

The construction of a diamesic competency within foreign speakers of French – A sociocultural perspective on language acquisition

Zahra AL-SHAROUFI¹

This study investigates how French Language acquisition, which varies from one learner to another, plays a detrimental role on the quality of the learner's oral production. The research focuses on the "diamesic" variation of French (Belgian or other Francophone variations), as well as "diaphasic" variations, in some cases. According to the collected qualitative data, this study adopts: a thematic analysis of spoken French variants on real case studies; an investigation on the type of linguistic "input" and its impact on the learner's "output," and an examination of the learners' "linguistic attitudes" regarding the French language spoken in Belgium and in other francophone countries. Thus, the incorporation of a pedagogical analysis is of utmost importance in order to reach the point of interest; the production of a diamesic competency within foreign learners of French – students of the FLE (Français Langue Etrangère) programme.

Keywords: *language acquisition, pedagogy, input, output, diamesic variation*

1. Introduction: The importance of a cultural input for an oral/written production of FLE students

The main objective of this research is to analyse the phenomenon of French language acquisition from the perspective of a non-native speaker of French (students of FLE – Français Langue Étrangère), from the perspective of sociolinguistics. The oral (or written) production of a non-native student learning a language is highly dependent on the quality of linguistic input², which does not limit itself to traditional grammar, where the student must learn conjugations or lists of vocabulary by heart. A good-quality output³ creates itself on the basis of a pragmatic acquisition of language, which focuses on diverse input, from a pedagogical perspective: a linguistic repertoire (a mastery of grammar, phonetics, morphology, and syntax) and, most

¹ Université libre de Bruxelles, alsharoufi.zahra@gmail.com

² The definition of input given by Benati (2014, 179)

³ Ibidem.

importantly, a cultural repertoire, which focuses on everything that is pragmatic and context-based.

Traditional pedagogy, which puts forth French language acquisition as just another school subject, does not encourage a natural production of language. On the contrary, this system creates superficial outputs, mere decontextualised repetitions which are devoid of meaning. Reproducing decontextualised phrases or words, which are learnt by heart just to pass an exam, cannot be considered acquisition of a language. To learn a language, one must experience a total immersion into the culture of the specific language; thus, a language instructor would have to immerse and expose their students to all that is representative of that foreign identity in order to offer them full comprehension of the roots and representations of the language. A language is certainly not a simple system of rules (or signs), as pointed out by the well-known Saussurian theory, but rather an identity with a heavy cultural baggage, full of special and unique elements that need to be uncovered and explained to foreign language learners.

2. The study's objective and analysis methodology

2.1. The aim of the study

The present study explores how French language acquisition, which varies from one student to another, plays a decisive role regarding the quality of the linguistic oral production. It shall mainly focus on the diamesic variation of the French language spoken in Belgium, and, in some cases, on the diaphasic variation. Thus, this research study favours a thematic and qualitative analysis of the French spoken language (with real, carried out case studies), the impact of the type of linguistic input on the students' output, and an investigation on the linguistic attitudes regarding the French language spoken in Belgium and in other Francophone countries. In addition, a pedagogical aspect is also present – intertwining with the case study analysis – which is directly linked to the main concern of this research: the production of a diamesic competency within foreign learners of the French language, students of FLE (Français Langue Étrangère).

The communicative approach as a pedagogical theory will, therefore, be of utmost interest for the creation of a Francophone pseudo-immersion, as I like to call it, within the French foreign language class, through the usage of non-traditional structures and resources. This study also aims to demonstrate how the input offered by an educational system, which includes the communicative approach, would encourage a more productive output, which would take into consideration the

importance of context and the way in which language is pragmatically linked to communicative situations.⁴ By considering our actual context, especially in Brussels, where we are surrounded by an active plurilingualism and multiculturalism, I would take into consideration the importance of inclusive pedagogy as well; adapting French language teaching according to the specific: level, social, political, and cultural contexts of the students. The art of adaptation is the key to a productive input.

The study will also take on board an analysis of linguistic attitudes⁵ (qualitative data), of natural enunciations given by French language learners and their ideologies regarding the French language. The aspects analysed will be those of cognitive, affective, and most importantly, behavioural aspects (with a focus on Belgian French). Additionally, the type of input influences the ideologies that one has regarding a language, which, henceforth, paves the way for the analysis to head towards a focus on social aspects, thus considering: the type of pedagogy, which differs from one era to another, and the personal context of the student (their social status, their country of origin, their socio-political context, their religion, their race etc.).

2.2. Sociolinguistic research – the stages of primary data collection

2.2.1 Research methodology

The present research started with a series of questions and hypotheses which sparked an interest in the subject, and then continued with a more in-depth investigation. The curiosities started with some general questions, debated amongst my other colleagues and specialists in the field, who were also interested in French language teaching. After this preliminary stage, these hypotheses were organised into a clearer structure, comprising three major categories: the linguistic repertoire and the language acquisition history; attitudes and ideologies regarding the French language, and the different variations of French – each category having a list of specific questions.

The study favours a qualitative research approach, which highlights what is of utmost interest to us, as language teachers – the quality of the students' linguistic output and their attitudes towards the language. It is this multicultural diversity and differing perceptions of language that emphasize the importance of adapting our pedagogical techniques, and thus highlights the need for an inclusive pedagogy.

⁴ This links to Van Patten's idea (2014) of offering the students an immersive input, having an opinion which goes against Chomsky's psycholinguistic theory of language acquisition.

⁵ According to Lasagabaster (2006, 393), the given definition is that of Ajzen (1988, 4) for "linguistic attitudes" regarding languages: « disposition à répondre de manière favorable ou défavorable au regard d'un objet, d'une personne, d'une institution, d'un événement ».

2.2.2. Research hypotheses

The research is guided by the following questions:

- 1) How can immersion impact French language acquisition?
- 2) Did learning through immersion make the students more aware of the different variants of French?
- 3) Is immersion a primordial stage to French language acquisition?

The following hypotheses were also kept in mind, going hand-in-hand with the questions:

1. Cultural immersion is important for French language acquisition, but not primordial.
2. French language acquisition does not start by immersion, but through traditional ways of learning a language – learning grammar rules and vocabulary lists first. Immersion comes in use after learning the basics.
3. Using the Communicative approach is useful for all students; all need the same way of immersion into the targeted culture and language.

2.2.3. Data collection and participants

The qualitative data was collected through guided interviews – the interview questions were chosen beforehand, and were used to guide the conversations in a *natural* manner, adapting each one to the interviewee's gender, age, origin etc. For the collection of qualitative data, the fact that these interviews were carried out naturally is extremely important, as it ensured reliable answers, unaffected by artificial settings or external factors, conveying the interviewees' feelings and attitudes towards French. It is important to mention that the participants were chosen through purpose sampling, meaning that they were specifically chosen to respect the following criteria: five participants needed to be younger than thirty years old (<30) and the other five participants over fifty (50+), and to have French as their second language. They were purposely chosen to have differing backgrounds, to offer a variety of data to the study, depending on their cultural background.

The interviews consisted of natural conversations on the topic of the French language, touching upon all the three categories (the controlled variables of the experiment). The questions (the independent variables) were adapted to each interlocutor, depending on their age, linguistic level, social context, and knowledge. This made possible the collection of very personalised data, with specific nuances for each different case. A limitation would, indeed, be the number of interviewees, yet

this research prefers a more in-depth analysis on qualitative data rather than a quantitative analysis of general situations.

2.2.4. Time-frame and ethical considerations

The interviews were conducted between October and December 2024. Each interview lasted between 30-40 minutes. Before starting each recording, a consent form was given to each interviewee to be signed. It incorporated consent approvals for their recordings to be used for future research projects, under pseudonyms, of course, in order to ensure confidentiality.

2.2.5. Transcription and analysis

After having collected all the recorded interviews, using the app “Audio Recorder” on an iPhone (which converted them to mp3 files), the transcriptions were done manually using indicating numbers to show the specific timings of each question and answer, such as “12:34.” These numbers are sometimes used throughout the research to reference a specific timing within a recorded audio.

After carefully carrying out the transcription⁶ of each interview and completing a detailed examination of the comparative results, the difference in the quality of output seemed of utmost relevance to be studied – in order to identify the causes of these particular differences. Consequently, the central questions of this study are: How can immersion impact French language acquisition? Did learning through immersion make the students more aware of the different variants of French? Is immersion a primordial stage to French acquisition? Immersion is, therefore, the central point of this study, as it is due to these hypotheses (which favour the importance of immersion) that the results illustrate a productive construction of a diamesic competency within foreign language students, which, after all, is the aim of this research.

More specifically, the case studies on which this research is based are the following:

⁶ The transcriptions followed the rules of Thibaut Rioufreyt's (2016) theory, elaborated in his work: *La transcription d'entretiens en sciences sociales*.

Table 1. Subjects in the study and the languages they speak

–30 years old	50+ years old
<u>Mrs. K</u> Mother tongue: German Foreign language: English, Spanish, French	<u>Mrs. S</u> Mother tongue: Korean Foreign language: English, German, French
<u>Mrs. A</u> Mother tongue: kinyarwanda Foreign language: French	<u>Mr. N</u> Mother tongue: kinyarwanda Foreign language: English, French
<u>Miss. C</u> Mother tongue: English Foreign language: Spanish, French	<u>Mr. H</u> Mother tongue: Arabic, French Foreign language: Flemish (Dutch), English
<u>Mr. M</u> Mother tongue: Romanian Foreign language: English, Flemish (Dutch), French	<u>Mrs. R</u> Mother tongue: Romanian Foreign language: English, German, French
<u>Miss. R</u> Mother tongue: Romanian Foreign language: English, Flemish (Dutch), French	<u>Mr. F</u> Mother tongue: Flemish (Dutch) Foreign language: English, Spanish, French

The collected data is varied, with interviewees of different ages and origins, which offers an in-depth comparison regarding the different types of linguistic input in different situations.

3. The methodology and the influence of external research on the sociolinguistic analysis

3.1. The *diamesic* variation

To investigate how to build a diamesic competency, a definition of the concept needs to be provided. Lacaze (2020) offered a concise definition which summarises very well Mioni's (1983) definition, on which this research is based:

The term diamesic variation was introduced by Mioni (1983) to emphasize the differences between oral and written modes of representation in contemporary Italian. [...] Studying diamesic variation obviously includes the analysis of adaptations between oral and written productions such as syllocutions, speech overlapping, and also disfluencies (pauses, hesitations, repetitions...) (Lacaze 2020, 100).

This definition conveys how the term “diamesic variation” envisages two output processes – oral and written. Based on this idea, this study analyses the produced quality of the students' output, their linguistic attitudes regarding the French language, and its variations (from a diamesic and diaphasic perspective).

3.2. The *deictic* value within the communicative context

Lacaze (2020) also speaks of a pragmatic approach to language acquisition, which is of utmost interest to this research:

[Verbs written as “nodded his head” or “smiled” which he analyses in his literary works] describe physical gestures: they provide the reader with contextual information, thus reducing diamesic variation. Some information about the speech act is transcribed, thus reducing the gap between what happens in an oral conversation. (Lacaze 2020, 106)

Here, we see the opposite of our research. Instead of a pragmatic analysis on oral production, we are presented with a pragmatic analysis on written production. The deictic value of the communicative context is very important for the transfer of meaning (the phonetic signs given by the locutor during the conversion of the cognitive process carried out by the interlocutor). In written output, this deictic value is more explicit than in oral output, and these “verbs,” which follow a character's citation, show “non-verbal communication” (Lacaze 2020, 106) which is carried out

during the characters' present, of the communicative situation, of which Lacaze speaks. These verbs serve as an explanation to the reader who is not present in the context (also known as *stage directions* in theatrical contexts). The real communicative situation does not need explanations, as the deictic elements are well understood implicitly, due to the context.

This idea was also explored by Wüest (2009), who talked about the implicit status of the deictic value in oral output:

Contrastingly, the rooting [of the I, here, and now] of oral production within the communicative situation and the simultaneous use of body language offers the chance to be less explicit. This manifests itself at the linguistic level through the heavy presence of deictics (Wüest 2009, 150)⁷. (Personal translation)

Why is the deictic value important to this research? The oral communicative context, which is deeply rooted within the present, naturally has deictic elements, and it is from the real context that meaning is understood. A diamesic competency is built through an immersive input that exposes students to deictic elements, which are extremely cultural. Therefore, without an understanding of culture, which incorporates its own deictic elements of communicative situations of native speakers, the student would not have access to a diamesic competency, nor to a productive output.

3.3. The Influence of the quality of input on the FLE students' output

The definition of input which Benati puts forth is: "the language that L2 learners are exposed to (hear or read)" (Benati, 2014: 188). So everything concerning the acquisition of a language is, above all, based on immersing and exposing the student to the French Language. Benati also stresses on the importance of input by saying that no theory ceased to mention it.⁸ To explain the importance of an immersive input (linked to the communicative approach of modern pedagogical theory), Benati compares input processed by children, before the critical age⁹ of seven, and that of adults. This highlights the more productive way in which input is processed by

⁷ The original quotation in French: « Inversement, l'ancrage de la production orale dans la situation communicative et le recours simultané au langage corporel permet d'être moins explicite. Cela se manifeste au niveau linguistique surtout par une forte présence de déictiques ».

⁸ Benati (2014, 189) says that: "On the whole, input is absolutely necessary and there is no theory or approach to SLA [second language acquisition] that does not recognize the importance of input."

⁹ Benati (2014, 183) believes that: "[a]ge seems to be another factor which might influence learners. Learners' brain seems to lose plasticity at a critical age (Critical Period Hypothesis, launched by Eric Lenneberg); therefore, certain linguistic features might not be mastered after this period."

children than that of adults, as it is much more spontaneous, natural, and absent of grammatical reflection on the different nuances of language. He says that:

[Children] tend to process languages generally through sensory experience, and language develops from exposure to simplified and concrete input. Adult language learners are, instead, notorious for their lack of ultimate mastery of language structure. (Benati 2014, 183)

This fear of lacking a necessary mastery of a language's syntax or morphology will slow down or even cease a student's linguistic production, leaving them with a linguistic hyper-consciousness which would haunt the subconscious of the student, thus stopping the correct output that a child could have had. Pedagogically, it is the opposite, according to Benati: a language instructor must first expose the student to a francophone immersion and then, as a second step, introduce the consciousness of grammar. This theory clearly favours a more pragmatic, communicative, and modern approach than that of traditional pedagogy which, unfortunately, is still widely used in the teaching of French language in many countries. Benati (2014, 188) adds:

Learners must be trained on how to process input more effectively and efficiently so that they are in a better position to process grammatical forms and connect them with their meanings... What are the conditions that might facilitate the speed in which languages are learned? A first condition is that L2 learners must be exposed to sufficient input.

VanPatten (2014) also speaks of the necessity of offering students an input, by criticising the Chomskian Innateness hypothesis of Universal Grammar. He stresses the fact that it is through input that one learns a language. Therefore, he is against the psycholinguistic approach of language acquisition.¹⁰ Exposing a student to real communicative contexts is, therefore, the only way to productively learn a language. Benati enriches this idea by citing Long:

¹⁰ VanPatten (2014, 108) states that: "Consequently, language learning uses the same architecture as learning anything else, and no special module for language is posited in the mind/brain of the learner. Any kind of linguistic knowledge in an emergentist framework evolves over time out of the interaction of input plus the general learning architecture. In short, representation "emerges" over time; no part of it is there from the beginning. Importantly, this representation is typically not characterized as the Chomskyan kind with a UG component that constrains it".

Long (1996, 451) has suggested that “negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interaction adjustments by the NS (Native Speakers) or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways”. In sum, input and interaction may have a facilitator role in the rate of acquisition and ultimate attainment. (Benati 2014, 190)

He conveys the importance of a student’s exposure to authentic communicative situations of native speakers, through role-playing exercises to put into practice the use of input and the chance to apply acquired elements.

Moreover, in the collected primary data, there are many examples of interviewees who admitted to improving their French level after being immersed in Belgium. For instance, we have Mr. M (I used pseudonyms for all the interviewees), who clearly explains this:

(13:30) *“M: When I first came here, in Belgium, I knew French, but as I have told you, I always thought in Romanian. And this was a little weird because as I thought in Romanian, it took me time to translate to French. Words always came out in, let’s say, an automatic way, like a robot. Maybe for someone who thinks of this for the first time, it seems funny... (14:18) But along the way, after living here in Belgium, French came to me naturally. And so, I did not have this need to think in Romanian anymore, except for exceptional expressions.” (Personal translation)*

There it is, an extract of a specific linguistic case. Here, we have a direct confession of the impact of moving to Belgium on French language acquisition. He says that words seemed like those of a “robot” which were “funny” and that for a student who is in an aggressive immersion, where he is forced to speak only in French, it is, at the beginning, a very artificial and difficult challenge. This person learnt French in a formal setting, at school, in his country of origin before moving to Belgium. Yet, clearly, these formal courses (probably traditional, based on a grammatical mastery) did not really help him with fluency. It was, on the other hand, through immersion with native speakers (at a francophone school in Brussels), that he managed to master the language. Of course, due to the fact that he experienced this immersion later on in his life (at the age of 15), after the critical age, this prevented a native mastery of the language (of pronunciation and native expression). This conclusion was made after a comparison with a different interviewee (Miss R) who moved to

Belgium earlier in her life (before the critical age) and who has a perfect mastery of the French language. We had a look at specific cases to see how the individual context of every interviewee has to be taken into consideration for a personalised analysis. Benati supports this idea by saying that: “Research on the effects of individual differences in second language acquisition has focused principally on constructs such as age, aptitude, working memory, and motivation” (Benati 2014, 191).

3.4. Practice as means of illustrating output

Output is the oral or written production of a language student. We have explored the importance of an immersive input in order to reach a productive output, yet, it is of utmost importance to guide the type of input a student receives. Benati (2014), by citing Swain (1985) lists the different types of output that a language instructor has to integrate within the language class.

Swain (1985) assigns several roles for output:

- 1. Output practice helps learners to improve fluency.*
- 2. Output practice helps learners to check comprehension and linguistic correctness.*
- 3. Output practice helps learners to focus on form.*
- 4. Output helps learners to realise that the developing system is faulty and therefore notice a gap in their system.*

Swain has pointed out that comprehensible input might not be sufficient to develop native-like grammatical competence and learners also need comprehensible output. Learners need “pushed output” that is speech or writing that will force learners to produce language correctly, precisely and appropriately. (Benati 2014, 190)

Immersion is, consequently, a necessary condition for all processes of acquisition, for both the input and output. Output can, indeed, be produced in a traditional classroom setting by using non-natural exercises such as dialogues (for an oral production) or a written text, in order to put into practice the received input. Unfortunately, these types of exercises can only offer minimal and basic knowledge of the language; for a mastery of the language, of all its different linguistic levels (phonetics, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, etc.), the student needs a necessary immersion in a francophone atmosphere.

The diamesic competency would, therefore, tick off francophone immersion. The language student is, thus, exposed to native speakers, which would allow him to

feel the differences between the written and oral language. For instance, the omission of the 'ne' (as the French form of negation) and the absence of the past simple tense in the spoken French, even though other romance languages ignore these particularities (Wüest 2009, 150), which is observed through real-life linguistic immersion, offers the student the chance to witness the way in which language is enunciated naturally. Linguistic comprehension is thus reached, making the diamesic difference between oral and written language much clearer than if it were simply mentioned in a textbook.

4. Linguistic attitudes of FLE students

4.1. The cultural background behind the linguistic attitudes

Contrary to our hypotheses, not all the interviewees had the same linguistic attitudes towards the French language. More specifically, the interviewees were addressed questions such as:

- Before learning French, did you have any preconceived ideas/ stereotypes/ prejudices regarding the French language?
- Is French a language which attracts you?
- We usually hear that French is a 'romantic' language. What do you think?

The aim of these questions was to answer the initial hypothesis that the French language is well-known for its beauty, its musicality (which makes it romantic) and, maybe, for its difficulty and prestige (Lasagabaster, 2006: 400). After the comparison of all the interview transcriptions, the results showed that, in fact, all these ideas are completely linked to each person's personal context. More precisely, here is a specific case, that of Mrs. R (when she was asked if she had any preconceptions of the French language before learning it):

(07:28) R: *"Not really. When I started learning the language, it is then that my soul had opened, how to say. Yes, at the beginning, we didn't know anything. It's like cake. We don't know if it's good before cutting it... And when it's mandatory at school..."* (Personal translation)

Here, we can clearly see that in the case of Mrs. R, French was something of the unknown and a mere school subject. Yet, in order to fully understand why Mrs. R's opinion differs from our initial hypothesis (before starting the study), her specific

context must be taken into consideration. First of all, her age, of 52 years, is important for the comprehension of her sociopolitical background. Before moving to Belgium, Mrs. R lived in a rural village during the Communist era, where French was indeed taught at school, yet without much context. This is because during the Communist era in Romania, access to information regarding foreign countries and cultures was extremely limited, especially to a school pupil in a rural village. She moved to Belgium when the Revolution started in 1989.

On the other hand, we have a differing case, that of Mrs. A:

(07:51) Mrs. A: *“When I was little, we thought that French was the language spoken by the rich [...] We now realise that French was maybe spoken by others, let’s say, but me, personally... I always thought that, as a small child, all white people were rich.”* (Personal translation)

Here, in the case of Mrs. A, who is younger than 30, we can clearly see a very precise stereotype regarding the French language (which did not appear at all in our hypotheses). Mrs. A, who comes from Rwanda, perceives French as the language of “whites” and of the “rich,” and these preconceived ideas are directly linked to the sociopolitical context of a country with a postcolonial history. One must change their lens to differing perspectives in order to understand each case, and adapt to every enunciation, which comes with its own cultural baggage. In order to understand a specific attitude, having information and experience regarding the person in question is crucial. Naturally, the personal experience of each interviewee is the most significant factor in the formation of [an] attitude (Lasagabaster 2006, 394). If the differences are so significant for each specific case, even from such a small point (of preconceived ideas regarding a language), then why does a sole traditional pedagogy exist, which is the same for everyone? Each student has different needs hence the reason why a language instructor must adapt to their students’ needs, favouring inclusive pedagogy.

4.2. Diaphasic variation and its implementation in FLE classes

From a pragmatic point of view, we have already explored the importance of communicative situations for a real immersion into the target culture. Why is the communicative situation more important than traditional exercises (for putting into practice the students’ output)? With a natural communicative situation, such as a conversation with a native speaker, the student is given the chance to put into practice their output in real-life situations. This helps the student hear the nuances of language, such as language registers (formal or informal), which are part of the diaphasic variation.

The student will also be receptive to different elements of the spoken language, such as contextualised expressions, contextualised grammar, the differences between the variations of French (such as those in Belgium or Quebec for instance) and those of written language as well. Favart supports the same idea by saying that:

Diaphasic variation is, in reality, a much broader notion which takes into account the changing expression of the person, depending on the different communicative situations. In other words, it is the adaptability of the spoken subject in spoken discourse. It even highlights that certain communicative situations demand specific forms of expression which force themselves upon the locutors and which take into consideration protagonists of Exchange. (Favart 2020, 124)¹¹. (Personal translation)

To link Favart's (2020) idea to this research, we will have a look at the case of Miss C, who is originally American and who is younger than 30. Her answers to the questions related to feeling a difference between the multiple dialects/ accents/ variations of Belgian French are the following:

(30:58) Miss. C: *"Yes, indeed, we have spoken of informal and formal [in class], but what's funny is that I realised after having left [school in the US], that we have been using 'tu' (an informal variant of you in French) in class for 4 years and after, I realised that it's not at all correct, at least in the Belgian culture..."*

(33:26) *"Yes, I especially liked the Wallonian influence, I had the opportunity [to hear this French variant] twice in Paris with someone who spoke Wallonian, it's the grandparents of the welcoming family, and I realised then that it wasn't just another dialect of French, but a whole different language and I always find it funny when people tell me "Ah oui, il drache" (ah yes, it rains very heavily). I learnt that "drache" is a Wallonian word which was transposed into French, and now, we only say it in Belgium, which means that if you go to France, no one will understand it."* (Personal translation)

¹¹ The original quotation in French: « La variation diaphasique est en réalité une notion bien plus vaste qui tient compte de l'expression changeante de l'individu en fonction des différentes situations de communication. En d'autres termes de l'adaptabilité du sujet parlant aux situations de discours. Elle met ainsi en évidence que certaines situations de communication exigent des formes d'expression qui s'imposent aux locuteurs et qui tiennent compte des protagonistes de l'échange ».

In the first example, Miss C compares the French she learnt in the US (before she moved to Belgium), to the French she heard at school in Belgium. From the beginning, after a Francophone immersion, she could compare the registers of formal and informal French, and learnt how to make the correct linguistic choices depending on the different communicative situation. More specifically, she learnt that the “tutoiement” (using the informal version of ‘you’) is an informal register which must not be used with teachers at school (which was not reinforced in the US, probably in order to simplify the linguistic level). In the second example, Miss C speaks of “belgicisms” (Belgianisms) which she had learnt after her immersion in Belgium. She learnt that these “belgicisms” are not understood in Paris; after having the chance to experience an immersion in Belgium and France, she had discovered the different variations of French, hence the importance of immersion into the target culture and language.

On the other hand, from a more pedagogical perspective, Favart (2020) supports the importance of raising awareness of the different variations of French to FLE students:

In opposition to methodological approaches and textbooks which present French as a monolithic body, which introduce some features of [French] variants using an anecdotal style, or even in a caricatural way, we consider that it is, henceforth, primordial to introduce the different types of language variations in education if we seek to provide an authentic and ecological vision of the French language. (Favart 2020, 124)¹². (Personal translation)

Favart stresses on the importance of an immersion, or even a pseudo-immersion in the FLE class, by trying to integrate the teaching of the different variants of French. The French variants are not taught as a subject by themselves in the Romanian educational system, nor in the British one, nor in the Middle East (in Kuwait). Unfortunately, this is a neglected aspect of French pedagogy, in the best cases, they are briefly mentioned. French teachers do not give enough importance to the different language variants, as they concentrate much more on the formal aspects of the language. Language variations remain a very important part of language as, in reality, they are very pertinent considering the vast context of the Francophone contexts.

¹² The original quotation in French: « À l'encontre des approches méthodologiques et des manuels qui présentent le français comme un corps monolithique ou quand ils se risquent à introduire quelques traits de variation le font de manière anecdotique, voire caricaturale, nous considérons qu'il est désormais primordial d'introduire la variation dans l'enseignement si nous tenons à fournir une vision authentique et écologique de la langue française ».

It is a pity to limit students only to the French variant of Paris (as the standard version) when there is a plethora of pedagogical resources which could be used, written or produced by French speaking communities outside France (Belgium, Canada, Morocco, Algeria, Congo etc.), and who have their own French variation and cultural background. Students need a maximised immersion in their FLE classes, especially if the class takes place in a non-francophone country where the students do not have access to a French linguistic immersion. The usage of varied resources in the FLE class (of French didactic materials coming from outside France), encourages multiculturalism, which is representative of today's Francophonie philosophy.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Results vs. initial hypotheses

After carrying out the interviews and after the detailed thematic analysis of the written transcriptions, the initial hypotheses turned out to be partially correct, if not completely incorrect. As analysed throughout this research paper, we have seen that the role of immersion is, indeed, a primordial one – thus, the first hypothesis, namely that “cultural immersion is important for French language acquisition, but not primordial,” is false. It is primordial from stage one, as input starts to build up from the very first contact with the foreign language. Another issue related to the first contact with the foreign language being “learning the basics first” through book-ish “grammar rules and vocabulary lists” is the hyper-consciousness that builds up in the subconscious of the student, which would create a long-term prevention of a natural production of language and even a fear of it. This brings us to the conclusion that our second hypothesis, i.e. “French language acquisition does not start by immersion, but through traditional ways of learning a language – learning grammar rules and vocabulary” lists first. Immersion comes in use after learning the basics,” is completely false. Language acquisition should start through immersion first, where the student is faced with real-life context-based situations, where he would start to subconsciously store the natural input – the way in which conversations really happen in real-life.

Even if the student has an A0-A1 level (beginner level) in French, he should learn the language through contextualised structures (not isolated lexical items). For instance: instead of offering the A0 level student a list of words to take home and learn for next day's spelling test, the teacher must offer the student a context in which these words are used in contextualised structures – in order to learn the whole structure and not single words which would be difficult to combine into structures

later on at a more advanced level. The teacher could show a video of how these structures are used in a real-life context conversation, and later on push the students to reproduce these structures through role-play conversations. The third hypothesis, as seen in the above analysis, is also partially false as, indeed, immersion through the communicative approach is important, but it *must* be adapted to each students' case. Through the interviews' analysis, it has been made clear that each student has their own cultural background which impacts the way in which they perceive the language – hence the need for the teacher to take the time to get to know each student first before teaching a uniformised method to all.

5.2. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this sociolinguistic research, based on primary source data, aims to convey how the construction of a diamesic competency within foreign speaking students of French, is based on cultural immersion. According to Benati's methodology, language instructors must offer students a generous input, from the point of view of culture, before polluting the students with grammatical theories. Favoring a pedagogy which concentrates on formal aspects of language would only introduce a linguistic hyper-consciousness and a fear of production (written or spoken), which would stop a desired output. This analysis also explores a pragmatic perspective, which highlights the importance of deictic elements in communicative situations, which are deeply rooted in the present, and which offers a difference between the spoken language (which is more implicit) and the written language (which is more explicit, as it has to lexicalise the deictic elements of the communicative situation). The deictic value illustrates the importance of context in each communicative case, and how a correctly grammatical phrase which is decontextualised, is entirely absent of meaning.

A foreign language student must not be conscious of these pragmatic theories, that is certainly not the aim. The idea is, on the contrary, that the language instructor must understand the necessity of an exposition and natural immersion in a Francophone atmosphere, in order to offer a productive input in the process of acquisition. The output also needs an immersion in order to put into practice all the acquired input; the chance to speak naturally with a native speaker, or in a pseudo-immersive context where the student is pushed to use the language and adapt it according to the context. This means that the student also learns to be aware of the different registers, variations and be able to use them in the right contexts – this is the construction of a diamesic competency.

The FLE (français langue étrangère) students' linguistic attitudes are also of utmost interest. From the collected data (from the interview transcriptions), the

results illustrate that the cultural background behind each student prevents a generalised universal preconception of a language. Each student has their own personal context, which must be taken into account and studied, especially by a teacher. We have seen specific examples of two people with very different personal contexts, which show that the linguistic attitudes are directly linked to differing factors such as: sociopolitical context, race, social status, origins etc. Therefore, each student sees the world (and the French language) from a distinct angle, hence why we, as language teachers, must be conscious of this and try to adapt the pedagogy according to the needs of every student.

Just as important as the diamesic variation, is the diaphasic variation which is interested in the variations and registers of a language. The interviewees, who have experienced a Francophone immersion, are not only aware but have explicitly pointed out the differences between French variations (such as those of Belgium, Quebec, or France). The interviewees who lacked an immersion into Francophone culture, or who moved to Belgium when they were older (with no linguistic interest) are not conscious of the existence of linguistic variants. Therefore, FLE students must be informed of the different variants of French, and they must experience an integration into a pseudo-immersive environment, created by the teacher, where the student can be exposed (thus receiving productive input) to the targeted culture and language. Hence the importance of an immersion in all cases of acquisition; input and output. It is cultural immersion which offers the possibility of a diamesic competency, which is at the heart of this research.

Appendix:

Original interview answers in French (cited within the text):

(13:30) *“M: Quand je suis premièrement venu ici en Belgique, je connaissais le français, mais comme je te disais, j'ai raisonné toujours en roumain. Et ça faisait un peu bizarre parce que je pensais en roumain et puis il m'a fallu du temps à essayer de traduire ça en français. Les mots sortaient toujours, disons, de manière un peu automatique, comme un robot. Peut-être pour quelqu'un qui en pense à la première fois, ça semble amusant...”*

(14:18) *Mais au fur et à mesure que j'ai passé ma vie ici en Belgique, le français me vient naturellement. Et donc, je n'ai plus ce besoin de raisonner en roumain, sauf s'il y a des expressions un peu exceptionnelles.”*

(07:28) R: *“Pas tellement. Quand j'ai commencé à apprendre la langue, c'est là que mon esprit s'est ouvert, comment dire. Oui, au début, on ne sait rien. C'est comme le gâteau. On ne sait pas si c'est bon avant de le couper... et quand tu es obligé à l'école...”*

(07:51) Mme. A: *quand j'étais petite, on pensait que le français c'était des gens riches qui parlaient cette langue-là « [...] on se rend pas compte que le français peut être parlé par des autres, on va dire, moi personnellement... j'ai toujours cru, en étant petite, que les Blancs étaient tous riches. »*

(30:58) Mlle. C: *Oui tout à fait on a parlé d'informel et formel mais ce qui est marrant et je me suis rendu compte après quand je suis partie, on s'est tutoyé dans la classe pendant 4 ans et après j'ai appris que c'était pas du tout correct vis-à-vis de la culture belge en tout cas...*

(33:26) *Oui surtout j'aime bien l'influence wallonne, j'ai eu l'opportunité deux fois dans Paris avec quelqu'un qui parle toujours wallon, c'est des grands-parents de la famille d'accueil et je me suis rendue compte que c'était pas un dialecte du français, c'est une langue différente quoi et je trouve ça toujours rigolo quand les gens me disent : « Ah oui, il drache ». Moi j'ai appris que drache c'est un mot wallon qui a été transposé au français et maintenant on le dit ça qu'en Belgique et donc si on va en France on ne comprendra pas.*

References

- Ajzen, Icek. 1988. *Attitudes, Personality, and Behaviour*. Chicago: Dorsey Press.
- Benati, Alessandro. 2014. “10. Second Language Acquisition.” In *Manual of Language Acquisition*, ed. by Christiane Fäcke, 179-197. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- Favart, Françoise. 2020. “Légitimer la variation linguistique en classe de FLE.” *Revue EXPRESSIONS* 10: 119-130. Trieste, Italy: Université de Trieste.
- Lacaze, Grégoire. 2020. “Diamesic Variation in Direct Reported Speech: Representing Orality in Fiction”. *Recherches Anglaises et Nord Américaines* 53: Internal Variation, 99-114.

- Lantolf, James P. and Steven L. Thorne. 2007. "Sociocultural theory and second language learning". In *Theories in Second Language Acquisition*, ed. by Bill VanPatten and Jessica Williams, 201-204. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lasagabaster, David. 2006. "Les attitudes linguistiques: un état des lieux." *Études de linguistique appliquée*, 4 n° 144, 393-406. CAIRN.INFO, shs.cairn.info/revue-ela-2006-4-page-393?lang=fr.
- Long, Michael. 1996. "The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition". In *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, ed. by Ritchie, William and Tej Bhatia, 413–468. San Diego, Academic Press.
- Mioni, Alberto. 1983. "Italiano tendenziale: osservazioni su alcuni aspetti della standardizzazione". In *Scritti linguistici in onore di Giovan Battista Pellegrini*, ed. by Paola Benincà and Giovan Battista Pelligrini, 495-517. Pisa: Pacini.
- Rioufreyt, Thibaut. 2016. "La transcription d'entretiens en sciences sociales." <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01339474/document> [accessed March 2025].
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1995. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Edited by Tullio De Mauro, postface by Louis-Jean Calvet, translated by Charles Bailly and Albert Séchehayé, with the collaboration of Albert Riedlinger. Payot.
- Swain, Merrill. 1985. "Communicative competence: some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development." In *Input in Second Language Acquisition*, ed. by Susan Gass and Carolyn Madden, 235–253. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- VanPatten, Bill. 2014. "Language acquisition theories". In *Manual of Language Acquisition*, ed. by Christiane Fäcke, 103-120. Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110302257.103> [accessed April 2025].
- Wüest, Jakob. 2009. "La notion de diamésie est-elle nécessaire?". *Travaux de linguistique* 59(2): 147-162. CAIRN.INFO, shs.cairn.info/revue-travaux-de-linguistique-2009-2-page-147?lang=fr. [accessed March 2025].