

Spoken Interaction in the French as a Foreign Language classroom in Malta: Learner responses elicited by teachers' questioning patterns¹

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Abstract

This study investigates the state of health of the spoken component in the teaching and learning of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Malta, positing that this may throw some light on the nature of foreign language (FL) pedagogical methods employed locally. A review of research conducted on the practice of the spoken skill by Maltese learners of French is supported by a study of questioning techniques employed by FFL teachers and their effect on the quality of learners' spoken participation in class. Modern language pedagogy values practice of the spoken skill by L2 learners. The language teacher as interaction facilitator needs to master strategies based on asking direct, specific, open-ended questions which may trigger replies that go beyond single-word answers. Using Bloom's taxonomy ensures that through their questioning, teachers engage learners in different cognitive processes. The analysis is based on a corpus of 16 transcribed FFL lessons delivered in two Maltese secondary schools, studied by means of Natural Language Processing (NLP), with a focus on questions, classified according to the types of responses they generate. The corpus is tagged with a tokenizer for French and another one for Maltese. The platform used for collocation searches and statistical calculations in the multilingual corpus is the Sketch Engine corpus management toolkit. Identification of grammatical categories mostly used by learners is carried out. Results confirm a rather traditional tendency in these

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classes, with the teacher as dominant figure, and a significant imbalance in the distribution of teacher and learner talk. Teachers frequently ask closed questions about word/phrase meaning and meta-language. Classroom verbal exchanges tend to involve lower order cognitive processes. Grammatical categories used in learner talk are predominantly heads of phrases, with very limited expansion. An improvement in the quality of classroom exchanges is warranted. Teacher training should go beyond theoretical knowledge of Bloom's taxonomy, to include practice of efficient questioning strategies that may help learners produce longer stretches of L2 talk and develop their thinking skills. Not much progress seems to have been achieved in recent years regarding the practice of speaking in the FFL classroom; a culture change in the FL teaching scenario seems to be necessary to allow for advancement.

Keywords: Speaking skill / teachers' questions / learner responses / learner participation / cognitive processes / utterance expansion

Introduction

The aim of this study is to describe features of the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Malta, in an attempt to understand which pedagogical practices are employed by teachers in this context, vis-à-vis principles upheld by current methodological theory, such as those of action-based learning and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). What this study is particularly interested in is to gauge the veracity of a shared, not to say widespread impression that the teaching of FFL in Malta may still be rooted in traditional methods, that risks producing an imbalance among the learners' different language skills and competencies, and to gradually lessen, if not kill, learners' interest in the language and motivation for furthering their studies in it. If L2 teaching in this context were really not in line with present-day methodological principles, then we would expect to find, in our observation, elements that would be more or less reminiscent of traditional pedagogy, such as a teacher-centred approach, lack of practice of the oral skill, and an overemphasis on grammar.

The approach adopted in order to build this description is two-fold: first, a literature review is undertaken of recent studies carried out on the local FFL teaching and learning scenario, in particular, those dealing with classroom interaction and the treatment reserved for the spoken component in lessons of French. This aims to summarize findings and conclusions, thus sketching a partial picture of salient characteristics of the context under study. Secondly, a corpus-based study of classroom interaction in two Maltese secondary

schools is intended to reveal further information about prevailing teaching methods that are resorted to in the teaching of French L2.

The French language in the Maltese educational system

In bilingual Malta, learners aged ten to eleven, normally speakers of Maltese and English since their early childhood, choose a foreign language that they study for the duration of their secondary school cycle, up until the age of 16. Although taking up one foreign language is mandatory, as per learners' educational entitlement in Malta, learners can freely choose from a range of languages offered for study. This range is wider in public schools, and more restricted in Catholic and independent, fee-paying schools. The most popular language is by far Italian, which is comprehensible, given the geographical vicinity of Malta and Italy, many parents' knowledge of the language, and easier exposure to this language through the availability of Italian television and music on local media. French, for a long time the second most widely chosen language, is fast losing popularity, especially in favour of Spanish, which enjoys the general public's more positive attitudes. Studies are needed to understand why French is faring less well in enjoying parents' and students' favour, especially to gain information about whether teaching methods used in the FFL scenario may be perceived as unengaging or ineffective by the receiving body of learners. If such were the case, remedies may be possible.

As regards assessment, learners studying French and any other foreign language and subject normally sit for national Secondary Education Certificate examinations at the end of their secondary cycle. Possessing a pass at a number of such examinations enables learners to further their studies at post-secondary institutions. For entry into institutions preparing for University courses, learners need a pass in Maltese, English, Mathematics, one Science subject, and at least another two subjects, which may be (a) foreign language(s) or other subjects from a wide array of possibilities. The current French examination is in part rather traditional in its setup, with formal grammar exercises, a dictation, and only 20 percent of the total mark being allotted to the oral examination, which includes a picture description, apart from an exchange about personal information and a role play. Other components of the examination include exercises on a culture syllabus that learners study by heart, a listening and a reading comprehension, and a short and a long writing task. Naturally, the examination setup has its wash-back effect on the style of teaching adopted in schools.

This examination is currently being phased out, as a learning-outcomes based programme is gradually being introduced in schools, with equal importance given to reading, writing, listening and speaking. The spoken component will now clearly cover both spoken interaction and spoken production (as in presentations). It is hoped that teachers will adapt well to the new system and give these skills their due importance. The next section will present research findings depicting how the oral component has been found to be dealt with in different classes.

Studies on the spoken component in 21st century local French L2 classes

Two of the basic characteristics of spoken interaction, namely cooperation and competition, are the focus of Micallef (2003), as she investigates how they feature in learners' speech within the local French as a Foreign Language (FFL) teaching and learning scenario. The empirical study involves eight fifth formers taking part, in pairs, in two audio-recorded and transcribed role plays, one a casual conversation between two friends on each party's present and future endeavours, and the second one involving reaching a compromise after a disagreement. The same role plays are also carried out by two native speakers of French, for comparability. Micallef finds that cooperation is lacking in the Maltese learners' spoken production: answers to the interlocutor's questions are brief and do not provide the requested information. Discourse markers that may confirm attention, interest or positive evaluation are not used. There are few instances when speakers help each other by suggesting a word or phrase, and interactions produced are in general strikingly brief when compared to those of the native speakers. Competition is very characteristic of the latter's exchanges, but is absent from the learners' role plays as they do not willingly strive to grab speech turns for themselves. Instead, they ask many questions in an attempt to pass the turn to their interlocutor. They produce frequent hesitation, simple 'yes' or 'no' answers, and interruptions and overlap are virtually non-existent in their speech. Interviewed learners consider problematic their lack of vocabulary, interference from Italian, and verb conjugation. They think they need to go for accuracy rather than fluency, and wish to have more exposure to spoken French and more frequent discussions in class. Through a limited number of interviews and questionnaires, teachers point towards lack of time to practise the oral enough in class, and state that when they assess learners' speech they mostly correct pronunciation, *liaison*, structure, and intonation. They claim they need (to make) more time for the oral skill, longer and more frequent

lessons, smaller classes, and that the spoken language needs to be given more importance in examinations.

Learners' performance in using communication strategies needed for three speech acts, namely refusing an invitation, contradiction and dodging a clear reply, is analysed by Farrugia (2006). Three pairs of first year sixth form students of Advanced Level French and three pairs of third year Bachelor of Education (French) students in total produce 18 role plays, revolving around the three mentioned speech acts. In spite of the advanced stage of the learners' education in French, the audio-recorded and transcribed role plays sound artificial, speakers are too slow and uncomfortable, waiting passively for their turn to speak, so that interruptions and overlap are in this case too very rare. Long pauses are made to search for words. Some students' performance is however clearly better than that of others.

A comparative approach is adopted in Bondin (2014) vis-à-vis spoken interaction performance in role plays carried out by a number of pairs of A1 and B1/B2 learners of French, as well as between a pair of native speakers. Bondin concludes that generally speaking, spoken production is not sufficiently developed for both learner categories, although there is naturally a noticeable improvement in the sixth formers' performance compared to that of the A1 learners. All role plays produced by the learners however manifest a number of shortcomings according to the level expected at each respective stage of learning. Three role play titles revolved around an argument between spouses, a casual conversation at a bus stop, and a transaction between client and shopkeeper in a boutique. Bondin identifies lack of vocabulary as one of the major barriers to a natural style of speech, leading to long pauses, hesitation to take speech turns, absence of interruptions and spontaneity, and lack of competition even in the quarrel, apart from great difficulty in choosing between formal and informal forms of address, and a general lack of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies. Learners were seen to be very tense while taking part in the interactions, leading Bondin to recommend that teachers significantly increase opportunities for their learners to engage in spoken interaction in class, and that they train their learners to develop sociolinguistic and pragmatic abilities for L2 interpersonal communication. Bondin (2020) stresses pronunciation difficulties encountered by Year 10, Sixth form and University students of French, and again attributes this to lack of practice of the oral component.

Gauci (2016) builds a transcribed corpus of 16 FFL lessons given by two teachers in two secondary schools, in a study aimed to identify functions of code-switching in this context. She also strives to decide, on the basis of her analysis, whether the extensive code-switching witnessed in the corpus serves as a useful instrument or an obstacle in L2 learning. Gauci finds code-switching to be omnipresent at both inter- and especially intra-sentential levels, and concludes that code-switching helps learners understand better and participate more in the lessons, and is a useful tool in mixed-ability classes. This is also confirmed by the two participant teachers, who were interviewed post-observation, and who claimed that if they impose exclusive target-language environments in their classes, learners end up feeling uneasy, lost and demotivated. The study however indicates code-switching as a potentially dangerous reality if it is allowed to cause under-exposure to the target language by allowing the L1 to occupy a dominant position in the L2 classroom. This study's statistical calculations do in fact point out that a large portion of all words produced in the classroom, by both teachers and learners, are in the L1. One important calculation proves that classroom interaction is dominated by the teacher. Gauci recommends the use of more open-ended questions by the teachers, so as to encourage longer replies from the learners, that teachers give less information themselves, resorting more to elicitation, and that they receive training on the classroom language distribution issue. Bezzina & Gauci (2018) expand on the sociolinguistic and pedagogical implications emanating from the analysis of this corpus, and stress, on the one hand, the dominance of teacher talk and the extreme brevity of learner interventions, and, on the other hand, the finding of the L1 being statistically proven to be the dominant language in the French L2 classroom. Learners' verbal input in the L2 is thus once again shown to be minimal.

In a study about the situation of the oral component in FFL teaching locally, Zammit (2018) observes 40 mostly audio-recorded and transcribed lessons, focusing on classroom practices and verbal interaction between students and teachers. Her results show that practice of the oral skill is largely neglected, in favour of a more formal teaching approach, where learners spend a considerable amount of time working on grammar and practice exercises in writing. Learners have their "parole sur commande" (Zammit, 2018: 228), and only intervene on teachers' prompts determining when, for how long, and about what they have to speak. They rarely have the opportunity to develop the spoken skill by producing a variety of speech acts, and do not produce chunks of speech that may be assessed by the teacher for their sake and

attract feedback that may lead to improvement in spoken production. The classroom is organised in a traditional manner, with the teacher managing space as the only mobile person in class, virtually enjoying a monopoly over classroom talk. Very little scope is created for collaborative work. The teacher tries to engage learners through constant questioning, but learners' reactions are expected to be brief. Thus the oral present in class is a type of oral used as a medium to convey information, not practised as an object of study in its own right. The situation in four observed Subject Proficiency Assessment programme classes, reserved for lower-achieving language learners, where equal importance is meant to be given to speaking, listening, reading and writing, is seen as largely reflecting what happens in four classes following the standard SEC syllabus. There is little conformity with action-based learning principles and the CEFR: teaching is far from being task-based, does not involve projects and is not organised according to CEFR level descriptors. Through questionnaires, learners express their wish to have more opportunity to speak, to listen to and interact with natives in activities beyond the classroom, and feel that spoken communication may be important later on in their life. Teacher questionnaires reveal that educators have a very vague idea of the action-based approach; they claim to follow a communicative approach, when in fact their teaching involves few activities geared towards the spoken component.

Overall, these various studies, based on recordings and observations carried out in different schools and diverse educational sectors, at different levels of the learning of French, seem to converge in the rather worrying picture they draw of local FFL teaching patterns, insofar as practice of the spoken language is concerned. Our aim is now to verify whether a study of Maltese teachers' questioning techniques and their effects on learners' answers could manage to throw more light on the nature of classroom communication, and whether it would corroborate previous findings or indicate a more positive state of affairs.

Questioning, an ever-present verbal activity in the language classroom

Spoken interaction in the language classroom, and in any classroom for that matter, involves a great number of questions asked by the teacher with the aim of obtaining a verbal response from the learners (Brown, 2006). According to Richards (2003), question-answer exchanges constitute the most frequently observed interactional activity in an English L2 class. These exchanges strive to engage learners in the discussion taking place in class, in

line with the present-day pedagogical principle that social interaction in the language classroom context promotes learning (Bange, 1996). Contemporary language methodology recommends the practice of spoken production in the L2 class: for several decades student-centred approaches have been favoured, in an attempt to move away from a model of the teacher as dominant figure, monopolising discourse (Perrenoud, 1991, Dolz & Schneuwly, 1998). It is therefore very important to understand which technical practices create interaction in class, and one of the main actions which can most potentially stimulate interaction in class is precisely teachers' questioning (Konen, 2017). This study deals with the types of questions used by French L2 teachers in their lessons and analyses the impact that these different types of questions have on the length and complexity of learners' responses.

From a perspective which values learners' verbal participation in class, the teacher should assume a role of interaction facilitator, showing mastery of questioning strategies based on frequent, direct and specific questions, especially open questions which may efficiently elicit responses going beyond single-word interventions by the learners. It is also believed that modelling questions according to Bloom's taxonomy of six cognitive levels involved in efficient learning may ensure that teachers target different cognitive processes through their questioning (The Teaching Centre, 2020).

Questions are an essential tool in the teaching process, and can foster learners' curiosity and instil in them a wish to know more. By answering questions, learners are actively involved in the learning process and experience. Questions also play an important role in the development of critical thinking (Dumteeb, 2009), aiding the creation of abilities and attitudes necessary for rigorous reflection which can help learners reach specific objectives, and analyse facts in order to pass judgments. Asking questions can challenge learners to define and justify their arguments through critical thinking (Limbach & Waugh, 2005). In the language classroom, most questions asked aim to encourage learners to actively participate in learning while at the same time practising the target language through spoken interaction (Johnson, 1995).

The different cognitive levels in Bloom's taxonomy from the point of view of questioning

Bloom's taxonomy establishes a sequential hierarchy describing six learning stages, ranging from the most elementary to the most complex. The version

being used here is the revision of Bloom’s somewhat static notion of “educational objectives” as in Anderson, Krathwohl et al. (2001), which gives a more dynamic conception of Bloom’s classification of types of thinking.

Remembering is the lowest level of the cognitive process but is necessary for all higher order levels. As illustrated in Example 1, taken from document 14 of the corpus upon which this study is based (for Transcription conventions see Appendix 1), at the remembering level (Knowledge in Bloom’s original terminology), questions are asked to check learners’ ability to recall concepts already learned, for example word meaning.

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|---|--|
| <p>Ex. 1 doc#14 T: issa ejja narawhom waħda waħda / per eżempju / *de* tfisser “of” normalment / qed naqblu? / u jekk ikollok eżempju l-verb *partir* jew *venir* / x’ inhu *partir*? L: “to leave”</p> | <p>T: now we’re going to see them one by one / for example / *de* means “of” normally / agreed? / and if you have for example the verb *partir* or *venir* / what is *partir*? L: “to leave”</p> |
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At the Understanding level (Comprehension in Bloom’s terminology) the learner has to go beyond simple knowledge, to understand concepts learned. In order to answer questions asked, the learner therefore needs to interpret facts and understand the meaning of information given to him. Among the verbs used for Understanding questions, one finds *describe*, *rephrase*, *relate* and *explain*.

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|---|---|
| <p>Ex. 2 doc#4 T: *oui / et donc qui parle dans cette vidéo? // qui parle? L1: une fille*</p> | <p>T: *yes / and therefore who is speaking in this video? // who is speaking? L1: a girl*</p> |
|---|---|

At the Applying level learners are required to apply acquired knowledge to diverse situations and to solve new problems. Some possible instructions at this level are *solve*, *choose*, *determine*, *use*, *interpret*, *show* and *relate*.

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|---|---|
| Ex. 3 doc#1 T: *cinquante* tajjeb / u bil-mod l-iehor kif ngħidha? / il-ħamsa neqsin għaxra L1: *il est cinq heures* | T: *fifty* good / and in the other way how do I say it? it is ten to five L1: *it is five o'clock* |
|---|---|

At the Analysing level the learner needs to be able to break down acquired knowledge into smaller parts, and to apply them to different situations. Verbs which are often associated with this level are *analyse why, classify, put in the right order and support your arguments*.

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| Ex. 4 doc#3 T: mela x'għandu stramb / mhux tas-soltu / dan il-verb? L1: għandu per eżempju tal-*vous / vous vous levez* /// u tan-*nous / nous nous levons* | T: so what is there that isn't normal / unusual / with this verb? L1: it has for example for the *vous / vous vous levez* /// and for the *nous / nous nous levons* |
|--|--|

Evaluating is one of the highest levels in Bloom's hierarchy of learning stages and encourages learners to pass judgments on the value of an idea, a particular experience, a solution, a method, and so on. The criteria for judging whether the object under examination is efficient or correct may be provided by the learners themselves or may be provided to them. Evaluating requires ability in all previous categories. An Evaluating question does not lead to any single correct answer. In order to bring learners to pass personal judgment on something, the teacher may ask them to *judge, choose, estimate, support an argument and predict situations*.

Ex. 5 (No example of Evaluating was found in our corpus of French lessons)
Example of an Evaluating question taken from : http://www.formablog.fr/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/6_niveaux_de_la_taxonomie_de_bloom.pdf: "Mention the advantages and disadvantages of Bloom's taxonomy"

Creating is the level that can mostly foster critical thinking by the learners. It encourages learners to use their creativity to combine different components of acquired knowledge stemming from different sources, in order to create something new, an original product integrating different elements: their own ideas, their previous knowledge, and their experiences. Instructions at this level may be based on verbs such as *create, construct, formulate, develop, plan, conceive and imagine*.

Ex. 6 (No example of Creating questions was found in our corpus of French lessons)
Example of a Creating question taken from http://www.formablog.fr/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/6_niveaux_de_la_taxonomie_de_bloom.pdf: “Construct assessment exercises using Bloom’s taxonomy.”

Kloss (1988) considers Bloom’s taxonomy as a framework which allows learners’ cognitive development to be analysed and evaluated, and recommends that teachers base their questioning techniques on Bloom’s model, by using a combination of cognitive levels so that their learners may practise critical thinking and fully develop their thinking skills.

A number of studies have used Bloom’s taxonomy to analyse the cognitive level of questions used by language teachers. Janice (1991), conducting her research in the context of English and Bahasa Indonesian lessons in Indonesian secondary schools, observes that even though the observed teachers tend to adopt a rather traditional teaching approach, it is possible to identify patterns based on higher order questioning in their pedagogical exchanges with their learners, and that teachers’ questions do not lead to imitation and repetitive answers. In contrast with these results, Dumteeb (2009) finds that questions asked by teachers of English in the Thai context are rarely of a type that could stimulate higher order thinking.

One of the objectives of this study is to analyse the questions of two Maltese teachers of French L2 by identifying the cognitive levels to which they correspond. The study also aims to evaluate the linguistic quality of learners’ answers elicited by the different types of questions. This would in turn allow us to test the statement in Richards & Rodgers (2001: 210), namely that “language learning is also believed to be motivating when students are focusing on something other than language, such as ideas, issues and opinions”.

Closed and open-ended questions in the language classroom

Wu (1993) classifies learners’ answers in two categories: on the one hand, restricted answers, limited to single words, or a few words, or very simple utterances, and, on the other hand, elaborate answers, containing at least two sentences linked by strategies ensuring cohesion and coherence.

Closed questions only allow for one or a limited number of possible answers, which are normally of the restricted type. They do not create space for free expression, but are usually used because the teacher is expecting an answer of a predefined nature and content, as in the case of total questions requiring “yes / no” answers. In example 7, the closed question explicitly proposes a choice of two possible answers, from which the learners only need to select the correct form:

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| <p>Ex. 7 doc#3 T: ... *profs* sibuha biex tispicča *les profs?* wieħed jew ħafna *profs*?</p> | <p>T: ... *profs* find it with what does *les profs* end ? one or many *profs*?</p> |
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Example 8 illustrates a closed question implicitly presuming a specific answer:

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| <p>Ex. 8 doc#0 T : issa rajniehom fejn ? où sont-ils ? kienu devant le... L : collège</p> | <p>T : now where did we see them? where are they? they were in front of the... L : school</p> |
|--|--|

An open-ended question gives learners the opportunity to produce more elaborate answers, and to express themselves freely on a specific topic. It is not restrictive and allows learners to use their own words, and to direct their intervention according to their initiative, since several different answers would be acceptable in this case. Open-ended questions push learners to reflect more, and in a creative manner, thus developing their critical thinking skills. In the long run this may make them more confident to provide answers to questions asked.

In example 9, the teacher asks open-ended questions after learners have listened to an audio recording used for a listening comprehension activity.

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| <p>Ex. 9. doc#5 T: *on va voir d'accord ? qu'est-ce que vous avez compris ? L : elle a des amis [...] L : elle est professeur [...]</p> | <p>doc#5 T: *we're going to see ok? what have you understood? L : she has friends [...] L : she's a teacher [...] L : she has travelled</p> |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| L : elle a voyagé | T : very well what does that mean?* |
| T : très bien qu'est-ce que ça signifie ?* | [...] |
| [...] | T : what else? |
| T : x'iktar ? | L : *she has two children* |
| L : *elle a deux enfants* | |

The example shows that learners are free to propose what they have understood using their own words, in such a way that even the vocabulary used by them can potentially be analysed and evaluated.

Problématique and research questions

Despite this consciousness of the potential benefits of question-answer exchanges, which, in the language classroom, often take the form of question-answer-feedback turns, it must be kept in mind that not all questions stimulate higher order thinking. Learners' level of thinking is intricately linked with the type of questions asked by the teacher. Bloom (1956) maintains that the ability to solve problems through critical thinking depends on higher order thinking, which can be taught through higher level questioning. Talebinezahd (2003) claims that the teacher can help develop learners' critical thinking skills by asking questions of the "why" and "how" type, which require learners to reflect critically and that they use more complex language to be able to provide the necessary answers. On the contrary, questions which simply require learners to remember previously acquired knowledge, which can be answered simply through a "yes" or a "no", or by mentioning precise facts or information, only lead to superficial thinking.

To investigate features of questions used by teachers of French with their groups of learners in the Maltese context, and their different effects, the study will attempt to address these three research questions:

- Do higher order questions lead to more elaborate answers than questions targeting knowledge and comprehension?
- Do open-ended questions effectively elicit more elaborate answers than closed questions?

- Are learners' response turns limited to minimal utterances or are they enriched with linguistic expansions in the form of adjectival and adverbial elements?

Research methods

The corpus

This study is based on the analysis of a corpus made up of 16 lessons of French as a foreign language, each of around 40 minutes' duration, given by two female teachers in a boys' and a girls' Maltese Church schools. Four lessons were delivered by each teacher at beginner level (first year of French studies, in Year 7) and four more at early A2 level (third year of French studies, in Year 9). The lessons were audio recorded and transcribed. Recordings and all other measures strictly followed ethical procedures.

The transcripts of the recorded lessons were analysed through the Sketch Engine corpus management system, after the multilingual corpus was tagged with the help of two tokenizers. The first one, described in Gatt & Ceplö (2013), was used for Maltese, while the tokenizer in the SpaCy library was used for French. Sketch Engine was chosen for digital processing of the corpus because of its robust performance as a tool facilitating the process of corpus creation and analysis, offering functions such as the computation of collocation statistics, and word sketches, including the identification of lexicogrammatical patterns.

Delimiting the sample of questions retained for the analysis

Questions were identified thanks to the Sketch Engine tool by running a search for the question mark symbol in the "concordance" command, which allowed us to isolate questions having an interrogative form, amounting to 823 instances in the corpus. Of these interrogative form questions, 253 were actually analysed according to their correspondence to the six cognitive levels in Bloom's taxonomy, and secondly, according to their closed or open-ended nature. This limitation to 253 questions is due to the fact that learners seem to consider as a question really soliciting an answer only the very final question in a teacher's turn, although a turn often contains more than one question, and sometimes a whole series of them. Questions preceding the last one in a turn are ignored by the learners, or in any case remain unanswered. The 253 analysed questions are therefore either questions produced by the teachers in

isolation, or the last question in a turn containing more than one question. Example 10 illustrates this selection method: from a series of seven questions, initially addressed to the whole group and later to a particular student (Mark, pseudonym), only the last one receives a verbal reaction from this student, and is thus included in our sample of analysed questions:

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| <p>Ex. 10. Doc#7 T: *alors / très bien* / mela *l'autre fois on a discuté le vocabulaire n'est-ce pas ? / aujourd'hui on va écouter le dialogue / ça va? * / orrajt ? mela /// *alors vous avez essayé les réponses ? // oui ou non ? / Mark vous avez essayé les réponses ? / Mark tu as répondu aux questions?*</p> <p>L1: tal-"oral"</p> | <p>T: *so / very well* / so *last time we discussed vocabulary right? / today we are going to listen to the dialogue / alright? * / ok? so /// *so have you tried the answers? // yes or no? / Mark have you tried the answers? / Mark have you answered the questions?*</p> <p>L1: of the "oral"</p> |
|---|---|

Usefulness of the digital corpus analysis

Apart from permitting the identification of interrogative form questions, through the search for the question mark symbol, digital analysis of the corpus also allowed us to separate questions asked by the teachers from those asked by the learners, so that the focus could be on the former, and this then led to a manual search of replies made by the learners, so that a word count could be performed for each answer.

Digital management of the corpus also facilitated the identification of grammatical categories mostly used by the learners, indicating whether they tend to limit their answers to the main elements or heads of phrases, or if they elaborate on their answers by including adjectives and adverbs. This was once again possible after isolating the learners' corpus from that of the teachers'. The corpus included fifteen learners who were identified as particular speakers (L1, L2, L3...), apart from learners who could not be identified from the audio recordings, and who, in the transcriptions, are simply marked as L. The learners' part of the corpus was isolated by typing L, L1, L2 and so on (up to L15) in the "Text type" field of the "Filter Context" menu. Since the corpus was tagged for the words' grammatical categories, it was possible to conduct searches for nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs through searches such as, in the case of adjectives: cql [tag="ADJ"]. s.speaker:

L, L1, L2, L3, ..., and furthermore to refine the search in order to obtain only French items for the different grammatical categories.

Limitations due to the digital corpus processing

Although the identification of the four above-mentioned grammatical categories was facilitated through the search for each category by the Sketch Engine tool, these categories had to be checked word by word in the retained sample, before giving any examples, because of several imperfect indications. For instance, mark-up at the word level, aiming to identify adjectives, results in the inclusion within this category of nouns such as *roman* (novel), *vélo* (bicycle), the adverb *beaucoup* (a lot) and the verbs *arrive* (arrive) and *fais* (does). These can be seen in the Sketch Engine screenshots in Appendix 2.

A second major limitation was due to the fact that questions were identified through a search for the question mark symbol. Not all questions are of interrogative form, and this meant that utterances functioning as questions but having a declarative or imperative form, had to be left out, in spite of the fact that their illocutionary force was that of demanding information. The analysis therefore had to be restricted to questions of interrogative form, notwithstanding our awareness that “question” and “interrogative” are not synonymous, the former being a hypernym to the latter.

Analysis of results

Teachers’ questions’ correspondence to Bloom’s cognitive levels

Table 1 shows that the corpus contains no instance of questions corresponding to the two highest cognitive levels - evaluating and creating. The number of questions per cognitive category gradually decreases as the categories become more demanding. The most frequent type of question is by far the lowest order category of Remembering (139 questions), followed by the second lowest type, Understanding (80 questions). There are few instances of Applying questions (26 questions) and extremely few examples of Analyzing (8 questions).

Table 1: Categories of teachers' questions asked in their French lessons

| | Question categories | Number of questions | Percentage |
|----|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Remembering | 139 | 55 |
| 2. | Understanding | 80 | 32 |
| 3. | Applying | 26 | 10 |
| 4. | Analyzing | 8 | 3 |
| 5. | Evaluating | 0 | 0 |
| 6. | Creating | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 253 | 100% |

Table 2 shows that as regards response length as a factor of more or less cognitively demanding questions, it seems that the higher the cognitive level of the questions, the higher the number of words in the learners' answers. The only exception is the Application category, for which learners systematically produce restricted answers.

Table 2: Average number of words in learners' answers per cognitive category

| | Question categories | Average number of words in learners' responses |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Remembering | 2.2 |
| 2. | Understanding | 2.9 |
| 3. | Applying | 1.76 |
| 4. | Analyzing | 5.25 |
| 5. | Evaluating (absent from the corpus) | 0 |
| 6. | Creating (absent from the corpus) | 0 |

A very evident trend in the data is that the vast majority of learners' answers, taking into consideration all cognitive categories, are brief or very brief. More elaborate answers are exceptional, but can appear even in the Remembering category. The maximum number of words per answer in the corpus is 14 words. Two examples of this were found, one in the Analyzing category (ex. 11), and the other one already within the Remembering type (ex. 12).

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Ex. 11. doc#3 T: mela l-verbi li jkollhom is-*se* fuq quddiem ikollhom tifsira differenti / x'inhi d-differenza bejn *je regarde la télé* u *je me regarde à la miroire*?</p> <p>L: l-ewwel wahda nara t-televixin u l-oħra nara lili nnifsi fil-mera</p> | <p>T: so the verbs that have the *se* in front of them have a different meaning / what is the difference between *I watch TV* and *I look at myself in the mirror*?</p> <p>L: the first one is I watch TV and the other one I see myself in the mirror</p> |
|--|--|

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Ex. 12. doc#9 T: issa / x'inhi *un bus par trente minutes? / un bus chaque trente minutes* / *chaque* tfisser "every" / *trente minutes* / xi =ġifieri?</p> <p>L1: ħa tasal kull "thirty minutes" il-"bus" / kull "thirty minutes" ħa tasal tal-linja</p> | <p>T: now / what is *a bus every thirty minutes? / a bus each thirty minutes / chaque* means "every" / *thirty minutes* / what does that mean?</p> <p>L1 : it's going to arrive every "thirty minutes" the "bus" / every "thirty minutes" it's going to arrive the bus (<i>dislocation structure</i>)</p> |
|--|---|

The Remembering category also contains a 10-word answer, and seven replies each of 6 or 7 words, as in example 13, which is made up of only two full words, surrounded by grammatical words:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Ex. 13 doc#15 T: issa fuq il-"whiteboard" ktibtilkom dawn iż-żewġ affarijiet / *les objectifs du cours d'aujourd'hui / d'accord*? / ħa nibdew nagħmlu ftit hekk qabel kull "lesson" / *qu'est-ce que ça signifie? / non n'écrivez rien / vous allez seulement écouter d'accord? / qu'est-ce que ça signifie les objectifs de la leçon*?</p> <p>L1: l-"objectives" ta' din il-"lesson"</p> | <p>T: now on the "whiteboard" I wrote these two things for you / *today's lesson objectives / ok*? we are going to start doing this little thing before every "lesson" / *what does that mean? / no don't write anything down / you are only going to listen ok? / what does that mean the lesson objectives*?</p> <p>L1 : the "objectives" of this "lesson"</p> |
|--|--|

The Understanding-oriented category of questions includes one occurrence of an 11-word answer, and 5 answers ranging from 6 to 9 words long, as in example 14, where the student produces his answer entirely in French:

| | |
|--|---|
| Ex. 14 doc#2 T: *et pourquoi est-ce qu'il lui a téléphoné*? L1: pour savoir ce qu'ils gagnent | T: *and why did he phone him*? L1: to know what they (can) win |
|--|---|

Within the Applying question category, learners' replies are systematically very brief, as the teacher asks learners to solve a problem and she usually targets that they provide a word or an expression. The longest answer of this type, which is moreover exceptional, is 6 words long (example 15), and follows a teacher's 30 word-long turn:

| | |
|--|--|
| Ex. 15 doc#1 T: *moins vingt* tajba imma hemmhekk għidtilkom / il-minutiera qegħda fuq it-"three" / it-"three" diġà daqq / l-erbgħa neqsin għoxrin mhux it-tlieta / kif se tiġi l-erbgħa neqsin għoxrin? A1: *il est quatre heures moins vingt* | P: *twenty to* that's correct but there I told you / the minute hand is on the "three" / it's already past "three" / it is twenty to four not three o'clock / what is it's twenty to four? A1: *il est quatre heures moins vingt* [it's twenty to four] |
|--|--|

Apart from the 14-word answer reproduced above as example 11, the Analyzing category contains one answer with 8 words, and several answers containing 5 or 6 words, as in example 16:

| | |
|--|---|
| Ex. 16 doc#3 T: ok u x'izjed apparti li jispiċċaw bil-"er"? L1: għandhom is-*se* fl-"infinitif" | T: right and what else apart from the fact that they end in "er"? L1: they have the *se* in the *infinitive* |
|--|---|

As expected, in the first three categories, responses are predominantly one, two or three words long, as in examples 17, 18 and 19:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ex. 17 [<i>Remembering</i>] doc#7 T: *OÙ SONT* / *qu'est-ce que cela signifie*? L1: fejn | T: *OÙ SONT* / what does that mean*? L1: where |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|--|
| Ex. 18 [<i>Understanding</i>] doc#7 T: kiekun tghid hekk tkun qed tirreferi għal "pullover" partikolari // *un pull / de quelle couleur* ? L2: *bleu* | T: if you said that you would be referring to a particular "pullover" // *a pullover / of which colour*? A2: *blue* |
|--|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Ex. 19 [<i>Applying</i>] doc#7 T: tini çans / inti għandek *un* *une* *des* / imbagħad għandek *le* *la* jew *les* / dawn “definite” mela ngħid / xi jfissru? / “the” / issa inti meta tkun qed titkellem tgħid “the lady is wearing the pullover jew a pullover”?</p> <p>L: “a”</p> | <p>T: one moment / you have *un* *une* *des* [a (m.sg.) a (f. sg.) some] / and then you have *le* *la* or *les* [the (m. sg.) the (f. sg.) or the (pl.)] / these are “definite” so I say / what do they mean? “the” / now when you are speaking do you say “the lady is wearing the pullover” or “a pullover”?</p> <p>L: *a*</p> |
|---|--|

Length of answers provided in response to open and closed questions

Of the 253 questions making up the analysed sample, closed questions outnumber open-ended questions by far, with 221 closed questions and only 32 open-ended ones, at a ratio of 7.4 to 1.1.

On average, fewer words are produced by learners in their replies to closed questions, compared with the number of words uttered in response to open-ended questions, as illustrated in Table 3. Raw figures are subsequently calculated in proportion to a hypothetical amount of 100 questions for both question types, which allows a clearer comparison of the word numbers for replies following open or closed questions.

Table 3. Number of words in learners’ responses to teachers’ closed and open-ended questions

| | Question type | Number of questions | Actual total number of words in learners’ responses | Average number of words per response |
|----|----------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | Closed questions | 221 | 481 | 2.2 |
| 2. | Open-ended questions | 32 | 118 | 3.7 |
| | | | | |
| | Question type | Proportional calculation | Number of words in learners’ responses | |
| 1. | Closed questions | per 100 questions | 218 | |
| 2. | Open-ended questions | per 100 questions | 369 | |

The difference between the total number of words in responses to closed and open questions, calculated in relation to the hypothetical amount of 100 for each category of questions, lies at a ratio of 4.4 to 7.4.

8.3 Predominant grammatical categories in learners' responses

As explained in the above presentation of research methods, identification of grammatical categories that learners use predominantly in their spoken production was carried out with the help of Natural Language Processing, through searches for parts of speech in the learners' isolated section of the corpus, following Part Of Speech tagging of the whole corpus.

Table 4 shows raw figures and rates per million, calculated by the Sketch Engine tool, of the four grammatical categories retained for numerical comparison in the learners' section of the 16 lesson corpus, namely: nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

Table 4. Frequencies of Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs in the corpus

| Grammatical Categories | Raw figures | Numbers per million |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Nouns | 600 | 34,041 |
| Verbs | 369 | 20,935 |
| Adjectives | 86 | 4,879 |
| Adverbs | 68 | 3,858 |

Grammatical categories that appear commonly in learners' speech are heads of phrases, rarely enriched with expansions. Nouns and verbs are significantly more numerous than adjectives and adverbs, as is demonstrated in Table 4. Some adverb phrase modifiers and clause modifiers could not be numerically accounted for because of the possibility that they contain elements belonging to different grammatical categories.

The above figures include grammatical categories in all languages used in the corpus. When the search is refined to exclude non-French items, the figures in Table 5 are obtained. A comparison between the raw figures in Tables 4 and 5 clearly shows the extent of code-switching in these FFL classrooms, and that learners often answer teachers' questions, at least partially, in their L1.

Table 5. Frequencies of French Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs in the corpus

| Grammatical Categories | Raw figures | Numbers per million |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Nouns | 224 | 39,437 |
| Verbs | 102 | 17,958 |
| Adjectives | 56 | 9,859 |
| Adverbs | 32 | 5,634 |

Other factors further reduce the actual number of adverbs and adjectives indicated in these first counts. As an example, of the 56 French adjectives identified by Sketch Engine as having been produced by learners, 3 were parts of compound nouns (*site web, jeux vidéo, téléphone portable*), 4 were instances of the terms *Vrai / Faux* while the class was correcting the outcome of a True / False exercise, 9 were cardinal numerical adjectives (*quatorze, trente, neuf, cent...*), 3 were ordinal numerical adjectives (*dix-huitième, troisième, quatrième*), and 4 examples were occurrences of the interrogative adjective *quel / quelle*. Adjectives may also appear for metalinguistic purposes, (such as in the reference to *verbes pronominaux* and *impersonnel*). As already mentioned above, there were also a number of erroneous POS indications in the Sketchengine lists. This leaves the very meagre total of 21 adjectives that can potentially truly enrich the noun phrases containing the nouns which they qualify, as in *personnage inconnu, un ville très intéressant, un ville beau, gros bisous...* Moreover, when the form of the adjective is morphologically correct as regards gender and number agreement, it is often because the adjective is part of a phrase read from the textbook. Several of these 21 adjectives were moreover repeated several times. Thus, spontaneous and varied use of modifier expansions is extremely limited in this corpus.

Interpretation of results

The first striking evidence emanating from the analysis of this corpus, is the conspicuous predominance of teacher talk: teachers produce 84.3% of the total number of words in a sample of twelve of the sixteen lessons in the corpus, whereas the group of learners together produce only 15.7% of the total number of words in the same sample. Consequently, if, like Konen (2017), teachers' questions are to be considered as one of the principal forces capable of fostering interaction in the classroom, at the same time, it has to be acknowledged that in our context of study, questioning only gives rise to a

crippled form of interaction, in which learners only manage to punctuate the teacher's speech by snatches of brief interventions often limited to single words or to an average totalling fewer than four or five words.

The spoken interaction produced in these classes restricts the oral component to a medium or tool for communicating instructions and explanations, rather than having the oral as an object of study for its own sake. In the 16 analysed lessons, the spoken competence only appears once as a specific objective, in the form of a preparation for the picture interpretation exercise, which moreover does not really give rise to sustained interaction. This lesson takes place immediately before the examination period, and in it the teacher is observed proposing a protocol to the learners, for them to follow strictly as regards expressions to use, in such a way that a uniform, orchestrated production is to be expected from all learners. This is far removed from the oral as objective, with its different genres, styles, and strategies which would be practised so that learners could be prepared for spontaneous interaction. This type of oral unfortunately does not seem to be a part of the teachers' priorities.

The oral present in this corpus is thus a utilitarian type of medium, used to convey information, and often excluding feedback on the learners' mode of expression (Dumais & al., 2015), from which students could derive learning. It is true that the oral as a medium can also serve as a tool enhancing learning, and can offer an opportunity for spoken expression, however it fails to allow learners' sufficient development of competences specifically related to the spoken component. Likewise, it does not allow scope for the teachers to provide advice based on the observation and analysis of spoken production, which would aim to improve the quality and efficacy of learners' spoken performance (Zammit, 2008).

An ideal approach would be to practise in class both the oral as a tool and as an objective in its own right, in an intelligent balance put together by the teacher according to his or her learners' needs. In this way, the teacher would equip learners with interactional competence leading to communicative success within the framework of specific and socially significant tasks.

A further shortcoming of the observed discourse pattern is that questions asked by the two participating teachers fail to really stimulate higher order cognitive activity. Our results thus conform more closely to the data gathered

by Dumteeb (2009) in the Thai context, contrary to the more encouraging results obtained by Janice (1991) in Indonesian secondary schools. The two participant teachers' questions hardly call for learners' opinions, judgments or synthetic reasoning, which goes against conclusions reached by Johnson (1995) as well as Richards & Rodgers (2001), namely that questions encouraging learners to participate actively in learning also stimulate them for practising the target language, through sustained exchanges.

In actual fact, the corpus contains a number of open questions of the "why" and "how" type, among which several tens of questions aiming to bring the learners to develop initial insufficient replies, the type of questions that Wu (1993) classifies as "probing questions". However, in the case of these questions, two things may be observed: first, most of the answers to such questions remain brief, as if the learners have become caught in virtually fixed routine discourse patterns dominated by teacher talk. Secondly, two possible interpretations may be made of the reasons why the majority of teachers' questions remain unanswered: either learners fail to take a turn on transitional places created by teachers wishing to give them the floor, or else the teachers themselves break the rule which implicitly accompanies the act of asking a question, namely the need to allow the addressee time to reflect so as to come up with an answer. In the corpus, there are numerous cases of the teachers themselves providing answers immediately after having asked a question. Very often, these self-replies end by a tag requesting learners' confirmation, but even this almost invariably does not bring about any reaction from the learners. In reality, in such instances teachers do not really seem to be expecting a verbal reaction, as they are taken up by their effort to utter explanatory statements uninterruptedly, in a style more closely reminiscent of a monologue than an interactional exchange. As can be seen in example 10 above, of the seven so-called questions in the teacher's turn, only the last two questions are considered as such by the students; the first five, which are all confirmation requests, form part of the teacher's continuous verbal production.

On the basis of the observed data, the three research questions presented in this study are more or less answered in the affirmative. As regards the sorting of teachers' questions according to Bloom's taxonomy, the average number of words in learners' replies is noticeably higher in the case of questions requiring Analyzing (5.25 words) compared to the number of words produced in the case of replies to questions testing Remembering (2.2

words) or Understanding (2.9 words), even if this gradual increase is contradicted by the length of replies to Applying questions (1.8 words). In the latter case, the particular brevity of answers provided could be due to the fact that the teacher asks learners to apply a feature under scrutiny to a specific context, and learners most often produce single-word answers to indicate the result of their application, as in example 19 above. In general, the data indicates the importance of integrating question types which can involve and help develop higher order thinking skills.

A similar observation can be made as regards the distinction between closed and open-ended questions. Although replies to open-ended questions remain predominantly of the restricted type, a slight improvement in the average number of words is noted when they are used, with an average of 3.7 words produced in reply to open-ended questions, in contrast with 2.2 words in the case of closed questions. The striking imbalance emanating from the much higher number of closed questions asked would need to be abated.

The restricted-type answers hardly contain expansion through the addition of adjectival or adverbial elements. The very evident gap between the rate of occurrence of nouns and verbs, often heads of phrases, vis-à-vis adjectival and adverbial expansions, means that grammatical patterns characterising learners' spoken production tend to be limited to minimal utterances, and more often to minimal noun phrases.

Conclusion

At the end of this study, a first comment needs to be made regarding the methodological approach adopted for this study. A positive assessment may be made of the use of Sketch Engine as a Natural Language Processing toolkit applied to our corpus. It facilitated the identification of questions having an interrogative form and the classification of different grammatical categories, as well as the search for particular terms. Although a certain amount of checks were necessary following the digital searches, to make up for imperfections in the machine Part Of Speech tagging, it is doubtful whether, without the aid of Sketch Engine, a study concerning all questions in a corpus of such a scale would have been practicable in terms of time and effort.

It was mentioned above that French is fast losing the popularity it enjoyed in the past among Maltese learners, and that ideally, studies should be carried out to understand the cause of this phenomenon. One possible reason for this

disenchantment is that learners may be ending up dissatisfied with the insufficient progress they would have been brought to make in speaking the language, and perhaps in other skills as well, at the end of five years of constant focus on form. SEC Examiners' reports have in fact pointed out the sad reality that learners know grammar rules, since they do well in the grammar exercises, but are unable to apply the rules in production tasks (Sammut & Bezzina, 2019). If it were the case that learners are feeling dissatisfied or demotivated because of the type of teaching taking place in class, the need for a change in practices used appears to be dire. However, we remain hopeful that the situation may gradually improve, since we know, through our contacts with key persons in the local FFL field, that a number of teachers, especially from the younger generation, but not only, have adapted beautifully to more modern L2 teaching principles and practices. It would be interesting to build a corpus of spoken interaction taking place in such teachers' classrooms, in order to be able to understand the mechanics of verbal exchanges and other activities taking place in their lessons, which may also lead to comparisons with the data already analysed.

The research works consulted in the literature review for their findings about characteristic features of spoken French in local classrooms all seem to point in the direction of quite traditional practices, with the teacher as central figure imparting grammatical and lexical knowledge to receptive students who are not encouraged to meaningfully and substantially participate in what would be a more balanced form of oral communication. Although, by its restricted sample size, each study is far from being representative of the local FFL teaching scenario, the similarities of results across the different research works does reflect a seemingly widespread situation, and more recent observations do not really differ from results obtained in the earlier years of the 21st century, indicating an unfortunately persistent phenomenon, possibly a vicious cycle of teachers reproducing what they themselves experienced as students. The teacher training milieu therefore would need to question whether it is managing to inculcate the badly needed culture of change in the newly qualified teachers it is training, by carrying out field studies about what is happening specifically in the classrooms of the younger generations of teachers.

This study leads us to draw up a rather bleak picture of the extent and quality of learners' spoken participation in the observed local FFL classrooms. While the number of participating teachers is extremely small and therefore

precludes any generalisation of results, it is feared that the observations made may be more or less indicative of verbal patterns in many Maltese foreign language classrooms, as it transpires from other classroom-based research dealing specifically with the spoken component in the case of French (Bondin, 2014, 2020; Zammit, 2018), and not only (see for instance Camilleri Grima and Caruana (2016) for the case of Italian).

Nonetheless, at times the corpus lets us perceive learners' interventions that instil some optimism regarding the possibility of improvement in answers typically provided by learners, as far as their degree of elaboration goes. In fact, a number of speech turns amounting to more than 10 words can be found in the corpus. Moreover, although it takes the form of very brief interventions, learners' verbal participation is not totally infrequent in the pedagogical exchange, contrary to students' reticence to participate noted by Wu (1993) in English as a Foreign Language classes in Hong Kong and by Dumteeb (2009) in the Thai context. The Maltese learners involved in this study do not seem to suffer from timidity or negative attitudes to an extent that would prohibit them from asking questions, or suggesting answers. At this stage, this is however not much more than an impression, which should be verified through a dedicated study concentrating on affective aspects linked to the act of answering teachers' questions.

The overall dominance of restricted answers however, indicates a need for measures to be taken in order to redress the situation. It is not enough that teachers receive theoretical training regarding the content of Bloom's taxonomy. Their initial and continuous professional training should integrate specific practice of questioning strategies aiming to encourage more elaborate answers from the linguistic and interactional points of view, answers which would also be of a higher cognitive level. It would likewise be important that teachers reflect upon the effect of finding a balance between allowing voluntary replies and questions nominating particular students. In classes where the traditional pedagogical exchange based on a question - answer - feedback format fails to give satisfactory results, increasing other interactional patterns needs to be explored, such as more frequent pair and group work. In order to avoid learner discouragement from verbal participation, it must naturally be ensured that a healthy atmosphere is created in the classroom, where errors are tolerated (though not ignored), and where there is a general feeling of mutual respect and ease.

This study calls for further research into the area. A corollary area of the topic may be explored, namely an analysis of questioning techniques according to Wu's taxonomy (1993). A corpus analysis undertaken from this perspective should allow us to describe teachers' reparatory questioning in those cases where an initial question remains unanswered or is insufficiently or inadequately answered. An evaluation of the degree of efficiency achieved by teachers' different questioning techniques, on the basis of their learners' verbal reactions, should bring us to identify those questioning strategies that are better suited to encourage linguistically and cognitively more elaborate answers from learners of foreign languages.

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Appendix 1

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

“...” : speech produced in English

... : speech produced in French

Normal : speech produced in Maltese

/, //, /// : pause – brief, medium, long

_____ : overlapping speech

bu- : interrupted words

da= : suppression of a phoneme or syllable, normally a feature of informality

? : interrogative intonation

Appendix 2

Sketch Engine screenshots of the search for a sample of adjectives

This screenshot shows a search result for the adjective 'roman' in Sketch Engine. The interface includes a search bar at the top with the query 'roman' and a list of 60 search results. Each result shows a document ID (e.g., doc#7), a snippet of text in Maltese, and the corresponding French word 'roman' with its part of speech (ADJ). The results are sorted by relevance, and the selected result (doc#8) is highlighted. A control bar at the bottom allows for selecting items on the page.

| Doc ID | Maltese Snippet | French Word | Part of Speech |
|--------|---|--------------|----------------|
| 48 | mhux dejjem tfiss- tal- personnel u | impersonnel | ADJ |
| 49 | kieku kienu QOSRA x' konna nghidu ? | petits | ADJ |
| 50 | ? donne - moi une réponse | blanc | ADJ |
| 51 | > une table eee blanc | blanc | ADJ |
| 52 | dil- " pattern " qatt m' ghamliniha | checked | ADJ |
| 53 | ? ces cinq personnes sont des membres de | même | ADJ |
| 54 | k ? hares lejn il- XXXXX | jeune | ADJ |
| 55 | eghdin nitkel- la bande inti m' ghandekx ktieb | eżatt | ADJ |
| 56 | ;jeune il est le plus petit xi gifieri ? | iżgar | ADJ |
| 57 | ' masculine " ta' folle flok qalina il adore les jeux | vidéos | ADJ |
| 58 | il est fou " he is crazy " orrajt ? jeux | vidéos | ADJ |
| 59 | he is crazy " orrajt ? jeux vidéos et | informatique | ADJ |
| 60 | ' " drums " afrikan | roman | ADJ |

This screenshot shows the KWIC (Key Word In Context) view for the search results. The search bar contains 'roman' and the results are displayed in a table format. The selected result (doc#15) is highlighted. The KWIC view shows the Maltese text snippet, the French word 'roman', and its part of speech (ADJ). A control bar at the bottom allows for selecting items on the page.

| Doc ID | Maltese Snippet | French Word | Part of Speech |
|--------|---|-------------|----------------|
| 81 | " in polite form " aħna mhux daqshekk | importanti | ADJ |
| 82 | xxejjajt it- " trick " magħna | BEAUCOUP | ADJ |
| 83 | imbagħad qegħdin nifhmu ? | gros | ADJ |
| 84 | kk ikollok " boy " u " girl " | cher | ADJ |
| 85 | ard " tista' tkun " postcard " ta' vera tistghu ssibu | stampa | ADJ |
| 86 | ok ? ovvjament li jimpurtani wkoll apparti li tkun | sabiha | ADJ |

