody. This near consensus can be interpreted in two ways: either understanding fluent spoken French is one of the main concerns of learners of French, or the students who volunteered to take part in the experimental study were self-selecting. The truth is likely to be a combination of both factors.

In the course of the interviews, the students reflected on how difficult they find it to understand spoken French as it is spoken by fluent speakers, and on what is difficult about it. One of the interviewees confidently said that he did not find it difficult to understand fluent spoken French: he was a student with no prior formal learning of French but who had worked in France for a short while. Three students identified this as an area of particular difficulty for them. Five students gave a more nuanced account, saying that it depended on circumstances. One said that they found it difficult but had noticed definite progress since embarking on L192; another one that understanding L192 tapes was easy but that for understanding French films they relied heavily on understanding the pictures. The other students explained that there were contexts where they were more confident than others; they mentioned things like whether they initiated the conversations themselves, whether the topic was familiar, whether they were listening face to face or whether their interlocutors had clear elocution as decisive factors.

When asked to describe where the difficulties in understanding fluent spoken French come from, some students were able to articulate areas of difficulty quite clearly and showed a high level of linguistic awareness, whereas others gave less expansive

accounts. Taken together, their answers provide quite an accurate description of the particular features of conversational French as opposed to formal or scripted spoken French, or the written language. The source of difficulty that was most frequently mentioned was speed (7 students), followed by the use of colloquialisms (5 students). Interestingly, the first impediment is to do with acoustic features whereas the second is lexical and related to register. They both seem to represent obstacles. The next two criteria, in terms of frequency, were elocution / articulation on the one hand, and accents on the other hand (mentioned by three students each)[7]. These were followed by differences in grammar or morphology (e.g. word endings not being realised in speaking) and 'running words together', which is related to the previous point about articulation. These were mentioned twice each.

The other difficulties cited, which were each mentioned once, are the relation between sounds and their written form, the different sentence structure in spoken French, speakers 'leaving out words', speakers hesitating (or 'stammering', as it was described), the 'rhythm' of fluent French, and its 'imprecision'. Interestingly, most students were quite matter-of-fact in their descriptions, but three were rather judgmental in that they portrayed the difficulties as being due to inadequacies of expression (people being too imprecise, or not taking enough care to articulate). To summarise, the large majority of areas of difficulties mentioned have to do with phonetic, acoustic or suprasegmental features of spoken French (19 mentions). This is followed by lexical differences, usually related to register (6 mentions) and by differences in grammar, morphology and syntax (3 mentions).

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[7] It should be noted here that the two notions are sometimes related in students' minds, as is evidenced at another point of the interviews, where it is apparent that some students interpreted the features of the naturally occurring speech samples used in the experimental study as being features of 'the Parisian accent' rather than features of fluent conversational French.

Students also explained how important it was to them to learn languages with authentic materials. The most common answer was that it is very important. Four students justified this by saying that the materials should reflect 'real life'. One elaborated by explaining that she 'wouldn't want to remain under a false illusion' or to be lulled 'into a false sense of security'. Another student carefully stated that 'it's important to be exposed to it' but warned that it must be done very sensitively because 'it can be a little demoralising, a little frustrating'. One student who said he had no difficulty understanding fluent French and who throughout the interview voiced strong views about what language learning should be like declared that 'for a beginner it would be better to have non-authentic [materials]'. Finally one student simply mentioned that the use of authentic materials is not important to her, but she was not able to articulate why not.

Overall, the interviews show that for most students, understanding fluent French is very important. Many said they had at least some difficulties in understanding it and in most cases this was due to factors related to pronunciation and articulation. Finally most students find it important to learn with authentic materials because it reflects the language used 'in real life', but some hinted that it must be done sensitively.

9.2.3   Views about L192 materials

The objective of the set of questions related to the L192 materials was not to elicit feedback on the module itself, as this is not within the remit of this project, but rather to provide a point of comparison when discussing the approach chosen in the experimental materials, with the next set of questions. The interviewees were asked in turn to describe the audio materials provided in the L192 module, then to discuss the activities linked to these audio recordings, and finally to comment on the

perceived effectiveness of the L192 materials to teach how to understand spoken French as used by fluent speakers.

None of the students interviewed were truly critical of the audio content of L192; indeed most started their description by stating that the recordings were good or very good. Five students provided a description that was generally positive: one student did not elaborate, but another one justified the answer by saying that the audio 'sounds like very good French', another one finds it 'great fun', and another says they like them because their content is relevant to being a visitor in France. One student's positive description is supported by comparing the L192 materials to what he 'remember[s] from the old ones I had at school'; it transpired that the content of L192 recordings is more 'realistic'. This student mentions that the L192 audio recordings are not authentic but he found that they are delivered in 'a fairly natural manner'. This contrasts sharply with the description of another students who found them 'very good […] but exaggerated, over the top, not very natural, a little bit put on, theatrical a little bit'. But overall this student still thought that they are 'very good'. Overall 4 students had a positive opinion of the L192 audio samples but expressed some sort of reservation, usually acknowledging that they are not authentic, one finding them 'stilted', another one saying 'it's not how you would actually hear someone speak'. Two students provided interesting insight into their reflection about the subject: they both pointed out that they had not initially thought that the L192 audio samples were different from fast fluent French. One said 'I didn't realise how slow they were to begin with', the other that

> 'if I'd taken them in isolation I would think that they sounded quite quick but in comparison to actual genuine French I would say that they are actually very slow and clear and well enunciated'.

One of them went on to explain that they found the L192 audio 'brilliant' but that they now realised that listening to authentic audio might have trained their ear in a different way. She concluded by saying

> 'I think it could leave you under the false impression that that is spoken French rather than what occurs every day'.

One theme that emerges here is that students expressed the need to be clear about the nature of what they were listening to: if the language is not authentic, the course should not create a false sense of reality; if it is, it should be clear about what the expectations are.

The students who discussed whether the recordings were authentic were aware that they were not 'natural spoken French', as one student called it, but many felt that their context was authentic and relevant, e.g. 'but they are trying to use authentic situations'. Four students said that they found the L192 audio recordings interesting, but another four did not fully endorse that view and mentioned that some were 'a bit more dry', 'not too bad', 'not very interesting', or 'not particularly interestingly written' (the last student expressed no view about this). There were similar reactions when discussing if the materials were motivating: only one student actually thought that they were, two found them 'quite motivating' and the others had more subdued responses such as 'it's fine', 'it keeps me going', 'it could be more motivating'. Yet students overall sounded satisfied with the audio content of L192, perhaps suggesting that for them to be interesting and motivating was not the most important feature. As regards their difficulty, students all agreed that they were not too difficult: five students felt that they were at the right level; two found them too easy.

When they were questioned about whether the activities associated with the audio recordings in L192 were helpful in learning how to understand spoken French, there was a consensus that they were helpful. And when they were asked if the materials helped to learn how to understand French as it is spoken by fluent speakers, the students who responded gave a cautious answer, suggesting that it did not help immediately but that it was 'a step on the way' or saying that 'we have to start somewhere'. One student wondered whether being exposed to more authentic speech might have trained her ear sooner, and another one said

> 'I think it could be done differently, maybe with an element of [authentic speech] perhaps in each chapter'.

Opinions were therefore divided on this subject, with some students implying that beginners have to start with non authentic audio materials, and others hinting that they could be exposed to such materials earlier than they are in L192. Interestingly the opinion of some of the students shifted slightly in the course of the interviews, as shown below.

9.2.4   Views about the experimental materials and approach

This section reports on the participants' reaction to the audio files provided as part of the experimental materials, then moves on to their judgment about the content of the teaching notes that were provided with the activities of the study pack, and finally examines the opinions expressed about the experimental materials, globally.

The students were all asked to describe their reaction upon looking at the written materials and listening to the audio recordings. The students who mentioned the written materials (teaching notes and activities) said they were 'fine' or 'good'. By contrast their descriptions of their initial reaction to the experimental recordings were all much more vivid, e.g. 'oh my goodness', 'I did have quite a sinking feeling',

'they were a bit of a nightmare', 'a little overwhelming and off-putting', etc. In all, seven students described their very first reaction as one of shock or as being negative. But importantly, six of them then qualified this and went on to explain that beyond the initial reaction they viewed it positively. Many talked about enjoying the challenge: 'I saw it as a challenge', 'I decided not to panic', 'I got over the initial shock' or described the outcome of the exercise as positive, e.g. 'I was generally able to work around that', 'in the end it was fine and for me that is good', 'I thought it was interesting', and even 'I found it quite reassuring'. When pressed to describe where the difficulty came from, many interviewees mentioned the speed of the speech, the hesitations and the fact that speakers 'swallow many of the words'. And even though several students had explained that they watched many French films or television programmes, many of them seemed to have only fully become aware of these features typical of conversational French when they listened to the materials created for this research project. It is remarkable that one student came to view this as a source of reassurance:

> 'It was quite reassuring to hear that some people did stop, restart sentences, they used a lot of *euhs* and *hums* and thinking about what they were saying trying to find the right word that they wanted to say, that was reassuring because it therefore gives you permission to be able to speak in the same way.'

It should also be noted that one of the students remained in denial about the fact that the recordings were samples of naturally occurring French and declared:

> 'I have the feeling that the people were told to speak fast, I don't think it was so natural, I don't think they speak like that.'

It was reassuring to see that all nine of the students agreed that they were able to tackle the activities and to do what was demanded of them, based on the difficult audio recordings. This is confirmed by their test scores (part of the quantitative data analysed previously): the nine students who were interviewed scored 85% or above. This seems to suggest that although the samples of naturally occurring French that were sent to them were difficult to understand, the activities designed around them were pitched at the right level and were such that the students could engage with the audio content. One of the themes that were discussed in relation to this during interviews was the use of transcripts. Five of the students who were interviewed stated that transcripts were a very useful tool for them, calling them 'crucial' or even 'compulsory' and saying that they would be even more so if working with authentic audio materials. Students said transcripts help them make a link between the written form and the spoken form of words, e.g. 'that's how you teach your brain that that's what that word sounds like' (student 113). Transcripts were systematically provided as part of the experimental study pack, with answers and feedback on activities. Further research could be done on how best to use them to develop perception skills.

Discussing whether the teaching notes and explanations from the self-study pack sent before the test had been helpful to understand the recordings provided ample evidence that they were found to be effective. Only one student found them 'indifferent'. Overwhelmingly, students responded that the explanations and activities had been helpful, and indeed they were quite enthusiastic about this: 'they were helpful, very much so', 'they helped without a doubt', 'they did, they really really did', 'they made a lot of sense'. As described in Section 6.5, the teaching notes contained explicit descriptions and explanations of some linguistic features of naturally occurring spoken French, focussing mainly on elisions and assimilations and

on discourse features such as pauses, hesitations and repetitions. What the students said about these notes confirmed that they had taken in the content, and most of them cited examples such as 'things like *il y a*', 'the words that are missed', 'parts that are dropped', 'the use of pauses in French', 'you don't pronounce the *e*', etc. They agreed that having been made aware of these features they were able to use the information to process the content and understand it better: they mentioned 'being forewarned', 'being on alert', 'being taught to look out for [these features]'. One student also mentioned being able to reuse that information later on, in a different context, and called it 'a useful tool'. Another student said she benefited from the reflective aspect of the exercise. Later on in the interviews, all the students also agreed that working with the self-study pack had been a helpful preparation for the test (only one student said that that was 'indifferent'). One of the student commented: 'I think there was an element that I was developing the skill of listening for spoken French really'.

Seven of the students were happy to characterise the materials as 'useful' and they said that they had taught them something new, not covered in L192. One student qualified this by calling them 'useful but scary'. All nine students found them 'interesting' and suggested that the 'authenticity' of the materials made them more interesting. For many, but not all, of the students the fact that the materials were challenging was a positive thing: seven of them explained that they were keen and enjoyed the challenge, for example declaring that 'if it's more challenging, it's more interesting', 'I was challenged but in a good way', or 'it was positive panic, not negative panic'. Two students said the materials could have a negative effect on motivation, calling them potentially 'demotivating' or 'stressful and a little demoralising'. But both went on to explain that this would be the case if the entire content of a beginners' course was based on similar materials, but that if authentic

audio materials were only a small element of it then they would both see it as a very positive thing. This particular view is mostly confirmed by the reactions elicited by the next questions.

9.2.5 Appropriateness of the approach for beginners

This section reports on parts of the interviews where students provided considerations on whether they thought that the approach trialled in this experimental study could be integrated as a mainstream feature of a language course such as L192. They were asked to think about how it could be done and at what stage in the learning process. Their views about this are reported in this section.

Only one student made a categorically negative answer, calling the approach too difficult for beginners. Interestingly, that student was not a beginner and got the highest possible score in the test. She was also the student who had expressed judgmental views about the incorrectness of conversational French. Similarly, another student repeatedly made broad judgments on the experiment based not on his own experience or on his own assessment but on his strong beliefs about what a beginners' module should contain. This suggests that one possible barrier to innovative approaches to teaching lies in preconceptions held by students and based either on previous experiences or on generalisations.

The other eight students started their answer with a positive statement, for instance calling the approach 'legitimate', 'appropriate' or saying that they would be 'happy' or 'pleased' to see it as part of a beginners' course. But all of these students also volunteered the view that the experimental materials and recordings should not be a substitute for the type of materials included in L192; instead they should be introduced 'in parallel' or 'in a mix', or again 'side by side'. They also suggested that the introduction of such materials should be gradual, that it should be done 'gently',

or 'slowly but surely', that it should be 'interspersed'. Some interviewees advised that the approach could be introduced in the second half of a beginners' module only.

Several of the students felt strongly that it would be essential to manage expectations and to clarify the objectives of the approach. One of them mentioned that 'you need to know what to expect' and talked about the 'need for big bold texting [saying] please don't panic if you don't understand this', another that 'if they can't understand tell them not to panic it doesn't matter'. Another one concluded: 'if the advertising was clear I think people would be prepared to do it'. Finally, a student mentioned that such activities shouldn't be part of assessment and said 'it shouldn't drag you down and make you fail the course'.

One further observation sprang from the analysis of the interviews: the fact that at different points in the course of the conversations, some students expressed the view that their experience of the experimental approach had been positive, but that it might be too challenging for beginners. This was done using linguistic forms (e.g. third person pronouns) which presented beginners as different from themselves, or in other words presenting themselves as being different from the typical beginner student, despite the fact that they had only started the module 3 months before the experiment started. What is interesting is that 6 out of 9 students did this at one point or another. Consequently there seemed to be a tendency to project potential difficulties onto others, or perhaps reluctance to completely endorse the approach. This raises further questions about the validity of the notion of 'beginner' or about how it should be defined.

Overall, it is striking that the students have come to agree not only that the approach is acceptable, but that actually it is desirable. One student summarised this as follows:

'I think the ideal is a blend of the two; had it been part of our structured course it would have been excellent.'

A different student expressed this view:

'if you had something similar but it would just be dropped here and there along the module that would be really good.'

Another said

'If I'd studied [French] in the way that that piece of work was done I would feel more confident than I feel now in terms of how I would be able to speak to people'.

A third one offered this statement:

'There was more interest […] L192 seems a little bit like learning your time tables and then the materials that you gave is suddenly being given a math question to do that uses a time table, you have to take it and apply it.'

A student concluded by stressing the importance of being aware of the reality of language:

'I think it is very useful so that you know what you're letting yourself in for, to know what to expect rather than letting yourself in for a bit of a shock.'

9.2.6   Conclusion

The analysis of the quantitative data has shown that there were clear trends in the views shared by the participants. The first finding was that students seem to find it difficult to evaluate their own level of proficiency and that the notion of beginner learner needs to be questioned, at least when applied to adult learners who have a wealth of previous experience. The next finding was that understanding fluent spoken French was important to most of the informants and that, taking into account their overall experience and also the fact that they had studied the experimental materials, participants were able to describe in some detail which areas presented difficulties in understanding fluent spoken French. The students' views about the L192 materials were overall very positive; some reservations were expressed about the audio content but assessment of the teaching activities in L192 was overwhelmingly positive. When pressed, some participants commented on differences between the type of spoken French found in L192 and the type used in the experimental materials. Their views on the latter were explored in the last part of the data analysis; overall they were positive but some participants mentioned issues to do with affect and motivation, some talked about the importance of grading materials in a language course, whilst the majority of informants concluded that they would like to find content such as that found in the experimental materials in a module like L192, as part of a mix of different types of materials and contents.

The next section reviews the outcomes of this analysis by bringing them together with the findings that emerged from the quantitative data analysis.

Discussion of findings

The intended benefit of resorting to mixed methods was to obtain a richer picture about the research issue under investigation by looking at it from different angles, through the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. This intention can only be realised by analysing both types of data not only individually but also together, to consider them as a whole which can yield findings which are different from those that emerged from each of its parts. This is first done in relation to the research questions, then to the different dimensions involved in listening skills, and finally with consideration to the relationship between theory and practice.

10.1   TRIANGULATION: ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In Section 5.2 it was shown that two sub-questions were formulated to help address the main research question. From this it follows that any answers to the two sub-questions must be considered prior to addressing the main question. This is reflected in the structure of this Section, where answers to the sub-questions are provided first (in Sections 10.1.1 and 10.1.2) before answers to the main research question, framed as recommendations, are presented (in Section 10.1.3).

10.1.1 Answer to the first sub-question

The first sub-question explored in this research project is: 'To what extent is it possible for early language learners to engage with naturally occurring spoken French and its linguistic features?' Answers are mainly drawn from the analysis of the quantitative data, but some aspects of the qualitative data are also relevant.

The test scores provided a measure of student performance when faced with listening tasks based on naturally occurring spoken French samples. The average test scores of 75% (treatment group) and 69% (control group), which in any UK higher education setting would represent safe pass grades (and at some institutions, although not at the Open University, a first class result). A finer analysis of these results has shown that the mean scores have been lowered by the performance of students in two particular questions (Bb and Cb) which required students to understand detailed meaning from the audio recordings. This has shown that if questions focus on forms or on general meaning and provide scaffolding, students obtain very high scores. In the interviews, all students confirmed that they had been able to tackle the activities. These findings all provide strong evidence that students were indeed able to engage with the tasks provided.

The quantitative data also suggests that students provided with relevant teaching and with opportunities to practise (in the guise of the experimental study pack) may be better able to engage with naturally occurring spoken French, as scores were higher in the treatment group—although this was not verified as being a robust finding by statistical analysis. There was further suggestion that the treatment may have helped the students from the treatment group identify and describe the characteristics of naturally occurring spoken French, as the only question which tested this ability showed a relatively large difference between the two groups, the mean of the treatment group being 15% higher than that of the control group. This

was evidenced in the interviews where students were found to have a good aptitude for describing the features of spoken French. In the interviews students also confirmed that they had found the study pack helpful in identifying forms and sounds in the rapid flow of the experimental speech samples, or that the teaching materials had made them aware of some features which in turn had helped them to process and understand naturally occurring spoken French, both as part of the experiment and in other circumstances. For example all students stated that using the study pack before the test had made tackling the test easier, in other words that practice had made them progress and/or get used to the type of exercise provided. It also transpired that several students had only become aware of some of the specific features of spoken French when they studied with the experimental materials, although they had been exposed to them before (an example mentioned by several students was the pronunciation of '*il y a*' which they had heard but not registered). This would indicate that the materials played a role in raising awareness and making explicit some features of speech.

This suggests that the answer to the first sub-question is that students *are* able to engage with naturally occurring spoken French in tasks which are appropriate to their level of proficiency and provide adequate pedagogic support, and that they are able to engage with its linguistic features sufficiently to be able to describe some of them. The results further suggest that explicit teaching of the linguistic characteristics of naturally occurring speech and opportunities for practice may improve the students' performance in engaging with such tasks and such teaching, although the significance of this finding was not confirmed by statistics.

10.1.2 Answer to the second sub-question

The second sub-question formulated at the start of this research is: 'What is the students' reaction to the integration of naturally occurring speech samples into a beginners' French course?' To answer this we rely primarily on the qualitative data analysed, but also on the quantitative data provided by the short questionnaire sent with the test.

The interview data showed that understanding French as it is spoken by fluent speakers is important to all but one of the students interviewed (who stated that he or she was learning French to acquire reading skills in French). Accordingly, a clear majority of students from both the treatment and the control groups indicated that they found the experimental materials interesting and that they were a good complement to L192. The interview data cast further light on this: when students were asked to comment on the L192 materials, their assessment was positive overall, but when pressed to specify their answer students expressed some reservations which they said had become apparent only after they had been exposed to the experimental materials. In terms of authenticity, level of interest and level of motivation, the experimental materials therefore appeared in a more favourable light when they were compared to the L192 materials and when they were considered as a complement to L192 materials.

There was a very clear verdict, in both the quantitative and qualitative data, indicating that the experimental materials were challenging. The questionnaire showed that the questions that the students had perceived as being the most difficult were indeed those where overall scores were lower. In the interviews, the majority of students described their initial reaction upon listening to the first audio tracks in the experimental materials as one of shock. The quantitative data regarding scores and perceived levels of difficulty showed that students particularly struggled

to understand the overall meaning of the recorded interactions when the tasks provided no support for achieving this—a less than surprising finding. The negative reaction to the audio materials was not always worded in terms of difficulty: some students justified their reaction in terms of motivation, calling them 'demotivating', 'demoralising' or 'stressful'. However students provided positives in their assessment of the materials, in almost equal measures, with many of them explaining that the initial shock at hearing the audio samples was followed by a positive determination to rise to the challenge and engage with them. Some said that tackling the challenge was even enjoyable. One student volunteered the information that hearing fluent speakers stumble and hesitate was a source of reassurance, demonstrating that it would be acceptable for learners to do so too. A recurrent theme was that it was not desirable for learners to remain under 'a false illusion' or 'a false sense of security' by not becoming aware of the challenge that understanding naturally occurring spoken French may represent. Students agreed that having been made aware of potential difficulties they were able to reuse this knowledge to improve their ability to process naturally occurring speech.

One of the striking outcomes of the data analysis process was to highlight to what extent the quantitative and qualitative data yielded different judgments as to the appropriateness of the approach experimented—and this in itself is confirmation that qualitative methods are powerful in enabling a deeper understanding of some issues. The questionnaire data, for both the treatment and the control group, was unambiguous: the materials were strongly judged as inappropriate to a beginners' course (although they were deemed a good complement to L192). But the interview data provided a more nuanced view on the issue. As stated above, students revealed that they had an initial negative reaction to the audio materials, but that this soon turned into a positive feeling of challenge. In the interviews students consistently

said that their reaction to the teaching and practice materials had been positive, and that these had helped them to engage with naturally occurring speech and to practise processing it. The materials as a whole had therefore been seen as a positive factor in developing listening skills. What was still deemed inappropriate by the students who were interviewed was the idea that the experimental audio materials might fully replace the easier, scripted audio samples provided as part of the OU beginners' module. However if the approach was to supplement, rather than substitute, the existing materials, then it would be appropriate for all but one of the student interviewed.

These findings suggest that the answer to the second sub-question is that students had an initial negative reaction to the content of the audio materials being tested but that they had found the teaching materials useful in approaching this as a positive challenge and in contributing to the development of their listening skills. Only one of the students who were interviewed maintained a categorically negative judgement on the materials, although this was on the grounds that they would be inappropriate for beginners, a group into which that student did not include him or herself. The overall reaction of the remaining students can be summarised by the phrases that they used themselves when asked to assess the approach at the end of the interviews: 'legitimate', 'I would be happy with it', 'it is appropriate', 'I would have been pleased to see it in a beginners' course', 'it would be nice', 'it would be interesting'.

10.1.3 Answer to the main research question: recommendations

The main research question for this study was: 'How can samples of naturally occurring spoken French be used in listening activities in a beginners' French course?' Answering the two sub-questions has established that the approach tested in the experimental study enabled students to tackle listening activities based on naturally occurring spoken French samples, and to engage with their linguistic features, and that, provided that certain conditions were met, the approach could be appropriate to a beginners' French course. Answering the main research question, which is worded in such a way as to examine the means ('how') by which the approach might be implemented, implies discussing what those conditions should be—hence the decision to frame the answers as recommendations.

The interviews provided rich data to address this. The first recommendation emerging from the data is:

I.   Naturally occurring speech samples and the associated activities should be integrated to a beginners' course as a complement to traditional audio materials and activities, not as a substitute.

Students have confirmed that naturally occurring spoken French can be extremely difficult to understand for beginners, mainly because of its acoustic features, and that these can be off-putting and demoralising. A small dose, however, helps dispel illusions and provides an insight into what students are aiming to understand. This is how one of the students put it:

'I think that that there is a legitimate place for this to come in parallel […] perhaps you'll have the audio clips like they are in L192 but then have an exercise of a real life situation to then be able to apply what you've learned

from the scripted version as it were and then have a real life situation to work with in comparison […] it dispels a false sense of illusion'

There were also indications that that could be a positive motivating factor, and that it could make for more interesting materials. Recommendation I relates to 'content selection', one of the four themes for reflection that emerged from the literature review (cf. conclusion to Part I).

The second finding and recommendation is that:

II. The introduction of naturally occurring speech and of associated listening materials should be gradual.

To a certain extent this tends to confirm the widely held view that the introduction of such materials should be delayed to a later stage of the language learning process. Nevertheless it does not fully do so as the overall view of the participants was that they could in fact be introduced at beginners' level, and as the data has shown that they were undoubtedly able to engage with them and tackle the activities. What the data has shown, however, is that within a beginners' course their introduction should take place progressively, using carefully graded materials (for example by selecting, amongst naturally occurring samples, slower ones for the start of the module) and scaffolded tasks (for example, the qualitative data has shown that the tasks which focussed on identifying forms or which were done using a full or partial transcript were easier to tackle for beginners). The way to introduce naturally occurring samples needs to be considered carefully, since, as one student stated:

'to learn a language properly it's crucial that you move to that stage as early as possible. But if you bring it too soon you'll lose people'

A few students mentioned that perhaps the approach should only be introduced after the first half of a beginners' module. The question of exactly when to start is

therefore one that would benefit from further research. This recommendation relates to the theme of 'reflection on difficulty and motivation'; so does the next one.

The next important factor for successfully introducing naturally occurring spoken French to beginners translates as the following recommendation:

III.   The objectives of the introduction of naturally occurring spoken French in listening activities for beginners, should be clearly stated. What is expected of students should also be explained clearly.

Since all students explained that they were very surprised when they first listened to the audio samples, and that most of them initially found them scary, countering potentially negative motivational factors and managing the students' expectations would be paramount. A key message to put across is that the objective of introducing naturally occurring speech is primarily to start familiarising students with it; that they are not expected to understand such materials fully. Adequate signposting should be used to flag the difficulty to students and explain exactly the purpose of any exercise, and also its limitations; for example, they should be told when they are not expected to understand part of the recording and referred to the transcript as soon as the activity allows. The activities should be designed in such as way that they allow students to understand the difficulties presented to them (as when, for example, they were asked to listen, locate any pauses, and then to reflect on how similar or different it was from what they had expected), and also to develop skills to face such difficulty (for example by focusing solely on the key information required and not on other aspects). In the experimental materials this was done through the provision of detailed instructions within activities and of organisers and teaching text between activities.

The following recommendation springs directly from the students' statements in interviews:

IV. The main purpose of content and activities based on naturally occurring spoken French in a beginners' module should be awareness raising.

A clear message that emerged from the interviews was that the key benefit the learners had drawn from engaging with the experimental materials was a new awareness of the differences between the type of spoken French that they had been exposed to so far, as part of their L192 module or any previous study of French, and the type of spoken French that they had listened to for the experiment. For example one student said:

> '[naturally occurring speech should be introduced] but just very gently, just so that you kind of know what to expect, and as a learning tool rather than a […] throw-you-in-at-the-deep-end approach'

Another one said it would be 'just to give you an idea what is actually spoken'. A different student mentioned 'being forewarned about the speed of the delivery and the interruptions'. Several cited the example of elisions (which they referred to as missing sounds/missing words) and assimilations (or sounds/words running into each other) as the most valuable learning point. This is likely to be because they are amongst the phenomena that make the spoken words so different from their written forms. Now the actual learning point was not the detail of when or how such elisions or assimilations happen, but merely the fact that they sometimes do happen and that therefore students should expect spoken words to be different from what they would have expected based on the written form. This is language awareness rather than linguistics and this is the level at which it should be pitched for beginners. This is

linked to the theme of 'teaching and learning strategies' defined in the conclusion to Part I, as is recommendation V.

Another outcome of the data analysis, and recommendation, is that:

V.   Some explicit teaching about the particular features of naturally occurring spoken French should be provided.

The reason for this is that students found such teaching helpful and useful to tackle the audio recordings, that it provided them with a focus for their listening within the activities based on the recordings, and that it equipped them with reusable knowledge or skills that they could transfer to other listening activities, for example when watching French language films or TV. Several students said that this now helped them be 'on alert' when listening to naturally occurring spoken French. Another student commented:

> 'the explanations were clear and went well with the clips, in enhancing that aspect of the learning, in pointing out what to listen out for.'

Providing some explicit teaching about the features of naturally occurring speech corresponds to the definition of 'form-focused instruction' given by Ellis (2001):

> any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form (pp.1-2)

In his study, which focuses on immersive instruction and is placed within the framework of cognitive theory, Lyster (2004) defines three types of activities involved in form-focused instruction: noticing activities, awareness activities, and practice activities (p.336). The aim of the latter is to provide opportunities to 'proceduralise their declarative knowledge' (ibid.)—although at beginners' level this would be very limited. This should obviously be done at a level that is accessible to the students, for example in the way in which grammar is taught in Open University languages

modules, i.e. with limited use of specialist terminology and maximum opportunities for students to identify structures or other language phenomena and infer principles and rules by themselves. These were the principles applied in the design of the experimental study pack.

The final recommendation is that

VI. The approach to introducing materials and activities based on naturally occurring spoken French should be integrated.

By this we mean that the learning benefits will only surpass the negative motivational factors if the exercise is relevant to students, and therefore that the introduction of naturally occurring speech should truly complement the rest of the materials. This relates to the themes of 'content selection' and of 'difficulty and motivation'. In the case of materials designed like the Open University materials, the new speech samples should match the theme of the unit they are integrated in, and they should also match the structures identified as key learning points in the unit. That is how the experimental materials were designed: the stimuli used to elicit the interactions that were recorded were extracted from the core content of the module. We reused the same questions that were asked in scripted exchanges, and then only selected recordings which displayed some of the structures and phrases taught in the unit. Practically, students suggested two ways that this could be done: some thought each section or unit of the existing module could finish with one or more activities based on naturally occurring spoken French. It could be done 'a bit at a time, throughout the module' (student 112). Others hinted at an even more integrated approach, as they indicated that naturally occurring speech samples could be used in parallel with scripted samples, either to enable a comparison between the two (which is reminiscent of a parallel texts approach) or to introduce an element of choice within

activities. One student explained that this would add relevance to the bulk of the materials and teaching by drawing a link between content that is mainly driven by pedagogical principles and 'real' content—the metaphor the student used is that of learning times tables vs. solving real-life mathematical problems. This parallel approach is an interesting suggestion that would merit further investigation.

As this section has demonstrated, the methods selected to investigate the topic of this study were appropriate to answer the project's research questions. The next sections consider the data from different perspectives with a view to generating further findings.

10.2   THREE DIMENSIONS FOR LISTENING SUCCESS

The scope of this research project was to consider how to expose beginners to naturally occurring spoken French as part of listening instruction. The literature review on listening skills development revealed that Vandergrift and Goh (2012) advocate what they call a metacognitive approach to listening instruction which combines multiple approaches, each of which has been the focus of practice in different eras and which they propose should be brought together. They also identify three dimensions which are crucial to listening success, and which this section will consider in turn.

10.2.1 The cognitive dimension

For Vandergrift and Goh (2012), the cognitive factors affecting listening success are linguistic knowledge and prior knowledge. This research has addressed this dimension by suggesting that different speech samples be used to develop language awareness about and some limited knowledge of the linguistic features of naturally occurring spoken French. Current theories of second language acquisition emphasise the importance of conceptualisation by learners in the process of appropriating the

target language; for example this is mentioned by Lyster (2004) and Véronique (2009a). Activities such as those included in the experimental materials could contribute to this. One of the recommendations that emerged from the data analysis was also that this be done in an integrated manner so as to complement other aspects of the teaching, such as the acquisition of vocabulary and structures relevant to a particular theme. This would further develop cognitive knowledge relevant to the development of the students' listening skills. Finally, the majority of the students who were interviewed explained that they are regularly exposed to naturally occurring spoken French outside of their university module (through visits to France or the use of external resources such as the radio or films). The study has shown that the experimental materials provided them with tools which helped them make more of those resources. It therefore also contributes to the cognitive dimension by making an explicit connection between their instructional learning and their prior or parallel learning.

10.2.2 The affective dimension

Vandergrift and Goh (2012) define the affective dimension as including anxiety and motivation. Both of these were mentioned by students in interview discussions, for example when they mentioned initially finding the experimental recordings scary and potentially demotivating. The literature review has also shown that this dimension is frequently invoked as an argument against the use of authentic materials in language learning. Dörnyei (2001b) presents a framework for L2 motivation which includes three levels: the language level (beliefs about the language learnt, the associated cultures, etc.), the learner level (learner characteristics and beliefs) and the learning situation level (which relates to the course, the teacher and the learner group). Possible negative affective factors to consider in relation to the experimental approach are linked to the learner level, and have to do with learner anxiety and with

learner beliefs. However the data has shown that in the majority of cases this can be turned into a positive factor, with students rising to the challenge and ultimately finding the experience more interesting and more rewarding. This is congruent with the suggestion by Dörnyei (2001a) that challenge is one of the elements which make tasks more interesting, which in turn increases student motivation:

> Humans like to be challenged, as evidenced by our continual fascination with crosswords, puzzles or computer games, and the same applies to taking risks if those are moderate. (p.76)

Dörnyei also implies that task instructions fulfil a number of roles that increase motivation; he mentions explaining the purpose of the task, whetting the students' anticipation and providing strategies for doing the task. In addition, the author mentions the importance of 'creating realistic learner beliefs' (p.66). The recommendations above take affective factors into account by suggesting clear signposting and advocating clarifying objectives and expectations to students. A third finding that can be linked to Dörnyei's framework is the idea that making materials relevant to students generates motivation. Our recommendation to adopt an integrated approach to working with naturally occurring speech by linking this to the rest of the course content contributes to this dimension too.

10.2.3 The contextual dimension

In the framework described by Vandergrift and Goh (2012), the contextual factors affecting the success of listening comprehension are linked to the context of use of the language, for example whether it is used as part of an interaction or not. This was not directly addressed by this research which relied on limited samples and materials. Yet there are some contextual factors, not mentioned by these authors, which do affect the type of listening that is relevant to this project. Within the study,

listening is strictly limited to a defined pedagogic setting: that of students learning a language independently, at a distance, and in most cases not in an immersive setting (i.e. not in the target country). This implies that there are contextual limitations to what the approach can offer and to what the students can achieve. In a real life situation, listening is done as part of face-to-face interactions and not in an artificial setting that involves listening to recordings. This must, however, be taken as a given constraint and used constructively. This research project has touched upon some issues which are related to this constraint, for example the (negative) issue of the quality of the audio recordings which was raised by some students, or the (positive) fact that students were encouraged to listen to the recordings multiple times or to use transcripts. Rather than be seen as a limitation, we would argue that the contextual dimension must be taken into account in tailoring the approach to the needs of the students it is intended to serve.

The next section considers further areas where different considerations have to be balanced and where compromises are necessary.

10.3 BALANCING PRIORITIES

Section 5.1 demonstrated how the research questions and research design emerged from issues raised by the literature review. It also showed how this research project fits into various theoretical and methodological frameworks linked to the fields of linguistics and language teaching and within the context of adult distance language learning. This section positions the research findings in relation to those frameworks and the constraints imposed by the context. It considers the relationship between theory and practice and shows that there is often a need to compromise when it comes to implementing ideas.

10.3.1 Ecology vs. reductionism

The review of past and present language teaching methodologies in relation to the spoken language presented in Chapter 1 and to the notion of authenticity in Chapter 2 has revealed a tension between reductionist and holistic stances. Recent proponents of the inclusion of authentic materials do so by advocating an ecological approach (cf. Section 1.2). Some aspects of the approach tested in this project fit within such an emergentist approach, as for instance the use of the naturally occurring speech samples or the fact that the choice of teaching points was based on the features that emerged from the recordings, by contrast with the widely used approach of generating recordings to fit pre-selected teaching points. However the data analysis has shown categorically that students would not welcome the use of such materials if they were adopted across the board in the course—hence our first recommendation in Section 10.1.3 above. This highlights the fact that the specifics of a teaching approach are necessarily the outcome of compromises between theory and practice, and between idealism and pragmatism. Pedagogical decisions must be made in relation to a specific context. In the particular case of distance language learning, which was the context of the experimental study, student support and guidance is at least as important as subject content and skills. The students that were interviewed were unambiguous about the fact that a small dose of work on naturally occurring speech, i.e. of an ecological approach, would provide benefits, but that too much would be too difficult and demotivating. They therefore insisted on the need for some reductionism.

One of the major challenges faced by language learners and teachers, but arguably one that is particularly acute in the case of distance learners, is that of time pressures and workload. If a language course has to fit into a two-hour weekly pattern, or if, as at the OU, learners starting French from scratch must progress to CEFR level A2 in

only 300 hours of study, course teachers and designers have to resort to a number of shortcuts to make language learning more efficient. Reductionism is often the outcome of such constraints.

In Section 1.2 it was shown that the CEFR introduced an extra dimension to the teaching of speaking and listening skills by singling out interaction as a distinctive mode of communication which is different from one-way speaking or listening. It follows that in any course that claims to use the CEFR framework, like the OU languages modules, it is crucial to teach content and skills relevant to developing the ability to take part in spoken interactions. It therefore also follows that in any setting which is not mainly immersive, there is a need to include materials and activities that illustrate and teach the specific features that are found in speaking interactions, such as a range of discourse features. The analysis of the audio component of existing published courses has shown that the scripted monologues and dialogues commonly provided do not contain such features, on the whole. The least that course materials should provide is opportunities for observing these features and for getting students to notice them.

In the part of the literature review dealing with the use of authentic materials, it was suggested that the notion of authenticity depended very much on the purpose that was assigned to given materials. It follows that the appropriateness of integrating naturally occurring speech samples and related activities into a beginners' French course is also purpose-related. The students interviewed have confirmed that the approach is a valid one if its purpose is to raise awareness of the features of conversational French and to dispel a false sense of reality that is often the result of conventional approaches. They have also indicated that the wholesale use of an ecological approach based entirely on naturally occurring materials would not be fit for purpose.

The compromise that is suggested by students' responses and takes all tensions and constraints into account is the use of a mix of scripted and spontaneous speech, with activities based on naturally occurring speech complementing more traditional materials rather than replacing them.

10.3.2 Prescription vs. student choice

In Section 5.4.3 the particular context of distance language learning was presented. This Section focuses on that context again by positioning the research findings in relation to distance language learning frameworks.

The conceptual framework developed by White (2003) to account for the specific context of distance language learning is summed up by her concept of a learner-context interface, which she explains as follows:

> One of the affordances of the distance learning context relates to choice, that is learners are able to make a range of choices about what will constitute their learning experiences. These may relate to the content of learning, the use of particular media, the amount of interaction, and the sequence and pace of study. Such choices all influence the precise interface that is developed between learner and learning context. (p.88)

She also opposes a traditional course model with 'the teacher/team as course producer' to an alternative model which

> foregrounds the learners as agents in developing the course. They make decisions in relation to the range of potential TL texts which have been developed by the teacher or course team. As they engage meaningfully with their selection these potential texts become the actual TL texts that form part of their learning environment. (pp.195-6)

This is reminiscent of the position of van Lier (2002) as he mentions 'potential affordances' in relation to his ecological approach. This relates to the idea that a selection of potential content should be on offer for students to choose to use or not. It argues in favour of integrating some content based on naturally occurring spoken French so that it is there for students to choose to engage with or not, depending on their needs or interests. As Carter et al. (2011) also put it,

> not to provide opportunities for exposure to authentic language use is to take away choices from both teachers and learners (p.90)

This confirms the notion that we should provide a variety of resources, including naturally occurring speech, for students to choose and select from. It also argues in favour of using a mix of materials rather than choosing a single approach.

10.3.3 Autonomy vs. isolation

One of the facts highlighted by the analysis of interview data was that most of the students who participated in the study regularly resorted to external resources and chose to expose themselves to naturally occurring spoken French by watching films or TV or listening to songs or the radio. The advent of the internet and of mobile technologies has of course made this extremely straightforward, and a wealth of resources is now easily accessible to students. Duda and Tyne (2010) suggest this too:

> there comes a point where exposure to various sources of language input is rendered almost inevitable in many modern contexts (in particular via technology) and, whereas in the 1960s and 1970s, say, classrooms or self-access centres were typically the primary source of contact with foreign languages, nowadays most learners in the Western world have immediate access to a host of different materials at all hours of the day. (p.15)

This is particularly relevant to adult learners who are also more likely to have opportunities to travel to a target country than younger learners. Those students are therefore characterised by a higher level of autonomy and are less likely to be isolated from external sources of the target language. Indeed if initially Véronique (1984) distinguished two possible contexts for language acquisition, i.e. the natural (or immersive) context and the guided (or institutional) context, in a more recent publication (Véronique, 2009a, p. 34) the notion of 'mixed context' is mentioned and is likely to apply to many OU language learners. This idea was previously developed by Porquier (1995) who showed that typically, language learners follow composite paths ('des itinéraires composites', p.93) in diverse interweaving contexts ('la diversité et l'imbrication des contextes', p.101) and that the timeframe and space spread of individual language learning never fully coincides with institutional instruction.

An interesting finding of this research was that students who do make use of external resources stated that they were able to engage with them better after working with the experimental materials. This would support the notion that providing activities to develop listening skills and language awareness based on naturally occurring speech, contributes to developing higher levels of autonomy in language students, which in the case of distance language students is particularly important as it helps them feel they can exercise control and construct an effective learner-context interface. It therefore supports recommendations IV and V of Section 10.1.3.

10.3.4 Innovation vs. student expectations and beliefs

In discussions with students, during interviews, it became apparent that some, although not the majority of them, had strongly-held views about the principles of language teaching or about what does and does not constitute proper use of language. This confirms Véronique's statement (Véronique, 2009a, p.22):

Le sujet apprenant dispose de différents types de savoirs et savoir-faire qu'il mobilise pour s'approprier la langue cible, le premier de ces savoirs concernant probablement la nature même de ce qu'est apprendre une langue.

(The learner can call on knowledge and skills of different types to appropriate the target language, the first one being, probably, the very nature of what learning a language is about.)

When students were able to put these views to the side, they were able to engage in a debate about the advantages and disadvantages of the experimental materials. But in two extreme cases it resulted in the students not trying to consider a different viewpoint that might contradict their preconceptions. In one of the cases it was manifested through the fact that instead of expressing personal insights the student was giving advice and expressing statements in a way that positioned him as a specialist rather than as a witness. For example it was the case in the following statement where the student disassociates himself from beginners:

'Gradually feeding in your native speakers would be more appropriate, it wouldn't be so daunting to the beginner, it wouldn't put them off'.

So despite claiming that his own level of proficiency was A1, and saying that he had been able to do the activities and engage with the recordings, the student persisted in finding that the approach was not appropriate to beginners. In another case, strong views about the French language and how it should be spoken were apparent in negative statements from a different student, for example when she talked about the spoken language being 'imprecise', or 'the French don't pronounce French extremely well always' or again 'I was very disappointed with how much they stammer'. What this suggests is that the students' prior perceptions and beliefs may

get in the way of how they might react to a different teaching approach or to new teaching content. This is likely to be strongly influenced by a student's previous experience of language learning (one of the two students mentioned above was Romanian and her *previous* experience may have corresponded to a different teaching culture, whilst some of the students who were interviewed were older and may have been using the days of their schooling as a point of reference). In the context of the Open University these are typical students and their reactions should not be dismissed as being unusual. The possibility of resistance to change has to be contended with, and a novel approach probably needs to be justified to students to ensure that they adhere to it. Recommendation III, in Section 10.1.3, addresses this issue.

11

Implications for practice and scope

The analysis of data has provided answers to the research questions and fed into a reflection on both theory and practice. The section below takes this reflection further by considering the practical implications of the theoretical findings at various levels which are relevant to my own professional practice.

11.1   IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

11.1.1 At course level

The implications for practice at course level are described in Section 10.1.3 where recommendations are given. To summarise these, the research findings indicate the desirability of integrating some naturally occurring speech samples, some teaching about the features of naturally occurring speech, and some activities based on this for support and practice. This should be done in addition to conventional content and introduced gradually, and the main purpose is to raise awareness about the specificities of naturally occurring speech. There is also a need to convince the students of the validity of the approach from the outset.

11.1.2 At institutional level

At institutional level, in the context of the Open University Department of Languages, a systematic progression from level to level and a degree of harmonisation across languages would be required. This could be done as part of the new integrated curriculum review for the BA in Languages Studies that is currently ongoing, and it

could be linked to both the new progression for phonology and pronunciation and the new recommendations about text types. The approach could also be linked to any learning outcome, at module and qualification levels, that covers the development of language awareness.

If the approach was rolled out across the OU modules then there would also be a need to engage with Associate Lecturers, who are responsible for the academic support of students and deliver tutorials, and to provide briefing or training sessions.

11.1.3 At discipline level

In the field of adult language teaching, one implication from the project is that the notion of beginner learner is not a robust one when dealing with adults. Researchers such as McKay and Tom (1999) have discussed the fact that adult learners bring a wealth of prior experiences and knowledge and, as has been shown, prior beliefs. Almost all of the students who were interviewed for this project had studied some French previously, whether recently or not, whether formally or not, although many of them still defined themselves as beginners. This shows that the use of different terminology may be more appropriate. The phrase 'early learner' would, for example, be more adequate than 'beginner' in the case of adults.

11.1.4 Beyond discipline level

In a much broader context, one of the implications of the research findings is that for the experimental approach explored in this study to be adopted by other practitioners, there would be a fundamental need for interaction and knowledge exchange between language teaching specialists and specialists of linguistics. The literature review which underlies this study covered a broad range of disciplines which are related but disparate. We would like to argue that there is a need for them to be brought together more: for teachers to design materials and content dealing

with the features of naturally occurring spoken French, they must be sufficiently confident in their knowledge about these features. Conversely, if specialists of linguistics want to see the results of their state-of-the-art research translated into content that is teachable, they must ensure that their findings are disseminated through the appropriate channels. Houssaye (2000, p.35) has conceptualised the act of teaching by representing it as a triangle, as shown in Figure 29.
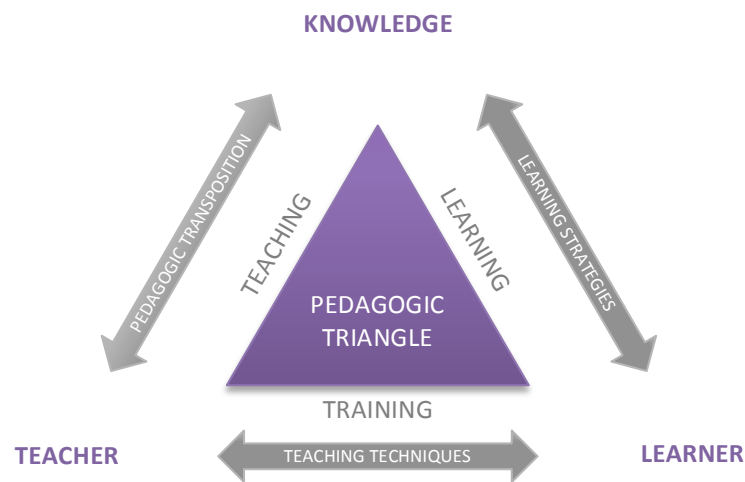

Figure 29: Houssaye's pedagogic triangle (translated into English)

The side of the triangle between 'knowledge' and 'teacher' symbolises the process of mediation (interpretation, simplification, translation, etc.) between scientific knowledge and knowledge that can be taught to students. It is labelled '*transposition didactique*', thus defined by Chevallard (1991, p.39):

> Le 'travail' qui d'un objet de savoir à enseigner fait un objet d'enseignement est appelé la transposition didactique.

> (The 'work' which turns knowledge to be taught into teaching objects is called pedagogic transposition.)

The transposition of recent knowledge about naturally occurring speech into teaching content is arguably yet to be achieved. This project demonstrates that more cross fertilisation between disciplines could only benefit students.

11.2   LIMITATIONS

It is in the nature of scientific knowledge that any research project has limitations, as any evidence is only valid for the particular context in which it was collected, and as generalisations can only ever be made with the utmost caution. In the case of this study, limitations can be grouped into two types: some are related to the methodology that was used, and some to the content of the experimental materials that were created.

11.2.1 Limitations of the research methodology

The most evident limitation of the study, perhaps, is the fact that many of the conclusions derived from the analysis of the quantitative data were based on findings that were not verified as statistically significant. It is therefore important to acknowledge that what was observed were trends whose relevance was limited to the sample examined, and which do not automatically lead to generalised conclusions.

It would have been helpful to be able to administer a pre-test to students to gain a more objective assessment of their proficiency than was provided through their self-assessment. It would also have been useful to administer the main test to all students twice: once soon after the treatment group had worked with the experimental materials, as was done in this study, and a second time a few months later, to gauge whether any benefits of using the materials remained in the long term.

With hindsight, it seems possible that interviewing some members of the control group would have shed more light on the study. Because this was not done, no qualitative data was available to gauge the control group's reaction to the test, only their performance was assessed. This was not identified early enough, partly because

the response rate during the pilot study had been so small that no control group had been formed at all, and consequently no conclusions could be drawn about this to influence the research design.

Another limitation is linked to the restricted scope of the experimental study, which tested a small amount of materials compared to the overall content of the module studied by the participants. This was due on the one hand to consideration for the participants' high workload and low availability, and on the other hand to the need to fit the experiment into the limited timeframe and practical constraints of an EdD degree. The consequence is that the experiment was restricted in time and in size (covering only 2 out of 12 of the existing module units).

Next, some limitations must be mentioned which might have influenced the participants' assessment of the experiment, or the disclosure of their reactions. Firstly there is a possibility that the participants were self-selecting. The relatively low response rate indicates that the majority of the students invited to participate did not feel that they were able to take part. This could be for personal reasons (in fact the students who chose to participate and then failed to return the test were contacted and indicated, on the whole, that the issue was workload), but it could also be because they were not confident enough to participate. This may have had an influence on the finding that the students who were interviewed were happy to rise to the challenge of the tasks presented to them: perhaps the students who did not take part would have been less likely to react in such a way. At another level, it is also possible that the students who did take part in interviews were influenced by the fact that I was, at that point, the module team chair of L192; they may have exercised a level of self-censorship in their responses, for example when asked to evaluate elements of the module.

11.2.2 Limitations of the materials tested

Further limitations of the study were a result of the experimental materials rather than of the research design. The first set of limitations is related to the nature of the audio recordings used in the study. Firstly, although a good digital recorder was used to collect the samples, the equipment was not of digital media professional standards. This was for practical reasons and also because the use of conspicuous equipment would have attracted attention and altered the very nature of the recorded interactions. The downside, however, was that the sound quality of the recordings was not as high as studio recordings might have been, and this was mentioned as an issue by some participants. A related problem was that some of the recording sessions took place in busy roads and the level of background noise was high. This could be remedied through the choice of quieter recording sites.

Although the French that was recorded was uttered spontaneously, one aspect that differed from any equivalent situation the students would find themselves in was that in the recordings the questions were asked by a fluent speaker. If the same questions had been asked by somebody at a similar level of proficiency as the students, the interlocutors might have made allowances and adjusted their speech. This would not have represented French as it is spoken amongst fluent speakers but it would have been a more accurate image of the type of French that the students themselves may be given to understand in their own interactions with fluent speakers.

The next limitation is that listening to interactions is very different from taking part in them. Many conversation analysts, e.g. Sacks et al. (1974), have shown that meaning is co-constructed by all speakers; not taking part directly means missing out on opportunities to negotiate meaning, or ask for clarifications and repetitions, for example. In addition, the fact that the samples were audio recordings means that the

visual dimension of the exchanges was absent. It is likely that the speakers who were giving directions will have accompanied their utterances with gestures, which would also have helped understand them. Video recordings might have been more helpful, but they could not be secured without conspicuous equipment, the undesirability of which was pointed out above.

A prerequisite for the study was to mirror the approach of existing OU materials, and to base the introduction of new audio materials and activities solely on self-study materials. However the provision of such module materials is only one dimension of distance learning at the OU. In that respect, the experimental study ignored other important dimensions, especially that of tutorials where students can work with Associate Lecturers (ALs) to reinforce the learning or ask for clarifications. It is also known that ALs have an important positive influence on student motivation. The fact that they were not involved in the study is therefore also a limitation. White (2003) talks about an 'enhanced course model' to describe multidimensional courses like the OU's; the experimental study did not represent an enhanced model.

There is no doubt that other limitations to the study could be mentioned but those identified above are the principal ones.

11.3   RELEVANCE

11.3.1 Beyond distance learning

Section 5.4.3 presented the specificities of the OU distance learning context which served as a background to the experimental study. This section demonstrates that the findings are relevant beyond that context.

White (2003) lists all the aspects involved in distance language learning: 'syllabus design, pedagogical decisions, choice of technology, course development, course delivery, learner support' (p.103). Within this framework, this experimental study has

to do primarily with pedagogical decisions, and to a lesser extent with course development. Consequently, although the project took place within the context of distance learning, it is concerned with generic pedagogic issues that are relevant to most language teaching contexts.

While the question of developing skills related to the spoken language is crucial in the OU context because speaking practice is a key challenge in distance language education, it is also relevant to many other contexts; for instance, it cannot be assumed that language learners in UK schools have many opportunities for interacting with fluent speakers beyond the classroom, or for travelling to the target country. Therefore even if the format of the materials developed for the experimental study matches the format of OU materials, the principles being tested apply to a wider context. If, as this study argues, exposing students to naturally occurring French at the early stages of their learning is beneficial, then it should be implemented, in an appropriate format, in other contexts than that of distance education.

11.3.2 Beyond beginner level

One of the key notions investigated in this project is that of progression, and in particular that of identifying the appropriate point in the learning progression at which it is appropriate to introduce naturally occurring speech. This study suggests that this can be done during the course of a beginners' module such as L192. From this it follows that it should also be done, in adapted forms, at higher levels and within a systematic progression. Currently at the OU the module that follows L192, L120, which takes students from CEFR level A2 to B1, does include samples of speech which were not pre-scripted (video interviews, for example), but does not include activities which help students become aware of their linguistic features. The main purpose of these documents is to teach cultural points and learn related vocabulary.

If the approach tested here was implemented in a beginners' module, the follow-up modules should build on it and a progression should be designed to cover all levels. More generally, this study argues that naturally occurring French should be introduced as early as possible, and shows that it is feasible as part of a module covering levels A1 and A2.

11.3.3 Beyond French

In a setting comparable to that of the experimental study, the approach could be replicated for languages other than French. Of course languages each have distinct linguistic systems, the differences between their written and spoken forms will be particular to each of them, and the teaching content would therefore have to be adapted. But the broad principles of encouraging early exposure and to develop an awareness of the particular features of the spoken form of a language remain valid for languages other than French.

11.3.4 Beyond adult learning

The question of whether the experience would be applicable to a context involving young learners, for example school pupils, rather than adults, is not straightforward to answer. On the one hand, as mentioned above, it can be assumed that pupils learning French in an institutional context get as limited exposure to naturally occurring speech as adults, and if it is assumed that the objective of these learners is also to be able to interact with fluent speakers it should follow that the same principles apply. However younger people do not bring the same level of life experience, general knowledge, and in some cases of previous language study, to support their learning as adults. It can therefore not be assumed that they would react to the experimental approach in the same way as adults—this would have to be tested before firm conclusions could be drawn. The next section considers other issues related to this study that could be investigated in further research projects.

11.4   FURTHER RESEARCH ISSUES

Having tested the approach in a limited timeframe, matching only two units of L192, it would be interesting to replicate the study over the whole length of a beginners' module, if issues around student workload could be resolved. This would ascertain whether the approach would be viable if rolled out throughout a module. The question of progression and of finding the optimal point at which to introduce the approach could also be investigated, for example by comparing the performance and reaction of students at different levels. Overall, adapting the research design to form a longitudinal study would enable the findings of this study to be further refined.

The question of whether to use audio or video materials to develop listening skills is another issue that was raised by some students in interviews and that would merit more systematic scrutiny. So would the use of transcripts to develop perception skills, which was touched upon in interviews.

Finding out whether the experimental approach, which was designed to contribute to the development of listening skills, would have any positive impact on the speaking performance of students would be another area for investigation.

In addition, since one of the arguments for starting this study was that current language teaching methodologies advocate approaches rooted in reality (cf. the approaches described in sections 1.1 and 2.1), it would be desirable to test the experimental study as part of one such methodological approach, for example as part of a task-based or action-oriented teaching approach.

Finally, one of the marginal notions that emerged from the study was the fact that there is no systematicity in the way adult learners define themselves as beginners or otherwise, and that the vast majority of participants who did describe themselves as beginners had done some, if limited, French before. It may be therefore beneficial to

use different terminology, such as perhaps 'early learners', instead of 'beginners'. Indeed the very concept of 'beginner' would merit more precise definition through research.

Conclusion to Part III

Following the literature review covering four domains relevant to this project, broad areas for reflection were identified and specific research questions emerged. Part II described the methods selected to collect and analyse data to answer those questions. Part III was dedicated to the analysis of that data and to research findings. It provided answers to the research questions and recommendations, and discussed implications for practice within and beyond the context of this particular study.

Based on Houssaye's pedagogic triangle (cf. section 11.1.4), Poisson (2003, p.10) designed a model more suited to autonomous learning and teaching—which matches the context of Open University language teaching. By adding a fourth corner for 'resources', he turned the triangle into a pyramid, as shown in Figure 30:
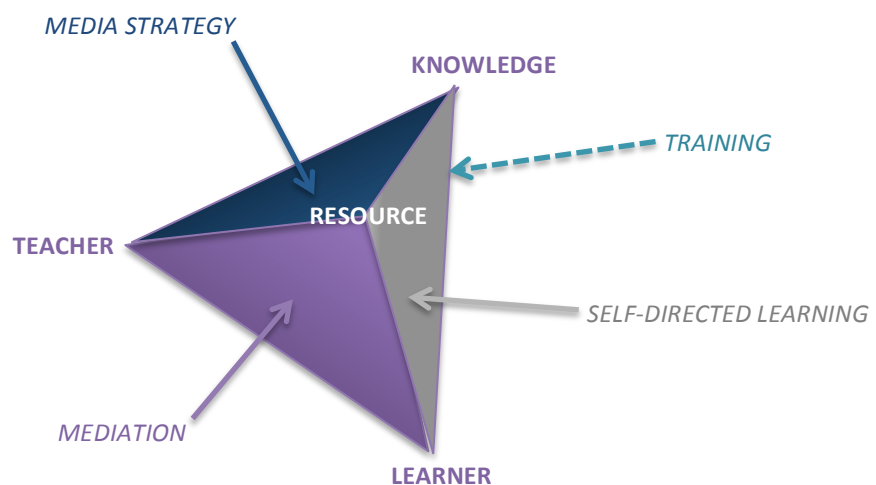

Figure 30: Poisson's pedagogic pyramid (translated into English)

Table 22 demonstrates that the four fundamental corners that form the pyramid were taken into account in this study, and that they are directly related to the four areas for reflection identified at the end of the literature review.

Areas identified for reflection	Description	Corners of Poisson's pyramid
Content selection	Use of samples of naturally occurring spoken French in teaching text and activities	Resources
Teaching and learning strategies	What the teacher develops for self and for learners	Teacher
Difficulty and motivation	Affective dimension involved in learning	Learner
Relationship between theory and practice	Integration of scientific (linguistic) knowledge into teaching practice	Knowledge

Table 22: Matching areas for reflection to Poisson's pyramid corners

Conclusion

A summary of the study is provided by Figure 31 which illustrates the successive phases of its design. The literature review has shown how this project, which set out to evaluate how beginner learners of French could successfully be introduced to and taught about naturally occurring spoken French, is positioned with respect to previous research about language learning and teaching methodologies, about the notion of authenticity as it relates to the selection or creation of language teaching materials, about the theoretical description and analysis of naturally occurring spoken French, and about the development of listening skills. Issues that this project could explore to advance knowledge in those domains emerged from the review. Those issues were translated into research questions, and it was shown how appropriate methods were then selected to address them and how they were implemented to collect data. The data analysis has demonstrated that the students were able to engage with samples of naturally occurring spoken French, with the related tasks, and with their specific linguistic features. It also revealed that students

found the approach challenging but useful in developing listening skills. Taking into account cognitive, affective and contextual dimensions, and bearing in mind the constraints inherent to the typically mixed context of adult language learning, the study has led to the conclusion that naturally occurring spoken French and activities aimed at developing awareness of its features should be gradually introduced to early learners as part of a mix of materials, in conjunction with more traditional materials using scripted spoken French, to raise awareness about the specificities of spontaneous speech. This allows a balance to be struck between ecological and reductionist approaches, offers students a chance to exercise choice between types of materials and provides tools they can reuse when they are exposed to naturally occurring spoken French autonomously. Some limitations to the study have been acknowledged, but it has also been shown that it is relevant beyond the context of the experiment, for example beyond the particular setting of distance language education. One of the outcomes of the research is the conclusion that there is a need for more knowledge transfer and more interaction between linguists and language teaching practitioners, to ensure that language learners benefit from teaching methodologies that take into account the latest advances in the description and analysis of languages. This project has demonstrated that transposing some findings of recent linguistics research about the features of naturally occurring spoken French into teaching content that is appropriate to early learners can be done successfully.
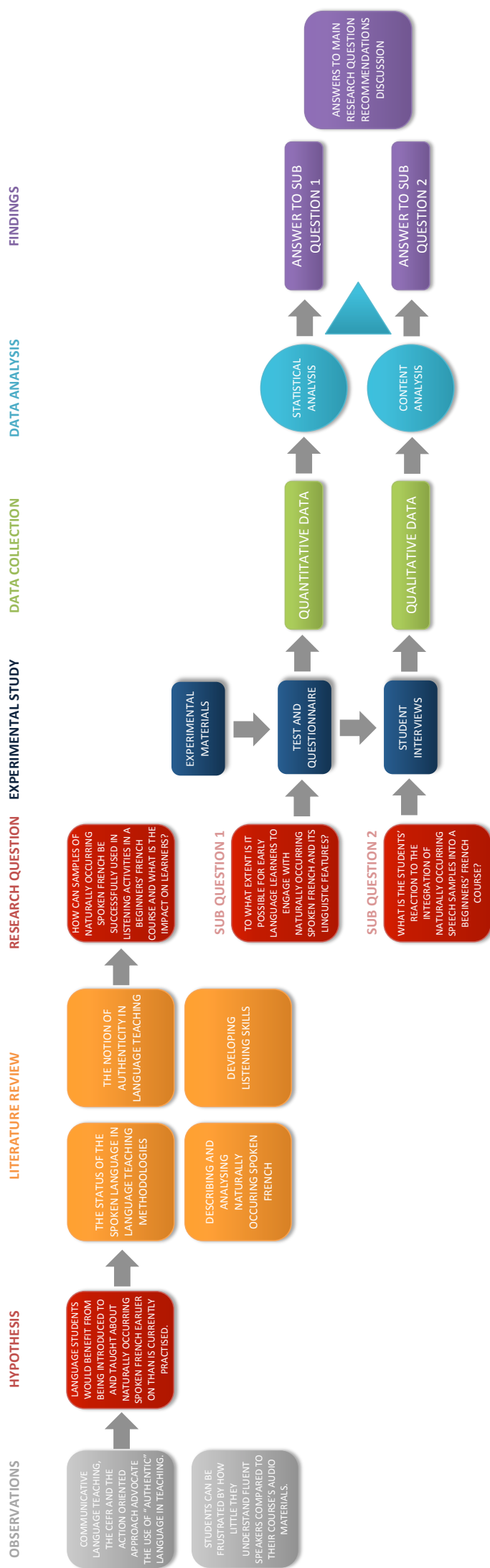
Figure 31: Design of the whole project

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