

## THE PRAGMATIC MASTERY OF STYLES-SHIFTING AMONGST EFL LEARNERS AND TEACHERS: CASE OF ABU-BAKR BELKAÏD UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** Language use is conditioned by the context in which such use occurs. Therefore, foreign language learners, just like native speakers, are required to know how to use language appropriately in different contexts. Among the aspects of appropriate use is the choice of the speech style. Therefore, the present research aimed to probe style shifting amongst EFL learners. The point was to investigate which style they use the most when interacting with classmates in comparison to conversing with their teachers, and whether they switch between the different styles or they keep the same style as long as the participant does not change. The study considered a sample of 136 learners and 55 teachers in the department of English at Tlemcen University, Algeria. The study was built on participant observation and online questionnaires. The results revealed that EFL learners and teachers alike systematically employ switch between the different styles regardless of the social status and relational distance between the interlocutors. This indicates that learners master the pragmatic use and shift of styles in relation to context.

**Keywords:** Context; conversation strategies; EFL learners; pragmatically competent; style shifting

### LA MAÎTRISE PRAGMATIQUE DU CHANGEMENT DE STYLES CHEZ LES APPRENANTS ET LES ENSEIGNANTS DE L'EFL : CAS DE L'UNIVERSITÉ D'ABU-BAKR BELKAÏD, TLEMCEM

**Résumé :** L'utilisation de la langue est conditionnée par le contexte dans lequel elle se produit. Par conséquent, les apprenants de langues étrangères, tout comme les locuteurs natifs, doivent savoir utiliser la langue de manière appropriée dans différents contextes. Parmi les aspects d'une utilisation appropriée figure le choix du style de discours. Par conséquent, la présente recherche visait à sonder le changement de style chez les apprenants EFL. Le but était d'enquêter sur le style qu'ils utilisent le plus lorsqu'ils interagissent avec leurs camarades de classe par rapport à la conversation avec leurs enseignants, et s'ils basculent entre les différents styles ou s'ils gardent le même style tant que le participant ne change pas. L'étude a porté sur un échantillon de 136 apprenants et 55 enseignants du département d'anglais de l'Université de Tlemcen, en Algérie. L'étude a été construite sur l'observation des participants et des questionnaires en ligne. Les résultats ont révélé que les apprenants et les enseignants d'EFL utilisent systématiquement le passage d'un style à l'autre, quel que soit le statut social et la distance relationnelle entre les interlocuteurs. Cela indique que les apprenants maîtrisent l'utilisation pragmatique et le changement de styles en fonction du contexte.

**Mots-clés :** Apprenants EFL ; changement des style ; contexte; pragmatiquement compétant; stratégies de conversation

## Introduction

While speaking a second or a foreign language, learners use this language differently depending on the context. They often fall in occasions when it is necessary to shift styles for keeping appropriateness within their speech. Appropriateness sometimes calls for the implementation of implicit meaning that is inconvenient to explicitly convey. Pragmatically speaking, opting for one style instead of another one or alternating between styles may hold a variety of covert messages and intentions. Style shifting does not always imply a change in the conversations. Rather, shifting can be performed by the same speaker and within the same conversation (Caltabiano, 2008). The current paper investigates style shifting amongst EFL learners and teachers at Tlemcen University, Algeria. It primarily aims at unveiling the various aspects of their styles-shifting. It also questions the pragmatic connotations of alternating between the different styles. The present research is a case study investigating the phenomenon of style shifting amongst learners and teachers at the department of English, Tlemcen University. The aim is to circle the styles which are frequently used and to determine the reasons guiding style shifting in participants' speech. The questions driving the research are listed as follows: What speech style(s) is/are dominant among EFL learners and teachers? Do teachers and learners alternate between the different styles in the academic context? If style shifting is a common practice among the target population, what motivates such shift? The following hypotheses are set to answer these questions. EFL learners and teachers mainly use a formal style in their conversations. They shift styles when they converse in academic contexts. This shifting is motivated with the search of ease of communication in relation to the needs of the speakers' and the context as well.

### 0.1 Literature review

In literature, scholars have attempted to unravel the ambiguity of style-shifting. Many previous works have dealt with important notions regarding the use and variation of style. This includes the various classifications of styles amongst which Joos' (1961) is considered the most fascinating, and the theories that account the reasons for the use and shifting of styles. Beneath, major works covering the concepts of style and style-shifting are discussed. It is quite common for people to use various speech styles of the same language depending on the context. The way one speaks in an academic context is pretty distinct from a casual conversation between intimate friends. The level of formality is governed by a number of variables, such as age, gender, social status of the addressee, type of occasion and so forth. Such variables determine the appropriate style which best fits a given linguistic transaction. This implies that there are different styles. Joos (1961) was among, if not the first, writers to provide a detailed classification of speech style. Joos identifies five types of styles, known in the literature as the five clocks. Long before Martin Joos (1961) has introduced his 'five clocks', language styles were merely regarded through the dichotomy formal and informal styles. Of course, this distinction is valid, but it definitely remains inadequate compared to Joos' classification which provides in-depth discussion, identifying each style with specific features. Joos' list includes the frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate styles. The frozen style, also renowned as oratorical, fixed

or static style, comes at the top of Joos' (1961) categorization, being the most formal style. It is associated with very formal situations, like international meetings, official political statements, ceremonies, etc. Speakers using this style opt for long, complex and well structured sentences, respected coherence and cohesion, a scientific vocabulary, a serious tone within a monolog or a large audience with no or a little interrupting accepted (Hamdany and Damanhury, 2017). In Joos' model, the formal style comes second. Speakers call for such a style when the situation is formal and the least background is shared. To put it differently, the formal style is opted for in contexts where interlocutors do not have tight bonds (Broderick, 1976). For example, interlocutors who just come to know each other usually opt for this style. Likewise, job interviews and research papers also use the formal style. What characterizes the formal style is the use of complete sentences delivered with caution, low tempo, title terms (e.g. Mr., Sir, Mrs.), polite openings, closings and requests with the use of 'may' and 'might', avoidance of repetition and contractions. It goes without saying that coherence and cohesion are respected. Joos' classification also consists of a consultative style in which communication usually takes the form of group discussions in regular settings, such as school, office and so forth. This style is semi-formal. According to Joos, this style is used when focus is not on the formality of communication, but rather on successfulness of communication. Here, all conversants contribute with the speaker providing background information and the addressee(s) participating continuously. This implies that interruptions are allowed as it takes the form of a conversation and not a monolog. This style is also characterized by short sentences, hesitations, and agreement terms (e.g. uhhuh, yes, I think so, etc.). Therefore, this style does not perfectly fit writing. What comes next in this model is the casual style which is used in day-to-day conversations between friends, family members and people with tight relationships. This style makes the conversants feel at ease, not giving much importance to wording and grammar. Participants opt for direct addressing of interlocutors besides friendly openings and closings (e.g. hi, see you, etc). This style is, furthermore, characterized by the use of ellipsis, contractions, and slang. In the end of Joos' model lies the intimate style. It is used within very informal contexts between close people, including friends, couples and family. This style identifies the use of ellipsis, deletions, non-verbal communication, private codes, rapid and slurred pronunciation, etc. Specific to this style, is the use of endearment words (e.g. babe, darling), extraction and jargon.

## ***0.2 The Intentions Standing behind Style Shifting***

According to Coupland (2011), Joos' classification of styles was established with the purpose of guiding learners to put on focus the relationship between language and the context that might be overtaken. The use of one style or another, according to Joos (1961), is mainly a matter of 'relational configuration' between interactants which makes the level of formality, in written or oral exchanges, a choice made by the interlocutors, Coupland (2011) adds. It merits to add that speakers may not necessarily make use of merely one style within the one conversation. In so many occasions, interactants happen to utilize more than one style within their speech. This act is, generally, referred to as style shifting. The latter is regarded as a "variation in an individual's speech correlating with differences in

addressee, social context, personal goals or externally imposed tasks” (Meyerhoff, 2006: 28). Selting (1983) defines style shifting as “the alternation of one speech style with another in the context of the same communicative event, towards the same or another addressee” (Selting 1987: 180). In simple words, Selting regards style shifting as a change between distinct styles during the same conversation when addressing the same or a different speaker.

Ever since pragmatics intrigued researchers’ attention, many scholars conducted investigations aiming at establishing theories and identifying reasons guiding style shifting. Hereby, two major dimensions are covered: intrapersonal and interpersonal, with the first discussed as attention paid to conversation and the second as audience. Stolarski (2013) claims that style shifting occurs in relation to intra-speaker variation rather than inter-speaker variation. This notion primarily evolved within Labov’s framework (1966; 1972) who clarifies this notion by stating that “the selection of a given style is primarily dependent on the amount of attention the speaker pays to what he is saying. In more formal styles he tends to be more aware of the way he speaks, and in less formal styles he does not concentrate on his linguistic performance” (in Stolarski, 2013: 245). Shifting occurs when a speaker switches his speech style from a formal to a less formal one or inversely to accommodate with the current discourse needs. Switching between speech styles does not exclusively involve wording, speakers may jump from a formal to an informal style only by changing the pronunciation features, including the tone, as a shift in register (Schilling-Estes, 2003). Furthermore, researchers like Stolarski (2013) and Caltabiano (2008) among others, agree that style shifting does not only occur in distinct conversations and/or when speaking with distinct people; instead, it may emerge within the same dialogue involving the same participants. For instance, two speakers who do not know each other well may shift their speech style from a formal to an informal style within one conversation as they advance and get to know each other more.

As for the reasons standing behind shifting styles, some researchers agree with Labov's (1966, 1972) claim that it simply and primarily relies on the focus and importance put on to the conversation. Dewaele (1995), for instance, observes that when the speakers give much importance to the conversation with the other speakers they use the formal style and when a little focus is put on the conversation, the informal or casual styles are opted for. Cook (1996b), with a cordial point of view, regards that formal and casual styles are factors that determine the value of distance and closure (Caltabiano, 2008: 132). According to this view, the use of formal styles (including what Joos (1961) terms as frozen, formal and consultative styles) indicates distance, whereas the use of the casual and informal styles gives clues of intimacy and warmth between the speakers. Nevertheless, other researchers (e.g. Coupland 1980, 1985; Bell, 1984; Eckert & Rickford, 2001; Schilling-Estes, 2003; Eckert, 2008) deny the notion that ties up style-shifting merely to attention and importance given to the conversation. They argue that, along with attention paid to speech, there are other factors that motivate the choice of styles and condition the shifting process. These factors include, according to Coupland (2007), audience, interpersonal dynamics, identity projection and persona. Coupland’s (ibid) notion of audience is explained on the basis of Giles and Smith (1979) ‘CAT’ (Communication

Accommodation Theory), stipulating that styles shifting emerges in conversation when a speaker puts on effort to build a certain image of themselves, or sometimes distinct interlocutors, in the view of the audience. Shifting for building an image of a distinct interlocutor occurs in such occasions whereby the speaker shifts his speech style to a formal one when a certain conversant joins the interaction, and is addressed, to make the audience believe he is of a higher social status. For instance, a teacher who is using a consultative style whilst interacting with his learners changes to the formal style when the dean joins the conversation. Thus, the speaker shifts from the current style to another one to fit this purpose well. Generally, the style that the speaker changes to is the one which the audience regularly use for communication. Between the factor of attention and that of audience stands Sharma's (2018) research, validating the coexistence of the two components as reasons of style shifting. Building on her radio speech analysis of an American Indian journalist who masters both variants of English, namely American and Indian Englishes, Sharma states that the journalist shifts styles depending on his audience. If the audience listening to him speaks American English, he opts for the same variety of English. If the audience speaks Indian English, the show will be guided in this variety. Sharma's research also revealed that the journalist shifted between styles of his dialects for intentional reasons as well.

## ***0.2 Methodological framework***

To provide adequate answers to the above-mentioned questions, it was opted for a mixed methods approach for data collection, using a mixed questionnaire and participant observation. This implies that both qualitative and quantitative data could be obtained. As for the questionnaire, it was administered to teachers via Google Forms. The number of participants was 15 out of 60 permanent teachers. Such participants are of different ages, ranging between 29 and 72. Concerning observation, two different groups of learners were covered together with their teachers. The sample included 1<sup>st</sup> year EFL learners (belonging to two subgroups which are taught by different teachers) and a group of 3<sup>rd</sup> year EFL students taught by two teachers. The number of participants was a total of 136 learners divided into two groups; a group of 90 1<sup>st</sup> year students and a second group composed of 46 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. Observation took place during classes of oral production whereby participants were observed within 45 minutes-long sessions during 10 days. Observation proceeded outside classroom walls, specifically in the department hall in order to depict the linguistic style(s) used and style-shifting in teacher/ learner conversations out of classrooms.

## **1. Results**

The findings are sorted according to each data collection instrument.

### ***1.1. Teachers' Questionnaire***

The teachers' questionnaire results are analysed step by step, considering each question separately. The results are as follows:

**Question 1:** How many hours do you spend with your students per week?

Answers to this question revealed that teachers generally spend between 6 to 12 hours a week with their students. Of course, some teachers spend this time with one or two groups, while others have more groups. This is the official timing that they have to work. However, teachers also have other duties where they can meet students too, including tutoring (mainly for first year) and supervision (Master II). Teachers work between 12 to 14 weeks a semester. This makes them meet their students frequently. Of course, most of such meetings are onsite and not online. This frequent and direct contact makes teachers and students familiar with one another.

**Question 2:** What speech style do you use with students during class?

Results showed that 64% of teachers claim to use essentially a formal style for lecturing and communicating during classes. 14% of them revealed using basically the consultative style. Still 14% of them prefer switching between formal, consultative and casual. What is noticed is that none of the respondents claimed to use the two styles at the edge of the continuum, i.e., frozen and intimate as shown in figure 1. below.

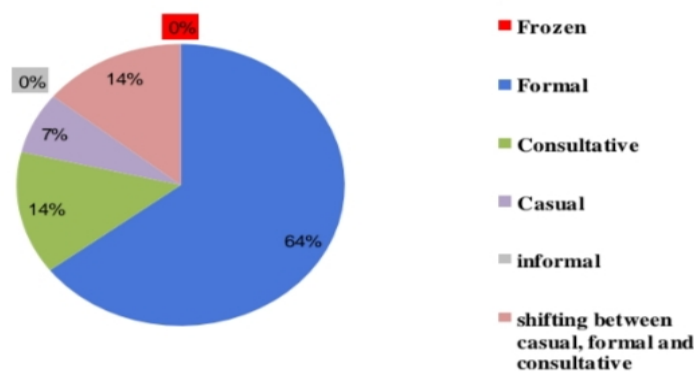


Figure 1. Teachers' speech styles use during classes

**Question 3:** What motivates you to opt for one style over the others?

Teachers gave different answers about the reasons for using one style and not the other. Those who opted for the formal style argued that the context, i.e., academic, dictates such a choice as it is the best which fits teaching/learning. They think that this is the style which should serve education and they are supposed to be formal in the classroom. Those opting for the consultative style believe that present time classrooms call for such a style as it targets team building and collaborative learning. Classes which build on such a style encourage students to take part in the learning process. As such, within these classes the teacher will not have to do all the talk, with students being passive bystanders. Those teachers who argue to switch from time to time to the casual style defend this behaviour stating that they seek to make the message across, i.e., transmitting the idea to the student has priority over formality of the context. Such teachers also believe that the casual style creates a friendly atmosphere where learners feel at ease.

**Question 4:** What style do your students use while interacting with you inside the classroom?

The bar chart shows that 71% of the participants (i.e., 11 teachers out of 15) revealed that a clear majority of learners use the formal style inside the classroom. The remaining teachers argued that students opt for other styles from time to time for a reason or another. However, formality remains the dominant feature of their interaction with the teacher.

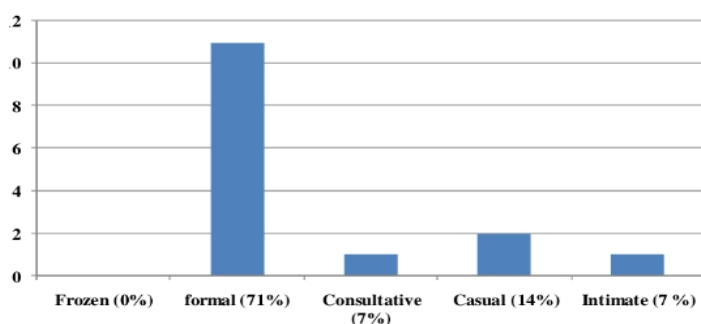


figure 2. Students' use of speech styles inside the classroom

**Question 5:** According to you, what motivates students' choices of speech style(s) inside the classroom?

Teachers who stated that learners interact with them using essentially a formal style justified this choice building on the requirements of the academic context and the social distance between the conversants. For them, the formal style reflects a high degree of respect between teachers and students. Those who reported students' use of the consultative style argue that this strictly depends on the teacher, i.e., if students opt for the consultative style, this is only because the teacher triggers them to use such a style. A teacher of this kind favours student-centred learning. Therefore, the use of the consultative style results from the general atmosphere ruling the classroom where interruptions, questions, debates and so forth are warmly encouraged. Teamwork is supposed to motivate students opt for this style more than any other style. As for the casual style, teachers observed that this style surfaces during their classes from time to time depending on a number of reasons. Sometimes students opt for this style because of a linguistic need, i.e., they may face situations of lexical gaps where they cannot come up with the formal word but opt rather for slang. In other times, they can use expressions and formulas without knowing that these are casual language. Of course, this happens because it has become easy to expose to English and students may learn it from movies, songs, shows, internet, etc, where the standard norm is not always present.

**Question 6:** Do you often hold conversations with your students outside the classroom?

Answers to this item revealed that a clear majority of teachers (70%) communicate with their students on a regular basis. Of course, this apart from lectures delivered in the classroom. 15% of them claimed to rarely communicate with students

outside the classroom. still 15% of teachers argued that they never hold conversations with students aside of the formal academic context.

**Question 7:** If yes, in which language do you hold the conversation?

Teachers who approved of that they communicate with their learners outside the classroom provided varying answers about the language through which communication is held. 75% of them claimed to be switching back and forth between English and Dialectal Arabic (sometimes even French) is the main linguistic behaviour which characterizes their interaction with students. the remaining 25% of teachers stressed the point that their conversations build solely on English though the context might be semi-formal at best. Those who opt for code switching view this as part of building tight bonds with students, unstressing social distance, creating a friendly environment, but also portraying local identity, especially through injecting Arabic

**Question 8:** What style do you use when conversing with your students outside the classroom?

34% of teachers claimed to use a formal style even when interacting with their students outside the classroom, and when the context probably calls for a less formal style. 27% of them proclaimed to use frequently the consultative style. 26% other participants confessed to opt for a more casual style. Still, 13% of them argued that shifting between formal and informal styles is the common process which takes place outside the classroom.

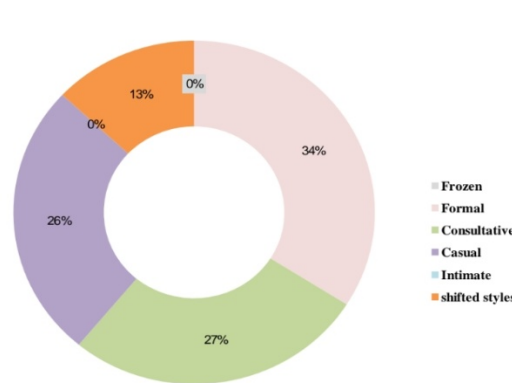


Figure 3. Linguistic Styles Teachers Use in Communication with Learners aside of classes

**Question 9:** What motivates your choice?

The participants gave different reasons which condition their use of a style at the cost of the other. Teachers who opt solely for the formal style justify their choice arguing that the nature of the context, being academic, dictates the use of such a style. They also add that the participants in the communication act (teacher-students) are the major factor which imposes formality whether inside the classroom or outside when classes are off. The third determinant factor relates to topics which are discussed, being most of the time about studies (lectures, assignments, exams, grades, etc.). As for teachers who favour the consultative style even outside the classroom walls, they defend it building on their belief



that it eases communication with students where spontaneity is by far reached. This style fits asking questions, providing answers, and giving pieces of advice. Those using a casual style outside the classroom context argued that they consider their learners compatriots with whom they share knowledge, give opinions freely and discuss different social matters with no boundaries dictated by the formality of the classroom. For these teachers, the social distance is, in a way or another, reduced. Concerning teachers who shift-styles, they observe that alternating between the different styles is conditioned by the topic being discussed. For example, if studies and school stuff are the main topics, formality is expected to surface. If the topic changes to, for example, social issues or personal matters, a less formal style is more likely to take place making learners at ease and building a closer relationship with them.

## ***1.2. Results of Participants' observation***

### *-First-year students results*

Observing first year students concerned two subgroups. Each group consisted of 45 students (males and females) taught by different teachers. Observation was conducted during oral production sessions. Many linguistic features were noticed. For example, students, and teachers alike, used frequently contracted forms, like I'm, it's too long, I won't play, that's all, let's, etc. Informal vocabulary and slang expressions, especially features of American English, were also present. It was not hard to hear expressions like 'I am gonna', 'I wanna', 'lotta', etc. Double negation also characterized the speech of a few students. Students repeatedly made use of some shortened forms, like 'cus' instead of 'because'. Ellipsis also characterized teacher-student and student-student interactions. As for coherence and cohesion, they were not really respected on the part of students. Concerning grammatical structures, students provided in many times short incomplete sentences. Long and complex structures were absent. Tags did not surface at all. As for greetings and leave-taking, no single form was used. Expressions like 'hi', 'hello guys', 'good morning', 'bye bye', 'see you then', etc were omnipresent. Polite requests were dominant, especially in student-teacher exchanges. Interruptions also took place with the teacher interrupting sometimes and students doing so in others. Examples of interruptions included expressions like:

*'I am sorry but I think...';*

*'I have something to add';*

*'What about.....?'*, etc

On the part of the teacher, directives delivered through the imperative were commonplace. This included expressions like 'silence', 'shut up', 'stand up', 'listen', etc. Such expressions were in many times realized with a raised tone.

### *-Third year students results*

As it was highlighted earlier, observation also concerned 3rd year EFL students. It goes without saying that such students are in their last year to graduate with a licence degree (equivalent of BA). Subject to observation were 45 students (males and females).

Again, observation took place during the oral production session. Such a class was obviously marked with a warm atmosphere. As for linguistic features characterizing communication, different greeting formulas were used ranging from formal to less informal (e.g. Good Morning, Hello, Hi, Hey, etc). Concerning leave-taking, two main expressions were used (goodbye, see you). It was easy to observe that turn-taking was highly respected during teacher-student and student-student interactions. In fact, permission was in most cases looked for before engaging in a speech act, sometimes through raising the hand asking for a verbal intervention. This does not imply that interruptions did not take place. In fact, both the teacher and the students interrupted the conversation in the appropriate way. Politeness dominated the whole communicative exchanges. In this sense, terms of address were predominantly used (e.g. Sir, Miss, etc). Expressions like 'I think', 'I believe', 'sorry', 'please', etc were frequently uttered. Requests, instead of direct commands, chiefly surfaced. As far as sentence structure is concerned, the conversant sometimes opted for complex sentences, elaborated grammatical structures, and even technical terms. Word choice was obvious their communication. In a word, formality of the classroom context was definitely respected. However, because observation concerned in essence verbal communication and not written documents, instances of informal language were also noticed though to a limited extent. This included ellipsis, contracted forms and other linguistic forms (e.g. wanna).

## 2. Discussion

The results reached through the questionnaire showed that teachers vary in their use of speech styles when conversing with their students. Although some teachers stick to the formal style, results revealed that switching between the different styles is the most prevailing linguistic behaviour. Such style shifting is mainly between formal, consultative and casual styles depending on the context and/or topic. Those who prefer using the formal style solely build on the belief that such a style fit preserving the required distance between the teacher and the learners. This is reflected in their consistent use of this style whether during classes or outside the classroom walls when holding communication acts with the learners (generally about school stuff). Such teachers also argue that the formal style should be encouraged in the sense that its use is very limited, being mainly associated with academia. Other teachers who show more flexibility seem to opt for different styles and even shift styles within the same linguistic exchange. Style shifting can be situational, depending on the context (formal like the classroom or semi-formal like the corridor), as it can be, say, topical, i.e., a change in the topic may call for a change in the speech style. Teachers' beliefs about style shifting from formal to less formal vary. They observe that the formal style only fit certain practices and situations, whereas the consultative style should take precedence in the classroom with the end to make students more engaged in verbal interactions. This is to promote learner-centred classrooms where learners are active contributors and not passive recipients of knowledge. In such classes, learners' opinions are encouraged and therefore interruptions are commonplace. Such teachers can, sometimes, allow even a casual style to take place, especially when certain topics are triggered. For them such a style does not threaten the rights and obligations (RO)

variable which characterizes teacher-learners relationship. If the casual style is permitted, it does not imply that respect among the conversant (teacher-student or student-student) is missed. The main motivation behind being quite less formal is to break the ice between the conversants, especially outside the classroom. This happens in the long run as the teacher spends at least 6 hours a week with the students which helps establish a relationship between them. The results obtained via the observation process only reinforced, to an extent, the questionnaire findings. The results showed complete absence of the frozen style. This is normal as such a style does not fit teaching, especially oral communication. Features of formality dominated teacher-student and student-student verbal interactions in the classroom. Greetings, turn-taking, leave-taking, politeness formulas, appropriateness of the tone, etc. characterized the oral production class. While observing 1st year and 3rd year EFL students, and their teachers, two main styles surfaced, namely the formal and the consultative styles. This is surprising in no way as the context (classroom) calls for both styles. However, it was noticed that students at an advanced level (3rd year in this case) have a stronger tendency to observe the formality of the context. Of course, both groups of learners exposed linguistic features associated with informality, particularly the casual style. This was more attested among 1st year students. This can logically explained on the basis of the subject during which observation took place. Verbal interaction is the medium through which oral production classes are delivered and, therefore, linguistic traits like contractions, ellipsis, hesitations, interruptions, etc are expected even if the speaker is eloquent. It is possible that such features were not to appear (with such a density) if, for example, written production was examined.

As for linguistic features characterizing communication, different greeting formulas were used ranging from formal to less informal (e.g. Good Morning, Hello, Hi, Hey, etc). Concerning leave-taking, two main expressions were used (goodbye, see you). It was easy to observe that turn-taking was highly respected during teacher-student and student-student interactions. In fact, permission was in most cases looked for before engaging in a speech act, sometimes through raising the hand asking for a verbal intervention. This does not imply that interruptions did not take place. In fact, both the teacher and the students interrupted the conversation in the appropriate way. Politeness dominated the whole communicative exchanges. In this sense, terms of address were predominantly used (e.g. Sir, Miss, etc.). Expressions like 'I think', 'I believe', 'sorry', 'please', etc. were frequently uttered. Requests, instead of direct commands, chiefly surfaced. As far as sentence structure is concerned, the conversant sometimes opted for complex sentences, elaborated grammatical structures, and even technical terms. Word choice was obvious their communication. In a word, formality of the classroom context was definitely respected. However, because observation concerned in essence verbal communication and not written documents, instances of informal language were also noticed though to a limited extent. This included ellipsis, contracted forms and other linguistic forms (e.g. wanna).

Another conclusion which can also be assumed is that EFL learners develop more pragmatic competence as they advance in their studies. This is what explains the results of the observation process where 3rd year students exposed more formal language compared to their 1st year counterparts. In fact, not only pragmatic competence which develops, but

communicative competence as a whole develops. To put it another way, and in terms of Canale and Swain's (1980) classification, linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competences also develop. Such an assumption builds again on the observation results where 3rd year students proved to use more elaborated grammatical structures and complex sentences (as an example of linguistic competence). Besides, coherence and cohesion characterized most of their verbal interactions unlike 1st year students where such discourse features were largely absent.

The other point which should be highlighted relates to formal vs. consultative styles. It was reported that some teachers only approve of the formal style, whereas others favour the consultative style while still observing formality of the classroom. The explanation that can be furnished considers two interrelated variables, namely the teacher and the subject of instruction. There are some teachers who still build their classes on a teacher-centred approach, especially when they teach content subjects like linguistics. In this case, most of the class content is new to the learners and delivered in a jargon full of specialized terminology. Because of the complexity of such subjects, if they are delivered by a teacher who has long worked within a teacher-centred approach, the result is expected beforehand with the teacher dominating classroom interaction doing most of the talk. Of course, checking understanding or injecting questions is not forbidden in this case. On the contrary, there are some teachers who promote learner-centred classes. Classes of such a kind call for the consultative style where checking with the other interlocutor is encouraged. Here, learners are not passive bystander. Instead, they have an active role contributing to the learning process. The point which should be stressed is that style shifting was not the by-product of attention, also pointed out as intra-personal variation in Stolarski (2013). Rather, it was merely an outcome of inter-personal dimension which proves on Coupland's notion of audience. Style shifting was depicted as a product of audience due to the use of a casual speech style in student-student interaction, counter to the student-teacher conversations which were characterized with the use of formal and consultative speech styles.

## Conclusion

While developing proficiency in a second/foreign language, learners observe the context in which language use occurs. This is part of their pragmatic competence. Style-shifting is an area where pragmatic competence, or simply language appropriateness, clearly manifests. In other words, different contexts call for different styles, and a pragmatically competent speaker is apt to know when to opt for a style instead of another. The present research was conducted to determine the main reasons which motivate style shifting. It covered EFL learners and teachers, using two different data collection instruments (questionnaire and observation). Consideration was given to teacher-students and student-student interactions to see whether the participants condition style shifting or not as claimed within Coupland's (2007) notion of audience. To see whether the physical context is a strong determinant of style shifting, investigation took place within a formal setting (classroom) and also an informal setting (outside the classroom) in order to test Cook's (1996b) notion that proclaims formal and casual styles as indicators of distance

and closure. The results showed that the context where communication is held determines to large extent the speech style, regardless of the participants. It was noticed that the formal and consultative styles dominate classroom interactions, being teacher-students or student-student interactions. On the contrary, a less formal context was found to tolerate partly the casual style. As for the participants, they also partly determine the speech style. While teacher-student and student-student classroom communication is largely governed by formality of the style, communication outside the classroom is not always as such in the sense that the casual style may be the main, or the sole, style via which interaction is held even in the presence of the teacher.

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