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Fostering learner autonomy: power and reciprocity in the relationship between language learner and language learning adviser

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Developments in lifelong learning and learner autonomy have given fresh impetus to the debate about learning without formal teaching. This paper concerns the educational relationship between learner and adviser in self-directed schemes. Two French self-directed language learning set-ups were observed, one situated at university level (Système d'apprentissage autodirigé avec soutien, Université Nancy 2), the second in a lifelong learning institution (Apprentissage en semi-autonomie, CNAM¹, Paris), and both dealing with adult language learners. Observations of 31 advising sessions between four learners and four experienced advisers suggest that the latter assume multiple modified pedagogical roles when assisting learners and that they switch between these roles frequently with the same learner. To understand the nature and the purpose of these variations in advising, the study focuses on the linguistic and educational aspects which characterize the advising sessions. Interviews with the advisers and learners were also carried out. These were designed to analyze the nature of advising practices viewed as professional practice. Their analysis highlights the determinants of the advisers' educational strategies, the perception of advising standards and the maintenance and evolution of their 'professional gestures'. The concept of *educational reciprocity* provides a useful framework for an understanding of the specific pedagogical relationship of language advising sessions.

Introduction

The concept of 'autonomous learning' has been popular for more than 30 years in language education. Indeed, the question of autonomous learning has become of crucial interest, especially in higher education and adult education. This learning modality appears to respond to the increasing language learning needs (more learners, more specific language needs, wider variety of languages) without a significant increase in costs. Numerous researchers have explained the growing

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interest in autonomous learning on the basis of ideological, psychological and economic arguments (Crabbe, 1993; Benson, 2001). The ideological argument highlights the individual's right to exercise his/her own choices, and not to be thwarted by institutional choices. Learning by means of autonomous practices is seen as an emancipatory practice, contributing to the good of the individual and of society. The psychological argument is that we learn better when we are in charge of our own learning because of cognitive, social and affective aspects involved in the learning process (memorization, significance, motivation, etc.) (Dickinson, 1987; Broady & Kenning, 1996). Learning by autonomous practices involves learning strategies based on metacognitive knowledge and appropriated beliefs about what a language is and what learning is (Cotterall, 1995; Riley, 1997). The economic argument is that society cannot keep providing the high level of instruction required by industrial and commercial development through educational institutions, especially in view of rapid technical changes (Carré, 2005). Therefore, individuals must be able to provide for their own learning needs, either individually or cooperatively. Learning by autonomous practices is seen as lifelong learning. All these arguments have implications for didactic and pedagogic approaches, and shape the practices of language teachers.

Since the 1990s, profound modifications have occurred in educational settings, and numerous resource centres have been developed, mostly in higher education and adult education, as an institutional response to support autonomous learning goals. Giving learners direct access to language learning resources is seen as a powerful means of enhancing autonomy, since it gives them the possibility of managing their own language learning. The advances of communication and information technologies (ICT) have also contributed to providing resources for autonomous language learning (e.g., giving access to a wider range of language resources on the Internet; giving a larger audience access to language learning through open and distance education). Previous research has shown that autonomous learning needs support to be successful (Holec, 1990; Little, 1995), and that the responsibility of educational institutions is not just to provide learners with the possibility of managing their own language learning, but also with the capacity to do so. Autonomous learning is then synonymous with self-directed learning. Learners need to develop skills to take control of their language learning, to decide on their learning objectives, on their learning contents, to select methods and techniques to learn by, to choose when, where and how learning takes place, and to manage the learning progression and assessment of the acquisition. Notions of choice and control by the learners are central to the autonomous learning approach.

Fostering learner autonomy has significant implications for educational professional practice. Autonomous learning compels the teacher to redefine his/her role and skills and to take into account the existence of new kinds of access to knowledge based on alternative language learning experiences coupled with reflection on language learning, as well as a new kind of control (helping to self-manage and self-assess the language learning means a looser and different control on language learning contents and progression), and a new kind of distance (s/he is no longer

contemporaneous to the conception and realization of learning activities; there is a new kind of educational relationship which enhances the learner's empowerment). As Mozzon-McPherson (2001, p. 7) notes: 'the shift in language learning from a teacher-led to a more learner-centred approach has involved a *repositioning* of the teacher and a *reappraisal* of the teacher's skills'. The educational relationship included in the term teacher is no longer adapted to the definition of the autonomous learning relationship. Terms such as 'facilitator', 'mentor', 'counsellor', 'adviser', 'helper', 'learner support officer', 'tutor' all seem to characterize this change towards attributing more expertise to the learner, as well as change of attitude involving modifications in traditional educational and communicative strategies (Gremmo, 1995). New professional roles characterize the nature of the specific support provided to autonomous language learners. If these denominations are sometimes used without distinction (the term tutor is the most used in France to qualify the specific training which occurs outside the classroom whereas 'adviser' seems to be more popular in the UK), they do vary according to their epistemological bases, their didactic and pedagogic approaches, and the type of educational relationship established to foster autonomy.

Previous studies have largely described the nature of the advising support in self-directed schemes (Benson & Voller, 1997; Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans, 2001). Advising is usually provided in the context of voluntary face-to-face interactions, separated by autonomous learning periods. The adviser aims to help the learners sustain their language learning project, and to help them find the most effective way of learning with a variety of learning resources and in particular learning environments, thus also supporting language learning awareness. Depending on the light the adviser sheds on the learner's needs or difficulties, s/he may put the stress on conceptual, methodological or psychological support (Gremmo, 1995). Advising mainly consists of providing learners with points of reference, to enable them to understand and decide on their learning, and to enable them to develop a specific attitude to learning, based on reflection on practices, negotiation of meanings and values, and adaptation to his/her needs and objectives.

Numerous studies have approached the notion of advising from the angle of professional skills and have generated powerful descriptive lists of the macro- and micro-skills used by advisers during their advising sessions (Régent, 1993; Kelly, 1996). These skill-sets highlight the characteristic positioning of advisers towards learners (to stand back, to be in reaction to the learner's demands and needs, to accommodate the learner) and exhibit the specific kind of discursive practices by which the adviser helps the learner to construct his/her discourse on his/her learning. These skill-sets also highlight the ways in which the positioning adopted by the adviser may vary from more to less directive during advising sessions.

The objective of the present study is to determine the nature and the role played by the specific relationship established between adviser and learner in relation to the fostering of autonomous learning. What does advising mean for the adviser in terms of position, power, collaboration, attitude towards the learner? What role does the learner play in the perception and the definition the adviser has of his/her function?

The present study is based (a) on the observation of the communicative and educational practices of four experienced language learning advisers with four adult learners for the whole duration of their training, or three to four months depending on the institution; (b) on interviews with advisers about their professional practices; and (c) on interviews with learners about the advising sessions they experienced. This paper first attempts to discuss the nature and the role of the advising relationship for fostering autonomy. Then it highlights the different aspects taken into account by the advisers to determine their position and establish their role in relation to their perception of the learners' needs, and the nature of the social relationship they build up session by session.

Theoretical framework

The pedagogical relationship between adviser and learner has been previously studied mostly from a discursive approach focused on the content of advising sessions, the organization of knowledge, and the communicative strategies typical of advising sessions (Gremmo, 1995; Clemente, 2003; Carette & Castillo, 2004). These studies have shown that the role of advising sessions was to formalize the learners' autonomous learning experiences and to create a specific language learning culture. They have highlighted the importance of notions such as negotiation and intersubjective process to understand the advising relationship. Both notions characterize the singular collaboration between adviser and learner. By negotiation, adviser and learner regulate the nature and mode of their joint work and define together the way of conceiving autonomous language learning. As for intersubjective processes, interacting with each other, the adviser and learner transform and enrich their perception of advising and learning. These studies have also put stress on the specific discursive role played by the learner during the advising sessions, in terms of control and participation, and have established a strong relationship between the active role the learner may play while managing his/her learning and his/her role of participant in the advising interaction, acquiring strategies, behaviours and representations more appropriate to the autonomous learning situation—since their own representations are usually shaped by former teacher-led learning experiences (Gremmo *et al.*, 1985; Gremmo & Riley, 1997; Clemente, 2003).

Another important set of studies has shed light on the learner's perception of the adviser's role. These studies have shown the variety of functions taken on by the adviser: problem-solving aid, 'pressurizer', guide, companion/supporter (Pemberton *et al.*, 2001). The notion of flexibility of the practices of an adviser is crucial to meeting the particular needs of the learners for whom the support is intended (Carter, 2001). To fulfil these various functions, the adviser has to adopt different positions. The notion of position (Goffman, 1987) is a powerful way of describing the adviser's place towards the learner. Indeed, the use of verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal features define the nature of the relationship with participants and shows the position adopted in the interaction.

Much has been written on the specific type of pedagogical interaction developed by the face-to-face advising sessions, and its discursive genre has been described as a

dialogue, a discussion, or a learning conversation (Esch, 1997; Gremmo, 2003). In this respect, rules of interaction and their internal coherence have been studied by descriptive tools such as: topics, speech-styles, speech acts, face-work, overlaps, turn-taking, and small talk. It has revealed the very different nature of advising interactions compared to classroom interactions, highlighting the equal nature of the relationship of both parties based on the rights and duties of each other as a speaker (Carette & Castillo, 2004; Gremmo, 1995). The discourse of learning is the *locus* where both parties exchange their points of view, accommodate each other's knowledge, and determine their roles according to the self-directed language learning project. In this way, these studies have developed useful tools for the understanding of the functioning of advising sessions, and the way advising relationships are established. Indeed, the relationship between adviser and learner is determined institutionally to a certain extent: for example, in terms of time available for meetings and of the ethos of the institution. But the practice of advising depends on the very nature of collaboration between adviser and learner. Culturally, this learning practice is still unknown by lots of learners coming to self-directed learning structures. It is often the very first experience of such a relationship for the learner and it varies according to the learner and to their degree of autonomy in learning. The interpersonal dimensions of the advising relationship is thus of the utmost importance.

In order to question the nature of the advising relationship, research has been conducted from a pragmatic perspective to determine the appropriateness of speech act forms used during the advising sessions, and especially those performed by the adviser. Clemente (2003) has shown how complicated it is for advisers to be in a position of expert without being directive. Citing Widdowson (1990), she stressed the relation between expertise and power: '[there is a distinction] between being "authoritative" (using one's knowledge and expertise) and being "authoritarian" (using one's power to control the situation)' (Clemente, 2003, p.213). The relationship between adviser and learner is described as an expert-novice relationship, the aim of which is to transfer expertise comprised of knowledge on language learning and the capacity to learn. It is characterized as dialogic and interactive, but also as being asymmetric as far as place, knowledge and activity are concerned (Gremmo, 2003). Therefore, the adviser's complex attitude to power is related to the fact that s/he is embodying a certain power due to his/her expertise, but at the same time, is trying to avoid situations in which s/he would have to perform a powerful role which s/he perceives as a potential barrier to the development of autonomous learning. Moreover, Vasquez (2005) has shown that there is a risk that learners do not perceive advisers as experts when advisers moderate their judgements and suggestions too much. The questions of the appropriate attitude towards the learner, or the best attitude conceived by the adviser to enhance the learner's autonomy, and of how this attitude is perceived are central to the development of advising practices.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness provides a helpful framework to describe and understand the functioning of the advising relationship. It focuses

on the individual's positive and negative face, face-threatening acts (FTAs), and linguistic politeness strategies. The term 'positive face' refers to an individual's desire to be accepted and valued by others, and 'negative face' pertains to one's desire to have the freedom to act without restraint. Politeness strategies are a means of accommodating the face needs of the individual by mitigating potential threats to the hearer's face. In short, positive strategies are used to express the speaker's solidarity with, familiarity with, and acceptance of, the hearer's 'wants'. Negative strategies have the goal of partially redressing the hearer's negative face and express the speaker's formality, distance, and restraint. Face-work is extended beyond the politeness devices contained in an utterance, and includes preliminaries and small talk, identifying the attitudes of the interaction between participants, and in general creating a cooperative environment in which the interaction can take place. Face-work is seen as central to interactional harmony. Using the model, advising may be described as an intrinsically face threatening act (FTA), even where the speaker indicates that s/he does not intend to avoid impeding the addressee's freedom of action. The authors note that the degree to which advice is an FTA depends on the social distance between the speaker and the addressee, the degree of power which the addressee has over the speaker, and the politeness strategies considered appropriate in a particular cultural context. In the light of these elements, the giving of advice is seen as a complex speech act that should be performed with caution when the adviser is reasonably certain that the learner is likely to do what is being advised, that all advice must be hedged and never given explicitly to avoid offending the learner, and that the adviser is presupposed to have the right or the authority to give advice. The notion of status is central here.

Bearing in mind these studies, the present paper aims to explore the way the advising medium may lead to the learner's autonomy, that is how it may enable him/her gradually to take personal control of the learning. The notion of 'medium' is thus explored as a factor which may promote the development of the language learner's empowerment by offering new opportunities for knowledge gathering and language practice. It is also a link between adviser and learner, in the specific context of self-directed learning, which encourages and maintains mutual support, in so far as advising sessions are voluntary. Variations in advising practices are conceptualized in terms of differences of educational strategies, that is, their relation to knowledge, or of positioning strategies, that is, their relation to power.

The context

Physical context

The study focuses on the advising practices developed by the CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues, Nancy 2, France). They demonstrate a skill-set which is the outcome of applied research carried out over the years according to certain pedagogical values and principles such as: autonomy, individualization of training, authentic language learning situations,

socio-constructivism and reflective practice. Two French self-directed language learning set-ups were observed, implementing advising practices as defined above. They were selected because they share the same conception of the nature of advising and are also based on the same learning design. One is situated at the University of Nancy 2. It provides resources for English, Spanish and French as a Foreign Language and deals mostly with adult learners- and some students. The advising culture is generally plurilingual. The other is situated at the CNAM (Paris) and deals with adult learners and students, some preparing English international certification. The advising culture is generally monolingual. Throughout the whole learning process, learners can use the resources provided by the system as a support for their learning process: these include the premises, staff, material learning resources and human resources (including an adviser and native speakers of the languages they are learning). Hence, learning depends on the learner's interactions with these resources. The learners are all adults wishing to develop language skills for professional or personal goals. Some choose self-directed learning schemes to prepare for a language examination. They interact with four kinds of people playing different roles in the co-managing of their learning: an administrator who deals with inquiries about the system and is responsible for organizing sessions with the adviser—usually the same one throughout the whole learning process—and with native speakers chosen according to the learners' needs (e.g., types of accent, topic, discourse), a librarian who issues and keeps a record of the selected learning resources, native speakers for conversation sessions in individual encounters and/or in groups; finally an adviser, who can help learners prepare their own materials and offers advising sessions, during which they learn how to learn by reflecting on their own language learning practices. Although these advising sessions are a formal part of the learning process, they are not compulsory, and learners are free to choose whether or not they meet an adviser.

Context of the study, methods of data collection

The main part of the data consisted of 31 advising sessions which were video recorded and analysed in 2002–2003. These took place between four learners, all beginners in self-directed learning, and four experienced advisers, all women, who had from 11 to 23 years of practice. The series of advising sessions lasted from 15 days to four months, depending on the type of training (intensive or regular) and on the centre where it took place. Each learner met the same adviser throughout the series of sessions. Individual sessions lasted from half an hour to an hour, and were conducted in French, the mothertongue of both adviser and learner. The choice of language reflects the fact that advising focuses on individuals' learning situation rather than on their learning a particular language by facilitating the verbalization of practices of the learner. Four complete sets of advising sessions were recorded, from the initial encounter until the end of the training contract. This substantial corpus is thus made up of four sets which are characterized differently in terms of number, length, regularity and frequency of the sessions as follows:

- *Set 1*: 6 sessions of 30 minutes duration for 15 days, every two days (intensive training).
- *Set 2*: 11 sessions of 60 minutes duration for 3 months, every week (regular training).
- *Set 3*: 10 sessions of 50 minutes duration for 3 months, every two weeks (regular training).
- *Set 4*: 5 sessions of 45 minutes duration for 4 months, every month (regular training).

Individual semi-directed interviews with learners and advisers were also recorded. Their aim was to collect extra-linguistic information in order to understand, and to be able to interpret data from the video-recorded advising sessions. The methodological framework is conceptualized from an activity theory perspective, because the latter focuses on the participant's subjectivity and on the notion of 'situated action' (Suchman, 1987). It aims to highlight the interpretation and the meaning of actions in work situation for the subjects who accomplish them. The interviews took place at the end of the sessions, and focused on the participants' attitudes towards the advising session. The actual protocol for the semi-directed interviews varied depending on the interviewee's role. For learners, the interview focused on the clarification of their perception of the adviser's role and functions built throughout the advising sessions. It gave information about the nature of the advising relationship experienced by the learner and its implications on his/her autonomy process. For advisers, the interview concerned their actual advising practices and focused on the notion of job analysis. The aim was to understand the advisers' conception of their role and functions, and to analyse the logics of action they used to perform their advising activity in order to understand the specific ways in which the professional practice called 'advising' may differ from one *community of practice* (Wenger, 1998) to another, while remaining clearly identifiable.

Finally, the data collected included group interviews conducted with the four advisers. These group interviews were organized in three parts with the following procedure:

1. In the first part, each adviser in turn was asked to make a brief presentation to the others about her work environment and the specific characteristics of her centre (educational contexts, types of learners, institutional constraints etc.) and of the way the institution defines the notion of advising.

Between this first part and the second part, the advisers watched short video clips together (two–five minutes), edited out of the set of their sessions. For all of them, the content of the video clip had been selected as examples of 'suggesting new learning resources'. Permission from both participants and their clients had obviously been obtained previously.

2. In the second part, each adviser commented on her own practice freely, although in a few cases the researcher may have helped them clarify what they were trying to do through questions, for example about their gestures or tone. The data produced thus focuses on what the advisers are saying about what they are doing,

one by one, and highlights their personal perception of their own practice and their own norms and values.

3. In the final part, the four advisers debate amongst themselves what they are doing and what they have said about it. The data produced thus focuses on the way they negotiate through talk a way of converging and of expressing a shared professional culture.

In this way, the protocol ensures that each adviser can analyse and comment upon the style of her own actions. Being confronted with the recording of their activity, they become involved in professional controversies concerning the characteristics of their own styles of action. This type of analysis puts the stress on the dynamics of the action of 'advising' in which personal and professional choices and interpretations play a fundamental role.

Findings

The main characteristics of the advising relationship results from the analysis made of the video-corpus of 31 sessions recorded. It is further discussed in the light of the analysis carried out on the learners' and advisers' interviews through triangulation.

Data from video-recorded advising session

The analysis of the video-recorded corpus of advising sessions identified many similarities in terms of advising script, skills and communicative practices, adviser's physical posture, and advising gestures (taking notes, providing resources, showing methodological procedures, etc), which shows a sort of respect of the standards defined by the advising skill-sets adopted by both institutions. Nonetheless, numerous variations are observed between advisers in terms of mode of advising behaviour (reactive/proactive; talkative/less talkative; friendliness/strictly professional) and of pedagogical approaches. Besides, advisers' practices may vary within and between encounters.

The structure and the nature of advising discourse has been analysed to interpret variations in the way advisers positioned themselves. Each advising session showed a regular specific structure, containing three kinds of sequences:

1. *Pedagogical sequences*: these concern the learner's analysis of his/her learning activity and language progress, the adviser's feedback on the learner's analysis, decisions about future work, needs analysis, final evaluations made by learner and adviser about the learning process and the advising sessions at the end of the training, and collaborative work between adviser and learner to solve a language or a learning problem. (Pedagogical sequences represent 40 to 60% of the advising time.)
2. *Organizational sequences*: these concern negotiations about making an appointment with the different experts involved locally, negotiations about borrowing resources, about defining the modalities of work, i.e., individual or collaborative work. (25 to 40% of the advising time.)

3. *'Conversational' sequences*: these consist of more personal conversations about learning, language and about the learner's feeling involved in the learning process. They include anecdotes told by learner and sometimes the adviser in a less formal register, creating a stronger interpersonal relationship between adviser and learner. These often appear at the end of the advising session or when the learner has some difficulties to put his/her learning into words and formalize it. (2 to 25% of the advising time.)

To characterize the nature of the advising relationship, rather symmetrical or hierarchical, three aspects were analysed: the amount of verbal participation (between adviser and learner), the status of participants (high/low depending on the social distance in the interaction), and their role in the advising interaction. Taken together, these three aspects show that the advising relationship is characterized by role sharing, in a complex and dynamic complementarity.

In the main, the adviser talks more than the learner (Set 1: the adviser talks 58% of the advising time; Set 2: 75%; Set 3: 67%; Set 4: 51%). The amount of the learner's verbal participation increases throughout the advising sessions, but the organization of discursive roles does not evolve significantly. The analysis of speech acts shows that the learner—contrary to the learner in the classroom—shares the same directive speech acts such as questioning, evaluating, introducing the topics, requesting, etc, with the adviser which reveals a certain symmetry of status. However, there is a difference of expertise and of domains of activity between them: learners are in charge of certain pedagogical sequences (learning analysis, needs analysis, final evaluation) and of almost all the conversational sequences, whereas advisers are in charge of some characteristic pedagogical sequences (resource suggestions, language explanations) and of almost all the organizational sequences. One of the ways in which power is displayed between participants is the control of turn-taking. In terms of discourse analysis, controlling the opening of an exchange, introducing new topics, verbalizing demands and requests mean that the speaker imposes on other participants the right/duty to reply. In the corpus, the adviser controls the interaction and also generally makes more interactional moves than the learners (advisers have introduced 54 to 69% of the topics and 75.5 to 90% of the demands and requests). However, the nature of the interaction does not consist in the classic adjacency pairs that tend to occur in the classroom, where the teacher is in charge of the questions and the learner responsible for the answer. In fact, the whole structure of the interaction is determined by the learner's interventions: his/her comments on language learning, on difficulties and successes. The adviser's questions are thus reactions to the learner and seek to elicit more information to determine what kind of support is appropriate. Moreover, overall not only do learners speak longer than advisers in conversational sequences about learning and their attitude to language learning but they also introduce and control them.

The analysis of interrelational strategies while advising shows that advising requires a specific social relationship between the learner and the adviser. Broadly, the analysis of advice-giving speech acts in the corpus revealed that hedged advice statements ('a bit', 'perhaps', 'we should' instead of 'you should', 'if you like', 'as for

me, I think that', etc) as well as requests for collaboration are frequently employed as a solidarity strategy to develop conversational rapport, and establish a sense of belonging.

Harmonious social relationships may be established through regular encounters, which enable participants to share a common history. Adviser and learner start sharing common ground, they are no longer strangers to each other and thus a more symmetrical relationship can develop. The relationship is based on complementary linguistic and extra-linguistic behaviours involved in collaborative discourse construction. Thus, we observe discursive phenomena that reflect the construction of a particular perspective on the world: jargon and shortcuts, shared stories, inside jokes, laughter and so on. Also, knowing what the other knows, what s/he can do, and how s/he can contribute to the learning enterprise, the very quick set-up of a problem to be discussed, the absence of introductory preambles, all give the impression that advising sessions are merely the continuation of an ongoing process. These features contribute to the creation of sustained mutual relationships—more harmonious than antagonistic. Both speakers contribute to this harmony by using politeness strategies: display of attention and desire to collaborate, use of positive feedback both by learner and adviser, face-work as compliments, apologies and acceptances, hedges, minimization, sharing of the floor, etc.

Thus, the analysis of the advising data highlighted a variety of logics of action which are sometimes in tension. The analysis of interviews with advisers showed that the issue of positioning towards the learner is central to the advisers' activity. Positioning concerns both the choice of the physical position and the verbal positioning constructed in interaction. The four advisers use two positions in tension: face-to-face and side-by-side. These two positions have also been observed in supported open and distance learning environments (Teutsch *et al.*, 2004), where the tutor assumes a double role: a 'parity role' (to establish social cooperation to motivate learners) and an 'expert role' (to ensure the quality of learning). Is the observation of these two positions related to the double objective of advising? Supporting the development of learner autonomy while assisting their language learning may reflect the complex position of all educational gestures.

Data from interviews

During the interviews carried out with advisers and learners, suggestions and advice are commented on by both as gestures of 'friendliness, concern, or interest'. Nevertheless, this interpretation is based on the assumption that the relationship between adviser and learner allows learners to interpret the adviser's behaviour as a possible help, and *not* as an order. Advisers declare that they take the time to clarify the value of certain pieces of advice when they perceive the learner as less autonomous than others. Advice can also be perceived, in some cases, as 'intrusive' by some learners, which reveals that the advising relationship is based on the sharing of 'territories of activities' assumed by the adviser and/or by the learner (Who decides on the activities? Who assesses the resources?, etc). The advising relationship is, in fact, negotiated throughout the advising sessions.

The analysis of the comments of the advisers on their practices from videoclips gives information on the norms of appropriateness accepted in the community of advisers observed. Advisers were asked about the direct and indirect strategies they used. They explained how direct/indirect request strategies may influence the advising relationship and then the learner's behaviour. According to them, three factors may work against learners' autonomy development: the directedness, the prescription, and the predominance of the adviser's interventions. First, the appropriateness of giving advice and the directness in its realization depend on the adviser's professional history (ideology and experiences) and on the specificity of each advising encounter (singularity of the context). Some advisers choose direct request strategies more frequently than others, in order to involve the learner in self-reflection on his/her learning. But other advisers commented that they interpreted direct request strategies as revealing a lack of concern for the learner's face, because the learner may not necessarily understand what s/he is asked for, or may not feel in a position to refuse to do what the adviser requests. In general, a *harmonious social relationship* is perceived as a condition for successful supporting/learning relationships, but some advisers interpreted this to be to the detriment of effective *autonomous* learning. Agreeing to assess an exercise, to give a grammatical explanation, or to do a learning activity with the learner, etc. may be seen as a means of maintaining a harmonious relationship, but they are also educational professional gestures which some advisers may consider counterproductive at particular points of the relationship.

Discussion

This discussion focuses on how the various positions outlined above are achieved. The analysis of the modalities and aims of the advising relationship have shown that advisers used a complex positioning process which aims at fostering both learner autonomy and language learning. Advisers conceived advising support as highly negotiated and individualized, depending on the particular needs of the learner and on their perception of the learner's degree of autonomy. Advising is realized by assuming different educational postures, related to the adviser's perception of the degree of autonomy of the learner, the respective participant's attitude (e.g., a position of parity or disparity) and the goal of their action (e.g., enhancing reflection or helping language production). Thus, several educational postures can be observed in the video recorded advising sessions, characterized by distinct communicative and positioning modalities as well as distinct educational approaches (Ciekanski, 2005). The analysis of the features of the pedagogical positions adopted by the advisers was carried out with a view to characterize the enunciative identity (Goffman, 1987) of the advisers and to define their attitudes towards the learners and their pedagogical conduct. Markers such as politeness and face-work, tone of voice, styles of discourse and the nature of lexis, gestures and behaviours, were studied. Five pedagogical postures were adopted in advising sessions²:

- *Advising posture* to enhance the learner's capacity to control and take decisions.

- *Tutoring posture* to enhance the learner's capacity to manage his/her learning.
- *Teaching posture* to enhance the learner's capacity to solve language problems.
- *Companion posture* to enhance the learner's capacity to engage himself/herself in the learning process and maintain motivation to reflect on his/her learning.
- *Accompanying posture* to enhance the learner's capacity to develop his/her own personal and individual learning approach.

The different postures reveal, in a continuum, different pedagogical options to solve learning problems. Some are techno-centred (tutoring), some are person-centred (accompanying, companion), and some are knowledge-centred (teaching, advising). However, there are differences in the ways learners are conceived of: as recipients (tutoring, teaching), as leaders (advising, accompanying), or as companions. Indeed, all those postures take place with different frequencies and different status in the advising sessions. Some advisers do not use the whole range of depicted postures. The analysis of the recordings of the advisers' professional debates highlighted a complex and personal organization of postures and that these postures correspond to different educational strategies with different values (minor or major). For example, the teaching and the tutoring postures—which are depicted as far from the advising attitude—are seen as scaffolding strategies to facilitate language learning, and the eventual possibility of establishing an advising posture. However, the study shows that they are part of the advisers' pedagogical resources and form an eclectic and chosen set of practices.

The observation of advising encounters has highlighted that advisers assume multiple pedagogical roles when supporting autonomous language learners, and they switch between these roles frequently, even with the same learner. This flexibility while advising shows that the advising relationship implies a 'reciprocity of perspective' (Cicourel, 1978). Both adviser and learner participate actively in the dynamics of this specific kind of transaction. Transfer of knowledge and activity is a bilateral process: without the information given by learners about their learning, advising is simply not possible. It is for that very reason that the advising situation diverges from the teaching situation. Reciprocity may be facilitated by the one-to-one interaction frame. Adviser and learner form a sort of duo in which mutual actions depend on what each member does for the sake of the learning as a joint enterprise. Therefore, the construction of knowledge and experiences in the advising sessions is not linear nor is it merely a transfer of information. The interviews with advisers highlighted specific educational strategies and values:

- *The meaning of negotiation* which is a central activity to the advising sessions: learner and adviser negotiate the information they need. Advisers need information about what learners do or think to advise them, whereas learners need information to develop their reflective learning. These on-going negotiations develop a shared story and a basis for less negotiated further exchanges.
- *Preservation and creation of language learning knowledge*: the adviser is seen as a guarantor of the knowledge constructed and legitimated in the findings of linguistics and language didactics research. These bodies of knowledge provide a

non-dogmatic interpretative framework for the learning experience: advisers keep an open mind to what learners may do or think if this seems relevant to their objectives. The learners seek the adviser's acknowledgement and recognition for their learning but also choose their own way of learning.

- *Personal and professional exchanges*: the advising relationship may also be depicted as an exchanging relationship. This exchange of experiences and knowledge seems, at first sight, to go beyond the professional sphere, in so far as the learner and the adviser frequently talk about their personal interests, tastes, difficulties or successes etc. The learning process involves more than just cognitive aspects: it also involves affective/emotional/subjective aspects, too, which are commented upon by learners during the session. The notion of exchange creates a particular atmosphere for the interaction, e.g., laughter, exclamations, and changes in tone, which gives a sense of collusion between the participants.
- *Engagement*: The learner-adviser relationship is defined by mutual obligations and individual rights: to have materials, to be helped, to meet the adviser, to discuss language learning, to try out the adviser's suggestions and to meet the learner. The adviser's engagement depends on the nature of the learning contract (co-constructed with the learner) and varies according to the adviser's conception of advising.
- *Recognition of otherness*: all learners and advisers share common knowledge and common values which condition their practices, but also develop their own style of belonging to the systems, depending on their personal commitment, as has been shown by the various advising practices described above. As the system aims at developing learners' autonomy in learning, the structure encourages learners to create their own learning situations. Each new interaction (with situations, with others) throws practice into question anew: this is true for learners involved in independent learning and it is also true for advisers who reshape advising in every new session.

To conclude, the depicted features echo Labelle's model of 'educational reciprocity' (1996), used to describe the nature of the educational relationship in adult self-training schemes. Labelle shows how the settlement of an educational relationship fostering learner autonomy requires two kinds of dynamics: the dynamic of dialogue—as a communicative modality which allows the reversibility of roles between the two participants, according to their own expertise—and the dynamic of donation, which deeply modifies the traditional scheme of knowledge construction, since in the model discussed here it is constructed by mutual exchanges of information, norms and values, in which both adviser and learner are involved.

Conclusion

This study analysed the discourse of advising sessions to explore how it creates and maintains an educational relationship fostering learner autonomy, when encounters with advisers are not compulsory. The analysis also considered various

linguistic and non-linguistic features of the advising sessions. Through the interrelationship of these features, a specific learning culture is emerging in favour of more learner-led approaches to learning. We have seen that the advisers' and learners' attitudes towards power play an important role in advising interactions. It is often assumed that the goal of advisers is to play 'equal' with the learner. However, the study has revealed the fundamental difference of power making guidance and assessment possible, based on expertise that is to be shared and appropriated by the learner. The advisers adapt their knowledge and experience according to the learner through a flexible and negotiated decision-making process. Because advising practices take into account the diversity of the social actors involved in the relationship, institutional procedures need to be flexible to be pertinent in terms of the structure of the sessions, their content and goals, but above all, in the way the institution shapes advising competences. Finally, Labelle's model of 'educative reciprocity' highlights the role played by the mutual involvement of the learner and adviser for the sake of the development of learning. Thus, advising can be described as a professional as well as an interpersonal relationship that concerns learning in its cognitive and subjective, as well as personal dimensions.

Looking at advising as a profession has shed some light on the social construction of the notion of 'work' in a community of advisers. Analysing experienced advisers' practices provides elements which enable us to understand advising styles, and the way advisers conceive of their professional gestures as a subjective interpretation of a professional genre. Besides, it appears that even if advisers share the same professional definition of what an advising relationship is, this definition is constantly renegotiated in relation to the context and to each learner. The notion of collaboration is fundamental to the pedagogical approach to autonomy, and collaborative practices between adviser and learner are encouraged by the very structure of the advising interaction. The dialogical process whereby advisers react, subjectively and collectively, to delineate their field of activity allows us to understand advising and the dimensions of its variations. Thus, the process has shown it can supply us with a powerful framework for the operationalization of the training of in-service advisers.

Notes

1. Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers.
2. A complete analysis may be found in Ciekanski, 2005.

Notes on contributor

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