

Chapter 7

Erasmus students: Joining communities of practice to learn French?

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This chapter investigates the language learning of incoming Erasmus students in Bordeaux, and focuses on pragmatic aspects of this language learning. It postulates that the diversity of the communities of practice these students will join has an influence on their language learning. First, it investigates the communities of practice which the investigated population (Erasmus students from different countries and studying various subjects) actually join (in the personal, educational and public domains). This leads to observation of differences in community of practice membership between Erasmus students who share living accommodation and Erasmus students who do not. Secondly, we investigate the differences between these two groups as far as the pragmatic aspects of language learning are concerned.

1. Introduction

The research study reported in this chapter takes an action-oriented approach and has an interest in pragmatic aspects of language, in order to understand and support the language learning of Erasmus students undertaking study abroad. It investigates incoming Erasmus students who spend a semester or an academic year in higher education institutions in Bordeaux (France), whether majoring in languages or not. We aim at using the concept of *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to analyse how Erasmus students involved in social activities related to study abroad in Bordeaux learn (or rather, continue to learn) French language.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Action oriented approach

In agreement with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR: Council of Europe, 2001), we consider language learners as “social agents” who have to accomplish tasks. These tasks may or may not require language to be

used, and they occur during the social activity of the language learner/user. Thus, the CEFR assumes that language use is always part of a social activity and that language always acquires its meaning in context. Therefore, the language used or learned depends greatly on the contexts students are exposed to. Language learning always occurs in context and requires the learners to be active and performing tasks using this language. The CEFR defines four domains in which social activity is likely to occur: educational, public, personal and professional.

2.2. *Communities of practice*

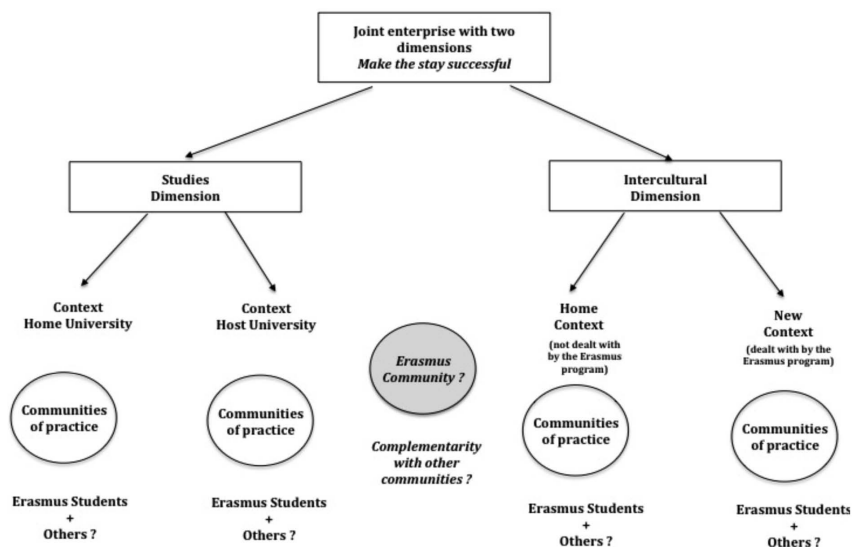
Theories about communities of practice refer to a situated perspective on cognition and learning that considers that “any knowledge, however theoretical it seems, is the product of a social space and a social practice and doesn’t exist in itself” (Berry, 2008: 16 – our translation). They regard learning as a process of participation in social practices. For Wenger (2005), in a given social context, individuals take part in a social activity that is organised to succeed as a *joint enterprise*. As individuals interact with other individuals, they perform activities and produce artefacts that display this shared experience. This in turn produces contextualised knowledge, and this collective learning both produces and structures practices among the group, i.e. it shapes the group of individuals into a community of practice. Inside this community, learning therefore is both a means and a condition for the integration of new members. In a community of practice, the activity to achieve the joint enterprise leads the individuals to build a shared repertoire. The level of integration of individuals is correlated to their engagement.

Communities of practice are a specific level of analysis, different from the analysis of specific interactions (individual level), or of the behaviour of social groups (social group level). One person can belong to several communities of practice, and a given social group would constitute a constellation of practices, i.e. several communities of practice related to each other, for different possible reasons (historical, organisational, institutional, geographical, competitive or collaborative: Wenger, 2005). The concept seems to us a good tool to investigate Erasmus students at a collective level, but also as individuals who may interact with different people.

The Erasmus programme is an institutional project in which different people from different institutions share enterprises and interact on an individual level; therefore, it can be seen as a constellation of practices. As shown by Dervin (2008) with his notion of *groupalité*, we are aware that we cannot limit the sociality of Erasmus students to being a group. We will consider that, by taking part in this programme, students get an “Erasmus” status, through which they can join or form different communities, made up of Erasmus students only, or not. These different possible communities of practice are represented schematically in Figure 1. We

have organised them according to two dimensions that reflect the objectives of the Erasmus programme: i.e. to foster students' mobility during their studies, but also to foster general intercultural understanding among Europeans (Erasmus Mundus, 2009).

Figure 1. Erasmus students and potential communities of practice



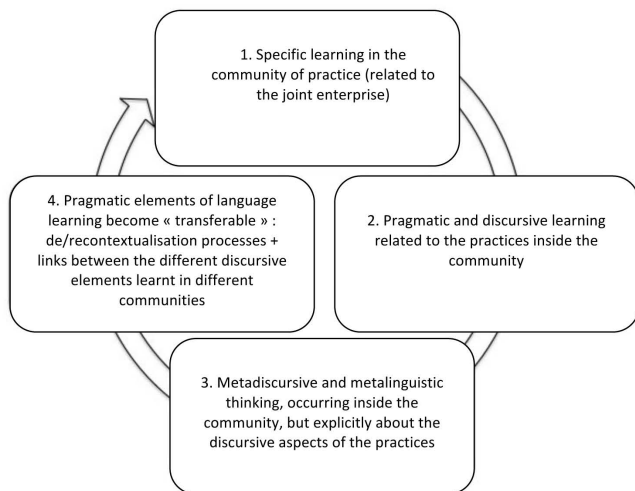
Our study focuses on the communities Erasmus students may form or join during their stay abroad. We consider these communities within three broad domains: educational, personal and public (the professional domain is not considered in this study). These domains are parallel to the three major settings in which students undertaking residence abroad are believed to have access to communicative interaction, according to Kinginger (2009): educational institutions and classrooms, places of residence, and service encounters and other informal contact with expert speakers.

2.3. Language learning and communities of practice for Erasmus students

We adopt a contextualised approach to language learning and are interested in the learning of pragmatic aspects of language. Building on the findings of Barron (2003) about important development in pragmatic competence of study abroad informants, our study investigates the relationship between the pragmatic language learning of Erasmus students and the communities of practice they join when in Bordeaux.

Figure 2 represents the way we think about this pragmatic language learning. We assume that Erasmus students, when in Bordeaux, join different communities of practice, possibly with various levels of engagement in these communities. Therefore, they learn how to act according to the practices in force in these communities (cf. Element 1 in Figure 2) - including how to use French language related to these new practices. Thus, they learn lexicon and grammar, but also develop a pragmatic and discursive competence (cf. Element 2 in Figure 2). Interacting with experts inside these communities, they have informal access to some metadiscursive and metalinguistic thinking (Gombert, 1993) about discursive aspects of the effective practices of the community; this thinking is elicited when focusing on being successful in the joint enterprise of the community (cf. Element 3 in Figure 2). Pragmatic elements of language learning become *transferable* via the decontextualisation process (by decontextualisation, we mean making explicit the characteristics of the context in which structures are encountered) and the recontextualisation process (the process of setting the structures in new contexts). This transfer process assumes that students are also able to establish connections between different discursive elements learnt in different communities (cf. Element 4 in Figure 2).

Figure 2. Erasmus students, communities of practice and language learning



After analysing the communities of practice joined by the Erasmus students, this chapter investigates what students report about their language learning during their stay, focusing on pragmatic aspects. This focus is obtained by working on what they report about the discursive strategies they used during their interaction in French.

A strategy, as defined in the CEFR, is “any organised, purposeful and regulated line of action chosen by an individual to carry out a task” (Council of Europe, 2001, p.9). We will use the term *discursive strategy* to refer generally to strategies that are used in discourse. This is a broad notion that, according to Gumperz (1982) refers both to linguistic and sociocultural knowledge that needs to be shared in order to maintain (conversational) involvement. It is difficult to define and delimit discursive strategies precisely, as they can be related to different levels of discourse management (planning, actual speech or writing, revision) and to different linguistic levels (micro or macro level: from choosing a word or a structure to designing general discourse organisation). Besides, discursive strategies vary according to the context and the aim of the discourse studied. For our purposes, we drew up a list of discursive strategies students may use when interacting with native speakers (see Appendix, Question 17). The sample of strategies we selected are strategies mainly for interaction (although some could be used in all language activities), and which aim either at maintaining and managing the interaction, or at managing the relationship between the context of the interaction and the linguistic structures used in this context. When designing this sample, we included strategies related to each of the four categories of the CEFR: planning, execution, evaluation and repair.

In French SLA literature, it is more common to talk about *communication strategies* (see for example Behrent, 2007, or Suso Lopez, 2001), and to distinguish between these and *learning strategies*. This is another reason for us to favour the term *discursive strategies*. Like Gaonac’h (1990), we consider that the distinction between communication and learning strategies is not completely satisfactory. First because, when learning a foreign language, communicating is a means for learning: When we try to keep the conversation going (using communication strategies) we are also maintaining the means of learning. Secondly, the limit between communication strategies and learning strategy is unclear: For example, making explicit the meaning of a word is related both to communicating and learning. On many occasions, only the intention of the participant could justify qualifying the strategy used as a communication one or as a learning one. We consider that discursive strategies can serve purposes both of communication and of learning, and therefore prefer this term.

We consider an action to be a strategy as long as it can be identified as a choice meant to achieve a specific aim, either by the subject who is using it or by an external observer. Thus, a research participant does not always explicitly design strategies as such, but he/she can identify a strategy in hindsight. We will use the expression that Suso Lopez (2001) borrowed from Faerch and Kasper (1983) about communication strategies and say that discursive strategies are “potentially conscious”: although the subjects are not necessarily aware of these strategies at the time of the interaction, they can in retrospect think about their aim and their cognitive process.

The aim of our study is to ascertain what types of pragmatic and discursive learning take place inside the communities of practice, and whether metalinguistic and metacognitive thinking about this learning is possible (cf. Element 3 in Figure 2). We will also investigate the connection between metalinguistic and metacognitive thinking and participation in communities of practice. This is a necessary step in order to investigate in future research the possibilities for the transfer of pragmatic learning (cf. Element 4 in Figure 2).

3. Protocol and population

As it is important for us not to limit our study to language or linguistics students, our long-term aim is to take into account all institutions involved in the Erasmus programme in Bordeaux. For the preliminary study reported in this chapter, we decided to work with six institutions, representative of different types of study mobility. On the methodological level, this preliminary study allowed us to make the people in the *Relations Internationales* (RI) departments within each institution aware of our research, and to test our methodological tools. On the epistemological level, it allowed us to test the relevance of our pre-suppositions and our hypotheses.

Figure 3. Participants' countries of origin

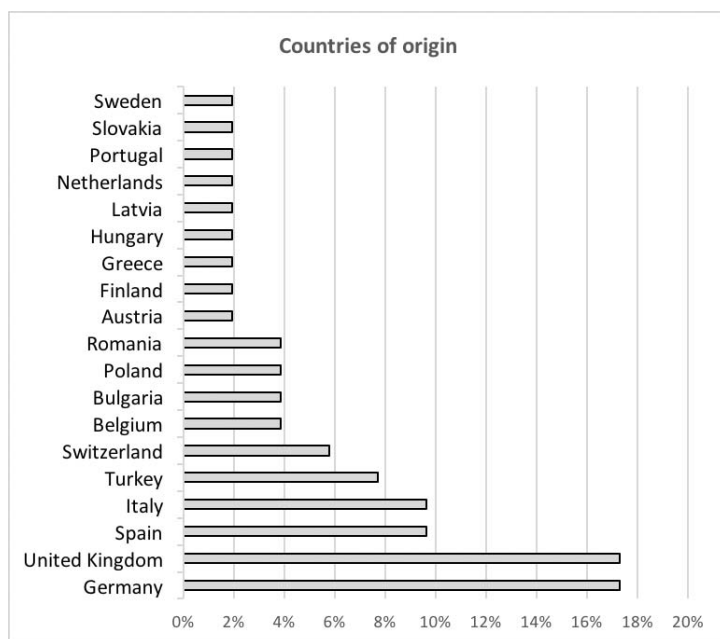
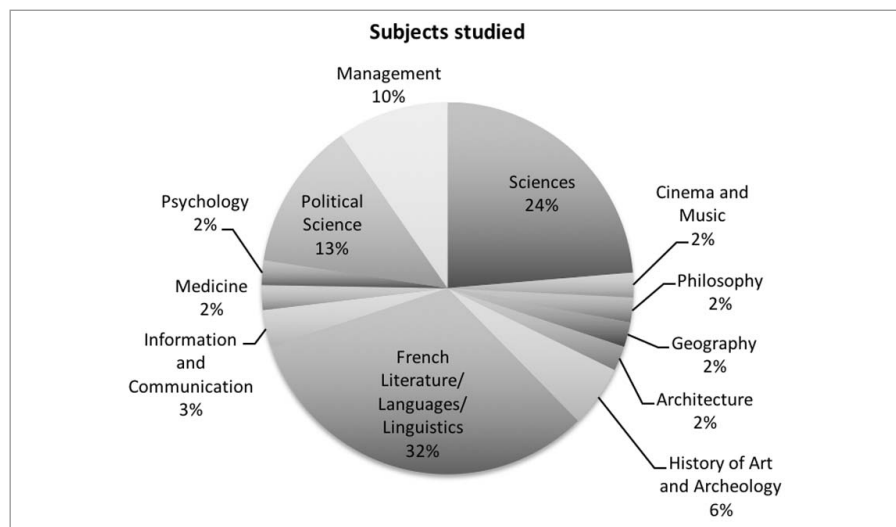


Figure 4. Subjects studied by participants

The chapter presents results obtained via an online questionnaire (cf Appendix). This questionnaire was designed with two kinds of questions. The first category focused on social activities in the personal, educational and public domains, and the second on participants' attitude towards language use and learning.

The questionnaire was sent via email to our partners in the RI departments in the six target institutions, who forwarded it to their incoming Erasmus students, in two phases: the first part of the questionnaire on arrival in Bordeaux, and the second part towards the end of their stay. We obtained 52 answers for each part of the questionnaire. Students came from 19 different countries (see Figure 3), while 73% were Bachelor's students, 23% were Master's students and 4% were PhD students. As stated previously, our population was studying varied subjects, although language, literature and linguistics students formed the biggest category of students (see Figure 4). We had no objective access to their level of proficiency in French, but 60% of them declared an intermediate level, and 40% an advanced level.

Due to the number of students we aimed to get data from, and the need to prioritise questions most directly relevant to our investigation, we did not determine in detail the mobility capital (including personal history and previous experience of mobility: Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) of the participants. However, as part of our research investigates the relationship between membership of the communities of practice and the learning of pragmatic aspects of language, we included questions to identify the participants' attitude toward French language learning.

Considering the usual requirements of higher education institutions in Europe, we expected incoming Erasmus students in Bordeaux to aim at improving their French language level, and indeed, French language learning was the main objective for the Erasmus students we surveyed. When answering an open question about their objectives for their stay in France, more than 90% mentioned progress in French language, compared with lesser frequencies for other hoped-for outcomes, such as: knowledge about French culture (53.3%); personal development/ becoming a more independent person (43.3%); meeting people from different countries (26.6%); progress in the subject they are studying (23.3%); and benefiting from the quality of French higher education (13.3%).

Regarding the means to improve their French language level, when asked whether they favoured “situations where they would have an opportunity to speak French”, a large majority of respondents (77%) said they did; fewer than 6% said they did not, and 17.2% “did not think about it”. In addition, 57% of students reported attending French lessons, although these classes were not compulsory for their studies. Not surprisingly, self-declared intermediate students were more likely to attend French lessons (62%, against 50% of the advanced students).

We can say that our participants cared about improving their language skills, and for this purpose relied mainly on “real life situations”, although more than half of the respondents also attended classes. Only a small minority (11.4%) neither attended French classes nor favoured situations where they could practice French.

4. Hypotheses and results

4.1. *Social activities and communities of practice for incoming Erasmus students in Bordeaux*

So far, the study has confirmed that Erasmus students take advantage of *situations of communication* in Bordeaux to improve their level of French. Next we focus on the social activities they were likely to take part in. Along with identifying their interlocutors (students or not, native speakers or not) in these activities, we clarify what communities of practice they joined. This part of the investigation is organised according to the CEFR domains.

4.1.1. Hypotheses regarding place of residence

The place of residence has an a priori impact on the communities which students join in the personal domain (i.e. simply by living with other people, they

will necessarily share tasks related to organising and managing their life together). However we assume that the place of residence (whether living with other people or not) has an impact on the variety of interlocutors students have access to, not only in the personal domain but also more generally.

Our specific hypotheses concern the different influence of the place of residence on the communities of practice Erasmus students join in the public and educational domains:

1. As they all have the same Erasmus student status, the place of residence will make no difference to the communities they join, and the variety of interlocutors they encounter, in the educational domain.
2. The place of residence has an impact on the communities they join in the public domain.

4.1.2. Process: questions relating to communities of practice

In order to identify the communities of practice Erasmus students would join, and whether these consisted of students or nonstudents, and of French native speakers or foreign native speakers, our approach was the following:

- Ask about the kinds of people they interacted with in general over their stay, in order to identify the interlocutors they had access to overall.
- For the personal domain, ask about accommodation type, and who they were living with.
- For the public and educational domains, draw up a list of activities they were likely to perform, ask them to confirm whether they did them, and who with.

We also asked questions about the organisation of activities, to assess participants' engagement in the communities identified.

4.1.3. Results

4.1.3.1. *Personal domain*

Concerning living accommodation, participants reported the following: 51.4% lived in a shared house or flat, 37.1% lived in a *chambre universitaire*, and 11.4% lived in a flat on their own. In Bordeaux, a *chambre universitaire* is an individual 9 m² bedroom, in a building with shared kitchen and bathrooms. The kitchen facilities are, in reality, rarely used and there are few contacts directly related to everyday life between students in these buildings. This is why we contrast students who live in a shared house or flat (or *shared accommodation students*, from now on SAS) with students living on their own or in a *chambre universitaire*, who do not have to

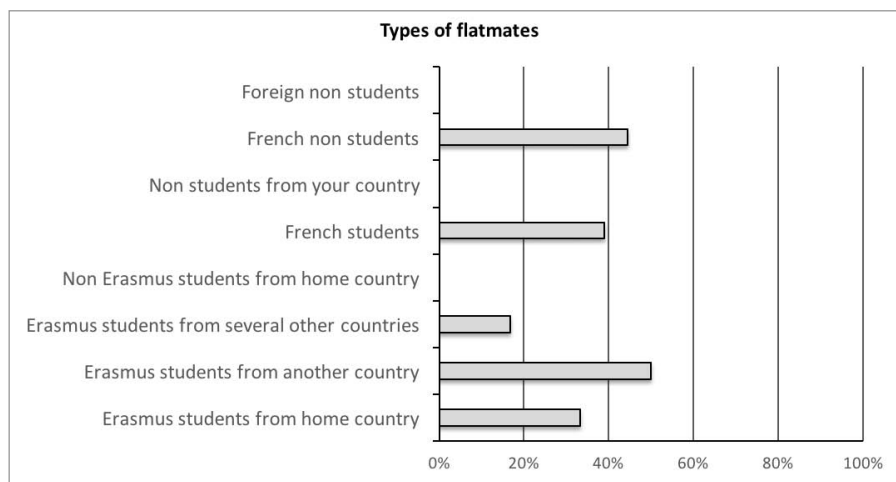
take part in collective everyday activities with flatmates (*non shared accommodation students*, NSAS).

The characteristics of the housemates of the SAS group are shown in Figure 5. (Participants could report as many categories of housemate as they wished, so that responses total more than 100%.) Among this group, four situations emerge with almost equal frequency:

- living with other Erasmus students from their own country;
- living with Erasmus students from other countries;
- living with French students;
- living with French non-students.

Participants did not live with people from their own country, unless they were also Erasmus students. Overall it seems that the *Erasmus student* status was more prominent than the *home* characteristic of the non-French housemates they chose to live with. However, they were willing to live with French non-students, suggesting that *French native speaker* status was more important than student status.

Figure 5. Flatmate types reported by SAS group



The SAS group clearly have potential for contact, in the personal domain, with a broader variety of people than the members of the NSAS group. How far these two groups interacted differently in practice, is explored below.

Figure 6 shows the type of interlocutors students in each group (SAS and NSAS) perceived they had access to, in general, during their stay.

Figure 6. Percentages of participants declaring an interaction with suggested interlocutors (RI= Relations Internationales)

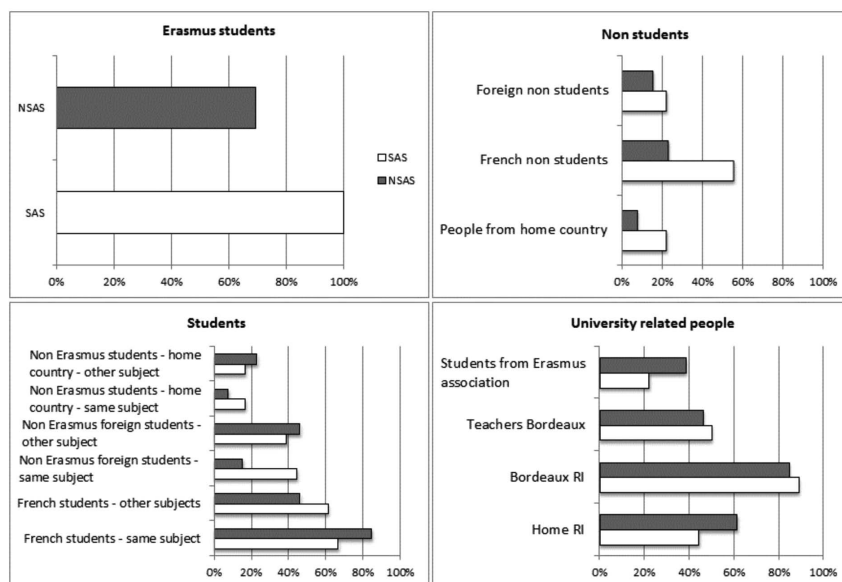


Figure 6 confirms our first hypothesis: overall, SAS do communicate with more diverse people in general (they score higher in the *non students* category), and NSAS tend to communicate more with students (either French or foreign) and with Erasmus associations. Thus it seems that students who have less variety in the personal domain have more intensive interaction among students in general, and have access to French native speakers mainly through students met during their studies. This means that SAS have at least peripheral participation in more diverse communities of practice than NSAS.

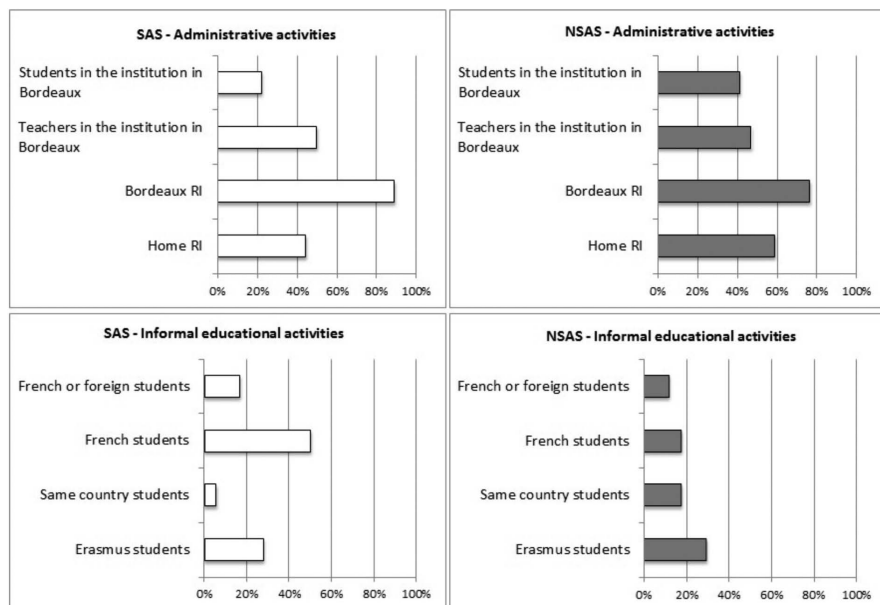
4.1.3.2. Educational domain

We investigated the communities formed/joined by participants in the educational domain via 1) questions about informal social activities (as opposed to activities organised by the institution) such as collaborative work outside the classroom, and 2) questions about social activities related to more institutional or administrative aspects of their stay.

We assumed that all participants had to deal with the institutional and administrative aspects of their stay, so we did not ask for confirmation. For informal educational activities, we were surprised to observe that, overall, less than half of the participants (48.6%) reported such activities. However, we can

note it seems easier, or at least more frequent, for students living in shared accommodation to take part in informal activities related to their studies: The SAS group do these informal activities more than the others (56% against 41%).

Figure 7. Interlocutors within educational activities, for SAS and NSAS groups



The graphs in Figure 7 present the interlocutors of SAS and NSAS groups, for these educational activities (both institutional and informal). The following points can be made about the informal interactions of SAS and NSAS with fellow students:

- there is no substantial difference in the numbers of Erasmus or foreign students they interact with;
- SAS have more interaction with French students;
- NSAS have more interaction with students from their home country.

As for institutional interlocutors, we can note that:

- SAS seem to interact somewhat more frequently with the host RI;
- NSAS resort a bit more frequently to their home RI;
- Overall, NSAS seem to resort more to institutional support than SAS.

Contrary to what we expected, therefore, there is an overall difference between SAS and NSAS in the educational domain as well: SAS seem to join more informal and diverse communities of practice than NSAS.

4.1.3.3. Public domain

We also investigated the groups that are formed or joined by students in the public domain via questions about activities to discover Bordeaux and the area, and activities related to their home culture. Most students reported activities to discover Bordeaux and the area: 82.9% in total. SAS were more involved (88.9%) in these activities than NSAS (76.5%). The situation is different for the activities related to their home culture, where 66.7% of SAS were involved, against only 17.6% of NSAS.

There is also a difference about the companions of SAS and NSAS for the activities to discover Bordeaux, as seen in Figure 8. In this analysis we have differentiated between activities offered by organisations and by individuals.

Figure 8. Activities in public domain: discovering Bordeaux and the area, for SAS and NSAS groups

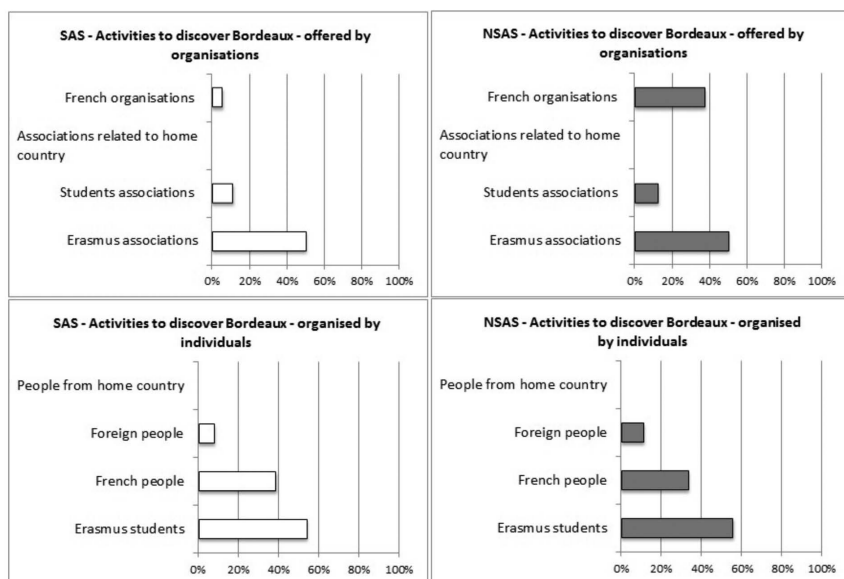
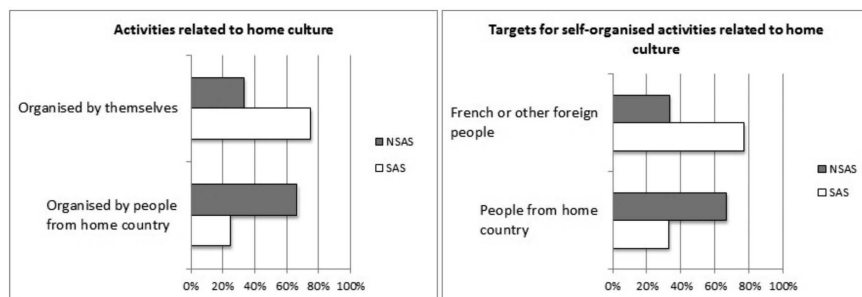


Figure 8 shows that both groups of students seemed to benefit similarly from the University offer, but that NSAS resorted more to other institutional interlocutors, such as the *Office du tourisme*. As in the educational domain, NSAS, who have fewer resources from their personal domain than SAS, resort more to institutional means in the public domain. When the activities were organised by individuals,

however, patterns were similar, and both categories of students did these activities with the same kinds of people: Erasmus students above all, then French people and finally, and significantly less, non-student foreign people.

We already noted that SAS did more activities related to their home culture. Organisation of these activities was different as well, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Activities in public domain related to home culture, for SAS and NSAS groups



NSAS tended to rely more on people from their home country than SAS. For 66.7% of NSAS, home culture activities were organised by people from their country, when this was the case for only 25% of SAS. On the other hand, SAS tended to be a lot more active in organising such activities (75% organised some themselves, when only 33% of NSAS did). SAS also tended to share their expertise in their own culture with different people (see above) which suggests not only a larger diversity of interlocutors in the public domain, but also a stronger mutual engagement in these communities of practice.

Overall therefore, the place of residence has a clear influence on the communities of practice students join in the public domain. SAS have more diverse practices, these practices are more informal, and they involve more diverse people, at a higher level of engagement.

4.1.4. Intermediate conclusions

SAS seem to have a larger variety of interlocutors, both in general and within each domain we investigated. This does not mean they interact less with other Erasmus (or foreign) students, but that they also interact with other interlocutors. It seems more difficult for NSAS to interact with noninstitutional interlocutors: The less variety there is in the personal domain, the more students centre their interaction on the student population and institutional interlocutors for the educational domain, and on home country related people and organisations in the public domain.

As the “informal and improvised” characteristics of communities of practices are important (Brown & Duguid, 1991), we can say that NSAS have more trouble joining existing informal communities of practice in Bordeaux, or forming communities with host country residents. SAS seem to join more diverse communities of practice than NSAS.

4.2. Variety of communities of practice and learning of pragmatic aspects of language

As mentioned earlier, Erasmus students aim at improving their French language level, through engagement in real life interactions. In 3.2, we observed that SAS seem to relate to a wider variety of interlocutors than NSAS, in more diverse communities of practice, where they seem to have a stronger engagement. Next, we investigated whether SAS and NSAS have a different attitude towards pragmatic aspects of language learning. Before doing so, we needed to establish that learning of these pragmatic aspects does occur for our participants. This area of the research was reflected in the second part of the survey instrument (Question 14 onward: See Appendix).

4.2.1. Learning of pragmatic aspects for general population

4.2.1.1. Hypothesis

Our main hypothesis was that, being in France, students would be confronted with real life contexts, and would notice and care about the pragmatic dimension of language.

4.2.1.2. Process

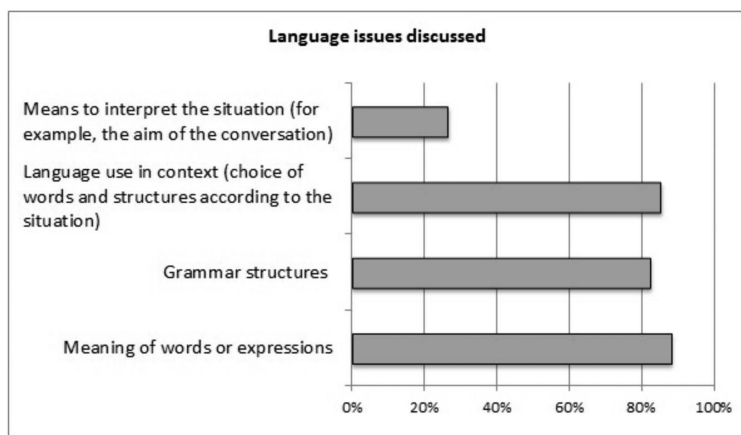
First, we asked participants whether they discussed language issues (with anyone) and, if so, to tick what these issues were related to: “meaning of words or structures”, “grammatical construction of some structures, how to use the language in context (how to choose words and structures)”, and “how to interpret the aim of the situation or the intention of the interlocutor”. We also asked them who they discussed these issues with.

Another set of questions investigated participants’ awareness of discursive strategies. Question 16 asked whether, during their stay, they used “means to adapt what you were saying to the situation”. This was a yes/no question, with the option to add examples if they wanted to. Question 17 consisted of a list of 12 discursive and learning strategies to tick if they used them, plus a “none of these” option. Finally, to assess metacognitive activity around these strategies, Question 18 asked whether they discussed strategies with anyone, and if so, who with.

4.2.1.3. Results

Participants' answers to the question about the language issues they discussed during their stay are summarised in Figure 10. These tend to confirm that use of structures in context attracts as much reflection as the meaning of words and grammar structures themselves. The last item (interpreting a situation) received fewer responses than the others, either because participants may not have faced this kind of issue, or because they did not address them explicitly in discussion.

Figure 10. Percentage of participants declaring having discussed language issues



As far as the use of discursive strategies is concerned, just over half of the students agreed they used “means to adapt what they were saying to the situation” (54%). Among those, some were able to give examples, such as paying attention to register, using intonation and situation to understand key ideas, asking for explanations, etc. Overall, this score shows a rather low awareness of using discursive strategies, and we noticed there was no significant variation depending on participants' level of French, nor on attendance at French lessons.

In response to Question 17, which offered a list of strategies, participants were able to identify those strategies they used: None of the students selected “none of these strategies”. However only 35% of the students said they discussed these strategies with someone, while 65% did not. This suggests a low awareness of strategies, and shows a lack of metalinguistic and metacognitive thinking about them.

To sum up, on the one hand 85% reported having discussed issues of language use in context, and all reported using at least some discursive strategies, while on the other hand their ability to refer spontaneously and explicitly to means of adapting their language was limited. From this we conclude that although the pragmat-

ic dimension of language use is something learners actually deal with, it is not the focus of their language learning, and they do not explicitly reflect upon it on a metalinguistic or metacognitive level, or discuss it as such with other people – not even French teachers. Interestingly, neither French lesson attendance nor French level led to any significant variation in responses.

Our hypothesis concerning pragmatics is thus partly confirmed: student participants do care about pragmatic aspects of language, as they discuss related issues with their interlocutors, and they perceive themselves to use discursive strategies. However, this attention to pragmatic aspects remains at the level of language use, and students seem not to develop this situated problem-solving on a metalinguistic or metacognitive level. Next, we compare this learning of pragmatic aspects for SAS and NSAS groups.

4.2.2. Comparison of learning of pragmatic aspects for SAS and NSAS population.

4.2.2.1. *Hypotheses*

We can sum up our hypotheses on this issue by saying that we expect variation in communities of practice to imply different levels of awareness of pragmatic aspects of language, for both use and learning. This expectation is captured in four hypotheses:

1. SAS look more for opportunities to practice French and will take advantage of the variety of interlocutors to talk about language issues with more people;
2. SAS are more aware of the importance of pragmatic aspects in language use;
3. SAS use a wider range of discursive strategies;
4. SAS reflect more on pragmatic aspects at a metalinguistic and metacognitive level.

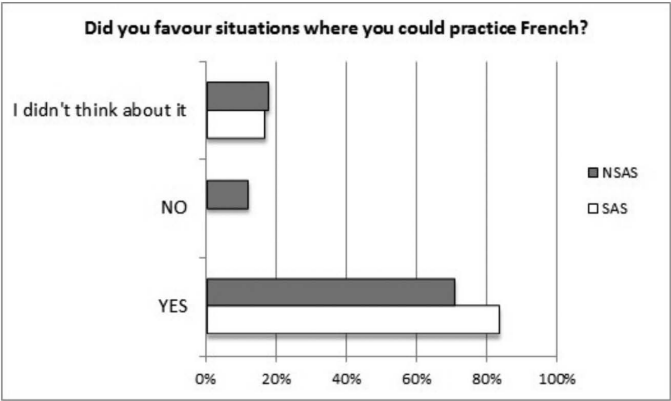
4.2.2.2. *Process: Questions relating to attitude towards language learning*

We will investigate these hypotheses by comparing the answers of the SAS and NAS groups to the questions already described in 4.2.1.2.

4.2.2.3. *Results*

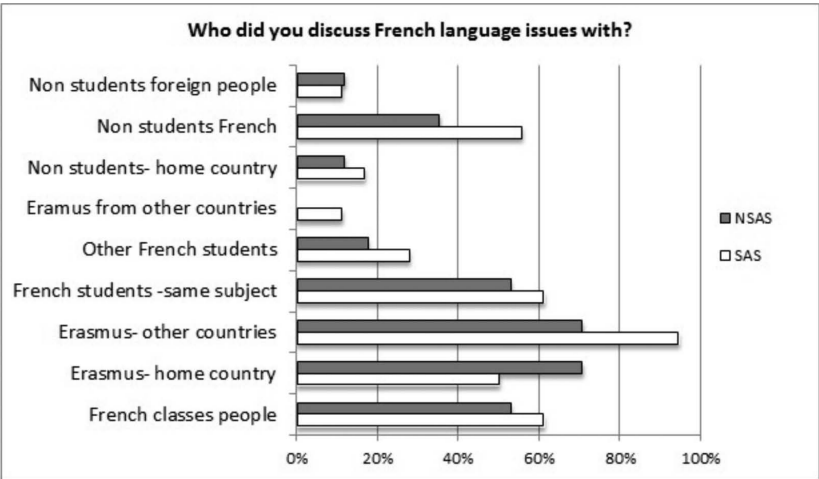
Hypothesis 1: Figure 11 shows some link between the place of residence and the tendency to favour situations where participants practise French: over 80% of SAS said they favoured these, and none said they did not. Among NSAS, 70.6% favoured these situations, but 11.8% did not. There was little difference in response to the third option, “I did not think about it” (16.7% of SAS answers, 17.6% of NSAS).

Figure 11. Attitude towards language practice: Comparison between SAS and NSAS groups



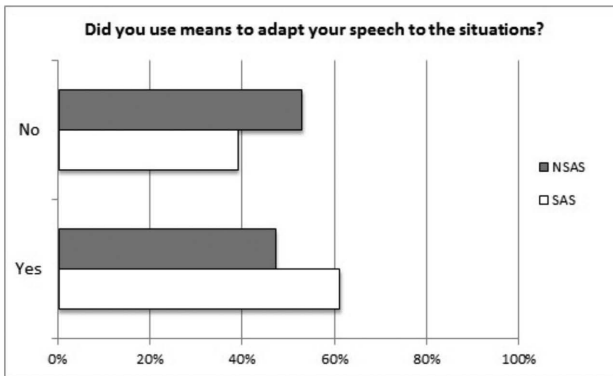
In Figure 12, we can observe that SAS talk about language issues more frequently with most types of interlocutor, thus confirming our first hypothesis. The only kind of interlocutors NSAS interact with more is Erasmus students from their home country.

Figure 12. Interlocutors when discussing French language issues: Comparison between SAS and NSAS groups



Hypothesis 2: As shown in Figure 13, more SAS declared having used means to adapt their speech to the situations than NSAS, which tends to confirm our hypothesis that SAS are more aware of pragmatic aspects in language use.

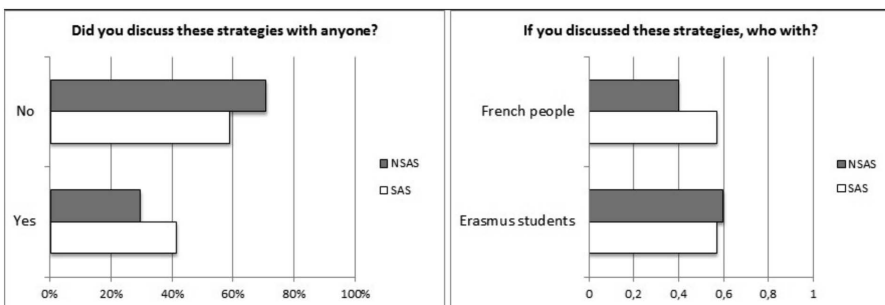
Figure 13. Speech adaptations to situations of communication: Comparison between SAS and NSAS groups



Hypothesis 3: Question 17 invited participants to tick the discursive/ learning strategies they used, and here we were unable to find a trend: Six strategies were ticked by more NSAS than SAS, four by more SAS than NSAS and two strategies were selected by almost the same numbers of SAS and NSAS. There was no regularity in regard to the individual strategies ticked either. Our third hypothesis is not confirmed by these results, as we cannot say SAS use a wider range of strategies. Thus, the variety of interlocutors does not seem to have an impact on the range of strategies used, or at least, our questionnaire method failed to show any such impact.

Hypothesis 4: As can be seen in Figure 14, more SAS students declared having discussed these strategies with other people (41.2%), against 29.4% of NSAS. Consistent with results presented in 3.2., SAS discussed these strategies equally with Erasmus students and with French people (whether students or not), while NSAS discussed them more with Erasmus students than with French people.

Figure 14. Discussions about strategies: Comparison between SAS and NSAS groups



The fact that SAS explicitly discussed strategies as such more than NSAS tends to confirm our hypothesis 4, indicating that SAS reflect more on these pragmatic aspects at a metalinguistic level. The answers to Question 19 followed the same trend. This question asked whether they would have been interested in working on these strategies in the context of language support for Erasmus students. 72.2% of SAS said they would, when only 27.8% of NSAS did; it seems that students who have been involved in more varied communities express a clearer interest in working on discursive strategies in a more explicit way.

5. Conclusion

This preliminary study has confirmed that learning French is part of the Erasmus students' main aims during their stay, and has shown that joining diverse communities of practice is favourable to the learning of pragmatic aspects of language. But this does not necessarily mean students are able to autonomously reflect on this learning on a metalinguistic and metacognitive level. Although all Erasmus students in Bordeaux have the same status, they do not all find themselves in the same communities: we have observed a positive relationship between *sharing accommodation* and *joining diverse communities* in every investigated domain. This may be as much a consequence of their place of residence, as it is a cause for them to choose to live in shared accommodation.

We can draw two sets of recommendations from this study: The first set is about the way local institutions (in our case, Bordeaux) organise the Erasmus programme, and the second about future lines of research.

As far as local institutions are concerned, we think they can influence the communities of practice students join, and related language learning, in three ways. Two of these entail providing shared enterprises to students. Examples for Bordeaux could be:

- providing shared enterprises in the personal domain by encouraging students to share nonstudent accommodation, or offering/building more communal student accommodation (unlike the present *chambres universitaires*);
- providing shared enterprises in the educational domain including collaborative tasks out of class (and encouraging teachers to mix groups of French and foreign students);
- providing study abroad students with specific training addressing metalinguistic and metacognitive thinking, as an extension of existing language support.

On a scientific level, in order to fully understand the relationship between *joining communities of practice* and *learning language*, we need to investigate further the way students engage in detail with the social activities they take part in, as well as the language learning they gain from their involvement in the activities. Further work will need to investigate two sets of issues:

- 1) The relationship between attitudes towards French learning and the level of engagement in the different communities of practice.
- 2) The relationship between explicit (metalinguistic and metacognitive) work on discursive strategies, level of engagement in the communities, and improvement in language learning.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Participants had to answer this questionnaire in two phases (the first one being at their arrival). It was submitted on line, and in French (although some of the questions, judged a bit more difficult to understand, were translated into English as well).

Information about participants: Please fill in the following fields:

First name:
 Last name:
 Home university:
 Major subject(s) in your home university:
 Level of study (Bachelor, Master, PhD)
 Training attended in Bordeaux:
 Date of arrival in Bordeaux (September / January)
 Length of stay in Bordeaux (a year, a semester)
 Self assessed level of French: (beginner, intermediate, advanced)

PHASE 1

Question 1 (open question):

Why did you decide to come and study in a French school / university ?

Question 2 (open question):

How do you think you are going to benefit from this stay in Bordeaux?

Question 3:

To prepare your stay and studies in your university/your school in Bordeaux, you may have looked for information about different topics: studies, life in Bordeaux, French language.

For each topic, please tick the boxes of the information you looked up before coming to Bordeaux (you can tick several boxes).

3.1. Studies:

- Looking up information about the similarity / correspondance between the curriculum in your home institution and the curriculum in Bordeaux.
- Looking up information about how your institution in Bordeaux is organised (for example: UFR in university, departments, etc.)
- Looking up information about the schedule for the semester, the year, the training you will be doing.
- Looking up information about how the training you will attend in Bordeaux is organised
- Looking up information about the contents of the training you will attend in Bordeaux.

- Looking up information about the kind of classes you will have to attend in Bordeaux (for example: classes in amphitheatre, classes in lab, groupwork, etc.)
- Looking up information about how the training you attend will be evaluated (for example: oral exams, written exams, continuous or final assessment, etc.)
- Looking up information about the ECTS you will get from the classes you will attend in Bordeaux
- Looking up administrative information about you will have to do in the institution in Bordeaux (forms you will have to fill in, registration, etc.)
- Looking up information about people to meet and places to go to take care of the administrative aspects of your studies when you will first arrive
- Other searches about your studies

3.2. Every day life in Bordeaux:

- Looking up information about housing:
 - University accomodation
 - Renting a flat
 - Sharing a flat
- Looking up information about transport:
 - To go to Bordeaux
 - To go around Bordeaux
- Looking up information about health system
- Looking up information about leisure and culture activities in Bordeaux
- Looking up information about the budget / finances (how much does it cost to live in Bordeaux: accommodation, food, going out, etc.)
- Other information about everyday life in Bordeaux

3.3. French Language:

- Looking up information about possible French classes in the institution you will attend in Bordeaux
- Looking up information to get ready to use French language specifically for the training you will attend in Bordeaux
- Looking up information about French language schools or language centres, and their fees, in Bordeaux.
- Looking up places where you could practice French in Bordeaux
- Looking up information about French Language in general
 - if so, what kind of linguistic information (for example, vocab, grammar, pronunciation, etc.)
- Looking up information about how past Erasmus students improved their French during their stay abroad

Question 4

For the researched topics, tick who you were in touch with, in which way, and in which language.

4.1. For studies related research:

4.1.2. you were in touch with:

- International Relations in your home institution:
 - By reading information on their website
 - By talking face to face with someone
 - By email:
 - In French
 - In your mother tongue
 - In English

- Students who attend the same training as you in your home institution and who were Erasmus students, in Bordeaux, before you:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Students who attend the same training as you in your home institution, and who were Erasmus students before you, but not in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Students who attend the same training as you in your home institution, and who were getting ready, like you were, to leave as Erasmus students, to Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Students who attend the same training as you, and who were getting ready, like you were, to leave as Erasmus students, but not to Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Other students from your home institution, who were Erasmus students before you but not in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Other students from your home institution, who were getting ready to leave as Erasmus students like you were, but not to Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Other students from your country, who were Erasmus students in Bordeaux before you:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Other students from your country, who were Erasmus students before you, but not in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Other students from your country, who were preparing to be Erasmus students like you, in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
- Other students from your country, who were preparing to be Erasmus students like you, but not in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)

- Via email
- Foreign students, who were Erasmus students before you, in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
 - In French
 - In your mother tongue
 - In English
- Foreign students, who were Erasmus students before you, but not in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
 - In French
 - In your mother tongue
 - In English
- Foreign students, who were preparing to be Erasmus students like you, in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
 - In French
 - In your mother tongue
 - In English
- Foreign students, who were preparing to be Erasmus students like you, but not in Bordeaux:
 - In a face to face interaction
 - Via social networks (ex. Facebook)
 - Via email
 - In French
 - In your mother tongue
 - In English

4.1.3. During these interactions, did you only gather information, or did you also provide information to other people?

4.2. For “everyday life in Bordeaux” research,

4.2.1. you were in touch with: (same options as 4.1.1)

4.2.3. During these interactions, did you only gather information, or did you also provide information to other people?

4.3. For “French language research”,

4.3.1. you were in touch with: (same options as 4.1.1)

4.3.3. During these interactions, did you only gather information, or did you also provide information to other people?

PHASE 2

Question 5

Since your arrival in Bordeaux, who did you / have you interact(ed) with? (you can tick several answers)

- People from the “Relations Internationales” (RI) from your home university
- People from Bordeaux “Relations Internationales” (RI)

- Specific teachers from Bordeaux in charge of tutoring Erasmus students
- Specific students from Bordeaux in charge of tutoring Erasmus students
- Erasmus students from your own country, who you had been in touch with before coming to Bordeaux
- Erasmus students from another country, who you had been in touch with before coming to Bordeaux
- Erasmus students you met in Bordeaux, who are from your own country
- Erasmus students you met in Bordeaux, who are from another country
- French students who study same subjects as you do
- French students who study different subjects from yours
- Foreign (non Erasmus) students who study same subjects as you do
- Foreign (non Erasmus) students who study subjects different from yours
- Students from your own country (non Erasmus) who study same subjects as you do
- Students from your own country (non Erasmus) who study subjects different from yours
- Non student people from your country, who live in France
- Non student French people
- Non student foreign people

Question 6

Tick the kind of activities you have taken part in since your arrival in Bordeaux:

- Collective activities, outside of classroom, related to your studies (for example, revision groups, working on a joint presentation, etc.)
- Activities to discover France, Bordeaux or the area (for example, excursion, visits, concerts, etc.)
- Activities to discover other cultures (European or nonEuropean)
- Activities related to your home culture (for example, national celebrations, typical meals, etc.)

Question 7

In your studies, when there were group activities and you had an opportunity to choose the members of the group, did you choose to work with:

- Erasmus students from different countries exclusively
- Students from your own country (Erasmus or not) exclusively
- French students exclusively
- Indifferently with French or foreign students

Question 8

8.1. In order to discover France, Bordeaux and its area, did you take part in (several answers possible):

- Activities organised by Erasmus associations
- Activities organised by student associations (not necessarily Erasmus ones)
- Activities organised by associations related to your country (for example: Turkish Association of Bordeaux)
- Activities organised by French associations or organisations (for example: Office du Tourisme, Association des amis de Mauriac, etc.)
- Activities organised by individuals who were:
 - Erasmus students
 - French people
 - People from your country
 - Other foreign people

8.2. For these activities, did you:

- only take part in them
- also took part in their organisation (partly or completely)

Question 9

When you had activities related to your own culture, were these activities (several answers possible):

- ☐ organised by associations related to your country
 - ☐ attended by people from your country exclusively
 - ☐ attended also by French or other foreign people
- ☐ organised by individuals from your country
 - ☐ attended by people from your country exclusively
 - ☐ attended also by French or other foreign people
- ☐ organised by yourself (on your own or with some help)
 - ☐ for people from your country exclusively
 - ☐ for French or other foreign people

Question 10

10.1. During your stay, what kind of accommodation do you live in:

- ☐ a "chambre universitaire"
- ☐ shared accommodation
- ☐ a flat/house where you live on your own

10.2. If you live in shared accommodation, apart from yourself, how many people live in this accommodation:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4 or more

10.3. your housemates are (several answers possible)

- ☐ Erasmus students from your country
- ☐ Erasmus students from another country
- ☐ Erasmus students from several other countries
- ☐ French students
- ☐ Students (non Erasmus) from your country
- ☐ Non students from your country
- ☐ Non students French people
- ☐ Non students foreign people

If they are students: do they study the same subject as you (YES/NO)

10.4. (If you live in a "Chambre Universitaire" or shared accommodation) what language do you speak in your place of residence (one answer only)

- ☐ French only
- ☐ Your mother tongue and French
- ☐ Your mother tongue, French and another foreign language
- ☐ A foreign language and French
- ☐ Foreign language(s) only

10.5. Is your place of residence what you were looking for when you first arrived?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no (if no, please say what you were looking for)

Question 11

Since your arrival, did you attend French classes

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes – if yes, where did you attend French classes:

- Compulsory classes in your curriculum
- Optional classes in your curriculum
- Classes in a language school / center
- Classes in an association

Question 12

12.1. Please tick the languages you use to communicate in the following every day life situations (several answers possible):

- To communicate when you attend classes,
 - You use French
 - You use your mother tongue
 - You use another foreign language
- When you communicate with other students in between classes:
 - You use French
 - You use your mother tongue
 - You use another foreign language
- When you go out with French people only
 - You don't do this activity
 - You use French
 - You use your mother tongue
 - You use another foreign language
- When you go out with French and foreign people
 - You don't do this activity
 - You use French
 - You use your mother tongue
 - You use another foreign language
- When you go out with foreign people only
 - You don't do this activity
 - You use French
 - You use your mother tongue
 - You use another foreign language
- When you are in French shops or services
 - You don't do this activity
 - You use French
 - You use your mother tongue
 - You use another foreign language
- When you do sports
 - You don't do this activity
 - You use French
 - You use your mother tongue
 - You use another foreign language

12.2. In your everyday life, can you think of other situations in which you always speak French? please give a list.

Question 13

In your daily activities, did you favour situations where you had an opportunity to speak French?

- Yes
- No

Question 14

During your stay, did you discuss French language issues?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes – if yes, who with?
 - ☐ People (teacher / learners) from the French classes you attended
 - ☐ Erasmus students from your country
 - ☐ Erasmus students from other countries
 - ☐ French students who study same subjects as you
 - ☐ French students who study subjects different from yours
 - ☐ Non Erasmus students from your country
 - ☐ Non students people from your country
 - ☐ Non students French people
 - ☐ Non students foreign people

Question 15

These language issues were related to:

- ☐ The meaning of some words or expressions
- ☐ Some grammar structures
- ☐ Language use in context: which words or structures to use according to the situation (who you're talking with, what you're talking about, etc.)
- ☐ Means to interpret what the aim of the conversation is / what the person you're talking to is after

Question 16

During your stay, did you use means to adapt what you were saying to the situation?

- ☐ Yes – if yes, what means did you use (please give examples)
- ☐ No

Question 17

During your stay, when communicating in French, did you happen to use the following strategies:

1. Ask yourselves questions about the status of the person you were talking to, in order to adapt your language.
2. Wonder how to organise what you wanted to say (what are you going to say or not, and in which order?)
3. Use your mother tongue or another foreign language to get around a problem in French language.
4. Ask the person you're talking to to rephrase something you didn't understand.
5. Rephrase something the person you're talking with said, in order to make sure you understood.
6. Rephrase something you said, in order to make sure the person you're talking with understands you.
7. Use gestures and facial expressions to understand what the other person is saying.
8. Use the context (where you are, who you are with, what you are talking about, what you already know about it) to guess the meaning of some words or sentences.
9. Use gesture, facial expressions or objects around you in order to get people to understand you better.
10. During a conversation, check with someone if a word or an expression you already know is appropriate in this situation.
12. During a conversation, when you come across a new word or expression, ask if it can be used in any context or situation.

12. Avoid using a certain word or structure because you are not sure it is appropriate in the situation.
13. None of these strategies.

Question 18

Did you discuss these strategies with anyone?

Yes – if yes, who with (open question)

No

Question 19

If you had been offered to work on these strategies as part of a support programme for learning French for Erasmus students, would you have taken part?