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Conversational interaction and the development of conversational competence in additional languages in higher education: Considerations for students, language centres, and language policy developers

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Abstract: This article addresses the questions: why is the development of conversational competence important within higher education? And how might this goal be pursued? We offer answers that may aid a broad range of stakeholders (language learners, course designers, lecturers, language development managers, and policy makers) in thinking through these issues. Our point of departure is the view that, whilst conversational interaction is significant, prevalent and complex, the development of conversational competence receives insufficient attention. We propose that this indispensable skill can be enhanced through dedicated development in the process of learning additional languages. To illustrate how this could be done, we provide extended examples from three conversation courses that are informed by a broad and normative definition of conversation that is coupled with a didactics of conversation rooted in critical theory and critical discourse analysis. The three courses are: a French conversation class in which conversation serves as mediator of identity and difference in an imagined community; conversations between learners of German who are paired with residents of a retirement home where conversation serves to fortify auto/biographical, intercultural and intergenerational contracts; and an English conversation group in which learners combine topic-oriented conversations with shaping the conversations that in turn shape them. Combined, these courses foreshadow fragments of an explicit curriculum aimed at developing conversational competence.

Keywords: teaching conversation, French, German and English conversation, L2 interaction, second language acquisition, curriculum development

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Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος
In principio erat sermo

Erasmus 1519[1]

1 Conversational competence is indispensable and requires dedicated development in tertiary institutions

The development of conversational competence as a very specific skill still tends to be underestimated in language centres and the higher education institutions they serve. Compared to writing and grammar, administrators, lecturers and students often consider conversation less important and even shun it as too fleeting or recreational to be of value in discerning academic settings. While the communicative turn in language learning has made some amends for this neglect, persistent bias reflects disregard for the importance of conversation, the extent to which it permeates all spheres of life, and its complexity. Taking as our starting point the view that conversation is significant, that it is prevalent, and that the competence to converse calls for considerable sophistication, we argue that conversational competence requires dedicated development, including in higher education institutions.

We argue that, like the development of plurilingual competence, the development of conversational competence too should be an integral part of language learning – from early days, through, and beyond higher education. This is because, like plurilingual competence, conversational competence too has the potential to keep on developing beyond childhood into adulthood and because the dedicated and explicit teaching of this competence can support such ongoing development. Correspondingly, we hold that, even at tertiary level, students learn to converse, learn through conversation and, accordingly, also need to learn about conversation (compare the broader argument in Coffin and Donahue 2015). Building on this, and drawing on transdisciplinary trends, we also argue that two concerns about language learning in higher education can be productively integrated. We propose that the rather neglected specific development of conversational competence can be fruitfully grafted onto growing attempts to develop multilingual competence in higher education.

1 *Novum Testamentum Omne*. Basel, Johann Froben. On Erasmus's translation of John 1:1 as "In the beginning was the conversation", see Jarrott (1964) and O'Rourke Boyle (1977).

Our overall position is that an explicit and dedicated didactics informed by a theory of conversational interaction is best suited to develop conversational competence of language learners in higher education. We hope to stimulate a discussion about this across a broad spectrum of stakeholders: from learners to course designers, lecturers, language development managers, and policy makers within higher education. Our argument is structured as follows: We begin (Section 2) by mapping some theoretical and empirical perspectives on conversational interaction and current practices related to the improvement of conversational competence that we believe others may also find helpful when contemplating the need for and nature of conversation courses. We then (Section 3) propose a broad, normative definition of conversational competence for the purposes of this article and (Section 4) a five-stage didactics of conversation in which learners: (Section 4.1.1) encounter; (Section 4.2.1) recognise, explicate and analyse; (Section 4.2.2) assess and adapt; (Section 4.3.1) train; and (Section 4.3.2) autonomously use conversational phrases in sequence. The largest part of our article (Section 5) is an extended account of a French, a German, and an English conversation course as three different ways in which conversation courses in additional languages can develop conversational competence in higher education institutions. We conclude (Section 6) with some remarks about convergences and divergences amongst the three courses as well as observations about the limitations of our article and avenues for future research. The latter include the need for empirical research into the approach we propose and the need to explicate the relations between conversational interaction and other forms of social action that may contribute to the transformation of selves, institutions and society.

2 Enhancing conversational interaction: Emergent theoretical perspectives and practices

This article promises neither a conventional literature review nor a coherent theory of conversational interaction. Nonetheless, we hope that identifying a selection of theoretical perspectives on conversation and some practices aimed at developing conversational competence may orient the reflections of stakeholders in higher education wishing to enhance the conversational competence of learners of additional languages.

Research in socio- and psycholinguistics over the last fifty years has underlined the significance of conversation as a central communicative and social competence that is vital to the survival and flourishing of individuals and societies. Besides sometimes delighting (Emerson 1904), conversational interaction is crucial, amongst other things, to individual psychological development (Talbot 2015) and the construction of identities (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 48–86; Weatherall 2002). Conversational interaction is also pivotal to functional transactions such as acquiring and providing information, services and goods (Li 1999; Thornbury & Slade 2006: 20); to intersubjective understanding (Schegloff 1992); and to social coordination and cohesion (Habermas 1982, 1989a) across generational, gender, class, religious and a host of other differences (Chernoff 2013; O'Keefe 2009). And conversational interaction plays a constitutive role in the production of knowledge and truth (Habermas 1989b; Taylor 2016) as well as the generation, application and negotiation of norms (Habermas 1983; Taylor 2016). Which is not to say that conversation is only benign; on the contrary, as a form of symbolic interaction conversation is inextricably tied to the reproduction of symbolic power across societies (Bingham 2002; Bourdieu 1993).

Following from the above, conversational interaction is highly prevalent across settings, permeating everyday, professional and academic life. Unsurprisingly, conversation saturates everyday life in private and public spheres (Bromberg 2012). In professional life, conversation is crucial to success in medical (Drew et al. 2001; Maynard and Heritage 2005), legal (Matoesian 2013), and business (Pullin 2013) institutions where members share information, coordinate processes, justify views, and seek and contest agreements. And in academic life, features of conversation are evident in decisive aspects of interaction amongst academics: in teaching and consultation with students, in administration, and in research (Limberg 2010; Saft 2009; Bowman 2014; Fulford 2012).

As can be expected of such a significant and widespread practice that has to achieve such a variety of demanding things, conversation is an extremely complex language game. One reason for this complexity is the many variables that contribute to conversation, the extreme complexity of each variable and the interactions amongst them. Many of these variables have been identified in overviews and dedicated branches of the study of conversational interaction such as ethnography, pragmatics and speech act theory, ethnomethodology, and conversation analysis (Cameron 2001; Sidnell 2011; Grice 1975; Searle et al. 1992; Hymes 1974). Often neglected is the fact that, in contrast to monological speech, conversational interaction is also particularly complex, because, for it to succeed, interlocutors must combine these many

variables associated with speaking with a host of skills and variables associated with listening. A second reason for the complexity of conversation is its spontaneity. Within extremely short spaces of time, members of a conversation have to simultaneously deal with several processes (such as speaking and listening), each process comprising several phases (for example, for speaking this may include conceptual preparation, formulation, articulation, monitoring, and repair; Goh and Burns 2012: 35–48). This places considerable demands on the language processing of interlocutors, especially in additional languages in which they may be less proficient than in first languages. Finally, conversational interaction is a joint achievement which includes both collaboration and competition amongst at least two but sometimes several speakers. Accordingly, interlocutors have to co-ordinate interactions, even when the meanings of their interlocutors may be opaque or their actions sometimes unpredictable and unexpected – all of these demanding spontaneous responses from speakers.

Given the significance of conversation, from ancient times to the present, it has been associated with all manner of ideals. Facilitators and participants in conversation courses may benefit from understanding this relationship as it often (unwittingly) informs their attitude to conversation and the specific conversational competences they seek to develop. On the one hand, historical studies present ideal forms of conversation and the conditions that make them possible. Often these studies are informed by a more or less implicit notion of the rise and decline of a now largely lost and lamented ideal notion of conversation (Miller 2006). On the other hand, present and future oriented approaches extoll and aim to revive the lost salutary effects of conversation. Scholars (Zeldin 2000), communication trainers (Bailey and Egan 1997; Hartung 2004), and civil society activists (Brown et al. 1997) of all stripes have sought to revive conversation because of what they perceive to be its power to positively transform individuals, interpersonal relations, institutions, and society at large. Some of these aspirational and at times utopian approaches to conversation have underlined the need to consciously develop the corresponding conversational competences, keeping in mind that like most human behaviour this may not happen automatically but requires considerable institutional and individual application.

Some of these academic studies inform practical attempts to augment first language users' conversation skills. These interventions assume that conversational competence is not innate, but must and can be universally acquired and improved. According to one manual, conversation is the "Swiss Army knife of social skills that anyone can learn to use" (Shepherd and Hogan 2006: 1). These practical interventions include instructions on conversational etiquette, which

might be described as manuals on proper behaviour that constitute discursive technologies of the self. Often, the historical manuals from previous centuries are of a disciplinary kind. While they are partly contested, advice from these etiquette manuals may still ring familiar:

- "One of the first rules for a guide in polite conversation, is to avoid political or religious discussions in general society." (Hartley 1875: 12)
- "Think before you Speak pronounce not imperfectly nor bring out your Words too hastily but orderly & distinctly." (Washington 1888: 27)
- "You need not tell all the truth, unless to those who have a right to know it all. But let all you tell be truth." (Martine 1866: 27)
- "Remember that having all the talk sustained by one person is not conversation; do not engross all the attention yourself by refusing to allow another person an opportunity to speak, and also avoid the other extreme of total silence, or answering only in monosyllables" (Hartley 1860: 11).

Congruent with contemporary technologies of the self, more recent guides tend to coach rather than censure; they aim to empower the conversational subject to success. This includes psycho-social coaching on overcoming the anxiety of first contact with techniques of opening and maintaining small talk (Lowndes 2003); on successfully managing challenging conversations (Stone et al. 2010); and on employing conversation strategically to enhance influence and success in institutions and professional life (Carnegie 2006 [1936]). Included amongst the latter are trainers in *Schlagfertigkeit* (repartee), a notion which has recently gained mounting attention in German-language areas (Pöhm 2004).

Save for the conversation tasks integrated into all-skills course books, the growing research on conversation and additional language acquisition (Brouwer and Wagner 2007; Kasper and Wagner 2011; Brouwer 2012; Hellermann 2012; Pekarek Doehler 2013) has still only to a limited extent translated into instructional materials devoted to the actual development of conversational competence. Many of the materials intended for the acquisition of additional languages largely assume that users are already competent conversationalists in other languages and simply need equivalent lexico-grammatical chunks in a less familiar target language or prompts to converse in additional languages. This is the assumption informing bi- and monolingual phrase lists that may be divided into topic domains and/or speech act categories (Cicurel et al. 1991; Engelhardt 2012). Other materials aim to activate and/or drill grammar (Pitts 2014a) or foreground role plays, games and activities (Payet 2010). Yet another approach focusses on content, and covers catalogues of questions designed with relatively succinct responses in mind (Pitts 2014b) as opposed to materials that

guide learners towards exploring a topic in a series of unfolding conversations (Roth and Aberson 2008).

A greater awareness of the importance of speaking in general and conversation in particular is evident in the communicative competence approach to learning additional languages. This can be seen in emerging transnational European guidelines such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2011), in the European Language Portfolio, and in commercial assessment (see http://eaquals.org → Descriptors) and exams. Connected to these developments, commercial exams in French, German and English typically include types of interactional talk that feature to a greater or lesser extent in conversations outside test situations: interviews, collaborative tasks, long turns, and discussions.

Such limited but promising acknowledgement of the importance of dedicated attention to conversation is often rooted in two deep-seated challenges: challenges associated with the demarcation and definition of conversation and conversational competence, and challenges related to an appropriate didactics for the development of conversational competence.

3 A broad and normative definition of conversational competence

Any call for the dedicated development of conversational competence in higher education would be naïve if it ignored the relationship between the sometimes limited and limiting goals of higher education institutions and the broad domain of conversation that stretches across the entertaining and the learned, the personal and the public, and so-called popular and more highly regarded culture. This diversity and broad scope is reflected across the ordinary language definitions of conversation in French (*Littré* and *Larousse*), German (*Duden* and *Das Digitale Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*) and English (*Oxford English Dictionary* and *Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus*).

For the purposes of this article, and drawing on accounts of conversation in Section 2, we propose the following three-tiered definition of conversational competence as *the competence of interlocutors to negotiate interactions in sequences of aural/oral interchange of information, ideas, views, and emotions, usually in real time and face-to-face; to collaboratively construct knowledge, norms and identities; and to reflect upon and adapt the forms and goals of these aural/oral interactions*. We would like to highlight two features of this definition. In terms of scope, it is broad; in terms of commitment it is normative.

This definition shares the view (propounded by Thornbury and Slade 2006) that the definition of conversation and conversational competence should have an inclusive scope. Furthermore, in contrast to neutral definitions which are silent about the norms informing conversation (Bendel 2004), our definition embraces three tiers, each normative in some way. The first tier largely covers the typical foundational skills of encoding/decoding oral/aural sequences. Even this first tier is already normative, in that it adds the more normative notion of negotiation to the more neutral notion of transfer. This means that the meanings of utterances and the forms of interaction are contestable, and also that the rules of how contestation and consensus themselves function are open to contestation. The second tier is normative in that it underscores the view (proposed by, amongst others, Geis 1995) that conversational competence is a social competence and hence takes into consideration the relationship of conversation to larger social practices such as the production of knowledge, norms and identities. The third tier is normative in the sense advocated within critical theory and critical conversation analysis, because it includes the ability to reflect upon and adapt both the forms and goals of conversational interactions that shape the mentioned social practices.

4 A five-phase didactics of conversation

The lay conception – still shared by many stakeholders in higher education – is that conversational competence develops "naturally" and hence does not require dedicated development. This view also finds its way into conversation courses where the focus is on letting participants speak without actually teaching conversation (Goh and Burns 2012: 2–4). Another problem in conversation courses is the use of speaking predominantly as a vehicle to teach aspects of language in general, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Hughes 2011: 7). While such use of speaking may develop aspects relevant to conversation, it is not yet the dedicated teaching of conversation as a distinctive form of communicative interaction. Research into first language conversational competence (Keenan 1974) confirms that, like many other competences, conversational competence develops through imitation and regulation by others. In other words, even where it is not explicitly taught, conversational competence does not develop unaided.

Building on insights by others about the teaching of conversation (Goh and Burns 2012; Thornbury 2005; Folse 2006; Thornbury and Slade

2006: 295–303) and adding elements of critical discourse analysis and critical theory, we propose a dedicated didactics of conversation that chimes with our definition of conversational competence. This didactics comprises three main phases (expose, reflect and appropriate) that consist of a total of five sub-phases.

4.1 Phase one: Expose

4.1.1 Encounter

Learners are exposed, in natural as well as teacher-led events, to acceptable and felicitous utterances and new meanings and communicative behaviours beyond their current range. This may include involvement in real-life conversations and being guided in detailed observation of audio(visual) recordings of natural or performed conversations, transcripts, and phrase banks.

4.2 Phase two: Reflect

4.2.1 Recognise, explicate, analyse

Learners are guided to identify speech acts and conversational sequences as a specific interaction (e.g. offering and accepting an apology); they are guided to specify the processes and parts (e.g. offer and response; verb forms and formulae); and they are guided to examine these features (e.g. explain which verb forms or formulae are conventionally used in a specific interactive sequence).

4.2.2 Assess, adapt

Learners are guided to compare existing expressions and behaviours (e.g. self-selected turn-taking or moderated turn allocation and the language used in these interactions) and to critically assess their different impacts on the conversational interaction as well as the negotiation of intersubjectively binding knowledge, norms and identities. In addition they are guided to introduce non-biased language and conversational strategies of inclusion. In other words, they are prompted to extend principles of non-biased writing (see

American Psychological Association 2013: 73–76) to the language of oral interaction, with the aim of moving towards an ideal conversational situation.

4.3 Phase three: Appropriate

4.3.1 Train

Learners are guided in the use of newly acquired language and behaviours through training such as drilling, writing for delivery, reading aloud, and task-based dialogues with feedback from peers and/or lecturers.

4.3.2 Use autonomously

Learners are exposed to natural situations in which they independently have to cope with conversations without the immediate support of lecturers.

4.4 Where to focus: Covering the basics and beyond

A comprehensive didactics must cover considerable ground – from the foundational linguistic to complex social competences – to include the many facets of conversational competence mentioned in our definition. Many conversation courses limit themselves to the foundational competences, such as speaking correctly and fluently enough, with appropriate range to achieve understanding and pragmatic goals. Even on this level, it is well known that developing each of these aspects may be at odds and that this can be further complicated when students' expectations and lecturers' emphases diverge. Few courses address the unavoidable challenge of developing the relationship between the aural and the oral. Moving beyond this, conversation courses seldom explicitly pay detailed attention to genre and the moves that constitute different conversational genres. Finally, attention needs to be paid to developing the competence of interlocutors in conversations to collaboratively negotiate intersubjectively recognised truth, norms and identities. This may stretch from formal features such as inclusive and non-biased conversation, to more substantive issues such as how to conduct conversations and reach consensus across differences pegged to power with the aim to abolish inequality. In dark times, and given our definition of conversational competence, it is imperative that the teaching of conversation extends this far.

5 Fragments of a curriculum: Three approaches to developing conversational competence in a higher education setting

As a one-semester course can hardly cover the extensive terrain outlined above, those who are serious about developing conversational competence must therefore think in terms of a curriculum. In this section we describe a French, a German, and an English course offered by the Language Centre of the University of Basel, each of which covers some of the terrain proposed in the previous sections. In combination, they foreshadow fragments of an explicit curriculum aimed at developing conversational competence.

5.1 Developing the competence to engage in conversational interaction as mediator of identity and difference in an imagined community – the French course

The multi-level French course (from B1 to upper C1) invokes an "idéal de sociabilité" that Godo (2003: 2) associates with naturally occurring conversation. It takes place against the backdrop of concerns about identity and difference – particularly in the French-speaking world – and the role that conversational conviviality could play in enhancing social cohesion and ameliorating social polarisation (see for example the introduction to Weiss 2002: 7; Gilroy 2004). Whilst difference is important in all language courses (Byram et al. 2002), the assumption is that it is so in a very particular manner in *linguae francae*, such as French, in which language is a common medium of interaction that mediates amongst a very broad range of differences.

The course pursues its challenging purpose, namely the improvement of French in the service of social interaction, by inducting participants into a tradition in which conversation bridges the divide between edification and levity (Godo 2003: 4). This amalgamation of lightness, "impertinence, and a little discomfort", inherited from the age of the salon, requires that conversationalists are "interesting and informed but not weighty and erudite" (Sansot 2003, quoted in Barlow and Nadeau 2016: 83). Their words are expected to be "moderate but at the same time spontaneous and personalized, a bit racy, spiced with a bit of irony, but no bad will" (Fumaroli 1997, quoted in Barlow and Nadeau 2016: 83). While cognisant of possible limits to what Rushdie (2005) describes as the right to offend and the duty to not take offence (Fox 2016) in a language learning environment, the course uses fantasy, satire and parody to edge towards an imagined community in which it is possible to be different without fear.

Because real and imagined settings can be modulated to impact on the *Stimmung* (atmosphere) of conversation, both are important. The real setting is a university seminar room in which it is possible to move about. As a variation on the brown-bag seminar, the lecturer provides French refreshments to which participants help themselves. This adds to the lightness of the course, which counters foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al. 1986). The course, which builds on Francis Debyser's *L'Immeuble* (1984), is an extended role play in which participants imagine themselves to be residents of a block of flats. Task-based learning and audiovisual materials add substance to the imagined community of residents and concretise influential debates in language learning about difference, alterity and solidarity and cosmopolitanism; about self, other and society; and about individual and collective identity and the deconstruction thereof (Ferréol and Jacquois 2003). The focus is on real-time, face-to-face, in-class oral production and aural reception. The emphasis is clearly on the spoken word; the written word is a scaffold to speaking.

Activities and tasks in the first phase centre on individual and collective auto- and *autre*-ethnographies: *Who am I, who is the other? Who are we, who are they?* This phase starts with semi-prepared interactions in which participants individually imagine for themselves, and then present to the group, a fantasy identity that includes gender, age, occupation, and civil status. Guided by semi-structured prompts, participants interview each other and take written notes to ascertain commonalities and differences. In addition they are prompted to together reflect and make notes on which similarities and differences surprise them and to explain to the whole group whether they attach any significance to any of the similarities and differences. In an improvised speed dating exercise they extend their existing fictitious identity and presentation of self to include languages spoken, faith, leisure activities, preferred and disliked food, and family traditions.

The media used in the first phase includes film excerpts, songs, and video clips. Drawing on Ruben Alves's *La Cage Dorée* (2013), a film about a Portuguese concierge of a Parisian apartment building, the lecturer assumes the fictitious persona of the concierge in the small block of flats that the course participants' fictitious personae inhabit. Slipping in and out of this role allows the lecturer to guide events related to the shared accommodation throughout the course. Songs by popular contemporary French chansonists such as Francis Cabrel and Grégoire thematise identity, difference and cosmopolitan neighbourliness:

> *On n'a pas le même drapeau,/ Ni la même couleur de peau,/ On n'a pas le même langage,/ La même culture, les mêmes images./ [...] Mais chacun de nous est vivant,/ Avec la même couleur de sang.// Et on y a tous le même soleil,/ Et la même lune sur nos sommeils* [We don't

> have the same flag / Nor the same skin colour, / We don't have the same language, / The same culture, the same images. / [...] But every one of us is alive, / With blood the same colour. // And we all have the same sun, / And the same moon over our dreams] (Grégoire, "Soleil", 2010).

A worksheet prompts participants to discuss whether groups inevitably impose common identities on members, what their views are of the song's message, and to compose a verse of their own for the song. Following the mentioned speed-dating activity, participants watch an extract from Gérard Pullicino's film *Le Grand Restaurant II* (2011) about an attractive young woman whose blind date turns out to look very similar to Adolf Hitler, without his sentiments. This jarring mix of playfulness with impertinence, of mainstream notions of romance with parodying horror typically has the paradoxical effect of dampening and deepening conversation amongst course participants in ways described by Barlow and Nadeau (2016: 77–89). Guided by the lecturer's conversational prompts, ever deepening exchanges evolve, with some participants drawing on their academic knowledge to elaborate on and scrutinize the constituents of identity as well as the workings and limits of empathy.

The semantic fields covered in the first phase centre mostly on the language of auto/ethnography: the construction, presentation and observation of selves and others. The linguistic structures include interrogatives and the revision of pronouns and verbs that are common in the construction of self, the other, and collective identities. The songs draw attention to the language of comparison (similarity) and contrast (difference). In terms of interactional talk, the central conversational genre in the first phase veers towards the interview, which largely consists of sequences of speech acts such as giving and extracting information about self and others. In addition, listening – one of the often overlooked partial competences that is nonetheless constitutive of interactional talk – receives dedicated attention in phase one. In order to train aural skills, participants listen to songs like those mentioned above with visual verbal support added incrementally in successive hearings.

In phase two, the focus is on location and space and a general thickening of geographic and social knowledge. The lecturer uses various channels to familiarise participants with the *culture générale* that, according to Barlow and Nadeau (2016: 103 ff.), constitutes the shared content of typical French conversation. In this phase the refreshments gain an additional function, with the lecturer explaining the origins of the various foods. This, at one and the same time, performs the significance of food, especially regional delicacies as a conversation topic (Barlow and Nadeau 2016: 105–120), and conveys information about the different regions of France.

Participants argue in favour of a specific location for the building in which they live as well as which apartment in the building should be allocated to them.

This phase thus builds on the first, in that it thematises the relationships between, on the one hand, identities and the needs associated with these identities, and, on the other hand, the resources associated with location and space that might potentially meet or thwart these needs. The aim of the first part in this phase is to reach an agreement on a location for the block of flats in which the personae will live. To do so, participants are familiarised with demographic, educational and economic statistics for various parts of France taken from Gérard Mermet's *Francoscopie* (2013). Participants must collect similar information on their preferred city to match the needs and interests of their imagined persona. Arguing from the perspective of their fictitious persona, participants try to convince the group in favour of their preferred location. Through the fusion of these individual perspectives participants produce a miniature Francoscopie of their own. Once a location has been chosen, the second task is for each participant to argue before the lecturer/concierge why a specific flat with its specific features should be assigned to them and why their need for certain spatial resources should have precedence over the requests of others. Again, the connection is made between the specific needs of the persona they developed in the first phase and the resources connected to specific living spaces.

Audio-visual media are again used to add detail, scope and concreteness to the imagined community. The group analyses a short film, *Un excellent dossier !*, by the French actor and screenwriter Artus de Penguern. This competition winner from a series of short films against discrimination and for the promotion of equality (Arte TV 2008, *11 Courts-métrages contre les discriminations*) further develops the themes of difference and antidiscrimination in shared living space. In addition, it introduces the language used in the administrative procedures when renting an apartment in France. An accompanying worksheet extends participants' vocabulary and structures and guides them to an enhanced understanding of the themes of the film. Echoing the original competition announcement for the Arte shorts, participants are prompted to sketch a script for a short film on discrimination and equality.

The semantic fields added in phase two largely concern location and space (from the extended space of the French-speaking world to the personal space of a home) as well as quantitative data associated with urban geography, demographics, and economics. In terms of linguistic structures, the emphasis is on sharing information, comparing statistics, and pointing out the relative advantages and disadvantages of locations. On a more complex level, participants are familiarised with and practise the language of arguments that connect identities with resource allocation, which is pivotal to struggles over recognition and redistribution (Fraser and Honneth 2003). Two forms of interactional talk are practised: argument and counter-argument in competition

over resources, and the transactional talk involved in closing a legal agreement such as renting property.

In the third phase individual and collective identities are related. This involves drawing the lines between the private sphere of individuals and the public sphere of shared spaces, as well as organising collective activities. Thus, in one task, participants are instructed to seek agreement about which areas (such as the garden and laundry facilities) are reserved for private use and which are shared by all. In another task, pairs create a poster for a notice board in which they offer contributions to the community through exchanged favours. Finally, the group collectively organises a *fête des voisins*, which the organisers describe as "l'occasion de rencontrer ses voisins pour développer la convivialité afin de rompre l'anonymat et l'isolement qui règnent souvent dans nos villes" [the occasion to meet their neighbours in order to develop conviviality so as to break the anonymity and the isolation which often reigns in our towns] (http://www.lafetedesvoisins.fr/).

In addition to studying Axelle Red's song "J'aime pas mes voisins", Renan Luce's "Les voisines" and extracts from David Haddad's film "*La fête des voisins*", participants consult the website http://www.lafetedesvoisins.fr/. This familiarises them with and prompts them to gather diverse views on this originally French event which has since spread to various parts of the world, and to get ideas for organising such an event themselves.

New semantic fields concern aspects of neighbourliness. The linguistic structures that receive special attention include eliciting, making, and responding to offers. Interactive talk in the third phase centres on creating consensus about reciprocal and collective action. On the one hand, this includes agonistic talk which nevertheless strives for agreement about conflicting interests (e.g. private vs public use), and which largely consists of the interactive language of negotiation and compromise. On the other hand, consensus-oriented interaction also includes cooperative agreements on how parties will join forces to make activities and events succeed.

5.2 Developing the competence to engage in conversational interaction as a binding force in auto/biographical, intercultural and intergenerational contracts – the German course

The German conversation course takes place against the backdrop of two major social trends: growing migration and population ageing. It fuses the linguistic integration of mobile people with the production and dissemination

of the life narratives of older people in the print public sphere. In addition to being paired in conversations with German-speaking residents of a retirement residence, students and the older participants converse in larger groups, and each student crafts a written portrait of their older interlocutor, which is published in a commemoration brochure that is available in the public domain.

For the students, one immediate and specific aim of the course is to enhance their conversational competence through authentic oral conversations with speakers of standard German. This includes becoming aware of, training, and integrating into their repertoire the specific linguistic and communicative competences required to conduct an ongoing conversation and an in-depth interview with an older individual over a period of six weeks. A second aim is to enhance their writing skills. Composing a portrait trains their ability to transfer dialogical oral text into written text for publication, enhances their general command of the written language, raises their awareness of genre types, and familiarises them with the specific thematic and linguistic features of the portrait as genre.

For the residents, the opportunity to meet and converse with interesting and challenging interlocutors offers intellectual stimulation and an opportunity to engage in life story work that may contribute to their cognitive and affective wellbeing (Swain 2013; Wills and Day 2008). As oral narrators who revisit earlier times in their lives, they co-construct a narrative identity with their interlocutors. This gives them an opportunity to present and reflect on their earlier selves. In addition, through such other-directed self-reflection they may gain recognition from their younger interlocutors as well as from prospective readers of the published brochure.

From the perspective of society, conversation courses like this enhance social cohesion and participation. Mobile learners of additional languages can enhance their linguistic integration and intercultural understanding in German as a medium of communication, thereby diminishing alienation between more recently mobile and more settled communities (Krumm and Plutzar 2008). Such conversations between younger and older people can also diminish communication avoidance across generations (Giles et al. 2005), enhance different age groups' understanding of each others' lifeworlds, and invigorate a flagging intergenerational contract.

The German course evolves over five phases, each with its own setting and constellation of interlocutors. Phase one, the preparation, is crucial, given evidence that participants from both groups may be both curious and anxious about the forthcoming encounter (Khimchenko 2014: 13; Sharro 2014: 37). To assuage these worries, participants receive methodical preparation. Anxieties

are addressed by preparing students regarding thematic vocabulary, conversation techniques, knowledge of the historical, social and cultural contexts in which their partners lived, as well as the genre of the portrait. Possible reciprocal expectations and their impact on conversation are addressed. And all parties are reminded of the importance of both giving and receiving. As one student emphasises:

> Zum Schluss möchte ich noch sagen, dass diese Gelegenheit, sich mit älteren Menschen zu unterhalten, ganz unglaublich ist. Ihr Alltag verändert sich auch durch uns. Sie verbringen Zeit mit Studenten, manchmal Ausländern, und das bringt auch ihnen eine aufregende Möglichkeit, mehr zu entdecken und zu lernen. Andererseits habe ich sonst nicht so viele Möglichkeiten, mit älteren Leuten Zeit zu verbringen. Das mahnt mich daran, wie wichtig und zentral der generationenübergreifende Austausch ist. [...] Ich wünsche, dass solche Erfahrungen öfter möglich werden. [Finally I'd also like to say that this opportunity to talk with older people is really incredible. Their everyday lives are also changed through us. They spend time with students, sometimes foreigners, and that brings them, too, an exciting opportunity to discover and to learn. On the other hand I don't otherwise have that many opportunities to spend time with older people. That reminds me of how important and central intergenerational exchange is. [...] I hope that experiences like this become possible more often.] (Mekonen 2014: 27)

Overall, one may characterise this interaction as the tacit establishment of a fused conversational and auto/biographical contract.

The second phase consists of six weekly conversations between the pairs of students and residents, as well as debriefing meetings between the lecturer and all students following directly upon each conversation meeting. Over the six weeks, the following could be observed or inferred:

– Reciprocity plays a central role in the exchange of information and views, as is common when getting to know someone and when constructing mutuality in conversations. As one student writes,

> Obwohl unser Rahmenthema eigentlich Kindheit und Jugend war, erzählte mir René viel über sein Berufsleben. Seinerseits wollte er alles über Algerien wissen, besonders über die kulturellen Unterschiede zwischen Algerien und der Schweiz. Ich war erstaunt, wie viel er über Algerien aus dem Internet ausgedruckt und gelesen hatte. Nachdem wir beide unsere Neugier gestillt hatten, fingen wir auch an über seine Kindheit zu sprechen [Although our overarching theme was actually childhood and youth, René told me a lot about his work life. And for his part he wanted to know everything about Algeria, especially about the cultural differences between Algeria and Switzerland. I was astonished at how much he had printed out and read from the internet about Algeria. After we had both satisfied our curiosity, we also started to talk about his childhood.] (Bellah Mebarki 2015: 5)

– This extract above also confirms that in addition to adhering to a specific topic, the interlocutors can negotiate the meandering structure of conversations.

Besides training their topic management strategies, this meandering confronts interlocutors with the management of distance, closeness, and disclosure.

- The older persons tend to conversational reserve. This may stem from an older (bourgeois) Swiss conversation culture and their guardedness about disclosing emotions and expressing value judgements about people in their lives. The students quickly develop alertness to these boundaries: where it is possible to explore, and where probing is unwanted (Butty 2015: 10; Milicevic 2015: 18; Mertenat 2014: 29).
- Given the imperative of writing a portrait, the younger students learn to mingle the role of conversationalist with the probing and more unidirectional role of interviewer, thereby positioning their interlocutors as an amalgam of conversation partners and interviewees.
- Because they are encouraged to focus on the interlocutor rather than on note-taking, the learners practise other ways of fixing things in memory for writing down after the conversations. By repeating and recapitulating, the learners train their retention of earlier utterances in German. Furthermore, to construct a conversational thread over weeks, the learners inevitably practise the language (such as tenses and time indexicals) required for referring back to previous utterances (e.g., something said by the interlocutor in a previous week) and following up on those utterances.
- Conversations are scaffolded in various ways. On the one side, older residents may bring along photographic or other records of people and events from the past that generate conversation. For this, students practise appropriate language for referring to such prompts, for interpreting them, and for weaving them into an ongoing conversation. On the other hand, conversation may prompt writing in the form of limited note-taking, which is subsequently converted at home into prose that unfolds and in turn prompts further questions over six weeks.

In the six debriefing sessions with the students, the lecturer deals with linguistic issues relating to the conversations and the emerging written portraits. Students create peer groups in which they review each other's texts, revise their own texts, and prepare questions for the next conversation.

In phase three, pairs of interlocutors circulate, while phase four, an excursion, prompts the introduction of new topics and new semantic fields, and the randomly changing partnering creates novel conversational constellations and interactions. The fifth phase is a closing event in the retirement residence and the dissemination of the brochure containing the students' texts. This has a snowball recruiting effect: open to all residents, it prompts conversations with prospective participants in the next round of conversations.

Whereas participants in the French course assume imagined identities, in the German course the identities of real persons are constructed and explored in both the conversations and the printed brochures. We sketch identities of the students and the older residents, as this indicates the language that learners (need to) develop to give linguistic form and substance to these identities.

Though a minor topic, the discursive identities that student language learners construct of themselves may be relevant to conversation courses. Typically, they foreground their identities as students from elsewhere, implying that they are competent users of other languages. Where they refer to themselves as language learners in higher education, the discursive identities they construct are of persons who are anxious about their incorrect or constrained receptive and productive competencies in the language they are seeking to improve. One student, for example, notes that she has butterflies in her stomach, "weil ich immer ein bisschen nervös bin, wenn ich Deutsch spreche, vor allem, wenn ich jemanden noch nicht kenne" [because I'm always a bit nervous when I speak German, especially when I don't know someone yet] (Swank 2014: 41). There are clear expressions of pleasure in learning more (Neuhaus 2015: 21; see also; Mekonen 2014: 26) and in succeeding in conversing, despite persistent limitations: "Je länger wir uns unterhielten, desto entspannter fühlte ich mich. Mein Deutsch war zwar nicht so perfekt wie gewünscht, aber Isolde war sehr hilfsbereit. Gemeinsam waren wir fähig, Missverständnisse zu klären und ein flüssiges Gespräch zu führen" [The longer we conversed, the more relaxed I felt. My German was perhaps not as perfect as desired, but Isolde was very helpful. Together we were able to clear up misunderstandings and conduct a fluent conversation] (Swank 2014: 41). They also present themselves as very appreciative of the opportunity to make the acquaintance of or sometimes befriend a local older person (Sharro 2014: 39; Alluri 2014: 7) and as grateful for the opportunity to improve their competence in the local language: "Dank dieses Gesprächskurses habe ich mein Deutsch vertieft und ich bin ganz gut vorbereitet ein Gespräch über fast alles zu führen" [Thanks to this conversation course I have deepened my German and I am quite well prepared to hold a conversation on nearly anything] (Serina 2015: 31). Often, befriending an older local person and improving their German are closely intertwined: "Ich habe eine sehr nette Person kennen gelernt und habe mit dieser viel mehr als einfach einen Deutschkurs erlebt" [I've got to know a very nice person and through this person I have experienced much more than just a German course] (Groelly 2014: 11).

Unsurprisingly, the most elaborated identities in the brochures are of older persons who negotiate different aspects of ageing. Overall, the younger learners

present the older residents positively. They are portrayed as competent conversationalists and custodians of privileged first-person knowledge about themselves and a local past. As shown by the title of one portrait, "Gemeinsamer Rückblick auf ein langes Leben" [Looking back together on a long life] (Milicevic 2015: 17), being older is presented as having a long past, which is constructed with markers of time, change and persistence (*damals* 'back then', *vorher* 'previously', *noch nicht* 'not yet', *immer noch* 'still', and *nicht mehr* 'no longer'). This long past bestows on the older conversationalists an awareness of their mortality (Alluri 2014: 7) as well as accrued knowledge and experience that make them lively and rich conversation partners (Khimchenko 2014: 13).

At times, the older persons are presented as voicing their own expertise on ageing (Bellah Mebarki 2015: 7) and negotiating other authoritative views on what it means to be older. They refer, for example, to real and feared ailments and bad health and dementia (Li-Blatter 2014: 23) that support Victor Hugo's pessimistic view quoted by Bellah Mebarki (2015: 7): "Toutes les passions s'éloignent avec l'âge" [All passions recede with age] (Hugo 1840). Generally, though, the dominant picture is of older people who have retained some youthfulness. There are plenty of references to the *Energie* of the older interlocutors and how *aktiv* they are, with one student explicitly noting that there is no big generation gap (Groelly 2014: 11). Curiosity of mind is presented as a conversational competence that co-constitutes this youthfulness. Thus the younger learners are at pains to underline that interlocutors speak about current affairs (Marin Lacruz 2014: 18) and are "immer noch 'up to date'" [still up to date] (Alluri 2014: 7). They are "offen für Neues und die Erfahrungen anderer" [open to new things and the experiences of others] (Sandoz 2015: 27) and open "Neues zu entdecken und zu erfahren" [to discover and experience new things] (Groelly 2014: 9). These youthful identities are connected to the modestly critical view of the late modern ideal that elderly people remain eternally young: "im Grunde haben wir nicht das Alter zu ‚lieben gelernt', sondern nur gelernt, lange jung zu bleiben" [basically we have not "learned to love" old age but only learned to stay young longer] (Höpflinger & Perrig-Chiello, cited by Bellah Mebarki 2015: 5). Often, these conversations prompt students to refine views on ageing they brought with them to Switzerland:

> Ich komme aus der Ukraine. Dort habe ich viele alte Leute gesehen und mit vielen gesprochen. Immer sind sie zu geduldig. Sie lassen alles über sich ergehen. Sie haben kein eigenes Leben mehr, sondern warten nur noch. Sie sprechen ausschliesslich von ihren Kindern und Kindeskindern, sich selbst haben sie ganz vergessen. Theresia wirkt auf mich ganz anders. Sie ist energisch, grosszügig und humorvoll [I come from Ukraine. I saw many old people there and spoke with many. They are always too patient. They let everything wash over them. They no longer have a life of their own, but are only waiting.

They talk exclusively about their children and their children's children; themselves they have forgotten. Theresia strikes me as quite different. She is energetic, generous, and humorous] (Khimchenko 2014: 15).

5.3 Developing the competence to shape the conversational interactions that shape us – the English course

The English conversation course (C1+) takes place in the context of concerns about the demise of the virtues of conversation, the erosion of conversational competence, and the implications this has for the production of knowledge, norms and identities. Fundamentally, it conveys the view that we shape the conversations that shape us. It shares the insight that language speaks us (in Gadamer's version: "insoweit ist es buchstäblich richtiger zu sagen, daß die Sprache uns spricht, als daß wir sie sprechen" [to that extent it is literally more accurate to say that language speaks us than that we speak it] Gadamer 2010: 467). Yet it extends this initial insight with the conviction that we can also shape the forms and the functions of the language we use in conversational interactions. Considerable weight is placed on combining reflection (in particular on assessment and adaptation) with appropriation. Or, put differently, the course combines our ability to shape conversation with conversations driven by topic-oriented curiosity. Sharing elements with other courses informed by conversation analysis (Barraja-Rohan 2011; Al-Amri 2011), the course trains the ability to recognise and shape form and function on two interconnected levels: the macro level of genre; and the micro level of lexico-grammatical formulaic sequences.

The real setting of the conversations is a university seminar room with participants sitting at a table. Light refreshments are provided to serve a range of purposes: to dilute the adversarial cerebral debates of the seminar atmosphere; to evoke the conviviality of imagined settings such as salons, coffee houses, or the kitchen table; and for participants to learn how to interweave the language of polite sociability (for example when serving or being served refreshments) with the language of topic-oriented curiosity.

In the following two subsections we outline how these conversational skills are developed in two interlocking cycles (see Figure 1): the learner-led topic-oriented conversations in which participants apply, in autonomous talk, what they have learnt (corresponding to Section 4.3.2 of the didactics proposed above); and the lecturer-led, formula-focussed training and reflection in which participants recognise, explicate, analyse, assess, and adapt these phrases (corresponding to the other four stages of the didactics proposed above).

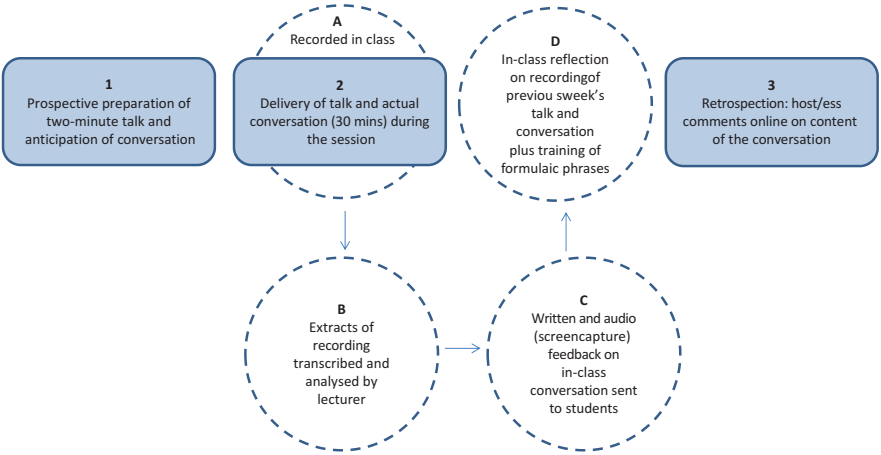

Figure 1: Two sequences of activities in a course that aims to develop the competence to shape the conversational interactions that shape us: the appropriation cycle (i.e. learner-led topic-oriented conversation in its larger context, see Section 5.3.1) and the reflection cycle (i.e. lectured-led reflection and training of formulae and genre structures, see Section 5.3.2). Key: Squares with numbers depict stages in the appropriation cycle. Circles with letters depict stages in the reflection and training cycle.

5.3.1 The autonomous use cycle and learner-led topic-oriented conversations

In a weekly series of student-led, pre-scripted two-minute talks and the conversations about the themes thus introduced, participants apply oral and aural interactional skills in a curiosity-driven topic-oriented conversation. These in-class conversations are part of a larger sequence. Table 1 shows some of the stages involved (prospective pre-class preparation, the actual in-class conversation, and post-class retrospection); media and skills (writing, silent reading, reading aloud, speaking and listening); and roles (host/ess, person giving a talk, other conversationalists).

One aspect of developing speakers' conversational competence is to familiarise them with the larger multimodal (written, spoken, audio-visual) communication networks within which conversations are embedded and for them to actively construct such networks. In particular, they are acquainted with the transformations in form (e.g. sentence complexity) and content, as well as the different degrees of preparation and improvisation that occur as texts travel across multimodal networks. This includes acquainting themselves with transitions (interconnections) and transfers (changes in the form of utterances) between: composing texts that prompt conversation; reading such texts silently

Table 1: Three phases of the autonomous use cycle (corresponding to the three numbered stages in Figure 1): learner-led, topic-oriented conversation.

1. Prospective preparation and anticipation
1.1 The week's talk-giver writes a two- to three-minute introduction on a topic of their choice related to the overall theme of the semester.
1.2 The lecturer reviews the draft text.
1.3 The talk-giver revises the written text and shares it with participants via a virtual learning platform.
1.4 Participants read the text before the meeting.
2. Actual conversation during the session (30 min)
2.1. The host/ess ensures that everyone is welcomed, serves refreshments, and introduces the talk-giver.
2.2 The talk-giver delivers his/her talk (either by reading it off the page or speaking to it).
2.3 All participants converse on the introductory talk.
2.4 The host/ess guides the above conversation. S/he ensures that it flows and is focused, and wraps up.
3. Retrospection after the session
The host/ess comments on an aspect of the conversation online in writing (two or three sentences).

for oneself prior to the conversation; delivering a pre-scripted texts to an audience; oral and aural interaction in conversation on a written texts; and a written response to the conversation after it has taken place.

Participants are also acquainted with the different roles (talk-giver, host/ess, remaining conversationalists), the competences related to each role that contribute to the success of a conversation, and the language associated with each role.

The learner-led topic-oriented conversation is recorded (Figure 1, circle A) and, between meetings, turned into a form conducive to reflection and training.

5.3.2 The reflection and training cycle: Lecturer-led analyses, assessment, and training of formulae and genre structures

Cycle two consists of lecturer-led flanking activities based on simplified transcripts of short interactional sequences from the learner-led autonomous conversations. The recording, transcripts, written commentary, and screencast (video of simplified transcripts of the conversations with overdubbed lecturer feedback on pronunciation and intonation) are shared via a virtual learning platform (Figure 1 circles B and C). During this cycle, participants make their

conversational habitus explicit; analyse the form and function of formulaic expressions; assess the normative implications of these chunks; adapt their own and canonical formulae; and adopt the existing or adapted patterns into their repertoires (see Table 2).

Table 2: Phases in lecturer-led training of genre structure and formulaic sequences (corresponding to lettered circles in Figure 1).

A. In-class conversation is recorded
B. Extracts are transcribed and analysed by lecturer
C. Written and audio (screencast) feedback is sent to students
D. In-class reflection and training of formulaic sequences and generic structure of conversation based on recording of previous week's conversation

Participants are guided to reflect on the formulaic interactional sequences used in the moves that constitute conversation as a genre. They identify and describe form and function (for example the use of modal verbs in polite offers *Would you like … ?*). They assess their utterances and interactions, pointing out shortcomings and strengths. Where these recorded interactive sequences are wanting, the lecturer seeks to enhance accuracy by guiding participants towards correction and improvement. To expand participants' range, the lecturer also guides them towards generating alternatives. Improved and additional phrases are then trained in short interactional exercises. We illustrate aspects of this process, focussing on four examples.

Polite sociability and preferred response: Participants are guided to identify and improve the formulaic language used in face-to-face interactions central to hospitality such as offering or requesting and responding to offers and requests. They are introduced to the notion of dis/preferred responses and how these impact on the language of conversational interaction. Participants may, for example, examine a simplified transcript of a deficient interaction from a previous conversation:

> Host: Please help yourselves
> [4 s silence. No one helps themselves.]
> Host: Ok, let's move on to today's talk …

Generally participants notice that the long pause suggests an awkward silence tied to the failure of the host's offer. The lecturer elicits reasons for this infelicity and may connect this to the notion of dis/preferred response. Familiarity with this notion enables participants to understand why some speech acts fail and

how such infelicity may require repair. Prompted by the lecturer, students suggest (linguistic and other) actions that might enhance the felicity of offers, such as:

Host: Please help yourselves
Ayanda: Not now thanks, I'll have some in a moment.
Host: Ok, let's move on to today's talk ...

Or:

Host: Please help yourselves
Ayanda holding the plate for Babette: Thanks [to host]. Babette, would you like some?
Babette: Ah thanks [takes a biscuit and passes on the bowl]
Host: Ok, let's move on to today's talk ...

Participation and selection in turn-taking: In addition to considering common aspects of participation such as holding the floor, interrupting, and responding to an interruption, participants also reflect on the following sequence from a previous meeting:

Jay: I think transparency is good.
[3 seconds]
Dang: I think that whistleblowers should get special protection. For example Julian Assange.
[2.5 seconds]
Lou: I think Ed Snowden is safe in Russia. But he cannot leave.
[3 seconds]

Participants may notice the long pauses between turns, and lecturer-guided reflection alerts them to the impact of different turn-taking strategies on the interaction speed and levels of participation. A solution that participants commonly suggest is closing with a question: *What do [the rest of] you think?* Again, participants' range may be expanded with related formulae such as: *Are there any further thoughts?* Open invitation to the group may then be compared to directed invitation in which the present speaker selects the next participant, such as: *What do you think Suraya?* Participants are encouraged to consider the impacts of different speaker-selection formulae in different conversation cultures. They may suggest alternatives that may be less face-threatening and more perceptive of cultural differences and personal sensitivities such as: *Maybe, Thulani, you would like to share your view on this with us?* Or, *Xie, you seem to be giving this some thought, is there something you may want to add?* Overall, participants come to recognise different approaches to inclusion and participation in conversation and expand the range of phrases through which they shape

such selection in turn-taking, while at the same time remaining sensitive to the risks of coercing and exposing interlocutors in a conversation.

Topic development and cohesion: When analysing the previous extract, participants generally also remark on the lack of development and interconnection amongst utterances and the impact of these deficits on conversation. They may propose formulae that enhance development (*Could you elaborate on that? Can you give an example?*) and cohesion (*There might be an additional reason to the one mentioned by Fairuza, why we should …*) in conversational sequences. Overall, participants thereby come to perceive and also more consciously shape conversation as a collective endeavour in which interlocutors, by relating their utterances to each other, potentially deepen and develop knowledge, norms, and identities.

Negotiating agreement and disagreement: Participants may also reflect on agreement and disagreement in conversation and how these are constructed. For example, they may consider the functions and impact of utterances such as: *Do you agree (with me)? You do agree with me, don't you? You don't see it differently, do you?* They could then generate phrases that allow greater leniency regarding both topic and function, such as *What do the rest of you think?* In addition, participants may reflect on exchanges such as:

> Ainsley: We can improve the situation of refugees if we build more reception centres.
> Cleo: We need to increase the number of rescue operations.
> Washma: We need to stop the funding of war.

Participants may be encouraged to expand their range with phrases that may make clear whether relationships amongst utterances are those of addition (*in addition, also*), prioritisation (*first and foremost*), or exclusion (*I don't see … how … is a viable solution to*). And participants may be encouraged to examine to what extent utterances express degrees of agreement and disagreement (*largely agree, don't see at all*), as in the sequence below:

> Ainsley: We can improve the situation of refugees if we build more reception centres.
> Cleo: I largely agree with that, but in addition, we also need to increase the number of rescue operations.
> Washma: First and foremost we need to stop the funding of war. I don't see at all how investing in reception centres is a viable solution for an emergency at this stage because …

Finally, so as to not threaten relations amongst interlocutors, participants may be familiarised with the higher degree of elaboration that is commonly used to introduce dissent, such as adding justification (*because …*), and various softeners (*Sorry, but I can't agree* (apology and modal verb); *I see your point, yet …* (concession and counterpoint).

Such examples from the English course develop participants' awareness of how formulaic sequences shape conversational interaction, the content of conversation, and the relationships amongst interlocutors; and how, in turn, interlocutors can use language to shape the conversational interactions that shape them.

6 Towards a curriculum that develops conversational competence

Considered together, these three conversation courses – one in French, one in German and one in English – constitute fragments of a prefigured, dedicated curriculum that aims to develop conversational competence in additional languages within higher education institutions. While the courses are not at odds with each other, there are some redundancies, desirable overlaps and valuable complementarities. In addition, there are gaps that would have to be filled for a coherent curriculum of sorts to emerge. A summary comparison may aid in clarifying how each course contributes toward the development of such a curriculum and aid stakeholders in identifying which aspects of which courses they would like to combine in course and curriculum development.

To begin with, all three courses share the point of departure outlined at the start of this article (Section 2), namely that conversation is vital, prevalent and complex, that it develops over the life course, and that it accordingly should receive dedicated development, including in higher education. In addition, the conviction that conversation can ameliorate some individual, institutional and social ills constitutes a common backdrop from which the three courses emerge. And they largely complement each other regarding the concrete issues they seek to address. Thus the French course strives to enhance conversational conviviality in order to negotiate social cohesion across similar and diverse identities. The German course, in turn, demonstrates the value of paired conversations amongst a younger and recently more mobile population on the one hand, and an older, currently more sedentary population on the other hand to strengthen the intergenerational contract and promote linguistic integration; while the English conversation course seeks to empower participants to shape the conversations which shape them.

When it comes to the proposed three-tiered, broad, normative definition of conversational competence (Section 3), the three courses are closest to each other in the attention they devote to the first tier (i.e., the competence to negotiate interactions in sequences of aural/oral interchange in real time and

face-to-face). This is to be expected, as the felicitous encoding and decoding of meaning is the foundation on which the other two tiers build. This focus on the first tier is also to be expected in conversation courses in additional languages, where participants often want to concentrate on understanding and correctness. The second tier (namely the competence to collaboratively construct knowledge, norms and identities) receives particular attention in the French and German courses, which focus on the co-construction of imagined and real identities respectively. In addition, the French course explicitly addresses the collaborative construction of norms associated with cohabitation within these imagined collective identities. Compared to the other two courses, the English one, with its more formalist approach, puts greater emphasis on the process than the substance of the collaborative construction of knowledge, norms and identities. Furthermore, more than the other courses, it emphasises the third tier, namely the competence to reflect upon and adapt the forms and goals of aural/oral interactions.

Finally, and corresponding to their specific emphases on the different tiers of the definition, the three courses also emphasise different aspects of the three-phase didactics proposed above (see Section 4). Again, as can be expected in the context of the acquisition of additional languages, all three courses seek to expand learners' range through encounter with unfamiliar language (phase one, see Section 4.1). In all courses, oral/aural interaction with the lecturers is a source of such encounter. In addition, other interlocutors also expose participants to unfamiliar language. This is especially true for weaker students in a broad-range course (such as the French one, which covers levels B1 to upper C1) and all learners in the German course, who converse with older, first-language users. A further source of encounter with unfamiliar language is audio and visual media. In the French course, video clips of songs and films play an important role in such encounter, while in the English course, recordings of participants' conversations can expand their range. Amongst the visual media used to expose learners to unfamiliar language, writing has a central role in all three courses. This is particularly so in the German course, where participants' written portraits are one of the goals of the conversations, and the English course, where participants' scripted talks are one of the starting points of conversations. In both of these courses, participants' range is also expanded via lists of thematically arranged formulaic interactional phrases compiled by the lecturer. In addition, in the English course, simplified transcripts of participants' conversations, along with comments by the lecturer on how these conversations could be improved, also expand learners' encounter with unfamiliar language. Reflection on newly acquired language (phase two, see Section 4.2) plays a role in all three courses, although to different degrees and in different

ways. Recognition and explication of language are evident in all three courses, for example in the way in which participants are alerted to what constitutes im/politeness and how this shapes conversational interaction. The German and English courses go beyond these basic stages of reflection, to include a larger element of assessment of bias in language and the adoption of inclusive conversational strategies. Appropriation through training and autonomous use (phase three, see Section 4.3) also varies across the three courses. Task-based pair and group work, with the lecturer providing low-level assistance (in the form of orally supplying as required, language that enhances felicity and fluency) constitutes a mix of training and semi-autonomous use in the French course. In the German and English courses, training and autonomous use are more clearly separated. In the German course, training takes place in the preparatory meetings before the actual conversations, while the conversations themselves offer the opportunity for autonomous appropriation. Correction by older interlocutors is limited, and the lecturer is available in the background mainly to re-animate flagging conversations. In the English course, the split into two cycles (see Figure 1) means that half of each meeting is devoted to teacher-led training of formulaic phrases and to using the recording and transcript from the previous session to train new expressions. The student-led talk and conversation that fill the second half of the meeting enable appropriation through autonomous use.

To conclude, we would like to highlight three shortcomings in our account of the development of conversational competence that require further examination. First, while the patchwork of courses described and compared here foreshadows an explicit curriculum aimed at developing conversational competence, they also show just how much still needs to be done to achieve this goal.

Second, we assume that conversational competence can develop and that such development can be observed. Yet, unlike Spitzberg and Adams (n.d.), we do not propose observable descriptors that operationalise our definition of conversational competence. Further conceptual development is required that would include clarifying which aspects of our definition allow operationalization. Neither do we provide empirical evidence to show the impact of the proposed courses, nor provide evidence about which course best enhances which conversational competence. Hence we have not addressed the justified question: What are the strengths and limitations of each of the three models with regard to enhancing conversational competence? Addressing these questions requires more space and empirical research.

Finally, we lauded conversation for its ability to transform the self, personal and professional relationships, as well as society and its institutions. This

optimism needs tempering. Conversational action, as a specific aspect of communicative action more broadly, may be a valuable or arguably even a necessary condition for the fulfilment of these promises of social transformation. We still need to clarify, however, how other aspects of social action combine with it to bring about the ideals foreshadowed in ideal conversational interactions.

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