Negotiating Solidarity

Negotiating Solidarity:
A Social-Linguistic Approach to Job Interviews

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P U B L I S H I N G

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> Self-presentation is an ineluctable fact of modern life in general and of organizational life in particular, and often may be an excellent way for people to achieve their goals.
>
> (Baumeister 1989, 59)

1.1. "I just wanted to make it look as if…": Impressions in job interviews

Clare's appointment is at 3 pm. She is meeting with Inès, who is responsible for the organisation of guided tours in one of Sydney's galleries. Clare has a bachelor's degree in Arts and Art History, and has been working voluntarily with an art gallery for the past few months. She has applied for a part-time job as a tour guide in the gallery where Inès works. Clare's intentions are to show that she is

> confident, personable, and because it was a guiding job, I thought that it was necessary to be obviously at ease with, you know, conversation and people you don't know and easy to get along with. I just wanted to make it look as if I was totally at ease in conversing with people.

Clearly then, Clare is aware that she is going to be judged on her performance, and has thought ahead about how she will present herself in her job interview.

The interviewer, Inès, drew a number of inferences from Clare' self-presentation. She inferred that Clare's guided tours would be well organised because her answers in the course of her interview were well organised. She thought that Clare was very enthusiastic about her job because she willingly provided a lot of details about her tasks at work. She even made inferences from the way Clare was listening to her, deducing that she must be considerate and thoughtful. All this contributed to present Clare as a good communicator. Inès also made inferences about Clare's personality through her ways of interacting. For instance, she thought that Clare was lively because she was quick to answer her questions, and that she was at ease from the way her gestures matched her words. Even

Clare's pronunciation conveyed an impression of will and decisiveness. So Inès's impressions did not evolve entirely from what Clare explicitly told her, but rather from a combination of linguistic, paralinguistic and non-verbal features. This prompted Inès to consider Clare as a strong candidate for the post.

This example, drawn from role-played interviews conducted at the start of this study, highlights the importance of performance in social encounters. Clare's comments point out her awareness that individuals are judged on their behaviour, amongst other things, and that controlling the impressions that others form of them is critical. This is why people often engage in impression management to influence their audience in a desirable way (Jones and Pittman 1982).

Impression management was first analysed by Erving Goffman (1959) in *The presentation of self in everyday life*. It describes

> the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them. (Goffman 1959, 9)

Thus, impression management involves individuals' performance, as well as the reaction of others to their performance. This performance can be consonant with the image that individuals are intending to present, or on the contrary be dissonant with their intentions. Moreover, self-presentation is constrained by one's culture. In an era of increased globalisation and multiculturalism, individuals are more likely to perform in intercultural situations, where they might break the conventions of their interlocutor's culture, thus increasing chances of miscommunication.

Controlling one's interlocutor's impressions is particularly important if there is much at stake, or if something can be lost or gained from a given interaction, so a good way to investigate impression management is to look at job interviews, where candidates try to elicit a favourable outcome in the form of a job offer, while interviewers do their utmost to attract the best possible applicant. Moreover, if people's perception that they are being observed may affect their performance, then they are most likely to use impression management in the context of a job interview (the way Clare did in her own interview), where candidates' behaviour is presumably scrutinised by their interviewers. On the other hand, interviewers will be keen to make a good impression on candidates, to prompt them to accept their job offer. This study sets out to discover how candidates, in the course of their job interviews, manage the impression they make on their interviewers.

1.2. Impression management and job interviews

Interviewers first come into contact with, and start forming an impression of job applicants through their paper credentials: cover letter, résumé, letters of reference, etc (Dipboye 1992). The information presented, and subsequent impression, is important since it usually determines who will be offered an interview. Items that influence interviewers' evaluations of credentials include candidates' experience, grades and test scores, plus seemingly less relevant information such as their gender, race or age (Dipboye 1992)—self-presentation clearly plays a role as well (Lipovsky 2008b).

At the time of the interview, interviewers start forming an impression of candidates from their appearance—for instance, research has consistently found a bias in favour of good-looking candidates, who are usually judged as being more qualified than unattractive candidates (Dipboye 1992). Likewise, interviewers make judgements of candidates based on their dress (Dipboye 1992). This highlights how job interviews involve far more than just speech, but also looks, dress, deportment, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, smiles, voice quality, and so on (see, for example, Adelswärd 1988, 76; Kerekes 2001, Chapter 5).

Since job applicants are usually selected for an interview on the basis that they do possess the skills and experience necessary for filling the position, so they are a priori qualified for the post they are applying for, other factors must influence interviewers' decisions about candidates, such as their ability to present their experience effectively. When candidates are asked a question, it may be a question they have already thought about, or it is not and they have to answer off the top of their heads. Candidates' amount of preparation seems to play a decisive role in their interviewers' impression of them, according to Paul Stevens, a career counsellor in Sydney, and author of the popular book *Win that job!*:

> In 21 years of interviewing, I terminated many interviews early and rejected the job seeker when the applicant revealed no preparation, no rehearsal, no purpose and no goals, even though the written credentials were well prepared. Many interviewers behave this way for the same reasons. (Stevens 1991, 76)

According to Stevens,

> most of the contents of an interview can be worked out in advance. Procedures, phases, and even many of the interviewer's questions can be determined in advance. Hence, there is no excuse for avoiding rehearsing

for selection interviews and relying on luck or thinking on your feet. (Stevens 1991, 78)

In fact, part of the popular literature on job interviews is devoted to the kind of questions job applicants may be asked, and a number of authors (such as Stevens 1991; Popovich 1993; DEET 1994; Burns 1999; Villiers 2000; Bright 2001) advise job seekers, before they attend any interview, to anticipate their interviewers' questions and rehearse answers to them[1]. Of course, candidates can also gain knowledge about the questions they may be asked from previous job interviews they have had, as Clémence, one of the candidates in the present study, pointed out:

(1)   *Alors ça, je savais qu'il allait poser la question, c'est comme dans tout entretien: «Est-ce que vous avez déjà entendu parler de nous?», «Comment vous avez entendu parler de nous?», «Pourquoi vous avez écrit?».*

Yeah, I knew he was going to ask that question, they always ask that one: 'Have you heard of us before?', 'How do you know about us?', 'Why did you apply?'

And Clémence again:

(2)   *«Projet professionnel», alors là, c'est la question bateau.*

'Career path', yep, that's the same old question that crops up all the time.

Much of the popular literature on job interviews even provides ready-made answers to interviewers' questions. Thus, job applicants can learn about 'right' and 'wrong' answers. Clearly, some interviewers expect candidates to be familiar with such questions and answers—even though one might cast doubt on how genuine candidates' answers then are. In Kerekes's (2001) study of job interviews in an American employment agency, one of the interviewers pointed out, when discussing a candidate's performance, that

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[1] Some authors (e.g. Burns 1999; Bright 2001) even suggest 'dress rehearsals', recommend to audio-record answers for practice (e.g. Popovich 1993; Villiers 2000) or advise video rehearsals (e.g. Stevens 1991; Popovich 1993; Burns 1999; Bright 2001).

she knows responses such as what are your strengths and she said immediately communication and flexibility. Y'know some people […] kind of stop and pause and hem and ha and not know what to say. (Kerekes 2001, 111)

Clearly, a number of candidates think about their interviewers' expectations when preparing for their interview or answering their interviewers' questions, as Clémence commented:

(3) Caroline: Est-ce que tu as essayé de deviner ce qu'il [l'interviewer] voulait, ce qui l'intéressait et puis de l'influencer en conséquence ?
Clémence: *Plus ou moins. Je pense que tout le monde le fait plus ou moins dans un entretien d'embauche. On entend la question et on sait pertinemment de quelle réponse ils ont besoin donc on va répondre en fonction, donc oui.*

Caroline: Did you try and guess what he [the interviewer] was after, what interested him, and then use that to try and influence him?
Clémence: More or less. I think everybody does it to some degree in a job interview. You get the question and you know exactly what they want to hear, so you give it to them, sure.

Interviewers actually expect candidates to have impression management strategies. This is what Inès, an interviewer in this study, suggests:

(4) *Et là, il se dit, «voilà, c'est là qu'il faut que j'impressionne, c'est là qu'il faut que je vende mon bifteck», et je sens que, tu vois, il s'anime parce qu'il sait que ça va avoir bon effet, tu vois […] là il est en train d'essayer de se vendre, là, à mon avis.*

And then he realises 'okay, this is where I've got to make a good impression. This is where I've got to stick up for myself' and you know, I can see that he's getting more animated because he knows that it's getting results, so […] it's at this point that he's really trying to sell himself, in my opinion.

Thus, numerous candidates make a deliberate attempt to satisfy their interviewers' expectations, and attend their interviews equipped with various impression management strategies. While promoting themselves, candidates have to walk the fine line between honesty and self-promotion strategies—"it's good to be honest but not super-honest"! (Linell and Persson Thunqvist 2003, 426). By practising their impression management tactics (such as trying to predict and prepare for possible questions), candidates can improve their interviewing competence, and build up their

chances of success. Of course though, not all impressions that candidates make on their interviewers will be deliberate.

1.3. An original view on job interviews

This study was designed with several aims in mind. The ultimate goal was to reveal the mechanics of impression management in the job interview process. Thus, the study examines empirically what candidates say (or omit to say) that makes a good (or not so good) impression on their interviewers, and how they say it. Therefore, it provides useful information on how to present oneself and one's experience in a job interview… and win the job. Another aim was to make interviewers more aware of the linguistic factors that may influence their decisions about candidates. So the study sets out to discover the linguistic elements that contribute to interviewers' impressions of candidates in job interviews[2].

Popular books on job interviews (such as any job seeker may find at their local library or bookshop before an interview) usually advise their readers about what kind of impression they should make on their interviewers on the whole, or what sort of information their interviewers are seeking when they ask such and such a question. Most books offer broad strategies such as "sell yourself", "show enthusiasm", "discuss the employer's needs", or advice such as "avoid one-word or one-sentence answers" or "keep all answers positive". Numerous books even provide ready-made answers. However, the emphasis is usually on *what* job applicants should say; few manuals provide advice on *how* to say it, such as how to sell oneself, how to look enthusiastic or how to build rapport. In this respect, such books are more normative than descriptive. This is another gap that this book is attempting to fill. It reports in detail *how* candidates present themselves precisely—in other words, the key features of candidates' lexico-grammatical and semantic choices that contribute to conveying certain impressions to their interviewers.

The data in this study also reveal that when candidates and interviewers engage in impression management in their job interviews, their objective is to show they belong, in an effort to lead to a positive outcome for the candidate (in the form of a job offer) and the interviewer (in the form of the candidate accepting their job offer). This study investigates how candidates negotiate their expertise to show they belong

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[2] Although non-verbal behaviour has been found to be significant in interviewers' assessment of candidates (see von Raffler-Engel 1983), it is beyond the scope of the present study.

as competent professionals, experts at their jobs. In particular, it analyses what the candidates say when discussing their work experience, and how they say it to demonstrate their expertise.

There are obviously other factors at play in a job interview. Stevens (1991, 76) even argues that "the personal chemistry between interviewer and applicant will influence the hiring decision far more than the applicant's qualifications, exam results or record of work experience". This suggests that how well candidates manage to negotiate rapport with their interviewers also plays a part in their interviewers' impressions of them. It seems logical that as individuals who are considering working with each other but do not know each other as yet, the interviewers and the candidates would strive to demonstrate that they will be good employers or employees who will get along well with their colleagues. This study demonstrates how the interviewers and the candidates negotiate a common identity and try to establish rapport. In particular, it looks at how the interviewers and the candidates establish co-membership by discussing shared attributes of their identity—attributes determined by their family situation (social co-membership), position (role co-membership) or workplace (institutional co-membership). Since the candidates do not possess much information about their interviewers or have much freedom for initiating new topics of discussion during the interviews, the study also examines how candidates negotiate role co-membership and empathy with their interviewers by sharing similar values and attitudes about their work.

All of the above aspects play a role in how candidates behave and what they say in the course of their interviews, and ultimately how they are perceived by their interviewers.

1.4. Outline of book

This chapter has laid the ground for an analysis of impression management in job interviews. Chapter 2 presents the research approach and methodology, and describes the participants, data and data collection. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which candidates negotiate their expertise to demonstrate they belong as competent professionals. Candidates' actual skills and professional experience are less important in interviewers' ultimate impression of the candidates than their enactment of their expertise (how they talk about it), so candidates have to convince their interviewers of their skills. This involves volunteering relevant, sufficient and precise information through numerous full clauses, material processes that describe what candidates do or did at work, circumstantial adjuncts

that express where, when, how, etc, candidates performed tasks at work, and technical language showing in-group knowledge. Then in the course of their interviews, candidates may share their feelings and beliefs with their interviewers so as to construct affiliation and solidarity. This is the theme of Chapter 4. In particular, candidates share positive judgements on their capability to perform in their job in order to demonstrate their professional competence. They also share positive feelings to negotiate empathy. Specifically, they may display enthusiasm and passion for their job to demonstrate genuine interest in their work and the position at stake. More generally, they show a positive attitude to emphasise they are the kind of individuals people want to work with and they can fit into their interviewers' organisation. In the course of their interviews, the interviewers and candidates also try to highlight or establish co-membership in order to show they belong. This is examined in Chapter 5. Co-membership can be highlighted through participants' use of the semantic resources of Involvement (such as familiar terms of address and informal or specialised language) or humorous utterances and joking. It can also be established by discussing shared attributes of participants' identity, through small talk about common acquaintances, or self-disclosure of information pertaining to participants' non-professional life. These conversations are mostly initiated by the interviewers, since they have more information about the candidates and more freedom to initiate new topics of discussion during the interviews. Benefits of establishing co-membership include putting the candidate at ease, promoting a friendly environment during the interview, providing an attractive image of the interviewer and contributing to establishing candidates' suitability for the position and how well they would fit into their new working environment and get along with their colleagues. The concluding chapter reviews the findings of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INTERVIEW CORPUS:
PARTICULARS, COLLECTION AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

2.1. Introduction

The research literature on job interviews (e.g. Akinnaso and Seabrook Ajirotutu 1982; Roberts and Sayers 1987; Gumperz and Roberts 1991; Gumperz 1992; Hawthorne 1992; Auer 1998; Bilbow and Yeung 1998; Birkner and Kern 2000; Birkner 2004; Roberts and Campbell 2005, 2006; or Campbell and Roberts 2007) has highlighted how candidates' linguistic choices have a crucial impact on the evaluation of their competences, as mastering the language the way it is predominantly spoken and used—which usually concurs with the interviewers' own usage—determines interviewers' recognition of candidates' professional ability and competences. This is the case even when these linguistic skills may have little to do with candidates' ability to perform well in their jobs[1]. In other words, candidates are expected to conform to their interviewers' style: "'someone like me' or at least 'someone who has the same expressive or rhetorical style as me' is the implied criterion by which selection takes place" (Roberts and Sarangi 1995 , 379). Moreover, candidates in such studies have little power to redress the situation to their advantage, since "when difficulties do arise they are usually not attributed to language differences as such but to attitudes, personal attributes or level of general competence or intelligence" (Roberts and Sayers 1987, 120). Rather than judging candidates' suitability for employment on hard facts or actual evidence, interviewers base their decision on vague feelings about the candidate or uncomfortable moments in the course of the interview. These studies highlight the "inferential leap from differences in discursive

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[1] Roberts and Campbell (2006, 1-2) note that any candidate applying for a low-paid position may experience some difficulty in their job interview, since the communicative demands of the job interview frequently exceed the communicative requirements for the job. This means that candidates who might actually be suitable for the job are judged unsuitable in the job interview.

practices to judgements of ability" as "the language ideologies that associate control of the officially accepted standard language with basic ability continue to prevail" (Gumperz 1999, 469)—of course, native speaker competency should not be equated with assured success in the interview either, and variations among native speakers' communicative styles should be taken into account. The present research primarily aims at investigating the linguistic features that contribute to interviewers' impressions of candidates in job interviews. In line with Gee (1996), it adopts a social-linguistic approach to focus on the negotiation of solidarity, examining how individuals act out different roles through their ways of behaving, interacting, valuing or speaking.

Interviews are traditionally defined as "gatekeeping" encounters, that is, "brief encounters in which two persons meet, usually as strangers, with one of them having authority to make decisions that affect the other's future" (Erickson and Shultz 1982, xi). A more specific definition describes gatekeeping encounters as

> asymmetric speech situations during which a person who represents a social institution seeks to gain information about the lives, beliefs, and practices of people outside of that institution in order to warrant the granting of an institutional privilege. (Schiffrin 1994, 146)

A number of studies insist on the asymmetric aspect of job interviews in view of the interviewer's power, at the end of the interview, to allow or deny the candidate access to their institution, or the institution they represent. Rather than focusing on conflictual differences originating in the interviewers' and the candidates' asymmetric roles and power, the present study attempts to highlight how candidates try to show they belong as fellow professionals, and as individuals who will get along well with their fellow workers. Negotiating expertise, co-membership and rapport involves presenting hard facts about one's experience and social identity, expressing judgements about one's capacity, displaying affiliation and intimacy, expressing feelings (such as enthusiasm) and displaying one's attitudes towards work. Job interviews involve people who usually do not know each other, often are meeting for the first time, and would not necessarily have chosen to spend time together, except for the pragmatic task they have to fulfil. Because most interviewers have working with the candidate as an objective, it is important that they find out whether they can get along, or, in cases where the interviewer is not the employer, whether the candidate can fit into the organisation. With this concern in mind, job interviews become opportunities for exploring commonality, establishing common ground and displaying similar values and attitudes,

so interviewers and candidates are not merely there to exchange professional information about the candidate or the interviewer's organisation, but also to show they belong.

To address these questions, I found that detailed qualitative analysis of authentic job interviews, followed by post-interviews with participants, was the most appropriate combination of methods. According to Martinko (1991, 273), "since impressions are perceptions, they are not directly observable and measurable and thus offer many challenges for research", and "it would seem that more qualitative approaches to research would offer the most rapid guidance in understanding the situational cues associated with impression management and the processes of creating and managing impressions". The main assumptions underlying qualitative research are that

> the social world must be discovered; that this can only be achieved by first-hand observation and participation in 'natural' settings, guided by an exploratory orientation; that accounts of the findings of such research must capture the processes involved and the social meanings that generate them. (Hammersley 1990, 598)

Martyn Hammersley (1990, 597) further states that "to rely on observation without also talking with people in order to understand their perspectives is to risk misinterpreting their behaviour", so participants' point of view plays a significant role in such research. Likewise, Derek Layder (1993) states that

> the researcher must attempt to describe how the actors themselves act towards the world on the basis of how they see it, and not on the basis of how that world appears to the outside observer. (Layder 1993, 38)

Qualitative research hence relies on participants' (or insiders') perspectives of events, rather than a researcher's (or outsider's) perspective. These perspectives are sought by examining participants' own interpretive accounts of the interactions they are involved in. Thus, observation of these interactions is usefully complemented by informal or semi-structured interviews with key informants, in which they discuss their behaviour and their own interpretation of their experience (see Layder 1993; LeCompte and Preissle 1993; Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

In line with this, my primary data in this study consist of authentic job interviews, interviewers' debriefing discussions following these interviews, and separate post-interviews in which the candidates and the interviewers comment on their interviews. I first video-taped the job

interviews and audio-taped the debriefing discussions; I next showed the video of each job interview to the relevant candidate and then to each interviewer in separate post-interviews, asking them to comment on various aspects of the candidate's performance. These post-interviews allowed the elicitation of candidates' and interviewers' views of what they considered salient (see Erickson and Shultz 1982). In this manner, the linguistic analysis of each job interview could systematically be judged against the participants' own interpretations of their encounter, providing insiders' descriptions of the key features of impression management. These data were completed by ethnographic information, collected through interviews, about the participants. Secondary data include an investigation of the popular literature on job interviews.

The qualitative analysis is supported by some quantitative analysis, as I corroborated interviewers' impressions of the candidates with the frequency of diverse phenomena involved in their impressions—for instance, I counted the number of clauses in candidates' answers when interviewers had an impression of prolixity. Such quantitative measures add to the accuracy and strength of the qualitative data and analysis (see Silverman 1985; Berg 1998).

The next two sections describe the interview context and participants, then the structure and content of the interviews that were recorded. They are followed by an account of the data collection and of the theoretical approach adopted for analysing the data.

2.2. Interview context and participants

2.2.1. Interview context

The study examines three authentic job interviews (as outlined in Table 2.1) in either French or French and English lasting 43 minutes, and post-interviews of a total duration of 6 hours and 54 minutes. It follows a pilot study of five role-played interviews[2]. The interviews took place in Sydney, Australia, in 2002 and 2003—note that although the interviews were recorded one year apart, they concern the same post at the same institution. The position for which candidates were interviewed involved teaching English conversation classes and, in addition, undertaking post-graduate

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[2] The aim of the pilot study was to identify key features of impression management as well as to test the analysing tools. Since the findings from the authentic data bear out the findings from the pilot study, I will not describe the pilot interviews in detail, although some of the participants' comments will be considered.

research at a host university in France (which I will call "Lyon 2"). The candidates were required to speak French, be willing to teach courses in English as a foreign language, and be engaged in post-graduate work. All three candidates were Australasians, native speakers of English. Each of the interviews involved two interviewers: a native speaker of English (Ingrid in the first two interviews, Irene in the third) and a French interviewer (Inès in all three). Two of the interviews were conducted in both English and French, whereas one was conducted in French only, although the questions asked were similar in all three interviews. Two of the candidates, Craig and Clothilde, were competing for the same post[3]. A fourth interview involving a French candidate, Clémence, who was interviewed for a French teacher's post in Sydney, is not included here to maintain the comparability of the data. Note that all participants' names have been changed to protect their identity.

Candidates	Craig	Clothilde	Carrie
Position at stake	Teach English + post-graduate research	Teach English + post-graduate research	Teach English + post-graduate research
Candidates' native language	English	English	English
Interviewers	Inès Ingrid	Inès Ingrid	Inès Irene
Interviewers' native language	French x 1 English x 1	French x 1 English x 1	French x 1 English x 1
Language of interviews	English and French	English and French	French
Length of interviews	10 min	13 min	20 min
Length of follow-up interviews	111 min (1h51)	122 min (2h02)	181 min (3h01)

Table 2.1. Interview context and participants

All three candidates are interviewed by experienced teachers and researchers, that is, individuals who do the same jobs as those for which the candidates are being interviewed. This has two implications with regard to the impression they may convey to their interviewers. First, the

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[3] A third candidate for this same post, Chloe, was interviewed over the phone by Ingrid the next day since she was not residing in Sydney. Her interview could not be included in this study for practical reasons.

candidates and their interviewers are more likely to hold shared values on their profession, allowing them to build rapport in the course of their interview. Then, there is some possibility for the interviewers and the candidates to build solidarity through establishing 'role co-membership', such as 'as teachers/researchers, we can understand and relate to each other', or 'institutional co-membership' as co-members of the same institution (see Erickson and Shultz 1982; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1993). This is further discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

In all three interviews, the interviewers have no direct interest in the hiring process since the selected candidate is going to be employed at another institution and the interviewers and candidates will have no further contact. On the other hand, the interviewers still have an interest in ensuring that a good candidate is chosen, since the choice of candidate will reflect on them. Irene underlined in her post-interview the value of their institution's relationship with the host university in France where the successful applicant was going to be appointed:

(1)   *On ne veut pas employer des étudiants pour être lecteurs, enfin qui*
      viennent de notre université, s'ils [ne] sont pas tout à fait fiables.

      We don't want to send students who come from our university as
      teaching assistants, if they're not that reliable.

Moreover, the candidates have similar backgrounds to their interviewers', if not in age or gender or native tongue, at least in terms of race and educational background. This may help create some common ground or solidarity between the participants. Kerekes (2001, 215) reports that "the staffing supervisors [in her study] reacted more favorably to those candidates whose backgrounds more closely resembled their own". This sets this study apart from other studies (such as Akinnaso and Seabrook Ajirotutu 1982 or Gumperz 1992) where the candidates have quite different backgrounds from their interviewers.

I studied non-native speakers of French because my initial hypothesis concerned the likelihood of intercultural differences between the non-native candidates' answers and their interviewers' expectations. However, the fact that the candidates speak French as a foreign language had little influence on the impression that they made on their interviewers. This was revealed by the analysis of the post-interviews and examination of the features that struck the French interviewers as inappropriate. In all the post-interviews, there are only a few remarks pertaining to the misuse or mispronunciation of a French word by a candidate, probably because of their high proficiency in French. No discrepancy was found between the

native English and the native French-speaking interviewers' impressions of the candidates. Likewise, Kerekes (2001, 217) reports that "sharing similar cultural backgrounds and making similar assumptions about expectations in a job interview have to do more with educational background, gender, race, than with shared L1s". Thus, intercultural communication is *not* an issue in this study.

Both Craig and Clothilde had their interview on the same day, with Craig's immediately after Clothilde's. They were both aware that they were competing for the same post as they met right before their interviews took place. Their interviews were held in a staff room with the two interviewers more or less facing the candidate and myself sitting on the floor behind the camera, slightly out of the candidate's view (see Figure 2.1). Craig was offered the post.

Carrie was interviewed for the same post, but a year later. Her interview was held in Irene's office, with the two interviewers and the candidate sitting closer to each other and at equal distances from each other (see Figure 2.2). Carrie was the sole applicant and was therefore not competing against anyone else, although she was unaware of this.
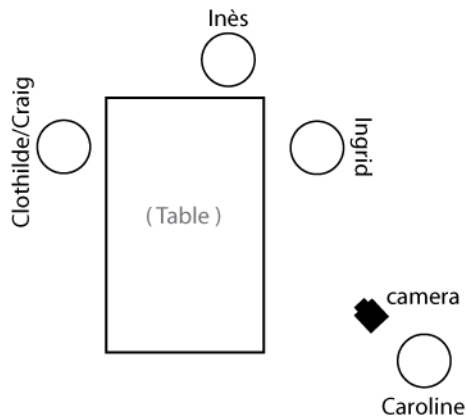
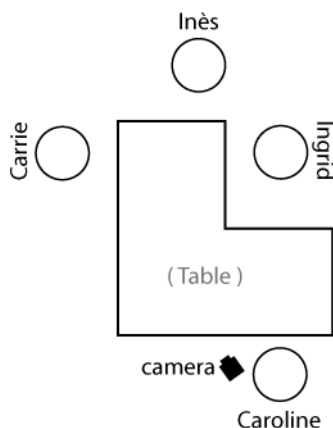Figure 2.1. Seating arrangement in Clothilde's and Craig's interviews

Figure 2.2. Seating arrangement in Carrie's interview

2.2.2. Participants[4]

Clothilde is an Australian-born 24 year old who has just completed the first year of her PhD research. She has also "tutored in English [literature] on a casual basis on and off over the years" at her university and has also just started tutoring in an Information & Communication course. Clothilde learned French at school during which time she spent six months as an exchange student in France. She also studied French in her first two years of university, and had both Ingrid and Inès as teachers. Inès did not seem to remember Clothilde though, even if her name was familiar. Clothilde has done "quite a lot of [job interviews], having worked in various capacities". She normally does not find job interviews "particularly nerve-racking" but she found this particular interview "quite difficult": "I suppose because it was in French and because I was really keen to get the position and because I wasn't sure whether I would get it and I feel a lot more confident in a job interview than in that kind of academic environment I suppose". She actually admitted in the course of her interview that she was nervous. This episode is discussed in Chapter 4.

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[4] The names of the courses, candidates' research interests and institutions were substituted to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Clothilde came to her interview dressed in dark pants and a dark grey blouse and wearing some jewellery. As she said, "I suppose I took a bit of care to present well. I'd been tutoring earlier in the day and I suppose I thought I should try to look a bit respectable in that environment. So I suppose I made an effort with my dress". Clothilde sat across the table from Ingrid and Inès, with both her hands on the table. As she answered her interviewers' questions, she either leaned back on her chair or came forward, while punctuating her words with gestures. She was also quite expressive. Clothilde's interviewers thought that she had a pleasant personality because she was "smiling a lot", "looking straight in the eyes" and had a "very modulated tone of voice, expressive" and "you could imagine that she would be a very pleasant personality in class, because she would be outgoing, she would have this really genuine exchange with the students", and "you can imagine that they would enjoy [the classes] and they would be stimulating".

Craig was interviewed right after Clothilde. Craig is 36 years old and studied and tutored in performance and communication studies in New Zealand. He has now lived in Australia for the past eight years. He is currently researching a writer who lived in France. He has already travelled to France where he met with the author's widow, who holds her husband's archives and has agreed to help him with his research. While in France, he also met with several researchers from "Lyon 2" who have research interests similar to his—as it happens, this is the same university where the exchange is taking place. This serves as strong evidence to his interviewers that he is actually able to do his research, using the French language (see further discussion, Chapter 3). Craig learned French at high school and university, but has never lived in a French-speaking country. Craig did not know whether his interview would be in French or in English "and it turned out to be both". However, as soon as he heard about the exchange, he enrolled in a French class at his university. He started with a language class, but soon discontinued it to enrol in a literature class that better fitted his research interests. The lecturer was Inès, who turned out to be his interviewer as well. He also met with Ingrid to discuss his application and the exchange program prior to his interview. So he "was kind of relaxed talking to them in French" as he "had had some contact". Craig has "not done that many job interviews" because "the sort of jobs I've gone for like I've been tutoring at university and usually if they contact you at all, it's that they want to give you the job so it's not really like an interview situation". He thought he would be assessed "on what research I was going to be doing and the experience I had like that was on my CV and things like that. I hadn't thought too much about the actual

teaching so I wasn't quite sure how to sort of think on the spot of answers to those questions". I will analyse in detail how Craig presented his teaching experience in Chapter 3. Craig was very conscious of his French expression in the parts of his interview in French: "When I was talking in French, I wasn't so much worried about what I was talking about, I was more worried about whether my French was going to be any good, whereas when I was talking in English, it was actually more the content that I had to get across".

On the day of his interview, Craig wore dark pants and a short-sleeved green shirt. He sat close to the table quite still and upright while resting his chin on the back of his right hand, with his left arm folded on the table. During the interview, he nodded frequently and smiled occasionally in response to Ingrid's talk while making eye contact with both his interviewers. As he answered Ingrid's questions on his teaching, he started gesturing with his left hand. However as he started discussing his research, he became more lively, making gestures with both hands. This contributed to his interviewer's positive appreciation that he was a passionate researcher (see Comment 10, Chapter 4). Craig made an overall good impression on his interviewers, who later described him as "someone who is reflective, who'd thought about what it meant to go to Lyons, was very keen to go, had the maturity to survive there, like it wasn't just how he presented to us but because what we knew about him having been there in the past, but clearly he is a man of some maturity and a pleasant personality".

Carrie was interviewed for the same position but the following year. She was actually the only candidate for the post that year, although she was not aware of it. Unlike Clothilde's and Craig's interviews, hers took place in Irene's office. Carrie is 27 and has lived in Australia for the past 22 years. She is researching authors from the 1920s for her PhD and needs to consult archives located in France. She is quite advanced in her research and hopes to be finishing her thesis while there. To this effect, she has already made contact via email with a researcher at "Lyon 2" who could assist her with her research—as it happens, Irene knows that person. Carrie studied French at school and at the Alliance Française (a French language institute). She has had "quite a few job interviews" in the past. Unlike Craig's and Clothilde's interviews, which were held partly in French and partly in English, her interview was entirely in French. She had assumed though that it would be the case: "I assumed that everything would be in French; I assumed that if I spoke a lot of English, they wouldn't take me seriously". As a result, she came to her interview with a

higher level of preparation than Craig and Clothilde, "because it was in French" and "it was a good job".

Carrie came to her interview dressed in dark pants and a sleeveless purple top—"something that was neat and maybe a little bit professional looking". She was sitting away from the table (but, compared with Craig and Clothilde, still closer to her interviewers), and was leaning against the back of her chair with her hands on her lap. She made a favourable impression on her interviewers because she had already made contact with a researcher at "Lyon 2" prior to her interview. She also projected the image of someone who was passionate about her research and about teaching and was keen to go to France.

Three different interviewers took part in the interviews. Inès, a French lecturer in her 40s who has lived in Australia for about 15 years, participated in all three interviews. Ingrid, in her 50s and originally from England, but with about 20 years of residency in Australia, interviewed Clothilde and Craig, whereas Irene, an Australian-born 60 year old, interviewed Carrie. All the interviewers have similar qualifications in teaching and research to the candidates whom they are interviewing. This means that they were well able to aptly judge the candidates' competences and skills. Furthermore, both candidates and interviewers research and teach in an arts subject, making it easier for the interviewers to follow the candidates' explanations of and comments on their research and teaching. One exception is an interdisciplinary arts and science course that Clothilde was then teaching (see further details in Chapter 3). All the candidates were familiar with Inès and Ingrid as they had been studying in their department or had made contact to discuss the post at stake prior to their interviews. The interviewers also made a good impression on the candidates, who thought they were quite friendly. Carrie for instance commented that "they were great, they were much less intimidating than I thought they'd be, friendly, much nicer than I thought they'd be".

2.3. Interview structure and content

The average length of the interviews is 14.3 minutes, with Clothilde's interview lasting 13 minutes, Craig's 10 minutes and Carrie's 20 minutes. In comparison, the average length of the interviews in Kerekes's (2001) study of placement interviews in an employment agency in the US is 12.5 minutes, ranging from 4.5 to 30.5 minutes, with interviews for clerical work lasting longer than those for light industrial work. The popular literature on the other hand mentions a length varying from 20-35 minutes

to 40 minutes (Burns 1999, 155; Shapiro 1999, 33; Stevens 1991, 82-83), although Stevens points out that the interview length depends on the position (as is the case in Kerekes's study). The interviews in this study could be shorter because the candidates have discussed the details of the post with the interviewers prior to their interviews, so the interviewers do not discuss the specifications of the position at all, except for Irene who checks that Carrie understands the requirements of the post.

Various descriptions of job interview structure have been offered. Adelswärd (1988, 30) and Komter (1991, 54) both propose a five-phase structure:

- Small talk
- Information on job and company
- Information on candidate
- Information regarding administrative details
- Small talk

Van Raffler-Engel (1983) and Akinnaso and Seabrook Ajirotutu (1982, 133) on the other hand distinguish three phases only[5]:

- Opening
- Main interview
- Closing

Interviews in the present study typically follow this latter pattern, with chunks of small talk taking place at various stages. As just mentioned, there are no discussions of the post and institution since this information was reviewed prior to candidates' interviews.

The interviews are a mixture of semi-structured and competency-based interviews. In semi-structured interviews (the most commonly used with candidates applying for their first job), interviewers first ask candidates to present themselves (e.g. "Tell me about yourself"), then solicit more detailed information in the course of their answers (Dumon 1999, 106). In competency-based interviews, interviewers ask questions designed to elicit examples of past experience which will exhibit behaviour indicative of the key competencies and attributes required for the position (e.g. good communication skills, capacity for team work, etc). This is because interviewers are unsure about whether a candidate, once employed, will be

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[5] Kerekes (2001, 76-78), in her study of interviews in an American employment agency, adds a fourth phase consisting of candidates' work preferences.

able to do the job, and the way they deal with this is to ask candidates questions about their past behaviour on the assumption that this will indicate how they might behave in the future, since applicants should be able to make use of the same skills again (Stevens 1991).

The greetings usually took place outside the interview room, except in Clothilde's interview when Inès came in late. Interview openings varied in length, depending on how much small talk the interviewers and the candidate engaged in. In the case of Clothilde's interview, more talk took place as participants were waiting for Inès to arrive. Small talk occurs in Clothilde's and Carrie's interviews only, at the beginning of both interviews and also at the end of Carrie's interview. Interviewers' questions concern candidates' teaching experience, how to promote conversation in class, their research projects while in France, their contacts at "Lyon 2" (Craig volunteers that information) and their progress with their theses. Thus, questions in all three interviews are similar. Clothilde was also asked specific questions about a course that she was currently teaching. This segment of her interview is discussed in Chapter 3. Irene also checked that Carrie understood the requirements of the post such as the number of teaching hours, the salary, starting dates, and so on. Candidates' answers to their interviewers' questions were often followed by a third turn (see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2008, 95) where the interviewer provided an evaluation of the candidate's answer, such as "excellent" or "it seems fine to me". Ingrid also provided appraisal of the candidate's performance at the end of each of her interviews, as well as more general appraisal of the quality of the candidates' applications at the beginning of Craig's interview. Both Craig and Carrie were offered the opportunity to ask questions or make comments, whereas Clothilde volunteered some comments of her own. One striking feature is that Craig and Carrie (the two candidates who were offered the position) received advice (Craig) or special help (Carrie) from their interviewers. This might be a sign of the positive outcome of their interview and is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Closings, as for openings, varied in length, depending on whether small talk occurred or not. In Craig's and Carrie's interviews, the interview closed after candidates were given an opportunity to ask questions or make comments. In Carrie's interview, discussions actually resumed after Carrie was given the floor during Irene's first attempt at closing.

Interviewers initiated and closed all the interview phases, such as small talk, questioning (including giving the floor to the candidate for asking questions), advice or special help. It is interesting to note that there were only three instances in all the interviews of a candidate taking the floor. This marks interviewers' institutional role: it is their prerogative to lead the

interview and control its different phases (see Kress and Fowler 1979, 63; Akinnaso and Seabrook Ajirotutu 1982, 121; Williams 1985, 166; Adelswärd 1988, 32-42). So even though some candidates assume a more active role than others, "the interviewers pull the strings" and "are responsible for the organization of the interviews" (Komter 1991, 19). However, the content within the interview phases is co-constructed by the interviews and the candidates (Adelswärd 1988, 53-61), and I will discuss in Chapter 5 how candidates can influence the course of their interviews.

Lastly, the language of the interviews was also controlled by the interviewers. Carrie's interview is entirely in French, whereas Clothilde's and Craig's interviews are partly in English, partly in French. In these two interviews, questions in French were asked by Inès, using a transition such as this:

(2)   Craig's interview

19   Inès   *je peux vous poser une ou deux questions en français[6]*

19   Inès   can I ask you a couple of questions in French

In Craig's interview, only the discussion of his projects while in France is in French. In Clothilde's interview on the other hand, discussions in French include her projects while in France as well as her progress with her thesis. The greetings are also in French, as Inès comes in and says "bonjour" (hello). Switching back to English is always controlled by Ingrid.

2.4. Data collection

An initial pilot study of five role-played interviews served to test the research questions and procedures as well as to ensure a smooth recording of the authentic interviews without ill effects for the participants. Role-played interviews were deemed necessary because authentic data are difficult to obtain.

After the pilot study was completed, I proceeded with the collection of authentic job interviews. All the interviewers and candidates participated

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[6] This kind of metatalk, where interviewers seem to be asking for permission to actually perform some speech acts, is typically used to control the course of the interview (Ragan 1983).