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► **To cite this version:**

Marie-José Gremmo. Advising for Language Learning: Interactive Characteristics and Negotiation Procedures. Mapping the Terrain of Learner Autonomy, Tampere University Press, pp. 145-167, 2009. halshs-00611103

HAL Id: halshs-00611103

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00611103>

Submitted on 25 Jul 2011

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**Advising for Language Learning:
Interactive Characteristics and Negotiation Procedures**

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The first principle which constitutes the specific character of self-directed language learning schemes (SDLLS) is that they enable learners to have direct access to learning resources: the focus is on the learner's autonomous¹ learning activity. The second principle for SDLLS is that they offer learners direct access to a pedagogical device which allows them to become competent self-directed learners. Both principles are essential: on the one hand, giving learners full responsibility for the learning activity in terms of freedom of choice and power of control² allows them to *experience* self-directed learning to the best of their capacity; on the other hand, giving them the possibility to learn-to-learn allows them to further develop their mastery of the learning process and their own specific learning competence: learner autonomy then becomes real.

The specific pedagogical device, which deals with the second objective of helping the development of the learner's learning competence and ability to self-direct is now generally termed "language advising"³. In this article, my aim is to show the essential part that verbal interaction plays in language advising. It is through the specific interactional characteristics of the "advising conversation" that language advisers are able to help learners without taking control or imposing decisions, thus making advising sessions a meaningful developmental resource for learners. I will first give a synthetic description of the nature of language

¹ Autonomy, as defined by Holec (1979) is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning", that is "to have the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of the learning: determining objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition and evaluating what has been acquired".

² Bouchard (2002)

³ This term is now widespread, although in some SDLLS other terms may be in use.

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advising. Then I will illustrate it using extracts from five advising conversations that took place between a specific adviser/learner pair. Finally, I will draw more general conclusions which will discuss aspects of the language interaction for advising and some requisites for advising conversations.

The nature of language advising

Language advising is a pedagogical device based on human interaction: the interaction that learners have with a supporting “expert”, the language adviser made available by the institution. Learners and advisers interact in a one-to-one relationship, and their interaction is focused on the learner’s activity. Advising for self-directed learning must be clearly differentiated from individualized teaching: although individualized teaching takes the learner’s specific characteristics into account and gives learners some latitude in the monitoring of their work, the pedagogical control remains in the hands of the teacher. In contrast, advising for self-directed learning is based on the fact that learners can and do take their own decisions, and make conscious and meaningful choices throughout the learning process. In other words, SDLLS are specific in that they are institutional schemes offering both learning a language “without being taught” (Holec, Little & Richterich, 1996), and learning to learn a language. As the aim of language advising is to ensure the development of the learner’s learning competence, advising is:

- a) focused on the learning *process* much more than on the learning *content*,
- b) non-decisional, and not founded on a power relationship,
- c) retro-active, negotiative , non-programmable and not programmed,
- d) dealing with a specific coherent conceptual framework, that of language didactics.

One can see that the role of the adviser is far different from the role of the teacher, who selects the knowledge to be acquired, prepares the ways in which it is learnt, monitors the teaching/learning sessions and finally evaluates the results. The adviser’s role rests not on a pro-active adaptive monitoring of learning activities (as individualized teaching does) but on a retro-active contextualised monitoring, depending on the learner’s request, bringing focused help to the learner’s construction of his/her learning competence, and taking place both before

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and after the learner's work sessions. The aim of this article is to clarify the characteristics of language advising, pointing out the way these characteristics define the modalities of the adviser's action in an advising conversation. A case study will be used as a basis for the discussion.

The case study

The extracts relate to a specific adviser/learner pair which was part of a larger research study⁴. Both are women. Lorraine, the learner, is a 24-year-old fourth-year economics student and has registered for the SDLLS because she plans to go through a selection procedure for a post-graduate diploma which includes an English test. Nancy, the adviser, is a 40-year-old experienced adviser. The advising sessions took place in French, which was the mother tongue of them both⁵. Two sets of data were collected. Firstly, the eleven advising sessions that took place between them were video-recorded. The extracts presented here deal with work on oral comprehension. Secondly, Nancy and Lorraine were interviewed separately, and asked to discuss their experience of the advising sessions. Their interviews were also recorded.

The adviser's verbal behaviour as a basis for advising

During Advising Session 1 (AS1), the SDLLS was presented to Lorraine. She discussed her learning objectives with her adviser Nancy, and together they set up a work programme with a first batch of resources. She took an active part in selecting the resources, accepting or rejecting Nancy's offers ("OK, I will test that" or "No I don't think I'll use that one").

Advising Session 2 (AS2) began with Lorraine's report of the work she had done. She had worked on two resources: a "classic" course book including oral comprehension activities which I will call BS, and a specific oral comprehension handbook, presenting working units

⁴ Ciekanski (2005). The SDLLS concerned is the SDLLS set up at C.R.A.P.E.L. (Nancy, France) for French adults learning English as a foreign language.

⁵ I will return to this important point in the last section of the article.

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built around a near-authentic recording and exercises, which I will call RL. Lorraine stated at the very beginning:

1. *I have tested everything (...) I like BS, it is rather simple, there are small exercises, it was not very hard and I managed well in the whole unit⁶*

This evaluation did not draw remarks from Nancy and Lorraine went on:

2. *(...) I liked RL too because I had the text. In fact it is very difficult for me to understand the cassette without the text, with the cassette only, I only understand a third of it all, my comprehension level is not good enough yet*

Nancy then broke in to ask the following question:

3. *...did you read the comprehension questions before?*

and that gave way to a rather lengthy discussion, in which Nancy explained what Lorraine's comprehension problems could be, as for example when she said:

4. *(..) as you did not know what to listen to, this made things very complicated for you because you felt you had to listen to every word (...) in many situations when you listen to someone or something, you have a listening objective and so you can focus your attention on specific elements and not on every word, it is the same in French, in one's mother tongue very often one is unable to repeat word by word what was said (...)*

Nancy gave Lorraine the following advice:

5. *it could be interesting for you to try not to look at the transcription too quickly, and instead to read the questions before, and to listen to the cassette for the answers to the questions, even listening several times, stopping the cassette, you see you are in a learning phase and you have the right to listen twice, even several times, looking for comprehension cues*

whereas Lorraine saw things differently:

6. *I think that it would be better for me to start with small texts, small cassettes which are not very long, and with simpler English*

Nancy acknowledged Lorraine's decision, as the discussion was closed by the following exchange:

7. Nancy: *if you find that too difficult, you have the freedom to leave it if you want to*
Lorraine: *yes I think I'd rather continue working with BS which I like*

These extracts form a clear example of how the adviser's verbal behavior is linked to the nature of advising:

- a) advising is focused on the learning process much more than on the learning content:

Nancy did not check if Lorraine's self-evaluation of her oral comprehension work was

⁶ All quotations from the advising sessions have been translated into English. They are originally in French.

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correct, but she broke in when she felt that Lorraine's work procedure was not fully adequate. On the other hand, Nancy did not evaluate Lorraine's comprehension level: the important criteria for her was how Lorraine herself related the resources to her level;

b) advising is non-decisional, and not founded on a power relationship: Nancy made her point of view quite clear to Lorraine but did not impose it on her. The way she expressed it draws on the linguistic forms for suggestion and advice (as in quotation 5 "*it could be interesting for you to..*"), and at the end of the discussion she explicitly states that it remains Lorraine's decision;

c) advising is retro-active, negotiative, non-programmable and not programmed: the elements that Nancy chose to discuss were all prompted by what Lorraine chose to mention in her account. At the beginning of the session, Nancy did not know what Lorraine had actually done among the set of materials she had chosen. On the other hand, Lorraine did not seem to agree with Nancy's suggestion, and one is led to think that, as Nancy reasserted Lorraine's control over her learning procedures, Lorraine had reached her decision and would drop RL.

d) advising deals with a specific coherent conceptual framework, that of language didactics: quotations 4 and 5 clearly indicate that the information given by Nancy deals exclusively with concepts and tools relevant to the field of language didactics. Moreover, the information given is not presented as "the best way" to learn: it is much more focused on giving expert criteria to get Lorraine to re-assess her analysis and leave her the freedom and responsibility of improving "her own way".

At that point, one could argue that a more clearly "directive" decision-making from Nancy, as one would expect from a teacher, would be more effective. However, it is very important to realize that the nature of self-directed learning itself makes any directivity ineffective. As the adviser's activity is clearly separate from the learner's activity and the advising process is clearly separate from the learning process, advisers cannot indeed impose on learners, let alone enforce, any decision they would make "in the learner's interest". Moreover, any decision by the adviser which gives priority to the acquisition of the linguistic content will slow down the development of the learner's autonomy, which is essential for efficient self-directed learning.

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Advisers are thus conscious that there is a tension between the objective of linguistic acquisition and the objective of learning competence development, and that the “learning to learn” objective requires time. Nancy made this very explicit to Lorraine, as in AS1:

8. (...) *it is important for you to take the time to test various materials, so that we will have a better idea of what you like*

The verbal interaction as a trigger for behavioural change.

The following advising session (AS3) opened with this remark from Lorraine:

9. *Well in fact there is a small problem and I would like us to change the materials, RL especially, because I have a lot of problems in terms of oral comprehension and perhaps it would be better if we chose to work on oral expression, so that I will speak and surely afterwards my comprehension will improve*

Nancy then engaged in a discussion of Lorraine’s comprehension difficulties, seeming to take no notice of Lorraine’s decision to drop comprehension work altogether:

10. *Could you describe some of your problems to me? What were you working on? (...) and how did you proceed?*

This question was answered in the following manner by Lorraine;

11. *I read the questions before now, I try to find what it is about and then I try to note down everything that I have managed to understand and to answer the questions at the same time (...) then I stop [the cassette] and listen again, quite often for sure!*

Lorraine indicated thus that, contrary to what she had induced Nancy (and us) to believe from what she said in AS2, she had put Nancy’s advice into practice: she had indeed worked on RL again, and she had worked with the procedure that Nancy had described to her (cf. quotations 3 and 5).

During AS3, Lorraine was interactively quite active and the exchanges were more numerous than in AS2. As Lorraine did not fully agree with the procedure that Nancy had suggested, they rediscussed the information given by Nancy in AS2. Lorraine was asked to express the way in which she saw things:

12. *there are many things which I do not understand and I feel that I am not getting anywhere and it irritates me*

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13. because of the fact that I could not understand immediately, I wasted time listening again and again

Nancy was then able to add more detailed information relevant to learning to learn, meanwhile giving Lorraine psychological support:

14. I think you are a bit hard on yourself, don't forget that you are in a learning phase, if you understood everything the material would be of no use (...) it is normal for you to find it's difficult this is how you will make progress

At the end of the episode on comprehension work, Nancy was brought to re-assert her position as adviser:

15. I am not a teacher who sets you work. If you do not have the time to do everything, you are completely free to work only on one of the materials

During the following session (AS4), most of the discussion was devoted to oral expression work, which shows that Lorraine did go through her decision to put more emphasis on improving her speaking skills. Nonetheless, towards the end of AS4, Lorraine noted:

16. I also listened to RL again and it is true that I hear better through listening again and again, and also when I know in advance what it deals with, I can fill in the answers better. And so I will keep on with RL

The extracts here illustrate how advising can trigger off behavioral change in learners through the negotiation process which is at the heart of the advising conversation. In AS2, Nancy had enforced no decision on Lorraine, but she did give herself the right to discuss Lorraine's positive account of her comprehension method (cf. quotations 2 and 3) in the light of her own didactic expertise. She then gave Lorraine information on the didactic concept of comprehension and suggested to her new methodological procedures for comprehension activities (quots. 4 and 5). In the same manner, in AS3, she allowed herself to discuss Lorraine's decision to change her linguistic objectives, meanwhile she explicitly acknowledged Lorraine's total freedom of decision (quots. 14 and 15). Her advising behavior gave Lorraine the opportunity to re-assess her own approach. One important element that the extracts show is that the negotiation that takes place between adviser and learner is valuable because it enables learners to engage in an internal negotiation procedure with themselves. When Lorraine started her self-directed work after AS2, she obviously re-negotiated with herself the decision expressed in AS2, using the information that Nancy had provided her during the advising session, and she decided on her own to try out her adviser's

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methodological suggestions. Quotations 12 and 13 show that Lorraine was not fully satisfied with the experimentation since she felt irritated and found she was not very efficient, but in return she had gained an experience which allowed the advising conversation in AS3 to go beyond what was reached in AS2. Quotation 16 demonstrates how Lorraine kept on a personal negotiating process which brought her to finally internalize some of the criteria that her adviser had discussed.

This stresses another important dimension of advising. The adviser's action trusts in the learner's capacity to adapt the adviser's contribution to his/her advantage. This is why, as we see in our case study, advisers can be effective without taking decisions in the learner's place. But on the other hand, they can only be effective if they make their "expert" criteria explicit to the learners. Their action is thus neither imposition nor "laissez-faire": it is based on reiterative negotiation.

Advising as a trigger for non-programmable change.

It is obvious from what I have discussed above that some learning to learn did occur in Lorraine. But what her case study also shows is that there is a discrepancy between what the adviser hopes for in terms of learner change and the changes that really occur to the learner.

First of all, quotation 16 shows that advising is dependent on the learning context. In AS4, Lorraine briefly mentioned her comprehension work in passing: the issue of oral comprehension did not seem to be vital to her any more so it was no longer an important conversational topic. Even if Nancy had wanted to discuss it (which she obviously did not), the simple fact that it had ceased to be a cognitive focus for Lorraine would have made the discussion useless. Lorraine's freedom of choice and control goes as far as the areas where change may occur.

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Secondly, a very interesting finding was uncovered through the comparison of the two sets of data⁷ : the data from the recordings of the advising session differed from both Nancy's evaluation of Lorraine's evolution and from Lorraine's own description, as revealed in the interviews.

In her interview, Lorraine showed that she had a clear understanding of the advising sessions:

17. work took place when I was alone at home (...) the advising sessions gave me help, gave me ideas for my work, small bits of advice (...) I never felt I had to follow them (...)

She saw the advising session in terms of an expert/non-expert relationship and she had trust in the adviser's expertise:

18. the advice she gives is generally useful because she knows what she is talking about. I would test the things she suggested to see how I could use them

But her own conclusion can be judged at first as rather disappointing:

19. the advising sessions helped me but they did not really change the way I work

Nancy, for her part, seemed to share Lorraine's point of view. She felt that

20. Lorraine very much kept to her own criteria, she changed a little but not much, and she was under the impression that her advising role was not understood by Lorraine:

21. I felt that Lorraine considered that my role was to provide her with materials and that all the rest did not really interest her

It seems to me that the difference between Lorraine's and Nancy's evaluations and the conclusions that can be drawn from the recordings of advising sessions can be explained by considering other dimensions that play a part in the advising conversation.

The analysis of the recorded sessions in fact confirms that the way in which Lorraine talked about her oral comprehension work evolved little: she kept analyzing the difficulties in terms of length, speech speed and vocabulary. It shows that her words reflect the abstract principles which underlie her conception of language learning. But her learning procedures for oral comprehension deeply changed: whereas in AS3 she said she was going to drop comprehension work altogether, not only did she continue working with comprehension resources but she also did so in more varied ways (using short and longer materials, didactic

⁷ As presented above: firstly, the recordings of the advising sessions and secondly, the recordings of the interviews with Lorraine and Nancy. .

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or authentic materials, sound or video cassettes). In her interview, when the researcher asked her to comment on this point, she stated:

22. It is true that at the beginning these materials frightened me, the length, the speed, but it was perhaps just a question of confidence, and through constant repetition, I managed to understand better,

and she clearly attributes this evolution to Nancy's advice:

23. Nancy insisted, she encouraged me to try again while saying " if that is really too difficult we will stop" so I kept on with this method whereas I would perhaps have given it up and finally I have started to like it

This is how she conceives of the adviser's role:

24. the adviser is there to give you a push when you can't manage to work as you'd like to

If we put quotations 17, 22 and 23 together, we can again see the importance of the verbal interaction between learner and adviser.

The difference between Nancy's rather negative appreciation of Lorraine's development and the picture that emerges from the analysis of the advising session can be explained, in my view, because it reflects a difference between what can be expected from advising and what is actually achieved through the interaction of a specific learner and a specific adviser. In terms of general expectations, Nancy's criteria for evaluation are mainly situated at the level of Lorraine's decisional principles (quot. 21). But Lorraine's evolution is on the level of her learning behavior, for instance, putting up with her lack of performance (such as not understanding all the words), or using new procedures (such as listening several times to the same extract).

Again, the data show that Lorraine's behavioural change is founded on her understanding of the advising session, and more specifically of the nature of the verbal interaction (quot. 25), the interactive roles (quot. 26) and the expertise of the adviser (quot. 27). She also never felt either constrained or imposed upon by Nancy (quot. 17).

25. at the beginning I thought that it was like an individual class then Nancy explained to me how that went on (...) it is true that I was surprised because you have an English teacher in front of you she does not speak English to you (..) finally you adapt to that and you work at home and Nancy gives you advice

26. She gave me advice, then I would test her suggestions at home and see whether her method worked better

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27. *generally it went better because she knows her job, she knows more about the methods than I do*

This leads me to stress two points:

- The influence that advisers have on the development of learners' learning autonomy is determined by the interaction modes which they set up during the advising sessions, and in particular by the verbal explanation of their advising role, which enables them to make the advising situation understandable to learners. Learners then feel able, as Lorraine did, to take up new options (through trial and error) and to control their learning process (through acceptance or refusal of the adviser's help);
- The evolution that learners undergo with the help of advising conversations is never exactly what advisers expect or work for, as learners' free will and understanding of the situation are the main trigger to change. Nevertheless, one can doubt if change would ever occur without the determined action of advising.

Language for advising

The case study presented here vividly illustrates how powerful an organizational tool language is for the development of learning autonomy. As I have already pointed out, the to-and-fro movement between experiencing self-directed learning and reflecting on this experience is fundamental to the whole concept of SDLLS. In advising sessions, learners and advisers do not carry out any language learning, they "talk about" language learning. But they do not talk about language learning "in general". On the contrary, they talk about the "real" and contextualized learning activity that a specific learner is experiencing. Thus, for adequate advising to take place, there must be effective learning activity, whatever the type, the content or the quality⁸. The advising session is thus used to set an interval of time during which learners can engage in the metacognitive reflection necessary for the development of their learning competence.

⁸ A "low quality" learning activity could for example refer to the situation in which a learner feels he/she did not work sufficiently. He/she then may feel that there is "nothing to talk about" but talking about why he/she could not work sufficiently is of value for the development of his/her self-directed learning competence.

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The advising session is also used as an interface between the learners and their activity: the act of talking to the adviser about what they have done, or what they plan to do, creates a symbolic gap between them and their work : it is then easier for them to view it differently. The focus that advising puts on the activity of language learning and not on linguistic acquisition leads learners to give importance to aspects which they may tend to hand over to teachers or course book authors, thus becoming more aware of the control which they can have on their own learning process. But the fundamental element is that while talking to the adviser, learners are in fact talking to themselves. As we have just seen with Lorraine, learners are led to gradually internalize into their own internal cognitive processes, the reflexive elements which are structured in advising through an intersubjective process between learner and adviser. One can truly recognize here that learners become autonomous, that is, fully able to decide by themselves.

The advising session provides the conditions for what can be described as the conceptual or epistemological rupture that learners need in order to engage in the transformation of their representations and behaviours. In addition, as advising sessions are concerned with the reality of each learner's specific learning experience, they allow learners to talk openly about their personal learning practices, some of which they may have kept hidden from their language teachers for fear of disapproval. Thus the verbal interaction with the adviser allows them to give legitimate existence to these practices.

One can then see how important it is that advisers and learners share a common language. Using the learner's mother tongue for advising⁹ is a deliberate choice in SDLLS. Talking about one's learning activity is something highly technical for learners: they must feel sufficiently at ease to be able to express themselves fluently and appropriately. But efficiency is not the only justification for the choice of the mother tongue: it also relates to the fact that the relationship is not founded on power, as learners will not feel at a disadvantage in the interaction. It also makes the objective of the advising sessions quite explicit: through the use of their mother tongue, learners are thus made aware that the advising sessions are not work

⁹ This entails that the adviser feels fluent in the learner's mother tongue. When the choice of the learner's mother tongue is not possible, the advising conversation may be in a common language in which both learner and adviser feel fluent. Otherwise, there can be no advising conversation as such.

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sessions, and advisers clearly indicate that they do not use the advising sessions to evaluate the learner's communicative competence in the foreign language.

One can deduce from this that the relational modalities for advising are complex¹⁰. They require specific communicative competence and specific expertise in advisers, and specific conditions in the advising context: I will now discuss these three dimensions.

The communicative characteristics of advising

The advising conversation is a one-to-one communicative situation between a learner and an adviser¹¹ which rests on the assumption that through a discussion about their learning procedures, learners will be able a) to transform the conceptions which underlie the decisions they make about learning a language, and b) to increase the methodological repertoire at their disposal when they actually work on learning the language. This is a very different situation from the teaching situation: the teacher-learner relationship is of a different nature as it links a group of learners to an individual teacher.

As I have already stated above, the difference between the adviser's and the teacher's role is reflected in the difference in the interactive modalities. In the classroom, the teacher's role is to organize the learning activities: for example, the teacher verbally gives instructions, designates pupils, and motivates their involvement in the class activities. The teacher's role is also about assessing pupil's knowledge: he/she will verbally request answers to questions, and then confirm or reject these answers. Teachers also have to organize and regulate the group's discourse: they will open and close exchanges, distribute turns and regulate interactive discipline (Coulthard, 1977).

In advising, as I have illustrated in the case study, the adviser's role relies on different communicative practices. To trigger the explanation process which will lead learners to reflect on aspects of their learning competence they may want to change, advisers in particular have to reformulate the learner's words into their own, "more expert" words, to supplement it with

¹⁰ Nancy's case shows that even an experienced adviser can get the impression that she is not successful, while at the same time objective data can prove that she does have a very positive influence.

¹¹A few SDLLS sometimes offer advising sessions for small groups of learners. ,

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didactical information, give their opinion on what the learner says (that the learner may freely discuss), to make suggestions (that the learner may freely accept or reject) (Gremmo, 1995). The essential element for advisers is not to take decisions concerning learning on the part of the learner, and to adopt a helping attitude. This determines very precisely the linguistic forms that the adviser will use. For example, to make sure that the suggestions they make will be understood as suggestions and not instructions, advisers tend to use attenuating intonation and highly-modalized forms such as: “perhaps you could..”, “what could perhaps be interesting for you is..”.

The organization of the interaction must also seek to reflect the greater equality that self-directed learning implies between the learner’s and the adviser’s interactional statuses. This relates in particular to the control of the interaction. In the advising interactive modality, there is a contradiction between the didactic situation and the social conditions of the two participants. The didactic situation implies that it is the learners’ role to monitor the interaction, as they are in charge of their learning and the adviser is there to help. This means that learners should for example open and close the session, or introduce conversational topics. However, the social conditions tip the scales towards the advisers. The advising sessions take place in their institution, they have professional expertise: common social rules imply that advisers have the right, even the duty, to control the interaction. So in my experience, the fact that learners take an active part in controlling the advising interaction (by actually opening and closing it, by introducing the discussion topics, as Lorraine did in the case study) is representative of their assuming the responsibility for their learning activity as a whole, and more specifically of their use of the advising session as a truly personal “helping scheme”.

Thus, one function of the adviser’s interactive role is to bring learners to view themselves as the person in charge of the interaction. Advisers do so by openly explaining their respective roles. They also do so by gradually refusing to assume the management of the interaction, leaving their turn as soon as learners attempt to break in, or letting learners deal with the task of filling in the silences which, without exception, do occur. As one can see, the dialogical communicative competence that is in coherence with the characteristics of advising is quite specific, and the development of such a competence is one of the significant elements at stake

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in the training of advisers. Without this communicative change, advising conversations run the risk of remaining teaching in disguise in which, because of the “natural” asymmetry of the learner/adviser relationship, advisers would, more or less unconsciously, impose their decisions, even with the best of intentions. In a self-directed learning context, the coherence between the adviser’s role and the adviser’s language necessarily implies that the advising conversation should truly be a negotiative situation which enables learners to give it meaning, and in which advisers are fully aware that they only have part of the information and that they cannot pre-determine what learners will achieve.

The nature of the adviser’s expertise

Throughout this article, I have used the term “advising conversation” to refer to the interactive modality. It is now time to point out that the term “conversation” here is not to be understood as “small talk” or “friendly” conversation. The term conversation here is used to differentiate advising from teaching, and to emphasize the fact that advising is a one-to-one relationship where the two participants have equal status. But it is also very important to understand that an advising conversation has a specific structure which makes it a “professional” situation.

The advising conversation has a well-defined focus and refers to a well-defined domain of both knowledge and know-how. In addition to the specific communicative competence I have just discussed, the expertise of advisers also deals with other areas of professional competence. Advisers are competent at analyzing the learner’s contribution to the discourse using the specific frame of reference of foreign language didactics, as this scientific field both defines and delimits their field of action. They are competent at analyzing what the learners say in order to indicate inaccuracies or gaps in the learner’s set of mental representations, cognitive sets and methodological procedures as far as they refer to foreign language and foreign language learning. They are also competent to provide information, suggest procedures, and describe learning activities which learners would not have thought of alone. Their contribution essentially, if not exclusively, consists of helping learners to develop their language learning competence and to become more autonomous learners. It follows that the adviser’s expertise comprises:

- detailed science-based knowledge about the nature of language, about the concepts

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which organize this field of reference and their evolution, as well as the methodological know-how referring to the didactic methodologies which constitute common knowledge;¹²

- detailed science-based knowledge of the nature of the language learning process, and especially of the nature of self-directed learning and its implications for the learner;
- detailed knowledge of the specific SDLLS in which the adviser is working, including detailed knowledge of the resources available.¹³

One can thus see that the adviser's expertise is multidisciplinary, since it comprises theoretical methodological aspects of various fields of linguistics¹⁴, psychology, and language didactics. This expertise determines the quality of the mental analysis that advisers will make during an advising conversation and that of the contributions which they will offer. This specific expertise is thus a fundamental factor for the success of SDLLS.

Specific conditions in the advising context

The conditions in which advising sessions take place can have an important influence on learners' understanding of their role. First of all, it is crucial that advising sessions should be given institutional existence. Thought must be given to the material conditions in which the sessions will function: a specific place furnished with the conversational objective in view, pleasant surroundings, and privacy, are signals given to learners that the moment is seen as relevant by the institution.

Advising can only play its role fully if it is inserted between two work sessions on the learner's part. It seems to me very important that learners should be aware from the very beginning that there will be an organized alternation of periods of work and regular "reflexive

¹²This means that advisers are not as much specialized in one specific methodology as they are able to present learners with various approaches, discussing their methodological proposals, techniques and types of activities.

¹³For example: types of resources, types of equipment, etc. Again the important point is to be able to discuss the rationale of the various options which the SDLLS makes available.

¹⁴For example, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, general linguistics, descriptive linguistics of the various languages concerned, etc.

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intervals” of a different nature from their working sessions, so that that they consider the advising sessions as an integral part of the SDLLS .

The advising sessions also benefit when they can take place within a sufficient time space: the advising relationship has developmental objectives which can only be carried out with a certain time framework, so that advising can be more than just solving material problems. On the other hand, it is also necessary to mark the limits within which it is organized and to clearly explain to learners what time space is available for them.

My last remark deals with the importance of a relational continuity. The advising relationship is a changing relationship and, in my case study, I have shown how the adviser has to balance her action between imposition and laissez-faire in differentiated ways according to her understanding of the learner’s evolution. On the other hand, learners need time to build up the communicative routines that will make it gradually easier for them first to take part in, and then to take control of the advising conversation. There is thus a need for the setting-up of a “permanent” interactive learner/adviser pair that will ensure that a discursive, learning and relational history is established to allow for the development of the learner’s autonomy.

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