

## **Discoursepragmatic features of spoken French: analysis and pedagogical implications**

Secova, Maria

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/jspui/handle/123456789/681>

Information about this research object was correct at the time of download; we occasionally make corrections to records, please therefore check the published record when citing. For more information contact [scholarlycommunications@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:scholarlycommunications@qmul.ac.uk)

**Discourse-pragmatic features of spoken French:  
analysis and pedagogical implications**

by  
Maria Secova

A thesis submitted to the School of Languages, Linguistics and  
Film, Queen Mary, University of London,  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy

September 2010

## **Abstract**

My research focuses on selected discourse features of spoken French, especially those typical of present-day youth language. The dissertation has two main parts:

- 1) Analysis of features typical of spoken language, based on my corpus of recorded data from young people aged 20 to 30, speaking to each other in spontaneous informal conversations. The analysis focuses particularly on features with discourse-pragmatic functions, including discourse markers, general extenders, presentational constructions and dislocated structures. I also address the question of how some of these typically spoken features develop in French youth language and the extent to which they may be considered innovative.
- 2) Discussion of the role of spoken language in foreign language teaching and learning, based partly on the results of a questionnaire for university learners of French as a foreign language aimed at investigating their knowledge of spoken features. This section addresses the question of whether features of spoken language generally, and of youth language in particular, are available to foreign learners.

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation was made possible through help from a number of people that I would like to gratefully acknowledge. First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Jenny Cheshire, for her priceless advice, constant support and enduring patience. She has been a great inspiration to me. I also owe a great deal of thanks to my second supervisor, Dr. Leigh Oakes, for his valuable comments and feedback, and especially for his help with the statistical elements of the research. I am also grateful to my former MA supervisor, Professor Françoise Gadet, for her inspiring lectures on French sociolinguistics and her encouragement of my interest in this field. I am greatly indebted to Queen Mary University of London, which awarded me a three-year postgraduate scholarship, as well as to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for a three-year tuition fee grant, which together made it possible for me to undertake this project in the first place. Special thanks are due to the Linguistics Department at Queen Mary for providing me with an extremely rich and stimulating academic environment to work in. I am also indebted to all the academic institutions which have been very important to my linguistics background, including the Anton Bernolak Grammar School and the University of Comenius in Slovakia, as well as L'Université de Metz and L'Université Paris X Nanterre in France. My deepest gratitude goes to the people who made this project possible by kindly allowing me to share their daily lives and to record them, and without whom this project would not have been possible.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, for being very supportive and for having faith in my abilities. A special thanks is due to my partner Christophe for his patience, emotional support, technical advice and, last but not least, for his help with my French.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TRANSCRIPTION KEY</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>FIGURES AND TABLES</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND YOUTH LANGUAGE IN FRANCE</b>	<b>15</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION	15
1.1.1 SPOKEN LANGUAGE: A GENERAL OVERVIEW	15
1.1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SPONTANEOUS SPOKEN LANGUAGE	19
1.1.3 SUMMARY	27
1.2 <i>LE FRANÇAIS PARLE</i>	28
1.2.1 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CURRENT SITUATION	28
1.2.2 <i>LA NORME</i>	31
1.2.3 LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND LINGUISTIC INSECURITY	34
1.3 FEATURES OF SPOKEN FRENCH	36
1.3.1 SYNTACTIC DEVICES	36
1.3.2 <i>NE</i> DELETION IN NEGATIVES	39
1.3.3 USE OF <i>ON</i> VS. <i>NOUS</i>	40
1.3.4 ELLIPSIS	41
1.3.5 SENTENCE-FINAL PREPOSITIONS ('ORPHAN PREPOSITIONS')	43
1.3.6 SUMMARY	44
1.4 YOUTH LANGUAGE AS AN ASPECT OF SPOKEN LANGUAGE	45
1.4.1 UNDERSTANDING YOUTH CULTURE	45
1.4.2 FRENCH YOUTH IN ITS SOCIAL CONTEXT	48
1.5 FRENCH YOUTH LANGUAGE	53
1.6 CONCLUSION	64
<b>CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>65</b>
2.1 GOALS OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH DESIGN	65
2.2 DATA COLLECTION: NATIVE SPEAKER DATA	67
2.3 DATA HANDLING AND ANALYSIS	74
2.4 SELECTION OF FEATURES	78
2.5 CONCLUSION	80
<b>CHAPTER 3 GENRE: AN INNOVATIVE DISCOURSE MARKER</b>	<b>81</b>
3.1 PREVIOUS RESEARCH	81
3.1.1 DISCOURSE MARKERS	81
3.1.2 GRAMMATICALISATION	86
3.1.3 <i>GENRE</i> : A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	89
3.1.4 SUMMARY	100
3.2 DATA ANALYSIS	101
3.2.1 FUNCTIONS OF <i>GENRE</i>	101
3.2.2 EXPRESSIONS RESEMBLING <i>GENRE</i> : <i>STYLE</i> AND <i>EN MODE</i>	121
3.2.3 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	132
3.2.4 A NOTE ON VARIATION	139
3.3 CONCLUSION	141
<b>CHAPTER 4 GENERAL EXTENDERS IN THE SPEECH OF YOUNG PEOPLE</b>	<b>142</b>

<b>4.1</b>	<b>PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>DATA ANALYSIS</b>	<b>151</b>
4.2.1	GENERAL EXTENDERS: DISTRIBUTION OF FORMS IN THE CORPUS OF SPOKEN FRENCH	151
4.2.2	GENERAL EXTENDERS: POLITENESS, FAMILIARITY AND INCLUSION	155
4.2.3	GENERAL EXTENDERS AND SEQUENTIAL ORGANISATION OF DISCOURSE	159
4.2.4	GENERAL EXTENDERS AND HEDGING	161
4.2.5	GENERAL EXTENDERS AND VAGUE LANGUAGE	163
<b>4.3</b>	<b>DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>180</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 5 DISLOCATION AND THE DISJOINT PRONOUN <i>MOI</i></u></b>		<b><u>182</u></b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>DISLOCATION</b>	<b>195</b>
5.2.1	DISLOCATION: STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS	196
<b>5.3</b>	<b><i>MOI</i>: DISJOINT PRONOUN AND ITS FUNCTIONS IN CONVERSATION MANAGEMENT AND SELF- PRESENTATION.</b>	<b>215</b>
5.3.1	PREVIOUS APPROACHES	215
5.3.2	DATA ANALYSIS	220
<b>5.4</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>234</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 6 PRESENTATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF WORD ORDER IN SPOKEN FRENCH</u></b>		<b><u>235</u></b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>PREVIOUS APPROACHES</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>DATA ANALYSIS: PRESENTATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN SPOKEN FRENCH</b>	<b>246</b>
6.2.1	EXISTENTIAL PRESENTATIONALS – <i>IL Y A</i> .	247
6.2.2	POSSESSIVE PRESENTATIONALS	250
6.2.3	PERCEPTION PRESENTATIONALS	253
<b>6.3</b>	<b>QUANTITATIVE RESULTS</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>261</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 7 SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF FRENCH</u></b>		<b><u>263</u></b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>264</b>
7.1.1	COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE	264
7.1.2	COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND THE NOTION OF LANGUAGE-AS-DISCOURSE	267
7.1.3	AUTHENTICITY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING	269
7.1.4	COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION	272
<b>7.2</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>276</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 8 SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND YOUTH LANGUAGE: A LEARNER SURVEY</u></b>		<b><u>278</u></b>
<b>8.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>278</b>
<b>8.2</b>	<b>AIMS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE</b>	<b>278</b>
<b>8.3</b>	<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>8.4</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>281</b>
8.4.1	SELECTION OF METHODS	281
8.4.2	PILOT STUDY	282
8.4.3	DEVELOPMENT OF INSTRUMENT: MAIN STUDY	284
8.4.4	ADMINISTRATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE	290
8.4.5	RESPONDENT PROFILES	292
<b>8.5</b>	<b>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE SURVEY</b>	<b>296</b>
8.5.1	FEATURES OF SPOKEN FRENCH	297
8.5.2	KNOWLEDGE OF SPOKEN FEATURES: RESULTS	308
8.5.3	EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE	310

8.5.4	EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING FRENCH IN CONTEXT	313
<b>8.6</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>320</b>
<b>8.7</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>322</b>

<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>326</b>
-------------------	------------

---

<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>329</b>
-------------------	------------

---

APPENDIX A	QUESTIONNAIRE ON SPOKEN FRENCH.....	352
APPENDIX B	INFORMATION SHEET .....	357
APPENDIX C	CONSENT FORM .....	361

## Transcription Key

The transcription conventions used in this thesis were inspired mainly by the analysis of rhythm and intonation presented by Halliday (1994: chap. 8).

### • Speech production

**1) Forward slash /** These signal speaker parcellings of non-final talk. They are used mainly to mark intonation units between sequences and correspond to silent beats in the rhythm.

**2) Full stops .** These mark termination (whether grammatically complete or not), or certainty, which is usually realised by falling intonation. The absence of any turn-final punctuation indicates incompleteness, either through interruption or trailing off.

**3) Question marks ?** These are used to signal a rising intonation (as in questions) or to mark what I interpret as uncertainty.

**4) Exclamation marks !** These indicate the expression of counter-expectation (e.g. surprise, shock, amazement etc.).

**5) Words in capital letters WOW** Uppercase is used to show emphatic segments of speech and/or those uttered with increased volume.

**6) Quotation marks " "** These signal the marked change of voice quality which occurs when speakers quote or repeat someone else's speech.

**7) False starts \_** These signal false starts or an abrupt termination of an incomplete segment.

**8) Repetitions** These are shown in full.

**9) Backchannels, fillers and quasi-linguistic particles:** These are transcribed phonemically. Some examples are as follows:

i) *eah*: doubt, hesitation

ii) *ah*: staller

iii) *mm, ouais*: agreement

iv) *aïe*: exclamation of pain

v) *ben (bien), nan (non)* etc.



- **Sequencing and intervals**

- 1) **Simultaneous utterances / concurrent utterances:** These are marked with double left-hand brackets [[
- 2) **Overlap:** The beginning of an overlap is signalled by a single left-hand bracket [; the end is signalled by a single right-hand bracket ]
- 3) **Latching or contiguous utterances:** when there is no interval between adjacent utterances, the run-on is signalled by placing the = sign at the end of one speaker's line and at the beginning of the subsequent speaker's turn.
- 4) **Hesitations:** Hesitations (i.e. brief pauses within turns, as opposed to those between turns) are transcribed by three dots: ...
- 5) **Pauses:** Pauses (untimed) are marked between parentheses as follows: (...) for longer pauses; (.) for shorter pauses.

- **Transcriber's comments**

- 1) **Non-transcribable segments of talk:** These are indicated by (xxxxxx). They include inaudible or incomprehensible segments of talk, as well as segments which the participants identified as private and did not wish to share.
- 2) **Uncertain transcription:** Words in brackets, as in (**I think**), indicate the transcriber's guess.
- 3) **Paralinguistic and non-verbal information:** Additional information about relevant non-verbal behaviour is provided in English within angled brackets, as in <LAUGHTER>.

- **Presentation and referencing**

- 1) **Example from a recording:** The information concerning the example in question is as follows: Speaker's name, Sex, Age, File reference: (**Jeanne, F15, R09**)
- 2) **Example from the notebook collection:** The information concerning the example in question is as follows: Example reference number: (**N345**)

## FIGURES AND TABLES

### FIGURES

FIGURE 1: NORM: USES AND ATTITUDES (ADAPTED FROM HOUEBINE, 1993) .....	32
FIGURE 2: A TYPICAL CONCORDANCE OUTPUT .....	77
FIGURE 3: ETYMOLOGY OF <i>GENRE</i> .....	94
FIGURE 4: <i>GENRE</i> : FUNCTIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN MY CORPUS .....	133
FIGURE 5: <i>GENRE</i> : FUNCTIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE CFPP CORPUS (YOUNGER PEOPLE).....	134
FIGURE 6: <i>GENRE</i> : FUNCTIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE CFPP CORPUS (OLDER PEOPLE).....	135
FIGURE 7: <i>GENRE</i> : FUNCTIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE BEECHING CORPUS .....	136
FIGURE 8: <i>STYLE</i> : FUNCTIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE NOTEBOOK COLLECTION .....	138
FIGURE 9: <i>EN MODE</i> : FUNCTIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE NOTEBOOK COLLECTION .....	139
FIGURE 10: DISTRIBUTION OF ADJUNCTIVE AND DISJUNCTIVE GENERAL EXTENDERS IN THE PRESENT CORPUS .....	168
FIGURE 11: <i>THE GIVENNESS HIERARCHY</i> (GUNDEL ET AL. 1993: 144) .....	194
FIGURE 12: <i>TOPIC ACCEPTABILITY SCALE</i> (LAMBRECHT 1996: 165) .....	194
FIGURE 13: BACHMAN’S (1990) DIVISION OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCE.....	266

### TABLES

TABLE 2.1 DISTRIBUTION OF RECORDED PARTICIPANTS.....	70
TABLE 3.1: DISTRIBUTION OF INNOVATIVE USES OF <i>GENRE</i> ACROSS SOURCES.....	136
TABLE 4.1: LIST OF GENERAL EXTENDERS AND COMPONENTS (ADAPTED FROM DUBOIS 1993: 202).....	144
TABLE 4.2: FORMS OF GENERAL EXTENDERS IN THE PRESENT CORPUS OF INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS ....	152
TABLE 4.3: DISTRIBUTION OF GENERAL EXTENDERS IN THE PRESENT CORPUS .....	166
TABLE 4.4: DISTRIBUTION OF GENERAL EXTENDERS IN THE BEECHING CORPUS.....	167
TABLE 4.5: DISTRIBUTION OF GENERAL EXTENDERS IN THE CFPP CORPUS: YOUNG PEOPLE.....	167
TABLE 4.6: DISTRIBUTION OF GENERAL EXTENDERS IN THE CFPP CORPUS: OLDER PEOPLE.....	168
TABLE 5.1: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HTLD AND CLLD (ADAPTED FROM DE CAT: 2005 AND 2007).....	198
TABLE 5.2: NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES OF PRONOMINAL SUBJECT DOUBLING IN CRFP CORPUS (BLASCO- DULBECCO: 2004) .....	218
TABLE 5.3: DISTRIBUTION OF DISJOINT PRONOUNS IN THE CORPUS.....	226
TABLE 5.4: DISTRIBUTION OF DOUBLE SUBJECTS WITH <i>MOI</i> AND SINGLE SUBJECTS <i>JE</i> IN THE CORPUS .....	227
TABLE 5.5: DISTRIBUTION OF <i>MOI</i> CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE CORPUS .....	227
TABLE 5.6: INTERVENING MATERIAL BETWEEN <i>MOI</i> AND <i>JE</i> / <i>MOI</i> AND <i>ME</i> .....	227
TABLE 6.1: FRENCH PRESENTATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS .....	244

TABLE 6.2: PRESENTATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE PRESENT CORPUS (MAIN FORMS IN BOLD).....	246
TABLE 6.3: DISTRIBUTION OF PRESENTATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE CORPUS.....	257
TABLE 6.4: DISTRIBUTION OF PRESENTATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE CORPUS.....	258
TABLE 6.5: DISTRIBUTION OF DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE REFERENTS .....	258
TABLE 6.6: DISTRIBUTION OF NEW AND INFERABLE REFERENTS .....	258
TABLE 6.7: DISTRIBUTION OF GENERALISING AND PARTICULARISING REFERENTS .....	259
TABLE 6.8: DISTRIBUTION OF ANIMATE AND INANIMATE REFERENTS .....	259
TABLE 7.1: COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE .....	265
TABLE 8.1: SURVEY PARTICIPANTS .....	291
TABLE 8.2: AGE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS.....	293
TABLE 8.3: LENGTH OF STUDY OF FRENCH (IN YEARS).....	294
TABLE 8.4: SELF-REPORTED LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY.....	296
TABLE 8.5: DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO TIME SPENT ABROAD.....	297
TABLE 8.6: GENERAL EXTENDER: <i>ET TOUT</i> .....	298
TABLE 8.7: MULTIFUNCTIONAL TERM <i>GENRE</i> .....	301
TABLE 8.8: VAGUE LANGUAGE – <i>MACHIN</i> .....	302
TABLE 8.9: <i>IL YA</i> .....	306
TABLE 8.10: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE <i>KNOWLEDGE</i> OF SPOKEN FEATURES AND THE INDEPENDENT FACTORS .....	309
TABLE 8.11: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE <i>TRANSLATION</i> OF SPOKEN FEATURES AND THE INDEPENDENT FACTORS .....	309
TABLE 8.12: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE <i>USE</i> OF SPOKEN FEATURES AND THE INDEPENDENT FACTORS .....	309
TABLE 8.13: EXPERIENCE OF FRENCH CLASSES .....	311
TABLE 8.14: EXPERIENCE OF FRENCH CLASSES .....	312
TABLE 8.15. EXPERIENCE OF LANGUAGE IN FRENCH-SPEAKING CONTEXTS .....	313
TABLE 8.16. EXPERIENCE OF LANGUAGE IN NATIVE ENVIRONMENT .....	314
TABLE 8.17. EXPERIENCE OF LANGUAGE IN NATIVE ENVIRONMENT .....	314
TABLE 8.18. LEARNING STRATEGIES.....	317

## Introduction

### Origins of the study and research aims

One of the main goals of this dissertation is to explore some of the discourse-pragmatic features of spoken French, and particularly those typical of youth language. The research study has two main parts.

In the first part, I focus on some spoken language features in my corpus of recorded data, especially those which have mainly pragmatic functions. More precisely, I look at discourse markers (e.g. *genre*), general extenders (e.g. *et tout*), presentationals (e.g. *il y a*) and dislocated structures (e.g. *moi, je*). In fact, it emerges from my data that some of these features are characterised by a degree of linguistic innovation observable mainly, albeit not exclusively, in the speech of young people. I thus address the question of how some of these typically spoken forms develop in French youth language and the extent to which they may be considered innovative.

The second part of the thesis is dedicated to a discussion of the role of spoken language in foreign language teaching and learning. This part is based on a questionnaire for learners of French which investigates their knowledge of some of the spoken features analysed in the first part of the thesis. More globally, my aim in using this questionnaire is to address the question of whether features of spoken language generally, and of youth language in particular, are available to foreign learners.

The origins of this study are deeply rooted in two overlapping aspects of my personal experience: the experience of pursuing the study of linguistics and the experience of learning a foreign language. I have always been very interested in spontaneous speech and in the ways speakers use ‘little words’ that do not seem to carry much informational content but that fulfil different types of pragmatic functions. In addition to listening to what people said in informal conversations, I have always observed *how* they said it and

what functional strategies they appeared to be adopting in their speech. At times, I was so engrossed in monitoring how people talked – in metalinguistic terms – that I forgot to listen to what they were actually saying.

My project thus started life as a desire to explore some of the discourse features typically occurring in informal spoken French. In an attempt to depict and understand the complexities of informal talk conveyed by such pragmatic features, I recorded native speakers of French and analysed the different ways in which they used these features. In addition to recording and analysing discourse patterns, I reflected on the ways in which pragmatic expressions and constructions were dealt with in foreign language teaching and learning. Because these constructions often lack explicit referential meaning, they tend, as I will argue further in the relevant chapters, to be generally overlooked as superfluous and paid little attention to in foreign language classrooms. However, the sheer frequency of these forms in spoken language suggests that they are not merely unimportant ‘fillers’, but carry important pragmatic functions in speech; I therefore believe that the knowledge and appropriate use of such functional forms are inherent aspects of the mastery of a foreign language in which they are used.

## **Organisation of the dissertation**

Beyond the introductory section, where the general background and the aims of the study are outlined, the dissertation is organised as follows. In Chapter 1, I locate my research subject within a larger theoretical framework, by providing an overview of spoken language in general, and of relevant aspects of spoken French in particular. In addition, this chapter discusses the definition of youth language and deals with the characteristics of the speech of young people specifically within the French context.

Chapter 2 sets out the research design and gives a broad outline of the methodology used to collect and analyse the data in the present study; I describe how and to what ends I used the chosen research methods and argue for the advantages of a combined methodological approach. I explain that in this project I nevertheless prioritise qualitative analysis.

Chapter 3 discusses the first discourse feature of interest: the multi-purpose pragmatic feature *genre*. I firstly review the literature concerned with this and similar expressions, focusing on uses that tend to be considered as atypical and innovative. I demonstrate these uses with authentic examples from my spoken corpus, reflecting on a possible language change in progress and on the potential role of grammaticalisation in the development of new functions of pragmatic features such as *genre*.

The second feature of interest is the use of general extenders, to which Chapter 4 is dedicated. Again, this chapter firstly reviews the relevant literature on general extenders from a broader point of view, before considering how general extenders have been described in French. I then look at the different ways in which these expressions are used in my data, concentrating on their pragmatic functions which seem to be closely tied to the notion of reciprocity and to the construction of intersubjective meaning.

In Chapter 5, I explore the syntactic-pragmatic feature of dislocation, with a particular focus on constructions with the disjoint pronoun *moi*. I explore how this particular type of disjoint pronoun typical of spoken French is exploited at the discourse level in order to fulfil a number of speaker-related pragmatic functions.

Chapter 6 deals with the last discourse feature under study: presentational constructions such as *il y a*. After a brief overview of the relevant literature, I demonstrate how these particular syntactic constructions – again typical of spoken French – are exploited for pragmatic purposes and how they are central to the management of information structure in discourse.

Chapters 7 and 8 constitute the second logical part of the dissertation. Unlike the preceding chapters, the analysis in this part involves an important pedagogical component; these chapters situate the previous discussion of spoken features within the context of language teaching and learning. While Chapter 7 discusses the relevant literature concerned with the acquisition of communicative competence in a foreign language, Chapter 8 describes a questionnaire given to learners of French, in which they were asked questions about spoken French and about the content of their French language classes. The questionnaire analysis thus completes the discussion of the role of

spoken language in foreign language teaching and learning, and places the discussion within an empirical context.

In the conclusion, I summarise the results of the study, discuss its theoretical and pedagogical implications, and suggest potential avenues for further research. I also attempt to stress the originality of my analysis and evaluate its significance with regard to previous studies relevant to the subject.

# Chapter 1 Spoken language and youth language in France

## 1.1 Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is firstly to outline the principal characteristics of spoken language in general, and secondly to focus on relevant aspects of spoken French and French youth language in particular. I also review and discuss some of the literature relevant to these areas, and explain how my research relates to them.

### 1.1.1 Spoken language: a general overview

This section is concerned mainly with a description of the general characteristics of spontaneous spoken language. It will consider the most important features of spontaneous speech along several dimensions, rather than describing it as a clear-cut, distinct mode of expression directly opposable to writing.

#### *Traditional views associated with speech and writing*

In recent decades, much research has focused on speech and writing, and on the modes and practices associated with each. While important insights have been gained in this area, scholars often point to some misleading assumptions that tend to be inferred from these insights; namely, as Elbow (1985: 283) has argued, that ‘speech and writing are distinctly characterisable media, each of which has its own inherent features and each of which tends to foster a particular cognitive process, or ‘mentality.’’ Associated with this assumption is the traditional view that spoken language and written language are straightforwardly opposable categories, a view that the literature usually links to historical understandings of literacy and orality (see, for example, Tannen 1982, Elbow 1985, Halliday 1989, Miller and Weinert 1998). Let us explain these understandings in more detail.

Historically, the differences between literacy and orality have been made salient especially in literate societies where written language tended to be regarded as different



from and superior to spoken language. As Tannen (1982: 1) points out, the primacy of written language has had a long tradition in literate societies where knowledge has been seen as facts and insights preserved in written records. According to Olson (1991: 21), this tradition can be traced back to the introduction of writing systems, which had important consequences both for the cognitive processes of individuals and for the cultural practices of social groups. Thus, in most western countries, there has been a tendency to consider written language as the highest form of communication, and to associate it with correctness, eloquence and literacy. This practice has, perhaps unsurprisingly, led to the mystification of written language: the latter came to be regarded by laypeople as language proper, and spoken language as an ‘imperfect representation of written language’ (Scholes 1993: 194). The dichotomy between ‘written’ and ‘spoken’ was thus consolidated, with writing regarded as a basis for literacy and therefore necessary for survival in society. Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1981: 96) describe the importance of the written word as follows:

(...) Developments of advanced technological societies have increased the dependence on the written word; new communicative requirements have been generated by bureaucracies, from tax forms to the wording of government regulations.

In most developed societies, authorities such as school and public administration have become important actors in promoting literacy, which in turn has become a skill necessary for social achievement, and increasingly for life in general. In such a context, spontaneous spoken language tended to be seen as unworthy of serious study, with speech considered as disorganised, formless or ‘defective’ in comparison to the written form (Smith 1994: 45).

However, in recent years, understandings of spoken and written language have been nuanced in important ways. For example, Miller and Weinart (1998: 4) note that the twentieth-century linguistics recognises a distinction between written language and spoken language, and contrary to previous approaches, prioritises the latter. They further explain that the terms ‘spoken language’ and ‘written language’ do not ‘merely refer to different mediums but relate to partially different systems of morphology, syntax, vocabulary and the organisation of texts’ (1998: 5). From this it follows that

speech and writing develop independently and should not be dealt with using the same criteria nor should they be seen as dichotomous. They differ in a number of dimensions, but these dimensions again should be considered as continuous rather than absolute. Let us explain this in fuller detail.

#### *Intention and conditions of production*

An important dimension along which spoken and written language may differ is their intended use and the conditions under which they are produced. Since these criteria are clearly different in the case of each particular medium, they cannot be used to evaluate spoken language and written language generally. For instance, the view that speech is disorganised and formless in comparison to writing has little substance, since, as Halliday (1989: 77) points out, the 'disorderly appearance of speech is an artefact of the way it is transcribed'. This is to say, quite simply, that not all written texts are meant to be read out loud and, conversely, speech is not initially meant to be written down. If a written text were to be reproduced with all the planning processes left in it, then it too would appear formless. Moreover, as Elbow (1985) explains, writing too can be disorganised if its process (rather than the product) is taken into account, and conversely, speech may sometimes be carefully prepared, planned and organised. In a similar vein, the traditional view that generalises writing as indelible and speech as ephemeral needs to be nuanced. Speech is a vivid medium and therefore is inherently more indelible than writing (Elbow 1985: 286); the spoken word cannot be retracted and may always be remembered by the speaker's audience. However, since writing is most often evaluated in terms of its product rather than its process, it cannot be judged using the same criteria. Besides, the process of writing may be seen as ephemeral, too, in that the author's ideas are often revised, reformulated or discarded before they reach the final product. With regard to the conditions of production, suggestions have also been made to replace the traditional designations "spoken/written language" by "language of immediacy" and "language of distance" (for a detailed discussion, see Koch and Oesterreicher (1990: 8-12).

#### *Communication medium used*

The model for describing spoken and written language as dichotomous categories cannot be generalised with regard to the range of media used. As a matter of fact, there

is no a single type of spoken interaction, nor is there a single type of written interaction. Similarly, ‘written’ need not necessarily mean ‘formal’, just as ‘spoken’ need not necessarily mean ‘informal’. Written and spoken media should therefore be analysed using different criteria and should not be devalued at the expense of one another. This is in keeping with Graddol et al. (1994: 190) who argue that one should be more precise when dealing with differences between speech and writing:

Where once a distinction between ‘spoken’ and ‘written’ could be viewed as a shorthand for a cluster of important distinctions, we now need to be more precise about which distinctions are of interest to us.

Nowadays, as Aijmer and Stenström (2005: 1746-47) explain, the boundaries between spoken and written interaction are becoming increasingly blurred, as shown by the emergence of new media such as CMC (‘computer mediated communication’). Thus each medium should be defined separately rather than described categorically as either ‘spoken’ or ‘written.’

### *Description tools*

The prestige of written language in literate societies means that the study of spoken language had been neglected until quite recently, even by linguists. However, as Graddol et al. (*ibid.*) suggest, theories describing language have recently evolved and there has been an increasing need to adopt a more versatile approach towards spoken and written interaction. They note that linguistics has in recent years begun to place more interest in spontaneous spoken language and to develop tools for describing it. Thus, instead of considering writing simply as a derivative of speech and vice versa, linguists have begun to consider them as different communication channels with different properties and functions. Therefore, as Halliday (1989: 109) explains, ‘one has to think of both written and spoken language in terms of three interrelated aspects: the nature of the medium, the functions served, and the formal properties displayed’, i.e. the ‘function, medium and form’. The nature of the medium may simply refer to spoken (e.g. casual conversation, telephone call, lecture) and written (e.g. letter, book, email) – forgetting, for now, the ‘blurred’ media such as CMC – while the functions served probably relates to the fact that some media are more planned than others. For example, a formal lecture (i.e. spoken communication) may be more planned than a casual

computer chat (i.e. written communication), since the two serve different functions. Lastly, the formal properties displayed will of course vary in each case. A casual conversation will be more fragmented and emotionally loaded than a formal lecture, even though both can be considered as spoken media. The formal properties of spontaneous speech are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

In light of the above observations, I consider spoken and written language as two poles of a continuum rather than absolute categories defined by opposing and unrelated characteristics. This continuum contains a whole range of different media that can be defined along several different dimensions, such as the degree of formality, speaker/writer involvement or the extent to which the language is planned or unplanned.

### **1.1.2 Characteristics of spontaneous spoken language**

Since my interest lies mainly in spontaneous speech as can be found in every-day interaction, I will now attempt to review its principal characteristics along several different dimensions.

#### a) Syntactic structure of spoken language

Spontaneous spoken language has a rather distinctive syntactic structure, usually characterised by complex syntactic chunks that cannot be defined as clearly as those found in written texts. With regard to spoken syntax, Miller and Weinert (1998: 28) argue:

(...) the sentence should be regarded as a low-level discourse unit of written language, clauses and phrases are units of both spoken and written language, and sequences of clauses in spoken language may form clause complexes.

While the syntax of written text tends to be explained using the *sentence* as the main analytical unit, the concept of the sentence cannot easily be applied to spontaneous spoken language. Therefore, Miller and Weinert (1998: 29) argue that it should be applied only to written language. Most of the time, spontaneous speech does not have

an integrated syntactic structure, but consists of blocks of syntax with little or no structural linkage; thus spoken language demands more inferencing from the listener than written language does from the reader.

One of the most important characteristics of spontaneous speech is that it is communicated in real time and cannot be planned in advance. The lack of planning time and the instantaneous character of speech seem to be the main reasons why spontaneous discourse tends to be fragmented rather than linked in a consistent way. In the literature, a distinction is thus often made between *planned* and *unplanned discourse*<sup>1</sup>, with the latter being defined as ‘talk which is not thought out prior to its expression’ (see Ochs 1979: 77). The distinction between planned and unplanned discourse and especially the linguistic reflexes of the lack of planning time are reflected in some of the characteristics of spontaneous speech: it contains simple rather than complex clauses, frequent repetition and coordinated rather than subordinated sequences.

According to Chafe, one of the chief characteristics of written language is *integration*, which can be understood as the ‘tight organisation of devices that result from the deliberate planning of discourse’ (1985: 154). Unplanned spontaneous speech, on the other hand, is characterised by *fragmentation*; it tends to be produced in a ‘series of spurts’ that are best described as ‘idea units’ (1985: 106). Chafe defines the main properties of a prototypical ‘idea unit’ as follows:

- (1) It is spoken with a single coherent intonation contour, ending in what is perceived as a clause-final intonation;
- (2) it is preceded and followed by some kind of hesitation, ranging from a momentary break in timing to a filled or unfilled pause lasting several seconds;
- (3) it is a clause – that is, it contains one verb phrase along with whatever noun phrases, prepositional phrases, adverbs, and so on are appropriate; and
- (4) it is about seven words long and takes about two seconds to produce (Chafe 1985: 106).

---

<sup>1</sup> In French literature, one can find distinctions between *discours planifié* and *discours au fil de la pensée* (see Morel and Danon-Boileau 1997: 195).

To illustrate the fragmented character of spontaneous discourse, let us use an excerpt from the data, containing prototypical traits of unplanned speech such as pauses, hesitation, repetition and reformulation.

1.) (Conversation about a radio programme; Speaker: Thomas M25, R02)

*T: j'ai écouté un truc à la radio / c'était France Inter en plus (...) et donc il y a un gars qui parlait justement de ça / que la vie c'est / finalement la vie c'est ça\_ c'est un battement de cœur tu vois / c'est une pulsation / t'as un moment zéro / un / enfin t'as\_ c'est pas ça / c'est pas zéro – un / mais t'as un moment où c'est à (..) c'est lancé (.) et t'as un moment où c'est / c'est à vide quoi / et c'est la même chose partout.*

As we have seen, fragmentation of unplanned speech can also be described in terms of intonation. While the syntactic structure in written texts is clearly indicated by punctuation cues, in speech syntactic blocks and their relations can be signalled by cues such as intonation, pitch and pauses. According to Chafe, the analytical unit in a prosodic segmentation of unplanned speech is an 'intonation unit', i.e. a 'sequence of words combined under a single, coherent intonation contour, usually preceded by a pause' (cited in Miller and Weinert 1998: 79). The slashes in (1) above indicate the end of an intonation unit.

Spontaneous spoken discourse tends to be expressed in intermittent and segmented ways, especially compared to the canonical pattern in which written text is usually produced. For example, in speech, new ideas are often introduced as dislocated nominal constituents, often added as a tag situated on the right or on the left side of the clause (i.e. *right-dislocation* or *left-dislocation*), as in:

2.) *I can't stand him, that friend of yours*

3.) *That friend of yours, I simply can't stand him* (examples from Bache, 2000: 54)

As pointed out by Bache (2000: 54), nominal tags 'amplify the message and serve to ensure that the entity referred to by the pronoun is correctly identified by the hearer'. Languages that favour such nominal tags and dislocation are also called *topic-prominent* languages, since they have a tendency to encode topics in a prominent position at the

clause periphery. While English is not commonly considered as a topic-prominent language, nominal tags are nevertheless possible, as seen in (3) above. Topic-prominence and dislocation are discussed in more detail with regard to spoken French in Chapter 5.

#### b) Lexical aspects of spoken language

Spontaneous speech also exhibits some distinctive lexical traits. Halliday (1989: 72-86) explains that spoken discourse is characterised by ‘lexical sparsity’, also termed ‘low lexical density.’ This means that unplanned speech, in comparison to written discourse, tends to contain a lower amount of content words and a higher amount of function words per clause. The lexis of written language, on the other hand, tends to be more dense and integrated. Let us compare example (1) above with a sample of written text (both discussing the topic of heartbeat):

4.) *L'homme qui a éprouvé le battement de cœur que donne de loin le chapeau de satin blanc de ce qu'il aime, est tout étonné de la froideur où le laisse l'approche de la plus grande beauté du monde. Observant les transports des autres, il peut même avoir un mouvement de chagrin* (Stendhal: *De l'Amour*; 1833: 74).

As we can see, integration in written language involves incorporating more information into an idea unit. This means that written texts tend to use more complex, longer sentences that can accommodate more content words. This is measured by the number of content words compared to the number of clauses necessary for communicating a piece of information, which, as we can see if we compare (1) and (4), is not quite the same (i.e. 22 content words out of 96 total words in (1), as opposed to 24 content words out of 51 total words in (4)).

The lexis of spoken language has a slightly different quality also. For example, it contains a large amount of deixis (e.g. *de ça, c'est, c'est ça*, as seen in the spoken extract above), while written discourse favours nominalisation. In other words, speakers in a casual conversation discuss the situation here-and-now, and it is thus possible to use deictics referring to their immediate surroundings. In written language, on the other

hand, the receiver is not immediately present and using deixis would thus make little sense. Therefore the referents need to be clearly labelled, i.e. nominalised.

While the coherent and integrated character of the lexis of written language used to be correlated with literacy and consequently opposed to orality, modern linguistics considers spoken and written discourse simply as a different way of representing and communicating experience. For Halliday (1994: 65), the basic distinction lies in the fact that written language represents phenomena as if they were ‘products’, whereas spoken language represents them as if they were ‘processes’:

A written text is an object; so what is represented in writing tends to be given the form of an object. But when one talks, one is doing; so when one talks about something, one tends to say that it happened or was done.

As a result, spoken language tends to be more dynamic. However, as Halliday explains elsewhere (Halliday 1989), the development of modern technology has blurred the distinction between written language described as static and spoken language seen as dynamic. If we consider an online Internet chat, for example, we notice that the language used by its participants may resemble spoken rather than written discourse (it is produced in real time, it requires at least two speakers, etc.); yet it is *written*. Therefore, again, it may be more felicitous to think of spoken and written language as two poles of a continuum constituted of different media, genres and registers.

### c) Subjectivity and involvement in spoken language

Chafe (1982) notes that speech and writing differ along a further important dimension: detachment versus involvement. Let us briefly define how these terms are understood here:

‘Involvement’ of spoken language refers to the speaker’s potential in face-to-face encounters to monitor the effect of what he or she is saying and also to be more concerned with experiential details that identify personal involvement in what is being talked about; ‘Detachment’ refers to those structures used in written



language to make it available to a wider audience at different times and places.  
(Smith, 1994: 54).

The strategy of detachment and involvement are often reflected in the use of not only lexical but also functional devices. For example, with regard to spoken conversation, Chafe distinguishes three types of involvement: self-involvement of the speaker, interpersonal involvement between speaker and hearer, and involvement of the speaker with what is being talked about (Chafe 1985: 116). The speaker's involvement is observable mainly in a high frequency of pronominal references in the first person, relating to the speaker's own experience, as was the case in (1) where the speaker was recounting his own story (*j'ai écouté la radio*). Interpersonal involvement can be observed in the use of second-person pronouns referring to the hearer (e.g. *tu vois, t'as un moment*) as well as deixis, the use of which requires shared knowledge and thus involves the interlocutor (e.g. *c'est ça*).

The speaker's personal involvement with what is being said can be seen in his or her use of words with *evidential* and *epistemic* functions. There is a great deal of debate in the literature on what exactly these terms refer to and whether they should be considered as the same category; however, I lean towards Palmer (2001: 8), who defines evidential and epistemic systems as two types of propositional modality. According to him, the essential difference between these systems is that 'with epistemic modality speakers express their judgements about the factual status of the proposition whereas with evidential modality they indicate the evidence they have for its factual status'. Let us consider two typical examples of modality; example (5) below may be considered as marking the speaker's evidence, while example (6) merely marks the speaker's epistemic stance (examples were invented for the purpose of discussion):

5.) *j'ai entendu que Thomas venait aussi.*

6.) *je pense que Thomas viendra aussi.*

As we can see, evidentiality refers to both the source and the reliability of the speaker's knowledge, while epistemic stance marks the degree of speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition. By using words that serve evidential and epistemic functions,

and thus expressing modality, speakers actively participate in the construction of meaning in interaction and communicate their involvement in it.

#### d) Discourse markers

Spoken language is characterised by a frequent use of *discourse markers*. These expressions, very frequent in and typical of spontaneous speech, have a wide range of different functions, which include marking epistemic stance as well as turn-taking and the marking of structural relationships. In the Anglophone tradition, discourse markers are also commonly labelled as *pragmatic markers* or *pragmatic particles*. Hansen (1998b: 236) defines discourse markers as:

(...) linguistic items which fulfill a non-propositional, metadiscursive (primarily connective) function, and whose scope is inherently variable, such that it may comprise both sub-sentential and supra-sentential units. (...) Semantically, markers are best seen as processing instructions intended to aid the hearer in integrating the unit hosting the marker into a coherent mental representation of the unfolding discourse.

Discourse markers may serve as additional cues signalling links between chunks of syntax, as well as the speaker's subjective stance towards the utterance. This can be illustrated in one of the previous examples:

7.) *c'est un battement de cœur tu vois / c'est une pulsation / t'as un moment zéro / un / enfin t'as\_ c'est pas ça* (Thomas M25, R02)

Here, *tu vois* is a marker of inter-speaker solidarity used in order to involve the interlocutor in the construction of discourse meaning, while *enfin* acts as a hedge and a marker of reformulation. Hansen (2005: 155) also speaks of a 'repair' sense, in which *enfin* marks 'the discourse in its scope as constituting a corrective reformulation of some aspect of the previous discourse'.

The use of discourse markers is predominantly a feature of spoken rather than written discourse. The latter tends to focus on the communicative and referential character of the conveyed message rather than expressing metadiscursive functions. Furthermore, the fact that discourse markers often serve interpersonal functions makes them a feature typical of spoken interaction. In other words, speakers often use discourse markers to communicate their attitude to their interlocutor(s) and/or to create interpersonal involvement. Since in written media the interlocutor(s) may not be immediately present, the use of discourse markers is usually associated only with spontaneous speech.

#### e) Politeness

Another feature characteristic of spoken interaction is politeness. In communicating messages and negotiating meaning in interaction with their interlocutors, speakers adopt all sorts of strategies that are reflected in the language that they use. Important in this is the notion of speaker's *face*. This term was first introduced by Goffman (1967) and then further developed into notions such as 'negative face', 'positive face', 'face-saving strategies' or 'face-threatening acts'. With reference to politeness strategies, Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) define face as the 'public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself.' Accordingly, positive face is the desire to gain the approval of others, or the 'positive consistent self-image or "personality" (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants.' Negative face, on the other hand, is the 'basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction, – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61).

Similarly, Goffman (1967: 5) described face as a 'mask that changes depending on the audience and the social interaction'. By changing this 'mask', speakers alternate between their need to be socially desirable and approved of and the need to be unimpeded by others. These needs are usually reflected in language use and consequently every language has a system of 'politeness strategies' characterised by specific grammatical, lexical and functional features. In English, for example, it would be more desirable and socially acceptable to say *would you like* instead of *do you want*, or in French, it would be more polite to say *pourriez-vous faire cela* instead of *faites*

*cela* (at least in a more formal context). Any kind of social interaction involving communication is a risk to face, and therefore speakers must be aware of linguistic strategies appropriate for the type of interaction they engage in. Positive politeness, for instance, helps speakers attend to positive face needs of their interlocutors by seeking to create a feeling of solidarity through offers of friendship, compliments or informal language use. On the other hand, negative politeness may be understood as employing strategies of deference, indirectness, apologies or formal language, e.g. in types of interaction that can be potentially face-threatening. For a detailed discussion of politeness strategies, see Brown and Levinson (1987).

Politeness as a feature of spoken interaction is relevant to the present study. I do not consider politeness strategies in terms of appropriate social practices or behaviour; rather, I look at how certain features of spoken language directly or indirectly reflect politeness considerations and whether politeness strategies may play a role in the development of discourse markers with new pragmatic functions (e.g. hedging, approximation or indirectness). Therefore politeness as one of the major aspects of spoken language is included in this discussion.

### **1.1.3 Summary**

In the present section, I have outlined the principal aspects of spoken language that I consider to be most relevant to my research. In this outline, I focused only on selected syntactic and discourse features of spoken language, and especially on those that, as we will see, are also pertinent to the analysis of youth language.

In the discussion of spoken language, it was first necessary to define what was meant by the term and how it relates to the present research. I explained that my study was focused mainly on spontaneous and informal speech as can be heard in every-day interaction. I therefore examined the relevant literature concerned with the characteristics of spontaneous spoken language on three levels. First, at the level of syntax and discourse, speech was described as characterised by fragmentation, repetition, dislocated segments and simple rather than complex clauses. At the lexical

level, speech was described as dynamic and characterised by a lower lexical density than written discourse. Lastly, at the level of affect, several aspects were considered and described as relevant to the present research, especially those related to modality, subjectivity and involvement, as well as to the use of discourse markers and politeness strategies. All the above concepts are, in my opinion, relevant to spontaneous speech in general and may thus be considered universal features of spoken language.

I now turn to a more detailed description of spoken language, specifically focusing on French.

## **1.2 *Le français parlé***

### **1.2.1 Historical perspectives and current situation**

In order to comprehend the nature of spoken French, it is important, in my opinion, to briefly consider the history of attitudes towards spoken French and of approaches to its analysis.

In the French linguistic tradition, the stark opposition between spoken and written language has been a descriptive tendency verging on ideology. While written language has been taken as the basis of literature, culture, and education, with social status gained through and associated with education, spoken language inevitably fell short of the literacy ideal and so was considered inferior to the written word. As a result of this long-standing tradition, spontaneous speech and attitudes towards it were rarely studied, and spoken corpora almost non-existent. However, this was also the case in other countries, since spoken corpora in general were nonexistent until relatively recently.

Overall, spoken language as a field of research in France has been marginalised and characterised by a '*flottement terminologique*' (Gadet 2003: 153), a terminological 'hesitation,' most probably implying that spoken language was not an easy concept to define. Moreover, Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 2) observes that in the past, spoken

language was deemed '*vulgaire, fautive et populaire*', which can perhaps partly explain the historic lack of scientific interest in oral speech.

However informal spoken language should be distinguished from *le français populaire* (Gadet 1992, Guiraud 1965), a term used to refer to the variety of the lower socio-economic groups, especially those from the Paris region. As noted by Lodge (1993: 246), *le français populaire* used to be defined mainly 'in contradistinction to *le français cultivé*', and was commonly associated with *argot* vocabulary and colloquial grammar, which were considered lower class and hence stigmatised. *Le français cultivé*, on the other hand, was the language used by educated people who were attentive to the rules articulated by grammarians and strived to use the prestigious *cultivé* variety, synonymous with *français soutenu* and *soigné*.

In search of objective terminology, Gadet (1989) introduces the concept of *le français ordinaire*, defined as follows:

*Ce n'est bien sûr pas le français soutenu, ni recherché, ni littéraire, ni puriste. Mais ce n'est pas non plus (pas seulement) le français oral ou parlé, puisqu'il peut s'écrire. Pas davantage le français populaire, ramené à un ensemble social. C'est davantage le français familier, celui dont chacun est porteur dans son fonctionnement quotidien, dans le minimum de surveillance sociale: la langue de tous les jours* (1989: 3).

As seen from this definition, Gadet likens the concept of *le français ordinaire* with that of *le français familier* ('colloquial French'), a variety that is defined predominantly in terms of informal register. Yet as she argues, *le français ordinaire* and *familier* cannot be equated only with spoken language, since they 'can be written.'

It appears that the terminology associated with spoken French often relates to out-dated historical concepts (e.g. the Parisian underclass as opposed to the aristocracy; ordinary people as opposed to the educated *bourgeoisie*), which may have contributed to the marginalisation of spoken language as a field of research which, as such, did not begin to be investigated in France until the early 1960s.

As Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 1) points out, an important factor in the study of spoken language was the invention of the portable voice recorder. Although this invention can be traced back to the early 1930s, studies based on recordings of spoken French did not develop until a few decades later. Blanche-Benveniste further argues that this might be due to a general tendency to record and study only languages devoid of writing systems. It was thought that there was less need to record the so-called *langues de 'grande culture'* (i.e. languages with a well-developed culture and writing systems). It is noteworthy that an important step in the study of spoken French was taken by Sauvageot and Gougenheim who collected and published the texts of the *Français Fondamental* ('Basic French', see Gougenheim 1956) based mainly on a large-scale survey of spoken usage. However, it was not until the 1980s that larger corpora of recordings with transcriptions began to be collected and exploited more systematically. Modern technology allowed the storage of large quantities of both spoken and written data, which also contributed to changing the way the data were approached and analysed. Even though French spoken corpora did not reach the size of those of other European languages, they brought new insights into the way spoken language was considered. Specifically, as pointed out by Blanche-Benveniste (2006: 35), new fields of the study of spoken language were created which brought in 'new ways of considering lexical and grammatical units' as well as providing insights on how different types of speakers relate to their language or the way they access meaning during their talk. This may also have contributed to the fact that spoken language increasingly began to be seen as worthy of study and the prejudice previously attached to orality began to decrease.

Nowadays, research on spoken French is carried out within a large variety of theoretical perspectives. Perhaps the most important research group working on spoken language in France is DELIC (*Description Linguistique du Langage Informatisé sur Corpus*), formerly known as GARS (*Groupe Aixois de Recherche en Syntaxe*). Within this group, the work of Blanche-Benveniste has been crucial for the description of numerous complex phenomena of spoken language, such as detachment, relative clauses, subordination and tense usage (see, for example, Blanche-Benveniste 1983, 1990, 1997). In the field of French sociolinguistics, it is important to note the work of Françoise Gadet who has addressed issues related to notions of *français populaire*, *français ordinaire*, French youth language, as well as specific areas of spoken language

correlated with social factors influencing its uses (see, for example, Gadet 1989, 1992, 2003; Gadet and Conein 1998).

As far as corpora are concerned, perhaps the largest existing corpus of spoken French is the *Corpus d'Orléans*, developed between 1968 and 1971 by a Franco-British team and amounting to 300 hours of recordings or 4 500 000 words (see Blanc and Biggs 1971). A more recent corpus is the *Corpus de Référence du Français Parlé*, developed by the DELIC research group and gathered from 1998. This corpus of 440 000 words and 36 hours of speech forms the basis of analyses carried out by the DELIC group which are regularly published in the *Recherches sur le Français Parlé* journal published by the University of Aix-en-Provence. I will also mention two recent corpora of which I make use in this dissertation: the corpus of Kate Beeching, gathered between 1980 and 1990 and amounting to 158 800 words, and the *Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien* ('corpus of Parisian spoken French'), collected between 2007 and 2009 and comprising 337 600 words (see Beeching 1980-1990, Branca-Rosoff et al. 2007-2009). Both are publicly accessible and represent a valuable contribution to the study of contemporary spoken French, and both are relevant to my research.

### **1.2.2 La Norme**

No synchronic or diachronic description of spoken French would be complete without at least brief discussion of 'the norm'. Throughout history, the French language has been subject to a strong normative tradition reflected in many areas of life that are related to language (e.g. education and public administration). French grammarians establish norms of 'correct' language use in relation to grammar and spelling, namely by compiling dictionaries and reference grammars. Gadet (2003: 28) describes 'the norm' as a highly polysemous term. She distinguishes between two concepts: the objective (observable) norm and the subjective norm that she defines as a *système de valeurs historiquement situé* ('a historically situated system of values'). These are defined as follows (2003: 28):

*Dans le premier sens, lié à l'adjectif « normal », il renvoie à l'idée de fréquence ou de tendance, et il peut être utilisé au pluriel, au contraire du second sens,*



*reflété par les termes « normatif » ou « normé », conforme à l'usage valorisé (la Norme, qui a pu être dite fictive).*

And this distinction is described further:

*La norme subjective impose aux locuteurs une contrainte collective à laquelle ils adhèrent fortement, qui donne lieu à des jugements de valeurs constitutifs de leur attitude courante, quelle que soit leur propre façon de parler. Elle s'appuie sur la norme objective, et tout en mettant en avant des motivations linguistiques ou culturelles, sa raison d'être est sociale.*

In France, a great deal of importance is attached to the norm, most notably by education institutions and public administration. However there is a lot of debate on how the norm should be understood or whether indeed there are several norms. As we saw in Gadet's definition, the norm in contemporary French linguistics tends to be divided along the axes of what is observable and what is subjective. For instance, Houdebine (1993) argues that norms are multiple and they are established on several 'levels', as follows:

**Figure 1: Norm: uses and attitudes** (adapted from Houdebine, 1993)

<b>Speakers' use =&gt; Language</b>	<b>Speakers' attitudes =&gt; "linguistic imaginary"</b>
Functional norm	Prescriptive norm
Internal norms	External norms
Statistic / Systemic norms	Fictive / Prescriptive / Evaluative norms
<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>SUBJECTIVE</b>

Let us now briefly explain how Houdebine uses the above terms. First of all, on a most basic level, different speakers of a language co-construct a variant based on a

‘convergence’ of most frequent uses of a linguistic form<sup>2</sup>, which creates a homogenised ‘functional norm’. This norm reflects real uses of the language that Houdebine calls *le français convergent* (‘convergent French’) and describes as the standard variety. The process of standardisation gives rise to attitudes and views of an essentially metalinguistic nature; these attitudes are prescriptive and supported by public institutions and authorities as well as by public discourse (to mention just a few, we may cite education, public administration, media, literature, grammar books and dictionaries). Houdebine also speaks of the ‘internal norm’ (objective, i.e. based on objective descriptions of language use) and the ‘external norm’ (subjective, i.e. based on subjective views of language use from an external point of view). The internal norms are based on statistical observations of language use (presumably compiled by linguists), while the external norms reflect fictive (i.e. showing speakers’ imagined representations) and prescriptive (i.e. reflecting institutional efforts) attitudes.

Prescriptive norms have had a long tradition in France, especially since the seventeenth century when the *Académie française* was created. The *Académie française* assembly was officially established in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, and nowadays has the task of acting as an official authority on the French language, notably by deciding on matters relating to correct language use and publishing an official dictionary of French (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*). Although the recommendations of the French Academy have a great deal of weight (especially in dictionary and grammar making), they are not legally binding on either the public or the government.

Equally important in the discussion of prescriptive norms is the reference book *Le bon usage*. The *bon usage* was first a concept based on remarks on correct uses of the French language (*Remarques sur la langue française*, Vaugelas: 1647), then developed as a prescriptive reference book about French grammar first published in 1935 by Grevisse and periodically revised ever since. As Battye (1992: 24) observes, the *bon usage* was a rather nebulous concept historically, based on the language of certain elite groups that Vaugelas viewed as correct and refined, and therefore exemplary. From a diachronic point of view, the *bon usage* became highly influential in the shaping of the

---

<sup>2</sup> The forms of *français convergent* would perhaps overlap with those of Gadet’s *français ordinaire*; though unfortunately the author does not provide specific examples of these forms.

French language as well as in attitudes towards it, with prestige attached to the use of the *français cultivé*.

### 1.2.3 Language attitudes and linguistic insecurity

Closely related to the existence of subjective norms is the notion of linguistic *insecurity*. Ager (1999: 9) defines linguistic insecurity as a recognised phenomenon, usually found in ‘speakers of a dialect or language used by a social group of low prestige’ who feel ‘unsure whether the language forms they are using are ‘correct’.’ The idealisation of prestigious language forms thus gives rise to linguistic and social judgements, conveyed in speakers’ subjective attitudes towards the language spoken by themselves and others. Some scholars argue that these processes often provoke feelings of *culpabilité linguistique* (‘linguistic guilt’, see Lafont 1971, Houdebine 2003) when people are asked to comment on their language use and they do not consider themselves as speakers of the prestigious variety. Subjective norms, however, are often based on the myth of an ideal language form, and do not always reflect reality. As an illustrative example, let us mention Lefebvre (1984: 3) describing the normative attitude of some French-speaking Québécois whose search for prestigious language forms is based on a ‘myth of returning to the authentic common sources’ of the French language, often regardless of how people really speak in Québec. Linguistic insecurity and linguistic ‘guilt’ may be manifest not only at a geographical level, but also, as is often the case, at a social level.

Linguistic normativity and the importance attached to correctness and the *bon usage* often lead to *hypercorrection*, which Labov (2006: 318) describes as follows:

Hypercorrection is a term often used to refer to the familiar tendency of speakers to overshoot the mark in grammatical usage; in attempting to correct some non-standard forms, they apply the correction to other forms for which the rules they are using do not apply.

The practice of hypercorrection is often considered to be a manifestation of linguistic insecurity, specifically associated with social mobility and upwards socio-economic

aspirations (see Labov 1972, Trudgill 1984, Gadet 2003). This may be apparent especially in societies where the ideal of correctness is encouraged by authorities such as school and public administration; hence speakers are often self-conscious in the way they perceive their language use and seek to better it. In France, the norms of correct language use are transmitted through the education system in which especially the written norm plays a preponderant role. Thus every speaker with at least a basic education has the obligation to learn the norms of correct French, both written and spoken, regardless of his/her language background.

As a result of strict language policies and subjective attitudes about language, speakers may feel insecure and use ‘hypercorrect’ forms, especially through misunderstanding of prescriptive rules, often combined with a desire to seem formal and well educated. Some areas of spoken French tend to be particularly sensitive to hypercorrection. For example, speakers sometimes place *la liaison* or *le subjonctif* where these are infelicitous, as in (8) and (9), or use prepositions redundantly, as in (10):

8.) *Les inscrits et les non z inscrits* (from Gadet 2003: 46)

9.) *Voilà la façon dont nous pensons que la culture **doive** évoluer* (from Cohen 1961: 106)

10.) *C'est une petite ville où il ferait assez bon y vivre* (from Gadet 1992: 96)

Use of both *la liaison* and *le subjonctif* is seen as prestigious and is characteristic of formal spoken French. Their use is governed by complex grammatical and phonetic prescriptive rules which speakers may not always master; hence there is a high tendency to use these forms incorrectly. However, as Boyer (2003: 41) notes, such mistakes are not so much caused by the lack of knowledge, as by an ‘excess of zeal’:

*L’hypercorrection est une réalisation linguistique « fautive » mais dont le caractère « fautif » ne tient pas tant à l’ignorance de la règle qu’à un excès de zèle (...).*

To conclude, one must note that spoken French and attitudes towards it are inseparable from the history of the French language as a whole. In France spoken language has been marginalised and underrated in contrast with the written word, upon which were based

many areas of cultural, scholarly and public life. France has also been known for its normative and prescriptive linguistic traditions, maintained through official authorities and policy-making bodies. This normative / prescriptive tradition had a particular influence on subjective language attitudes on the part of the speakers themselves, some of whom express feelings of linguistic insecurity based on myths of a language ideal. This has contributed to the fact that spoken French as field of research, as we have seen, did not begin until relatively recently.

This discussion of the French language situation from a historical point of view is certainly not exhaustive, but it serves to situate the field of spoken French within a wider perspective. Let us now look at some important characteristics of spoken French in general.

### **1.3 Features of spoken French**

In French, as with other languages, spontaneous speech is characterised by specific lexical, syntactic and discourse features. In addition to the typically spoken features which I considered universal to all languages (see Section 1.1), here I am concerned with the characteristics of spontaneous informal speech specifically related to French. This discussion bears relevance to the following chapters, and will hopefully also contribute to a better understanding of French youth language situated within the field of spoken language in general.

#### **1.3.1 Syntactic devices**

The syntax of spoken language is distinctive, as we saw earlier. As a Romance language, French has some further syntactic devices that are almost exclusive to spontaneous speech. In fact, spoken French rarely follows the canonical patterns of word order found in the written language; instead, it is characterised by a number of syntactic phenomena that involve displacement of expressions or phrases beyond the boundaries of the clause, and consequent partitioning of discourse segments. These phenomena are illustrative of the unplanned nature of spontaneous speech, which is

produced as a string of fragmented chunks of syntax, easier for speakers to produce and listeners to process.

First of all, from a syntactic point of view, spoken French has the characteristics of a *topic-prominent* language (see section 1.1.2), i.e. a language that favours detachment phenomena (e.g. dislocation, clefting and presentational constructions) rather than the SVO (subject + verb + object) word order.

Lambrecht (2001b: 1050) defines dislocation as:

‘a sentence structure in which a referential constituent which could function as an argument or adjunct within a predicate-argument structure occurs instead outside the boundaries of the clause containing the predicate, either to its left (...) or to its right’.

Syntactic strategies such as dislocation make it easier for speakers to manipulate information blocks within the discourse. Among other things, they allow speakers to introduce the topic (left-dislocation), emphasise or clarify a piece of information after something has been said (right-dislocation), highlight different discourse constituents (clefting) or introduce new referents into the discourse (presentational constructions). Let us illustrate these phenomena with authentic examples from our data:

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| 11.) <i>le gars il est venu</i>                                    | (Nathan, M28, R01) |
| 12.) <i>je le course le mec</i>                                    | (Léa, F25, R01)    |
| 13.) <i>c'est jaune à la base donc c'est le safran qui fait ça</i> | (Chloé, M26, R04)  |
| 14.) <i>il y a une voiture qui s'est arrêté derrière moi</i>       | (Nathan, M28, R01) |

As can be seen from examples (11)–(14), all the syntactic strategies used here serve to manipulate the topical constituent in some way. In (11), the topic is announced first as a dislocated nominal, which is then dealt with in the subsequent clause. Conversely, in (12), the first clause deals with the referent in the form of a pronoun, but his existence is recalled in a dislocated nominal constituent placed at the end. In (13), special emphasis is placed on the referent (*safran*) in order for it to be correctly identified. And lastly, in

(14), an entirely new referent is introduced into the discourse with the aid of the presentational construction *il y a*.

Constructions such as those we have seen in (11)–(14) are very common in spoken French. Among all the types of syntactic detachment, left dislocation seems to be the most frequent, as well as the one displaying the most idiosyncrasies. For example, as noted by Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 67), studies of large spoken corpora show that left dislocation does not generally maintain the preposition that is expected from its construction as a complement, while right dislocation generally does:

15.) *Je fais confiance à ces femmes*

16.) *Je leur fais confiance, aux femmes*

17.)  $\emptyset$  *Ces femmes, je leur fais confiance* (Instead of: *A ces femmes, ...*)

The elements dislocated to the left are not case-marked but left as they are, without any prepositional dependence between the noun phrase and the resumptive pronoun. They illustrate a very particular relationship between topic and comment, introducing the topic as an independent element first, and indicating its grammatical relationship to the other arguments afterwards. This may also stem from the lack of planning time; it may simply be more natural and cognitively easier for the speaker to announce the topic first and deal with the syntax subsequently. As far as dislocation is concerned, both left and right types are usually considered to be typical of spontaneous spoken language; however, it is sometimes noted that left dislocation may also be used in written texts in order to produce a particularly ‘*recherché* rhetorical effect’ (Berrendonner and Reichler-Béguelin 1997: 202).

Another typically spoken phenomenon frequently noted in my data is a large amount of cleft constructions of various types. Lambrecht (2001a: 1) defines the main property of cleft constructions as the ‘expression of a single proposition via bi-clausal syntax,’ which is well illustrated by the following examples from my data:

18.) *c’est plutôt lui qui ne veut pas* (N06)

19.) *il y a mes parents qui arrivent la semaine prochaine* (N11)

Examples of clefting are very commonplace in spoken French. They can be formed using different matrix constructions (e.g. *c'est, il y a, tu as/vous avez*) whose semantic and interpersonal functions vary to some extent; some of them serve emphatic functions, others act as presentational devices. In order to be able to get a better understanding of these functions, one needs, amongst other things, to look at the linguistic context in which they occur, especially the previous sequences. These may help to establish whether the entity being referred to needs to be specified or emphasised, as in (18) above, or whether it is a new entity being introduced into the discourse, as in (19) and (20). According to Lambrecht (2001a), the former may also be understood as ‘specificational’ and the latter as ‘existential’ or ‘presentational.’ However, matrix constructions generally exhibit a great deal of functional overlap, i.e. they may serve different functions at the same time. For example, even an existential construction such as *il y a* can be used for specificational and emphatic purposes:

21.) *de toute façon il y a que moi qui suis intelligent* (Thomas, M/25, R03)

Presentational constructions such as those in (19) and (20) above serve important pragmatic functions at the level of discourse, and I have therefore decided to discuss them in greater detail in a separate chapter.

### 1.3.2 *Ne* deletion in negatives

The presence or absence of the negative form *ne* is possibly ‘the best known sociolinguistic variable in Contemporary French’ (Coveney 1996: 55). Many argue that deletion can be traced as far back as the seventeenth century, when it reflected mainly patterns of age and class differences (see Ayres-Bennett, 1994). Nowadays the absence of *ne*, however, seems to be a widespread and commonly accepted phenomenon; for example, Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 39) remarks that more than 90 per cent of negative clauses in her recorded conversations display an absence of *ne*, regardless of the speakers’ social status. She also observes that the absence of *ne* does not seem to be



stigmatised anymore and that it appears in fairly formal contexts too (e.g. political speeches), which is consistent with the findings of Armstrong and Smith (2002: 39) who observe that *ne* deletion is spreading to ‘highly monitored speech styles’ (e.g. serious radio discussions). This is also in line with Ashby (1981, 1991, 2001) who compared the phenomenon of *ne*-deletion across several decades and found that it was in decline even amongst groups hitherto considered ‘conservative’ (older speakers, intermediate and upper-class, female). Despite this decline, however, the realised variant *ne* is still said to carry some overt prestige and to be used by certain speakers, mainly for functional purposes such as emphasis, reinforcement and formality.

The overall decline of *ne* in French may be associated with a number of internal (linguistic) or external (social) factors. For example, the decline is said to occur more rapidly in contexts where deletion is favoured by the tendency to fuse clitic pronoun and verb form (especially frequent phrases with clitic pronouns such as *j'aime pas* or *c'est pas*), while unfavourable contexts are those which involve a full noun phrase (e.g. *les profs n'ont pas la loi*). For a detailed discussion of this question, see Armstrong and Smith (2002: 32-33).

External factors contributing to the decline of this form, as the same authors observe (*ibid.* p.39-40), may include the general ‘informalisation’ of speech linked to the socio-economic changes of the last decades, mainly social levelling and the increasing importance of youth as a social category and an influential consumer group.

*Ne* deletion has, as we can see, existed in French for a substantial period of time. Thus it can be argued that, sometimes, it is not so much the linguistic phenomena that change over the years, but rather the normative view of them. Since *ne* deletion appears to be particularly frequent in (and perhaps exclusive to) spoken language, it was important to mention it in this section.

### **1.3.3 Use of *on* vs. *nous***

Spoken French is characterised by a relatively high frequency of use of the informal pronoun variant *on* instead of the first-person *nous*. In order to see whether these

pronouns are interchangeable, one needs to distinguish between *on* used in the definite sense denoting a) the speaker along with someone else (e.g. *on va au cinéma*), b) other people present (e.g. *on se calme*) or in the indefinite sense, referring to people in general (e.g. *on dit pas ça*). While the use of *on* is natural in all these contexts, the use of *nous* would perhaps be pragmatically and semantically felicitous only in the first one (i.e. where the speaker is included among the referents). This is consistent with Fagyal et al. (2006: 206) who observe that:

Inclusion vs. exclusion of the hearer and others from the referential process together with the type of reference (definite/indefinite) have been identified as the main factors determining the use of *on* as equivalent of either *nous* ‘we’ or *tu* / *vous* ‘you’.

While the use of informal *on* was historically associated with working-class speech and stigmatised, nowadays such negative evaluations are said to have almost disappeared. According to many sources (Laberge and Sankoff 1980; Coveney 2000, Blanche-Benveniste 1997), the current generation almost categorically uses *on* instead of *nous* and this trend does not seem restricted to informal speech. In fact, as was the case with *ne* deletion, the use of *on* appears also in fairly formal contexts such as political speeches and public discourse. Many attempts have been made to explain this trend. For example, Coveney (2000) observes that the rise of *on* may be generally attributed to a simplification of verb paradigms in French, or as suggested by Leeman (1991), a tendency to hide behind ambiguous language in order to avoid taking responsibility for one’s actions (as one would have to do if the more explicit *nous* were used). Another motivation for preferring the *on* variant may be that it is simply shorter, and the conjugated verb is consequently shorter too. Thus the whole verb phrase may not only be cognitively easier to produce, but also easier to process. However, while *on* is amply preferred in informal spoken language, *nous* is still widely used in more formal speech styles, as well as in written genres (see Coveney 2000).

#### **1.3.4 Ellipsis**

Another frequent feature characteristic of spoken language is ellipsis. Ellipsis can be understood as the omission of one or several elements from the utterance without

affecting its meaning and interpretability. First of all, one needs to differentiate between *semantic* (also *contextual*) ellipsis and *grammatical* ellipsis; L’Huillier (1999: 35) defines semantic ellipsis as a ‘way of making the utterance shorter, but still understandable to the interlocutor’.

22.) *Tout droit!* (= *Il faut aller tout droit!*)

23.) *Autre chose ?* (= *Vous désirez autre chose ?*) (from L’Huillier 1999: 35)

On the other hand, grammatical ellipsis can be found in grammatical coordination and comparison, as in (24), or in ellipsed pronouns and prepositions, as in (25) and (26).

24.) *Robert est plus gentil que [qu’il ne l’était] l’année dernière*

25.) *Faut y aller maintenant* (= *Il faut y aller maintenant*)

26.) *Début septembre* (= *au début de septembre*)

While some types of ellipsis can be motivated phonetically, ellipsis of longer words or whole phrases suggests that it may also be a largely pragmatic phenomenon. It seems to be coherent with the general characteristics of spontaneous speech, especially with the need for uncomplicated sequences that are cognitively easier to process than more complex ones, as well as being shorter and thus produced more rapidly. This pragmatic feature is also reflected in a frequently attested phenomenon in spoken French: the reduction of prepositional phrases. In fact, as Danon-Boileau and Morel (1997: 193) observe, deletion very frequently occurs in prepositional phrases such as *du point de vue de*, *au niveau de*, *du côté de* or *dans le genre de*, *dans le style de* and *à la façon de* which reduce their form to the sole use of a noun and subsequently behave as prepositions. Although this seems to be a property typical of spoken French, it sometimes occurs also in written genres, including the journalistic register.

These ellipsed prepositional phrases can be divided into two groups: they comprise a) a noun that serves to frame and delimit a particular category that one is about to speak of (*point de vue*, *niveau*, *côté*) or b) a noun that serves to further qualify the described element (*genre*, *style*, *façon*). The following examples show that the sentence position

of these nouns tends to differ too: while the *framing* nouns are sentence-initial, the *qualifying* nouns are typically placed inside the utterance:

27.) *niveau DVD, j'ai tout ce qu'il faut* (N023)

28.) *côté jupes, je n'ai pas grand-chose* (N03)

29.) *des grosses entreprises façon ADF* (N035)

In spontaneous speech, prepositional phrases tend to drop their surrounding prepositions / articles and behave as prepositions themselves. However, what seems even more interesting is that some of these nouns have begun to acquire new pragmatic functions at the level of discourse, which I examine in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### 1.3.5 Sentence-final prepositions ('orphan prepositions')

Spoken French allows certain prepositions to be used without an immediately adjacent lexical element. They are defined as 'orphan prepositions' (Zribi-Hertz 1984) and mostly include locative prepositions (*contre, devant, entre, autour de*, etc.) and temporal prepositions (*avant, depuis, pendant, après*, etc.), as well as various others (*pour, avec, sans, selon*, etc.). They usually appear in topicalised structures with a left-detached nominal element, as in (30) (from Zribi-Hertz 1984: 13), but also in relative clauses, as in (31).

30.) *Cette valise, je voyage toujours avec*

31.) *le mec que t'es sortie avec* (N012)

Even though the French use of 'orphan prepositions' looks somewhat similar to the English use of prepositions (as in, for example, *the chap that you went out with*), this resemblance is only superficial. Roberge and Vinet (1984: 223) note that the English counterparts of the French orphan prepositions are ungrammatical. One cannot say, for example, *\*this suitcase, I always travel with*. Nevertheless, as one can see in example (31), relative clauses containing an orphan preposition together with the relative *que* seem to be an exception, as their equivalents in English are very common, though disliked by purists.

### 1.3.6 Summary

In this section, I have discussed features characteristic of spoken French that are directly or indirectly relevant to my own study. I have omitted features such as informal vocabulary and colloquial relative constructions typical of spoken language<sup>3</sup>. Spontaneous spoken French is characterised by a large number of distinctive phenomena and attempting to include all of them would be too ambitious; therefore, for the purpose of this thesis I have selected only four features characteristic of spoken French (the discourse marker *genre*, general extenders, the disjoint pronoun *moi* and presentational constructions). The rationale for their inclusion here is severalfold: a) with the exception of the literature reviewed in the relevant chapters, relatively little research has been devoted to the study of these features, b) they were frequent in my data, c) they are salient discourse or syntactic features that are typical of spoken French and do not (or rarely) occur in written French d) although all the selected features are characteristic of spoken French, some of them seem typical of, and more frequent in, youth language (especially *genre* and general extenders).

In this chapter I have reviewed a number of features that appear in spoken language generally, and then looked more in detail at the features considered specific to spoken French. I have also included, as background, a general overview of the linguistic situation in France as well as some widespread ideas and perceptions associated with the French language. Before analysing my own data based on the speech of young people, it is now important to look at youth language from a general point of view, and to review the literature that has addressed it.

---

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of informal spoken features, see Blanche-Benveniste (1990 and 2000), Blanche-Benveniste and JeanJean (1987), Gadet (1992, 2003).

## 1.4 Youth language as an aspect of spoken language

The main purpose of the present section is look at ways in which one can characterise the French spoken by young people, and to situate it within a more general framework of spoken language. My goal is also to describe the factors that make youth language a unique object of investigation for a linguist, and an authentic and imaginative source of language features for a learner of French. My research is concerned not so much with individual lexical features as with recent tendencies in the development of youth language at the level of syntax and discourse. However, lexical items used for discourse-pragmatic purposes form a substantial part of this analysis, and are thus necessarily involved in the discussion of relevant features.

Before I turn to the analysis of these features, it is relevant to look at how the social category of *youth* may be defined in general terms, and what linguistic features can be considered as characteristic of this social category. In addition, it is pertinent to look at French youth in particular and situate it within its own social and linguistic context, and explore how the term *langage des jeunes* is perceived in France, both from a linguistic and a lay point of view.

### 1.4.1 Understanding youth culture

#### *Youth as an age category, youth as an age of transition*

Youth has been a subject of particular interest in recent decades, not only among sociologists and linguists, but also among the media and the general public (for discussion, see France 2007, Bucholz 2003, Cohen 1999). Much of this interest seems to stem from the fact that youth has tended to represent dissociation from the generally accepted norms, increased expressivity (mostly seen in style of dress and lifestyle), subjectivity and individualism but also peer-group affiliation. Most of the literature concerned with the youth question claims that in recent decades, especially in the post-war period, youth began to be regarded as a distinct age category with its own interests and needs (see, for example, France 2007). However, questions arise as to how exactly youth should be defined and to what extent the stereotypes associated with it reflect

reality. Nilan and Feixa (2006: 01) collectively refer to ‘youth’ on a rather wide chronological scale:

[... The term comprises] young people of both sexes in the age range 12 to 35 (or even 10 to 30 in some countries). This age range indicates the extent to which the cultural age category of ‘youth’ has expanded to include some who are legally recognised elsewhere in society as children, and some who are legally recognised elsewhere in society as adults.

I feel sympathetic to this definition for several reasons. As will be noted throughout this study, it is difficult to draw specific age boundaries in relation to youth language and to the category of youth as a whole, mainly due to the social, behavioural and linguistic idiosyncrasies associated with the transition between child and adult age. Similarly, as sociologists tend to suggest, young people in the modern era are experiencing an increasingly prolonged transition between childhood and adulthood, and between education and work. The age range of youth should therefore be set quite broadly, since it largely depends on the socio-cultural context of the members described as well as on the individual.

In the early twentieth century, different branches of social science (including psychology, criminology and sociology) began to focus on the youth question and create models that reinforce the view that ‘youth is a state of transition between childhood and adulthood’, and ‘tends to be a troublesome and problematic period of the life course’ (France, 2007: 40). Youth research has since developed a great deal and attempted to look at youth problems from a different perspective, taking into account how they may be conceived and identified. Powerful alternative forces (such as feminism, gay pride and new forms of youth subcultures) have developed in order to challenge stereotypical understandings of youth and its roles in society. As France (2007: 23) observes, in modern ages youth has been perceived in a dual way:

As major social and economic changes have taken place, youth has been seen as both ‘dangerous’ and a ‘threat’ to the stability and maintenance of the status quo, but also as ‘vulnerable’ and in need of protection, especially from the ravages of modernity.

A great deal of literature dedicated to the youth question (Frith 1984; Nilan and Feixa 2006; France 2007) has described the migration of population from rural to urban environments as a major factor in the growing awareness of youth as a distinct age category and in the shaping of urban youth culture. The above authors note that aspects such as gender, class and, more recently, ethnicity have been important in the understanding of the youth question and are nowadays its inherent aspects.

Youth has generally been portrayed as vulnerable period of one's life, one that is particularly prone to difficulties. Especially in modern societies where the dynamics of social and cultural settings has been undergoing change, young people have been exposed to moral, economic and cultural uncertainties shaping their identity. In creating new alternative movements as well as new cultural and social activities, young people have become a creative and innovative force but also one that challenged traditional boundaries and engaged in risk-taking activities (e.g. consumption of drugs and alcohol, clubbing, criminal activities). In modern societies, new institutionalised structures have been created for addressing the problems of young people in general, and for channelling youth skills and efforts into appropriate life choices and respectable roles in society. These include not only education institutions, but also organisations deriving from youth justice and youth social services.

#### *Youth and a change in personal ties: peer groups*

It has been recognised in the literature that youth is usually characterised by an increased importance of peer culture. As explained by Sherif and Sherif (2008: 5), this movement towards age-mates during adolescence in modern societies is symptomatic of a 'general shift in psychological ties.' In other words, a young person's 'conception of himself is linked firmly with the domain of other adolescents, the ties with adults and children being proportionately less salient' (2008: 5). Peer groups often provide young people with a sense of belonging, power and security. Participation in these groups, often being a major factor in shaping a young person's values, can be based not only on common desires and activities, but also on common external traits characterising a person culturally and socially. Peer group activities can inhibit as well as initiate action in individuals belonging to these groups, which is reflected in their everyday behaviour.



As Nilan and Feixa (2006: 22) put it, ‘participation in youth cultures can no longer be characterised as a brief period of ‘gang’ or ‘peer group’ activity restricted to a certain limited period in the teens and early twenties’. Participation in youth culture practices in general may last markedly longer, and reflect themselves in particular behaviour and speech patterns that young people adopt. This is where the domain of youth peer groups may become of relevance for the present study. Acknowledging that youth is not merely a brief and insignificant period of life, I will argue that certain features of youth language are not just transient inventions, but may influence a given language in the long term. Young people, as a social and consumer group, tend to have a particular engagement in the choice of ‘products’ and ‘styles’, and the way speak may be one of the most important factors in defining their self. Borrowing the term adopted by Cheshire et al. (2008), young people often act as ‘linguistic innovators’ and their practices may sometimes lead to language change. In this process, peer groups play a significant role, especially in creating and spreading new language trends sometimes even beyond their own age group and geographical ‘territory’.

#### **1.4.2 French youth in its social context**

In France, youth as a distinct social category and an influential consumer group started to emerge after the Second World War. This period was generally associated with the emergence of *la nouvelle vague* ('new wave') - a generation carrying new aspirations and opportunities for change, renewal and rejuvenation. This period overall was marked by a general levelling of social classes as well as by an increase in geographical mobility. Youth as a distinct age group played both a symbolic and a productive role in social changes such as the upheavals of May 1968 or the economic growth of the *trente glorieuses*<sup>4</sup>, the student revolt of 1968 in France possibly being the biggest among the countries in Western Europe. As Armstrong and Smith (2002: 40) observe, these socio-demographic changes of the post-war decades were also closely associated with a general ‘informalisation’ of the French language.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Trente glorieuses* ('Thirty glorious' (years)) refers to the economic growth and modernisation of the post-war decades, especially in Western Europe and America, roughly between 1947 and 1974.

The French society of today has been characterised by a very mixed relationship with its youth. As Jobs (2007: 10) explains, the French youth have been conceptualised as a social group capable of provoking both the society's degeneration and regeneration. The emergence of youth subcultures that often rebelled against the widely accepted norms and traditional values accentuated the phenomenon of youth being viewed as a threat. For example, the arrival of new music genres such as rock'n'roll in the nineteen-sixties, or rap and techno later on, brought about a lot of anxieties on the part of older generations, concerned with the anti-social nature of the message that these genres conveyed and the life-style they were associated with. The youth subcultures have been changing with different historical periods, but their relationship with how the young are perceived in society is always relevant.

### *Problems of the French youth*

Overall, young people in France have been facing similar problems as young people in other developed countries. However, some recent sources show that there seems to be a general malaise among the French youth, which has aggravated in recent years. For example, a recent study carried out amongst young people in several European countries and in the USA revealed that the French youth were the most 'depressed' of all, and they were the last to see their future in 'bright colours' (Stellinger and Wintrebert 2008). Associated with this may be the sociological concerns related to certain extreme behavioural patterns of the French youth, especially risk taking, excessive drinking or the consumption of drugs and alcohol. With the emergence of youth subcultures, sociologists also point out an increasing penchant for the culture of 'partying' in which young people engage, and to the hazardous activities that this involves. By way of example, Dagnaud (2008) observes that an important fraction of the French youth considers partying and its continuous pursuit to be a way of life<sup>5</sup>. It is further noted in her work that young people, discomfited by the uncertainties and insecurities of today's world, seek solace in alternative sources and often turn to dangerous substances such as drugs and alcohol. In recent decades, the issue of excessive alcohol and drug

---

<sup>5</sup> Although the French term *faire la fête* (or in verlan *faire la teuf*) refers to the act of 'partying' in general, Dagnaud's work primarily concerns the environment of illegal rave parties in France and the youth subculture associated with this milieu (i.e. *les teufeurs*).

consumption among the French youth has been the subject of many debates in the media, but also among social scientists and policy-makers.

Another frequently mentioned problem of the young generations in France is unemployment. According to recent sources, France faces one of the highest rates of youth unemployment amongst European countries, i.e. 22.3 per cent.<sup>6</sup> One of the reasons may be the character of the French socio-economic system itself. For instance, Smith (2004: 188) suggests that the French employment system is inefficient and unfavourable for young people, partly ‘because the protection of *droits acquis* (‘acquired rights’)<sup>7</sup> has taken precedence over allowing young people to acquire those very rights’. The protectionist system thus favours and benefits older workers while the young people aspiring to jobs find it increasingly difficult to enter the labour market. As Smith further explains, French youth often oscillate between low-paid internships, short-term contracts and part-time temporary jobs that can rarely be translated into a real, permanent work experience. As far as higher education is concerned, universities are said to be very popular but heavily underfinanced, which affects the quality of some of them. Many graduates having finished their degree and sometimes even several degrees, are not able to find adequate jobs and become unemployed. Even in this respect, as Smith (2004) notes throughout his book, government attempts to change policies are rarely welcome, mainly due to the French protectionist tradition and fear of reforms. As an example, one may cite the 2006 upheavals after the French government’s attempt to introduce a new ‘youth’ contract called the *CPE* (*Contract première embauche* – ‘First Employment Contract’), designed to encourage the hiring of young workers<sup>8</sup>. This unsuccessful attempt further illustrated the paradox between the need for change and the fear of reforms. As a result of economic and social problems, it seems to have been increasingly difficult for young people to become fully integrated into the structure of a

---

<sup>6</sup> Source: EUROSTAT (2009): <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/09/109>; accessed on 04/06/2010

<sup>7</sup> *Droits acquis* (‘acquired rights’): set of rights, advantages and privileges given to workers on the basis of their occupational seniority. These rights are both financial and protection-related.

<sup>8</sup> The CPE contract was designed to encourage the hiring of young workers by authorising employers to dismiss new hires without having to show cause, but labour unions and student organisations fiercely opposed this plan. Widespread strikes and demonstrations lead to its cancellation (for discussion, see Kesselman et al. 2008: 166)

stable adult life, which according to Smith ‘does not begin in France until the age of thirty to thirty-five’ (2004: 63).

### *French youth from the banlieue*

The description of the youth question in France would be incomplete without considering one of its inherent aspects: the multicultural character of the French society. Since the Second World War, France was considered to be a *terre d’accueil* – a ‘receiving country’ that welcomed immigrants, especially from its former colonies such as Algeria and Morocco. However, in many respects, immigration has been seen as a rather sensitive issue in France, and avoided in public and political discourse. Grewal (2006: 50) also speaks of immigration in terms of France’s national identity:

Immigration has generally been excluded from France’s imagined national identity. Instead, France has seen itself as an old and static nation with the role of migrants seen only in terms of fulfilling economic needs, in part due to low birth rates in France compared to other European nations.

Recent developments show that the French model of assimilation has not been altogether successful since it failed to recognise the present-day multi-cultural and multi-ethnic character of the French society. As noted by Amara (2003), French immigrant youth are identified as being French citizens, but at the same time constantly reminded of their origins and often discriminated, for example, in the hiring process or in the allocation of housing. Even though France is a largely secular society and manifestations of religious and ethnic identity are banned from public space such as schools, the immigrant youth still feel like ‘foreigners’ (Amara, 2003: 19).

One of the most important factors contributing to the feeling of alienation is the exclusion of the immigrant populations in the *banlieue*. Historically speaking, *banlieue* denotes a ‘zone on the periphery’, but also – more figuratively in the French public discourse – a zone of immigration. The population living in town and city suburbs in France, the majority of whom are in fact young people, is of a largely immigrant origin. The *banlieue* as such thus tends to be associated with immigrants and socially excluded people, often also due to unattractive housing estates and a high crime rate. Balibar

(2007) believes that the problem of the endemic malaise of the French poor suburbs, and the according social exclusion of the youth, lies in the political contradictions of the French state itself:

France [...] thinks of itself as the country of universal values, where discrimination as such is unthinkable. While this double characteristic could ideally lead to the invention of a form of multiculturalism equal to the challenges of the contemporary world, to the contrary it generates remarkable blindness about its own history and social contradictions as well as an inability to question the founding myths of Jacobinism and state secularism (Balibar 2007: 52)

In the public and political discourse, the *banlieue* has usually been spoken of in negative terms and associated with dangerous social classes posing a threat to the society and social order (see Baudin and Genestier, 2002). This negative portrayal is said to be perpetuated also by the media discourse, in which it is frequently projected as a high-risk, male-dominated criminal zone. As observed by Lepoutre (2001: 105), the existence of mixed-gender groups are very rare in this space, especially because of intense social scrutiny and pressures on women to avoid spending time in public, mainly because of religious and cultural reasons (e.g. the value put on girls' sexual purity); hence the *banlieue* is considered as an environment in which young women tend to occupy only a peripheral place. Similarly, the French political and media rhetoric indirectly refers to the *banlieue* merely when invoking social problems associated with young men, but rarely when discussing positive events.

The relevance of the *banlieue* to youth culture and correspondingly also to youth language is manifest on several levels. First, in public representations the word *banlieue* often appears in connection with the phrase *jeunes de banlieue* ('suburban youth'), who are perhaps most distinctively characterised by a *langage de jeunes de banlieue* ('suburban youth language'). Interestingly, since there are both theoretical and empirical loopholes in characterising French youth language from a *general* perspective (rather than restricted to the suburban way of speech), the term *langage de jeunes* ('youth language') itself used by the French tends to connote the language spoken by the suburban youth. However simplistic it may be, this association with the *banlieue* tends to shape the ways in which youth language is perceived in France.

## 1.5 French youth language

In this section, I look at French youth language from several perspectives. Firstly, I consider it in terms of its representations in the media and among the general public, raising questions of whether these representations reflect reality. Secondly, I discuss youth language simply as an aspect of spontaneous spoken French, as widely described in the literature (e.g. Blanche-Benveniste 1990 and 1997, Coveney 1996). I then discuss the judicious or injudicious associations between youth language and the concept of *français populaire*, as defined by Gadet (1989, 1992 and 2003), and finally, I attempt to find reasons why youth language is commonly connoted with the suburban ways of speech.

### *French youth language as a media subject*

In the last few decades, there has been a growing media interest in youth language, with the informal vocabulary being given particular attention. Boyer (1994: 85) describes this phenomenon as ‘linguistic journalism’ which is, according to him, a cultural feature specific to the French context. In France, youth language is depicted not only in comic literature, small user-friendly dictionaries and in the daily press, but also in shows and television programmes (e.g. *les Guignols de l’info*). Most of these sources regard this variety as a *sociolect* ('social dialect') with its own distinctive features, originating mainly in suburban areas such as those that can be found around the French capital. The attitudes towards youth language also vary; some describe it as very rich, productive and inventive, others as poor and detrimental to the French language. Terms such as *langage des jeunes*, *parlers jeunes* or *la tchatche* are most often linked to notions of suburban youth language, regarded as a secret code and often further associated with disaffected youth living in low-status housing estates.

The connotations described above raise questions of why in French public representations, youth language is systematically linked to the language of the multi-ethnic youth living in the suburbs. In order to get a better understanding of these representations also fostered by the media, it is necessary to examine whether the suburban language can really be linguistically defined as vernacular with distinct and salient features, and whether it has such a significant impact on youth language

generally. The difficulty here is the fact that not all French young people live in suburban areas and come from multi-ethnic backgrounds and, similarly, not all the suburban multi-ethnic youth speak the way they are often portrayed. Therefore, the linguistic debate should move beyond public representations and look at youth language from a wider perspective, encompassing all aspects of it – not just those of the suburban ways of speech, as the case may well be. In doing this, it is important to look at what really is pertinent in the development of youth language in general, not just in the lexical, often arbitrary aspects of the speech of certain individuals and groups.

*Youth language: a working definition*

Young people and their communicative practices have continued to attract a lot of attention in research and in the linguistic literature generally (see, for example Calvet 1994, Goudailler 1997, Pagnier 2003 and 2004, Méla 1997, Doran 2004 and 2007, Séguin and Teillard 1996). From a scientific point of view, French youth language has been evoking dichotomous views; on one hand, it is seen as a source of linguistic innovation, and on the other, as a stigmatised and linguistically poor vernacular. Most scholars, however, agree on one point. Youth language (often labelled in the plural as *parlers jeunes* in French) should not be treated as something distinct, fixed and isolated. However, even though French youth language has increasingly become an object of study in recent decades, difficulties still exist in defining precisely what youth language is, and in finding a suitable theoretical framework for analysing it in the French context. Questions may arise, for instance, about whether this context is inherently specific to France, or whether it shares the same characteristics as the contexts in which youth languages occur in other countries.

Although the ways in which youth language is understood and defined vary in different cultures and contexts, it generally refers to:

(..) all patterns of language use in the social age of adolescence, encompassing all ranges of linguistic description as well as a variety of research questions and topics within sociolinguistics (Androutsopoulos 2005: 1496).

In this definition, as the author acknowledges, the scope of youth may be extended into post-adolescence, including speakers in their early twenties. It is noted that the period of youth is not merely a biological age but also a social institution that is specific to the modern era, conceived as a transition from childhood to adulthood. Since in modern societies this transition may be, as I have explained, increasingly prolonged, I would add that the definition of youth language, too, should not be restricted to a specific age of adolescence but instead should encompass a much broader age range, often stretching as far as mid- or late twenties. Moreover, in my opinion, youth language should not refer to the speech of a whole age group or a group delimited geographically. Rather, youth language should be understood as a way of speech defined on several – usually overlapping – levels, such as external (e.g. social, geographical, contextual) or internal (e.g. discourse, syntax, lexis).

#### *Youth language as an aspect of spoken language*

Youth language is first and foremost a type of spoken language, although in some cases it may include written and graphic representations (e.g. SMS, chat, graffiti). It is created and spread in peer groups, at school, in the street – in places that presuppose spoken interaction performed in groups and networks. It is therefore mostly oral, spontaneous and interactive. Involving primarily people of the same age group and occurring outside the institutional framework, it can be freed from the influence and restrictions imposed by authorities (e.g. parents, school) as well as from the prescriptive weight of the norm. Due to its highly heterogeneous character, youth language is often said to be changeable and short-lived, and to vary greatly across individual speakers and locations. However, certain frequent features do penetrate a given language in a more significant and long-lasting way.

In France, youth language has been described mostly in lexical terms (Girard and Kernel 1996, Goudaillier 1997, Merle 2006, Rey et al. 2007, Secova 2006). However, upon closer examination, it may be observed that lexical items represent only a partial – and perhaps the most ephemeral – element of youth language practices, and should not be regarded as the sole aspect of youth language. Spoken interaction provides a favourable ground for observing other than exclusively lexical language features.



Current developments in youth syntax, morphology and discourse, for example, show that changes can progressively occur at various levels, not solely at the level of vocabulary. Discourse-pragmatic motivations underlying language use (e.g. hedging, marking solidarity, indexing stance) may be considered as important factors in explaining certain youth language features, often parallel to those developed in other languages. With reference to British English, for example, we can mention Stenström et al. (2002) who focus on the language of young people from London and whose sample was collected as part of the Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT). This study examines not only youth vocabulary, but also pragmatic and discourse phenomena such as the use of hedging, intensifying, reported speech and discourse markers. As far as discourse phenomena are concerned, we can also mention Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou (2003) who examine issues of youth identity through different types of discourse practices (e.g. narratives, teasing, use of nicknames) across different languages, or Cheshire et al. (2008) focusing on the influence of ethnicity, friendship networks and social practices on dialect change and innovation in London. All these studies show that the analysis of youth language cannot be limited to the study of vocabulary or slang.

However, in the French tradition, youth language has rarely been described from a discourse-pragmatic point of view, simply as a type of spontaneous spoken language. And it is precisely at the level of discourse that certain innovative features develop and spread. For example, it is often in the pragmatic domain of spoken discourse that speakers use strategies like hedging, indexing inter-group solidarity, marking epistemic stance, or positive or negative politeness. And these strategies are achieved predominantly through the use of specific linguistic features, whether they be grammatical, syntactic or lexical. It is mainly for this reason that, in my opinion, youth language should be understood essentially as a type of spoken language, as extensively described by Blanche-Benveniste (1990, 1997). Moreover, the main youth language features relevant to this dissertation can be found almost exclusively in speech – and if they do exist in writing, it is in order to reflect spoken context or because they originate in such a context (we can cite examples of written fiction using authentic youth language, such as Queneau's *Zazie dans le métro* (1959) or Despentès's *Mordre au travers* (1999)).

In view of the above observations, youth language, like all types of informal spoken language, contains features such as dislocations, clefting, fragmented syntax, ellipted phrases or discourse markers. What is of more interest here, however, is the way speakers exploit these features for discourse-pragmatic purposes, and whether these features may be considered innovative and leave a long-term imprint on the language. As I will attempt to show in Chapters 3 – 6, some of these features seem constrained to spoken contexts and thus may be viewed as a particular type of spontaneous spoken French – that is spoken by young people.

### *Youth language and 'français populaire'*

One may argue that youth language displays numerous characteristics of *français populaire*. Historically, the term *le français populaire* (see section 1.2.1) can be traced back to the time when the French society was more socially divided; it was then used to refer to the language of the lower classes (common people) as opposed to that of the upper class (bourgeoisie, aristocracy and intellectuals). The ideology associated with the use of this term became deeply ingrained in linguistic representations both among scholars and the general public, obviously attaching overt prestige to the language of the upper class (whose language reflected literary or written language) and stigmatising the language of the 'common people' (derogatorily labelled also as *bas-langage* or *langue du peuple*). Yet if we look at what used to be defined as features of *français populaire* (see, for example, Guiraud 1965, Gadet 1992), we will note striking similarities with what present-day French linguists may simply describe as *spoken language*. Abecassis (2003: 3) summarises the features of *français populaire* as follows (shortened for current purposes):

#### Phonetic features:

- stress on the penultimate syllable
- elision of *il y a* into *y'a* (e.g. *y'a pas de mal*)
- schwa-deletions (e.g. *t'as des beaux yeux, tu sais*)
- higher rate of non-realisation of variable liaison (e.g. *je vais à Paris*)
- hypercorrect liaisons (e.g. *moi-z-aussi*)

#### Syntactic features

- questions by intonation (e.g. *tu m'appelles Marcel ?*)

- questions with *ti* (e.g. *c'est-ti drôle?*)
- deletion of *ne* (e.g. *je sais pas pourquoi*)
- higher use of *ça* for *cela* (e.g. *ça se trouve en Australie*)
- non-realisation of *il* in *il faut* (e.g. *faut pas pleurer mon vieux*)
- neutralisation of the relative subject *qui* -> *que* (e.g. *c'est le lapin qu'a un drôle de goût*)
- omnifunctional use of *que* (« relative defective ») (e.g. *l'homme que je t'en parle de lui*)
- use of *on* rather than *nous* (e.g. *on va au ciné*)

#### Discourse features

- left dislocations of the subject (e.g. *la femme, elle a de beaux yeux*)
- right dislocations of the object (e.g. *elle les a mangés, les fraises*)
- cleft constructions (e.g. *c'est lui qui est parti*)
- higher rate of existentials (e.g. *il y a quelque chose qui me chiffonne*)
- higher rate of interjections and discourse markers (e.g. *ben, euh, quoi*)
- use of the indicative for the subjunctive (e.g. *je veux le voir avant qu'il ne part*)

#### Lexical features

- higher rate of non-standard vocabulary and colloquial idioms
- use of metaphors and similes
- statistically higher rate of function words (*mots-outils* = function words)

#### Pragmatic features

- certain social distinctions in the use of address forms (*vous* et *tu*) and honorifics, in certain tense uses, and in the use of formal vs. informal vocabulary

The above features, traditionally attributed to *français populaire*, nowadays clearly overlap with everyday spoken French and seem even more frequent in informal youth language. Most of them are no longer stigmatised as working-class features, even though they are still regarded as colloquial compared to those characteristic of formal written language. To a large extent this reflects the impact of societal changes in France, especially dialect levelling and a general informalisation of the French language in the post-war period. Although class differences exist, they are reflected in the language to a lesser extent than they were in the past (see Rickard 1989, chapter 7). The notion of

*français populaire* seems to have lost some of its meaning; in modern literature and especially in the dictionaries, terms like *familier* are now preferred to *populaire*, even though the latter is still used in the linguistic vocabulary. The question of youth language and its relationship with *français populaire* is also raised by Gadet and Conein (1998) who argue that:

*Sauf pour quelques traits saillants, il n'y a donc pas de "langue populaire des jeunes" : ce qui est en cause n'est pas massivement une question de langue, mais des modalités d'interaction. Il est donc indispensable de pratiquer davantage d'enquêtes d'envergure (sans négliger les différences géographiques) réunissant des corpus saisis dans des situations d'interactions réelles.*

There is a range of social contexts in which new, creative uses of youth language features seem to be manifested and subsequently spread across groups and networks. These uses may perhaps be considered *populaire*, but in a *diaphasic* (stylistic) rather than *diastratic* (social) sense. Youth language may be more of a stylistic choice, more or less conscious but also heavily influenced by external forces (e.g. role models or peers) and by the situation (e.g. informal context). Youth language may also be governed by a desire to deviate from the norms; it may therefore naturally contain colloquial rather than formal, literary features.

Despite the above considerations, I will avoid definitions of youth language based on traditional notions of *langue populaire* which, in my view, still connote the existence of 'ordinary' people as opposed to the upper class. In my opinion, youth language can be defined as a set of the most prevalent language features that have been able to survive their ephemeral phase as linguistic 'inventions' and spread to the repertoire of a larger number of young speakers. As mentioned above, these features will pertain not only to vocabulary, but also to syntax and discourse.

#### *Youth language and the banlieue*

Another French tradition is to associate youth language with the *banlieues*; the latter are felt to be not only the cradle of linguistic innovation but also a space where youth language itself originates. It is often argued that in an environment with a high density

of ethnically, culturally and linguistically mixed populations, unconventional linguistic practices are likely to innovate and develop. This view is also reinforced by the French state policies and language ideologies that have tended to promote the idea of 'Frenchness' based on the same linguistic, ethnic and cultural identity for all. The failure to recognise and integrate the diversity of French multi-ethnic populations has, as mentioned previously, led to the exclusion of certain parts of this population, which in turn caused a 'linguistic exclusion' characterised by a *fracture linguistique* (see Calvet 1999 and Goudaillier 1997). This 'linguistic fracture' is usually explained as a gap between the language of school (*language de l'école*) and that of life in general (*langue de la vie*). But this gap also transcends the school level and touches mainly upon the life of immigrants who are socially, culturally and linguistically excluded. The language spoken by young people from the *banlieues* therefore evokes controversial attitudes. For example, some linguists (Calvet 1994, Goudaillier 1997, Boyer 1997) point out a growing illiteracy in schools in the so-called ZEP<sup>9</sup> and indeed, a growing gap between the actual language spoken every day and the one that they learn at school. It is sometimes believed that the 'street vernacular' prevents young people from becoming fully integrated into the society (e.g. finding work and advancing in their career). Teachers from the *banlieue* tend to argue that the illiteracy issue should not be dissociated from the social exclusion and the difficulties faced by most disadvantaged communities. Begag (2000), for instance, discovers serious problems of eloquence and language mastery which result in a further stigmatisation of people from disadvantaged communities, who as it is face a great deal of prejudice because of their origin, language and social position. Begag also reflects upon the impact of the peer-group influence on these individuals, who are placed in a difficult position having to choose either to follow the peer group or to consider their own professional future as individuals (which admittedly would require the acceptance of the commonly established values of the French society as well as its standard language). The author explains that dilemmas of this type pose difficulties to many pupils who are heavily reliant on the attitudes and values of the peer group, and consequently find themselves unable to interact socially, especially in formal situations where the use of polite and standard language is required.

---

<sup>9</sup> ZEP – *Zone d'Éducation Prioritaire* ('Zone of Priority Education'): French 1982 educational scheme that channels additional resources to schools in disadvantaged areas and encourages the development of new teaching projects

Thus it is often believed that the *banlieue* way of speech has a negative impact on some individuals in making them ‘push back’ their own ambitions to the profit of the group identity, strengthening their cohesion as a group but failing to open up a path towards the rest of the French society.

Despite the above observations, it may be argued that even socially marginalised children and young people from the ZEP areas are actually capable of adapting their language to the appropriate context and speak ‘correctly’ where it is required (e.g. in schools and public places). Or rather, they can be taught how to do so. Some recent ethnographic studies carried out in the *banlieue* (see Lepoutre 2001, Séguin and Teillard, 1996) argue that an alternative, proactive approach to the youth question can not only produce a great deal of scientifically valuable data, but also help young people from the *banlieue* to see, reflect on and analyse the way they behave and speak. These young people often acknowledge the informal and unconventional character of their way of speech; however, this way of speech seems to serve a certain number of purposes that can only be explained in terms of belonging and a complex multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identity (see Doran 2004 and 2007). An illustrative example of such a nonconformist language practice can be found in a language game called *verlan*, used predominantly by young people living in the *banlieue* and also, but perhaps to a lesser extent, by French youth in general. This language practice is mostly lexical and consists in inverting the syllables of a word (mainly nouns but also verbs, adjectives, verbs and pronouns), as in:

- 32.) *femme* -> *meu-ffa* -> (shortened as) *meuf* (‘girl’)
- 33.) *flic* -> *keu-fli* -> (shortened as) *keuf* (‘policeman’)
- 34.) *comme ça* -> *comme aç* (‘like that’)

Doran (2004) sees *verlan* as a language practice prevailing in suburban Paris. She describes its users mostly as young people of diverse origins (North Africa, West Africa, Portugal, Asia, and the Caribbean) and argues that ‘*verlan* can be viewed as an alternative code which stands both literally and figuratively outside the hegemonic norms of Parisian culture and language’ (2004: 94). In this context, *verlan* is seen as a practice closely tied to various aspects of youth identity, such as ethnicity, class, cultural as well as peer values. As far as vocabulary is concerned, *verlan* is one of the

most salient elements of the *banlieue* way of speech, alongside lexical borrowings from immigrant languages such as Arabic, Wolof or Romani. The heterogeneous and mostly cryptic lexical character of the *banlieue* language probably contributes to its mystification and frequent publicisation. But questions arise whether this lexical side of the *banlieue* language (a word which also connotes youth language in general) is really what constitutes youth language and makes it a valid, analysable concept.

Jamin (2005) discusses reasons underlying the spread of the *banlieue* language beyond its social and geographical boundaries, especially outside the less well-off suburbs. Interestingly, some aspect of the *banlieue* language (especially *verlan*) seem to have ‘caught up’ also among young people from middle-class backgrounds. Although the extent of this spread has never been thoroughly investigated, factors such as the success of rap music and an increase in geographical mobility may be considered influential. In addition, the extensive media coverage of the *banlieue* question (often through portrayals of language) is another factor contributing to the shaping of different types of public representations. However, the media image associated with the *banlieue*, as I have explained, is usually negative and stigmatising. Tetreault (2010: 75), for instance, points out that ‘any reference to a *cité*<sup>10</sup> connotes a few, infamous low-income housing projects that the media has repeatedly represented in tandem with crime, drugs, and immigration, often positing immigration as the cause of the former two problems’ (see also Bonnafous 1991). In her extensive work concerned with suburban communicative practices, Tetreault (2002, 2009, 2010) observes that both academic research and journalistic publications identify an emergent, youthful *cité* identity with attendant dress, music and speech styles; these individuals being depicted mostly as ‘overwhelmingly male, non-white, that is, generally Arab or Black, and violent’ (2009: 69). Accordingly, the language of the *banlieue* (attributed mostly to young men, seen as the main users of this ‘language’) tends to be limited to a few derogatory, mostly lexical items circulating and originating in the suburban areas (see, for example, Pagnier 2003).

As is apparent from the above discussion, the *langage de la banlieue* is, for the most part, a sociologically identified concept. When it is subject to linguistic description, it tends to be reduced to vocabulary and phonological traits often identified as ‘accent’.

---

<sup>10</sup> *Cité*: (f) (‘housing estate’)

However, such descriptions fail to demonstrate what the *banlieue* language exactly consist of linguistically, and how it fits into a larger picture of youth language in France. It seems that there is a need to approach youth language in a more comprehensive way; linguistic descriptions should be carried out in a multilevel but convergent fashion, that is, they should include different research areas such as syntax, lexis, phonology and discourse, and should not privilege the study of youth lexis as the sole salient aspect of youth language. The impact of the *banlieue* as a cradle of linguistic innovation should be studied from a broader perspective; one should move beyond simplistic and reductionist descriptions of the vocabulary, but rather, discover how the *banlieue* language contributes to youth language on a long-term basis and whether it spreads outside the *banlieue*. If linguistic traits spread, as may well be the case, it is necessary to determine, again, in which domains (phonology, syntax, discourse) this happens, lexis often being the most unstable aspect of linguistic innovation. In addition, youth language cannot be described as a sole prerogative of young men; instead, the different communicative practices should be studied in their context and such contexts vary enormously. As Tetreault (2002, 2009, 2010) has widely demonstrated, young women are often present in this space and exploit different discursive strategies as much as men. Thus a description of youth language should encompass the whole spectrum of youth identity and should not be limited to some contexts only (e.g. male-dominant or suburban).

Attempting to embrace the whole spectrum of youth language may certainly be an ambitious approach, but one that would provide a better understanding of language issues of a wider linguistic relevance. For example, while youth language frequently displays the effects of age-grading, it can also be seen as a domain where language change originates and develops (see Stenström 2002, Androutsopoulos 2005 and Thöle 2007). The latter case is well described as follows:

Although not all innovations of everyday speech do eventually become the norm of standard speech, the reverse is true: Practically all norms of standard speech did at one time in history begin as deviative innovations (Thöle 2007: 3).

Scholars thus tend to agree that adolescence and youth is a period of life where change and innovation is the most clearly visible. These innovations leading to change,



however, concern a much larger scope of language – one that is not limited to the lexis; innovative uses often bring about new pragmatic strategies at the level of syntax and discourse also. Therefore, in this dissertation I hope to go beyond lexical representations and explore in greater detail what discourse features constitute youth language, and whether they may be likely to survive over time.

## 1.6 Conclusion

The main goal of the present chapter was to examine the principal aspects of spontaneous spoken language in general, and then to look more closely at informal spoken French and French youth language. To this end, I reviewed the pertinent literature concerned with the syntactic, pragmatic and affective aspects of spoken language that may be considered universal. I addressed the characteristics of spoken language that bear relevance also to other chapters of this dissertation; these were mainly related to spoken fragmentation, politeness and the use of discourse markers. The description of spoken language provided a framework in which I could situate and analyse the speech of young people; within this framework, I attempted to shed light on what is cross-culturally understood by the term ‘youth language’, before focusing precisely on how youth language is perceived in France. In addition to examining the ways in which the media and public discourses shape the overall stereotypes and representations associated with youth language in France, I looked at the interrelationship of youth language and the notions of *français populaire* and *langage de la banlieue*. In a larger sense, however, I defined youth language mainly as an aspect of spoken language, attempting to avoid reductionistic descriptions of youth language as a type of male-dominated suburban vernacular or as a type of cryptic lexical slang. As will be shown throughout this dissertation, interesting aspects of youth language are often based on complex pragmatic and affective discourse strategies, which are usually expressed through functional rather than lexical language features.

## Chapter 2 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to review the methodology followed in my study, as well as to assess the reliability and the validity of the results produced by the methods used. To achieve this, I begin this chapter by setting out the main goals of the study and reviewing the research design in accordance with the research questions posed at the outset. This is followed by a detailed outline of the methods that were used for the study, focussing mainly on the following topics:

- a) choice of sample, including a description of the participants and location.
- b) fieldwork-related issues, including the ‘observer’s paradox’, ethical considerations, methodological and practical constraints faced during the fieldwork process.
- c) technical aspects of data collection, i.e. an overview of how the data is collected, transcribed, stored and encoded.

Finally, I outline the approaches used to analyse the data and summarise the criteria upon which I based the selection of features to analyse.

### 2.1 Goals of the study and research design

The main objective of this dissertation is to investigate some discourse features of contemporary spoken French, and especially those typical of youth language. The research project has two main parts, each using two different methodological procedures.

In the first part, I focus on the analysis of some spoken features that emerged as salient in my corpus of recorded data, especially those which have pragmatic functions at the level of discourse. What is meant here by ‘discourse features’ includes spoken forms such as discourse markers, general extenders, quotatives, presentationals and dislocated structures, all of which seem to have little lexical content but important functional roles in spoken language. In this part, I also address the question of how some of these

typically spoken features (especially the discourse marker *genre* and general extenders) seem to be developing in French youth language.

In the second part of the dissertation, I focus more generally on the role of spoken language in foreign language teaching and learning. This part is based on a questionnaire for learners of French designed to find out what knowledge they have of spoken French. Thus it addresses the question of whether features of spoken language generally, and of youth language in particular, are available to foreign learners.

With a research project such as mine, a mixed research design was required that would, on the one hand, allow me to investigate current discourse features typical of spoken French and, on the other hand, place my analyses within the perspective of foreign language learning. A multi-level approach was thus needed. In each part of the study, this approach consisted mainly of qualitative methods of collecting and analysing the data, which were supplemented by quantitative methods of analysis if the data warranted it. It was believed that such a combination of methods would be best suited for this type of project, and thus best allow me to tease out answers to the research questions posed at the outset.

Although ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ were long seen as mutually exclusive direct opposites, this dichotomy is nowadays much less rigid, and simultaneous use of mixed methodologies and approaches is no longer seen as impossible (for discussion, see Dörnyei 2007, Angouri 2010). In fact, much literature has recently focused on the benefits of such mixed approaches, and argued that the use of combined methods is a suitable way of combining the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches while overcoming their possible shortcomings. It also permits the researcher to obtain varied data. The benefits of mixed methods are perhaps best resumed as follows:

Whether combining or integrating quantitative/qualitative elements, mixed methods designs arguably contribute to a better understanding of the various phenomena under investigation; while quantitative research is useful towards generalising research findings, qualitative approaches are particularly valuable in providing in-depth, rich data (Angouri 2010: 33).

The methodology used for the second part of the study (i.e. a questionnaire) is examined separately in the relevant methodology section (Section 8.4), since it uses different techniques to collect the data as well as a different framework for its analysis. I now turn to the first part of the project, focusing on spoken language and youth language in a native-speaker context; in the next section, I look in more detail at the methodology developed specifically for this part of the project.

## **2.2 Data collection: native speaker data**

This section provides an overview of the principal methods adopted for collecting the data, and of the methodological considerations faced at this stage of the project.

### *Sample: Participants and location*

Let us recall that the object of my study is to explore pragmatic aspects of spoken language, and especially aspects typical of the type of language spoken by young people. Therefore, in order to obtain authentic and spontaneous spoken data for this purpose, it was necessary to adopt methods that would allow me to capture natural language use, i.e. methods that would reflect typical, every-day conversation routines as closely as possible. In order to achieve this, it was considered sensible to select participants from an already known source rather than randomly, since it was important to get to know them within a short period of time in order to build a trusting working relationship, albeit a very informal one. Thus I used my existing network of contacts, and extended it through the so-called ‘friend of a friend’ approach, often used in sociolinguistic research (see Milroy 1980: 47). In this particular case, the network was constructed through friends and personal acquaintances of mine; I presented the project to them personally and arranged to meet them and organise a ‘recording session’ in an informal, casual environment. This phase of preparation (extending the network, contacting participants, organising and ‘setting up’ recording sessions) and the actual fieldwork phase lasted approximately 18 months.

The recorded data was supplemented using observation methods. The phase of observation and notebook collection, carried out in parallel to the recording phase, lasted 24 months and consisted of observing the spontaneous use of language in a native-speaker context and of noting down interesting and relevant utterances verbatim.

The network consisted of 14 native speakers of French (8 females and 6 males; see Table 2.1 below) whose conversations were recorded. The notebook collection included a further 20 participants whose language was observed. I sought to maintain a balanced sample, and therefore observed roughly the same number of male and female speakers. I felt that the geographical provenance of speakers (within France) should be as varied as possible, and therefore the sample was not restricted to speakers from any particular place or origin (for speakers' residence, see Table 2.1 below). It is commonly known that in developing a spoken corpus, it is usually required to design a sample that would be representative of the population one aims to describe. The notion of representativeness was included among the principles of 'good practice' in developing a language corpus (see Sinclair 2005), suggesting that a corpus should be as 'representative as possible of the language from which it is chosen'. This requirement is important especially if the objective of the researchers is to use the corpus for quantitative purposes and to draw general conclusions about the language used in a particular context.

Due to the small size of my corpus, aiming for representativeness and generalisability may, in my case, be slightly difficult. However, despite the impossibility of drawing general conclusions about the language use of *all* young speakers in France, I do feel that some very frequent discourse patterns are still observable in the speech of even a small number of individuals. Secondly, although, as mentioned earlier, I used both quantitative and qualitative approaches, my principal aim was to carry out a *qualitative* analysis of such patterns, rather than draw general conclusions based on quantitative results. The latter would certainly require a much larger amount of data, which might not even have been possible to gather in a PhD project of three years. Thus I believe that even my relatively small sample is large enough to serve as ground for observing some widespread discourse features of spoken French.

In the sample design, one of the selection criteria was the *age* of the participants. However, age cannot be strictly delimited, as it is almost impossible to determine at what age a speaker stops using language features typical of youth generations and what factors influence the transition from ‘youth’ language to adult language. Therefore, I decided to focus mostly on speakers of university age. This choice was partly influenced by the goal of the project, which was to examine spoken language and youth language in relation to language learning and teaching. I assume that a large proportion of foreign learners are at school or university, and that the age group they are most likely to meet among French native speakers are their peers. Therefore, in more general terms, I chose the age group of *early adulthood* (see Eckert 1997: 159), set broadly between 18 and 30 years old. I believe that speakers at this age are perhaps less influenced by the, often arbitrary, linguistic fashions of adolescent years, but still use certain features characteristic of ‘youth language’ to a relatively large extent, especially those discourse and syntactic features that have primarily pragmatic functions.

The second selection criterion was *nationality*. Since the aim of my study was to focus on the language use of French young people, the participants had to be native speakers of French. If any of the natural friendship groups turned out to include non-native speakers they were still recorded, but their speech was not analysed. No other specific selection criteria were used. Due to the size of the sample, further sociolinguistic variables such as social class and ethnicity were not considered relevant to the context and goals of my study, since it was felt that these factors did not have an extensive influence on the pragmatic features analysed in this thesis. In fact, it turned out that the speakers had relatively similar socio-economic background (working-class / middle class) and were of the same ethnicity (white).

**Table 2.1 Distribution of recorded participants**

Name	Sex	Age	Highest level of education	Employment	Current residence	Approximate recorded time (min)
Emma	F	27	B + 5 (F)	Civil servant	Paris	200
Léa	F	25	(unknown)	Waitress	Paris	180
Aurélié	F	28	B + 5 (F)	Secretary	Paris	20
Joëlle	F	28	B + 3 (U)	Fine arts student	Nantes	30
Carole	F	24	B + 3 (U)	Apprentice	Nantes	30
Katy	F	26	B + 5 (F)	Administrative assistant	Strasbourg	40
Jeanne	F	24	B + 2 (U)	Fine arts student	London	60
Chloé	F	26	(unknown)	Receptionist	Paris	180
Alex	M	28	B + 5 (F)	IT specialist	Strasbourg	40
Damien	M	24	(unknown)	(unknown)	Rennes	20
Thomas	M	25	(unknown)	Unemployed	Nantes	120
Nathan	M	28	B + 3 (U)	Technician	Paris	160
Fabien	M	24	(unknown)	Waiter	London	60
Cyril	M	24	(unknown)	Telemarketer	London	30

B= baccalaureate (+ years at university / college), F= finished degree, U= unfinished degree

### *Fieldwork phase*

As mentioned earlier, the fieldwork was carried out at different stages in the first eighteen months of the project. This phase involved recordings of spontaneous conversations of French young people, with the aim of collecting naturally occurring, informal speech that would reveal authentic discourse patterns of language-in-context. Bearing in mind this fundamental concern, it was necessary to design a methodology that would allow me to record conversations in an informal and comfortable environment, while at the same time minimising potential epistemological and practical difficulties such as the observer's paradox and ethical issues.

In light of the above considerations, it was believed that the recording sessions should be held in an informal, private setting, where the participants could be made to feel at ease and their inhibitions would be reduced. Therefore, most of the recording sessions were held in a home environment, typically in the form of a casual dinner party or afternoon tea. At the outset, I informed the participants that the recording was about to begin, placing the recording equipment in an unobtrusive place in the middle of the area where the participants were seated. The recordings took place in a relaxed, intimate

atmosphere with each conversation lasting between 30 and 120 minutes. It was considered sensible to record longer sessions, especially in order to minimise the effects of the *observer's paradox*, a notion first described by Labov (1972: 61) who noted that our goal as linguistics and researchers is to 'observe the way people use language when they are not being observed'. I hoped that longer sessions would enable speakers to become more at ease as the session progressed, and that they would gradually 'forget' the recording equipment and the presence of the researcher, and talk in a natural way, insofar as the circumstances allowed.

Even in a relatively artificial environment, I believe it is still possible to progressively minimise the effects of the observer's paradox, especially by making the participants feel comfortable and by adjusting the setting, for instance in the following ways:

- if the recording session takes place in the evening, it is possible to lower the lighting in order to minimise the laboratory-like effect of the environment on the speakers;
- it is possible to 'hide' the recording equipment (for instance, under a sheet of paper), provided that this does not impede its functioning properly;
- it is possible to create an informal atmosphere by, for example, preparing dinner or light refreshments for the participants, and adding quiet music in the background (again, provided that it does not reduce the quality of the recording);
- the role of the researcher should not be neglected; (s)he should continuously participate in and encourage the conversation.

It is also suggested in the literature that the 'laboratory-like' type of setting and its effects on the speakers can be, at least partly, overcome. By way of example, Argyle (1988: 155) notes that it *is* actually possible to obtain instinctive, natural responses from participants. In order to achieve this, he says, it is desirable that 'observers and equipment should be unobtrusive' and that the researchers involved should 'create settings which have some resemblance to real life, and whose rules and conventions are familiar'. Therefore, in my case too, every effort was made to minimise the observer's paradox by making speakers feel relaxed and at ease with the setting and the people



with whom they were communicating. I believe that the recording sessions were thus very close to ordinary conversations in which everybody participated actively and on an equal footing.

The process of recording took place in 8 different 'sessions', resulting in 12 sound files. 4 of these sessions took place in one of the participants' homes, while the rest took place in my own home. One session took place in a quiet bar in one of the participants' neighbourhoods. The equipment used for recording was an OLYMPUS VN-240PC, a voice recorder with good technical specifications in terms of coverage, reception, battery life (25 hours), and storage space (4 hours of recorded data at a time). Due to its small size, this voice recorder allowed a great deal of flexibility during the recording, as it could be moved freely from one place to another, or casually camouflaged if required. Although, at times, the awareness of the participants obviously affected the spontaneity and 'naturalness' of the data collected, every effort was made to minimise artificiality and encourage spontaneity.

As mentioned previously, additional data was collected using observation methods, and utterances containing relevant forms as well as their linguistic context were carefully noted down verbatim. This phase lasted throughout the first two years of the PhD project (roughly 24 months) and consisted of different occasions when I participated in spontaneous conversations with native speakers and observed patterns of their language use.

Such a combination of methods enabled me to collect a satisfactory number of tokens. The recordings did not always provide enough instances of a particular form due to the restricted time frame, the individual speech style of each participant, or to the nature of the context. However, the notebook collection method allowed me to observe and focus on each form of interest in a spontaneous context, without the speakers being aware that they were observed. Such a combination of methods produced diverse and therefore interesting data, in which I could detect certain prominent language features characteristic of younger generations.

### *Ethical considerations*

In designing the methodology for the project, particular attention was given to ethical considerations involved in work with human subjects. Since the data collection included recordings of speech, a number of factors had to be taken into account, such as the participants' consent, preserving anonymity, and encoding and storing personal information. In the following lines I explain how I ensured that the process of recording was compliant with ethical guidelines and principles.

Prior to each recording session, I explained the project, including its purpose and potential benefits, to the participants orally and also in a short, non-technical information sheet (see Appendix (B)). They were reminded that the recording would be anonymous and that their names and any personal details would be removed from the sound file. The participants were also told that they would have a chance to listen to the recording if they so wished, and could ask to remove any information that they did not feel comfortable sharing. I clearly explained how the data would be used, analysed and stored, and who would have access to it. Before each session, a consent form was handed out to the participants, which they were asked to sign without being coerced to do so in any way. A copy of this form is attached in Appendix (C).

No financial incentives were offered to the participants; the only reward was in the form of a dinner, snacks or drinks which were served during the session, helping to create an informal and relaxed atmosphere.

It was decided that the collected recordings would be stored at least for the duration of the PhD project (i.e. 3 years). The transcriptions are stored separately from the contact details of the participants. The sound files are stored in a computer file protected by a password, with backup copies stored on a separate hard disk, also password protected. The project and its procedures complied with the Data Protection Act and involved absolutely no risk or harm to the participants. The recording, transcription and storage of the data were carried out according to the BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics) rules and recommendations, and the data was not divulged to anyone apart from the researcher and the people involved in the research (e.g. supervisors), and short extracts used in this dissertation for illustrative purposes. All participants were

reassured that they might refuse to take part in the study without any judgment or pressure and were told that this would not cause any problems for future friendly relationships. They also had the opportunity to withdraw from the recording at any time.

## 2.3 Data handling and analysis

### *Corpus issues*

Let us now turn to a brief description of my corpus in terms of size and distribution. In total, I collected a corpus of approximately 11 hours which, transcribed, represents approximately 57000 words. As was mentioned earlier, this corpus consists of several recorded ‘sessions’ of between 30 and 120 minutes, transcribed and grouped into 12 separate text files (one file represents one ‘session’, i.e. one conversation among several speakers).

Constructing a corpus of language data is a challenging task. There is no definitive answer to the question of how much data is ‘enough’. The size of the corpus will evidently depend on the nature of the project (e.g. smaller-scale studies such as a PhD project will differ from longer, larger-scale studies such as those funded by a research council), the nature of the phenomena of interest (vocabulary, syntax, phonology) and of course, on the amount of resources available in terms of time, space and funds. For an interest in vocabulary, a corpus might need to be relatively large, as certain infrequent words might be very scarce or even not occur at all even in large chunks of data. Word combinations and constructions might be even more difficult to find. As regards phonological features, on the other hand, one might be able to identify patterns in a smaller sample of data. With respect to corpus size, it may perhaps be opportune again to cite Sinclair (2008: 30) who argues that, since ‘language text is a population without limit, and a corpus is necessarily finite at any one point, a corpus, no matter how big, is not guaranteed to exemplify all the patterns of the language in roughly their normal proportions.’ For practical and methodological reasons, it is almost impossible to include *everything* in a corpus; one therefore needs to be careful in drawing general conclusions based on results which might not be representative of the phenomena one studies.

Considering the phenomena of interest for my study, I believe that even a corpus of a relatively small size can show a sufficient number of patterns, which can be justified on the following grounds:

a) my corpus was interested in *discourse features* such as the use of pragmatic markers, general extenders and syntactic structures characteristic of and largely present in spoken language; I therefore expected that they would be quite frequent in my corpus of informal conversations;

b) my main objective was to analyse these features *qualitatively* rather than quantitatively: priority was therefore given to the analysis of the actual meaningful *patterns* rather than to numbers;

c) due to the time and space limitations of a three-year PhD project, and to the nature of the project itself (having two parts based on two relatively different studies), it would have been difficult to collect a corpus of a larger size.

### *Transcription*

The second phase in the development of my corpus was the *transcription* of the recorded data. Transcription is commonly viewed as ‘an integral process in the qualitative analysis of language data’, one that is ‘widely employed in applied research across a number of disciplines and in professional practice fields’ (Lapadat and Lindsay 1999: 64). Lapadat and Lindsay further note that there is little agreement among researchers about standardization of transcription conventions; these conventions therefore tend to vary, and so does the software used to transcribe and annotate recorded speech. The use of different conventions and software, again, largely depends on the nature of the project and the purposes for which it is intended. For an interest in phonetic or prosodic features, a special set of transcription conventions might be adopted, using, for instance, a phonetic alphabet. Whatever method one chooses to adopt, the transcription and its conventions need to be consistent throughout the whole process.

For purposes of clarity, the audio recordings in my corpus were transcribed

orthographically, using the Transcriber software (see Barras et al. 1998 and 2001). Since I was interested mainly in discourse phenomena (mostly represented by word forms and word order), an orthographic transcription was considered both appropriate and practical. During the transcription process, every effort was made to ensure that there was consistency in the orthographic representation of different word forms; for instance, between various common but non-standard forms which may be spelt in a variety of ways (mainly informal terms such *ouais*, *chuis*, *chais pas*, different lexemes such as *euuh*, *ah* or *argh*, or shortened words or contractions like *y a* or *t'as*). In developing my corpus, it was necessary to identify such terms early on, in order to establish a unique form for their representation, which was to be used throughout the process of transcription and analysis (for reference, see the Transcription Key).

For the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, proper names, names of participants and any personal details referred to in the recordings were changed or deleted. It should be noted that little importance was accorded to the actual content of the recordings, but rather to the language used, and to its communicative function in the environment in which it arose. Examples from the transcription are used in the thesis to exemplify such functions.

In the analysis of the datasets, I used several different methods. An ordinary count-based method was used to determine the frequencies of various linguistic features and to extract relevant observations about the patterns of language use. As mentioned previously, my interest was centred primarily on the pragmatic functions of forms seen in their discourse context. Therefore, a sentence-based concordance tool was used to examine the preceding and following contexts of different forms. This is where my qualitative data started to be quantifiable, as specific features of relevance to my research were extracted for analysis. However, these relevant items were not coded or annotated in the actual transcription. Instead, 'concorded' items were exported to separate files and saved thematically.

The software used for examining concordance, clusters, collocations as well as simple word search was CasualConc (Version 1.4 for Mac). An example of a typical concordance output can be seen as follows:

Figure 2: A typical concordance output

---

```
: aussi je sens que tu vas revenir et tout
: elles ont des jupes ras la moule et tout
: t'as le coeur qui palpite et tout
: comme tu parles plein de langues et tout
mais si tu nous bien fais rigoler et tout
que ça va mieux alors vous parlez et tout
des primes / il a plein de primes et tout c'est obligé
comme l' les trucs comme ça et tout c'est / ça te prend ...
: et tout est ..genre même s'il gagnait mille cinq
lisent ouais on passe sur tel pays et tout et je me dis ouais imagine on se prend une
voient beaucoup / de l'alcool dur et tout / et une fois le lendemain il commençait à
te faire attraper par les parcs et tout ' je fais 'mais n'importe quoi' mais même
: # et tout l'argent va sur son compte en France #
/ je sortais du RER derrière et tout le temps ça m'arrivait pendant trois ans et
ça se trouve tu vas pas revenir et tout / ma sœur elle me dit aussi je sens que tu
il l'a trouvé sur Internet et tout mais
mère avec ma sœur ***** sa voix et tout 'mais tais toi quoi il conduit c'est bon' e
: et il a des copines et tout ? parce que
universitaire et ils font la fête et tout / (unclear) des fois ils boivent beaucoup /
```

---

In addition to basic counting techniques, some features had to be analysed in more complex ways, especially constructions which could occur in different forms or that were composed of several words. In such cases it was necessary to find *all possible* forms of the term in question. For example, with the first-person subject doubling *moi + je*, I had to find not only the conjoint occurrences, but also separated forms with right-dislocated subjects *je + ne trouve pas + moi*, or separated left-dislocated occurrences, such as *moi + franchement + je trouve (...)*. In cases such as these, every single occurrence as well as its context had to be analysed with the aid of the concordance tool.

In short, it was mainly the search, word count and concordance tools which allowed me to analyse some quantitative characteristics of my corpus, and to explore specific lexemes, phrases and patterns of language usage in more detail.

## 2.4 Selection of features

In Chapter 1, I attempted to describe spoken language not only from a general perspective, but also from an angle that focused on specific features typical of spoken French. I attempted to shed more light on the concept of youth language in France, and to situate it within the French social and cultural context. In the next chapters, I look more closely at the spoken features which emerged as particularly salient in my corpus of recorded conversations. I selected four syntactic and discourse-pragmatic features that are characteristic of spontaneous spoken French:

- a) discourse markers (e.g. *genre*)
- b) general extenders (e.g. *et tout, et tout ça*)
- c) dislocation and disjoint pronoun *moi je*
- d) presentational constructions (e.g. *il y a*)

There are several reasons for the choice of the above features. First of all, transcription of the recorded data revealed clear patterns of use which seem typical of speech rather than writing. These patterns are interesting not only because of their sheer frequency, but also, in some cases, because of their innovative character. For example, in young people's speech certain discourse markers occur with a high frequency, a bleached lexical meaning and new pragmatic functions, suggesting that a language change may be in progress or has already occurred. Secondly, from the point of view of language teaching and learning, I chose the above features on the grounds that they were usually specific to and very frequent in every-day spoken French<sup>11</sup>, yet foreign learners do not always notice and pay attention to them. Thus I believed that examining these features would contribute towards a better understanding of spoken French and of the communicative practices of young people from France. Lastly, I believed that the analysis of features typical of youth language (discourse markers and general extenders) would also be beneficial for foreign learners of French, since as I explained previously, a large proportion of foreign learners may be young people. A larger goal, once the

---

<sup>11</sup> By 'specific' I mean both specific to spontaneous *spoken* French (as opposed to formal written French) and specific to French as such, since in some cases it may be hard to find exact functional equivalents in other languages.

dissertation has been completed, is thus to disseminate the results of this study to learners of French and to the broader research community.

In the analysis of the individual spoken features, I use authentic examples given in the original French; however, due to space limitations it was impossible to include their translation. Unless otherwise stated, all the examples provided in this analysis are either excerpts from my recordings of informal conversations, or excerpts from my notebook collection. In the former case, the speaker's sex, age and file reference are provided in brackets, while in the latter, an individual reference number of the example in question is provided.

In order to situate the analysis within a wider context, I compare some of my quantitative results with those drawn from two corpora of spoken French: the Beeching corpus, gathered between 1980 and 1990, and the CFPP corpus (*Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien*: 'corpus of Parisian spoken French'), collected between 2007 and 2009 (see Chapter 1 and bibliographical references). The fact that these two corpora were collected at different periods of time almost 20 to 30 years apart was seen as an advantage, as it should give me an insight into whether some of the features I am interested in were used at these times. This may, in turn, allow me to draw tentative conclusions about possible diachronic changes.



## 2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology used in the first part of my project. I addressed a range of methodological issues related to the data collection and corpus development, as well as to the analytical approaches used. I covered a range of topics, from the process of recording conversational data through to its representation in a transcription and analysis. I also discussed the criteria upon which I based the selection of features to analyse.

This chapter aims to provide a background for my analyses, by outlining both practical and theoretical questions that were of relevance to the first part of my study. This part of the study is based on the analysis of native speaker data, to which the following chapters are dedicated (Chapters 3 to 6).

Chapters 7 and 8 relate to a separate study based on a questionnaire given to learners of French.

## Chapter 3 *Genre*: an innovative discourse marker

This chapter focuses on the word *genre*. This pragmatic expression was selected for analysis mainly on the basis of its innovative pragmatic functions, but also on account of its frequency in both my corpus of recordings and the notebook collection. Although the existing literature on discourse markers in spoken French is quite extensive (see, for example, Beeching 2002; Hansen 1998a, 1998b and 2008; Dostie 2004 and 2001, Fernandez 1994, Ducrot 1980), new functional uses of words such as *genre* have not been studied as often or in as much detail as their foreign equivalents, e.g. *like* in English (e.g. Blyth et al. 1999, Buchstaller 2001, Romaine and Lange 1991, Tagliamonte and Hudson 2008). Therefore, I hope that my analysis based on authentic examples from spoken data will contribute to the existing body of literature on French discourse markers and shed more light on how such expressions are used in the French spoken by young people.

In the next sections, I firstly review the relevant literature concerned with the subject, and then continue with an analysis based on examples drawn from my corpus of informal recordings, in which I illustrate the newly developed functions and contexts of occurrence of *genre* and of expressions resembling *genre*. The analysis is mainly qualitative, for reasons explained later in the chapter.

### 3.1 Previous research

#### 3.1.1 Discourse markers

In chapter 1, I briefly defined discourse markers and their principal functions in discourse. In this section I will focus specifically on the literature concerned with discourse markers and on approaches to their analysis. Due to lack of space, this review will be selective and will consider only the most relevant aspects pertaining to the development of innovative discourse markers in spoken French.

Discourse markers were described in Chapter 1 as functional items very frequent in informal spoken language, and some of them as almost exclusive to speech. Let us consider one of the previous examples from the corpus to illustrate some common French discourse markers:

35.) (Conversation about a radio programme; Speaker: Thomas M25, R02)

T: *j'ai écouté un truc à la radio / c'était France Inter en plus (...) et donc il y a un gars qui parlait justement de ça / que la vie c'est /  finalement la vie c'est ça / c'est un battement de cœur tu vois / c'est une pulsation / t'as un moment zéro / un / enfin t'as \_ c'est pas ça / c'est pas zéro – un / mais t'as un moment où c'est à (..) c'est lancé (.) et t'as un moment où c'est / c'est à vide quoi / et c'est la même chose partout.*

In French, discourse markers are usually referred to as *marqueurs discursifs* (Dostie 2004, Beeching 2007), *particules discursives* (Hansen 1998a), *particules énonciatives* (Fernandez 1994), *marqueurs de structuration* (Auchlin 1981), *connecteurs pragmatiques* (Roulet 1985), *phatiques* and *ponctuants* (Gadet 1989) or simply as *les mots du discours* (Ducrot 1980). In the French linguistic tradition, especially in the past, these items used to be seen as redundant and typical of colloquial speech, which, as we have seen, was in itself stigmatised compared to written language (see, for example, Hansen 1998a and 1998b, Beeching 2002). However, discourse markers as a topic of research were also generally ignored in other countries (see Traugott 1995: 5). It was not until spoken language began to receive more attention in research and speech began to be transcribed that discourse markers began to be analysed more seriously. As Traugott observes (*ibid.*), discourse markers are now a widely recognized category, especially so since Schiffrin's book (1987) on the subject; nevertheless, to this day there is no unified terminology for naming these items.

Blanche-Benveniste describes discourse markers primarily as expressions playing a role in speakers' 'meta-language':

*Les locuteurs utilisent une grande partie du temps de la production à commenter ce qu'ils sont en train de dire: remarques sur la façon de dire, recherches de meilleures façons de dire, etc. Le 'dire' et le 'dit' sont étroitement imbriqués.* (Blanche-Benveniste 1990: 17).

From this definition, we can see that discourse markers are used as part of speakers' comments on what is being said or as devices that help to structure what is being said. Thus they do not carry propositional meaning, but rather serve a pragmatic function. However, as noted in the literature, most discourse markers have lexical equivalents that do carry propositional meaning (see Hansen 1998b, Traugott 1995):

36a) *She spoke well.*

36b) *Well, she spoke.* (from Traugott 1995: 6)

37a) *Tiens ça un instant, t'es gentil*

37b) *et tu sais ben tiens je t'ai pas raconté le dernier jour ah mais faut que je te raconte ça* (from Hansen 1998b: 236)

The lexical and the discourse-marking expressions differ in several respects; for example, while the discourse marker usually has scope over the entire utterance, as in (36b) and (37b), the lexical equivalents are usually attached to one clause element only, as in (36a) and (37a). However, as Hansen (1998b: 242) points out, the distinction between the discourse-marking and the non discourse-marking function is not always clear-cut, as illustrated by the following example in which *maintenant* may have a temporal or an adversative reading:

38.) *Voilà ce que je te conseille. Maintenant, tu fais ce que tu veux.* (Hansen 1998b: 242)

Since discourse markers contribute very little to the propositional content of the utterance, they are optional, i.e. the utterance would not be ungrammatical if they were removed. However, even though removing the discourse marker would not change the content of the utterance, it would change its pragmatic dimension:

The absence of the discourse marker does not render a sentence ungrammatical and/or unintelligible. It does, however, remove a powerful clue about what commitment the speaker makes regarding the relationship between the current utterance and the prior discourse (Fraser 1988: 22).

I would suggest here that it is not only the speaker's commitment that the pragmatic dimension pertains to, but also the notion of intersubjectivity (e.g. *tu vois*) and discourse coherence (e.g. *enfin*). Spoken discourse devoid of discourse markers may seem too blunt, impolite and lacking logical coherence.

An important feature of discourse markers noted in the literature is their multifunctionality (see, for example, Schiffrin 1987, Jucker and Ziv 1998). The functions that discourse markers may serve, however, are not to be interpreted separately; a discourse marker usually carries several *overlapping* and *context-dependent* functions. Hansen (1998b: 256), for instance, adopts a 'dynamic polysemy' approach to the semantics of discourse markers, describing them as polysemous or 'heterosemous', i.e. cross-categorically polysemous. This approach reflects the fact that discourse markers carry different functions and their pragmatic sense can be variably interpreted depending on the context. The approach is inherently dynamic, firstly, because the semantic interpretation is context-dependent, and secondly, because the senses and functions may – and usually do – evolve over time (see Hansen 2006: 36).

When we speak of the 'semantics' of discourse markers, it does not mean that they carry lexical meaning; their sense is usually defined as 'procedural' rather than conceptual (the latter sometimes also termed as 'representational', see Fraser 1999: 931, Blakemore 1992: 150, Schourup 1999: 238). They have no conceptual core, and act simply as instructions on how to process their host utterance in a particular context; they may thus be felicitously analysed within the framework of 'instructional semantics' (see Hansen 1996, 1998b). In the literature it is thus often argued that even though markers do not contribute to the propositional meaning of utterances, they are not completely devoid of 'semantic content' (Hansen 1998b: 250), which is also illustrated by the fact that they are not interchangeable. We can see this clearly by changing the discourse markers in one of the previous examples:

- 39.) finalement la vie c'est ça / c'est un battement de cœur tu vois
- 40.) \*autrement la vie c'est ça / c'est un battement de cœur enfin

Discourse markers differ with respect to their structural characteristics, as well as with respect to their position within the utterance. A majority are said to be disjuncts placed in utterance-initial position (see Traugott 1995: 6), which would also be the case for French markers such as *autrement*, *sinon* or *finale*ment. However, they can also occur anywhere within the utterance (e.g. *enfin*, *bon*) or in a terminal position (e.g. *quoi*, *hein*, *quand même*).

In summary, the role of discourse markers in spoken discourse is to present individual phrases as a coherent whole and mark the attitude of the speaker towards the message expressed. Fuller (2003b: 24) lists the most common features of discourse markers as follows:

- They are used to signal relationships between discourse units (e.g. reformulation, modification or qualification).
- Grammatically speaking, they are optional.
- They do not change the truth conditions of the propositions in the utterances they frame (but they do carry meaning).

In addition to these functions, the literature also mentions the epistemic and intersubjective functions of discourse markers, such as:

- Expressing speaker attitude, especially meta-textual (Traugott 1995)
- Communicating interpersonal involvement (Bolden 2006)

Some typically spoken expressions are particularly relevant to my research, as they seem to be developing from content words to function words, and seem to have become particularly salient in the speech of young people. It is often noted that most discourse markers initially have a propositional function and their discourse-marking functions develop gradually (see Hopper and Traugott 2003). Such a development is inherently linked to the process of *grammaticalisation*, which I discuss in the next section.

### 3.1.2 Grammaticalisation

A process directly relevant to the development of discourse markers is *grammaticalisation*, without which the discussion of these expressions would be incomplete. Spoken interaction usually shapes the language diachronically and generates gradual processes like grammaticalisation, to which the development of many ‘spoken traits’ (e.g. the use of discourse markers) is generally attributed. Since this dissertation is directly concerned with pragmatic language features such as discourse markers and general extenders, it is crucial to explain theories associated with those aspects of grammaticalisation that relate to pragmatic developments in/of spoken language.

Hopper and Traugott define the process of grammaticalisation as follows:

Grammaticalization refers to that part of the study of language change that is concerned with such questions as how lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions or how grammatical items develop new grammatical functions (1993: 1-2).

It should perhaps be explained here how the concept of grammaticalisation differs from that of *pragmaticalisation*. The latter, the definition of which I borrow from Dostie (2006: 2), refers to a ‘phenomenon of evolution in which a full lexical unit (noun, verb, adjective or adverb) or a grammatical unit (coordinate or subordinate) changes its category and status to become a *pragmatic unit*.’ As explained further, such a pragmatic unit emerges from the sentence structure and acquires a new role at a textual and interpersonal level. Therefore, generally, the main difference between the process of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation is that while the former occurs only at the level of grammar, the latter occurs at the level of discourse. Thus, some linguistic expressions (e.g. discourse markers) go beyond the propositional level of the language and develop primarily pragmatic functions in spoken discourse.

The literature usually identifies certain processes and changes inherently associated with both grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation (see Dostie 2004, Hopper and Traugott 2003, Traugott 1995). One of them is *decategorisation*, whereby the grammaticalised forms progressively lose or neutralise their morphological and syntactic characteristics of a ‘full lexical category’ (such as nouns or verbs) and acquire the attributes of their adoptive category. Haspelmath (1999: 1045) provides an illustrative example of decategorisation, in which the Latin noun *casa* ('house'), a content word, most probably developed into the French preposition *chez* ('at /somebody's place/'), a function word.

The decategorisation process is characterized by a loss of syntactic flexibility and by *figement* ('clotting') which Dostie (2001: 64) illustrates with the French forms *tiens* and *tenez*. Through grammaticalisation, the word has become a discourse marker with two possible forms, *tiens* and *tenez*, but not with other forms of the verb *tenir*, e.g. *tenons*. A similar phenomenon reflecting grammaticalisation is 'bonding' (Hopper and Traugott, 2003) whereby the frequently used terms may 'bond' together to form a discourse marker (e.g. *in deed* => *indeed*).

The category changes and bonding are said to be accompanied by 'phonetic reduction' (or 'erosion'), i.e. a loss of phonetic substance (see Heine and Kuteva 2002). This may be illustrated, for example, by the development of English auxiliaries such as *will* or *can*. As Newmeyer (2000: 231) explains, in the earlier stages of English these expressions were 'full verbs with full lexical meaning' (e.g. *will* 'desire', *can* 'know how') and in this capacity, 'they took full stress and never occurred in reduced form.' Today, however, they are often unstressed and they may be contracted to the preceding subject.

Another process that is said to accompany grammaticalisation is *persistence*, whereby in the intermediary stages of grammaticalisation, the word form tends to be polysemic, i.e. used with its original meanings as well as with those that have developed later. As Hansen (1998b: 240) explains, the meaning of the element involved thus evolves over time, and in this process new uses may be added to its existing ones, while certain others may fall into obsolescence. Such coexistence of uses is also defined as 'layering'



(Hopper and Traugott 2003: 124), or the ‘persistence of older forms and meanings alongside newer forms and meanings, whether derived by divergence from the same source or by renewal from different sources’, which may be visible at any one synchronic moment in time. In this process, however, new meanings become more vague.

This vague character of newly developed items can be explained in terms of semantic *bleaching* (or semantic *weakening/reduction*), which is defined as ‘the loss of concrete, referential, and content meaning’ (Traugott 2006: 111). The grammaticalised term thus progressively loses its literal meanings and acquires new *pragmatic* functions. Besides, this is perhaps why discourse markers are also often referred to as *pragmatic markers*, a term I use synonymously with *discourse markers*.

Closely associated with the development of discourse markers is the increase in pragmatic functions. Indeed, as I will attempt to illustrate in my data analysis, the grammaticalised items gradually acquire new pragmatic functions and some of them, especially discourse markers, begin to be used at an extra-sentential level (implying also that they are optional and do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterance). In this process, they become increasingly associated with speaker attitude, especially with the attitude to discourse flow and content. This development towards epistemic functions is also commonly referred to as ‘subjectification’ (Hopper and Traugott 2003: 92).

To summarise, we may say that grammaticalisation is a gradual and complex process that consists of shifting ‘a linguistic expression further toward the functional pole of the lexical-functional continuum’ (Haspelmath 1999: 1044), rather than occurring as a sudden change from a lexical to a functional category. A very similar concept is used by Hansen (1998b: 238) who speaks of a ‘grammaticalisation cline going from content words at one end to pure function words at the other.’ Innovative functional uses of content words may thus become conventionalised over time.

### 3.1.3 *Genre*: a theoretical background

In the French language, the term *genre* frequently occurs as a lexical item in phrases such as *de ce genre* or *le genre de* (e.g. *ce genre de choses* or *les choses de ce genre*), typically containing an article (such as *ce* or *le*) and/or a preposition (such as *de*). I therefore believe that it is important, from the outset, to distinguish between the traditional uses of the word and its newer uses as seen in the following examples:

41.) *je sais qu'il y a pas beaucoup d'accidents (...) c'est juste ce qui me soûle (...) c'est genre quand ils te disent "ouais on passe sur tel pays" et tout* (Léa, F/25, R05)

42.) *chais pas on essaye de se voir genre / genre à 7 heures / on passe la soirée au bar à picoler* (Léa, F/25, R09)

In contemporary spoken French, it seems that two types of use are now in parallel existence: the short form (e.g. *genre*) as well as a full form (e.g. *ce genre de*). Although it would be difficult to attempt to trace the diachronic development of *genre*<sup>12</sup>, the use of this word seems to have in recent years begun to shift and acquire innovative functional features, seemingly emblematic of the language of young people. Many of its discourse functions resemble those of its foreign equivalents (such as English *like* or German *so*); however, as will be argued in later sections, in French there seems to be a larger variety of expressions with functions similar to those of *genre*.

The literature on the subject seems to be limited to studies of *genre* in the context of exemplification (see Vincent 2005, Dostie 1995), of innovative uses of *genre* (Yaguello 1998) or of *genre* compared with its foreign equivalents, especially *like* (Fleischman 1999, Fleischman and Yaguello, 2004). It is noteworthy that all of these studies attribute the short-form use to the speech of young people. Yaguello (1998: 18), for example, describes recently developed uses of the word *genre* as a new *tic de langage* ('language tic') typical of young generations, who 'squeeze this word in different positions,

---

<sup>12</sup> Since the new, short forms are not recorded in any dictionaries and, as far as I am aware, appear only in recent corpora of spoken French, it is difficult to establish when exactly they began to be used. As we will see below, Rosier (2002) examines the development of *genre* from a diachronic perspective; however, she looks only at the journalistic (written) use of this term.

between a verb and an object, or between two independent clauses.’ Examples (41) and (42) above illustrate uses that could be seen as a ‘language tic’. Yaguello examines different examples of the word as well as its functions in different contexts. Similarly, Fleischman (1999) looks at the uses of *genre* from a comparative perspective, contrasting French *genre* and English *like* in order to show their striking similarities, thus raising the question of whether languages develop functionally parallel discourse markers. For both languages, her analysis offers a division of discourse marker functions into several categories (focus, quotative, hedge, approximator, exemplifier or marker of sarcasm/irony), illustrated, respectively, by the examples that follow (from Fleischmann 1999):

43.) *C’était GENRE glauque* (‘It was LIKE a drag’)

44.) *Elle veut plus nous donner de fiches de lecture à faire à la maison, GENRE QUE c’est trop tard dans l’année* (‘She doesn’t want to give us any more reading assignments to do at home, LIKE it’s too late in the year’)

45.) *Elle est GENRE méchante avec les cas, cette prof* (‘She’s LIKE mean to the problem kids, that teacher is’)

46.) *Il saute GENRE 1m 30 sans peine* (‘He can jump LIKE a meter 30 with no difficulty’)

47.) *Il y a pas grand-chose comme commerce, GENRE il y a un arabe et une boulangerie, c’est tout* (‘There’s not much in the way of shopping there, LIKE there’s an Arab [grocer] and a bakery, that’s all’)

48.) *Tu sais à quelle heure elle nous remplace son cours GENRE pour pas nous déranger? à huit heures samedi!* (‘You know what time she [the teacher] picked for the make-up class, so it wouldn’t LIKE interfere with our schedules? 8 o’clock Saturday morning!’).

Fleischman’s selected examples quite clearly show that youth discourse markers do have the potential to develop in parallel ways across different languages or, at least, across English and French. What is unclear, however, is whether the languages have any degree of influence over one another, or whether the forms develop independently. In both cases, it would be interesting to study the diachronic evolution of the respective discourse markers such as English *like* and French *genre*, as well as their meaning at various stages of this evolution. However, these changes may be inherently linked to

putative discourse-universal tendencies<sup>13</sup> which make discourse markers develop in parallel ways (see, for example, Beeching 2007, Fleischman and Yaguello 2004). Furthermore, as is discussed below with respect to Québec French, similarities may also arise as a result of language contact.

Innovative uses of *genre* have also been attested by Rosier (2002), who examines the development of polysemic meanings of discourse markers such as *genre* and their discourse functions over time, drawing her examples from a corpus of 7000 occurrences of the word in the Belgian daily newspaper *Le Soir*, of which 200 were studied in closer detail. She sketches the progressive semantic evolution of *genre*, which is accompanied by a loss of its determinative and prepositional ‘accompanying words’ *de* and *le*. She also points out (2002: 86) that the development is in this case further accompanied by a ‘weakening of modal value’ (as in: *il est genre dix heures*),<sup>14</sup> agreement of an accompanying adjective with the subject rather than with *genre* (*elle est genre méchante / elle est du genre méchante* but not *elle est du genre méchant*) and a ‘semantic shift from affirming the identification of a category to the approximation of a posited category.’ The new agreement pattern and the loss of *de* and *le* seem to imply that *genre* has, in certain cases, begun to decategorise from a noun to a function word, behaving almost as an adverb or a preposition.

The examples below, from my data, conform that *genre* has acquired new functions and a somewhat bleached lexical meaning. This seems particularly salient in the speech of young people where it serves as a vague universal shortener for a whole conceptual unit, as in (41) above, repeated here as (49) for the purpose of discussion:

---

<sup>13</sup> Schiffrin (1994: 415) describes *discourse universals* as ‘derived from the universality of uses to which language is put in human interaction’. For example, speakers may feel the need to hedge a direct or offensive statement, and such a motivation may be considered universal across different languages. Thus the similarities between ‘hedging’ discourse markers, as in (5) above, are justified.

<sup>14</sup> In our understanding, the ‘weakening of modal value’ translates as the weakening of epistemic commitment in sentences with *genre*, where truth conditions and speaker commitment are lower (i.e. ‘*il est genre dix heures*’ as opposed to ‘*Il est dix heures*’).

49.) *je sais qu'il y a pas beaucoup d'accidents (..) c'est juste ce qui me soûle (..) c'est genre quand ils te disent "ouais on passe sur tel pays" et tout* (Léa, F/25, R05)

In this example, *genre* is replaceable by a whole potential discourse segment which could be phrased along the lines of 'I give you an example' or 'I will describe it to you'. Fleischman (1999: 7), then, is right in saying that *genre* is often used to 'connect two segments of discourse of which the second, the focal information, is an explanation, justification, or elaboration of the first.' My data also confirm the distinction made by Yaguello (1998) between the use of *genre* as a 'modal particle' (indicating approximation and stance) and that of *genre* as a *connecteur discursif* ('discourse connector'). The latter definition that seems to correspond to example (49) above; the former to example (42). However, as we will see, in my data *genre* also has the other functions identified by Fleischmann (1999).

One question is how and indeed why this feature seems generally attributed exclusively to young people. Chevalier (2001: 13) suggests that frequent use of words such as *genre* does not seem to be a unique phenomenon existing only in France. She examines the excessive use of 'non-standard' *comme* by French-speaking adolescents in Québec and notes that *comme* seems to give way to *genre* at later stages of adolescence, and to more traditional equivalents at adult age. Like Yaguello (1998), she raises questions about a 'language tic' that would tend to 'normalise' towards adult age (2001: 13). Let us illustrate this discourse use of *comme* in the following examples (from Chevalier 2001):

- 50a) *comme moi j'étais euh j'ai j'ai j'avais comme le la family allowance*
- 50b)  *finalement on est devenu comme cinq filles cinq garçons*
- 50c) *Tout le monde braillait là : «Kirk Cummin est mort». J'étais comme : «Qui-c'e qui est?»*

Chevalier's observations suggest that the use of such innovative forms may be *age-graded*, used during adolescence and post-adolescence and then dropped in adulthood (Trudgill 2003: 6). However, in order to see whether the use of innovative forms is age-

graded or whether it eventually leads to language change, it would be necessary to compare large-scale corpora comprising samples of different generations of speakers.

In French, there seems to be a range of possible variants in different registers to choose from, with *genre* being generally considered informal and spoken (or taken as a sociolinguistic index of spontaneous speech/thought even in written genres, see Fleischman 1999). Besides, this informal character is sometimes reflected also in speakers' attitudes. Interestingly, speakers themselves seem to be aware that the word *genre* is informal and colloquial, and might thus be inappropriate for certain types of social setting. By way of example, consider the comment of a young suburban female interviewee on the radio describing her colloquial language habits that seem too difficult to abandon:

51.) *D'enlever les habitudes c'est dur (...) pas de parler bien (...) mais d'enlever les habitudes (...) genre (...) comme là – 'genre' (...) normalement en salon on dit pas 'genre'*<sup>15</sup>

How, then, did a word that is part of standard phrases such as *de ce genre* or *un genre de* lose its preposition and determiner, acquire new grammatical and discourse functions and pass into an informal register? There might be several reasons for this. Much of the literature on discourse markers judiciously links their appearance to the phenomenon of *grammaticalisation / pragmaticalisation*, both of which I described in greater detail in the previous section. In fact, the development of *genre*, characterized by a change of form as well as function, is well in line with the processes generally associated with grammaticalisation.

For example, the process of 'decategorisation', whereby the grammaticalising forms progressively lose or neutralise their morphological and syntactic characteristics of a 'full lexical category' (such as nouns or verbs) can be observed in the case of *genre*.

---

<sup>15</sup> Radio *France Culture*: 'Banlieue 1/3 : Aux urgences de l'hôpital de Corbeil.' Programme: *Les Pieds sur Terre*, broadcast and recorded on 30/1/2008. (The speaker comments on the colloquial use of '*genre*', inappropriate in her workplace - at a hairdresser's salon).

Gradually, this word appears to be shifting from the lexical towards the functional pole of the grammaticalisation continuum described earlier.

The phenomenon defined earlier as ‘bonding’ is well illustrated by the expression *c’est genre* (see example (49) above). Here, the introductory phrase *c’est genre* indicates the speaker’s intention to add a new descriptive comment to what has been said or to give an example of it. Curiously, it very often appears in a fixed (‘clotted’) form – *c’est genre*. Similarly, as we shall see in the data analysis, *genre* seems to bond well with *un truc* to indicate approximation (e.g. *payer un truc genre trois euro*).

The characteristic of *persistence*, whereby throughout the process of grammaticalisation newer functions coexist with former functions, is also manifest in this case. Here we note that some of the present-day functions of *genre* (consider, again, examples [41]-[48]) more or less reflect the original lexical sense of word, albeit only vaguely. If we look at how this word was used diachronically, we notice that its approximate present-day pragmatic function can easily be derived from its semantic meaning(s):

### Figure 3: Etymology of *genre*

---

#### GENRE, subst. masc.<sup>16</sup>

A. 1121-34 *gendre* lang. commune « sorte, type » (PH. DE THAON, *Bestiaire*, 868 ds T.-L.).

B. 1. *ca* 1200 « sexe » (*Dial. Grégoire*, 144, 3, *ibid.* : ... nient ke il despitoit lo **genre** [*non quia aspernabatur sexum*]);

2. *ca* 1245 gramm. (H. D'ANDELI, IV, 386, *ibid.*).

C. 1. Début XIII<sup>e</sup> s. *humaine genre* (*La Venjance del mort nostre Seigneur*, Brit. Mus., Egerton 613, fol. 18 r<sup>o</sup> ds GDF. *Compl.*);

2. *ca* 1300 philos. « ensemble des caractères essentiels d'une chose » (*Gl. Bruxelles*, 9543 ds T.-L. : **genre** : si com estre d'une nature); *cf. ca* 1380 ne chiet en *espece* ne en *gendre* (J. LEFEVRE, *Vieille*, 109, *ibid.*);

3. 1654, 17 oct. litt. (RACAN, *Œuvres*, éd. Tenant de Latour, I, 357 : si l'on veut acquérir la réputation en ce **genre d'écrire** [le théâtre]). Empr. au lat. *genus*, *-eris* « origine, extraction, naissance » qui recouvre l'ensemble des sens de l'a.fr. : « race, nation; espèce, genre [*humanum genus*]; sorte, type, manière », philos. : *pars subjecta generi* [l'espèce]. La forme a.fr. *gendre* s'explique prob. par l'infl. du verbe a.fr. *gendrer* (lat. class. *generare* « engendrer ») « engendrer » (v. *DEAF* s.v. 465, 27).

---

<sup>16</sup> Extract from the CNRTL Etymological Dictionary (*Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales*), /www.cnrtl.fr/ accessed on 30/09/08.

It is particularly worth noting that most of the above definitions refer to *genre* as a ‘sort/type’ (A), a ‘set of essential features of a thing’ (C2) or a ‘race, nation, species, (human) genre, sort, type or manner’ (C3). Therefore, even though the innovative uses of *genre* are not recorded in French dictionaries, it is not surprising that this word has developed a set of pragmatic functions that reflect its role as a qualifying discourse marker (one that describes the properties of a person or a thing), while it has also kept its traditional forms in expressions like ‘*le genre de*’ or ‘*quelque chose de ce genre*’. Similarly, if we consider its meaning in the fixed expression ‘*se donner / faire du genre*’, we notice that in some current uses, and especially in youth language, one can drop the particle ‘*du*’ but convey a similar meaning of artificially created appearance and ostentatious behaviour. This form can either occur with a verb (e.g. *faire genre*), as in (52), or on its own, as in (53):

52.) J: *elle s’habillait pareil que moi / elle reprenait toutes mes expressions et tout et\_*

T: *elle voulait faire genre / tu vois* (Thomas, M25; Jeanne F24, R03)

53.) T: *genre t’es un homme !* (Thomas, M25, R03)

New uses of words such as *genre* are also discussed by Morel and Danon-Boileau (1997: 195) who argue that their occurrence is perhaps linked to the fact that speech is typically unplanned (see Chapter 1). They argue that the ‘paratactic’ uses<sup>17</sup> of words like *façon*, *style* and *genre* can be attributed to the spontaneous character of spoken language and to the lack of planning time speakers have to face when they express themselves. This is reminiscent of the principle of ‘least effort’ (see Zipf 1949) applied also in linguistics, according to which the basic cognitive motivation underlying spoken language is *economy*. In other words, speech is made more economical in terms of articulatory effort as well as cognitive processing if the high frequency items are kept short. Thus, one can assume that it is the ‘least effort’ principle that motivates speakers to reduce the form of certain frequent expressions, including fixed or semi-fixed phrases

---

<sup>17</sup> By *emploi paratactique*, Morel and Danon-Boileau presumably speak of the short-form use, without articles and prepositions.



such as *ce genre de* or *de ce genre*. In this regard, Morel and Danon-Boileau observe that words that are traditionally used in prepositional phrases can thus also be used just on their own:

Il existe en français contemporain des noms qui fonctionnent comme des prépositions (*question, point de vue, niveau, côté, genre, style, façon* etc.), parallèlement à des locutions prépositionnelles (*du point de vue de, au niveau de, dans le genre de, à la façon de* etc.) (1997: 193).

They further divide these expressions into two groups: those with a *framing* function and those with a *qualifying* function. The *framing* expressions (*question, point de vue, niveau, côté*) are used to thematically delimit the specific conceptual field of an utterance, as in (54), while the *qualifying* expressions (*genre, façon, style*) further determine or explain the features of a discussed subject, as in (55):

- 54.) *Côté look d'abord, les goûts et les couleurs ne se discutent pas vraiment; fille ou garçon, on préfère nettement la mère tailleur à la mère survêt – baskets.*  
55.) *Ses quelques bons mots, façon James Bond, font toujours mouche.* (from Morel and Danon-Boileau 1997: 197)

Due to their functional and semantic differences, these terms are not interchangeable. However, from the point of view of grammaticalization and pragmaticalization, the two groups do seem to have common traits. As Morel and Danon-Boileau (1997: 195-196) point out, the generally accepted way of explaining the paratactic use of some prepositional phrases is to describe them merely as a simplification of complex forms by the ellipsis of their prepositions and determiners. They argue, however, that it is not sufficient to talk about ellipsis and it is important to look at different degrees of word omission. For instance, in the case of the framing expressions, ellipsis of the determiner inevitably leads to the ellipsis of the preposition, as in *à côté de la cheminée* which gives two paratactic possibilities *côté cheminée* or *du côté cheminée* (but not *\*de côté cheminée*, *\* du côté la cheminée* or *\*côté de la cheminée*). Similarly, the example mentioned earlier – *du côté de look d'abord*, will give *côté look d'abord* rather than *\*de côté look* or *\*côté du look*.

The question is now whether the same rules apply for the second group of expressions, such as *genre*, *façon*, *style* and *mode*. Some of them, as can be seen from the examples below, are quite flexible in terms of ellipsis, others are rather rigid and only used in certain contexts. *Genre* seems to be the most flexible one, on all levels (examples<sup>18</sup> invented for the purpose of discussion):

- 56a.) *elle s'habillait genre rock-star*
- 56b.) *elle s'habillait genre la rock-star*
- 56c.) *elle s'habillait genre une rock-star*
- 56d.) *elle s'habillait du genre rock-star*
- 56e.) \* *elle s'habillait de genre rock-star*

Although words such as *genre*, *style*, *façon* and *en mode* can be used in similar contexts, their functions and meaning vary to some extent and therefore they are not totally interchangeable. For instance, *genre*, *style*, *façon* and *en mode* can all be used to describe a person, as in:

- 57.) *elle s'habillait façon / style / genre / en mode rock-star*

However, they cannot all act as quotatives or approximators, as in (44) and (46) above. These functional differences are further discussed in later sections of this chapter.

In summary, we can be broadly sympathetic to Morel and Danon-Boileau's division of pragmatic words derived from prepositional phrases. They argue that paratactic uses cannot be attributed to ellipsis only; these words seem to have undergone a complex, gradual development that did not have the same impact on all forms, hence the functional differences that we observe in certain contexts. In all cases though, these words are used for functional rather than lexical purposes, and their lexical content is thus less precise.

---

<sup>18</sup> Native speakers were consulted to find out whether the examples were acceptable in French.

In the case of *genre*, the grammatical category as recorded in French dictionaries remains in use but the current uses show that the word might simultaneously be moving towards the functional pole of a lexical-functional continuum. Might it not, in several decades, transform into a shortened form only and become a function word, as was the case with Latin *casa* (house) that most probably gave the French preposition *chez* ('at /somebody's place/')

As a matter of fact, the evolution of colloquial discourse markers via processes which closely resemble those involved in grammaticalisation, has been widely attested in other varieties of French, notably in Québec (see Vincent 1992, Sankoff et al. 1997, Chevalier 2001, Dostie 1995 and 2004). Many similarities have been shown to exist between the variants *comme*, *genre* and *style*, while some of their uses have been described as relatively new and 'non-standard' (Vincent 2005).

For example, the traditional marker of comparison *comme* is shown to be used in colloquial speech by Québec youth, in a way that sometimes 'verges on ungrammaticality' (Chevalier 2001: 17), most notably on the grounds of its unusual syntactic position in spoken utterances. In the examples below, a typical case of comparison, (58), is contracted with an atypical case of comparison, (59), the latter being considered unusual since *comme* is not normally placed between a verb and its complement. And if we recall a previous example, repeated here as (60), we may see that a traditional marker of comparison is also used as a quotative (i.e. a device used to introduce direct speech):

58.) *il était comme un père pour moi* (Chevalier 2001: 3)

59.) *il voulait comme parler* (Chevalier 2001: 4)

60.) *Tout le monde braillait là : «Kirk Cummin est mort».*

*J'étais comme : «Qui-c'e qui est?»* (Chevalier 2001: 6)

From Chevalier's analysis, it transpires that *comme* has acquired a higher degree of syntactic freedom and begun to be used almost as a discourse marker.

Similar observations have also been made with reference to intergenerational differences in the use of *disons*, *mettons*, *par exemple*, *comme*, *genre* and *style* in Québec French (Vincent 1992 and 2005). Vincent compares the use of these ‘exemplification markers’ in two different corpora in order to show their evolution and finds that while traditional exemplification markers such as *disons* or *mettons* are on the decline, use of the new variants *genre* and *style* has largely increased among young people. In Québec French, these markers can also be used in a post-posed position (Dostie 1995), as in (61) below. However, in European French there is no evidence that *genre* occurs in such a position:

61.) A. *Pourquoi dis-tu que c’est une personne généreuse ?*

B. *Ben i m’a donné une télévision genre* (from Dostie 1995: 257)

Interestingly, similar discourse markers seem to be used across different varieties of French. However, while in Québec French the range of non-standard variants used is larger (*comme*, *genre*, *style*), European French seems to favour *genre*. In Québec French, these markers also have a greater syntactic flexibility than in European French, which might be due to the effects of language contact and linguistic situation in Québec (see Sankoff et al. 1997), characterised by a high degree of bilingualism and contact between English and French. In fact, the use of ‘exemplifying’ discourse markers such as *comme* or *genre* would be heavily influenced by English *like*, an example of which can be found in the ways Anglophone bilinguals in intensive contact with French use such discourse markers:

62.) *Ah oui on était comme un des seuls, on était peut-être cinq dans mon année qui parlaient les deux langues, puis c’était comme "Wow" tu sais.* (from Sankoff et al. 1997: 198).

In Québec French, as much of the literature shows, *comme* is now used as a desemanticised marker of ‘distancing/detachment’, serving functions such as approximation, exemplification or hedging (Chevalier 2001) and, as can be seen in examples (60) and (62) above, it can also be used to introduce hedged direct speech or non-lexicalised sounds. The authors focusing on the Québec *comme* thus see its new

discourse functions as an existing ‘fact of grammar’, and not a ‘performance error’ (Dostie 1995: 247). Its innovative uses, which according to Sankoff (1997) can be traced back as far as 60 years ago, appear to be very similar to those of *genre* in European French, and therefore it is directly relevant to our analysis.

### 3.1.4 Summary

Previous research on innovative uses of words like *genre* demonstrate the existence of a cross-linguistic phenomenon of their development into discourse markers. *Genre*, in particular, already displays signs of almost anarchic functionality in that it is used for all sorts of different purposes and contexts, which I attempt to illustrate further in the analysis of my own data. There seems to be much support for a hypothesis that words like *genre* have, in some cases, moved away from purely lexical words to more functional words, and their category boundaries are now more difficult to define. However, it seems natural that for the purpose of economy and rapidity of speech, or in Zipf’s terms, of the ‘least effort’ principle, discourse markers may follow such a path, perhaps especially in youth language.

In this section, I have attempted to review the relevant literature concerned with new pragmatic uses of words such as *genre*. This review is selective and, due to space limitations, includes only seminal work directly relevant to the subject. However, even though literature on such innovative uses exists, it seems relatively scarce compared to the literature on equivalent discourse-marker uses in the Anglophone countries (especially English *like*) or in other varieties of French (e.g. *comme* in Québec). Research on European French is perhaps more oriented towards traditional discourse markers such as *eh bien*, *ben*, *bon*, *enfin*, *tu sais*, *écoute*, *quoi*, *quand même* etc. (Hansen 2008 and 2005, Dostie 2004, Beeching 2002, Bruxelles and Traverso 2001, Ducrot et al. 1980). Therefore, I hope that my analysis will be a useful contribution to the up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the developing discourse markers in French.

## 3.2 Data analysis

### 3.2.1 Functions of *genre*

In the previous section, I examined some of the pertinent literature concerned with the use of pragmatic marker *genre* in European French, as well as that concerned with its closest equivalents like *style* or *comme*. It has been pointed out before (Chevalier 2001: 36) that among these variants, European French tends to favour *genre*. This was also shown in my data where, perhaps unsurprisingly, *genre* occurred much more frequently than other pragmatic markers of a similar type. In line with this is also the fact that *genre* appears to fulfil more discourse functions and can therefore be used in more situations and contexts. In this section, I attempt to shed more light on the characteristics of this word, by considering its different functions based on examples drawn from the spoken data.

#### *Approximation*

As noted by Yaguello and Fleischman (2004: 135), one of the primary functions of the particle *genre* is to indicate approximation or inexactness. Where speakers would traditionally use expressions such as *environ* or *à peu près*, they may nowadays also use *genre*.

63.) *ils ont fait du bruit franchement (..) il était un truc genre trois - quatre heures du matin (N/101)*

Thus the lexical content of the word seems to have been bleached to some extent and its use resembles that of a preposition, i.e. a function word. Considering the semantic field of *genre*, and looking at its different meanings synchronically, we note that its main sense centres on comparison, similarity or further division. This sense can in fact be illustrated also on examples of its traditional usage (examples invented for the purpose of discussion):

64.) *c'est le genre d'homme qui n'aiderait personne*

65.) *les choses de ce genre*

66.) *j'aime la musique un peu retro, dans le genre de David Bowie*

Given that example (64) does not refer to a *specific* man, but to a *kind* of man, we could rephrase the sentence in a way that highlights the approximate, rather than exact, character of the man's personality trait: *he is similar to people who do not help others*, which does not have the same truth conditions as *he is the man who does not help others*. Similarly, example (65) can be rephrased as *things like that* or *that kind of thing* (often used as a general extender), rather than *these precise things*. Utterance (66) is an illustrative example of both approximation and similarity, comparing the speaker's favourite music style with a specific type of music. Therefore, *dans le genre de* could also be easily replaced by *comme* ('like').

The degree of similarity and approximation of traditional uses of *genre* may vary, but it is unsurprising that the word has developed new functional uses closely reflecting its semantic field. Although all the tokens present in my data seem to be characterised by a degree of *looseness of meaning* (term borrowed from Andersen (1997) describing *like*), some examples suggest that *genre* has also developed as an approximator *per se*; a function that is closely linked to its occurrence before NPs expressing amounts, sizes or figures:

67.) *je sais pas c'était pas cher (...) ça a coûté genre dans les 10 euro* (N/098)

68.) *il a fait genre (...) trois pas* (Emma, F27, R01)

69.) *ça va faire genre 200 pounds* (Nathan, M28, R03)

70.) *ça va faire un truc genre 50 euro* (N/081)

71.) *ils ont fait du bruit franchement (...) il était un truc genre trois - quatre heures du matin* (N/101)

From the examples above, it can be seen that *genre* is not just an optional grammatical element, but conveys the same meaning as *à peu près*, *environ* or *vers*. Without it, the overall semantics and interpretation of the utterance would be different, that is, more exact. Interesting observations are made by Yaguello (1998: 21) who remarks that *genre* carries an appreciative 'modal value'<sup>19</sup>, as in her example *il saute genre 1 m 30 sans*

---

<sup>19</sup> In English it is perhaps more appropriate to talk about speaker's stance.

*peine*. However, my examples do not exactly show that *genre* marks any positive or negative stance towards the utterance. In Yaguello's example, what seems to mark the speaker's positive stance is rather the term *sans peine* ('without difficulty'), while *genre* seems to be used only to indicate the speaker's inexact memory of how far the described person could jump. The speaker's attitude can be inferred from any positive or negative comments, which might or might not be present in the utterance. Example (67), for instance, reveals a positive attitude in the clause *c'était pas cher* but without it, it would have been difficult to establish whether the speaker approves of the price. Conversely, example (71) expresses a negative stance as the speaker disapproves of the fact that he was woken up at a late hour. However, examples (68) – (70) do not appear to convey any apparent expression of stance, or rather, the only stance expressed by the word *genre* appears to be of metalinguistic nature, in that the speakers do not want to be held to the fact that the price was *exactly* what they said it was, but instead, they indicate it roughly. Thus, *genre* seems to be used solely to express the inexactness of a phrase and any additional modal stance depends on the choice of surrounding words or phrases. Also, in instances such as (67) above, a higher degree of approximation is expressed in *dans les* ('around/about') which can be regarded as tautological, since *genre* already indicates approximation. Examples (70) and (71) suggest that a new approximator might be forming with *genre*, i.e. *un truc genre*. There are many instances of this particular expression in my data, which suggests that it is now a fixed expression used to express approximation (like *something like* in English).

By way of summary, the analysis shows that indicating approximation and inexactness is more or less a common property of most of the occurrences of *genre*. In some cases, this property overlaps with other functions (such as exemplification or reporting speech, as I discuss below); in others, it has developed as a main function for marking the approximate character of an amount, size or figure. In the latter case, it is used in the same way as a preposition.

#### *Exemplification / paraphrase*

In the previous section, we saw that *genre* can be used as an approximator, usually placed before a noun or a noun phrase. However, it can also stand before a whole phrase, in which case it connects the preceding sequence with the following one, as in:



72.) *elle parle toute seule (.) genre t'as vu quand elle était sur le canapé ?*  
(N/087)

Although many instances of *genre* introduce the idea of approximation to a sequence of speech, this inexactness also overlaps with other, more complex functions. One of them is exemplifying. In many instances, *genre* serves to provide an example or justify the previous utterance, and thus acts as an informal connector of two segments of speech:

73.) *c'est genre (..) si t'es riche tu peux t'acheter une maison et puis la louer*  
(N/100)

74.) *j'avais une copine / et genre elle s'habillait pareil* (Jeanne, F24, R03)

75.) *chais pas comment t'expliquer (...) genre hyper prenante quand elle est là*  
(Léa, F25, R04)

76.) *ça va être plus joli / genre là ça va être tout désherbé (..) là aussi* (N/082)

77.) *pas aujourd'hui (.) on peut le faire un autre jour / genre demain matin*  
(N/104)

In order to establish whether *genre* is used as a marker of exemplification/paraphrase, it is usually useful to examine the linguistic context of occurrence (in this case, the foregoing sequences). In (75), for instance, *genre* can easily be glossed with *par exemple*. This example can be interpreted in two ways: either as an explanation / reformulation of the previous claim or as a concrete example of it. In fact, (77) appears to be the only clear-cut example where *genre* can be replaced by *par exemple*, although all of the above tokens of *genre* can be glossed in that way. Upon examining all the tokens of *genre* in my data, a distinct group formed around this particular function of *exemplification* and/or *paraphrase*, which I henceforward refer to as a single group.

My understanding of *exemplification / paraphrase* seems to be in line with Fleischmann's (1999: 7) previous description of English *like* and French *genre* as discourse connectors. In a similar vein, Yaguello (1998: 23) describes *genre* as occurring between two segments of discourse of which the second is a form of subjacent subordination to the first. Thus, it can be glossed with other discourse

connectors such as *par exemple* or *la preuve*. She also argues that such uses of *genre* are situated at a metalinguistic level, since the second segment (immediately following *genre*) constitutes a reformulation of the first one and can thus be translated by ‘*je veux dire par là*’. In some instances of my data, a similar usage can be observed:

78.) *c'est minime pour vivre (...) genre je paye juste mon loyer et les factures et il me reste 200 euro pour vivre (N/09)*

The tokens of *genre* that I have analysed indicate that exemplification occurs in my data more frequently than paraphrase (see section 3.2.3). This is probably due to the fact that the word *genre* itself is semantically quite close to the word *exemple*. If we consider the cross-linguistic comparison of English *like* and French *genre* again, we note that even though their functions have developed in almost parallel ways, some of them differ. For instance, Fuller (2003a: 367) notes that in (79) below, *like* marks the focus of the utterance, and is not in any way an approximation:

79.) *I used to work for, like, the public defender in my home town*

Here, it seems clear that the speaker is referring to a concrete entity and not something that resembled the public defender. In my examples, too, *genre* often marks new or salient information in the utterance, with sometimes exaggerated significance, like in (75) above. However, in all the occurrences of *genre* in my data (in the *exemplification / paraphrase / focus* group), no instance where *genre* precedes a concrete entity and could not be replaced by *for example* was found. If (79) was translated into French with *genre* at the place of *like*, its meaning would shift: the person described would have worked for different companies, including the public defender. Alternatively, it would be the case that the speaker is unsure of the workplace described and therefore hedges his / her statement. At any rate, *genre* seems to express a more tentative meaning than *like* in this case.

One can thus conclude that French *genre* has overlapping functions – it can be used to exemplify, paraphrase or mark salient information. However, when emphasizing a

salient piece of information denoting a concrete (one and only) entity, *genre* might not be the best word choice, as it indicates the possibility of other entities.

#### *Reporting speech, thought and attitude*

One of the many recent functions of *genre* attested in the data but rarely examined in the literature is the *quotative* function. While Yaguello (1998) does not include quotation in her first analysis of new uses of *genre*, this function appears in later studies (Yaguello and Fleischmann, 2004) that compare French *genre* and English *like*. It could be the case that the quotative function has developed later than the other functions of *genre*, and therefore earlier studies do not mention it. However, this remains a tentative hypothesis. Let us now look at an example that illustrates the use of *genre* as a quotative:

80.) *moi j'ai bien aimé (.). franchement (.). mais Patrick il était là genre "ouais j'aime pas la chanteuse"* (N/106)

In this example, the speaker describes the attitude of her friend while at a music concert, using a first-person direct quote 'yeah, I don't like the singer'. As we will see, the apparently curious choice of a quotative like this might be explained in terms of speaker commitment, epistemic stance, sequential organisation or register.

Some recently developed French quotatives (including *genre*, but sometimes also *faire style*, *être en mode* and *être là*) have the same referential meaning as traditional quotatives like *dire*; however, they are used for slightly different purposes, with different levels of commitment and, of course, in different registers (or styles). Looking at another example from my data, we can experiment by replacing the quotative construction *faire genre* in order to express different types of quotation:

81a.) *puis il fait genre « ouais donne moi ton numéro »* (N/044)

81b.) *puis il fait « ouais donne moi ton numéro »*

81c.) *puis il dit « ouais donne moi ton numéro »*

All of the above sentences involve direct reported speech and contain quotatives that can be easily paraphrasable and interchangeable. This does not mean, however, that they serve the same pragmatic and stylistic functions. While example (81c) represents the highest level of speaker commitment and statement plausibility (i.e. possibility that the statement is true), the presence of *genre* in example (81a) lowers the level of commitment and plausibility. In other words, (81c) suggests that the reporter remembers what was said verbatim, whereas in (81a), the reporter seems to not want to commit to the exactitude of the utterance. Here, *genre* indicates that the speaker renders an approximate instead of an exact version of what was said.

In terms of stylistic choice, the examples are not entirely the same. Example (81c) resorts to the traditional quotative *dire* ('say'), while in (81b) the informal *faire* (perhaps equivalent to English *go*) is used. Example (81a) appears even more informal.

Interestingly, in my data the majority of quotative tokens of *genre* occur together with *faire*, i.e. *faire genre*. It is important to note here that this particular form has been occurring in two different contexts, either as a quotative or as an intransitive verb construction, meaning 'to show off'. The latter is illustrated as follows:

82.) J: (...) *elle s'habillait pareil que moi* (...) *elle reprenait toutes mes expressions et tout* (...) *et\_*

T: *elle voulait faire genre* (...) *tu vois* (Thomas, M25; Jeanne F24; R03)

My data contains relatively few tokens where *genre* functions as (part of) a quotative construction (only 5 per cent of all tokens of *genre*, as noted further in Section 3.2.3). This may be due to the fact that contexts where quotatives occur are somewhat constrained. For instance, it has frequently been suggested (Blyth et al. 1990, Tagliamonte and Hudson 2008, Buchstaller 2001) that the most favourable contexts for the occurrence of quotatives are conversational narratives. These contexts might not be so frequent even in long stretches of talk (simply because people do not always tell stories in their conversations); therefore the probability that different quotative variants might occur is lower than, say, for discourse markers.

However, quotative contexts were fairly frequent in my data, which is also illustrated by the fact that the quotative constructions with *dire* occurred 16 times more frequently than those involving *genre*. This perhaps shows, firstly, that the quotative function may be one of the last to develop for *genre*, and secondly, that *genre* is not completely equivalent to other quotatives since it is not a verb form which can stand on its own. *Genre* may thus be felicitously described merely as a marker adding a non-committal attitude to direct quotation.

As we can see, it is slightly problematic to consider *genre* as a fully-fledged quotative in the same line as, for instance, *dire* or *faire*, or even English *be like*, since it cannot normally stand as a quotative on its own or occur with the verb ‘to be’:

83a.) \**il genre « je ne viens pas »*

83b.) \**il est genre « je ne viens pas »*

This perhaps constitutes the main difference between *genre* and *like*: even though the functions of these two words within the quotative frame are very similar, *genre* does not co-occur with *être*. In some cases, however, *genre* can act as a sole quotative, especially when it is disconnected from the syntactic structure of a clause and placed independently between two meaningful clauses, one of which is rendered as direct speech:

84.) *Il y en a qui dès qu'ils entrent sortent le chéquier, le posent sur le bureau GENRE attention je paie donc j'en veux pour mon argent.* ‘There are people who, right when they come in, they take out their check book and put it on the desk, LIKE hey, I’m paying you so I want my money’s worth’ (Martin Winckler, *La Maladie de Sachs*, 1998, cited by Fleischman: 1999)

85.) C: *elle accrochait ses fringues aux murs (..) pour les montrer aux gens (..) euh elle faisait venir les gens pour qu'ils les voient / je\_j'ai pas trop compris [mais\_]*

L: [genre] " faites gaffe à mes (fringues) "

(Chloé, F/26; Léa F/25; R05)

The actual occurrence of the direct speech in cases like the above is questionable. Speakers use *genre* to convey expressive dramatic content of the message in the form of direct speech; however, it is not entirely clear whether the quoted speech was explicitly verbalized or just imagined / inferred from the attitude of the person described. While a ‘verbatim reproduction’ is generally considered necessary and taken for granted in quoted speech (Leech 1974, Genette 1980, Li 1986), scholars have also often argued against it. For example, Clark and Gerrig (1990: 795) argue that ‘what speakers commit themselves to in a quotation is the depiction of selected aspects of the referent’ and thus only replicate whatever they want to convey to the recipient(s). When speakers quote, it is not necessarily their goal to provide a verbatim reproduction; rather, they simply try to give a general picture of or feel for what the referent meant or showed by his/her attitude (if the direct speech is attributed to someone else) or how they felt about the situation themselves (if the direct speech is in the first person). In many contexts, such as story-telling or fiction, speakers use direct speech in this way in order to produce a vital dramatic effect on the hearer, but the speech might not have actually been uttered at all before it was quoted.

In this context, quotative *genre* seems to fulfil a number of functions relating to speaker commitment and subjectivity, and thus seems very similar to English *like*, as described by Romaine and Lange:

The marker *like* seems especially useful for reporting and/or modulating the speaker’s feelings, which may or may not have been explicitly lexicalised at the time of the event (Romaine and Lange 1991: 238).

The explicit verbal content - and the highest probability that it was really uttered – might be better conveyed by words such as *dire*. *Genre*, on the other hand, gives speakers a much larger scope of possibilities as to the actual occurrence of the speech following the quotative: 1, the speech might have been uttered; 2, the speech might have been uttered but not exactly along the same lines; 3, the speech might not have been uttered (and the words are only extrapolated from the speaker’s attitude). These different levels of probability make *genre* a multipurpose quotative that can be used for both reported speech and reported thought. As a result, its usage can be thought of as

existing on a continuum between the real, explicit utterance and an inferred impression or thought. *Genre* thus gives speakers the possibility to signal their epistemic stance towards the utterance, ranging between detachment and commitment, and between conviction and uncertainty.

There is now cross-linguistic evidence (see Romaine and Lange 1991, Fleischman and Yaguello 2004) that words whose meaning centres on comparison (e.g. *genre* and *like*) have become items that serve to introduce reported speech with hedging and approximative properties. Sometimes, it may seem paradoxical that speakers should try to reproduce the original speech exactly as it was uttered by imitating features such as voice quality, intonation and choice of words (e.g. interjections), while at the same time mitigating and weakening their statement with the aid of hedging quotatives. However, referring to English quotatives, Tannen (1986: 311) explains that every attempt to quote is actually ‘constructed dialogue’. Speakers thus assign direct speech or thought to those who they talk about, not always on the basis of what they actually said but also on the basis of the impression that they induced. Along the same lines, Blyth et al. (1990: 222) describe different quotatives as items introducing speech acts that can be either *perfective* or *imperfective*:

*Go* and *say* typically introduce a perfective (i.e., completed and punctual) speech act, whereas *be like* may be either perfective or imperfective according to its discourse function. Thus when *be like* is interpreted as imperfective it introduces a thought, inner monologue or a gestalt which summarises the speaker’s frame of mind; when perfective it introduces direct speech.

Most of the time, quotative *genre* functions in a way that is very similar to that described above. One reason can possibly be found in the similar semantic properties of *like* and *genre*; their recent functions can indeed be traced back to the core meaning of comparison and resemblance. If, in every language, there is a need to render direct speech in an approximative and noncommittal way, then the items marking comparison and resemblance might be the appropriate choice. The present-day development of homologous discourse markers and quotatives (e.g. French *genre*, English *like*, German *so*) suggests that speakers may need loosened, less serious and less restraining ways of

reporting quotes, thoughts, impressions and their stream of consciousness more generally. Naturally, speakers may sometimes want to hedge what they say, and allow themselves to use direct speech even if it did not actually occur *stricto sensu*.

Another element that the research on new quotatives has pointed to is the increased presence of sound effects, exclamations or non-lexicalised items following these quotatives (see Buchstaller 2002: 3). My data shows that *genre* as part of a quotative expression often occurs with informal *ouais* ('yeah'), but so do the more 'traditional' quotatives like *faire*, which in this case occurs with the more formal variant *oui*:

86.) *elles peuvent chanter à propos de différents trucs tu vois (.) genre "ouais t'es la femme la plus cocue de PA-RIS!"* (Nathan M28, R07)

87.) *et le mec il répond il fait "oui c'est normal que tu ne me connais pas ça fait dix ans que\_ avec Emma on s'est pas vu"* (Léa F25, R06)

Using words like *ouais* might become an automatism resorted to in order to strengthen the vividness and phonetically demarcate direct speech, giving it an authentic and dramatic 'touch'. Such attempts at creating authenticity may be considered as part of a 'performed narrative,' as described by Wolfson (1978).

This seems to be in line with Clark and Gerrig (1990: 793) who argue that one of the main functions of direct reported speech is reproducing *direct experience*: "when we hear an event quoted, it is as if we directly experience the depicted aspects of the original event". Quoted material thus often comprises original – or quasi-original – prosodic cues, sounds and a particular voice quality. If the experience depicted was reproduced in the form of indirect quotes with constant use of words such as *say* or *tell*, the description would possibly appear quite dull and monotonous. Speakers might therefore tend to resort to direct speech and quotatives that render this direct speech more vivid and authentic, while at the same time hedging their commitment to it.

By way of summary, new quotatives serve an important purpose in language at the pragmatic and interpersonal level. They not only serve to enhance the authenticity and vividness of speakers' descriptions, but they also serve to mark speakers' epistemic



stance. This stance is effectively represented on two levels; first, in a non-committal attitude towards the exact wording of the quoted material, and second, in a subjective stance towards the quoted material. That is to say, speakers often use direct quotes to depict someone's behaviour while also portraying and justifying their own view of it.

The increased frequency of use of the new quotatives and their popularity among young people might be indicative of a new trend. Do words such as *like* and *genre* actually help speakers enrich their descriptions and narratives? Only more detailed studies of the development of new quotatives will show whether these linguistic items become established in spoken language and spread across different age and network groups, which seems to be happening for English *be + like*, at least with regard to its spread across age groups (see Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2009). So far, it seems that quotatives with *genre* are not redundant, but fulfil important communicative functions, albeit in a colloquial style.

### *Irony*

Another function of *genre*, sometimes overlapping with other functions, is marking *irony*. It can be expressed in many forms, either as ironic quoted speech or an ironic explanation of someone's actions. It can easily be glossed with the French *soi disant*, which suggests that the segment following *genre* is given as an apparent reason for what has been uttered before, but a reason that is untrue or not credible. In English, *genre* could be, in this particular case, translated as 'supposedly because' or 'as if':

88.) *elle était prête pour venir avec nous et au dernier moment elle annule genre parce que tout d'un coup elle doit partir à la Réunion (N/111)*

89.) *ah ouais genre tu savais PAS (...) genre tu croyais que ça allait mettre 20 minutes alors que ça met une heure (N/055)*

90.) *ouais, genre ! (N/115)*

In the context of irony, *genre* is usually placed immediately before a conjunction introducing a subordinate clause, as in (88), or acts as a conjunction itself, such as the

second *genre* in (89). Interestingly, it can also be used on its own to mean ‘as if’, that is, to express the speaker’s disbelief that what is being discussed is true, as in (90) above.

The function of expressing irony has previously been noted by Yaguello and Fleishman (2004: 137-138), describing it as *ironic quotation*:

In all these examples, *like* and *genre* enable *dual-voiced utterances* in which narrators can use the direct quote form to report thoughts/attitudes they attribute to participants in their narratives while at the same time superimposing onto those internal quotations their own evaluative judgements.

Interestingly, my examples tend more towards *indirect quotes* in the second or third person, even though a direct, first-person quote is also possible:

91.) *genre j’ai jamais entendu un truc aussi bidon* (Like I’ve never heard such bogus before)<sup>20</sup>

Thus I would slightly amend Yaguello and Fleischman’s claim in order for it to reflect the fact that ironic quotes can involve not only direct speech, but also indirect speech and thought in the second and third person, as in (88) and (89) above. Nevertheless, with both direct and indirect speech, these quotes convey ironic evaluative and subjective judgments.

At the intersection of irony and explicative paraphrase, we should mention another form of *genre* that Yaguello and Fleischman classify in the group of ‘interpretive quotatives’ – *genre que* (2004: 9). Although this construction is not frequent in my data, it is nevertheless useful to note its occurrence with the conjunction *que* in indirect quotation:

92.) *Elle veut plus nous donner de fiches de lecture à faire à la maison, genre que c’est trop tard dans l’année* (‘She doesn’t want to give us any more reading

---

<sup>20</sup> The example in question was invented for the purpose of discussion, but French native speakers find it acceptable.

assignments at home, LIKE it's too late in the year') (From Yaguello and Fleischman, 2004: 9)

Here again, *genre que* introduces interpretations of what might have been explicitly verbalized or simply suggested by a remark or behaviour. It is important to stress their approximative character; as the authors point out in this case, they are rarely – if ever – verbatim. They solely provide an approximation, and ‘notably one that conveys the quoting speaker’s interpretation of what the quoted speakers said or might have thought, often in a highly condensed version’ (Yaguello and Fleischman, 2004: 136). This seems to be yet another variation of *genre* used for paraphrase, exemplification or interpretation in the form of indirect speech. However, one needs to examine the context, the voice quality and the prosodic cues in order to see whether the speaker really implies irony and disbelief, as in (88) above, or whether he/she just repeats what someone else has said, as in:

93.) *parce que moi on me l'a déjà dit que (...) genre que je parle tout le temps le cul quoi genre (...) chuis le genre de meuf qui aime le cul quoi*<sup>21</sup> (Léa, F, 25)<sup>22</sup>

However, it might not be entirely appropriate to treat *genre que* as a kind of a fixed expression, as it seems that *genre* is often placed before a subordinate clause introduced by *que* to hedge it, to weaken its strength or to express approximation. The pauses in the above example suggest that the speaker merely interrupted herself and added *genre* between two clauses, in order to provide *an example* of what people say about her. The fact that *genre* can also be placed *after* the conjunction *que* shows its syntactic flexibility. For illustration, let us look at another example from the same conversation:

94.) *mais il paraît que / genre après 30 ans maintenant c'est hyper dur de pouvoir / faire un emprunt parce que maintenant les emprunts ils sont sur 30 ans tu vois* (Léa, F, 25)

---

<sup>21</sup> *cul* - (m) sex, sexual matters

<sup>22</sup> The use of *genre que* seems to verge on ungrammaticality. I discussed both examples (93) and (94) with several native speakers who noted that *genre* used in conjunction with *que* did not sound correct. It remains an open question whether this use is idiosyncratic or commonly spread.

Interestingly, *genre* in (94) seems to be used in order to reduce the speaker's commitment to a statement that is already hedged by *il paraît que* ('it seems that'). As can be seen from the examples in this section, *genre* can be used as a conjunction itself or together with other conjunctions (e.g. *parce que* or *que*) in order to paraphrase someone's words and to justify or provide a reason for someone's actions. Depending on the context and the voice tone, such an utterance may carry an ironic subtext, as was illustrated in examples (88) to (92).

#### Focus as a function common to most uses of *genre*

The word *genre* shows some distinct characteristics in terms of information structure, namely with regards to the concepts of *topic* and *focus*. Although there seems to be little unanimity on what these concepts exactly stand for, let us briefly define how topic and focus are generally understood in linguistic theory, and more specifically in the context of the French language. Topic is generally defined as the 'thing which the proposition expressed by the sentence is about' (see Lambrecht 1996: 118). It is also often described as a 'scene-setting' expression, or 'a spatial, temporal or individual framework within which the main predication holds' (Chafe 1976: 50). It is to be distinguished from the notion of *discourse topic*, i.e. what the speakers generally talk about in a given stretch of conversation.

Focus, on the other hand, is sometimes defined as 'complement of topic', or 'the new information conveyed about a topic' (Lambrecht 1996: 206). Lambrecht, however, finds that these definitions are inappropriate since not all sentences have a topic, and thus focus should not be defined as its complement (1996: 206). The concept of *new information* is also slightly vague, since not all utterances and their parts can be clearly divided into 'old' and 'new'. Lambrecht, therefore, prefers to talk about *pragmatic presupposition* and *pragmatic assertion*. 'New knowledge' and 'new information' (focus) would be loose equivalents for the term *pragmatic assertion*, which he defines as 'a proposition that is superimposed on and that includes the pragmatic *pragmatic presupposition*' (1996: 206). For a more detailed discussion of these concepts, see Chapter 5, where I examine dislocation.

In French, spoken clauses (or utterances) usually follow a topic-to-focus (left-to-right) articulation, i.e. topic is usually placed on the left side of the sentence, while focus can be, in most cases, found as a piece of new information following the introduced topic – towards the right side of the clause. As illustration, see the following example:

95.) *telemarketing* (..) *c'est genre* (.) *tu fais qu'appeler les gens alors qu'en telesales tu dois vendre des trucs* (N/123)

In (95), the speakers talk about the difference between telesales and telemarketing. We might therefore rightly suppose that the notions of *telesales* and *telemarketing* are already known to them, and they are attempting to answer the question of what is the difference between the two. In this particular context, the speaker ‘picks up’ the old information (the word *telemarketing*) and continues with an explanation of what the word means. The expression *c'est genre*, placed at the beginning of the utterance, acts here as an introducer of an explanation. Interestingly, unlike English *be + like*, French *c'est genre* developed only as a device presenting explanations or exemplifications, and not as a quotative used with a grammatical person, as we saw earlier.

Both English and French *be + like* and *être + genre* tend to function as focus markers at the sentence or discourse level, since they introduce new information or a comment. However, it does not seem to be the case with *genre* alone, since it does not always introduce a focus, a piece of new information or a comment to the previously mentioned topic. Upon closer examination of the corpus tokens, it emerges that *genre* can sometimes be placed in a scene-setting position in a sentence (left periphery), and be followed by a comment. In such a case, *genre* can mark the topic itself, as in (96), or frame a scene within which the following comment applies, as in (97):

96.) *genre* *mes parents / ils partent à la campagne tous les weekends* (N/117)

97.) (Conversation about favourite beer; Speakers: Thomas, M/25; Nathan M/28; Chloé F/26; Damien M/24; R03))

Thomas: *Pauline elle utilise pas mal 'binche'*

Nathan: \_ *genre* avant (..) avant (.) au départ on se pétait une huit-six  
 Chloé: oh là là  
 Thomas: *sinon moi / (xxx) / avec Tony c'était la seize / j'avoue que c'était la  
 seize / une petite seize ça fait du bien* <LAUGHTER>  
 Damien: *c'est ce que j'allais dire / pour moi c'était seize*

The above examples suggest that at a sentence level, *genre* is not always used as a focus marker. Even though instances like (96) and (97) are rare compared to the instances where *genre* does occur in a focus-position, one cannot draw any general conclusions as to its semantic-syntactic status with respect to information structure.

#### Hedging as a function common to all uses of *genre*

Hedging is a communicative strategy that serves to express uncertainty and the speaker's noncommittal stance towards what is being said. This can be achieved by using devices that lessen the strength of an utterance, such as downgraders, indirectness, mitigation or understatement. Hedging can be achieved with an adverb (*a little, perhaps*), an adjective (*slight*) or a whole clause (*I don't know much about it but...*). Brown and Levinson (1987: 145) describe as 'hedge' a 'particle, word, or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that it is *partial*, or true only in certain respects, or that it is *more* true and complete than perhaps might be expected.' Chafe (1986: 270) defines hedges only as expressions that show that 'the match between a piece of knowledge and a category is less than perfect'. I use Chafe's definition and consider the hedging properties of *genre* only in terms of inexactness and imperfectness, or as marking speaker's reduced commitment to what is being said.

Considering all the functions of *genre* described in this chapter, it seems plausible to posit the hypothesis that epistemic hedging is one of their common characteristics. *Genre* as an approximator is the clearest example of a hedge, in that it shows the speaker's inexact memory of the correct figure, and thus his/her noncommittal attitude towards the statement. The fact that each segment introduced by the word *genre* is almost always accompanied by a brief prosodic break or hesitation seems to indicate

that the statement should not be taken literally. The truth conditions of the proposition as well as the speaker's own confidence in it are reduced. The statement still stands, but the speaker's commitment to its truth is limited:

98.) *t'sais il est genre un peu (...) un peu susceptible quoi* (N/124)

99.) *elle est (...) chais pas comment t'expliquer (...) genre hyper prenante quand elle est là* (Léa, F25, R04)

100.) *Tu veux dire (.) genre (.) je suis trop bête pour comprendre c'est ça ?* (N/069)

All of the examples with *genre* could be regarded as serving the hedging function to some extent. But some of them seem to fulfil this function *per se*, and can be used as a face-saving politeness strategy when the statement uttered by the speaker might seem strong, inappropriate, negative or too blunt. The above examples illustrate this function rather well; in example (98) we can see the speaker's attempt to justify an unpleasant statement, and likewise, in examples (99) and (100) we find an attempt to downplay the possible offensiveness of the following comments. Example (100) is particularly interesting, with the speaker trying to minimise the derogatory character of what her interlocutor might have implied previously. In such a way, with unspoken irony, she attempts to save face by proposing a statement that might not be completely true, while at the same time saving the face of her interlocutor – if the point that he was making was true and too abrupt. Insofar as each occurrence of *genre* in my data attaches only an imperfect and approximative character to the following segment of speech, and because speakers resort to this word in order to reduce their commitment as to the truth of what they say, one can rightly assume that *hedging* could be, to a greater or lesser extent, a common function of all its uses.

### *Summary*

My data suggests that resorting to the pragmatic marker *genre* is a common phenomenon in French youth language, probably resulting from a long-lasting process of pragmaticalisation on a lexical-to-functional continuum. The word has thus developed a network of new overlapping functions, of which the most important ones include *approximation*, *paraphrase*, *exemplification*, *quoting speech* or *thought* and *expressing irony*. In addition, there are two functions that appear common to all its

uses: at the epistemic level, *genre* acts as a *hedge*, while at the syntax-semantics level, it tends to be used as a marker of *focus* (even though, as I have shown, within a single clause it may sometimes be used as a topic-marker).

In many languages, discourse markers develop through a process of pragmaticalisation and therefore it seems unsurprising that this is also the case for French. Interestingly, the development of discourse markers like *genre* has been very similar – and almost parallel – in different languages and language varieties, with young people usually being the first adopters of innovative forms. Despite being considered colloquial and informal, the innovative pragmatic uses of the word *genre* have been attested not only in European French (Yaguello 1998, Fleischman 1999, Rosier 2002), but also in the French of Québec (Dostie 1995, Vincent 2001). This leads me to believe that using *genre* is not only a passing phase but might be indicative of a larger and more serious trend in the progressive development of some lexical words and prepositional phrases (e.g. *genre, façon, style*).

The question arises whether this trend has to do with a general development of language and would hence be ascribed to language change, or whether it is characteristic only of the use of young people and would thus be age-graded. As we have seen, it is too early to draw conclusions on this matter, mainly due to the lack of sufficient diachronic data exemplifying the innovative uses of *genre* across age groups. Thus, for a postulate of language change, it would be necessary to find out whether uses of innovative *genre* are spread among not only younger age groups, but also among older generations. And conversely, if this trend was age-graded, one would need to see if younger and older generations *do not* use it. I will suggest later, when comparing my results with other corpora of spoken French, that in general, innovative uses of words like *genre* are a relatively recent phenomenon; and it has been suggested in the literature (e.g. Yaguello 1998, Fleischman 1999) that it is popular mainly among young generations.

Although innovative uses of *genre* might often be subject to critique because of their untraditional syntax and grammar, it would be useful to look at the ways in which they can enrich the language and make a contribution to the variety of ways in which certain meanings are conveyed. We can cite the example of quotative *genre* that is able to link reported speech, thought or attitude immediately with the preceding segment, without



using a complex prepositional frame or changing the sentence structure. One may wonder whether more ‘traditional’ quotatives such as *dire* do not do exactly the same; however, if we wished to use *dire* in one of the previous examples, we would perhaps need a more complex quotative frame to reflect the same nuance:

101a.) *Patrick il était là genre "ouais j'aime pas la chanteuse"* (N/106)

101b) *Patrick il était là à dire quelque chose comme "ouais j'aime pas la chanteuse"*

101c) *Patrick il était là et c'était comme s'il disait "ouais j'aime pas la chanteuse"*

*Genre* seems to be able to introduce a whole idea unit, while at the same time maintaining the vividness of the statement and keeping a noncommittal stand towards its truth conditions. It thus seems to be a practical, multi-purpose word.

It might also be the case that new pragmatic markers such as *genre* simply directly reflect the speaker’s interior *stream of consciousness*. Following Chafe’s (1980: 13) observations on the intermittency of speech and on the fact that is produced in a ‘series of brief spurts’, it can be expected that speakers will naturally look for ways to reproduce their thoughts as *simply* as they can, and for linguistic (and functional) devices that allow them to do so. The possibility of such a multifaceted usage probably contributes to the popularity of innovative pragmatic markers like *genre* which, as many speakers reveal, can be used and reused in all possible ways ("on l'utilise à toutes les sauces", as one of the native speakers observed).

Using mainly qualitative methods, I attempted here to provide a more detailed analysis of newly developed pragmatic features of *genre* and shed more light on their functional uses. Firstly, the relative ‘simplification’ of youth speech, in my opinion, seems to reflect the desire for spoken expression to be concise, pragmatic and efficient, but at the same time modern and popular. Such pragmatic markers may therefore be appealing to young people on the grounds of both their practicality and prestige. Purists may be concerned that excessive use of words like *genre* impoverishes the language; in fact, it can be argued that words like *genre* make speech and thought somewhat less complicated, as speakers do not need to search for complex grammatical terms in order to connect sentence segments, introduce direct speech or soften the assertiveness of

their comments. The fact that all these functions can be found in one single word reduces the amount of words necessary to convey the desired message, and consequently, an individual's speech style and repertoire may seem somewhat less sophisticated. However, speakers are often aware of their register/style and chose to use non-standard pragmatic markers only in appropriate context. In fact, most recorded speakers in my sample confirmed their awareness of 'good usage', and although using *genre* may have become a 'language tic', they know when and where this word is acceptable.

### **3.2.2 Expressions resembling *genre*: *style* and *en mode***

There are several expressions in the French language that seem to have been 'pragmaticalised' to various extents and that serve functions similar to those of *genre*. My data suggests that while traditional uses of such terms are still common, innovative uses can also be heard, perhaps especially amongst young people. The expressions that are the most salient and interesting from the point of view of their potential functional equivalence with *genre* are *style* and *en mode*. This section discusses the functional and stylistic uses of these words, as well as their similarities and differences. While some functions of *style* and *en mode* overlap with those of *genre*, they are not identical. In fact, the two expressions have fewer functional possibilities than *genre*, but nevertheless represent a discourse-pragmatic phenomenon worthy of analysis. Although my data contains fewer instances of *style* and *en mode* and they are less varied, they are none the less relevant to my discussion of innovative uses of discourse markers.

Upon detailed examination of the characteristics of *style* and *mode*, similarities can be found between their semantic cores, especially when they refer to a particular form, variety, or manner. In the Larousse French dictionary, *en mode* refers to: 'manière particulière sous laquelle se présente quelque chose; forme particulière d'une action': e.g. 'mode de vie, de transport'. *Style* generally means: 'façon particulière dont chacun exprime sa pensée, ses émotions, ses sentiments', or 'ensemble des goûts, des manières d'être de quelqu'un; façon personnelle de s'habiller, de se coiffer, de se comporter', e.g.

‘style de vie’<sup>23</sup>. Since *style* and *en mode* have a similar meaning, we can consider that ‘a way’, ‘manner’ or ‘means’ are the key terms providing a clue to their present-day meaning and pragmatic uses. In other words, there are reasons for considering that these expressions have developed a set of similar pragmatic functions closely linked to their core semantic meanings. Let us now examine the functions of *style* and *en mode* in closer detail.

#### Qualifying / descriptive function: *style*

In a qualifying / descriptive context, *genre* and *style* fulfil very similar functions. While both can be used as descriptive markers interchangeably, *style* tends to be used more in situations where a particular external description is added to a person, thing or phenomenon. This is presumably due to the very meaning of the word *style*, i.e. the way/manner in which something is said, done, expressed, or performed. Through pragmaticalisation, the qualifying phrases that can be expressed in a canonical way, as in (102a), drop their prepositions and articles in order to make *style* the sole functional device used for qualification, as in (102b):

102a.) *elle était habillée avec le style d’une femme de ménage ...*

102b.) *elle était habillée style femme de ménage / ça lui allait pas (N/050)*

In such contexts, *style* is interchangeable with *comme*, both with or without the article that belongs to the noun described:

102c.) *elle était habillée comme (une) femme de ménage...*

This pattern reminds us of the way Rosier (2002) describes *genre* and its new uses that present a striking symmetry with the functioning of prepositions. *Style* seems to have developed a similar pattern of use, which can be modelled as follows:

Prep + zero article + noun

---

<sup>23</sup> Both examples from: Larousse 2010; <http://www.larousse.com/en/dictionaries/french>, accessed on 20/04/2009

As can be noted in my data, it is very often the case that new discourse markers behave according to this pattern, that is, they are presented in a short form rather than as a prepositional phrase. This is indicative of a change in their grammatical category, i.e. nouns become function words, by dropping what is strictly speaking unnecessary for the understanding of the sentence, e.g. prepositions and articles. Sometimes, as also noted by Fleischman (1999: 6), such markers can co-occur, as in:

103.) *C'est un mec genre style zonard*

I have noted one instance of co-occurring pragmatic markers in my recordings; here the speaker talks about a girl who dressed exactly like his friend Roxanne:

104.) *Elle s'habillait pareille (...) genre mode Roxanne* (Thomas, M25, R03)

Here, *genre* introduces a paraphrase, an explanation of the previous sentence, while *mode* serves as a qualifying marker introducing a description of the person in question. Even though at first sight such co-occurrences may look tautological, each marker has a specific function and can be replaced by another term, as in the following example, modified for the purpose of discussion<sup>24</sup>:

105.) *Elle s'habillait pareille (...) je veux dire comme Roxanne*

As we can see, it is not so much a lack of lexical meaning that characterises these particular new pragmatic markers, as they can still be rephrased and glossed with alternative terms. Rather, their meanings have become more vague, and therefore it is sometimes difficult to translate them into another language or find synonymous variants. This raises the question whether *style*, too, will gradually evolve as a discourse marker that is optional in speech but serves manifold discourse functions, such as those served by English *like*.

---

<sup>24</sup> Again, a native speaker was consulted in order to find out whether these substitutes were correct.

### Qualifying / descriptive function: *en mode*

*En mode* fulfils functions that may also be described as mainly qualifying and descriptive. More specifically, it depicts a particular state of being, a state of mind or the mood of a described subject. It seems, however, that the use of this expression with reference to human beings is considered as an Anglicism, and it is therefore stigmatised (see the website referenced in the footnote below). According to the Quebec board of the French language<sup>25</sup>, the use of *en mode* is acceptable in technical domains, but not in general use. Yet some new uses of *en mode* show that although this expression can perhaps be replaced by more common and natural French equivalents, it seems to have spread into every-day language and be used with reference to people's moods and states of mind.

Interestingly, the main definition of *en mode* specifically refers to the particular way a machine operates at a given time (example from the Quebec board of the French language website):

106.) *Les nouvelles voitures pourront être utilisées en mode automatique ou en mode manuel.*

By extension, this 'way of operating' can metaphorically be applied to people and the way in which they behave or the state/mood in which they are at a given moment. Thus, examples such as (107), (108) and (109) below typically contain a qualifying / descriptive term to the right of *en mode*, usually an adjective (107) or a noun (108), but sometimes an adverb (109):

107.) *on était dans le parc (...) on était assis (..) en mode tranquille* (N/038)

108.) *je suis en mode travail (...) ne me parle pas* (N/051)

109.) *on se met en mode bien et on y va* (N/057)

---

<sup>25</sup> Quebec board of the French language: [http://66.46.185.79/bdl/gabarit\\_bdl.asp?t1=1&id=3588](http://66.46.185.79/bdl/gabarit_bdl.asp?t1=1&id=3588) accessed on 22/04/2009

Whilst uses of *en mode* seem quite varied, this construction can only be used to define people's moods, states, appearance and the way they behave or talk. Beyond these uses, *en mode* could not be a substitute for *genre* or *style* in other contexts, such as those that express approximation, exemplification or paraphrase (in the examples below, *genre* was originally used):

110.)\* *tu vas payer en mode 20 euro*

111.)\* *ça va être plus joli (..) en mode là - ça va être tout désheuré*

This suggests that *en mode* has not been pragmaticalised to the extent of becoming a multi-purpose discourse marker, and seems to be restricted solely to the use defined by its semantic meaning. However, the innovative pragmatic uses of *en mode* show that this expression has acquired some grammatical and semantic flexibility. This, on one hand, is illustrated by the fact that *en mode* need not be used exclusively with adjectives of a technical nature, as in (106) above, and on the other hand, it need not be followed only by adjectives, but can also be used with nouns, adverbs or direct quotes. The latter use as a quotative is examined in the next section.

#### Quotative function: *style*

It is useful to examine the way in which innovative pragmatic markers began to be used in quotative expressions, and the specific contexts with which this quotative function is associated. In French, it is common to find the word *style* in phrases such as *se donner du style* or *faire du style*, presenting a particularly refined manner in which something is performed, as in:

112.) *Les filles publiques en écrivant font du style et de beaux sentiments*  
(BALZAC, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, 1847: 617)

Interestingly, this sense is kept in some innovative uses of *faire style* that occurs as a quotative and in some contexts suggests an ironical subtext. In (113) below, the speaker describes a restaurant in which people are seated close to the door and windows so that they can attract other customers. In (114), the speaker suggests to his interlocutor that she should take her friends for a walk in one of the nice parts of the neighbourhood:

113.) *pour eux, ça fait style "il y a des gens à l'intérieur" mais à côté de la porte c'est les pires places* (N/067)

114.) *tu les feras passer par ici / ça fera style "ouais j'habite dans un beau quartier"* (N/072)

In the above examples, combinations of direct speech and descriptive content expressed by *faire style* convey an image of extravagant self-praise, with reported speech increasing the effect of authenticity by creating an impression that the quoted words were really uttered. Interestingly, the functions of the quotatives with *faire style* are closely linked to one of the semantic meanings of *style*, especially as in *se donner du style*, i.e. taking exaggerated pride in one's own style. We rarely find instances of the quotative use of *style* without at least a peripheral subtext implying such an attitude. Thus the quotative use of *style* very much resembles some quotative uses of *genre*, in that it expresses an apparently false attitude of the described subject with an ironic allusion from the point of view of the speaker.

#### Quotative function: *en mode*

While the term *style* in its quotative context might convey a relatively ironic tone, *en mode* usually presents quoted speech without irony. In general, the quote following *en mode* is based on an unspoken attitude of the person described and the impression that s/he creates. Such a description can be applied to any person, either in the singular or in the plural:

115.) (Conversation about a visitor; Speakers: Nathan M/28, Jeanne F/24; R03)

N: *il va te draguer (...) il va [te draguer]*

J: *[non mais\_] moi (.) je vais être en mode "je parle à personne"*

In cases like the above, it is difficult to draw a clear boundary between speech and thought. Especially in the first person, one cannot establish with certainty whether the quoted segment was actually explicitly uttered or just present in the speaker's mind. The very definition of *en mode* leads me to believe that the quoted segment is just a

verbalised manifestation of the speaker's current mood. If the quote is presented in the second or third person and thus attributed to someone else, it usually expresses the impression that the speaker has of the person s/he describes, based on the behaviour of the latter. This can be illustrated as follows:

116.) *on arrête pas de l'appeler (...) on peut pas le joindre (...) il est trop en mode "je t'aime"* (N/090)

117.) *t'es en mode "je fais la gueule"* (N/121)

Just as was the case with the quotative *style*, *en mode* can introduce a direct quote in the third person, usually paraphrasing an implicit, insinuated attitude. However, it seems that among the occurrences of quotative *en mode* in my data, none of the quotes were actually explicitly uttered, at least as suggested by the surrounding context. This raises an interesting point: why do speakers resort to direct quotes if the quoted speech did not occur? *En mode* seems to be a suitable qualifying construction that connects easily with direct speech in order to describe a person's 'way of operating', i.e. their current mood, attitude or physical condition. Such a description often requires the use of direct quote; it seems like a strategy by which the speakers attribute direct speech to someone else and thus minimise their own responsibility for it, providing a seemingly 'objective' description of someone, as (116) and (117) above. The most practical way of achieving this objectivity is probably by using direct speech, as it creates a direct mental representation of someone's behaviour. Thus, in example (116), it is not relevant whether the person actually said *je t'aime* ('I love you') at any given moment. Rather, what is more important is that the interlocutors are able to visualise a picture of how the person behaves, and they can do so by imagining what the person could say in that context.

However, with *en mode*, the reported segment represents a particular way of behaving rather than a false, boastful approach, as was the case with *style*. The way of behaving, or an 'operational mode' seems to be the sole possible interpretation of the meaning of *en mode* both in quotative and non-quotative contexts.



Ironic explicative function: *style*

My recordings and notebook collection reveal several ambiguous occurrences of *style* which seem difficult to classify as purely qualifying or purely quotative. In this particular case, *style* acts as a discourse connector between two clauses, with the second clause explaining whatever has been said or implied previously. In example (118) below, speaker (A) explains how he understood the comment of speaker (B). Similarly in (119), the speaker explains the reasons for his previous comment:

118.) A. *je suis fatiguée* \_

B. *comment ça, style tu veux pas venir ?* (N/122)

119.) *il continuait à rigoler (..) style il a pas compris ce que je lui ai dit* (N/097)

As can be seen from these examples, *style* acts as a type of a connecting particle placed between two meaningful clauses, and can generally be glossed with *cela veut dire que* or *comme si*. Instances like this are not uncommon in my data; they usually contain an ironic subtext, with *style* having scope over the clause that immediately follows it. Again, variations seem possible, with *style* occurring with the verb *faire* and other prepositions or conjunctions:

120.) *j'ai fait style de pas comprendre* (N/120)

121.) *je fais style que je bosse* (N/064)

122.) *elle fait style elle m'écoute pas* (N/073)

Examples (120) – (122) are somewhat different from examples (118) and (119). While the latter contain an independent token of *style*, examples (120) – (122) all contain an instance of *style* immediately adjacent to the verb *faire*, and dependent on the verbal clause that follows. *Style* in such conjoined constructions cannot be treated as a discourse marker, as it does not have the syntactic flexibility and scope normally associated with discourse markers. If *style* was removed from the constructions (120) – (122) above, the sentences would no longer make sense. It can thus be argued that the word is evolving along two different paths: one as a potential discourse marker and the other as a fixed construction with *faire*. When behaving as a discourse marker, *style*

seems to have a greater syntactic flexibility, a looser semantic relationship with surrounding words and a more vague meaning. In this case, it can be linked either with direct quoted speech or with qualifying, justifying and explicative comments.

#### Attitudinal stance: *style* and *en mode*

At this point, we are familiar with the major functional differences between the descriptive and quotative uses of *style* and *en mode*. However, in addition to these functional differences, there seem to be differences between *style* and *en mode* in terms of the attitudinal stance expressed by these expressions. My data show that both *style* and *en mode* carry some emotional content on the part of the speaker; therefore, examining the context and the affective environment of the utterances seems important in determining what the speaker's message conveys and what functions are served by *style* and *en mode*. In my data, all the tokens appear to be linked to very specific contexts, that is, contexts in which speakers express some sort of stance towards what they say. Let us consider the following examples:

123.) *il est en mode galère* (N/036)

124.) *il est trop en mode déchet* (N/017)

125.) *j'étais un peu indécise sur mes écoles sur euh: j'étais un peu j'me disais un peu en mode en mode échec on va dire* (from the CFPP corpus; see Rosoff, 2007-2009, Recording 07-02, line <1179.431>)

All of the above utterances take place in an 'assessment' environment. In other words, the speakers provide an assessment of a phenomenon – most often of a person's behaviour. As noted further, this assessment tends to be marked emotionally. Let us consider these words in terms of their contexts of occurrence.

In my data, instances of *en mode* (used as a qualifier) are often followed by adjectival expressions with negative connotations, usually describing phenomena such as financial difficulty (*en mode galère*, *en mode crevard*), neglected physical appearance (*en mode déchet*), or a generally negative attitude or behaviour (*en mode casse-couille*). However, tokens expressing positive judgements were also found, notably ones describing pleasant states of mind or moods (*en mode bien*, *en mode relax*).

The quotative use of *en mode* tends to be associated with negative characteristics that the speaker attributes to the referent in the form of direct speech. Most of the time, the quoted speech itself would not necessarily contain any negative tone if it stood alone; the evaluative judgement is often expressed by the comments that precede or follow the quoted speech. For clarification, let us consider example (116) above. The fact that the person referred to is in love does not, in itself, suggest any negative judgement. However, as is apparent from the comments surrounding the quoted speech, the speaker seems to want to condemn the reduced responsiveness of this person and to express his negative view of it. A similar negative assessment is expressed in example (126) below, where the pretentious attitude of the person being referred to is viewed negatively, judging by the pejorative expression *se la péter* ('to show off') in combination with the adverb of intensity *trop*:

126.) *elle est trop en mode "je me la pète"* (N/029)

It is noteworthy that in the examples of quotative *en mode* in my data, there were no cases where the quoted speech seems to have been explicitly verbalized. This leads me to believe that the speakers ascribe their own value judgements and opinions to the subjects of their description, assigning to them speech that is not actually theirs. This type of direct reported speech thus seems to be only a stylistic device, employed in order to add more credibility and authenticity to the judgement of the speaker, albeit without any reliable evidential weight as to the source of the quoted element. Speakers thus seem to use the quoted element mostly for aesthetic and argumentative purposes; quotative *en mode* probably gives them the possibility of assessing the referent in an authentic style without taking responsibility as to the actual occurrence of the quote, and perhaps also without taking responsibility themselves for the negative assessment – the described person is *presented* as behaving in a bad way.

In my data, similar characteristics were observed with respect to the use of *style*. The fact that the semantic meaning of the word *style* is slightly different from that of *en mode* implies that the word is used for different purposes too. In terms of attitudinal

stance, *style* also expresses subjectivity, since it serves to display the speaker's own judgement of people or events. Let us look at the following examples:

127.) *elle me regarde style elle me connaît pas* (N/107)

128.) *il est venu m'apprendre la guitare mais toute la soirée il a joué tout seul – style "regarde comment je sais bien jouer" !* (N/112)

As we can see, both examples occurred in an assessment environment and reveal a negative stance of the speaker vis-à-vis the person they are describing. In addition to this, the referents are most often described in light of their false or pretentious behaviour, interpreted perhaps as an insincere attempt to pass for somebody that they are not, or as pretending to do something that they should not (or cannot) do. Consider also the following example:

129.) *t'as ton passeport qui est tout déchiré (...) style tu voyages énormément*  
(Damien, M24, R03)

The example contains a token of *style* independent of the sentence structure. This means that we could easily separate the two clauses and replace *style* with a whole segment such as *ça donne l'impression que* ('it gives the impression that') or *comme si* ('as if'). It is apparent from the choice of the word *style* that the subsequent sentence does not necessarily reflect reality, or at least not completely. If the addressee really did travel a lot, then it would have been more accurate to use a different – perhaps a less ironic expression, such as *ça montre que* ('it shows that'). *Style*, then, seems pragmatically appropriate in describing pretended and unrealistic behaviour, of which the speaker does not always approve. Both *style* and *en mode* thus seem to act as stylistic devices in that they allow speakers to assess a situation, sometimes also by using direct quoted speech without any evidence that it was really uttered.

### 3.2.3 Quantitative analysis

#### Functional distribution of *genre*, *style* and *en mode*

In my analysis of *genre*, *style* and *en mode*, different procedures were chosen to categorise, classify and analyse tokens. First of all, it is relevant to point out that the corpus of informal recording contained a sufficient number of instances only of new uses of *genre*. The recordings revealed only conventional uses of *style* and *en mode*, except for one quotative instance of *en mode*. For these forms I therefore added tokens from my notebook collection. Another important point to mention here is the difficulty of assigning clear functions to each token of *genre*, *style* or *en mode*, and hence the difficulty of creating a quantified set of clear-cut distributional categories. In fact, *genre*, *style* and *en mode* often serve overlapping functions in discourse, and thus only the main, most salient function was taken into account in the quantitative analysis. For instance, if quoted speech was introduced immediately after a given token, the latter was classified among the quotatives; however, the token could have also had other functions, e.g. exemplifying, hedging or expressing irony.

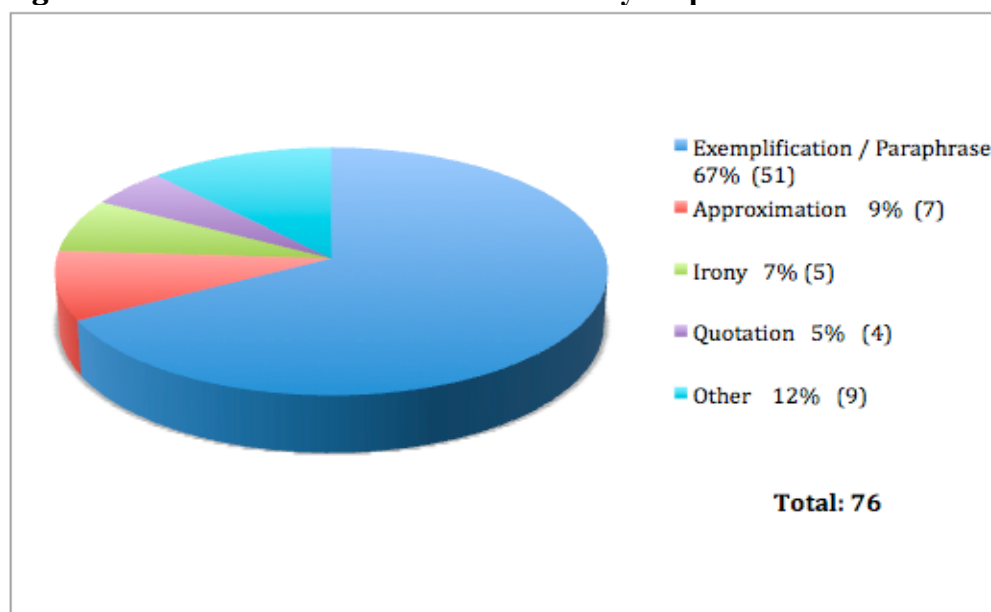
In the classification, it was important to take into account the fact that creating a wide range of categories increases the arbitrariness of classification, with different functions being too subtle to define and classify. Therefore, the number of categories was kept to a minimum and only what seemed to be the most important ones were operationalised. In the case of *en mode*, for instance, only two categories were established: the quotative function and the descriptive function.

Finally, as mentioned previously, a quantitative analysis was also carried out on two different corpora of spoken French: the CFPP corpus and the Beeching corpus. In order to facilitate comparison, the corpora were divided into two working files according to the age of the participants, using 30 as an arbitrary cut-off point. There was thus a group of younger speakers aged 15-30 and a group of older speakers aged 30 and above. The results from analysis of the two age groups in the Beeching corpus were collapsed, since they did not reveal any innovative uses of the tokens in question (i.e. short forms as opposed to prepositional phrases). Let us now turn to the quantitative analysis of the results and the functional distribution of tokens. All the Figures that follow contain

percentage counts, with the total number of occurrences in the corpus given in brackets. In the comparative Tables, frequency counts per 1000 words are used (see Macaulay 2002).

Let us start with the word *genre*, which occurred with the highest frequency and the most varied functions in the corpus of informal recordings. Figure 4 shows the distribution of functions:

**Figure 4: *Genre*: functional distribution in my corpus**



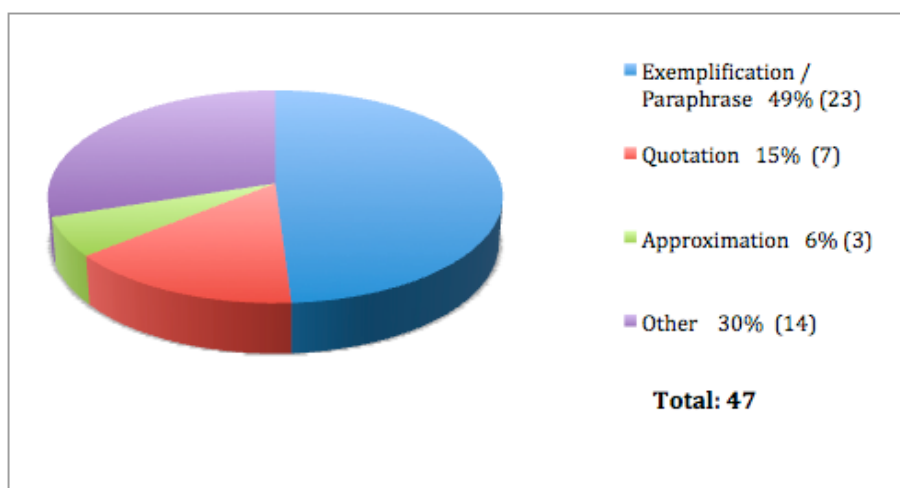
There was a total of 94 occurrences of *genre* in the corpus, of which 18 were excluded because they were used meta-linguistically. That is, one recording turned out to include a discussion of youth language, and the speakers started to mention different vocabulary items that they associated with it. The conversation thus included several tokens of *genre* that were meta-linguistic (i.e. reflecting speakers' comments *on* the language) rather than linguistic (i.e. reflecting speakers' use of the language). The remaining 76 tokens were then analysed with respect to their most salient functions.

Figure 4 shows that the most frequent function in my corpus was *exemplification / paraphrase* (such as *on peut le faire un autre jour, genre demain matin*). The second most frequent function of short-form *genre* was *approximation*, which occurred only

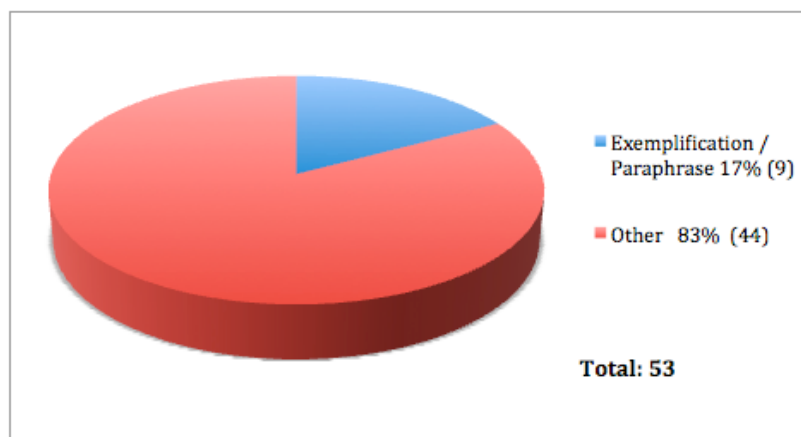
with immediately adjacent numbers (such as *genre 20 euro*). However, as was discussed in the qualitative analysis, approximation is a function present in most of the uses of *genre*. Another overlapping function, *irony*, was noted only if *genre* was uttered in a clearly ironic context that overshadowed its other functions (*ah ouais, genre!*; *genre maintenant t'es un homme!*). If the utterance contained a segment of direct quoted speech introduced by *genre*, the token was classified as a quotative (e.g. *Patrick il était là - genre "ouais j'aime pas la chanteuse"*). The category of 'other' included conventional lexical uses of *genre*, mainly in prepositional phrases such as *ce genre de choses*. The functions of *focus* and *topic* were not analysed quantitatively; it appears that only about 8 percent of all the instances acted as topic markers within a single utterance (e.g. *genre mes parents, ils partent à la campagne tous les weekends*), the remaining 92 percent acting mostly as markers of focus. However, since the very notion of topic and focus are highly debatable, their functional distribution may be difficult to establish objectively. Lastly, the function of *hedge* was not included in the quantitative analysis, as it was present, to a greater or lesser degree, in all the instances of *genre*.

Let us now look at the functional distribution of *genre* in the other corpora that were used for comparison. As mentioned before, the *Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien* was divided into two files. Figure 5 shows the distribution for the younger age group and Figure 6 for the older age group.

**Figure 5: *Genre*: functional distribution in the CFPP corpus (younger people)**



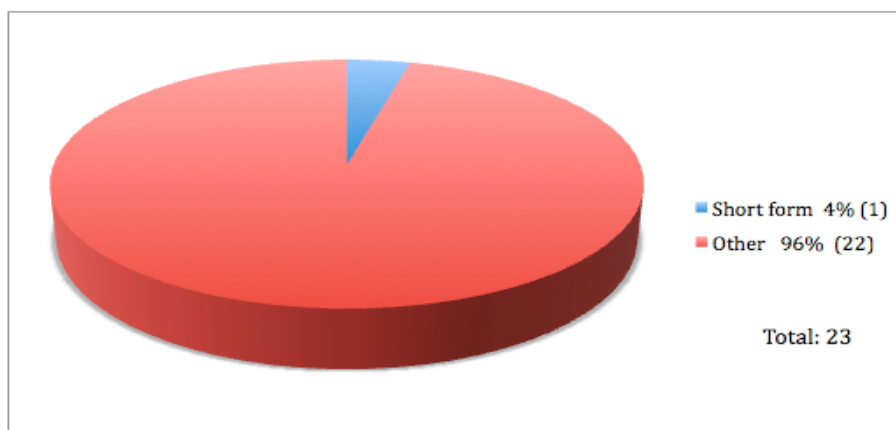
**Figure 6: *Genre*: functional distribution in the CFPP corpus (older people)**



As can be seen from Figures 5 and 6, the functions of *genre* are markedly different across the two age groups studied. Young people's use of *genre* is more varied and their speech contains a great deal more short-form tokens than older people's. Again, let us recall that the category labelled as 'other' contains both lexical uses (e.g. *genre musical*) and prepositional phrases (e.g. *ce genre de choses*). Thus we can see that the corpus of older people contains mostly traditional uses of *genre*, while these represent only 30 percent of the tokens in the corpus of younger people. It is very interesting to note, however, that the older people's corpus does contain short forms too, these mostly occurring in the context of exemplification. This raises questions about whether the pragmaticalisation of *genre* should be ascribed to age-grading, or whether it is subject to a more general process of language change, perhaps first used for the function of exemplification and then used for more diverse functions later. As we will see, in the Beeching corpus collected approximately 20-30 years earlier, this difference is even more categorical, with traditional usage representing 96 per cent of the occurrences:



**Figure 7: Genre: functional distribution in the Beeching corpus**



To summarise, it is important to note that *genre* does seem to be evolving diachronically; however, one can raise only tentative hypotheses about its grammaticalisation / pragmaticalisation. Larger and more varied corpora are necessary in order to draw more general conclusions about its usage from a historical perspective. For example, in order to answer the question whether new uses of *genre* should be attributed to age grading or language change, it would have been relevant to study current usage across all age groups. To some extent, the *Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien* contributes to our knowledge of the current usage across age groups; it is relatively large and varied, and it shows that innovative uses of *genre* can also be found in older age groups. Let us illustrate this evolution as follows:

**Table 3.1: Distribution of innovative uses of *genre* across sources**

	Sampling period	Corpus size	Frequency	Total short forms	Total all tokens	%
My corpus	2007-2009	54,000	1.24	67	76	88
CFPP corpus: young people	2007-2009	100,700	0.33	33	47	70
CFPP corpus: older people	2007-2009	337,600	0.03	9	53	17
Beeching corpus	1980-1990	158,800	0.006	1	23	4

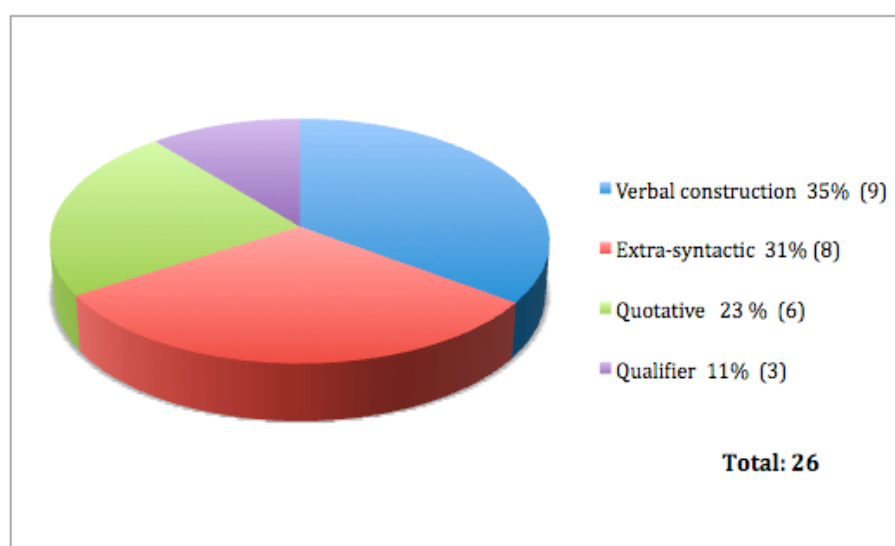
It can be noted from Table 3.1 that the use of *genre* varies a great deal in the corpora compared. For instance, my own corpus contains twice as many tokens as the CFPP corpus, even though the former is relatively small compared to the latter. Interestingly, the Beeching corpus contains only one token of an innovative use, while the total number of occurrences of the word *genre* was 23.

From these results, it does seem that more recent corpora contain more innovative uses. However, one has to take account of various factors that may affect the outcome of the recording process. For example, the level of formality and the extent to which speakers feel at ease are important aspects to consider when trying to tease out colloquial language forms from speakers' repertoires. In my own corpus, the level of formality may have been lower than in the other corpora, since the researcher was roughly the same age as the participants and belonged to the same network of friends. Also, the methodology was designed in such a way as to reduce speakers' inhibitions and create an environment that would be as informal and natural as possible. With the CFPP corpus and the Beeching corpus, however, information about the conditions of the recording process (e.g. location, age of researcher, relationship with the participants) is not available, and thus one can only speculate about the level of formality in the participants' language.

Another important factor to take into account is the idiosyncrasy of speakers' repertoires. One speaker may be a more frequent user of informal linguistic features than another, and therefore if a corpus is small in terms of the number of participants, just a few speakers can easily skew the results. However, this is a problematic aspect of most research involving recorded speech: the smaller the sample, the less representative it will be. In my case, although the corpus is smaller than, for example, the CFPP corpus, it has a larger number of young speakers. Taken together, the comparison of the three corpora provides a larger picture of innovative uses of *genre* across different age groups and a time span. However, although these results are interesting and relevant, they are only suggestive. More and larger corpora are needed in order to find out whether changes in the use of *genre* are just age-related, or indicative of language change.

Let us now look at the distribution of *style* and *en mode*. As mentioned earlier, very few innovative tokens were noted in the corpus of recordings, so I had to rely on the notebook collection to analyse these forms. In this collection, although the utterances were noted verbatim, the wider context could not always be recorded in great detail, so it was considerably more difficult to assign functions in a reliable way. Thus, functions were noted only with respect to the immediate linguistic context and easily identifiable discourse functions. The results are shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: *Style*: functional distribution in the notebook collection**

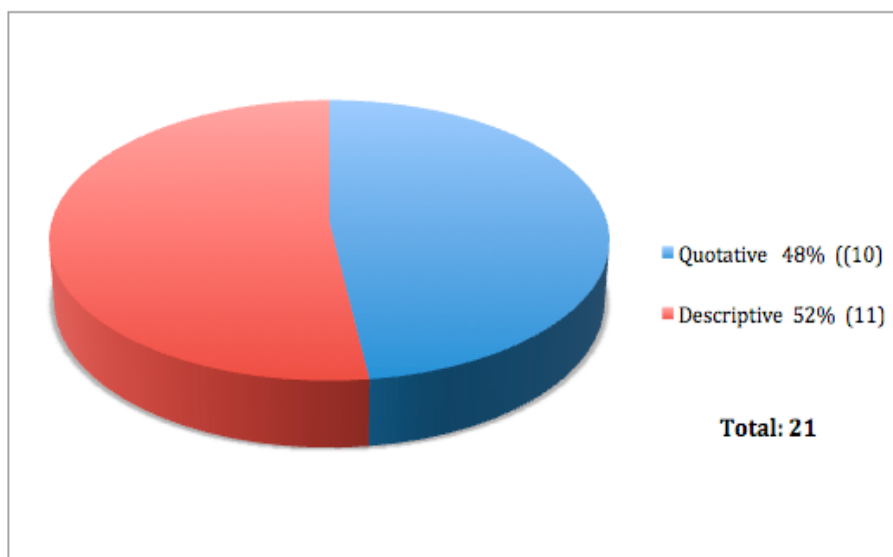


Let us now explain what the labels used mean exactly. The most frequent occurrence of *style* is in the form of *faire style*, which I refer to as ‘verbal construction.’ The occurrence of *style* labelled as extra-syntactic relates to the sentential position of the word; here, it is used as a type of conjunction between clauses or at the beginning of an utterance. In both cases, it is optional. That is, the truth conditions and the propositional meaning would not change if it was removed (e.g. *style tu veux pas venir?*). The function defined as quotative requires the presence of an immediately adjacent quoted segment. And lastly, *style* as a qualifier is usually followed by an adjective or noun modifier (e.g. *cheveux style Johnny Hallyday*).

While *style* has a relatively varied usage, this is less so for *en mode*. In the data, there are only two major types of discourse functions served by *en mode*: the quotative (*être*

*en mode* ‘*je parle à personne*’) and the descriptive (*en mode relax*, *en mode échec*). The distribution of these two functions is shown in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: *En mode*: functional distribution in the notebook collection**



The quantitative analysis confirms the results of the qualitative analysis: *genre* is used for a much larger set of functions than *style* and *en mode*, the two latter being used only in specific and semantically restricted contexts. Perhaps this is the main reason why nowadays *genre* seems to be used much more frequently, as was shown by the comparison of corpora in Table 3.1.

### **3.2.4 A note on variation**

Given the similarities between *genre*, *style* and *en mode*, I initially considered performing a multivariate analysis using a program such as Goldvarb. This program is used to analyse the relative strength of the effect of different factors on the use of one variant over another, and to determine whether the differences are statistically significant. However, I soon realised that performing a multivariate analysis would be impossible, for several reasons. First, *genre* was by far the most common variant among all the potentially equivalent expressions. Tokens of other words (e.g. *style*) were too few for this kind of analysis to be possible. For example, there would be a risk that a low number of tokens would produce what is commonly labelled as ‘empty cells’ and

consequent ‘knock-outs’<sup>26</sup> (i.e. inability to perform the analysis due to empty cells after performing cross-tabulations where factors interact). For more information on variationist analyses, see Tagliamonte, 2006).

Secondly, most tokens of *style* and *en mode* were obtained through the notebook collection, with only *genre* frequently employed in the conversation recordings. One could mix these sources for a Goldvarb analysis only if the relevant potentially constraining factors had been adequately documented. However, in my notebook collection, information about linguistic or non-linguistic context was not always available. The notebook collection was based exclusively on verbatim utterances focusing on particular words of interest heard in random situations, and did not include the wider linguistic context.

Another reason for the impossibility of performing a variable analysis is that the uses of *genre* show a large degree of semantic overlap and a multifunctional usage. Thus even the apparently equivalent expressions could not be considered as *total* equivalents. In the context of exemplification, for instance, it would have been possible to consider words like *style* or *par exemple*, but not *en mode*. So, although *style* and *en mode* carry certain functions that seem similar to those of *genre*, they could not be considered as equivalents and treated as variants of one variable.

Lastly, with regard to the factors that could potentially be analysed, it would have been possible to consider only the linguistic context (e.g. pauses or surrounding words). External factors, such as speakers’ age or social class, were not varied enough to be worth including in the analysis. This is one of the reasons why in my study as a whole, priority is given to qualitative analysis.

---

<sup>26</sup> Goldvarb 2001 manual defines *knockouts* as cases where ‘all the tokens are accounted for by one or the other of the application values. For example, if we are looking at the occurrence of plural -s, it may be that in geographical area X its occurrence is categorical. So if one of the factors groups is geographical area, and the results file shows that occurrence of plural -s is 100% and absence is 0%, there is no variation in this environment and the multiple regression analysis will not run’. ([www.romanistik.uni-freiburg.de](http://www.romanistik.uni-freiburg.de), accessed on 10/05/2010)

### 3.3 Conclusion

In this section I discussed the differences and similarities among three discourse particles which all seem to have been pragmaticalised to various extents. In the process, they have begun to be used as short forms and to serve functions at the level of discourse. Although they may seem equivalent, and sometimes are, there are many subtle differences between them which I attempted to illustrate using authentic spontaneous examples both from the corpus of conversation recordings (for *genre*) and from the notebook collection (for *style* and *en mode*). My aim was to describe the different functions that these expressions serve, and the consequent constraints that govern the choice of a suitable discourse variant. In an-depth qualitative analysis I attempted to provide insights into the contexts in which these words tend to occur. Then, in a quantitative and qualitative comparison of three different spoken corpora, I sought to raise questions about whether the complex development of words like *genre* could be associated with youth language, or whether they are involved in a more general language change, and to what extent the uses of these expressions may be considered innovative.

From the point of view of variation, the particles cannot be considered completely equivalent. The overall picture that emerges from my analysis is that *genre* serves the most varied discourse functions, has the largest semantic scope and the most syntactic and discourse flexibility. It also seems to be the most frequent among the particles of a similar type. *Style*, on the other hand, seems mostly associated with false or ironic contexts, especially in descriptions of people's behaviour and appearance. Similarly, *en mode* is associated only with descriptions of a state of mind or mood, while also appearing as a quotative that serves to introduce imagined direct speech associated with such descriptions.

By way of summary, it can be seen from the above observations that the particles discussed have their own contexts of usage, in which they have acquired new pragmatic functions. This shows that they may be grammaticalising into discourse markers. The results thus point to the need for larger studies concerned with the variation and the development of these particles both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective.

## **Chapter 4 General extenders in the speech of young people**

As part of the analysis of discourse-pragmatic elements in spoken language, this chapter addresses contemporary trends in the use of general extenders in the speech of young people. I consider this language feature to be an important element of youth language, again, because of its sheer frequency on the one hand, and because of its pragmatic and intersubjective functions on the other. From the analysis of my spoken data, it transpires that the pragmatic functions of general extenders are progressively shaping speakers' preferences for the use of a particular variant, and this is also reflected in my quantitative results where certain variants are highly prevalent while others seem on the decrease. In order to gain an insight into young peoples' use of general extenders, I firstly review the relevant literature before examining my own qualitative data and, as was the case in the previous chapter, finish with a discussion of some quantitative results.

### **4.1 Previous research and theoretical background**

In recent decades, studies of spoken language have noted the importance of general extenders in discourse, shifting the focus of analysis from the structural to the interpersonal level in order to understand their role (Dubois 1992 and 1993, Overstreet 1997, Cheshire 2007). As was the case with innovative uses of discourse markers, the French literature on general extenders is less extensive than that in the Anglophone countries; hence I review the relevant literature from both the Anglophone and the Francophone field.

In her extensive work on general extenders in American English, Overstreet (1997, 1999, 2002, 2005) defines general extenders as follows:

General extenders are typically phrase- or clause-final expressions with the basic syntactic structure, conjunction + noun phrase, which extend otherwise complete utterances (hence, 'extenders') (Overstreet 2005: 1847).

Like most other scholars, she divides these expressions into *adjunctives* (those beginning with *and*) and *disjunctives* (those beginning with *or*); let us consider some examples of both types:

A) adjunctive general extenders: *and everything, and all, and stuff*

B) disjunctive general extenders: *or something, or anything, or whatever*

While in English general extenders commonly begin with a conjunction, in French there are several other types of expressions which function in a very similar way, but do not necessarily contain a conjunction. Consider the following extract from my data:

130.) (Conversation about passport. Speakers: Chloé F26 and Thomas M25; R03)

A: *il est hongrois ?*

B: *non il est français mais bon / tu dirais même pas / attends déjà / regarde  
déjà les traces de barbecue tout ça / regarde le passeport*

Other than ‘general extenders’, the expressions in question have often been referred to as ‘set-marking tags’ (Dines, 1980), ‘utterance-final tags’ (Aijmer, 1985), ‘generalised list completers’ (Jefferson, 1990), ‘extension particles’ (Dubois, 1992), ‘discourse extenders’ (Norrby and Winter, 2001), ‘set markers’ (Stenström et al. 2002) or ‘performance fillers’, introduced to ‘give both speaker, and hearer, additional time for processing’ (Channell, 1994: 120). They have also been described as part of vague language, and hence labelled ‘vague category identifiers’, serving to designate both concrete and abstract categories (Channell, 1994). Following Overstreet, I will henceforward refer to these expressions as ‘general extenders’, since this term seems not only the most frequent and neutral but also, in my opinion, best reflects the properties of these pragmatic expressions.

As far as French is concerned, I have noted the term *particules d’extension* (Dubois 1993), described as ‘anaphoric elements, serving to extrapolate from what has previously been said’, but also ‘functioning to indicate the end of a sentence or phrase’ (Dubois 1993: 179-180). Dubois provides a list of the following constructions common in Québec French:



Table 4.1: List of general extenders and components (adapted from Dubois 1993: 202)

tout	tout ça	toute la patente
tout le tra la la	tout le reste	tout le kit
tout l'affaire	toute la bébelle	toute la ribambelle
tout le truc	tout le fourbi	toutes ces affaires-là
toutes ces choses-là	toutes ces patentes-là	un tas de choses
un paquet de patentes	un paquet de choses	cinquante-six bébelles
quelque chose	quelque chose de même	quelque chose comme ça
quelque chose du genre	quelque chose dans le genre	ces patentes-là
ces trucs-là	ces affaires-là	ces choses-là
ces histoires-là	ces affaires de même	des choses de même
des affaires comme ça	des patentes comme ça	des trucs du genre
des affaires de même	des choses de même	des patentes de même
des histoires de même	des affaires du genre	des histoires comme ça
des choses pareilles	une affaire comme ça	et cetera
ci puis ça	c'est ci, c'est ça	patati patata (bla bla bla, . . .)
ainsi de suite	envoie	envoie donc
le diable à sa patte	n'importe quoi	toutes sortes de bébelles
toutes sortes de choses	la compagnie	un paquet d'affaires de même
peu importe	je sais pas trop quoi	un paquet d'affaires comme ça
quoi que ce soit	whatever	un paquet de trucs comme ça
une affaire de même	quoi que ce soit comme ça	tout ce que vous voulez
toutes sortes de patentes	toutes sortes d'affaires	toutes sortes de trucs
toutes sortes de choses comme ça		toutes sortes d'affaires comme ça
toutes sortes d'affaires de même		toutes sortes de choses de même
toutes sortes d'histoires du genre		cinquante-six affaires comme ça

As Dubois explains, French general extenders typically comprise a combination of a quantifier, a generic and a comparative, and are optionally prefaced by the conjunction *puis*, *et* or *ou*. The list also includes many fixed forms (e.g. *et cetera*) or forms with onomatopoeic aspect (e.g. *patati patata*).

Like the other researchers cited above, Dubois speaks of general extenders as constructions typical of spoken language with manifold discourse functions. She observes that written genres usually have recourse to words like *such as* or *and the like*, and even if these are used in spoken language, they are often accompanied by general extenders. She thus contrasts the 'reflexive post-hoc editing' of written modes, with the 'real-time dynamic of discourse organisation' in spoken language (1993: 198). With regards to spoken French, Andrews (1989) also speaks of 'terminal tags / series markers', which he identifies as part of a larger set of 'terminating devices', a

heterogeneous category that typically contains terminating elements such as *voilà*, *quoi* or *hein*.

### *General extenders and shared knowledge*

Dubois (1993) explains that the existence of specific areas of social knowledge shared by the speaker and listener is inherent in the use of general extenders. Similarly, Channel (1994: 143) invokes the role of the ‘addressee’ and notes that in order to identify the intended category marked by a general extender (or by a ‘vague category identifier’), the addressee needs to draw on pragmatic information. Therefore, general extenders are a set of words that function mainly on the socio-pragmatic and interpersonal level of interaction, where speakers share some degree of mutual understanding or some sort of knowledge. This is in line with Stenström (2002: 86) who links the use of vague words like general extenders to the degree of formality among the speakers; the less formal the situation, the more vagueness there may be.

However, invoking the existence of common knowledge among speakers who use general extenders may be problematic. As Overstreet explains, the use of general extenders marks an assumed reciprocity of perspectives rather than an actual piece of shared knowledge:

It is the assumption of shared knowledge that is marked by the general extender, not the fact, and that assumption is rarely challenged. Indeed, questioning an utterance containing a general extender might be perceived as a breach of the reciprocity of perspectives (the assumption that the hearer will supply whatever unstated understandings are required to make sense of the speaker’s utterance). Rather than affirming the participants’ solidarity, this would draw attention to their differences and potentially increase the social difference between them (Overstreet 1999: 74).

Similarly, Dines (1980: 29) notes that the hearers in her corpus never question the general extenders or request their clarification from the speakers. Instead, they offered ‘supportive feedback indicating that they were following the communication’ (1980: 30).

There is a consensus among most researchers that general extenders are expressions serving to extend the set of referents announced by the previous word or phrase, or by a group of words or phrases. The latter are also referred to as ‘operands’ (Dubois 1993: 181) or ‘anchoring constituents’ (Ward and Birner 1993: 208). The operand is a word or a set of words to which the general extender refers and which it extends. In the present context, it can be either a specific item (from a set) or a much vaguer notion represented by a group of words or a clause. Let us consider an example in which the speaker describes his favourite cartoon character and all the remarkable skills this character has:

131.) *jamais il se casse la gueule (...) tout le temps il arrive à se sauver à la dernière minute et tout* [Nathan, 28, R07]

As we can see, the above example does not contain an explicit list of nominal ‘items’; rather it evokes different activities as processes. The operands may thus be understood as all independent units representing a single notion, such as a skill in example (131), e.g. *jamais il se casse la gueule* (‘he never breaks his neck’) and *tout le temps il arrive à se sauver* (‘each time he manages to escape’).

#### *General extenders and discourse markers*

Much of the literature on general extenders has pointed out their similarities with discourse markers, especially their similar epistemic role and their non-truthconditional value in discourse. Some scholars therefore treat general extenders as belonging to a larger set (or subset) of discourse markers (Dubois 1993; Aijmer 1985; Lemieux, Fontaine and Sankoff 1987) or as a larger set of ‘pragmatic operators’ (Overstreet 1999). Indeed, there are many common characteristics between general extenders and discourse markers: both are semantically and grammatically optional, that is, the utterance would be complete without them (e.g. consider the utterance without the underlined segment in (131) above). Where they do play a role, however, is at the pragmatic level of the utterance; they help to express the speaker’s epistemic stance and mark inter-speaker solidarity as well as punctuate individual segments of discourse. The fact that general extenders tend to co-occur with discourse markers, as has been noted

previously (Cheshire 2007), seems to confirm that they play similar pragmatic roles in interaction.

While clearly strong parallels can be drawn between discourse markers and general extenders, there are some differences in terms of their structural position in discourse. Cheshire (2007) describes the functions of general extenders as follows:

Many of their discourse functions resemble those of pragmatic particles such as *sort of* or *you know*, but they differ from most other pragmatic particles in having a fixed position within a clause: they occur immediately after a word, phrase or clause and rarely before them (Cheshire 2007: 156).

On one hand, general extenders may be treated as pragmatic particles on the grounds that they serve a meta-pragmatic function in discourse and structure the flow of speech with respect to arguments in individual turns, as I have shown in the previous examples. On the other hand, however, it may be argued that general extenders should not be treated as discourse markers because they do not possess the necessary syntactic flexibility associated with the use of most discourse markers. Although it is the case that structural differences exist, especially with respect to the flexible position of discourse markers as opposed to the fixed position of general extenders, these differences do not alter the pragmatic properties of the latter. In other words, what is important in the use of all pragmatic particles is their primarily pragmatic discourse function as opposed to their referential meaning. In example (131), the discourse-pragmatic function seems to outweigh the referential meaning of the general extender used in that the latter serves to emphasise the idea expressed beforehand, which seems more important than suggesting other referents. Bearing this in mind, I would lean towards Overstreet's description of general extenders as members of a larger class of forms known as 'pragmatic operators' (1999: 13).

As was the case with discourse markers, general extenders have come to be identified as a category commonly subject to grammaticalisation and change (defined previously in section 3.1.2). There are different degrees of grammaticalisation and some expressions may be more prone than others to be grammaticalised. In English for instance, several

general extenders are said to be used in their shortened, grammaticalised forms (Aijmer 2002) and these variants seem to be used more frequently among adolescents and young people (Cheshire 2007). Cheshire (2007: 156) provides a list of grammaticalised general extenders<sup>27</sup> in the three varieties of English analysed in her study:

<i>And that (and all that)</i>	<i>And stuff (and stuff like that)</i>
<i>And everything (and everything like that)</i>	<i>And things (and things like that)</i>
<i>Or something (or something like that)</i>	

French grammaticalised forms of general extenders seem to be less numerous than their English counterparts. In my data, there seems to be only one case in which the form may have been shortened through grammaticalisation: *et tout* (from *et tout ça*), a form that seems to have become the preferred variant among young people. Although establishing with certainty whether this form has been grammaticalised would require a comparison of ample diachronic and synchronic data, I nevertheless attempt to provide qualitative evidence for new uses and new discourse functions that this form may progressively be taking on (refer to the next section). In fact, a similar phenomenon has been noted in Toronto English (Tagliamonte and Denis 2010), where the form of general extenders seems to undergo ‘lexical replacement’, with the short-form variant *and stuff* becoming predominant and acquiring various new discourse functions.

The fact that in French there are fewer potentially shortened forms is probably due to the structure of the French language which is quite different from English. While in English constructions with *like that* may be shortened by omitting the last phrase, this is not the case in French. Interestingly, it seems that general extenders with *quelque chose* cannot be shortened:

132.) *Il était pas disponible ou quelque chose comme ça* ('He wasn't available or something like that')

? *Il était pas disponible ou quelque chose* (BUT: 'He wasn't available or something')

*On a mangé du pain, des choses comme ça* ('We ate bread and things like that')

? *On a mangé du pain, des choses* (BUT: 'We ate bread and things')

---

<sup>27</sup> Presumably, the short forms have grammaticalised from the longer forms (in brackets).

This leads us to believe that the grammaticalisation paths may vary cross-linguistically; since the variants in each language are structurally different, they rarely undergo the same type of change.

#### *General extenders and vague language*

The use of general extenders has been commonly associated with vague language and they were thus often explicitly referred to as ‘vague category identifiers’ (Channel 1994). Their use has been associated with working-class speech, and in popular opinion has been stigmatised as vague, inexplicit or even inarticulate (Dines, 1980). While some previous studies have tended to concentrate on the referential function of these forms (see Dines 1980, Dubois 1993, Channel 1994), others have begun to examine the possible interactional and pragmatic goals that can be achieved by the use of general extenders, primarily at the discourse level (see, for example Overstreet 2005 or Cheshire 2007).

Jucker et al. (2003) argue that vagueness in language should not be understood as a deviation from preciseness and clarity, but that vague expressions may be ‘more effective than precise ones in conveying the intended meaning of an utterance’ (2003: 1737). As the authors further point out, vague utterance should not be regarded as ‘approximately true’, because all utterances can only be an approximation to whatever thought the speaker has in mind. Vague expressions may then be better described as providing ‘processing instructions that guide listeners to the most relevant interpretation of an utterance’ (Jucker et al. 2003: 1742), often expressing pragmatic information such as the degree of the speaker’s commitment, their propositional attitude or personal evaluation. More importantly, however, they are said to serve important social functions, such as ‘engendering camaraderie’ or ‘softening implicit criticisms’ (2003: 1737).

#### *General extenders, informality and youth language*

Authors usually link the use of general extenders to informal and spontaneous spoken language. As we have seen, Stenström et al. (2002) has argued that the more informal

the situation, the more vagueness is permitted, and speakers are thus more likely to use expressions such as general extenders. The casual and colloquial character of these expressions is perhaps one of the reasons why their use is systematically associated with youth language. For example, as Winter and Norrby (2001) argue, the use of general extenders often reveals ‘affiliative meanings’ among participants, their ‘self presentation and wider adolescent norms as well as the negotiation of topical structure and negotiation strategies for representing and co-constructing realities’ (2001: 8). Elsewhere (2000), they have argued that the use of general extenders (or as they say, ‘set marking tags’) is a salient youth feature, displaying parallel patterns across different languages: they are used in similar and innovative ways, especially to to express ‘meanings of participation, interaction and identity’ (2000: 8).

Consistent with this is Dubois’s (1993) observation that the use of general extenders displays the effect of age-grading and their frequency diminishes with increasing age. Cheshire (2007) assumes that young people are important in the development of change in general extenders, arguing that these forms are often subject to grammaticalisation, including ‘phonetic reduction, decategorisation, pragmatic change and semantic shift’ (2007: 188). Tagliamonte and Denis (2010), too, note that the use of general extenders in Toronto English may be undergoing lexical replacement with the variants with *stuff* becoming highly predominant in youth speech.

Bearing all this in mind, it seems that in the domain of general extenders, young people play a key role in shaping (and perhaps changing) patterns of use. As we will see in my data, French youth language exhibits several of the phenomena attested for the English general extenders, including a preference for particular variant(s), grammaticalisation, increased multi-functionality and a putative effect of age-grading, which I address in fuller detail in the next section.

### *Summary*

General extenders have been described mainly as pragmatic forms typical of spoken language, serving important interpersonal functions such as marking solidarity, hedging, organising discourse units as well as expressing solidarity and politeness. Because their

epistemic functions display similarities with those of discourse markers, some authors have argued for their inclusion in the same category of pragmatic operators. Many authors have also pointed out the impact of grammaticalisation on the use of general extenders, noting especially that their function of ‘extending a referential set’ has been somewhat ‘eclipsed’ to the profit (and the development) of a range of discourse-pragmatic functions. General extenders are said to be particularly salient in the speech of young people, where they are most likely to be grammaticalising.

## **4.2 Data analysis**

### **4.2.1 General extenders: distribution of forms in the corpus of spoken French**

In this section, the functions of French general extenders are considered within a more general framework analysing primarily their discourse properties. I thus attempt to avoid considering these forms only in terms of their referential meaning and functions (i.e. the function of extending a referential set). Based on examples drawn from my spoken data, I look at different forms and offer a qualitative analysis with respect to their meaning and discourse functions. The contextual cues provided by authentic examples should allow an insight into the interpersonal factors involved in the use of general extenders, especially into the ways they are manipulated in an appeal to common ground. It is also useful to determine whether the use and the choice of general extenders are conditioned by any interactional factors and whether some forms may be preferred to others. I also aim to establish whether the uses shown in my data confirm the findings of previous analyses and what further observations can be made, specifically in the French context.

The selection of expressions that I henceforward include in the category of general extenders is based on the following criteria:



- a) They extend a referential set (e.g. *tomates, carottes et tout ça*)<sup>28</sup> or a looser dynamic notion (e.g. *il arrive à se sauver et tout*);
- b) They occur in a terminal position (immediately after a word or phrase or in turn-final position);
- c) Even though some of them do not contain a conjunction, logically they can still be divided into adjunctives (*tout ça, (et/ou) machin, etcetera*) and disjunctives (*ou quoi, quelque chose comme ça, un truc comme ça*);
- d) In phonological terms, general extenders are usually uttered with low pitch and unstressed (Overstreet 2005: 1850).

On the basis of these criteria, I have noted several general-extender variants in my data, listed as follows.

**Table 4.2: Forms of general extenders in the present corpus of informal conversations**<sup>29</sup>

---

<i>Et tout</i>	<i>Ou quoi</i>
<i>(Et) tout ça</i>	<i>Quelque chose comme ça</i>
<i>(Des/les) trucs comme ça</i>	<i>(Des/les) choses comme ça</i>
<i>/ Un truc comme ça</i>	<i>(Des/les) trucs du genre</i>
<i>Etcetera</i>	<i>/ Ce genre de trucs</i>
<i>Gnan gnan gni gnan gnan gna</i>	<i>Je sais pas quoi / je sais plus quoi</i>
<i>/ nan nan ni (...)</i>	<i>J'en sais rien</i>
<i>(Et/ou) machin</i>	<i>Tu ce que tu veux</i>
<i>(Ou) n'importe quoi</i>	<i>Ou quoi que ce soit</i>

---

Table 4.2 contains traditional general extenders usually introduced by a conjunction (e.g. *et tout ça, ou quelque chose comme ça*), but also other forms which meet the criteria listed above. Some of these variants echo the written style (e.g. *etcetera*), others are more colloquial (e.g. *un truc comme ça, ou n'importe quoi*) or have an

<sup>28</sup> Even though I attempt to avoid terminology based on notions of ‘referential meaning’ in connection with general extenders, I nevertheless use this semantic/syntactic property in order to identify them formally, although I argue that extending a referential set is not the main function of general extenders at the discourse-pragmatic level.

<sup>29</sup> Minor variations are possible.

onomatopoeic effect (e.g. *gnan gnan*), and still others clearly represent ‘vague language’ (e.g. *machin*). In this table, I have included all the words and phrases that might be viewed as having functions similar to general extenders, and throughout this chapter I attempt to show why I consider them as such.

Note that while the list is exhaustive as far as my corpus is concerned, there are many other general extenders in contemporary French which did not appear in my recordings, such as *patati patata*, *tout le reste*, *des affaires de même* and many others (cf. Dubois 1993). In addition, the framework usually used for analysing general extenders in languages such as English cannot always be applied to French in a straightforward way. For example, as I showed previously, Overstreet’s division (1999) of general extenders into adjunctive and disjunctive is less clear-cut in French, simply because some French expressions do not contain any conjunction at all, and no conjunction needs to be added to them (see example (133)).

133.) *il devait avoir deux cents grammes dans ses poches / quelque chose comme ça / et il s'est fait arrêter (...)* [Nathan M28, R12]

Secondly, in spoken French there are numerous vague words (e.g. *machin* or *truc*) which meet the selection criteria for general extenders, i.e. they are placed in a terminal position, they are used functionally rather than lexically, and their semantics indicates that they extend a set of items or a notion (even though this function is bleached in most cases). For illustration, compare the following examples:

- 134a). *tu achètes des trucs pour le petit-déjeuner machin et ça ira* [N086]  
134b) *tu peux me passer le machin pour ouvrir la boîte ?* [N140]  
134c) *alors machin nous a dit soit payez immédiatement soit vous partez.* [N020]

In the examples above, the generic *machin* is used in three different ways illustrating its diverse uses. While this term is ordinarily described as belonging to a lexical category, as is the case with (134b) and (134c), example (134a) differs slightly from the others. The word *machin*, typically defined as a (vague) content word, refers to something or someone whose name does not come immediately to mind; it replaces the name of

something one cannot name (*mot par lequel on désigne quelqu'un dont le nom ne vient pas immédiatement à l'esprit, qu'on ne sait pas nommer; désigne toute chose dont on ne sait pas le nom*)<sup>30</sup>.

Although treating the word *machin* as a functional word included in the category of general extenders may not be as straightforward as with forms like *et tout ça*, there are several semantic, prosodic and syntactic factors which allow for its interpretation in (134a) as a member of this category. Firstly, its clause-final position indicates that the word *machin* in (134a) is used in ways similar to those of a general extender. Secondly, what the word *machin* refers to in (134a) may not necessarily be a nominal item, as is seemingly the case in (134b) and (134c). *Machin* in (134a) may refer to an extended list of nominal items (*pain, jus de fruit, céréales...*) but it may also very well refer to more complex notions that are not necessarily nominal (*tu achètes des trucs pour le petit-déjeuner, tu prépares le café* etc.). Used in this way, the word *machin* seems to serve interactional purposes and could easily be replaced by another general extender such as *tout ça*, for instance. Furthermore, this interactional use of *machin* can probably be ascribed to the process of grammaticalisation through which the expression moves on a continuum from a content word to a function word, as seems to be the case with the word *genre* described in Chapter 3.

In Table 4.2, I also included formulaic phrases such as *j'en sais rien* ou *tout ce que tu veux*, since these phrases fulfil the criteria outlined above, i.e. syntactically they clearly appear in the general-extender slot, semantically they mark the possibility of a larger set (although their literal meaning is more or less bleached) and, more importantly, they serve interpersonal functions based on inclusion and solidarity. Moreover, general extenders of this type can be found in the literature; for example, Dubois's (1993: 202) list contains the form *tout ce que vous voulez* as well as *je ne sais pas trop quoi*.

In sum, the initial selection of general extenders in my data was carried out following the structural, functional and prosodic criteria widely used in the literature (Overstreet 1999 and 2005, Dubois 1993). In English these general extenders are typically formed of a combination of a quantifier, a generic and a comparative, with or without a

---

<sup>30</sup> Le Petit Larousse 2011 Edition.

preceding conjunction. Within the French context, the list of possible variants also includes formulaic phrases, fixed expressions, vague terms and onomatopoeic words.

#### 4.2.2 General extenders: politeness, familiarity and inclusion

My data of recorded conversations among young people show that general extenders form a very distinct set of expressions playing a complex pragmatic and interpersonal role in discourse; they serve a range of overlapping functions which usually reveal intersubjective links between speakers and contribute to a feeling of familiarity. Even though literally these expressions seem to assume common knowledge among participants in that they invite the interlocutor to extrapolate a larger category from what has been said, common knowledge is far from a being prerequisite for the use of general extenders. Let us consider the following extract from a conversation between speakers who had met for the first time:

135.) (Conversation about TV series. Speakers: Nathan, M/28; Katy F/26; Alex M/28; R07)

N: *tous les jours j'étais / chez ma grand-mère / voilà / et je regardais les petits épisodes / et j'avais ma petite banane et tout / j'avais les petits mikado (..) et dès que ça partait je chantais\_ je me souviens plus des paroles et tout mais avant je chantais\_*

A: (xxxxx) \_ *sans famille et je m'appelle Rémi / et je me balade euh <SINGING>*

N: *ma famille à moi / c'est celle que je choisis / et je me balade euh dans la vie / je suis sans famille et je m\_ <SINGING> <LAUGHTER>*

K: <LAUGHTER>

Even though the speakers in the above extract do not have the same background and have only met for the first time, they seem to be attempting to create solidarity by acting as if there was shared knowledge between them. This is in line with Overstreet's (1999) observation that speakers use general extenders based on an implied *assumption* of shared knowledge, not on the actual existence of it. This assumption also fits with Dines's previous observation that the interlocutors never question or request clarification after hearing a general extender, but instead offer supportive feedback suggesting that they are following the conversation. Returning to our extract, we can see

that the speaker (N) has managed to establish common ground with other participants in the conversation; although at the beginning he cannot be sure whether his interlocutors are familiar with the cartoon character in question, it turns out that they are and start singing along. The general extenders in this extract serve to 'set the scene' by describing what the speaker would usually do before watching the programme; he clearly does not wish to tire out his listeners with possibly tedious details, instead he offers several cues illustrative of the situation he wants to describe and relies on his listeners to interpret them. As we can see, it is not exactly important what else he was eating apart from the banana; what is relevant is rather the construction of common experience: each of the participants has some sort of childhood memories of watching TV while eating something nice, and the general extender may serve to evoke these memories. For one speaker it may be the banana, for another, it may be another type of food. Thus it is almost as if the speaker was saying "I had my little banana and everything (else you can imagine in a situation like that)".

Considering examples such as the above, it may be argued that general extenders are best described as serving to incite and generate solidarity rather than invoke existing shared knowledge. They are inherently interactive as well as closely associated with informality and positive politeness (see Brown and Levinson 1987, and Chapter 1), especially in that they help to create a link between the speaker and the listeners by inviting them to co-construct the meaning of a given utterance. As we have seen in (135) above, some general extenders seem to be used as highly formulaic expressions, independently of whether there is common knowledge between the speakers or not. Because the term 'common knowledge' is therefore quite relative, I feel sympathetic to Overstreet's definition of this notion, portraying it on a continuum between broad and limited:

The type of knowledge required to infer what may be implicated by the use of a general extender ranges along a continuum from broad, cultural, or general knowledge potentially shared by many, to knowledge that is shared only by a small number of interactional participants (Overstreet 1999: 69).

My data comprise different conversations between speakers who vary in their degree of familiarity, from those who did not previously know each other to those who know each

other very well. Nevertheless, all of my recorded conversations contain general extenders. The question then arises whether there is a need for shared experience or knowledge between speakers at all, in order for them to make sense of each other's talk. Let us look at other tokens of general extenders and consider whether there is some sort of mutual meaning that they may evoke among the speakers:

136.) (Conversation about men and women. Speakers: Nathan M/28 and Joëlle F/27; R12)

N: *non mais c'est / c'est / moi c'est ce que j'ai constaté tu vois c'est quand même / c'est / les femmes mine de rien elles sont quand même adultes avant les hommes / tu vois ben elles sont plus responsables / un petit peu ben avec tout ce qui peut se passer dans la vie (.) les hommes sont un peu plus "ouais c'est bon on a le temps tranquille" et tout ça / tu vois ce que je veux dire ?*

J: *ouais mais / c'est pas forcément l'âge à (...) enfin je connais plein de mecs avec qui / c'est plutôt l'inverse quoi*

137.) (Conversation about a friend. Speakers: Léa F/25 and Chloé F/26, R04)

L: *et en plus il a des primes (.) il a plein de primes et tout c'est obligé*

C: *et toi tu te dis avec trois cents euro (...)*

138.) (Conversation about questionnaires and slang. Speakers: Fabien M/24, Thomas M/25 and the researcher F/27; R03)

F: *mais je te dis (.) vraiment (.) tu fais des formulaires et machin / je l'envoie à quelques potes en France*

R: *mmm*

T: *moi je veux bien que tu me l'envoies*

F: *ils vont rigoler hein*

Insofar as the context permits, we can ponder whether there is any sort of common knowledge between the speakers that would lead them to interpret the general extender in the same way. In (136), the speakers analyse men's behaviour as opposed to women's; however the speakers do not share exactly the same knowledge and opinion

concerning the question at hand, and *tout ça* therefore denotes an unspecified set of attitudes that the addressee is able to interpret the way she wants. Similarly, in example (137), the speaker talks about the bonuses of an embassy worker whom she knows personally, but her claim about his salary is only a guess – judging by the last comment *c'est obligé* ('he must have') which suggests the uncertainty of her proposition (i.e. the comment expresses her epistemic stance but does not provide concrete evidence). Thus again, *et tout* has quite a vague meaning that the speakers, even based on their shared knowledge, might not be able to decode in the same way. Example (138) is the most illustrative of mutual cooperation between speakers, but probably of the least amount of common knowledge. The speaker suggests that his addressee (the researcher) make some 'forms' (e.g. questionnaires) for native speakers of French. He is not familiar with the design (and the exact topic) of the study and offers his help with whatever *machin* ('thingy') the study might involve. Again, he thus invites the researcher to interpret the general extender in her own way.

It may of course be argued that some general extenders may have a more pronounced referential function and thus require some degree of common understanding between the speakers. This is admittedly true in some cases, especially with general extenders that may require some mutual understanding based on specific or general facts, like the knowledge of dairy products, as in (139), or an awareness of drugs, as in (140):

139.) *c'est comme le lait des choses comme ça tu peux être allergique aussi* (N77)

140.) *le speed machin nan nan tout ce que tu veux* [Léa, F/25, R05]

However, in many cases, there is no specific item (or list) and the general extenders may evoke very different concepts in different speakers. Based on these observations, I will argue that common knowledge is a rather nebulous and relative concept, and it is not always required for the use of general extenders. This applies mainly to the general extenders that seem to have been grammaticalised and bleached (e.g. *et tout* or *machin*, as I discuss further below). In examples such as (136), (137) and (138) above, it is hard to see concrete entities behind the general extenders used. Yet what the examples do show is that there is a high degree of cooperation and familiarity among the speakers, and this inherently leads to their mutual understanding. By using general extenders,

speakers offer cues for a concerted interpretation of the utterance meaning, even though the speakers' cognitive representations evoked by these general extenders may be dissimilar. On a more general level, this is only possible if general extenders have a bleached referential meaning and a strengthened pragmatic function. The more frequent and the more grammaticalised the general extender is, the broader its interpretation can be in both the speaker's and the addressee's mind. In fact, one can go as far as to say that the notion of referential meaning is not even relevant in this process, since the primary function of such general extenders is interactional and instructional, i.e. they serve as instructions to the interlocutors to collaboratively interpret the utterance while at the same time creating an environment of familiarity and belonging. Therefore, their meaning may be described as 'procedural' (see Hansen 1998b, Blakemore 1987).

#### 4.2.3 General extenders and sequential organisation of discourse

General extenders, like discourse markers, play an important role in structuring spoken discourse; they can signal the speaker's intention to mark an utterance boundary and simultaneously appeal to the knowledge of the interlocutor. As illustration, consider the example below:

141.) (Conversation about clothes. Speaker: Jeanne, F/24, R03)

*J: elle voulait faire tout comme moi / et elle reprenait des expressions en fait / que que que j'utilisais et tout / et genre elle s'habillait pareil et tout / genre elle me dit "mais pourquoi tu t'habilles pas pareil que moi" et tout*

Despite the fact that the use of *et tout* seems rather excessive in the above extract, sequences like this are not uncommon among the speakers participating in my study. Here, the form in question seems to be used in a very consistent way with respect to its sequential position; each time it is used at the end of a clause as if to demarcate it thematically and continue with another idea. Therefore general extenders may also be felicitously analysed as particles that provide segmentation signals at the discourse level, dividing it into smaller, easier processed units. But if we consider general extenders as part of a wider group of discourse particles, questions arise as to which group of particles this would be in the French context.



Traverso (2007: 45-46), for example, divides discourse particles into *ouvreurs*, *conclusifs* and *ponctuels*, based on their functions in discourse. *Ouvreurs* generally introduce utterances marking a rupture with the preceding segment (e.g. *tiens*, *en fait*, *alors*), while *conclusifs* help speakers to conclude and end a topic or a turn (e.g. *bon ben* or *enfin bon*). Finally, ‘punctors’ (e.g. *bon*, *quoi*, *bon ben* or *voilà*) serve to structure one’s turns throughout the conversation (arguably, the other two types seem to do that as well).

General extenders are reminiscent, then, of a category of particles that are referred to as ‘punctors’ (see also Vincent and Sankoff 1992) or in other words, particles that serve to support the speaker's argumentation throughout the discourse, divide it into separate units as well as signal links between these units. However, if we recall the distribution of 'terminal tags' outlined by Andrews (1989), forms such as *tout ça* or *des choses comme ça* are included in a larger category of 'terminating particles' that would indeed correspond to Traverso's category of *conclusifs*. The problem of course remains that although general extenders are obviously in a conclusive position at a micro level (clause-terminal), they do not necessarily end one's turn (note that in example [141] above, the speaker punctuates her utterances with *et tout* but continues to hold the floor and even continues with the same topic).

Let us consider other cases where general extenders serve different types of connecting functions; they can mark a shift in topic by finishing the current segment, as in (142), but they can also signal the end of a turn or an utterance, as in (143):

142.) (Conversation about money and mortgage. Speakers: Léa, F/25, R04)

L: *on était deux avec Romain / on voulait acheter aussi donc on avait commencé à demander et tout tu vois (.) et genre à l'époque / je touchais mille six cents net*

143.) (Conversation about a night-out. Speakers: Chloé F/26, Emma F/27 and Léa F/25, R05)

E: *ouais / d'accord (...) ouais on peut se faire un truc lundi soir*

L: *ouais chais pas / vers*

C: *rue de la Roquette* <LAUGHTER>

L: *vous venez me chercher à mon taf*<sup>31</sup> *et on va rue Nation / on peut aller au bar à côté c'est sympa pas trop cher / on peut draguer des mecs et tout*

C: *ouais / allez*

L: *chais pas on se passe une bonne petite soirée*

In example (142), it seems the speaker wishes to finish off a description which may seem irrelevant to the interlocutor (description of how she inquired about mortgage options) while still continuing with the same topic; she thus ends the segment with *et tout* and shifts to a description of another aspect (salary). Exactly as in (141), here the general extender clearly serves to punctuate individual units in a description, which are usually produced as *digressions* to the main point at issue.

In example (143), speaker (L) ends her turn by uttering *et tout*, thus sparing her interlocutors all the details of an activity she suggested for Monday night as she is unsure whether they actually agree with this activity. In this way, she relies on her interlocutors to interpret the general extender for themselves. Again, it appears that *et tout* serves in this case as a hedging 'conclusive particle', used to end a turn in a friendly and cooperative way.

#### 4.2.4 General extenders and hedging

As we have seen in many previous cases, general extenders often function as hedges serving to mitigate or weaken the strength or directness of the utterance they punctuate. As Andrews (1989: 193) observes, general extenders are pragmatically useful when speakers want to spare their interlocutors unnecessarily detailed information. I would add that 'sparing the information' is an inherent function of adjunctive general extenders, while the disjunctive forms (e.g. *ou quoi*, *ou un truc comme ça*) hedge statements by adding another possibility to the one that was raised. Consider the difference in the following examples:

144.) *tu veux pas prendre des efferalgans ou un truc comme ça ?* [Emma, F/27, R05]

---

<sup>31</sup> TAF (abr.): *travail à faire* ('work to do', nowadays denoting 'work' or 'workplace').

145.) (Conversation about electrical appliances. Speakers Nathan M/28 and Carole F/24, R12)

N: *tu débranches tout et c'est vrai qu'on dort mieux*

C: *la télé par exemple moi toutes les nuits je m'endors avec la télé et\_*

N: *c'est peut-être / chais pas en même temps si c'est physique ou quoi / c'est plutôt simplement au niveau psychologique / le fait que tu te dises que t'as pas tout ça qui est allumé dans la chambre*

146.) (Conversation about common friend. Speakers Emma F/27 and Chloé F/26; R12)

E: *comme elle était toujours poursuivie par les flics*

C: *tu sais comment elle jetait des lettres et tout (...) elle jetait des lettres / des factures*

E: *aaah ouais*

C: *quand elle sortait (de son appartement) elle disait "tiens une facture" machin*

E: *ouais elle les balançait*

In cases like (144) and (145), the statements would seem categorical and specific without the general extender. More specifically, in (144), the speaker offers her friend a medicine but at the same time raises other possibilities, suggesting that a) there may be other medicines her friend may like to take (e.g. aspirin or ibuprofen), b) there may be other alternatives her friend may like to have (e.g. drink or food) or perhaps c) she simply does not remember the exact name of medicine she may have at home. Similarly, in example (145) the speaker explains how electrical appliances should be turned off during the night if one wants to sleep peacefully; he seems unsure whether sleeping better has to do with something physical or psychological so he hedges his statement with *ou quoi* ('or what' / 'or something'). Thus we can see that disjunctive general extenders are typical prototypes of politeness hedges in that they add additional possibilities to those that have been raised and invite the interlocutor to interpret them freely. At the same time, using a general extender may often serve as a strategy to avoid being explicit, and in this respect it has the same effect as approximation. If we consider example (146), the word *machin* following the referent *factures* ('invoices') suggests that there were other things of the same type that the person in question was throwing away, but the speaker cannot explicitly remember what they were or does not want to go into too much detail about them.

General extenders thus seem to accomplish hedging on two levels. First, as is often the case with adjunctive general extenders, the information conveyed in the utterance may be irrelevant or boring so the speaker may want to shorten it with a general extender and move on with the topic, thus saving the face of the interlocutor, i.e. from imposition (as was the case with *et tout* and *machin* in (146)). Alternatively, as is often the case with disjunctive general extenders such as *ou quoi* in (145), the speaker does not exactly know how to name the referent and wants to remain inexplicit by offering other possibilities for interpretation, thus saving his own face.

It is apparent that once again, general extenders are linguistic devices that require the active participation of the interlocutor, and in this sense they are closely tied to the notion of politeness and to the mutual construction of meaning.

#### **4.2.5 General extenders and vague language**

In the literature, as I pointed out earlier, general extenders tend to be described as vague and inexplicit language. Such a description is of course understandable and legitimate; but even if general extenders are thought of in this way, they should not be described as adding no contribution to communication. I concur with Jucket et al. (2003) who argue that vagueness can successfully convey non-referential information, and should not be regarded only as a deviation from clarity and preciseness.

However vague they may be, general extenders serve important pragmatic and interpersonal functions in discourse by providing cues for the interpretation of thoughts and concepts that may sometimes be too complex to define explicitly. Most often, in my view, these thoughts and concepts do not *need* to be explicitly defined; in fact, a general extender acts as a signal that the referent is open to *free* interpretation. Let us consider some examples of general extenders that could, in the French context, be seen as vague and ambiguous:

147.) (Conversation about mortgage. Speakers: Léa F/25 and Chloé F/26; R05)

L: *moi j'ai trop pas envie quoi*

C: *tu peux vivre sans ça toute la vie si tu veux*

L: *ben oui (.) mais bon après / quand tu vas avoir des gosses machin (..) non mais / tout le monde rêve à (..) à l'accès à la propriété je veux dire (..) tout le monde a envie d'accéder à ça quoi (.) avoir son logement sa maison*

And let us recall some previous examples, repeated here as (148) and (149):

148.) N: *c'est peut-être / chais pas en même temps si c'est physique ou quoi / c'est plutôt simplement au niveau psychologique / le fait que tu te dises que t'as pas tout ça qui est allumé dans la chambre* (Nathan, M/28, R12)

149.) *tu veux pas prendre des efferalgans ou un truc comme ça ?* (Emma, F/27, R05)

Analysing the above examples solely in terms of vague language would underestimate their important interactional functions. As I have noted earlier, general extenders often exploit the common ground between speakers and help them interact in a cooperative way. Even though these forms are not explicit, and possibly because of that, they have an important impact on the unfolding of the conversation and on the negotiation of speaker roles and relationships. Their absence in speech would possibly result in socio-pragmatic failure; in many cases such as the ones I discuss in this section, utterances devoid of at least some degree of vagueness would appear too specific, categorical and blunt, and would thus place significant constraints on the interpretation of the message expressed. For illustration, let us consider Example (147) above, in which speakers talk about people's desire to purchase property. Although the speakers themselves do not yet feel concerned by this issue, one of them suggests that having children may be one of the reasons why people start thinking of purchasing property. However, it is to be noted here that there may be other such reasons and the interlocutor is free to infer whichever reasons may be closer to her understanding of property purchase (i.e. *quand tu vas avoir des gosses machin*: 'when you have kids or something / and that / and stuff'). Although speaker (L) might be sure of how she herself understands the term, she invites the interlocutor to interpret it in her own way. Similarly, if we recall Example (148), we notice that the speaker adds a vague reference to the adjective he used (*physique*) simply because he is unsure of the accuracy of the chosen term and wants to raise a possibility of alternative interpretation. Lastly, in example (149), we can also find an

attempt at cooperation; the speaker inquires whether her friend would like to take an *effergan*, but gives her the choice of interpreting the general extender in her own way, and possibly choosing another type of medicine.

Thus, even though the general extender has only vague reference, for the purpose of cooperative and meaningful communication it needs to be this way. I would therefore argue that general extenders are not meaningless vague expressions but, like discourse markers, they serve as instructions for interpretation. The fact that general extenders might be progressively moving away from their literal meaning towards more abstract, non-propositional discourse functions highlights a new division of labour that lies at the intersection of semantics and pragmatics. In most cases, the pragmatic cues that general extenders provide seem more important than their referential content; they not only aid the speaker to construct and structure his or her discourse, but also aid the interlocutor to interpret it. As Jucker et al. (2003: 1749) point out, ‘vague category identifiers are one form of loose use of language in that they indicate to the hearer that the thought the speaker has in mind is more complex than is directly expressed’. I would add that this may not be the only reason for their use; while the thought in a speaker’s mind might certainly be too complex to express, they may simply wish to avoid imposing their own interpretation of it on their interlocutors. General extenders are therefore beneficial for spoken interaction in that they provide ways of expressing complex information as well as cues for processing this information in a collaborative manner.

### **4.3 Discussion of quantitative results**

While in the previous section I presented a mainly qualitative analysis of the whole range of general extenders occurring in my corpus, in the present section I discuss the most relevant quantitative results of my data, focusing on one particular variant of interest: *et tout*. Since my results indicate an overwhelming preference for this variant, I believe it is important to consider its functions in greater detail, and compare its uses with those shown in other corpora of spoken French in order to see possible developments in its semantic and functional properties. Questions also need to be raised with respect to the possible discourse role that *et tout* may play in the speech of young people.

## Results

First of all, let us consider some tables based on the quantitative results of my data. Table 4.3 below presents the frequencies of all the general extenders in my corpus. Due to space limitations, some variants were collapsed, as they did not yield sufficient numbers on their own. Tables 4.4 – 4.6 below compare my results with the Beeching corpus and the *Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien* (described in greater detail in Chapter 2).

As noted in the previous chapter, I followed the same methodological procedure and divided the CFPP corpus into two working files, based on the age of the speakers (below and above 30). In these tables, I have included only the most frequent general extenders occurring in the corpora compared, i.e. those that displayed a frequency of more than 0.01 per 1000 words. Lastly, Figure 10 outlines the distribution of adjunctive and disjunctive general extenders in my data, and are followed by a qualitative analysis of the most frequent form.

**Table 4.3: Distribution of general extenders in the present corpus**

Form	Number	Frequency per 1000 words
<i>et tout</i>	154	2.70
<i>(et/ou) machin</i>	17	0.30
<i>(ou) je sais pas quoi / (ou) je sais plus quoi / (ou) j'en sais rien</i>	16	0.28
<i>(et) tout ça</i>	15	0.26
<i>(un/des/les) truc(s) comme ça</i>	14	0.25
<i>ou quoi</i>	8	0.14
<i>ou n'importe quoi</i>	3	0.05
<i>nan nan / gnan gnan</i>	3	0.05
<i>(des/les) choses comme ça / quelque chose comme ça</i>	2	0.04
<i>tout ce que tu veux</i>	1	0.02

**Table 4.4: Distribution of general extenders in the Beeching corpus**

Form	Number	Frequency per 1000 words
<i>(et) tout ça</i>	65	0.41
<i>etcetera</i>	14	0.09
<i>et tout</i>	12	0.08
<i>(des/les) choses comme ça / quelque chose comme ça</i>	9	0.06
<i>(un/des/les) truc(s) comme ça</i>	5	0.03
<i>(et/ou) machin</i>	2	0.01

**Table 4.5: Distribution of general extenders in the CFPP corpus: young people**

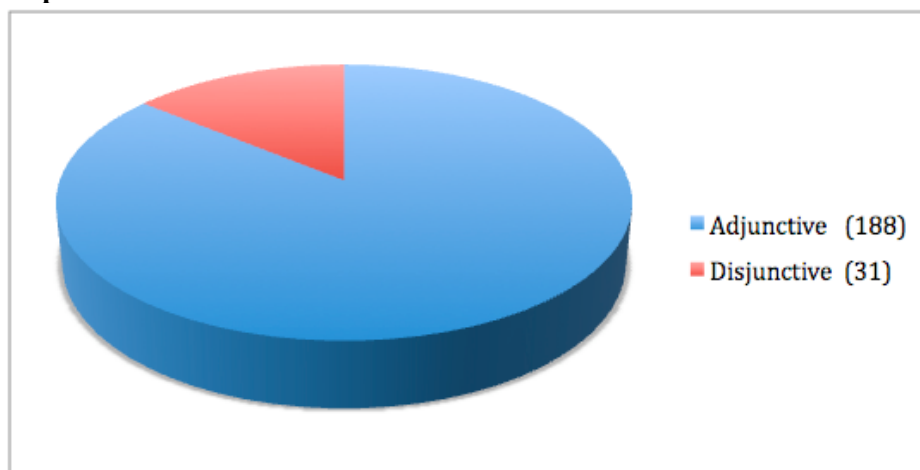
Form	Number	Frequency per 1000 words
<i>(et) tout ça</i>	25	0.25
<i>(des/les) choses comme ça / quelque chose comme ça</i>	18	0.18
<i>et tout</i>	13	0.13
<i>(ou/et) machin</i>	6	0.06
<i>(ou) je sais pas quoi</i>	5	0.05
<i>(un/des/les) truc(s) comme ça</i>	4	0.04
<i>ou quoi que ce soit</i>	2	0.02



**Table 4.6: Distribution of general extenders in the CFPP corpus: older people**

Form	Number	Frequency per 1000 words
<i>et cetera</i>	120	0.36
<i>(et) tout ça</i>	112	0.33
<i>et tout</i>	70	0.21
<i>(des/les) choses comme ça / quelque chose comme ça</i>	34	0.10
<i>(et/ou) machin</i>	17	0.05
<i>(un/des/les) truc(s) comme ça</i>	8	0.02
<i>(ou) j'en sais rien</i>	6	0.02
<i>ou quoi</i>	4	0.01

**Figure 10: Distribution of adjunctive and disjunctive general extenders in the present corpus**



*'Et tout' as a multifunctional general extender*

Among the general extenders used in my corpus, the form *et tout* was by far the most frequent. Interestingly, *et tout* seems to be not only the most frequent form used among my participants overall, but sometimes also the most frequently repeated expression in an individual turn, perhaps verging on redundancy. Let us consider one of the previous examples again, repeated here as (150):

150.) *elle voulait faire tout comme moi / et elle reprenait des expressions en fait / que que que j'utilisais et tout / et genre elle s'habillait pareil et tout / genre elle me dit mais pourquoi tu t'habilles pas pareil que moi et tout* [Jeanne F/24, R03]

The prevalence of *et tout* in my data seems consistent with the fact that this variant is also one that exhibits the largest functional range and the most signs of having been grammaticalised. Although finding diachronic evidence for the grammaticalisation path of *et tout* would involve a complex longitudinal study, most of its characteristics indicate that this variant has undergone an increase in functional scope and a possible morphological reduction, while still existing alongside a similar but longer form: *et tout ça*. All these phenomena are generally associated with grammaticalisation, so it seems that *et tout* might have developed from the longer form *et tout ça* and extended its functional range to include a set of non-literal discourse functions. It has therefore also undergone semantic bleaching.

The high frequency of constructions with *et tout* in my corpus attests to their importance and ability to provide pragmatic and affective cues in conversation. Very similar patterns of occurrence can be found in English, where variants of the *et tout*-type of general extenders attract a great deal of attention in research. Overstreet's (1999) analysis, for example, is particularly relevant for this section as it examines types of general extenders (e.g. *and everything* and *and all*) whose uses are highly reminiscent of those of *et tout*. A quantitative analysis of similar constructions is presented by Cheshire (2007), who considers variations of such forms in adolescent speech from a point of view of grammaticalisation, mostly pertaining to forms *and that*, *and stuff*, and *things*

and *and everything*, which are shown to vary with respect to different local and social contexts. Elsewhere, in Toronto English, the grammaticalised variant with *stuff* is shown to prevail in adolescent speech (see Tagliamonte and Denis 2010).

Given similarities in the cross-linguistic development of discourse markers such as *like* and *genre*, one may wonder whether similar changes are occurring with French general extenders, especially in the language of young people where innovation tends to occur. Moreover, if one considers the structural character of the Anglophone variants that are often described as undergoing grammaticalisation (e.g. *and that*, *and stuff*, *and everything*, *and things*), it becomes readily apparent that there are far fewer short form general-extender variants in French that may be considered similar to these,<sup>32</sup> and therefore it may be argued that the functions of French *et tout* are perhaps partly equivalent to all those fulfilled by the set of short English general extenders. Indeed, the predominance of *et tout* suggests that this construction may be becoming a French ‘youth’ general extender *par excellence*; yet questions arise as to why it seems so popular and frequent, and what specific functions it serves that may be pragmatically more effective than those of the other possible variants (e.g. *et tout ça*, *machin*).

In my corpus of recorded conversations, *et tout* occurs with a vastly greater frequency than other forms of general extenders (summarised earlier in Table 4.3). We saw in Table 4.3 that the corpus yields a frequency of 2.7 tokens of *et tout* per 1000 words, with only 0.26 tokens of *tout ça* and even smaller frequencies of other variants. While I agree that idiosyncrasy and inter-speaker differences may play a role in this distribution (i.e. individual speakers often have different patterns of use and different personal preferences), I can affirm that all of the recorded subjects used the expression *et tout* to a greater or lesser extent and minor individual differences existed only in terms of frequency.

Let us now examine some functions of *et tout* which appear to be the most salient in my corpus and illustrate the different contexts of its occurrence. Crucially, I consider *et tout* to be a highly polyfunctional term whose different, context-dependent functions are certainly not mutually exclusive (as it is often the case with discourse particles, *et tout*

---

<sup>32</sup> It is noteworthy that most forms translated literally from English (e.g. *\*et ça*, *\*et trucs / et machin*, *et tout*, *\*et choses*) would be considered pragmatically infelicitous).

may serve several different functions at the same time). Some of these functions have already been discussed as typical of general extenders, while others, as we will see, are new.

*'Et tout' and the construction of a narrative / description*

The pragmatic development of *et tout* described above appears to be inherently linked to the multiple ways in which speakers manipulate chunks of discourse. If we consider extract (150) above, we find combinations of discourse markers and general extenders used in comparable ways, with their discourse functions being considerably more salient than their referential meaning. In other words, general extenders might sometimes be just a practical way of helping speakers structure their discourse. In fact, as my data shows, this 'structuring' is particularly salient in contexts such as narratives and descriptions of phenomena external to the situation (i.e. where speakers do not talk about the 'here and now'). This seems to be related to the typical structural frame of narrative discourse (see Labov and Waletzky 1967) in which speakers 'work their way' towards some most important event (i.e. climax) while the less important sections are preparing the scene for this event (this is usually called *orientation*). While narrative structure is often complex and may not necessarily involve all the elements defined within the Labovian framework, thinking in this way helps us understand how speakers go about constructing a narrative and what devices they may use in doing so. As we have seen in (150) above, general extenders may be particularly useful in the construction of a narrative or an external description, since they help speakers interpolate chunks of descriptive discourse, punctuate them as individual units, shorten them by avoiding unnecessary detail, and move on.

For further illustration, consider example (151) below, where the speaker seems to punctuate her clauses on purpose, out of concern for economy and politeness, based on affiliation with her interlocutors. Therefore, *et tout* seems to have acquired discourse functions that may be effective in the structuring of an informal narrative where speaker and hearer negotiate the meaning based on a mutual understanding of the events.

151.) (Conversation about a male friend. Speaker: Léa F/25 and Emma F/27; R04)

L: *alors ça s'est passé comment* \_

E: *\_ouais c'était [cool ]*

L: *[ouais] mais t'as vu il m'a répondu sur MS\_\_ (..) sur Facebook / ouais je dis "mais c'est qui ce keumé"<sup>33</sup> et tout euh "Emma tu me caches des mecs" et tout / et le mec il répond il fait "oui c'est normal que tu ne me connais pas / ça fait dix ans que\_ avec Emma on s'est pas vu"*

This extract is a telling illustration of *et tout* being used as a descriptive device. The speaker seems to be moving towards explaining that she has already spoken to the man in question; she thus explains all the details of how she managed to do so, while simultaneously being aware that this description may sound tedious to the listener and thus shortening the components with *et tout*. The non-specific character of these expressions also makes them well suited for use in quoted speech, where speakers seek to reproduce someone's words in an authentic manner – but since they cannot reproduce them exactly as they were uttered – they resort to the use of a general extender to indicate that there is more to be said along similar lines. Thus in many cases, like in (151) above, the emphasis is on the manner (rather than the content) of what is reported. At the same time, making use of *et tout* to punctuate utterance units in narrative discourse can be viewed as a floor-holding strategy. As I have noted in many examples of *et tout* in story-telling and descriptions, this construction is systematically exploited as part of a scene-setting procedure, where speakers situate the background information and prepare the way for the main event (or resolution of an event), or simply for the main point of their argument. It also structures the discourse by marking the end of a section of reported speech.

#### *'Et tout' as an intensifier*

At the discourse level, as we have seen, speakers use general extenders in a way that transcends their purely referential function; all of the above examples suggest that *et tout* is not always used as a category-implicative expression. Sometimes, speakers seem to resort to general extenders in order to point out to the importance of an idea and fulfil the expectations of their listeners. In my corpus, speakers often use *et tout* in a way that seems to emphasise the preceding phrase and to intensify its effect upon the hearer:

---

<sup>33</sup> *keumé* (verlan): *mec* ('bloke')

152.) (Conversation about cartoon character. Speakers: Nathan M/28 and Alex M/28, R12)

N: *et il y a les trois chiens qu'il avait / qui se font bouffer par des loups / et c'est là j'étais en larmes / j'avais huit ans neuf ans quelque chose comme ça* <LAUGHTER>

A: [ouais]

N: [ouais] *c'était vraiment joli / enfin vraiment / c'était vraiment très très bien / euh très très bien monté tout l'ensemble et tout*

153.) (Conversation about music, Speakers: Léa F/25 and Emma F/27, R10)

L: <SINGING> *ouais c'est la chanson mais faites comme si j'étais pas là hein*

E: *mais si / tu nous bien fais rigoler et tout*

This function is reminiscent of those of English general extenders *and all* and *and everything* which have been described by Overstreet (1999, 2002, 2005) as having the role of intensifiers. My data reveal similar uses, where the general extender is to be interpreted pragmatically rather than literally, and its primary function is not the marking of a set but rather strengthening an idea while inviting the interlocutor to interpret it. The intensifying function may also be related to the fact that these forms contain the universal quantifier *all* or *everything* (for English), and *tout* (for French). In my data, the emphasised information may be a positive evaluation of people or events, as in (152) and (153) above, but very often also a negative assessment of a situation, such as the expensive transport or an unpleasant health condition in the following examples:

154.) *attends mais on va payer les cartes et tout / on va payer les\_ les billets / tout simplement pour aller là bas* [Nathan, 28, R03]

155.) *t'as pas fait des cauchemars et tout ?* [Emma, 28, R04]

In example (154), the speaker clearly opposes the idea of going to the town centre to accompany his friend to the train station, as he may be discouraged by the price of the transport. This idea is intensified with *et tout* ('and all the rest of it' – probably referring to travel cards, expenses and the general trouble associated with the travel). Based on

their mutual understanding, the participants in the conversation are able to infer that *et tout* may translate as ‘all the hassle of travel’, without the speaker having to elaborate further on the subject and describe everything he had in mind. Similarly, in (155), *et tout* serves a pragmatic rather than referential function (one can hardly imagine a clear-cut list that the word *cauchemars* could be extended to). The speaker simply intensifies the idea of all the unpleasant states one has to go through while being ill, and the interlocutor can freely interpret what these mean.

In the context of intensification, *et tout* could sometimes be glossed with *and everything*, which Overstreet describes as follows:

*And everything* can be used as an intensifier that assumes intersubjective understanding in connection with one (or more) anchoring constituent(s) that represent extreme points on some implicit scale which may be presented as remarkable in the evoked context (Overstreet, 2002: 789).

I have found occurrences of *et tout* uttered within various subjective environments reflecting speakers’ stances towards something ‘remarkable’. If we recall example (151), we can see that the speaker is overwhelmed by the fact that her friend has a new male friend and she did not know about it (it is presented as ‘remarkable’). Speakers’ stances may be both positive and negative; in example (152) above, *et tout* accompanies a positive assessment of the way his favourite film is directed, while in (153) the speaker intensifies her positive evaluation of her friend’s ability to sing. On the other hand, in examples (154) and (155) speakers emphasise their negative evaluation of the events described.

#### *'Et tout' as a marker of contrast*

It seems noteworthy that in my data, *et tout* often occurs before the word *mais*. This, again, is similar to English *and everything*, which often co-occurs with *but* (Overstreet and Yule, 2002). In this case, *et tout* is used to emphasise the speaker’s previous discourse and justify its result with respect to the expectations of the listener(s):

156.) (Conversation about a friend. Speakers: Emma F/27, R09)

E: *non mais il était présent c'est-à-dire il m'appelait tous les soirs / enfin j'avais quelqu'un qui pensait à moi et donc on parlait et tout mais / quand \_ quand tu comptes que sur toi-même / c'est pas facile*

In cases such as the above, *et tout* is used in connection with *mais* as a marker of contrast or exception, with what follows presented as contrary to the presumed expectations of the listener. More specifically, the speaker demonstrates an acknowledgement of some fact (e.g. 'everything you can imagine is true'), followed by *mais* and an explanation of why the situation was contrary to what might have been expected. In this way, speakers often attempt to justify their own views, and the use of a general extender may thus be an effective argumentation strategy. For instance, in (156) above, the speaker is aware that what she is about to say is viewed as contrary to the expectations of her friend; hence she offers a further explanation of her previous claim. Here, *et tout* (followed by *mais*) can be viewed as having the role of justifying one's position with respect to what has just been said. Again, the speaker may simultaneously be time-conscious and aware of the risk of sounding tedious if her explanations are too long. *Et tout* is therefore a good way of pointing to all the things that her interlocutor can infer for herself, and there is no need to elaborate on them.

#### *'Et tout' as a hedge*

When speakers participate in conversation, they not only communicate information with propositional content, they also present themselves in a certain way and choose strategies that are closely linked to the notion of 'face' (see discussion of politeness in Chapter 1). As we saw in the previous section, using a general extender may be a strategy that helps speakers manage their utterances in anticipation of the listener's reactions. It gives them the possibility of shortening their utterances altogether by implying that although there is 'more', they do not wish to elaborate. At times, *et tout* is adjoined to an expression of stance without necessarily presenting anything remarkable, but simply summarising the comments presented as a justification for this stance. Consider the following example, in which the speaker condemns the non-payment of rent:



157.) (Conversation about subletting. Speakers Chloé F/26 and Léa F/25, R04)

C: *elle est toujours chez toi alors ?*

L: *ouais cette connasse là qui me doit [xxxxx] la moitié / parce qu'elle m'a pas payé / elle me paye pas le loyer et tout enfin laisse tomber c'est la merde*

Speakers may often feel the need to move the topic on if they feel uncomfortable or lack relevant information. They may also feel that the subject of conversation might be tedious for the interlocutor and that there is no need to expand on it. At times, as was the case in (157), the general extender can be accompanied by other discourse markers and hedges such as *enfin* or *bref*, which indicate hesitation as well as the fact that the speaker may feel uncomfortable with the topic, either because it is unpleasant in itself or there are no better words to describe it appropriately (*enfin* also indicates that the speaker may wish to close the topic). Thus, using a general extender provides an effective way of shortening an utterance while at the same time indicating that there is more that the interlocutor can infer himself or herself. It is noteworthy here that phonetic prominence and intonation play an important role in differentiating between *et tout* as an intensifier and as a hedge. In the case of the latter, the piece of information punctuated by the general extender is not the most salient and emphatic segment in a given utterance, and serves solely as background information for a more salient following segment. It is therefore often used prospectively (at the end of a clause but before another, more salient piece of information). This function is very often exploited in narrative construction. For illustration, consider the following example in which the speaker tells a story about a stolen bag:

158.) (Conversation about theft. Speaker: Emma F/27, Aurélie F/28 and Chloé F/26; R01)

E: *et en fait y'avait un gars à coté de moi qui était en / comment*

*un mec qui avait pas de papiers là (...) et du coup moi je lui ai parlé*

*j'ai dit "ah ça va" et tout / "t'es tout seul" machin*

J: [ *quel* ] *con*

C: [NON] *tu lui as PARLÉ mais c'est la première fois de ma vie que j'entends ça*

E: *ah si je lui ai PARLÉ au mec*

C: *c'est pour ça qu'il nous a braqué nos trucs là*

E: *et il m'a dit "ouais" machin chais pas quoi*

*et après on a commencé à danser parce qu'on était ivres et tout (...) et après\_*

C: *ah mais tu abuses je savais pas ça / je croyais que c'était un inconnu  
qui est venu et qui nous a braqué\_*

E: *si je (.) non je lui ai parlé comme ça / mais bon*

C: *oh t'es naïve*

E: *et il m'a pris mon sac à l'arraché*

The above extract, which I reproduce in its original length, is an illustrative example of how general extenders may be employed in narrative production. In telling her story, speaker (E) is 'setting the scene' by providing descriptions and segments of quoted speech; the clauses punctuated with general extenders offer background information so that the listeners can easily visualise the event in question. In this case, all the clauses concluded by *et tout* serve as a backdrop to the overall events that the speaker is about to relate. The general extender thus serves as a hedging device replacing all the notions that would possibly be too long and tiresome to relate, and perhaps cannot be remembered clearly (since the speaker is recounting a past event). The general extender offers the possibility of punctuating stretches of speech and moving on towards a more important point (in this case, perhaps, towards the climax and the resolution of the story). *Et tout* thus serves to maintain a certain level of conciseness and rapidity, sparing the listeners the unnecessary details that cannot be related or remembered properly.

The above examples highlight the fact that *et tout* has very nuanced and largely overlapping functions; it can thus sometimes be difficult to see whether it is used as an intensifier or as a hedge, or as both simultaneously. As I have noted, intonation and stress may often provide useful cues in distinguishing the purposes and functions that *et tout* fulfils. Segments where the construction serves as an intensifier are usually phonologically salient as well (uttered more loudly), while as a hedge *et tout* tends to be less salient and phonologically reduced (i.e. uttered less loudly and often more quickly, and leading to more salient points of description).

*'Et tout': a case of grammaticalisation in youth language?*

As seen earlier, *et tout* is the dominant variant in my data, displaying an overwhelming frequency of 2.7 tokens per 1000 words, approximately 9 times greater than the second most frequent variant. This may be ascribed partly to the informal character of most of

my recorded conversations, but also to the fact that *et tout* is highly multifunctional and suited for different discourse purposes, such as hedging, intensifying, holding the floor as well as helping with narrative and descriptive strategies. The fact that all these functions can be found in one single variant strongly suggests a case of grammaticalisation; *et tout* seems to have increased its functional scope and moved away from a purely referential role. The difficulty of defining its meaning points in a similar direction: while the discourse functions of *et tout* have become more salient, its literal meaning has become bleached. The excessive frequency with which speakers in my data employ this variant is also consistent with previous studies of discourse markers (e.g. *like*) and general extenders (e.g. *and stuff*, *and that*, *and everything*) which show that pragmatic operators at the level of discourse tend to be grammaticalised through frequent use, and their functional extension may consequently make them even more frequent (see Tagliamonte and Denis 2010, Cheshire 2007, Romaine and Lange 1991).

The comparison of different corpora revealed that a few decades ago the use of general extenders was on the whole more balanced. More specifically, in the Beeching corpus (collected between 1980 and 1990), no variant surpassed the frequency of 0.5 tokens per 1000 words, even though the variant (*et*) *tout ça* was considerably more frequent than the others. The more recent corpus (*Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien*) shows an even more balanced usage in both age groups, with no variant exceeding a frequency of 0.4 tokens per 1000 words. Interestingly, though, older speakers' use is more varied, containing a wider range of forms: for example, *et cetera* occurs with a frequency of 0.36 tokens per 1000 words. Thus, if I compared my own corpus only with Beeching's, it would seem that the patterns of use of *et tout* have indeed changed; if, however, I compared it with the more recent corpus of *Français Parlé Parisien*, it would seem that *et tout* in my corpus may be an outlier case with an unusually high frequency.

It is difficult to draw conclusions from this comparison, for several reasons. Although the CFPP corpus is larger than my corpus in terms of size (100,800 compared to 57,000 words in total), the number of speakers in the CFPP corpus is lower than in my corpus (7 versus 14 participants in the sample of younger speakers), and analysis is therefore more likely to reflect idiosyncratic behaviours. Another factor to take into account is the character of the recording; as noted in the previous chapter, the degree of formality may

play a crucial role in the overall frequency of colloquial forms such as discourse markers and general extenders. The conversations in my corpus were, for the most part, very informal and may thus have favoured the occurrence of a large number of colloquial forms. Even so, however, there is no obvious reason why it would contain such a disproportionate number of tokens of *et tout*, at the expense of other colloquial general extenders.

Of course, only larger and more varied samples of informal speech taking account of both synchronic and diachronic variation would provide insights into whether the patterns of use of general extenders are changing. The comparison of corpora shows that *et tout* as a general extender exists in all the corpora compared, and is the preferred variant only in my corpus. Therefore no general conclusions can be drawn with respect to diachronic changes that may be occurring on a larger scale.

However, from a qualitative point of view based on the heterogeneous discourse uses attested in my data, I would suggest that *et tout* might be undergoing grammaticalisation. First, in terms of phonological reduction (as gauged by the length of variants), *et tout* is a shorter form compared to other general extenders of a similar type, and thus perhaps more prone for frequent use, given the 'least effort' principle described earlier. Secondly, from the point of view of decategorisation, I have attempted to show that along with losing its referential meaning *et tout* has changed its morpho-syntactic properties; it is now used in a much broader range of contexts than merely with a nominal "list" of items (it can perfectly well collocate with non-nominal phrases as shown by several previous examples, e.g. (150) and (153). In addition, perhaps the most salient characteristic of grammaticalisation in this case is the increase in discourse functions; my recordings show that *et tout* is a pragmatic expression that can be used for different discourse purposes, notably to convey the interactional functions of stance and affiliation.

Bearing in mind the above observations, the functions of *et tout* seem very close to those of discourse markers – not only because they very often co-occur, but also because they are sometimes used to achieve the same interactional goals (such as punctuation of reported speech or hedging), albeit with some differences in sequential order (*et tout* has a fixed post-posed position while discourse markers are flexible).

From a discourse-pragmatic point of view, *et tout* accomplishes the same intersubjective functions as those of discourse markers like *you know*.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The speakers in my corpus make extensive use of different types of discourse particles, especially in order to organise sequential information, manage interpersonal relationships, and convey their stance towards the content as well as the audience. General extenders play an important role among these particles, and they seem to be especially efficient in expressing cooperation and reinforcing common ground.

In the case of general extenders, a small number of words may be used to express an indefinite range of meanings, giving leeway for unconstrained interpretation on the part of the listeners and thus reinforcing feelings of inclusion and solidarity. However, as I attempted to show in this chapter, the use of general extenders is not restricted to in-group membership or to people who know each other well. As I have argued, all speakers use general extenders to a greater or lesser extent, including those who have not met previously. Thus it is perhaps more felicitous to think of these constructions as pragmatic operators whose purpose is to contribute to harmonious communication based on a mutual negotiation and interpretation of meaning in context.

General extenders have often been associated with a set-marking function (with their operand including at least one element pertaining to a general set), mostly pertaining to the existence of some shared socio-cultural reference points. Yet by discussing an overlapping set of functions that general extenders serve, I attempted to demonstrate that their referential function is not the most important one, since in many cases it is difficult to infer specific referents from the general extenders used. If indeed they did have specific referents, it would sometimes be necessary to clarify them in order to facilitate comprehension. However, as Dines (1980) noted earlier, speakers never question the use of general extenders or request clarification. In my data, this is also illustrated by the fact that listeners often provide feedback in the form of back-channel

expressions (e.g. *ouais*, *hmmm*, *d'accord*) and thus indicate that they can easily interpret the message for themselves.

As noted previously, the use of general extenders also tends to be readily associated with vague language indicating sloppiness and carelessness, and hence these expressions tend to be stigmatised (see Labov 1982, Dubois 1992, Overstreet 1999, Overstreet and Yule 1997). Given the high frequency of general extenders in my data, some may also argue that their use may be merely a passing, age-graded phase (adolescents and young people generally are often said to use discourse markers and general extenders excessively). However, the participants in my study are young adults rather than adolescents, and can thus perhaps be viewed as speakers of an already 'fossilised' type of youth language. Moreover, what the comparison of different spoken corpora showed is that in the French context, general extenders are used by both younger and older people.

As far as my own data is concerned, what I attempted to show in this chapter was the way in which speakers exploit pragmatic devices of this kind to achieve important social and discourse goals. I discussed in some detail the functions and purposes of the preferred variant *et tout*, which is used primarily as a marker of affiliation and accommodation rather than an indicator of additional categories of a set. I also discussed other variants occurring in my data, and demonstrated how some French 'vague' words can now be used in general-extender slots (e.g. *machin*) achieving the same functions as those of general extenders. This further suggests that speakers use vagueness to their advantage as an interactional strategy, manipulating units of discourse on a textual level and soliciting listener participation on the interpersonal level.

## Chapter 5 Dislocation and the disjoint pronoun *moi*

In this chapter, I present a description of a syntactic-pragmatic phenomenon typical of spontaneous spoken French – dislocation, with a particular focus on disjoint pronoun constructions with *moi*, which were widespread across all of my data sets regardless of gender, region of origin or age of the speakers. I firstly examine the relevant notions pertaining to the concept of information structure and to the distribution of information roles in spoken discourse. Secondly, I address the question of how certain topic- or focus-promoting constructions function with respect to the sequential organisation of utterances in spoken language. Within this framework, I discuss the system in terms of which certain propositions are encoded as dislocated or ‘doubled’, focusing on a particular construction pervasive in spoken French (disjoint pronoun *moi*) and addressing the various discourse purposes for which this construction is used.

As part of each thematic section, I firstly provide an overview of previous research on the topic, followed by a qualitative analysis based on examples drawn from my spoken corpus. Insofar as the data permit, I complement this discussion with quantitative results.

### 5.1 Previous research and theoretical background

As widely noted in the literature (Blanche-Benveniste 1990, Lambrecht 1988, 1996, 2000; Larsson 1979; Blasco-Dulbecco 1999 and 2004; De Cat 2007), detachments, dislocations, presentational and cleft constructions are widespread features of spontaneous spoken French; however, they are considerably less frequent in standard written language. For instance, De Cat (2007: 220) notes that almost a fifth to a quarter of all clauses in her spoken corpus are dislocated. Similarly, Blasco-Dulbecco (1999) who contrasted examples from spoken and written texts, observes that over 10 per cent of all subjects in oral French are dislocated, while these represent less than 3 per cent in written French. Further, she notes that 69 per cent of dislocations in oral language are left-dislocations, and that a majority of these (76 per cent) concern subjects. These figures would no doubt be even higher if they included cleft constructions and presentational structures, which I also consider as detached elements in that they deviate

from the canonical subject verb object (SVO) word order. The considerable difference between the results for oral and written language in the research mentioned above shows the importance of considering the linguistic constructions typical of spoken language in their own terms, and of defining them as unique spoken phenomena rather than as deviations from the written norm.

### *Information structure, topic, comment and focus*

The syntactic characteristics of dislocation and disjoint pronouns (and of presentational constructions discussed in the next chapter) are inextricably linked to the wider concept of *information structure* in spoken discourse, notably reflecting the complex ways in which information tends to be packaged and conveyed, as well as the rules and constraints by which information structure is governed. Theories describing information structure vary greatly, as does the terminology used for describing it. Since the present dissertation is primarily concerned with discourse-pragmatic phenomena, I shall focus on information structure from a pragmatic rather than a syntactic point of view. In particular, I attempt to provide some insight into the ways in which certain pragmatic constructions typical of spoken French allow speakers to express information in a coherent way, most notable in helping to shape the sequential order, the process of turn taking and the overall cohesion of spontaneous discourse.

Many labels have been used to name what is commonly understood as information structure; among these we may include the term ‘information structure’ itself (Halliday 1967, Gundel 1974, Lambrecht 1996), ‘information packaging’ (Chafe 1976, Prince 1986) or ‘informatives’ (Vallduví 1992). Among these authors, I will concentrate particularly on the work of Lambrecht (1996) and Vallduví (1992), since they focus on Romance languages and hence are probably more relevant for my current purposes.

As far as information structure is concerned, spoken French is a topic-prominent language, that is, it employs specific syntactic features that make up a system in which sentences are organised around ‘topics’ (defined below) rather than subjects and objects. French is also a non-pro-drop language, i.e. a language that requires that an explicit subject be present in all tensed clauses. Any pragmatic-syntactic analysis



concerned with information structure and sentence forms should therefore take into account these two facts. Vallduví (1992) defines information packaging as follows:

Our conception of information packaging is a literal interpretation of the notion of packaging. Namely information packaging, the structuring or packaging of information, is taken to consist of a small set of instructions with which a speaker directs a hearer to retrieve the information encoded in a sentence and enter it into her/his knowledge store. The purpose of information packaging is precisely to optimise the entry of data into the hearer's knowledge store (Vallduví 1992: 14).

The concept of information packaging is important for the present purposes in that spoken French uses specific syntactic constructions in order to structure the information expressed in interaction. My discussion of the syntactic aspects of information structure will however be only peripheral, and will only relate to the immediate correlation between syntax and interaction. Spoken syntax, the way it is deployed in conversation, is motivated mainly by pragmatic factors and by the contextual constraints of a given situation. Lambrecht (1966) argues that these factors and constraints mainly have to do with a) the (existing or non-existing) shared knowledge between the speakers (or 'presupposition'), b) the speaker's assumptions about the representation of discourse referents in the addressee's mind (or 'identifiability' / 'activation') and c) the speaker's assessment of the 'relative predictability vs. unpredictability of the relations between propositions and their elements in given discourse situations,' or 'topic' and 'focus' (Lambrecht, 1996: 6).

At the level of discourse, utterances can be seen as propositions structured into portions, which have both anchoring parts and informative parts. In a continuous flow of speech in a conversation, the structuring of information is *gradual* and constantly changing, i.e. the informative part of an utterance may be the anchoring part of the following utterance. Such structuring requires a complex system of linkage and connections, based on a wide array of choices of syntactic constructions and word order that vary from language to language in significant ways. This system is based on a logical and context-dependent articulation of information whereby some elements are contextually bound (present in the immediate memory of both speaker and hearer) and

others enter this system as contextually ‘new’ (speakers are just about to talk about them). In this articulation of information, what is important is not the referent(s) alone, but rather the effect of a combination of ‘old’ and ‘new’, i.e. the context of old assumptions between the speaker and the hearer, and the addition of new information related in some way to those assumptions (see Van Valin and LaPolla 1997).

Many terms have been used to define what is generally accepted as the ‘about’ part of an utterance on one hand, and the informative part on the other. The most common terms found in the literature include the dichotomous notions of ‘theme’ and ‘rheme’ (Halliday 1967), ‘topic’ and ‘comment’ (Reinhart 1981), ‘topic’ and ‘focus’ (Lambrecht 1996), ‘focus’ and ‘presupposition’ (Chomsky 1971) or ‘focus’ and ‘open proposition’ (Prince 1986). However, as Vallduví (1992: 35) points out, even though there are many differences among theoretical approaches, all of them recognise ‘that in the sentence there is some sort of informational split between a more informative part and a less informative part,’ the only subject of disagreement being the nature of the split, notably whether the split should be defined as a dichotomy or a continuum. Following the discourse-pragmatic approach outlined by Lambrecht (1996), I will henceforth use the terms ‘topic’ and ‘focus’, and conceive their relationship as a continuum rather than as a combination of isolated, dichotomous categories<sup>34</sup>.

### *Topic*

The notion of *téma* (‘aboutness’) was first introduced by the Prague School linguists (see Firbas 1964) who essentially viewed this part of a sentence as that which is being talked about, also defined as the ‘base’ of a sentence. This part sometimes coincides with the ‘point of departure’ of a message, or the part ‘which is known or at least obvious in the given situation and from which the speaker proceeds’ (Mathesius 1939, cited in Firbas 1964: 268). Mathesius describes the topic as that part of a sentence which the speaker wants to comment upon or give some information about. Consequently, what is being said about this ‘theme’ is referred to as ‘nucleus’ or (‘rheme’). Up until now, scholars have been using different variations of these concepts to describe information structure along the continuum from known to less known to new. This continuum may also contain instances which are neither ‘old’ nor ‘new’, but

---

<sup>34</sup> Topicless (or ‘thetic’) constructions are discussed later.

contextually or situationally inferable. Let us consider these concepts in more detail, replacing the notion of ‘theme’ with that of ‘topic’.

Generally, ‘topic’ and ‘topic expressions’ are understood as follows:

TOPIC: A referent is interpreted as the topic of a proposition if in a given situation the proposition is construed as being about this referent, i.e. as expressing information which is relevant to and which increases the addressee’s knowledge of this referent.

TOPIC EXPRESSION: A constituent is a topic expression if the proposition expressed by the clause with which it is associated is pragmatically construed as being about the referent of this constituent. (Lambrecht 1996: 131)

Disagreements exist over such issues as the sentential position of the topic or its exact nature and scope. Some researchers argue that the topic need not appear at the beginning of the sentence (Firbas 1964: 274) or even correspond to old information (Reinhart 1981, De Cat 2007).

When referring to the notion of ‘topic’, one needs to differentiate between the supra-sentential or ‘discourse topic’ (i.e. a topic that is being discussed in a segment of discourse larger than the sentence) and the sentence-level topic (i.e. the anchoring piece of information that is already part of the speaker’s and hearer’s knowledge store). Topic can therefore be, and often is, a cumulative notion. Reinhart (1981: 25) speaks of a ‘file card’ model whereby the topic of a sentence S is a ‘file card’ within the speaker’s and hearer’s knowledge store onto which new information is entered.

Sentence topics often are (but need not be) present in the previous discourse. Let us consider the following example, showing that some propositions can be uttered completely out-of-the-blue and yet be acceptable as containing a topic:

159.) *Le mauvais temps, c’est déprimant* (from De Cat 2007: 68)

As shown by examples like the above, the principle of topic continuity does not apply in all cases. What is more important for topics, as the author argues, is the principle of *salience*, i.e. only referents that are active (or salient) enough may be topics (De Cat 2007: 68). Thus the concept of salience may be defined as the level of awareness of the contextual significance of the choice of a linguistic element. Lambrecht (1981: 64) also argues that the principle of salience may explain why the informational scope of a topic often extends beyond the limit of the single clause in which it occurs.

Another principle evoked with respect to topics is their relevance. If discourse referent X is a topic, the relevance principle assumes an implicit question: what about X? If discourse referents are explicit or implicit entities (such as a person or an item), it is relatively easy to identify them as topics. However, while it is often assumed that topics are entities or items, it is not always the case; topics can often be represented by vague concepts that cannot always be thought of as entities. Consider the following example from the present data:

160.) *genre si t'es riche, tu peux t'acheter une maison et puis la louer* [N100]

The conditional clause in (160) puts a restrictive frame on the interpretation of the subsequent segment and creates a type of 'restricted topic'. De Cat (2007: 71) notes that locative, temporal and conditional clauses act as restrictors for the interpretation of a sentence, and therefore serve as *stage topics*. Although this view has seldom been implemented in the literature, several authors have noted that sentence modifiers such as conditionals can be topics (Gundel 1974, Von Stechow 1994, Erteschik-Shir 1997). Example (160) can thus be read as having a restrictive frame on the predicate; it only holds true if the topic situation exists (the addressee can imagine that it does). De Cat (2007: 76) summarises this characteristic as a general function of all topics: 'the topic of a sentence defines the domain of applicability of the predication (i.e. the frame within which the predication is assumed to hold true)'.

As mentioned above, topic can also be referred to as *theme* (Firbas 1964, Halliday 1967), *presupposition* (Chomsky 1971) or *open proposition* (Prince 1981, 1986). All of these concepts (especially the latter two) are primarily based on the idea of shared (or

'presupposed') knowledge between speakers or knowledge that is inferable from the context. These are, by and large, similar to the notion of topic, yet less rigid in that they do not refer to something that has been explicitly identified as topic. Consider the following example:

- 161.) a. What did she give to Harry?  
b. What she gave to Harry was a SHIRT.  
c. I heard she gave a few dishes to Harry.  
d. No, a whole SET she gave him. (from Prince 1986: 2-3)

The above examples are illustrative of the existence of a degree of shared knowledge (i.e. presupposition/open proposition). As we can see, the direct question (161a) and the corresponding answers such as WH-clefts (161b), propositions (161c) or focus-movements (161d) all depart from a presupposed idea that *she gave SOMETHING to Harry*. If the act of 'giving' is taken to be shared knowledge between the speakers, it creates ground for whatever comment or focus comes to complete it.

More generally, the notion of topic-hood in spoken language provides a framework for understanding the different pragmatic and syntactic means of expressing fronting, detachment or dislocation. As mentioned previously, spoken French generally favours syntactic patterns derived from topic-prominence, i.e. these patterns are typically organised in a way that highlights the topic-comment structure of the sentence, independently of the syntactic ordering of the subject, verb and object (or the 'SVO' pattern). Some syntactic/pragmatic constructions discussed in this chapter serve to express topic-prominence, and are thus closely related to the notion of topic-hood.

### *Focus*

*Focus* is generally accepted as the most informative part of a message, and is sometimes also defined as 'rheme' (Firbas 1964, Halliday 1967). It usually overlaps, or is a narrower part of, 'comment' (Gundel 1974) or 'focal' / 'rhematic' zone (Lacheret-Dujour 2003: 2). Focus typically covers syntactically or prosodically prominent words, usually those which introduce 'new' information (new in relation to the information that has been given or implied). Halliday (1967: 206) defines 'given' as 'anaphorically

recoverable’ and ‘new’ as ‘textually and situationally non-derivable’ information. To illustrate this point, let us consider the following example:

162.) C1: *Il est parti depuis quand, Romain?* [Chloé, F26 + Léa, F25; R05]

L1: *Il est parti le vingt-quatre là*

C2: *Ah donc c'est tout récent*

In the above example *Romain* (or the fact that he has left) can be identified as the topic, known from the previous discourse or contextually salient, and subsequently ‘recovered’ in (C1) and (L1). What appears to be the most prominent piece of new information in (L1) is *le vingt-quatre là*; this segment is not only prosodically marked (given emphasis) but also answers the previous question and thus can be considered as focus. In addition, its salience seems to be increased by the use of the punctor *là*, whose function is not only spatial but also temporal deixis. In my interpretation, the segment could be remodelled in a binary fashion as follows:

C1: TOPIC: *Romain (partir)* – FOCUS: *depuis quand*

L1: TOPIC: *partir* – FOCUS: *le vingt-quatre là*

C2: TOPIC: (anaphora) *c'est* – FOCUS: *tout récent*

In examples such as (162), identifying topic and comment is relatively straightforward; in cases like this the topic is often known or present in the previous discourse and therefore easily recognisable. It also tends to overlap with the supra-sentential topic – the topic of a conversation as a whole, such as *Romain*, in (162). Once this topic is known, it is also easier to specify the relevant foci/comments, as they tend to be ‘about’ the topic.

Theories concerned with information structure tend to agree that there is a posited (‘anchoring’ or ‘vehicular’) part and a communicative (informative) part in each utterance. Topic would then relate to a) the shared knowledge between speakers, b) to the referents present in the previous discourse or c) to any kind of knowledge that can be inferred contextually or situationally (as opposed to the information that is presented as ‘new’). However, it is often the case that all parts of an utterance are new:

163.) *Il y a mes parents qui arrivent demain* [N011]

If expressed out of the blue and independently of what was discussed in the previous discourse, the whole utterance presents new information. In fact, there may be several ways of interpreting it; according to Lambrecht (1996: 142), presentational constructions beginning with *il y a* and followed by a noun phrase (and by *qui/que* + clause) serve to introduce a wholly new referent into discourse. They are thus part of the focalisation process and labelled as *sentence-focus clefts*. A slightly different perspective is outlined in De Cat (2007: 88) who treats presentationals as newly introduced *topics*. I return to this point and discuss it in detail in a later section.

Examples such as (163) above illustrate how ambiguous the concepts of topic and focus may be. Therefore they should not be defined in categorical terms but instead be viewed as *relational*, i.e. identified only in relation to one another (or in relation to other segments of the discourse). Distinguishing between topic and focus (or even identifying the topic itself) is not always straightforward; hence the critical role of the context in determining the status of discourse referents. Returning to example (163), one can imagine that there is a discourse antecedent to *demain* ('tomorrow'), and the latter can therefore be defined as topic. This can be so if we imagine that (163) was an answer to the question: *tu pourras venir demain?* ('can you come tomorrow?'), in which case *demain* would be the topic and *il y a mes parents qui arrivent* would be a sentence-focus cleft such as those described by Lambrecht (1996: 223) as serving to introduce a new referent into the conversation. However, one can easily imagine a situation where a sentence like (163) is uttered completely out-of-the blue and without any discourse antecedents (i.e. in the previous discourse, the speakers had not talked about *demain*, *parents* or any other recoverable concept). In this latter case, one may consider the referent of *parents* as a newly introduced topic whose existence is asserted with the help of *il y a*, as previously noted by De Cat (2007: 88).

Interestingly, focus is not always represented in a binary relationship with topic. Scholars also refer to more nuanced phenomena such as *dominance* (Erteschik-Shir, 1981), these being based on the idea that some segments of discourse are more salient than others and hence described as dominant. Dominance is defined as follows:

‘A constituent *c*, of a sentence *S*, is dominant in *S* if and only if the speaker intends to direct the attention of his/her hearer(s) to the intension of *c*, by uttering *S*’ (Erteschik-Shir 1981: 665).

It seems that dominant constituents very closely resemble focalised constituents in terms of their intonational and communicative salience. Within an utterance, speakers can influence the placement of dominant constituents by manipulating the word order so that the focus of the utterance is placed in a prominent slot, and thus increase the salience and put additional emphasis on what they communicate. This process is traditionally called *focalisation*. For example, if we take the canonical SVO direction (word order from left to right) to be a direction leading from the thematic to the informative, then we can inverse this direction to increase the dominance/salience of any given constituent (e.g. the object). Focalisation (or ‘rhématisation’) can be achieved by a variety of syntactic means, as illustrated by the following example:

164.) (Conversation about flying; Chloé, F/26 and Léa F/25, R05)

C: *j’aime pas prendre l’avion*

L: *chais pas moi j’ai aucun problème / c’est juste la / le décollage  
que j’aime pas mais j’ai pas peur*

In the above example, speakers discuss their dislike of flying and the utterance (L) thus has a contextual discourse antecedent. As we can see, the focalised constituent in the second part of utterance (L) – *c’est juste le décollage* – is moved leftwards and thus given pragmatic salience. The canonical word order would have been slightly different: *juste je n’aime pas le décollage*. The topic is easily identifiable here because it happens to overlap with the supra-sentential discourse topic – the dislike of flying, and therefore *j’aime pas* may be considered as the topic. Inverting the word order to highlight the focal constituent in this way is very frequent. It consists of assigning focal status to the object and thematic status to the predicate, and results in a pattern that Lambrecht (1996: 223) also calls *argument-focus*.



Let us consider another instance of this type of structure, this time focusing on the subject (*moi*):

165.) *c'est moi qui ai taillé (le rosier) tout l'été!* (Nathan M/28, R03)

As we can see in (164) and (165), both subject and object can be promoted to the focus slot. In this respect, some may argue that focalisation is very similar to topicalisation, for as soon as the focalised constituent is uttered, it is available as a topic. This is part of the progression principle generally associated with the dynamism of communication, which is based on the fact that speakers typically start with less informative speech clusters and proceed towards more informative ones. It is a gradual process of constant reassigning of discourse roles and statuses.

Focus-marking strategies have often been described in the literature. Lambrecht (1996: 221-223), for instance, distinguishes between three types of focus structure: the predicate-focus (PF), the argument-focus (AF), and the sentence-focus (SF) structure, illustrated respectively as follows:

166a) Predicate focus structure

Q: What happened to your car?

A: My car / It broke DOWN

166b) Argument focus structure

Q: I heard your motorcycle broke down?

A: My CAR broke down.

166c) Sentence focus structure

Q: what happened?

A: My CAR broke down.

Although literal equivalents of these structures exist, in French focalisation may be felicitously realised using accessory syntactic devices, especially as in (167b) and (167c):

167a) Q: *Qu'est ce qui est arrivé à ta voiture ?*

A: *Elle est tombée en panne (ma voiture elle est tombée en panne  
/ Elle est tombée en panne, ma voiture)*

167b) Q: *J'ai entendu que ta moto est tombée en panne*

A: *C'est ma voiture qui est tombée en panne*

167c) Q: *Qu'est ce qui s'est passé ?*

A: *Il y a ma voiture qui est tombée en panne*

In (167a), the focus has scope over the predicate and is expressed canonically (i.e. as an S-V pattern); in cases like this speakers can also dislocate the topic to express emphasis and ensure its continuation. While (167a) is a straightforward example of a bare topic-focus construction, (167b) involves a different type of topic, which stretches over the predicate *tombée en panne*. The function of cleft sentences like (167b) is to focalise the subject or object in the argument position while the topic follows. The construction *c'est* introduces a partially new referent into the discourse which can subsequently be used as a topic. Finally, example (167c) may be described as a 'sentence-focus cleft' (*construction à focus propositionnel*, see Lambrecht 1996: 221), which serves to introduce a completely new referent into the discourse. Utterances where the ground is null and the focus domain is the entire utterance are sometimes also called *all-focus structures*, because they involve no pragmatically presupposed open-proposition (Vallduví 1992: 63). In spoken French, such utterances may begin with a *presentational* construction like *il y a* in (167c).

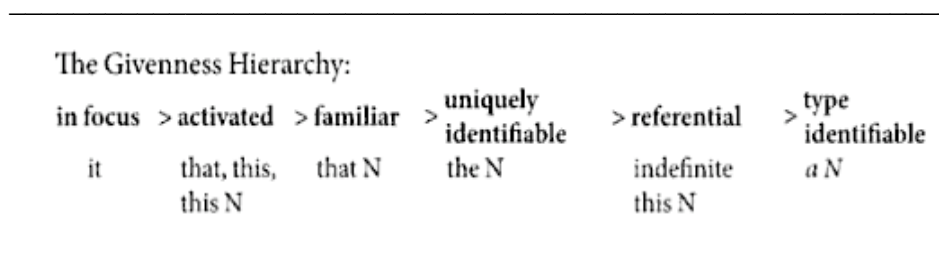
The above examples illustrate that while in languages such as English intonation and stress are usually sufficient to express focalisation, in French specific syntactic constructions are often involved.

#### *Topic, focus and the cognitive status of referents*

As we have seen, most theories concerned with topic and focus are related to such concepts as the givenness of information, previous knowledge or contextually inferable antecedents. However, questions remain as to the status of clauses that are expressed

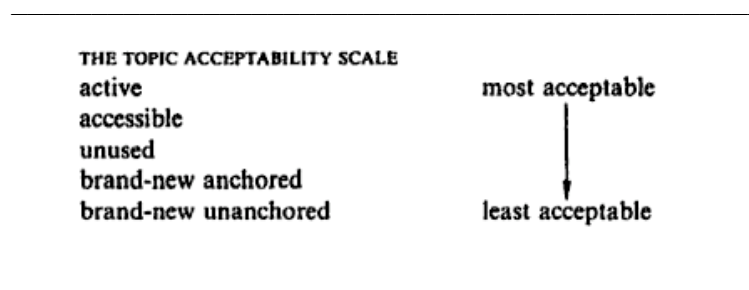
unexpectedly and do not have any link to the previous discourse. Gundel et al. (1993: 275) explain different degrees of knowledge by evoking a ‘givenness hierarchy’, which they use to examine the cognitive statuses of referents used in discourse. There are several states of ‘givenness’ represented on a scale that corresponds to the degrees of recoverability of a referent; this hierarchy comprises six cognitive states (represented here by different morpho-syntactic forms) distributed as follows:

**Figure 11: *The Givenness Hierarchy* (Gundel et al. 1993: 144)**



The cognitive status of a referent has an impact on how this referent will be introduced into the discourse and how it will ‘behave’. For example, a brand new referent can rarely act as a topic if it has not been introduced into the discourse nor been contextually salient. Thus the hierarchy in Figure 12 seems very closely related to another scale, defined as ‘topic acceptability scale’:

**Figure 12: *Topic Acceptability Scale* (Lambrecht 1996: 165)**



In using a particular form, speakers express their assumption that the relevant cognitive status is met. Lastly, Prince’s (1981) ‘familiarity scale’, very similar to the ones above, is based on the degree to which discourse information from the speaker is assumed to be known to the addressee (based on the relationship of the information to the discourse

context or given situation, rather than on the form of the expression used). Prince's familiarity scale comprises cognitive statuses that are evoked not only textually but also contextually.

In summary, there are different means of encoding information structure and of expressing givenness; they can be morphosyntactic (e.g. articles, pronouns, deictics), prosodic (e.g. stress, intonation) or syntactic (e.g. specific accessory constructions and word order). In each language, different combinations of these cues are exploited to different extents. However, theories on information structure converge on the view that universally, utterances express something given and something (relatively) new. Most of these theories therefore describe information structure in terms of binary structures (e.g. topic-focus) but also in terms of a single gradual notion (dominance). Since in this and the following chapter, I am concerned with pragmatic-syntactic constructions typical of spoken French (disjoint pronoun *moi* and presentational structures), it was important to discuss the management of information structure, which is relevant to both of these features.

## 5.2 Dislocation

Dislocation is a particular type of detached construction much favoured by spoken registers, although it is also frequently present in written texts (especially in popular literature). Dislocation is defined as:

‘a sentence structure in which a referential constituent which could function as an argument or adjunct within a predicate-argument structure occurs instead outside the boundaries of the clause containing the predicate, either to its left (...) or to its right’ (Lambrecht 2001c: 1).

In dislocated constructions, an element placed at the left- or at the right-periphery of the clause is usually resumed by another element inside the clause/sentence. Its place within the clause is often occupied by a pronoun. The following examples illustrate cases of left and right dislocation respectively:

168.) *mon père il voulait pas trop que je l'apprenne* [Emma, F27, R06]

169.) *mais pourquoi il va en Corrèze ton père ?* [Léa, F25, R06]

Dislocated constructions (also often referred to as ‘moved’ or ‘detached’, see Ball 2000) have typically been considered as oral, colloquial and spontaneous, but also viewed as devoid of rules and predominantly used by the working-class. These views led to dislocation being marginalised and defined solely as a stylistic phenomenon, which partly inhibited detailed study (Gadet 1991: 112). In this respect, Gadet (describing Bally, 1909) speaks of a traditional opposition between the ‘intellectual’ and the ‘affective’ way of speech. On one hand, the intellectual (also defined as ‘impersonal’) way of speech was said to favour clauses that formed a ‘logical whole’ and in which all elements ‘bonded together’. On the other hand, the ‘affective’ way of speech was said to favour features typical of fragmented syntax, such as dislocation, notably described as a device serving to ‘stimulate attention’ in spoken language (Bally 1909: 312).

In recent times, approaches to ‘fragmented syntax’ have become more nuanced (see, for example, Gadet 1991, Blanche-Benveniste 1986, Blasco-Dulbecco 1999, Coveney 2003). Current research encourages new directions for the study of detachment which, as Gadet (1991: 123) points out, should be seen as a specific ‘syntactic resource of its own’, rather than one that is based on the opposition between spoken and written language.

### **5.2.1 Dislocation: structure and functions**

Let us now review the characteristics of dislocation, commencing with a description of left dislocation. In this description, I refer particularly to recent analyses presented by Blasco-Dulbecco (1999) and De Cat (2007), which, although unrelated from a theoretical perspective, provide useful insights into the structural and functional aspects of dislocation.

There are two major types of left dislocation in French: dislocation of the subject and dislocation of the object, illustrated respectively in (170) and (171) below. Blasco-

Dulbecco (1999: 89) observes that left-dislocated subjects represent the most frequent type of dislocation in spoken French.

170.) *Romain quand il va revenir il aura sa chambre* (Léa, F25, R05)

171.) *la chambre je la vois pas du tout /orientée comme elle est* (Nathan, M/28, R15)

It is of particular note here that not all left-detached constituents are of the same nature. From a syntactic perspective, for instance, a distinction is made in the literature between two types of constructions: (A) topicalisation and (B) left dislocation.

#### (A) Topicalisation

Topicalised structures are those ‘in which a (generally contrastive) left-peripheral element appears without a resumptive element and the sentence would be ungrammatical if the peripheral XP is removed’ (De Cat 2005: 99).

As examples, consider:

172.) *les trucs comme ça j’aime pas* (Léa, F25, R05)

173.) *à elle, j’ai rien dit* (N109)

(B) Left dislocation            B1: Hanging Topic Left Dislocation (HTLD)  
  B2: Clitic Left Dislocation (CLD)

In the syntactic literature, left dislocation is divided into the two types listed above, based on the status of the detached constituent, the existence (and the nature) of the resuming element, and the relationship between these two. Table 5.1 summarises their main characteristics and differences.

**Table 5.1: Differences between HTLD and CLLD (adapted from De Cat: 2005 and 2007)**

<i>Hanging topic left dislocation</i>	<i>Clitic left dislocation</i>
a) Dislocated constituent is a noun phrase only	a) Dislocated constituent can be of any kind
b) No case matching	b) Case matching
c) The resumptive element can be an epithet or an ordinary pronoun (i.e. tends not to be a clitic)	c) The resumptive element is a clitic only
d) Dislocation tends not to be recursive (i.e. no more than one dislocated element is usually dislocated)	d) Dislocation can be recursive (i.e. more than one dislocated element is allowed)
e) Can only occur at the left periphery	e) Can be mirrored with right dislocation

Let us illustrate these criteria with concrete examples of spoken French:

174.) <i>Paris j'y vais presque jamais</i>	(N116)	HTLD
175.) <i>à Paris, j'y reste jamais longtemps</i>	(N137)	CLLD
176.) <i>Romain, quand il va revenir / il aura sa chambre</i>	(Léa F25, R06)	CLLD
177.) <i>ben Romain son frère il est parti depuis longtemps là</i>	(Léa F25, R06)	HTLD
178.) <i>moi mon père je l'ai déjà entendu dire ça</i>	(Emma F27, R08)	CLLD
179.) <i>ma mère non je ne crois pas que c'est son style</i>	(Emma F27, R08)	HTLD

First of all, the difference between (174) and (175) is that in the former, the relevant case-marking preposition, *à*, is omitted, while in the latter it is expressed. Thus the examples meet the above criteria, especially a) (in (174) the dislocated element is a noun phrase, while in (175) it is a prepositional phrase, and b) ((175) has case matching while (174) does not. This is consistent with De Cat (2007: 505) who points out that even case-marked left-dislocation is a hanging-topic construction if the preposition in the dislocated element is omitted. Further, the difference between examples (176) and (177) is that the dislocated element in the former is resumed by a corresponding subject clitic *il*, while in the latter it is replaced by another referent whose relationship to the previous referent can only be found in the possessive adjective *son*. A similar observation can be made in examples (178) and (179). In terms of criterion (d), we see

that example (178) is recursive, while (179) is not (i.e. the latter would perhaps sound too cumbersome if there was more than one dislocated constituent). However, De Cat (2007: 506) also mentions cases where HTLD does occur recursively:

180.) *La mer, son photographe, elle lui en a jamais parlé* (from De Cat 2007: 506)

Finally, as far as criterion (e) is concerned, we can see that clitic dislocations can have right dislocated equivalents, while hanging topics would seem unnatural if the dislocated element was moved to the right periphery.

The literature (especially De Cat 2005 and 2007) notes other complex syntactic criteria for differentiating among different types of dislocation (e.g. sensitivity to islands, occurrence in embedded clauses). However, since these are rather ambiguous and present many idiosyncrasies, I will not discuss them in detail. I am more concerned with the ways in which speakers employ dislocated structures as discourse-pragmatic means.

Non-pro drop languages like French are more predisposed to dislocation, since even the semantically inferable pronouns cannot be omitted from the sentence structure. In other languages, such as Balto-Slavic languages where the word order can be manipulated in a way that highlights salient information, topic does not need to be expressed twice. In French, where the word order usually cannot be randomly changed, the information sometimes needs to be expressed by means of accessory syntactic constructions.

The main difference between pro-drop and non-pro-drop languages is that the latter favour both subject and object dislocation while in the former, subject dislocation is considerably less common. This is due to the fact that a pro-drop language omits subject pronouns unless particular emphasis is placed on the subject. Subject pronouns are otherwise unnecessary since both the person and the number are grammatically inferable (they are expressed by the conjugated verb form). In languages such as French where the different forms of a conjugated verb might have the same pronunciation, the distinction needs to be made by expressing the pronoun. Spoken French, where pronouns are very often dislocated and resumed afterwards, offers a unique detachment phenomenon whose equivalents cannot be easily found in other languages:



181.) *Moi je me fais pas braquer* [Léa, F/25, R01]

?‘Me, I don’t get robbed’

?‘Personally I don’t get robbed’

One may wonder why other languages do not favour dislocation as much as spoken French, and I believe this is mainly due to a complex interaction of grammatical, syntactic and pragmatic factors. In some languages, the functions commonly attributed to dislocation can be achieved through intonation or inverted word order. For example, let us consider a pro-drop, inflectional and case-marking language (Slovak) where the object is emphasised by being placed in a prominent position before the verb (182b), and contrast this with a case of French dislocation (182a) where the object is ‘doubled’:

182a.) *Moi, ils ne m’auront pas !*

182b.) *Mňa nedostanú!*

‘Me (they) won’t get!’ (Pro. accusative case + Null SUBJ +  
Verb 3<sup>rd</sup> person fut. tense)

In French the word order cannot be inverted in such a way that the object would be placed before the subject, so that the former is emphasised. Therefore, in order to achieve this, the object needs to be dislocated.

In addition to structural and grammatical reasons for dislocation, there are a number of pragmatic functions that dislocation carries in interaction, notably those relating to topic continuity, topic shifts and topic changes. However, dislocation plays a role not only in topic organisation, but also in the negotiation of speaker roles and in the management of sequential turns. In example (183) below, we can see a clear case of how topic status is constantly reassigned. I attempt to model this flow as follows: *toi* (Emma) → *toi* (Léa); *toi* (Léa) → *chez la mère*; *elle* (mother) → *wifi*; *wifi* (unprotected Wi-Fi) → *elle* (mother); *Romain* (son; situationally evoked – new topic) → *Facebook*; *Facebook* → *elle* (mother); → *paëlla* (brand new topic).

183.) [Conversation about Internet; Speakers: Chloé F26, Emma F27, Léa F25; R04]

- 1 C: *mais toi t'as une ADSL Emma ?*
- 2 E: *ouais*
- 3 C: *et toi chez la mère de Romain t'as quoi ?*
- 4 L: *ouais mais chez (...) comme elle est en Wifi non protégé*
- 5 *y'a à mon avis\_ y'a pas que moi qui doit être sur ce wifi là*
- 6 *et tu vois ça rame mais chanmé<sup>35</sup> quoi*
- 7 C: *et elle peut pas protéger ?*
- 8 L: *ben si mais elle sait pas le faire et (...) déjà avec*
- 9 *[xxxxx] Facebook Romain il a un truc enfin Romain (...)*
- 10 E: *elle a pas Facebook sa mère déjà ?*
- 11 L: *non (...) faudra un de ses quatre\_ va falloir dans la semaine que je*
- 12 *[passe\_]*
- 13 E: *[ah elle]-est belle ta paëlla !*

While the conversation topic in (183) appears to centre around unlimited broadband, the sentential topic is not always the same. As we can see here, dislocation provides a way of expressing links between individual utterances, and especially between their topics. The ways in which speakers choose to process the information of the communicated message and provide feedback to it are, however, highly subjective. For example, if an utterance of a speaker A is composed of different referential elements, a speaker B may choose and deal with a specific element of that utterance and leave other elements aside, depending on what (s)he is interested in knowing or finding out. Naturally, different speakers will make different choices of referents; in (183), for instance, it is easily imaginable that a different speaker would have had a different reaction to line (9) by selecting another element from the previous utterance. For example, instead of saying *elle a pas Facebook sa mère déjà*, the speaker could have recovered the referent *Romain* as a topic and continue to expand upon that topic with, for example, "*il est sur Facebook, Romain, je ne savais pas*". The conversation would thus take a wholly different path and probably drift towards a new discourse topic, too. The method of dislocation, whether conscious or not, therefore serves the pragmatic purpose of linking individual topical units and structuring them in accordance with the interactional needs of a given situation.

---

<sup>35</sup> *chanmé* (verlan): *méchant* ('bad')

From the above observations it follows that dislocation should be based on definiteness and accessibility. It is a process whereby a referent acquires the status of a topic and becomes available for predication; the referent thus needs to be accessible and implicitly ‘concrete’. The existence of a topic therefore seems to tie in with the existence of definite subjects, such as proper nouns, noun phrases with a definite article or demonstrative or possessive constructions. Topical structures are characterised by a syntactically more independent relationship between the referent (e.g. a noun phrase) and the predicate:

184.) *Les enfants, ils s’amusent bien*

185.) *Ce type, j’en ai horreur* (from Attal 1994: 188)

Topicality is thus generally associated with definiteness. However, despite the general belief that only definites can be topics and hence dislocated, several authors have also noted examples of dislocated indefinites (especially those with a generic interpretation):

186.) *Tsé un enfant il arrive pis il te pose une question*

(Québec French; Auger 1994 : 71)

187.) *Un père, ça se respecte* (European French; Berthoud 1994: 163)

188.) An old preacher down there, they augured under the grave  
where his wife was buried (English; Prince 1985: 74)

Another case of topic that seems hard to interpret as definite is the so-called *stage* topic, as earlier illustrated in (160). A stage topic defines the framework with which the subsequent utterance applies; it serves to set the (sometimes hypothetical) spatio-temporal parameters with respect to which the utterance holds true. Stage topics therefore cannot always be viewed as definite, all the less so if they contain a conditional. It was also previously noted (Chapter 3) that some discourse markers such as *genre* function mainly as focus markers; however there seems to be an exception to this, especially in cases of exemplification where *genre* can sometimes be used to introduce a stage topic, as in the following examples:

- 189.) *genre même s'il gagnait mille cinq un truc comme ça, mille cinq cents euro depuis six ans tous les moins qui vont sur un compte* (Léa, F25, R05)  
 190.) *genre si tu pars pendant tout l'été, tu peux sous-louer* (N117)

While *genre* usually occurs in an immediately pre-focal (and post-topical) position, here it seems to be used to give a specific example of whatever has been dealt with in the previous utterance, thus framing a stage topic in a sentence-initial position (the speakers discuss their common friend and his salary). In Lambrecht's (1994) terms, such brand-new 'unanchored' referents can only be promoted to topic status by presentational clusters (e.g. *il y a, tu as, vous avez*). This raises the question whether *genre* is gradually becoming a function word that may be included in the category of *presentationals*, thus acquiring yet another pragmatic function, mainly at the pragmatics-syntax interface.

Further constraints on dislocated topics are noted by De Cat (2007: 503) who argues that quantifiers, (non-generic) indefinites and *wh*-elements (standardly regarded as operators) cannot be topics and thus cannot be dislocated. This is because they do not meet the requirement that topic referents be readily identifiable in the context, as illustrated by the following case:

- 191.) *\*tout homme, il est mortel.* (from De Cat 2007: 503; [39])

Even though *tout* ('every') is in the singular here, it reflects a generic, plural reading; the following specific referent *il* thus clashes with the universal meaning of 'all the people'. As far as non-generic indefinites are concerned, they can occur in what Erteschik-Shir (1997: 40) defines as 'subordinate update', i.e. 'the process that associates subordinate topics with their foci', as illustrated by the following example from the data:

- 192.) *y'a des gens / ils veulent se casser ils payent le billet d'avion  
 et ils restent au noir là bas* [Léa, F25, R05]

With the use of a presentational construction, the as yet unspecified referent is inserted in the topic position and, while still being indefinite, becomes subsequently specified

with a comment. Initially this referent (*des gens*) was not contextually or situationally inferable, which shows that even brand new items can be presented in a topic-prominent position.

*Topic, sub-topic, hanging topic*

As noted in Table 5.1, the literature (especially in the Anglophone tradition) considers topicalisation and dislocation as two different processes, illustrated respectively as follows:

- 193.) (1) John saw Mary yesterday. (from Prince, 1984: 213)  
(2) a. Mary John saw yesterday. TOPICALISATION  
b. Mary, John saw her yesterday. DISLOCATION

In the French tradition, however, topicalisation refers to the process of promoting a referent to topic status by changing its sentential position, and it includes the process of detachment and dislocation (see Prevost 2003: 10). However, regardless of the labels used, the theories converge on the general idea that the main differences between detachment methods have mainly to do with a) whether or not the detached element is resumed and co-indexed with a pronoun in the matrix clause and b) what the exact nature of the resumptive element is. The resumptive element can either be a clitic (e.g. *il, elle, me, le, les, lui*) or a non-clitic (e.g. *ça*, possessive and demonstrative pronouns, epithets). If the resumptive element is a clitic and the dislocated element contains a preposition matching the relevant case (i.e. a ‘governed’ preposition), the construction is considered to be a ‘proper’ case of dislocation:

194.) *à moi, elle m’a pas dit !* [N122]

Examples where a matching preposition in the dislocated element is absent are generally considered to be cases of hanging topic, as in (174) above (for discussion, see De Cat 2007 and Cinque 1977).

Another grammatical difference between the detachment cases mentioned previously is the character of the detached element (i.e. whether it is a subject or an object). While

resumption is frequent in both cases, object dislocation can also occur without resumption, while subject dislocation cannot:

195a) *Corneille, je le connais* → *Corneille, je connais* (from Kihm 1988: 58)

195b) *Moi, je connais Corneille* → \**Moi, Ø connais Corneille*

Cases such as (195a) are also often referred to as ‘object fronting’ (see, for example, Adger et al. 2004, Lambrecht 2001b).

As far as hanging topics are concerned, more complex cases can indeed be found, where several detached elements are sometimes associated (example [177] repeated):

196.) *nous Porte de Bagnolet c'est moche* [Chloé, F26, R03]

197.) *ben Romain / son frère il est parti depuis longtemps là* [Léa F25, R05]

In both (196) and (197), there are two dislocated topics that I henceforth refer to as *main topic* and *sub-topic*. The context reveals that in (196), the speakers discuss where they live and compare their neighbourhoods. As has been widely noted (e.g. De Cat 2007, Lambrecht 1996), left dislocation often occurs in contrastive contexts. Thus even here, the main topic of (196) seems to be in a contrastive relationship with the other topics in the conversation (the other speakers versus *nous*) while the sub-topic refers to one of the locations discussed. Similarly, the main topic of (197) is *Romain* who may presumably already be present in the knowledge store of the participating speakers, while *son frère* is introduced as a sub-topic to be dealt with. Contrary to proper cases of (clitic) left-dislocated topics, hanging topics do not exhibit reconstruction effects, nor have a right dislocated equivalent. Hypothetically, they can in some way be reconstructed in the matrix clause, but only indirectly:

196b.) *Porte de Bagnolet où nous habitons, c'est moche*

197b.) *ben le frère de Romain, il est parti depuis longtemps là*

Only then can they be placed at the right periphery:

196c.) *c'est moche où nous habitons, à Porte de Bagnolet*

197c.) *ben il est parti depuis longtemps là, le frère de Romain*

Due to the extra-propositional character and the complexity of some topical constructions, simple reconstruction is often ambiguous, as illustrated by (198) below:

198a) *Les enfants, tu fais une croix sur les grasses matinées* (Prevost 2003 : 10)

198b) ? *Tu fais une croix sur les grasses matinées des enfants / avec les enfants / une fois que tu as des enfants.*

Moreover, when two topics (main topic and sub-topic) are dislocated and they happen to belong to the same grammatical category, it is difficult to distinguish which one is the subject of the matrix clause:

199a) *Rosi, sa mère, elle m'a dit qu'elle adorait jardiner* (De Cat 2005: 92)

199b) ? *Rosi m'a dit que sa mère adorait jardiner /*

*La mère de Rosi m'a dit que Rosi adorait jardiner.*

Moreover, as noted by De Cat (2005: 92), in French the dislocated constituent is not always interpreted in its reconstructed position. It is mainly on this basis that French clitic left dislocation seems more felicitously analysed in terms of base-generation rather than movement. She also argues that French resumptive clitics involved in left dislocation should be treated as fully-fledged pronouns rather than true resumptives, because the dislocated element to which they relate is grammatically and semantically optional. This means that the clitic in question has the same pronominal status as it would have in a clause that did not have a dislocated element. In some examples from my data, dislocation even seems redundant:

200.) *quand la copine de Yann, elle va venir (= quand la copine de Yann va venir)*

(N092)

The difference in status is also noticeable in the case of prepositions involved in left dislocation. More precisely, there is a difference between simple prepositions (usually involved in the grammatical marking of case) and morphologically complex prepositions (compounds and longer prepositions such as *avec*, *dessus*, *dedans*). If dislocation takes place, some complex prepositions can indeed be separated from their noun phrase and be left at the end of the root clause (these were previously called ‘orphan prepositions’, see Chapter 1). Simple prepositional phrases are, however, indivisible and dependent on clitic binding. To illustrate this contrast, consider the following two cases:

201a) *Fabien, je suis jamais sortie avec* [N123]

201b) \**Fabien, j’ai jamais parlé de* (= Fabien, j’en ai jamais parlé)

Although constructions such as (201a) are relatively frequent, similar alternations using simple prepositions would be ungrammatical (e.g. [201b]). Left-dislocation involving an orphan preposition with a null-pronoun is nowadays possible, as shown in (201a) above and (202a) below<sup>36</sup>. It is of particular note that right dislocation in this case is not felicitous (202b); and in most cases it would cause the clause to revert to its canonical SVO word order, as in (203) below:

202a.) *La pelouse, j’aime marcher dessus*. (from Batllori et al. 2005: 110)

202b.) \**J’aime marcher dessus, la pelouse*.

203.) \**Je suis jamais sortie avec, Fabien*.

One of the features of orphan prepositions is that they do not have a clitic (e.g. *en*, *y*) and thus cannot be resumed:

DE LUI / DE ÇA = EN;    AVEC LUI / AVEC ÇA = X ?

---

<sup>36</sup> Batllori *et al.* (2005: 110) observe that changes in the transitivity of prepositions can be related to the lexicalisation of verbal and prepositional affixes, which lead to the split of the prepositional system into two subsystems in Modern French (i.e. simple and complex prepositions).



The absence of a clitic and the complex morphology of orphan prepositions can account for the fact that they are loosely bound and therefore easily separable from their adjacent pronoun or noun, which in turn can be either omitted or retained clause-finally:

204a) *Fabien, je suis jamais sortie avec.*

204b) *Fabien, je suis jamais sortie avec lui.*

Left-detachment structures (topicalisation, hanging topic and clitic dislocation) thus have many distinctive syntactic characteristics when seen in their discourse context, which are not always easy to account for formally. This is mainly due to the unplanned character of spoken discourse, which tends to be characterised by a linear organisation and often incomplete linkage. Before moving to the next section concerned with right dislocation, let us summarise the principal characteristics of left dislocation:

- left dislocation is a topic-promoting or thematising operation
- clitic left-dislocation is to be distinguished from hanging topic dislocation
- a left-dislocated subject is usually resumed in the root clause
- left dislocation is recursive (more than one dislocated element is allowed)
- left dislocation can occur in complex and embedded clauses
- a left-dislocated element is not necessarily definite (but usually is)
- a left-dislocated element does not necessarily represent old information

The main functions of left dislocation are as follows:

- establishing a topic which was contextually or explicitly evoked in previous discourse as a main topic
- topic maintenance between sequential turns
- contrastive topic shifting

### *Right dislocation*

Having examined the pragmatic and syntactic characteristics of the most common type of dislocation (i.e. left dislocation, or ‘LD’), I now address the question of what is generally perceived as its counterpart, i.e. right dislocation (or ‘RD’). The latter has typically been analysed as the mirror image of left dislocation but otherwise functioning in the same way. However, despite many similarities between these linguistic operations, in essence they are pragmatically and syntactically different (see Chafe 1976, Lambrecht 2001c, Ashby 1988, Gadet 1989, Blanche-Benveniste 1990, Blasco-Dulbecco 1999). While left dislocation creates an *anticipation* effect in speech, right dislocation is said to carry the function of a ‘reminder’ or re-identification of a referent; the speaker, having used a pronoun, realises that his interlocutor may not have understood its exact reference and thus he specifies it more precisely. This view of right dislocation might date back as far as the beginning of the last century, when the construction was already described as a *thème attardé* (‘delayed topic’) by Bally (1932: 63).

The right-detached constituent has also been variably described in the literature as ‘antitopic’ (Chafe 1976, Lambrecht 1996) or ‘tail’ (Vallduví 1992), while other less common labels include ‘after-thought’, a ‘de-focused NP’ or ‘post-predicate constituent’ (cf. Lambrecht 2001c). Lambrecht outlines the main difference between RD (anti-topic) and LD (topic) as follows:

TOP vs. ANTITOP position of a topic expression correlates with the relative pragmatic salience of the topic referent at utterance time: while the order topic – comment signals announcement or establishment of a new topic relation between a referent and a predication, the order comment – topic signals continuation or maintenance of an already established relation (Lambrecht 2001c: 1074).

Although right dislocation is somewhat less common than left-dislocation, previous research has confirmed its high frequency in spontaneous speech. By way of example, Blasco-Dulbecco (1999: 97) observes the following split between spoken and written registers:

Spoken language: 69.25% left-dislocation; 30.75% right-dislocation

Written language: 67.92% left-dislocation; 32.08% right-dislocation

Somewhat different results are presented by De Cat (2007: 223) who registers a total of 51 per cent right-detached elements compared to 49 per cent left-detached elements in spontaneous spoken French. Let us now consider the main characteristics of right dislocation, and examine the differences between the right and the left periphery of the clause.

An important point of difference between RD and LD is the character of the dislocated element. For example, it has been previously noted that left-dislocated elements associated with an indirect object are preferably bare (i.e. strongly tend to be determiner phrases rather than prepositional phrases) while right-dislocated elements of this type are not bare (i.e. the case-marking preposition is always present):

205a.) *Tu vas parfois leur donner à manger, aux canards ?* (De Cat 2007: 36)

In right-dislocation, the resumptive pronominal is cataphoric, i.e. placed in the root clause before the verb and before the dislocated constituent. The fact that the resumptive pronominal has been uttered previously creates a dependent relationship with the subsequent dislocated element. In the case of left-dislocation, the speakers announce the topic first, without necessarily thinking about its grammatical relationship with the resumptive pronominal placed in the root clause. This relationship cannot always be formally defined as syntactically 'linked' if the topic has been uttered as a bare element without its dependency markers (prepositions), as illustrated by the following example (altered for illustration purposes):

205b) *Les canards, tu vas parfois leur donner à manger ?*

Due to the spontaneous character of spoken language (characterised mainly by the pragmatic salience of the left periphery, the lack of planning time and the 'least effort'

principle described in previous chapters), left-dislocated topics are often announced bare. In the case of right dislocation, on the other hand, the syntactic relationship has already been established, so the dislocated element is preferably governed (i.e. contains its grammatically relevant prepositions). Let us test the felicitousness of RD in terms of dependency markers:

205c) *\*Tu vas parfois leur donner à manger, les canards ?*

206a) *je le lui ai dit / comment\_ à mon patron (..)* (Nathan M28, R15)

206b) *\*je le lui ai dit / comment\_ mon patron (..)*

In line with the above observation is also the fact that RD and LD cannot always be considered as mirror images of one another. While in general it is possible to change a right-dislocated element into a left-dislocated one, the converse may be impossible, as illustrated by (205c) above.

Similar observations are made with respect to so-called ‘unlinked’ topics (Lambrecht 2001c: 1071). The presence of unlinked topics is possible at the left periphery, but ill-formed at the right periphery of the matrix clause. Again, this seems to be largely due to the pragmatic habit of presenting a bare topic first, which is not felicitous in right dislocation. Compare (207a) and (207b) from Lambrecht (2001c: 1058):

207a.) *[Mon premier mari], on avait une voiture puis une moto.*

207b.) *\*On avait une voiture puis une moto, [mon premier mari].*

Both LD and RD may have multiple dislocated elements. However, again, at the right periphery all dislocates must be matching in grammatical case (i.e. linked), as illustrated below:

208.) *je n'y ai même pas touché moi, à ton ordinateur [N07]*

Right dislocation and left dislocation also differ in terms of information structure. While left-dislocation usually serves to establish a sentence topic, right dislocation is often

used to maintain, explain or recall the previously established/contextually inferable topic. This is illustrated by the following examples:

- 209.) *c'est clair que la dernière fois c'était pas très approfondi / votre cours de guitare* [Chloé F26, R06]  
210.) *il a de la gueule quoi le passeport* [Fabien M24, R03]  
211.) *ça t'allait vachement bien les dreds* [Nathan M28, R03]  
212.) *mais sinon ça m'arrive pas ce genre d'histoires* [Aurélié F28, R01]  
213.) *mais pourquoi il va en Corrèze ton père ?* [Léa F25, R06]

The context reveals that all the above examples revolve around a 'proximal' topic. In other words, even though the dislocated element may not have been an explicit topic in the previous utterance, it was at least contextually inferable. Some may prefer to talk about an after-thought that was added to the utterance in order to clarify a referent, although the latter may have already been part of the hearer's presupposed knowledge store (see Chafe 1976). Right-dislocation can thus sometimes serve to retrieve a 'forgotten' topic, as in (209) and (210) above. Topic retrieval can also be a function of left dislocation, described by Givón (1990: 757) as serving to 'retrieve topics that have been put aside'. However, right dislocation may sometimes be better suited for utterances where the left periphery is already too 'loaded', as in questions, for instance. Let us alter one of the previous examples to illustrate this point:

- 214a.) *mais pourquoi il va en Corrèze ton père ?* [Léa F25, R06]  
214b.) *? mais ton père pourquoi il va en Corrèze ?*

Right dislocation is conventionally described as serving to compensate for an insufficient context, to clarify and add more information or, like left dislocation, to indicate contrast between referents. The latter was notably the case in (213), in which the previous topic was 'mother' which was then changed to 'father'.

Even in right-dislocation, there may be some inconsistencies in grammatical correspondence and 'linkage'. In other words, speakers can sometimes start with a generic *ça* or *ce* in the matrix clause (rather than pronouns such as *tu*, *elle* or *il*),

possibly because they are unsure what the dislocated element will correspond to until it is actually uttered. This was indeed the case in examples (209), (211) and (212) where generic *ce* and *ça* were used, while in left-dislocation personal pronouns would perhaps be preferred:

215.) *votre cours de guitare, il était pas très approfondi* (..)

Right and left dislocation are also said to diverge slightly in terms of their discourse functions, notably in the use of discourse markers with which they co-occur (Simone 1997: 51). Left dislocation is said to be used with discourse markers such as *tu sais* or *tu vois*, which allow the speaker to select from a number of possible referents, while right dislocation tends to favour *explicative* discourse markers such as *c'est-à-dire*. Finally, as can be seen in many previous examples (e.g. [209] - [211]), RD often serves to present subjective value judgments, while simultaneously concluding these judgements. Indeed, I have noted in many cases that right dislocated elements are placed at the end of a turn to summarise someone's point of view or to conclude their argument in some way, as we saw in example (212).

Last but not least, it should be noted that LD and RD differ also in terms of stress and intonation patterns. It has been widely noted that right-dislocated constituents are unstressed and have the lowest pitch compared to the rest of the sentence (Lambrecht 1981: 84, Ashby 1994: 39; De Cat 2007: 34), which also shows that the non-dislocated part of the sentence is prosodically well-formed and self-sufficient. However, pitch and intonation are obviously different in questions, where they may have a rising contour (this was the case, for instance, in example (213) above).

Let us now summarise the main characteristics and functions of right dislocation:

- The full Noun Phrase – the detached constituent – is placed at the right periphery of the root clause (or at the right of the verb);
- The detached constituent is coreferential with a pronominal construction in the root clause (also called 'cataphor');

- Dependency markers (such as case-marking prepositions) in the right-dislocated element are present;
- The root clause contains all its arguments so the dislocated constituent can be omitted without any detriment to the syntax of the clause (i.e. the root clause is autonomous);
- Right dislocation is not always a mirror image of left dislocation;

The main functions of right dislocation are:

- RD may resolve a potentially unclear pronominal reference.
- RD may mark contrast.
- RD may reinstate a 'forgotten' topic or maintain the existing topic
- RD may express value judgements and conclude subjective arguments.

#### **5.2.1.1 Summary**

In this analysis, I have attempted to show that French detachment structures such as dislocation are a unique syntactic phenomenon typical of spoken French. In unplanned speech, these strategies play a large part in the syntactic shaping of utterances and in the structuring of information, notably by allowing for a coherent segmentation of discourse and better potential cognitive processing. While in some languages this may be achieved mainly through prosody and the manipulation of word order, spoken French relies heavily on dislocation.

As was shown, right and left dislocation have many similar, overlapping functions, while at the same time being different in many respects. Both play an important role in topic management and turn-taking. Thus, rather than merely looking at the formal syntactic characteristics of dislocation and at theories concerned with its generation from a canonical clause, my main goal here was to examine the ways in which the syntactic aspects of dislocation interact with its discourse-pragmatic functions. In this section I especially sought to provide a background for the analysis of a unique phenomenon typical of spoken French: different combinations of the first-person

disjoint pronoun *moi*. These constructions occur with an overwhelmingly high frequency in my data, employed as highly functional devices in an almost formulaic way. While syntactically they seem to originate (and most probably do) in dislocation, they seem to diverge towards an interactional domain in which they serve a wide range of complex subjective and epistemic functions.

### **5.3 *Moi*: disjoint pronoun and its functions in conversation management and self-presentation.**

In this section I address the distinctive characteristics of the disjoint pronoun *moi* and its different forms including the left-detached (*moi je*), the separated right-detached (*je + X + moi*), the separated left-detached (*moi + X + je*) and the hanging-topic forms (*moi + X*). Interestingly, the different constructions with *moi* represented the highest frequency of dislocation attested in my data (see Table 5.3 below), while it also emerges that *moi* carries complex interactional and epistemic functions that go beyond those generally associated with simple dislocation (e.g. topic establishment or contrast marking). Notably, I discuss the role of forms with *moi* in conversation management and self-presentation, with particular reference to the different contexts in which they tend to appear.

#### **5.3.1 Previous approaches**

First of all, it is important to point out that French *moi* belongs to a category of 'disjunctive' pronouns (also called 'stressed' or 'tonic', cf. L'Huillier 1999) that have corresponding unstressed forms (e.g. *je*) and are typically used to emphasise a noun or pronoun that refers to a person. While their equivalents may exist in other languages, the use of these pronouns is, again, very specific to French and a literal translation of these pronouns may thus often seem unnatural in other languages. The functions served by the tonic pronouns pertain not only to syntax, but play an equally important role at the level of discourse.



Generally, and perhaps rightly so, detached pronoun *moi* is analysed in terms of dislocation. However, its syntactic and pragmatic functions present certain characteristics that raise questions about the status of *moi* as an ordinary dislocated pronoun, and call for more nuanced understandings of the phenomenon.

Blasco-Dulbecco (2004: 129), for instance, observes that constructions involving the ‘disjoint’ pronoun *moi* should be accounted for ‘in and for their own sake, and not as a derivation or a transformation’. The high frequencies of *moi* in spoken corpora require such an analysis, firstly because this form is largely dominant over all the other forms of dislocated nouns, noun phrases and pronouns, and secondly, because the use of this disjoint pronoun is at variance with certain characteristics generally attributed to dislocation, such as the use of governing prepositions in dislocated-object roles, resumption or immediate proximity of the dislocated elements. Blasco-Dulbecco (2004: 130-133) demonstrates that *moi* can be used in very different ways:

- 216a) *moi ils me font pas peur*
- 216b) *à moi elle me fait pas peur la bête*
- 216c) *ils me font peur moi*
- 216d) *ils me font pas peur à moi*
- 216e) *vous avez l'air de rire mais moi je ne ris pas*

As with other detachment structures, theories vary in how they account for constructions with *moi*. For example, in Damourette and Pichon’s *Des mots à la pensée, Essai de grammaire de la langue française* (1930: § 1008), an example such as (216a) would be considered as real dislocation, while (216b) would be considered as ‘semi-dislocation’. In more recent work, examples like (216b) and (216d), governed by a preposition and therefore dependent on the verb, may also be described as ‘double-marking’ (*double marquage*, see Blasco-Dulbecco 2004: 130), while (216e) may also be defined as ‘subject doubling’ (*redoublement du sujet*, cf. Coveney 2003: 111). Last but not least, De Cat (2007) distinguishes cases of ‘hanging topic’ (which would correspond to examples [216a] and [216c]) and cases of ‘clitic dislocation’ (e.g. examples [216b], [216d] and [216e]). I would add that there is a third type of detachment, in which the bond between the detached pronoun and the ensuing comment is even looser:

217.) *moi ça va / franchement* (N139)

In cases like the above, one may even wonder whether or not dislocation actually takes place at all. In fact, in terms of pronominal resumption, there does not seem to be any link between *moi* and the subsequent comment (in the form of pronominal anaphora such as *je*, *me* or *mon*). Therefore, example (217) may be considered as a case of a proper hanging topic without dislocation. While not excluding other common terms for this detachment phenomenon, I will henceforth refer to constructions with *moi* as those with a ‘disjoint pronoun’ (following Blasco-Dulbecco 2004) since this term seems the most appropriate for encompassing the wide range of possible detachment forms including dislocation, subject/object doubling and hanging topics.

Like many other constructions typical of spoken language, disjoint pronoun *moi* has often been considered redundant in relation to its anaphor placed in the ordinary (canonical) position (see Grevisse 1969). However, as will be argued throughout this section, even though *moi* seems redundant syntactically and does not contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance, it makes a significant contribution to the pragmatic and interactional domain of conversation. The fact that this disjoint pronoun is so pervasive across all varieties of spoken French attests to its important discourse-pragmatic role.

Blasco-Dulbecco (2004) notes that the most common function of *moi* is to mark contrast or a point of view. In her corpus of spoken French (currently one of the largest spoken corpora in France: *Corpus de Référence de Français Parlé*, ‘the Reference Corpus of Spoken French’), she observes the frequencies listed in Table 5.2 below. According to Blasco-Dulbecco, the fact that *moi je* occurs over 10 times more frequently than the second most frequent pronoun (*toi tu*) raises questions about the particular status of this pronominal construction and its possible role in interaction (notwithstanding the fact that first person subjects tend to be more frequent than other subjects in speech generally). Thus, defining disjoint *moi* solely in terms of syntactic dislocation may leave out its important pragmatic and subjective functions at the level of discourse.

**Table 5.2: Number of occurrences of pronominal subject doubling in CRFP corpus (Blasco-Dulbecco: 2004)**

<i>Moi je</i>	475	<i>Eux ils</i>	74
<i>Je moi</i>	66	<i>Ils eux</i>	22
<i>Toi tu</i>	43		

In the literature on spoken French, disjoint *moi* is habitually called *moi 'énonciateur'* (from *énoncer* – ‘to utter’) – an attribute that is meant to reflect the relationship between the utterance and its instigator, i.e. the speaker, agent or, simply, the author of the utterance. As noted further, this relationship tends to be crucial, especially in terms of the speaker’s standpoint and the responsibility (s)he has towards the conversation topic and towards the other speakers. Spoken conversation, and spontaneous discourse more generally, therefore offers fertile ground for the occurrence of disjoint pronouns, and especially of the self-oriented first-person *moi*.

In French, the syntactic and discursive functions of the tonic form *moi* apparently start to develop at a very early stage of child language development. For example, Brigaudiot *et al.* (1994) examine the acquisition of personal pronouns in Francophone and Anglophone children and point out that French *moi* generally starts being used at the same time as *je* (sometimes even earlier), and progressively develops as ‘a condition of access to *je*’ (Brigaudiot *et al.* 1994: 14). It is also noted that children acquire *moi* as a marker of comparison, opposition or contrast, with the form initially materialising in ritual play and routine interaction with older speakers. Naturally, as the authors point out, the most common interactional situations of this type are simple dyadic conversations between mother and child, which very often involve phrases of the following type:

- *c'est moi qui* + verb, implying *pas toi, pas eux...*, or inversely,
- *c'est pas moi qui...*, *toi tu* + verbe, *moi je* + verb
- *moi aussi je* + verb, or inversely *moi non plus je* + verb
- *je sais faire..., je peux faire..., regarde je suis en train de faire...!*, implying *moi aussi* (from Brigaudiot *et al.* (1994: 7).

It is argued that at the early stages of language acquisition, the child does not yet fully possess the strong individual, affirmative and subjective functions associated with the personal form *je*. The use of *moi*, as opposed to *je*, seems to be based on the notion of ‘otherness’ (*altérité*), i.e. in situations where children start to compare or oppose themselves to their entourage. In other words, *moi* is used and construed with respect to others, and presupposes the existence of different points of view, different events and individual experiences. Despite the fact that single subjects *je* are, as we will see below, a great deal more frequent than double subjects with *moi*, the use of the latter seems to be a specific pragmatic phenomenon that should be considered separately.

I believe that the fundamental purpose of French *moi* and its pervasive use stems from this characteristic of *otherness*. This is in line with Danon-Boileau (1994: 164) who defines *moi* as a modal marker of discordance, employed in a situation of *coénonciation*<sup>37</sup>, in which a speaker assigns a certain value to his or her utterance in order to support the proposition that it instigates. *Moi* would thus be employed in a context of divergence, while *je* would be employed in a context of ‘solitude’, *moi* having a referential value that is directly opposable to *toi* (or *lui, elle ..*) and *je* being the ‘sole index of real subjectivity’ (Danon-Boileau 1994: 164). The former is therefore used to express a point of view that deviates somewhat from the reciprocal dialogic exchange and places the speaker in an almost monologic position (regardless of whether *moi* is emphatic, contrastive or explicative).

The pervasiveness of first-person *moi* in spoken French is also attested by Coveney (2003, 2005) who explores quantitative variation between canonical sentence patterns and those involving subject doubling. Interestingly, he excludes the *moi + je* pattern from the data analysed (2003: 115), on the grounds that subject doubling with *moi* is viewed as neutral while with the other persons it is viewed as redundant and typical of *français populaire*. This is said to have been widely attested in the research literature (Dannequin 1977: 74-76; Romaine 1984: 210-12), as well as in traditional grammars (Dauzat 1947: 424-25) and the attitudes of French speakers influenced by the education

---

<sup>37</sup> Although *coénonciation* (Jeanneret 1999) is mainly understood as a situation in which a speaker aids his interlocutor to complete his intervention (i.e. utterance), I believe that on a more general level, it can be viewed as a situation of conversational exchange in which speakers mutually construct the discourse and negotiate the meaning. Unfortunately Danon-Boileau does not provide concrete examples to illustrate this situation.

system. Coveney also observes that *moi + je* is used among all social classes while subject doubling in the other persons tends to be more common amongst the working class. This widespread use of *moi je* is predominantly attributed to its interactional and discursive functions; Coveney observes that *moi je* is widely accepted and used as a marker of topic shift or point of view, independently of style, register or social class.

Finally, the use of disjoint pronouns is not specific to European French. As Auger (1994: 118) observes, doubled phrases, and most particularly doubled subjects, are also used in very large numbers in colloquial French in Québec, which makes her wonder whether these doubled structures can ‘still do the work of dislocation constructions’ (e.g. marking stress, emphasis or changes of topic). She rejects this hypothesis and instead suggests that these constructions are undergoing grammaticalisation such that they are becoming simple syntactic subjects rather than extra-sentential topics<sup>38</sup>.

It is apparent from all the above studies that double marking, and especially the use of disjoint *moi*, is very widespread and attested both synchronically and diachronically. It is precisely because the constructions with *moi* have such a common and widely accepted use that I have decided to focus on this form in particular. In my data, *moi* not only occurs almost four times more frequently than the second most frequent disjoint pronoun (*toi*), but it also appears to have a wider range of discourse functions than the other disjoint pronouns. This may be largely due to the fact that speakers simply like to talk about themselves, but their resorting to *moi* rather than relying on *je* seems to imply that the former may play an important role at the interface of syntax and pragmatics.

### **5.3.2 Data analysis**

#### **5.3.2.1 Syntactic mobility / information structure / grammatical correspondence**

It has been noted on many occasions (Blanche-Benveniste 1990, Blasco-Dulbecco 2004, Chevalier 2007) that a large majority of *moi* forms occurring in spontaneous

---

<sup>38</sup> Incidentally, Auger notes that subject doubling was already a prominent characteristic of colloquial speech in the 17th century (1994: 118).

discourse are in some way related to the subject clitic form *je* or to the object clitic form *me*. Of these, a significant portion occur in the form of disjoint constructions involving *moi* dislocated to the left, as illustrated by the following example:

218.) *moi* y a une chose qui m'énerve (.) quand on me dit / tu sais / les numéros  
par téléphone (Catherine F27, R07)

However, *moi* can also be dislocated to the right or separated by a variety of different lexical constituents:

219.) *Tout d'un coup je* ferais un voyage *moi* avec ça (from Auger 1994: 111)

Although right-dislocated *moi* is inevitably separated (by the matrix clause), the left-dislocated form does not have to be, and indeed often occurs as a conjoint construction *moi je*. However, if separation does take place, it can have many different forms. According to Chevalier (2007: 54-55), *moi je* can be separated by the following constituents: a) a second dislocated constituent b) a modifier, c) a subordinate clause or a combination of several subordinate and/or conjoint clauses. Let us look at each of the above cases individually, illustrating them with examples from the data.

a) *moi je* separated by another dislocated constituent

Left-dislocated *moi* can be separated from its resumptive *je* by a wide range of noun phrases, removed from their canonical sentence position. Within this paradigm, the second dislocated element usually corresponds to the object of the main clause, such as the *médicaments* in the following example:

220.) *moi* (.) ces médicaments (.) j'en prenais il y a presque dix ans [Léa, F25, R06]

Such combinations of dislocated elements (involving a dislocated object NP placed immediately after *moi*) are very frequent in my data. In terms of information structure, they represent double-topic constructions that usually involve an 'experiencer'/agent (*moi*) and an object/patient (*ces médicaments*) both encoded as salient elements in a

topic-prominent role. In most cases it seems that *moi* prepares the hearer for an additional topic shift in the discourse; while *médicaments* is already the topic of the previous discourse (as indicated by the demonstrative *ces*), *moi* places this topic in relation to its experiencer – the subject of the utterance. *Moi* thus serves as a ‘stage topic’ for the main topic, i.e. as a *framework* to which the subsequent comment applies (the French literature also speaks of *cadre énonciatif*, see Chevalier 2007: 57).

If such a double-topic structure involves two hanging topics without anaphora in the main clause, their relationship is even looser. Such cases are relatively rare, but nevertheless possible:

221.) *moi* (.) *les cours* (.) *ça va pas en ce moment* [N135]

Logically, speaking of separation is relevant only in the case of left-dislocated *moi + je*, since *moi* placed at the right periphery is always separated from *je* (by the main clause with or without the object), as in (222c) – (222e) below. Since in spoken French the left periphery is more salient, and thus more likely to receive topical constituents (e.g. noun phrases and modifiers), it is also more likely to ‘accumulate’ such constituents between *moi* and *je*, as in (222f), invented for the purpose of discussion.

222a) *moi* *j’aime pas les avocats* (N075)

222b) *moi* *les avocats* *j’aime pas*

222c) *les avocats* *j’aime pas moi*

222d) *j’aime pas* *moi* *les avocats*

222e) *j’aime pas les avocats moi*

222f) *moi* - *d’habitude* - *chez mes parents* - *je* *mange des avocats*

b) *moi je* separated by an adverbial modifier

Another frequent case of separation is when *moi* is immediately followed by a modifier (the latter usually being of spatial, temporal or locative nature) or by phrases whose role is to specify or further restrict the thematic framework:

223.) *et puis* *moi de mon côté* *je t’ai donné mon plus gros bout* [Nathan M28, R13]

224.) *sinon moi (.) avec Tony (..) c'était la seize* [Thomas M25, R03]

It is questionable whether instances like *de mon côté* in (223) should be considered as second dislocated constituents, since they do not have a strictly assigned canonical position. In fact, the sentence-initial position is usually a natural position for such modifiers (adverbs of time, place or manner); therefore they often serve to co-construct the thematic frame. Interestingly, *moi + je* frequently occurs with terms like *quand, là, parfois, avant, hier, des fois, or là-bas*, which delimit/narrow down the thematic frame of the ensuing comment. Blasco-Dulbecco (2004: 138) notes that this particular construction with *moi* and a modifier is often used by speakers to describe an 'aspect of themselves', which is also frequent in my data:

225.) *moi quand j'étais petite je me mettais toujours ici* (Léa F25, R06)

In many 'separated' occurrences of *moi + je*, the gap is filled by a discourse marker or a meta-discursive comment:

226.) *moi franchement / moi mon truc c'est que / je suis gentil* (Nathan M28, R15)

227.) *oui (..) moi de toute façon je ne suis pas un intellectuel* (Fabien M25, R03)

This is consistent with Chevalier (2007: 54) who notes that *moi* in general occurs with markers grouped into several categories: a) markers of 'interrelation' (e.g. *moi t'sais; moi là; moi je vais t'dire* etc.), b) meta-discursive markers (e.g. *moi, dire comme le gars; moi je dis ça là; moi je me dis* etc.) but also c) argumentative adverbs (e.g. *moi aussi; moi pareil* etc.) and other markers expressing 'propositional attitudes' (e.g. *moi je sais pas; moi je trouve*; cf. Blasco-Dulbecco 2004). Such instances are very frequent in my data.

c) *moi je* separated by a subordinate clause or a combination of subordinate and/or conjoint clauses

*Moi je* may be separated not only by a single word or a phrase, but also by an entire clause. In most cases, such clauses present another type of 'stage topic' that restricts the



framework within which the subsequent clause applies. These clauses usually begin with temporal or conditional conjunctions such as *quand* or *si*:

228.) *moi, si tu t'fais opérer d'l'appendicite, je suis pas intéressé d'être là* (from Chevalier 2004: 55)

Again, even in this case, *moi* can be followed by several subordinate clauses before it is resumed (note the distance of the clitic *me* in the following example):

229.) *moi – tu me donnes la moitié ou un quart<sup>39</sup> – j'ai tellement une putain de crève – ça me fait que dalle quoi* (Léa, F25, R05)

The above example contains an embedded conditional clause and another clause that serves as an explanation supporting the following statement. In theory, many combinations of embedded clauses are possible. However, in the case of right dislocation, *moi* usually follows the main clause immediately, as in (222e) above.

It is apparent from these observations that left-dislocated *moi* has a relatively high degree of syntactic mobility. In theory, there are almost no constraints on the proximity of *moi* to its resumptives *je* and *me*. However, given the intermittent and segmented character of spontaneous discourse, it may sometimes be difficult to find related instances of *moi* and *je*, especially if the distance between the two forms is very large, as in (229) above. Likewise, it may sometimes be difficult to ascertain whether *moi* is right-dislocated or left-dislocated (e.g. when it is surrounded by *je* from both clause peripheries or when it occurs twice):

230.) *je sais pas moi j'ai aucun problème* (Léa F25, R04)<sup>40</sup>

231.) *mais moi je l'air bête moi* (Emma F27, R06)

---

<sup>39</sup> Speaking of medicine.

<sup>40</sup> In (230), intonation may help to identify the exact nature of dislocation, while in (231) both LD and RD are present (pertaining to the same instance of *je*).

Chevalier (2007: 54) observes that theoretically, there is no limit to the distance between *moi* as a topic and the ensuing comment with *je* or *me* as an anaphor. In her data, the maximum number of constituents separating *moi* from its anaphor was 5 (including *moi*), as illustrated by the following example (Chevalier's own segmentation is retained here):

232.) *moi / pour moi / là / malgré tout quoi c'que c'est qu'j'm'ai ramassé là / je me dis que / je me sens pas plus [supérieur aux autres]* (from Chevalier 2007: 55)

In my data, the longest segment separating the seemingly related elements *moi* and *je* is as follows:

233.) *mais moi là / le fait de vivre / tu vois la manière de vivre là / avec RIEN quoi / avec genre trois fringues et juste euh / mon ordi quand même t'as vu / mais franchement je me dis que je suis pas euh\_ que je peux vivre sans rien en fait* (Léa F26, R05)

From the above examples, we can see that *moi je* can be separated by an embedded clause or a combination of clauses, phrases and single words. The boundaries of such segments may be rather difficult to define without taking into account the combination of prosodic, syntactic and semantic factors, as well as their context of occurrence. From such examples, it even seems that instances of *moi je* should not necessarily be thought of as dislocation, simply because in most cases, the speaker may not be aware of which clitic (s)he is going to use or whether (s)he will use one at all. It appears that speakers often use *moi* only as a marker establishing themselves as topics (contrastive or other) and the corresponding clitic can be very far from it, or even totally absent, as evidenced by the number of cases of hanging topic in Table 5.3 below. Thus this referring to *moi* seems to be an almost automatic discourse strategy, providing a way for the current speaker to establish or reestablish topic priority and topic roles in the discourse, as well as to manage individual speaking turns.

In terms of information structure, *moi + je* constructions may function in different ways. Generally it would seem that *moi + je* indexes topicalisation, or at least specifies a thematic framework. Sometimes, however, *moi + je* can be used as a focalisation

device similar to cleft constructions of the *c'est ... qui* type, in which case *moi* tends to be focalised while the matrix clause repeats previous discourse and is therefore thematic. This is in keeping with Chevalier (2007: 56) who points out that *moi* + ADV constructions, for example, may serve as a syntactic means to achieve focalisation, as in:

- 234.) a. *Moi aussi, c'est d'même récupéré*  
 b. *Moi non plus j'comprends pas l'allemand* (from Chevalier 2007: 56)

Analysing elements in terms of information structure largely depends on the context of the utterance, especially on the previous discourse that may contain antecedents of any of the elements of the current utterance. So in (234b) for example, not being able to speak German was already mentioned in the previous discourse and may thus be understood as a topical element of the current discourse.

Now, to summarise the structural characteristic of constructions with *moi*, let us consider some quantitative results presented in Tables 5.3 – 5.6 below. This is followed by a discussion of the pragmatic and discourse functions of *moi* + *je* constructions, which I consider to be more important for the present purposes than their formal syntactic description based on dislocation.

**Table 5.3: Distribution of disjoint pronouns in the corpus**

Type of disjoint pronoun	Number	Percentage	Frequency per 1000 words
<i>Moi</i> <sup>41</sup>	301	72	5.28
<i>Toi</i>	68	16	1.19
<i>Lui / elle</i>	25	6	0.44
<i>Nous</i> (e.g. <i>nous on</i> )	18	4	0.32
<i>Eux</i>	5	1	0.02
<i>Vous</i>	3	1	0.02
TOTAL	420	100	7.36

<sup>41</sup> Instances of the disjoint pronoun *moi* were counted altogether in this case. A further distribution is presented in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.4: Distribution of double subjects with *moi* and single subjects *je* in the corpus**

Type of subject	Number	Percentage	Frequency per 1000 words
<i>Moi je / je moi</i>	231	14	4
<i>Je</i>	1417	86	25
TOTAL	1648	100	29

**Table 5.5: Distribution of *moi* constructions in the corpus**

	Number	Percentage	Frequency per 1000 words
Conjoint <i>moi je</i>	159	53	2.8
Separated <i>moi je</i>	44	15	0.8
<i>Moi</i> unlinked / hanging top.	35	12	0.6
Right dislocation <i>je moi</i>	28	9	0.5
<i>Moi</i> + object clitic <i>me</i>	22	7	0.4
Ambiguous cases	13	4	0.2
TOTAL	301	100	5.3

**Table 5.6: Intervening material between *moi* and *je / moi* and *me***

	Number	Percentage
Modifier	20	24
Embedded clause	18	22
Discourse marker	16	19
<i>Je sais pas moi / chais pas moi / moi je sais pas / moi chais pas</i> <sup>42</sup>	15	18
Second dislocated NP	14	17
TOTAL	83	100

<sup>42</sup> In Table 5.5, I counted these instances as either left- or right-dislocation, while in this Table, I wish to point them out as formulaic expressions.

### 5.3.2.2 Pragmatic characteristics of constructions with *moi*

Although scholars tend to hold quite contradictory views about the syntactic and grammatical characteristics of constructions with *moi*, they tend to agree on their pragmatic role in discourse. In fact, it tends to be widely accepted that *moi* serves important pragmatic and interactional functions that go beyond those associated with mere dislocation (see Chevalier 2007, Coveney 2005, Blasco-Dulbecco 2004). While older versions of traditional grammars such as *Le bon usage* consider the use of disjoint *moi* as redundant, the form is now considered to have a functional role such as marking insistence or emphasis. Let us now consider the individual discourse functions of the constructions with disjoint *moi* respectively.

#### *Contrast*

In many cases, *moi* presents an overtly contrastive comment. This is often the case in interactive segments where the previous utterance contains a reference to someone with whom the current speaker contrasts himself / herself. This referent is either named in the previous discourse or present in the minds of the interlocutors. The contrast can be seen even more clearly with formulas such as *moi aussi / moi pareil / moi non / moi non plus* in which either the contrast or affiliation is patently pronounced. Frequently, however, constructions with *moi* alone can mark a contrast, often explained and nuanced in the following comment:

235.) [Jeanne F/24 and Nathan M28, R03]

J: *on est pareils*

N: *oui (..) mais moi je suis pas blond*

Blasco-Dulbecco (2004: 133) observes that most contrastive cases involve two parallel, juxtaposed constructions in which the disjoint pronoun is opposed to another element, usually in the form of another disjoint pronoun. In such uses, the chosen verbs in each of these sequences are either contrasted, or repeated in order to create the effect of a parallel:

236.) *ça va faire payant puisque lui a arrêté et moi je continue*

237.) *comprenez-vous vous avez l'air de rire mais moi je ne ris pas* [from Blasco-Dulbecco 2004: 133; Examples (1) and (5)]

As noted further, the effect of contrast can be reinforced by various terms inserted between *moi* and *je*, such as *personnellement*, *aussi*, *même* and other speaker-related terms of a similar type.

The contrast produced by *moi + je* can be explicitly stated, as in (236) and (237) above, or only implicit, as in:

238.) *ben moi je faisais du sport (...) entre la porte de Clignancourt et porte de la Chapelle* (Fabien M25, R03)

The context reveals here that the speakers are talking about their hometown, describing places where they used to go and activities that they used to take part in. Although no explicit contrastive references can be found in the previous discourse, it can be seen that the current speaker positions himself *in relation* to other speakers participating in the interaction. This is often the case with subject/object doubling; the disjoint pronoun can mark a topic shift from the previously established topic to the same topic posited *in relation* to the current speaker. Such a contrastive use involving disjoint pronouns can function as a conversational strategy, in which the detached elements can be deployed almost in the same way as discourse markers, a hypothesis which I develop in more detail in the following sections.

### *Judgement and attitude*

From a discourse point of view, *moi* is by definition a very subjective term. It emerges from my data that constructions with *moi* commonly serve an evaluative function, especially when they are accompanied by axiological terms and value judgements marking the speaker's 'propositional attitude' (see Blasco-Dulbecco 2004). Although the evaluative function is usually attributed to right dislocation (see Horlacher and Müller 2005), *moi* at both the right and left periphery may be used for evaluation

purposes, as my examples frequently illustrate. In fact, *moi* tends to systematically occur with verbs of opinion and attitude, such as *penser, croire, trouver, dire, se dire, aimer bien* etc., as in the following example:

239.) *on parle tous de la crise aux Etats Unis et tout (..) moi je me dis / dans dix ans c'est la tuerie* [Léa F25, R04]

It has been noted before (Chevalier 2007: 60) that this type of dislocation seems to be reserved for cases of personal viewpoint and not necessarily topicalisation. As noted earlier in this section, this strategy is used by a speaker in order to comment on the topic and then mark a shift to his or her own position by uttering *moi*. In general terms, the discourse topic remains the same, but the transition to *moi* indicates that this topic will be re-evaluated from the speaker's point of view. This may raise questions about the actual information status of the dislocated element with respect to other elements in the utterance. Are these multi-topic constructions and if so, is the speaker considered as a topic? It seems that the predicate following *moi* does not really convey any new information of relevance to the speaker; it simply marks a point of view. In this sense, it could potentially be replaced by any other phrase with a similar meaning, such as *in my opinion*. At this level, then, the pragmatic function of topicalisation cedes place to the function of *moi* as a type of modifier: *moi* is an angle from which the utterance is looked at, it is a framework within which it holds.

#### *Hedging / justifying*

The data observed reveal a close connection between the evaluative function and the hedging function, which often overlap. A large proportion of tokens in my data are associated with a hedged presentation of personal opinion, involving phrases such as *moi il me semble, moi ça me paraît* or *moi je dirais*, these modal devices being frequently used to cautiously present, and at the same time justify the speaker's attitudes and judgements. To illustrate such a hedged strategy, consider the following example:

240.) *t'as pas un accent français moi je dirais que t'as un accent suisse* [Chloé, F26, R07]

In this example, the speaker seems wary of offending the interlocutor and chooses her words accordingly. In general, by presenting a comment prefaced with the initial *moi*, speakers take responsibility for a monologic judgement and thus distance themselves from any categorical and direct assertions that may sound too blunt. *Moi* always places the utterance within the subjective framework of the first person, probably simply because speakers are often unable to make generic assertions or are unsure of the objective truth conditions of their statements.

### *Approximation*

In a similar way to that described in the previous section, *moi* can serve to introduce approximate statements or describe inexact memories. Interestingly, Blasco-Dulbecco (2004: 130) observes that 23 per cent of *je + moi / moi + je* in the Aix reference corpus are approximators, occurring in the form of a fixed phrase *je sais pas moi* or shortened as *chais pas moi*. This suggests once again that *moi* is used almost like a discourse marker:

241.) *mais même moi quand je fais des vols internes de petits de petits avions (..) chais pas moi (..) j'ai aucun problème* [Léa F25, R05]

In the above example, uttering *chais pas moi* serves to convey an almost apologetic statement, softening the following *j'ai aucun problème*. At the same time, *je sais pas moi / chais pas moi* can also serve to express instances where speakers are not sure about the objectivity or the exact truth of what they say:

242.) *si tu perds (...) chais pas on va dire (...) je sais pas moi (...) ils te parlent à chaque fois en quantité* [Emma F27, R05]

Here the speakers are talking about insurance policies and money loss; it is noticeable that *je sais pas moi* serves to fill the gaps where hesitation is apparent and the speaker cannot remember exact figures. In this sense, *je sais pas moi / chais pas moi* can have different variations with a similar function, the following being the ones that occur in



my corpus the most frequently: *j'en sais rien, je sais pas, chais pas* (often followed by *moi* at the right periphery). Note that these forms sometimes co-occur, as in (242).

In the corpus, I counted both shortened and canonical forms, with disjoint *moi* both at the left and at the right. The results in Table 5.6 above suggest that resorting to hedging and approximation using formulaic or semi-formulaic forms with *savoir* may be common in spoken French.

#### *Discourse marker use and turn management*

Indeed, one of the main discourse functions of constructions with *moi* is to mark a shift with respect to the previously established topic and position that topic in relation to oneself. Closely tied to the function of topic management is the domain of turn taking. In fact, it transpires from the corpus that in a number of interactional turns, the speakers display their interpretation of the immediately prior turns and structure their own turns through constructions prefaced with *moi*. Very often *moi* is not just randomly positioned within such sequences; it seems to be systematically used in order to claim the speaking floor. Note that in the following example, speaker (T) tries to maintain the floor by uttering *moi* several times, then continues with his argument:

243.) (Conversation about neighbours; Speakers Thomas M25 and Chloé F26, R02)

T: *franchement faut (...) par contre Chloé vraiment (..) faut pas vivre en  
fonction de tes voisins (...) [parce que\_*

C: *[ mais non mais\_*

T: *moi [à côté\_*

C: *[oui mais\_*

T: *moi à coté (..) à côté de chez moi j'ai (..) les voisins (..) ils votaient l'UMP*

Simultaneously, as we can see, *moi* serves an important argumentative function: it allows the speakers to provide examples of their own experiences in order to justify their position. The male speaker in (243), for example, supports his argument by invoking his own experience with neighbours, thus justifying his comment ‘you should not live according to your neighbours’ rules.’ In this respect, resorting to disjoint *moi*

has very little to do with the actual process of topicalisation; *moi* is of course a reminder that the topic is posited in relation to the current speaker, but its main purpose in this context is mainly argumentative.

It has also been noted elsewhere (Chevalier 2007: 62) that *moi* plays a part in the sequential organisation of the conversation and in the negotiation of speaking turns. Referring to the self might in fact help speakers to access the floor and legitimise their turn; *moi* thus plays a role in the regulation of speakers' reciprocal positions, and is especially useful for appropriating experience relevant to the topic that is being discussed. In this respect, constructions with *moi* function almost like discourse markers, in that they aid in structuring the discourse and allow speakers to support their arguments at a metalinguistic level. It might not be incidental then that they often co-occur with other discourse markers such as *franchement*, *de toute façon*, *sincèrement*, *en tous cas* or *quand même* (see Table 5.6 above).

Chevalier (2007: 63) further observes that *moi* is frequently used as a punctuator, that is to say, as a device that serves to demarcate content units within one's turn. Although *moi* may seem redundant in this type of use, it usefully serves to signal a transition between descriptive or narrative utterance blocks:

244.) *non mais / c'est pas la grippe moi / c'était pas un virus moi / c'était une bactérie (.) c'est une angine / t'as deux types d'angines t'as des angines virales et des angines d'origine bactérienne / et moi c'est la bactérienne* [Léa F25, R04]

As can be seen from (244), topicalisation is hardly the main reason for the occurrence of *moi*. While the term undoubtedly serves as a 'reminder' of the thematic framework in many cases, the way it is used in (244) indicates that it may also be employed as a punctuation marker serving to endow one's discourse with arguments based on personal experience. On that account I believe that *moi* has a wider pragmatic application than topicalisation or contrast; in fact, it can serve many functions in different discourse domains, including topic management (e.g. marking topic changes and reformulations), production and processing, interaction (emphasis), textual structure (punctuating individual utterance units) and turn-taking (negotiating access to the speaking floor).

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that constructions with *moi* carry important functions that lie at the interface of pragmatics and syntax. While in other languages the first-person pronoun ‘I’ usually suffices to convey speaker-related information, French uses disjoint pronouns extensively, for a variety of reasons depending on the interactional context. Because of their detached position, outside the clause, it may seem that constructions with *moi* serve merely as topic markers. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate with examples in their discourse context, constructions with *moi* also fulfil strategic discourse functions. The pervasive use of this particular type of subject/object doubling raises questions about whether it should actually be defined in terms of dislocation, with functions assumed to simply mark emphasis or topic. As we have seen, these are not the only functions that constructions with *moi* may serve; my spoken examples suggest that *moi* can play an equally important part at the interactional level, fulfilling functions such as reformulation, discourse structuring, punctuating individual discourse units, supporting individual arguments, negotiating access to the speaking floor and more generally, adding a subjective dimension to someone's discourse. These functions often overlap and are not mutually exclusive.

I have also attempted to show that while constructions with *moi* were long considered redundant and colloquial in French (especially in relation to written norms), their pervasiveness in spoken language has been well attested synchronically as well as diachronically. As many authors have shown, most subject- and object pronouns in informal speech are doubled, with *moi* being the most salient of such disjoint pronouns.

In a larger sense, the use of constructions with *moi* may be seen as an automatic discourse strategy typical of spoken French. Its pervasive use may of course be stimulated by the fact that speakers simply like to talk about themselves and their personal experiences, but the fact that a simple *je* does not suffice to express subjectivity indicates that the role of *moi* may be more complex than it often seems. As I have endeavoured to show throughout this section, speakers use constructions with *moi* for a variety of different pragmatic and interactional reasons.

## Chapter 6 Presentational constructions and pragmatic aspects of word order in spoken French

This chapter examines another pragmatic-syntactic feature characteristic of spoken French: the structures commonly referred to as ‘presentational’ (Lambrecht 1996: 177). My aim here is to address the ways in which these structures aid in organising spoken discourse and help speakers deal with new information in a cognitively easy manner.

As part of this chapter, I firstly provide an overview of the previous research concerned with the topic in question, followed by a qualitative analysis based on examples drawn from the present corpus and by a discussion of some quantitative results.

### 6.1 Previous approaches

It has long been noted by linguists that various sentential forms may be used in spoken French to introduce new referents into the discourse. For illustration, consider the following seemingly equivalent constructions:

245a) *on a pris cher ce soir-là / ou là! y a un gars qui est arrivé* [Thomas M25, R01]

245b) *on a pris cher ce soir-là / ou là! un gars est arrivé*

In terms of truth conditions, the above constructions are equivalent, i.e. the same conditions that must be satisfied for (245a) to be true must be satisfied for (245b) to be true. Therefore, the difference between (245a) and (245b) is not what information they express, but in how they express this information, and whether this information is expressed in a way that allows for a natural flow of communication and easy cognitive processing. In terms of information structure, (245a) and (245b) are equivalent in that in both cases the information is expressed in a similar logical order, i.e. *gars* may be considered as a topic and *est arrivé* as comment<sup>43</sup>. In syntactic terms, however, it may

---

<sup>43</sup> There are several ways of looking at this utterance. As I explain later, some authors consider cleft constructions with *il y a* as all-focus structures.

seem that *il y a un gars* is the main clause where *gars* is a focus, and the subsequent clause is subordinate. However, in that case, *(il) y a* would be a construction carrying the same (semantic) meaning and function as, for instance, that in example (247) which is actually very different:

- 246.) *on a pris cher ce soir-là / ou là! y a un gars qui est arrivé*  
247.) *dans le magasin, il y a un gars et deux femmes.*

The two *il y a* forms in the above segments are not altogether the same, simply because *il y a* in (247) appears to carry propositional content (i.e. locative-existential) while in (246) the purpose of *il y a* seems to be purely functional. Going back to examples (245a) and (245b), the main difference lies at the pragmatic-functional rather than the logic-semantic interface. While their propositional content is the same, they do not provide the information in the same way. In a speaker-hearer interaction, the speakers structure their utterances according to their assumptions about what their interlocutors already know and how much the information contributes to the hearer's knowledge store; therefore the information must be *presented* in a particular way, depending on the degree of its newness or inferability. In this sense, the structuring of information in a conversation is very context-sensitive. With this in mind, we can propose that (245a) seems contextually more natural than (245b), where a brand-new referent appears to be placed in the sentence 'out of the blue'. It has often been noted (e.g. DuBois 1987, Lambrecht 1996) that in spontaneous discourse it is difficult to introduce brand new referents and deal with them in the same proposition. Speakers usually need to gain planning time, and to this end they may use a variety of accessory structures that help them to express information easily. Presentational constructions belong to this category of structures; they seem to be an inherent trait of spoken language that relates to the cognitive pressures that people face when speaking spontaneously.

#### *Preferred argument structure*

The use of accessory structures like presentationals varies from one language to another, and is closely tied to aspects of word order and argument structure (i.e. verb arguments). The idea that in spoken language, there may be preferences for a particular type of word

order and argument structure was developed by DuBois (1985 and 1987) who defined a set of universal statistical tendencies and constraints on argument distribution in discourse. Hence the notion, and the principles of 'Preferred Argument Structure' (DuBois 1987), among which I shall mention only the following:

*Given A constraint:*<sup>44</sup> a constraint on new information whereby new referents in the A-role argument position are avoided (1987: 827); DuBois observes that new (previously inactive) information 'appears to be more difficult to process and hence most subject to constraint' and it requires special cognitive effort to bring this information into an activated state.

*One Lexical Argument Constraint:* a constraint whereby spoken discourse tends to 'avoid more than one new lexical argument per clause' (DuBois 1987: 819), which is said to be applicable cross-linguistically. Similarly, Chafe (1987: 32) evokes 'the constraint on new information quantity per unit' whereby the cognitive basis of an information unit is 'the expression of a single focus of consciousness.'

These two principles are the most important for the present purposes, since they are directly relevant to the use of the presentational constructions. What these constraints mean in practice is that for introducing a brand new referent into the discourse, speakers may prefer presentational clauses rather than canonical SVO clauses with a brand new lexical item in the agent role directly at the beginning of the utterance. Especially in Romance languages such as French, speakers tend to create a separate processing unit for such referents. Interestingly, Lambrecht observes that 'French systematically avoids all non-active referents in subject position' (1988:153) and prefers to use 'ready-made grammatical constructions whose main function is to allow lexical NPs to occur elsewhere than in initial subject position' (1988: 136). More generally, he notes that the basic communicative function of such 'presentational' constructions is not 'to predicate a property of an argument, but to introduce a referent into a discourse, often (but not always) with the purpose of making it available for predication in subsequent discourse' (Lambrecht 1996: 177).

---

<sup>44</sup> DuBois's Preferred Argument Structure pertains to the discourse role of the 'core' verb arguments, with the respective roles as follows: A = subject of a two-argument verb (agent); S = subject of a one-argument verb; O = direct object.

### *Information flow*

It is not always easy to think of presentational constructions in terms of a topic/focus articulation. This possibly has to do with the fact that in such constructions, the information is conveyed in one step, without separating it into an entity on the one hand and saying something about that entity on the other hand. Such all-new structures are also called ‘thetic’ or ‘all-focus sentences’ (see Lambrecht 1996: 237, Drubig and Schaffar 2001: 1084). By way of example, some very frequent types of thetic statements in French include weather expressions (*il pleut / il neige*), assertions of existence (*il y a NP / il arrive que*) and appearance (*il paraît que*). These are typically described as ‘sentences in which the focus domain is the entire sentence, involving no pragmatically presupposed open proposition’ (Lambrecht 1988: 11).

Considering thetic sentences as all-focus structures seems quite straightforward if they have a non-specific subject (as in the above clauses). However, it is less straightforward in more complex structures that do contain a subject and a predicate in the form of a relative linked by *qui*, thus forming a type of double predicate:

248.) *y a une nana qui m'a appelé en anglais (...) pour la chambre* (Jeanne F24, R03)

249.) *j'ai mon pote qui vient d'avoir son brevet* (Léa F25, R05)

Whilst cases like (248) and (249) may still be considered as sentence-focus structures (according to Lambrecht 1996: 223), it would be misleading to consider them as topicless. It might be more appropriate to regard the topic/focus notion as a relational concept, in which a topic can only be topic in relation to the proposition and to the potential discourse antecedents of either the topic or the focus (cf. Lambrecht 1996: 76). The context is therefore critical in determining the status of referents introduced by a presentational construction such as those in (248) and (249) above.

The use of presentational constructions relates to a speaker’s assumptions about what the hearer knows of the referent introduced by such a construction. This seems closely related to Prince’s Familiarity scale (1981); one may suggest that the lowest degree on the scale equals the highest probability of occurrence of a presentational constructions

that may facilitate the task of introducing referents into the discourse. If we consider the introduced referent with respect to the previous discourse, and if the predicate contains a discourse antecedent, then an *il y a* + NP constituent would be a focus (i.e. if the speakers in (248) had discussed telephone calls in the previous discourse, then *il y a une nana* could be considered as focus and *appeler* as topic). However, structures that present nothing but *new* information composed of a referent and a predicate would simply serve to promote this referent to topic status. A similar point of view is expressed by Ashby who attributes these differences to the distinction between pragmatics and syntax:

‘In syntactic terms, it may be appropriate to characterise the NP that follows the verb *avoir*<sup>45</sup> as the direct object but in pragmatic terms, these structures function to introduce the referent into the discourse so that it can become topical’ (Ashby 1995: 93).

The pragmatic characterisation of the NP as a newly introduced referent would also correspond to De Cat’s (2007: 87) description of brand-new topics. The fact that the referent becomes topical immediately after being introduced into the discourse is also reflected in its sentential status, e.g. in that it can be dislocated:

250.) *Moi, en mécanique, il y a un gars, il était entré à l’école des métiers* (from De Cat 2007: 87)

In French there is a wide array of presentational constructions. They generally include existential, locative and possessive constructions and occur in varying forms, such as *il était une fois NP*; *voilà NP qui*; *NP est / sont là qui*; *j’ai NP qui* and *il y a NP qui*.

The most frequent type of construction is the ‘presentational cleft construction’ (see Lambrecht 1996, Ashby 1993 and 1995), also termed *construction relative présentative* in French (see Lambrecht 2000). In terms of syntactic analysis and the analysis of information structure, the presentational cleft constructions should be distinguished

---

<sup>45</sup> With reference to the verb *avoir* in presentational structures such as *il y a* or *vous avez / tu as*, as illustrated by example (249) above.



from traditional subordinate relatives, such as (251a), and from focus cleft structures, such as (251b):

251a) *j'ai réparé mon vélo qui était en panne*

251b) *c'est mon vélo qui est en panne*

While (251a) contains a semantically full subordinate relative clause with a second predicate, (251b) contains a relative clause following the focalisation marker *c'est* that can hardly be seen as a constituent with semantic content. While presentationals do not serve exactly the same functions as *c'est* in (251b), they are similar in having a bleached meaning and a reinforced pragmatic function. They should thus also be distinguished from literal possessive and locative constructions:

252a). *J'ai une copine sympathique.* (literal - possessive)

252b). *J'ai une copine qui arrive demain.* (functional)

252c). *J'ai mes parents qui arrivent demain.* (functional)

253a). *Il y a des gens dans la chambre.* (literal - locative)

253b). *Il y a mes parents qui arrivent demain.* (functional)

Although in (252b) the first predicate is syntactically well-formed (*j'ai une copine*), its meaning would be different if it stood on its own, implying that the speaker has only one friend. Similarly, if each clause in (252c) and (253b) was uttered as a separate sentence (with a descending intonational contour), their reading would be semantically unnatural, which shows that presentationals are devoid of semantic autonomy and content:

254.) ? *J'ai mes parents. Ils arrivent demain.* (altered)

Interestingly, however, both existentials *il y a* (*y'a*) and possessives (*j'ai*, *tu as*, *vous avez* etc.) allow dislocation without involving a relative, and can be used as topic-promoting devices introducing both definite and indefinite NPs. The referent is thus presented first and commented upon in the subsequent coordinate phrase:

255.) *j'ai une copine elle est géniale* (from De Cat 2007: 87)

256.) *j'ai ma copine elle a eu une amende* (N130)

As has been pointed out by De Cat (2007: 87), it is crucial that segments such as (255) and (256) be uttered as a single unit - without a pause marked by a falling intonation. Thus, even though the first clause contains a predicate, it should have the prosody of a single left-dislocated NP. In a larger sense, this shows that presentationals contain mutually co-dependent constituents, of which the first should be considered as only accessory and purely functional.

The fact that presentational constructions are very frequent in spoken French has also been noted by Ashby (1995) and Ashby and Bentivoglio (1993). While Lambrecht's analysis of presentationals is mostly pragmatic, Ashby (1995) focuses primarily on a quantitative analysis of the subject roles and the types of subjects appearing in spoken French, as well as on the role and the distribution of presentational structures across various syntactic sentence-types. Unlike Lambrecht's, Ashby's analysis also includes simple (non-cleft) presentationals, not only those containing the relative pronoun *qui*:

257.) *C'est bien tout ça. Il y a un retour à la culture.* (Ashby 1999: 93)

Ashby's (1995) quantitative analysis of referents and their sentence status supports previous observations (e.g. Lambrecht 1984 and 1988) and reasserts the importance of presentational structures in introducing new or partially new referents in languages such as French. Ashby's (1995) analysis shows that new referents are preferably introduced into the discourse via presentational forms, but also frequently appear in oblique or direct object roles<sup>46</sup>. However, his findings confirm that the subject position in non-cleft canonical clauses of the S-V or S-V-O type is highly disfavoured as a locus for the introduction of new referents. These observations raise the question whether the new referents introduced in the direct object / oblique slots are the same as those introduced in a presentational slot. In fact, and interestingly, Ashby's results suggest that a key determinant in this distribution is the 'semantic variable of animacy' (Ashby 1995: 97).

---

<sup>46</sup> Direct object role: *Quand maman a vu ça*; Oblique role: *Et j'ai commencé avec mon père avant* (from Ashby 1999: 489)

It emerges from his data that in spontaneous discourse, presentationals are favoured sites for NPs coding animate referents, while object roles are not. Consider the difference between two new referents, one animate and the other inanimate:

258.) (...) *et il y avait un monsieur qui venait*

259.) *Alors je fais deux tournées (...) (examples from Ashby 1999: 489)*

Ashby summarises this finding as follows:

‘It appears that it is not simply newness of the referent, but newness and animacy together which determine the speaker’s encoding decision. NPs that encode referents that are both new and animate are likely to end up in presentative structures; those that are new and inanimate are more probable as direct objects. This finding is consistent with the fact that the direct object is, in semantic terms, more often a patient than an agent – patients are often inanimate, while agents are typically animate (Ashby 1995: 98).

As far as the choice of a particular presentational variant is concerned, Ashby (1995) suggests that it may again be related to the character of the referent, particularly to whether the latter is generalising or particularising. Constructions involving the verb *avoir* in the possessive sense are apparently likely to favour particularising NPs (referring to a particular entity, e.g. *j’ai ma mère*), while *il y a* constructions are likely to favour generalizing NPs (referring to a class whose members are considered to be interchangeable, e.g. *il y a des gens*). This factor is examined in greater detail with respect to my own data in a later section.

Constructions typical of spoken French, such as *il y a*, are also discussed in some detail by Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 92-94) who observes that segments in bipartite cleft constructions such as those involved in presentationals (*il y a NP qui*) should be accounted for as a unity rather than in terms of their individual segments. In most cases, as already seen above, the NP preceding *qui* is simultaneously an object and a subject in the utterance (object of the presentational construction and subject of the subordinate relative predicative clause). The meaning of such double-predicate structures is

explicable only in terms of the mutual dependence of their parts which could hardly be interpreted separately. The first predicate (presentational) has therefore a merely functional purpose, as opposed to other constructions (e.g. locative) in which *il y a* has a literal meaning, as in (260) below. Both of them are formulaic and non-divisible.

260.) *Non bref / il y a trois îles à côté de Barcelone* (Chloé F26, R04)

Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 92) observes that different syntactic roles and functions can be concealed under the same morphological forms. This was illustrated by constructions such as (252a) involving a full-verb predicate and (252b) involving a type of predicate with a bleached meaning. As Le Goffic (1994: 86) points out, such functional constructions with *il y a* have been considered colloquial and characteristic mainly of spontaneous speech, while Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 92) adds that they are used as a ‘stylistic detour’ in order to avoid placing direct indefinite NPs in canonical SVO constructions, which is considered disagreeable and rather unnatural. However, she does note that formal language prefers direct nominal equivalents to *il y a* (1997: 93), as in (261b):

261a) *il y en a qui aimeraient bien, il y en a qui aimeraient pas du tout*

261b) *certains aimeraient bien, certains n'aimeraient pas du tout*

Despite these stylistic differences, constructions such as (261a) and (261b) may be considered equivalent. Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 93) also suggests that expressions like *il en y a qui* serve as auxiliary constructions with the purpose of ‘nominal determination’ (i.e. they specify a noun or a noun phrase). Although she limited her description to direct indefinite subjects (e.g. (261a)), my data shows that *il y a* as a presentational is perfectly acceptable also with definite subjects, as will be seen in my data analysis.

#### *Presentational variants*

Many different constructions may be used as presentationals. At first sight, these expressions often look like phrases with literal propositional content; however, if they are used as presentationals, their purpose is purely functional, their meaning is bleached

and their syntactic autonomy is lowered. Table 6.1 below provides a list of presentational constructions habitually noted in the literature (adapted from Lambrecht 2000).

**Table 6.1: French presentational constructions**

<i>Voici NP qui / Voilà NP (qui)</i>	<i>NP est là (qui)</i>
<i>Il y a NP (qui)</i>	<i>NP est là bas (qui)</i>
<i>Je vois (surprends/ trouve) NP (qui)</i>	<i>La / le / les voilà (qui)</i>
<i>Tu as / Vous avez / J'ai / On a NP (qui)</i>	<i>Il était une fois NP (qui)<sup>47</sup></i>

Lambrecht (2000) mostly focuses on the uses of what he calls ‘perception’ presentationals. As their name suggests, these constructions typically involve perception verbs such as *voir*, *entendre* or *apercevoir*. Lambrecht has identified several logical constraints on presentational structures involving perception verbs. Firstly, there seems to be a constraint on the type of predicate used – perception presentationals cannot be used with verbs of state or mental activities (e.g. *penser*, *mentir* or *trouver*):

262.) \**Je l’ai vue qui était malade*

263.) \**Je l’ai vue qui mentait* (from Lambrecht 2000: 58)

Secondly, since these presentational constructions are inherently context-specific and affirmative (i.e. they affirm the existence of some entity in a given context), logically they cannot be negated nor occur in the future tense or questions. This constraint probably also relates to the fact that most presentationals function as fixed expressions, as pointed out earlier:

264a) *Je la vois qui arrive*

264b) \**Je ne la vois pas qui arrive*

264c) \**Je la verrai qui arrive*

264d) \**Je la vois qui arrive ?* (from Lambrecht 2000: 59)

<sup>47</sup> Although this construction is characteristic mainly of written French, it is also said to be used in story-telling.

As I discuss in the analysis of my own data, the logical constraints that apply to perception presentationals do not necessarily apply to other types of presentationals. This is largely due to the fact that not all presentationals are necessarily speaker-related or involve an act of perception.

Another presentational that involves the act of perception and deixis is *voilà*. The construction may be followed not only by a simple NP, but also by a relative construction with a predicate. In the latter case, the NP is the object of perception and the subject of action at the same time. Lambrecht (2000: 62-63) distinguishes between deictic *voilà* and event-reporting *voilà*. Distinguishing between these two types depends entirely on the context and *voilà* can therefore be described as a context-related presentational. Deictic *voilà* describes an entity present in the internal context of the utterance, an entity that is either approaching or, less frequently, moving away from the utterance situation (e.g. *voilà maman qui revient*). On the other hand, the event-reporting *voilà* is often used in narratives where it serves to introduce an entity into the external<sup>48</sup> context of the utterance, as an unexpected or surprising event that does not relate to the here-and-now:

265.) *Lui, quelque temps après, pouf! Le voilà qui meurt !* (Lambrecht 2000: 63)

To summarise, there are different types of presentational constructions in spoken French. Perception presentationals, for example, are speaker-related and need to be situated in space and time. Other forms contain impersonal deictic elements such as *voilà / voici*, while still others contain the impersonal form *il y a* that asserts the existence of an entity from an external viewpoint. While the above review of research concerned with presentationals is not exhaustive, I have attempted to examine the most relevant literature in this area. The next section seeks to contribute to the existing body of literature on presentational constructions characteristic of spontaneous spoken French.

---

<sup>48</sup> Lambrecht presumably talks about context which is not immediate.

## 6.2 Data analysis: Presentational constructions in spoken French

This section addresses individual presentational constructions found in my data, considers the differences among them, and examines possible constraints on their use. In addition to a qualitative analysis of presentational forms, I discuss some quantitative results and, insofar as this is possible, compare them with the findings of previous research.

I attempt to establish how and when presentational constructions are used, as well as to ascertain whether some forms may be preferred to others. In my data, young speakers display patterns of use which seem to favour two presentational constructions in particular: a) the impersonal existential construction involving *il y a* and b) the possessive construction involving *avoir*, which both occur variably in their shortened forms (e.g *y a* and *t'as*), as illustrated by the following examples:

266.) *t'as* tous les gens du tiéquar<sup>49</sup> qui viennent là pour manger des crêpes (Fabien M24, R03)

267.) *y a* mon ex de Lyon qui vient de me dire qu'il est avec une nana (Emma F27, R04)

Table 6.2 below provides an exhaustive list of all the presentational forms in my data:

**Table 6.2: Presentational constructions in the present corpus (main forms in bold)**

<p><b><i>Avoir NP (qui)</i></b>  <i>Tu as / T'as NP (qui) / Tu en as (qui)</i>  <i>J'ai NP (qui)</i>  <i>Elle a / Il a / On a NP (qui)</i></p>	<p><b><i>Il y a NP / Y a NP (qui) / Il y en a (qui)</i></b>  <b><i>Voir NP (qui)</i></b>  <i>Tu vois NP (qui)</i>  <i>Je vois NP (qui)</i></p>
--	--

Based on this list, I divide presentational constructions into three categories, each of which I examine in the following sections.

<sup>49</sup> *Tiéquar* (verlan) – *quartier* ('neighbourhood')

- a) existential presentationals (e.g. *il y a*)
- b) possessive presentationals (e.g. *tu as / vous avez*)
- c) perception-related presentationals (e.g. *je vois / tu vois*)

### 6.2.1 Existential presentationals – *il y a*.

In many languages, presentationals involve an ‘existential’ construction such as *there is* or *there are*, containing a locative deictic term (e.g. English *there* or French *y*) that seems to have lost its locative function. Its primary purpose as a presentational is merely to assert the existence of a particular referent, the latter usually being brand new or ‘forgotten’ in a given discourse situation. This referent must thus have the form of a noun phrase, contrary to the referents occurring in dislocation or *c’est* clefts that can also have a pronominal form (since the referents are already topical).

As noted in the previous section, some presentational constructions do not allow the use of state verbs and verbs involving mental processes. Interestingly, however, the existential presentationals do allow such verbs:

268.) *Y a des gens qui doivent venir* (Jeanne, F24, R03)

269.) *Il y a ma mère qui est malade* (N108)

The main reason for this seems to lie in the character of the presentational construction and in the extent to which it involves direct speaker-related processes such as perception. The logical constraints on the existential *il y a* are obviously less strict, since the form does not involve perception verbs or any other construction directly related to the speaker. The construction purely asserts the existence of an entity from an external point of view. Another constraint observed in connection with perception-related presentationals was the impossibility of negation. However, as illustrated by Example (270), this constraint does not always apply to existential presentationals:

270.) *y a pas beaucoup de gens qui sont aussi conscients que toi* (Chloé, F26, R03)



271.) \*y a pas ma mère qui est malade

One possible explanation for the constraints can be found in the character of the presented referent; if this referent is definite, negation is impossible, simply because the presentational form *asserts* the existence of this referent and therefore denying its existence would be illogical. However, if the referent is indefinite, and especially if it is prefaced by a quantifier (e.g. *beaucoup*), negation is possible for similar logical reasons. It follows from this consideration that the negation constraint applies to all other tenses and aspects, although positive assertions in other tenses are usually possible, as shown by the following hypothetical examples:

272.) il y avait ma mère qui préparait à manger

273.) il y aura ma mère qui préparera à manger

The grammatical and semantic scope of *il y a* suggests that this construction has developed into a flexible and versatile presentational used for activating new referents, while the locative meaning of the particle *y* seems to have undergone semantic bleaching. Interestingly, Blanche-Benveniste (1997: 93) described *il y a* as a frequent spoken equivalent of the adjective *certain*. She argues that this characteristic, however, only applies to those forms that introduce indefinite referents:

274a) il y a des personnes qui sont arrivées en retard

274b) *certaines personnes* sont arrivées en retard (invented examples)

In my data, 37 per cent of all presentational forms involving *il y a/y a* introduce definite noun phrases, showing that their scope and their degree of flexibility are more extensive than others have argued. In the case of definite referents, the presentational variant has a very simple equivalent in written registers, as illustrated by the comparison below. Clauses (275a) and (275b), while representing two different information packaging instructions, represent the same logico-semantic proposition (a previous example is repeated here):

275a.) *y a mon ex de Lyon qui vient de me dire qu'il est avec une nana* [Emma F27, R04]

275b.) *mon ex de Lyon vient de me dire qu'il est avec une nana*

Let us now look briefly at another frequent type of *il y a*: a presentational without the relative pronoun *qui*, but with *en* instead. In this case, the first predicate functions almost as a lexical dislocated element:

276a) *Il y en a ils s'étaient ramené des tenues africaines et jamais ils les auraient mises* [from Blanche-Benveniste 1997: 94]

Such cases seem relatively common in spoken French, though they do not appear in my data. Interestingly, as suggested by Blanche-Benveniste, the presentational constituent *il y en a* may theoretically be easily replaced by a nominal construction, as in (276b):

276b) *Certains s'étaient ramené des tenues africaines et jamais ils les auraient mises.*

Lastly, the recordings reveal that the vast majority of *il y a* instances occur in their short form *y a*. Again, this might be attributed to the spontaneous character of spoken language and to the pragmatic shortening of words; spoken French, like other languages, is quite prone to phonetic reduction and assimilation. Gadet (1989: 77-78) notes that rapid speech flow increases the number of all kinds of reduction phenomena, including shortening, abbreviation and phoneme dropping. This not only applies to so-called "mute" *e* (or schwa) deletion, but also to the omission of impersonal particles like *il* with verbs such as  *falloir* and *y avoir*, as illustrated by the following examples:

277.) *faudrait savoir c(e) que tu veux* (from Gadet 1989: 78, example [63])

278.) *y a des gens qui disent "je vais sur Paris"* (Alex M28, R07)

To summarise, it emerges from these observations that presentationals with *il y a* serve as functional constructions that seem to have been grammaticalised to a certain degree. Both in cleft or non-cleft forms, their component parts (one presentational and the other predicative clause) are mutually dependent and semantically indivisible. All types of

such bi-propositional constructions with *il y a* can also be expressed in a canonical way (S-V-O) without altering their truth conditions. However, if the presentational was omitted, the discourse-pragmatic nuance of the utterance would undoubtedly change.

The elements that make up the presentational clause (e.g. *il y a*) are bleached in their propositional content. The fact that these clauses have little informational value is also reflected in the fact that they cannot stand on their own; their function is merely to insert an entity into the discourse in order to make it accessible for further predication.

### 6.2.2 Possessive presentationals

Possessive presentational constructions are used in ways quite similar to those of existential presentationals, but they add an important intersubjective dimension to their pragmatic function. Although they are not as frequent as existential presentationals (see the discussion of quantitative results below), possessive presentationals are the second most used presentational constructions in my corpus, with the shortened form *t'as* being the most common.

There are no definite rules constraining the choice of either of these presentational types. However, possessive forms seem to be preferred in more subjective contexts, in which the presentational construction relates to the speaker personally (*j'ai NP qui*) or involves the interlocutor (*tu as NP qui / vous avez NP qui*). In this latter case, even if the reading of the chosen pronoun is just generic, it creates an affective context that seems to be aimed at the interlocutor's inclusion in the telling. This is reminiscent of Chafe's (1982) notion of *involvement* in spoken language. Chafe points out that spontaneous speech, as opposed to formal written language, contains not only many more speaker-oriented (first-person) forms, but also addressee-oriented forms used to enhance the interactive relationship between speakers who participate in the exchange. This, however, does not mean that a close relationship of the speakers is a prerequisite for the use of a second-person presentational form. My data reveals that possessive forms can indeed be used generically even among participants who do not know each other very well.

Lambrecht (2000: 57) points out that the (grammatical) subject of presentationals with *avoir* is always a point of reference in relation to which the referent is situated and localised in the discourse time and space. Most of the possessive presentationals involve a first-person or second-person subject in the singular, as in:

279.) *j'ai mon car à 7 heures du matin / y a pas moyen qu'on dorme* (Thomas M25, R03)

280.) *t'as tous les gens du tiéquar qui viennent là pour manger des crêpes* [Fabien M24, R03]

In the case of (280), the interlocutor is placed in the subject role of the presentational clause and thus gains a place in the mutual construction of discourse meaning. Although the use of the second person *tu* here is generic, it helps to maintain and enhance the interpersonal link between the speakers. Interestingly, as we will see later, the second-person possessive presentational (*tu*) in the singular is almost three times more frequent than the first-person (*je*). In addition, half of the first-person forms with *avoir* refer to body parts and processes associated with them. In fact, in spoken French such bodily changes and processes are systematically expressed by a possessive cleft construction, as illustrated by the following examples:

281.) *j'ai la tête qui tourne* (N125)

282.) *j'ai mes hanches qui vont pas bien* (Léa F25, R05)

283.) *moi aussi j'ai la peau qui souffre* (Léa F25, R05)

The presence of a possessive cleft in connection with predicates about body parts is consistently attested by examples from my corpus. This raises questions regarding the status of this particular type of construction with *avoir*, notably whether it should in fact be considered as a presentational form rather than just an ordinary fixed expression characteristic of spoken French. In this case, generally, the speaker does not need to introduce the referent as it is usually a topic of the previous discourse (in the case of (283) for example, the speakers were *already* discussing skin problems in the previous discourse). This suggests that presenting a brand new referent is not a primary function of such constructions and that they are principally intended to predicate a property associated with a body part. In spoken French, these structures would perhaps seem unnatural if expressed by a canonical SVO construction (e.g. *ma tête tourne*). Due to

their partly fixed character, I did not consider these forms as presentationals, since they could not be replaced by other presentational variants. When such corporal referents are omitted, the number of occurrences of cleft forms involving *j'ai* in the data is decidedly lower. However, among possessive presentationals, the lowest number of occurrences was noted in the case of the third-person forms (e.g. *elle a / il a*). Although these forms are rare, they generally occur in descriptions, narratives and story-telling, where references to people and/or objects in the third person are more likely to be used. As seen in the following example, the context of a narrative is propitious for the occurrence of such presentationals (literal translation provided for clarification):

284.) *enfin si elle<sup>50</sup> avait juste le phare qui était un peu éclaté*  
 (...) *donc il y avait juste le phare à changer* (Nathan M28, R01)  
 ('well yes it had a headlight that was a bit broken (..) so there was  
 just the headlight to change')

This extract demonstrates the use of a combination of existential and possessive presentationals. Although these forms are interchangeable in many cases, the possessive variant expresses a closer as well as a more subjective link between the subject of the presentational clause and the subject of the subsequent cleft clause. In addition, there seems to be a logical constraint on the use of third-person possessive presentationals: they can only be used if the subsequent cleft clause is *directly relevant* to the subject of the presentational clause:

285.) *elle avait un\_ un de ses parents / en fait / qui était belge* (Nathan M28, R07)

As noted in the previous section, presentationals are frequently shortened, and this seems to be the case also with possessive forms. In French, as many spoken examples indicate, pronouns terminating with a vowel may be shortened if they occur before a verb starting with a vowel:

286.) *t'arrives toujours vendredi ?* [Emma, F27, R04]

287.) *pourquoi t'habites pas chez elle ?* [Chloé, F26, R04]

---

<sup>50</sup> *Elle = la voiture*

Second-person presentationals in the singular may also be shortened in this way; interestingly, in my corpus the shortened form *t'as* is clearly preferred to its full form *tu as* (24 out of 26 tokens in total), as illustrated by one of the previous examples repeated here as (288):

288.) *T'as tous les gens du tiéquar qui viennent là pour manger des crêpes* [Fabien M24, R03]

In summary, possessive presentationals are inevitably speaker-related and therefore more subjective than existential presentationals. While second-person forms are used to intensify the intersubjective link between the speaker and the interlocutor, third-person forms are used mainly in descriptive contexts and narratives. A large number of cleft constructions with *j'ai* are associated with corporal referents; these seem to function as fixed expressions and should thus not be considered as constructions with proper presentational functions.

### 6.2.3 Perception presentationals

Perception presentationals, like their possessive counterparts, are usually either speaker-related (*je*) or oriented towards the addressee (*tu/vous*). As a result, they are almost exclusively expressed in a first-person or a second-person form. As previously mentioned by Lambrecht (2000: 58), these constructions crucially involve a deictic or a perception element, with verbs such as *voir*, *entendre* or *apercevoir*. When a referent is thus introduced into the discourse, it acts as the object of perception and the subject of predication at the same time.

Perception presentationals are comparatively rare in my data, and involve only the verb *voir* in two forms: the first-person and the second-person singular:

289.) *tu vois les mecs qui prennent du crack / ils sont tous à Château d'Eau* (Léa F/25, R05)

290.) *puis je vois un mec qui arrive et qui me pousse* [N121]

As was the case with other presentational types, using deixis and perception is a means of *activating* a referent which was previously inactive and therefore difficult to insert into the discourse without any accessory construction. As Lambrecht (2000: 56) observes, one of the main pragmatic functions of this construction is to present a new entity and bring it to the attention of the interlocutor. According to him, the latter therefore ‘cannot be the subject of the presentative clause’:

291.) ?*Tu entends Marie-Paule qui monte les escaliers.* [from Lambrecht 2000: 56]

However my data suggests that placing the interlocutor as the subject of the presentational clause is indeed possible with the verb *voir*, which was used in the second person in example (289). Arguably, this might be due to the wide semantic scope of the verb *voir*, which can be, as in the case of (289), loosely interpreted as equivalent to ‘imagine’ or ‘know’. In this case, the speaker invites his interlocutor to frame the referent first, so that they can deal with it in the ensuing comment.

Interestingly, in the case of the second-person forms, the presentational clause borders on the discourse-marker use of *tu vois*. The main distinction between the discourse marker form (*tu vois*) and the presentational form (*tu vois NP*) lies in the prosody: if *tu vois* is followed by a pause, it could be seen as a discourse marker.

The fact that some perception presentationals can be expressed in the second person does not automatically entail that all perception presentationals in the second person are acceptable. In fact, as was the case in (290), if the main clause involves *perception* as such, i.e. the perceived entity is apprehended visually or aurally, the subject of the presentational clause must be the speaker, as it is him or her who activates the referent for the interlocutor. This is especially true if the introduced referent is indefinite; it seems that indefinite and brand new entities are usually presented by a first-person presentational clause, while referents bearing a definite article (i.e. inferable) may also be introduced by a second-person form involving the interlocutor. This was attested, as we have seen, by examples (289) and (290) above. In other words, the deixis involved in the process makes it difficult for the interlocutor to be the subject of the presentational clause if the referent is indefinite, as in (290). If, however, the referent is

definite and the presentational verb (e.g. *voir*) is used figuratively as in (289), it may involve the interlocutor: the latter is thus invited to create an imaginary framework for the referent and thus facilitate its interpretation in the subsequent utterance.

Lambrecht (2000: 57) equally argues that perception presentationals and existential forms (*il y a*) differ in one main aspect. Although both constructions allow definite and identifiable referents, perception presentationals also license pronominal subjects:

292.) *C'est la petite Cavinet. En remontant, tout à l'heure, je l'ai aperçue qui se faisait embrasser par le fils Martinez* [from Lambrecht 2000: 57, Les Bidochon]

One may argue that if an entity is given in a discourse sequence that directly precedes the one we are interested in (*je l'ai aperçue*), the perception verb can hardly be considered as a presentational *per se*. Besides, the pronominal anaphora itself indicates that the entity is already given as a topic (*c'est la petite Cavinet*) and can thus be resumed in the subsequent discourse. In fact, in terms of both information status and semantic content, the sentence would be perfectly acceptable also along the following lines:

293.) *C'est la petite Cavinet. Tout à l'heure, elle se faisait embrasser par le fils Martinet.* (altered)

Thus it seems that, in the above example, the entity does not need to be 'presented'. One can therefore wonder whether some uses of perception verbs should actually be considered as presentational rather than just perceptive alone. Consider also the following example:

294.) *je vois ma sœur par exemple (.) elle part à l'étranger très souvent* (N113)

As can be seen from a comparison between (292) and (294), the perception verb in (292) appears to have a full semantic meaning (propositional content), as opposed to (294) in which the meaning appears to be primarily functional. In other words, the speaker in (292) actually saw the *Cavinet* girl and testifies to the act of *seeing* her being



kissed. The act of perception could also apply to example (290) above. However, in proper *presentational* instances of perception verbs, as in (294), the speaker does not literally perceive the referent visually. The fact that *je vois* in (294) can be replaced by other presentational or topic-marking structures (e.g. *il y a ma sœur, elle.../ genre ma sœur, elle...*) suggests that the construction itself may be best understood in functional rather than literal terms. Moreover, as a native speaker remarked when asked, constructions like (292) – (*j'aperçois / vois NP qui + VERB*) – are rather literary and in contemporary informal French they may preferably be phrased as (*j'aperçois / vois NP en train de + VERB*), as in:

295.) *C'est la petite Cavinet. Tout à l'heure, je l'ai aperçue en train de se faire embrasser par le fils Martinet.* [example (46) altered for the purpose of discussion]

Lambrecht's example, albeit representing spoken discourse, is an extract from a comic book, i.e. a written genre. Since I am merely interested in spontaneous spoken language, I consider as real presentationals only those structures that have a functional purpose of introducing a new or an identifiable referent into the discourse and whose referents are expressed by a nominal form (as opposed to referents resumed by a pronoun, and therefore already *given*).

In my data, the presentationals involving perception verbs are the least frequent ones and due to the small number of occurrences, no absolute conclusions can be drawn about the general characteristics of different forms and their functional uses. It seems, however, that the most common perception presentational is *je vois / tu vois*, used in both cleft and non-cleft forms. This presentational clause should be distinguished from the discourse marker *tu vois*, usually followed by a pause and used to express intersubjectivity and mutual agreement. While no other perception verbs were used as presentationals in my data, various perception verbs may be used to introduce brand new or inferable referents into the discourse in French.

### 6.3 Quantitative results

Let us now discuss the distribution of the most frequent presentational forms ('P-forms') occurring in the present corpus. In order to analyse the role of referents introduced by a presentational construction, I took into account all the possible variants of P-forms, including the fully articulated forms (e.g. *il y a, tu as, vous avez*), the shortened forms (e.g. *y a, t'as*), as well as the partitive variants (*il y en a qui, t'en as qui*). First of all, I examined whether the NP was definite (introduced by *la, le, les, mes, tes*, etc.) or indefinite (*un, une, des*), both in the singular and the plural. Secondly, I established whether the referent was brand new to the discourse or inferable from the previous context. Lastly, based on Ashby's (1993 and 1995) criteria, I examined whether the referent denoted a particularising or a generalising entity, and whether it was animate or inanimate. The referents introduced by a presentational construction in this analysis include both subject and object roles (e.g. *il y a un truc que j'aimais bien avant*, where *un truc* is the object).

In examining the occurrences of P-forms, I obviously excluded forms that carried semantic content rather than presentational functions. So, with *il y a* for instance, I excluded temporal forms (e.g. *il y a deux ans*), deictic locative forms (e.g. *il y a quelqu'un là bas*), deictic temporal forms (e.g. *hier il y avait tout le monde*) and fixed formulas (e.g. *il y a moyen, il y a besoin*). Tables 6.3 – 6.8 below show the distribution of all P-forms in my data.

**Table 6.3: Distribution of presentational constructions in the corpus**

Presentational form	Number	Percentage	Frequency per 1000 words
Existential	62	57.4	1.1
Possessive	39	36.1	0.7
Perception-related	7	6.5	0.1
TOTAL	108	100	1.9

**Table 6.4: Distribution of presentational constructions in the corpus**

Presentational form	Number	Percentage	Frequency per 1000 words
Cleft	60	55.6	1.1
Non-cleft	48	44.4	0.8
TOTAL	108	100	1.9

**Table 6.5: Distribution of definite and indefinite referents**

Type of presentational form	<u>Definite referent</u>		<u>Indefinite referent</u>	
	n (T)	%	n (T)	%
Existential	23 (62)	37	39 (62)	63
Possessive 1st P	4 (10)	40	6 (10)	60
Possessive 2nd P	15 (26)	58	11 (26)	42
Possessive 3rd P	3 (3)	100	0 (3)	0
Perception-related	7 (7)	100	0 (7)	0
TOTAL	52	48	56	52

**Table 6.6: Distribution of new and inferable referents**

Type of presentational form	<u>New referent</u>		<u>Inferable referent</u>	
	n (T)	%	n (T)	%
Existential	43 (62)	70	19 (62)	30
Possessive 1st P	6 (10)	60	4 (10)	40
Possessive 2nd P	10 (26)	39	16 (26)	61
Possessive 3rd P	1 (3)	33	2 (3)	67
Perception-related	7 (7)	100	0 (7)	0
TOTAL	67	62	41	38

**Table 6.7: Distribution of generalising and particularising referents**

Type of presentational form	<u>Generalising referent</u>		<u>Particularising referent</u>	
	n (T)	%	n (T)	%
Existential	28 (62)	46	34 (62)	54
Possessive 1st P	0 (10)	0	10 (10)	100
Possessive 2nd P	11 (26)	42	15 (26)	58
Possessive 3rd P	0 (3)	0	3 (3)	100
Perception-related	2 (7)	29	5 (7)	71
TOTAL	41	38	67	62

**Table 6.8: Distribution of animate and inanimate referents**

Type of presentational form	<u>Animate referent</u>		<u>Inanimate referent</u>	
	n (T)	%	n (T)	%
Existential	32 (62)	53	30 (62)	47
Possessive 1st P	5 (10)	50	5 (10)	50
Possessive 2nd P	4 (26)	15	22 (26)	85
Possessive 3rd P	2 (3)	67	1 (3)	33
Perception-related	5 (7)	71	2 (7)	29
TOTAL	48	44	60	56

Let us now discuss these results with respect to individual presentational forms:

a) *Existential P-forms*

It can be seen from Table 6.3 that existential presentationals are the most frequent in my corpus, while Table 6.4 shows that cleft forms tend to be more common than non-cleft forms among all the presentational forms. Table 6.5 illustrates that occurrences of *il y a* coding indefinite referents (i.e. bearing the indefinite article) are almost twice as frequent as those coding definite referents, which is probably related to the number of

brand new and inferable referents introduced into the discourse (Table 6.6). While the literature tends to associate presentationals of the *il y a*-type with new and indefinite referents, my data suggests that the proportion of definite (and thus perhaps inferable) referents should not be neglected. In fact, Table 6.5 shows that as many as 37 per cent of all *il y a* occurrences code definite referents, as illustrated by one of the previous examples:

296.) *Il y a mes parents qui arrivent demain.*

Tables 6.7 and 6.8 show that there is relatively little difference between the generality and animacy of the referents introduced by *il y a*. Ashby's (1995) finding that *il y a* disfavours particularising referents (i.e. only 20 per cent of the occurrences in his data coded such referents) is slightly at odds with my results, where as many as 54 per cent of the tokens code such referents. Table 6.8 shows that the difference between inanimate and animate referents is very small. Again, this suggests that *il y a* is a versatile presentational construction that can encode any type of referent, as also suggested by its sheer frequency, which is considerably higher than that of the other presentational forms, as we saw in Table 6.3.

#### b) *Possessive P-forms*

Ashby (1995) notes that the choice of a P-variant may also be constrained by whether the reference is particularising or generalising. Table 6.7 suggests that while existential presentationals occur with both generalising and particularising referents, possessive presentationals seem to favour only particularising referents (especially the first-person and the third-person variants). This seems related to their function of creating intersubjectivity and involvement in discourse, as well as to the generic character of the *tu* forms. While the first-person and the third-person forms seem best suited for concrete, particularising referents (e.g. *j'ai mes parents qui arrivent, il a sa voiture qui est en panne*), the generic *tu* may also be well suited for generalising statements (e.g. *t'as tous les gens du quartier qui viennent*). Interestingly, the third-person possessive form in my data encodes only definite and mostly inferable referents (see Tables 6.5 and 6.6); however, since my data contains only 3 occurrences of a third-person possessive form, no conclusions can be drawn from this result. As regards animacy, Table 6.8

shows that the only notably high figure relates to second-person forms coding inanimate referents, which in my opinion has to do with the fact that generic *tu* is, again, semantically flexible and may refer to inanimate, generic phenomena (e.g. *tu as des moments qui sont durs, tu as des maladies qui sont incurables*) where the first or the third person form would seem odd.

#### c) *Perception-related P-forms*

The perception presentationals were the least frequent in my data, as Table 6.3 shows; therefore I will not discuss them in detail. Tables 6.5 – 6.8 show that they seem to be used mainly to encode new, definite, particularising and animate referents, such as those that often appear in descriptions and narratives (e.g. *tu vois les mecs qui travaillent à l'aéroport; je vois ma copine Betty, elle le fait toute seule*).

## 6.4 Conclusion

As we can see from the present analysis, presentationals are accessory syntactic constructions used to introduce inactive referents into the discourse. As much previous research has pointed out, the character of such referents seems to constrain the choice of a particular presentational variant, and thus different presentational forms seem to favour slightly different types of referents. Even though a detailed quantitative study (e.g. multivariate analysis) proved impossible here due to low token numbers, the present analysis sought to contribute to our knowledge of presentationals used in informal spoken French, through a qualitative analysis.

In particular, I hope to have shown that presentational forms have little propositional content but instead have a strengthened pragmatic function. They help to structure the discourse, namely by allowing for a natural flow and easier cognitive processing. In addition, some presentationals may carry an intersubjective function of involving the interlocutor (e.g. *tu as / tu vois*) and thus appealing to common knowledge among discourse participants.

Presentationals are, as we have seen, another pragmatic feature typical of spoken French that should be of interest to learners. These expressions are very likely to appear in the target language input that learners encounter, and the latter should thus have an awareness of them. In practice, these constructions may help learners sound more natural, especially by using word order and expressing argument structure in an easy, spontaneous and informal manner.

## **Chapter 7 Spoken language in the learning and teaching of French**

The primary focus of this chapter is to raise questions about the place of spoken language in the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language, and to provide background for the analysis of the questionnaire given to students of French, discussed in Chapter 8. This chapter considers previous research relevant to questions of foreign language acquisition, with a particular focus on the acquisition of communicative competence. It provides a range of definitions associated with theories and approaches to pragmatic and communicative competence in a foreign language, and reviews some of the literature concerned with these topics.

Chapter 8 is more empirical, and focuses on the analysis of a questionnaire for learners of French, designed to find out what they know of spoken French and how they acquired their knowledge of it. In other words, one of its purposes is to situate the spoken features analysed in this dissertation within the context of language teaching and learning; here students are asked questions about specific pragmatic features of spoken French, and about some selected features of youth language in particular. The questionnaire uses and discusses a set of authentic examples from the spoken data analysed in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. These examples are non-exhaustive, and are used simply to illustrate certain pragmatic and functional features typical of spoken language.

Chapters 7 and 8 are thus a separate logical part of this dissertation, seeking to provide a practical application of some of the results of previous analytical chapters. As we have seen, these previous chapters were dedicated to the study of functional features typical of spoken French, based on recordings of spontaneous conversations in which such features were identified and examined both qualitatively and quantitatively. Chapters 7 and 8, on the other hand, are oriented towards learners of French; they contextualise the previous study of spoken features and situate it within a broader educative framework, thus linking the research results with possible educational awareness and practice.



## **7.1 Spoken language and foreign language teaching: theoretical background**

In recent years, there have been efforts to make changes in the ways foreign languages are taught, in particular by focusing on real communication based on authentic language use. Foreign language classrooms, quite naturally, form a space where students learn the grammatical, lexical and phonetic bases of a given language. These are necessary for understanding the language and for the development of communication skills. At a later stage, they also address the extra-linguistic reality surrounding and influencing the target language, namely the underlying aspects of its socio-cultural context. Frequently, however, some facets of language use are left aside, especially those that pertain to informal speech. Informal, non-literal functional expressions are an inherent aspect of every-day communication, yet due to their vague meaning they are not easily 'learnable'. Paradoxically, it is usually the pragmatic-functional level of language use that is key to making learners sound proficient and natural, and capable of expressing more complex, subtle meanings. A grasp of this level may thus be required if foreign language learning is to be successful.

There are many theories concerning the acquisition of a foreign language, and since the latter is not the central purpose of my study, I will not discuss them in detail. Instead, I will focus only on those aspects of foreign language teaching that are in some way related to the domain of spoken language, and to the learners' communicative competence.

### **7.1.1 Communicative competence**

The knowledge and effective use of spoken language is mostly based on what has come to be termed 'communicative competence'. The notion of communicative competence was first described by Hymes (1972) in order to contrast his view of language as communication with Chomsky's notion of 'linguistic competence' (1965). The latter was regarded as a set of abstract abilities that speakers possess that 'enable them to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language' (see Richards and Rogers

1987). While Chomsky's term has since then been narrowly understood as the mere knowledge of linguistic form (albeit observable in actual performance), Hymes's notion of competence aimed to encompass not only the referential aspects of a language, but also other complex extra-linguistic aspects of communication such as the socio-cultural context. Hymes's theory was thus a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate effectively in a given speech community; and this competence would undoubtedly include the knowledge of pragmatic and functional language features.

Notions of communicative competence and language competence have since then been operationalised in many ways, and often divided into several subcomponents. For example, Canale and Swain (1980) divide communicative competence into grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence, with the notion of 'discourse competence' added to these components later on (Canale 1983). This schema is illustrated in the following table (adapted from Safont-Jordà 2005: 52):

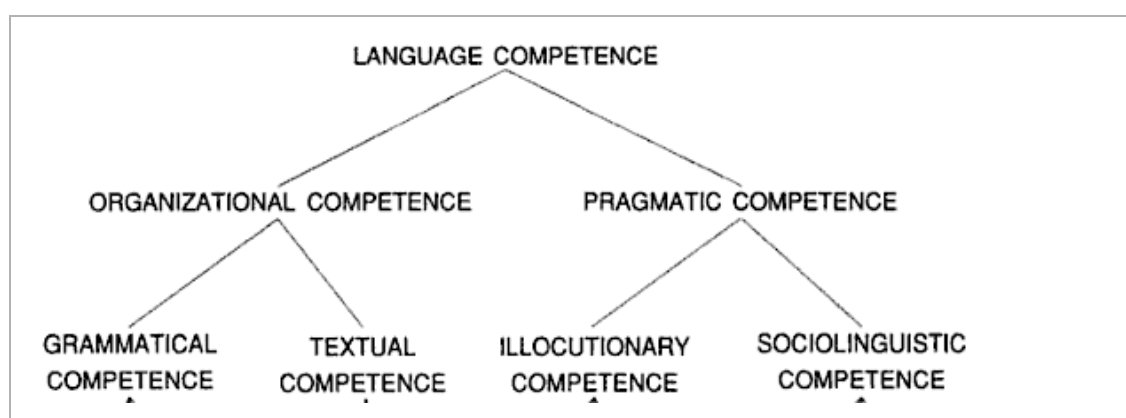
**Table 7.1: Components of communicative competence**

Grammatical competence	Lexis, morphology, syntax, phonology, semantics; ability to distinguish between correct and incorrect
Sociolinguistic competence	Norms of use, norms of discourse, situational and contextual factors of language use, social meaning of the ways language is used
Strategic competence	Capacity to overcome problems in communicating, ability to reinforce communicative intention; appropriate use of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies
Discourse competence	Cohesion (i.e. grammatical links) and coherence (i.e. appropriate combinations of communicative functions)

As we can see in the Table above, the four components are all incorporated into a general notion of communicative competence. Although some authors may prefer a

different term, this usually encompasses very similar components; Bachman (1990: 87), for instance, speaks of ‘language competence’ that he subdivides as follows:

**Figure 13: Bachman’s (1990) division of language competence**



According to Bachman, organisational competence implies the control and knowledge of the formal structure of language, i.e. the ability to recognise and produce grammatically correct sentences, comprehend their propositional content and order them to form texts. Pragmatic competence, on the other hand, is concerned with ‘the relationships between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers intend to perform through these utterances’ (i.e. *illocutionary force*) as well as with ‘the characteristics of the context of language use that determine the *appropriateness* of utterances’ (Bachman 1990: 90).

However it is defined, the concept of communicative competence tends to revolve around the fact that the mere knowledge of linguistic form is not sufficient for a speaker to communicate effectively in a given language. The term thus embodies not only the structural aspects of linguistic knowledge, but also the psychological, social and cultural rules that govern the use of a language. The discussion of communicative competence has had important implications for foreign language teaching, since it introduced the idea that teaching should focus on the actual process of communication rather than on the prerequisite mastery of language forms based on traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary. Priority thus began to be given to meanings and rules of language use rather than to the structure of language (see Richards and Rogers 1987), as it was

thought best that students should engage in activities oriented towards the development of natural speaking skills through communication. In any case, research on language learning and acquisition tends to stress that after all, language can only be learnt through its use in communication use rather than through mechanical practice or drills (e.g. Morrow 1981, Ellis 1985).

New ideas associated with communicative competence have stimulated the emergence of new approaches to foreign language teaching. These approaches (a detailed discussion thereof can be found in Richards and Rodgers 1987: 1986) are often referred to as ‘communicative’ approaches, or ‘communicative language teaching’ (sometimes also termed the ‘functional approach’ or ‘the notional-functional approach’; see Ellis 2005). It should be pointed out here that communicative language teaching has been considered as a holistic approach rather than as a specific method; in fact the concept can be interpreted in a variety of ways and involve different practical methods and techniques. Crucially though, such an approach is founded on the belief that activities involving real communication promote learning, and such activities should involve *meaningful* language based on *meaningful* tasks.

Since theories of communicative competence focus mainly on the use of language in and for the sake of spoken communication, they are very relevant to the present discussion.

### **7.1.2 Communicative competence and the notion of language-as-discourse**

In foreign language teaching, the communicative approach has gained increasing importance in recent years, prioritising methods which promote functional language use and which target the development of learners’ communicative competence, including the ability to hold a conversation. Therefore, instead of learning individual linguistic forms, more importance is now placed on the pragmatic notion of ‘speech acts’, a term used to account for the functions of individual utterances as well as the way in which these utterances relate to one another. Speech acts are described along the following lines:

The minimal unit of communication is not a sentence or another expression, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving orders, describing, ..., etc. (Searle et al. 1980: VII).

Speech acts are said to involve three simultaneously active dimensions: the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. These are clearly described by Barron (2003: 12) who claims that ‘in producing an utterance, we not only say something about the world (locution), but we also perform an act (illocution), which we intend to have an effect on our interlocutor (perlocution).’ Thus in a foreign language, learners should be taught how to perform purposeful speech acts rather than being taught individual structures disconnected from a context. At the initial stages of the learning process, however, foreign-language students usually need a certain level of grammatical and lexical knowledge of the language before they can understand more subtle language phenomena and thus perform meaningful functional acts. In other words, it is not until they have developed a solid grasp of the linguistic form that they can express more complex sociolinguistic and pragmatic information. This knowledge, or ‘competence’, can be acquired through the use of authentic materials that reflect the spontaneous speech behaviour of every-day life.

It is quite crucial that language learners be aware of the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of the target language in order to be able to speak not only correctly but also appropriately. Indeed, it has been widely argued (e.g. Boxer and Pickering 1995, Thomas 1995) that while syntactic, phonological and lexical errors are considered as signs that a speaker does not have a native command of a given language, sociolinguistic errors are ‘typically interpreted as breaches of etiquette’ (Boxer and Pickering 1995: 56). Yet, as Dewaele (2002b: 130) points out, while learning grammar and vocabulary is usually quite straightforward, it may be more difficult to learn that certain terms, expressions or syntactic constructions are appropriate only in some contexts and not others. Similar observations are made by Thomas (1995: 105) who argues that pragmatic language use is often characterised by complex relationships and a richness that should not be defined in terms of a ‘tidy system of rules’. She points out that in pragmatics, the most interesting effects are often achieved when ‘categories overlap or are blurred’, and this seems to apply not only to speech acts, but also to other linguistic phenomena such as discourse roles and activity types. Speech acts as such are seldom well-defined,

predictable and learnable exactly, as they may have to be carried out in different contexts, so learners of a foreign language should be made aware of not only how to perform such acts, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how to achieve some general ‘pragmatic strategies’ through the functional use of words and phrases. Functional words that convey extra-propositional information (such as those expressing politeness, stance, solidarity or uncertainty) are an inherent trait of spoken language and a key element in the communicative competence of native speakers; therefore they are important for language learners. Yet they are often seen as vague and they tend to be overlooked in teaching materials and textbooks, where conversations may be contrived. The question then becomes: how can the foreign language classroom be more faithful to the language used in an authentic native-speaker context? Naturally, authentic casual conversations among native speakers would perhaps be the best source of genuine spoken material, but these are rarely included in teaching materials, possibly because they are seen as unstructured and therefore unteachable (see Eggins and Slade 1997: 315). Furthermore, one of the drawbacks of communicative approaches to language teaching has been that in practice, they tend to be rather difficult to apply due to their demanding requirements, especially those pertaining to the principles of authentic spoken communication. Let us discuss some of these principles in greater detail.

### **7.1.3 Authenticity in foreign language teaching**

The study of communicative competence has raised the question of authenticity and its place in foreign language teaching. While the term ‘authenticity’ is associated with a multitude of meanings and is generally viewed as a rather elusive concept, a suitable definition is formulated by Morrow (1977: 13; cited in Gilmore 2007: 98):

An authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort.

In communicative approaches to foreign language teaching, it is believed that only authentic use of a language can promote the acquisition of pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of communicative competence. This raises questions of how much the classroom input reflects genuine language use in the target community, and whether

authentic communication can be achieved in the classroom context at all. As Gilmore (2007: 98) points out, it has long been recognised that ‘the language presented in textbooks is a poor representation of the real thing.’ Teachers themselves tend to rely on materials in which emphasis is usually placed only on formal and written varieties of the target language and, consequently, they are often reluctant to use or discuss other varieties or registers of that language.

Much of the literature discussed so far relates to English language teaching, but this phenomenon is not unique to English. The question of authenticity has also been raised with regard to French by Mougeon et al. (2002) who observe that the language presented in textbooks used for teaching French as a foreign language (henceforth also referred to as ‘FFL’) in Canada is almost exclusively based on formal variants, and that teachers show an overwhelming preference for these variants in the language used in the classroom. Having compared several popular and commonly used textbooks, their study revealed that the books excluded sociolinguistic variants almost completely (these being mostly the *variantes populaires* and *variantes non-standard*; see Mougeon et al. 2002). The study found that students’ sociolinguistic competence was not developed appropriately unless the students had contact with native speakers, and that the classroom discourse endorsed and taught only a highly standardised variety of French.

It has been pointed out on many occasions that there is a wide gap between the language of FFL textbooks and the French spoken in context. For example, in his study of textbooks used for teaching French abroad, Walz (1986) observes gaps and inconsistencies in the explanation of oral language forms at the levels of phonology, morphology and syntax. As a syntactic example, he mentions dislocation which, he argues, is a phenomenon so pervasive in spoken French that students would have to possess at least a passive knowledge of it in order to function effectively (1986: 17). Yet the French textbooks that he analysed largely ignore this important feature of spoken French. The language and style presented in the textbooks is very formal and, as he further explains, some forms are rarely used and have little communicative value. Walz does acknowledge that it is easier to represent written registers in a written textbook, while oral forms are much more difficult to represent. He mentions academic purism as a further possible reason; written registers are said to have always enjoyed more prestige than oral forms and textbooks support the more prestigious forms. Overall,

however, Walz's analysis shows that the textbooks used for teaching French as a foreign language fail to reflect the French that is commonly spoken today.

A similar study was carried out by O'Connor Di Vito (1991), who compared native-speaker use of French with the language structures typically presented in the textbooks used for teaching French. She argues that even if one knows the grammatical structures and rules, native-like mastery of a second language is 'impossible unless one knows the discourse and social norms governing their use' (1991: 393). Her findings show that even in widely used and well-respected textbooks, the structures presented to learners tend not to be used by native speakers.

As rightly argued by Dewaele (2002b: 134), learners rarely have the occasion to engage in authentic interaction with their teachers or with native speakers outside the classroom context. They may thus be incapable of developing sufficient sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence, and hence become 'monostylistic' (see Dewaele 2001, 2002b). Even though this implies that native-like socio-pragmatic competence can usually be realistically acquired only outside the classroom context, Dewaele does note that textbooks should be communicative enough and include the whole range of oral and written registers (2002b: 140).

In view of the above observations, it does seem that foreign language teaching has increasingly come to concentrate on the development of students' communicative competence and oral proficiency. Achieving this competence means possessing native-like intuitions, acquiring native-like patterns of use, and being able to function effectively in the target language contexts. Paradoxically, however, while linguists seem to have been calling for more focus on oral forms, teaching and learning is still primarily based on written textbooks which, as has been shown, lack the potential to reflect native patterns of use. As Gilmore (2007) notes, any changes in syllabuses have been slow to take place partly because of the practical difficulties of the communicative approach. Among the possible reasons for the slow progress is poor communication between linguists and language teachers; potentially useful research findings are said to linger in journals and be seldom applied in practice (see Bouton 1996: 112). Another reason mentioned is the cost and the reluctance to embrace changes on a global level, especially if these changes have not been empirically tested and are not widely



supported. As Gilmore (2007: 112) points out, using traditional methods is usually thought to be ‘safe’.

It may then really be the teacher’s responsibility to bridge the gap between theory and practice and bring authenticity into the foreign-language classroom in the form of complementary material in addition to the textbook. Even though authentic material may sometimes be cognitively more difficult to process, it plays a vital role in the development of students’ communicative competence. Besides, as Chavez (1998) has found in his study, learners enjoy interacting with authentic materials and are appreciative of pedagogical support in this area. These observations are corroborated by Lyster (1994) whose functional-analytical teaching experiments successfully showed that learners improved their sociolinguistic competence when exposed to such genuine material.

#### **7.1.4 Communicative competence and sociolinguistic variation**

It has been widely shown (e.g. Dewaele 2002b and 2007, Regan 2005, Howard et al. 2006) that while language classes can raise students’ awareness of socio-pragmatic rules, it is usually only in a native-speaker context that learners can really perfect their communicative competence, especially the sociolinguistic component. Sociolinguistic competence has been defined in variety of ways. For example, Dewaele (citing Ranney 1992: 25) defines the term as follows:

(...)‘the ability to perform various speech acts, the ability to manage conversational turns and topics, sensitivity to variation in register and politeness, and an understanding of how these aspects of language vary according to social roles and settings’ (Dewaele 2007: 3).

With regard to French, much of the relevant research concerned with this type of competence has concentrated on the acquisition of native-speaker patterns of sociolinguistic variation. Most studies focus on learners’ use of morphosyntactic variants (e.g. omission of *ne*, use of *vous* vs. *tu* and *nous* vs. *on*; see, for example, Rehner et al. 2003, Dewaele 2004c, 2004d) but some also analyse learners’ uses of

specific syntactic constructions and vocabulary (e.g. Mougeon and Rehner 2001, Dewaele and Pavlenko 2002, Dewaele 2004a).

As concerns the omission of *ne*, pervasive in spoken French, it was found that learners who had spent little or no time abroad tended to retain this particle, while more advanced learners, especially those who had spent more time abroad or had authentic contact with native speakers, had a better mastery of appropriate stylistic variation in its use (see Dewaele and Regan 2002, Dewaele 2004c, 2004d, 2007, Sax 2003). In particular, such learners are said to have progressively grasped ‘the sociolinguistic rules that allow the particle to be omitted in certain situations’ (Dewaele 2007: 8).

Similar results were found with respect to the *tu* vs. *vous* pronouns of address, a choice that is usually rather difficult to master for learners in whose native tongue only one type of address pronoun exists. The social ambiguity involved in the choice of these pronouns is well described by Dewaele (2007: 9):

The *vous* can be used as a form of respect, but it can equally serve to indicate a social distance between the interlocutors and the superiority of one of them. The *tu* on the other hand, can be perceived as a sign of solidarity, but it can also carry a value of familiarity or inferiority.

The frequency with which learners use French and the amount of time they spend abroad (or in a native-speaker context) tends to correlate positively with a better mastery of the system of address pronouns, which is also the case for the system of first-person plural pronouns, i.e. *nous* vs. *on*, the latter being the informal variant that inexperienced learners tend to avoid (see Dewaele 2002a, 2002b). The amount of authentic interaction, again, plays a key role in the development of the competence necessary for the mastery of correct and appropriate pronoun choice. As Bayley and Regan (2004: 326) conclude, studies of variation have consistently shown that ‘contact with native speakers results in a greater approximation to vernacular patterns of variation’, while classroom learners show a ‘lesser approximation to native speaker rates and patterns of variation’.

The study abroad experience is usually identified as one of the major factors contributing to an increase in students' spoken proficiency, reflecting an increase in the amount of vocabulary used as well as a finer understanding of sociolinguistic variation. However, the view that undertaking study abroad is the sole and only means of attaining proficiency may be misleading. For example, as Kinginger and Blattner (2008) rightly point out, the degree of the students' engagement in language learning and the quality of their experiences abroad are both very variable. In other words, while some students might have a perfectly engaging and productive study-abroad experience, others might lack the opportunity to meet with native speakers and engage in spontaneous conversions even in a study-abroad context (for a comprehensive account of students' experiences abroad, see also Kinginger 2008). Thus the results of the experience abroad is very different in each individual case, and is dependent not only on the practical arrangements and the quality of the study-abroad programme (e.g. social setting, host family, contact with native speakers, etc.), but also on the psychological factors that come into play (e.g. speaker's degree of extraversion, as noted by Dewaele and Furnham 1999).

With regard to lexical variation in learners' interlanguage, studies have mostly focused on colloquial vocabulary (e.g. Dewaele and Regan 2001, Kinginger and Blattner 2008), emotion words (e.g. Dewaele and Pavlenko 2002) and polysemous and polyfunctional discourse words such as *juste / seulement / rien que* (e.g. Mougeon and Rehner 2001, Rehner 2005). Again, it is usually argued that authentic contact with native speakers helps learners develop better intuitive socio-pragmatic knowledge that allows an increased use of colloquial and informal words. Some studies also reveal a positive correlation between the use of colloquial words and an extrovert personality, as well as the level of proficiency and frequency of contact with authentic French (e.g. Dewaele and Regan 2001, Dewaele and Pavlenko 2002). However, it has also been shown that learners tend to avoid using colloquial variants out of concern for appropriateness. Dewaele ascribes this to 'the social-psychological costs' of using colloquial variants inappropriately, which is higher than 'that of using formal variants inappropriately' (Dewaele 2007: 15). Therefore, performance data alone might be insufficient to assess learners' knowledge in the sociolinguistic domain, simply because learners may wish to avoid colloquial variants because of the uncertainty of their lexical nuances (see Dewaele and Regan 2001), but also because they may not wish to sound colloquial

(Kinging and Blattner 2008: 228). There seems to be a high degree of individual variation in the way informal or colloquial language is perceived, and if students do not use it this does not necessarily imply a lack of knowledge. By way of example, we note Charkova's (2007) study on the use and knowledge of slang among Bulgarian learners of English, which showed significant differences in the way slang was used and perceived among school learners and university learners of English. While both groups had a knowledge of slang words, university learners appeared more conservative in their perception of slang and in their attitudes towards it.

Sociolinguistic studies in the field of French second language acquisition tend to focus on morphosyntactic or lexical variants such as those described above, whereas studies that focus on informal functional words and constructions such as those that were analysed in the first part of this dissertation are relatively rare (with the possible exception of Rehner (2005) who did analyse the use of *comme / like* in Ontario French). Nevertheless, sociolinguistic competence includes the ability to perform speech acts, index politeness or manage discourse topics and turns (see Ranney's (1992: 25) definition, given earlier). This definition implies that competence includes the ability to use linguistic forms for functional and discourse purposes in unplanned conversation.

It has been widely noted that discourse-pragmatic expressions are under-represented in classroom discourse and textbooks (Holmes 1988, Overstreet et al. 2006, Walz 1986, O'Connor Di Vito 1991), yet such expressions are vital for the development of learners' functional speaking ability. As Aijmer (2009: 174) points out, certain linguistic items are more characteristic of spontaneous speech than of writing, and some of these items may occur only in speech. Items peculiar to spoken language (e.g. discourse markers, general extenders, hedges, tags or backchannels) play a vital part in the natural flow of communication and conversational fluency. Aijmer further observes that this category of words is very relevant to the learners' communicative needs and may be especially helpful, for instance, in the management of communicative stress, hesitation or uncertainty. Although she notes that the learners in her corpus use these devices mainly as 'fillers', they express important meta-linguistic functions and may help learners achieve natural conversation fluency. Many such functional expressions may thus relate to the domain of what is commonly termed 'strategic competence' (Canale and Swain 1980), involving in this case mainly functional strategies used to compensate for

breakdowns in communication. Strategic competence may also involve grammatical knowledge (knowing how to paraphrase forms that one cannot master or cannot recall) as well as sociolinguistic knowledge (knowing how to cope appropriately in authentic context-dependent communication).

Knowledge of such ‘coping’ strategies can be particularly helpful for foreign language learners, and may often involve the use of pragmatic expressions. An illustrative example of using pragmatic words in the foreign language classroom can be found in Overstreet et al.’s (2006) study, where the authors discuss why a knowledge of general extenders, for example, may be particularly useful for foreign learners. The authors point out that while native speakers use these expressions on a daily basis, in language teaching they tend to be overlooked. Similar observations are made by De Cock et al. (1998), who found that native speakers employ almost four times as many ‘vagueness tags’ (i.e. general extenders) as foreign language learners, which shows that learners do not always learn to use salient and authentic functional expressions. If the classroom syllabus is oriented only towards teaching lexicogrammatical items, many important aspects of natural spoken language go unnoticed in the classroom and learners are thus unlikely to get a feel for genuine native-speaker patterns of use.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

In this literature review, I focused on studies that show the importance of a functional approach to language learning and language teaching. The review is selective and includes mainly those studies that are concerned with the place of communicative competence in foreign language teaching and learning, and especially those that deal with communicative competence in the acquisition of French. In particular, the aim of this chapter was to provide a background for a discussion of pragmatic and functional expressions in the learning and teaching of French.

Studies of authentic corpora based on transcription of native-speaker production reveal that little functional words that are salient features of casual conversation are often lost in written media such as textbooks, but that they in fact convey a great deal of meta-

linguistic information and serve important pragmatic functions in speech. Relevant research shows that the discourse-pragmatic domain of the foreign language to which they belong tends to be insufficiently mastered by learners, and that foreign language classrooms do not always adequately focus on the development of a learner's sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. Since functional expressions (e.g. discourse markers or general extenders) do not necessarily contribute to the propositional meaning of utterances, they are often ignored in structural and formal linguistic descriptions and in foreign language textbooks.

The goal of this chapter on the acquisition of communicative competence was to provide a backdrop for the following chapter, which discusses the results of a questionnaire for learners aimed at discovering what they know about certain pragmatic features of spoken French.

## **Chapter 8 Spoken language and youth language: a learner survey**

### **8.1 Introduction**

As was seen earlier, the first part of the thesis was dedicated to the analysis of pragmatic features of spoken French, including some features typical of youth language. This analysis was based on recordings of spontaneous conversations in which such spoken features were identified and analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The second part of the project concerns learners of French and their views towards features of spoken language.

The primary aim of this part of the study is to find out what students know about spoken French and how they acquired their knowledge of it. In other words, one of the main purposes is to situate the spoken features analysed in the first part of the study within the context of language learning and teaching. The empirical part of this section is based on a questionnaire designed for learners of French in which they were asked questions about specific pragmatic features of spoken language in general, and some selected features of youth language in particular. The present section discusses the aims of and the background to the questionnaire, as well as the methodology used in its construction and for the analysis.

### **8.2 Aims of the questionnaire**

While the analysis in previous sections concentrated mainly on native speaker data, the aim of this part of the study is to examine data gathered from a questionnaire aimed at university learners of French. The questionnaire uses a set of authentic examples from the spoken data analysed earlier. These authentic examples are non-exhaustive; they are simply used to illustrate certain spoken features which may best be understood in pragmatic and functional terms. The questionnaire is thus designed to provide insight into learners' knowledge of this aspect of language use. In this section, I first explain

the design of the questionnaire and the methodology used for the survey and the analysis. I also discuss the spoken features selected for the questionnaire and the reasons for my choice. I then proceed to the analysis of responses, using mainly qualitative methods; however certain answers are analysed quantitatively when their nature allows it. I also discuss the practical issues involved in implementing this survey and finish with a discussion of the results. The final version of the questionnaire used for the main survey can be found in Appendix (A).

The specific purposes of the questionnaire were as follows:

- to critically examine the nature of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence in young university learners of French (students at British universities)
- to examine learners' understanding of spoken language and youth language
- to examine learners' views about the topics covered in foreign language classes
- to address the question of whether spoken language is sufficiently incorporated into foreign language classrooms

### **8.3 Background**

As was seen in the previous chapters, the native-speaker data suggests that certain spontaneous discourse features are quite pervasive in spoken language. Spontaneous spoken registers are also the ones that learners of a foreign language are most likely to encounter in the target country or with native speakers of the target language. However, there is very little literature on how spoken language is used and discussed in foreign-language classrooms. As we have seen, studies concerned with language acquisition tend to focus on patterns of sociolinguistic variation in learners' interlanguage and the acquisition of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. They usually concentrate on learners' production, including cross-cultural errors, issues of language transfer and different stages of interlanguage development (Dewaele 2005, Dewaele and Regan 2001, Dewaele and Pavlenko 2002, Myles 2003, Labeau and Myles 2009, Bayley and Regan 2004). However, it appears that learner views and attitudes towards spoken language, and especially the language spoken by young people, have not been addressed in great detail.



In view of the above considerations, my aim was to combine questions of how learners perceive their spoken competence, and what direct knowledge of spoken language they have. Thus the questionnaire covers not only linguistic, but also *meta*-linguistic issues, by making students *reflect* upon their learning. In implementing the survey, I did not have direct access to learners in language classrooms, and therefore was unable to test their actual spoken production on a regular basis or examine the development of their spoken competence as a longitudinal process. The present study is thus only an indirect contribution to the knowledge of learners' interlanguage and their communicative competence; instead, it seeks to directly examine learner views of spoken language and youth language, as well as the role of spoken language and youth language in foreign language classrooms.

I had some broad initial hypotheses concerning the place of spoken language in language teaching. As we saw in Chapter 7, it is often the case that the language acquired in foreign language classrooms is often dissociated from an authentic context, and thus many spoken features might be left aside. What is meant by 'spoken features' includes mainly linguistic features that are encoded in a lexical form but have a mainly pragmatic function, such as discourse markers. Part of the questionnaire concerns the learnability and awareness of these features. One of the initial hypotheses was that these features, often being non-literal and polysemous, are not easily 'learnable' and might therefore receive little attention in language learning. One might expect that it is not until learners have spent a certain period of time in the target country that they actually start to notice these 'little' words and chunks of words with pragmatic functions. However, some learners might not have the necessary metalinguistic ability and observation skills to notice such features, and in this respect the questionnaire should reveal whether learners actually perceive features of spoken language and understand them. In doing so, they may resort to functional equivalents from their native language and practise what is referred to as 'positive transfer', if such functional equivalents exist. *Positive transfer* is defined as the 'facilitating effect on L2 acquisition due to cross-linguistic similarities' while *negative transfer* refers to 'debilitating effects due to a cross-linguistic divergence' (Hansen 2006: 9, referring to Odlin 1989). Therefore, if a certain spoken feature is language-specific, identifying it correctly might prove considerably more difficult than a feature that has an equivalent in one's native tongue. In any case, the questionnaire should reveal interesting data on how certain features of

spoken French are understood. Questions (1), (2), (3), and (4), in Part II of the questionnaire, were designed to elicit data of this kind (see Appendix (A)).

Another hypothesis related to spoken language was that learners do not always understand the exact meanings of the terms ‘spoken language’ and ‘youth language.’ In fact, it was shown in the pilot study that spoken features – as opposed to features typical of written registers – are generally associated with colloquial lexis, while youth language is mostly equated with slang and even taboo or vulgar expressions. Part II of the questionnaire, then, was designed to provide insights into whether these preconceptions are borne out and if so, to what extent.

A more general research question was that of knowing whether learners thought spoken language was sufficiently discussed in foreign language classrooms. Again, one would probably expect that functional and pragmatic features of spontaneous speech would tend to be overlooked, and parts III and IV of the questionnaire therefore attempted to shed more light on the content of foreign language classrooms, albeit in a very concise way. The study also aimed to find out whether students had any specific learning strategies to improve their communication skills in spoken language and, if so, how they would describe these strategies. This was investigated through question (5) in the last part of the questionnaire.

## **8.4 Methodology**

This section provides an overview of the methodology used in this second part of the PhD study, namely the choice of methods used, including the description of the pilot study and the main study, their content and structure, and the methodological procedures employed in the investigation.

### **8.4.1 Selection of methods**

In a study such as mine, several methodological procedures might have been possible. Having regular access to learners of French would have allowed me to investigate their communication skills directly; it would in fact have provided me with the possibility of

recording the learners' oral production and investigating whether they made use of pragmatic and functional features appropriate to the context. Direct interviews, on the other hand, may have allowed for an in-depth exploration of individual views about spoken language and youth language, of the content of foreign language classrooms and of their learning strategies. However, gathering interviews and recordings would have been a lengthy and time-consuming process, requiring a considerable amount of data in order to be able to examine the points of interest. Since my main goal was to investigate and analyse native-speaker patterns of use, more time was dedicated to the first part of the PhD project. It was therefore decided that a written questionnaire would be an appropriate direct method for investigating learners' knowledge of spoken French as well as their views about the content of their classrooms.

There were several additional reasons for this decision. It is believed that individual views, attitudes and opinions can be reported by directly answering a question of a specific nature. Although self-reports might often prove insincere or biased (Baker 1992: 19, Oakes 2001: 177), it was felt that the respondents would be honest in answering the questions, not least because the survey was given to them as part of their homework and was completely anonymous. The fact that the respondents' answers might also be affected by the presence of the researcher was not felt to be of much relevance, as the researcher was present only for a brief period of time, in order to distribute the questionnaire before the class. Lastly, but importantly, the respondents were learners at university level, and could reasonably be expected to have a serious attitude towards language learning, and therefore it was believed that they would provide honest, serious and unbiased answers to the questions.

#### **8.4.2 Pilot study**

In the first stages of the PhD project, a pilot study was conducted amongst university learners of different nationalities (e.g. Spanish, Italian, German, Slovak) who have been on the Erasmus exchange program, in order to ascertain whether the questionnaire was structured in an understandable and appropriate manner. This preliminary version of the questionnaire was distributed by e-mail and its main purpose was to examine the respondents' reactions and responses to individual questions. Respondents were asked not only to fill in the questionnaire, but also to give their opinion on whether any

questions were problematic or too difficult to answer. Since this preliminary survey was carried out mainly to develop and improve the main questionnaire, its results are not included in this dissertation. In this pilot survey, different nationalities and a rather wide age range (22-35) were allowed among the respondents. This was not seen as problematic, as this survey was going to be analysed mainly qualitatively (and in less depth than the main survey). The questionnaire was distributed to 15 respondents who were all studying French as part of their university degree. Some of them had also studied French as part of their secondary school studies. For the most part, the subjects were friends and acquaintances of the researcher (the ‘friend of a friend approach’, see Milroy, 1987), but this network was extended as the participants were asked to distribute the pilot questionnaire to contacts who were also studying French in similar conditions. In this way, the number of respondents was extended to 25.

Useful feedback from the pilot study helped me refine the final version of the instrument, notably by identifying and deleting illogical or inappropriate items, reformulating certain questions, enlarging certain sections in order to encompass further spoken features from the native-speaker data, and eventually formulating the final version of the questionnaire.

As was the case with the pilot questionnaire, the main questionnaire combined questions about views of spoken language and knowledge of certain typical spoken features. However, the pilot and the main questionnaire differed in several respects. For example, the main questionnaire was much more thorough. Furthermore, in the pilot study, some questions were revealed as being rather vague and difficult to understand and thus unlikely to provide usable data. These questions (e.g. “*Comment pourrais-tu décrire, en quelques mots, la langue parlée (informelle) par rapport à la langue standard (formelle)?*”) were therefore eliminated or changed. Also, while the pilot questionnaire was written in French, it was decided that the main version would be presented only in English, since it was given only to students at British universities.

Finally, the pilot study was conducted before the completion of the analysis of native-speaker data for the first part of the thesis. This yielded valuable samples of speech that could be used for the main questionnaire. Thus, more concrete examples of spoken

language were added to the main questionnaire in order to illustrate authentic use of spoken language.

### **8.4.3 Development of instrument: main study**

The main questionnaire used a combination of closed and open-ended questions. In order to facilitate the analysis of results, several closed questions, especially those to do with opinions and attitudes, used a 5-point Likert-type scale of measurement (as outlined by Likert 1932, 1974). This scale, typically used to collect and assess attitude data, is represented as a continuum of possible answers in a format such as: SD (strongly disagree), D (disagree), N (neutral), A (agree), and SA (strongly agree). While this type of measurement is generally regarded as an easy and practical way of assessing results and producing an overall score, it tends to disregard the subjective nature of certain types of data. Therefore, questions that sought to investigate subjective and complex matters were structured as open-ended, and could thus be examined qualitatively (e.g. questions (4) and (5) in Part IV of the questionnaire, see Appendix (A)). The aim of these questions was to obtain a more thorough picture of the respondents' views and opinions. Each of them was therefore analysed individually. It was hoped that such a combination of methods would produce interesting data, analysable both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The final version of the questionnaire – as presented to the students (again, see Appendix (A)) – consisted of four main sections. First, an introduction explained the aims of the questionnaire, emphasising that the survey was entirely anonymous and confidential. The researcher further explained at the beginning of the class that the questionnaire was not a language test and that there were no correct or incorrect answers. As regards the questionnaires sent by e-mail, the same points were explained in an introductory e-mail.

Part I of the survey was made up of questions 1–6, which focused on the background of the respondent. This data was used to ascertain whether the students met the main criteria for participation in the survey (age, nationality, background in the study of French). Length of stay in a French-speaking country was expected to vary: all lengths were accepted, and this was predicted to yield interesting data based on differences in

the length of time that individuals had spent studying abroad. The purpose of this first part of the questionnaire was to develop a respondent profile, used mainly for qualitative analysis in order to assess individual differences between speakers and their backgrounds. The remaining questions in the questionnaire sought to tap learners' views and knowledge of spoken language. These questions were grouped under four main topics centred around the participants' knowledge of spoken French, their view of spoken French, the content of their foreign language classrooms and their learning strategies.

Part II of the questionnaire focused on the selected features of spoken French, some of them typical of youth language. These were excerpted from my corpus of recorded conversations among native speakers, therefore illustrating authentic informal and spontaneous speech in everyday situations. The purpose of this part of the questionnaire was to determine whether the students were able to correctly identify forms which had mainly pragmatic functions in language. Very frequently, these forms do not have direct translation equivalents across different languages and therefore students cannot always rely on the possibility of 'positive transfer' (see Section 8.3). In addition to their being language-specific, these pragmatic features often have a vague meaning and are multifunctional, which learners may not always be able to notice and comprehend when they hear them. One would thus expect that they are not easily learnable, as they may not be the first on the list of learning priorities (see, for example, Overstreet et al. 2006).

In this part of the questionnaire, I attempted to provide illustrative examples of features that were defined as 'functional' in the analysis of native-speaker production. These include a general extender (*et tout*, 'and everything'), a discourse marker (*genre*, 'like'), a multi-purpose lexical-functional term (*machin*, 'thing') and a presentational form (*il y a*, 'there is / there are'). These examples are obviously not at all exhaustive and are solely used to illustrate certain salient features of informal, spontaneous discourse. In this part of the questionnaire, the questions focus on three main points:

a) Source of identification. This question sought to find out if learners had heard the term in question; if so, where they heard it and whether they actually noticed it at all. It may be the case that speakers often hear certain terms in native-speaker production, but do not pay attention to them.

b) Passive knowledge. The aim of this question was to measure a learner's passive knowledge of the term in question: are learners able to find a suitable functional equivalent of the term in their native language? Do they correctly identify and translate it? Do they know its functions?

c) Active knowledge. This question was aimed at providing information about the student's active proficiency. One might assume that only advanced learners are likely to possess sufficient active knowledge of the functional term and be able to use it appropriately. Being able to provide an example of its usage testifies to the students' meta-linguistic awareness, that is, to the fact that they *know* whether they use a certain term and how they use it. Although this questionnaire item had the potential to provide interesting results, it might have been somewhat more difficult to answer simply because it required more time and thought; students might have therefore preferred not to complete it. The question of whether they are familiar with the term might have also led them to answer in the negative, merely because they preferred to avoid having to provide an example in context (a constraint that also applies to the previous question concerned with translation). Despite these limitations, it was hoped that the questions would be answered carefully and honestly.

The exercise in part II of the questionnaire is reminiscent of Laufer's (1998: 255) notions of 'passive vocabulary', 'controlled active vocabulary', and 'free active vocabulary', corresponding to degrees of knowledge on a continuum from superficial to deep at various stages of learning. Laufer defines the first type of knowledge as passive, receptive knowledge, i.e. understanding the most frequent and core meaning of a word without using it. On the other hand, controlled active (productive) knowledge entails producing words when prompted by a task, while free active (productive) knowledge has to do with the use of words at will, without any specific prompts for particular words. In this exercise, question (a) would then seek to determine whether or not the respondent has any knowledge of the term(s) in question, and questions (b) and (c) would relate to whether this knowledge is passive, controlled active or free active.

Part III of the questionnaire sought to evaluate learners' experiences of learning French as a foreign language at school and university. This part consisted of two questions. The

first one aimed to ascertain whether the foreign language classes sufficiently covered all aspects of language use. What is meant by ‘aspects of French language’ was outlined in more detail in question (2): it is not only the way language can be seen, heard and reproduced (reading, listening, speaking) but also the different registers of a language (which are divided here into ‘formal’ or ‘informal’). This division, albeit rather simplistic, relates to the fact that spoken language is often informal, and what we are concerned with here is whether spoken language and informal registers are discussed in language classes. The questions in this part of the questionnaire thus especially attempted to measure learners’ attitudes towards ‘speaking’ and towards the ‘informal’. Both questions used a 5-point interval scale, although the scale points were structured and named differently, due to the different character of the questions.

The aim of part IV, consisting of 5 questions, was to provide insight into individual learners’ experiences in a French-speaking country. As was the case for the previous part of the questionnaire, questions (1) and (3) here were also measured on a 5-point interval scale, differing only in the way the questions and the possible answers were worded. The remaining questions sought a more qualitative judgement about learners’ experience and were thus structured differently.

In particular, question (1) (‘In the French-speaking country, I felt comfortable speaking French’) sought to gauge the extent to which the respondents felt comfortable when having to express themselves in French in the initial stages of their stay abroad. Although this is not necessarily directly related to the ways in which they learnt French and how they were prepared for a native-speaker context, it might be an indication of the extent to which they have acquired communicative competence in the language.

While question (1) in this part was oriented towards communicative competence, question (2) focused on comprehension. The aim of this question (‘When I did not understand French, it was because...’) was to investigate further the areas which posed the most problems for learners. Since learners could choose multiple answers to this question, it was possible to establish whether their problems were due to issues of vocabulary, rapidity of speech in native speaker production, accent or other factors. It also sought to ascertain whether colloquial spoken language might be a source of incomprehension, or whether learners were unfamiliar with different French accents.



This might indicate whether they were exposed only to a certain type of standard French and were inexperienced in dealing with different levels of variation (be it lexical, pragmatic, phonetic or some other kind). The next question ('when speaking to native speakers, did you feel that your university classes adequately prepared you for the language used in a natural context?') addressed the role of language classes in learners' acquisition of communicative competence. This question was closely related to the subsequent one as, on its own, it would not provide very detailed information about the content of language classrooms and related issues. Here students were expected to express their opinion on whether they would change the structure of their language classes – and especially their content – if they had an opportunity to do so ('If you were a language teacher at university, what aspects of language would you cover in more detail than was the case when you studied?'). Although this was a rather complex qualitative question to ask, and one that did not have an easy answer, I hoped that some thought would be given to the structure and content of the language classes that the participants experienced, and that they would express their views on the eventual shortcomings of these classes. Here, again, a degree of linguistic awareness, and especially awareness of one's individual language needs, would have been necessary in order to be able to comment on the ways in which language classes succeed or could be improved.

In the last question of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to suggest what learning strategies they use in order to improve their communication skills in the foreign language (i.e. 'Please briefly describe any learning strategies which helped you improve and gain confidence in spoken language'). By 'learning strategies' I mean any kind of extra-curricular activities, behaviour or techniques that learners consciously and purposely use in their free time with the aim of improving their skills in the foreign language, e.g. listening to the radio, watching TV, using Internet chat-rooms, corresponding with pen-friends or talking to native speakers.

It is a common fact that not all foreign-language learning occurs in classrooms. In order to progress along the interlanguage continuum from non-existent knowledge to native-speaker knowledge, a learner must go through certain mental processes that involve meta-cognitive awareness and sensibility to their own language needs and their learning process. However, not all learners seem to be able to succeed in doing so, and they do

not all progress in the same way. In the literature concerned with language acquisition, reference is frequently made to ‘good learners’ and ‘poor learners’ (see, for example, Johnson 2008, Naiman *et al.* 1996, Stern 1975). ‘Good learners’ are often described with respect to their learning strategies, i.e. more or less deliberate approaches to learning, and more specific techniques associated with these strategies, observable in learners’ behaviour. In this last question of the survey, I was interested in finding out what procedures, techniques and approaches students employ. As a point of reference, I used a list of learning strategies, outlined by Stern (1975; cited by Naiman *et al.* 1996: 4) as follows:

- Planning strategy (a personal learning style or positive learning strategy)
- Active strategy (an active approach to the learning task)
- Empathic strategy (a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language and its speakers).
- Formal strategy (technical know-how of how to tackle a language)
- Experimental strategy (a methodical but flexible approach, developing the new language into an ordered system and constantly revisiting it)
- Semantic strategy (constant searching for meaning)
- Practice strategy (willingness to practise)
- Communication strategy (willingness to use the language in real communication)
- Monitoring strategy (self-monitoring and critical sensitivity to language use)
- Internalisation strategy (developing L2 more and more as a separate reference system and learning to think in it).

In addition to the theoretical strategies defined above, I was particularly interested in specific practical techniques that students consciously use. Admittedly, again, I dealt here with meta-linguistic awareness and it might be the case that some students were simply not able to reflect upon their learning process and their strategies, especially if they did not make any conscious efforts to improve their foreign language skills. In fact, there are many complex factors influencing these efforts, especially motivation, the degree of which strongly varies from learner to learner. Their degree of motivation is likely to be based upon a wide range of factors such as career choice, life style and individual taste. This part of the questionnaire was thus expected to reveal differences

in the degree of learners' motivation and hence also differences in strategies (or a lack thereof). Here students were asked to provide a short description of any such activities that they consider beneficial for language learning, especially in terms of spoken competence. Examples of such activities were provided in case the definition of such strategies was not entirely clear. Since this question was open-ended, it was analysed mainly qualitatively. However, I endeavoured to assess certain frequently recurring patterns on a quantitative scale in a percentage distribution, based on the character of the data.

The subjects' responses to all the questions were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively, the latter by calculating percentages and mean scores in order to determine what trends emerge in learners' views, attitudes and strategies in dealing with spoken French. Statistical analyses were performed if the nature of the data allowed it; in order to carry out such analyses, the responses were first coded in Microsoft Excel, and then analysed using the statistical software Sofa Version 0.9.15. The results of the analysis, including discussion, illustrative tables and figures, are presented in Section 8.5.

#### **8.4.4 Administration of the questionnaire**

The students were initially approached at Queen Mary University of London, with the help of three French university lecturers who all gave permission for the researcher to distribute the questionnaire at the beginning of their classes. It was decided that only second year and final year students should be included in the study, as it was expected that they would be more likely to have some knowledge of spoken French and to have spent some time in a French-speaking country (almost all final year students have spent a year or half a year abroad). In choosing this university level, it was hoped that a certain level of knowledge and awareness of linguistic issues would have been obtained by the students, and that some thought would have been given to processes of language learning in general and to the learning of French in particular. It was also expected that the students' level of French would be sufficient for them to comprehend and to comment on the more complex language issues addressed in the questionnaire.

The students were approached at the beginning of their language class. After the lecturer had introduced the researcher, the latter briefly explained the project and handed out copies of the questionnaire to the students. The students were asked to fill in the questionnaire as part of their homework and bring it to the next language class. (The researcher actually allowed two weeks for completing the survey, as some students failed to bring their copies to the following session and had to be reminded to do so). Students were also reminded that a copy of the questionnaire was posted on their internal virtual learning service<sup>51</sup> and they were asked to send it to contacts who were also studying French at university. In this way, a further 18 e-mail responses were obtained from students at other British universities who were learning French in very similar conditions.

The fact that the main sample also included students from universities other than Queen Mary was not expected to affect the results, since only participants following the same degree programme and at the same university level were included. Besides, it was thought that methods of teaching French in different British universities would not differ radically.

In total, 55 students participated in the survey. Of these 55 participants, most were undergraduate students of French at Queen Mary, University of London (37 in total) and the remainder were from other British universities. As I explain below, 3 participants were excluded on the criteria of age and nationality and thus only 52 responses were used for analysis. Table 8.1 below outlines the distribution of participants included in the survey:

**Table 8.1:** Survey participants

Source	Number
Queen Mary University of London	35
Other universities	17
TOTAL	52

---

<sup>51</sup> Queen Mary online learning platform “Blackboard”

The questionnaire was administered between September 2009 and January 2010. In the first sample (Queen Mary, University of London students), the questionnaire was distributed in person to all the students in a class. This distribution process lasted three weeks overall. The distribution by email (other universities) lasted slightly longer as students had to be reminded to complete the questionnaire.

Ideally, the number of participants would have been higher, but several methodological problems were encountered during the survey. First, gaining access to learners proved very difficult. This was largely due to the restricted time frame of both students and lecturers, and to the lengthy procedure of communicating with them and preparing the distribution. It would have been advisable for students to have completed the questionnaire in class; however, this was impossible due to the very tight teaching schedules of the lecturers, who could not spare fifteen or twenty minutes of their one-hour class. Thus the questionnaire had to be allocated as homework, which might have led to another possible limitation of the study, i.e. students being unwilling to give up their free time and hence their being careless and quick when completing the questionnaire. This concern, however, proved unjustified. The email distribution of the questionnaires was expected to encounter the same problems, yet the students who completed the survey remotely seemed to have taken the time to do so carefully.

#### **8.4.5 Respondent profiles**

While the pilot study allowed some scope in the choice of methods and respondents, the main study had to be restricted, in order for the results to be easily interpreted and analysed. The main criteria for the selection of participants were a) nationality (other than French) b) age (18-30) and c) field of study (French at university level). This information was provided in Part I of the questionnaire, i.e. the information concerning students' general background. Let us discuss this information in greater detail.

##### *Age and level of study*

The age of the respondents considered for the study ranged from 18 to 30 years. I chose students at university level, as I believed that any potential ethical issues would thus be minimised; all respondents were above the age of eighteen years and therefore did not

require parental permission in order to participate in the study. The university age also corresponds to Eckert's (1997) notion of 'young adulthood'. At this age, I believe, learners should have acquired some experience of travelling and meeting native speakers, especially their peers. They can also be expected to have engaged in some sort of interaction and communication with them. I thus expected that they would already have had a degree of exposure to native-speaker patterns of language use, by which I also mean spoken language in general, and youth language in particular.

One person whose age was 40 was excluded on the criterion according to which students had to be of a similar age. The main reason for excluding respondents whose age differed significantly from this age group is that the way languages were taught at the time they were students is likely to have changed. In addition, the length of time for which they had studied French and the amount of time spent abroad might vary significantly. Moreover, the survey dealt primarily with aspects typical of youth language and thus mainly targeted people who were likely to be exposed to this type of speech.

Among the participants, age ranged from 19 to 30 (mean 22.04). In light of the similar age of respondents, it was expected that the way they learnt French (in terms of amount of hours, content of the curriculum and level of French) would not radically differ from learner to learner, and thus the results would be easier to interpret. Table 8.2 outlines the age of respondents.

**Table 8.2:** Age of survey participants

	Range	Mean
Age	19-30	22.04

### *Nationality and mother tongue*

Several British university students were excluded on the criteria of nationality and mother tongue. Among the Queen Mary students, two had both French and British nationality and their mother tongue, i.e. the first language spoken at home, was French. Despite the fact that they had lived in Britain for most of their lives, they spoke French

at home, in addition to which they had also spent a considerable amount of time in a French-speaking country. Thus it was felt that they could not be considered as learners in the same way as their peers of non-French origin.

Not all the students at both Queen Mary and other British universities were British. Five students had another nationality (2 Polish, 1 Greek, 1 German, 1 Dutch). Upon closer examination of their student profiles, however, it was decided that these students should still be included in the study, on the grounds that their university degree was awarded (or was to be awarded) in the United Kingdom and all the other background details were similar to those of other respondents (age, years of study, duration of stay abroad).

However, contrary to the pilot study, it was decided that only students at British universities would be considered for the main study, in order for the sample to be homogenous.

#### *Length of study of French*

The students' length of study varied significantly, from students who had studied French for only three years, to those who had studied it from primary school. The British students had generally started studying at GCSE or A-level. However what was important for my purposes was the fact that students were taking a *degree* in French; such a degree may be considered more systematic and thorough than French courses at the level of primary or secondary school. The mean average for the length of study of French was 8.98 years, as shown in Table 8.3 below. The students' length of study was taken into account in assessing the factors influencing the students' knowledge of informal pragmatic features, as will be shown in later sections.

**Table 8.3:** Length of study of French (in years)

	Range	Mean
Length of study	3-18	8.98

### *Year abroad*

The responses concerning the year-abroad period were used only as complementary information, as it was the overall time spent in a French-speaking country that was of more importance here. A major difference emerged between the second-year students who had not been on a year abroad yet, and the final-year students, the majority of whom had. However, even younger students had spent some time abroad through their own initiative, so drawing general conclusions only from the year-abroad experience would be imprudent. Thus the results of this question were used only as a qualitative contribution to the analysis. However, the following question (i.e. ‘How much time overall have you spent in a French-speaking country?’) was crucial. Unsurprisingly, the length of time spent abroad was generally greater for the final-year students and those who had finished their degree, though it was still very variable. This is due to the fact that the final-year students had a choice of spending either a full or half year in a French-speaking country (or no time at all for those who were exempt). The amount of time spent abroad was also taken into account when assessing the factors influencing the students’ knowledge of informal pragmatic features, as will be shown later.

### *Level of proficiency*

Self-reports of any kind, especially those to do with the subjective rating of language proficiency, might not necessarily reflect reality and should thus be interpreted with caution. It might be the case that certain students are too modest or, on the contrary, too confident in assessing their own language skills and abilities, especially since there is no objective measurement according to which one’s own language skills can be assessed and no clear boundaries that can be drawn between different levels of proficiency. Nonetheless, it was relevant to see how students rated their own level of French.

The mean average for the proficiency level was 2.78, ranging between intermediate and advanced (one student did not provide a response to this question). Whether or not these results reflected the students’ actual knowledge of spoken French could only be partly assessed by their responses to the second part of the questionnaire, in which questions about specific spoken features were posed.



**Table 8.4:** Self-reported level of proficiency

	Number	%
Beginner	1	2
Intermediate	13	25
Advanced	33	65
Almost native	4	8
<hr/>		
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.78</b>	

Scale used: 1–Beginner, 2–Intermediate, 3–Advanced, 4–Almost native

## **8.5 Results and discussion of the survey**

In this section, I present and discuss the findings of the questionnaire designed for the students of French. Following a similar structure to that of the previous section, I present a topic-by-topic analysis of the results for each individual question. A final section summarises the results of the survey in terms of the research questions posed. This is followed by a general discussion of the results and the implications of the questionnaire.

For the purpose of analysis, I divided the participants into two groups, based on the amount of time they had spent in a francophone country. I chose this criterion for several reasons. Firstly, I assumed that the amount of time spent in a francophone country – in a native speaker context – was the most relevant factor influencing students’ acquisition of communicative competence. This variable, as I believe and will argue below, also seemed to have the most impact on the students’ knowledge of informal pragmatic features. It would have made little sense as well as being impractical to divide students according to their year level, since the amount of time they had spent studying French was very variable, and some participants had recently finished their degree.

Secondly, it was not relevant for my purposes to divide the students according to their age or to the length of time of study of French, as the main variable I wished to look at was the amount of time spent abroad. Thus I divided students into two groups: the group of pre-year abroad students (henceforth also referred to as the ‘PRE group’) and the group of post-year abroad students (or the ‘POST group’). The cut-off point I used in the amount of time spent abroad was 8 months, since it emerged from the questionnaire responses that a period of 8 months and above was considered as a full year abroad. It is noteworthy that the assessment of the amount of time abroad was made based on the responses to Question 5, Part I of the questionnaire (‘How much time overall have you spent in a French-speaking country?’) and not on the responses to Question 6 (‘Have you been/did you go on a year abroad as part of your degree programme?’). Table 8.5 shows this distribution of survey participants:

**Table 8.5:** Distribution of survey participants according to time spent abroad

	Number	Average length of time spent abroad (months)
Pre-year abroad (0-7 months)	27	2.67
Post-year abroad (8 months +)	25	15.92
TOTAL	52	9.04

### 8.5.1 Features of spoken French

Knowledge of features of spoken French was measured primarily by means of four examples from spontaneous spoken French, put to the students in Part II of the questionnaire. Questions in each example sought to measure the students’ passive knowledge of the feature (i.e. whether they had come across it and, if so, where), as well as two types of active knowledge (i.e. whether they could translate it into their mother tongue and whether they used it themselves). This section will present each example individually, followed by a discussion of the overall knowledge of spoken features and the statistical results with regard to the responses provided.

### 8.5.1.1 Example 1: General extender *et tout*

As was shown in Chapter 4, *et tout* is by far the most frequently used general extender in my data, and as shown by the comparison of different spoken corpora, it is also very frequent in spoken French in general. This general extender, as was discussed previously, is a common pragmatic feature typical of spontaneous discourse, one with important functions such as hedging, indexing solidarity or shortening speaking turns, thus avoiding imposition. This form, occurring almost exclusively in speech, may rarely be seen in writing or discussed as a lexical expression in foreign language classes. It was mainly for this reason that I decided to include it among the pragmatic features discussed in the questionnaire.

Students' responses revealed that the general extender *et tout* is an expression which they noticed relatively easily compared to other pragmatic expressions described further below. This may be due to the fact that speakers are on the whole much more aware of those features which have an equivalent in their mother tongue (see below for equivalents to *et tout*). In addition, the functional equivalent in their native language might have the same functions and even the same or a similar form. If this is the case, there might be a *positive transfer* between the native and the target language, which might help students to infer the meaning of the given feature more easily. Table 8.6 below provides the distribution of responses with respect to the students' active and passive knowledge of this general extender.

**Table 8.6: General extender: *et tout***

	a) Have heard	b) Can translate* (mean)	c) Use themselves
Pre-year abroad	11 (27) / 41%	1.41	5 (27) / 19%
Post-year abroad	19 (25) / 76%	1.36	11 (25) / 44%
TOTAL	30 (52) / 58%	1.39	16 (52) / 31%

\* Translation mean (2 – correct, 1 – approximately correct, 0 – no translation)

Many languages use general extenders with a structure relatively similar to that of French *et tout* (e.g. English 'and that', 'and all that' or 'and everything', German 'und so', Spanish 'y todo eso' or 'y eso', Italian 'e tutto'). These equivalents were provided by native speakers of different languages, who also helped me verify the students'

translations, paying particular attention to maintaining stylistic and functional equivalence between the two languages. Due to many cross-linguistic similarities in the use of general extenders, one might have expected that learners would identify them correctly, or at least hazard a guess at a natural equivalent in their mother tongue. However, even if very close equivalents exist, some students provided an incorrect translation of *on s'est regardé et tout* (e.g. 'we looked at everything but...', 'everybody looked at each other but' etc.), possibly due to their misunderstanding of certain other words in the phrase. It was also the case that certain translations were too literal, and therefore sounded artificial. For example, a native speaker of Spanish confirmed, in two cases where the translation 'y todo' was used, that 'y todo eso' or 'y eso' were better functional equivalents of *et tout*. One possible explanation for this finding is perhaps that the speaker/learner does not have sufficient pragmatic knowledge of the given feature, i.e. sufficient pragmatic competence in the target language. Alternatively, he/she might be influenced by the foreign language to the point of not being able to see that the translation in the native-language does not sound natural. Such an observation would raise an interesting, albeit tentative hypothesis: perhaps different languages are permanently influenced by one another as a result of this process (in bilingual speech) and this fosters cross-cultural language change. In this particular case, it might be possible that a general extender which was not used in a given language is gradually 'brought over' from or assimilated to another language. Thus, even a once unnatural expression can become natural over time. This would be an interesting phenomenon to examine, especially in relation to certain pragmatic constructions such as general extenders or discourse markers, and notably in relation to English which as a global lingua franca might have a considerable influence over other languages.

In light of the cross-linguistic similarities, *et tout* was, on the whole, a relatively easy term to understand. The results in Table 8.6 reveal that more than 40 per cent of the students had heard the expression and most of them were able to translate it. That POST group students were much more likely to be familiar with the term would seem logical, considering that most of them have already spent more than half a year in a francophone country. As we can see in detail, the POST group students had a higher score for recognising the feature: 19 out of 25 versus 11 out of 27 for the PRE group.

Considering these results, one may wonder which factors have the most influence on the students' knowledge and use of informal pragmatic features such as those in my data, in particular whether it is the length of time spent in a francophone country or the length of time of study of French. I compared these two factors in relation to all four spoken features (conflated) and carried out a statistical analysis, which is presented later in Section 8.5.2.

Among the four examples of spoken features used in this part of the questionnaire, *et tout* had quite a high score in terms of knowledge and active use (i.e. students found it relatively easy to recognise, translate/guess at a translation and reuse). A possible reason for this tendency might have to do with the fact that the term *et tout* has quite a rudimentary, uncomplicated structure composed of two words that are very common and learnt relatively early. Thus the term might be easily recognised just by logical inference based on the meaning of the two words of which it consists.

#### **8.5.1.2 Example 2: multifunctional term *genre***

As substantially described in Chapter 3, *genre* is a multifunctional feature typical of spoken language. Its relatively non-standard use stripped of prepositions tends to be associated with the speech of young people and considered informal. This form exists in parallel with the more traditional use of the word, employed in phrases such as *de ce genre* or *le genre de* ('of this kind' or 'the kind of'). The fact that the traditional use of the word is also relatively common in written language was reflected in the responses to question (a), where several students reported having found the expression in the media and in French literature. In fact, prepositional phrases containing *genre* are quite frequent in descriptions of all sorts, and can often be found even in newspaper or magazine articles (e.g. *ce genre de choix*, *idées de ce genre*, as can more informal uses such as *une suédoise genre ABBA*)<sup>52</sup>. They may also have been thinking of other meanings of *genre*, e.g. literary genre. Three respondents also reported having heard

---

<sup>52</sup> Websites accessed on 20 March 2010:

<http://www.liberation.fr/societe/0101595960-l-histoire-ca-mene-a-quoi>;

<http://www.liberation.fr/livres/1201275-livres-les-manuscrits-ninja-les-sept-lances-d-aizu>;

<http://www.liberation.fr/livres/0101623744-mondrag-n-tout-feu-tout-flamme>.

this term in their French class; yet, arguably, they might have been referring to the traditional use of the word.

Table 8.7 below indicates that slightly fewer students reported having heard the term *genre* (24 out of 52, i.e. 46 per cent) compared to the general extender *et tout* (58 per cent). The ability to translate this term and its reported active use were also lower: only 5 out of 27 PRE-group students claimed to use the term *genre* and even though POST-group students claimed to use it more, the number does not surpass one third of the total.

**Table 8.7: Multifunctional term *genre*.**

	a) Have heard	b) Can translate* (mean)	c) Use themselves
Pre-year abroad	9 (27) / 33%	1.33	5 (27) / 19%
Post-year abroad	15 (25) / 60%	1.24	8 (25) / 32%
TOTAL	24 (52) / 46%	1.29	13 (52) / 25%

\* Translation mean (2 – correct, 1 – approximately correct, 0 – no translation)

The analysis of the translation provided by the students showed that not all students were able to capture the meaning of *genre* in the particular semantic context of the example given (*on peut faire ça un autre jour, genre demain matin*). The English equivalents considered as appropriate were ‘like’, ‘for instance’ and ‘for example’. There were a few instances of slightly ‘shifted’ translation, such as ‘maybe’, ‘perhaps’ or ‘probably’, suggesting that students were merely guessing, and which were rated as 1 on a scale from 0 to 2 in terms of appropriateness. In attempts to translate the expression, some respondents provided inaccurate translations of *genre demain matin* (e.g. ‘just not tomorrow morning’, ‘except for tomorrow morning’ etc.).

When asked whether they use the term in question, several students provided an example of its traditional use (e.g. *les choses de ce genre, ce genre de truc*). However, what was of interest here was to find out whether they used the informal equivalent, that is, *genre* alone. The results thus show that some students failed to comprehend the stylistic and pragmatic nuance of the original sentence given as an example from the data. Admittedly, it might not have been sufficiently explained to them that this question/example was aimed at the informal use of *genre* alone, without the use of the

article *le* and the preposition *de*. Nevertheless, the results suggest that the learners are familiar with this term, albeit not used in this particular informal way.

### 8.5.1.3 Example 3: vague language – *machin*

The term *machin* is usually viewed as a mere lexical expression characteristic of informal, colloquial style. Due to its indeterminate meaning, this expression is commonly thought of as vague language. Nonetheless, this does not mean that it has no function in interaction, or that it merely serves to fill gaps in speech. As was argued in Chapter 4, *machin* can serve certain pragmatic functions of the same order as general extenders (such as completing a phrase or a list of items, filling gaps in reported speech, shortening speaking turns or inviting the interlocutor to co-construct the meaning of the utterance by suggesting that there is ‘more’ but there is no need to continue). In fact, the term can be used in two ways, as illustrated by the following examples from my data. It can be used as a substitute for a word that the speaker is unsure of or does not remember (e.g. *tu peux me passer le machin qui est là bas?*, ‘can you pass me the thingy over there?’), in which case it can be said to have a *lexical* meaning. In this context it mostly occurs in conjunction with an article and, as is usually the case with nouns, it can be found in a subject or object position. However, when *machin* is placed at the end of a clause, phrase or enumerative list (systematically without an article), it has a much more obscure meaning – one that is more salient at the level of *discourse*. The latter use was the object of the present example (*mais bon après quand tu vas avoir des gosses machin ... ça sera plus dur*; ‘later when you have kids and stuff... it will be harder’), in which I attempted to show that *machin* displays the same or very similar characteristics as a general extender, as I also argued in earlier chapters.

**Table 8.8: Vague language – *machin***

	a) Have heard	b) Can translate* (mean)	c) Use themselves
Pre-year abroad	5 (27) / 19%	0.30	1 (27) / 4%
Post-year abroad	19 (25) / 76%	1.00	12 (25) / 48%
TOTAL	24 (52) / 46%	0.64	13 (52) / 25%

\* Translation mean (2 – correct, 1 – approximately correct, 0 – no translation)

On the issue of whether or not the students had come across this expression, the results were quite similar to those in previous examples. It is relatively unsurprising that very few PRE-group students were familiar with the expression, considering the limited amount of time spent abroad. The POST-group students, on the other hand, noticed this term more frequently. The rate for translation of this term was twice as low as with the term *genre*, and although the use of *machin* was overall the same as the use of *genre* (i.e. 25 per cent), only one PRE-group student claimed to use it.

It emerges from the results of the translation exercise that students tend to think of *machin* as a purely lexical word. It came as no surprise to see that most of the respondents translated this expression as ‘thingy’, ‘something’, or explained it using French equivalents such as *truc*. In this particular context, however, we can see that it could be translated with a vast array of other functional constructions such as ‘and stuff’ ‘and everything’, ‘and everything like that’, and ‘things like that’. It is apparent that in this context *machin* functions as a general extender, yet perhaps not all students were aware of this usage or, if they were, they may have been unable to explain it appropriately. It was quite curious to find that the PRE-group subjects had such a low rate for translation (only 2 students translated the term appropriately). This does not necessarily indicate that the students were totally unfamiliar with the term in question; in fact, they might simply have been puzzled by the following slang term *gosses* (‘kids’) which might have made the task of translating the phrase rather confusing. That is, if a student did not know two key words constituting the overall meaning of the sentence, in this case *machin* and *gosses*, it was hardly possible to translate it. Thus it was likely that only those students who had spent a considerable amount of time abroad could be familiar with such informal vocabulary items.

Despite these difficulties, some students did capture the nuance of *machin* as a general extender. It was interesting to see that some advanced students translated it as ‘and all that’, ‘that kind of thing’, ‘or something’, ‘etcetera’ or ‘y todo eso’ in Spanish. As I explained in Chapter 4, general extenders can be semantically divided into two groups: *adjunctive*, e.g. ‘and stuff’, ‘and all’, and *disjunctive*, e.g. ‘or something’, ‘or whatever’ (see Overstreet, 1999). It can be argued that it makes little sense to attribute an absolute and definite value to vague terms of this type, since their meaning is relatively difficult to grasp. The fact that students provided both adjunctive and disjunctive translations of



*machin* tends to confirm the claim made in earlier sections that this term can be understood either as adjunctive or disjunctive, depending on the context and its subjective understanding. Several native speakers confirmed that *machin* in this particular case can be replaced by other colloquial expressions of a disjunctive type, such as *ou quoi* or *ou quelque chose comme ça*, but also by adjunctive *et tout* or *(et) tout ça*:

- 297) *Quand tu auras des enfants ou quoi, ça sera plus dur*  
(‘When you have kids or something, it will be harder’)
- 298) *Quand tu auras des enfants et tout ça, ça sera plus dur*  
(‘When you have kids and all that, it will be harder’)

Some students provided comments as to the usage of this term; most of them associated it with a non-standard, informal, colloquial register; some went as far as defining it as a slang term. This association would appear to indicate that students tend to correlate simple colloquial terms typical of spoken language with slang. This correlation is, however, not entirely adequate. Slang is a construct that is not precisely defined in the literature. Andersson and Trudgill (1992: 69) argue that slang is ‘language use below the neutral stylistic level’, which in itself is a ‘relative concept’. Therefore, changes in ‘neutral and formal usage will lead to changes in what is seen as slang.’ Thus they attempt to characterise slang in terms of what it is and what it is not, drawing up a list of the following traits (1992: 69-80):

- Slang is
- a) typical of informal situations
  - b) typical of spoken language
  - c) found in words, not in grammar
  - d) creative
  - e) often short-lived
  - f) often conscious
  - g) group-related
- Slang is *not*
- a) dialect
  - b) swearing
  - c) register

d) cant, argot<sup>53</sup> or jargon

Returning to the above observation that students tend to correlate spoken language with slang, it can now be explained why this correlation is, for several reasons, not entirely adequate. First, slang relates to vocabulary rather than grammar. However, as we can see, the examples of spoken features used in my data cannot be described solely in terms of vocabulary; they have, in fact, more complex functional roles which operate at the intersection of grammar, syntax and discourse. Since these expressions are often used as discourse markers, it would be hard to find them in a slang dictionary. Secondly, slang is usually described as group-related and often short-lived. Here, the features from my data do not exactly fit the description either, since their use is not restricted to any particular group; often their use does not even seem to be restricted exclusively to young people or to be short-lived.

Returning to our discussion, although *machin* is undoubtedly a colloquial word, it is not used only by people who belong to a particular group. This association with slang was also mentioned with reference to *et tout*, *genre* and *il y a*. The fact that students tend to treat slang and simple spoken / colloquial vocabulary as the same suggests that there are misconceptions in their knowledge of certain linguistic terms, and perhaps that many judge simple colloquial expressions as far more taboo than they actually are. Another possibility is that their understanding of slang is simply just associated with colloquial and informal spoken vocabulary rather than slang as described above.

Responses to question (a) in example (3) did not reveal any surprising facts. It was to be expected that native speaker production would be the most frequent source where students could encounter an expression like *machin*. However, several students reported having heard the term also during class (notably from their lecturer, as one student mentioned). This suggests once again that *machin* should not be defined in terms of

---

<sup>53</sup> Gumperz (1971: 86) defines *argot* as ‘any speech variety distinct from that used around the home and the local peer group which serves as the norm in one or more socially definable communication situation.’ While French *argot* translates in English as *slang*, the English term *argot* seems more restricted than *slang*.

slang or taboo vocabulary, since it is readily accessible in informal speech, and even in a fairly formal setting.

#### 8.5.1.4 Example 4: presentational and emphatic *il y a (y a)*

In topic-prominent languages, the use of presentational structures to introduce new or partially new referents into discourse are quite frequent. This was apparent in my data, in which two particular presentational structures were comparatively salient: *il y a / y a* and constructions with *avoir* (e.g. *tu as/ t'as*). For this reason, I decided to include one of these constructions in the questionnaire, as a syntactic-pragmatic feature typical of spoken language. My goal here was to inquire into the *presentative* and *emphatic* use of *il y a*, which is most frequently presented in a *cleft* form. It should be noted that I was not interested in the *locative* use of *il y a* (e.g. *il y a du lait au frigidaire*), yet despite my illustrative example of a cleft, many students misunderstood this task when asked about their active use, and provided examples of a locative *il y a* instead. There were some missing responses, which might be due to the fact that students were not familiar with the short form of *il y a*, i.e. *y a*, and thus omitted this question. Table 8.9 provides a distribution of responses concerning *il y a*.

**Table 8.9: *Il y a***

	a) Have heard	b) Can translate* (mean)	c) Use themselves
Pre-year abroad	19 (27) / 70%	1.15	10 (27) / 37%
Post-year abroad	20 (25) / 80%	1.32	10 (25) / 40%
TOTAL	39 (52) / 75%	1.23	20 (52) / 38%

\* Translation mean (2 – correct, 1 – approximately correct, 0 – no translation)

The analysis of question (a) in example 4 showed that almost all students have heard this expression, particularly from French native speakers. Yet this result must be interpreted carefully; in fact, it remains an open question whether what the students had in mind was a locative or a presentational use of *il y a*. Since it is virtually impossible to ascertain which one the students had in mind, it was felt more appropriate to judge this expression by looking at students' own examples of the type of *il y a* used. However, as we can see, a majority of students were familiar with this construction, albeit sometimes

only with its locative, non-cleft form (e.g. *il y a du lait au frigidaire*). This shows, once again, that certain multifunctional constructions can have either *literal* or *discourse-pragmatic* purposes, and that these should be distinguished from each other. Discourse-pragmatic structures seem to be learnt at a much later stage of foreign language acquisition.

The students reported having seen or heard the expression not only in the speech of native speakers, but also in the media, in class and in French literature. However, the translation task revealed a more complicated situation. It should be remembered that not all languages use presentational structures in order to introduce referents into the discourse. Some might use completely different syntactic constructions (other than the *il y a*-type), others achieve the presentational function by manipulating word order or by means of intonation. Native speakers of English confirmed that in this particular case, constructions such as *there are / there's / it's* are not the best functional equivalent of *il y a*. A similar pragmatic function can be arrived at by using a construction with *existential have* ('I have my parents coming over tomorrow') or by means of intonation, with an emphasis placed on the semantically important word ('My parents are coming tomorrow'). In spite of many such cross-linguistic differences, a large number of students provided literal translations which arguably sounded quite unnatural ('there are my parents who', 'it's my parents who', *etc.*). It emerges from this task that students might be incapable of dissociating themselves from the structure of the foreign language and tend to translate individual forms literally, instead of looking for naturally sounding pragmatic equivalents.

Responses to question (c) were slightly more telling. Here, students were asked whether they used the term *il y a* and had to provide an example in context, which ultimately revealed their knowledge of the difference between the locative and the presentational form of this term. Again, this question proved slightly difficult to analyse, since some respondents reported using this term without providing an example of it. Overall, 20 students out of 52 reported using this expression, but only 15 of them provided an example of a cleft construction. Still, of the four spoken examples provided in the questionnaire, *il y a* proved to be the easiest to understand and reuse, possibly because it is very common, especially as a locative.

### 8.5.2 Knowledge of spoken features: results

For the second part of the questionnaire, it was considered appropriate to conduct a statistical analysis of the results, most notably in order to establish what factors had the most influence on the knowledge of spoken features. Two factors were of particular interest here: a) period of time spent abroad and b) length of time studying French. In order to establish whether either of these two factors had an effect on the passive and active knowledge of the spoken features, the Pearson correlation test was chosen. This test is commonly used to ascertain whether there is a relationship between two variables, and what the direction of this relationship is (i.e. positive, negative). Further, this test is used when the data is distributed normally; in this case, the independent variables (i.e. time spent abroad and length of time studying French) were distributed relatively normally and no strong outliers were present. For some questions in Parts III and IV of the questionnaire, Student's t-test was used in order to find out whether there was a statistical difference among the pre-year abroad students and the post-year abroad students in their views of French classes and their experiences abroad.

One would expect that both independent factors would affect students' knowledge of spoken features more or less, but it was relevant to see which one had more influence and whether the influence was significant. In calculating the correlations between these factors, individual responses were coded in spreadsheet format, which were then exported to the statistical analysis program mentioned previously. In the Pearson correlation test, the four features (*et tout, genre, machin, il y a*) were analysed together, which enabled me to gain more insight into the students' overall knowledge and use of pragmatic features typical of spoken language, and to see whether the differences among the independent variables were statistically significant. Tables 8.10 – 8.12 below outline the statistical results of the Pearson correlation tests with respect to the dependent variables a) knowledge, b) translation and c) use, respectively. The number of responses (N) represents the number of respondents (52) multiplied by the number of features analysed (4), dummy-coded for the purpose of statistical analysis.

**Table 8.10:** Correlations between the *knowledge* of spoken features and the independent factors

	N	Pearson's $r$ <sup>54</sup>	Significance
Time abroad	208	0.389	0.000
Length of study	208	0.103	0.139

**Table 8.11:** Correlations between the *translation* of spoken features and the independent factors

	N	Pearson's $r$	Significance
Time abroad	208	0.260	0.000
Length of study	208	0.024	0.736

**Table 8.12:** Correlations between the *use* of spoken features and the independent factors

	N	Pearson's $r$	Significance
Time abroad	208	0.371	0.000
Length of study	208	0.060	0.390

From Table 8.10, we can see that there is a positive correlation between the amount of time spent abroad and the knowledge of the given features ( $r = 0.389$ ). The seemingly weak correlation between the length of study of French and the knowledge of the features ( $r = 0.103$ ) is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.139), i.e. is above the significance threshold of 0.05.

With regard to translation (Table 8.11), the results show that there is a weak, positive correlation between the amount of time spent abroad and the ability to translate the given features, and this correlation is statistically significant. However, there is no correlation between translation and the length of study of French ( $r = 0.024$ ). We can thus claim that it is only the amount of time spent abroad that has a significant effect on the ability to correctly translate the informal pragmatic features analysed in the study.

Similar results can be observed in Table 8.12, which relates to the students' use of the given features. There is a significant positive correlation between the amount of time

<sup>54</sup> Pearson's  $r$  = Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient

spent abroad and the use of the features ( $r = 0.371$ ); however, again, there is no correlation between the use of the features and the length of study of French ( $r = 0.06$ ).

In summary, the results show that the amount of time spent abroad has much more influence on students' knowledge of discourse-pragmatic features than the length of time students spend studying French at school and university. Interestingly, in the three cases studied (i.e. knowledge, translation and self-reported use), the effect of the length of study of French was not statistically significant (i.e. in all three cases the p-value was above the significance threshold of 0.05). This does not necessarily imply that students do not improve their level of French with increasing years of study, but that features typical of spoken language are only acquired after a certain period of time has been spent abroad. This finding is not new, and is supported by previous studies. For instance, Dewaele and Regan (2002) tested the effect of several independent variables (sex, personality, length of study, amount of time spent abroad, frequency of contact with native speakers) on the dependent variable: the omission vs. retention of the particle *ne*. They found that the intensity and the length of study of French had no effect on the learners' sociolinguistic competence, and that one of the few factors that affected and positively contributed to the acquisition of this competence was the amount of 'authentic interaction' with native speakers.

### **8.5.3 Experience of learning French as a foreign language**

This section of the questionnaire was aimed at assessing the learners' individual experience of learning French as a foreign language at school and university. This part consisted of two questions requiring answers on a 5-point Likert scale which, due to their structure, were relatively straightforward to evaluate. Following previous language attitude studies (e.g. Flaitz 1988, Oakes 2001) and specific learner-oriented studies (e.g. Dewaele 2004a-e, Dewaele and Pavlenko 2002), it was decided that this type of scale was also appropriate for the purposes of the questionnaire. Question (1) ('My French classes are / were very varied and covered all aspects of the French language') was thus rated on the following scale: 1= completely agree, 2= somewhat agree, 3= undecided, 4= somewhat disagree, 5= completely disagree; and question (2) was rated similarly: 1= perfectly well, 2= well, 3= quite well, 4= not very well, 5= not at all. Topics in question

(2) ('Thinking about your French classes, how well do / did they cover the following aspects?'), i.e. reading, listening, speaking, formal contexts and informal contexts, were analysed individually on this scale. For the Likert-scale answers, t-tests were used to examine potential differences between the groups.

The results of the students' opinions about their experience of learning French are shown in Tables 8.13 and 8.14 below. These results include the means and the numerical values for each of the two questions; Table 8.14 is divided into separate topics, as outlined in the questionnaire. It is to be noted that if there were missing responses to any of the questions, the table provides the number of analysed responses out of the total number of potential responses in brackets.

**Table 8.13:** Experience of French classes

Q1: My French classes are / were very varied and covered all aspects of the French language					
	N	Mean	t	df.	p-value
Pre-year abroad	27	2.22	0.8683	50	0.3894
Post-year abroad	25	2.44			

Scale: 1= completely agree, 2= somewhat agree, 3= undecided, 4= somewhat disagree, 5= completely disagree

As we can see in Table 8.13, question (1) itself is not very revealing, suggesting merely that students are somewhere in the middle between the two extremes represented on a scale from 1 to 5, leaning towards 'somewhat agreeing'. Although at first it would seem that the PRE-group students are slightly more positive about the content of their language classes (mean= 2.22) than the POST-group students (mean= 2.44), the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.3894$ ). Therefore, the responses that both groups gave to the following question, focusing on different aspects of foreign language classes, were analysed altogether.



**Table 8.14:** Experience of French classes

Q2: Thinking about your French classes, how well do / did they cover the following aspects?		
	Number of responses	Mean
Reading	47 (52)	2.06
Listening	47 (52)	2.26
Speaking	47 (52)	2.85
Formal contexts	47 (52)	2.09
Informal contexts	47 (52)	3.15

Scale: 1= perfectly well, 2= well, 3= quite well, 4= not very well, 5= not at all

From Table 8.14, we can see that reading had the overall highest rate amongst the three aspects mentioned (mean=2.06), while listening and speaking, respectively, had a lower rate (mean=2.26 for listening and mean=2.85 for speaking). This suggests that, according to the students, language classes prioritise reading, followed by listening and speaking. This observation is not altogether surprising; due to time and space limitations in class, it could be expected that students perhaps do not have a chance to practise speaking as much as they would like to, while reading and listening – as passive/receptive activities – are perhaps more easily dealt with and therefore given preference in class.

With regards to the contexts exploited in language classes, the results were similar, leaning towards ‘well’ with respect to formal contexts (mean= 2.09) and ‘quite well’ with respect to informal contexts (mean= 3.15). This question makes better sense if analysed in conjunction with the qualitative comments in the next section of the questionnaire, which provided more insight into what students actually thought about their language classes. However, the results do suggest that informal contexts tend to be less covered in class than formal contexts.

### 8.5.4 Experience of learning French in context

In part IV of the questionnaire, only questions (1) and (3) were analysed on a 5-point Likert scale. Others were analysed in a more in-depth, qualitative way, either because they were open-ended or because they had several possible answers. The results for each of questions (1) – (3) are shown in Tables 8.15 – 8.17 below.

**Table 8.15.** Experience of language in French-speaking contexts

Q1: In the French-speaking country, I felt comfortable speaking French					
	N	Mean	t	df.	p-value
Pre-year abroad	25 (27)	2.44	0.3523	48	0.7261
Post-year abroad	25	2.32			

Scale: 1= yes, immediately; 2= yes, but only after a while; 3= undecided; 4= no, I had a few problems speaking French; 5= no, I had a lot of difficulty speaking French

The results for question (1) were quite predictable. This question is, again, better understood when considered in relation to individual comments provided further in the questionnaire. As we can see, students' responses ranged between point 2 and 3 on the scale, suggesting that they did not feel comfortable speaking French immediately, mostly because they had a few problems at the beginning and it took them a while to get used to speaking. The following question revealed more about the actual problems they encountered in a native-speaker environment. Individual responses were counted and represented in percentage values in Table 8.16, indicating which aspects posed the most difficulties for students in the target country.

**Table 8.16.** Experience of language in native environment

Q2: When I did not understand French, it was because (...)	N	%
People spoke too quickly	41 (52)	36.6
People had an accent that I could not understand	12 (52)	10.7
People used words that I did not know	32 (52)	28.6
People used a very colloquial language	26 (52)	23.2
People used a very formal language	1 (52)	0.9

The percentage values given are calculated with respect to the sum of all answers provided (i.e. 112)

This question was especially aimed at problematic language areas in native-speaker production such as vocabulary, accent or rapidity of speech. It can be clearly seen from these results that rapidity of speech was the area that posed students the most problems (36.6% out of all answers), followed by unknown vocabulary (28.6%), a too colloquial style of language (23.2%), an unfamiliar accent (10.7%) and a too formal language (0.9%).

Table 8.17 below shows the results for question (3), which sought to measure the extent to which the learners felt adequately prepared for the native-speaker environment by their language classes. From these results, it would seem that the students who have spent more time abroad were, retrospectively, slightly more critical of their foreign language classes. However, again, statistically this difference was not significant.

**Table 8.17.** Experience of language in native environment

Q3: When speaking to native speakers, did you feel that your university classes adequately prepared you for the language used in a natural context?					
	N	Mean	t	df.	p-value
Pre-year abroad	23 (27)	3.13	1.2445	44	0.2199
Post-year abroad	23 (25)	3.43			

Scale: 1= perfectly well, 2= well, 3= quite well, 4= not very well, 5= not at all

Question (4) (i.e. ‘If you were a language teacher at university, what aspects of language would you cover in more detail than was the case when you studied?’) was analysed qualitatively, identifying the key areas that students claimed to be insufficiently covered by their language classes. Not all students provided an answer to this question. Of those who did provide a response, the majority (91 per cent) agreed that more emphasis should be given to speaking and more every-day, informal type of language situations. Although this was the most common point stated in the responses, other comments were given, which are summarised as follows:

- more emphasis on oral production, speaking (as ‘that is the most important aspect of language learning’, as several respondents noted)
- more general conversations (practical, natural every-day topics as opposed to ‘set piece’)
- more informal and colloquial style (‘not necessarily slang, but less formal language’, as one respondent noted)
- more areas of language, not just grammar
- more discussions
- more emphasis on general conversational skills
- translation tasks
- listening
- improvisation
- reading and writing (noted by two students only)
- listening to radio and TV clips (which provides an opportunity to ‘hear language in context’)

Opinions on this question were rather divided. On one hand, there were students who thought that more emphasis should be given to speaking and everyday informal language, noting that foreign language classes at university tend to be oriented mostly towards writing and reading. On the other hand, several students remarked that there was no need to change anything, as spoken language can be learnt abroad and that is the way it should be. In fact, such views do have some grounds. Considering the time and space limitations of foreign language classrooms, it is often very difficult to immerse students and provide them with opportunities to practise speaking and to address

informal language. There are many other factors at play; for example, more extrovert students usually tend to take the opportunity to speak while more introverted speakers can be left behind. The classes might also be too short and not frequent enough; therefore it might be unrealistic to aim at providing all students with equal and regular opportunities to practise spoken language. Students also claimed that classes should cover more informal, colloquial language but not necessarily slang. They considered it best to start with a formal register while the informal one should only follow after a solid grasp of formal language has been acquired. They also affirmed that language teachers should constantly provide students with material that keeps them ‘in touch’ with *all forms* of the foreign language (including informal style). In short, the respondents were on the whole demanding of more opportunities to learn and practise spoken language based on informal and natural everyday situations: nearly all of the students who responded to this question touched upon this point in one way or another. Those who did not provide an answer, thus perhaps implying that they would not make any changes to their language classes, were less numerous (16 out of 52). However, we can see that the majority, i.e. two thirds of the respondents, felt that their language classes could be improved in some way, especially by incorporating more spoken language and the language of ‘informal’, ‘everyday’ situations.

Question (5) enquired about strategies that helped learners improve their speaking skills. Some examples were provided (e.g. watching French films, taking notes) in order for the students to understand what was meant by ‘learning strategies’. This qualitative open-ended question yielded a relatively large amount of feedback. The most commonly addressed points are summarised in Table 8.18, arranged in descending order from the most common to the least common strategy. Each activity mentioned has the number of responses that mentioned that activity as well as the percentage value relative to the sum of all responses provided (i.e. 123). In order to facilitate the analysis, responses that were similar were grouped into ‘themes’. The media, for instance, had been divided into four subgroups: visual (e.g. TV, film, cinema), audio (radio), print (newspapers) and online information formats (e.g. Internet, chat, forums). Note that students were able to mention more than one strategy: the total number mentioned was 123.

**Table 8.18.** Learning strategies

Activity	N	%
Visual media (French films, TV, cinema, DVD)	37 (52)	30.10
Immersion (e.g. spending time with native speakers, travelling, living abroad)	24 (52)	19.51
Vocabulary (noting down words and reusing them)	10 (52)	8.13
French radio	10 (52)	8.13
Contemporary literature	8 (52)	6.50
French newspapers	7 (52)	5.70
Artistic activities (theatre / singing courses)	5 (52)	4.07
Internet (chat, forums, online social networks)	4 (52)	3.25
French music	4 (52)	3.25
Courses abroad	2 (52)	1.63
Other	12 (52)	9.76

The percentage values given are calculated with respect to the sum of all answers provided (i.e. 123)

By way of response to question (5), the majority of students reported using the visual media as the most common learning strategy. An interesting comment made in relation to the visual media was that films and programmes should, as often as possible, be watched with subtitles in the target language, as it allows the association of written and spoken language and thus facilitates the acquisition of new vocabulary. Among their favourite films and programmes, some respondents cited specific titles such as *La roue de la fortune*, *Secret Story*, comedies with *Gad Elmaleh* and films made by *La troupe du Splendid*. Some also mentioned their favourite TV channels such as *France 2*.

The second most frequent learning strategy mentioned by the students was *immersion* in a native-speaking environment. This is a rather surprising result, as one would have expected that spending time with native speakers would be the most important factor in an effective approach to language learning. Arguably, this result does not so much suggest that students do not consider immersion to be the most important factor in language learning, as imply that not all students have had the opportunity to be immersed in a native-speaker environment yet. Secondly, the media was given as an

example of a learning strategy and students were thus perhaps more inclined towards mentioning it in their responses.

Another common learning strategy was taking notes. Students frequently reported noting down new vocabulary, looking up exact definitions and re-using new expressions that they have acquired in this way. In more or less similar words, they mentioned that they tried to observe the ways in which new constructions were used by native speakers, and tried to re-use these constructions in similar ways. This appears to be an effective learning strategy and requires that students be receptive to the target language that surrounds them. It also requires a degree of meta-linguistic skill, that is, being able to 'reflect upon' the way words are used in a foreign language. Overall, it was rather surprising to see that only 10 respondents cited this strategy.

As seen in Table 8.18, the second most frequent medium used as a learning device was the radio (surprisingly, before the Internet). Admittedly, there might be some overlap between these strategies, as many learners surely listen to the radio *through* the Internet, where a large variety of French-speaking radio channels are readily available. Unfortunately, though, students did not expand on this issue and did not provide concrete examples of radio channels which they like – except for one speaker who mentioned *France Culture*, an illustrative example of a radio oriented towards the spoken word (as opposed to music). Listening to the radio in a foreign language is generally considered as a good strategy for passive learning, and foreign language learners could use the radio as often as they can, at least as a background sound. In his portrayal of a 'good language learner', Naiman et al. (1996: 35) also argue that 'receptive activities aid language acquisition'. He further suggests that students should strive to achieve exposure to *meaningful* language. They should, for instance, seek out foreign-language topics and 'kill two birds with one stone' by listening to something they would be interested in if they heard it in their native tongue.

Students also agreed that an effective learning strategy is reading French contemporary literature and French daily newspapers, such as *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* or *Libération*. Several students also remarked that a good way of learning French in context is through participating in artistic activities, such as theatre, improvised performances or singing. Surprisingly, only four students mentioned using the Internet as a learning tool, despite

the fact that it is very easily accessible and most students probably use it daily. Some students reported using social networks such as Facebook, as well as online forums and chats in French. An equal number of students agreed that listening to music is a good method of learning new vocabulary and language constructions used in context. Two students mentioned taking ‘courses abroad’ as an effective learning strategy.

The category marked as ‘other’ includes rare comments which were too idiosyncratic to be included in either group. Interestingly, some students provided examples of specific learning strategies that can be explained in terms of their individual linguistic efforts at developing a better communicative competence. These include a type of ‘post-productive’ learning (remembering unknown words used by native speakers, looking them up in the dictionary, reusing them, practising speaking alone, mimicking gestures and language constructions used by native speakers, studying linguistics and patterns of speech, learning phonetics *etc*). Other activities that the students mentioned are more related to the actual *communication* process (e.g. getting confident in grammar and not being afraid to make mistakes). This is consistent with Rubin’s (1975: 45) description of a ‘good language learner’ as being ‘a willing and accurate guesser’; having a strong drive to communicate; being uninhibited and willing to make mistakes; in short, a good learner should make full use of his/her linguistic experiences, even incomplete ones, in order to learn. Returning to the students’ comments on learning strategies, some responses to this question were more related to *motivation factors* than conscious *learning strategies* (e.g. ‘having friendly lecturers’), which suggests that some students might have misunderstood the term ‘learning strategies’.

Looking at a possible relationship between part II (knowledge of spoken features) and part V (learning experience) of the questionnaire (from a strictly qualitative and intuitive point of view), I discovered that the students who reported employing conscious strategies and out-of-class practices were on the whole more successful in recognising the pragmatic spoken features discussed in this thesis. A similar observation has been made in earlier studies, for instance by Huang and Van Naerssen (1987: 290) who noted that ‘students who were more successful in oral communication reported employing functional practice strategies more frequently than the less successful ones.’ In my results, successful students also appeared more motivated in terms of their individual efforts associated with language learning: they made metacognitive



observations about their way of learning, evaluated their strategies and their outcome, provided statements about their proficiency, pinpointed specific areas of difficulty, commented on their progress and expressed beliefs about the usefulness of their strategies. Although it is not sure to what extent they actually pursue their strategies, the majority of students reported using at least two or three.

## **8.6 Summary of questionnaire results and discussion**

In this section, the results of the questionnaire are briefly summarised and discussed in relation to the initial hypotheses and questions posed at the outset of the study. This is followed by a discussion of its implications for language learning and a general conclusion.

One of my initial hypotheses was that the language learnt in foreign language classes might be dissociated from the ‘real’ language the students encounter in a native-speaking context. This hypothesis was investigated directly with respect to students’ own views about spoken language and about the content of their classes, and indirectly from their knowledge of spoken features. The first part of the questionnaire revealed that not all students were familiar with the spoken features provided in the examples. As expected, those students who had spent more time in a French-speaking country had a better knowledge of spoken language. This observation was related to the amount of time spent abroad, rather than to the amount of time spent learning French.

Most students reported a fairly positive attitude towards their language classes and the wide scope of aspects that they cover (overall mean = 2.33, leaning towards ‘somewhat agreeing’). But while it is true that they were satisfied overall with the content of the curriculum, a majority did note that spoken language and oral practice *were not* addressed sufficiently. These results provide some evidence for the observation made earlier that the foreign language learnt in the classroom does seem to be dissociated from the ‘language spoken in a native context’ in several respects, which I summarise as follows:

- a) the passive and active knowledge of pragmatic and functional features typical of spoken language was not as good as was expected (56.7% students had come across the features I investigated, 46.2% students found an appropriate semantic and functional translation equivalent for them, and only 31% students actually used them). This suggests that the students' attention might not have been directed to features typical of informal spoken French and that such features are probably not sufficiently discussed in foreign language classrooms.
- b) Although opinion was slightly divided with respect to the content of foreign language classrooms (a few individuals argued that spoken language can be learnt abroad and not necessarily in the classroom), most students commented on the content of their language classes, with a majority claiming that they would have changed something, especially by incorporating more oral practice. It remains an open question how this can be implemented in reality, since, as I argued earlier, it is often difficult to practise speaking due to time and space limitations.
- c) From the responses to question (2) in Part IV we learnt that the major aspects causing incomprehension were rapidity of speech and unknown vocabulary but also, importantly, the fact that native speakers used language that was too colloquial. Again, this is indicative of the fact that learners might not be familiar with, or prepared for, colloquial spoken language as it is used in a native context.
- d) The students who had spent more time abroad were on the whole more categorical in their opinion that foreign language classes should incorporate more oral practice and more everyday, informal topics. They also seemed more critical of their language classes and of the extent to which the latter prepared them for the language used in a natural context. Although statistically the difference between the PRE- and the POST-group was not significant, qualitative analysis of open-ended responses revealed that the POST-group students provided more evaluative and thorough comments about the language classes and their content.

- e) Responses to question (5) revealed that students employed a wide range of individual extracurricular strategies and practices, based on their own learning style. Nevertheless, these strategies converged towards certain trends that appeared to be common for most students. I have noted that the most frequent activities reported by the students were: using the visual media (TV, cinema), seeking out opportunities to use the language in a native-speaker environment, noting down new vocabulary, listening to the radio and reading. As we can see, these strategies especially included (passive) receptive activities such as listening, reading and watching. Although speaking opportunities tend to be more limited, learners did report using conscious strategies aimed at improving their speaking skills, such as mimicry, repetition, theatre, singing or talking to themselves. Many students revealed that they constantly attempted to gain more exposure to the ‘language in context’ by surrounding themselves with native speakers. One of the common strategies was noting down unfamiliar items of language and reusing them, a strategy that is also aimed at building up vocabulary and improving speaking skills.

## 8.7 Conclusion

At various points throughout this empirical study, it has been argued that functional-pragmatic spoken features such as discourse markers play an important role in the construction of meaning in everyday communication. Without such features, typically observable only at the level of discourse, one would not be able to express certain types of information, such as affect or attitudinal/modal stance. This is why this discourse level also plays a role in language learning and teaching. Since space and time in foreign-language classrooms tend to be limited, it is often the case that aspects of spoken language *per se* are paid very little attention.

Throughout this study, a case has been made for the importance of spoken language and of the spoken features that appear to have little lexical content but nevertheless seem to be used very often. It was hoped that the first part of this thesis succeeded in showing the richness of discourse features used in everyday spoken French: an aspect that I attempted to integrate into the discussion of the place of spoken language in foreign

language classrooms. Based on the quantitative results of the first part of the thesis, I tried to exemplify some of the most frequent discourse features used by young native speakers of French and integrate them into the learners' questionnaire. The aim here was to draw students' attention to the fact that it is not only a knowledge of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary that constitutes the basis of comprehension and communicative competence in a foreign language. In fact, analysis of real-life communication shows that a great deal of linguistic information is transmitted above the level of a sentence. This type of information is often conveyed by features with pragmatic functions.

This empirical study has specifically focused on the language of young people: an age group that the learners might be most likely to come into contact with. It is perhaps judicious to cite Canale and Swain (1980: 27) here, who argue that 'it is particularly important to base a communicative approach on the varieties of the second language that the learner is most likely to be in contact with in a genuine communicative situation.' Thus I hoped that the students would feel concerned by the issues addressed and discussed in the questionnaire, and that these issues would evoke memories of their own experiences of learning and speaking French.

Despite the difficulty in finding respondents, the present study has nevertheless sought to provide an original insight into learners' knowledge of spoken language and into their views of the content of their foreign language classrooms, and thus contribute to the knowledge of learner needs. Learners themselves acknowledge the role that spoken language plays in the process of learning, as well as the necessity of taking part in a meaningful, real-life type of communicative exchange. Again, as Canale and Swain argue:

The second language learner must have the opportunity to take part in meaningful communicative interaction with highly competent speakers of the language, i.e. to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic second language situations (1980: 27).

Here it is perhaps opportune to refine the view of 'learners' needs'. Of course, the type of language taught at university should reflect these needs, and it may thus be

inappropriate to teach students elements of colloquial language, especially since university classes are expected to prepare students for future employment that requires a good command of standard, formal language. Therefore, the features that I discussed in the first part of this dissertation (and exemplified in the questionnaire) should only be part of a supplementary discussion to the advanced curriculum rather than explicit material to learn. In other words, teachers could incorporate the discussion of spoken features into a class for more advanced students who are able to understand register differences, but certainly not overload beginner-level students with complex colloquial features that would confuse and mislead them. Then again, a difference should be made between the more colloquial features such as *genre* or *machin* that may be inappropriate to use in some contexts, and more widespread spoken features such as dislocation or presentationals which are commonly used. Therefore, I believe, a sensible and context-sensitive approach to spoken language is needed in order to incorporate spoken features into classroom discussion without burdening the students with unnecessary or inappropriate colloquial vocabulary.

Canale and Swain (*ibid.*) acknowledge that encouraging meaningful communicative interaction is a challenging task for teachers and programme designers. While it is natural that there is no time for learning *everything* in a language class, efforts can be optimised towards a more effective way of also learning *outside* the class. Thus, ideally, students should not only be taught *the language*, but taught also *how to learn* the language. In this, teachers play an important role in pointing students towards activities and strategies that could help them achieve the goal of efficient communication at all levels. Therefore, as argued earlier, even if there is little time and space to practise certain aspects of language in class, it is important to orient learners not only towards grammatical knowledge, but also towards sociolinguistic and pragmatic discourse competence. The primary goal of such an approach would be to facilitate the integration of all these types of knowledge into classroom discussion, not necessarily by teaching students spoken language, which might be unrealistic, but by orienting their attention towards it. This can perhaps be done by incorporating the use of ‘real-life’ situations in the classroom, such as through radio recordings, excerpts from films or transcripts of genuine conversations among native speakers, all of which could be exploited in order to identify and discuss spoken features in the classroom. Language teachers can also recommend the use of certain TV or radio programmes at home, and ask students to

investigate these sources to prepare a short extract in which they would identify typically spoken features such as discourse markers or general extenders (this could be allocated as homework).

An implication of this study would therefore be to stimulate discussion of the role of spoken language in foreign-language classrooms, on the one hand by providing language teachers with empirical data related to learners' knowledge of spoken French, and on the other, by providing pertinent material for learners who are interested in spoken language. Although the literature concerned with the acquisition of foreign-language communicative competence and sociolinguistic variation is quite extensive, there are very few studies that actually tackle discourse-pragmatic features such as those discussed in this thesis (i.e. discourse markers, general extenders, disjoint *moi* and presentational constructions). I believe that this study thus breaks new ground in suggesting concrete examples of how spoken language can be approached, and of specific pragmatic features that can be heard in everyday spoken French. It might indeed be the case, as one of the respondents confessed, that learners 'do not always notice these little expressions.'

## Conclusion

The main focus of this thesis was to explore some discourse-pragmatic features of spoken French, some of which seem frequent in the speech of young people. In doing so, it was necessary to situate the topic within the more general framework of spoken language, and outline the principal characteristics of spoken French, to which I devoted Chapter 1. The methodological approach adopted in this thesis, as I explained in Chapter 2, was mainly qualitative; however, some quantitative analyses were also carried out, mainly to identify recurrent patterns and processes at work in spoken discourse, as well as to add validity to my qualitative results.

The analytical part of the study consisted of Chapters 3 – 6, which were aimed at investigating 4 informal spoken features drawn from my corpus of recorded conversations. In Chapter 3, I attempted to show that the pragmatic expression *genre* may be grammaticalising along a cline from a content word to a function word. A qualitative analysis of innovative uses of this term revealed that its meaning was becoming more bleached, while it was beginning to serve pragmatic functions comparable to those of a discourse marker. The second feature typical of spoken language, the use of general extenders, was described as important in, among other things, creating rapport among speakers, marking reciprocity and expressing epistemic functions. In my corpus, *et tout* was the most popular form among the general extenders used; whether or not this form may be preferred among French young people in general would indeed be an interesting question to explore in future research.

Another feature identified as typical of and specific to spoken French was dislocation, including constructions with the disjoint pronoun *moi*. Rather than looking at formal syntactic properties of dislocated constructions, I attempted to describe them from a pragmatic perspective, mainly as spoken devices serving to structure information in discourse and to manage speaker turns. The disjoint pronoun *moi*, furthermore, was shown to fulfil a number of speaker-related pragmatic functions such as structuring argumentation in discourse, justifying personal opinion, hedging as well as accessing or leaving the speaking floor. Presentational constructions, another pragmatic feature

typical of a Romance language such as French, were described as pertaining primarily to what has been termed ‘preferred argument structure’, i.e. the pragmatic and syntactic constraints influencing word order in a given language. With spoken examples from my data, I attempted to demonstrate that these constructions had little propositional content, but fulfilled a number of pragmatic functions, namely structuring the discourse, allowing for a natural flow and easy cognitive processing, and also, in some cases, marking reciprocity and involvement of the interlocutor. While the analysis of the pragmatic spoken features described here was far from exhaustive and, admittedly, depicted only a small number of rather informal spoken features, its aim was to point to an important dimension of language that was worthy of study.

Since the discourse-pragmatic dimension of language was shown to be an inherent aspect of native speaker production and competence, my further aim was to look at how spoken language was approached in a foreign language classroom. This question was addressed in Chapters 7 and 8, which related to the second phase of my research. Specifically, Chapter 7 looked at the concept of communicative competence, its definition, components and implications for foreign language teaching. A number of previous studies on language acquisition and the acquisition of communicative competence were discussed. Chapter 8 attempted to consider this question from an empirical perspective; it presented the analysis of a questionnaire designed for learners of French, investigating mainly their knowledge of spoken French, but also their opinion of the content of language classes. This survey, as I demonstrated, used recognised statistical and methodological procedures. Whilst it was conducted on a rather small scale, it has succeeded, I believe, in illustrating a number of relevant points relating to the students’ knowledge of informal spoken features. One of the findings in this respect was that the pragmatic and sociolinguistic component of communicative competence seems to be acquired mainly, and perhaps naturally so, during the stay abroad period. The results revealed that there was a significant correlation between the 3 dependent variables (i.e. knowledge of features, translation and active use) and the independent variable of the amount of time spent abroad. However, the length of time of learning French at school or university did not have a significant bearing on these dependent variables. In other words, it appears that no matter how long students learn French at school, the knowledge of certain pragmatic variables may only be acquired after the students have spent some time abroad, in a native speaker context. In addition,



various qualitative points have been highlighted by this survey, notably that the knowledge of pragmatic features which I tested was indirectly linked to the students' apparent motivation and general commitment to learning French. In other words, the students who had the highest scores for recognising, translating and using the given features, seemed, on the whole, more interested in the issues discussed in the questionnaire; these students provided more extensive comments on their understanding of spoken French, on the content of their language classes, on extra-curricular strategies and on the way of learning French in general.

While this PhD study as a whole has obvious limitations, I believe it may be considered original in several respects. Firstly, as I argued in the first part of the thesis, the spontaneous spoken language of young people in France has rarely been described from a discourse-pragmatic point of view. Apart from a number of studies mentioned in the previous chapters, the literature has tended to concentrate on youth lexis and, in most cases, has equated French youth language with slang and *banlieue* vocabulary. I have attempted to show that everyday, spontaneous language practices are much richer than the analysis of lexis leads us to believe.

Secondly, as I argued in the second part of this thesis, discourse-pragmatic expressions are a feature that language learners usually encounter in interaction with native speakers. However, students' knowledge of pragmatic words such as discourse markers and general extenders has rarely been investigated (again, with the exception of the studies mentioned in the relevant chapters). In a sense, my questionnaire only touched upon the surface of the given question; whilst, I hope, it has succeeded in showing some aspects of the acquisition of pragmatic competence, it has pointed to a number of areas which would repay closer investigation. Although I do not advocate the idea that students should always be taught or oriented towards colloquial items such as some of those exemplified in the questionnaire (e.g. *genre, machin*), a discussion of pragmatic expressions in general may be useful for learners and raise their awareness of a level of language that may be important for their informal, everyday communication in the target language. The pragmatic features I have described in this thesis are only a small part of a wider picture that is extremely rich and continues to evolve.

## REFERENCES

- Abecassis, M. 2003. "Le français populaire: a valid concept?" *Marges linguistiques* 6 (11): 116-132.
- Adger, D., De Cat, C. and Tsoulas, G. (eds). 2004. *Peripheries: Syntactic Edges and their Effects*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Ager, D. E. 1999. *Identity, Insecurity and Image: France and Language*. Multilingual Matters.
- Aijmer, K., 1985. "What happens at the end of our utterances? The use of utterance-final tags introduced by 'and' and 'or'." *Papers from the 8th Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics*, 366–389. Copenhagen: Institut for Philologie, Kobenhaven University.
- Aijmer, K. 2002. *English Discourse Particles: Evidence from a Corpus*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Aijmer, K. 2009. "Pragmatic markers in spoken interlanguage." *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 3 (1): 173–190.
- Aijmer, K. and Stenström, A.-B. 2005. "Approaches to spoken interaction." *Journal of Pragmatics* 37: 1743–1751.
- Amara, F. 2003. *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*. Paris, France: La Découverte.
- Andersen, G. 1997. "They like wanna see like how we talk and all that. The use of like in as a discourse marker in London teenage speech." In *Corpus-based Studies in English*, Magnus Ljung (eds), 37-48. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Andersson, L. and Trudgill, P. 1992. *Bad Language*. London: Penguin.
- Andrews, B. 1989. "Terminating devices in Spoken French." *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 27 (3): 193-216.
- Androutsopoulos, J. 2005. "Research on Youth Language." In *Sociolinguistics / Soziolinguistik. An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society* 2, U. Ammon et al. (eds), 1496-1505. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Androutsopoulos, J. K. and Georgakopoulou, A. (eds.) 2003. *Discourse Constructions of Youth Identities*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Angouri, J. 2010. "Quantitative, qualitative or both? Combining methods in linguistic research." In *Research Methods in Linguistics*, L. Litosseliti (eds), 29-45. London / New York: Continuum.
- Argyle, M. 1988. *Bodily Communication* (2nd edition). London: Methuen.

- Armstrong, N. and Smith, A. 2002. "The influence of linguistic and social factors on the recent decline of French 'ne'." *French Language Studies* 12: 23-41.
- Ashby, W. J. 1981. "The loss of the negative particle ne in French: A syntactic change in progress." *Language* 57 (3): 674-687.
- Ashby, W. J. 1988. "The syntax, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics of left- and right dislocations." *Lingua* 75 (2-3): 203-229.
- Ashby, W. J. 1991. "When does variation indicate linguistic change in progress?" *Journal of French Language Studies* 1: 1-19.
- Ashby, W. J. 1994. "An acoustic profile of right-dislocations in French." *Journal of French Language Studies* 4 :127-145.
- Ashby, W. J. 1995. "French presentational structures." In *Contemporary Research in Romance Linguistics*. J. Amastae, G. Goodall, M. Montalbetti and M. Phinney (eds), 91-104. Amsterdam/Philadelphia.
- Ashby, W. J. 1999. "Au sujet de quoi? La fonction du sujet grammatical, du complément d'objet direct, et de la construction présentative en français parlé." *The French Review* 72 (3): 481-492.
- Ashby, W. J. 2001. "Un nouveau regard sur la chute du ne en français parlé tourangeau: s'agit-il d'un changement en cours?" *Journal of French Language Studies* 11(1): 1-22.
- Ashby, W. J. and Bentivoglio, P. 1993. "Preferred argument structure in spoken French and Spanish." *Language Variation and Change* 5: 61-76.
- Attal, P. 1994. "Indéfinis et structures sémantiques." *Faits de langues* 4: 187-194.
- Auchlin, A. 1981. "Réflexions sur les marqueurs de structuration de la conversation." *Études de Linguistique Appliquée* 44: 88-103.
- Auger, J. 1994. *Pronominal Clitics in Québec Colloquial French: A Morphological Analysis*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- Ayres-Bennett, W. 1994. "Negative evidence: or another look at the non-use of negative ne in seventeenth-century French." *French Studies* 48 (1): 63 - 85.
- Bache, C. 2000. *Essentials of Mastering English: A Concise Grammar*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bachman, L. F. 1990. *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, C. 1992. *Attitudes and Language*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Balibar, E. 2007. "Uprisings in the banlieues." *Constellations* 14 (1): 47 – 71.

- Ball, R. 2000. *Colloquial French Grammar: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bally, C. 1909. *Traité de stylistique française*. Genève / Paris: Georg et Klincksieck.
- Bally, C. 1932. *Linguistique générale et linguistique française*. Paris: E. Leroux.
- Balzac, H. d. 1847. *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. Elibron Classics.
- Barras, C., Geoffrois, E., Wu, Z. and Liberman M. 1998. "Transcriber: a Free Tool for Segmenting, Labeling and Transcribing Speech", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC)*, 1373-1376.
- Barras, C., Geoffrois, E., Wu, Z. and Liberman M. 2001. "Transcriber: Development and use of a tool for assisting speech corpora production." *Speech Communication* 33 (1-2): 5-22.
- Barron, A. 2003. *Acquisition in Interlanguage Pragmatics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Batllori, M. 2005. *Grammaticalization and Parametric Variation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Battye, A., Hintze M-A. and Rowlett, P. 1992. *The French Language Today: A Linguistic Introduction*. London / New York: Routledge.
- Baudin, G. and Genestier, P. (eds.) 2002. *Banlieues à problèmes. Construction d'un problème social et d'une action publique*. Paris: La Documentation française.
- Bayley, R. and Regan, V. (eds). 2004. "Acquisition of sociolinguistic competence." A special issue of *The Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8 (3): 408-432.
- Beeching, K. 1980-1990. *Un corpus d'entretiens spontanés*. Web: [www.uwe.ac.uk/hlss/llas/iclru/corpus.pdf](http://www.uwe.ac.uk/hlss/llas/iclru/corpus.pdf)
- Beeching, K. 2002. *Gender, Politeness and Pragmatic Particles in French*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Beeching, K. 2007. "La co-variation des marqueurs discursifs *bon, c'est-à-dire, enfin, hein, quand même, quoi* et *si vous voulez*: une question d'identité ?" *Langue française* 154 (2): 93–107.
- Begag, A. 2000. "L'enfermement linguistique ou la langue des banlieues comme facteur d'assignation sociale." In *Black, Blanc, Beur: Youth Language and Identity in France*, F. Aitsiselmi (eds), 113-123. Bradford: Bradford studies in Language, Culture and Society.

- Berrendonner A. and Reichler-Béguelin M.-J. 1997. "Left dislocation in French: varieties, norm and usage." In *Taming the Vernacular. From Dialect to Written Standard Language*, J. Cheshire and D. Stein (eds), 200-217. London: Longman.
- Berthoud, A-C. 1994. "Indéfini et thématization." *Faits de langues* 4: 161-168.
- Blakemore, D. 1987. *Semantic Constraints on Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Blakemore, D. 1992. *Understanding Utterances*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Blanc, M and Biggs, P. 1971. "L'enquête sociolinguistique sur le français parlé à Orléans." *Le Français dans le Monde* 85: 16-25.
- Blanche-Benveniste, C. 1983. "Examen de la notion de subordination." *Recherches sur le français parlé* 4: 71-115.
- Blanche-Benveniste, C. 1986. "La syntaxe et le français parlé." *Études de linguistique appliquée* 63: 16-22.
- Blanche-Benveniste, C. et al. 1990. *Le français parlé: études grammaticales*. Paris: Éditions du CNRS.
- Blanche-Benveniste, C. 1997. *Approches de la langue parlée en français*. Paris: Ophrys.
- Blanche-Benveniste, C. 2006. "Linguistic Analysis of Spoken Language – The Case of French Language." In *Spoken Language Corpus and Linguistic Informatics*, Y. Kawaguchi, S. Zaima and T. Takagaki (eds), 35-66. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Blanche-Benveniste, C. and Jeanjean, C. 1987. *Le français parlé: transcription et édition*. Paris: Didier-Erudition.
- Blasco-Dulbecco, M. 1999. *Les dislocations en français contemporain*. Paris, Honoré Champion.
- Blasco-Dulbecco, M. 2004. "Quelques éclairages sur le sujet de type *moi je* à l'oral" *Recherches sur le Français Parlé* 18: 129-146.
- Blyth, C. et al. 1999. "I'm like, « Say what ?! ». A new quotative in American oral narrative." *American Speech* 65: 215-227.
- Bolden, G. B. 2006. "Little Words That Matter: Discourse Markers “So” and “Oh” and the Doing of Other-Attentiveness in Social Interaction." *Journal of Communication* 56: 661–688.
- Bonafous, S. 1991. *L'immigration prise aux mots*. Paris: Kimé.

- Bouton, L. F. 1996. "Pragmatics and language learning." In *Pragmatics and Language learning* (vol. 7), L. F. Bouton (eds), 1-20. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, Division of English as an International Language.
- Boxer, D. and Pickering, L. 1995. "Problems in the presentation of speech acts in ELT materials: the case of complaints" *ELT Journal* 49 (1): 44-58.
- Boyer, H. 1994. "Le jeune tel qu'on en parle." *Langage et Société* 70: 85-92.
- Boyer, H. 1997. *Les mots des jeunes. Observations et hypothèses*. Paris: Larousse, Bordas.
- Boyer, H. 2003. *Langue et parole: recherches sur le fonctionnement des représentations communautaires*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Branca-Rosoff, S., Fleury, S., Lefevre, F. and Pires, M. 2007-2009. *Discours sur la ville. Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien des années 2000 (CFPP2000)* web: <http://ed268.univ-paris3.fr/CFPP2000/>
- Brigaudiot M., Morgenstern A., Nicolas C. 1994. "Me found it, I find it, à la recherche de "je" entre deux et trois ans." *Faits de Langues* 3 (*La Personne*): 123-131.
- Brown, P. and Levinson, S. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Bruxelles, S. and Traverso, V. 2001. "Ben : apport de la description d'un « petit mot » du discours à l'étude des polylogues." *Marges Linguistiques* (2): 38-55.
- Bucholtz, M. 2002. "Youth and cultural practice." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 525-552.
- Buchstaller, I. 2001. "He goes and I'm like: The new Quotatives re-visited." Paper presented at NWAV 30, Raleigh, NC, USA: 11-14 October.
- Calvet, L-J. 1999. *Pour une écologie des langues du monde*. Paris: Plon.
- Calvet, L-J. 1994. *Les voix de la ville: Introduction à la sociolinguistique urbaine*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Canale, M. 1983. "From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy." In *Language and Communication*, J. C. Richards and R. W. Schmidt (eds), 2-27. London: Longman.
- Canale, M. and Swain, M. 1980. "Theoretical bases of communicative approach to second language teaching and testing." *Applied Linguistics* 1 (1): 1-47.

- Chafe, W. 1976. "Givenness, Contrastiveness, Definiteness, Subjects, Topics, and Point of View." In *Subject and Topic*, C. Li (eds), 25-55. New York/London: Academic Press.
- Chafe, W. 1980. "The Deployment of Consciousness in the Production of a Narrative." In *The Pear Stories: Cognitive, Cultural, and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production*, W. Chafe (eds.), 9-50. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
- Chafe, W. 1982. "Integration and Involvement in Speaking, Writing, and Oral Literature." In *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*, D. Tannen (eds), 35-53. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
- Chafe, W. 1985. "Linguistic differences produced by differences between speaking and writing." In *Literacy, language, and learning: The Nature and consequences of reading and writing*. D. R. Olson, N. Torrence and A. Hildyard (eds), 105-122. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chafe, W. 1986. "Evidentiality in English conversation and academic writing." In *Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*, W. Chafe and J. Nichols (eds), 261-272. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
- Chafe, W. 1987. "Cognitive constraints on information flow." In *Coherence and Grounding in Discourse*. R. Tomlin (eds), 21-51. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Chafe, W. and Nichols, J. 1986. *Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
- Channell, J. 1994. *Vague Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Charkova, K. D. 2007. "A Language Without Borders: English Slang and Bulgarian Learners of English". *Language Learning* (57): 369-416.
- Chavez, M. M. T. 1998. "Learner's perspectives on authenticity." *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 36 (4): 277-306.
- Cheshire, J. 2007. "Discourse variation, grammaticalisation, and stuff like that." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 11: 155-93.
- Cheshire, J., Fox, S., Kerswill, P. and Torgersen, E. 2008. "*Ethnicity, friendship network and social practices as the motor of dialect change: Linguistic innovation in London.*" *Sociolinguistica Jahrbuch*. Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Chevalier, G. 2001. "Comment *comme* fonctionne d'une génération à l'autre." *Revue québécoise de linguistique* 30/2 : 13-40.

- Chevalier, G. 2007. "Autour de *moi*: de la syntaxe à l'interaction." In *Variation et stabilité du français: des notions aux opérations*, P. Larrivée (eds), 51-66. Peeters Publishers.
- Chomsky, N. 1965. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Boston: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. 1971. "Deep structure, surface structure, and semantic interpretation." In *Semantics*, D. Steinberg and L. Jakobovitz (eds.), 183-216. Cambridge University Press.
- Cinque, G. 1977. "The Movement Nature of Left Dislocation." *Linguistic Inquiry* 8 (2): 397-412.
- Clark, H. H. and Gerrig, R. J. 1990. "Quotations as Demonstrations." *Language* 66: 764-805.
- Cohen, M. S. R. 1961. *Le subjonctif en français contemporain: tableau documentaire*. Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire.
- Cohen, P. 1999. *Rethinking the Youth Question: Education, Labour, and Cultural Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cook-Gumperz, J. and Gumperz, J. 1981. "From oral to written culture: The transition to literacy." In *Writing: The Nature, Development, and Teaching of Written Communication*, M. F. Whiteman (eds.) California: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Coveney, A. 1996. *Variability in Spoken French. A Sociolinguistic Study of Interrogation and Negation*. Exeter: Elm Bank.
- Coveney, A. 2000. "Vestiges of *nous* and the 1st person plural verb in informal spoken French." *Language Sciences* 22 (4): 447-481.
- Coveney, A. 2003. "Le redoublement du sujet en français parlé: une approche variationniste." In *Structures linguistiques et interactionnelles dans le français parlé*. A. B. Hansen and M-B. M. Hansen (eds), 111-143. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum.
- Coveney, A. 2005. "Subject doubling in spoken French: A sociolinguistic approach." *The French review* 79 (1): 96-111.
- Dagnaud, M. 2008. *La Teuf: essai sur le désordre des générations*. Paris, France: Éditions du Seuil.
- Damourette, J. and Pichon, E. 1927. *Des mots à la pensée. Essai de grammaire de la langue française*. Paris: d'Arthey.
- Dannequin, C. 1977. *Les enfants bâillonnés*. Nathan: Paris.



- Danon-Boileau, L. 1994. "La personne comme indice de modalité." *Faits de langues* 3: 159-167.
- Danon-Boileau, L. and Morel, M-A. 1997. "Question, point de vue, genre, style: les noms prépositionnels en français contemporain." *Faits de langue* 9: 192-200.
- Dauzat, A. 1947. *Grammaire raisonnée de la langue française*. Editions IAC: Lyon.
- De Cat, C. 2005. "French dislocation without movement." In *ZAS Papers in Linguistics. Proceedings from the Dislocated Elements Workshop* (Vol. 35), B. Shaer, W. Frey and C. Maienborn (eds), 77-109. Berlin: Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft.
- De Cat, C. 2007. *French Dislocation: Interpretation, Syntax, Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Cock, S., Granger, S., Leech, G. and McEnery, T. 1998. "An automated approach to the phrasicon of EFL learners." In *Learner English on Computer*, S. Granger (eds), 67-79. London/New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Despentes, V. 1999. *Mordre au travers*. Paris: Libro.
- Dewaele, J.-M. 2001. "Une distinction mesurable: corpus oraux et écrits sur le continuum de la deixis." *Journal of French Language Studies* 11: 179-199.
- Dewaele, J.-M. 2002a. "Using sociostylistic variants in advanced French IL: the case of *nous/on*." In *EUROSLA Yearbook* (2), S. Foster-Cohen, T. Ruthenberg, M.L. Poschen (eds.), 205-226. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dewaele, J.-M. 2002b. "L'acquisition de la compétence sociopragmatique en langue étrangère." *Revue Française de Linguistique Appliquée* 7 (2): 129-143.
- Dewaele, J.-M. 2004a. "Individual differences in the use of colloquial vocabulary: The effects of sociobiographical and psychological factors." In *Learning Vocabulary in a Second Language: Selection, Acquisition and Testing*, P. Bogaards and B. Laufer (eds), 127-153. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Dewaele, J.-M. 2004b. "The acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in French as a foreign language: An overview." In *The acquisition of French as a second language*, F. Myles and R. Towell (eds), Special issue of *Journal of French Language Studies* 14: 301-319.
- Dewaele, J.-M. 2004c. "Retention or omission of the *ne* in advanced French interlanguage: The variable effect of extralinguistic factors." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8: 433-450.

- Dewaele, J.-M. 2004d. "Vous or tu? Native and non-native speakers of French on a sociolinguistic tightrope." *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 42 (4): 383-402.
- Dewaele, J.-M. 2004e. "The emotional force of swearwords and taboo words in the speech of multilinguals." *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development* 25: 204-222.
- Dewaele, J.-M. (eds). 2005. *Focus on French as a Foreign Language: Multidisciplinary Approaches*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Dewaele, J.-M. 2007. "Diachronic and/or synchronic variation? The acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in L2 French." In *Handbook of French Applied Linguistics* (Language Learning and Language Teaching 16), D. Ayoun (eds), 208-236. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dewaele, J. and Furnham, A. 1999. "Extraversion: the unloved variable in applied linguistics research". *Language Learning* 49 (3): 509-544.
- Dewaele, J.-M. and Pavlenko, A. 2002. "Emotion vocabulary in interlanguage." *Language Learning* 52 (2): 265-324.
- Dewaele, J.-M. and Regan, V. 2001. "The use of colloquial words in advanced French interlanguage." In *EUROSLA Yearbook* (1), S. Foster-Cohen and A. Nizgorodcew (eds), 51-68. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Dewaele, J.-M. and Regan, V. 2002. "Maîtriser la norme sociolinguistique en interlangue française: le cas de l'omission variable de 'ne'." *Journal of French Language Studies* 12: 123-148.
- Dines, E. 1980. "Variation in discourse—and stuff like that." *Language in Society* 1: 13–31.
- Doran, M. 2004. "Negotiating Between *Bourge* and *Racaille*: 'Verlan' as Youth Identity Practice in Suburban Paris." In *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, A. Pavlenko and A. Blackledge (eds.) 93-124. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Doran, M. 2007. "Alternative French, Alternative Identities: Situating Language." *La Banlieue. Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 11 (4): 497-508.
- Dörnyei, Z. 2007. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dostie, G. 1995. "Comme, genre et style postposés en français du Québec : Une étude sémantique." *Linguisticae Investigationes* 19/2: 247-263.

- Dostie, G. 2001. "La gradation du sens et ses traces morphologiques et syntaxiques. Considérations sur la (poly)pragmaticalisation." In *Grammaticalisation 2. Concepts et cas*, D. Roulland and G. Col (eds), 61-91. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Dostie, G. 2004. *Pragmaticalisation et marqueurs discursifs : analyse sémantique et traitement lexicographique*. Belgium: De Boeck Université.
- Dostie, G. 2006. "Les marqueurs discursifs et la variation régionale. Approche lexicosémantique." Conférence plénière présentée dans le cadre du congrès annuel de l'Association for French Language Studies (AFLS), Bristol, UK.
- Drubig, H. B. and Schaffar, W. 2001. "Focus constructions." In *Language Typology and Language Universals: An International Handbook*. M. Haspelmath et al. (eds), 1079-1104. Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- DuBois, J. W. 1985. "Competing motivations." In *Iconicity and Syntax*. J. Haiman (eds), 343 - 365. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- DuBois, J. W. 1987. "The discourse basis of ergativity." *Language* 63: 805 - 855.
- Dubois, S. 1992. "Extension particles, etc." *Language Variation and Change* 4: 179-203.
- Dubois, S. 1993. "Les particules d'extension dans le discours: analyse de la distribution des formes et patati et patata." *Revue québécoise de linguistique théorique et appliquée* 11 (1-4): 21-47.
- Ducrot, O. 1980. *Les Mots du discours*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- Eckert, P. 1997. "Age as a sociolinguistic variable." In *Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, F. Coulmas (eds), 151-67. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Egins, S. and D. Slade. 1997. *Analysing Casual Conversation*. London: Cassell.
- Elbow, P. 1985. "The Shifting Relationships between Speech and Writing." *College Composition and Communication*. 36 (3): 283 - 303.
- Ellis, R. 1985. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. 2005. *Instructed Second Language Acquisition: A Literature Review*. Wellington: Ministry of Education Research Division.
- Erteschik-Shir, N. 1981. "More on Extractability from Quasi-NPs." *Linguistic Inquiry* 12 (4): 665-670.
- Erteschik-Shir, N. 1997. *The Dynamics of Focus Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Fagyal, Z., Kibbee D. and Jenkins, F. 2006. *French: A Linguistic Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fernandez, M. M. J. 1994. *Les particules énonciatives dans la construction du discours*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Firbas, J. 1964. "On defining the theme in functional sentence analysis." *Travaux Linguistiques de Prague* 1: 267 - 280.
- Flaitz, J. 1988. *The Ideology of English: French Perceptions of English as a World Language*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Fleischman, S. 1999. "Pragmatic markers in comparative perspective: a contribution to cross-language pragmatics." (Paper presented at PRAGMA 1999, Tel Aviv).
- Fleischman, S. and Yaguello, M. 2004. "Discourse markers across languages? Evidence from English and French." In *Discourse Across Languages and Cultures*, C.L. Moder and A. Martinovic-Zic (eds.), 129–147. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- France, A. 2007. *Understanding Youth in Late Modernity*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Fraser, B. 1988. "Types of English discourse markers." *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 38: 19-33.
- Fraser, B. 1999. "What are discourse markers?" *Journal of Pragmatics* 31: 931–952.
- Frith, S. 1984. *The Sociology of Youth*. Ormskirk: Causeway Press.
- Fuller, J. M. 2003a. "Use of the discourse marker *like* in interviews." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7: 365–37.
- Fuller, J. M. 2003b. "The influence of speaker roles on discourse marker use." *Journal of Pragmatics* 35: 23–45.
- Gadet, F. 1989. *Le français ordinaire*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Gadet, F. 1991. "Le parlé coulé dans l'écrit: le traitement du détachement par les grammaires du XXe siècle." *Langue française* 89 (1): 110-124.
- Gadet, F. 1992. *Le français populaire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Gadet, F. 2003. *La variation sociale en français*. Paris: Ophrys.
- Gadet, F. and Conein, B. 1998. "Le 'français populaire' des jeunes de la banlieue parisienne: entre permanence et innovation." In *Jugendsprache, Langue des Jeunes, Youth Language*, J. K. Androutsopoulos and A. Scholz (eds), 105-123. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag.
- Genette, G. 1980. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Gilmore, A. 2007. "Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning." *Language Teaching* 40 (2): 97-118.
- Girard, E. and Kernel, B. 1996. *Le vrai langage des jeunes expliqué aux parents*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Givón, T. 1990. *Syntax: a Functional-Typological Introduction* (Volume II) Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Goffman, E. 1967. "On facework: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction." In *The Discourse Reader*, A. Jaworski and N. Coupland (eds), 306-321. London: Routledge.
- Goudaillier, J-P. 1997. *Comment tu tchatches ! Dictionnaire du français contemporain des cités*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.
- Gougenheim, G., Michéa, R., Rivenc, P. Sauvageot, A. 1956. *L'élaboration du français fondamental*. Paris: Didier.
- Graddol, D., Cheshire, J. and Swann, J. 1994. *Describing Language*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Grevisse, M. 1969. *Le bon usage*. Gembloux: Editions J. Duculot.
- Grewal, K. 2007. "'The threat from within:?' Representations of the *Banlieue* in French Popular Discourse." In *Europe: New voices, new perspectives*, M. Killingsworth (eds), CERC Australia.
- Guiraud, P. 1965. *Le français populaire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Gumperz, J. J. 1971. *Language in Social Groups*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gundel, J. 1974. *The role of topic and comment in linguistic theory*. Ph.D. Thesis. University of Texas, Austin.
- Gundel, J., Hedberg, N. and Zacharski, R. 1993. "Cognitive Status and the Form of Referring Expressions in Discourse." *Language* 69 (2): 274-307.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1967. "Notes on transitivity and theme in English: Part II." *Journal of Linguistics* 3: 199-244.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1989. *Spoken and Written Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1994. *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2nd edition). London: Edward Arnold.
- Hansen, J. G. 2006. *Acquiring a Non-native Phonology: Linguistic Constraints and Social Barriers*. New York / London: Continuum.

- Hansen, M-B. M. 1998a. *The Function of Discourse Particles: A Study with Special Reference to Spoken Standard French*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Hansen, M-B. M. 1998b. "The semantic status of discourse markers." *Lingua* 104: 235-260.
- Hansen, M-B. M. 2005. "A comparative study of the semantics and pragmatics of *enfin* and *finalement*, in synchrony and diachrony." *Journal of French Language Studies* 15: 153-171.
- Hansen, M-B. M. 2006. "A dynamic polysemy approach to the lexical semantics of discourse markers, with an exemplary analysis of French *toujours*." In *Approaches to Discourse Particles*, K. Fischer (eds), 21–41. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Hansen, M-B. M. 2008. *Particles at the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface: Synchronic and Diachronic Issues. A Study with Special Reference to the French Phrasal Adverbs*. Amsterdam / London: Elsevier.
- Hansen, M-B. M. and Rossari, C. 2005. "The evolution of pragmatic markers: Introduction." *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 6: 2.
- Haspelmath, M. 1999. "Why is grammaticalization irreversible?" *Linguistics* 37: 1043-1068.
- Heine, B. and Kuteva, T. 2002. *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmes, J. 1988. "Doubt and Certainty in ESL Textbooks." *Applied Linguistics* 9 (1): 21-4.
- Hopper, P. and Traugott, E. C. 2003. *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Horlacher, A-S. and Müller, G. M. 2005. "L'implication de la dislocation à droite dans l'organisation interactionnelle". In *Grammaire, discours, interaction. La structuration de l'information*, S. Pekarek Doehler and M-J Béguelin (eds), 127-145. Neuchâtel: Travaux Neuchâtelois de Linguistique.
- Houdebine, A-M. 1993. "De l'imaginaire des locuteurs et de la dynamique linguistique." Colloque de Louvain, NOV/1993. *Cahiers de l'Institut linguistique de Louvain* 19 (3/4): 31-40.
- Houdebine, A-M. 2003. "Trente ans de recherche sur la différence sexuelle, ou le langage des femmes et la sexuation dans la langue, les discours, les images." *Langage & Société* 106: 33-61.

- Howard, M., Lemée, I. and Regan, V. 2006. "The L2 acquisition of a phonological variable: The case of /l/ deletion in French." *Journal of French Language Studies* 16 (1): 1-24.
- Huang, X.-H. and Van Naerssen, M. 1987. "Learning strategies for oral communication." *Applied Linguistics* 8 (3): 287-307.
- Hymes, D. 1972. *On Communicative Competence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jamin, M. 2005. *Sociolinguistic Variation in the Paris Suburbs*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Kent at Canterbury.
- Jeanneret, T. 1999. *La coénonciation en français: approches discursive, conversationnelle et syntaxique*. Berne: Lang.
- Jefferson, G. 1990. "List construction as a task and resource." In *Interaction Competence*, G. Psathas (eds), 63–72. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Jobs, R. I. 2007. *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War*. Stanford, USA: Stanford University Press.
- Johnson, K. 2008. *An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Jucker, A. H. and Ziv, Y. 1998. *Discourse Markers: Descriptions and Theory*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Jucker, A.H., Smith, S.W. and Ludge, T. 2003. "Interactive aspects of vagueness in conversation." *Journal of Pragmatics* 35 (12): 1737-1769.
- Kesselman, M. et al. 2008. *European Politics in Transition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kihm, A. 1988. "Récupérer un thème: une étude contrastive." *Langue française (Le thème en perspective)* 78 (1): 57-66.
- Kinginger, C. 2008. *Language Learning in Study Abroad: Case Studies of Americans in France*. The Modern Language Journal Monograph Series (1).
- Kinginger, C. and Blattner, G. 2008. Histories of Engagement and Sociolinguistic Awareness in Study Abroad: Colloquial French. In *The Longitudinal Study of Advanced L2 Capacities*, L. Ortega and H. Byrnes (eds), 223-246. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Koch, P. and Oesterreicher, W. 1990. *Gesprochene Sprache in der Romania. Französisch, Italienisch, Spanisch*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

- Labeau, E. and Myles, F. (eds). 2009. *The Advanced Learner Variety: The Case of French*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Laberge, S. and Sankoff, G. 1980. "Anything *You* Can Do." In *The Social Life of Language*. G. Sankoff (eds), 271-294. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, W. 1972. "The transformation of experience in narrative syntax." In *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, T. 1982. "Social structure and peer terminology in a Black adolescent gang." *Language in Society* 11: 391–411.
- Labov, W. 1994. *Principles of Linguistic Change*. Vol 1: Internal Factors. Vol. 2: Social Factors. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Labov, W. 2006. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Labov, W. and Waletzky J. 1967. "Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience." In *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, J. Helm (eds), 12-44. Seattle: University of Washington Press (Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society).
- Lacheret-Dujour, A. 2003. *La prosodie des circonstants en français parlé*. Louvain/Paris: Peeters Publishers.
- Lafont, R. 1971. "Un problème de culpabilité sociologique: la diglossie franco-occitane." *Langue française. Linguistique et société* 9 (1): 93-99.
- Lambrecht, K. 1981. *Topic, Antitopic and Verb Agreement in Non-Standard French*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lambrecht, K. 1984. "A pragmatic constraint on lexical subjects in spoken French." *Papers from the Chicago Linguistic Society* 20: 239-256.
- Lambrecht, K. 1988. "Presentational cleft constructions in spoken French." In *Clause Combining in Grammar and Discourse*. J. Haiman and S. A. Thompson (eds), 135-179. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lambrecht, K. 1995. "The pragmatics of case. On the relationship between semantic, pragmatic, and grammatical roles in English and French." In *Essays in Semantics and Pragmatics*, M. Shibatani and S.A. Thompson (eds), 145- 190. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.



- Lambrecht, K. 1996. *Information Structure and Sentence Form. Topic, Focus and the Mental Representation of Discourse Referents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lambrecht, K. 1997. "French relative clauses as secondary predicates." In *Texas Linguistics Forum 38. The Syntax and Semantics of Predication*. (Proceedings of the 1997 Texas Linguistics Society Conference.) Department of Linguistics, UT Austin. 205-221.
- Lambrecht, K. 2000. "Prédication seconde et structure informationnelle. La relative de perception comme construction présentative." *Langue Française* 127: 49-66.
- Lambrecht, K. 2001a. "When subjects behave like objects." *Studies in Language* 24 (3): 611-682.
- Lambrecht, K. 2001b. "A framework for the analysis of cleft constructions." *Linguistics* 39 (3): 463-516.
- Lambrecht, K. 2001c. "Dislocation." In *Language Typology and Language Universals: An International Handbook*. M. Haspelmath et al. (eds), 1050-1078. Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Lapadat, J.C. and Lindsay, A. C. 1999. "Transcription in research and practice: from standardisation of technique to interpretative positioning." *Qualitative Inquiry* 5 (1): 64-86.
- Larsson, E. 1979. "La dislocation en français: étude de syntaxe générative." *Études Romanes de Lund* 28. Lund: Gleerup.
- Laufer, B. 1998. "The Development of Passive and Active Vocabulary in a Second Language: Same or Different?" *Applied Linguistics* 19: 255-271.
- Le Goffic, P. 1994. *Grammaire de la phrase française*. Paris: Hachette.
- Leech, G. 1974. *Semantics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Leeman, D. 1991. "On thème." *Lingvisticae Investigationes* 15: 101-113.
- Lefebvre, G.-R. 1984. "Le problème de la norme linguistique au Québec, à la lumière des idéologies socioculturelles." *Actes du Congrès langue et société au Québec*, Tome 2. Québec: Éditeur officiel du Québec.
- Lemieux, M., Fontaine, C. and Sankoff, D. 1987. "Quantifieur et marqueur de discours." In *Diversity and diachrony*, D. Sankoff (eds), 381-390. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lepoutre, D. 2001. *Coeur de banlieue: codes, rites et langages*. Paris, France: Éditions Odile Jacob.

- L'Huillier, M. 1999. *Advanced French Grammar*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Li, C. N. 1986. "Direct speech and indirect speech: A functional study." In *Direct and indirect speech*, Coulmas, F. (eds.) 29-45. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Likert, R. 1932. *A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes*. [Archives of Psychology 140]. New York.
- Likert, R. 1974. "The method of constructing an attitude scale." in *Scaling: A Sourcebook for Behavioral Scientists*, G. M. Maranell (eds), 233-243. Chicago: Aldine.
- Lodge, A. 1993. *French, from Dialect to Standard*. London / New York: Routledge.
- Lyster R. 1994. "The effect of functional-analytic teaching on aspects of French immersion students' sociolinguistic competence." *Applied Linguistics* 15: (3): 263-287.
- Macaulay, R. K. S. 2002. "Discourse variation." In *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, J. K. Chambers, P. Trudgill and N. Schilling-Estes (eds), 283-305. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Méla, V. 1997. Verlan 2000. *Langue Française* 114: 16-34.
- Merle, P. 2004. *Argot, verlan et tchatches*. Paris: Les Essentiels Milan.
- Miller, J. and Weinert, R. 1998. *Spontaneous Spoken Language: Syntax and Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Milroy, L. 1980. *Language and Social Networks*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Milroy, L. 1987. *Observing and Analysing Natural Language: A Critical Account of Sociolinguistic Method*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Morrow, K. 1977. "Authentic texts and ESP." In *English for Specific Purposes*, S. Holden (eds), 13-17. London: Modern English Publications.
- Morrow, K. 1981. "Principles of communicative methodology." In *Communication in the Classroom*, K. Johnson and K. Morrow (eds), 59-69. Harlow: Longman.
- Mougeon, R. and Rehner, K. 2001. "Variation in the spoken French of Ontario French immersion students: The case of juste vs. seulement vs. rien que." *Modern Language Journal* 85: 398-415.
- Mougeon, R., Nadasdi, T. and Rehner, K. 2002. "État de la recherche sur l'appropriation de la variation par les apprenants avancés du FL2 ou FLE." *Acquisition et Interaction en Langue Etrangère* 17: 7-50.
- Myles, F. 2003. "The early development of L2 narratives: a longitudinal study." *Marges Linguistiques* 5: 40-55.

- Naiman, N., Frohlich, M., Stern, H. and Todesco, A. 1996. *The Good Language Learner*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Newmeyer, F. J. 2000. *Language Form and Language Function*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nilan, P. and Feixa, C. (eds.) 2006. *Global Youth? Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds*. London / New York: Routledge.
- Oakes, L. 2001. *Language and National Identity: Comparing France and Sweden*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- O'Connor Di Vito, N. 1991. "Incorporating Native Speaker Norms in Second Language Materials." *Applied Linguistics* 12 (4): 383-396.
- Ochs, E. 1979. "Planned and unplanned discourse." In *Discourse and Syntax*, T. Givón, (eds.), 51-80. New York: Academic Press.
- Odlin, T. 1989. *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Olson, D. R. and Torrance, N. (eds.) 1991. *Literacy and Orality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Overstreet, M. 1999. *Whales, Candelight, and Stuff Like That*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Overstreet, M. 2005. "And stuff *und so*: Investigating pragmatic expressions in English and German." *Journal of Pragmatics* 37: 1845–1864.
- Overstreet, M. and Yule, G. 1997. "On Being Inexplicit and Stuff in Contemporary American English." *Journal of English Linguistics* September 25: 250-258.
- Overstreet, M. and Yule G. 2002. "The metapragmatics of *and everything*." *Journal of Pragmatics* 34: 785– 794.
- Overstreet, M., Tran, J. and Zietze, S. 2006. "Increasing Pragmatic Awareness: Die Vagheit der Sprache und so." *Die Unterrichtspraxis / Teaching German* 39 (1/2): 24-29.
- Pagnier, T. 2003. "D'une théorisation de l'espace linguistique des « cités » à l'analyse lexicologique des dénominations de la femme." In *Marges linguistiques* 6 (11): 135-144.
- Pagnier, T. 2004. "Étude microstructurale et parler d'un groupe de jeunes lycéens: outils et analyses." In *Parlers Jeunes, ici et là-bas: Pratiques et représentations*, D.Caubet et al. (eds), 185–197. L'Harmattan,
- Palmer, F. R. 2001. *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Prevost, S. 2003. "Détachement et topicalisation: des niveaux d'analyse différents" *Cahiers de praxématique* 40: 97-126.
- Prince, E. 1981. "Toward a Taxonomy of Given/New Information." In *Radical Pragmatics*, P. Cole (eds.), 223–255. New York: Academic Press.
- Prince, E. 1985. "Fancy syntax and shared knowledge." *Journal of Pragmatics* 9 (1): 65-81.
- Prince, E. 1986. "On the syntactic marking of presupposed open propositions." *Chicago Linguistic Society* 22: 208 - 222.
- Queneau, R. 1959. *Zazie dans le métro*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Ranney, S. 1992. "Learning a new script: An explanation of sociolinguistic competence." *Applied Linguistics* 13: 25-50.
- Regan, V. 2005. "From Speech Community Back to Classroom: What Variation Analysis Can Tell Us About the Role of Context in the Acquisition of French as a Foreign Language." In *Focus on French as a Foreign Language: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, J.-M. Dewaele (eds), 191-209. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Rehner, K. 2005. *Developing aspects of second language discourse competence*. Munich: LINCOM Europa.
- Rehner, K., Mougeon, R. and Nadasdi, T. 2003. "The learning of sociolinguistic variation by advanced FSL learners: The case of *nous* versus *on* in immersion French." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 25: 127–156.
- Reinhart, T. 1981. "Pragmatics and linguistics: an analysis of sentence topics." *Philosophica* 27: 53–94.
- Rey, A. et al. 2007. *Lexik des Cités*. Paris: Fleuve Noir.
- Richards, J. and Rogers, T. 1987. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rickard, P. 1989. *A History of the French Language*. London / New York: Routledge.
- Roberge, Y. and Vinet, M-T. 1989. *La variation dialectale en grammaire universelle*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Romaine, S. 1984. *The Language of Children and Adolescents: the acquisition of communicative competence*. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Romaine, S. and Lange, D. 1991. "The Use of *like* as a Marker of Reported Speech and Thought: A Case of Grammaticalization in Progress." *American Speech* 66 (3): 227-279.

- Rosier, L. 2002. "Genre: le nuancier de sa grammaticalisation." *Travaux de linguistique* 44: 79-88.
- Roulet, E. 1985. *L'articulation du discours en français contemporain*. Berne: P. Lang.
- Rubin, J. 1975. "What the 'good language learner' can teach us." *TESOL Quarterly*, 9 (1): 41-51.
- Safont-Jordà, M. P. 2005. *Third Language Learners: Pragmatic production and Awareness*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Sankoff, G. 1997. "Variation in the use of discourse markers in a language contact situation." *Language Variation and Change* 9: 191-217.
- Sax, K. 2003. *Acquisition of stylistic variation in American learners of French*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University.
- Schiffrin, D. 1987. *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schiffrin, D. 1994. *Approaches to Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Scholes, R. J. 1993. *Literacy and Language Analysis*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Schourup, L. 1999. "Discourse markers." *Lingua* 107: 227-265.
- Searle, J., Kiefer, F. and Bierwisch, M. (eds). 1980. *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Secova, M. 2006. *Le verlan: point de vue d'une apprenante*. Unpublished MA dissertation, Université Paris X Nanterre.
- Séguin, B. and Teillard, F. 1996. *Les Céfrans parlent aux Français*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Sherif, M. and Sherif, C. W. 2008. *Problems of Youth: Transition to Adulthood in a Changing World*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Simone, R. 1997. "Une interprétation diachronique de la « dislocation à droite » dans les langues romanes." *Langue française* (La variation en syntaxe), 115 (1): 48-61.
- Sinclair, J. 2005. "Corpus and Text – Basic Principles", In *Developing Linguistic Corpora: a Guide to Good Practice*, M. Wynne. (eds) 1-16. Oxford: Oxbow Books. <http://ahds.ac.uk/linguistic-corpora/> [Accessed 5 October 2009].
- Sinclair, J. 2008. "Borrowed ideas." In *Language, People, Numbers: Corpus Linguistics and Society*, A. Gerbig and O. Mason (eds), 21-42. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

- Smith, L. W. 1994. "An interactionist approach to the analysis of similarities and differences between spoken and written language." In *Sociocultural approaches to language and literacy: an interactionist perspective*, V. John-Steiner et al. (eds), 43-81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, T. B. 2004. *France in Crisis: Welfare, Inequality, and Globalization since 1980*. Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stellinger, A. and Wintrebert, R. (eds). 2008. *Les jeunesses face à leur avenir*. Paris: Fondation pour l'innovation politique.
- Stendhal. 1833. *De l'amour*. Lyon: Bohaire.
- Stenström, A-B., Andersen, G. and Hasund, I. K. (eds). 2002. *Trends in Teenage Talk. Corpus Compilation, Analysis and Findings*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Stern, H.H. 1975. "What can we learn from the good language learner?" *Canadian Modern Language Review* 31: 304-318.
- Tagliamonte, S. 2006. *Analysing Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tagliamonte, S. and D'Arcy, A. 2009. "Peaks beyond phonology: Adolescence, incrementation, and language change." *Language* 85: 58–108.
- Tagliamonte, S. and Hudson, R. 2008. "Be like et al. beyond America: The quotative system in British and Canadian youth." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3 (2): 147 - 172.
- Tagliamonte, S. and Denis, D. 2010. "The *stuff* of change: General extenders in Toronto, Canada." *Journal of English Linguistics* 38 (2).
- Tannen, D. (eds.) 1982. *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
- Tannen, D. 1986. "Introducing Constructed Dialogue in Greek and American Conversational and Literary Narratives." In *Direct and Indirect Speech*, F. Coulmas (eds.), 311-322. Berlin: Mouton.
- Tetreault, C. 2002. "'You call that a girl?': borderwork in a French *cit *." In *Gendered practices in language*, S. Benor, M. Rose, D. Sharma, J. Sweetland, and Q. Zhang (eds), 237-254. Stanford University: Center for the Study of Language and Information.
- Tetreault, C. 2009. "Reflecting Respect: Transcultural Communicative Practices of Muslim French Youth." *Pragmatics* 19 (1): 65-83.

- Tetreault, C. 2010. "Collaborative Conflicts: Teens Performing Aggression and Intimacy in a French *Cité*." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20 (1): 72-86.
- Thomas, J. 1995. *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. New York: Longman.
- Thompson, P. 2005. "Spoken Language Corpora." In *Developing Linguistic Corpora: a Guide to Good Practice*, M. Wynne (eds.), 59-70. Oxford: Oxbow Books. <http://ahds.ac.uk/linguistic-corpora/> [Accessed 2 October 2009]
- Thöle, J. 2007. *Current Tendencies in Colloquial London Speech*. Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag.
- Traugott, E. C. 1995. "The role of the development of discourse markers in a theory of grammaticalization." Paper presented at ICHL XII, Manchester 1995.
- Traugott, E. C. 2006. "Historical aspects of modality." In *The Expression of Modality*. W. Frawley (eds.), 107-39. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Traverso, V. 2007. *L'Analyse des conversations*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Trudgill, P. 1984. *Language in the British Isles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trudgill, P. 2003. *A Glossary of Sociolinguistics*. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vallduví, E. 1992. *The Informational Component*. Garland Publishing: New York.
- Van Valin, R. D. and LaPolla, R. J. 1997. *Syntax: structure, meaning and function*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vaugelas, C. F. 1647. *Remarques sur la langue françoise*. Paris: Camusat.
- Vincent, D. 1992. "The sociolinguistics of exemplification in spoken French in Montréal." *Language Variation and Change* 4: 137-162.
- Vincent, D. 2001. "The journey of non-standard discourse markers in Quebec French: Networks based on exemplification." In *The Evolution of Pragmatic Markers*, M-B. M. Hansen and C. Rossari (eds.), 188-210. *Special Issue of Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 6 (2).
- Vincent, D. and Sankoff, D. 1992. "Punctors: A pragmatic variable." *Language Variation and Change* 4: 205-216.
- Von Fintel, K. 1994. *Restrictions on Quantifier Domains*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Massachusetts: Amherst.
- Walz, J. 1986. "Is Oral Proficiency Possible with Today's French Textbooks?" *The Modern Language Journal* 70 (1): 13-20.

- Ward, G. and Birner, B. 1993. "The semantics and pragmatics of 'and everything'." *Journal of Pragmatics* 19: 205-214.
- Winter, J. and Norrby, C. 2000 "Set marking tags 'and stuff'." In *Proceedings of the 1999 Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society*, J. Henderson (eds) <http://www.uwa.edu.au/LingWWW/als99/proceedings.html>
- Winter, J. and Norrby, C. 2001. "Affiliation in adolescents' use of discourse extenders." *Proceedings of the 2001 Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society*. [www.als.asn.au/proceedings/als2001/winter\\_norrby.pdf](http://www.als.asn.au/proceedings/als2001/winter_norrby.pdf)
- Wolfson, N. 1978. "A feature of performed narrative: the conversational historical present." *Language in Society* 7: 215-237.
- Yaguello, M. 1998. *Petits faits de langue*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil.
- Zipf, G. K. 1949. *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort*. Cambridge, MA: Addison -Wesley.
- Zribi-Hertz, A. 1984. *Orphan Prepositions in French and the Concept of 'Null Pronoun'*. Bloomington: Indiana, USA: University Linguistics Club.



## APPENDIX A QUESTIONNAIRE ON SPOKEN FRENCH

### Questionnaire on spoken French

The following questionnaire is part of a study which aims to discover what you know about spontaneous spoken French and how you acquired the knowledge that you have. Your answers will make a vital contribution to this study. This is not a language test; we are interested solely in your personal experiences and your perception of spoken language. Your answers should reflect your own personal point of view and will be entirely anonymous.

---

#### Part I: About yourself

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ (years)
2. What is your mother tongue? (i.e. the first language learnt at home) \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How long did you learn/have you been learning French? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How much time overall have you spent in France (or a French-speaking country)?  
\_\_\_\_\_ (months)
6. Have you been/did you go on a year abroad as part of your degree programme?  
  
Yes - full year       Yes - half-year       No
7. What do you consider your level of proficiency in French to be?  
  
Beginner       Intermediary       Advanced       Almost native

## Part II: Some features of spoken French

These are some features of spoken language used by native speakers in a natural and spontaneous context. All examples are excerpts from a corpus of informal recordings used for an analysis of spoken French. The following questions aim to determine what is your view of spoken language and how you acquired your knowledge of it.

### Example 1: *On s'est regardé et tout mais on s'est pas parlé.*

a) Have you come across the underlined expression? Yes  No

If yes, where? (you may tick more than one box)

° In a classroom setting  ° In the French media (radio, TV, cinema...)

° Being used by native speakers  ° In French literature

° Other: \_\_\_\_\_

b) How would you translate the above sentence (especially the underlined expression) into your mother tongue?

\_\_\_\_\_

c) Do you ever use the underlined expression when you speak French?

Yes  No

If yes, can you please provide another example (a brief sentence)?

\_\_\_\_\_

### Example 2: *On peut faire ça un autre jour, genre demain matin.*

a) Have you come across the underlined expression? Yes  No

If yes, where? (you may tick more than one box)

° In a classroom setting  ° In the French media (radio, TV, cinema...)

° Being used by native speakers  ° In French literature

° Other: \_\_\_\_\_

b) How would you translate the above sentence (especially the underlined expression) into your mother tongue?

\_\_\_\_\_

c) Do you ever use the underlined expression when you speak French?

Yes  No

If yes, can you please provide another example (a brief sentence)?

---

**Example 3: *Mais bon après quand tu vas avoir des gosses machin ... ça sera plus dur.***

a) Have you come across the underlined expression? Yes  No

If yes, where? (you may tick more than one box)

° In a classroom setting  ° In the French media (radio, TV, cinema...)

° Being used by native speakers  ° In French literature

° Other: \_\_\_\_\_

b) How would you translate the above sentence (especially the underlined expression) into your mother tongue?

---

c) Do you ever use the underlined expression when you speak French?

Yes  No

If yes, can you please provide another example (a brief sentence)?

---

**Example 4: *Y'a mes parents qui arrivent demain.***

a) Have you come across the underlined expression? Yes  No

If yes, where? (you may tick more than one box)

° In a classroom setting  ° In the French media (radio, TV, cinema...)

° Being used by native speakers  ° In French literature

° Other: \_\_\_\_\_

b) How would you translate the above sentence (especially the underlined expression) into your mother tongue?

---

c) Do you ever use the underlined expression when you speak French?

Yes  No

If yes, can you please provide another example (a brief sentence)?

---

### Part III: Experience of learning French as a foreign language.

Now think about your experience of learning French at university. Please tick the box which best corresponds to your judgement.

1. My French classes are / were very varied and covered all aspects of the French language.

Completely agree       Somewhat agree       Somewhat disagree   
Completely disagree       Undecided

2. Thinking about your French classes, how well do / did they cover the following aspects? (Tick)

	Perfectly well	Well	Quite Well	Not very well	Not at all
<b>Reading</b>					
<b>Listening</b>					
<b>Speaking</b>					
<b>Formal contexts</b>					
<b>Informal contexts</b>					

### Part IV: Your experience in a French-speaking country.

Now think about your experience in a French-speaking country. Please tick the box which best corresponds to your judgement.

**1. In the French-speaking country, I felt comfortable speaking French:**

- Yes, immediately.
- Yes, but only after a while.
- No, I had a few problems speaking French
- No, I had a lot of difficulty speaking French.
- Undecided.

**2. When I did not understand French, it was because** (you may tick more than one box):

- people spoke too quickly.
- people had an accent that I could not understand.
- people used words that I did not know.
- people used a very colloquial language.
- people used a very formal language.

**3. When speaking to native speakers, did you feel that your university classes adequately prepared you for the language used in a natural context?**

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Perfectly well           | Well                     | Quite Well               | Not very well            | Not at all               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**4. If you were a language teacher at university, what aspects of language would you cover in more detail than was the case when you studied?**

---

---

**5. Please shortly describe any learning strategies which helped you improve and gain confidence in spoken language (e.g. extra curricula activities, watching French films, noting down expressions used by native speakers and then using them yourself, etc.):**

---

---

## **APPENDIX B    INFORMATION SHEET**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

REC Protocol Number.....

**Please note that this information sheet will be translated into French**

**YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **Features of spoken language in the learning and teaching of French**

We would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The study concerns spoken French and the influence that it has on learners of French. We are particularly interested in spoken sentence constructions and vocabulary typical of young generations. Therefore, it is necessary to collect data among speakers like yourself, in order to have an idea about the language that they use. The recordings will be transcribed and analysed in a PhD thesis. The recordings will be stored in a safe place and all the personal information (such as names of people and places) will be entirely anonymous. The data will only be available to the people involved in the research (PhD student, + first and second supervisor). Short extracts of recorded speech will be used in the thesis to illustrate spoken features; however, all the personal information will be removed or changed.

You may withdraw from the recording at any time, or ask to interrupt it if you do not feel happy with the topics discussed. You will also have a chance to listen to the recording and remove all the information that you do not wish to share.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

In the event of you suffering any adverse effects as a consequence of your participation in this study, you will be compensated through Queen Mary University of London's 'No Fault Compensation Scheme'.

## CONSENT FORM

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: **Features of spoken language in the learning and teaching of French**

Queen Mary Research Ethics Committee Ref: \_\_\_\_\_

- Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.
- If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.
- *I understand that if I decide at any other time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and be withdrawn from it immediately.*
- *I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.*

### Participant's Statement:

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed:            Date:

### Investigator's Statement:

I \_\_\_\_\_ confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the volunteer.

Signed:            Date:

## FICHE DE REINSEIGNEMENT

Numéro du protocole .....

Notez que cette fiche d'information sera traduite en français. Vous recevrez une copie de cette fiche d'information.

### *La langue parlée dans l'apprentissage et l'enseignement du français langue étrangère*

Nous aimerions vous inviter à participer à ce projet de recherche doctorale. Vous n'êtes en aucun cas obligés d'y participer.

Avant de décider si vous souhaitez participer, il est important que vous compreniez le but de cette recherche et ce que votre participation implique. Veuillez prendre le temps de lire attentivement les informations suivantes et discutez-en avec les autres si vous le souhaitez. N'hésitez pas à nous poser des questions si quelque chose n'est pas clair ou si vous souhaitez plus d'informations.

Notre étude porte sur le français parlé et son influence sur l'apprentissage de français. Nous nous intéressons particulièrement aux constructions de phrase parlées et au vocabulaire typique des jeunes générations. Pour cela, il est nécessaire de recueillir des données de locuteurs comme vous-même, afin de comprendre la langue qu'ils utilisent. Les enregistrements seront transcrits et analysés dans une thèse de doctorat. Ils seront stockés dans un endroit sûr et tous les renseignements personnels (tels que les noms des personnes et des lieux) ne seront pas divulgués. Les données ne seront disponibles que pour les personnes impliquées dans la recherche (doctorant, premier et deuxième directeur de thèse). De courts extraits de conversations enregistrées seront utilisés dans la thèse pour illustrer des caractéristiques de la langue parlée, bien sûr tous les détails personnels seront supprimés ou modifiés.

Vous pouvez vous retirer de l'enregistrement à tout moment, ou demander de l'interrompre si vous ne vous sentez pas à l'aise avec les sujets abordés. Vous aurez également l'occasion d'écouter l'enregistrement effectué et de faire supprimer toutes les informations que vous ne souhaitez pas partager. C'est à vous de décider si vous souhaitez participer ou non. Si vous décidez de participer, vous recevrez cette feuille de renseignements et vous serez invités à signer un formulaire de consentement. Même si vous décidez de participer, vous serez toujours libre de vous retirer à tout moment et sans donner de raison.

Si vous subissez des effets néfastes à la suite de votre participation à cette étude, vous serez indemnisé par le plan "No Fault Compensation Scheme" de l'Université Queen Mary de Londres.



## FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT

Veillez remplir ce formulaire après avoir lu la fiche de renseignement et / ou entendu une explication de la recherche en question.

### **Titre de l'étude: La langue parlée dans l'apprentissage et l'enseignement du français langue étrangère**

Queen Mary Ref Comité d'Éthique de la Recherche: \_\_\_\_\_

- Je vous remercie d'envisager de participer à cette recherche. La personne qui organise cette recherche doit vous expliquer le projet avant de solliciter votre participation.
- Si vous avez des questions concernant la feuille de renseignements ou les explications qui vous ont déjà été données, veuillez les poser au chercheur concerné avant de décider de participer. Vous recevrez une copie de ce formulaire de consentement que vous pourrez conserver et consulter à tout moment.
- *Je comprends que si je décide à tout moment au cours de la recherche de ne plus participer à ce projet, je peux informer les chercheurs impliqués et je peux m'en retirer immédiatement.*
- *Je consens au traitement de mes renseignements personnels aux fins de cette étude. Je comprends que ces informations seront traitées de manière strictement confidentielle et conformément aux dispositions de la Loi sur la protection des données 1998.*

Déclaration du participant:

Je \_\_\_\_\_ confirme que le projet de recherche mentionné ci-dessus m'a été expliqué de façon satisfaisante et j'accepte de participer à l'étude. J'ai lu les informations ci-dessus ainsi que la fiche de renseignements sur le projet, et je comprends les implications de l'étude.

Signé: Date:

Déclaration de l'enquêteur:

Je \_\_\_\_\_ confirme que j'ai bien expliqué la nature, les exigences et les risques potentiels (le cas échéant) de ce projet de recherche aux volontaires.

Signé: Date:

## **APPENDIX C    CONSENT FORM**

### **RESEARCH PROJECT ON *FEATURES OF SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF FRENCH***

I (undersigned) \_\_\_\_\_ give permission for the recording of my speech to be used for teaching and research purposes. I understand that this is the only purpose for which it will be used. I also understand that although extracts from the recording may be reproduced in research publications and teaching, confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved at all times.

I understand that this consent form will be stored separately from the recording for the purpose of anonymity.

### **PROJET DE RECHERCHE SUR *LA LANGUE PARLEE DANS L'APRENTISSAGE ET L'ENSEIGNEMENT DU FRANÇAIS LANGUE ETRANGERE***

Je (soussigné/e) \_\_\_\_\_ donne la permission pour que l'enregistrement des conversations auxquelles je participe soit utilisé dans le cadre de l'enseignement et de la recherche. Je comprends que ceci est le seul but dans lequel il sera utilisé. Je comprends également que même si certains extraits de l'enregistrement peuvent être reproduits dans des publications de recherche ou dans l'enseignement, la confidentialité et l'anonymat seront préservés à tout moment.

Je comprends que pour des raisons d'anonymat, ce formulaire et l'enregistrement seront gardés séparément.

Signature/ Signature :

Date/ Date :