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# Teaching business French with macrosimulation

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on a description of an innovative approach to the teaching of foreign languages. It is constructed on the notion that learning is a highly individualized process that depends essentially on each person's life experience: his or her history. As a consequence, and in order to best meet the needs of students, any learning structure needs to be highly individualized. In turn, such individualization requires personalized feedback/information for the problems encountered by students. This paper describes a solution to the above issues which consists of (a) an operational learning space constructed around a "macrosimulation": a long-term learner-managed simulation designed to engage each participant's personal history thus eliciting each person's learning needs and (b) a support structure based on the postmodern notion of "rhizome" which meets learners' needs by providing a model for sequencing learning activities based not on traversing a pre-determined network of knowledge representation nodes, but rather on the creation by the learner of a dynamic, unpredicted and unpredictable sequencing of events. On the basis of the above principles, the paper details a possible implementation of a macrosimulation-based, rhizomatically-constructed, course/set of activities focusing on the teaching of business French for university students in the United States.

***Keywords:*** *macrosimulation, simulation, business French, language learning, rhizomatic, autonomy*

## 1. Introduction

In his article entitled 'Reflections on language-learning in the 21st century: The rhizome at work' (Lian, A-P., 2011), Andrew Lian described two concepts: macrosimulation and rhizomatic language learning. The present article outlines the implementation of both concepts in the context of a business French course, thus simultaneously partially re-describing them and enriching them.

Traditionally, business language courses have revolved around a textbook focusing on the study of technical terms linked to a series of hands-on activities, such as case studies. This article will describe an approach which breaks away from that model and will discuss a business French implementation of that approach in the context of universities in the USA (although the principles discussed can be applied to any business language context).

As stated by Annette Sampon-Nicolas: "The primary object of most business French courses is to master a new vocabulary, and to hone the four skills while learning about the French business world … Business French courses have frequently been used to prepare for an exam, The *Certificat Pratique de Français Commercial et Economique* (the Practical Certificate of Commercial and Economic French) offered by the *Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris* (CCIP) (the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry)" (Sampon-Nicolas, 1997, p. 187). This approach presents serious disadvantages for the learning process. For instance, as business practices and interactions are changing rapidly, literally from month to month, the teacher must constantly update the material presented in the textbook and, although case studies enable students to get a better understanding of cultural differences in the business world, other aspects of language learning, e.g. communicative competence, are not fully supported. Furthermore, grammatical accuracy and other linguistic elements, such as pronunciation, intonation or body language are seldom part of business courses. Regrettably, they also fail to provide an overview of the diverse cultural practices of the Francophone world[1] as business French courses have

[1] Such is the case of Québec : "La province, qui entretient avec les Etats-Unis, des échanges économiques plus importants que la France, est à toutes fins utiles absentes des contenus des cours de français de spécialité" (Fontenay, 1997). The same is true of the Francophone countries of Africa.

remained resolutely focused on France. In a modern pedagogic perspective where, at least according to some, learner knowledge is constructed individually according to each person's logical and representational systems (e.g. Lian, 2004, p. 3), the challenge facing business language specialists will be to develop the above missing elements. It will also involve positioning the students at the heart of the learning process. This is to counter practices in traditional business courses where the teacher, more than in other courses, is perceived as the holder of a technical somewhat esoteric knowledge and occupies center stage, thus leaving little room for learners' individual expression and personal contributions. In addition, studies have clearly indicated that, in order to respond to the demands of the international marketplace, and in particular, of French-owned companies in the United States, "we need to prepare our students better by emphasizing oral communication, and the reading and writing of authentic documents" (Sampon-Nicolas, 1997). A similar finding was documented in 'Foreign Languages and International Business: Meeting the Demands of the 90s' (Moore and McGoey, 1995). The solution proposed at the time was to assign students extensive research projects on the Web so that they could "learn about employment opportunities, study economic developments … while using their newly acquired French business terms in authentic settings" (Sampon-Nicolas, 1997, p. 187). More than ten years later the situation has not changed much and the need for developing innovative teaching approaches is even stronger.

Keeping the above in mind, our article seeks to offer an original perspective on this area of language study which is gaining importance and popularity because of its practicality. Our goal is, ideally, to remodel the concept of business French courses so as to make them properly learner-centered. In order to achieve this, we suggest, as a point of departure, a learning structure that has already been used for general language courses: *ongoing self-managed macrosimulation* (cf. Lian, A-P. & Mestre, 1985; and also *simulation globale*, a variation on the same idea developed a decade later, Yaiche, 1996).

## 2. The notion of macrosimulation

A macrosimulation is a long-term simulation where participants are required to create a specific lifelike environment—such as a village, a college campus, a school. They build houses and other buildings consistent with the foreign environment, generate local institutions and develop local ways of life. They select roles and personae, determine their characters and act out their roles for significant periods of time e.g. a whole semester. The simulation develops naturally according to the students' interactions provided that they conform to the specific cultural constraints of the situations that they have chosen to act out. As an example, if the simulation occurs in a French village, then behaviors and interactions appropriate to a French village will be expected. In other words, the simulation is totally under the control of the students but there are cultural and linguistic constraints to respect (this may not always happen immediately as the simulation itself serves to introduce and raise awareness of appropriate cultural and linguistic knowledge. In the beginning such knowledge will simply not be there). Over time, participants develop a sense of their own history within the simulation and their personal stakes change: they are no longer just doing an exercise as their "self" is at risk, just as in real life. They now have something real to lose: their self. Their interactions in the simulation are video-recorded and time is set aside for observation and analysis of their performances by teachers, other students, even the general public (adapted from Lian, A-P., 2004; cf. also Lian, A-P., 2011; Lian & Mestre, 1985; Mestre & Lian, 1983). Feedback from the analysis suggests future learning activities and usually generates a learning plan potentially involving all kinds of work such as individualized pronunciation lessons, listening comprehension exercises, familiarization with language and culture in contact, consultations with teachers, other experts and native speakers. The use of macrosimulation is designed to enlarge the range of communicative activities, imitate real life as closely as possible, be flexible, and endow students with the freedom to determine their learning path. In summary:

Students entering the system engage in complex tasks which create confrontation between their logical and representational systems and the task requirements. In doing so, their needs will emerge, they will be identified and, subsequently, will be supported by human, material or technological resources (Lian, 2011, pp. 11-12).

For our business French course, we have chosen to simulate a situation which offers boundless possibilities, closely resembles real life and is particularly relevant to college students: a job search in France. Obviously, teachers and students may

agree on a totally different simulation, or opt for another Francophone country of reference.

In France, there exists an organization called ***Pôle Emploi***, an employment space supported by the government which centralizes all the tools necessary for job-seekers to secure employment. The students' task will be to re-create a *Pôle Emploi* environment. The macrosimulation will not only enable them to practice the four language skills actively and creatively as defined by the ACTFL guidelines (Swender, Conrad & Vicars, 2012): speaking, listening, writing and reading, but also to explore cultural differences in the business world thus satisfying the National Standards in Foreign Languages' requirement of the so-called 5Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities) (ACTFL et al., 2012).

### 3. A rhizomatic approach and infrastructure

In order for this system to function optimally and help solve specific problems encountered by students, access to cultural and linguistic information is necessary. Such access can be provided in a variety of ways but, nowadays, the obvious solution lies in Information Technology (IT). An appropriate infrastructure is currently being developed on the basis of work by Lian, A. B. (1996), González, J. A. & Lian, A-P. (2008), Lian. A-P. (2004, 2011), Lian, A-P. & Mestre (1985), Moore, C. R. & Federico, S. (1997a, 1997b). The infrastructure requires cultural and linguistic taxonomies which, in turn, form the underlying framework for a multimedia database of cultural and linguistic events. These taxonomies are partially based on John Munby's seminal work, *Communicative Syllabus Design* (1998) and heavily modified and supplemented by the work of Lian, A. B. (1996) and Lian, A-P (2004). Inter alia, the taxonomy includes such categories as "function", "register", "activity", "time setting" and "psychosocial setting". The entire system itself, is still very much under development, containing annotated media plus linked resources, lessons and exercises constructed according to principles of awareness-raising and autonomy (Lian, A-P. 1987). In its final form, the system includes a social network comprising other learners, expert teachers, members of various professions and native-speaking general public.

The infrastructure is constructed on the assumption that it will be used in a *rhizomatic* fashion (although that is not in fact a requirement of use – it will function in any structure). The notion of "rhizome" is derived initially from botany and transported into the domain of critical theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This provides an interesting metaphor for processes associated with teaching and learning. A rhizome is not unlike a ginger root where all of the nodes of the root are potentially interconnected. It provides a model of sequencing learning activities that is not based on traversing a pre-determined network of knowledge representation nodes, but on the creation of a dynamic, unpredicted and unpredictable sequencing of events where connections and flows to and from knowledge representation nodes are determined by students' needs and, to some extent, inclinations. The following, slightly modified, quote from Lian, 2011 will explain further:

> A rhizome can be thought of as consisting of a set of conditions which allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This is the very antithesis of a tree structure. A rhizomatic structure can be thought of as a structure which contains components where each and every component is connected to each and every other component of the living, i.e. organic and potentially infinite, structure. Within a learning structure, this means that students are able to connect from any activity or information point to any other activity or information point according to perceived need [or even inclination]. A rhizomatic structure should not be thought of as chaotic but rather as a self-regulating structure responsive to the learners' needs as determined by the mechanisms in place (human or otherwise) for determining such needs. Thus, in a rhizomatic system, whatever path students follow will be determined by the needs that they identify or negotiate with teacher, advisors or even technology as they attempt to perform cultural and linguistic tasks. Macrosimulations are, by their very nature, rhizomatic self-regulating structures. (Lian 2011, p. 11)

The diagram below is a symbolic representation of the connections of a fragment of a rhizomatic structure where, characteristically, any point in the network of nodes has the possibility of connecting to any other point. The diagram does not represent the connections actually made by any specific user. It only represents the *potential* to connect. How students *actually* connect is a matter for decision at the time of use of the network. In

particular, it situates the student in control the network either directly or through a set of tools as well as through the connections of each node accessed. Each node is itself much more complex than indicated in the diagram. For instance, the Dialogue Generator node might contain hundreds of dialogues (sub-nodes) generated by the node from its connection to the Multimedia Database or the multimedia materials external to the database. As a consequence, the network can grow to extraordinary levels of complexity in terms of the available, but not imposed, pathways but it is not likely to be nearly as complex as the unpredicted and unpredictable requirements of the myriad students using it. Importantly, from both a teaching and a research perspective, students' connections and activities can be monitored and stored and individual and collective feedback provided – and the system can also be modified accordingly. Over time, as a result of students' interactions with the system new connections will be added to the network to meet students' needs, either by teachers or by the students themselves, resulting in potentially massive growth of the network.

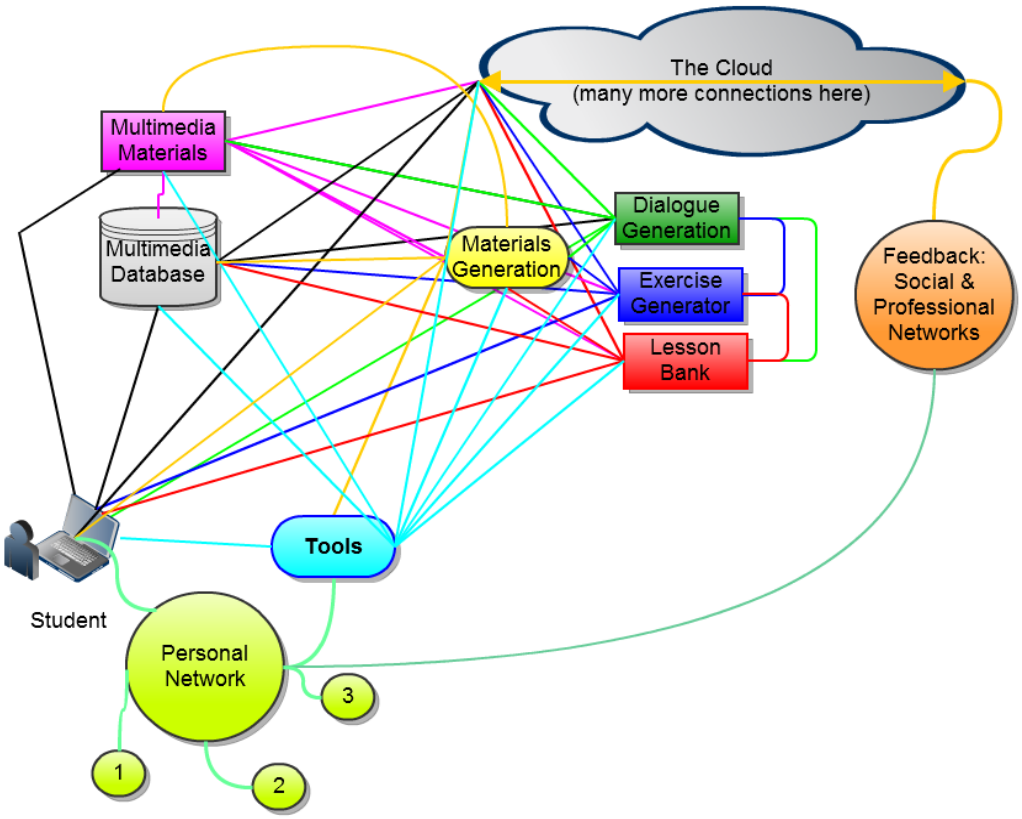


**Figure 1** Fragment of a rhizomatic learning environment for foreign culture/language learning

## 4. The macrosimulation

In a macrosimulation students engage in complex tasks which create confrontation between their logical and representational systems and the task requirements. In so doing, their needs emerge in new unpredicted and unpredictable directions. They are identified and, subsequently, supported by human, material or technological resources.

As a general principle, the first step of a macrosimulation involves each student deciding on the role they wish to play out. Each role, in turn, is connected to a large number of potential activities. Students organize their "lives" by defining the tasks at hand, doing research by consulting authentic documents available on their database or on the Web, preparing the different stages of the simulation and acting them out. Each activity creates a new focus for reflection as well as a raft of new activities. The process is open-ended, more or less infinite in its possibilities and lends itself to all kinds of teaching structures, both traditional and non-traditional: a one semester or two semester course, a refresher course for professionals, an intensive summer course, a short course. Students may be language majors or business majors (perhaps minoring in languages), business people or, for that matter, language teachers. To ensure rapid development of activities and interaction, students probably need to have completed at least an intermediate level course in the target language. Ideally, they should be somewhat autonomous and self-motivated, as they will be directly involved in and responsible for their learning process although the macrosimulation itself automatically encourages autonomy development. Teachers act more as conductors and guide, they advise the students, provide suggestions and feedback, supply research tools, correct mistakes, comment on discussions choices. In short, they intervene when needed, but are no longer the focus of class attention.

We will, now examine in some detail four essential (and, to that extent, predictable) stages in our business macrosimulation: initiation of role assignment, job advertisements, the candidate's portfolio and job interview, and we will identify the kinds of activities suitable for each stage.

While this sequencing may seem imposed, and therefore in contradiction with the spirit of macrosimulation which is directed by organic development of the simulation, in reality, in the French context, this sequence of steps is, with few exceptions, conventionally predetermined and mandatory for success.

### 4.1 Role assignment and initiation of role play: listening, speaking, reading, writing, cultural awareness

The first task for students is to choose a role for themselves e.g. job-seeker, employer, employee, advisor, consultant, office administrator, etc. As their roles and the simulation evolve, students may find themselves becoming the employer rather than the job-seeker, an office administrator rather than an employee according to circumstances. Besides the three main roles of counselor, job-seeker and recruiter, many other roles are available: friends, family members, business and personal contacts, referees such as former employers or teachers, alumni associations, secretaries, receptionists, director of human resources, etc. Students are able to select from several different protagonists thus setting up a variety of formal and informal interactions.

At the beginning of the macrosimulation, students are asked how they imagine job-seeking and the employment culture in France. The teacher then analyzes and discusses students' understandings and possible misconceptions. Cultural differences will impact heavily on the role play.

In France, the largest recruiter is the public sector, or *fonction publique*. This is considered the most desirable employer owing to job security. Unemployment is high among young graduates with no work experience, and well paid secure jobs (or CDI *Contrats à Durée indéterminée*) are very hard to come by. A job search is, therefore, a long, extremely competitive process which is often very stressful. Most young people are forced to accept a string of low paid internships or CDD (*Contrats à durée déterminée* - short term contracts) before landing their dream job, or any job for that matter. Many job-seekers have to rely on *piston* (connections) just to get an interview. While formal qualifications are extremely important throughout one's career, increasingly, job-seekers have to settle for jobs that are below their level of education and offer little or no security.

Before playing their parts, students preview short videos so as to clearly identify obvious differences between French and American general appearance and behavior. They study posture and body language as well as other physical

characteristics. They notice, for instance, that professional relationships are extremely formal while the dress code is somewhat different from the American "interview suit" and, paradoxically, is often more relaxed. They discover that handshaking is compulsory (and different from its American counterpart) when meeting someone and, that handshakes may be seen as revealing aspects of the candidates' personality, etc[2]. The teacher needs to attract the class attention to linguistic specificities as well. Students can also generate their own list of differences and discuss them as a group. While playing their roles, they seek to adjust their attitudes and general appearance to fit the models studied. The class will be the judge of the accuracy of each interpretation, with the assistance of the teacher as necessary, in order to disambiguate and/or raise the awareness of students to cultural and linguistic phenomena to which they had hitherto been blind.

4.2 Job advertisements: reading, writing

Besides the job listings available at the ***Pôle emploi***, job openings are available from many sources such as the Internet, newspapers, professional journals, university bulletin boards. Private employment agencies as well as temporary employment agencies such as Manpower also list job opportunities. It is even possible for job-seekers to contact private headhunters.

An initial task might consist of making lists of the main French multinational corporations listed in the CAC 40 (*Cotation Assistée en Continu* – a French stock market index listing companies). Each student might research one company (for instance, Danone, Bic, Sodexo) and prepare a presentation for the class. Students find it valuable to identify potential professional opportunities within these companies and formulate job descriptions. Students should also seek out employment opportunities in nongovernmental organizations or in major administrations, such as *la Poste* (the Post Office) or the SNCF (*Société Nationale des Chemins de fer français*: the French national railroad system). Many of these jobs are strictly limited to French citizens and recruitment occurs through competitive examinations.

After reading and selecting the advertisements that fit their skill set, students draft their own advertisements learning, in the process, how to advertise themselves and their knowhow. They will also learn how to use the abbreviations most commonly found in advertisements, e.g. *a* for *ans* (years); *tri. Fr/Ang/All* (trilingual French/English/German); etc. Teachers may also draw their attention to the importance of foreign language fluency for most positions as well as to the frequent use of abbreviations and acronyms and the necessity to unravel them, e.g. *Bac + 3* (High School Diploma + three years of college), HEC (*Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales*: the most prestigious business school in France). A comparison on these points with employment practices in the United States is beneficial. Allen Wood has noted that "the more that acronyms are examined, the more complex and diverse these expressions appear" (Wood, 2002). Acronyms may be cultural reflecting a French reality that has no American equivalent, e.g. SNCF or BNP, or vice versa e.g. AFL-CIO, or international with minute differences between French and English, e.g. EU and UE, IMF and FMI, OPEC and OPEP, etc.

Activities include finding advertisements, reading and understanding them, using them as models to write one's own and, finally, posting them. Students compare and evaluate the impact of specific advertisements. They rank them and choose the best. Translating advertisements, transcribing acronyms and abbreviations are other valuable class activities.

4.3 The candidate's portfolio: listening, speaking, reading, writing, cultural awareness

One of the most important tasks facing job-seekers is the creation of a portfolio which must mandatorily include:

- a cover letter
- a résumé
- references

*4.3.1 The cover letter*

There are two kinds of cover letter: the so-called spontaneous candidacy and the cover letter responding to a particular advertisement. Both follow the same rules.

Producing the cover letter sensitizes students to the difficult task of official letter-writing in the Francophone world. Writing skills are the hardest to acquire, and business letters are particularly challenging since the writer must comply with very strict rules.

[2] Many of these cultural differences are commented on and analyzed in Moore C. R. and Federico, S. (1997b).

Students need to peruse a large number of letters to extract the main conventions for layout, formatting, structure, addresses, signatures, etc. They will find this information on a multitude of sites which offer examples of cover letters, or *lettres de motivation*. Students collect many samples which will habituate them to the writing of dates and addresses, enable them to understand how to begin and conclude letters, how to address people in positions of authority, how to be respectful of hierarchy and, in so doing, they learn the keywords and idiomatic expressions needed to draft a "proper" letter.

Close attention should be paid to letter endings. As French culture is very demanding and respectful in its wording of formal letters, concluding formulae are both extremely diverse and intricate. Students make a list of the "endings" they find, and discover when and to whom they apply. Irène Finel-Honigmann summarizes American students' likely reactions to these formulae: "For the American student and business person, French business letters appear heavy and quaint in their elaborate endings and formulaic exigencies" (Finel-Honigman, 1997, p. 16). As a cultural exercise, students can imagine the kinds of misunderstandings and problems that may arise if they were to choose the wrong formulae.

More advanced students may try to unravel the historical background behind this phenomenon: "it is important to emphasize the correlation between the modern French business letter and its antecedents in the 18th century epistolary novel when stylistic formality and courtesy were tools of deception and manipulation" (Finel-Honigman, 1997).

An activity relevant to this issue might be to develop students' sensitivity to error. Teachers can present students with a "bad" letter, full of errors which they are required first to correct and then redraft appropriately. In the same vein, teachers can also have the students correct spelling and grammatical mistakes. Finally, whereas American job-seekers "boast" about their qualities and achievements, French candidates need to appear humble and low key in order not to seem arrogant and bombastic. As a consequence, the use of the conditional is the norm in French cover letters. While Americans use "will" and "can", the French use "would" and "could". This cultural requirement leads naturally to a review, if necessary, of the uses of the conditional in French and the completion of practice exercises.

Other cultural differences can be quite striking and deserve close attention. For instance, cover letters sometimes need to be handwritten. Handwriting and signatures carry a lot of weight as both are considered to be significantly reflective of the job applicant's personality. Corporations routinely hire graphologists to analyze applicants' handwriting. This attitude is reflected in the French cultural practice that encourages children and adolescents to construct, from quite an early age, their own original signature, in effect their trademark. Students could therefore analyze other students' handwriting and signatures as well as their own. They could compare their own everyday handwriting and signatures to French ones and identify and explain the differences.

Following these preliminaries, students draft two kinds of letters: a spontaneous candidacy addressed to a particular company not currently advertising for a position, and a letter which responds to an advertised position.

*4.3.2 The curriculum vitae (résumé)*

The résumé, or "*CV*" as it is known in French, is a key element in the job search. Résumés can take on different shapes in different contexts and students are asked both to review existing résumés and produce their own as appropriate to their specific role. Students can inspect the résumés of others in documents stored in the database.

Importantly, they can add to the database any new CVs that they discover or produce. The act of adding items to the databank helps give students an understanding of the structure and organization of resources thus introducing them to a new and interesting way of thinking about authentic resources, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, providing insights on how to define their own learning needs. Adding items also enlarges and enriches the resources for other users and the database keeps growing in response to each student's needs, some of which will correspond to those of other students. In the modern French tradition, candidates must still continue to provide a traditional document, typed on paper but, in addition, CVs are now published on Facebook, or provided as videos or even recorded on an iPhone. Ultimately the CV becomes both an audiovisual and a written exercise, as well as a cultural artifact to be studied and commented upon.

One of the first CV-related tasks students may undertake is simply to compare and contrast an

American and a French CV. Some sections are obviously similar: educational background, professional experience, computer knowhow, interests and pastimes. This exercise provides an opportunity for students to do some research on the European Education system. Students study, inter alia, differences between the prestigious, competitive *Grandes Ecoles* and the more open state universities as well as two year programs such as BTS *(Brevet de Technicien Supérieur,* Advanced technical certificate) and IUT (*Institut Universitaire de Technologie,* University Technological Institute). Popular university exchange programs, such as the famous Erasmus program are examined. These enable young people to discover the languages and cultures of their European partners. Having lived and studied in another country is a definite plus on a CV.

Again, this time at the linguistic level, the differences between Europe and the USA will be drawn out. These differences are striking in Europe, where knowledge of one, or preferably two languages, is a requirement for most jobs. Job-seekers must provide evidence of their level of oral and written fluency. Students may also be asked to do a self-evaluation of their own language skills.

In France, CVs used to require the candidate's picture, a home address and some personal information such as marital status, number of children, birth date, etc. In recent years, because of discrimination claims, the so called "anonymous" CV has been gaining favor. Students might discuss this development and weigh up the pros and cons taking into account the job-seekers' and the hiring company's potentially opposite viewpoints.

Finally, at the end of this process, students may decide to create video or oral CVs of their own. Besides accurate pronunciation, intonation and relevance, originality will also be taken into account and may play a decisive, and positive, role in determining the job-seeker's success.

*4.3.3 Other documents*

Students identify the kinds of documents that are necessary to complete their portfolios. These additional documents may include: reference letters from former employers, professors or mentors, samples of thank you letters following job interviews, samples of acceptance or rejection letters

As they perform the macrosimulation, students may also identify other original documents necessary for their candidacy.

4.4 The Job Interview: oral comprehension, listening, speaking, pronunciation, intonation, phonetic accuracy and writing skills

This part of the macrosimulation will emphasize oral skills as the students prepare and act out oral situations both informal and formal as outlined below.

*4.4.1 Informal components*

The orientation interview with the counselor and subsequent meetings to discuss the progress of the job search. Conversations with family and friends about job perspectives and the job market. Many relatives will probably volunteer *tuyaux* (hints) on how to proceed. Others may give the candidacy a little "push" by contacting their own network of potential employers. Conversations with potential referees — students will learn to use the informal *tu* in conversations with family or anyone close to the "candidate" but the formal *vous* with prospective employers. The *tu*/*vous* opposition is less trivial than first meets the eye and is embedded in a complicated and subtle relational construct which defies easy description. It needs to be experienced and practiced.

Students will also learn to deal with recorded messages on answering machines (the database will provide relevant sources). Students will judge the most professional and effective ones. The short voice messages on answering machines provide an excellent opportunity for developing oral skills.

*4.4.2 Formal components*

Formal components may include, telephone calls from recruiters to referees to verify the job-seekers' statements, or they might also include telephone contact with human resource personnel:

to invite candidates for interview
to respond to an interview invitation
to set up a date, time and place for the interview

After listening to sample telephone conversations, students begin to grow an awareness of idiomatic expressions and basic professional interaction rules such as: how to be welcoming, polite, clear, articulate and concise, when and how to repeat key information, and the obligation to remember greetings and farewell formulae. Emails are often used for first contacts. Although less formal than the cover letter, French emails tend to be more

intricate, courteous and formal than American emails.

*4.4.3 Job interview*

The second most important step in job-seeking is the job interview. Job-seekers need to prepare carefully before facing the recruiters. The Web offers a wealth of tools including advice on how to tackle interviews and tricky situations. It also offers sample illustrative videos made available through the database and is organized and commented upon by experienced (and sometimes inexperienced) language users and employment professionals (principally from outside the simulation) through one or more social networks.

Students watch informational videos advising job-seekers on such things as what to do, how to dress, what to say, how to behave, how to respond, how to deal with difficult questions. As an exercise, they make lists of things to do and things to avoid, and draft possible answers to challenging questions. Then, they preview job interview videos available through the web or the database. They analyze them, critique them, keep the best, and then create their own interview, act it out and film themselves.

Personal videos are viewed and critiqued in class and through social professional networks provided by the IT infrastructure. Drawing on diverse forms of assistance, students then identify ways to improve on their initial performance. While "perfection" is not required, the process should nonetheless lead to a better understanding of what constitutes a "good" job interview.

Interview videos accessed through the IT infrastructure provide students with key information on cultural differences relating to dress, attitude, and also language while feedback from peers, teachers and professional people through social and professional networks (online and personal) will refine the students' personal discoveries. As a consequence, students will learn that French interview techniques can be harsher than in the United States. For instance, it is common practice to ask questions deliberately designed to destabilize candidates just to gauge how they will respond. Furthermore, job-seekers are often interviewed in several languages besides their native tongue. As an exercise, students are taught to imagine typical "throw-off" questions, possible reactions to them as well as techniques for countering them.

More activities can be envisioned such as meeting with the counselor following the interview, dealing with a telephone call from the Human Resources department offering employment, negotiating future salary and benefits, writing a letter of acceptance, attending an orientation meeting at the new place of employment, etc.

As we can see, the macrosimulation can go on forever and could take two or even more semesters to complete. As the students live through the simulation they gradually gain an awareness of the main aspects of the French business world. Students then compare the entire hiring process in the United States and Francophone countries and outline cultural and other misunderstandings that may arise when crossing from one culture to the other. This of course is the ultimate goal of this approach.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we have sought to share a learning framework based on a concept of personal knowledge-construction which challenges the notion of lock-stepped synchrony of learning activities orchestrated by a teacher or textbook. Instead, it replaces the arbitrary sequencing of activities with a dynamic, student-directed, technology-supported learning network which is open, negotiable and negotiated, highly task-oriented and resource-based offering students the possibility to progress at their own pace in unpredicted and unpredictable directions through knowledge-representation networks in a relatively asynchronous fashion as determined, effectively, by their personal needs and histories (adapted in part from Lian, 1987).

While the approach described above is applicable to any aspect of language-learning, it is particularly appropriate to constrained contexts, such as business language and, as a consequence, becomes more manageable.

It is hoped that this approach makes a contribution both to the pedagogy of foreign language learning in general as well as to the study of business language.

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