
**THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE.
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF TOPIC MANAGEMENT
BY ADOLESCENT LEARNERS OF FRENCH L2.**

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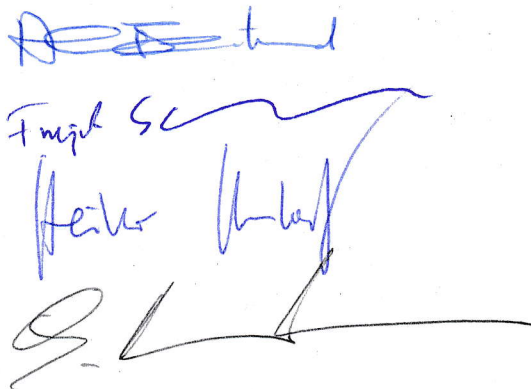
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Le doyen
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The development of interactional competence. A longitudinal study of topic management by adolescent learners of French L2.

Drawing on Conversation Analysis for Second Language Acquisition (CA-SLA), this study presents a twofold discussion. On the one hand, the concept of topic is described, starting from the School of Prague and arriving to the conversation analytical approach (Chapters 1 and 2). Topic is conceived here as an ongoing process in conversations, i.e. topic is not seen as an entity, but rather it is revealed in the ways (methods, strategies, resources) adopted by the participants for managing conversational topics.

On the other hand, this study addresses L2 developmental issues and problematizes the idea of L2 learning, especially of L2 learning “in the wild”. The concept of L2 interactional competence and its development over time plays here a crucial role (Chapter 3). The resulting research questions are: (1) how do L2 speakers manage conversational topics? (2) How do their methods change over time? Two further questions arise at this point: (3) What can synchronic observations tell us about the nature of L2 interactional competence? And, finally, (4) what can longitudinal observations tell us about the development of L2 interactional competence? (Chapter 4).

The applied methodological tools belong to the approach of CA-SLA (Chapter 5). The dataset was collected within a research project at the University of Neuchâtel (Chapter 6). The data are audio-recordings of dinner-table conversations between au-pair girls spending 6-12 months in the French speaking part of Switzerland and their host-families. For this study, three au-pair girls have been chosen, that have three different French L2 levels (according to the CEFRL). The analyses are divided into three parts: topic introduction (Chapter 7), topic closure (Chapter 8), and topic progression (Chapter 9).

In the final part, two chapters deal with summaries of findings addressing specifically the development of L2 interactional competence (Chapter 10) and its nature (Chapter 11). Subsequently, the link between conversational topics and epistemics in conversation is briefly addressed (Chapter 12), pointing out the need for more studies about the intrinsic epistemic property of topics (the distribution of speakers' rights and authority to talk about something). The final chapter 13 reflects in a more personal way about the challenges of addressing several issues in this work and proposes some more general thoughts about the usefulness of CA-SLA research for other practical purposes.

Key-words: Conversation Analysis, CA-SLA, French L2, topic management, L2 interactional competence, longitudinal study

Le développement de la compétence d'interaction. Une étude longitudinale du topic management chez des adolescentes apprenantes du Français L2.

En appliquant l'approche de l'Analyse Conversationnelle pour l'Acquisition d'une Langue Seconde (CA-SLA) cette étude présente une double discussion. D'un côté, elle décrit le concept de topic en partant de l'École de Prague pour en arriver à l'approche de l'Analyse Conversationnelle (Chapitres 1 et 2). Dans cette approche, le topic est conçu comme un processus continu dans la conversation, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'est pas vu comme une entité fixe, mais qu'il se révèle dans les façons (méthodes, stratégies, ressources) dont les participants gèrent les topics conversationnels.

De l'autre côté, cette étude adresse les défis liés à l'acquisition d'une L2 et thématise l'idée de l'apprentissage en milieu non-institutionnel. Le concept de compétence d'interaction en L2 et son développement au fil du temps revêtent ici un rôle crucial (Chapitre 3). Les questions de recherche qui en résultent sont les suivantes : (1) comment les locuteurs de L2 gèrent-ils les topics conversationnels ? (2) Comment changent leurs méthodes au fil du temps ? En plus, deux questions ultérieures naissent de ces deux premières : (3) qu'est-ce que nous disent les observations synchroniques des données à propos de la nature de la compétence d'interaction en L2 ? Et, enfin, (4) qu'est-ce que nous disent les observations longitudinales à propos du développement de la compétence d'interaction en L2 ? (Chapitre 4).

Les outils méthodologiques utilisés dérivent de l'approche de la CA-SLA (Chapitre 5). Les données ont été recueillies pendant un projet de recherche de l'Université de Neuchâtel (Chapitre 6). Les données sont des enregistrements audios de conversations lors de moments de repas entre des filles au-pair, qui font un séjour dans la Suisse francophone pendant 6 à 12 mois, et leurs familles d'accueil. Pour cette étude trois filles au-pair ont été choisies, puisqu'elles ont trois différents niveaux de Français (d'après le CECRL). Les analyses sont divisées en trois parties : introduction topicale (Chapitre 7), clôture topicale (Chapitre 8) et progression topicale (Chapitre 9).

La dernière partie du travail contient deux chapitres qui proposent une discussion des résultats analytiques par rapport au développement de la compétence d'interaction en L2 (Chapitre 10) ainsi que par rapport à sa nature (Chapitre 11). Ensuite, le lien entre topics conversationnels et « epistemics » dans la conversation est adressé (Chapitre 12), en pointant vers le besoin d'avoir plus d'études sur le caractère intrinsèquement épistémique des topics (lié à la distribution des droits et de l'autorité des participants). Le chapitre conclusif (13) propose une réflexion plus personnelle sur les défis liés aux différents niveaux inclus dans cette étude et il offre des réflexions plus larges sur l'utilité des résultats analytiques de la CA-SLA pour d'autres domaines d'application.

Mots-clés : Analyse Conversationnelle, CA-SLA, Français L2, topic management, compétence d'interaction en L2, étude longitudinale

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Introduction

Our common-sense knowledge about conversations suggests that when we talk with other persons there is always something we are talking about. This is true, but it still represents a debated aspect in a variety of linguistic, sociolinguistic and anthropological approaches to the study of language, especially of spoken language.

I start my study with an overview of different linguistic approaches that have dealt with the concept of topic. Topic has often been defined as the matter (*what*) people are talking about when they are in a dialogue. There are several approaches that operate with this definition of topic (chapter 1), such as text linguistics, discourse analysis and functionalism. Complementary to these approaches, there is another research field, rooted in the domains of sociology and ethnomethodology, that works with other analytical tools: Conversation Analysis (CA). CA investigates the methods (Garfinkel 1967) with which conversationalists do what they do when they talk to each other. The concept of topic is redefined in relation to the methods and practices conversationalists employ for managing topics in interaction: how do they introduce a new topic? How do they close it? How do they go back and forth between topics in an ongoing interaction?

Adopting an emic perspective, i.e. investigating the data from an endogenous point of view, I show how topic management is realised in interactions in French as a second language (L2). I apply CA analytical tools for the analysis of second language acquisition: CA-SLA is the research field in which my study is situated. My data stem from every-day family interactions between host-family members and au-pair girls that are living in Switzerland for a long time for learning or improving their French L2. The L2 learning process I investigate, then, happens simultaneously to the socialisation process in the host-family, where the au-pair girls slowly become members of this community of practice. As far as the L2 learning process is concerned, my analyses show how the L2 speakers' interactional competence is observable in the data and how it develops (i.e. how the L2 speakers' practices change) over time.

My analysis of topic management is divided into three parts: I investigate separately topic introduction, topic closure and topic progression (topic shift + topical backlinking). This division is necessary for comparing cases either over time (longitudinal analysis) or among the au-pair girls (cross-sectional analysis). The research questions guiding

my investigations are primarily two: (I) How do L2 speakers manage conversational topics in every-day interactions? This first question helps me individuating the methods and practices used by the au-pair girls for introducing, closing down and developing topics in conversation. (II) How do the practices for managing topic change over time? Do they all change or only some of them? I show that changes over time are observable in first line for topic introduction, whereas topic closure and topic progression are more suitable for uncovering the nature of L2 interactional competence. Two further sub-questions arise at this point: (III) What do observations of topic closure and topic progression tell us about the nature of L2 interactional competence? And (IV) what do longitudinal observations about topic introduction tell us about the development of L2 interactional competence?

This study is structured as follows: in chapter 1, I present an overview of the more traditional linguistic approaches to the concept of topic, and I concentrate particularly on functionalist studies on L1 and L2 data. Chapter 2, instead, is dedicated to CA and CA-SLA. This chapter represents the basis for my terminology and for the analytical tools I have used for my investigations. Chapter 3 contains a discussion about the existing literature on CA and L2 language learning, i.e. I present here the concept of L2 interactional competence. In chapter 4 I address several specific issues related to the analysis of conversational topics. In this chapter, I also present more in detail my research questions and the contributions of my study.

In chapter 5 I describe the analytical tools and methods of CA and CA-SLA and introduce the actions I analyse (topic introduction, topic closure and topic progression). Chapter 6 is a presentation of the data, the research project and the specific learning context of host-families. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 are each dedicated to a particular action within topic management. Chapter 7 presents the analysis of topic introduction. For this action a longitudinal comparison is presented and discussed. Chapter 8 contains the investigations of topic closure. A specification needs to be made about this action and this chapter: I had started to look at changes over time for topic closure as I had done for topic introduction. However, it turned out that topic closure needed to be investigated rather with a cross-sectional comparison. Chapter 8 contains a discussion of this challenge and I purposefully left some traces of my change of positioning. This action fulfils a twofold goal: it is a sign of how unmotivated looking still represents a best practice for working on real data; and it is a trace of the fairness of my analytical

process. Chapter 9 contains the analysis of topic progression, which I have divided into topic shift and topical backlinking. In this case I compare the actions between the participants and not longitudinally.

The last part of my work presents several closing steps. Chapter 10 brings together the most important aspects of the longitudinal development of L2 interactional competence, whereas chapter 11 treats the most salient aspects of the nature of L2 interactional competence. In chapter 12 I address a matter for which I had difficulties find literature about: the relationship between topics and epistemics. Conversational topics have the property of structuring the upcoming talk as regard who knows what about what, who tells and who does not – especially when they are embedded into a storytelling. However, the literature about how topics influence the co-construction of territories of knowledge in conversation is rather scarce and I address this issue in this final chapter. Chapter 13, then, contains some more personal remarks about the choice of such a controverted analytical object as conversational topics, as well as more general thoughts and questions about the usefulness of CA-SLA investigations for the world(s) of practice.

PART I

Theoretical background

1. A complex notion: the topic

*"This is not to say that
a system, once established,
cannot change independently of
its point of origin".
(Givón, 1976)*

This chapter introduces the most important linguistic approaches that have treated the concept of topic in first and second language. In the introduction (1.1) I sketch the central results of the Prague School and of text linguistics. Subsequently I describe the approach of discourse linguistics (1.2) and then, more deeply, the functionalist approach (1.3). On this basis, I address the study of topic in the domain of second language acquisition (1.4).

1.1 Introduction: Prague School and text linguistics

The researchers within the circle of the Prague School have discussed the centrality of the concept of topic with an approach based on syntactic and pragmatic cues, and investigating different sentence levels. The main researchers of this approach were R. Jakobson, V. Mathesius, N. Trubetzkoi and subsequently J. Firbas and F. Daneš. These researchers defined language as a system and concentrated their analysis on its structure (linguistic structuralism). Mathesius (1961) first defined the sentence structure in terms of known vs. new information and introduced therein the opposition between theme and rheme: the theme was the known information, the rheme was the new information. Firbas (1992) instead addressed the issue of linguistic dynamism, this being another feature of sentences in texts. He explained communicative dynamism as the degree to which a constituent is subjected to change in the flow of a text. In his proposition, the theme is the element with the minor degree of communicative dynamism, whereas the rheme has the higher degree of communicative dynamism.

Within this frame, the sentence topic was identified as the known information (the theme) and the element with the minor degree of communicative dynamism. The sentence, following a functionalist perspective, was built in a given-before-new

fashion¹. The notion of topic emerging from the approach of the Prague School shows two major aspects: on the one hand, the identification of the sentence constituent that coincide with the topic; on the other hand, the problematisation of its dynamic aspect, i.e. the degree to which the topical element can change within a text. Firbas (1992) talks about communicative dynamism as the inherent quality of communication, which is manifested while a speaker is fulfilling a communicative purpose. For the author, the sentence always orients towards the most dynamic elements, i.e. towards the elements with the higher degree of communicative dynamism. However, in order to be understood, sentences need to be placed in a context, defined in terms of preceding text. For this reason, the researchers have retrieved the information pieces in the sentences through questions of the type: "Who did X?" or "What happened to X?". This is shown in the following example:

(1) From Reinhart (1982: 56)

Max saw Rosa yesterday.

Depending on the question one asks either Max or Rosa can be the sentence topic. For instance, if the question asked is "Who did Max see yesterday?", then Max will be the topic; whereas if the question asked is "Did anyone see Rosa yesterday?", then Rosa will be the topic². Depending on the question asked, the structuring principle of "given-before-new" can be relativized.

Summing up, the analysis of sentence topic the approach of the Prague School has followed two directions: on the one hand, the delimitation of a topic entity within specific sentential elements, on the other hand, the possibility this entity has of changing through the text.

Developing partially from the results of the Prague School, the research in the field of text linguistics focused mainly on the surface structure of sentences (Halliday 1967; Hornby 1971) related to theme and sentence topic (Reinhart 1982) and on the anaphoric chains in text (Haviland & Clark 1974; Halliday & Hasan 1976). The research

¹ Although the researchers noted that, under specific circumstances, speakers tend to follow their interests and thoughts and produce sentences with a new-before-given structure.

² Cf. for this analysis Reinhart (1982: 56).

is concerned with sentence topic³ and considers it, generally, as the first element in the sentence⁴ and the element about which something is predicated.

In his pioneer study on text cohesion, Halliday (1967) is concerned with the process of thematisation in the text, thus concentrating on the sentence as a unit *per se*, and not on information units in the text: "[T]he theme is what is being talked about, the point of departure for the clause as a message" (Halliday 1967: 212). The starting point being the clause, Halliday studies only sentences wholly constructed of "a number of (one or more) information units" (ibid.: 201), so that he can analyse the distribution of information throughout the text in quantitative terms (counting the number of information units), relying, in a second moment, on the intonation features of sentences. He distinguishes new and old information by means of intonation contours: "what is focal is 'new' information" (ibid.: 204). He herewith introduces another difference between given and new information based on the intonation, because the latter is pronounced with a higher pitch than the former. In line with the results of the Prague School, Halliday also shares the idea that the theme/rheme organisation in the sentence is reflected into a left-to-right sentential construction pattern in which the given information precedes the new one: "[...] the theme is assigned initial position in the clause, and all that follows is the rheme" (ibid.: 212).

Another research line of text linguistics has concentrated on textual coherence and cohesion. Halliday & Hasan (1976) define cohesion as the link between the interpretation of two related elements. Cohesion is realised by means of different techniques: e.g. through co-reference (I went to **Rome**. I really liked being **there**), through substitution (I love **books**. I read **one** every day), ellipsis (All the children had an **ice-cream** today. Eva chose **strawberry**. Arthur had **orange** and Willem too⁵), conjunction (I bought that book, **because** I really like it) and lexical cohesion (Why

³ See also the studies by Davison (1984) on strong and weak topic NPs; Hyman & Zimmer (1976) on the relationship between word order, subject saliency and definiteness and the expression of topic in French sentences; and Pérez de Ayala Becerril (1997) on topic marking at question times in the House of Commons.

⁴ Galambos (1980) addresses the issue of interlinguistic variation and analyses spoken French as a topic marking language (thus, we find topic-comment utterance structures) and opposes it to written French, which is a subject-predicate language. Hanson (1987) addresses the issue of topical constructions in spoken French for a comparison with Chichewa (a Bantu language).

⁵ From Sanders & Maat (2006: 591).

does this little **boy wriggle** all the time? **Girls** don't **wriggle**⁶⁾⁷. Coherence is an inherent feature of text, it is somehow what makes a text a text. Coherence can be seen at two levels: (I) in the anaphoric chain in text, thus in the existing links among parts of different sentences (e.g. NPs) or (II) in the relations existing among sentences (e.g. cause-effect relation). As far as the topic is concerned, it is mainly placed at the beginning of the sentence and this allows the organisation of text cohesion and coherence⁸.

Focussing on the surface-structure of sentences, Hornby (1971) addresses the sentence construction in the form of topic-comment, proposing another view of the structure theme-rheme. Rephrasing Chafe, he defines the topic as "the part of the sentence [...] the speaker is talking about" (Hornby 1971: 1976), whereas the comment is the part of the sentence that provides new information about the topic. With his study, he problematizes the idea that only a temporal cue can explain the sentence organisation in topic and comment and comes to the conclusion that another principle is more important for determining the topic-comment relation in sentences, namely contrastive stress⁹. Intonation is, thus, a means for separating the topic from the comment¹⁰.

Finally, the later study by Reinhart (1982) addresses the issue of distinguishing between sentence topic and discourse topic and proposes different features for

⁶ From Halliday & Hasan (1976: 285).

⁷ The presentation of the cohesion techniques has followed the presentation in Sanders & Maat (2006).

⁸ In a different way, Ellis (1983) talks about *textuality* when "some corpus of language use is unified and exists as a whole" (p. 223) and, thus, a text exists when it creates the link between the chosen words and the real world. Another discussion is presented in Hawes (1983). See also Sanders (1983) for a description of "tools" usable for constructing a coherent discourse.

⁹ Hornby tested sixty children at three different school levels in order to see if they can identify the topic and the comment in sentences and what strategies they use for themselves when producing some utterances. The children had to work with pictures and listen to sentences that described them. Then, they had to pick the pictures that represented the topical part of the sentence. This study has shown that very young children (4 years old) can already identify the topic in a sentence even when it is produced in a different fashion than normal active topic-comment sentence. E.g. in stress and cleft sentences, children at every stage were able to identify in 90% of the cases the right picture corresponding to the topic and they did this despite the fact that in these types of sentence the syntactical order is rather comment-topic.

¹⁰ The study by MacWhinney & Price (1980) sought to improve Hornby's approach, highlighting the difficulties of investigating thematic structures by children via the use of sentences. The authors conclude that a test for the relationship between givenness and newness in isolated sentences is much easier than a similar test for topic and comment structures.

identifying the sentence topic. The author concentrates exclusively on NPs and on the semantic and syntactic properties of sentences as a starting point for identifying the sentence topic. She assumes that sentence topic "must correspond to an expression in the sentence" (p. 54).

Within the approach of text linguistics following features characterise the topic:

- The object of study is the sentence topic;
- The topic identifies a sentence constituent: it generally coincides with the subject;
- What is said about it identifies another sentence constituent: it is generally the verb or the verbal predicate (rheme/comment);
- Thus, a sentence is generally constructed in a left-to-right fashion, in which old information precedes new information. Three main consequences can be drawn from this observation:
 - i. the sentence topic coincides with the old, whereas the comment coincides with the new information;
 - ii. it is the old information that shows the link between a sentence and what was said before in the text; therefore
 - iii. the topic is likely to be found in the left periphery of a sentence;
- finally, the sentence topic is what a sentence is about¹¹.

1.2 Discourse analysis

Research in the field of text linguistics has been further developed with the studies in the field of discourse analysis (cf. van Dijk 1977; Brown & Yule 1983).

¹¹ For a description of different devices available to the speaker for conveying given and new information, see Haviland & Clark (1974). In this study, the researchers not only present some methods for coding the information units in the sentence, but they also test the time a listener needs in order to correctly interpret a sentence produced by a speaker (or in a written text) in a laboratory setting. Depending on the presence and right coding of an antecedent in their memories, listeners will be quicker in decoding a sentence when the given information it contains correctly addresses an existing antecedent in the listener's memory. If this is not the case, the listener will undergo another analysis of the sentence and try to identify possible antecedents in order to establish the right correlations between the sentence parts and the sentences themselves.

1. A complex notion: the topic

Discourse analysis is different from text linguistics as far as discourse is concerned and talk is analysed. The interest for spoken language influences the terminological choice in the field: authors no longer talk about sentences, as they occur in the written language; rather they talk about utterances as units for spoken language. Moreover, talk is seen as fulfilling two functions: on the one hand, it is a means for transmitting information to another participant (transactional function); on the other hand, talk allows speakers *to do* something with the language. In this case, Brown & Yule (1983) speak of the *interactional function* of language, which they relate to the theory of speech acts (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). From the approach of textual linguistics, which analyses "text as a product" (Brown & Yule 1983: 24), the researchers within the discourse analytical approach shift their focus on discourse as a process that brings together a message producer and a message receiver: "The discourse analyst, then, is interested in the function or purpose of a piece of linguistic data and also in how that data is processed, both by the producer and by the receiver" (ibid.: 25).

The influence this approach has on the study of topic is multifaceted. A central place is taken by the fact that researchers are focussed on *interpreting* the discourse: their concerns are the message a speaker sends and how it is received and understood by the hearer. For this reason, discourse is cut into smaller fragments "and the discourse analyst always has to decide where the fragment begins and ends" (ibid.: 69). It is the case of an external, ethical perspective on the data¹², following which different definitions of discourse topic have arisen.

As the concept of sentence topic becomes too narrow to account for discourse, the new concept of discourse topic is introduced. A first attempt of defining discourse topic is made by Ochs-Keenan & Schieffelin (1976). The authors are concerned with language development and analyse the talk produced within mother-child interactions in family settings. They define the discourse topic as "the proposition (or set of propositions) about which the speaker is either providing or requesting information"

¹² However, this was also the case within textual linguistics. Even though the context was recreated through the use of different questions, this was only for identifying the sentence element that corresponded with the topic. In fact, sentences were extrapolated from written texts and they had no link with everyday talk.

(Ochs-Keenan & Schieffelin 1976: 338)¹³. They start from the assumption that for every part of a discourse there is always an utterance that represents the topic of that piece of talk¹⁴. Moreover, they explain that participants use a part of their conversations for actually formulating the discourse topic, for example via reference to background knowledge, or to interactional environment or also to previous discourse. I take the following example:

(2) From Ochs-Keenan & Schieffelin (1976: 339)

01 Mother: (trying to put too large diaper on doll, holding diaper on)
Well we can't hold it on like that. What do we need? Hmm? What do we
need for the diaper?
02 Allison: pin/

According to Ochs-Keenan & Schieffelin (1976), the discourse topic in example 2 is the proposition "we need something for the diaper". This proposition is attended to both in the question and in the answer, so this question-answer pair has a single discourse topic. Consequently, conceiving the discourse as "any sequence of two or more utterances produced by a single speaker or by two or more speakers who are interacting with one another (at some point in time and space)" (ibid.: 340) will necessarily mean considering how topics are related to one another in the flow of discourse. The researchers have distinguished two types of discourse topic: (I) there are collaborating discourse topics when two or more utterances share the same topic (like in the case of question-answer sequences); (II) there are incorporating discourse topics when a new utterance develops the presuppositions contained in the previous discourse. As a consequence, the discourse flow can be seen to be either continuous (when collaborating or incorporating topics are at hand) or to be discontinuous (when no linkage between topics is done and a speaker disengages his/herself from the previous discourse).

The concept of topic, then, is not used for describing a fragment of talk, but rather for indicating what that fragment is about. It is the analyst who judges the relevance of a speaker's contribution to the talk on the basis of his/her own knowledge and of the

¹³ This definition of topic is also used in the study by Kramsch (1983) about topic constructions in German, although her focus is mainly on pedagogical issues for teaching and studying this language.

¹⁴ This assumption is based on studies like the one by Bransford & Johnson (1973), in which the researchers used the concept of topic in relation to written texts and asked their participants to describe in only one sentence what a spate of text was about.

contextual clues of the discourse. The concern is not about defining which sentence element is the topic, but in delineating what the topic framework is. This is explained in van Dijk (1977): discourse topic belongs to the macro-structure of discourse and is therefore more difficult to grasp than sentence topic. The analyst can observe if a speaker talks topically by looking at the utterances he produces and by seeing if they "fit closely to the most recent elements incorporated in the topic framework" (Brown & Yule 1983: 84)¹⁵.

Topic in discourse analysis, then, is determined by the analyst, who cuts a conversation in different topically relevant parts and observes the coherence relations presents in every fragment. The underlying idea is that the topic is shared between the participants, although sometimes there are also "personal topics" (ibid.: 87) that a speaker introduces in the talk and that can possibly become shared discourse topics in what follows. To summarise, then, discourse topic is:

- not related to a sentence, but rather to a spoken utterance (or a set of these);
- the point of departure for the discourse, what the discourse is about;
- determined not for an entire discourse, but for its constituent fragments, which are cut by the analyst;
- a source of coherence for an entire discourse and retrievable through it by means of the existing linkage between parts of subsequent utterances.

In conclusion, the difference between discourse analysis and text linguistics concerns the type of data they analyse and this, in turn, requires a new definition of the concept of topic concept to work with. In what follows I present two further approaches that have dealt with the conceptualisation of topic starting from oral data: functionalism and conversation analysis.

1.3 Functionalism

Functionalism is a linguistic approach born in the seventies whose aim is to map the link between linguistic forms and their functions in discourse. The basic concern of the

¹⁵ The framework is based mainly on a "presupposition pool" (cf. Venneman 1974), composed of subjects that are likely to be talked about by two or more participants.

research is to understand the functions that are fulfilled by linguistic forms, typically at both sentence and discourse level. For the analysis of topic functionalism focuses first on the information structure¹⁶ of written texts and monologues (more rarely on conversations). The topic is seen as a phenomenon that structures the discourse itself and for which speakers have many different possibilities of coding. Similarly to other approaches, topic is defined in terms of given vs. new information (Chafe 1976; Givón 1983, 1987). However, from the dichotomy of given/new information, attention is brought to the information flow in discourse. In so doing, a link between information units (cf. Givón 1987 on background and foreground information; Klein & von Steutterheim 1987) and cognitive constraints on them ("accessibility scales", cf. Ariel 1988; Chafe 1987; Givón 1983, 1987; Prince 1981) is established. Moreover, the analysis of the information structure in discourse allows for a new conception of topic, namely its description in terms of *aboutness* (Lambrecht 1984, 1987, 1994; but see also Reinhard 1982 for text linguistics). In this sense, functionalists further push the analysis of discourse topic already begun within the frame of discourse analysis and bring to the light the pragmatic links that ensure cohesion in discourse.

Functionalists have dealt in depth with the link between topic, subject and referent. Lambrecht (1987), for example, clearly states that he works with the concepts of topic expression, i.e. the term used for referring "to a *linguistic expression* designating the topic referent in a sentence" (p. 222, italics in the original), which he opposes to topic referent, this being "the *discourse referent* about which new information is being added in the proposition" (p. 222, italics in the original). In his definition, there is a clear-cut line between the linguistic level of talk production and the real world in which the referents are present. In relation to this analytical statement, different studies deal with the cognitive constraints related to referents in discourse.

In what follows, I sketch the results of the studies by Chafe (1976, 1997), Prince (1981), Givón (1976, 1983, 1987) and Ariel (1988) because they share the same cognitive conceptualisation of topic, which is related to the information structure in the data and the accessibility (or activation) of referents in the listeners' minds. With the analysis of the coding strategies employed by the speakers for verbalising referents, the researchers presuppose that speakers make suppositions about what their hearers

¹⁶ Combettes (1998) defines it as "*charge informative*" (1998: 135). See also Combettes & Tamassone (1988) for a study of thematisation in discourse.

may already know and what could be new information for them in order to make the best choice for constructing their message.

1.3.1 Chafe: analysis of referent "statuses"

In his study of 1976, Chafe addresses the issue of "statuses" of referents in utterances, saying at first that such statuses have been related so far to their syntactical roles (e.g. being the subject). He proposes instead an analysis of referents that considers their "packaging", i.e. the way in which referents are coded for the hearer:

The statuses to be discussed here have more to do with how the content is transmitted than with the content itself. Specifically, they all have to do with the speaker's assessment of how the addressee is able to process what he is saying against the background of a particular context. (p. 27)

Considering referents in relation to the messages they are produced in and the fact that they are produced for a specific hearer, six different packaging statuses can be identified. First, givenness: the difference between given and new information concerns what the speaker assumes the hearer already knows at the time of the utterance production. What is assumed to be known by the hearer is the old or given information, what is assumed to be unknown is the new information. Given information is generally spoken with a lower voice volume and tends to be pronominalized. Givenness is established on the basis of linguistic (as previously mentioned) or extra-linguistic cues (the referent is present at the time of uttering).

Second, contrastiveness, i.e. the way by which speakers select a particular referent for their sentences putting it in contrast with other possible candidates. This is usually accomplished via higher voice pitch on the contrastive focus or by a cleft or pseudo-cleft sentence. Here are three examples:

(3) Maria

(3) Maria stole the book.

(3a) It was Maria who stole the book.

(3b) The one who stole the book was Maria¹⁷.

In all the examples, Maria is the object of contrast, but the way in which contrastiveness is packaged differs in each case. In (3) the name is stressed when it

¹⁷ Following Chafe (1976), I also indicate here the stress and the higher pitch on the concerned syllables by underlining them.

is spoken, in (3a) and (3b) the focus of contrast is singled out via a syntactical means placed previously to the utterance in question.

Third, definiteness, which is explainable by the possibility for the hearer to identify the referent expressed by the speaker. The point of view is the speaker's: if s/he thinks that the hearer can pick the right referent, then s/he will code it as definite, i.e. with a definite article or a demonstrative; otherwise s/he will code it in a more complex way¹⁸.

Fourth, the possibility that for a noun to be the subject in an utterance¹⁹. Chafe defines it as follows: "the subject is what we are talking about" (p. 41). His explanation for this status is related to the transfer of knowledge between speaker and hearer: the speaker's utterances communicate knowledge to the hearer in a way that increments his/her previous knowledge²⁰. At this point, Chafe discusses the problems that arise in the literature from a superimposition of subject and given information. He cites the studies by Hornby (1971) about topic and comment, in which the author identifies the topic with the subject, hence with the given information, whereas new information is delivered by the comment, or the rest of the utterance.

Finally, Chafe describes the status of "topic" (the fifth status of a referent) as follows: "The so-called topic is simply a focus of contrast that has for some reason been placed in an unusual position at the beginning of the sentence." (p. 47). Topic is defined in relation to the focus of contrast in the utterance. The placement of a particular referent at the beginning of an utterance is explained by the fact that this puts it closer to the previous context²¹. The last status he briefly takes into consideration is the "point of

¹⁸ Chafe identifies an interesting relation between definiteness and old information and indefiniteness and new information. Old information, like a previous mentioned referent, tends to be coded in a defined way, whereas the information, which the speaker presupposes that the hearer does not know, is generally coded via indefinite articles.

¹⁹ A deeper discussion about the notion of subject is presented in Keenan (1976).

²⁰ Chafe speaks of "adding-knowledge-about" when he describes the function of subjects.

²¹ However, Chafe offers further considerations about topics in two different languages, English and Chinese, taking into account what syntactical structures are typical in these languages. For English, the topic is generally the element at the beginning of an utterance; in Chinese it has more to do with the establishment of a certain temporal and spatial frame. He criticizes therefore the use of the term "topic" for English because in fact he finds that most of the examples given are, actually, contrastive utterances.

view" or "empathy", i.e. the choice of delivering an utterance recalling the point of view of one particular referent. Looking at the following examples:

(4) From Chafe (1976: 52)

(4a) John hit his wife.

(4b) Mary's husband hit her.

It is possible to say that the speaker assumes John's point of view in (4a) but Mary's in (4b)²².

Based on this study, Chafe further develops the concept of topic and describes discourse topics as "coherent chunks of semiactive information" (p. 6). Topics can then move in the flow of one's consciousness or in the flow of conversation and they can also develop on different trajectories. Topics can follow a particular schema, as e.g. during a narration in which the speaker holds a monologue on some events; or they can develop via the collaboration of two interlocutors, without following a particular scheme, but relying on previous talk (Chafe 1994); finally, they can develop "polyphonically" (Chafe 1997) when speakers share common knowledge on an event but develop the telling in concurrently directions²³. This attention towards speakers' collaboration or concurrence in conversation will be addressed later on in chapter 9, when I present my analysis of topic progression. I now continue to sketch other important studies in the domain of functionalist research.

1.3.2 Prince: a taxonomy of information status

Beginning with a discussion about the term givenness as regards predictability, saliency and shared knowledge, the author criticises the idea of given/new information used so far as being too intuitive and not usable. In her 1981 article Prince addresses the issue of knowledge transfer between speaker and hearer: she considers what a speaker presupposes a hearer may know only as far as it leaves traces in the speaker's linguistic productions. Consequently, she proposes a three-steps-solution for the analysis of information flow in discourse. First, she introduces a new taxonomy for the

²² As a counter-example, the utterance "Mary's husband hit his wife" (p. 52) contains two different *foci* of empathy that seem strange.

²³ Chafe found for instance cases of disagreement or overlapping during the retelling of the same event experienced simultaneously by two friends.

linguistic forms that relate to the dichotomy given/new information; second, she proposes a taxonomy structuring what she calls "Assumed Familiarity" (p. 233); third, she shows how these two taxonomies correlate.

The dichotomy given vs. new information concerns the verbalisation of referents in a text²⁴ and is split into a *continuum* divided in three parts: entities can be new, inferable or evoked, depending on their activation status within the hearer's mind. In a further step, Prince distinguishes the entities in each of the three groups. New entities can be verbalised as "brand new" (I bought **a** beautiful **dress**) or "unused" (**Rotten Rizzo** can't have a third term) entities. Inferable entities can be inferred from the co-text or from common knowledge about a particular situation/event (I went to the post office and **the** stupid **clerk** couldn't find a stamp – the supposed knowledge, in this case, is that post offices have clerks) or they can contain their inference in themselves (Have you heard **the** incredible **claim that** the devil speaks English backwards? – in this case the inferred claim at stake is properly uttered after the NP "the incredible claim"). Finally, entities can be textually evoked (Susie went to visit her grandmother and **the sweet lady** was making Peking Duck) or they can be evoked by the situation itself (**Lucky me** just stepped in something – this entity corresponds to the speaker and the attribute "lucky" is observable in his/her person at the moment of uttering)²⁵.

The next step is to build a "Familiarity Scale" (p. 245) that represents the hierarchy in the use of entity coding: evoked entities comes first and are followed by unused, inferable and brand new. This scale is useful in so far as it represents the way in which speakers code their entities according to the Gricean Maxim of Quantity: if a speaker does not choose the right way of coding his/her entities, his/her message can end infelicitously. This means that this scale "must be relative to the speaker's hypothesis about the hearer's belief-set" (p. 245) and does not concern the general frequency of appearance of NPs in texts. Prince's analysis of entities' coding techniques has shed new light on the linguistic level of referent verbalisation in texts (although less in conversational data). Her more detailed scale has been one of the first to be proposed

²⁴ Her definition of text is as follows: "a TEXT is a set of instructions from a speaker to a hearer on how to construct a particular DISCOURSE-MODEL. The model will contain DISCOURSE ENTITIES, ATTRIBUTES, and LINKS between entities." (ibid. 235, capital letters in the original).

²⁵ All the examples are taken from Prince (1981: 237).

within the functionalist approach. In what follows, I discuss two related types of accessibility scales, those by Talmy Givón and Mira Ariel.

1.3.3 Givón: topic accessibility

"[t]here was a range of rather recalcitrant data which suggested that, at least at the functional level, 'topic' was not an atomic, discrete entity" (Givón 1983: 5). With these words, Givón addresses the issue of how to define a topic in discourse²⁶. He positions his approach as critical towards Prague School and text linguistics. In his view, the analysed data showed a "non-discrete entity of 'topicality'" (ibid.:7) and the problem of relating this concept to its real usability in the actual language use. He proposes instead a scale of topic accessibility which has the advantage of illustrating different possibilities of topic marking in a non-dichotomist way²⁷.

"The functional, psychological dimension involved here concerns *how* accessible the topic is to the hearer" (Givón 1987: 178, emphasis in the original), i.e. a topic can be available either in the short- or in the long-term memory. Starting from this assumption, Givón proposes a list of factors that can influence the topic's availability to the speaker and the hearer:

(I) the topic's absence from the discourse, i.e. when a new topic is introduced it is difficult to process because of its newness, but when a topic is introduced and reappears in the discourse, then it will become easier to process;

(II) interference with other topics, i.e. if in the preceding discourse there are other elements that can concur for the topic role, the process will be more difficult;

(III) previous semantic information, i.e. in the case of topic interference, semantic information from the predicate can help identify the topic;

(IV) previous thematic information, i.e. information cues related to the discourse type that indicate a tendency for a certain topic to be continuous in that particular discourse.

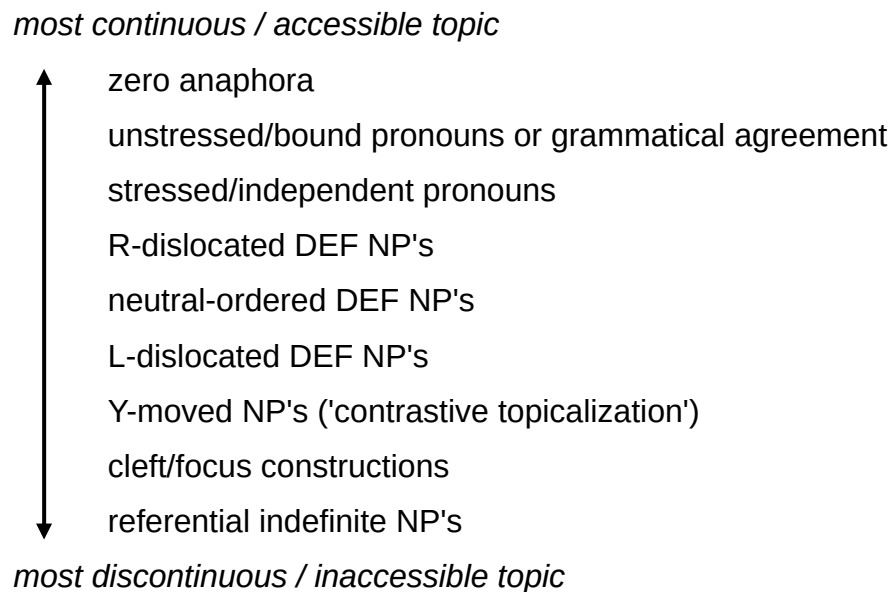
Depending on their availability, different topics show different degrees of continuity in discourse that correlate with the distance between their first and second mention, the

²⁶ Givón already addressed this issue in his 1976 paper, in which he describes the relation between subject-verb agreement and topic-verb agreement.

²⁷ Givón criticises the restrictive dichotomy between definite and indefinite NPs, the former marking a topic, which is assumed to be known/available to speaker, the latter marking topics that are introduced for the first time in discourse.

presence/absence of other interfering topics and, finally, their degree of persistence, i.e. the probability that a topic appears more or less frequently throughout the discourse. Givón finds a strong correlation between the coding strategies used for verbalising discourse topic and their degree of accessibility. This is best represented in his accessibility scale:

From Givón (1983: 17, table 10)



This scale gives the issue of accessibility a universal character²⁸, and will indeed be used by other researchers for their linguistic analysis of texts. With this scale, Givón delivers a fine-grained linguistic order for the coding strategies of topics in discourse that stands as a counterpart for the more restricted dichotomy definite vs. indefinite NPs.

1.3.4 Ariel: referents and their accessibility

Recalling Givón's studies, Ariel (1988) is concerned with a definition of accessibility that relates to the coding devices that are available for verbalising referents in discourse.

Accessibility is defined as the assumed state of activation by the speaker of a given referent in the addressee's mind. The referent identification is supported by three intertwined aspects: general knowledge, local situation and previous mentions in

²⁸ Its universality is highlighted in the 1983 volume thanks to its cross-linguistic and comparative nature.

discourse. Moreover, a major granularity in the analysis is assured if we include other factors that can influence the referent accessibility to the hearer: the distance between a previous and a later mention, the presence of a competitor for the referent (e.g. two referents with same gender and number), if the referent was a topic or not in the previous discourse and, finally, the importance of the situation. Ariel proposes a scale for the identification process itself. In this way, she argues, a *continuum* in the available devices can be identified and this allows for the proposition of a scalar access to the referents themselves, which is reflected in the way speakers assess the accessibility of referents for the addressees.

Taking into account the type of first mentions of referents and the distance between the first and the second mention, Ariel notes that full NP are used in cases where the accessibility of the referent is inferior, e.g. when using a pronoun. Therefore the accessibility scale is constructed in a way that takes into account many different factors that influence the actual hearer's accessibility to the referents: on the one hand, its initial accessibility (general knowledge, context or co-text) and, on the other hand, its activation in the hearer's memory. In this way, Ariel postulates that a proper name or a description explicitly express all the information the hearer needs to know, whereas coding strategies like demonstratives or personal pronouns incorporate more information than they explicitly verbalise. Moreover, high accessibility markers are generally used to verbalise discourse topic, whereas low accessibility markers refer to other discourse entities. With regard to English, Ariel proposes the following accessibility scale:

From Ariel (1988: 84, table 19)

Proper name + description > Proper name > Definite NP > Demonstrative NP > Demonstrative pronouns > Personal pronouns > $\emptyset$.

In this sense, this scale recalls Givón's scale for topic accessibility.

1.3.5 Lambrecht: topic and information structure, studies on spoken French

In his book of 1994, Lambrecht proposes a clear definition of what he considers to be the information structure of discourse: considering the relationship between the verbalisation of what speakers have in mind and their mental representation of meaning, Lambrecht defines information structure as follows:

1. A complex notion: the topic

That component of sentence grammar in which propositions as conceptual representations of states of affairs are paired with lexicogrammatical structures in accordance with the mental states of interlocutors who used and interpret these structures as units of information in given discourse contexts. (Lambrecht 1994: 5)

In Lambrecht's terms, a topic is what a proposition is about, signifying that a topic is something that is momentarily a matter of concern and about which a speaker delivers relevant information. *Aboutness* is thus the pragmatic relation at the basis of the topic-focus sentence construction.

In his paper from 1987, Lambrecht discusses the use of topic-focus analysis for spoken French. Beginning with an analysis of NPs in French conversations, Lambrecht notes that, although French is an SVO language, in its oral form there is little use of NPs in subject position, thus "the SVO clause pattern is *not* the predominant pattern at the level of surface structure" (Lambrecht 1987: 218, emphasis in the original). For Lambrecht the focus represents the element for which the proposition is the furthest from the addressee's assumed state of information. Lambrecht talks, for this reason, about "focus of the assertion" and "focus of the (new) information" (p. 221). Moreover, he introduces a distinction between the focus of the new information and a new discourse referent: partially rephrasing Chafe (1976), he identifies the new referent in an *ex-negativo* way, thus the new referent is neither given (i.e. present in the hearer's consciousness), nor recoverable (i.e. identifiable through the context). Instead the topic is defined in term of *aboutness*, i.e. the topic expression is the one a speaker adds information about. For French, the referent of a topic expression needs to be taken for granted and it can be expressed in different ways: full (lexical) NP, demonstrative pronoun, personal pronoun.

Lambrecht's analysis has shed light on different sentence patterns in French used to focalise or topicalise the referents in discourse²⁹. For instance, identificationals like "c'est X" (it's X) are typically used for putting the clefted part in the focus; presentationals like "y il a X qui (abbreviated form: y a X qui)" (there is/are X that) allow for the introduction of new information in focal position and the recall of the same element immediately after "qui" in a topical position. This is only possible because the first part of the sentence introduces the new referent through its mention and then, by the time it has to be topicalised, it has reached the status of given information. Another

²⁹ Zufferey (2004) presents a detailed analysis of the relationship between given/new information analysing utterances introduced by *puisque* and *parce que* in French.

possibility is to displace the topical element to the left (topics) or to the right (antitopics, cf. Lambrecht 1981) periphery of an utterance via left- and right-dislocations. Lambrecht argues that the relation between the use of these "non-canonical" patterns in spoken French and the use of SVO structures relies, for Lambrecht, on the topicality degree of referents³⁰.

1.4 Functionalism and L2 acquisition (SLA): information structure and topic verbalisation

Within the functionalist approach, a prominent project for the study of L2 acquisition has been guided by C. Perdue and W. Klein³¹ in the late Eighties with which new insights about L2 acquisition stages have been won. The research was based mainly on the analysis of the information structure in L2 written texts and oral narratives (from picture stories or film retelling activities). The analysis of information structure was construed on the assumption that a text is constituted of utterances delivering information as answers to an underlying question (cf. '*quaestio*' Klein & von Stutterheim 1987; von Stutterheim 1998). This implicit question represents the way in which a speaker understands a certain communicative task (e.g. s/he tells a story or explains something)³².

Based on the studies on L1s and taking into account several L1s and L2s³³, the functionalist researchers have widely analysed the coding strategies adopted by L2 learners. Particular attention was paid towards the verbalisation of spatial and temporal relationships (see, among others: Andersen 1991; Andorno 2005; Bardovi-Harlig 2000;

³⁰ For another presentation of non-canonical sentence patterns used for topicalisation see also Cadiot (1992).

³¹ Cf. Klein & Perdue (1997).

³² Information in a text is structured on the basis of two simultaneously working principles: aboutness and contrastiveness (Dimroth 2002). The former indicates the link between a topical element and its (linguistic and extra-linguistic) context. Dimroth talks about a syntagmatic relationship in this case. The latter functions as an indicator of the leitmotif for a certain text: it is the way in which different and subsequent utterances are bound together. In this sense, Dimroth describes this relationship as paradigmatic.

³³ Punjabi, Italian, Turkish, Arabic, Spanish and Finnish were the L1s studied in the project. The L2s investigated were: English, German, Dutch, French and Swedish.

Benazzo 2003; Carrol *et al.* 2008; Dimroth *et al.* 2003; Klein 1994; Perdue *et al.* 2002; Starren & van Hout 1996).

Also topic and topic (dis)continuity in discourse have been studied. Topic is defined in terms of *aboutness* (Lambrecht 1994). Hendriks (2000) has studied how French children develop the topic marking techniques (especially dislocation) in their L1 compared to how this happens with adult Chinese learners of French L2. The results have shown that children have to learn the pragmatic-discursive functions of dislocation, whereas adult L2 learners already know them but realise them with non-standard forms. The study by Hendriks & Watorek (2008) has investigated the "universal" nature of the topic-comment structure based on French, English and Polish L1 data from speakers of different ages. The authors found out that age plays a crucial role, because younger children structure their utterances in a different way compared to older children or adults. Generally, the topicalised information is found at the beginning of the sentence in French and Polish, whereas in English it can vary and it can appear also at the utterance end. A comparison has been drawn up between English and Polish adult learners of French. The results partially have reflected those for the L1: the topic was placed in first place in the utterance, but for the use of more complex structures (like dislocations) a higher L2 developmental level needed to be reached.

The functional research on second language acquisition (SLA) has shed light on the referential and anaphoric processes in discourse and especially on the coding strategies adopted by the L2 speakers for referring to a known or an unknown referent. The results align with the studies conducted on the L1s: when an unknown referent is introduced in discourse, it is coded by means of more linguistic material (e.g. with a full NP) than in a later mention in the same discourse (e.g. with a pronoun or even zero anaphora). More complex and "non-universal" structures like French dislocations appear only at a later L2 developmental stage and need some time to stabilise. However, these studies have neglected what they define as 'deviant cases', such as the use of pronouns in long distance anaphora (cf. under-specification, Fox 1987) or the repetition of a full NP after a short distance (cf. over-specification, Pekarek Doehler 1998). The existing L2 research on social interactions has shown that topic management in such natural contexts is worth careful attention, as it poses a challenge for L2 users (Pekarek Doehler 2004).

In this chapter, I have presented how different approaches (Prague School, text linguistics, discourse analysis and functionalism) have defined the concept of topic. Depending on the linguistic co(n)texts their observations were based on, topic was identified as sentence topic, or as discourse topic. Investigations on topic have been conducted mainly on its linguistic coding in sentences and longer stretches of talk (such as narratives). Despite the intense attention paid in L2 research to information structure, dialogic data and the related social coordination of referents and topics still largely remains unexplored. In the next chapter I present the conversation analytic approach, which is different to the approaches listed above since it addresses the concept of topic in a more global fashion, i.e. it includes also structural and sequential aspects in its analysis of topic management.

2. Topic(s) in interaction: Conversation Analysis

*"It takes two to topic,
since a topic line is a socially
– not individually –
negotiated accomplishment."
(Covelli & Murray, 1980)*

This chapter is concerned with the approach of Conversation Analysis (henceforth: CA) for the study of naturally occurring interactions and, in particular for the identification, description and analysis of topic management in interaction. After an introductory paragraph about CA (2.1), I present several CA studies on L1 data (2.2) that have dealt with topic management in interaction and I shift thereafter to CA studies in the domain of second language acquisition (2.3). Finally (2.4) I present the terminology for the current study.

2.1 Investigating conversations: why and how

This introduction summarises the central aspects of CA as regards the object of study and the techniques applied for the analysis. It represents the basis for a better understanding of the discussions about the concept of topic within this approach³⁴.

As Sacks (1984a) affirms it, CA is "that domain [that] seeks to describe methods persons use in doing social life" (p. 21). In first line CA is interested in the *social actions* that take place daily among people. This interest goes back to CA's ethno-methodological roots (Garfinkel 1967) in as far as attention is drawn primarily to how daily, ordinary social actions like inviting someone for dinner, or calling someone on the phone take place in the way we all know, thus in a way we can all understand using our common-sense interpretation.

In second line CA analyses naturally occurring interactions. Every conversation shows that "there is order at all points" (Sacks 1984a). The application of an emic (endogenous) perspective is necessary in order to grasp this order and to describe it. CA is thus a bottom-up approach, in which the first step is to collect data from naturally occurring conversations with audio- and video-recordings. A detailed transcription

³⁴ More information about the methodology I apply for my study is presented in chapter 5.

follows, in which verbal communication, non-verbal behaviour and information on the spatial context of the interaction are conveyed. Focus is brought on the analytic procedure of looking at the data without *a priori* hypotheses to verify: it is an unmotivated study (Psathas 1995) that enables the researchers to grasp the different aspects of the analysed transcription. However, it is often the case that the researchers discuss some spate of data with a set of precise questions in mind.

In third line CA searches for the "methods" people use for accomplishing social actions. A "method" is a systematic procedure for creating and maintaining social order and intersubjectivity (Garfinkel 1967). This means that the focus of attention is directed towards the practices participants employ for accomplishing concrete and precise actions or actional microcosms (Fasel Lauzon *et al.* 2009), like opening or closing a conversation, introducing a conversational topic or (dis)agreeing with one's interlocutor. A practice, then, is a recurrent way of doing something. For example, the action of disagreeing with someone can be accomplished by means of very different practices:

(5) J & J (from Pomerantz 1984: 67)

A: Yeah I like it ()

B: [1] I like it too [2] but uhh
 hahheh it blows my mind.

Ex. 5 shows a case in which B responds to A's first assessment with a second assessment. B produces first an agreement (*I like it too*) but then a disagreeing assessment, introduced with the contrastive conjunction "but": "*but it blows my mind*". Pomerantz describes this action as a prefaced disagreement, which could also be seen as a weak agreement. Disagreement, however, can also be expressed in a more straight forward way, as in the following example:

(6) SPC: 44 (from Pomerantz 1984: 74)

R: ... well never mind. It's not important.

D: Well, it is important.

In this case, the disagreement turn uttered by D contains "exclusively disagreement components, and [is] not in combination with agreement components" (ibid: 74).

To conclude, CA investigates the accomplishment of social actions on the basis of transcriptions of naturally occurring interactions. The analysis is twofold and points to

both the actions accomplished and the practices enacted by the interactants during the conversations.

With these ideas in mind, I now proceed to an overview of the most important studies about topics in CA: first, I present studies about L1s, dividing them between studies about topical progression (2.2.1) and studies about topical disjunctions (2.2.2). I introduce two focus paragraphs on studies on French data (2.2.3) and studies from the domain of interactional linguistics (2.2.4), because these two *foci* of interest play a crucial role for my investigations. I close this chapter (2.2.5) with a discussion of studies that apply CA methodology in the domain of L2 learning (CA-SLA).

2.2 Topics in L1 interaction

Intuitively speaking, it seems clear that interlocutors, when talking together, are talking "about something". The issue addressed by CA researchers is: how do people display that they are talking about something right now? Differently from the functionalist approach (chapter 1), CA is interested in the interactional work done by the participants themselves: when talking to each other, they produce turns in a specific fashion for the purpose of the ongoing conversation. This is all negotiated on a turn-by-turn basis, and this also means that the communicative purpose can be changed locally and adjusted in every moment of the conversation. CA major concern is not to decide what a topic is, but rather to analyse *how* interlocutors do topic talk. This means considering topic not only at a mere content level, but rather "in terms of formal procedures" (Sidnell 2010). The question is not be of the what-type, but rather of the how-type: how do interactants manage (i.e. introduce, change, close, shift and construct) topics in conversation?

Looking globally at a conversation, one has the feeling that its turns hang somehow together in a way that make them depend on one another. One possibility for the description of this dependency is to consider it as topical. These sequences can be seen to be topically glued together, or "topically coherent" (Heritage & Sorjonen 1994: 4) but also to be structured by the action(s) a speaker is accomplishing. For analysing the "content level" of conversations, researchers within the CA approach have generally followed two paths (cf. Seedhouse & Harris 2011): they have either focused on topic progression, i.e. how topics develop during the conversation and flow almost

unremarkably into one another; or on topic boundaries, i.e. moments in which speakers mark the beginning or the end of a topic at hand.

2.2.1 Topical progression

Most of the time, at a certain point in conversation, people talk about something completely different from what they had started with, and they often do not know how this happened. The explanation lies in the inherent conversational feature of topics to develop in a mostly unmarked way. Extending the analysis of her 1972 article about side sequences, Jefferson (1984) presents a detailed, step-by-step analysis of how speakers overcome troubles telling in talk without interrupting the conversational flow³⁵. After talking about some difficult matters, a speaker can summarise his/her point of view (e.g. via a general or final statement) and simultaneously turn to some ancillary matters, i.e. some aspects of the main story that were marginal thus far. These techniques are typical for sequence-closing sequences. At this point, the story-recipient can topicalise the ancillary matters (e.g. with a question like "What is then with X?") in a way that not only invites an answer by the troubles-telling speaker (the answer is conditionally relevant), but provides a slot for the story-recipient him/herself, who can immediately start his/her own story on the ancillary matter. This is the case of pivot utterances (see Drew & Holt 1998; Holt & Drew 2005), i.e. an utterance that is still "on topic" but that already points towards a different matter. Such an utterance allows for the bridging of two unconnected matters via the collaborative creation of a (new) common starting point.

In a similar way, Maynard (1980) studies the conversational places in which topic changes generally occur. Parallel to Jefferson, he identifies different conversational environments in which troubles in the speakership transfer are observable. Maynard works with the concept of topicality, and not of topic, the latter being for him too closely related to the idea of "entity":

[t]opicality is an achievement of conversationalists, something organized and made observable in patterned ways that can be described. (Maynard 1980: 263).

Problems in the transfer of speakership can be identified by a frequent presence of longer inter-turn pauses, as in the following example:

³⁵ See also her complete report on topic organisation (1981) and her paper on topic shift (1993).

(7) From Maynard (1980: 266, partial transcription of the whole example)

01 [...] (talk about a party given by a friend)
02 (1.2)
03 Al: ye::ah
04 (1.0)
05 Al: tch th- that'd be really impressive ya' know, just that Rent out a place heh
06 (1.0)
07 Al: throw a formal party. It- it was kinda fun though
08 (3.0)
09 Al: ye:ah
10 (1.0)
11 Al: y'ever get into sports cars or anything er?
12 Bob: umm I Used to be e a mechanic.
13 [...] (talk goes far about cars)

In ex. 7, Al is telling about a party he went to. When he reaches the end of his story, he tries to solicit a reaction from Bob, but this fails several times: l. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10. After this series of long pauses, Al changes the topic at hand by introducing a new referent into the conversation: sports cars (l. 11). This time he succeeds in transferring the speakership to his interlocutor, who starts talking about his experience with sports cars³⁶. A series of pauses can intervene when a story is being closed but the story-recipient fails to align or affiliate with the storyteller, so that, after several pauses, the story recipient him/herself changes the topic. A particular case is represented by topic shift, which Maynard identifies either as the passage from one aspect to another of a same subject in order to occasion a new class of mentionables³⁷, or as the passage from a rather general to a rather particularised statement. Finally, topic change can also be engendered by the fact that a first topic is just a transitional one, e.g. it is introduced in order to keep the turn machinery going, but for which no further development is in sight (cf. the case of "weather", Garfinkel & Sacks 1970).

With a specific focus on topic change, Covelli & Murray (1980) studied how topics are managed in interaction based on data from middle class, English-speaking North American families. The researchers use the concept of "topic line", i.e. an introduced topic that is further developed in the conversation. With the idea of "line" the authors present topical talk as a system that develops chronologically on a temporal line and in which "topic change occurs and recurs" (Covelli & Murray 1980: 384). Through the identification of different cues that participants use for signalling that a topic is

³⁶ This can be due to the question-format of his turn in l. 11.

³⁷ In the sense of co-class membership as introduced by Sacks.

vanishing (e.g. by summarising one's main point³⁸), the authors identify several techniques the interactants adopt for changing the topic at hand, such as the proposition of different topics or the introduction of a new topic line (more or less related to the preceding one) through the use of "by-the-way information" (ibid.: p. 386³⁹). The researchers conclude with a parallelism between topic change and turn-taking system: "both systems are recursive, and both are at once context-free and context-sensitive". (ibid.: 386).

Recalling Maynard & Zimmermann's (1984) study, West & Garcia (1988) studied conversations between unacquainted couples of people and highlighted the participants' orientation towards the topical progression of conversation focussing particularly on the categories male/female. They identified cases of topic extinction and topic closure in conversations. The former is characterised by a series of pauses and unsuccessful attempts to create topical talk (e.g. only minimal responses were given and no further turns about the topic were uttered). The latter is related to topic-bounding activities and therefore presents different features, such as concluding remarks or arrangements for future activities together. Their results show that: (I) men generally change topics more often than women; and (II) this influences the course of activity of a conversation, because

What was achieved through men's unilateral topic changes was the then-and-there determination of activities that would not be pursued and the tellables that would not be told. (West & Garcia 1988: 570).

Finally, topic progression has also been studied in particular institutional contexts, such as meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous (Arminen 1996), doctor-patient interactions (Campion & Langdon 2004), business interactions (Du Babcock 1999, 2006; Bolden 2008) and classrooms (Heyman 1986). In such contexts, different factors were found that influenced the conversational flow, especially asymmetries in authority and knowledge. Arminen (1996) relates the specific organisation of turn-taking during AA meetings to the way in which participants occasion topical talk and reintroduce or reformulate a previously discussed topic. Typically, this happens via an idiomatic expression that links two topics also when they are in contrast with each other. Two

³⁸ This happens when a speaker is unable to further develop the topic at hand.

³⁹ Cf. "ancillary matters" by Jefferson (1984).

examples are the use of expressions like "I recognize the reverse of the coin" (Arminen 1996: 101, ex. 5), which allows a speaker to "acknowledge the prior turn, and give them its own addition even as a reverse of the coin" (ibid: 102), or the use of tying techniques⁴⁰ (Sacks 1992) in order to highlight a stronger link to the previous talk.

During doctor-patient interactions (Campion & Langdon 2004), several topics are discussed throughout the conversations. However, new topics are introduced mainly by patients via either a pre-announcement like "first of all", which projects more than one "thing" the patient wants to talk about, or via the use of marked "in-situ announcements" of the type "I know it's another thing but" or "and I have another little problem".

With a cross-linguistic comparison, Du Babcock (1999) suggests that there are two different ways of managing topic in Chinese Cantonese meetings compared to English meetings. In Cantonese meetings, interlocutors follow a more circular and communicative topical line, recurrently coming back to a previous talk, whereas English meetings are characterised by a rather linear topical development⁴¹. Investigating the management of topics and agendas in business conversation, Bolden (2008) individuates the role played by the discourse marker "so" at juncture points in conversation: it seems that this marker signals that the upcoming action is introducing the intended topic after a conversation has been opened.

Heyman (1986) studies the use of topic formulations in classroom discourse: he argues that formulations are central to this type of conversation in as far as they "fix" the topic (Heyman 1986: 40). The author proposes an analysis of cases in which topic formulation seems to be problematic, for instance when the teacher verbalises for the class what he/she intends to do next and for this reason relates to what has been done before. In fact, while one would expect topical talk in the classroom to be rather coherent, it is when formulating topics that troubles may arise: (I) it can be that not all members have the same access to the "stock of knowledge" (ibid: 53) that is needed

⁴⁰ Tying techniques are procedures by means of which a speaker shows the relationship between her turn and a preceding one. These are observable in the syntactic, lexical and prosodic pattern that a speaker recycles from the turn of her interlocutor. The speaker shows hereby her understanding of the previous turn and her alignment to it.

⁴¹ A similar analysis was conducted by Chen (1995) on intra- and intercultural dyads. The author pinpointed different ways for eliciting topical talk and for reacting to context cues depending on the cultural similarity or difference of one's interlocutor.

for understanding the topic formulation; and (II) asymmetries in authority arise as far as only the teacher seems to have the right to propose particular formulations and glosses⁴².

To sum up, the investigation of topical progression in conversation has highlighted the instable nature of conversational topics and the collaborative nature of topic progression. It is never just one interlocutor that decides *a priori* what the topic will be, but it is rather the continuous adjustment among participants that makes available to the researcher the progression line of a certain topic. In fact, researchers have the traces left by the interactants at their disposal for "reconstructing" a particular topical talk: thanks to linguistic structures, overlapping turns, pauses and non-verbal communication, topics are collaboratively managed in a way so as not to interrupt the conversational flow and to show acknowledgment for what has been previously said by others. In opposition to topical progression I now turn to the study of moments of disjuncture in the development of conversational topics.

2.2.2 Topical disjunctions

Another line of studies about conversational topics has oriented towards the moments in conversation in which topic boundaries are made relevant by the interlocutors and are observably oriented to in their turns. It is especially the case of topic introduction and topic closure. Most of the research has concentrated on topic introduction, starting with the three related articles by G. Button and N. Casey.

⁴² A critical point may be, however, that it is not always clear what the author means by "topic". In fact, it seems that topic and activity almost always coincide. For example the formulation "what I wanna do today is continue uh talkin' about why the volumes were different" is analysed as topic formulation and contributes to the conclusion that classroom conversations differ from everyday conversation because in the latter ones no such formulations are found. In my opinion, what the author indicates as "topic formulation" should rather be considered as "activity formulation" or as "agenda formulation", because it does not identify one precise discourse object, but rather a longer course of action (Heritage & Sorjonen 1994) that is related to some activities previously done in the class. If we consider this formulation as activity/agenda formulation, then we can ascribe it to a particular situational context: I mean a generic "didactic" context, in which one party assumes some expertise as regards a particular object/knowledge and positions him/herself as expert, whereas the counterpart is oriented to being new to the object/knowledge. In this case, however, I think that we can find plenty of situations in ordinary life outside the classroom, such as conversations between parents (or caregivers) and children. The former often employ similar activity formulations in order to explain to the children what is going to happen next (especially when the children are learning something new, like riding a bike), thus they distribute the conversational roles of expert and newcomer, positioning themselves as knowing party in the face of the other unknowing one (cf. Goodwin 1979).

Button & Casey (1984) address the issue of topic initiation via the analysis of topic initial elicitors. This resource, typically expressed in English with questions of the type "What's new?" or "Anything else (to report)?" accomplishes a multi-layered action in conversation. First, it segments the upcoming talk in three parts: the inquiry, a response to it (the preferred option is a positive response) and a topicaliser, i.e. an element that invites the interlocutor to tell more about the topic. Second, the interactant that uses it does not directly propose a topic, but shows to his/her interlocutor his/her availability for talking about a topic. Third, it provides a ground from which a possible topic can be proposed, i.e. it prepares the field for a certain domain of talkables. Topic initial elicitors are typically found after sequence-opening or sequence-closing components and after topic-bounding elements⁴³.

Button & Casey (1985) deal with another type of topic introduction, namely itemised news inquiries and news announcements. Both of them are labelled as topic nominations. With itemised news inquiries we are still in the domain of inquiries, but in contrast to topic initial elicitors, itemised news inquiries "aim themselves directly at a particular item" (Button & Casey 1985: 6). The authors identified at least three ways in which itemised news inquiries can be proffered:

(I) by asking a question about a matter that shows that the questioner has partial access to and wishes to know more;

(II) by asking a question relative to some known troubles of the other party (e.g. health problems);

⁴³ In the case of topic-bounding elements, the authors say that "their design is aimed at newsworthy events but without marking them as further for the conversation, and without marking them as immediately current" (Button & Casey 1984: 174). As we can see from this example:

(8) NB: II: 1: 4 (from Button & Casey 1984: 175)

A: (Ih) was too depre[ssing
B: [Oh:::: it is te::rruhble=
B: =What's new?

The inquiry by B in the third line is clearly projecting a new domain of tellables and of topicalisable elements marking a disjunction from what has just been said.

(III) by addressing a recipient-related activity "which is oriented to as news generational" (ibid.: 9). In this third case, an elaborated response can follow⁴⁴.

As for news announcements, they do not inquire, but "report on an activity" (ibid.: 22). They have three main characteristics: first, the activity they report on is speaker-related, as opposed to the news-inquiries that were recipient-related; second, although the activity is speaker-related, it is presented so as to show that the speaker is aware of some recipient's knowledge about it; third, the activity is only partially reported, i.e. there could be more to come if the recipient topicalises the announcement.

In their third article, Button & Casey (1988/89) analyse the methods used by interactants for initiating a topic when there is an actual business-at-hand, i.e. when a particular event is happening or has happened that a speaker wishes to address and to introduce in the conversation. Consequently, interactants are shown to deploy a "topic-sensitive method" (Button & Casey 1988/89: 63). This is illustrated in the following example:

(9) MDH:1:8:8: (From Button & Casey, 1988/89: 64)

01 Dr. D: If we wait tod:ay perhaps tomorrow if we reng
 02 Through and see if we can get ah:
 03 (0.4)
 04 () .ts
 05 Dr. A: Yes:
 06 Dr. D: Er:
 07 (1.5)
 08 Dr. A: Y eah
 09 Dr. D: w ritt en reports an if we (0.7)^ you know=
 10 Dr. A: Mmm
 11 Dr. D: =I: should think (0.8) we should really get full
 12 author:ty (.) hhh an if: (1.0) it is alright
 13 then we'll go a:head
 14 (3.4)
 15 Dr. D: No|w then: hhhh (1.0) Mr. E:llacott
 16 (1.4)
 17 Dr. A: He's very well.

⁴⁴ An important consequence of this structural property of itemised new inquiries is that the response that follows need not be exclusively on the item addressed in the inquiry, but can be extended to some other related aspects. As the authors put it "the sequence is designed to begin a topic". (ibid.: 17).

In example (9), two doctors are talking about their patients whilst going through their files whilst watching and completing information in the patients' paper files. The line focused on is line 15: Dr. D. accomplishes the introduction of a new topic by means of, first, a transition marker (*now then*) at turn beginning. The speaker introduces the referent Mr. Ellacott, who cannot be found in the immediately preceding talk. However, this introduction is oriented to by both interactants as non-problematic and understandable at this point in conversation. Dr. A. does not initiate any repair sequence after line 15, but aligns with his colleague and reacts to his topic introduction with a description of Mr. Ellacott's health state.

Example (9) shows that, under specific conditions, topic introduction takes place with the new introduced topic not being related to the immediately preceding talk. On the contrary, interactants can rely on previous knowledge by the recipient about some specific matters: in this case, the two doctors are going through their files, and it is possible that, at some point, Mr. Ellacott will be addressed during the conversation. The authors refer to this aspect of topic introduction as the "item's *known-in-advance* status" (ibid.: 67, emphasis in the original): in this case, the turn used for introducing a new topic contains marking devices (like the transition marker *now then*) and specific intonation clues that show the speaker's orientation towards the new item, which can be understood by the recipient whilst being disconnected from the preceding talk⁴⁵.

The analysis and comparison of conversations between acquainted and unacquainted pairs of interlocutors allowed Maynard & Zimmermann (1984) to investigate the methods speakers use for introducing topics in conversation. Considering three basic factors that influence the accomplishment of topical talk (relevance of the topic as regards previous conversations, reference to what is known/unknown by the interlocutor and management of interpersonal relationship), the researchers highlighted the strong link between topical talk and the construction of interpersonal relationships:

[C]onversationalists' relationship is an ongoing accomplishment partly exhibited in those procedures utilized for initiating and pursuing topical talk. (Maynard & Zimmermann 1984: 313)

⁴⁵ Taking another approach to the generation of topics in conversation, Adato (1980) and Bergmann (1990) investigate the *occasionality* (cf. Adato 1980) or the *local sensitivity* (cf. Bergmann 1990) of topic introduction. In their studies, the authors shed light on the local and co-constructed nature of topics by showing that they are often related to the context in which conversations are happening, i.e. the "real world" becomes itself a way of generating topics in conversation.

Through the introduction of known referents, the topicalisation of previous introduced matters and the continuous adjustment to one another, acquainted speakers "do being acquainted". On the contrary, unacquainted speakers were seen to start their conversations with different types of question-answer sequences, f. ex. with inquiries that help categorising their interlocutors (student, visitor, professor, etc.) or questions about the activities related to some specific membership categories (if someone is a student, s/he might take courses or participate in some campus activities). These conversation-opening sequences accomplish an important pre-topical work that functions on three levels:

(I) they are necessary for producing further topical talk, which would be disruptive if it appeared "out of the blue" at the beginning of the conversation;

(II) they help with the categorisation of one's interlocutor and this, in turn, allows producing topical talk; and

(III) they frame what is sayable during the ongoing conversation, avoiding for instance offending remarks, and increasing the possibility to produce topical talk leads to alignment and affiliation.

The study by Svennevig (1999) shows an investigation of topical talk in people's first conversations – when people get to know each other. He presents five principles of topical talk, i.e. general organisational "precepts" that involve *production constraints* and *interpretive resources* (Svennevig 1999: 172) for producing and participating in topical talk. According to these principles, topical talk is in the first place reportable, i.e. the interactants presume their talk to be of some interest for their co-participants⁴⁶. Topic reportability is established in the opening sequences (or in the pre-sequences) of conversations and involves the cooperation of all participants. This is observable in the use of topicalizers by the coparticipant, as in the following example:

⁴⁶ As Svennevig mentions, "reportability" has been differently labelled within the literature, so e.g. Maynard & Zimmerman (1984) and Sacks (1992) call it "mentionability", Labov (1972) labels it "reportability" and Button & Casey (1984, 1985) name it "newsworthiness". Again, one can see how differentiated the landscape is as regards topic characterisation.

(10) "Lecture" (3: 82-88), from Svennevig (1999: 174)⁴⁷

R: ... 'oh,
... it was a bit too 'much for me that last
.. lecture
V: (0) 'yeah?
R: ... (2.1) <X on the X> go from two till
.. ['six, and then] -
V: [yeah that's ..] ex'hausting.
R: .. 'very,

The interesting turn is the first one by V: " 'yeah?". Though her reaction to R's turn seems minimal, it accomplishes nevertheless the action of topicalising R's assessment by allowing him to expand on the proposed matter. This is especially done via rising intonation, which equates it to a question, and by the fact that this reaction arrives immediately after R's turn. The function of a topicalizer is, then, to "establish the topic proposal interactionally as the joint topical project for the subsequent turns of talk" (ibid.: 174). The investigation of topicalizers shows, again, the collaborative nature of topic introduction and, especially, how this collaboration is needed to establish what is reportable in a conversation. To better understand the collaborative nature of topic reportability, Svennevig also shows an example of non topicalisation, that is, a case in which the co-participant does not topicalise the proposed matter and, in so doing, rejects its reportability. The main aspects of this rejection are to be found in the co-participant's delayed reaction and in the falling intonation of his minimal response:

(11) "Legendary" (5:866-889) (from Svennevig 1999: 174-175, partial report of the whole example)

B: (0) hm
...(2.5) of course the 'premises are
e= legendary
or like
L: ... yeah.
B: .. [yeah you know?]
L: [yeah yeah yeah.]
B: ...[[it--]]
L: [[it's]] a 'good 'story [that one.]
B: [@@@]@@
.. 'really.
...(2.0) 'unbe'lievable,

The differences to example 10 are quite striking. First, L's first turn "... yeah." differs from V's first turn in example 9 in its timing (this one is delayed) and its intonation (this

⁴⁷ I report only the English translation of this example. The original Finnish transcription can be found in Svennevig (1999: 174).

one has a final, falling intonation). Second, the consequences of this are observable in the subsequent talk: whereas R, in ex. 9, expands his matter and V participates in it via a demonstration of affiliation, in this example B is fishing for L's topicalisation. This is observable in his explicit question "yeah you know?", which is also reacted to with a series of minimal responses terminating with a final falling intonation ("yeah yeah yeah."). Moreover, L assesses his knowledge of the story B wishes to talk about by verbalising it with "it's a good story that one". This turn stops every possible expanding move about the proposed story and, in fact, the conversation continues in another direction⁴⁸.

A second principle is that of projectability. This means that when a topic is proposed, it structures the upcoming talk in a specific way and this needs to be accepted by all participants. A special group of projectors occurs in narratives, in the sense that they are prefaced and framed in such a way as to project their main point. When an activity such as storytelling is started, the upcoming talk is somehow strictly organised: the roles of teller and recipient are distributed and the recipients generally accept the fact that the teller will produce many turns at talk, thus suspending the turn-taking machinery and the standard distribution of speakership. However this is not a problem, since it is collaboratively constructed turn-by-turn by all interactants.

Local connectedness is the third principle presented. It relates to topic continuity and talk interpretation. Indeed, as regard the production constraints, topic continuity is to be assumed if no other techniques are exploited to signal that there is no disruption whatsoever in the ongoing talk (Sacks *et al.* 1974). Therefore, a turn is seen and interpreted as being related to the preceding one – if the contrary is not clearly signalled. The following example clarifies this point:

(12) Julie, 05.02.2010 "*anglais*" (English)

01 Mar: >alors< dans ma lettre je lui ai écrit en allemand, les deux
well in my letter I wrote to her in German the other two

02 autre:s (0.6) en anglais.
in English

03 (0.6)

04 Mar: déjà alors moi au téléphone en anglais +je suis pas sûre que je
already well me on the phone in English I'm not sure that I

05 (peux) tellement ((en riant))+

⁴⁸ For a deeper discussion of this example see Svennevig (1999: 175-176).

2. Topic(s) in interaction: Conversation Analysis

- 06 (0.8) *can really ((laughing))*
- 07 Jul: ouais moi- oh non: en anglais c'est- c'est- (0.3) c'est °terrible.°
yeah me oh no in English it's it's it's terrible
- 08 Mar: >bon toutes< les ↑trois=↑elles ont dit qu'elles parlaient un pe-
well all three they have said that they speak a bit
- 09 qu'elles avaient fait un peu de français=[parce que&
that they had had a bit of French because
- 10 Jul: [ah:=(ouais)
oh yeah
- 11 Mar: &ça c'était un peu une condition parce que on veut pas quelqu'un qui
that was a bit a condition because we don't want someone who
- 12 dit pas un mot quelqu'un (x) rien à comprendre [°quand même°.
can't utter a word someone (x) nothing to understand in any case
- 13 Jul: [ou:ais.
yeah
- 14 (0.5)
- 15 Mar: [°c'est quand même embêtant°.
it's really annoying
- 16 Jul: [.hh
- 17 Jul: >ouais=MOI< (0.2) j'ai: eh: maintenant avec les cours de ski là à
yeah me I have uh now with the ski lesson at
- 18 l'uni?
the university
- 19 (0.4)
- 20 Jul: euh des fois je parle angl↑ais parce que y a: ce=sont qu↑e de:s
uh sometimes I speak English because there are it's only
- 21 (0.5) [des gens-&
people
- 22 Mar: [°des étrangers°.
foreigners
- 23 Jul: [ah:=ouais >des étrangers.<&
oh yeah foreigners
- 24 Mar: [ouais.
yeah
- 25 Jul: &.h et:=euhm (0.9) <o::uais> c'est vraiment (0.8) c'est ↑dure
and uhm yeah it's truly it's hard
- 26 de parler anglais parce que .hh maintenant
to speak English because now

In example 12, Marie is explaining to Julie how she goes about searching for the next au-pair girl and she is telling that one of the girls she has contacted wishes to speak to

her on the phone in English. Marie's concern is that she might not be that good in speaking English on the phone (l. 04-05) and Julie reacts with an affiliating response (l. 07): she admits that speaking English is terrible for her (*c'est terrible*). Marie continues explaining that all the girls had had French courses, because the condition of speaking a little bit of French is essential for her (l. 08-12). After Marie's closing remark (l. 15), Julie starts talking about her ski classes at the university (l. 17-18). Julie contextualises her talk by linking it to herself via the left dislocation *moi je* in line 17 and by introducing the ski classes of the university, but the topical linkage is observable only later in this turn when she tells that she sometimes speaks English during these classes (l. 20). After a repair sequence about the word "foreigners" (l. 20-24), Julie continues her telling, assessing that it's really hard to speak English for her (l. 25-26). Julie is thus accomplishing many different things at once: her story mirrors Marie's story structure by first delivering facts and then commenting on them, expressing a negative stance. Moreover, Julie's talk remains on topic, although her turn-beginning in l. 17-18 could be interpreted as disruptive regarding the preceding talk – but it is not. Finally, Julie tells a story that is structurally aligned to Marie's and also allows her to affiliate with Marie's point of view. In conclusion, local connectedness is a multi-layered matter that relates not only to the content (or information) level of conversation, but also to its linguistic verbalisation and its sequential organisation.

The fourth principle addressed is progressivity. Progressivity indicates the possibility of carrying on a topic as long as participants can say something about it. Svennevig describes it precisely by saying that:

Progressivity includes both form and content. On the form side, this means that talk should be continuous, and pauses and gaps should be minimized. On the content side, progressivity means adding new information, that is, expanding the common ground of the participants. (Ibid: 184)

When it happens that one or more of these four principles are not respected, i.e. when some work is done to indicate that a disruption is coming in, then the very fact that they are not respected "gives them [the principles] a potential for conveying procedural information" (ibid.: 186). Procedural information is, thus, the fifth principle. When a topic is maintained, then progressivity and local connectedness are followed, whereas the establishment of reportability and the related projection appear at work when a new topic is being introduced. Subsequently, when talk off topic is done or another disjunction in the topical talk is coming, the interactants will signal it with some extra work and by this means, will highlight which principles are being disregarded in that

specific moment. Through this, the interactant will deliver to his/her co-participant the necessary procedural information for interpreting the upcoming talk.

Finally, Holt (2010) analyses topic terminations and identifies a specific use of laughter at the end of storytelling, although she concentrates on specific types of stories, i.e. no complaint-stories or tragic stories are treated in her paper. She shows that, in this particular conversational environment, not only alignment but also affiliation is required from the story recipient. When it is delivered, at least two turns contain laughter, which *per se* is not a sufficient closing device (it is, at most, closing implicative). However, it indicates the speakers' orientation towards the introduction of a possible new matter. Instead, when affiliation is not achieved, the storyteller tries to expand the topic at hand, thus creating a new opportunity for the recipient to affiliate⁴⁹.

Up to now I have shown that existing literature has focussed either on topic progression, when one topic is generated from the previous one and is somehow tied to it, or on conversational moments in which such flow does not happen and participants orient more towards topical boundaries. After this overview, I now turn to two particular *foci* of interest for my research. I first present an overview of the basic studies about topic in French (2.2.3). This paragraph shows how the research has concentrated on the topic matter especially in the Nineties and how the approach changed from a more discursive to a more conversation-analytic one. I then discuss the existing literature about the linguistic features of conversational topic, because these studies greatly contribute to my definition of topic for the rest of the present study. In this case, I insist particularly on studies that describe and analyse French data in the following section.

2.2.3 Topic analysis in French data. From *objet de discours* to conversational process

Within the French-speaking research area, there are different studies about topics by Anne-Claude Berthoud and Lorenza Mondada. For instance, Berthoud & Mondada (1992) propose a comparison between topic introduction strategies in children French

⁴⁹ Holt (2010) does not clearly state what she intends by topic in my opinion. In fact, she is interested in analysing topic terminations in relation to laughter, but subsequently she focuses on storytelling, which is an activity participants accomplish collaboratively. Clearly, a story needs to have "a topic", in the sense that a storytelling reports on something newsworthy, i.e. on something mentionable or reportable. For this reason, when a story ends, the topic it was about might also end. However, a story need not necessarily be about only one topic or that this topic will not be expanded by a next speaker.

L1 and adult French L2 conversations. It is shown that children tend to use deictic means for introducing new referents and that their discourse is often characterised by several topical ruptures. Instead, adult L2 speakers' discourse does not show so many ruptures but the topics are introduced with different means, for example without phatic markers. Moreover, topic introduction and topic changes are often guided by the L1 speakers, whereas the L2 speakers participate in a rather passive way to these changes. In Berthoud & Mondada (1993) the authors propose a critical review of the studies about the notion of topic and use this basis for positioning their own conception of topic. In fact, using a discursive-interactive approach for the data analysis, they identify three main characteristics for the topic, namely:

(I) its dynamic nature. The authors highlight the contrast between a notion of topic as entity and a notion of topic as process, which they use for their analysis. Hence, the topic is not fixed once a conversation starts and kept invariable during the conversational flow, but it is constantly changed and adapted during the conversation.

(II) its formal marking, i.e. a topic is marked and verbalised in different ways that depend on the local adjustment of the interactants⁵⁰. That happens for instance in the following example:

(13) From Berthoud & Mondada 1993: 127⁵¹

2.1:

A1: mais c'est un qui est pour mai 68 / dans ses idées
 but it's one who is for May 68 in his ideas

B2: ouais
 yeah

A3: c'est marrant y a encore beaucoup de gens qui ont cette optique mai 68
 it's weird there are still many people that have this vision may 68

 [etc]
 etc

B4: ouais
 yeah

A5: moi je vois ma marraine celle qui habite Genève elle est pour pour le:
 me I see my sponsor that one who lives in Geneva she is for for the
 les sociétés de consummatrices suisses je crois \ mais elle a tout à

⁵⁰ Cf. Berthoud (1991) and Berthoud & Mondada (1995) on the marking strategies for the introduction of new conversational matters.

⁵¹ My personal English translation.

the societies of Swiss consumer-F.pl. I think but she has anyway
fait les idées mai 68 hein
the ideas May 68 has she
 (MOU-C2)

Here, the expression "*mai 68*" undergoes a repetition that shows different entities related to the very same expression. Indeed, in A1 "*mai 68*" identifies a particular moment in time, in A3 it appeals to a particular historical and political period and, in A5 it is further elaborated and related to a specific situation in the present. The constant re-elaboration of the topic is thus visible at the lexical level and the different verbalisations are the traces of the interactants' turn-by-turn adjustment.

(III) its procedural nature, dependent on discourse⁵². Because the topic is not considered as fixed entity but rather as process and, consequently, can be constantly rearranged and reformulated, it has to be addressed through the lens of procedural information. In so doing, its changes and its transitions can be seen to be locally relevant and orderly accomplished by the interactants themselves.

Mondada (1995) addresses the issue of "instability" as an inherent feature of conversational topics. In fact, instead of being decided at the beginning of interactions, topics are entities *en devenir*, i.e. entities that vary during the course of interactions and which all participants can shape. Therefore topics can be proposed by one interlocutor via a question or an assessment, but they constantly change in conversation through other participants' turns: interactional topics are a collaborative matter, which means that interactants can make use of different strategies in order to implement their topical line. In some cases, the turns are seen to strongly connect, so that even if the topic is still stabilising (but not yet totally stabilised), the interactants are following the same topical line. On the contrary, other cases show that participants' topical developments are competing, as in the following example:

(14) Corpus Fribourg: apos (from Mondada 1995: 123)

1P: *et v(ous) faite d'ailleurs des propositions qu(e) j(e) trouve*
and you make by the way some propositions that I find

⁵² An analysis of topic marking and topic management in travel stories is discussed in Berthoud & Mondada (1994). In this article, the authors chose to concentrate on a specific type of discourse in order to highlight the relationship between the introduction of discourse objects and their linguistic marking taking into account the story recipient.

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- intéressantes / comme uh: euh sur le pou:ce [pour
interesting like uh euh about the thumb for
- 2C: [sur l(e) pouce /
on the thumb
- oui oui [. c'est très joli/
yes yes it's really nice
- 3P: [pour euh... pour remplacer euh fas(t) food \ i- voilà
for euh for replacing euh fast food i- there it is
- euh vraiment on pourrait faire l'économie de fast food /
euh really we could do the economy of fast food
- 4B: moi je crois qu'i(l) faut éliminer le fast food / pas le mot mais
me I think that it is necessary to eliminate the fast food not the word but
- la chose/
the thing
- 5P: ah éliminer la chose \ ah ben c'est BIEN\ alors ça: / euh là..
oh eliminate the thing oh well it's good this then euh there
- là j(e) crois qu(e) vous avez touché le coeur des gens \ enfin: ..
there I think that you have touched the people's hearts in the end
- oui faut éliminer la chose \ mai(s) enfin / .. bon\ et et: ..
yes we need to eliminate the thing but in the end well and and
- mai(s) enfin ce food s'accroche / quand même \ alors qu'est-ce que
but in the end this food clings to anyway so what is
- comment SUR le pouce \ le: l-
how on the thumb the-M.pl.
- 6B: je n(e) sais pas \ mm- sur le pouce / franchement/ je: je pense
I don't know on the thumb frankly I I think
- que ça: ça ne va pas marcher\
that this this is not going to work

This example shows a clear case of concurrent topical development: whereas P is insisting on "fast food" as a new word in French, B chooses to talk about "fast food" as a thing (as a particular type of restaurant and a way of eating). The contrast is made clear in B's turn in l. 4: he starts his turn with a left dislocation (*moi je crois*) and re-introduces the previous mentioned term "fast food" with a determined article "*le fast food*", thus accomplishing the transition from term to place/way of eating. In 5, P tries to bring back the conversation on the neologism "fast food": see the interrupted aligning assessments at the beginning of his turn and the subsequent partial disagreement with "*mais enfin .. bon ...*". The work done on the lexical item "fast food" reflects the concurrent topical lines in which the interactants are trying to lead the conversation

and the negotiation of a common reference ground happens continuously in the turn-by-turn unfolding of the interaction.

"Paroles à propos", published in 1996, is Berthoud's volume and presents a detailed discussion about topic, thematisation, topicalisation and theme in French⁵³. The study concentrates on the formal marking of the *"thématisation"* (p. 8), which for the author is *"une opération de marquage du topic dans le discours."* (an operation of topic marking in discourse, p. 8). The aim of this volume is to investigate in detail the topic marking strategies used in French conversations. In order to do this, Berthoud first states what her analytical object is, namely the discourse topic:

Considérer le topic comme trace d'objet en train de se construire au travers des marquages linguistiques et de la séquentialité du discours, c'est comprendre la dimension linguistique à la fois comme manifestation et comme source de la construction des topics. C'est en cela qu'ils n'ont pas de réalité en dehors du discours, mais sont constitutivement discursifs." (Berthoud 1996: 16)⁵⁴

Topic, here, is approached from its formal constituents (cf. *marques linguistiques et séquentielles*, p. 22). Indeed, the investigation of topic introduction, change and closure shows their evolution online and the participants' collaboration to these changes. According to the author, instead of crystallising the topic as an independent entity, the analyst should look at conversations in order to detect the pragmatic operations accomplished by the interlocutors. Berthoud's analysis concentrates mainly on topic introduction in conversation. The author presents an investigation of the different possibilities for introducing a topic in conversation, such as: through existential markers, (un)determined NPs, deixis, etc. An extra chapter is devoted to the *"thématisation"*, i.e. to the operation of topic introduction, which is mainly accomplished through right- and left-dislocations. An analysis of operations such as topic introduction is only possible if the verbalisation of referents in spoken discourse is considered. A new referent can indeed be introduced by an undetermined NP and become the conversational topic at hand. The integration of sequential structure and co-participant in the analysis sheds light on a conversational element that is sensed to be omnipresent but still remains very difficult to grasp.

⁵³ See also Grobet (2002) for another presentation of dialogical topics.

⁵⁴ Considering topic as a trace of an object that is constituting itself through linguistic marking and sequential aspects of discourse means understanding its linguistic dimension contemporarily as manifestation of and as source for topic construction. It is in this aspect that they [topics] do not exist outside the discourse, but are intrinsic discursive. (My English translation).

Mondada (2003) has dealt with the relationship between topical talk and sequence organisation in interaction. The author concentrates on topic introduction after opening-sequences and in pre-closing environments in phone calls. The author shows that the first topic in a conversation is placed in the so-called *anchor position* (Schegloff 1986) and identifies the "reason for calling". Normally, a pre-closing sequence signals the end of a previous topic and this frees a new slot either for starting the closure or for introducing a new topic. Topics that appear in this position are, however, marked by misplacement markers, or are introduced in a fashion that shows to the co-participant that they are dislocated as regards what preceded (bad news, afterthoughts).

The studies presented so far lead to the conclusions that interactional topics need to be analysed considering different, intertwined aspects:

- (I) their introduction and identification is created on-line through the turns every interactant produces in the conversation;
- (II) their organisation is sensible to other systems working in conversation, like turn-taking;
- (III) the stabilisation and the development of a topic are collaborative accomplishments, which means that participants have to orient themselves to others' turns in order to contribute in a coherent way to the topic at hand, or, when this is not the case, then they need to manifest their contrast as regards what has just been said.

In the next section, I focus on studies that have dealt with the challenges related to the notion of topic in interaction from a more linguistic starting point. I present several studies from the domain of interactional linguistics that have concentrated on reference and anaphora in ordinary conversation.

2.2.4 Topic, reference and anaphora in conversation

As I have shown in chapter 1, reference has been largely studied within the functionalist approach. Particular attention has been paid to the coding strategies for referents in L1 and L2 productions and the main result is a scale that fixes the coding possibilities the speakers dispose of. However, sometimes conversations function in a different way to monologues or written texts, in the sense that the activities carried on during conversations are always collaborative, i.e. they demand at least two participants. As soon as more than one speaker is involved, particular methods and practices are required in order to ensure mutual comprehension. Thus the question arises: what happens with reference, anaphora and deixis when more than one person is concerned? How do interactants establish and stabilise the referents they are talking about?

Sacks & Schegloff (1979) have illustrated how conversationalists follow two preferences: a preference for recognitionals, i.e. definite expressions that make a referent available to the recipient within a specific discourse, and a preference for single form references, i.e. the use of minimal reference forms for referring to some items/persons/events. Auer (1984) highlights an important fact regarding this, namely that whenever speakers describe their interactions, they will say that they were telling something or complaining about something – but they will never say that they were establishing reference⁵⁵. This could be related to the fact that this action does not bear many difficulties but "is done *en passant*" (Auer 1984: 628, emphasis in the original). However, several moments can be found in conversations where repairs concern reference, and it is on these cases of "misfits" (ibid.: 629) that the author has based his analysis of referential problems in conversation. Reference can be addressed in conversation as a source of trouble in different ways, e.g. through another-initiated repair. Other practices are also available: in order to avoid referential problems at the outset, the referring party may want to settle the referent in question. This can be done using preparatory questions like "Do you know X?". The other party, the recipient, also has some techniques available: back-channelling devices or agreement tokens indicate that the reference is recognised.

⁵⁵ See also the study by Quasthoff (1984) on the ways in which children establish reference in conversation. For a formal analysis of inaccurate reference, see Perrault & Cohen (1981).

Auer (1988) uses a new description of the function of deixis in conversation by considering the process of contextualising, i.e. a "process that activates social categories and category-bound activities" (ibid.: 265). His analysis shows how, in ordinary conversations, people shift from situated to displaced language in a constant back-and-forth move. Displaced language identifies conversational moments in which the focus of attention is on one of the elements of another context (spatial or temporal elements, more specific or more generic elements). Auer discovers that the passage from situated to displaced language is disjunctive as regards the preceding topic⁵⁶.

More recent studies by Bolden (2008) and Betz (2011) have focused on different linguistic resources related to topic management. Bolden (2008) investigates the use of the marker "so" for entering the first conversational topic of an interaction, whereas Betz (2011) concentrated on the use of the adverb "now" in a variant of German. Depending on its placement within a turn, this adverb contributes not only to topic management (especially in turn-final components) but also to the projection of a new action.

Important work has been done specifically on the French language by Pekarek Doehler (Pekarek 1999; Pekarek Doehler 2000a, 2000b, 2001). Pekarek (1998) analyses a case of over-specification of a referent, i.e. the use of NP when a pronoun would theoretically be enough – according to Ariel's accessibility scale (1988, see section 1.4.4 above). The author identifies two functions for the over-specification, which go beyond the mere accessibility of referents: a discourse structuring function and an argumentative function. Referential over-coding with a full NP where a pronoun would be possible can be used as a way of re-appropriation (or multiple re-categorisation) of the referent in question. Finally, the use of a left-dislocation also topicalises the element and shifts the attention of the interlocutor to it. On the argumentative level, the over-specification sustains the action of disagreeing with the interlocutor, marking two contrastive stands. In conclusion, over-specification is not just a "deviant case" with respect to the accessibility scales: rather, it is a referential process that modifies the discourse and structures social actions.

Both papers from the year 2000 are concerned with the relationship of anaphora, left-dislocation and sequence organisation. Pekarek Doehler (2000b) discusses the use of

⁵⁶ The new topic starts, however, at a point in which it can be legitimated to start without being semantically related to the previous one.

over-specification in French conversation and shows how information structure alone cannot account for the coding of referents. In fact, left-dislocations have been found at the crossroads of preference and disagreement organisation. Over-specification, through the use of left-dislocation in turn-beginning, functions as a preface to an upcoming disagreement, as in the following example:

(15) 2 MH/LA, ent., i. (from Pekarek 2000b: 188)⁵⁷

P: mais si on aime eh un langue c'est plus facile .. je crois
but if we love uh a language it's easier I believe

la motivation est très importante
motivation is very important

S: **la motivation** c'est importante mais aussi eh . le talent .
motivation it's important but also uh the talent

je veux dire . la: disposition à apprendre une langue eh . (...)
I mean the disposition for learning a language uh

This example shows how the preference for agreement leads S to construct his turn in two parts: a first part partially repeating P's last TCU (*la motivation est importante*). It is only a partial repetition because S transforms this utterance with a left dislocation (*la motivation C'EST importante*). The over-specification signals to the interlocutor that a possible deviation from the preference structure is ongoing: in fact, after this first agreement, a disagreement follows (*mais aussi le talent*). Similar results are also presented in Pekarek Doehler (2001), where the author investigates the use of left-dislocations in disagreement sequences in which a referent is promoted to the status of topic. Pekarek Doehler (2000a) focuses on long distance anaphora in conversation. Recalling Fox's study (1987) on return-pops, the author addresses the question of how a referent can remain activated across several turns at talk (long referential distance). The data suggests that not only inference or precoding mention, but also (and foremost, in conversation) the sequence organisation and progression in conversation and the participants' orientation towards a specific activity-type.

To conclude, the analysis of topic management in conversation can be done by concentrating on two different aspects, starting either from the forms, or from the sequence- and action-organisation. It is however clear that, as the topic is at the crossroads of these two levels, both of them must be taken into account when

⁵⁷ My English translation.

investigating conversational topics. I now turn to the (less numerous) studies about topic management in a second language.

2.3 Topics in L2 interactions: CA-SLA

In recent years, the field of second language acquisition (SLA) has seen a change in the approaches adopted for investigating how learners of a language actually use it in everyday life. A major change has occurred with a stronger orientation towards the sociocultural aspects of the process of L2 learning and the application of CA analytical methods has shed light on widely neglected characteristics of L2 learning⁵⁸ (cf. Pekarek Doehler 2013 on CA-SLA).

In the research domain of CA-SLA, the studies addressing the issue of topic in a second language are only a few. Pekarek Doehler (2004) presents an investigation of left-dislocated constructions by advanced French L2 speakers. The corpus used is composed of French L2 classroom interactions and semi-directive interviews with German-speaking students learning French⁵⁹. The author, with a first quantitative analysis, shows that L2 speakers' use of left-dislocation is generally rarer than its use by L1 speakers. Moreover, sometimes the left-dislocated constructions display non-standard features, such as the dislocation of an indefinite NP. However, the functions accomplished by the left-dislocations are as many as for the L1 speakers, first of all when a referent is promoted to topic status, as shown in the following example:

(16) en3cII, 1-12 (from Pekarek Doehler 2004: 19-20)⁶⁰

1P: mesdames messieurs bonjour nous avons lu avant Pentecôte le reste de
ladies and gentlemen good morning we read before Pentecost the rest of
 notre texte . avant de: avant d'approcher certains problèmes plus
our text before PART before approaching certain problems more
 particulièrement d'abord un petit résumé peut-être: pour nous
precisely let's start with a little summary maybe to put
 remettre un petit peu en forme monsieur M s'il-vous-plaît ((voix
us again a bit in form mister M if you like ((low

⁵⁸ A detailed description of studies in the domain of CA-SLA follows in chapter 3.

⁵⁹ In both cases, the learners have already reached an advanced L2 level.

⁶⁰ My personal English translation.

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basse))
voice))

2H: eh . .
uh

3P: bon alors qu'est-ce qui se passe .
well then what happens

4H: eh
uh

5P: qu'est-ce qui se passe à la fin de ce scénario . .
what happens at the end of this scenario

6H: alors **Pierre** . eh il entre dans le hangar . et là il rencontre ses
well Pierre uh enters the hangar and there he meets his
amis les conspirateurs . et: . il veut les convaincre . ehm il veut
friends the conspirators and he wants to convince them uhm he wants
les aider qu'ils
to help them that they

In this case, Pierre is the protagonist of a book the students have read, so it is an inferable referent, which however has not yet been activated. Through the left-dislocation "Pierre – il", the referent becomes the topic at hand. Other cases show that left-dislocations are used by the L2 speakers for a reorientation of the discourse, namely when a former topic has been abandoned and is reintroduced later on via a dislocated construction:

(17) en3cl, 135-142 (from Pekarek Doehler 2004: 21-22)

1P: mais alors qu'est-ce que vous qu'est-ce que vous voulez que la
but then what do you what do you want that
Suisse achète d'autres avions/
Switzerland buys other planes

2M: non de mon opinion il faut (pas) d'avions
no in my opinion we need no planes

3P: pas d'avions du tout\
no planes at all

4M: pas d'avions du tout ((voix basse))
no planes at all ((low voice))

5P: mais alors eh: **un autre système de défense**/
but then uh another defence system

6M: peut-être **un autre système de défense** . oui **système de défense** mais
maybe another defence system yes defence system but
chaque personne (ne va) x x soi-même mais aussi eh: la tolérance .

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each person doesn't go himself but also uh the tolerance

c'est un grand (marge) de cet eh (3s)
it's a great margin of this uh

7G: *et cet autre eh: . système . ((souffle)) système de défense qu'est-*
and this other uh system ((breath)) defence system what

ce que ce serait/
would this be

The conversation is about the defence system in Switzerland. In turn 6, M introduces a new matter (*la tolerance*). At that point, G interrupts M, reintroducing the previous topic via a left-dislocation. The author concludes that, despite some structural and lexical differences in the realisation of left-dislocations by French L2 speakers as compared to French L1 speakers, the functions of the left-dislocations used by L2 speakers conform to the pragmatic constraints found in the use by L1 speakers, especially concerning topic management. The analysis of interactional data has allowed the author to relate the use of left-dislocation not only to the level of information structure, but also to the issues of turn-taking and interaction management in collaboration with other interlocutors.

Gan *et al.* (2008) investigate the ways in which Hong-Kong secondary ESL students negotiate topics in small group work. The paper presents two long excerpts in which the interlocutors are assigned a specific task, namely to find a gift for the main character of the film "Forrest Gump". The researchers found out that the peers started their interactions with typical transitional/first topics, such as short comments on the film. During the interaction the participants' orientation was made mutually observable both towards the task to accomplish (through many formulations and reformulations of it) and towards new topics or topic shifts, as the participants overtly address the next matter to be discussed at turn beginning. In conclusion, ESL students in small group work with different L2 proficiency levels, were able to manage the task they were assigned and, in so doing, also to collaboratively create, change and eventually close the topics they proposed. As the authors say (p. 330): "Such instances of either 'marked' topic shift or 'stepwise' topic movement [...] display characteristics of emergent topical development in conversation".

König (2013) presents topic introduction in French L2 conversations. Using data from a corpus of au-pair girls interacting with their hosting families, the author traces the changes in the way the au-pair girl Julie introduces new topics in conversation. At the

very beginning, this is done in a rather abrupt way, without a real contextualisation of the introduced referent and with almost no preliminary work (cf. Gan *et al.* 2008) in "preparing the ground" for the upcoming talk. Over time, however, Julie shows an increasing ability to introduce new topics in a smoother way, using misplacement markers for announcing a disjoint, upcoming talk.

Finally, König (2014) handles the case of topical back-linking in French L2 conversations. The author analyses one single case of topical back-linking in the data of the au-pair girl Christine (low-intermediate French L2 level). The analysis shows how Christine manages not only conversational topics, but also other ongoing conversational activities. Specifically, Christine is able to deliver an answer to an interlocutor maintaining the topic he proposed. Moreover, she can recall a referent she had introduced previously in the conversation with only a pronoun whilst continuing her answer and bringing forward the story she had started. In this sense, Christine shows her orientation towards the content or information level of the conversation, and towards the other activities that structure the conversation (answering someone's questions, telling a story, delivering a report on the day's activities with the children).

All these studies are concerned with the linguistic competences⁶¹ of the speakers and with the interactional competence related to their use of the L2.

⁶¹ It is noteworthy that the studies cited in the domains of CA-SLA present reflections on linguistic competencies seeing them as a resource within specific environments. Interactional resources are mobilised by interactants in order to employ practices that are at the same time context-free and context-dependent. Practices are context-free because they can be found also in other interactional contexts, and because they can be put in relation to other extra-linguistic environments. Interactional procedures, however, are also context-dependent because interactants activate them at specific interactional moments for achieving locally relevant social and interactional goals.

2.4 Implications and terminology

The literature review presented here has highlighted how complex the treatment of interactional topics is and also how varied the terminology is. As Goffman (1983) has stated, topic is an "organizational feature that does not fit neatly in utterances or even turns" (p. 11). This crystallises the nature of topics: they can be studied at the utterance level or at the propositional level (see chapter 1), or also as discourse or conversational topics (this chapter). For the present study, I am not interested in the topic as "*ce sur quoi [...] JE dis quelque chose, voir la seule chose à propos de laquelle JE peux le dire, le topic délimitant le domaine de la prédication que se donne l'énonciateur.*"⁶² (Laparra 1982, quoted in Berthoud 1996: 7). In my study, topics are not fixed entities.

Conversational topics are an emic category (Mondada 2003), for which the only observable traces are found in the conversation. I mean that L2 speakers introduce, reintroduce, change and close conversational by means of turns that are designed in particular ways. I propose an analysis that integrates the formal level (cf. Berthoud 1996, linguistic marking) with the sequential level of conversations. In fact, as Sacks *et al.* (1974) explain, interlocutors endeavour turns at talk that fit with the prior ones. This is not only done at the content level, but also at the level of turn design. This is namely a way of showing one's alignment with what precedes. In this way conversationalists also show their interpretation of the previous turn and eventually begin to repair if some problems arise. These problems, as Auer (1984) showed too, can sometimes concern not the linguistic but the referential level. Interlocutors, thus, need to collaboratively and continuously check one another's understanding of the talk so-far and find agreement on the topic at hand.

Defining the topic as a conversational accomplishment implies analysing it as a process and not as a product: it is always necessary to look at the conversational work accomplished by co-participants, since a topic can only be proposed – and afterwards accepted or refused. Topic then is an intrinsic collaborative endeavour. My research question will not be "what is this matter?"; it will be "how is this matter presented and treated (collaboratively) during the conversation?".

⁶² [T]hat about what [...] I can say something, actually the only thing about which I can say it, the topic delimiting the domain of predication that the speaker chooses. (My English translation).

For this study I use the following terminology:

- *topic*. I use the term "topic" in the sense of "conversational topic", i.e. I look at the methods of the L2 speakers for introducing, changing and closing talk about a particular matter. In this sense, I also use the term "topicality" (Maynard 1980), since topicality "is an achievement of conversationalists, something organized and made observable in patterned ways that can be described." (p. 263). . I identify the ways conversationalists achieve (collaboratively) topicality in conversation and describe the traces this process leaves in the turn-by-turn unfolding of interactions. I then try to answer following questions: how do speakers introduce a new referent? How does it become the conversational topic? How does it change in the conversational flow? How do participants orient to it? Only occasionally do I use the term "sentence topic" (Reinhard 1982) to refer to the sentence-topic status of an entity as defined by the grammatical properties of the sentence in the classical functionalist sense.
- *action/actional microcosm*. In order to investigate topic management in conversation, I need to focus on a precisely defined action (Fasel Lauzon *et al.* 2009) that is comparable over time and among different speakers. I do not mean to address the global issue of "topic management in conversation"; instead, I "cut" this large activity in smaller, recurrent actions that I isolate and compare. I present an analysis of topic introduction, topic closure, topic shift and topical back-linking. For topic introduction, I follow a longitudinal design, i.e. I show how this same action is accomplished differently over time and I relate this to the development of the L2 speakers' interactional competence. Topic closure, topic shift and topical back-linking are addressed in a synchronic perspective, in order to focus the nature of L2 interactional competence.
- *sequence*. My attention is oriented towards "larger" sequences or episodes in the sense discussed by Korolija & Linell (1996):

"discursive events or action sequences, each delimited from prior and subsequent discourse and internally bound together by a coherent topical trajectory and/or a common activity." (p. 800)

From this definition of conversational episodes I draw two main points. First, the progression and changes of conversational topics are observable only if a larger spate of talk is considered and, the investigations are directed to what a speaker verbalises, and to how his/her interlocutors react and participate in what s/he

first said. Consequently, conversational topics function as an underlying element that structures the conversation on the content level. Second, conversational topics might be best investigated if they are seen in their relationship with the ongoing conversational activity (such as answering a question, telling a story, making a report on something, joking, complaining about something, etc. See Schegloff 1996, and his distinction between “talk about” and “talk that does”).

This far, I have presented the first main aspect of my study, namely the discussion and identification of conversational topic(s). In the following chapter, I address the second, essential aspect of my research, which is related to the L2 learning process. I discuss the notion of interactional competence, presenting first an historical overview and then a reflection on how it can be analysed in L2 data and how it is possible to account for its development over time.

3. L2 acquisition and interactional competence

- 07 Oks: c'est:- parce que c'est (.) c'est mixer le nom de cette chose?
it's- because it's it's mixer the name of this thing
- 08 (...)
- 09 Pie: oui s- c'est- s::: c'est un mixer normal, †toi ce que tu penses c'est
yes i- it's i it's a normal mixer you what you think about it's
- 10 le robot.
the food processor
- 11 Oks: o- oui parce que s- c'est bon pour gâteau?
y- yes because i- it's good for cake
- 12 (...)
- 13 Oks: [(x) -
- 14 Pie: [mh=oui.=
mh yes
- 15 Oks: =†ah †okay.
oh okay
- 16 (...)
- 17 Pie: tu penses c'est nécessaire u:n plus grand?
you think we need a bigger one
- 18 (...)
- 19 Oks: mh PAS POUR ÇA: mais pour gâteau: normalement avec les yeux:=et avec
*mh not for this but for cake usually with the *eyes(=eggs) and with*
- 20 les far†ine peut-être †mais pour ça?
the-pl. flour maybe but for this
- 21 (...)
- 22 Pie: je le regarde (lui) qu'est-ce qu'il y a demain.
I look at it (it) what is there tomorrow

A first look at this example draws one's attention to the non-standard vocabulary and grammatical items employed by Oksana. For example: in l. 05 '*la même mixer*' (the same mixer: article *the* in feminine) instead of '*le même mixer*' (article *the* in masculine); in l. 11 the construction '*c'est bon pour gâteau*' (it's good for cake) instead of '*c'est bon pour faire un gâteau*' (it's good for making a cake) or '*c'est bon pour les gâteaux*' (it's good for cakes); or also the term '*yeux*' (eyes) in l. 19 instead of '*oeufs*' (eggs)⁶³.

However, Pierre does not address any of these non-standard items and shows herewith his orientation towards the conversation progression. Pierre can identify the sense of Oksana's turns, probably drawing on environmental and co-textual

⁶³ It is true that, in this latter case, it is my personal interpretation of Oksana's turn. I base my interpretation on the contextual information (they are talking about a mixer and a cake) and especially on the fact that Oksana mentions another ingredient typically found in cake receipts: flour (l. 20). The French word for egg, '*oeuf*', has a similar (though not identical) phonetics to the word for eye, '*yeux*'. For these reasons, I interpret the otherwise strange item "eyes" in Oksana's turn in l. 19 as being just a wrong pronunciation for the French word for eggs.

information related to the interactional setting. In the ecology of this interaction, no negotiation of linguistic forms takes place about the non-standard items used by Oksana. Only in l. 07 does Oksana ask for a clarification concerning the name of the object they are talking about: '*c'est mixer le nom de cette chose?*' (it's mixer the name of this thing?) and Pierre answers this question in l. 09, explaining that it is indeed a mixer they are talking about, which is different from a bigger food processor.

Drawing on CA analytical tools, I first observe that Oksana is able to convey the information she wants to (a new mixer should be bought, and the ingredients for a cake) and she is also capable of asking for clarifications (l. 07), despite some difficulties in the production of her turns. Moreover, both interlocutors are collaboratively achieving mutual comprehension and they are helped by their respective encyclopaedic knowledge (related, in this specific case, to the domain of baking cakes), but also by the ecology of their interaction.

This example shows how comprehension is achieved on a turn-by-turn basis and how the L1 and the L2 speakers adjust their turns to each other in order to accomplish a larger, joint activity (the next day's organisation). Neither of them is merely behaving like a learner (Oksana) and an expert (Pierre) of French. Their identities are negotiated as the conversational flow progresses. Oksana and Pierre achieve on a turn-by-turn basis mutual understanding: this is a basic constraint for the conversation to progress⁶⁴ and it is observable for the researcher in "the way parties in interaction rely on what has been or is accountably present in the interaction" (Emanuelsson & Sahlström 2008: 206).

The just mentioned observations indicate how L2 learning cannot be reduced to the development of vocabulary or grammatical skills in a second language. L2 learning happens mostly through the use of the second language in a panoply of contexts in one's every-day life (in the bakery, in a bank, at the hospital, at school, with friends or unknown persons, etc.). It is important to consider the interactions that take place in all these environments in a second language. And it is also important to investigate how L2 speakers participate in these conversations. Looking at the diversity of the resources and practices the L2 speakers employ for accomplishing locally relevant

⁶⁴ However, Emanuelsson and Sahlström (2008) propose a lighter version of this idea, by stating that: "[On] most occasions, an approximation to something like "shared understanding" is likely to be sufficient for interaction to continue" (p. 206).

purposes sets the basis for the analysis of their L2 interactional competence. This is a multi-layered competence that cannot be reduced to only vocabulary or grammar. L2 interactional competence incorporates other aspects that are related to the construction and maintenance of intersubjectivity, such as the way a speaker positions his/herself as regard his/her interlocutor or how s/he opens or closes the conversation. The inclusion of these features in the analysis of the L2 learning process is needed for understanding what changes take place in the L2 speaker's interactional competence.

3.1.1 Reconceptualization of learning

The example above sheds light on the very nature of CA for SLA: from the first call in Firth & Wagner (1997) for more attention to L2 learning outside the classroom (Firth & Wagner 1997: 286), several studies have seen the light in which different conversational settings for L2 learning have been considered. Avoiding addressing cognitive processes influencing L2 learning, CA-SLA looks at L2 learning as it happens through naturally occurring interactions in a wide range of environments – from the classroom, to the workplace, to family conversations. A substantial change in the conceptualisation of learning is advanced:

CA-SLA views learning processes as contingent upon (and observable within) the micro-details of social interaction, and as socially distributed. (Pekarek Doehler 2013: 1)

This is to say that L2 learning is not approached in terms of *a priori* defined patterns of language development (cf. for instance the concept of interlanguage), but is seen as taking place in everyday conversations. These interactions represent occasions in which L2 speakers collaboratively construct mutual understanding with their interlocutors. L2 learning is therefore not reduced to mere lexical or grammatical improvement, nor is it conceived of as language transfer from the L1 into the L2. L2 learning is observable in the way(s) L2 speakers participate in conversation with the resources they have available. The central point is the joint work between the participants for achieving mutual understanding and making sense:

A more emically based perspective would allow the authors to explicate the competencies through which the participants conjointly accomplish meaningful communication with the resources – however seemingly **imperfect** – at their disposal. (Firth & Wagner 1997: 290)

The emic perspective adopted within CA and CA-SLA studies is a key analytical tool for investigating every-day talk in interaction as it happens like in the example 18 above. If we were to assume an exogenous perspective on this excerpt, then we would list all the errors Oksana produces while talking to Pierre. In so doing, however, we

would approach the data with a “learner-as-defective-communicator mindset” (ibid. 290) which would lead us to highlight only the errors and imperfections in Oksana’s turns. This is not to say that CA-SLA wants to exalt whatever L2 speakers do while talking. This rather means adopting a free look at the data, distancing oneself from the linguistic norm governing the L1 and L2 learning processes. In so doing, the resources employed by the L2 speakers are observed to be purposefully exploited for enhancing the possibility of establishing a common ground during the interaction.

3.1.2 Analysis of competence

Under the impact of a growing body of CA-SLA studies, an important analytical shift takes place, which is also accompanied by a terminological one: the analytical object is becomes the L2 speaker's ability to participate in social interaction. Participation is understood as based on the accomplishment of actions through the unfolding of turns at talk. The interactants are observed achieving the opening or the closing of a conversation, the introduction, shift or closure of a conversational topic, the deployment of (dis)agreements with their interlocutors, the initiation and accomplishment of repair, and so on.

These specific actions relate to the interactional competence of a speaker. Since the language *per se* is no more the only analytical object, different issues are addressed that feed altogether into the concept of competence, specifically of interactional competence. Pekarek Doehler (2005) pinpoints the collective nature of competence in interaction. In fact, she states that competence is built in relation to sense-making activities, to the creation of context and to the establishment of intersubjectivity between the participants (p. 49). The idea of competence is no longer restricted to the mind of one speaker, but involves the collaborative nature of interactions, i.e. competence is observable *because* it is shared between (or among) the interactants. For example, the establishment and the management of intersubjectivity is a continuous ongoing conversational activity, through which the interlocutors position themselves in mutually observable ways that help them in the production of turns that are recipient designed (i.e. adapted to the recipient) and topically relevant (i.e. related to the matter so-far). For instance, Berger (submitted) shows how an au-pair girl and the host-mother construct in the ongoing conversation their respective territories of knowledge (Heritage 2013) as regard children’ misconducts. The construction of these territories, for which each speaker claims epistemic primacy (Stivers *et al.* 2011), is

achieved turn after turn so as not to affect the interpersonal or the working relationship between the participants. The L2 speaker's interactional competence is observable in the ways she positions herself in comparison to the host-mother claiming a minor or indirect right to overtly sanction a child's misconduct.

Competence, and L2 interactional competence, is analysed as being situated, constructed and activated within a specific interactional ecology, and not as being universally valid, present and active.

“[L]a compétence (en langue, mais aussi tout autre compétence) est *contingente* (*nonautonome*) par rapport à d'autres compétences, dans la mesure où sa mobilisation et son développement se font dans le cadre d'interprétations des activités d'autrui, des contraintes situationnelles, des valeurs et légitimités mises en pratique et du choix des façons appropriées, opérationnelles, légitimes d'agir et de dire.” (Pekarek Doehler 2006b: 39, emphasis in the original)⁶⁵

The author stresses the dependence of language competence upon the situation, in which it is activated. For her, language competence is established when a speaker interprets what others have said and done so far in the conversation, under the specific circumstances in which the exchange takes place. Consequently, the speaker's competence is distributed among the participants, and so is the learning process, too. Learning takes place thanks to the collaborative nature of conversations, i.e. in a way that see all the participants being part of the process, not only the L2 speaker.

3.2 The study of interactional competence

The concept and the definition of interactional competence are a recent achievement in the domain of CA-SLA. In one of the first volumes entirely dedicated to L2 interactional competence, Hall and Pekarek Doehler define this competence as follows:

IC [interactional competence], that is the context-specific constellations of expectations and dispositions about our social worlds that we draw on to navigate our way through our interactions with others, implies the ability to mutually coordinate our actions. (Hall *et al.* 2011: 1-2)

⁶⁵ Competence (language competence as any other competence) is contingent (non-autonomous) as regard other competences as far as its mobilisation and its development are done within the interpretation of someone else's actions, of situational constraints, of practiced values and entitlements and of the choice of appropriate, operational and entitled ways of acting and speaking. (My English translation).

This is only a part of their very precise definition. This part contains many analytical levels that concern all the actions accomplished by the interactants during a conversation. The authors address the issue of context-specificity, which is central for the study of conversations, since every conversation represents a specific non-repeatable instance and needs to be investigated as such. The authors talk about “our social worlds”, which include the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, i.e. the creation and maintenance of intersubjectivity.

However, interactional competence is not limited to the linguistic level of an exchange between interactants: Hall and Pekarek Doehler state that such exchanges imply the ability of a mutual *action coordination* between the participants. The focus of this definition is on the *action level* of conversations, which broadly contains verbal and non-verbal actions as well as activities related to the interactional context (e.g. storytelling). Moreover, interactional competence is not described as an ability that a speaker transfers from the L1 to the L2 simply because s/he can already accomplish specific actions like disagreeing his/her L1. Interactional competence is rather composed of an ensemble of abilities that a speaker learns and develops through the participation in L2 talk in interaction.

This definition of interactional competence is the result of a system of describing the L2 speaker's competence(s), which started with Hymes' definition of communicative competence. I now sketch the historical roots of interactional competence (3.4.1) and concentrate then on more recent investigations of it (3.4.2), especially on the study of IC and its development over time.

3.2.1 The roots of interactional competence

Hymes has conceptualised the idea of communicative competence. In one of his first works (Hymes 1962) within the domain of linguistic anthropology, he states the centrality of actions and activities for the investigation of speech. In fact, his main concern is not the language *per se*, but rather the functioning of human behaviour. For this reason, he describes the *ethnography of speaking* (p. 3) as an area that links studies on language (especially on grammar) to studies in the ethnographic domain. From the beginning, he concentrates on the active participation of speakers such as children or foreigners in conversation. Hymes identifies an analytical object that is not described only in linguistic terms:

[T]his is a question of what a child internalizes about speaking, [...] while becoming a full-fledged member of its speech community. Or, it is a question of what a foreigner must learn about a group's verbal behavior in order to participate appropriately and effectively in its activities. (Hymes 2008 [1962]: 3)

Hymes' description sheds light on the centrality of socialisation through interaction. In this sense children and foreigners undergo the same process: they both have to learn the rules of the linguistic and cultural community they are going to be part of and they do this through their participation in the community discourses. The result is, normally, their inclusion as "fully fledged members" of the community. At the same time, Hymes characterises the children' and foreigners' participation as appropriate and effective. This is the actual challenge of the language learning process that children and foreigners have to face, i.e. participate effectively with mostly only limited resources at their disposal. Finally, a last emphasis is made on the word "activities" that children and foreigners contribute to and manage in cooperation with their interlocutors. Not only language-related activities are meant, but also social activities such as the creation and maintenance of relationships or the face-to-face work (cf. Goffman 1955) with one's interlocutor.

In a further paper, Hymes puts forward the fact that one can analyse competence either "from the standpoint of a system *per se*, or from the standpoint of persons" (Hymes 1972: 282). Communicative competence can only be grasped with a multi-layered analysis that includes (I) the means a speaker disposes of in order to understand what is feasible for her; (II) the contextual constraints for understanding what is appropriate; and (III) the speaker's performance, which enlightens what is done and what is at stake while performing. (ibid: 281)⁶⁶.

A first adaptation of communicative competence in the SLA domain is offered by Canale & Swain (1980), who state that "[t]he second language learner must have the opportunity to take part in meaningful communicative interaction with highly competent speakers of the language, i.e. to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic second language situations". (p. 27). The main concern of the researchers is to challenge the institutional world of schools and teachers, with the goal of testing communicative competence more precisely. Their description of communicative

⁶⁶ "Summarising, the goal of a broad theory of competence can be said to be to show the ways in which the systemically possible, the feasible, and the appropriate are linked to produce and interpret actually occurring cultural behaviour". (ibid: 286)

competence includes linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatics aspects, but not interactional ones.

More has been done in the domain of pragmatics, especially of intercultural pragmatics. Many studies that have investigated speech acts such as requests or apologies, comparing them cross-culturally and interculturally⁶⁷.

However it is at the beginning of the Nineties⁶⁸ that some researchers have started to focus eminently on interactions and socialisation-related matters. Joan K. Hall has published several papers on the sociocultural aspects of interactions that are related to SLA. In her paper of 1993 she discusses the concept of oral practice, which she defines as follows:

Oral practices are culturally-mediated moments of face-to-face interaction whereby a group of people come together to create and recreate their everyday social lives. (Hall 1993: 145)

The emphasis of this definition is on the cultural side of people's encounters. In fact, culture can be seen to be constructed, modified, adapted in every situation where interactants come together and share their lives, beliefs and social rules for a certain spate of time. Moreover, they create, recreate and adapt their social and interpersonal context during interaction, in order to create group cohesion and membership.

Hall (1995) describes the concept of interactive practice in relation to interactional competence:

Interactive practices are recurring episodes of purposeful, goal-directed talk which are significant to the establishment and maintenance of a group or community. (Hall 1995: 39).

For the author, the creation of a group or a community is dependent upon the realisation of talk aimed at achieving a specific purpose. The achievement of a purpose, i.e. the existence of a goal and of goal-directed talk, structures the community through the unfolding of conversation. The more an interlocutor participates in the activities of a community, the more s/he learns what is appropriate for that community. Hence, s/he learns to participate in a competent way in the community life through his/her use of the community language for cooperating in the community activities.

⁶⁷ See the review in Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1989) and the studies in Kasper & Blum-Kulka (1993). Kasper & Rose (1999) propose an interesting review of studies in the domain of intercultural pragmatics addressing the relationship between proficiency and pragmatic performance.

⁶⁸ See also Hanks (1996) for communicative practice.

Consequently, Hall's definition of interactive practice is strongly related to the inherent goal-oriented⁶⁹ nature of community conversation. One aspect of interactive practices concerns particularly the development and management of topical issues in "practice-relevant ways" (Hall 1995: 39). Topical issues can be analysed at two different, though intertwined, levels. On the one hand, a topical relation is present at the utterance level, i.e. when "a locally relevant utterance is lexically linked to the prior utterance" (ibid.: 39). On the other hand, topics are managed more extensively when they are embedded in a larger course of action, such as a storytelling⁷⁰.

Young (2009) introduces the concept of discursive practice in relation to L2 language learning and teaching. He proposes a wide description of this practice and also of the central aspect that teacher and researcher should always consider: the way in which L2 speakers employ their resources in a variety of different contexts⁷¹. Later on, Young (2011) relates the concept of discursive practice to the concept of interactional competence. For the author interactional competence is found *within* a discursive practice, which he defines as "recurring episodes of social interaction in context, episodes that are of social and cultural significance to a community of speakers" (p. 427). With this definition, Young brings in a new aspect of discursive practice and interactional competence, namely the concept of "community".

Young describes herewith a community of speakers, whereas Hellermann (2008) has adopted the label of "community of practice" (p. 7). In his book, Hellermann states that a community of practice takes place where speakers are co-present and related by a common goal for which they construct practices that, "in turn, constitute the community of practice" (p. 7). This definition seems circulatory; however it is not. A community of practice does not have to be considered as a fixed entity that exists as a rigid group, only in specific places and with specific members. On the contrary, a community of practice can be created wherever people come together and start talking to each other

⁶⁹ Elsewhere this particular nature of a community of speakers is also called topically coherent (see Heritage & Sorjonen 1994)

⁷⁰ As I have already noted, the boundary between story(telling) and topic is rather unclear and storytelling or „topic under discussion“ tend to be superimposed.

⁷¹ Young (2009: 2) adopts a very large idea of context, „meaning the network of physical, spatial, temporal, social, interactional, institutional, political, and historical circumstances“, under which speakers accomplish their practices.

in no matter what social, historical or spatial context. This definition of community of practice relates back to the concept of interactive practice used by Hall (1995), through which speakers are shown to build and maintain a group or a community⁷².

To sum up, looking at L2 talk in interaction means a reconsideration of how to analyse such data. Leaving the norm-oriented, etic perspective on language, for which a right and a wrong language use exist, CA-SLA studies have demonstrated that other concepts and aspects are to become central in order to understand what is at stake when L2 speakers participate in conversations. These concepts are: community of practice, i.e. when interactants gather together and talk to each other in no matter what context; discursive practice, i.e. goal-oriented talk within a community of practice; and (language) competence, i.e. interactional competence. I concentrate exclusively on this term in the upcoming section and I show how it has been used in recent investigations in the domain of CA-SLA.

3.2.2 The investigation of interactional competence in the domain of CA-SLA

Within CA-SLA, interactional competence is defined “in terms of participants’ methods for accomplishing L2 talk-in-interaction” (Hall & Pekarek Doehler 2011: 7). This presupposes considering L2 acquisition not merely as acquisition of linguistic items and syntactic structures, but as a process through which an L2 speaker acquires, *and* is socialised into, the L2. As noted above, in their introduction to the 2011 volume, Hall & Pekarek Doehler explain that interactional competence is “the context-specific constellations of expectations and dispositions about our social worlds that we draw on to navigate our way through our interactions with others” (2011: 1-2).

Studying the development of L2 interactional competence implies the consideration of three aspects. First, a reconsideration of the importance of L2 daily use for participating in conversations. This is the way through which L2 speakers learn to mutually collaborate during interactions for co-constructing the context(s) with their interlocutor(s). Kasper & Wagner (2011) state that interactional competence is a distributed competence, i.e. it is available between (or among) the participants. In this sense, interactional competence becomes also a procedural competence, because L2

⁷² Cots & Nussbaum (2008) investigate the relationship between communicative competence and identity construction in the talk of immigrant students in Catalunya, thus they employ a similar concept to the one of IC.

speakers have to learn interactional practices (e.g. turn taking, disagreeing or introducing and closing a conversational topic) for participating in conversation. If interactional competence is built up of a panoply of procedures L2 speakers need to develop, then it is arguable that interactional competence is a “condition for and a means of learning” (Kasper & Wagner, 2011: 119).

Second, the analysis of L2 talk in interaction needs to be extended over a broader range of resources that are employed during conversations: not only linguistic (grammar and vocabulary), but also prosodic, sequential and multimodal ones. In fact, our social worlds (Hall & Pekarek Doehler 2011) are not constructed only through language but also through actions that are finely tuned among the participants. Interactional context(s) are continuously re-shaped by the interactants through every turn, movement and action they accomplish. In the same way, their focus of attention is constantly shifted towards different contextual and interactional aspects that are made relevant on a turn-by-turn basis by the participants. For example, Mori (2004) has shown how the focus of attention of Japanese L2 speakers shifts from the accomplishment of an assigned task to a linguistic problem during the task accomplishment. The participants orientation converges at the boundaries of repair sequences, where code-switching is purposefully used for addressing the linguistic problem at hand and then for closing the repair sequence once the problem has been solved.

Third, the central point of investigation become the ways in which one action is accomplished and how these ways change over time. This accounts for learning in the sense of changes in the participation modes of the interactions with others. Studies on this aspect have been conducted in many different contexts. Institutional contexts, especially classroom interaction⁷³, have been largely investigated by Hellermann (see, among others, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008). In his book of 2008, Hellermann presents a longitudinal investigation of different tasks accomplished by Spanish-speaking learners of English in the USA. His attention to different actional microcosms, such as the opening of dyadic tasks, storytelling and the disengagement from dyadic tasks, sheds

⁷³ More studies on classroom interaction and IC are: Bowls & Seedhouse (2007) propose an analysis of the LSP classroom and indicate, at the end, also some practical advice for the researchers and for the teachers; Hellermann (2007) concentrates on task openings in dyadic interactions in the EFL classroom; Knutson (2001) addresses the classroom looking at student-student interactions and how they support each other for developing their IC; Pekarek (1999) largely discusses the concept of IC in advanced classrooms of French L2 in Switzerland.

light on the several resources those speakers employ for constituting their communities of practice. Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger (2011) have analysed the realisation of disagreement in French L2 talk in the classroom. Their cross-sectional study, which compares beginners and advanced learners of French L2, puts forward the development of IC as regards the speakers' sensibility for preference organisation, their ability of scaffolding their disagreement and their attention towards the co-participants' talk (p. 237). Sahlström (2011) presents a longitudinal analysis of two Swedish children learning to count in English at school. The author shows that what can be accounted for as "learning" is addressed by the children through explicit negotiations and topicalised epistemic stance. Moreover, learning can be seen in the changes that occur in the way the children address their object of learning. Sahlström states that "[w]hen Sarah and Hanna situate the subject of the words one to 10 in English in relation to prior use, [...] they do so, as to be able to *change* that very thing" (p. 62, emphasis in the original).

Within the domain of study abroad⁷⁴, only few studies are known. Masuda (2011) traces the development of IC in a group of English-speaking Japanese learners by analysing their use of the Japanese aligning particle "*ne*". The author compares two sets of data, i.e. first interactions between the JFL learners and Japanese peers at the beginning of their stay and interactions between the same participants during the fifth week of their stay. Taguchi (2015) investigates the experience abroad of Japanese L2 learners, all having an intermediate L2 level. Her main concern regards the speech styles in peer-to-peer interactions, since these have a great sociocultural importance in Japanese. The main findings concern the increased L2 speakers' ability to shift from polite to plain style when talking to a peer, their ability to overtly mark this shift, and their increased ability to participate in meaning-constructing exchanges.

All these studies show the difference between L2 interactional competence development and linguistic L2 development. The development of L2 interactional competence is in fact visible in the *adaptation of existing resources* to mutating interactional contexts (see Brower & Wagner 2004; Markee 2008), whereas L2 linguistic development points mainly to the acquisition of new linguistic items.

⁷⁴ See Kinginger (2013) for a collection of studies on social and cultural aspects of study abroad experiences.

3.3 A current challenge for CA-SLA: the investigation of the development of L2 interactional competence

The study of L2 interactional competence development forces the researcher to focus on the process (rather than the products) of L2 acquisition, and this stresses the importance of longitudinal studies. Lantolf (2011) explains how sociocultural theory looks at L2 learners in order to “trace relevant processes *during their formation*” (p. 26, italics from the original). It is worth looking at what happens *while* L2 speakers are socialised into their L2, i.e. when they use their L2 for daily communication in different communities of practice. This analysis is most fruitful when the interactional micro-organisation is investigated.

There are several CA-SLA studies that have focused on specific, identifiable actions accomplished at different points in time by the same speakers. Cekaite (2007) investigates how L2 Swedish speaking children interact in a more appropriate way with their peers in the classroom, and especially how they improve their ways of taking the floor. König (2013) presents a longitudinal investigation of topic introduction in French L2 family conversation. The author finds out that the au-pair girl introduces conversational topics in a smoother way, i.e. engaging in a more complex interactional work for preparing her interlocutor for the upcoming talk. Young & Miller (2004), who were among the first to propose a longitudinal analysis, show how a participant changes his practices for participating in the tutorial hour for developing his writing abilities. Nguyen (2011) proposes a detailed analysis of interns working in a pharmacy. She describes the development of their IC in terms of recipient-design and topic management, i.e. the interns developed new methods for explaining more clearly to their customers what their medications were for. Moreover, they were able to orient towards customer-related topics in a smoother way, i.e. they learned to manage their relationships with their clients.

More recently, Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger (2015) have offered an overview on the existing literature about longitudinal development of L2 interactional competence. The authors have compared the results of existing studies on turn-taking, sequence organisation, repair organisation and preference organisation. They have also presented analyses of their own collected data on French L2. The authors were able to outline some central principles that help understanding how L2 interactional competence develops over time. Specifically, changes are seen in the resources

employed by L2 speakers. Pekarek Doehler & Pochon Berger state that L2 speakers begin with more rudimental techniques for taking turn or starting a repair. However, these resources become more diversified when time passes so that interactants participate more effectively to conversations. The diversification is observable both at a sequential and at a linguistic level. Generally, then, L2 speakers increase their ability to recipient design their turns, i.e. to adapt their turns to their interlocutor so as to respect the principle of preference organisation in conversation. As far as language is concerned, the authors observe that, indeed, linguistic resources built an important part of a speaker's interactional competence. What develops over time is the way these resources are employed, i.e. the purposes for which they are locally used in conversation.

CA offers suitable analytical tools for “uncovering details involved in the development of interactional competence in a language” (Hellermann 2011:167), because the focus of attention is on a specific phenomenon that is comparable either longitudinally or cross-sectionally. Moreover, it facilitates accounting for development in terms of changes in the way of performing the same action at different points in time (Hellermann 2007). To sum up, the argumentation of my study is based on a concept of learning that derives from CA and theories of language socialisation. I consider L2 learning as visible changes in the participation in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Hellermann 2007). To demonstrate the visible changes in my data, I use the concept of L2 interactional competence (Hall *et al.* 2011), i.e. I investigate topic management in the forms of topic introduction (chapter 7), topic closure (chapter 8) and topic progression (chapter 9). My analyses show how French L2 speakers introduce and then close a new conversational topic; moreover, I also demonstrate how they shift and link the topic at hand back to a previous conversational topic in an on-going interaction. This allows me to show to what extent L2 interactional competence goes beyond mere L2 linguistic knowledge, how it is distributed amongst participants and how it (observably) develops over time. My results integrate on-going debates on the concept of learning within the field of CA-SLA pinpointing two major aspects. First, my results derive from a longitudinal study, for which still too few are known. Second, through the lens of three specific actional microcosms I show how these are at the same time *objects of* and *ways for* learning how to participate in L2 talk-in-interaction.

04. Topic-related issues in L2 talk-in-interaction: my research questions

In this chapter I situate my study in relation to the existing literature in the domain of CA-SLA.

4.1 Two aspects to be considered when investigating topic management

The first matter is: topic is a tricky issue in CA since it has been investigated from the beginning of this research tradition⁷⁵ but was slowly forgotten in the more recent research outputs (cf. Seedhouse & Harris 2010). In my study I show that CA and CA-SLA have an interesting way of approaching topic-related issues, which differs from the mainstream linguistic approaches to this concept. In so doing, I argue that CA methodology is a very useful tool to be applied to L2 talk-in-interaction for uncovering how L2 speakers employ sequential as well as linguistic resources in their contributions.

The second matter concerns the type of data available and its use in the domain of CA-SLA. Although recently published work has investigated settings outside the classroom (see for instance the studies collected in Hall *et al.* 2011; König 2013, 2014; Pochon-Berger *et al.* 2015; Theódorsdóttir 2011), still the majority of CA-SLA work is done on classroom interaction (Hellermann 2008, 2009, 2011; Majlesi & Broth 2012; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger 2011; Pochon-Berger & Pekarek Doehler 2011; Sert 2015). Institutional contexts like that of the language classroom are preferred places for the study of language learning. This is in first line due to the fact that these are the places where language teaching prototypically takes place. Secondly, the interest for the language classroom is also related to the fact that classroom discourse

⁷⁵ This is especially true if one takes a closer look at Sack's lectures (Sacks 1995). It is not the case that „topic“ as a concept *per se* is addressed in one or two lectures, rather that it appears „marginally“ in several lectures that deal with other conversational aspects, like turn-taking, recipient design, tying techniques, and so on. This simple fact reflects at best the actual nature of topic: it is a conversational feature that is to some extent independent of other more structural features, while at the same time it cannot exist without them.

happens in a relatively stable environment, which is governed by external rules that are taken for granted by all participants. Consequently, studies on classroom discourse are a privileged place for cross-sectional and comparative studies, which can bring new insights on the interactional mechanisms at work during the everyday activity of language teaching and learning. So the language classroom is a privileged CA-SLA investigation setting, whereas CA studies on L1 interactions have broadly dealt with every-day and workplace interaction.

4.2 Two matters at stake in L2 talk-in-interaction in families: L2 language learning and the ongoing socialisation process

Au-pair girls start as complete outsiders in the family where they arrive, and this is observable in the data in the way in which the participants structure their interactions. It resembles an “interrogation”, consisting most of the time of a chain of question-answer pairs that are generally short and repetitive. Therefore in my study I investigate this particular type of L2 learning environment. I show what happens when a specific group of people (in my case au-pair girls) works for a family in which socialisation is an ongoing process. By the end of their sojourn the au-pairs become family members. The L2 learning context for the au-pair girls is, thus, a “hybrid” one, in which features of institutional and informal talk cross each other⁷⁶.

There are at least two central and intertwined matters at stake in the family context: first, the matter of *L2 language learning*. This is mainly the first reason why young girls decide to have an experience as au pairs abroad – because they want to learn or to improve a foreign language. For this reason, the literature on the language classroom delivers important insights about:

- (I) the co-construction of learnables in interaction (Majilesi & Broth 2012),
- (II) the ways in which L2 speakers accomplish the same action over time (see e.g. disagreeing Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger 2011; opening or closing a task Hellermann 2008; counting Sahlström 2011), and

⁷⁶ I look in depth at this aspect in chapter 6, subchapter 6.3. At this point, I want to introduce this aspect of hybridity for depicting the importance of investigating interactional competence in family settings.

(III) the very different possibilities speakers have for actively participating in the construction of their language learning process.

Another important matter is *the socialisation process* that takes place in the family. The socialisation is twofold: on the one hand, it is informal, since it happens steadily during normal family life. On the other hand, however, it is also work socialisation, i.e. it happens in interactional moments that are characterised by specific social roles, like employer and employee.

Over time I could observe the au pairs producing longer spate of talk, narratives and the like, that are more independent from the questions of their host-parents. Moreover, the au-pairs talked more often about their own lives (parents, relatives, friends, their past at school, their hobbies, their free-time, etc.).

The following two examples show the two matters described above:

(19) Julie, 30.09.2009, "aujourd'hui avec les enfants" *today with the children*

01 Mar: pis aujourd'hui avec les enfants ça s'est bien passé °alors°.
so today with the children it went well then

02 Jul: oui c'est bien passé::, ils étaient très sages,
yes it went well they were very good

03 (..)

04 Jul: .hh et: on était à la place de jeu:x, ((léger rire)) et pis: euh:
and we went to the playground ((light laughter)) and then uh
05 ouais.
yeah

06 (1.3)

07 Jul: c'était chouette.
it was nice

08 Mar: ah: alors c'est bien.
oh then it's good

09 (..)

10 Jul: oui.
yes

11 (...)

12 Mar: et manon elle a joué avec ses copains et ses copines.
and manon she played with her friends-M.pl. and her friends-F.pl.

13 Jul: ouï,
yes

14 (..)

15 Jul: e- elle a joué +avec ses [copains et ses copines ((en riant)) +
e- she played with her friends-M.pl. and her friends-F.pl. ((laughing))

16 Mar: [((rit))
((laughs))

This example stems from the first conversation recorded between the au-pair girl Julie and her host-mother, Marie. At that time Julie had spent about three weeks in the family. The conversation so far is about the day Julie had with the children. As I have noted before, at the beginning of their sojourn au-pair girls tend to have similar conversations with their host-parents, in the sense that these represent for both parties a possibility for getting to know each other better. Typically, the host-parents question the au-pair girl about her daily activities with their children. The example above clarifies that this happens eminently via a question-answer format, in which the au pair's answers partially repeat the parent's question, as is the case in lines 2 and 15. If we now compare the example above with the following, we observe that the "independence" Julie has developed over time emerges out of the data:

(20) Julie, 23.03.2010, "au dernier moment" *last minute*⁷⁷

01 Jul: °ah mais° ts. ↑jor↑dan qui doit toujours faire au dernier
oh but jordan who must always do at the last

02 moment=euh.
minute uh

03 (.)

04 Jul: (h) (ha) [(h) ou: (h) ais (h)]
yeah

05 Mar: [(h) (..)] (h) (h)

06 (2.8)

07 Mar: +↑ouais c'est un peu:+ +pis- pis lui il prend du t↑emps lui quand il
yeah it's a bit then then he he takes his time he when he

08 le fait donc [euh: (hh) ((voix tremblante)) +
does it so uh ((shaking voice))

09 Jul: [°oui° (.)] >pis souvent il dit< (.) j'ai fini pis >°°je dis-°°< ↑ah
yes then often he says I'm done then I say oh

10 c'est bien t'es pr- >t'as fait v↑ite.< (.) pis deux minutes après
it's fine you are re- you have been quick then two minutes later

11 (.) .h en fait euh j'ai pas encore: ((voix légèrement tremblante)) +
actually uh I haven't yet ((slightly shaking voice))

⁷⁷ A more detailed analysis of this excerpt concerning the phenomenon of direct reported speech (DRS) is presented in Berger & Pekarek Doehler (2015).

12 forcément (h)fi(h)ni(h) .hh +je dois encore une fois ((voix
exactly finished I must go another time ((slightly

13 légèrement tremblante)))+ +aller: aux toilettes.((registre bas et voix
shaking voice)) to the toilet ((low voice and

14 `creaky'))+
creaky))

15 Mar: pis c'est marrant, ça c'est- depuis qu'il est tout petit [c'est
and it's funny this is since he was very little it's

16 toujours la même chose
always the same thing

17 Jul: ((ouais)
yeah

18 ouais.=.h mais cette fois après il s'est vraiment dépêché il est- il
yeah but this time then he really speeded up he ran he

19 est couru=euh les escaliers en-bas, et il a pris sa veste et
ran uh down the stairs and he took his jacket and

20 puis il était dehors(h) .hh
then he was outside

21 (..)

22 Jul: parce que: la dernière fois qu'e j'av- j'étais partie toute seule
because the last time that I ha- I left all alone

23 (.) c'était pour ça qu'il étai:t ((tapotement sur un verre))
that was why he was ((patting on a glas))

24 (3.5) ((télé en français en arrière-fond))
((French TV in the background))

25 Mar: °°mh.°°

This example stems from the middle of Julie's stay, when she had been in Switzerland for 6 months. The talk turns around her experiences with the children, in this case especially with the son Jordan. The way she reports on the day is very different from example 19. It is not only a matter of the length of turns, though this is maybe the first observable aspect. It is also a matter of self-selection: Julie self-selects in l. 01 after a previous sequence has been closed down (she and Marie were talking about how to pass through a field when it is still wet in the morning). Moreover, the pauses between the turns have almost disappeared. The long pause in l. 06 is related to the fact that this is a potential closing environment. Julie introduces a new topic in l. 01-02 and then starts laughing. Marie's aligning and affiliating laughing in l. 05 has the potential either to topicalise the just introduced news (see Button & Casey 1985), or to stop the potential story Julie might start telling (see Holt 2010). The television is heard in the

background so it might also be that Marie is listening to it and her self-selection in l. 07 is therefore delayed. The other pauses are to be found again at the end of this telling sequence, starting with l. 21 and then in l. 24. This latter pause is again very long, which is also a typical feature of closing environments (cf. Maynard 1980, Holt 2010).

With these two examples, I have demonstrated that socialisation is a central matter at stake during the au pair's sojourn and that it is very important to consider it when investigating the data, since they reveal traces of the au pair's inclusion in the family. These traces are observable especially in the ways the au pair girls cooperate in structuring their interactions with the parents: they self-select more often, they produce longer turns-at-talk and they manage the conversational topics in a more independent way. This in turn is best observable in the way they introduce and develop conversational topics in an on-going interaction⁷⁸.

With these reflections in mind, I now present the research questions at the basis of my study.

4.3 Research questions

My research questions are of two types.

The first question is: "How do L2 speakers manage conversational topics in French L2 interactions?". I investigate how L2 speakers introduce and close conversational topics and how they maintain or change them during the conversational flow. These three aspects are treated singularly in the analytical chapters 7 (topic introduction), 8 (topic closure) and 9 (topic progression). This first question supports the identification of the linguistic and prosodic resources the au pair girls employ for managing conversational topics. I analyse also the turn architecture and the component of recipient design in the au-pairs' L2 talk, because these two features are central for participating in conversation (see Sacks *et al.* 1974) and they show how the L2 speakers introduce, close or change conversational topics. In conclusion, with my first research question I want to depict the resources and procedures employed by the au pair girls for managing conversational topics.

⁷⁸ The analysis of topic introduction will be presented in chapter 7, whereas the investigation of topic progression is the object of chapter 9.

The second question is: “How do L2 speakers change their practices of topic introduction over time? Do they change their practices for topic closure and topic progression, too?”. My study has a longitudinal design, i.e. the data was collected in regular intervals over 6 to 12 months for the same au pair. This was repeated for three years in a row. The longitudinal research design allows me to compare data over time, i.e. I analyse how an au pair girl introduces topics from the beginning of her sojourn until the end of it. However, I had to differentiate my analyses. I have adopted a longitudinal and comparative analysis only for topic introduction. This was possible because the action of introducing a conversational topic is well defined and (most of the time) clearly observable in the data. With topic closure and topic progression, instead, longitudinal changes could not be clearly observed. Therefore, I have decided to analyse these actions in a synchronic way. For topic closure I have built a collection of cases⁷⁹ and I argue that this action is not a good starting point for a longitudinal comparison. However, it is possible to compare the methods for closing a topic between the au-pair girls. Hence topic closure allows for a cross-sectional comparison between the participants. For topic progression (specifically: topic shift and topical backlinking) I have analysed one example for every au-pair girl. This decision is based on the fact that topic shift and topical backlinking are difficult to grasp in conversation because they are underlying features of every human interaction. The possibility of going back and forth among different conversational topics represents a big obstacle in the delimitation of the space of talk to analyse and to present in an example. I have avoided the building of a collection of cases for this reason and I have decided to present a prototypical example of topic shift and of topical backlinking for every au-pair girl. This decision can appear as completely ethical in nature, but my investigations demonstrate that single-case analyses (cf. Schegloff 1987) are very useful for showing the nature of L2 interactional competence. The upcoming analyses, then, are of two types: longitudinal for topic introduction, synchronic and comparative for topic closure and topic progression.

These two research questions generate two further (sub-)questions.

⁷⁹ At an earlier stage of this study I have tried to analyse longitudinally also the instances of topic closure in my datasets. However, it was not possible to apply an investigation as rigorous as for topic introduction (see chapter 7) and, moreover, no significant differences in the methods and practices for topic closing could be found. I have therefore decided to show a longitudinal investigation only for topic introduction and to integrate my reflections about the difficulty of a longitudinal investigation on topic closure in chapter 8.

The first one is: “What do synchronic observations tell us about interactional competence?”. I extrapolate precise features from the data of L2 IC in a specific learning setting. My goal is to contribute to the on-going research in the field of CA-SLA and to add more knowledge to the concept of IC for the learning of a second language. In this sense, the identification of recurrent resources and procedures that are mobilised for the accomplishment of the same actional microcosm brings more stability in the description of what IC is.

The second sub-question is: “What do longitudinal changes in the accomplishment of the same microcosm tell us about the development of L2 interactional competence?”. With this question address the changes in the way the au pair girls manage conversational topics and observations about such changes are useful for a better grasping of IC development over time. With my analysis I uncover new aspects related to topic management in a second language, and want to corroborate the results presented in the existing CA-SLA literature about the development of IC.

4.4 Contributions of my study

My study contributes to the understanding and definition of IC and its development over time in several ways.

For the CA-SLA research domain, I show the importance of relying on the analysis of well-defined actions that can be compared (longitudinally or cross-sectionally). This enables the identification of a developmental trajectory that can shed light on the way L2 speakers participate in everyday interactions. Moreover, the use of longitudinal data is needed in the field of CA-SLA since such data allows us to understand how interactional practices change over time. This is of great interest for my study, because I investigate a language, French, and its learning process, French L2, that are still marginal in the domain of CA-SLA, with the exceptions of the research done by Berthoud, (Pochon-)Berger, Fasel Lauzon, Mondada, Pekarek Doehler, and myself.

Another innovative aspect of my study is the investigation of a hybrid learning context, namely everyday conversations where the family is the workplace of an external subject (the au pair). I have the possibility of relying on studies about classroom and workplace interactions as well as on studies about family interactions. My aim is to show what is at stake when these two fields come together.

Finally, the analysis of topic management is to some extent also “new” in the domain of CA-SLA, because this matter has been neglected for a long time. The discussions presented in the literature are not always satisfying for making terminological choices. Moreover, I put in evidence a gap in the literature, namely the missing link between studies on topics and studies on epistemics⁸⁰. If it is possible to discuss features of conversational topics when starting from epistemics in interaction, it is very difficult to build a bridge in the opposite direction (from topic to epistemics). I dedicate chapter 12 to the discussion of this gap.

In the upcoming Part II I describe the methodology I have applied in my study. I first present ethno-methodological CA (chapter 5), where I describe CA research methods (5.1), how to use CA methods for the study of L2 interactions and which microcosms I analyse in this study (5.2). Chapter 6 contains the data description, namely the research project (6.1), the chosen dataset (6.2) and the characteristics of the learning context (6.3).

⁸⁰ My special thanks to Prof. Fritjom Sahlström for bringing my attention towards this point.

PART II

Methodology and data description

5. Methodological issues for CA-SLA investigations

*"Observation is central to CA precisely because
CA does not set out to prove this or that theory
but rather to get a handle on,
and ultimately to describe
in some kind of formal language,
something in the world."
(Sidnell, 2010)*

Until now the concept of topic has been presented and discussed through the lens of different linguistic approaches. The major focus has been brought towards the methods employed within CA and, specifically, of CA-SLA, i.e. the study of L2 interactional competence and its development over time as it happens in daily interactions.

Part II of my study is concerned with the presentation of CA analytical tools and CA-SLA analytical objects (chapter 5) as well as with the description of the research project and the dataset (chapter 6).

5.1 CA: methodological and analytical issues

CA analytical approach is characterised by a detailed look at specific interactional phenomena. CA investigations are based on transcriptions of naturally occurring interactions as they happen in different every-day contexts. This means that the investigated data is highly dependent on the interactional context in which they were embedded. CA analyses interactions as they take place in the interactants' lives, in a panoply of different contexts. The researchers record naturally occurring conversations as they happen daily in people's lives: in the family, at work, in school, on the street, in a car, with a doctor, on the phone, etc. Finally, CA focuses on the structural organisation of conversation and on the methods the interactants use when they talk to each other. People, then, are seen not merely as exchanging messages, but as collaboratively accomplishing social actions.

The basic question CA researchers ask is how interactants do what they do at that specific interactional moment. This question is central for the methods (Garfinkel 1967), i.e. the systematic procedures, interactants employ and develop for accomplishing social actions with their interlocutors. This attention towards the

speakers' methods correlates with Ca interest for the language-in-use, i.e. the language as it is used in specific occasions by specific interactants⁸⁰.

5.1.1 Type of data

CA analysis is based on naturally occurring data, for whose obtainment ethical and formal constraints have to be respected⁸¹.

The data can be audio-recorded or video-recorded. This depends on the type of data, for example phone calls are only audio-recorded; it also depends on the willingness of the participants to be video-recorded. Obviously the aim of the study influences the type of data to be collected. In the next chapter I present my data: I have audio-recordings of family conversations. In this case, video-recordings could have been possible, but the families did not allow the research team to video-record their small children. It is, then, always a matter of the participants' discretion.

Once the data is recorded, it has to be transcribed. The transcription is already a first data analysis. The transcripts can have different formats and also differ in the quantity and quality of details they include. As Jenkins (2011) points out:

Transcripts are sometime produced *in situ*, as the social-interaction event unfolds. Stenographers, for example, are commonly employed to produce real-time transcripts during courtroom talk or for closed captioning during televised news broadcasts. However, in most research for the human and social sciences, transcripts are created from video and/or audio recordings of events that have taken place in the past. The 'written or printed version' of data recordings includes text and/or visual material. (p. 2)

Depending on how an interaction is rendered in the written form and depending on how many details are included in the transcript, the analyses vary in their definiteness and precision. Jenkins (2011) proposes a short example to clarify this point.

(21) Ex. nr. 2 (from Jenkins 2011: 2)

5 Merchant: hello sir do you wanna
6 something
7 Peter: walk in here and have a look

⁸⁰ For this summary I lean on ten Have (2007).

⁸¹ For instance, the participants have to accept to be recorded and that the data will be used only for scientific purposes. Moreover, the researchers are obligated to anonymise the participants' names and also every other information that can help finding out who talk, where and when.

This transcript renders what the interactants said to each other when they were talking. This is written in a line by line fashion and, on the left part of the transcript, a number identifies the line and a name identifies the speaker.

(22) Ex. nr. 3 (from Jenkins 2011: 2-3)

5 Merchant: hello sir. (0.5) do↓ you↑
6 wa↓nna↑ something?
7 (0.4)
8 Peter walk in here and have a look.

This example is completed with indications about how the turns were uttered (punctuation symbols and flashes indicates intonation contours) and when, i.e. the numbers in parenthesis indicate the pauses. This information reveals important aspects related to the ways a speaker has uttered a turn, if s/he has asked a question or not, and also how precise their turns were (was there a longer pause? Were other noises heard?). The next example is completed with an image from the video recording:

(23) Ex. nr. 4 (from Jenkins 2011: 3)⁸².



5 Merchant: hello sir. (0.5) do↓ you↑
6 wa↓nna↑ something?
7 (0.4)
8 Peter walk in here and have a look.

From the snapshot it is possible to understand that the customer, Peter, has entered the store and has approached the merchant, who asks him a question in lines 5-6.

If it seems obvious to include as many details as possible in the transcript, another limit arises: the transcript must be usable. Since the transcript is the basis for the analysis, it contains important details, but it has to be clear and readable for the analysts. The

⁸² Jenkins (2011) also discusses the possibility of adding a description of the situation before the picture or before the transcript.

consequence is that the researchers set the rules for the transcript in relation to their research interests. This does not mean that they manipulate the data, but rather they try to optimise the transcript they will work with. For example, if the researcher is specialised in multimodal aspects, i.e. in gestures, face or head movements, use of objects from the environment, then the transcript will rather contain information on these aspects, but not many details about the prosodic contour of every word or TCU. If a particular turn shows interesting prosodic traits that are also related to multimodal aspects, it is always possible to increase the prosodic details of that particular turn in the transcription⁸³.

Once the transcript is ready the data are discussed during data-sessions, i.e. moments of exchange based on the transcriptions⁸⁴. Generally the researcher presenting the data does not explicitly address her analytical concern, but only describes the data and the example(s) under discussion, in order to avoid influences on the participants' observations. When the first round is complete, some major points are picked up and further discussed by the researchers. This system of approaching the data reflects what Sacks (1992) and Psathas (1995) called an "unmotivated looking", i.e. a look at the data without specific research questions in mind.

5.1.2 Analysis of participants' methods and specific interactional phenomena

CA investigates language as it is used in people's conversations in different settings. Language, then, is not a fixed entity that a speaker uses in a right or wrong way. On the contrary, language is flexible, adaptable to the practical purposes the interactants are accomplishing in their conversations. For these reasons, CA analyses the methods through which interactants accomplish social actions in conversations. It is through this approach that the ethnomethodological routes of CA become observable:

I use the term "ethnomethodology" to refer to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life. (Garfinkel 1976: 11)

⁸³ Another underestimated reason for operating in this way is related to the time needed for the transcript. The researchers have often a delimited time for collecting, transcribing and analysing the data, so the time itself becomes a constraint for the preparation of the transcriptions. Therefore the preparation of a first basic transcript that is continually refined is an usual procedure.

⁸⁴ In general, data-sessions are more efficient if they are kept in small groups, because the central principle of data-sessions is that everyone comes to talk and in the first round every participant illustrates the aspects she found interesting in the data under investigation

The “ethnomethods” are the central analytical object of CA research. They are “ethno” because they are endogenous for the interactants themselves, i.e. these methods are known-in-common in the community the speakers belong to. The community ultimately is not only a regional, political, religious, or linguistic grouping of individuals. A community is constituted every time people come together and share a conversation. The community is defined always *ad hoc* by the participants themselves, and this happens naturally during the interaction, i.e. the interactants do not have to declare their rules every time they gather together.

CA investigations are directed either towards specific actions accomplished during interactions (repair, (dis)agreement, conversation opening and closing, topic management, (dis)alignment and (dis)affiliation, task opening and closing), or towards specific resources (oh, mhm, and), or towards structural principles governing conversational sequences (organisation of preference, turn-taking, construction and expansion of adjacency pairs, sequence organisation, etc.). The next example shows clarifies this point.

(24) Excerpt 1.2 from ten Have (2010: 4)

Pt: This- chemotherapy (0.2) it won't have any lasting effects on havin' kids
will it?
(2.2)
Pt: It will?
Dr: I'm afraid so.

Example 24 stems from a conversation between a doctor and his patient. The patient asks the doctor a question in the first line and does it by proposing a positive assessment regarding the effects of the chemotherapy she has to do. The doctor does not answer this question for a long time (2.2 seconds-pause) and this makes the patient realise that something does not match her positive assessment⁸⁵. The pause in this example, however, gives the patient the possibility of self-selection again. She indeed takes it and reformulates her previous assessment in the exact opposite direction, i.e. she “reverses” (ten Have 2010: 5) her assessment (It will?). Now the doctor confirms this with his turn “I’m afraid so”.

⁸⁵ Several studies on assessments and agreement (particularly the fundamental study by Pomerantz 1984) have shown that interactants are seen to delay their reactions when a dispreferred response is delivered.

This short example contains several points of interest for CA. First, the organisation of preference. Preference is a structural feature of conversation, i.e. when a first pair part is uttered (like the first question in ex. 24), then a specific type of second pair part is projected and made conditionally relevant. This means that the second pair part has to follow the first. However, there is not just one possible second pair part that can be delivered (in this case, the second pair part could be the answer to the question or a silence). The second pair part shows the type of alignment its speaker takes as regards *the previous turn*. There are essentially two types of alignment: a positive one, i.e. the second speaker structurally aligns to the first pair part of the first speaker (like in: question-answer; greeting-greeting); or a negative one, i.e. the second speaker structurally disaligns from the first pair part of the first speaker (like in: invitation-decline; agreement-disagreement). It is important to state that:

this is not necessarily an alignment with, or distancing from, the *speaker* of the first pair part (although it *may* be that as well) but the project of the first pair part, and the course of action it is designed to implement. (Schegloff 2007: 59-60)

Second, ex. 24 shows the action of agreeing/disagreeing. With her first question, the patient projects a response that aligns to the positivity of her stance. The long pause that follows, however, suggests some trouble from the doctor's side to actually align with her patient's stance. With her second question, then, the patient reverses the polarity of her stance, i.e. from a positive (and hopeful) to a negative one. At this point, the doctor can align to her turn. In this case we see the organisation of preference at work: the doctor could have answered the patient's question with a disaligning and disagreeing turn. However, she prefers not to answer in this way and offers the patient the possibility to reformulate her question so that she can answer with an aligning turn.

A final point is the use of affiliating responses. Ex. 24 is taken from a doctor-patient consultation. This consultation contains exchanges about private and intimate problems that may arise from a chemotherapy. As demonstrated by Selting (1994), Stivers (2008), Stivers *et al.* (2012) and Steensig (2013), in specific cases, especially at the end of storytelling, the interlocutors are offered a final turn with which they can not only align, but also affiliate. An affiliation is observable in the sense that the interactant shows a sort of "empathy" towards the other speaker: for instance, if a story ends with a funny assessment and the teller begins to laugh, the projected preferred actions are not only an alignment to the teller's stand, but also an affiliation at the

empathic level, i.e. the story receiver can also start laughing. In ex. 24 the affiliation of the doctor is seen with her last turn: the doctor does not respond to the patient's first question, instead she lets her reformulate it so that her next answer is not only aligning but also affiliating. This is observable if one thinks that a merely affiliating answer could have been of the type "Yes it will". On the contrary, the doctor proffers a turn that displays empathy as regards the difficult and personal topic they are discussing.

5.1.3 Interest for linguistic forms in interaction

There are several studies that have concentrated on specific linguistic forms in interaction. These studies belong to the domain of interactional linguistics and have the following aim:

Studies in interactional linguistics aim at a description of linguistic phenomena as resources for the construction and organization of practices and actions/activities in interaction. (Kern & Selting 2013: 1)

The attention brought to linguistic forms derives from the fact that these forms are recurrently found in conversation and are strategically used by the speakers for accomplishing social actions. This means that interactants can rely on them as resources for achieving a variety of practical purposes during the interaction. In their introduction to the volume "Studies in interactional linguistics" (2001), Selting and Couper Kuhlen explain that it is indeed not possible to look at interactions ignoring the linguistic, prosodic and grammatical resources the speakers employ in conversation. They support this point of view addressing one of the core machineries of interaction: turn-taking. The authors support the idea that interactants manage turn-taking on the basis of TCUs (turn constructional units), which are linguistic units, since they can be words, phrases, clauses or sentences (p. 5). Moreover, the point of completion of TCUs is established as regard other linguistic features, namely their grammatical, prosodic and pragmatic cues (p. 6). In so doing, they consider that linguistic observations have their right to be in the research domain of CA and can moreover be very helpful for a deeper understanding of the most basic principles and machineries of conversation⁸⁶.

Within this linguistic approach to interactional data, another, most specific approach has seen the light that has focussed specifically on grammar in interaction. In one of

⁸⁶ The studies on interactional linguistics count, among others: Auer (1996), Couper Kuhlen (2004), Ford & Thompson (1996), Ford *et al.* (1996), Ford *et al.* (2001), Lerner (1991), Selting (1996), Sorjonen (1996).

the first volumes of reference a very large background is identified, in which different types of studies converge:

Three genres of inquiry converge here - one grounded in functional approaches to language concerned with its role in communication and cognition, one grounded in linguistic anthropology and the cultural underpinnings of language, and one grounded in conversation analysis and the interactional matrix of language structure and use. (p. 3)

The research in the field of interactional linguistics has its volume of reference with “Interaction and grammar” (1996), edited by Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson. Grammar is no longer seen as a fixed group of rules that can be used in a right or wrong way. Instead, grammar in interaction is an open class of rules that the speakers adopt on-line, i.e. while they are speaking, for adjusting their turns and their actional trajectories. The studies in this specific research domain have, for example, challenged the traditional descriptions of syntactic structures in different languages⁸⁷. The starting point of these investigations is the relationship between the turn construction and its temporality: since the turn is an online production, i.e. it is not defined *a priori* and delivered in a package, it often happens that an interactant changes her trajectory *while* uttering her turn. Syntactic constructions, then, show their flexible and adaptable nature: they are not fixed entities, but can be adapted for the ongoing construction of turns-at-talk.

The studies in the domain of interactional linguistics show that it is possible to analyse the “linguistics of interactions” (Couper Kuhlen & Selting 2001) without neglecting the specificities of the CA research methodology. As I introduced in chapter 2, it is central to always adopt the emic perspective of the interactants. In so doing, the analysis of linguistic forms and structures is possible and relevant for a better understanding of the interactional mechanisms. As my citation at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the point is not to prove this or that linguistic theory. The point is rather to observe the reality and describe how participants use and orient to linguistic forms in a way that is understandable for the researchers and external persons.

⁸⁷ For French see especially the works by Horlacher & Pekarek Doehler 2014; Pekarek Doehler *et al.* 2011; Pekarek Doehler 2011a, 2011b; Pekarek Doehler & Stoenica 2012; Pekarek Doehler & Horlacher 2013. A recent volume collecting several studies on the emergence of grammar in conversation is Auer & Pfänder (2011).

5.2 CA-SLA: issues with longitudinal studies

The application of CA methodology to L2 conversations raises several issues, some of which are methodological, whereas others are analytical in nature. In chapters 2 and 3 I have already presented and discussed the concept of L2 interactional competence. This concept is multifaceted and includes several aspects concerning the use of a second language in everyday interactions.

At this point I address the challenge CA-SLA has to face for documenting learning over time: the use of longitudinal comparisons. As explained before, CA-SLA analyses shed new light on the nature of L2 interactional competence (see especially Hall *et al.* 2011). Particularly, CA-SLA investigations have already revealed the multitude of abilities L2 speakers possess when they interact in their L2, such as their management of intersubjectivity and recipient design (Nguyen 2011), their management of repair sequences (Theodorsdottir 2011) and the social nature of language learning (Sahlström 2011).

CA-SLA studies also provide a particularly good starting point for investigating language learning⁸⁸ over time. In fact, CA offers the best methodological base for addressing issues related, for instance, to participants' orientation in conversation and management of one's identity. The availability of more longitudinal data obviously plays a crucial role for these investigations. Since CA-SLA studies deal with microanalytical approaches for the observation, description and documentation of specific actions, a longitudinal comparison, i.e. a comparison of the accomplishment of the same action by the same speaker(s) at different moments in time, allow the researchers to identify a learning trajectory that concerns the action under investigation.

In this sense:

[E]vidence for learning is provided in terms of the increased diversification and local efficacy [...] of speakers' methods for accomplishing social actions in talk. (Pekarek Doehler 2012: 6).

This means that learning is, first of all, seen and handled as a process that takes place regularly in every-day conversations. It is not limited only to the language classroom for example. As the studies in Hall *et al.* (2011) and Cadierno & Eskildsen (2015)

⁸⁸ However, as Hellermann (2012) pointed out, every type of learning can be documented with a CA longitudinal approach: "children developing competencies for language and social interaction, adult learners of a foreign language, physical therapy patients, or apprentice professionals in training." (p. 2)

demonstrate, language learning occurs in different contexts, either institution or non-institutional. As Pekarek Doehler (2012, above) points out, learning is to be identified in the diversification of the speakers' methods for accomplishing the same action at different points in time. What is at stake, then, is not just an analysis of linguistic repertoire, but rather "tracing practices for talk-in-interaction over time" (Hellermann 2009: 120).

Approaching L2 language learning in the domain of CA-SLA means first of all, to identify one action to be investigated over time. In the case of topic management, I have proceeded first to "split" the large activity of management into three sub-activities, namely topic introduction, topic closure and topic progression. In the next section I present the actional microcosms I have investigated for this study and how they help me answer the research questions I introduced before in chapter 4.

5.3 Actional microcosms under investigation

With these considerations in mind, I now briefly present the three actional microcosms I analyse further in Part III of this study. First allow me to say that it is not possible to address the issue of topic management as a whole. The management of conversational topics is namely constituted of several more specific actions. I have concentrated three of these actions and will present the analyses for:

- Topic introduction. This actional microcosm includes the methods L2 speakers use for introducing a possible new conversational topic. It is not my opinion that a topic is new or not. My observations are based on the linguistic and structural resources the L2 speakers employed for presenting a conversational topic at a precise interactional moment. Specifically, I have collected cases in which recurrently a previous sequence and topic were collaboratively closed and afterwards the L2 speaker self-selects introducing the new conversational topic. I have adopted a longitudinal research design, i.e. my results contain some observations about the changes in the way the L2 speakers accomplish this action. I have also considered a cross-linguistic comparison based on the different L2 proficiency levels of the au-pair girls. These analyses are presented in chapter 7.

- Topic closure. Although topics are typically seen to flow into one another, i.e. to progress in a rather unmarked way, it is also possible to find cases in which a topic closure happens after which a new topic is introduced. I present an analysis of such cases in chapter 8. For topic closure I discuss in depth the issue of documenting changes over time, since this actional microcosm seems to be more resistant in showing them.
- Topic progression. Specifically, I have investigated cases of topic shift and topical backlinking. These two specific actions show very interesting features as regards the L2 speakers' ability of monitoring the topical progression and the structural progress of conversation. Since topic progression in general is a pervasive characteristic of interactions, I have based my analyses on a synchronic perspective, i.e. presenting for each au-pair girl one example of topic shift and one of topical back-linking. Therefore I discuss in more depth the nature of L2 interactional competence, pinpointing its salient constituent parts. These analyses are the object of chapter 9.

In the cases of topic introduction and topic closure I have established two collections of cases and have done a longitudinal comparison. This means that I have analysed cases from different points in time and have observed if and which changes have taken place as regards the resources and practices the au-pair girls have employed for accomplishing topic introduction and topic closure. These analyses are presented in chapters 7 (topic introduction) and 8 (topic closure). I have chosen to discuss three examples for each au-pair girl, this representing the learning trajectories of the L2 speakers. With this investigation I deliver an answer to my research question concerning the methods L2 speakers employ for managing topics in L2 conversations and how these methods change over time.

In the case of topic progression which I present in chapter 9, I first made a distinction between topical backlinking and topic shift. For both operations, I present the analysis of one example for each au-pair girl, i.e. three examples for topical backlinking and three examples for topic shift. These investigations deal more with the research question on the nature of L2 interactional competence

Until now I have discussed the issue of analysing topics in interaction in detail, especially applying the research methods of CA and CA-SLA (chapter 2). In chapter 3 I presented the concept of L2 interactional competence and the possibilities for documenting its development over time. Chapter 4 was dedicated to the identification of my terminology for this study and my research questions. With this chapter 5 I have described the methodological issues that concern the research on second languages in the domain of CA and indicated the precise objects of my analyses.

The next chapter includes a detailed description of the data I have used for my research, so that this chapter 5 and the next chapter 6 constitute the methodological part of my study. In chapters 7, 8 and 9 I present the analyses of the three actional microcosms I described above. In chapter 10 I summarise the findings about topic introduction and topic closure and what they show about L2 interactional competence and its development over time. In chapter 11 I summarise the findings about topic progression and how they contribute to a better understanding of the nature of L2 interactional competence. Finally, chapter 12 contains my conclusions and some implications for practice.

6. Data and project description

This chapter contains a detailed description of the dataset I have worked with. I first describe the research design and how the data was collected (6.1). Then I go more into detail about the data of the three au-pair girls I have used for the present study and specify the reasons why I chose these three participants out of the entire dataset (6.2). Finally, I present and discuss the particularity of my data as regards the setting of my collection, namely family conversations. I argue that this setting provides for a hybrid learning context that has not yet been investigated in depth. Thereafter I pinpoint the major aspects related to my analyses and how they can contribute to a better understanding of the L2 learning process within this specific setting.

6.1 *The research project*

This dissertation is part of a larger research project financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF): "*Developing interactional competence in a second language. A longitudinal study of actional microcosms*" (FNS subside n° 100012_126860/1, March 2010 – February 2014). The research team was headed by Prof. Simona Pekarek Doehler and composed of a post-doc researcher, Dr. Evelyne Pochon-Berger, and of a PhD candidate, Clelia König (born Farina). The research was carried out at the University of Neuchâtel (CH), and, more precisely, at the Centre for Applied Linguistics (CLA).

6.1.1 Research aim: general goal and more specific aspects

The main goal of the research project was to document how French L2 speakers develop their interactional competence over time. Using audio recordings done directly by the participants, the research team set out to depict the developmental trajectories of the L2 speakers by analysing their daily interactions with L1 speakers longitudinally.

This larger goal was divided into smaller sub-projects. One of these projects is the present study about topic management in French L2 and how this relates to the development of L2 interactional competence. In particular, König (2013) has shown how an au pair, Julie, changes her way of introducing new conversational topics in an ongoing interaction. In König (2014), another aspect of topic management has been analysed, namely topical back-linking, i.e. when the au pair girl Christine links back her

discourse to a previous topic. In this case, too, it is not a matter of linguistic abilities, but rather a complex action at the crossroads of different aspects: structural (sequential) and content-sensitive ones.

Other aspects of L2 interactional competence have been studied. Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger (2010, 2011) and Pochon-Berger & Pekarek Doehler (2011) have investigated how L2 speakers accomplish disagreement in conversation. The central findings show that the higher the proficiency level gets, the better L2 speakers can manage disagreement sequences in conversation, especially changing from overt and direct "no"-disagreement towards a more complex turn-design that includes weaker disagreement tokens (e.g. "yes-but" constructions).

Another analysed activity was storytelling. Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger (to appear) concentrate on story-openings and show how an au-pair girl, Julie works increasingly on her story-prefaces, thus initiating a storytelling in a smoother and interactionally more sustainable and accountable way over time. Pochon-Berger *et al.* (2015) document the way in which access to epistemic knowledge is distributed and talked about in the everyday family interactions of Julie's host-family. In fact, storytelling is a means for the au-pair girl for not only telling her day with the children, but also for positioning herself as a good caregiver. In this sense, it can sometimes come to asymmetries of knowledge and of authority between au-pairs and host-parents regarding the way of handling the children. Interestingly, the main observations of the study do not concern the lexical or grammatical skills of the au pair, but rather her way of positioning herself in the conversational flow taking into consideration her interlocutors' stance- taking and authority.

Finally, a more linguistic study is Farina *et al.* (2012) about lexical searches and request for help, König (in preparation) about other-initiated other-repairs and how the L2 speaker manages intersubjectivity in such cases. All the aspects briefly depicted so far indicate how much L2 interactional competence is multifaceted.

6.1.2 Data collection: contacts and recordings

The L2 speakers that participated in the project were au-pair girls and boys that came to Switzerland for a period of 6 to 10 months and lived with a host-family where they took care of the children. The au pairs also attended a language course in a Swiss language school for two hours per week. Before starting this course, they had to pass a test about their lexical and grammatical skills. Based on the test results, the au pairs

were divided into groups with different L2 proficiency levels – in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL)⁸⁹.

The research group tried different ways to contact voluntary L2 speakers. First attempts were made through known persons with young children that might have been interested in employing an au pair. These attempts remained unsuccessful. Subsequent attempts were made by contacting several language schools, in whose programs we found courses addressed specifically to au-pairs. Two language schools in two Swiss Cantons (Neuchâtel and Fribourg) accepted to let us talk to the au-pairs and ask them if they wished to participate in our research project. At the beginning of every semester in the years 2009, 2010 and 2011, the post-doctoral researcher and the PhD candidate went to the language schools and briefly presented the research project in different classes. At the end, the interested au pairs received (I) a questionnaire about themselves and the host-family members that provided us information about their working and living context, and (II) a legal paper concerning the treatment of the audio-recorded data. Here we guaranteed the anonymous treatment of the collected data and its use only within the context of scientific activities (i.e. we were allowed to use these data in scientific presentations whereas we were not allowed to publish them e.g. in YouTube).

At the end 10 au-pairs contributed to our research, 9 girls and one boy. Three girls were staying in the Canton of Neuchâtel, whereas six girls and the boy were living in the Canton of Fribourg. All the participants received an audio recorder⁹⁰ that vaguely resembled a little cellular phone from the research team. It was relatively easy to handle and did not occupy a large space on the table or on the floor during the recordings. The participants were all instructed in the same way: we asked them to record themselves while talking with the host-family members, either with the whole family or only with the children. It did not matter if this happened during a mealtime or during the children's playtime. We asked them to record themselves at least once a week – but better twice or three times. The length of the recordings was not discussed,

⁸⁹ See the complete document here: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf

⁹⁰ The families did not allow the research team to take video-recordings, especially because of the presence of very young children. This is the reason why the dataset only has audio recordings.

so that, in the end, we had recordings between 5 and 50 minutes in length. The complete corpus is made up of about 58 hours of audio-recorded interactions.

6.1.3 Data transcription: issues at hand

The transcriptions were made by the research members with the software Transana⁹¹. All person and place names and possible references that could lead to the identification of the participants have been rendered anonymous. So far almost all the recordings have been transcribed, except from some au-pairs who made only one or two recordings. A specification must be made about the recordings of the au pair boy, Vinicius: most of the time he and his host-family spoke Swiss German. This represented a double obstacle for the transcriptions: first, because the main research object was the learning of French L2 in Switzerland, so that Swiss German data could not be considered for the analyses; second, because nobody in the research team had such good linguistic knowledge of Swiss German to allow us to completely transcribe the recordings. Therefore these recordings have been only partially transcribed.

The transcription conventions are inspired by the Jeffersonian conversation analytical conventions from 1984⁹², with a few modifications.

6.2 *The chosen dataset*

As explained above, the complete corpus is made up of 10 participants, French L2 speakers (9 girls and one boy). This corpus contains about 58 hours of audio-recorded everyday interactions between the au- pairs and their host-family members. I have made the choice of concentrating on three participants for different reasons. These are: first, these participants delivered their recordings continuously. As I have already mentioned above, some participants left the project after a couple of recordings, but not the three participants I have chosen. This fact allows me to conduct longitudinal investigations on a consistent corpus of interactions. Second, these recordings have very good sound quality. Despite the fact that the children are sometimes very loud, only a minimal part of these recordings sounds incomprehensible for the transcribers, so that I could use almost all the data delivered by the participants. Finally, and most

⁹¹ For more information, visit the site <http://www.transana.org>.

⁹² See Appendix 1.

importantly for my data comparisons, the chosen au-pairs had been categorised at the language school as having three different L2 proficiency levels. After an entry-level test, Julie reached a B2 level, Oksana a B1 level and Christine an A2 level. For the scope of my study, it is important to consider this initial difference, which resulted from a standardised written test. In my analysis, I show that this discrepancy is only marginally relevant for discussing the development of L2 interactional competence by these participants. Indeed, my analyses will show that sometimes no actual difference can be found in the actions accomplished by the au-pairs.

The next table contains general information about the three chosen au-pair girls:

Au-pair	L2 level	Length of stay	Age	L1	Nr. of recordings	Total length
Julie	B2	10 months (Sept. 2009 – June 2010)	18	German	20	7h 36'
Oksana	B1	10 months (Sept. 2010 – June 2011)	22	Polish	23	3h 17'
Christine	A2	6 months (Sept. 2010 – March 2011)	18	Swiss-German	15	2h 55'

Table 1: General information about the chosen dataset.

As table 1 shows, the dataset I worked with counts 58 recordings. I have made a further selection within this dataset. The au-pairs have sometimes recorded themselves while playing with the children. Since these conversations went very differently from those with the host-parents or the whole host-family, I have chosen to unify the conversational context I looked at as far as possible. For this reason, I further divided the recordings with the family from the recordings with only the children. The following table shows the results:

Au-pair	Nr. Rec	Total duration	Rec. family	Duration	Rec. children	Duration	Others
Julie	20	7h 30min	10	2h 26min	09	4h 4min	1 accidental rec. (1h)
Oksana	23	3h 17min	08	1h 1min	14	2h 8min	1 rec. with Christine (8min)
Christine	15	2h 55min	14	2h 47min	0	0	1 rec. with Oksana (8min)
TOT.	58	13h 42min	32	6h 14min	23	6h 12min	3 (1h 16min)

Table 2: categorisation of recordings.

To sum up: 58 audio-recordings, for a total of 13 hours and 42 minutes of free occurring interactions between the au pairs and their host-families. I analysed 32 recordings

(55% of the total), since 23 occur only with the children. This choice was made in order to keep the conversational setting and speech exchange system as comparable as possible. Subsequently, the analysed recordings total 6 hours and 14 minutes. This analysis does not consider recordings with only the children since they show different interactional mechanisms that are very interesting but that could not be taken into consideration for the present study, and 3 other interactions. One is between Oksana and Christine, who know each other from the language school; and another one seems to be an accidental recording during a language class. It sounds as if the recorder started in Julie's rucksack, so that it is possible to recognise the teacher's voice and to understand that Julie is at school, but otherwise it contains just a lot of noise.

I now describe and discuss the particular learning context in which the au pairs find themselves as L2 speakers.

6.3 A "hybrid" learning context

The experience abroad of au pair girls is characterised by a context specificity that is not found in any other learning context. Ochs & Taylor (1992), in their study of dinner table conversations of the American middle class, pointed out that families are a political entity, in which there is a hierarchy that concerns the authority for evaluating, criticising and managing discourse matters. This aspect must be considered when analysing the experience of au-pairs. On the one hand, au-pairs are L2 speakers spending a period abroad in order to improve the knowledge of their second language. For this reason, they are often categorised as learners by their co-participants. In so doing, a particular linguistic asymmetry is made locally relevant by the interactants, towards which they mutually orient (for example, when a repair sequence occurs).

On the other hand, au-pairs are also officially employed by the host-parents, hence there is a work contract that involves another class of categories, such as employer/employee or parent/caregiver. These categories come into the foreground in specific interactional moments, for example during storytellings, as shown in Pochon-Berger *et al.* (2015). This study demonstrates that storytellings are interactional activities that are prone to incorporate changes of participant categorisation in the course of their progression. Typically, an au-pair girl reports her day with the children to the host-parents – and this report happens in the form of a conversational storytelling. During the telling, moments alternate in which either the category of L2

learner or the one of caregiver is oriented to by participants. In particular, when it comes to demonstrating one's conduct as a "good caregiver", asymmetries in authority arise, since both the mother and the au-pair girl claim to have acted as good caregivers. Another example for the existence of asymmetries in authority and, consequently, in the categorisation of one's co-participant, is documented in König (in prep.). Differently from the previous study, this one concentrates on cases of other-initiated other-repair, in which the L1 speaker seems to orient towards the category of L2 learner for the au-pair, whereas the latter rejects the repair and through subtle conversational work, shows her orientation towards another interactional focus.

A last aspect that needs to be taken into account in the analyses is the general family setting, in which the L2 learning process takes place. In fact, it is different from a mere institutional context like a classroom, because the au-pairs participate in the daily activities of their host-families. This means, that the L2 learning process happens through and whilst other activities are accomplished, such as preparing lunch or dinner, playing with the children, preparing the children to go to bed or helping them eating. Sometimes, the children are very loud, want more attention, have some other problems and search for help from the au-pair or from the parents. This all influences the recorded interactions in so far as it generates (longer or shorter) interruptions. When looking at how the au pairs participate in the interactions, one needs to consider that sometimes the family environment does not help the learning process as compared to the language classroom. Nevertheless, my analysis shows that the au pairs' participation is not marginal and that they are able to manage, in one way or another, interruptions of different kinds.

Now I turn to the analytical part of my study, which is structured into three main chapters for topic introduction (chapter 7), topic closure (chapter 8) and topic progression (chapter 9).

PART III

Analyses

07. Topic introduction

In this chapter, I draw on the literature about disjunctions in conversation and specifically address the issue of topic introduction in conversation. As I have already explained in chapter 2, one possibility for analysing conversational topics is to focus on the moments in which a topical disjunction is made relevant by the participants themselves, i.e. when they address and make mutually comprehensible topic boundaries. In this chapter the studies of Button & Casey (1984, 1985) on topic initiation are particularly relevant, where the researchers identified two different strategies for proposing a new topic, i.e. through topic initial elicitors (Button & Casey, 1984), such as news inquiries, or through topic nominations (Button & Casey, 1985), such as news announcements.

Topic introduction is a specific actional microcosm (see chapter 2 above) that is comparable over time. The way in which a topic is routinely introduced in conversation differs in relation to the interactional context. Knowledge asymmetry, power relationships and institutional expectations might influence the turn-taking system of an interaction when they relate to an agenda of points or issues that are known to only one party. This is the case of classroom interactions for example, (Heyman 1986; Seedhouse & Harris 2011; Seedhouse & Supakorn 2015; van Compernelle 2011) or doctor-patient consultations (Stivers & Heritage 2001).

In contrast, in everyday interactions outside the classroom and in a family context, the participation patterns are different to some extent. First, no pre-established unilateral agenda appears normally in everyday talk. For instance, the question-answer pattern is often absent in everyday interactional data. Second, the interaction does not aim at a precise purpose, such as collecting or delivering specific information. Third, other extra-linguistic constraints are normally found in everyday interactional data: for example, the lack of institutional expectations is reflected in a different participation mechanism, in which overlapping occurs more often than it would in a more controlled conversation. Especially at home, people usually interact with each other while accomplishing other activities (such as cooking, playing or watching TV). The participants' focus of attention can thus be on different aspects of the same interaction and of the same context simultaneously. This divergence is occasionally made relevant

by the interactants themselves throughout the conversation, for example in that they explicitly address a lack of response by their interlocutor.

Particularly in everyday talk, the topical progression has been seen to unfold in a rather unmarked way (Sacks 1995). Typically, speakers talk about a subject and at the end of their conversation, they are talking about something completely different without having made any marked breaks within the conversational flow. In contrast to this, there are cases where a speaker introduces a completely new conversational topic or interrupts the topic at hand by changing it. In these cases, the speaker has to accomplish further conversational work in order to show his/her interlocutor(s) that he/she is going to introduce or change the conversational topic. This extra work produces a break in the conversational progression and marks topic boundaries (see Sacks 1995:352 about 'marked topics'; see also Jefferson 1984 about 'disjunctive topics'). Research has shown that disjunctions in conversation are normally made visible through discourse markers used as misplacement markers (cf. Bolden 2008 for an overview; cf. Auer 1988 about 'displaced language'), with the aim of signalling a change in the topical progression in the on-going conversation. Typically, such markers are placed at turn-beginning positions to project a change in what follows, and pauses, hesitation markers (*uhms*, *uhs*) and changes of communicative projects (Sacks & Schegloff 1973) often characterise the upcoming talk.

All this information derives from studies on L1 interactions undertaken mostly in English. In my study, I intend to focus on French L2 conversations, as this language is still less investigated (but see Pekarek Doehler 1999, 2004; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon Berger 2011).

I am interested in looking at how L2 speakers manage to introduce a new conversational topic in an on-going interaction, which is a rather rare action, considering that topics generally flow from one to the other without marked disjunctions. However, this feature allows me to pinpoint clear occasions in which the L2 speaker overtly orients towards topic boundaries. Moreover, I identify a recurring pattern for this microcosm as regards two different features: first, its sequential position in conversation – the topic is introduced after a previous sequence and topic are closed – and, second, the first turn's architecture, e.g. the use of discourse markers, pauses, and hesitation markers.

In this chapter, I present the analysis of two au-pair girls, Julie and Oksana, for whom I collected a total of 19 cases. In contrast to Julie and Oksana, I have no records of topic introductions in the data by Christine. This is important information *per se*, as in the school administered test Christine showed a lower level of French L2. Also, the data shows that the conversations in Christine's host-family are based on the question-answer pattern for the whole duration of her stay. It is always a parent, generally the host-father, that asks Christine questions, allowing her to tell what she did during the day.

I now turn to the analysis of topic introduction. I first present the data from Julie's data set (7.1) and I then continue with Oksana's data (7.2). I conclude this chapter with a summary of the findings (7.3) putting together the common points and the major diversities found in the data and relating them to my research questions about L2 interactional competence and its development over time.

7.1 Advanced L2 level: Julie⁹³

With the following three excerpts, I highlight what resources Julie exploits in order to open up a new topical sequence, that allows her to introduce a new referent that could possibly become the conversational topic. The longitudinal data allows me to show what changes in Julie's first turn. Moreover, through a sequential analysis, I identify the importance of Julie's action in introducing a new topic and opening a new sequence with regards to what was preceding. The results show, on the one hand, that Julie introduces a new referent in a sequential place that is an appropriate sequential place for this type of action, thus showing from the very beginning of her stay a high sensitivity towards the sequential progression of conversation. On the other hand, her orientation towards the topical progressivity is an aspect that shows important changes over time.

⁹³ The analysis of these three examples has been already the object of König (2013).

For topic introduction, I have collected a total of 12 cases in Julie's data. Their chronological distribution is as follows:

Recording date	30.09. 2009	12.10. 2009	28.10. 2009	09.11. 2009	10.11. 2009	05.02. 2010	16.02. 2010	15.03. 2010	23.03. 2010	02.06. 2010	16.06. 2010
Cases of TOP intro	0	2	3	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	2

Table 3: Cases of topic introduction in Julie's data.

Julie recorded herself in the host-family from September, 30th 2009 until June, 16th 2010. In table 1 I have only included the recordings she has made with the host-parents or the complete family. In addition to these recordings there are further ten recordings Julie has taken when only the children were with her. These data have not been considered for the present study. Finally, the examples I discuss in this section are taken from different points in time. These are indicated in the grey columns in the table above. So the excerpts I present are representative for the entire collection.

(25) Julie, 12.10.2009 "suivre la danse" *go to the dance class*

01 Mar: MAIS ÇA RECOMMENCE PAS HEIN?=
but it doesn't start again hunh

02 Jor: =mais (xx)=
but

03 Mar: =TU SORS DE CE DIVAN MANON S'IL TE PLAÎT.
you leave this couch manon please

04 (1.1)

05 Man: (non:::; m:::)
(no, m)

06 +(6.3) ((sopirs des enfants en arrière-fond))+
((children are breathing in the background))

07 Jul: j'espère que je peux suivre
I hope that I can follow

08 main- euh: de↑main (.) la: eh [la gy- euh: la d↑an[se=hein=hh.&
tomorrow uh tomorrow the uh the-F.sg. gy uh the dance course

09 Mar: [°(le)(x)-° [danse.
the-M.sg. dance course

10 Jul: &.h=parce que j'étais pas là une f↑ois +(↑ouh)((en inspirant))+=f:::
because I haven't been there once uh ((in-breath))

11 Vic: mhm

12 Mar: ouais.
yeah

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13 Jul: ça va <telle>ment vite
it goes that fast

14 ((bruits des enfants))
((noises by the children))

15 Jor: mais manon (xx)
but manon (xx)

16 (7.6) ((bruits des enfants))
((noises by the children))

17 Mar: mais des fois (.) c'est mieux d'arrêter une semaine
but sometimes it's better to stop for a week

18 pis après tu reprends t'as l'impression que ça va mieux
and then you start again you have the impression it's going better

19 Jul: o:ui?
yes

20 (.)

21 Mar: c'est comme courir
it's like running

Ex. 25 stems from Julie's second audio-recording. At this time, she has been in Switzerland for almost two weeks. As with many other recordings, this one was made during dinner time, while all the family was sitting at the table. I am interested in Julie's turn at lines 07 and 08. I will propose an analysis of it in two steps: first, I will describe the turn construction in terms of linguistic resources and information structure; second, I will propose a sequential analysis of its placement in the interaction. This means looking at the precise moment in conversation in which the turn is uttered, identifying the action it accomplishes and placing it with regards to the topical progression. All these aspects relate to Julie's interactional competence in French L2.

As for the linguistic resources, Julie starts in l. 07 with a sentence, '*j'espère*' (I hope) that projects a subordinate clause, which in this case is uttered with some difficulties in l. 08. We can resume it with: '*que je peux suivre demain la danse*' (that I can attend the dance course tomorrow). She places herself as the subject of these clauses, thus '*je*' (I) becomes the deictic centre of both clauses, and she also projects a predication about a future point in time, '*demain*' (tomorrow). The last element of the predication, '*la danse*' (the dance course), introduces a new referent in the sentence in the position of direct object. So Julie produces a sentence structure placing the sentence topic ('*je*') in the canonical, pre-verbal

position, and the focus (new information) in its classical direct object position. The object referent is a definite NP, which indicates that it is not presented as a 'brand new referent' in the terms of Prince (1981), but it is considered cognitively accessible to the interlocutors in the sense of Ariel (1988). In fact, this referent was briefly mentioned earlier in the same conversation. Summing up, regarding the structuring of information on the sentence level, Julie deploys conventional L1-speaker-like linguistic means.

I now turn to the sequential environment in which the turn in lines 07 and 08 is produced. Before this turn, the mother and the children are concluding a discussion about the children's behaviour and their being too noisy during the mealtime. The closing environment is observable in the following aspects: in l. 01 Marie utters a turn which is formatted as an order and ends with a question tag (*'hein'*). The next relevant action should be for the children to perform what Marie asks (to be quiet). This is not the case, as we can see in l. 02, where Jordan responds with a disaligning turn, beginning with a typical opposition marker, *'mais'* (but), but afterwards his voice lowers, so that it is only possible to suggest what he utters. However Marie in l. 03 clearly orients toward the disaligning activity performed by her daughter Manon (who meanwhile continues to play and to be noisy), showing in this turn her orientation towards the local (contextual) sensitivity of this conversation (Bergmann, 1987). Subsequently, the pauses in l. 04 and 06 suggest that the on-going course of action is coming to an end: in fact, no noises are audible in the recording, except for Manon's unclear sound production in l. 05. So, the children have now performed the relevant actions projected by Marie's turns in l. 01 and 03 and this sequence is understood by Marie and Julie as being closed.

Afterwards in l. 07, it is Julie who self-selects and takes the floor and by doing so, opens a possible new sequence in the on-going conversation, thus orienting to what preceded as being closed. Julie utters a hope, requiring some kind of recipient uptake. But she also shows some difficulties in proffering her turn: see in l. 08 the hesitation markers (*euuh*), the vocal prolongations and the repeated cut-offs followed by self-repairs (*main- demain; la gy- la danse*). In response to these linguistic troubles, Marie twice provides the item Julie is searching for (l. 09). In the first case, Marie drops off the overlap and, in the second case, she proposes the item *'danse'* while Julie is already uttering this same item.

Despite her troubles in the first turn in lines 07 and 08, Julie holds the floor and completes her utterances, so she opens a new sequence after a former has been closed. She does this by using herself as a deictic centre for anchoring her discourse. But she also introduces a new referent (the dance course), which becomes the conversational topic later on in the interaction. All this indicates Julie's sensitivity for the sequential progression of conversation, but this is not the same for its topical progressivity. In fact, Julie starts a new sequence about a new matter, which is not related to what precedes – neither to the sequence about Marie and the children, nor to what was done before that sequence. Julie does not use any misplacement markers to explicit the topic change in conversation, but starts her turn in l. 07 in a rather abrupt way with a standard clause. This is interesting since it is not a typical way of opening a sequence about a new matter: there is a sort of 'mismatch' for Julie between the sequential level for which she shows sensitivity, and the topic talk, for which she does not. Although she opens a new topical sequence, she does it without any markers related to its dependence or independence from the previous matter. So we can call this system of introducing a new topic, an abrupt topic introduction. I now show how this aspect changes in the following excerpts.

(26) Julie, 05.02.2010 "skier dans la poudre" *ski on the powder*

- 01 Mar: <c'est> bon j'ai rien dit=>j'ai cru qu'y avait plus de
it's alright I said nothing I thought there was
- 02 jambon=mais je l'ai trouvé<.
no ham left but I've found it
- 03 +(5.0) ((bruits))+
((noises))
- 04 (1.0)
- 05 Jul: m[†]ais à la fin: (0.1) euh: (0.1) oui (0.1) à la fin de l'hiver je
but at the end uh yes at the end of winter I
- 06 veux savoir (0.1) je veux (0.1) arri[†]ver (0.5) à skier dans la poudre.
want to know I want to get to to ski on the powder
- 07 (0.5)
- 08 Mar: hein=hein
unh hunh
- 09 Jul: †et je veux faire- eh- eh- arriver de faire (0.9) car[†]ving
and I want to do uh uh to be able to do carving

Ex. 26 is taken from a recording taped six months after Julie's arrival in Switzerland. Similarly to the preceding one, the analysis will proceed in two steps, looking first at the linguistic features of Julie's turns in l. 05 and 06. l. 05 starts with a discourse marker '*mais*' (but), which is very common in spoken French for both getting the interlocutor's attention (attention-getting device) and claiming the floor, projecting more to come. Afterwards Julie introduces an adverbial construction '*à la fin*' (in the end), which is interrupted by two short pauses, a hesitation marker (*euuh*) and a self-regulation marker ('*oui*', yes), which seems to be directed to Julie herself than to her interlocutor. In fact, just after it, Julie repeats the first part of the adverbial construction '*à la fin*' (in the end) and completes it with a temporal specification '*de l'hiver*' (of winter), identifying in this way a precise temporal context: at the end of winter. Subsequently, she introduces a predication about herself: as she did in the first excerpt the '*je*' (I) becomes the deictic *origo* of the utterance, e.g. the utterance topic in a classic pre-verbal position. She expresses her wish to learn a new way of skiing, '*skier dans la poudre*' (ski on the powder), which projects as relevant to the next uptake by her interlocutor, like the wish expressed in ex. 1.

Also for the sequential development, we observe a similarity to the previous example. Also in ex. 26 there is on-going activity that is strongly related to the family context: Marie is searching for ham in the refrigerator and she cannot find it. In l. 01 we have Marie's pronouncement, which is produced with high volume and fast speed, so that she can resume the whole activity that was going on until that moment. As no one reacts to Marie's resumption, one can consider the problem solved. After some seconds of noise in l. 03 (the participants are preparing the meal) and a silent pause of 1 second in l. 04, Julie self-selects in l. 05 opening a possible new sequence and clearly indicating the preceding activity as being closed. As in ex. 25, Julie shows some difficulties (a repetition in l. 05 and a change of communicative project in l. 06) but nonetheless she manages to introduce new information and a new referent (a particular type of skiing) in the focal position of her utterance (ski on the powder), which subsequently becomes the conversational topic. In fact, even though not immediately after Julie's turn, Marie acknowledges it with a minimal response ('*hein-hein*', l. 08), thus inviting her to continue her telling. Julie progresses after Marie's minimal reaction, adding a new turn in l. 09.

If we compare this second excerpt with the first one, we observe some common features: I) a preceding sequence and topic are collaboratively closed down, II) there is a pause (in this second case it is partially filled with noises coming from the kitchen), and then III) Julie self-selects proposing a new conversational topic which is anchored to the 'I' as sentence topic. The main difference concerns Julie's turn architecture: in ex. 25, she introduces the new matter in an abrupt way, whereas in ex. 26 she accomplishes a more complex contextualisation and interactional work allowing her interlocutor to anchor the new topic in a particular time constellation. Therefore, even though she uses a new pronouncement for nominating a possible new topic (Button & Casey, 1985), she accomplishes more interactional work for projecting the upcoming topical disjunction.

The third excerpt is part of the last recording done by Julie during her stay; this means ten months after her arrival in Switzerland.

(27) Julie, 16.06.2010 "qu'est-ce que je voulais" *what I wanted*

- 01 Man: j'ai dit [(peut-être)] un cauchemar?
I said maybe a nightmare
- 02 Jul: [ouais.]
yeah
- 03 Mar: ↑mh↑m.=
mhm
- 04 Jul: =°ehm.°
uhm
- 05 (1.1)
- 06 Jul: °<qu'est-ce> >que je voulais,<° (0.1) .hh >AH OUI=.h<
what did I want oh yes
- 07 j'ai télépho↑né ehm:: (0.4) avec ma=Mama::n et j'ai demandé euh
I called my Mom and I asked uh
- 08 (0.4) qua::nd (0.4) eh ben en f↑ait si tu ↑veux le ↑jeu:di tu peux
when uh well in fact if you want on Thursday you
- 09 encore aller >travailler<=c'est ↑bête si tu va:s- restes ici.
can still go to work it's stupid if you go- stay here
- 10 Mar: [°(x)(oui).°
yes
- 11 Jul: [parce que on- on part le- à midi?
because we we leave the-M.sg. at noon?
- 12 (0.2)

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13 Mar: †si mais bon >faut quand même que tu prépares tes choses
yes but still you need anyway to prepare your stuff

14 tranquille†ment<,
calmly

In l. 06, Julie's first utterance, though it has the syntactic form of a question, it functions as a misplacement marker. This utterance lacks the final rising intonation typical for questions, but is constructed following its particular syntactic pattern, the most important feature being the question marker *qu'est-ce que* (what). This utterance functions as a misplacement marker rather than as an actual question, showing the discontinuity of the upcoming topic and action with regards to the preceding ones. This is visible, first, in the lower voice volume that suggests that this question is rather self-directed than directed to an interlocutor (Steinbach & Thorne 2011) and, second, in the fact that Marie does not orient to it as projecting an answer. In fact, after a micro-pause, Julie produces '*ah oui*' (oh yes) with higher voice volume and accelerated voice speed. This item is also preceded and followed by breath intake, and marks the beginning of the actual utterance, which has – as seen before – '*je*' (I) in topical, pre-verbal position and a new referent in its second, focal part (Julie's mother). This time again the utterance is interrupted by two micro-pauses and two hesitation markers ('*ehm*:' and '*eu**h*' in l. 07). This accounts for some difficulties Julie is encountering and, after a third micro-pause in l. 08, Julie changes her communicative project. She marks this using the marker '*eh ben*' (uh well) and the adverb '*en fait*' (in fact, actually). In lines 08 and 09 Julie formulates a proposition to Marie, which makes an acceptance or a refusal from her relevant. After a short pause in l. 10, it seems that Marie is accepting (l. 11), but there is an unclear segment and her turn is overlapped by Julie's increment in l. 11: she delivers an account for her preceding proposition, possibly because Marie's reaction is a little bit delayed. The conversation proceeds afterwards about the organisation of Julie's departure.

Focussing now on the sequential organisation of this excerpt, we observe a similar structure to the preceding ones, e.g. we can compare the structural features of all three excerpts. Firstly, a sequence is getting closed: in ex. 25 and 26 the closed sequences were strongly bound to an extra-linguistic activity (ex. 25: children making noises, and ex. 26: preparing dinner), whereas in ex. 27 the on-going activity is a storytelling and is pursued by Marie, reporting the nightmare her

daughter had the night before. Lines 03 and 04 show minimal recipient reactions, both from Marie and from Julie: these features are typical of a sequence being closed and they prepare the field for a smooth passage to a new topic and to a new sequence. In fact, Julie's 'ehm' in l. 04 can be considered a 'pivotal element', in the sense that it belongs both to the closing and to the opening sequence. Retrospectively, l. 04 aligns to Mom's minimal response in l. 03, showing the slow exhaustion of the topic and of the activity – the climax of the story being reached before that moment. Prospectively, l. 04 indicates Julie's claim for the floor and though it is followed by a rather long pause, it pre-announces a possible upcoming self-selection by Julie. In fact, in l. 06 Julie self-selects and produces a complex turn introducing a new conversational topic that is independent from the previous one.

Compared with the preceding excerpts, ex. 27 shows Julie's different way of structuring the turn that introduces a new conversational topic. In this excerpt, her preparatory work starts possibly already in l. 04, when she shows her willingness to take the floor. However, the main prefacing and linking work is accomplished in l. 06. With the question 'what did I want' functioning as a misplacement marker, Julie projects a change in the topic progressivity of conversation, indicating that what comes next is not related to the previous on-going activity and topic. The 'oh yes' in l. 06, contributes both to prepare the interlocutor for the new upcoming topic and to help Julie resuming her thoughts in order to better structure the continuation of her turn.

7.2 Intermediate L2 level: Oksana

For the au-pair girl Oksana I collected a total of 7 cases of topic introduction. I represent their distribution in form of a table, as I have already done with Julie's data:

Recording date	28.09. 2010	25.10. 2010	31.10. 2010	13.12. 2010	28.02. 2011	16.03. 2011	23.05. 2011	31.05. 2011
Cases of TOP intro	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	2

Table 4: cases of topic introduction in Oksana's data.

Oksana's recordings began on September, 28th 2010 and ended on May, 31st 2011. In addition to these tapes there are also other 14 recordings only with the children. The

cases of topic introduction are not so distributed as in Julie's data, so the examples I have analysed stems from the three recordings in which also other cases of introduction are to be found.

For my analysis, I first focus on the sequential placement of topic introduction, which reveals that a new topic is introduced when the previous sequence and topic is collaboratively closed. I then describe the linguistic and prosodic resources employed by Oksana for introducing a new topic. This description refers to the turn architecture and the introduction of referents in an ongoing conversation. The most important aspects, showing a similarity to Julie's data, concern the sequential placement of the topic introduction and the employed resources for the turn construction. However, I also document an important difference between the two au-pair girls and this is related to the type of topic, i.e. to their possible newsworthiness or interest for the interlocutor. This relates to the interactional aspects of recipient design which Oksana brings more to the foreground than Julie.

I now start with the first example from Oksana's data-set.

(28) Oksana, 28.09.2010 "aujourd'hui" *today*

- 01 Oks: mh PAS POUR çA: mais pour gâteau:
 mh not for this but for cake
- 02 normalement avec les yeux:=et avec les farine
 normally with eggs and with flour
- 03 peut-être ↑mais pour ça?
 maybe but for this
- 04 (...)
- 05 Pie: je le regarde (lui) qu'est-ce qu'il y a demain.
 I 'll look at this what there is tomorrow
- 06 (1.3)
- 07 Oks: ehm okay ↑eh:m (...) eh quoi nou::s avons faire aujourd'hui?
 uhm okay uhm uh what we do have to do today
- 08 (.)
- 09 Pie: voilà oui.
 there you are yes
- 10 Oks: eh: Nadège?
 uh Nadège
- 11 Nad: èh?
 yeah

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- 12 Oks: qu'est-ce que nous avons faire aujourd'hui?
what did we do today
- 13 (...)
- 14 Oks: nous allons aller à côté de lac=oui?
we go go (==we went) to the lakeside yes
- 15 (...)
- 16 Oks: [oui?]
yes
- 17 Pie: [tu] as été faire une promenade?
did you go for a walk
- 18 (...)
- 19 Nad: non.
no
- 20 (.)
- 21 Oks: non=non nous allo::ns eh:: jouer avec le ballon-
no no we go (=went) uh to play with the ball-
- 22 eh dans le sable=parce que il y a u- une liè,
uh in the sand because there is a- a place
- 23 (..)
- 24 Oks: une liè pou:r euh=
a place for huh
- 25 Pie: =un lieu.
a place
- 26 Oks: une lieu [pour] jouer^avec ballon ↑mhm?
a place for playing with the ball mhm
- 27 Pie: [mhm]
mhm

This example stems from Oksana's very first recording, at which point she had just arrived in her host-family. She and the host-father Pierre are having dinner at home and Oksana is telling what she did during the day with Nadège. I am interested in l. 7, when Oksana self-selects after a previous sequence and topic are collaboratively closed-down and a long pause occurs.

From l. 01 through 05 Oksana and Pierre are taking decisions and making arrangements for buying a new mixer, since the one they have does not work anymore. Pierre's final statement in l. 05 marks the closure of this sequence and topic. This is also observable in the long pause that occurs after this turn. Longer pauses are namely

found in closing implicative contexts (cf. Button 1990) and also in relation to introduction or change of conversational topic (cf. Maynard 1980).

After a 1.3seconds pause, Oksana utters a turn that simultaneously aligns with Pierre's closing turn in l. 5 whilst claiming the floor for herself. Her '*ehm okay ehm*' (uhm okay uhm) functions as alignment to Pierre closing, though retarded, because it does not topicalise any other element of Pierre's statement. The double hesitation marker '*ehm*', the second of which is also prolonged, allows Oksana to claim the floor for herself, also blocking a possible further talk by Pierre. In so doing, she keeps talking after a micro-pause, introducing the next conversational topic, i.e. what she and Nadège did that day. Pierre's alignment and topicalization arrive in the next turn straightforwardly. In l. 10 and 12, Oksana also tries to involve Nadège in the telling of their day, but the child does not react to this invitation. In line 14 she offers a description of their activity, fishing for Nadège's confirmation with a questioning turn ending, '*oui?*' (yes?). As no reaction follows, Oksana fishes again for the child's answer in l. 16, but again with no success. At this point, Pierre formulates another question, which he addresses to Nadège, namely if she had gone for a walk. Nadège finally answers with a minimal negative response. Oksana then self-selects and explains to Pierre that they were at the lakeside playing with the ball, since there is a sand place there where one can play.

A look at the sequential placement of Oksana's turn in l. 7 uncovers similar features to Julie's examples. Two aspects can be observed. First, Oksana self-selects after a long pause has occurred and no one else is talking. Second, Oksana's turn contains a news announcement in the form of a question. As a question, her turn necessarily projects as next action an answer from her interlocutor. This shows that Oksana orients to what precedes as being closed down.

The next example, taken from a recording after one month of her stay, shows some differences as regards Oksana's topic introduction methods.

(29) Oksana, 31.10.2010 "piscine" *swimming pool*

01 Pie: on peut lever les barrières,
one can put the barriers

02 (.)

03 Pie: comme ça >la-< la boule elle va [pas&
so that the the bowl it doesn't go

```
04 Oks: [oui:,
         yes
```

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- 05 Pie: &à droi[te ou à gauche.
to the right or to the left
- 06 Oks: [ehm.
- 07 (.)
- 08 Oks: .hmm
- 09 Pie: ouais: par>ce qu'autrement< c'est pas inté°ressant°°.
yeah because otherwise it's not interesting
- 10 (5.0) ((eating-related noises))
- 11 Pie: mais elle aime BIEN.
but she really loves (it)
- 12 (4.0) ((eating-related noises))
- 13 Oks: peut être je: (2.6) je vais:: à:: pi↑scine avec na°dège° (0.4)
maybe I I go to swimming pool with nadège
- 14 cette +°°(sean)°° ((semaine))+.
this week
- 15 (2.5)
- 16 Pie: alors mar↑di, (.) c'est là où l'eau elle est- elle est chaude.
well on Tuesday it's when the water it is it is warm
- 17 (1.3)
- 18 Oks: mh?
- 19 (1.0)
- 20 Pie: les mar↑dis (0.4) l'eau elle est chaude.
on Tuesdays the water it is warm
- 21 (.)
- 22 Pie: elle fait trente: >je sais plus< environ trente degrés.
it's thirty I don't know anymore about thirty degrees

Oksana and Pierre are having dinner at home. For the analysis of topic introduction, I am interested in Oksana's turn in lines 13-14. From line 1 till line 9, Pierre is explaining to Oksana how it is possible to let little children play bowling, namely via the use of barriers on both sides of the track, so that the bowls cannot drop off. Pierre concludes his explanation with the comment that otherwise the game is not interesting for the children (l. 9). During the long pause in l. 10 both interactants are heard eating. In l. 11, Pierre self-selects and adds another comment, a more specific one concerning the bowling experiences of his daughter Nadège: '*mais elle aime bien*' (but she really likes it). As an assessment, this turn functions as closing implicative. Similarly with his

preceding turn in l. 9, no reaction comes from Oksana. At this point, there is another very long pause (l. 12) and here also some eating-related noises are heard. After this pause, Oksana self-selects and introduces a possible new conversational topic. Through a new announcement (Button & Casey 1985) she informs Pierre that she might go to the swimming pool with Nadège that week. She constructs her turn as follows: she begins with the adverb '*peut-être*' (maybe), which functions as a modal particle. Then she positions herself as the deictic *origo* of this sentence. A vocal prolongation on the subject and a long intra-turn pause immediately after it suggest some difficulties in turn construction. After the pause, Oksana repeats the subject and continues with a predication (lines 12-13): '*je vais à piscine avec nadège cette semaine*' (I go to swimming pool with nadège this week). This predication contains a spatial and a temporal indication, as well as an indirect object (with nadège). In conclusion, placing herself in the canonical subject position, Oksana constructs a long and complex predication, which delivers to her interlocutor all the contextual clues needed for the establishing of the conversational topic.

Focusing now on the sequential position of Oksana's turn, it is interesting to notice that Pierre was explaining to the au-pair girl how to let children play bowling in a way that allows them to have fun too. His two last turns (l. 9 and l. 11) get no reaction from Oksana, at least nothing verbal. L. 11 can then be seen as an attempt by Pierre to fish for a response from his interlocutor. However this attempt fails. The two long pauses in lines 10 and 12 recall a typical closing environment, when the topics fade and no interactant adds anything to keep them going. It is therefore at a precise conversational moment that Oksana self-selects in l. 12, namely when no one else is requiring the floor and the preceding topic and sequence have faded out.

She constructs her turn in a fashion that shows her orientation towards the preceding sequence and topic as being closed: she does not start with a linking device, instead she starts with a modal particle that shows no bond (either topical or sequential) with the preceding turns and sequences and she positions herself as the sentence topic

(Reinhart 1982), whereas before it the sentence topic was the child⁹⁴. Interestingly, however, Pierre acknowledges Oksana's topic introduction in a very delayed way. It might well be that he does something non-verbal, maybe with his eyes or his head. But we do not possess this information. Pierre goes ahead with the conversation and explains something about the water temperature in the swimming pool on Tuesday (l. 15). This explanation adds a piece of information for Oksana, but it also functions as an alignment to Oksana's previous turn: since she announced that she would probably go to the swimming pool with the child, the father informs her about which day it is better to go to more enjoy the water.

To sum up, in this example Oksana accomplishes a more complex topic introduction than in the previous one. She uses a modal adverb to weaken her viewpoint and also the content of her new announcement, since it is essential for her to receive Pierre's authorisation for the activities she plans to do with the child. Therefore a modal particle successfully plays the role of indirectly asking for permission without directly asking her interlocutor a question. This is an important activity concerning the protection of one's face and the management of inter-subjectivity in conversation. Oksana's predication in her topic introduction turn is also more complex than in the preceding example, though some speech troubles are still to be seen (pauses and vocal prolongations). Finally, the sequential placement of this topic introduction shows a great similarity to Julie's data, since it takes place after a previous sequence has been closed.

I now turn to the last example from Oksana's collection, which stems from the last recording she did with her host-family, i.e. after 8 months of stay.

(30) Oksana, 31.05.2011 "volley" *volleyball*

01 Oks: +°c'est pas gra[ve° ((loin de l'enregistreur))+
 it's not bad ((away from recorder))

02 Pie: [non: je pense pas?
 no I don't think so

⁹⁴ Nadège is thus shifted from the place of sentence topic to the indirect object place in Oksana's predication: this aspect might lead to the observation that Oksana is not introducing a new topic, but that she is shifting from a preceding to another one. This observation could be true if one considers an external perspective on the data, and decides what the topics are. On the contrary, I have applied an internal perspective, concentrating on the way Oksana constructs her turn: looking at the sequential moment of her self-selection and at the resources she employs, she is accomplishing the introduction of a new topic via a new announcement. This is thus not my opinion, but what the speaker is doing with the resources she has at her disposal.

7. Topic introduction

- 03 Agn: (OUI ELLE) A DIT PAS GRAVE.
yes she said not bad
- 04 (4.1)
- 05 Agn: ei- elle a dit pas grave hein.
she said not bad did she
- 06 (1.6)
- 07 Nad: ↑A::h hihihhi
- 08 Oks: °>mh okay tiens<°.°
okay here you go
- 09 (.)
- 10 Oks: [aujourd'hui::&
today
- 11 Nad: [gna:m gna:m.
- 12 Oks: &tu j/u/::: volley- +volleyball, ((prononciation anglaise))+
you play volley volleyball ((English pronunciation))
- 13 (.)
- 14 Oks: comment on dit ça °en français°?
how do you say it in French
- 15 Pie: aujourd'hui je- je vais jouer du +volley. ((prononciation
today I I am going to play volley ((French
- 16 française))+
pronunciation))
- 17 Oks: +volley. ((prononciation française))+
volley ((French pronunciation))
- 18 Pap: >ouais c'est-< c'est [(xx)
yeah it's it's
- 19 Oks: [c'e:st eu:h +volleyball, ((prononciation
it's uh volleyball ((English
- 20 anglaise))+
pronunciation))
- 21 Pie: volley+ball ((prononciation anglaise))+ >oui oui<.
volleyball ((English pronunciation)) yes yes
- 22 on dit aussi du volley+ball ((prononciation française))+ hein?=
we also say volleyball ((French pronunciation)) do we ?
- 23 Oks: =aha
- 24 Pie: en français. (.) [on a]
in French we have
- 25 Agn: [ON PEUT] DIRE FOOTBALL
one can say football

7. Topic introduction

- 26 (..)
- 27 Oks: n: on c'est pas la même=
no it's not the same
- 28 Pie: =c'est pas la même chose on dit
it's not the same thing we say
- 29 foot+ball ((prononciation anglaise))+
football ((English pronunciation))
- 30 on dit baseket+ball ((prononciation anglaise))+ (.)
we say basketball ((English pronunciation))
- 31 basket+ball ((prononciation française))+
basketball ((French pronunciation))
- 32 disons en français c'est basketball football (.)
let's say in French it's basketball football
- 33 [mh]
- 34 Agn: [+football ((en riant))]+
football ((laughing))
- 35 Pie: +ball ((prononciation anglaise))+ c'est eu:h (..) en anglais?
ball ((English pronunciation)) it's uh in English?
- 36 Agn: a
- 37 Pie: oui c'est le:: >c'est avec le travail?<
yes it's the it's with the work?
- 38 (.)
- 39 Oks: mhm=
- 40 Pap: =on s'en↑traîne parce que le dix-huit juin on a:: (..)
we are training because on the eighteenth of June we have
- 41 on a un tournoi.
we have a tournament
- 42 Oks: °aha d'accord°.
aha allright

The whole family is having lunch together and Oksana is discussing Pierre's plans for the evening, while preparing something to eat for the children. I am interested in Oksana's turn in lines 10 and 12 and, as usual, I proceed with an analysis of its resources and then of its sequential placement.

Oksana starts her turn in l. 10 with a temporal locator, '*aujourd'hui*' (today) and is immediately overlapped by Nadège's noises related to her eating activity (l. 11). Therefore, Oksana continues her turn immediately after it and she places Pierre (in the second person singular) in the canonical place of sentence topic (Reinhart 1982), i.e.

the subject 'tu' (you) is now the deictic centre of her turn. The predication concerns his activity: the VP '*j/ʊ/ volley- volleyball*' (play volleyball), though the verb is pronounced in a non-standard way, completes Oksana's question, i.e. she asks Pierre if he is going to play volleyball that evening. By means of a new inquiry (Button & Casey 1984), Oksana takes the floor, thus proposing a possible conversational topic and she also projects a next relevant action, namely an answer from Pierre. However after a short pause (l. 13) she self-selects again and asks Pierre for help, since she shows some incertitude about the pronunciation of the lexeme "volleyball" in French. In l. 15, Pierre offers his lexical help, though in an embedded repair, i.e. answering Oksana's question, '*aujourd'hui je- je vais jouer du volley*' (today I- I'm going to play volleyball). Right after this answer, Oksana repeats the lexeme with the correct French pronunciation, and so confirms that she has understood Pierre's repair. In l. 18 Pierre self-selects and initiates a turn which seems to be designed as an explanation ('*c'est- c'est-*' (it's- it's)). However, Oksana overlaps this turn in l. 19 and utters another clarification request concerning the right pronunciation of the term "volleyball". Pierre repeats the item in l. 20 and acknowledges Oksana's pronunciation at turn ending with a fast and repeated "yes yes". After the side sequence concerning the pronunciation issues is closed down (l. 35), Pierre picks up Oksana's conversational topic and develops it further, explaining that he plays volleyball with his colleagues since they have a tournament coming up.

Looking at the sequential placement of Oksana's self-selection in l. 12, it is again done in a sequentially relevant place, namely after a previous sequence is closed. The closing environment is observable in the following aspects: in lines 3 and 5, Agnes (the older daughter) is commenting on an expression that Oksana used in l. 1. In l. 3 Agnes highlights it with her augmented volume, whereas the repetition in l. 5 is characterised more by a normal voice volume. However, no one reacts to her assessments, see the long pauses in lines 4 and 6. As Maynard (1980) noticed, a topic change generally occurs when one topic line slowly fades, i.e. when no interactant contributes to the maintenance of the ongoing topic. This is particularly clear when longer pauses are seen between turns, then this means that he/she is prospecting a response from her interlocutors, but nothing comes. After this, a topic change generally occurs. In fact, in this example no one reacts to Agnes' turns, Nadège produces some laughter-like noises in l. 7 and Oksana, who was preparing toast for her, refers to it in l. 8 by saying "*mh okay tiens*" (mh okay here you go). The lower voice volume also suggest that this turn is not conceived for furthering the conversation. Only then does Oksana self-select

and change the topic, i.e. she introduces a new one. She herewith orients towards the preceding sequence and topic as being closed and, with a new temporal reference, she makes it clear to her interlocutor that she is introducing something new to the conversation. However, before Pierre has the possibility of answering Oksana's question, she self-selects again initiating a repair with a metalinguistic question on the pronunciation of the word "volley". In his answer, Pierre does not limit himself to just offering the item with the correct pronunciation. He embeds the words in a complete (standard) sentence, accomplishing thus a double action. On the one hand, he answers Oksana's question from lines 10-12, that is to say he aligns to her topic introduction. On the other hand, he embeds the repaired item in a way so that it is not directly delivered, thus saving Oksana's face and helping to manage the inter-subjectivity in the conversation. In the last two examples, then, I have shown how the actions of topic introduction and repair can be closely intertwined and happen in a contemporary way that helps the maintenance of inter-subjectivity during the conversation.

I now conclude this chapter summing up the results of my analyses on Julie's and Oksana's data pinpointing their similarities and differences.

7.3 Summary of findings

To summarise my analysis, I first address the two features I have looked at throughout the excerpts (sequential placement and linguistic and prosodic resources) and I then conclude with a paragraph on the most important differences between Julie and Oksana.

I have collected all the cases in which Julie and Oksana accomplish topic introduction in an ongoing conversation. This action can be seen as recurrent and stable, so that several examples could be compared. I have concentrated particularly on the sequential environment of topic introduction and on the resources mobilised by the L2 speakers for its accomplishment. I now summarise the most important features of these two aspects in the next two paragraphs.

7.3.1 The sequential environment: sequence opening after a closed sequence

In my data, the au-pair girls are shown to introduce new conversational topics after a previous sequence has been closed. This means that the previous turns are closing implicative (Holt, 2010), e.g. they project no more talk to come in relation to the same matter or activity, and they are normally followed by a pause. It is after this pause that Julie and Oksana self-select and produce a turn that introduces a new conversational topic, which needs to be ratified by their interlocutor in order to become the actual conversational topic at hand. This feature of topic introduction, namely its placement after a closed sequence, does not show any changes over time, so that I consider it a crucial aspect of my object of analysis.

In relation to my question about the development of La interactional competence, these findings show that Julie and Oksana possess an already advanced L2 interactional competence. With their topic introductions, they show a strong orientation towards the topical and the sequential organisation of the ongoing conversation. This ability might come from their L1, but they also manage to apply it in a locally relevant and observable way in their L2 conversations.

7.3.2 The turn architecture: linguistic and prosodic resources

Julie shows interesting changes over time in her way of participating in the conversation. At the beginning of her stay, she makes no use of discourse markers of any kind for making visible to her interlocutor that she is introducing a new conversational topic. The introduction happens in a rather abrupt way, with no preparatory work for her interlocutor. This way of introducing a topic is rather unusual, because such an action of disjunction generally requires extra conversational work by a speaker to prepare the interlocutor for the new upcoming topic and to signal its newsworthiness.

In the second excerpt, Julie exploits some linguistic items which 'prepare the field' for her interlocutor. The discourse marker '*mais*' (but) and the temporal locator '*à la fin de l'hiver*' (at the end of winter) make visible for Mar that the upcoming talk is not related to the preceding one. Though the discourse marker alone creates a rather weak disjuncture from the preceding talk, it shows at the same time that Julie is orienting slightly more towards the preceding turns. On the other hand, the

contextualisation clues in her first turn show a stronger orientation towards the upcoming turns, thus highlighting Julie's prospective perspective.

Finally, the third excerpt shows complex conversational work accomplished by Julie. She starts her turn possibly even before her actual self-selection, i.e. Julie is seen collaborating in a closing implicative environment. Simultaneously with the same turn Julie projects a possible continuation, and she self-selects after a pause. By doing this, she orients again backwards by uttering a self-directed question that functions as a misplacement marker: she orients to what preceded as completed and closed. At the same time, she orients again forward, projecting something new to come. In fact the '*ah oui*' (oh yes) and the previous misplacement marker stand as preliminaries for the central utterance in the turn, the information that Julie delivers afterwards concerning her future travel back home. This is reformulated online by Julie through a change in her communicative project, but at the end, the information is delivered to the mother and gives the latter the occasion for an alignment. The consequence is that Julie's first turn in the last excerpt is much longer than her first turns in the other two excerpts and it accomplishes fine work making Julie's orientation towards the topical progress of conversation evident.

Oksana's data show a more stable picture of her methods for introducing a new conversational topic. The main difference can be retrieved in the fact that she uses news announcements at the beginning for introducing a new conversational topic, whereas towards the end she employs more news inquiries.

Between Julie and Oksana there is an interesting difference concerning the management of recipient design in relation to topic introduction. I discuss this issue in the next sub-section.

7.3.3 Difference between Julie and Oksana: management of recipient design

I have observed the following: Julie tends to introduce topics that are self-attentive, whereas Oksana seems to introduce topics that are more other-directed (cf. Bolden 2006). More specifically, Julie introduces topics that are of personal concern: in the examples presented she starts talking about her dance class, then about her skiing experiences and wishes, and finally about her mother's arrival. Clearly, in the last example, this is also important for the organisation of the host-mother, since Julie proposes that she can still go to work, whereas Marie prefers not to. A look at the other examples from Julie's collection, however, attests this tendency: within the 12 cases I collected, there are only four instances in which Julie introduces a other-attentive topic.

Differently to her, Oksana tends to introduce other-attentive topics. Of the three discussed examples, in two cases she introduces a topic of great relevance for her interlocutor (Nadège's school day and Pierre's volleyball training) and she introduces a self-directed topic only once, namely when she says that she wishes to go to the swimming pool with Nadège. However, even in this case, I have noticed that it is not really her personal interest, but rather a permission request to Pierre, i.e. it is about his daughter and the activities Oksana is allowed to do with her. For Oksana I have collected a total of seven cases and in not one of them does she introduce a topic related to herself (her interests, wishes, past, etc.). This difference between the two au-pair girls was quite striking and very intriguing for me. I relate it to their age (Oksana is 22, Julie is 18) and to the ways they do "being a good caregiver". I got the impression that Oksana concentrates more on this role and therefore introduces topics that are related to this or, eventually, to the host-father's interests more often. However, the conversational dynamics that take place in these two host-families are very different and this too can influence the ways in which the au-pairs treat conversational topics. I will return to this point in my concluding chapters.

I now turn to the next actional microcosm, namely topic closure, to which I consecrate the next chapter of my dissertation.

8. Topic closure

The preceding chapter has shown what L2 speakers do in conversation when they introduce a new conversational topic: how they coordinate this work with their interlocutor(s), what resources they employ and where they choose to introduce a topic in an ongoing conversation. Similarly, this chapter presents the conversational work done by the au-pair girls Julie, Oksana and Christine when they participate in the closure of a conversational topic. I first present a review of the literature about this action (8.1) and I subsequently discuss three examples for each au-pair girl (8.2 for Julie, 8.3 for Oksana and 8.4 for Christine). Finally (8.5), I present a summary of findings that leads to the concluding chapters.

8.1 The analysis of topic closure

There is a major difference between the literature on topic introduction and the literature on topic closure. Topic introduction represents an interactional work that has attracted a lot of attention. Although conversational topics are typically seen to flow into one another, i.e. to progress in a rather unmarked way, much attention has been paid to the moments in conversation when interactants mark a disjunction at the topical level. This is related to the fact that, generally, speakers need to do some extra interactional work to make their interlocutors aware that they are introducing a new conversational topic. Thus, speakers need to show where and how the disjunction happens and if and what kind of relationship their next turn has with the preceding talk. All this has been shown in the preceding chapter.

On the contrary, the analysis of topic closure is not as broad and deep. I begin by reporting on studies about L1 conversations that concentrate mainly on conversational closure in general, but not specifically on topic closure. This allows me to better explain what the specificities of topic closing are as compared to conversational closings. Conversational closure is shown to be initiated (or proposed) by one speaker and the other(s) have the possibility to align with his/her turn. There are three possibilities for investigating closing sequences: in two cases, only conversational closures are analysed, in a third case sequence and topic closure are taken into consideration. I now briefly sketch these three possibilities for the analysis of closures.

The first analytical possibility focuses on the sequential structure of closing sequences: the starting point is the minimal closing sequence as proposed by Schegloff & Sacks (1973). This study does not concentrate at all on topic related issues. The authors individuate a minimal sequence that regularly happens at the end of phone calls. This minimal sequence is built up of two adjacency pairs: a first pair, in which a speaker proposes a closure and in response the interlocutor accepts it, i.e. s/he aligns with the previous turn; and a second pair containing final greetings. Later on, Button (1987) defines this simplest type of closing as “archetype closing” (p. 102) and proposes a further analysis of closing sequences in this paper and in his later paper from 1990. He identifies different types of closing sequences, which differ mainly on the sequential level: the actual closing can namely be delayed if other turns are proffered after the first turn proposing the closure. For instance, if something in the turn initiating the closure is not clear, then a repair sequence occurs; or if an arrangement is still to be made, then the closing implicative environment is made relevant, but the actual closing is delayed and is reinitiated later on in the conversation⁹⁵.

The second possibility for investigating conversational closure is to orient toward the management of intersubjectivity during closing sequences. “Leave-taking serves to project possible future encounters, and is, thereby, a practice for maintaining a continuous relationship across periods of separation” as Bolden (2008) describes it. Therefore, the management of the relationship assumes a more important role within a closing implicative environment, since it rules the time in which the interactants will not be together (see also Schegloff *et al.* 1987). In her paper, Bolden shows the importance of relationship management in the closing sequences of Russian phone calls. Her analyses highlight the link between the introduction of a new matter in the closing sequences and the orientation of the speaker introducing it towards her addressee. In fact, the author observes that only matters that concern the addressee are introduced in the closing sequences and that the person introducing these is the

⁹⁵ Schegloff (1990, 2007) also shows a detailed sequential analyses of sequence-closing sequences.

one who initiated the closing. Holt (2010)⁹⁶ analyses the way speakers terminate stories in conversation. She highlights the importance of joint laughter: laughter *per se* is not closing, but is often found in relation to a “potentially termination relevant” context (p. 1520), i.e. when a possible closing is approaching. When joint laughter is reached, the interactants are seen to treat that moment in conversation as suitable for introducing a new matter.

The third possibility is to discuss sequence closing *and* topic closing. Jefferson (1984) has shown how topics progress in a stepwise fashion. For her analyses, she has concentrated on unmarked boundaries in conversation when speakers gently shift from one topic (in her cases it was included in the activity of a troubles-telling) to a following matter. In this case, interactants do not really accomplish a closing, but find themselves in a closing implicative environment⁹⁷ and it is therefore appropriate to either close the conversation or to introduce a new topic. After a troubles-telling, as Jefferson observes, this happens at best when an interactant addresses a so-called “ancillary matter” (p. 202), i.e. a matter that had remained marginal until that moment. In so doing, the conversation is restarted but without the interactants having completely closed the ongoing sequence.

More recently, Mondada & Traverso (2005) analyse alignment and disalignment in closing sequences during meetings in French conversations. Their study shows a difference between alignment and disalignment in closing environments. When alignment is observed, then the closing of a conversational phase is accepted and aligned to by the participants and, similarly, the opening of a new conversational phase is aligned to by the interlocutors. On the contrary, when the interlocutors do not align with the proposed closure of the ongoing conversational phase, then the closing movement is suspended and the ongoing conversational phase is reopened and extended. When disalignment occurs, two significant aspects gain centrality: either there is a contrast on the topical or epistemic level, i.e. the interlocutor(s) change the

⁹⁶ I have previously expressed some criticism on this paper (chapter 2), and I am simply going to summarise it briefly now. The main problem with Holt’s article is that it is not always clear where the terminological boundaries of sequence, topic and story are. It is evident that these three levels are deeply intertwined in conversation and that they are all concerned when a closure is collaboratively accomplished by the speakers. However, since it is in their nature to be linked to each other, it is even more important to clearly state at the beginning to which aspect one is orienting to in the analysis.

⁹⁷ As the author describes it: „[...] a massively recurrent device for moving out of a troubles telling is *entry into closing*.” (Jefferson 1984: 191; emphasis in the original).

topic or do not have the same epistemic access to the ongoing topic; or the first speaker aligns to the disaligning turn and the conversation takes a new direction.

Laurier (2008) focuses on workers' encounters in cafés and particularly on the moments of leave-taking⁹⁸. He analyses the linguistic and environmental features (especially how coffee cups are brought into the conversation) of closing sequences starting from the point that "[leave-taking] requires us to achieve the ending as an appropriate accountable part of the occasion that it is". (p. 170). This is mostly achieved through a collaborative construction of the closing environment: this happens not only through the conversation itself, i.e. through the subsequent turns at talk, but in this specific context, drinking up one's cup of coffee coincides very often with topic closing and is followed by departure from the shop⁹⁹.

These studies on L1 conversations focus mainly on the structural aspects of closing sequences and investigate the conversational moments in which a possible closure is initiated. They are based on a wide range of conversational data in different settings, from phone calls¹⁰⁰ to face-to-face interactions, each one showing specific aspects. For instance, a medical consultation is generally established on the basis of an agenda and authority and epistemic asymmetries are present and oriented to during the conversation. On the contrary, a meeting in a café has most of the time no predetermined reason for taking place. Laurier (2008) comes to this observation in his conclusions:

[...] what might be distinctive about going for a coffee in the café is that it might be an occasion without 'a' reason, thus, unlike the telephone call with its ever-present 'reason for calling' (Sacks,1992). The lack of any particular intention over and above having some refreshment and conversation gives us the possibility for unmotivated talk. (p. 178-179)

The main results of these lines of analyses concern the identification of specific structural, linguistic and environmental resources for the initiation of closure when a

⁹⁸ Another study linking the use of objects present in the environment during sequence closing is LeBaron & Jones (2002).

⁹⁹ The studies I have cited so far are, of course, only examples of the three possible ways of addressing closure in conversation. Many other studies have been conducted on closing sequences in different contexts, for example phone calls (Antaki 2002), television interviews (Clayman 1989; Clayman & Zimmerman 1987), health consultations (Heath 1985, 1986; Robinson 2001), and academic advisory sessions (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig 1992, Warga 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Raitaniemi (2014) proposes one of the most complete comparative analysis of phone calls endings in two languages, Finnish and German. Comparative studies within the domain of CA and interactional linguistics that are based on an actual comparison of two data sets in two different languages are rather rare (but see the papers collected in Sidnell 2009). This study is therefore refreshing in these two linguistic domains.

conversation starts to fade. However, the link to the topical level of conversation is only partially addressed and is discussed only in a few papers. This is probably due to the difficulty of separating these two analytical levels (topical and sequential) and this is sometimes reflected in the chosen terminology. It is namely not always clear where the terminological and analytical boundaries among sequence, action, topic and activity (especially: storytelling) are set¹⁰¹.

I conclude this literature overview with some papers on L2 conversations. Also in this regard the literature is rather scarce, as was the case for topic introduction. Jeon (2003) has investigated the activity of closing an advising session at a university. His study aims at finding a relationship between ESL proficiency level and ways of closing the advising session. In a large database of video-data from the University of Michigan, which included speakers of three ESL proficiency levels, the author first identifies three types of closure in relation to their structure. Some closings are abbreviated, i.e. some parts were missing (for example when the closure was abrupt); other closures are complete and others again are extended, i.e. they contained a reopening sequence. As regard the markedness of the closure, Jeon has found out that the higher the ESL proficiency level was, the more unmarked (i.e. smooth) the closure was. This suggests that the more proficient is the speaker, the better s/he manages a session closure.

Mori (2004) has studied a conversation between peers in an intermediate Japanese language class in North America. Her focus was on the sequence boundaries, which were occasionally made relevant by the speakers themselves. Particularly, the author has highlighted the collaborative work of going in and out of subsequent sequences. This single case analysis has concentrated on an interaction that happened after a teacher had assigned a task to the class. The students started the task but also engaged in repair sequences when lexical problems arose. In this case, code-switching (Japanese-English-Japanese) coincided with the sequence boundaries and was employed to mark the beginning and the end of the side sequence and also of the topic-at-hand. The paper has shown what resources are employed by Japanese L2 speakers for collaborating in the closure of an ongoing sequence and of an ongoing

¹⁰¹ In my opinion, this is an intrinsic limit of CA analysis of closing sequences, because topic talk is such an underlying feature of conversations that it is not easy to completely separate it from other interactional features.

topic and how L2 speakers show that they are orienting back to the task assigned by the teacher.

There is a striking point concerning the papers in the domain of second language acquisition: none of them clearly addresses or includes the matter of topic in their analyses. It seems that the main concerns of these papers reside in finding the relationships between the accomplishment of a closing sequence and the L2 proficiency level of the investigated speakers. Consequently, great attention is paid to the lexical and prosodic resources used by the L2 speakers in the conversation. This is, indeed, an important and central aspect to consider. However, topic closure should gain more importance within the analysis of sequence closing. Many fundamental papers, like Schegloff & Sacks (1973) or Button (1987, 1990) have indicated that the closure is a conversational moment in which the matters-at-hand are oriented to by the conversationalists. Closure is, for example, an appropriate conversational place for either reopening a previously interrupted topic or for introducing a new one.

It is my aim to concentrate the analysis of the following examples on topic closure in order to show how L2 speakers participate in this collaboratively achieved endeavour. As in the preceding chapter, I present three examples for each au-pair girl. In total, I have collected 85 cases of topic closure. I start with Julie's data, continue with Oksana's examples and conclude with Christine's data.

8.2 Advanced L2 level: Julie

In Julie's data, I found 42 occasions of topic closure. Her recordings were taped between September, 30th 2009 and June, 16th 2010. The following three examples are taken from Julie's corpus at different points in time. I present the linguistic and sequential analysis for each of them and this will set the ground for discussing what happens at the topical level.

The first example stems from Julie's second recording. She had been in Switzerland for about five weeks at that time. At the moment of recording, the host-family is having dinner and Julie is telling something of her day with the children. Specifically, she is reporting on going to the bakery with the children and having bought two cups of hot chocolate. The saleswoman then asked her if she should make the cocoa tepid. Julie

did not know this word yet so she first looked a bit surprised before understanding what the word meant.

(31) Julie, 10.12.2009 “lauwarm” (German¹⁰² word) *tepid*

- 01 Jul: à: la b:oulangerie elle m'a- (0.3) euh: j'ai demandé deux
at the bakery she asked me euh I asked for two
- 02 (0.4) euh cacaos?
euh cocoas
- 03 (0.6)
- 04 Jul: et puis ehm (0.3) elle m'a [demandé&
and then uhm she asked me
- 05 Jor: [DEUX cac[aos.
two cocoas
- 06 Jul: &[ah je l- je les fait
oh I make- I make them
- 07 <ti↑èdes>.
tepid
- 08 (0.3)
- 09 Jul: et moi j'ai- (0.3) <tièdes>? ((rit))=
and I have tepid ((laughs))
- 10 Mar: =((rit))=
((laughs))
- 11 Jul: je >ne savais< pas qu'est-ce que ça °veut dire°°.=
I didn't know what this means
- 12 Mar: =ah ouais.=
oh yeah
- 13 Jul: =↑oui lauwarm.
yes tepid
- 14 (0.3)
- 15 Jul: c'est- ouais.=
it's yeah
- 16 Vic: =↑mh=
mh
- 17 Jul: =c'est pas ↑chaud pas f[roid.=
it's not warm not cold
- 18 Mar: [>ouais ouais<.

¹⁰² As I explained in chapter 6, Julie's L1 is German. Occasionally, she uses it in the conversations with the host-family, especially with the host-mother, who knows a bit of German herself.

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yeah yeah

19 Jul: ((respiration forte))
loud respiration

20 +(6.1) ((Man saute et rit))+
Man jumps and laughs

21 Jor: mais ma↑non c'est pas <drô:le> hein.
but manon it's not funny is it

22(8.1) ((Man rit))+
((Man laughs))

23 Mar: ou↑ais c'est bien pis comme ça ↑nous l'après-midi on peu:t se
yeah that's fine and so in the afternoon we can

24 donner rendez-vous en v↑ille.
meet in the city

25 (0.3)

26 Jul: oui.
yes

27 (0.3)

28 Mam: toi tu peux aller direct-
you can go there directly

29 mais toi t'as beaucoup de ch↑oses à pr↑endre?
but do you have many things to take

30 pour aller à la gym ou- ça va.
to go to the gym or is it fine

31 (0.2)

32 Jul: non: ça va.
no it's fine

The sequence develops as follows: from line 1 to 10 Julie reports of her visit to the bakery with the children. There she bought two hot chocolates and the saleswoman asked her if she wanted them tepid. This item was new to Julie, who asked the saleswoman what that meant. This is reported in l. 9, where Julie repeats the question she asked the saleswoman, i.e. the item itself with a rising intonation (tepid?). She closes this turn with a laugh, which Marie aligns with and affiliates in line 10 with another laughter. Lines 9 and 10 constitute a closing implicative environment in so far as the interactants show aligning and affiliating turns at the end of a storytelling sequence.

Subsequently, in line 11 Julie self-selects and utters a summarising conclusion to her preceding story, thus stating that she did not know what the word meant. Marie aligns

with it in line 12 but with a minimal continuative response ('*ah ouais*' (oh yeah)). Julie aligns herself with Marie's turn in line 13 in that she confirms the comprehension by the host-mother ('*oui*' (yes)) and repeats the problematic item in her L1 (German: '*lauwarm*' (tepid)). After a short pause, Julie self-selects in line 15 and reopens the conversation starting to deliver another possible explanation for the same lexical item (see the cut-off on '*c'est-*' (it's-)), but then she stops and realigns with Marie's previous display of understanding, producing the confirmation item '*ouais*' (yeah). Vic also aligns at this point in line 16 with Julie with a minimal alignment token, which also functions as a topicaliser and thus invites Julie to continue her story. In fact, in line 17 she ties back to her previous turn in line 15 by reproducing the same beginning: '*c'est*' (it's) and this time she also continues with a full word explanation, which rephrases the term tepid. Toward the end of Julie's turn, Marie produces in line 18 a double alignment token, characterized by a faster speech speed, which overlaps Julie's end of the turn. In line 19 Julie only produces a long in-breath and then the conversation is subsequently re-launched by the children, who are apparently playing nearby. From line 23, Marie continues the conversation, i.e. she recalls the organisation plans they were discussing early on in the same conversation and reopens the topic of the activities that are planned for the next day¹⁰³.

The next example also stems from Julie's second recording. This is useful for a future comparison, although it is not really from another point in time if one refers to the moments of the recordings. Indeed, this spate of talk is subsequent to the previous one, so it temporally follows ex. 31. The family is still having dinner together and Julie has just addressed the issue of her dance class, which she did not attend the previous week. In relation to this, she has expressed the wish of still being able to dance after such a pause. Marie, the host-mother, explains to her that sometimes it is better to stop for a while in order to be able to completely follow the lessons again. The example shows the closure of this sequence.

(32) Julie, 10.12.2009 "*c'est comme courir*" (it's like running)

01 Mar: mais des fois (.) c'est mieux d'arrêter une semaine pis après
but sometimes it's better to stop for a week then afterwards

02 tu reprends t'as l'impression que ça va mieux.
you restart you have the impression that it goes better

03 Jul: o:ui?

¹⁰³ For an analysis of the story-closing in this example see Berger & Pekarek Doehler (2015).

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yes

04 (.)

05 Mar: c'est comme courir.
 it's like running

06 ((Jul et Mam rient))
 Jul and Mom laugh

07 Jul: je ne sais pas.
 I don't know.

08 (.)

09 Jul: peut-être?
 maybe

10 (3.7)

11 Jul: °je vais voir:°
 I'll see

12 (1.8)

13 Mar: non (.) parce que (xx) °je n'ai rien à faire hein°
 no because I don't have anything to do do I

In this case, Julie is telling Marie that she has missed one dance lesson and she is worried about not being able to follow the next one. Marie answers that it will indeed be better, because a pause can sometimes be helpful. This is the beginning of this example, in lines 1 and 2. In line 3 Julie produces a request for specification or confirmation of Marie's turn (see the final rising intonation). In line 5 Marie responds with a generalizing explication, '*c'est comme courir*' (it's like running), which projects the end of the sequence, i.e. it marks the beginning of a closing implicative environment. In fact, this turn is followed by joint laughter of both Julie and Marie, line 6. As showed in the literature review, laughter, and especially joint laughter, is seen to be relevant in closing implicative environments (see Holt 2010). However, after a little pause Julie self-selects and produces a disaligning turn in line 7, '*je ne sais pas*' (I don't know), which is not responded to by Marie. After a micro-pause, Julie downgrades her disalignment uttering "*peut-être*" (maybe) in l. 09 with a final rising intonation and attenuates therein her previous disaligning turn. Also in this case, Marie does not react and a remarkably long pause follows Julie's turn (l. 10). In line 11, Julie self-selects again and proposes a summarising statement, which she utters with a lower voice volume, '*je vais voir*' (I'll see). In so doing she overtly projects the end of the sequence and of the topic at hand. In fact, after another longer pause, Marie's turn in l. 13 is directed to the attention of her children.

This example shows a more complex closing sequence than the previous one. Here Julie manages her disalignment starting immediately in l. 02 with her inquiring turn 'oui?' (yes?) and that possibly questions Marie's knowledge or epistemic stance about the dance lessons. Julie extends the closing sequence after a first possible closure in l. 05 and in l. 06, when she and Marie laugh together. Julie proposes several summarising and generalising statements (lines 07, 09, 11) that are typical of closing sequences. Moreover, Julie also manages the absence of recipient reaction by her interlocutor by downgrading her disaligning statements and the conversation flows towards a topic change (see Maynard 1980 about placing topic change in conversation).

I now turn to the last example for Julie. At the moment of recording, Julie had been staying in Switzerland for seven months. During the recording, she is eating with Marie and is telling something about a girl she knew from Belgium, who also spent some time in Switzerland.

(33) Julie, 23.03.2010 "elle est très sympa" (she is very nice)

- 01 Jul: *pis on a parlé toujours de suisse j'ai dit .h ah bientôt*
then we have always talked about switzerland I've said oh soon
- 02 *je veux aller en suisse >et pis elle me dit< ouais*
I want to go to switzerland and then she told me yeah
- 03 *c'est bien:: c'est che:r c'est ((rit))*
it's good it's expansive it's ((laughs))
- 04 Mar: *mh:*
- 05 (...)
- 06 Jul: *°elle >avait< parlé°.*
she had spoken
- 07 (4.8)
- 08 Jul: *°elle est très sympa.°*
she is very nice
- 09 (1.0)
- 10 Mar: *ah*
oh
- 11 (4.4)
- 12 Jul: *hh. alors (.) >je sais< pas.*
so I don't know
- 13 Mar: *mh=(nous) à pâques >je sais< pas ce qu'on va faire,*
mh we for easter I don't know what we'll do

Marie and Julie are planning the period of Easter and Julie has started telling that she may go to visit a friend of hers. Subsequently, she tells Marie something about this friend of hers and, towards the end of her telling, Julie explains what this girl once told her about Switzerland. Parallel to the preceding example, Julie comes to the climax of her story, signalled by her prosody from lines 1 to 3, and especially by her laughter in l. 03, inviting laughter by her interlocutor. Instead, in l. 04, Marie only produces a minimal response token, which is in itself aligning but disaffiliating (see Selting 1994 on “emphatic speech style”). This is responded to by Julie after a pause of almost one second by an increment of her telling: in l. 06 Julie produces a new turn which works as summarising her previous talk, “*elle avait parlé*”¹⁰⁴ (she had spoken, meaning maybe “she had told me”). This turn offers Marie another possibility for reacting, but it does not happen for a remarkable long time (l. 07). In l. 08 Julie produces another final statement, also implicating a closure, “*elle est très sympa*” (she is very nice). A closer look at Julie’s prosody reveals that her voice is lower and somehow “softened”. After a one second pause, Marie reacts to this turn again with a minimal response, l. 10. After a longer pause, Julie produces a resuming turn in l. 12, marked by the resuming connector “*alors*” (so) and the final statement “*je sais pas*” (I don’t know)¹⁰⁵. Only after this turn does Marie react to Julie with a topical reorientation of the talk, projecting an explanation about her state of affairs for the Easter period.

So far, I have shown what Julie does as regards closing implicative environments:

- She produces generalising and summarising statements (cf. Button 1990; Holt 2010),
- Her generalising and summarising statements are sometimes produced in an incremental way, thus soliciting recipient reaction. In so doing, she shows her orientation toward a preference for alignment and affiliation at this point in conversation (cf. Berger & Pekarek Doehler 2015; Selting 1994),

¹⁰⁴ Julie’s voice volume is lower in this turn, a feature of closing implicative environments. Moreover, Julie herein orients to the minimal and disaffiliating response from Marie in l. 04.

¹⁰⁵ It is impossible to clearly state which previous conversational topic Julie is addressing with this final statement: this could be related to her plans for the Easter period or it could also be a generalising final statement about her friend.

- Linguistically seen, she uses standard French expressions (cf. Jeon 2008; Warga 2005),
- And finally, her prosody is adapted to the closing implicative environments: softened voice, lower speech speed, final falling intonations (cf. Berger & Pekarek Doheler 2015; Holt 2010).

These summarising observations raise a central question: what about changes over time? As compared to the examples of topic introduction in chapter 7, no real changes are seen to have taken place. I have considered two main points for finding an answer to this question. First, Julie's advanced L2 level could make it difficult to find any relevant differences in her way of collaborating in closing sequences. Closing sequences are places in which generalising or summarising statements are typically found, along with formulaic expressions. Since Julie's L2 level is already so advanced, I could not find any differences in her closing contributions at the beginning or at the end of her stay. This consideration brought me to a second point: is such a sojourn a too short space of time to consider? Or, to rephrase: should I not consider the longitudinal aspect for this microcosm but rather strive for a cross-sectional comparison? I discuss these questions and doubts in the final subchapter (8.5). For now, I continue with the presentation of the longitudinal data I have collected and now turn to Oksana's data.

8.3 Intermediate L2 level: Oksana

For Oksana, I collected a total of 19 cases of topic closure. Oksana's recordings took place between September, 28th 2010 and May, 31st 2011. The next three examples stem from Oksana's data-set. As with Julie's data, I present a sequential analysis that also includes the linguistic and prosodic features of the closing turns-at-talk. In general, Oksana's data show her active participation in the construction of topic-closures. However, there are two main differences as compared to Julie's data: (1) Oksana seems only to align to her interlocutor's closing initiations, whereas Julie initiates closing herself, and (2) Oksana's resources differ from those at Julie's disposal. The following analyses show these two points in more in detail and are also summarised at the end of this sub-section.

The first example is taken from Oksana's first recording. She is having dinner with the host-father, Pierre, and the younger child, Nadège. Oksana and Pierre have just discussed about buying a new mixer for the kitchen and the example begins with Pierre stating that he will search for it the next day.

(34) Oksana, 28.09.2010 “*quoi nous avons faire*” (what we did)

- 01 Oks: c'est:- parce que c'est (.) c'est mixer le nom de cette chose?
 it's- because it's it's mixer the name of this thing
 02 (...)
- 03 Pie: oui s- c'est- s::: c'est un mixer normal, †toi ce que tu penses c'est
 yes i- it's i it's a normal mixer you what you are thinking of it's
 04 le robot.
 the food processor
- 05 Oks: o- oui parce que s- c'est bon pour gâteau?
 y- yes because i- it's good for cake
 06 (...)
- 07 Oks: [(x)-
 08 Pie: [mh=oui.=
 mh yes
- 09 Oks: =†ah †okay.
 oh okay
 10 (...)
- 11 Pie: tu penses c'est nécessaire u:n plus grand?
 you think we need a bigger one
 12 (...)
- 13 Oks: mh PAS POUR ÇA: mais pour gâteau: normalement avec les yeux:=et avec
 *mh not for this but for cake usually with the *eyes(=eggs) and with*
 14 les far†ine peut-être †mais pour ça?
 the-pl. flour maybe but for this
 15 (...)
- 16 Pie: je le regarde (lui) qu'est-ce qu'il y a demain.
 I take a look at it (it) what there is tomorrow
- 17 (1.3)
- 18 Oks: ehm okay †eh:m,
 uhm okay uhm
- 19 (...)
- 20 Oks: e:h quoi nou::s avons faire aujourd'hui?
 uh what we did today
- 21 (.)
- 22 Pie: voilà oui.
 that's it yes
- 23 (...)

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- 24 Oks: nous allons aller à côté de lac=oui?
we go-3p-pl go-inf (we went) to the lakeside yes
- 25 (...)
- 26 Oks: [oui?]
yes
- 27 Pie: [tu] as été faire une promenade?
did you take a walk
- 28 (...)
- 29 Nad: non.
no
- 30 (.)
- 31 Oks: non=non nous allo::ns eh:: jouer avec le ballon-
no no we go uh play with the bal-l
- 32 eh dans le sable=parce que il y a u- une liè,
uh in the sand because there is a- a place

From l. 01 to 04 Pierre and Oksana are cooperatively solving a language-related issue, i.e. they are identifying the same object they should buy soon and Pierre clarifies in lines 03-04 that what Oksana is thinking about is a big food processor, whereas they might only need a normal mixer. Oksana then asks if the processor would be good for preparing cakes, and Pierre confirms it in l. 08. Oksana's turn in l. 09 acknowledges Pierre's answer and is also closing implicative by means of the final falling intonation and the absence of topicalisers. Pierre self-selects afterwards, re-addressing the topic-at-hand and asking Oksana if she thinks that they need a bigger machine (l. 11). Oksana answers in lines 12-13 explaining that it is not necessary for their every-day use so Pierre states that he will look for a mixer the next day (l. 16). Subsequently, a long pause follows, after which Oksana self-selects in l. 18. She produces a first hesitation marker, then an acknowledgment token (okay) and then another, prolonged hesitation marker. This last item ends with a continuative intonation, i.e. Oksana prepares the field for more to come and requests the floor for herself. There is subsequently a short pause, in which however no one else takes the floor, and Oksana continues in l. 05. After another hesitation marker ('e:h'), she introduces a new conversational topic, namely her daily activities with the child: what we did today (l. 20). This introduction is characterised by a final rising intonation, which makes it resemble to a question. However, Oksana does not inquire about Pierre's day, instead she is the one who tells something about her own day. The final rising intonation

functions rather as a request for permission: do you want to hear what we did today? After a micro-pause, Pierre responds positively to the question and aligns to this new topic line with the topicalising turn '*voilà oui*' (that's it yes). The conversation continues with Oksana telling him what she did during the day with Nadège, namely that they went to play at the lakeside.

This example shows that Oksana's participation in the closing sequence is minimal: in l. 09 she produces an acknowledging turn after an explanation she received from Pierre. The final falling intonation in her turn initiates a closing implicative environment. However, as often happens in closing sequences (cf. Schegloff & Sacks 1973), Pierre re-opens the sequence and the topic-at-hand (Button & Casey 1988/89; Bolden 2008) delaying the topic closure. Also in l. 18 Oksana minimally acknowledges Pierre's final statement, which initiates the closing, and through her repeated hesitation markers, at the same time claims the floor for herself. In so doing, she shows her orientation towards the preceding sequence and topic as being closed.

The next example stems from Oksana's fifth recording. At that moment, she had spent almost four months in Switzerland. In this example, she is planning her travel home for the Christmas holidays. She and Pierre are discussing the possibility of taking Oksana to the train station.

(35) Oksana, 13.12.2010 “ce sera *lundi*” (it will be on Monday)

01 Oks: mais ce sera:: (.) [euh lundi.
but it will be uh on Monday

02 Pie: [(pa) (x) .
(pa) (x)

03 (...)

04 Pie: <lundi>,
on Monday

05 (1.2)

06 Pie: anna elle a l'école le lundi à::: sept heures et demi,
anna she goes to school on Monday at half past seven

07 (1.6)

08 Pie: °ouais:: j'arrive à huit heures à:: fribourg, °
yeah I arrive at eight o'clock in Fribourg

09 (2.5)

10 Pie: ↑non: je crois que c'est >>bon<<.
no I think that it's good

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11 (...)

12 Oks: ↑non c'est bon.
no it's good

13 (.)

14 Oks: c'est bon.
it's good

15 (...)

16 Pie: on regardera encore si jamais les horaires.
we will look again if necessary at the timetables

17 (.)

18 Pie: si jamais on peut- °°peut voir°°. *if necessary we can we can see*

19 (1.8)

20 Pie: <et autrement autrement> oui comme >je t'ai dit< la clé
and otherwise otherwise yes as I told you the key

21 tu l'as vue aujourd'hui?
have you seen it today

In l. 01 Oksana concludes her explanation stating that her journey will be on a Monday. Her last TCU is overlapped by Pierre's turn in l. 02, however his words are not clearly audible. Oksana's turn suggests (at least) that this information can possibly be problematic for some reasons. She starts her turn with a contrastive conjunction ('*mais*' (but)), the VP is prolonged on the final vocal ('*ce sera::*' (it will be::)), this is followed by a micro-pause and an hesitation marker. This turn architecture sustains Oksana's stance-taking about a possible problem in relation to her leaving on a Monday morning, since she has knowledge of the activities that normally take place on that day. After a long pause (l. 03), Pierre reacts to Oksana's statement. He first repeats the day with a slower speech speed and with a continuative intonation, thus claiming the floor again for himself. A longer pause follows and then Pierre continues with a first information about the beginning of school of the older daughter. In this case too he concludes the turn with a continuative intonation, thus self-selecting for the next possible slot. In l. 07 another long pause takes place, after which Pierre again takes the word. In l. 08 he delivers a turn with a lower volume. This is also observable in the beginning affirmative token '*ouais::*' (yeah). For the third time in a row he concludes his turn with a continuative intonation, thus again projecting more to come. Another long pause takes

place (this time it is even longer than the preceding two) and Pierre self-selects again in l. 10 delivering his final statement. He starts with a higher voice pitch, thus marking a prosodic contrast with the previous turn. The first item is a negative particle (*'non'* (no)), which marks the end of Pierre's previous contributions. In fact, he had structured his previous turn in a chronological order and a list of three following elements: "on Monday + Anna goes to school at half past seven + I arrive at eight o'clock". Structuring his contributions like a list, he has claimed and obtained the floor for himself for a longer time, thus putting on hold the normal machinery of turn-taking. Oksana has aligned to this, since she has not verbally taken the floor until Pierre had finished with the list. It is only afterwards that she self-selects in l. 12 and aligns to Pierre's final statement by recycling his prosodic and syntactical pattern *'non c'est bon'* (no it's good). This alignment is already closing implicative in itself, since it displays an agreement between the interlocutors. After a micro-pause, however, Oksana self-selects again in l. 14 and repeats her agreement in a shorter form *'c'est bon'* (it's good). This turn is also closing implicative, since it again ratifies Oksana's agreement with her interlocutor's standpoint.

However, after a short pause, Pierre self-selects and therein postpones the closure. With his turns in lines 16 and 18 he tries to reopen the previous topic of the time of Oksana's journey and suggests that they can have another look at the timetable if it is necessary. His turn in l. 18 ends not only with a lower voice volume, but also with a final falling intonation. The following pause is very long and there are no audible reactions to Pierre's last turn from Oksana. He then self-selects and clearly orients to the preceding sequence and topic as being closed: he begins his turn in l. 19 with an additive particle *'et'* (and) followed by a repetition of the word *'autrement'* (otherwise). Moreover, he utters this turn beginning with a slower speech speed, in order to ensure Oksana's attention. By means of a news inquiry (Button & Casey 1986) he introduces a new matter concerning the house key. Thus he overtly shows his orientation towards the upcoming talk as being disconnected from what preceded. This example shows a rather prolonged closing sequence: there are four closing implicative turns, the first two by Oksana, and the other two by Pierre. In a similar way, Pierre does not verbally react to Oksana's turns in lines 12 and 14 and Oksana does not verbally react to Pierre's turns in lines 16 and 18. In so doing, the closing sequence is prolonged after Oksana's shows her agreement in lines 12 and 14 towards Pierre's considerations (lines 4 to 10). The closure is marked rather by Pierre's turn in l. 20 with his introduction of a new

topic through a marked and disconnecting turn. To sum up, Oksana's participation in the closing sequence is longer in this example than it was in the previous one, although no great differences can be seen in the linguistic and prosodic means she employs in her turns.

I now turn to the last example for Oksana. It stems from her last recording, thus almost nine months after her arrival in Switzerland. She is talking with Pierre about fruits coming from other nations and they address the aspect of health safety when eating some exotic fruits.

(36) Oksana, 31.05.2016 "je pense c'est pas mi-" (I think it's not mi-)

- 01 Pie: <ou:ai:s> (...) >je sais< que- au brésil ça fait euh- ils disent
yeah I know that in brasil that makes uh they say
- 02 toujours c'est pas très bon mais (.) mais ça: (.) +ah >ça ça< vient
always that's not very good but but this oh this this comes
- 03 des états-unis? ((high pitched voice))+
from the USA
- 04 (...)
- 05 Oks: °mhm°
- 06 (1.6)
- 07 Pie: [(bon)-
well
- 08 Oks: [†et je pense c'est pas mi- c'est pa::s=
and I think it's not mi- it's not
- 09 Pie: =non: [c'est rien marqué.
no there are no marks
- 10 Oks: [le- plus- plus pire que: (°collaboratif°)
the more worst that (collaborative)
- 11 Pie: ou:ais (.) n†on >y a< <aucune eu:h (..) notice euh->
yeah no there's no uh note uh
- 12 Nad: ((chante en arrière-plan))
((sings in the background))
- 13 (2.1)
- 14 Pie: >non non< c'est bon.
no no it's good
- 15 (1.5)
- 16 Oks: °d'accord°
alright
- 17 (...)

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18 Pie: ouais (.) super.
 yeah great

19 Oks: .h alors à jeudi on va: à:: aquaparc?
 so on Thursday we go to the water park

From l. 01 to 03 Pierre delivers an explanation about exotic fruits and what is generally labelled as good or dangerous. He concludes his turn with a high-pitched TCU. Oksana minimally responds to this turn after a long pause with a lowered voice acknowledgment token (*mhm*). Another longer pause takes place and then Pierre self-selects, but is overlapped by Oksana's turn in l. 08. She starts with a high pitch on the first turn item, takes the floor and delivers an assessment about the fruit. Her turn is characterised by a cut off (*'c'est pas mi-'* (it's not mi-)) followed by an incomplete sentence *'c'est pas'* (it's not). The last item (*pas*) is also prolonged. The cut off and the vocal prolongation suggest some troubles in the turn delivery. Pierre self-selects and, in a latched turn, takes up Oksana's stance without providing any lexical help. On the contrary, he seems to align with Oksana's stance-taking by stating that there are no marks of any kind on the fruit. Meanwhile, Oksana self-selects again and overlaps Pierre's turn: she seems to further her previous turn, but also in this case (l. 10) she shows some lexical troubles (see the several cut offs, the repetition of *'plus'* (more) and the final word produced with a lower voice volume (*'°collaboratif'* (collaborative)). In l. 11 Pierre first aligns to Oksana's stance with a weak affirmative token (*'ouais'* (yeah)) and then continues with a reformulation of his previous turn *'non y a aucune notice'* (no there is no note). Oksana does not react immediately to this turn: in l. 12 Nadège sings something in the background and then a longer pause follows in l. 13. In l. 14, Pierre self-selects and produces the first closing implicative turn: *'non non c'est bon'* (no no it's good). Oksana's reaction is nevertheless delayed, after a 1.5second pause: she aligns to Pierre's turn in l. 16 with a low volume *'d'accord'* (alright). After a short pause Pierre takes the word and again utters two aligning and closing implicative items: *'ouais super'* (yeah great). Thus the closing is sequence accomplished. This is observable in Oksana's next turn, with which she introduces a new conversational topic and thus orients to the preceding one as being closed.

To conclude, Oksana's participation in topic closure is active from the very beginning. She shows an appropriate use of agreeing tokens (*'okay, d'accord'*), which she employs in closing implicative environments. Sometimes, longer pauses are seen in

the transcripts, however the interactants are having dinner and this can be a possible cause for some delays in the response-giving turns. The second example shows a longer closing sequence, characterised not only by long inter-turn pauses, but also by a different turn-taking mechanism. Oksana seems to appropriately contribute to the closure and continuously shows her orientation towards the topical and the structural levels of the ongoing conversation. The main differences as compared to Julie's participation in topic closure reside in the fact that Oksana does not initiate closing herself, but rather collaborates in the closing sequence once it has been initiated by her interlocutor. Moreover, the linguistic resources she employs are less in number and not as diversified as those used by Julie.

I now turn to Christine's example and then conclude this chapter with some summarising remarks on the actional microcosm of topic closure.

8.4 Beginner L2 level: Christine

In Christine's data 24 cases of topic closure were identified. I now present the analyses of three examples from this dataset. The examples stem from different recordings at different moments in time, between September, 21st 2010 and February, 22nd 2011. The first example stems from Christine's first recording, when she had been in Switzerland for one week. A particular aspect regarding Christine's recordings is that the whole family is always together and always present during the recordings. However, not all the members are at the table all the time and they are also not always engaging in a conversation with the au-pair girl. It is nevertheless a remarkable feature of Christine's family situation. Christine was very consistent with the recordings and they were always done during the evening meal time.

The participants of the following example are: Christine, Pascal (the host-father), Rachel (the host-mother), Cédric (the older son) and Daniel (the younger son).

(37) Christine 21.09.2010 "*sept huit*" (seven eight)

01 Pas: *pis christine elle est gentille ta maîtresse?*
and then christine is she nice your teacher

02 (...)

03 Pas: *à- (h) au cours [(x) ((rit))*
a- at the class (x) ((laughs))

04 Chr: [à l'école?

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at school

- 05 Chr: [((rit)) oui:
((laughs)) yes
- 06 Dan: [((bruits))
((noises))
- 07 (.)
- 08 Dan: ((bruits pendant 2.3sec))
((noises for 2.3seconds))
- 09 Pas: [hein?
what
- 10 Chr: [elle a u:n- comment on dit.
she has a- how do we say
- 11 Dan: [((bruits))
((noises))
- 12 (.)
- 13 Chr: avec une bébé dans la ven[tre].
with a baby in the-F-SG tummy
- 14 Pas: [↑enceinte.
pregnant
- 15 (.)
- 16 Chr: oui elle est enceinte.
yes she is pregnant
- 17 Pas: ah:: d'accord.
oh alright
- 18 (..)
- 19 Pas: [(ah super)
oh great
- 20 Rac: [combien de mois?
how many months
- 21 (...)
- 22 Ce?: ((bruits))
((noises))
- 23 Chr: quoi?
what
- 24 Rac: et combienième mois?
in what month
- 25 (..)
- 26 Chr: je ne sais pas.
I don't know

8. Topic closure

- 27 (.)
- 28 Ce?: (xxx) [PARCE QUE
 because
- 29 Chr: mais je crois peut-être (...) sept? huit? ((rit))
 but I believe maybe seven eight ((laughs))
- 30 (.)
- 31 Ced: elle (ha[bite où ta sœur?
 she lives where your sister
- 32 Pas: [ah.
 oh
- 33 Chr: mhm.
 mhm
- 34 ((tous rient pendant 1.3sec))
 everyone laughs for 1.3sec
- 35 Ced: ta sœur elle habite où?
 your sister where does she live

Christine is having dinner with the whole family and is now telling her host-parents that her language teacher is pregnant, maybe in the seventh or eighth month. In l. 01 Pascal asks Christine if the teacher is nice and Christine answers positively to this. In line 10, then, Christine expands the topic-at-hand telling that her teacher is pregnant. This information is delivered with some problems, see Christines' turns in lines 10 and 13, in which she utters the metalinguistic question of "how do we say it?" and then explains what she is trying to say "she has a baby in her tummy". When the repair is accomplished, in line 16, Pascal produces two generalising statements in lines 17 and 19, with which a possible closure is projected. However, Rachel reopens the topic-at-hand by asking Christine how far gone is the pregnancy. Here too Christine shows some difficulty in delivering the answer, see her repair initiation in l. 23. Once she has answered Rachel's question in l. Pascal reacts to this in a delayed and minimal way, see l. 32. Christine herself also responds in a minimal way to Pascal's turn, in l. 33. With these two turns, the ongoing topic is closed.

Between Christine's turn in l. 33 and Pascal's minimal response in l. 32 Cédric asks a question to Christine about the place where her sister lives. However, neither Christine, nor the other family members orient to his question. Pascal's reaction overlaps Cédric's question and afterwards Christine aligns to Pascal's final and minimal reaction with a minimal reaction token in l. 33. This leads to general laughter of the whole family in l.

34. Afterwards, Cédric again asks Christine the same question about her sister and the conversation continues on that matter, so that the previous sequence and topic have been closed.

The next example stems from Christine's fourth recording, at which point she had been staying in Switzerland for three months. As usual, she is having dinner with her host-family. Ex. 38 was recorded after Christine has explained to her host-parents that on one of the following days a friend of hers will come to visit to spend some time with her. The example contains the end of Christine's explanation, particularly the moment in which she tells her friend's name. Meanwhile, the whole family is having dinner and they are eating crêpes, as it is observable in the transcript from l. 07.

(38) Christine, 02.12.2010 "sans –e" (without –e)

- 01 Chr: elle s'appelle aussi sandrine come ma ↑sœur.
she is also called sandrine like my sister
- 02 (..)
- 03 Pas: ah: d'accord ou↑ais.
oh alright yeah
- 04 (..)
- 05 Chr: mais sans +e ((lettre))+ en fin.
but without e ((letter)) in the end
- 06 (6.9) ((bruit de service))
((noises of plates))
- 07 Rac: ↑bon (...) qui c'est qui veut encore une ↑crêpe?
well who wants another crêpe
- 08 (.)
- 09 Pas: oui: oui:
yes yes
- 10 Chr: oui volontiers.
yes with pleasure
- 11 (...)
- 12 Mam: tu les préfères à quoi les crêpes °christine.°
but what kind of crêpes do you prefer christine

In l. 01 Christine is telling her host-parents that her friend has the same name as her sister, Sandrine. After a short pause (l. 02) Pascal reacts to Christine's turn in l. 03 with a change-of-stake token (Heritage 1984), an acknowledgment token ('d'accord' (alright)) and a final affirmative token ('ouais' (yeah)). After another short pause (l. 04),

Christine self-selects in l. 05 and increments her previous turn delivering an explanation specifically on the name of her friend: '*mais sans e en fin*' (but without an "e" at the end). Verbally, no one responds to this turn of Christine and a very long pause follows, during which only some noises from the table are heard. In l. 07, Rachel self-selects and initiates a turn with 'bon' (well), which functions as a resuming and restarting device (Local 2004). A closer look at the prosody of this item suggests that she uses a higher pitch at the beginning of the word, clearly marking a new onset and projecting more to come. After a longer intra-turn pause, she asks her interlocutors if they want some more crêpes. In the subsequent turns, Pascal and Christine respond to Rachel's question and Rachel asks Christine another question (l. 12). The final turns of this example clearly show the interactants' orientation towards the sequence and the topic at hand until l. 05. Christine's turn in l. 01 delivers an explanation, which is aligned to by Pascal. His turn in l. 03 is already closing implicative, since he does not topicalise any elements in Christine's previous turn. However, she self-selects afterwards and therefore postpones the actual sequence and topic closure. In this example, the closure is observable in the lines 01 through 04, where the closure of an explanation is collaboratively achieved by Pascal and Christine. Then, in l. 05, Christine re-opens the topic-at-hand with a post next turn increment, which however does not receive any audible reactions by her interlocutors¹⁰⁶. The closure is observable in the turn uttered by Rachel in l. 07: therein she begins with a disjunction marker ('*bon*' (well)), which indicates a cut from the preceding sequence and topic. The next relevant activity is then overtly addressed by Rachel, i.e. who wants some other crêpes.

I now come to the last example from Christine's data-set. This stems from her last recording, i.e. almost six months after her arrival in Switzerland. The family is having dinner together. In the example, Christine is telling Rachel, the host-mother, what she did during the last week-end, because she was in a place near a hotel where the family also spent a couple of days on holiday.

(39) Christine, 22.02.2011 "*c'était rigolo*" (it was funny)

01 Pas: elle était sympa la piscine là-bas.=
 it was nice the swimming pool down there

02 Rac: ouais mais on avait déjà été aussi: seulement à la piscine.

¹⁰⁶ It is however possible, that the interactants reacted in some non-verbal ways to Christine's final statement in l. 05. Since no video-data are available for these interactions, I prefer not to speculate on this aspect but only observe what is contained in the uttered turns.

8. Topic closure

- yeah but we already went there only at the swimming pool*
- 03 Pas: ouais.
yeah
- 04 Rac: en dormant pas:
without sleeping
- 05 Ced: (XXXXX)
- 06 (...)
- 07 Ced: m:::=
- 08 Pas: m↑hm.
- 09 Chr: ↑mais en soir on a fait euhm toujours quelque chose
but in the evening we uhm always did something
- 10 avec les autres familles?
with the other families
- 11 (.)
- 12 Chr: c'est presque euhm (...) (xx) presque
it's almost uhm almost
- 13 là-bas [((rit))]
down there ((laughs))
- 14 Rac: [ah ouais.
oh yeah
- 15 Chr: ou(h)ais(h).
yeah
- 16 Rac: c'est vrai.
it's true
- 17 Chr: oui: c'était rigolo(h).
yes it was funny
- 18 +(3.0)((enfant chantonne en arrière-fond))+
child sings in the background
- 19 Pas: ah pis les vacances scolaires c'était: la semaine passée.
oh then the school holidays they were last week
- 20 Chr: oui de berne.
yes (those) of bern

In the lines 01 to 08 Pascal and Rachel are collaboratively telling that they had also been in the place where Christine was the week-end before. In line 09-10 Christine tells about the evenings there, where they all did something with the other families, too. In lines 12-13 Christine has spatially identified the place of her holiday, where she spent some time with her family, and starts laughing. Overlapping her laughter, Rachel aligns to this with an acknowledgment token in l. 14: 'ah ouais' (oh yeah), which is

repeated by Christine in l. 15 with a laughing voice. Rachel then utters a final statement: '*c'est vrai*' (it's true), in l. 16, to which Christine ties up her aligned turn in l. 17. After an initial confirmative item ('*oui*' (yes)), she recycles the syntactic pattern used by Rachel and produces '*c'était rigolo*' (it was funny)¹⁰⁷.

After a long break in the conversation, due to some loud noises produced by one child, Pascal in l. 19 addresses a question towards Christine, inquiring about the school holidays of the week before. Although the general topic might be seen to be somehow related to the previous one (Christine's telling of her activities during the holiday period), Pascal presents his news inquiry as introducing something new and disconnected from the preceding talk (see especially the initial change-of-state token, which is retrospectively oriented, and the following adding particle '*pis*' (and), which is prospectively oriented).

To conclude, Christine's data show some interesting features. Although Christine's linguistic resources seems to be more reduced as compared to those of more advanced L2 speakers like Julie, she shows over time an increased participation in joint topic closures. In fact, by the end of her stay, Christine is engaging more actively in topic closings by means of recycled syntactic patterns and tying techniques, which allow her to align in a more visible way to her interlocutor's turn.

After this analytical part, I conclude this chapter with some summarising observations about the actional microcosm of topic closure.

8.5 Summary of findings

In this chapter I have discussed the accomplishment of topic closure by three French L2 speakers, namely the au-pair girls Julie, Oksana and Christine. At the beginning of their sojourns, they were acknowledged respectively as B2, B1 and A2 level in French. This has been the reference for me to structure my subchapters. To discuss the similarities and differences in the accomplishment of topic closure, I need to recall the questions I asked myself after the first analyses of Julie's data, namely: are longitudinal observations really possible (and relevant)? Or should in this case cross-sectional comparisons be preferred?

¹⁰⁷ The recycled pattern differs from the one of Rachel in the temporal feature of the VP: whereas Rachel's statement is in the present tense, Christine's statement is in the past tense.

8.5.1 Main findings regarding the participation in topic closure

As I pointed out after Julie's analyses, this au-pair girl seems to show a rather stable pool of methods for participating in topic closure. Probably in relation with her advanced French L2 level, she can appropriately use typical closing implicative expressions (okay, fine), also with final falling intonation. When her interlocutor does not immediately react to her closing initiating turns, she is able to propose new closing implicative turns that solicit her recipient's response, and she generally finds one. She can, thus, manage a possible disalignment in a closing sequence and shows herewith her orientation towards both the topical and the structural levels of the ongoing conversation.

Oksana's data have shown that at the beginning she seems to only minimally participate in closing sequences. She is soon seen to manage a prolonged topic closure composed of longer, complex and reformulated turns from her interlocutor. She thereby understands the particular rules of turn-taking, when her interlocutor claims the floor for himself and aligns to his stance taking turns by letting him finish and self-selecting only afterwards. The main finding for Oksana concerns the fact that she participates in the closure, i.e. she aligns to her interlocutor's closing initiation whereas she does not initiate closure herself. Although her French L2 level is intermediate, she also employs typical French closing implicative expressions (alright, it's good) at the right conversational places from the beginning of her stay.

Christine's data have maybe shown the most remarkable changes over time. In the first example, she only minimally participates in the topic closure, i.e. the closure is rather "controlled" by her interlocutors and she limits herself to align to their topic lines. As the time passes, she changes her way of participating in topic closures: she uses more formulaic expressions (it was funny), she does not limit her contribution to only one turn, but produces rather two or three closing implicative turns, and she therefore participates more actively in the joint construction of topic closure.

8.5.2 Topic closure: longitudinal or cross-sectional observations?

Topic introduction (chapter 7) has been analysed through the lens of longitudinal observations. In this case, investigations from different points in time were delivered that shed more light on our understanding of L2 interactional competence and its development over time. It could have been the same for topic closure. However, as this chapter has shown so far, this might not be the case. It is more difficult to use topic

closure for longitudinal observations. There are several reasons. First, the closures come in when different courses of action (Heritage & Sorjonen 1994) are carried out. In fact, a conversational topic can be developed within the frame of a storytelling or of an explanation, so the large background activity influences the interactants' participation in it.

Second, closures can be investigated either from their initiation or from the point of view of the speakers' participation to it. The fact that, for instance, Julie initiates closures whereas Oksana and Christine rather participate in the closures initiated by their interlocutors is a result *per se* (cf. Jeon 2008, Warga 2005). It shows that there is a relationship between the proficiency level of the L2 speakers and their ability of participating in a more active way in topic closures. Julie's data have shown that she has a broader linguistic repertoire for managing closing implicative environments, whereas Oksana and Christine are limited to minimal or standard expressions.

Third, also the time-span in which the data are collected influences the results: following an au-pair girl for only six months is different to collecting data for nine or ten months. In this sense, an eventual cross-sectional comparison could deliver more evidence for a developmental trajectory in the ways the au-pair girls participate in topic closures. The main differences arise, in fact, in a comparison between the two more advanced L2 speakers, Julie and Oksana, and Christine. As I said before, Christine at the beginning shows some difficulty in participating into topic closures, i.e. her contributions are zero or one turn, whereas longer turns and formulaic expressions appear only at the end of her stay.

The next chapter (9) contains the analysis of topic progression. After chapter 9, I turn to the final part of this work. My conclusions are structured within several chapters. In chapter 10 I describe L2 interactional competence as regards the longitudinal observations derived from my analyses in chapter 7 on topic introduction. In chapter 11 I present some considerations derived from the analyses on topic closure and progression from the chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 12 contains a reflection about the link between conversational topics and epistemics in conversation. Finally, chapter 13 closes this work with some broader thought and questions about CA-SLA and its importance for practice.

9. Topic progression

The present chapter is concerned with the analysis of topic progression. Until now, I have shown how topics are managed as they are introduced and closed down, i.e. how L2 speakers orient towards sequence and topic boundaries within the flow of conversation. Now, the analytical focus is directed to the conversational moments in which the L2 speakers manage to shift from a topic to a next (or to some particular aspects of an ongoing topic), and to the moments in which they link the ongoing discourse back to a previous turn and topic that are not adjacent.

Topic shift and topical back-linking are omnipresent activities that contribute to topic management throughout the body of conversations. Speakers use a variety of resources and practices for managing topic progression in real time. For these reasons, it is rather difficult to build a collection of cases that can be used for showing changes over time. This is why I propose a synchronic and not a longitudinal analysis of topic shift and topical back-linking. My purpose here is to pinpoint several aspects of topic progression that are central for the description and the conceptualisation of interactional competence.

9.1 Topic shift

Topic shifts happen with every turn at talk, in the sense that interlocutors further the conversation and therefore necessarily transform the conversational topic¹⁰⁸. Maynard (1980) proposes a first general description of this mechanism:

Topic shifting procedures [...] are regular features of ongoing topical talk, and are ways in which transformations can be done on a prior utterance in order to occasion a set of mentionables in a present utterance. It is in this sense, that *structural* matters are crucial to the description and understanding of topical talk. (p. 272, emphasis in the original)

There are two main points in Maynard's description. First, that one can look at what happens in an ongoing conversation, i.e. that conversational topics can be analysed taking their unstable nature into consideration. Second, that this changing nature relies

¹⁰⁸ I am aware that there are several possibilities for defining a topic shift. Morris-Adams (2014: 153) proposes a short overview of the most used terms for addressing this matter.

on structural properties of interaction, i.e. that it is not only a matter of content or of content interpretation, but at stake are the features of interactional structure, turn concatenation and turn design. These endogenous, underlying features are more general than content, since content varies from conversation to conversation, but the structural properties of conversation and turns at talk are generalizable. It is, then, through these structural matters that topic shifts are accountable for the interlocutors and analysable for the analyst.

The question to ask is then how to analyse topic shifts in conversation, and Garcia & Joannette (1997) point out: "How is it then, that one can continually shift topics yet maintain relevance?" (p. 94). The researchers indicate the main principle that makes it possible to continuously shift topics in conversation whilst letting the very same conversation look coherent: relevance. Recalling the Gricean principle of cooperation¹⁰⁹, the authors highlight the cooperative nature of conversation and particularly the fact that interactants incessantly orient towards the preceding turn as regards its design and its content: "[interlocutors] work towards a common purpose thereby explaining the fact that conversations are not a series of disjointed remarks" (p. 95). This is best shown in the following example:

(40) Oksana 25.10.2010 *stadion glace* 'ice stadium'

03 Oks: ma (.) par exemple ici en suisse vous avons (.) euh stadion?
but for example here in Switzerland PRO-2nd.pl. have-1st.pl uh stadium

04 (.)

05 Pie: ou[i.
yes

06 Oks: [avec glace dans chaque grand (.) [hm: vi?
with ice in every big city

07 Pie: [hm: :

08 (2.4)

09 Pie: .h hm::: chaque grande ville ↑ouais disons >on peut presque dire<
every big city yeah let's say one can almost say

10 maintenant oui.
now yes

¹⁰⁹ This principle states following: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975: 45, cited in Garcia & Joannette 1997: 95).

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- 11 (...)
- 12 Pie: oui [.hh
yes
- 13 Oks: [mais en pologne je sais pas où est:: °stadion glace°.
but in Poland I don't know where is stadium ice (ice stadium)
- 14 (.)
- 15 Pie: ouais il n'y a peut-être pas beaucoup.
yeah probably there aren't a lot
- 16 (2.2)
- 17 Pie: ouais.
yeah
- 18 (..)
- 19 Pie: bon celui où on a été à ((ville)) c'est un vieux stade hein=c'est-
well that one where we have been in ((city)) it's an old stadium huh it's-
- 20 je crois que c'est le- c'est le: le:: le plus vieux stade::
I believe that it's the- it's the the the oldest stadium
- 21 du groupe A de- du: la première ligue si tu veux suisse=hein.
of the A group of- of the first Swiss league if you want huh
- 22 (..)
- 23 Oks: °mhm°
- 24 Pie: ligue nationale A.
national league A

L. 13 is the one I am interested in, but the whole fragment goes like this: the au-pair girl Oksana asks her host-father Pierre if in Switzerland every big city has an ice stadium (a couple of days before they went to see a hockey match in an ice stadium). Oksana's question is split between l. 03 and l. 06. In l. 03 she starts her inquiry by geographically indexing the referent *stadion* 'stadium' she introduces as turn-final item. In l. 05, Pierre is positively answering this question when Oksana overlaps his answer (l. 06) and increments her question with a series of specifications concerning the stadium: she is asking about ice stadiums in big cities. After a long pause, Pierre initiates a repair (l. 09) and then repeats his positive response *ouais* 'yeah'. However, this time he adds some remarks that moderate his answer: *disons* 'let's say', *on peut presque dire* 'one can almost say'. Nevertheless, his turn ends with a positive response (l. 10), which he repeats after a pause (l. 12). In l. 13, overlapping Pierre's intake of breath, Oksana self-selects and produces a turn that initiates a topic shift: she affirms

that she does not know where there are ice stadiums in Poland (her home country). As Maynard (1980) recalls, there are many different strategies for accomplishing a topic shift: in example 40, Oksana shifts the geographical reference frame for the same referent (ice stadiums). By virtue of a disjunctive marker at turn beginning (*mais* 'but', l. 13), she prepares the field for a possible contrastive proposition to come. In fact, her statement compares two countries (Switzerland and Poland) as regards the presence of ice stadiums (the referent she introduced with her first inquiry, l. 03 and 06) and she positions herself as an unknowing party. In conclusion whilst the main referent is maintained, the contextual frame is changed and, in this way, the au-pair girl is able to manage a topic shift that takes the conversation in a new direction.

Another possibility for shifting the topic is through a pivot-shifting, i.e. by using an already introduced referent to address new aspects that concern it. In the following example, Marie is telling a story about a kitchen tool she has just bought, which is the same used by Didier Cuche (a famous competitive athlete). The naming of the athlete coincides with the story climax and, after Julie and Victor have reacted to this announcement, Julie shifts the conversational topic by addressing another aspect concerning Didier Cuche's health condition (l. 78).

(41) Julie 16.02.2010 Didier Cuche

57 Mar: =mais °°je pense pas.°° .h et pi:s euh >il me dit< +C'EST LA MÊME
but I don't think so and then uh he tells me it's the same

58 (.) QUE DI- QUE DIDIER CUCHE. ((voix souriante))+
as di- as Didier Cuche ((laughing voice))

59 (1.2)

60 Mar: mais lui il en a un plus grande mais il utilise le même truc.
but he he has a bigger one but he uses the same thing

61 (0.8)

62 Mar: ts.=

63 Jul: =ah ouais.=
oh yeah

64 Mar: =j'ai dit +ah bon be:n on sera aux prochains ((voix souriante))+
I said oh well then we will be at the next ((laughing voice))

65 +jeux olympiques. ((en riant))+
Olympic games

66 Vic: ((rit))
((laughs))

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67 Mar: ((rit))
 ((laughs))

68 Jul: ((rit))
 ((laughs))

69 Jul: ouais c'est ça. ((rit))
 yeah that's it ((laughs))

70 (1.7)

71 Jul: ↑ah ouais (0.2) alors c'est bien ce tr↑uc je=pen[se.
 oh yeah then it's good this thing I think

72 Mar: [↑ouais ((en
 yeah

73 riant))
 ((laughing))

74 (0.7)

75 Mar: .h >parce qu'après j'ai dit< mais:=c'est encore- y a encore une
 because afterwards I said but it's still- is there also a

76 ↑boule dessus >il dit< ouais=ouais c'est tout un:
 bowl over it he says yeah yeah it's all one

77 (1.2)

78 Jul: mais didier cuche il a: (0.5) ts. aussi des problèmes avec son
 but Didier Cuche he has also some problems with his

79 ge↑nou?
 knee

80 (0.2)

81 Jul: tu sais?
 you know

82 Mar: boh.
 buh

83 (0.7)

84 Mar: je pense (.) ↑ouais [...]
 I think yeah [...]

Marie reaches her story climax in l. 57-58, when she announces that she has found out that Didier Cuche uses the same kitchen tool she has just bought for herself. The climax is characterised by a higher voice volume and a laughing voice (cf. Selting 1994 on emphatic speech style). It is noteworthy that 1.2 seconds of pause follow, in which her co-participants do not react to her story. Marie, then, self-selects after the pause

and increments her story with a downgrading assessment of the previous one: she says that Didier Cuche has a bigger kitchen tool, but in the end, they both use the same thing (l. 60). Again, a 0.8 second pause follows, after which Marie produces a tong slam?. Julie reacts at this point with a weak alignment (Pomerantz 1984) (l. 63) to which Marie latches her next turn, thus soliciting an affiliative response to her story. She makes a joke (l. 64-65) about the fact that they, too, will be at the next Olympic Games (implying that they will be there with Didier Cuche) and at this moment Victor and Julie laugh, affiliating to Marie's joke (l. 66-68). Afterwards, Julie self-selects and proffers a concluding remark: *ouais c'est ça 'yeah that's it'* (l. 69). After a long pause, she self-selects again and proffers another concluding remark, assessing that she thinks that the tool must be good (l. 71). Marie overlaps Julie's last TCU and aligns to her assessment (l. 72). After a pause, she then self-selects and continues her telling about the kitchen tool: she has asked for more information about the components of this tool. In l. 77, a longer pause occurs (1.2 seconds) and, in l. 78, Julie self-selects and shifts the conversational topic with a pivotal movement, i.e. she employs a left dislocation (*'Didier Cuche il a'* Didier Cuche he has), which marks a topical restart whilst remaining related to the ongoing topic through the adverb *'aussi'* (also). In fact, she asks if Didier Cuche also has problems with his knee and solicits a response after a micro-pause (l. 80): *tu sais?* 'you know?' (l. 81). From l. 82 onwards, the conversation continues about Didier Cuche's knee condition and the health conditions of competitive athletes. There are several noteworthy aspects about Julie's turn in l. 78-79. First, she self-selects at an appropriate interactional moment, i.e. after a story has ended and a long pause has taken place. Second, she uses an opposition marker at turn beginning (*mais* 'but'), which prepares the field for an upcoming talk that might be disjointed from the preceding one. In fact, this is partially the case: Julie takes the conversation in a new direction, whilst she anchors it to an already introduced referent. Third, she accomplishes the shift through a left-dislocation: this allows her to reintroduce an already named referent and to promote it to the status of sentence topic and thereby to propose it as conversational topic for the upcoming talk. The turn in l. 78-79, then, pinpoints Julie's competence in shifting the topic using referential expressions and turn design; moreover, this turn also shows Julie's orientation towards the conversation progression and its structure, particularly through the precision timing of her self-selection.

In the next example, the au-pair girl Christine accomplishes a topic shift by indirectly introducing two possible persons that can correspond to the referent introduced in l. 492 (*ta soeur* 'your sister'). During the recording, the whole family is sitting at the table and is having dinner. It is one of the children, Cédric, that initiates an inquiry addressing Christine.

(42) Christine 21.09.2010 *ma soeur* 'my sister'

492 Ced: *ta soeur elle habite où?*
your sister where does she live

493 (..)

494 Chr: *MOI?*
me

495 (..)

496 Ced: [TA SOEU:R.
your sister

497 Rac: [ta soeur.
your sister

498 (.)

499 Chr: *AH MA SOEUR avec moi à la maison.*
oh my sister with me at home

500 (..)

501 Chr: *au week-end (.) +au moment à ((LOCALITE)) ((voix soriante))+¹¹⁰*
during the weekend at the moment in ((place)) ((laughing voice))

502 (..)

((pendant 7.4sec les enfants crient - incompréhensible))
((for 7.4 seconds the children are screaming very loudly – incomprehensible))

503 Chr: *tu as VU (0.1) déjà ma sœur.*
you have seen already my sister

504 (0.1)

505 Chr: *manon.*
Manon

506 (..)

507 Pas: *oui::,*
yes

¹¹⁰ The laughing voice is probably caused by the fact that Christine's sister, who is younger than her, stays at her boyfriend's house almost every weekend.

508 Chr: mais leïla pas encore.
 but Leïla not yet

Cédric inquires about Christine's sister in l. 492 and asks where she lives. After a short pause, Christine initiates a repair on the reference (l. 494), which is responded to in overlap by Cédric and his mother Rachel (l. 496-497). In l. 499, Christine initiates the third turn of this repair sequence with a change-of-state token (*ah 'oh'*) and repeats the repaired referent (*ma soeur* 'my sister') continuing the turn with the response to Cédric's inquiry: *avec moi à la maison* 'with me at home'. After a short pause, Christine self-selects and increments her turn with a specification: she explains that, at the moment, her sister spends her weekends in another place – so to say that she lives in two places. For a long moment, then, the children are very loud and the parents are busy keeping them calm. When the children calm down, Christine self-selects and addresses Cédric again with a turn that states that he has already seen her sister (l. 503). She then increments this turn by adding her sister's name (l. 505). After a short pause it is Pascal, the host-father, who responds to this statement with a confirmation (l. 507), which is, however, prolonged and terminates with a continuative intonation, accomplishing a request for more information. Indeed, in l. 508 Christine produces a turn stating that he has not yet seen her other sister, Leïla. Christine's topic shift is a double one and is accomplished over three turns at talk. Starting from the fact that Cédric has introduced the referent 'your sister', Christine first changes the conversational direction in l. 503 by establishing a new relationship between the introduced referent and her interlocutor. In fact, Cédric's question was merely about the place where Christine's sister lives. However, this kind of news inquiries (Button & Casey 1985) offer the possibility for expanding one's response, and this is exactly what Christine does in l. 503. After her responses in l. 499 and 501, thus accomplishing the next relevant action after an inquiry, she expands her responses shifting the topic in l. 503 and she does it by addressing a new aspect of an already introduced referent. Moreover, she is able to accomplish another topic shift with her turn in l. 508, since she disambiguates further the referent talked about: in fact, she herewith states that she has not only one sister, but two, and that Cédric has only seen one of them, namely Manon.

9.2 Summary of findings

The three examples above clearly show that topic shifts happen with almost every turn at talk, because with their turns, the interlocutors show their understanding of what preceded and add new material for what will come next. I now wish to make the point about the au-pair girls' ability to manage conversational topic shifts and what this tells us about their interactional competence.

The conception of topic shift I have worked with is intuitive and relies on common-sense interpretation, as reported in Sacks (1995: 566):

A general feature for topical organisation in conversation is movement from topic to topic, not by a topic-close followed by a topic beginning, but by a stepwise move, which involves linking up whatever is being introduced to what has just been talked about, such that, as far as anybody knows, a new topic has not been started, though we're far from wherever we began.

I have looked at topic shifts that happen stepwise, i.e. without the participants' orienting towards whatever topic or sequence boundaries. The shifts I have analysed are located in adjacently placed turns and they are accomplished by the French L2 speakers in the conversations. As I have shown, all three L2 speakers manage conversational topic shifts, independently of their proficiency L2 level. This is a central point for my analysis, since this allows me to pinpoint several features of L2 interactional competence.

Firstly, the au-pair girls show that they are able to build a new relationship between the conversational topic so-far and marginal or new aspects of the same topic. They accomplish this by means of some available contextual clues that they can manipulate and change. These linkages recall the features of "displaced language" as defined by Auer (1984):

In displaced passages of interaction, the *origo* may be left on any of its dimension, or on all simultaneously. Whereas an element of a language system is either deictic or non-deictic, an utterance can be more or less *umfeld*-dependent. (p. 269, emphasis in the original).

Specifically, Oksana links the Swiss situation to the Polish one as far as the presence of ice rinks is concerned, Julie addresses the health condition of a known Swiss athlete after knowing what kitchen tools he uses and Christine shifts the focus of attention from one of her sisters to the other. This means that when the au-pair girls address a new aspect of an ongoing conversational topic, they not only create the possibility for a new class of mentionables (see Maynard 1980), but they also displace (see Auer 1984 above) the focus of attention on another point/place/referent in space and time.

In so doing, however, they continuously show their interpretation of the just-happened talk whilst adding new material for the upcoming talk. This action requires not only "good" L2 linguistic skills: it necessitates an incessant attention to the conversational flow, and especially to its sequential structure. The au pairs are, then, able to start and accomplish a topic shift at the content level because they are already able to orient to the conversational structure of adjacency pairs and larger sequences.

Secondly, topic shifts are merely a means for L2 speakers to participate in a conversation and to collaboratively work on the conversational topic. In fact, many studies of a more traditional approach position L2 speakers in a rather "passive" role. L2 speakers are shown to "just" listen, they are not very active with regard to content management, i.e. L1 speakers continuously propose new topics whilst L2 speaker limit themselves to "go along with". From my data I have shown that this is not the case: in chapter 7 I demonstrated that au pair girls are able almost from the beginning of their stay to introduce new conversational topics. Now, I have shown that they are also able to change ongoing topics using many different resources, especially semantic relationships. This only happens in collaboration with their interlocutors, as Julie's example crystallises.

(43) Julie, 16.02.2010 *genou* (knee)

78 Jul: mais didier cuche il a: (0.5) ts. aussi des problèmes avec son
 but Didier Cuche he has also some problems with his

79 ge↑nou?
 knee

80 (0.2)

81 Jul: tu sais?
 you know

82 Mar: boh.
 buh

83 (0.7)

84 Mar: je pense (.) ↑ouais [...]
 I think yeah [...]

The topic-shifting movement begins in l. 78, however Julie shows her orientation towards the new conversational topic by explicitly soliciting a response from her interlocutor in l. 81. With this example, I underline the centrality of a topic-shifting

collaborative nature and, especially, the fact that L2 speakers can observably orient towards this collaboration, as Julie's participation has just shown.

9.3 Topical back-linking

Jefferson (1972) has indirectly presented what happens in conversation when interactants link their ongoing turn back to a turn that is not immediately adjacent. The author dealt with side sequences, i.e. sequences that temporarily direct the focus of attention to another matter than the principal one, and concentrated especially on repair sequences. These sequences allow the participants to clarify a conversational problem by suspending the conversational flow. Once the problem is solved, the conversation is restarted, generally with linking expressions of the type "to go back on" or "anyway". Sacks (1995) introduces the term of skip-connecting for describing the action of reconnecting to some prior turn:

[...] a speaker produces an utterance, which is indeed related to some prior utterance, but it's not related to the directly prior utterance, but some utterance prior to the directly prior utterance. (Sacks 1995: 349)

It is, however, Schegloff (1996) who adopts the term "back-linking" for the first time, pointing to the fact that, in conversation, not only it is relevant for the interactants to refer back to the previous turn, but, occasionally, it is also necessary to refer back to other turns:

But there can also be particular types of jobs precipitated or made relevant by particular prior turns or actions, or particular *types* of prior turn or action, e.g., stance-taking of various sorts (aligning with or against, registering surprise or familiarity), laughing, doing sequentially appropriate nexts, etc. or disengaging from the sequential projection of prior turn. Such jobs may on occasion be best done in a TCU dedicated to something else (like "just kick him"), on occasion in a TCU-initial component dedicated to back-linking (like "by the way"), [...]. (Schegloff 1996: 81-82, emphasis in the original)

Schegloff addresses not only turns *per se*: he rather talks about types of turns and also about particular actions that might require an action of linkage that connects two distant turns. He highlights an important aspect of back-linking, namely the consideration of the ongoing actions. In fact, in the following examples, I show that back-linking occurs when an action, like responding, is initiated by a second speaker and is for some reason interrupted at a certain point. The back-linking happens then, when the action

is restarted (cf. Sacks re-beginning, 1995: 349)¹¹¹. This means that an analysis of back-linking does not make sense if it does not take into account the actions carried out by the participants during a conversation.

The most inspiring work within the French-speaking research area is the study by De Stefani & Horlacher (2008). The authors analyse how back-linking is achieved in radio phone-in programs after an opening sequence is accomplished (age-inquiry sequence). Two possibilities are documented in their study: interactants link back their talk either by the use of *et* 'and' or by the use of *et xxx alors* 'and xxx then'. These two TCU initial devices accomplish two different actions: turns beginning with *et* 'and' produce a weak link to a previous topic, whereas turns that begin with *et xxx alors* 'and xxx then' operate a stronger link to a previous sequence.

With this background in mind, I now present the analysis of three excerpts, taken respectively from the data of Julie, Oksana and Christine. I concentrate on the lexical, sequential and topical features of the conversations in order to highlight the relationship between ongoing actions and topic management: I show that back-linking can only be accounted for if one considers both the action and the topical development of conversation. To do this, I use longer conversational spates that help understand the conversational environment of topical back-linking. To conclude, I propose a summary of the main similarities and differences in the realisation of back-linking by the three au-pair girls and discuss this in the light of a better understanding of interactional competence.

9.3.1 Advanced L2 level: Julie

The following excerpt stems from Julie's second recording. She had been in Switzerland for three weeks at that moment. The recording was made during dinner, while the whole family is sitting together at the table. As it is usual for that family and for their dinners, they are talking about the day and are organising the following days. In example 44, Marie and Julie are organising themselves for the next day.

¹¹¹ Along the same line there is also the study by Local (2004), which presents an analysis of back-connecting "and-uh(m)" at turn beginning. He shows how these turn beginnings are followed by talk that "is returning to and continuing a course of action that was earlier halted or suspended" (p. 377).

9. Topic progression

(44) Julie 12.10.2010 *demain matin* 'tomorrow morning'

01 Vic: (xx) pasta ancora?
noodles again

02 (..)

03 Vic: [eh?
uh

04 Mar: [pis demain soir t'as la danse?
then tomorrow evening you have the dance class

05 Man: mh non.
mh no

06 Jul: +mhm ((réponse affirmative))+
mhm ((affirmative response))

07 Vic: mais toi- tu manges [encore la sauce sinon (xx)
but you- you eat also the sauce otherwise (xx)

08 Mar: [à sept heures.
at seven o'clock

09 Jul: oui.=
yes

10 Mar: =parce que- ce qu'on peut [faire demain-
because- what we can do tomorrow

11 Jul: [A: (.) sept heures oui.
at seven o'clock yes

12 Mar: ce=qu'on peut faire demain s'il fait un peu meilleur quand vous
what we can do tomorrow if the weather is a bit better when you

13 pouvez un peu aller au bord du ↑lac.
can go for a while to the lake

14 (..)

15 Mar: peut-être vers quatre heures et demie comme [ça,
maybe around half past four or so

16 Jul: [oui
yes

17 Mar: donner du pain aux cygnes,
give some bread to the swans

[...]

200 Mar: pis ce matin euh monsieur était debout euh- et- moi qui disais tu
then this morning uh Mister was up uh- and- I that I said you

201 peux profiter de dormir °tu parles°.°.

9. Topic progression

you know

203 Mar: (à)=>sept=heures et demie=(i)=était< déjà debout.
(at) half past seven (he) was already up

205 Mar: bon vous avEZ FINI quand même de tou<jour:s>=euh sauter sur ces
well have you stopped though to always uh jump on these

207 Ju?: =(°°non°°).
no

209 Jul: .hh et: euh demain matin c'es:t (.) on fai:t la même chose [que-
and uh tomorrow morning it's we do the same thing as

211 (. . .)

212 Mar: ça va comme ç[a].
this goes like this

213 Jul: [aujourd'hui.
today

214 (.)

215 Mar: okay?

216 Jul: ↑mhm.

217 Mar: pis vous rentrez ici man<ger> pour >le dîner<,
then you come back here to eat for lunch

This excerpt starts with Victor, the father, asking his daughter Manon if she wants to eat more noodles (l. 01). Almost simultaneously, Marie is talking with Julie and asks her if she has her dance class the next day (l. 04). Julie responds positively in l. 06 and Marie then inquires for a more precise time information in l. 08 (at seven o'clock). After Julie's positive response to that (l. 09), Marie starts a turn with *parce que* 'because' and introduces a possible plan for the next day. In l. 11, Julie overlaps Marie and repeats the time of her dance class, concluding the turn with an affirmation marker (*oui* 'yes'). In l. 12, Marie restarts her previous turn repeating almost completely her turn in l. 09: *ce qu'on peut faire demain* 'what we can do tomorrow' and continues by proposing that Julie and the children go to the lake in the afternoon to feed the swans. The

conversation then continues a moment about the other possible activities Julie could do with the children and subsequently many other matters are discussed (such as Marie's cooking class, the children's eating habits in the afternoon and the fact that the family still has a lot of Victor's mother's pomegranates to eat).

In l. 200-201 Marie starts telling about her morning and she informs her interlocutors that she had to wake up earlier than she had planned to do, because her son (jokingly referred to with *monsieur* 'mister') was already awake¹¹². At the end of her turn, the next preferred action is to align with her. However, a long pause follows (l. 202) in which nobody speaks and no other reaction is produced. Orienting to this lack of response, Marie expands her previous turn (l. 203), specifying the time at which her son was awake. It is noteworthy that also after this expansion, nobody seems to orient to Marie's telling: in l. 204 a 3.3 second pause occurs¹¹³. Orienting towards the background noises, Marie produces a turn addressed to her children (l. 205-206) asking them to stop jumping on the sofas. She neither expands her story further, nor does she seek for a response from her interlocutors. The turn in l. 207 is rather unclear: it could be Julie that gives a response to Marie's turn, but the background noises are too loud to clearly understand who verbalises the negative response.

After a long pause, Julie who self-selects linking back to a prior topic, and particularly to the day's organisation she was discussing with Marie (see l. 04-17). Julie initiates her turn (l. 209) with a long breathe in (.hh) followed by the conjunction *et* 'and' latched to a hesitation marker *euuh* 'uh'. Following the study by De Stefani & Horlacher (2008), the conjunction 'and' in a turn-initial position is often used to link back to a previous topic. In this case, Marie and Julie are establishing an agenda for the next day and need to discuss all the activities they have to do in order to best organise their time. What Julie does with her turn is, however, to re-launch the conversation about a new temporal span for the next day: until l. 17, the conversation was about the next

¹¹² As Egbert (2012) explains, a participant in a multi-party conversation may accomplish actions that serve in different ways to her interlocutors. In this case, Marie is telling the story to her interlocutors, but through her laughing and mocking voice, she is also reproaching her son to have woken her up too soon.

¹¹³ Marie has clearly tried to provoke a recipient reaction, whose absence is relevant, as explained also by Stivers: "[...] a conceptualisation of storytelling as an activity that both takes a stance toward what is being reported and *makes the taking of a stance by the recipient relevant*." (Stivers 2008: 32, my emphasis)

afternoon, whereas Julie, in l. 209, addresses the organisation of the next morning. Moreover, recalling a pioneer study on a similar phenomenon by Jefferson (1972), it is possible to distinguish between sequence resumption and sequence continuation. The author uncovered a particular sequential progression related to back-linking devices: an ongoing sequence is interrupted by a side sequence, after which the participants return to the ongoing sequence. This sequence can be either resumed or continued. Jefferson (1972) dealt with troubles-telling and in her example a resumption of an ongoing sequence was related to the re-introduction of the problematic matter, whereas a continuation of an ongoing sequence meant that the problematic issue was skipped over. In my example, Julie has achieved a sequence resumption, because she re-introduced a previously discussed matter in order to get more information about it. To sum up, the back-linking Julie realises in l. 209 functions on three different levels:

- (I) as regards the activity-level, Julie connects back to a previous ongoing activity (establishing an agenda for the next day) that is crucial for her as the children's caretaker and re-starts it;
- (II) as regards the topical level, she establishes a link to a previous topic, i.e. the organisation of the next day, and pushes it further forward; and
- (III) as regards the sequential level, she expands a previous sequence by adding a new point to the agenda she is discussing with Marie.

Marie's reaction (l. 210) to Julie is minimal and comes after a point of possible completion, overlapping the end of Julie's turn. However, Marie not only produces the relevant next action, but she simultaneously accepts the conversational topic proposed by Julie. After a pause, in l. 212 Marie produces a statement, which could be directed either to Julie or to her children. In fact, it is most probably directed towards the children, because Julie continues her turn completing her inquiry with *aujourd'hui* 'today' (l. 213). As this latter TCU is in overlap with Marie's turn in l. 212, it seems possible that Julie orients to Marie's response in l. 210 as being too minimal. In l. 215, Marie asks Julie for confirmation and Julie responds affirmatively in l. 216. l. 217 shows Marie's orientation towards her previous agreement with Julie: she initiates her new turn with *pis* 'then', a conjunction used for adding more information to the existing discourse. In fact, Marie addresses the lunch-time of the next day, thus considering the organisation of the next morning completed.

Looking in a more detailed way at Julie's turn in l. 209-211, it is noteworthy that she initiates it with a deep breath in that functions as an attention-getting device. The conjunction 'and' projects more to come and simultaneously accomplishes a link back to a previous topic and to a previous activity. This is made clear by the introduction of the contextual clue *demain matin* 'tomorrow morning'. This time reference creates a connection between the ongoing turn and a preceding one about the organisation of the next day, specifically recalling Marie's turns in l. 10 and l. 12, when she introduces the time reference *demain* 'tomorrow' and recycles the same verb, '*faire*' (do). At the same time, however, the specification about the morning, related to the use of 'and' at turn beginning, accomplishes a re-start of the previous activity of the day's organisation.

The initial TCU, then, has to be analysed in at least two respects. On the one hand, it is bringing the conversational flow back to a known agenda (cf. Heritage & Sorjonen 1994) after several interruptions have occurred (several topics discussed, Marie's storytelling, and the children being loud and jumping on the sofas). As the entire conversation is actually pervaded by organisational concerns, it is not surprising that Julie inquires many times about organisational matters. On the other hand, the use of 'and' corresponds to the use of continuity markers in conversation as pointed out by Turk (2004)¹¹⁴. The author explains her terminological choice about (dis)continuity in the following way:

The discontinuity analysis of *and* is thus obviously inspired, in part, by an understanding of discourse coherence [...] leading to the conclusion that *and* does not create an otherwise non-existent linkage between two elements but rather strengthens a linkage that, for discourse pragmatic reasons (such as speaker change or subject change), appears to have weakened. Thus *and* may be productively viewed not as cohesion-creating device but as cohesion-restoring device. (Turk 2004: 220)

In fact, Julie's turn 209 is produced after a long pause and is initiated with 'and', a fact that already indicates some kind of continuity. In excerpt 44, there is a return to an organisational agenda after a previous sequence has been closed, hence there is a

¹¹⁴ The author examines the meaning of "conjunction" and "coordination", two concepts traditionally related to the discourse marker 'and'. She offers plenty of examples for supporting her view that a mere grammatical (especially syntactical) or textual analysis of 'and' does not account for most of its occurrences in everyday interactional data – and this especially because "traditional" studies are based on decontextualized spates of talk. The author proposes therefore to start with a discourse analytical approach and to subsequently integrate conversational data.

steady movement between two different activities (storytelling vs. organising a daily routine).

To conclude, it is noteworthy how the participants orient to the time schedule throughout the conversation: both Marie and Julie cooperate in order to create a consistent time plan for the next day, and this is observable in the markers of temporal reference they use. In l. 200, Marie starts her story by anchoring it to *ce matin* 'this morning'; then, paradigmatically, Julie starts her inquiry in l. 209 with *demain matin* 'tomorrow morning'. Julie's turn is semantically tied to Marie's previous turn, as she repeats the expression 'morning' in turn-initial position, but it contemporarily shifts the temporal background (from 'this morning' to 'tomorrow morning')¹¹⁵. Marie, on her side, accepts this anchor position and uses it for going further in the next day's planning. In l. 217 she starts talking about the lunchtime (*pis vous rentrez ici manger pour le dîner* 'then you can come back here to eat for lunch'). To sum up, the prosecution of an agenda is observable also in the interactants' linguistic choices, in particular in their use of temporal adverbs. That is to say, the organisation of a future timetable can be reflected on a sequential basis in the recurrent use of temporal reference, which, in turn, structures the temporal unfolding of turns at talk.

9.3.2 Intermediate¹¹⁶ L2 level: Oksana

The next example stems from Oksana's third recording, three weeks after her arrival in Switzerland. Oksana and the host-father, Pierre, are having dinner together and are talking about a hockey game they have watched together. The conversation, then, is about the presence of ice stadiums in Poland and my focus of attention is on l. 93, when Oksana reintroduces a spatial contextualisation she has used before in order to get back to a previous referent.

(45) Oksana 25.10.2010 stadion glace "skating rink"¹¹⁷

01 Pie: mais autrement bon c'était pa:s un match euh::: (...) un +super

¹¹⁵ As Sacks already noticed: "In the tying techniques we have what amounts to an automatic procedure. [...] You can't *not* tie in talk." (1995: 720, emphasis in the original).

¹¹⁶ As in the preceding chapters, I use this terminology only for referring to the classification of the speakers' L2 proficiency level. This terminology, however, does not influence my analyses.

¹¹⁷ In this excerpt, there are several items that are pronounced in a non-standard way. In order for the reader to better understand the content and the repair sequences eventually occasioned by the non-standard forms, I have placed the symbol in front of the non-standard items.

9. Topic progression

- but otherwise well it hasn't been a game uh a super
- 02 match ((en soupirant))+ °mais::°.
 game ((whispering)) but
- 03 Oks: ma (.) par exemple ici en suisse vous avons (.) euh stadion?
 but for example here in Switzerland you-2nd.pers.pl. have-1st.pers.pl uh stadium
- 04 (.)
- 05 Pie: ou[i.
 yes
- 06 Oks: [avec glace dans chaque grand (.) [hm: vi?
 with ice in every big city
- 07 Pie: [hm::
- 08 (2.4)
- 09 Pie: .h hm::: chaque grande ville ↑ouais disons >on peut presque dire<
 every big city yeah let's say one can almost say
- 10 maintenant oui.
 now yes
- 11 (...)
- 12 Pie: oui [.hh
 yes
- 13 Oks: [mais en pologne je sais pas où est:: °stadion glace°.
 but in Poland I don't know where is stadium ice (skating rink)
- 14 (.)
- 15 Pie: ouais il n'y >a peut-être< pas beaucoup.
 yeah there aren't maybe a lot
- 16 (2.2)
- 17 Pie: ouais.
 yeah
- [68 lines omitted – the conversation is about skating rinks in Switzerland and their opening times]
- 86 Pie: et tu peux <↑louer> les patins.
 and you can rent your skates
- 87 (...)
- 88 Oks: mhm.
- 89 Pie: <louer>.
 rent
- 90 (...)
- 91 Oks: °mhm°.
- 92 (4.0)

9. Topic progression

- 93 Oks: parce que mh.mh. en pologne c'est (...) très: (...) m.tsk ↑dans les
because in Poland it's very in the
- 94 pays euh (...) le- <l'ancien> pays <comm:unistiques>,&
nations uh the- the old communistic nations
- 95 Pie: m[hm.
- 96 Oks: &[c'est très commun,
it's very common
- 97 (.)
- 98 Pie: dans l'ancien pays communiste.
in the old communist nation
- 99 (..)
- 100 Oks: communiste,
communist
- 101 (..)
- 102 Oks: euh: et >à- en-< en pologne c'est très commun,
uh and at- in- in Poland it's very common
- 103 (..)
- 104 Oks: comme (.) euh: dans: chaque::: (1.3) ↑lié: ((incorrecte))
as uh in every place ((wrong pronunciation))
- 105 avec le:.,
with the
- 106 (.)
- 107 Pie: à chaque lieux.
in every place
- 108 Oks: à chaque ↑lié: (.) avec les: <botiments> (..) où: il y a
in every place with the blocks where there are
- 109 beaucoup de: l'appartement.
many the flat

In lines 01-02, Pierre formulates a concluding assessment concerning the conversational topic addressed so far: a hockey game he and Oksana went to see a couple of days before. In l. 03, Oksana self-selects and verbalizes an inquiry about stadiums: she initiates her turn with an opposition marker *ma* 'but', followed by a short pause and by a specifying structure *par exemple* 'for example'. She then goes on further specifying the referent she will introduce using a spatial clue: *ici en suisse* 'here in Switzerland' and she finally asks, though in a grammatically incorrect form, if there are stadiums (*vous avons euh stadion* 'you have uh stadium'). Pierre is positively

responding to this inquiry (l. 05), when Oksana overlaps his turn (l. 06) with an increment to her previous turn that functions as a further specification for the referent identification: *avec glace dans chaque grand vi?* 'with ice in every big city?'. The last item of her turn is overlapped by Pierre first minimal response (l. 07 'hm'), to which he, after a long pause, adds a new turn (l. 09) that initiates with an breathe in and a prolonged hesitation marker (.h hm:::). Afterwards, Pierre repeats Oksana's final TCU *chaque grande ville* 'every big city'¹¹⁸ and then responds again positively to her (now complete) inquiry with *ouais* 'yeah'. He continues further specifying his response, latching this first TCU to the previous one via a faster speech speed: *on peut presque dire maintenant oui* 'one can almost say yes now ' (line 09-10). After a long pause (l. 11), Pierre self-selects in l. 12 and again repeats his positive response *oui* 'yes'. This self-selection and the response repetition (by now, Pierre has given the same answer three times) may suggest a difficulty in the passage of the speakership (cf. Maynard 1980). Indeed, Pierre has kept the floor from l. 07 until l. 12 repeating his positive response. In l. 13, Oksana addresses a new aspect of the referent she previously introduced, namely that she does not know where there are ice stadiums in Poland¹¹⁹. Pierre reacts to her assessment (l. 15) with a turn initiated by a first alignment (yeah) followed by a possible explanation for Oksana's lack of knowledge (maybe there aren't a lot). In l. 17, Pierre's *ouais* 'yeah' with final falling intonation signals the closure of this sequence and temporarily indicates that the ongoing conversational topic is also vanishing. The omitted lines contain a discussion about ice stadiums in Switzerland and their opening hours, a fact that shows Oksana's interest in going there. Pierre, then, initiates the closure of this sequence explaining that one can also rent the ice skates there l. (86). Oksana shows her alignment to the closing initiation (l. 88) but then Pierre initiates a repair on the item 'rent' (l. 89) repeating it with a lower speech speed. Oksana again shows her alignment with a minimal response (l. 91); then she self-selects after a 4-second pause in l. 93 and shifts the discourse back to Poland: *parce*

¹¹⁸ This repetition could be a repair initiation. However, probably due to its placement at turn beginning, Oksana does not orient towards it in her next turn.

¹¹⁹ As documented in Maynard (1980), topic shifts often happen in conversation after some troubles have arisen, for instance in the passage of speakership. The author has found repeatedly in his data cases in which several longer inter-turn pauses alternate with self-selections by one speaker, who then introduces a new topic or shift to a new aspect of the ongoing one. In ex. 45, the shift is operated by the interlocutor, as it is the au-pair girl who addresses a particular aspect of the conversational topic.

que en pologne 'because in Poland'. L. 93 is characterised by some initial hesitation markers (mh.mh.) and especially by an online change of communicative project. What follows is a generalisation that shifts the focus from a specific nation, Poland, to the communist nations: *dans l'ancien pays communistique* 'in the old communistic nations'. This is characterised by some trouble: a hesitation marker (*euuh* 'uh'), a long pause and a cut-off followed by a restart (*le- l'ancien* 'the- the old'). In l. 95, Pierre aligns with a minimal response and in l. 96 Oksana restarts from the spate of talk preceding her reformulation: *c'est très commun* 'it's very common'. It is noteworthy that only at this point Pierre initiates a repair (l. 98): *dans l'ancien pays communiste* 'in the old communist nation' (cf. Schegloff 1992 on repair after next turn). Oksana, then, repeats the repaired item (l. 100) with a continuative intonation and pushes further her statement in l. 102, integrating what she had already said: in Poland it's very common. The conversation continues with Oksana explaining where people in Poland can go ice skating: in places with many rental flats, there is always a park and, in winter, people pour water onto to the grass so that it can become ice. There people go ice skating.

With her back-linking turn in l. 93, Oksana re-introduces a referential frame she has already used in the conversation and, in so doing, she links back to the conversational topic she had introduced before, l. 13. Recycling the same spatial clue (in Poland) in the same turn slot after a long distance allows her to connect back to what she previously said without needing to further specify the referent she will talk about. In l. 13, she had positioned herself as an unknowing party (Goodwin 1979) as regards the existence of ice stadiums in Poland, an assessment that had been reacted to with a weak alignment from Pierre. From l. 93 onward, Oksana is able to deliver an explanation for her "lack of knowledge", namely that she cannot know where there are ice stadiums because people in Poland use something else for ice skating. The back-linking turn allows Oksana to carry on a complex activity, like explaining, at a later moment than her first assessment.

9.3.3 Beginner L2 level: Christine

The following example stems from Christine's fifth recording. At that time the au-pair girl had been in Switzerland for five weeks. The participants are: Christine (Chr), the host mother Rachel (Rac), the host father Pascal (Pas) and one son, Daniel (Dan). During the recording, the family is having dinner and the host parents ask Christine about her day.

(46) Christine 09.11.2010 *au papiliorama* 'at the papiliorama'

- 01 Chr: °°dis quelque chose°°
(I) say something
- 02 ????: m↑hm.
- 03 (..)
- 04 Rac: (oh;donc) qu'est-ce que [t'as fait christ]ine aujourd'hui.
(oh;well) what did you do Christine today
- 05 Ch?: [((rit))]
((laughs))
- 06 (1.1)
- 07 Chr: .hh au matin, (.) ehm françoise était là avec ophélie?
in the morning uhm Françoise was here with Ophélie
- 08 (..)
- 09 Pas: ↑oh:
oh
- 10 Chr: elle a appelé, °>j'ai< pris le téléphone°=((rit))=
she called I have taken the phone ((laughs))
- 11 Pas: =((rit))=
((laughs))
- 12 Chr: =deux fois aujourd'hui ((rit))=
twice today ((laughs))
- 13 Rac: =ou(h)ais=
yeah
- 14 Pas: =ah ouais:?
oh yeah
- 15 (.)
- 16 Pas: bien:=
fine
- 17 Chr: =d'abord c'était un(h) mon(h)sieur qui a parlé allemand.
first it was a gentleman who spoke German
- 18 (...)
- 19 Pas: un alleMAND?=
a German
- 20 Chr: =oui.
yes
- 21 (..)
- 22 Rac: c'était le: hollandais.
it was the Dutchman

9. Topic progression

- 23 (.)
- 24 Rac: ((rit))=
((laughs))
- 25 Pas: =ah: (.) okay [ouais.
oh okay yeah
- 26 Chr: [ouais.
yeah
- 27** Chr: pis après: (.) elle est venue et après nous avons fait une
then afterwards she came and then we took a
- 28 pr[†]omenade avec les trois,
walk with the three
- 29 +(1.0) ((qgn chuchote qqch))+
((someone whispers))
- 30 Rac: ((bruit))
((noise))
- 31 Pas: ou[ais
yeah
- 32 Da?: [(est-ce [que je peux avoir (xxx)]
may I have (xxx)
- 33 Chr: [et après (xx), (...)] nous sommes allés- à chiêtres
and then (xx) we went to kerzers
- 34 à:=au: papiliorama?
to the papiliorama
- 35 Dan: (xxxx)
- 36 Rac: [(xxx)
- 37 Pas: [mais aussi avec euh françoise?
but also with uh Françoise
- 38 Chr: +mhm. ((en buvant))+
mhm ((drinking))
- 39 (..)
- 40 Chr: [sans Françoise.
without Françoise
- 41 Dan: [(xxx) [maman
(xxx) mom
- 42 Chr: [avec la voiture,
by car

The beginning of this excerpt coincides with the beginning of the recording. After some unclear comments about the fact of having to say something (l. 01, but l. 02 is unfortunately incomprehensible) and after a short pause (l. 03), in l. 04 Rachel asks Christine a question about her day. Christine does not answer immediately (see laughter in l. 05, probably by Christine, which overlaps Rachel's question, and see especially the long pause of 1.1 seconds in l. 06). In l. 07, Christine responds, concluding her turn with a try-marked item: *ophélie?* Christine might be indicating some kind of incertitude or might be trying to solicit a reaction from her interlocutors. In l. 08, Pascal reacts to Christine's turn with a change-of-state token (Heritage 1984). With his reaction, Pascal not only ratifies Christine's answer through an alignment to it, but he explicitly shows his not-knowing, until that moment, of the state of the affairs as regards Christine's day. Pascal's *oh* in l. 08 makes observable his newly gained access to one new piece of information.

In l. 10, Christine seems to resume her telling of the day, but actually she is now telling of an event that took place *before* Françoise arrived with Ophélie, namely Françoise's telephone call. Christine's telling of this event (*elle a appelé* 'she has called') is followed by a comment with lower voice and faster speed and terminates with laughter (*°>'ai<pris le téléphone°=((rit))* 'I have taken the phone ((laughs))'). These signals are acknowledged by Pascal, who shows his orientation towards this parenthetical insert: in l. 11 he reacts to Christine's laughter, thus not only aligning to it on the structural level (see the adjacent pair formed by two laughs), but also affiliating to it at an empathic level (cf. Steensig 2012). The following sequence is, in fact, an evaluative one: Christine explains that, in the same day, she has picked up the telephone twice (l. 12) and this fact is responded to by the host parents with different acknowledgment tokens (l. 13 'yeah', l. 14 'oh yeah?', l. 16 'fine').

From l. 17 onwards, Christine deepens the topic about the two phone calls she has received during the day, telling that the first one was made by a German-speaking man. In l. 19, Pascal initiates a repair and opens herewith a side-sequence: he asks Christine a clarification about the referent she has just introduced (l. 17 'a gentleman who spoke German', l. 19 'a German?'). Christine responds positively to the clarification request in l. 20. In l. 22, Rachel self-selects and increments Christine's turn, explaining that it was the Dutchman. It is noteworthy that she uses a definite NP, which presupposes a common knowledge about the referred person among the interlocutors. In fact, after

Rachel's laughter in l. 24, Pascal aligns to Rachel's turn in l. 25 by means of a change-of-state token (oh) and a minimal receipt (okay). In the end, Pascal's and Christine's turns overlap during a final agreement (l. 25-26), also stressing the end of the side sequence.

In order to define the lines 25-26 as closing a side sequence, I have looked at the actions accomplished in l. 27. In this turn, Christine clearly orients towards a resumption and a continuation of her telling with at least two resources: first, the first TCU is the temporal adverb *pis après* 'then afterwards'; second, this adverb is followed by the personal subject pronoun *elle* 'she'. This turn initiation relies semantically in at least two ways on l. 07. In the first line, the temporal adverb *pis après* 'then afterwards' proposes a resumption and a continuation of what Christine had started in l. 07 (in the morning, then afterwards). In the second line, the personal subject pronoun *elle* 'she' functions as return pop (Fox 1986) towards a referent previously introduced, i.e. Françoise (l. 07). Moreover from a syntactical point of view the turn initiation in l. 27 links back to l. 07: the syntactical structure in l. 27 "temporal adverb + referent in subject position" recycles the same structure used in l. 07. This highlights Christine's use of a specific tying technique (Sacks 1995), which allows her to recycle a syntactical pattern in order to stress the link between two particular turns at talk – independently of the fact that they are adjacently placed or not. For these reasons, l. 27 fulfils a crucial role in the way Christine manages the ongoing conversation. Through it, she shows her interlocutors that she resumes a previously ongoing activity (telling her day) and she continues it at the same time. Moreover, the very fact that Christine self-selects at l. 27 after her overlapping agreement with Pascal shows her orientation towards the preceding sequence as being closed.

In what follows, no reaction is found: see the 1 second pause in l. 29 and some unclear noises from Rachel in l. 30 (the participants are eating at the table). Only in l. 31 does Pascal produce a minimal reaction (yeah), which is overlapped by a question from Daniel. However, Christine seems to orient towards this minimal reaction, because in l. 33 she continues her telling with a new turn (and then we went to kerzers). The turns immediately after it are unfortunately not clear, but in l. 37 Pascal utters a clarification request. Christine answers immediately and affirmatively (l. 38 'mhm'). In l. 40, Christine further develops her first answer, adding 'without Françoise', thus

demonstrating that she considers her first answer in l. 38 as too minimal or maybe not clear for her interlocutor.

It is noteworthy how Christine manages the temporal references she uses in her talk. In l. 07, she introduces a first contextual clue, *au matin* 'in the morning', about which she tells a particular event, i.e. that Françoise has come to her with Ophélie, who is the child Françoise looks after. In l. 10, she adds new information that concerns an event that happened before Françoise and Ophélie came to her: *elle a appelé* 'she called'. Here Christine refers to Françoise: the personal pronoun 'she' is in a preverbal, subject position and relates to the referent mentioned in l. 07, Françoise (also in a preverbal, subject position). In so doing, the interlocutors can distinguish who Christine is referring to and there is no incomprehension about this, which is observable in the fact that they do not initiate any repair at this point. In l. 12, Christine introduces another contextual clue, namely *aujourd'hui* 'today'. This temporal indication does not seem to continue what Christine introduced in l. 07, where the referential expression 'in the morning' rather projects the use of a temporal adverb that also indicates a particular moment in the day, like "at noon" or "in the afternoon" or simply "later on". It is at this point that the sequential analysis helps disambiguating the temporal contextualisation. From l. 10 onwards, Christine introduces a new conversational topic, shifting from the description of her day with friends and children to the fact that she spoke twice on the telephone¹²⁰: I focus on the use of the temporal reference *d'abord* 'first' in l. 17. Christine told, in l. 12, that she talked twice on the telephone during the day and she had already announced in l. 10 that Françoise had called before coming to visit her. Consequently, the adverb 'first' in l. 17 delivers the last temporal clue in the side sequence: that day (*aujourd'hui* 'today', l. 12) Christine spoke twice on the telephone, first (l. 17) with a German-speaking man and then with Françoise, who called before coming (l. 10). The relationship between the sequential structure and the temporal referents in this sequence is noteworthy: the side sequence started with particular prosodic resources (fast speech speed, low volume) that are typical for the insertion of parentheticals in an ongoing discourse. A side sequence can be considered as a "parenthetical sequence" that interrupts the main ongoing sequence. Indeed, the side

¹²⁰ The sequential analysis highlights the beginning of a side sequence, which can contain temporal (and/or spatial) contextualisation clues that differ from those presented in the main sequence.

sequence also shows its own chronological development, which is independent from the chronological structure that pertains to the main interactional flow.

It is now clearer how to disambiguate the temporal adverb *pis après* 'then afterwards' in the turn-initial position in l. 27. This temporal reference relates neither to *d'abord* 'first' in l. 17, nor to *aujourd'hui* 'today' in l. 12 for at least two reasons. First from the sequential point of view, because in lines 25-26 Christine and Pascal find an (overlapping) agreement, which highlights the end of the side sequence about the phone calls. Second, from the lexical point of view, the side sequence is chronologically completed as soon as Christine says who has called and when. The temporal adverb 'then afterwards' in l. 27, then, has no link with the turns of the side sequence. The use of *elle* 'she' in l. 27 also corroborates this analysis: this pronoun can only refer to Françoise for two reasons. First, because the last referent Christine introduces is 'a gentleman who spoke German' (l. 17) – and this cannot be the antecedent for the pronoun 'she' in l. 27. Second, based on the sequential analysis by means of which I have identified the end of the side sequence in l. 25-26, the pronoun 'she' in l. 27 functions as return pop (Fox 1986) towards the referent Françoise introduced in l. 07 and pronominally repeated in l. 10. It is the use of this pronoun in association with the adverb 'then afterwards' in l. 27 that shows Christine's orientation towards the preceding sequence as being closed.

9.4 Summary of findings

The three preceding examples have shown how the au-pair girls have managed conversational topics in a very specific way, namely linking an upcoming stretch of talk back to a previous topic. Clearly, every example is unique and it is not possible to compare them as regards their contents, the ongoing activity or even the conversational frameworks (since every family and every recording is unique in nature). However, it is possible to affirm some general observations that can lead to a deeper investigation of how this actional microcosm is accomplished in a second language.

First, all three au-pair girls are able to link back their talk to a previous conversational topic in a mutually recognisable way – independently from their L2 proficiency level. The literature I have cited at the beginning of this sub-chapter deals with the analysis

of back-linking in L1s. The current analysis has shown that L2 speakers too are able to accomplish this action, although the analyses showed some differences as regards the resources employed by the au-pair girls in relation to their L2 proficiency levels. Nevertheless, the L2 speakers orient towards conversational progression, interactional structures and content organisation, demonstrating their ability to manage long-distance anaphora (Pekarek Doehler 2000) and to handle personal, spatial and temporal referents at different conversational moments.

Second, the back-linking takes place within larger ongoing activities (courses of action, cf. Heritage & Sorjonen 1994). Julie and Christine advance the telling of their day with the children, whereas Oksana introduces an explanation for her previous assessment. In all three cases, the discussed topic is not abandoned; instead, it is resumed (Jefferson 1972) and continued. The main difference concerning the larger activities is that whilst Julie and Christine are delivering a response, i.e. they are second speakers accomplishing a relevant next action (answering), Oksana is acting as first speaker and explains her stance taken concerning the presence of ice stadiums in Poland.

The following three chapters summarise the findings so far (chapters 10 and 11). Chapter 12 addresses the relationship between conversational topics and epistemics in conversation, whereas chapter 13 presents more general concluding observations and open questions.

PART IV

Discussion and conclusions

10. Longitudinal development of L2 interactional competence

*[A]ssessing change
in interactional competence means
assessing the change of the individual
within the entire community.
(Hellermann, 2011)*

I have investigated how French L2 speakers manage topics in everyday conversations. My analyses have been based on the investigation of three distinct actional microcosms: topic introduction, topic closure and topic progression, the latter being further divided into topical back-linking and topic shift. The investigations have shown the methods L2 speakers recurrently employ for introducing, closing and changing topics in ongoing interactions, pointing out the collaborative nature of topic management.

At this point, I summarise the main features of topic introduction (10.1) and topic closure (10.2) and I conclude this chapter with some reflections about the development of L2 interactional competence over time in relation to my findings (10.3).

10.1 Topic introduction: summary of findings

The study of topic introduction and how it changes over time has dealt with the data of two au-pair girls: Julie and Oksana. Both au-pair girls have a rather advanced French L2 proficiency level: Julie has a B2 level, whereas Oksana has a B1 level. For the third au-pair girl I have considered in my study, Christine, no case of topic introduction was found. For Julie and Oksana I have collected a total of 19 cases of topic introduction.

My data has shown that topic introduction was always initiated by the au-pair girls when the previous topic and sequence were closed. This closure was observable in the data through closing implicative turns, the presence of a final agreement and, generally, a longer pause. After the pause the L2 speaker self-selected and introduced the new conversational topic. The interactional *locus* in which the L2 speakers introduced a new conversational topic has shown the most stable features in my collection of cases.

Regarding the linguistic and prosodic features of topic introduction, both au-pair girls showed some changes in the ways, i.e. in the methods, they employed for introducing the new conversational topic. In both cases, the au-pair girls become more proficient

in the accomplishment of this action: they both accomplish finer interactional work for preparing their interlocutors to the upcoming talk. This interactional work is seen in the use of misplacement markers or attention-getting devices, in the establishment of more contextual clues for anchoring the new topic and also in the growing length of their turns. In so doing, the L2 speakers increase the visibility of their orientation towards the conversation progression: they demonstrate more clearly that they are orienting to what preceded as being closed, so that their next relevant action will be the one of introducing a new topic in an interactional place, which is appropriate for this action. Moreover, the finer interactional work accomplished for introducing a new conversational topic also shows a greater orientation towards the conversational aspect of recipient design (Nguyen 2011). By better preparing their interlocutors for the upcoming talk, the au-pair girls show their ability to actively integrate their interlocutors in the ongoing conversation.

A longitudinal comparison was made for both au-pair girls (Julie and Oksana) and, in both cases, it revealed that the methods for introducing a topic in conversation changed from more abrupt to smoother topic introduction. A cross-sectional comparison, then, highlighted some differences between the two au-pair girls, which mainly concerned their L2 proficiency level and the nature of the introduced topic. In fact, Oksana's topic introductions seemed to be generally more addressee-oriented than Julie's topic introductions. These interpersonal differences can be related to the relationship existing between the au-pair girls and their host-families, i.e. to the degree to which the L2 speakers are (getting) integrated in the family life. Moreover the age difference between the au-pair girls can influence their topic management activities: Oksana being four years older, it is possible that she has taken up the role of caregiver in a different way to Julie¹²¹

¹²¹ Their previous life experiences can also influence the way in which Oksana and Julie treat conversational topics in relation to their interlocutors. However, we know very little about their previous life, so it is not possible to investigate this aspect.

10.2 Topic closure: summary of findings

The study of topic closure and its changes over time have dealt with the data of all three au-pair girls. In conclusion, I have collected a total of 85 cases of topic closure.

Looking at the structural and sequential features of topic closure, the data has shown that many features could be found regularly in topic closure sequences: the presence of long inter-turn pauses¹²², the use of shorter turns containing formulaic language, as well as summarising and generalising statements, and the presence of a final, longer pause, after which a speaker self-selected and introduced a new conversational topic. These features were present in the data of all three au-pair girls from the beginning of their stays and can therefore be considered as stable and reliable aspects for the constitution of collection and for the analysis of topic closure.

A closer look at the linguistic and prosodic level of the topic closing turns has demonstrated that changes are to be seen more clearly in Christine's data. She becomes more active in the action of topic closure, i.e. she produces more turns and she uses more formulaic language. Julie and Oksana show less changes in the accomplishment of this action: from the beginning, they use formulaic language, final statements and final falling intonations in their closing implicative turns. Nevertheless, the lexical repertoire retrieved through the corpus shows a certain stability in respect of the expressions used. This is a typical characteristic of closing sequences.

A longitudinal comparison was carried out for all three au-pair girls. In the cases of Julie and Oksana, however, this comparison showed no changes over time. Only Christine showed a more appropriate participation in topic closure, with more turns-at-talk and more closing implicative expressions. Therefore, a cross-sectional comparison was also carried-out. However, the only result obtained was the evidence that interpersonal differences were found only between Christine, on the one side, and Julie and Oksana on the other side. It seems plausible, then, that the action of topic closure shows more longitudinal changes when the L2 speaker's proficiency level is rather low. Topic closure appears to be an actional microcosm that tends to stabilise over time and with an increased L2 proficiency level.

¹²² This is a typical clue for some trouble in the change of speakership, i.e. an appropriate interactional moment for closing the topic at hand and moving on with the conversation (see Maynard 1980).

10.3 L2 interactional competence and its development over time

In a recent volume, Taguchi (2015) rephrases Hall *et al.*'s (2011) definition of L2 interactional competence as follows:

[I]nteractional competence views language ability as a dialogic construct, locally situated and jointly constructed by participants in discourse. [...] Interactional competence considers participants' skilful use of a variety of linguistic and interactional resources at the task of joint meaning creation. (p. 1)

I take this rephrase as a starting point for my remarks on L2 interactional competence and its development over time. The first aspects to be considered are: L2 interactional competence is distributed among the participants. As introduced in chapter 3, this competence cannot be seen as the product of one mind, specifically of the L2 speaker's mind. L2 interactional competence is studied in interaction, i.e. when the L2 speakers inter-ACT with someone else.

10.3.1 L2 interactional competence and topic introduction

My investigations into topic introduction overtly address the distributed nature of L2 interactional competence in that not only did I consider the turns produced by the L2 speakers, but also larger sequences in which the interlocutors' reactions were also to be found. In both cases, the topic management actions accomplished are jointly accomplished by all interactants on a turn-by-turn basis, i.e. I could only see turn after turn how the participants positioned themselves as regards the preceding turn-at-talk (cf. Firth & Wagner 1997).

The second point I find interesting in Taguchi's words is her use of the word "skilful": 'participants' skilful use of [...] resources'. Skilful in this context refers to the use of resources and practices for the accomplishment of locally relevant social actions. The observation of the data refers uniquely to the way in which the L2 speakers employ the resources they have available at the moment of the ongoing conversation. In my case, with the analyses of topic introduction I pinpointed the fact that the L2 speakers change their introductory methods rendering them smoother, i.e. contextualising their topic introductions more (see also Hellermann 2007 on task opening). In so doing, they accomplish a more elaborated topic introduction and thereby show a stronger orientation towards their addressees (König 2013; Taguchi 2015). This result is also in

line with Nguyen (2011), a study on recipient design and its changes over time¹²³. In fact, topic introduction can also be seen in relation to recipient design: rendering the introduction more elaborated and smoother allows the interlocutor to be prepared for the next conversational topic and this, in turn, makes it easier for the interactants to collaboratively construct a topical sequence (Covelli & Murray 1980; Maynard & Zimmermann 1984).

Moreover, when the topic introductions happen in a smoother way, this helps the conversational progression, i.e. the conversation is not interrupted but can be advanced with less fracturing moments. The au-pair girls' changes in their ways of participating in conversation when it comes to introduce a new topic in an ongoing interaction suggest that a long-lasting and continuous learning process is taking place. The au-pair girls are becoming members of the host-families (cf. Farina et al. 2012), they are more acquainted with the interactional dynamics of their families, they get more involved in the children's lives, and they share increasing information and knowledge with the host-parents. The L2 learning process at stake is more a social than a merely linguistic one (Sahlström 2011): the longitudinal changes in the au-pair girls' methods for introducing topics display their orientation towards the family and the interactional contexts they are acting in.

10.3.2 L2 interactional competence and topic closure

The relation between topic closure and the development of L2 interactional competence is less clear than with topic introduction. Despite less striking changes being documented longitudinally, more interesting observations were made in a cross-sectional basis. In so doing other important aspects emerge that relate L2 interactional competence to changes in the methods for closing a topic. In this case, the development of L2 interactional competence seems to be more observable at the linguistic level of the closing turns.

Topic closing seems to be related to the existence of a possible agenda that underlies the whole conversation. Closing a topic projects either a new topic or the restart/resumption of a previous one. I have stated in my introduction that everyday conversations, especially in families and during mealtimes, are not based on an

¹²³ Indeed, Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) previously pointed out that recipient design is a feature of conversations that also influences the choice and the management of conversational topics (p. 727).

agenda, i.e. there is no previous schemata to follow about the topics to be discussed. However at the same time I noticed in every conversation the presence of something like a virtual agenda, which relates mainly to the activities that are still to be organised and the activities that were done by the au-pair girl with the children. These two activity types are always discussed in the conversations of my data-sets. Other topics are sometimes present (like the telling of some personal experiences by the interactants), but the conversations, although familiar, have the covered aims of checking on the au-pair girl's work and of organising the upcoming days.

Considering this underpinned and non-declared agenda as an underlying of everyday family interactions sheds more light on the cases of topic closing, because the finding of an agreement and the smooth passage to a next matter gain great social importance. It is then a thoroughly positive result the fact that in Julie's and Oksana's data the topic closing sequences ran smoothly. The data has shown that these two au-pair girls were able from the beginning to manage prolonged closing sequences and occasionally the absence of recipient reactions. If these results do not concern the development of L2 interactional competence over time, they still show that Julie and Oksana have an advanced L2 interactional competence from the beginning of their stay as regards the management of topic closure. Christine's data, on the other hand, was more similar to the data on topic introduction. They showed some changes in her methods for closing a topic and especially in the way she more clearly agrees with her interlocutors and ties her closing turns to the ones of her interlocutors. Christine's changes over time, then, show the social nature of L2 interactional competence: she does not widen her vocabulary, nor proffers less error-free turns. Instead, she positions herself more clearly as regard her interlocutors' stance takings and becomes more active in the action of topic closing itself (cf. Farina *et al.* 2012).

11. About the nature of L2 interactional competence

*[T]eaching and learning is something
not limited to adult-children relationships,
or classroom or other formal educational settings,
but seem to be part of the interactional repertoire
used and relied upon
in a number of different settings [.]
(Sahlström, 2011)*

One part of my study was dedicated to the investigation of topic progression in French L2 talk-in-interaction. The data analysis of topic progression did not allow for a longitudinal comparison; however, from the analyses of topical back-linking and topic shift it is possible to draw interesting observations about the nature of L2 interactional competence.

11.1 L2 interactional competence: not only linguistic

There is essentially one central point that can be addressed with the results of a synchronic analysis of L2 interactional data: the *nature* of L2 interactional competence. Whereas longitudinal data tends to project the researcher's attention towards the changes L2 speakers show over time in the accomplishment of the same actional microcosm, synchronic observations deliver a sort of "snapshot" of the microcosm under investigation.

In my case, the analyses of topic progression, specifically of topic shift and topical back-linking, have led to a precise characterisation of the studied microcosms, and moreover to a clearer understanding of their importance for the concept of L2 interactional competence. -

My observations are based on a cross-sectional comparison that has shown some general tendencies about the accomplishment of topic shift and topical back-linking in French L2 talk. The first important tendency is: all three au-pair girls accomplish both topical back-linking and topic shift. This means that neither topic shift, nor topical back-linking are strictly dependent on the L2 proficiency level of a speaker. This is important for better understanding L2 interactional competence, because this means that speakers already know topic progression from their L1 and they can also accomplish it in their L2. However, and this is the striking point, we are not confronted with a simple

linguistic transfer from the L1 to the L2. On the contrary, I have identified not only typical linguistic resources of the French language for the accomplishment of topic shift and topical back-linking. Topic progression was accomplished at specific interactional places, i.e. topic progression is characterised by essential structural features that are language-independent. This means that the L2 speakers use the linguistic resources they have at a certain time in order to collaboratively accomplish an action with their interlocutors but they also overtly orient to the general progression of the conversational flow. In this sense, my results sustain the point that L2 interactional competence is not merely linguistic in nature, but it relates to other resources that are locally made available in the conversation by the participants themselves (Hall & Pekarek Doehler 2011; Taguchi 2015).

11.2 L2 interactional competence: local and shared

The word “collaboratively” brings me to the next point. The au-pair girls collaborate with their interlocutors to “juggle” with topics during an ongoing conversation. The actions of shifting a topic or linking it back to a previous one can then only be achieved if the interactants work together. To do so, they have to constantly monitor each other’s reactions, i.e. they have to continuously check on the other’s (dis)alignment with oneself. In the case of topic progression, a double check is needed: on the one hand, the L2 speakers have to control if their interlocutors are following the new or old topic line (Covelly & Murray 1980) they are starting; on the other hand, they also have to control the structural development of the ongoing conversation, i.e. see if the turns at talk, the pauses or silences, the marked sequence boundaries, etc. allow for the start of a new topic line. All three au-pair girls under investigation are able to appropriately place a topic shift or a topical back-linking: they show their interlocutors via linguistic and prosodic cues and they are able to search (and wait) for their interlocutors’ affirmative reactions, i.e. when the topic can be cooperatively developed. This aspect of topic progression depicts the local and shared nature of L2 interactional competence. As many other studies have already demonstrated (see for instance Hall *et al.* 2011; Kasper 2009; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler 2004; Mori & Hasegawa 2009; Pekarek Doehler 2006; Taguchi 2015) L2 interactional competence cannot be studied only by means of a speaker’s production in the L2. L2 interactional competence is composed of many different abilities that are made observable during the interactions

and that are employed in close coordination with one's interlocutors. When the au-pair girls under investigation bring the conversation back to a previous topic, they do it in a way that is locally relevant (in reference to the sequential and topical structure of the conversation) and in a way that is negotiated with their interlocutors (König 2014).

11.3 L2 interactional competence: many abilities, one term

To conclude this chapter I discuss a third aspect of L2 interactional competence. In my study I have demonstrated how topic management relates to L2 interactional competence: it is a part of it, because this competence is not merely linguistic or structural. It is a socially-related competence and its development and nature can only be grasped if one links this idea of competence to its intrinsic social origin.

Interacting in a second language signifies not only speaking that language, but also socially acting in that language. This peculiarity of L2 interactional competence has already been discussed in several papers (Kasper & Wagner 2011; König 2013; Lantolf 2011; Pekarek Doehler 2010; Sahlström 2011; Steinbach Kohler & Thorne 2011): interactional competence embraces several abilities, and is not restricted only to the linguistic knowledge of the L2 speaker. In contrast with many studies of more traditional approach (see especially "functionalism" in chapter 1), with L2 interactional competence CA-SLA sheds new light on the abilities L2 speakers possess when they speak their L2.

In my study I have concentrated on topic management and have also shown that the management of a limited activity like topic progression already requires a multitude of abilities: orientation to the structural features of conversation, such as sequence and activity boundaries; management of intersubjectivity and recipient design; ability in opening and closing a topic and a sequence; management of other interactional activities such as repairing communication problems, agreeing or disagreeing with one's interlocutor, and so on.

12. Topics and epistemics

*The central mechanism we will be concerned with
involve members' methods for managing rights
to identity-bound knowledge in self-other relations -
or, as we will have it,
the epistemics of social relations.
(Raymond & Heritage, 2006)*

In chapter 1 several linguistic approaches have been described that have dealt with the problem of identifying and defining topic as an entity at different analytical levels, such as the clause or sentence, the discourse, the text and the monological spoken discourse. In chapter 2 the approach of Conversation Analysis (CA) has been presented more in depth since it has built the basis for the data analysis (chapters 7, 8, 9). CA researchers have adopted a different conception of topic. Topic is not seen as an entity, i.e. as a static part of language, but rather as a process, i.e. it has an unstable nature that evolves through the conversation as it is created and developed by the interactants' turns at talk. The investigation is directed towards the practices and methods conversationalists employ for managing topics in interaction, which means to analyse how they introduce, change or close conversational topics.

12.1 Epistemics and narratives

My analyses of conversational topics in L2 interactions in the chapters 7, 8 and 9 have shown that topic management is an intrinsic feature of everyday interactions as well as of everyday institutional interactions. In fact, the family conversations investigated in this work unify both formal and informal traits because the L2 speakers are au-pair girls employed by the host-families for taking care of the children. Therefore, even if the conversations take place in a familiar setting, they show also institutional features, for instance when the host-parents questions the au-pair girls about the day with the children.

After the first conversations in the new family, which resemble more an interrogation because of the frequent question-answer pairs, the au-pair girls develop more independently their storytelling and reports about the day (e.g. expanding their narrative after responding to the host-parents' question) or introduce new conversational topics about their families and lives in form of a storytelling. In the

literature about topics storytelling is presented as a preferred activity for packaging newsworthy information (see Covelli & Murray 1980; Holt 2010; Jefferson 1981, 1984).

Narratives, however, have been analysed also under a different light, namely as regard their intrinsic property of structuring the conversation in a specific way. When a speaker starts a narrative, s/he does so with a prefacing work that projects more to come. The other interactants do not claim the floor and become story-ipients, whereas the first speaker act as story-teller (cf. Goodwin 1984). Storytelling is therefore a conversational practice that puts on hold the normal turn-taking machinery, and distributes the speakership among the interactants in a different way. Through narratives knowledge is transmitted and the story-teller designs his/her turns to show the newsworthiness of the upcoming talk. Knowledge, however, is difficult to describe, identify and analyse. The functionalist studies presented in chapter 1, for instance, focus on the information structure in texts and monologues and are concerned with the possibilities the speakers dispose of for packaging their information (old vs. new information), i.e. functionalist studies are concerned with the verbalisation of information.

Conversations, however, show how knowledge cannot be reduced to the information status of separated bits of text or of discourse. On the contrary, knowledge in interaction is managed by and distributed among conversationalists:

Each time we take a turn in conversation we indicate what we know and what we think others know. However, knowledge is neither static nor absolute. It is shaped by those we interact with and governed by social norms [...] [Stivers *et al.* 2011, preamble in the first page]

Stivers, Mondada and Steensig (2011) have collected several papers that show how knowledge is treated within CA and how interactants leave traces of their positioning in their turns at talk. The authors work with the notions of (I) epistemic access, i.e. the differences between knowing and not-knowing parties in conversation, (II) epistemic primacy, i.e. the rights related to knowing or claiming and the authority of knowledge, and finally of (III) epistemic responsibility, i.e. what a speaker must and what s/he can know. Generally, within institutional contexts a clear asymmetry of knowledge is observable. Courtroom interactions, for example, show that the truth is built up through different versions of the same event, to which not all the witnesses have had direct access and for which not all the witnesses have actual proofs (see Drew 1992; Pollner 1987; Pomerantz 1987). Another well-investigated institutional setting is doctor-patient consultation. Although the patient possesses a direct epistemic access to his/her

situation and knows it at best, s/he lacks the authority for a diagnosis or a treatment prescription (see Heritage 2006; Heritage & Robinson 2006).

In the domain of CA-SLA, Berger (submitted) has investigated the epistemic positioning of an au-pair girl, Julie, reporting to the host-mother about the misconduct of her children. The author observes that a narrative offers a privileged place in conversation for delivering such information. Moreover, the author notes that the epistemic authority of a mother vs. of an au-pair girl is observable in the evaluations of the children's misconducts: whereas the mother explicitly address the negativity of such conducts, Julie embeds her critics in direct reported speech, thus in a more indirect way. Finally, Julie and the host-mother construct their specific territories of knowledge (see Heritage 2011; Raymond & Heritage 2006) in the sense that each one claims for herself a different type of authority, experience and knowledge about children education and caregiving. Pochon-Berger *et al.* (2015) have addressed the issue of epistemic access and primacy in relation to storytelling about the activities the au-pair girl Julie has accomplished with the children during the day. Also in this case, storytelling assumes a central role in the institutional (working) context for exchanging important information between the parents and the caregiving person. In line with CA research on L1, then, narratives are seen as a preferred practice for making observable one's epistemic stance and one's epistemic authority in comparison to other interactants.

12.2 Epistemics and conversational topics: an example

Narratives are used by conversationalists for introducing new topics or for developing on-going ones. In example 27, chapter 7, the au-pair girl Julie employs a short storytelling, reporting her phone call to her mother. Julie purposefully uses a storytelling at this specific interactional moment because it allows her to introduce the new topic of how she and Marie (the host-mother) should organise Julie's upcoming leave, for which Julie's mother will come to Switzerland. I reproduce here this example adding the continuation of the conversation:

(27a) Julie, 16.06.2010 "qu'est-ce que je voulais" *what I wanted*

01 Man: j'ai dit [(peut-être)] un cauchemar?
 I said maybe a nightmare

02 Jul: [ouais.]

12. Topics and epistemics

yeah

03 Mar: ↑mh↑m.=
mh

04 Jul: =°ehm.°
uh

05 (1.1)

06 Jul: °<qu'est-ce> >que je voulais,<° (0.1) .hh >AH OUI=.h<
what did I want oh yes

07 j'ai télépho↑né ehm:: (0.4) avec ma=Mama::n et j'ai demandé euh
I called my Mom and I asked uh

08 (0.4) qua::nd (0.4) eh ben en f↑ait si tu ↑veux le ↑jeu:di tu peux
when uh well in fact if you want on Thursday you

09 encore aller >travailler<=c'est ↑bête si tu va:s- restes ici.
can still go to work it's stupid if you go- stay here

10 Mar: [°(x)(oui).°
yes

11 Jul: [parce que on- on part le- à midi?
because we we leave the-M.sg. at noon?

12 (0.2)

13 Mar: ↑si mais bon >faut quand même que tu prépares tes choses
yes but still you need anyway to prepare your stuff

14 tranquille↑ment<,
calmly

15 (1.6)

16 Jul: ↑ouais mais ↑bon je peux- tu vois les deux ils vont à l'↑co:le
yeah but well I can- you see the two of them they go to school

17 et puis entre-temps on peut mettre [°(x)°°.
and then in the meantime we can put (x)

18 Mar: [°non mais (écoutes)
no but (listen)

19 je prendrai congé c'est pas un problème ça.°
I will take the day off this is not a problem

20 (0.5)

21 Jul: ah.

22 (0.2)

23 Mar: °°non=non.°°=
no no

12. Topics and epistemics

24 Jul: =°c'est comme tu ↑veux hein°=
it's as you wish isn't it

25 Mar: =°°(non=non).°°
no no

26 (1.1)

27 Jul: en tout cas on part euh ve:rs midi.
in any case we leave uh almost at noon

There are several important aspects to consider that regard epistemics in this spate of talk. My analysis of topic introduction has focused on the sequential and linguistic features of Julie's turns from line 4 till line 9. However, an aspect that I have not considered is that Julie positions herself as a knowing party in this conversation: she has a first-hand knowledge because she is the one who has talked to her mother and so she is the interactant with a direct access to knowledge about the organisational aspects of her mother's arrival to Switzerland. Julie, then, verbalises her epistemic access to this information and shows her right to claim something about it, too (epistemic primacy). Moreover, in lines 8-9 she proposes a possible day-organisation for Marie, saying that she can go to work (at this point in conversation it is implicitly meant that Julie and her mother can manage Julie's leave). Marie at first aligns to Julie's turns and proposition in line 10. She does so with a minimal reaction, but this shows her understanding of Julie's epistemic primacy about the discussed matter.

Julie subsequently self-selects and adds another information: Marie can go to work because Julie and her mother leave only at noon, so Marie does not need to stay at home (Marie only works in the morning). Julie shows again her epistemic access to a first-hand information about her mother's stay and she also claims this territory of knowledge (Heritage 2011) for herself. After a micro-pause, Marie reacts to Julie with a disagreeing turn, line 13. Her disagreement is weak because it is delayed and in the form of a yes-but structure: *si mais bon* (yes but well) (Pomerantz 1984; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger 2011). With this turn Marie accomplishes a twofold action as regard Julie's epistemic primacy: on the one hand, she acknowledges it (the yes-part of her turn). On the other hand, however, she claims her territory of knowledge as far as the organisation of a leave is concerned. In so doing, Marie positions herself as the more experienced person as regard organisational matters.

Julie reacts to Marie's turn with a weak disagreement in line 16 (*ouais mais bon* (yeah but well)) and explains her previous epistemic stance, namely that she and her mother can manage the organisation of Julie's leave because Marie's children are not at home.

In line 18 Marie's turn overlaps Julie's turn-end and Marie starts her turn with a stronger disagreement: *non mais* (no but). She then explains to Julie that she can take the day off from work because it is not a problem. This turn reverses the epistemic access and primacy constructed so-far. Now it is Marie that claims her first-hand knowledge about her working situation. In addition, she demonstrates her right to propose to take a day off because she knows that it is not problematic. Marie defines more precisely her territory of knowledge and presents it in her turn as concurrent to Julie's territory of knowledge. This process is observable in the disagreeing turns both speakers utter. Through their turns, both Marie and Julie claim their epistemic access and primacy until it is clear that they have different knowledge and experiences regarding two separated domains: Julie knows more about her mother's stay and how she can help with her leave; Marie knows more about her working situation and about what she can do for helping Julie and her mother preparing the leave.

Julie's turn in line 21 contains a minimal reaction, with which she acknowledges Marie's previous turn. In line 23 Marie starts a new turn with a lower voice volume and a fast, double denial item: *non non* (no no). However, Julie's turn in line 24 is latched to Marie's one and the au-pair girl aligns to Marie's suggestion, thus projecting a conclusion of this sequence. Marie then repeats her double denial in line 25 with a lower voice volume. After a longer pause, that is typical for closing environments, Julie reformulates her previous turn from line 11, namely saying that she and her mother will leave at noon. The conversation continues afterwards in a different direction since the children need Julie's help for preparing their backpacks.

12.3 On the usefulness of topic analysis for epistemics

Example 27a has shown that conversational topics, embedded in different types of larger sequences such as storytelling, have the property of structuring the upcoming talk. In my case I have investigated this structuring feature when conversational topics are introduced. Button & Casey (1984, 1985) and Covelli & Murray (1980) have already addressed the matter that when conversationalists introduce a new topic in the interaction then the coparticipant can topicalise the previous turn and start herewith a new topical sequence or stop the topical talk from the beginning. If the topical sequence is initiated, then the interactant introducing the topic develops it. This is observable

especially when a storytelling is initiated the interactional identities of story-teller and story-recipient are distributed among the participants.

The research on epistemics in interaction has shown how narratives are related not only to the distribution of identities, but also to the distribution of territories of knowledge, i.e. how interactants construct on a turn-by-turn basis their epistemic status and how they claim their primacy about it (Berger submitted; Heritage 2013; Pochon-Berger et al. 2015; Raymond & Heritage 2006; Stivers et al. 2011). However, CA and CA-SLA research so-far lacks to show the link between conversational topics and epistemics.

My data on conversational topics, and especially the chapter on topic introduction, have shown that topics have the feature of structuring the upcoming talk, but also the distribution of knowledge between the participants. When a new conversational topic is introduced it is generally presented as new or newsworthy for the coparticipants. This aspect concerning the recipient design and the turn design is linked with the speaker's responsibility about the topic s/he introduces, i.e. about her knowledge about it. Moreover, my data have shown (French) L2 interactions and I therefore argue that the link between topic management and epistemics in conversation needs not be restricted to L1 conversational data (see also the analyses in Pochon-Berger *et al.* 2015; Berger submitted for French L2 interactions).

The relation between conversational topics and epistemics shows, from another point of view, how topic management is an underlying feature of every conversations that cannot be set apart when dealing with interactional data. The difficulties in grasping it, the challenges in defining, observing and analysing it demonstrate its centrality for conversationalists. It is therefore desirable to mind the existing literature gap and to show in a clearer way that conversational topics and epistemics strongly depend on one another.

13. Final considerations

*The focus on 'real world problems' suggests
that we should seek to start
from the problems of the real world,
of non-applied linguists [.]
(Bygate, 2015)*

This work is the result of a long journey, during which I have learned to exercise an unconventional look at linguistic data. I never applied Conversation Analysis (CA) until 2010, I actually barely knew something about it by then. At the beginning of my doctorate, I started to read articles and books about CA and contemporarily began to work on conversational data through data-sessions. In 2010, the research project TRIC-L2 was started at the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland) and I was part of it.

The entire project title was: “Developing interactional competence in a second language. A longitudinal study of actional microcosms”. My first thoughts after reading it were: “What is interactional competence? What is an actional microcosm? How does a longitudinal study work?”. I was embarrassed by the quantity of things I did not know at that moment – and this was only the title. However, I decided to benefit from the opportunity to discover a new area of linguistic research, and I am still happy to have done this.

With this study, I have explained what CA is, how its methodology works and how it is possible (and why it is useful) to apply it to the study of L2 data, i.e. how one comes from CA to CA for Second Language Acquisition (CA-SLA, see Pekarek Doehler 2013). There have been many steps on my research journey, from data collection, to data transcription, to data analysis, to analytical outputs, etc. This work is a collection of all these steps.

I have decided to concentrate on conversational topics because of my previous interests for reference and anaphora. When I started in Neuchâtel, I thought this would “set forth” a sort of tradition for me. I did not know I was wrong. “CA is a rigorously empirical approach to social interactions” (Sidnell 2010: 35) and I learnt very quickly how it works. I learnt to analyse the data from the emic perspective of the interactants, not driven by *a priori* theories. I started to see what speakers do and how they do it. Every beginning is difficult, but once you understand how CA works, then you cannot

mistrust its methods: they bring you so near to the data that you cannot think that they are wrong.

I still held to topics because I was convinced that topic is a pervasive feature of conversation: no one talks about nothing with anybody. There is always something people talk about. I was not wrong, but I had to change my analytical view: the question to ask was *how* conversationalists talk about what they talk about. This discrepancy as regards all the linguistic theories I knew is still a burning point for me. Now I totally understand the different CA approach, I understand its usefulness and newness, its unconventional traits. However, it made it difficult for me to talk about topics in terms of methods and resources, though it is enriching and sheds new light on the concept of topic itself.

The main problem was that I did not know how to really talk about it without falling again in the already known terminology about topics. This is why I have proposed my terminology for this study. However, I am still not completely satisfied with this solution, since it is only an apparent one. I reuse known terms and place them in the right context, this is enough for this work and for my aims, but surely it is not a solution to the problem. With the time, I matured the certainty that there is no other possible solution, apart from the introduction of a complete new term-sets. However, for the moment I do not feel mature enough to take this step.

Analysing more and more data, I have convinced myself that talking about topics in CA is easier when one works on L2 data. The mechanisms of introducing, closing and changing topics are somehow more “rudimental”, the linguistic resources are more delimited and so some turns or silences gain more importance than in L1 conversations. For this reason, I hope for an increasing attention to topic in the domain of CA-SLA: topics are an underlying feature of conversations, they are omnipresent and continuously adjusted by the interactants with every turn-at-talk. This makes a “clear-cut” analysis of this conversational aspect more difficult, but looking at how L2 speakers present and treat what they hold for a conversational topic makes it clearer for the researcher, too.

During the years of my doctorate, I have analysed conversational topics in L2 interactions putting them in relation to several aspects: conversational structure, L2 speaker’s participation, L2 speaker’s development of his/her interactional competence, i.e. how s/he changes his/her way of participating in conversation over time. It is my

opinion that CA-SLA investigations can contribute in several ways to a better understanding of L2 language learning. I think particularly of two different domains: language pedagogy and language in professional environments.

The research in the field of language pedagogy is very wide. The central questions it addresses concern, on the one hand, the definition of (linguistic) competence in itself (recent studies among others are: Bronckart *et al.* 2005; Crahay 2004; Lüdi 2006; Pekarek Doehler 2003, 2009). On the other hand, more practical issues are present, such as the identification and applicability of linguistic curricula in schools and the evaluation of linguistic competences (see for example the documents of the European National Council, and the recent studies by Bachman & Palmer 2010; Lenz & Berthele 2010; Pekarek Doehler 2007). Bridging CA-SLA and the real world still seems to be difficult. This is probably due to the very technical and detailed analyses contained in CA-SLA studies. However, CA-SLA is one of the rare approaches to L2 learning that includes the social aspects of this process. Its focus is not restricted to lexical forms or grammatical rules. As I have demonstrated, the analytical objects of CA-SLA studies are different in nature and are more related to the procedural knowledge an L2 speaker has to acquire in order to appropriately participate in L2 conversations.

Though it is difficult to directly integrate CA-SLA studies in the domain of language pedagogy, it is not impossible to use them as a basis for approaching the process of L2 learning in a different way. Especially the attention paid to the management of the relationship with one's interlocutors, the documentation of changes in the way an L2 speaker accomplishes one and the same action over time, and finally the changing way of participating in conversation are all aspects of an increased L2 interactional competence. This competence, CA-SLA researchers argue (see for instance the studies by Brower 2013; Firth & Wagner 1997; Hall 1995; Hall *et al.* 2011; Hellermann 2008; Kasper & Wagner 2011; Pekarek Doehler 2005, 2006, 2013), should become more central when the pedagogy specialists fix the linguistic curricula and the references for evaluating the L2 level of a speaker.

Similarly, CA-SLA research results can contribute to a better understanding of what happens in some professional domains that explicitly deal with L2 learning issues. The case of au-pair girls' employment is exemplary in this sense. Generally, spending some time abroad is the best opportunity for learning a new language. In chapters 2 and 3 I have presented some works in the domain of CA-SLA that have dealt with the learning

context of study abroad (König 2013, 2014; Masuda 2011; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger 2011; Taguchi 2015). However, not all the contexts of a study abroad experience are similar. In many cases, the study abroad experience takes place at university, for example during an exchange period. In this case, the daily life of the L2 speakers is organised differently from the life of an au-pair girl. In chapter 6 I have discussed the specificities of this experience abroad and have defined the learning context as a hybrid one. By this, I mean that when an au-pair girl arrives in a host-family and stays there for a longer sojourn, then two different social traits arise (Pochon-Berger *et al.* 2015): formal and informal ones. CA-SLA studies have shown that these formal traits are overtly addressed by the interactants themselves during their interactions and are therefore made relevant only at some specific interactional moments.

CA-SLA investigations reveal the undergoing social processes that characterise this particular social relationship and the results of their studies can be very useful for all the participants. Pochon-Berger *et al.* (2015) presents some practical steps for narrowing the gap between the research and the professional world, such as the implementation of consultations for host-families, agencies and future au-pair girls by the researchers. This is an attempt to popularise the research results in the CA-SLA domain and to show that a fine-grained analysis of everyday talk can be useful for a better understanding and organising of daily activities in families (more steps in this direction are presented in König submitted).

To conclude, in this study I set out to investigate the development of interactional competence in French L2 through the study of topic management. Specifically, I have investigated the actions of topic introduction, topic closure and topic progression. My results show that topic management is a good starting point for the investigation of L2 interactional competence and its development over time. In fact, the au-pair girls of my study have shown a longitudinal diversification of the resources and practices implemented for participating in conversation as far as topical issues are concerned. If these findings have important theoretical implications for the study of L2 interactional competence, they can also be useful for practical purposes in different working domains.

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Appendix 1

Transcription conventions

.	Final falling intonation
?	Final rising intonation
,	Continuative intonation
bla:::	Vocal prolongation
(bla)	Unclear segment
(xx)	Incomprehensible segment
BLA	High voice volume
°bla°	Low voice volume
↑bla	High pitch
>bla<	Faster speech speed
<bla>	Slower speech speed
.h .hh .hhh	In-breath
h. hh. hhh.	Out-breath
=	Latching
(non;mon)	Uncertain segment for which possibilities are given
+ bla ((comment))+	Comment
[	Overlap
&	Turn continuation
(.) (..) (...) (2.5)	Pauses