The Linguistic Dynamics of Support

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, there has been ever-growing demand for support specialists in a wide variety of areas, from social matters to the justice system through training, health, and work. These professionals, whose job is to lead, advise, and give guidance, are variously labeled "coach," "counselor," "tutor," "mentor," or "sponsor" (Paul 2003, 2004). When we explore what is behind these job titles, we find practices that are in fact quite diverse, and it is not always obvious what they have in common or how parallels can be drawn between them. What does "support" mean, and how is it given? How do people come to be supported, and why? What exactly is it that is supported, and to what extent? This issue of support, including its definitions, effects, and techniques, remains a somewhat vague phenomenon despite attempts by researchers from various disciplines (ranging from sociology and clinical psychology to training and linguistics) to provide solid answers to these questions (Boutinet 2004; Boutinet et al. 2007; Cifali, Bourassa, and Théberge 2010; Divay and Balsani 2008; Filliettaz 2009; Glady 2008; Salini 2009).

Moreover, existing research rarely focuses on the actual relationships that develop *in situ* between the professionals and the people they support. While it is clear that support situationsgenerally try to elucidate the situation of the person being supported, the position of the support worker remains for the most part obscure (Chauvet 2002). On the assumption that a detailed analysis of a single situation may lift the lid on some hidden aspects of the profession, the aim of this paper is therefore to approach the subject of support as "an ethnographer of the activity as it unfolds" (Brassac 2011, 213).

With this in mind, the focus of this paper is on one specific social practice, namely the support offered to the low-skilled unemployed in vocational retraining. In particular, this monitoring of the unemployed raises the following question: how do support workers carry out their work when unemployment is structural, that is, when they are not in a position to create jobs and when available jobs do not fit the qualifications of the jobseekers? This is a complex question, and responses vary depending upon individuals and the political context. To gain a

better understanding of what support workers do under these conditions, we therefore chose to examine this type of monitoring situation (i.e., where a job seems inaccessible but where a position of support must be sustained) in the hope of shedding light on some of the dilemmas and challenges posed by the situation. Since support situations are situations of linguistic exchanges, it is also pertinent to analyze this situation using categories drawn from discourse and interaction analysis, which is where our work has its roots.[1]

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We begin by giving an account of what interactional approaches can specifically bring to an analysis of support situations. We also identify some of the challenges these situations present for discourse analysts (Section 1). We then put forward some theoretical tools for tackling an aspect of support that has been little studied, namely, its anticipatory dimension (Sections 2 and 3). We then test the suitability of these theoretical tools by analyzing an empirical monitoring situation (Sections 4–6). Finally, we return to more general issues raised by the analysis (Section 7).

1. Support in Vocational Transitions: A Linguistic Activity

On reflection, it may seem surprising that so little attention has been paid to support situations by discourse and interaction analysts since such situations present a number of features that should be of interest to sociolinguists. For example, such communication situations have by nature a dialogic character. It is not just that information is passed on, but the participants involved also enter into mutual interplay. The aim of this interplay is to try and construct continuity in disrupted situations, reconstruct some meaning when the situation seems devoid of it, and deal with practical problems encountered. Both the support worker and the person being supported are therefore engaged in forms of joint action. The aim of the exchange is to "do something together," such as restore self-confidence, develop a plan of action, or calculate chances of success.

For the most part, the relationship established between the actors is also asymmetric. The support worker generally takes up an active position of control, while the person supported moves into a position of temporary dependence or of being monitored for a period of time, however long or short that may be (Boutinet 2004). This distribution contributes to creating an asymmetry in terms of ranks occupied in the interaction (Kerbrat-Orrechioni 1992) and of the

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[1] For a more developed definition of these roots, see Filliettaz, de Saint-Georges, and Duc (2008) and Scollon and de Saint-Georges (2011).

distribution of roles. Finally, support plays out like a trajectory, which is frequently marked by progressions and regressions resulting from unforeseen events emerging along the way. It also often shows a character that is open and unpredictable.

These interactional properties remind us of discussions that have been taking place since the 1960s in both discourse analysis and applied linguistics. For example, from pragmatic studies, there is longstanding evidence that communication is rarely an end in itself, but that it consists by and large of bringing about changes in the real world (see Filliettaz 2004, Scollon 2001). Critical discourse approaches take a close interest in power relations and in the negotiations that can be entered into in linguistic exchanges when there is an imbalance of rank (Holmes and Stubbe 2003). As regards methodology, recent studies suggest going beyond the microanalysis of one-off episodes in order to gain a better understanding of the longer paths they combine to carve out (de Saint Georges and Filliettaz 2008, Scollon and Scollon 2004, Wortham 2004). More generally, studies in the field of language in the workplace (Boutet 1995 and 2008, Drew and Heritage 1992) have refined the necessary tools and categories for the linguistic analysis of work. Such studies might therefore be turned to good account in the analysis of the work of support professionals and its consequences.
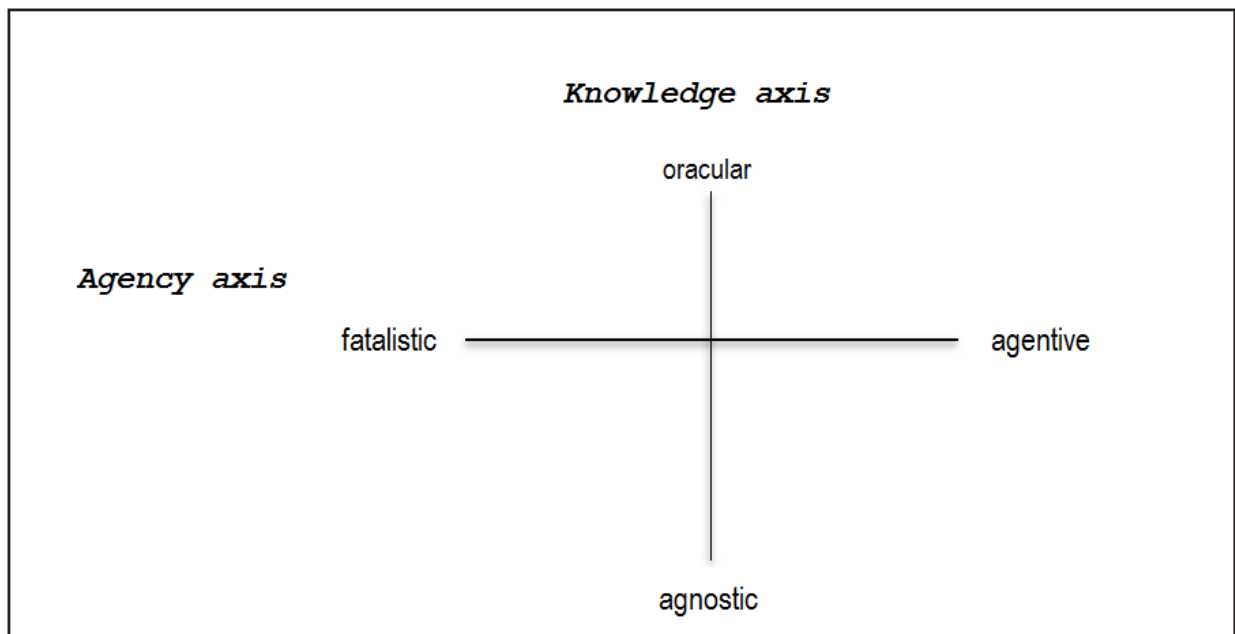
However, support situations also present new challenges to discourse analysts. One of these is connected to the anticipatory nature of support and advice giving. Part of the exchanges between support workers and those they support consists in clarifying what in their lives might have led them to their current situation. But an equally important part is dedicated to exploring possibilities for the future. Yet there is little in the linguistic literature on the subject of such anticipatory discourse. While the analysis of narratives and retrospective discourse constitutes a research field in itself,[2] forward-looking discourses have been studied only marginally (de Saint-Georges 2012). It seems therefore useful to develop a framework for approaching anticipation in support situations in order to be able to tackle the following two questions: i) how is the future socially configured in the discourse of support workers; and ii) to what extent do anticipatory discourses contribute to broadening the scope of actions for the person being supported or, conversely, to what extent do they limit it? In the sections that follow, we propose a framework for tackling these questions.

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2   See the seminal work of Labov and Waletzky (1967), or, for syntheses, the more recent work of Bamberg, de Fina, and Schiffrin (2008).

2. Anticipatory Discourses

The notion of "anticipatory discourse" is borrowed from the work of Scollon and Scollon. Their work paved the way from 2000 onward for a linguistic theory of anticipation (see Scollon and Scollon 2000, S. Scollon 2001, de Saint-Georges 2005, 2012). These authors postulate that all human behavior is naturally forward looking. Consequently, if a researcher is interested in the viewpoint of actors at the time of acting, she/he should integrate a theory of anticipation to his/her theory of action. While Scollon and Scollon (2000) only sketch out the idea of such a theory, they suggest that it should at any rate include: i) an analysis of the motives and reasons for acting that speakers refer to when justifying a choice of one future course of action over another, and ii) an analysis of the attitudes or positions they express with regards to the future in their discourse. Scollon and Scollon (2000) further propose that any utterance concerning a forthcoming situation bears a trace of the way in which the speakers positions themselves in relation to that situation, whether epistemologically (does the future appear as known and knowable or rather as unknown and unknowable?) or in terms of agency (do the speakers believe they are in a position to act in relation to future events or rather that it is impossible for them to influence these events?). Depending on the position taken up on the knowledge axis (see Figure 1), speakers will construct either an agnostic or an oracular stance, while on the agency axis, they will take up either an agentive or a fatalistic stance.

Figure 1: Anticipatory positions (adapted from Scollon and Scollon [2000])

More broadly, the underlying outline in Scollon and Scollon falls under a critical discourse approach. The authors are concerned with the political dimension of anticipatory discourses. Conceptualizing the future involves imagining what has yet to happen. In a sense therefore, the future is relatively open and up for debate. Such debates always attempt to project specific configurations of events in the world, to pre-form the future in some way (Gee 1998). In this context, the political question is therefore: since the suggestions expressed concerning the future cannot be proven to be false at the time when they are voiced, who has the power to impose one particular representation over another? Further, in the case of group negotiations, which descriptions are legitimated, by which processes, and with what consequences?

Guidance and advice-giving situations are in some of their respects similarly political, only on a more micro level. For example, there is throughout Europe an "ideology of activation" – a set of measures taken to encourage the re-entry of the unemployed within a very neo-liberal frame of mind, which does not index the same possible futures for the unemployed person as the kind of plans that can be found in the social economy,[3] which are often based on a more liberating ideology. In both cases, attempts to reintegrate into the job market can be done in a very proactive manner, but the reasons to act might be very different. Examining actual situations of support and debates among professionals in these situations can provide a glimpse of how ideologies are constructed in interaction.

3. Directive Speech Acts and Strategic Managing of Action

Another possibility for analyzing the work of support professionals is to observe the way in which their discourse contributes to legitimizing or restricting the courses of action for the person they support. If we examine empirical data, one of the things support workers and those they support start with during their meetings, is to work out a considerable number of scenarios. This exploratory work often consists of trying to identify the preferences of the unemployed in terms of work, assess their skills, and form a picture of the realities of the job market in order to project a set of possible choices for the unemployed. Typically, two types of scenarios present themselves in advice-giving situations (de Jouvenel 2004, 77). "Exploratory" scenarios enable jobseekers to survey what is possible, imaginable, or desirable, that is, to carry out an inventory

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3   See below for further discussion of these points. .

of the possibilities open to them (whether realistic or otherwise). Meanwhile, "strategic" scenarios consist of sifting through all the imaginable scenarios and keeping only those that appear realistic or possible. Following from this, the work of the advisor consists in clarifying in agreement with the person being supported the steps that should be implemented for the plan of action to be carried out.

Working out of the scenario thus consists in opening up the future[4] and recommending actions and resources that will give the person focus in the search for work. At other times, advice-giving activities involve closing off certain paths again or discouraging certain behaviors or paths that are judged not to show much potential for the jobseeker. Whatever form this takes, the professional therefore supports the jobseeker's decision making process. Even when support workers believe that their role is to allow jobseekers to be free to make their own choices, their position rarely appears neutral. In advice-giving situations, in terms of speech acts used, we can note that support workers sometimes *suggest* actions, sometimes *invite* it, and sometimes keep to giving advice when referring to potential strategies or initiatives.[5] As noted by Vanderveken (1988), these speech acts do not all have the same illocutionary force. To "suggest" that someone do something, for example, is a relatively weak linguistic attempt to mobilize that person to act (Vanderveken 1988, 184), while to "insist" constitutes a more forceful and resolute manner of engaging that person, and to "demand" that someone act in a certain way is the most imperative form of telling someone to do something (Vanderveken 1988, 185).

Depending on which directive form the adviser uses, the utterance creates different response possibilities for the interlocutor. To tell interlocutors to do something, for example, or to strongly encourage them to do so, leaves them less room for refusal compared with simply suggesting or asking them to adopt a particular course of action. Here, the most important point to note is that the linguistic system the adviser necessarily depends on to give advice forces him/her to choose a specific form when giving advice. Moreover, this form always embodies a particular stance in relation to the suggestion being made. Discourse therefore has, to a greater or lesser extent, a performative function in guidance and influences agency. In other words, support amounts to making use of language resources to spur the person being supported into action, to

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4 Classic studies on the psycho-sociology of work have amply demonstrated the importance of this dimension since long-term unemployment often erodes the capacity of those involved to project themselves into the future (Jahoda 1987).
5 In this work on speech acts, we pick up and expand upon the work of Mayen and Specogna (2005), who first suggested working on the "advising" speech act in agricultural management meetings.

lead him or her to reflect on a situation, or to anticipate events to come, so that emotions are stirred and decision making is elicited. Directives are therefore a particularly effective practical and psychological instrument for inducing certain behaviors in the person on the receiving end, even if the person is always in a position to refuse the "offers of meaning" (Glady 2008) presented to them. In the dialogic relation that is thus set up, the person is also able, for example, to negotiate suitable choices, present other scenarios that seem viable, and challenge the offers being made.

In the remainder of this paper, we examine more closely how the development of particular anticipatory positions constructed in the course of exploring different scenarios serves as a basis for conducting advice activities and inducing certain behaviors in someone undergoing training for re-entering the workplace. The analysis will also lead to identify a number of controversies that arise surrounding the issue of support during these activities. However, before proceeding with the analysis, we give a brief account of the context of the investigation and the situation under study.

4. Context of the Investigation

The extracts we chose to analyze represent different points in time along a support trajectory, which was recorded during a study conducted in a training center, which we shall call "Horizons." With its team of 25 employees, Horizons provides around 52,000 hours of training in four trades (building, painting and plastering, forestry, and cleaning) each year. This center, which is recognized by the francophone Wallonia Region of Belgium, belongs to a network of Entreprises for Vocational Training (EFT – *Entreprises de Formation par le Travail*), which integrate the values of a social economy.[6] These entreprises are associations that emerged into the work sector in the 1980s[7] and present the distinctive combination of real economic activity (the production of goods and provision of services) and a mission of integration and training. Strictly speaking, they give priority to people threatened by social exclusion and those who have

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6 For a detailed description of the origins and organizational structures of the Entreprises for Vocational Training in Belgium, see Nyssen and Grégoire (2002).

7 As noted by Nyssen and Grégoire (2002), the Enterprises for Vocational Training developed outside of any legal framework at the start before becoming increasingly recognized by the public authorities. This institutionalization has had partly beneficial effects (including the legalization and funding of the activities carried out). However, the resulting structure also sometimes contributes to limiting the autonomy of initiative of these organizations since, because their training programs do not lead to any formal qualifications, they are at the mercy of political changes affecting the public authorities, and they often have to struggle against the fact that their success is measured and their activities financed solely on the basis of the number of successful placements they generate.

most difficulty integrating in the workplace. Compared to the integration policies of the public authorities, they place less emphasis on the number of placements following training than on the broader objectives of socialization, integration into society, and education.

This investigation, which involved six months of ethnographic observations and audio and video recordings of different activities at the center (on courses and building sites and in the monitoring and support of individuals), did not focus initially on the specific question of support (de Saint-Georges 2003). However, during the course of this work, one activity emerged as central to that question, namely an activity called *pedagogical meeting*. The role of these meetings is to contribute to supporting trainees in their personal plans by offering them help and signposting in order for them to successfully achieve the objectives they set for themselves. The meetings are characterized by the fact that they gather together all the professionals in contact with the person undertaking training (including teachers, building site supervisors, social workers, training supervisors, and integration supervisors) over the course of the support period. In some respects, this situation is therefore atypical from a support point of view, given that one-on-one meetings between support workers and the person they are supporting is the more usual format. From a methodological point of view, the group discussions, however, proved to be a unique vantage point for gaining access to a discourse that usually remains hidden in the secrecy of one-on-one meetings. We therefore chose to analyze extracts of these collective meetings since they enable us to highlight a number of controversial issues specific to the profession while also representing support activities in action.

5. The Situation under Study

More specifically, the support situation we will examine here concerns Barry, a young father, who has chosen to retrain as a plasterer after many years in the catering sector. After a very promising start, his retraining comes up against a major obstacle. Recurrent health problems (a swollen right arm and chronic back pain) lead to frequent sickness absences. The various people supervising Barry encourage him to see a doctor, but Barry refuses, replying that his health is a private matter. After several months with no improvement, questions emerge: how can Barry be prompted to take responsibility for his health and unblock the situation? What chance does he have of finding another job if he does not to resolve his problem? For the support workers concerned, his vocational plan may be put at risk if he cannot hold down a job.

The extracts selected for analysis come from two consecutive meetings, one month apart. The first meeting is an ordinary pedagogical meeting. The session participants are: MF, supervising all issues related to pedagogy in the center; W, a mentor on building sites; JP, a workshop manager; and P and F, teachers of numeracy and literacy respectively, who provide refresher courses in these sectors. Barry himself is absent from this first meeting (trainees are invited to participate but rarely do so). The second situation is more unusual. The same people are present once again (except for the two teachers), but the meeting has been convened by the trainees themselves to discuss what was said at the first meeting. They also want to discuss the evaluation reports they received subsequently. At this second meeting therefore, there are four trainees in all, but our attention is focused here on the exchanges with and concerning Barry only.

Barry's case is an interesting one to take up. The discussions about him are very typical of the negotiations and deliberations that usually take place within the framework of the pedagogical meetings. The supervisors look for individualized avenues to explore to support the particular needs of the trainee. However, the fact that Barry puts up resistance to the support workers' suggestions also makes the situation unique, forcing them to question their roles and the limitations of their work. These extracts therefore offer rich material for analysis as even the approach to support itself is explicitly discussed in them.

6. Analysis of Extracts
6.1. An Initial Paradox: Support Prevented[8]

The matter discussed at both meetings is what was just described above: how can Barry be persuaded to resolve the health problem that prevents him from bringing the same energy to his work every day? The training supervisor sums up this problem at the beginning of the meeting, as follows:[9]

(1)   "it's my problem and there's nothing you can do about it"
MF: 1. it really is a problem isn't it (xxxxx) […]
         2. the problem of-

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8   We borrow this expression from Filliettaz (2009).
9   The transcription conventions are presented in the appendix.

3. of lack of strength. […]

4. so in December […] we did the report uh

5. Barry really dug his heels in at that time […]

6. he had said uh . it's my problem . I'll deal with it . and and no question (xxxxxxxx) uh

7. so obviously he didn't want anyone to interfere

8. and he's not decided to take control of the situation at all.

9. the message we had was to say uh.

10. i-it's your life we we can't do anything more but

11. (and then the message)

12. (it) had been very clear uh in December (xxxx) your training depends on it.

13. to turn up and put the same amount of energy in day in day out . to increase your capacity […]

14. and he had responded to that if I can summarize..

15. it's my problem and and there's nothing you can do about it you know okay

16. that's it isn't it?

This extract immediately illustrates a paradoxical support situation. On the one hand, the type of health problem Barry suffers from could mean that a job as a plasterer is potentially inaccessible to him. Depending on how serious the problem is and whether or not it can be remedied, this could place a major question mark over his plans to retrain. On the other hand, Barry refuses to find out how serious the problem is or what might be done about it. The support workers' efforts to provide support are thus blocked on two fronts. If they consider that their role is to bring about a return to work, they are faced with the physical limits of the trainee. If they think that their function is to make him take responsibility for his own health, they are faced with requests from the trainee not to interfere in matters he considers private (cf. l. 6 "he had said uh it's my problem. I'll deal with it. and and no question (xxxxxxxx) uh," l. 7 "so obviously he didn't want anyone to interfere," l. 8 "and he's not decided to take control of the situation at all"). The support workers thus find themselves in the difficult position of having to provide support (given that the aim of the meeting is to give the trainee feedback on his work and to suggest areas for improvement) while not being able to do so (since they have already exhausted the option of

getting across a message to which they received a negative response) (cf. 1. 9-15). In this context, the question is therefore: how can and will the group carry out their work?

6.2. Examination of the Scenarios

After summarizing the problem, the participants begin exploring the range of possibilities existing to address it, through the working out of different scenarios. We will examine four of them based on the data. The first scenario consists in planning what might happen to the trainee if he manages to find a job in his new trade without having resolved his health problem. This scenario is conjured up by W, plasterer by profession and Barry's on-site mentor, as follows:

Scenario 1. Hiring by an Employer

(2)   "what employer's going to take him then?"

W: 1. job-wise it'll be harder

        2. that's

        3. there's nothing can be done.

        4. but <u>here</u> it's going to lead to him having other problems and real problems (xxxx) he has just now.

MF: 5. what do you mean?

W: 6. well . so . he'll need his salary and everything

        7. (now they start to work)

MF: 8. ah yes.

W: 9. (to fall behind) it'll be (xxxx)

        10. it'll be noted down on paper

        11. and then that's it

        12. lack of strength

        13. what employer's going to take him after that?

In this scenario, W is presupposing that Barry has found some work in the occupation he has set his sights on and is setting the scene so that the practical consequences can be explored. In doing so, W adopts a particular anticipatory stance. Returning to the terms proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2000), W's stance could be considered oracular and fatalistic. First, the future being

envisaged is presented as known, as can be seen in the use of the future tense (l. 1. "job-wise it'll be harder," l. 6. "well. so. he'll need a wage and everything," l. 10. "it'll be noted down on paper"). The trainer bases his judgment on his own experience of the environment to extrapolate the future situation for Barry. Second, the trainer's stance is also fatalistic. He thinks there is no alternative scenario to the one he sets out (l. 3. "there's nothing can be done"). If Barry is incapable of producing the same work rate every day, nothing is going to suddenly materialize that will mitigate the situation. Finally, the scenario is presented as potentially unfavorable, once again risking unemployment for Barry (l. 13. "what employer's going to take him after that?"). All these reasons (the reality of the professional environment and the risk of job loss) lead the support workers to want to continue with their support work even if Barry does not ask them to do so, even in fact if the trainee actively refuses to be supported.

Scenario 2. Ending Training

The second scenario in the exchange is once again exploratory in nature. It is put forward by the numeracy teacher, P, who is questioning the wisdom of keeping Barry in training if it has little chance of leading to a job. In the exchange, F (the literacy teacher), MF (the educational training supervisor), and JP (the workshop supervisor) also intervene:

(3)   "no one's ever been thrown out because they had problems"
P: 1. I'd like to ask a question […]
        2. here in this-
        3. in this training program
        4. would it be a handicap such that, that's a suggestion, we would say
        5. "listen, no, you (xxxx)"
        6. these are the questions I'm asking uh because
        7. that's theoretically eh.
MF: 8. hmm.
P: 9. do you see what I mean?
        10. what happens in business, should we not in the end if it becomes <u>too much</u> =
F: 11. yes.

12

P: 12. = uh uh would that be a reason in spite of all the sympathy we have for him to tell him "listen if you- it-it's not going well eh"

??:   13. no!

P: 14. I'm asking it's a question could it be that?

MF: 15. no-one's ever been thrown out because they had problems (xxxx)

P: 16. but thrown out I didn't- I'm not saying <u>that</u>!

MF: 17. but it- it comes back to the same thing doesn't it (xxxx) his training […]

JP: 18. he's been here a year and- and working

        19. and you're going to say to him "listen uh because of your health problem, we don't want you anymore"?

P: 20. yes well yes yes that's what I was asking uh that's it

MF: 21. no no . […]

JP: 22. (to leave his training perhaps to stop it) and then after uh he's on his own as we say.

This scenario, which suggests ending Barry's training, is conjured up only with a lot of rhetorical care. First, questions are used (l. 1. "I'd like to ask a question," l. 6. "these are the questions I'm asking uh because," l. 14. "I'm asking it's a question could it be that?"). The outcome is presented as a theoretical possibility rather than as a proposal (l. 6-8. "these are the questions I'm asking uh because," "that's theoretically eh"). Equally, the idea of ending Barry's training is never explicitly mentioned by P, allowing him to reject the scenario when one of the group members also rejects the idea (l. 15. "no one's ever been thrown out because they had problems," l. 16. "but thrown out I didn't- I'm not saying <u>that</u>!"). Moreover, the scenario is judged unacceptable by several group members. One participant rejects it straight away (l. 13. no!), and another describes why it seems inconceivable to him (l. 18. "he's been here a year and- and working," l. 19. "and you're going to say to him 'listen uh because of your health problem, we don't want you anymore'?"). These negative reactions result in the scenario being abandoned.

More broadly, this exchange is interesting because it highlights the difficulty involved in discussing the limitations to providing support. This can be seen in the level of careful oratory in P's utterances and in the reactions to the scenario from various group members. The exchange thus illustrates the fact that some of the participants find it impossible to give up their support

position even when they are in the paradoxical situation of not being able to provide it because the situation does not appear to offer any quick solution and because the only actions deemed feasible by the group are rejected by the person they are supporting. Moreover, this also constitutes a way for the group to clarify its work. For example, there is a general consensus that just because someone is having problems does not mean that they should be thrown out (l. 15). In addition, they agree that when trainees have been in training for almost a year, they cannot simply be told not come back the next day (l. 18-19) and that abandoning someone with a problem is not an option (l. 22).

Finally, the extract is also interesting from the point of view of anticipatory stances. In the first scenario, W refers to employer demands in the construction of an oracular and fatalistic stance (no professional future for Barry if he does not seek treatment). Advice is therefore given from the viewpoint of demand and employers. However, P's questions were more focused on the possibility of acting on the supply side. His fatalism seems to be concerned with Horizons' capacity to train Barry independently of the job market. In effect, he seems to question the sense of training someone who is no longer in a position to learn.

Scenario 3. Forcing the Trainee to Seek Treatment

(4)   "yes but we we are in a position where we can also force something"

T: 1. yes but we we are in a position where we can also force something

JP: 2. force?

        3. we've never forced anything on anyone though

T: 4. yes, but we have forced some things on some people!

5.   we force them to do courses we force them=

JP: 6. yeah we

T: 7. = we- well some things

        8. so in relation to

        9. to his vocational plan

        10. I think there're there're things we can force him to do.

        11. and that's true for

        12. it's a side of things he has to he has to:

JP: 13. (it's intruding) in his private life.

P: 14. no . what? . if it if it has repercussions ..

T: 15. it's affecting his professional life

P: 16. = if it- if it has repercussions ..

        17. from a professional ang- euh

        18. training and professional

        19. it's not just intruding into his private life is it in that case […]

        20. = the employer though he's not going to beat about the bush

        21. so then we we ha-have to get in there first and maybe

        22. I don't know myself I can't see it I can't see it

JP: 23. but I'm not saying

P: 24. we've already strongly advised him

        25. we've given him strong warning

        26. uh

T: 27. and we can't do anything else can we

P: 28. or else it's (xxx)

T: 29. or else right if the worse comes to the worst you know we don't ask him anymore.

JP: 30. okay we know

T: 31. now that's all that's no problem.

The professional controversy referred to here involves two aspects of support work: i) where does support stop (can it be about matters other than professional ones), and ii) how far can support workers influence the actions of the person they support (must they limit themselves to giving advice or can they enforce it)? Different positions are rejected as the group speculates on what is acceptable within the professional support relationship to break the deadlock. The social worker, T, justifies the support workers' authority to guide the activity of others on the basis of the fact that they are in a specific institutional context (l. 1. "yes but we we are in a position where we can also force something"). This position is immediately challenged by the workshop supervisor, JP, who comments that imposing such demands goes against the center's usual policy (l. 2-3. "force?," "we've never forced anything on anyone though"). The social worker retorts that there are precedents (l. 4. "yes, but we have forced some things on some people!," l. 5. "we force them to do courses we force them"). The two interlocutors then clash on the issue of interference. JP believes that forcing Barry to seek treatment is an invasion of his privacy (l. 13.

"[it's intruding] in his private life"), while T situates the issue at the professional level (l. 15. "it's affecting his professional life"). This point of view is also taken up by P, the numeracy teacher (l. 16-19. "if it- if it has repercussions... from a professional ang- uh training and professional it's not just intruding into his private life is it in that case"). Once again, the professional future of the learner is brought up as a justification for potential interference (l. 20-21. "the employer though he's not going to beat about the bush," "so then we we ha-have to get in there first and maybe").

As the exchange progresses, support moves are debated and examined from several angles. At the end of the exchange, there is still uncertainty over what decision to take (this is expressed by P in his anticipatory agnostic stance: l. 22. "I don't know myself I can't see it I can't see it") and no choice is made between a proactive and a wait-and-see stance. The decision to increase the illocutionary force of the messages (advice, warning, enforcement) is not taken, and a fatalistic stance therefore emerges (l. 27. "and we can't do anything else can we," l. 29. "or else right if the worse comes to the worst you know we don't ask him anymore"). The issue of determining what support action is suitable remains open, as can be seen in the remainder of the exchange.

Scenario 4. Getting the Message Back to the Trainee

(5)   "we have to help him all the same"

MF: 1. but now how can we act in the most appropriate way possible to uh

JP: 2. (yeah) we can't beat about the bush we have to go straight in.

MF: 3. meaning?

JP: 4. well tell him straight (xxxx)

MF: 5. ah yes.

       6. but we've already told him haven't we.

JP: 7. well.

MF: 8. we don't know how to be clearer than that.

W: 9. I've repeated it to him myself.

JP: 10. and well that's it isn't it.

       11. what do you want to do?

MF: 12. yes, I don't know either. […]

P: 13. if W's told him clearly

MF: 14. yes but we don't know (xxxx)

P: 15. = if you yourself told him

        16. if we've all told him eh

JP: 17. (if everybody said it xxxxx)

        18. we have to help him all the same.

MF: 19. he-he's <u>so</u> fixed on it that

At this stage, the group seems to have exhausted all the options of which they are aware. A double stance is expressed in relation to what course of action to adopt: fatalistic (l. 10. "and well that's it isn't it," l. 11. "what do you want to do?"), and agnostic (l. 12. "yes, I don't know either"). On the agency axis, although all possibilities for action seem to have been explored, the group cannot make up its mind about what to do (l. 18. "we have to help him all the same").

6.3. Making a Decision

The exchange ends with two options, representing the two strategic scenarios that will be adopted, being accepted. The first option is to continue to send messages. However, rather than escalating the illocutionary force of the messages (for example, forcing rather than advising or warning), the pressure of repetition (to keep saying the information as often and for as long as is necessary) is chosen to produce a change in attitude in the trainee:

(6)   "I agree I suppose with telling him each time that he's in danger of losing his job"

MF: 1. = so now we can take it that really it's going to be a recurrent problem

        2. I agree I suppose with telling him each time that he's in danger of losing his job.

        3. let's not mince our words

        4. let's be very clear in the messages we send back

        5. I hope one time it'll just click.

        6. but but I think

        7. more than that […]

        8. so our position is clearly to let him follow his own path.

T: 9. yes.

MF: 10. to reinforce the message every chance we get

T:	11. yes
MF:	12. and to- to help him until it clicks that he has to take his health in hand
MF:	13. so we're going to stick our noses in his business but it's our business too to keep telling him
JP:	14. to keep telling him
MF:	15. to keep giving him the message constantly
F:	16. the message every time

Over the course of the exchange, the objective has also changed. In Extract 1, the focus was on getting Barry to take his health in hand. However, in Extract 6, given the apparent impossibility of this occurring, we see that the goalposts have shifted as the focus is now on "hoping it will just click." To engineer this "clicking," the support workers agree on the idea of repeating the same message over and over again, namely, the warning about the difficulties Barry will face if he does not resolve his problem. In this way, the group members arrive at a solution that avoids any interference on their part (l. 8. "so our position is clearly to let him follow his own path"). Moreover, this is also a form of agency that makes the support activity possible (l. 13. "so we're going to stick our noses in his business but it's our business too to keep telling him," l. 15. "to keep giving him the message constantly"). The second action the group opts for is not to give Barry a salary raise for the forthcoming period. Although the trainees are drawing unemployment benefits, they receive additional remuneration for their work at Horizons, and this remuneration can continue to increase as their training progresses as a form of encouragement or reward:

(7)	"we force him without forcing him that's it"
MF:	1. and he's on 130.
	2. uh
	3. do we want to change something there? […]
??:	4. (as long as doesn't look after himself)
	5. [laughing]
MF:	6. yes that's it.
	7. no! but it's true isn't it.

8. (xxxx) we have to be very consistent.

JP: 9. we're going- we're going to end up forcing him really.

MF: 10. yes! But I think it'll be more

11. actually more effective then we- we all agree that

12. status quo isn't it you know.

JP: 13. we force him without forcing him that's it

14. [laughing]

Over the course of the overall exchange, positions are proposed, argued, and negotiated. Different scenarios compete, with none appearing completely satisfactory. In the absence of a consensus on any of the options, agreement is reached to repeat the information and to give tangible signals that progress can be made (via, for example, a salary raise). By the end, even though the group has not ratified the idea of imposing a course of action on Barry, different sorts of action are proposed to induce Barry to take responsibility for his health (l. 13. "we force him without forcing him," as JP neatly sums it up). Thus discussions and actions are used to anticipate a particular trajectory considered preferable for the trainee (look after him now, rather than have him be fired by an employer later).

Following the meeting, the educational training supervisor compiles a report synthesizing the discussion and picking up on some of the aspects discussed. The document addresses Barry in the following way: "we think that it is important that you take control of your life and your health, but this is your decision, we think it will be difficult for you to hold down a job if you do not resolve this problem of lack of strength." Moreover, Barry is informed that he will not get a salary raise. This second point generates a reaction from Barry and leads to him and other trainees to call a meeting. The meeting lasts an hour, and although it is rich and fruitful, we will limit ourselves to making reference to only two passages from it. These reveal Barry's own view of his future trajectory and the way in which the support workers begin to listen to his point of view.

6.4. The Viewpoint of the Person Receiving Support

Barry appears to project his professional future in quite a different direction to that anticipated in the support workers' discussions. We can see this in the extract (8) below:

(8)   "I've been thinking about maybe coming back and doing painting… but do I have to come and tell you that here?"

B: 1. yes but

2 .what happens at home has nothing to do with Horizons <u>here</u> […]

3. I said to my wife

4. uh

5. I'm going to get through

6. to the end of my training for me to be able to get treatment

7. I'll have a year

8. and after that I've been thinking about maybe coming back

9. to do painting.

MF: 10. yes.

B: 11. okay.

12. she completely agrees

13. but do I have to come and tell you that here?

14. no.

MF: 15. not at all (xxxxx)

B: 16. th-th-that's my own business.

In this extract, we can see that Barry also does not know what might happen to him. However, he has opted for a different scenario from those explored during the first pedagogical meeting. The scenario that seems both the most realistic and desirable to him follows a different time sequence. He is thinking of pursuing his training until it is completed (oracular stance: l. 5-6. "I'm going to get through to the end of my training") and he aims to seek treatment (l. 6. "for me to be able to get treatment"). By contrast, his long-term future is less certain. He is considering a return to training at a later stage (probabilistic stance, l. 8-9. "and after that I've been thinking about maybe coming back to do painting"). Throughout this scenario, Barry seems to have already accepted that retraining as a plasterer will be difficult. His plan to return to work does not appear to be a priority any longer. He also reiterates his request for no interference (l. 13. "but do

I have to come and tell you that here?") while at the same time showing transparency and revealing his scenario.

6.5. Freedom of Choice or Constrained Autonomy?

Following this, the interaction continues at length. Barry expresses his regret on several occasions at not having received a salary raise. He also repeats his view that his health is his own business. MF, the educational training supervisor does not object to this and therefore hands him back responsibility for his own choices. In the following extract, we can see how this accountability is built up:

(9)   "we don't force anyone, just so we're clear"

MF: 1. I believe it's your choice Barry

        2. I'd like you to understand what we're saying

        3. that you're not just digging your heels in about the salary raise.

B: 4. well that's what you're asking me to do as well isn't it

        5. to get treatment.

MF: 6. first of all we're not asking you.

        7. it's you who decides to come and do training

B: 8. you're suggesting

        9. I go and get treatment.

MF: 10. we're taking stock of your- of your progress

        11. of your development.

        12. we don't ask anything

        13. it's you who's asked to come.

        14. we've not been looking for you okay?

B: 15. no no (xxxxx)

MF: 16. it is a choice.

B: 17. I'm quite happy

        18. I've learned a lot

MF: 19. and we- […]

MF: 20. and by doing that we're saying to you

21

21. you can take it or leave it

22. we don't force anyone.

23. just so we're clear.

24. we don't <u>ask</u> you to get treatment.

25. we're saying if you want to find a job

26. sort out your strength problem

27. take control of things.

28. at the end of the day we shouldn't even have had to talk about this health matter

29. we would just have had to say take control of things to sort out your strength problem

30. but we don't <u>force</u> you to go and see a doctor

31. it's your choice, it's your life

32. and we like to think that's something you also learn at Horizons . to take control.

33. without having someone say you must do it.

34. as they say all the time in school.

35. okay?

36. when you said I spoke about it with my wife she's the one who-

37. who this affects the most okay

38. but you're completely right

39. it's obvious

40. take matters in hand if you choose

41. to-to get treatment after

42. do it.

43. get treatment after

44. the most important thing is to do it.

45. okay?

46. but you have to make a choice because you are the one who makes the decision.

47. and not because we we ask you to do something.

48. we don't ask you we guide you.

49. we can signpost you

50. and you can follow or not.

51. it's your choice. ..

52. and if it's your choice now that it's not worth the bother anymore because you haven't had a salary raise now it's your choice to stop okay we will respect your choice.

This final exchange is interesting on several levels. First, we note that while the rhetoric from the educational training supervisor is presented at several points as a discourse of choice and autonomy (for example, l. 1. "it's your choice Barry," l. 22. "we don't force anyone," l. 32. "and we like to think that's something you also learn at Horizons, to take control," l. 33. "without having someone say you must do it," l. 34. "as they say all the time in school," l. 51. "it's your choice"), it is perceived by Barry more as a discourse of constrained autonomy. He has the impression that the absence of a salary raise is a form of punishment designed to make him adopt a particular course of action (l. 4-5. "well that's what you're asking me to do as well isn't it to get treatment"). The educational training supervisor strongly refutes this interpretation on several occasions during the course of the interaction. When Barry states that he has the impression that they are asking him to seek treatment, MF responds that no such request is being made (l. 6. "first of all we're not asking you," l. 7. "it's you who decides to come and do training"). Barry then rephrases the suggestion (l. 8-9. "you're suggesting I go and get treatment"). This rewording pinpoints the ambiguity experienced by the trainee, namely being under the impression that he is having something forced on him (since a request leaves less room for maneuver than a simple suggestion) while at same time not having the power to say so. Finally, the sequence sheds light on the educational training supervisor's understanding of support, in which decisions must in the end be taken by the person receiving support, with the role of the support workers being to guide and signpost, not to ask or demand. In this extract, the paradoxical side of the performative and inductive dimension of the meeting is clearly visible. Leaving it to Barry to choose his course of action seems like the ultimate way of taking him somewhere he has not necessarily chosen to go.

7. Conclusion

Clearly, many other elements could be highlighted in the extracts examined above. However, this analysis allows us to propose some reference points for understanding the activity of social support. In this conclusion, we will review some key elements from the analysis in order to highlight some salient points.

In this study, we attempted to examine the social practice of support in vocational transitions. This was done through the analysis of a single situation, based on the assumption that the analysis will prove informative when other situations of the same type are compared and contrasted.

The investigation also led us to venture a little outside of traditional frameworks. Instead of examining a one-on-one meeting, we focused on a situation of group support, and rather than analyzing the discourse of professionals talking about their work, we tried to understand support while it is actually in progress (Filliettaz and Bronckart 2005). Finally, we focused on a particular institutional context, namely the social economy sector, where the focus is, in this case at least, less on professional placement and integration than on the wider socialization and autonomization of the person undertaking training. In spite of the atypical character of the situation studied, this short case study affords us a glimpse of more subtle linguistic traits characteristic of support work in transitions, at least as far as they are expressed in this context.

First of all, Barry's case displays that analysis, anticipation, and prevention are at the heart of support workers' activities. The functions of these activities are numerous. Analysing or anticipating might include removing psychological blocks, anticipating possible failures down the line, encouraging the persons receiving support to take responsibility, and providing them with options and choices. Support work consists as much in planning possible actions as dismissing those that seem undesirable or unrealistic. Furthermore, the discussions about Barry's situation reveal the extent to which support work is situation-specific and unpredictable. It is mostly carried out in real time and is based on negotiation. The support stances that come to the fore pertain to an arrangement between the various participants and the person receiving support in their attempt to reach an agreement that makes sense and is consensual. In this respect, there is never a ready-made support stance, which makes this work complex and uncertain but also profoundly dynamic and open-ended.

In sum, the close analysis of the performative acts analyzed in this study gives us greater awareness of the responsibilities borne by support workers. In uncertain situations, it is difficult to predict whether or not an action will pay off in the long term. In spite of this uncertainty, the support workers are, whether they like it or not, constantly taking part in decision making. Even through the speech forms they use, they are always inducing choices. This reality may partly explain the caution that is often appropriate in support work as well as the propensity in social

work to euphemize when it comes to interfering in other people's lives, as previously indicated by Chabrol (1994).

Furthermore, Barry's case also allows us to illustrate a dilemma of support that is expressed quite clearly here. The philosophy of support advocated at Horizons is an ideology of the autonomization of individuals. Faced with a job market that is relatively closed to the population sectors targeted by this kind of organization, Horizons advocates putting individuals, their desires, and their intentions at the center and showing them how to become masters of their own destinies. However, Barry's case contradicts this institutional discourse. Faced with a risky situation, he has weighed up his options and decided on a course of action (to finish his training and then return at a later stage to take up another course). This decision shows both his capacity for self-determination and his ability to bounce back when encountering a problem. Moreover, he has developed his own scenario and defined a path that complies with his wishes and seems to him to be the most realistic. Throughout all of these decisions, Barry demonstrates the very capacity that was expected of him, which was to become self-determined and independent. Yet the group has difficulties in recognizing this self-determination, and we might question whether, while wishing to develop independence and a sense of responsibility in Barry, they have not instead accentuated the dependence of the trainee in respect of the training system. This example reminds us of the curious paradox that consists in wishing to develop independence within a context of dependence and support. More broadly, it allows us to highlight how the work of support professionals fluctuates between two norms. On the one hand, support workers must not judge, be authoritative, enforce decisions (they must let individuals make their own choices). On the other, support workers cannot *not* give support (to adapt Bateson's famous saying). They have to do something. In the case under study here, this tension between two contradictory positions leads to a curious form of resolution, which consists in enjoining the trainee to act freely. As could be expected, this is experienced by Barry as the expression of a constrained autonomy.

Although we have done no more in this study than provide a brief outline of an interpretative framework for the linguistic analysis of support situations in vocational transitions, the conjoined notions of anticipatory discourse, scenarios, and directive actions allow for a clarification of some aspects of the complex work carried out by support workers. In return, the study of situations of support in transitions appears to be fertile ground for a more general

understanding of the roles played by discourse and interactions to either reinforce the status quo or generate new actions and possibilities. Further empirical research in this area should enable a refinement of these reflections.

Appendix
Transcription conventions

underlined	stress
.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
xxxxx	untranscribable section
:	long syllable
-	truncation
(hesitation)	section where the transcription is uncertain
. .. …	pauses of varying duration
??	speaker unidentifiable
=	continuation of preceding speaker's turn
[…]	passage not transcribed

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Abstract

Few studies have examined the relationships that develop *in situ* between support professionals and those they support in vocational retraining situations. To address this gap in the literature, this paper examines the way in which support plays out in a real interactive situation. First, some generic aspects of support situations will be outlined (including the open and unpredictable character of the dialogue, goal orientations, and the asymmetry of roles). Second, the anticipatory nature of support situations, which are forward-looking and focused on decisions concerning future actions, will be underlined and analytical categories put forward. Finally, a real support situation will be analyzed using these categories. The context in which the analysis takes place is a vocational training community organization that incorporates social economic values and has a dual mission to integrate and train the low-skilled, long-term unemployed. In terms of methodology, the analytical tools are drawn from the field of interactional sociolinguistics and mediated discourse analysis. A close analysis of support interactions identifies some salient aspects of social support activities and reflects a number of dilemmas and controversies associated with the profession.