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“Doing” a Task in the L2 Classroom: from Task Instruction to Talk-in-interaction

Evelyne Pochon-Berger

Abstracts

Recent studies – emanating from a socio-interactionist perspective on second language acquisition – interested in classroom interactions have highlighted the situated nature of tasks. These studies have shown how tasks only give a general framework – goal-oriented – in which some communicative event has to take place. However, all participants locally and jointly construct the effective accomplishment of the task. Following that line of research, this paper explores how talk-in-interaction is shaped by participants’ initial understanding of the task instruction on the basis of a comparison of two groups of intermediate French L2 learners engaged in an identical task. The examples show that the talk-in-interaction unfolds very differently: while one group engages in an interview-like interaction, the other group undertakes a collective writing activity. Implications of these findings for second language pedagogy such as task design and evaluation of the learners’ performances will be discussed.

Des études récentes émanant d’une approche socio-interactionniste de l’acquisition des langues secondes et s’intéressant en particulier aux interactions en classe ont mis en évidence la nature située de l’accomplissement des tâches en classe de langue. Ces études ont décrit la manière dont la tâche n’établit qu’un cadre général, orienté vers un objectif pédagogique, dans lequel un certain événement communicatif va avoir lieu; toutefois son accomplissement effectif est géré localement et de manière conjointe entre les participants. S’inscrivant dans cette approche, cet article explore la manière dont le développement séquentiel du discours s’ancre dans la compréhension située des consignes de la tâche. Deux groupes d’apprenants de français L2 seront comparés lorsqu’ils sont engagés dans la même tâche. Les exemples révèlent que le discours-dans-l’interaction se déploie très différemment entre les deux groupes: alors que l’un des groupes accomplit la tâche sous forme d’interview, l’autre groupe s’engage dans une activité de rédaction collective. Les retombées pratiques de ces résultats pour l’apprentissage/enseignement des langues secondes (p.ex. conception de la tâche et évaluation des performances) seront discutées.

Neuere Studien, die sich insbesondere mit der Interaktion im Klassenzimmer beschäftigen und von einem sozio-interaktionistischen Ansatz des Fremd-/Zweitspracherwerbs ausgehen, unterstreichen die situierte Art der Aufgabenausführung im L2-Unterricht. Diese Studien zeigen, dass eine Aufgabenstellung allein einen allgemeinen pädagogisch zielorientierten Rahmen setzt, in welchem ein bestimmtes kommunikatives Ereignis stattfinden soll. Jedoch wird die effektive Ausführung lokal und kollaborativ von allen Teilnehmern gestaltet. Auf der Basis dieses Ansatzes untersucht der Beitrag, wie das situierte Verstehen der Aufgabenstellung durch die TeilnehmerInnen die sequentielle Entwicklung des Diskurses gestaltet. Dafür werden zwei Gruppen von Französischlernenden, beide fortgeschrittene Anfänger, die sich derselben Aufgabenstellung widmen, verglichen. Die Beispiele zeigen, dass sich der Diskurs auf sehr unterschiedliche Art und Weise entwickelt: Während eine Gruppe die Aufgabe in Form eines Interviews ausführt, führt die andere Gruppe eine kollektive Schreibaktivität aus. Die praktischen Implikationen dieser Resultate für Fremdsprachendidaktik, beispielsweise für die Konzeption von Aufgaben sowie die Evaluation von Lernleistungen, werden diskutiert.

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Introduction

“any event that generates communicative language is unique – an activity born from a particular constellation of actors, settings, tasks, motivations, and histories.” (Coughlan & Duff, 1994: 190)¹

In the second language (L2) classroom, tasks are a particular type of pedagogical activity that requires learners to engage in communicative activities with each other while working towards a goal. In that perspective, tasks are generally conceived as a learning situation insofar as it offers a possibility for the learners to ‘practice’ the target language, while focusing on meaning rather than on forms (Ellis 2003; Nunan 2004; Samuda & Bygate 2008). A number of studies have shown, however, that the learners’ performances might be radically different from the initial pedagogical intentions of the task design (Breen 1989). This phenomenon relates to the situated nature of task accomplishment (Mondada & Pekarek Doehler 2004); that is the participants’ own re-interpretation of the task and the local circumstances in which it is carried out.

This paper² explores how the sequential development of talk is shaped by participants’ initial understanding of the task instruction on the basis of a comparison of two groups of intermediate French L2 learners engaged in an identical task. The examples show that the talk-in-interaction unfolds very differently as participants do not focus on the same aspects of the task design: while one group sticks to the task instruction – ‘to discuss’ a given topic –, the other group orients strongly to the post-task stage (i.e., provide a report of the discussion), therefore engaging in a collaborative writing activity. Implications of these findings for second language pedagogy such as task design and evaluation of the learners’ performances will be discussed in the conclusion.

Tasks as a situated accomplishment

A number of studies within Sociocultural Theory applied to second language acquisition (SLA) have demonstrated how identical task designs can result in different activities (discourse types, linguistic structures used, etc.) when achieved by the participants. For example, comparing performances of an experimental picture-description task, Coughlan and Duff (1994) demonstrate variation across participants, and also variation across time for the same participant. These observations lead the authors to distinguish the ‘task’ from the ‘activity’: the first one consists of the general framework, goal-oriented, in which some kind of behaviour is going to be elicited, while the second one concerns the actual behaviour produced when participants perform the task (Coughlan & Duff 1994: 175). These unique ways of achieving the task are believed to relate to participants’ personal purposes (e.g., establishing a relation with the interlocutor, making the description more interesting, giving a ‘communicative’ dimension to the experimental task, etc.). In that perspective, task performances cannot be understood apart from the context in which they are produced. The study concludes by questioning the validity of tasks, within experimental settings, as an element in language performance measurements. In the same vein, but focusing on classroom tasks, Platt and Brooks (1994) observe the same phenomenon of re-interpretation of task designs by groups of learners. Questioning the idea of ‘acquisition-rich environment’ traditionally attributed to tasks, the authors conclude that a ‘rich’ environment is constructed in the course of the task by the participants themselves rather than established by the externally defined task features.

More recent studies on classroom interactions within a CA-for-SLA paradigm (i.e., Conversation Analysis applied to L2 interactions) provide a description of the complex

1 My thanks go to Anne Meyer and Kristian Mortensen as well as two anonymous reviewers for their fruitful comments on an earlier version of this article.

2 This study has been achieved within the project “Discourse competence in French L1 and L2: acquisition, teaching and evaluation” (FNS 405640-108663/1, dir. S. Pekarek Doehler, University of Neuchâtel/Switzerland), which is part of the Swiss National Science Foundation Research Program NRP56. The detailed elaboration of this study has been conducted during a one year research stay at the University of Luxembourg (F3R-LCM-PMA-07622, Fonds National pour la Recherche, Luxembourg, granted to G. Ziegler).

interactional work emerging while accomplishing a task. Detailed sequential analyses show a range of practical issues that appear to be relevant while accomplishing a task such as managing task boundaries (e.g., task openings and disengagement, Hellermann 2008), dealing with a twofold focus on the task as a communicative activity as well as a learning one (Mori 2004), constructing identities and participation statuses (e.g., language expert, Kasper 2004), establishing mutual orientation to relevant linguistic forms and formats for the ongoing activity (Mondada & Pekarek Doehler 2004), organising and negotiating the upcoming task accomplishment in pre-task work (Mori 2002). Comparing different groups, Nussbaum and Unamuno (2000) show that discourse ‘products’ may not only be different according to participants’ own purposes and interpretative work. Moreover, the interactive regulation of the task accomplishment might vary from one group to another. In sum, these studies evidence the way participants jointly configure pedagogical tasks, and thus learning opportunities, in a moment-by-moment fashion. Such findings relate to Breen’s (1989) opposition of ‘task-as-work-plan’ on one hand, that is, the initial conception of the task and the given instructions, and ‘task-as-process’ on the other hand, which refers to the participants’ actual performances, establishing thus a gap between pedagogical intentions and effective practices. Task performances therefore cannot be determined ahead of time and controlled by the task designer, as participants continuously re-interpret the task. From that perspective, the learners play an active role in creating learning opportunities, insofar as they co-construct classroom discourse practices (Mondada & Pekarek Doehler 2004).

Following the socio-interactionist line of research, this paper aims at contributing to the study of interactional practices emerging in the process of accomplishing a task in the language classroom. The sequential analyses describe how two groups of learners re-interpret identical task instructions and how they rely on relevant organisational means to work towards the outcome as understood by them, in particular as one group engages in writing while the other does not. The analyses show furthermore that the very use of these organisational means shape in turn the way talk sequentially unfolds as participants carry out the task. This results in different interactional patterns between the two groups and therefore different participation opportunities.

Data

The analyses in this article are concerned with two small group interactions in the French L2 classroom in the German-speaking part of Switzerland³. The learners are 13-year-old adolescents in 8th grade. They have already had three years of French L2 classes at the moment of the recording and have attained an intermediate level of proficiency in French L2. The audio- and video-recordings are drawn from a larger database of 30 hours of French L2 classroom interactions (teacher-fronted and peer-group activities) in a Swiss public school, collected between 2005-2006 by the Institut des Etudes françaises et francophones, University of Basel⁴. The recordings have been transcribed according to Conversation Analysis conventions (see Appendix I).

The two sections used for the analyses in this article consist of two peer-group activities lasting for approximately 30 minutes. The teacher organises the class in groups of three or four participants, deciding on the composition of the groups. During the group work, the teacher and the researcher sporadically supervise the groups’ progress in the task. Note that the researcher is not a member of the school community. However, she is taking part in the classroom activity as a participant on her own: she circulates between the groups and helps them out with the task instruction and other difficulties the students face in the course of the task.

3 In the Swiss educational context, pupils learn at least two second languages: one of the national languages (French, German or Italian) and English. The organization of L2 education (according to age and structure) varies from one canton to the next. In the canton where the present data has been collected, French classes start in 5th grade of Primary School, (while English does only in 7th grade), 4 hours a week (Elmiger & Forster 2005).

4 Project “Le rôle des émotions dans l’enseignement des L2 à l’exemple de la WBS Bâle-Ville” (dir. G. Lüdi, with collaborators N. Pépin and F. Steinbach Kohler).

Setting up the task

The assignment given to the learners is an unfocused type of task (Ellis 2003), which does not aim at mobilizing any specific type of structures. The task is set up as a decision-making task on a real world-like issue (attending or organising a party). This section presents the task instruction, according to the information given on the instruction sheet (see Appendix II) and the clarifications provided by the teacher before the task begins. We will then describe how these instructions are understood and appropriated by the two groups of learners: what are the aspects they orient to as being relevant for accomplishing the task.

Task instruction

Students receive an instruction sheet offering two options: attend a party or organise a party (see Appendix II). The task is then *to discuss in French*, i.e., the target language, the different practical points that figure on the sheet (e.g., what drinks they should bring or buy, who buys the birthday gift, etc.) related to the chosen topic. The instruction sheet also specifies that the groups will have to present the ‘results’, i.e., the decisions they took, in front of the class after the 25 minutes allocated for the task. The students first read the instruction sheet silently, then the teacher provides a general clarification of the task instructions. She explains how they will be evaluated in the end, an aspect that was not specified on the instruction sheet (excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1 (Plenary classroom - Tschu-TG1-181105-gs; lines 78-85)

01	TEA:	'h à la fi:n (.) vous présentez tout ça (.) à la classe (...)
	trans	h at the end you present all of this in front of the class
02		je vais (4.9) je vais faire des notes (.) en (xx)=
	trans	I will I will grade it in (xx)
03	STD:	=hä?
	trans	huh
04	TEA:	les critères (.) comme pour la récitation. (.) hm? (2.0)
	trans	criteria like for the oral presentation hm
05		alors chacun du groupe doit présenter (.) (une) quelque chose (1.8)
	trans	so everyone in the group has to present (one) something
06		c'est clair? (1.6) mettez-vous en groupe maintenant
	trans	is it clear go into your groups now

The teacher states that the front-of-class presentation of the students will be graded according to familiar criteria (1.4). Students acknowledge this unexpected bit of information (for example, surprise marker with rising intonation hä?, 1.3). As a requirement for the grading, each participant needs to present something, that is, each participant needs to ‘speak’ in the target language. The teacher insists again on the modalities of the task accomplishment (excerpt 2) students should only talk in the target language (French) and not in their L1 (Swiss-German/standard German⁵).

Excerpt 2 (Plenary classroom - Tschu-TG1-181105-gs; lines 92-95)

01	TEA:	u:hm (...) écoutez aussi tous encore (1.0) écoutez (2.6)
	trans	ehm listen again all of you listen
02		vous ne bavardez qu'en français hm? (d'acc-) il n'y a pas
	trans	you only chat in French huh (alrig-) there are no
03		d'exceptions faites (tout) en français (..) vous pouvez (discuter)
	trans	exceptions do (everything) in French you cannot (discuss)
04		ni de suisse-allemand ni allemand (standard) c'est clair?
	trans	in Swiss-German nor in (standard) German is that clear

Once all of these practical aspects of the task have been set (through the instruction sheet and through the teacher’s clarifications), the groups engage in the task.

5 ‘L1’ is used here as a generic term to designate interchangeably Swiss-German and standard German. The linguistic situation in the German-speaking part of Switzerland is a diglossia: Swiss-German, the local dialect, used in the private sphere, and standard German, the official language, used as the schooling language for example. Of course, participants coming from a migration background might know other languages, but Swiss-German/German use refers to the everyday common practices in the educational context.

Students’ understanding of the task

Participants of the different groups seem to build a different understanding of the task instruction. A first group of students (Group 1) understands the task as ‘doing a dialogue’, as stated by Lorena, who is one of the learners (excerpt 3, l.6):

Excerpt 3 (Group 1 - Tschu-TG1-181105-sadj; lines 156-164)

- 01 LOR: madame tschappat fait [une note (et puis-)
trans madam Tschappat does a grade (and then)
- 02 OLI: [was müe mer mache
trans what do we have to do
- 03 LOR: on prépare (.) *ça.
trans we prepare that
lor *pointing at the instruction sheet
- 04 (..)
- 05 OLI: °red tütsch°
trans speak in German
- 06 LOR: no:-on no:-on on prépare *ça une dialogue
trans no we no we we prepare this a dialogue
lor *pointing at the instruction sheet
- 07 OLI: °ah oui°=
trans oh yes

Later on in the discussion, the same learner insists several times on the need to speak in French, telling her partners: on PARLE en français. (.) maintenant; ‘we speak in French now’ (l.97 in the original transcript), sticking to the task instruction (i.e., ‘to discuss in French’, as it is mentioned on the instruction sheet). In fact, she sticks so hard to that instruction that one of her partners, Olivia, asks her to speak in German, the L1 (l.5, excerpt 3), when she needs to understand what they have to do (question was müe mer mache, ‘what do we have to do’, l.2). However, Lorena does not switch to German; she explains the task one more time in French, pointing to the sheet (l.6). Interestingly, the idea of ‘discussing’ a topic, given by the task instruction, is interpreted as creating a dialogue that they will enact in front of the class. The vague and general concept of ‘discussion’ is re-interpreted in a more tangible and manageable activity, which allows them to achieve the task.

In the meantime, another group (Group 2) focuses on another aspect of the task: the possibility of writing down the decisions in order to present them to the class once the task is completed. At the beginning of the group works, Ebru, one of the students, asks the researcher whether they are allowed to take notes (excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4 (Group 2 - Tschu-TG1-181105-gs; lines 117-121)

- 01 RES: si possible tout ce que vous décidez (.) vous (le dites)
trans if possible everything that you decide you (say it)
- 02 en français (..) d'accord?°
trans in French alright
- 03 EBR: ähm:: (.) kömm mr ufschribe?
trans ehm can we write
- 04 RES: oui vous pouvez prendre des notes
trans yes you can take notes
- 05 EBR: oui
trans yes

Following that sequence, the researcher then goes on with clarifying the task, what the purpose of the task is (c’est un exercice pour voir si vous êtes capables entre vous (.) de discuter (.) en français, ‘it is an exercise to see whether you are able to discuss in French among yourselves’, l.131, in the original transcript), also emphasizing that they should talk in French, and possibly not in German, and confirming one more time that they can take notes. However, Ebru, the same student, summarizes the task instruction by saying: mir könneds ufschribe, ‘we can write it’ (l.141 in the original transcript). They organise then their working space according to that resource for achieving the task, therefore organising the relevant tools for that purpose: each one gets a pencil and a sheet of paper on which they can write. The focus on the possibility of writing reflects a strong orientation to the post-task stage: for the public report of their discussion, written notes are allowed. However, this note-

taking activity is not mentioned on the instruction sheet or in the general clarification of the teacher, but might be part of the classroom community common practices.

As a consequence, these situated and unique (in the sense of proper to the group) interpretations of the task are enacted through a very different organisation of talk-in-interaction: one group will accomplish the task in a dialogue-like fashion whereas the other will engage in a collaborative writing activity.

Different organisation of talk-in-interaction

This section describes the interactional patterns found in the two groups of learners and how these embody participants' interpretation of the task design. The interactional patterns relate in particular to the resources and tools used by the participants' in order to work towards the goal they set for themselves as being relevant. Moreover, the analyses show how participants locate opportunities for participation in the group activity within the organisational framework they set up for accomplishing the task.

Excerpt 5: (Group 1 - Tschu-181105-sadj, lines 930-960)

```

((everybody is looking at the sheet of paper)) #1.1
01 LOR: et toi olivia qu'est-ce que vous fait=*
   trans and you Olivia what do you do
   lor
   *turns to Olivia
02 OLI: *=eh: je préparer à manger
   trans ehm I prepare something to eat
   oli *sits up
03 LOR: une pizza?=
   trans a pizza
04 OLI: *=de la pizza ehm:
   trans some pizza ehm
   oli *looks at Lorena
05 LOR: avec salami?
   trans with salami
06 (..)
07 OLI: non: [prosciutto
   trans no prosciutto
08 MIC: [ou le jambon?
   trans or ham
09 OLI: °prosciutto°
   trans prosciutto
10 MIC: eh? (..) avec [le jambon.
   trans huh with ham
11 LOR: [mais (qu')est-ce qu'il y a prosciutto&
   trans but is there prosciutto
12 LOR: &pour le pour le (xx)
   trans for the for the (xx)
13 OLI: *(je porte eh::)=
   trans (I bring eh)
   oli *looks towards the sheet
14 LOR: =qu'est-ce qu'il faut *avec la pizza **prosciutto&
   trans what do we need with the pizza prosciutto
   lor *looks and points at the sheet
   mic *leans back in her seat
   lor *circles on the sheet
15 LOR: &(.)*qu'est-ce qu'il faut (le;la) pr- prosciutto. hein?&
   trans what do we need (the) prosciutto huh
   lor *clicks pencil and repeats circling on the sheet #1.2
16 LOR: &qu'est-ce qu'il po:rte [le prosciutto.
   trans what does it carry the prosciutto
17 MIC: [des champignons?=-
   trans some mushrooms
18 OLI: =non=-
   trans no
19 LOR: =nei-
   trans no
20 MIC: ou le: [ananas (.)&
   trans or pineapple
21 LOR: [(on achète [des:)]

```




#1.1



#1.2

Accomplishing the task as a dialogue

Excerpt 5 presents Group 1, which is composed of three girls (Lorena, Michelle and Olivia). The excerpt takes place 25 minutes into the activity. Participants are discussing what food they should bring to the birthday party, which is one topic to be discussed as mentioned in the instruction sheet. Previously to the selected excerpt, the students divided the task into individual responsibilities: Michelle is in charge of the drinks and the birthday present, Lorena of the music and Olivia of the food. As Olivia said earlier that she wanted to bring a pizza to the party, Lorena asks her what ingredients will be needed⁶ (excerpt 5).

During the task, the participants are seated in a circle around a table (see #1.1): Lorena and Olivia sit next to each other on one side of the table, and Michelle on the other side facing her peers. They are slightly turned towards one another with the upper part of their bodies, displaying that way orientation to one another (Goodwin 1981). On the table are two sheets of paper where instructions for the task are given and on which they also take notes. The sheets are placed ‘in the middle’ so that all three participants have access to it. Thus, the body arrangement creates an interactional space where participants can look at each other as they are facing one another but where they can also orient to the relevant tools (namely the instruction sheet) for the accomplishment of the task (Hellermann 2008). The tools are placed in a way that they are accessible to all participants, thus establishing a shared space for joint attention. The tools are then used sporadically to manage the task: in lines 14-15, Lorena circles a relevant word to assist Olivia in solving her apparent comprehension problem (see Lorena’s multiple reformulations of the question, in lines 14, 15, 16, pursuing an answer that Olivia should provide, Pomerantz 1984). The writing is not so much exploited in this group: only at one point in the course of the task (not visible in this excerpt), Lorena writes down what the group has been discussing, but then engages again in face-to-face interaction.

This group organises participation as doing the task as a ‘dialogue’. Participants make this visible in the adjacency-pair organisation of the interaction. By means of a first pair part (in this case a question), Lorena selects Olivia in line 1 (*qu’est-ce que vous fait*, ‘what do you do’) as the next speaker (made explicit through the use of an address term). Further on, more questions are addressed to Olivia (Lorena, 1.5 and 11; Michelle, 1.8) inviting her to elaborate on the ingredients of the pizza, therefore offering further participation opportunities. Participants also orient to this adjacency-pair organisation as opportunities for taking a turn when not being selected. Indeed, as Lorena and Olivia engage in a clarification sequence (1.14-25), the interaction seems to become more and more exclusive of Michelle: while Lorena and Olivia both orient to the instruction sheet where Lorena points to some relevant linguistic material (see # 1.2) in order to help Olivia in understanding the question, Michelle leans back in her seat (1.14), physically leaving the shared interactional space of the group. As Lorena restates the question for the third time (1.16), responding to a noticeable absence of recipient reaction (i.e., Olivia’s lack of response), Michelle proposes a lexical candidate (*des champignons?*, ‘mushrooms’, 1.17), providing that way for a second pair part (i.e., the answer to Lorena’s initial question). Moreover, her turn is produced exactly when Lorena’s question comes to a syntactically potential completion point (after the question

6 The pictures presented with the excerpts 5 and 6 are extracted from the video recordings.

qu’est-ce qu’il porte, ‘what does it carry’, 1.16). However, Michelle’s proposition is produced in overlap with Lorena’s increment (le prosciutto, ‘the ham’, 1.16) and rejected by her partners (1.18-19). She pursues her talk with more candidate elements in a list format (1.20; 21; see Jefferson 1991). She comes back near the table when producing the third item of the list (1.22), thus re-integrating the shared interactional space. As a participant being momentarily out of the joint focus of attention, Michelle orients to the adjacency-pair organisation as an opportunity for participating in the ongoing activity by taking a turn at a sequentially relevant place, i.e., answering a question that was lacking recipient’s reaction. However, not only is the turn-allocation organised by means of questions, but also the negotiation of the different topics of the working sheet’s agenda. This question-answer sequencing is a technique for topic introduction (1.1), as well as for topic development through specification requests (1.11-12; 14-16). In that sense participants jointly carry out the topical agenda and co-elaborate the topics as they all get involved in answering Lorena’s initial question addressed to a particular participant (1.1).

Though the interactional pattern observed in this group does not correspond to a ‘conversation-like’ pattern which would not rely so strongly on adjacency-pair sequencing of actions (see Mori 2002 for a critic of interview-like interactions found in tasks that aimed at practicing ‘conversation’-like skills), it results being rather dynamic as speaker change is quite frequent and rapid (very few pauses). Note also the rare occurrences of L1 use, except for a word search sequence (1.26-28). The next excerpt presents Group 2 and illustrates a very different interactional pattern.

Accomplishing the task as collaborative writing

In the following excerpt⁷, participants of Group 2, which is also composed of three girls (Anila, Ebru and Natascha), are focusing on the question which food to bring to the birthday party. In this group however, participants orient to the achievement of the task by means of writing collaboratively the contents of their discussion, working on a text that they will read to the class in the post-task report. This excerpt also takes place after 20 minutes into the activity. Excerpt 6 shows a process of summarizing the negotiation through writing it down.

Excerpt 6 (Group 2- Tschu-181105-gs; lines 847-915)

01	ANI:	*et j/E/ f/ε/ une- (..) **<et (..)j/E/ f/ε/>=	
	trans	and I do a-FEM and I do	
	ani	*writing	#2.1
	ebr		*writing
	nat		*writing
02	EBR:	**je fais	
	trans	I do	
	ebr	*quick gaze at Anila’s sheet	
	nat	*gazes at Ebru	
03	ANI:	pour dessert	
	trans	for dessert	
04	EBR:	°°pour dessert°°	
	trans	for dessert	
05	NAT:	pour le dessert	
	trans	for the dessert	
06	ANI:	*pour dessert et j/E/ f/ε/ <pour °(x dessert xxx)&	
	trans	for dessert and I do for (x dessert xxx)	
	ebr	*quick gaze at Anila’s sheet	
07	ANI:	&pour l/E/ dessert> (doch=doch)°	
	trans	for the dessert (yes,yes)	
08	?:	*°°pour le dessert°°	
	trans	for the dessert	
	nat	*stops writing	
09		(2.5)	
10	ANI:	ehm:	
	trans	uhm	
11	NAT:	*le crème,=	
	trans	the-MASC cream	
	nat	*looks at Anila and points with index	

7 An analysis of this excerpt has been presented in the paper “Let’s write it down: writing as social activity in French FL conversational tasks”, E. Pochon-Berger & F. Steinbach Kohler, in the symposium on “Writing as a social activity” (G. Ziegler, M. Egli-Cuenat) at AILA 2008 - 15th World Congress of Applied Linguistics, Essen / Germany.

- 12 ANI: =un crème,
trans a-MASC cream
- 13 ** (1.9)
nat *writing again
ebr *stops writing, raises slightly the head
- 14 ANI: eh[m
trans uhm
- 15 EBR: [às isch la crème
trans it_i is the-FEM cream
- 16 NAT: la crème*
trans the-FEM cream
ebr *writing again
- 17 ANI: [crème de chocolat
trans chocolate cream
- 18 EBR: [la crème
trans the-FEM cream
- 19 (2.8)
- 20 EBR: <°de chocolat°>
trans chocolate
- 21 ANI: et aussi?
trans and also



#2.1

This group is seated the same way as Group 1. Two participants (Anila and Ebru) are sitting on one side of the table facing another participant. Natascha is seated on the opposite side. However, this time each participant has an individual set of tools (sheet of paper, pencil), as each one writes her own text (see #2.1). However, they orient to writing as being a jointly accomplished activity as they agree on the contents and on the form of the text that is written by each participant. Therefore, three individual writings are synchronized as one collective activity.

While all three participants are ‘scriptors’, Anila appears to be the main ‘formulator’ (Goffman 1981, Krafft & Dausendschön-Gay 2000), taking thus the lead in the management of the task. She engages in ‘audible writing’, that is uttering step-by-step what she is writing or is about to write. Krafft (2005) identifies the phenomenon of self-dictation in ‘conversational writings’. Self-dictation is prosodically shaped by a slow speech delivery, relaxed articulation, low voice, isolated syllables, flat intonation and irregular rhythm. In this example, it is difficult to tell whether Anila is dictating to herself or to her partners, as she does not speak in a very low voice. But whatever she does, it is loud enough to be heard by her partners and is therefore made publicly available. This allows then her partners to follow closely the progression of her writing, thus giving the opportunity to anyone to contribute to the formulation. Her partners (Ebru and Natascha) display alignment in content and activity (i.e., writing the same text at the same time) with Anila through repetitions which follow her utterances immediately (1.4; 8; 18-20; 24) as well as corrections (1.2; 5; 15; 26). ‘Audible writing’ plays thus a crucial role as it establishes joint attention on the task at hand. That way, participants can coordinate among each other while carrying out their own writing activity on their individual sheet of paper.

Participation in that group is organised around the collaborative writing process. The very fact of engaging in a joint writing activity allows for particular ways of participating to the communicative event. First, participants seem to orient to a shared floor (Coates 1994, 1997): they engage in a joint formulation of utterances, sharing thus the same turn. This is observable in occurrences of turn completions and continuation

(l.11; 35), other-corrections (l.2; 5; 15; 26; 28), other-repetitions (l.4; 8; 12; 16; 18-20, 24). Second, talk-in-interaction also reflects ‘writtenness’, i.e., features that characterize written discourse, (Koch & Oesterreicher 1994) which is displayed through various aspects: a high degree of planning is made visible through a progressive verbalization of the ‘text’ (addition of informational packages), a syntactically complex utterance construction (multi-propositional utterance), presence of discourse markers which are integrated in the written product (*et*, ‘and’, l.1; 34; *et aussi*, ‘and also’, l.21; 23; 24; 36), work towards grammatical correctness (l.2; 5; 6-7; 15; 25; 26; 31-32; 34-36) and orthography (l.28). Finally, the engagement into a writing activity has the effect of slowing down the rhythm of verbal production, as writing is slower than speech, and resulting in a type of talk-in-interaction formatted by a sentential logic. In fact, such an interactional pattern is typical of collaborative writing tasks (although this very task was not initially meant to be a writing task by the teacher) where participants negotiate and jointly formulate a text in form and content (see *rédactions conversationnelles*, Bouchard & Mondada 2005; Bouchard & De Gaulmyn 1997; Dausendschön-Gay & Krafft 1996). Furthermore, opportunities for participation are identified by participants as situated within the process of jointly formulating a syntactically complete utterance, as for example the syntactic turn completions mentioned above. Another example refers to the process of dictating as in Natascha’s self-selected turn as a non-addressed participant (Goffman 1981) in line 35. Natascha’s turn is precisely timed: she produces ‘salad’ immediately after Anila has announced an upcoming dictation (*nei schrib*, ‘no write’, l.34). The candidate (‘salad’) she provides is produced in a sequential position that completes an action initiated by someone else, that is, dictating what to modify in the written sentence.

To sum up, even though the task instruction is exactly the same for the two groups discussed here, the actual understanding of the task varies. Whereas one group seems to stick the closest to the initial pedagogical intention (‘to discuss’), the other group re-interprets the task as a writing activity. Moreover, other parameters such as the constellation of individuals in each group or distribution of expertises (in the L2, in talking/writing, in the contents at hand, etc.) certainly contribute to shaping the talk-in-interaction within a joint enterprise. However, the point being made here is not so much about showing that some groups accomplish the task ‘correctly’ and some others do not. Rather, the analysis shows that the interpretation of the setting leads to different interactional work and dynamics, creating structurally different participation opportunities and, as a consequence, possibly fostering different types of ‘skills’.

The difference between the two groups crystallizes essentially in participants’ orientation to and organisation of different relevant means and tools to pursue their goal. In Group 1, only the final ‘product’ of the group’s negotiation is written down by one participant (the ‘scriptor’). Writing then functions as the result of the process of negotiation of the task and its elaboration. The tools (sheets, pencils) are used by the participants as resources for organising the interaction and the shared space for joint action (for instance, clarification sequence). In Group 2, writing functions rather as a mediational activity for producing discourse in L2 (Lantolf & Thorne 2006), that is, participants write down the utterances in L2 as they are formulated. The strong orientation to the writing activity (and hence the final evaluation) makes linguistic appropriateness relevant. Therefore, participants in Group 2 spend a lot of time negotiating lexical and grammatical issues as well as correct orthography while that barely happens in Group 1.

The use of the L1 is also different in the two groups: Group 1 does rarely use the L1 while Group 2 does it quite frequently. In Group 2, the L1 is used as a resource for managing the task in a metacommunicative perspective (Brooks & Donato 1994; Nussbaum & Unamuno 2000): to manage the progression in the task agenda and the organisation of the joint work, as well as regulating the interaction (disagreements, etc.). The L2 is only used as the target forms to be written on the sheet of paper. In Group 1, the target language is used all the time, even when negotiating the task procedure itself (e.g., on *prépare ça une dialogue*, ‘we prepare a dialogue’, see excerpt 3).

When participants use the L1, it is mainly when encountering linguistic difficulties such as in word search sequences (1.26-28 in excerpt 5). This reflects a different way of conceiving the target language. In Group 2, the French language is only present in the products that are written and that are evaluated in the end. French is only an ‘object’ of learning and of evaluation. In Group 1 however, the use of the target language is part of the very process of accomplishing the task. Here, French is also used as a ‘means for communication’. Even when different groups have the same potential set of resources (material but also linguistic) at hand, the relevance of these resources is situated in participants’ understanding of the task and the definition of its outcome, rather than imposed from outside (e.g., the teacher or the task design).

Conclusion

The examples illustrate the complex interactional work involved in task accomplishment as a joint enterprise: managing the procedural and topical progression of the task, establishing common agreement on contents and forms, managing participation and joint attention, operating mutual adjustments, etc. (Samuda & Bygate 2008). The fact of accomplishing a task relies on interactional skills that are developed over time. Hellermann’s (2008) extended study on adult classroom learners shows how the shift from a plenary classroom participation structure to a dyadic interaction (task) is a practical problem that participants need to organise interactionally. Task opening is thus achieved through different ‘methods’ (postural alignment, clarification sequences, etc.) that launch the task and which grow in complexity over time as the learners’ language proficiency increases. In that perspective, developing skills for managing the task efficiently and appropriately is as important as the development of linguistic knowledge.

The differentiated practices in accomplishing the task seem to indicate that the learning situation in which participants engage is locally co-constructed by the learners rather than defined by the task design. In fact, this analysis shows that designing a task in a less constraining way offers space for the learners, allowing them to create a framework that is relevant for them to accomplish the task, to draw on relevant resources and to mutually organise their actions in an efficient way. Therefore, the flexibility of the task gives the learners the possibility to define and monitor their own learning route.

Such considerations raise the issue of evaluation. In the data discussed, the teacher announced at the beginning of the lesson that the groups would be graded on the basis of their oral presentation in front of the class. This is problematic insofar as only the final product is evaluated. However, the final product cannot account for the complex interactional work involved in the process of managing and accomplishing the task. This organisational work is not accessible from the final writing that only accounts for the decisions taken, in a possibly ‘well-formulated’ fashion. In other words, the 30-minute interactions allowing for the front-of-class presentations are simply left aside. Evaluation in this case ends up being form-and-content-oriented rather than accounting for interactional processes. Such observations therefore invite future research in second language learning and teaching as practices need to pay increased attention to means for process-oriented evaluation.

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Appendix I: Transcription conventions

[onset of overlap
=	latching
&	turn continuation
(.)(.)(...)	pause<1.0 second
(1.0)	pause (duration indication)
-	cut-off
>faster<	faster
<slower>	slower
.	falling intonation
?	raising intonation
,	continuing intonation
:	lengthening of preceding sound
((comment))	transcriber’s comment
(guessing)	transcriber’s guess
°softer°	softer
LOUDER	louder
<u>underline</u>	emphasis
<u>underline</u>	in L1 (Swiss-German and German)
<i>ani</i> *turns	non-verbal activity (line below beginning of non-verbal activity in the transcription line)
trans	translation gloss

Appendix II: Task instruction sheet

Choisissez un des deux sujets et discutez-le *en français* entre vous

Aller à une fête

Vous êtes invité(e)s à une fête d’anniversaire d’un copain / d’une copine, samedi prochain.

Avant d’y aller, vous devez vous organiser et régler encore quelques questions :

- Qu’est-ce qu’on lui offre comme cadeau et combien d’argent est-ce qu’on peut dépenser ?
- Qui achète le cadeau ?
- Qu’est-ce qu’on prépare à manger ?
- Qu’est-ce qu’on apporte comme boisson ?
- Qui prépare à manger, qui achète les boissons ?
- Qui organise de la musique et quelle musique ?
- Comment est-ce qu’on s’habille ? Quels vêtements est-ce qu’on met ?

Vous avez 25 minutes pour discuter *en français* et ensuite, vous présentez vos résultats à la classe.

Organiser une fête

Vous voulez organiser une fête et vos parents vous ont donné un peu d’argent pour préparer la fête.

Mais avant d’inviter vos amis, vous devez encore vous organiser et régler quelques questions.

- Quand est-ce que la fête va avoir lieu ? Où, chez qui ?
- Quel est le thème de la fête ?
- Qu’est-ce qu’on prépare ou achète à manger ?
- Qu’est-ce qu’on offre à boire ?
- Qui achète et prépare à manger, qui achète les boissons ?
- Qui organise la musique ? Quelle musique ?
- Comment est-ce qu’on va s’habiller ? Est-ce qu’on va se déguiser ? Quels vêtements est-ce qu’on va mettre ?

Vous avez 25 minutes pour discuter *en français* et ensuite, vous présentez vos résultats à la classe.