



*THE LINGUISTIC AND EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS
FROM MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS*

STUDIES AND RESOURCES

N° 3

Migrant pupils and formal mastery of the language of schooling: variations and representations

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– The role of linguistic and intercultural competences'

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Table of contents

Introduction	5
1 Social norms and linguistic context	6
1.1 The French linguistic context.....	6
1.2 Social representations of language practices	6
2 Variability and systemic change	8
2.1 Appropriation of the categories of gender and number	9
2.1.1 Marks of gender.....	9
2.1.2 Marks of number.....	11
2.2 Explanations: a systemic tendency within the language, the persistence of areas in the system where variation appears.....	13
2.3 A pragmatic method of communication	14
3 Proposals	16
3.1 Making allowance for the characteristics of the spoken language in language teaching	16
3.2 Acquisition of the language of schooling: key objects of study.....	17
3.3 Teaching of second languages and the development of plurilingualism.....	17
3.4 Acquisition of the language of schooling: some avenues of investigation....	20
Bibliography	25
Annex 1: <i>Extract from Bulletin Officiel No 3 of 18 January 2007</i>	28
Annex 2: <i>NALDIC. Diagnostic tool developed for analysing the writing of more advanced learners. 2009</i>	29

Introduction

The schooling of migrant children is a sensitive question from the viewpoint of plurilingual and intercultural education because it involves performing cross-analysis and showing the close interrelation between linguistic and social phenomena. Before focusing on variability and the question of systemic developments, we will therefore look at the social norms and out-of-school linguistic contexts experienced by a number of migrant pupils.

It will first be assumed that the successful schooling of migrant children is closely dependent on the linguistic context of the host countries and on the openness of those countries to plurilingualism and interculturalism. For analysis purposes, we will take the case of the traditionally monolingual¹ French linguistic context, highlighting two elements that obliquely affect how migrant children are received in schools, namely the ordinary representations of French and the language practices commonly associated with migrants.

¹ This very strong monolingual tradition in France differs greatly from the case in English-speaking countries. Social history shows how a very strong tendency to homogenisation of the national identity was forged in France from the end of the 19th century onwards. The function of State schools was to give all pupils a body of common knowledge and to smooth over specific cultural and linguistic characteristics. Social identity is primarily national identity and must prevent withdrawal into community identities (Castel, 2009: pp. 387-389). This explains the misgivings about allowing the use of *languages of the home* and about variation in general in schools (Bertucci, 2007).

Social norms and linguistic context

1.1 The French linguistic context

Migrant children have to adapt to, and deal with, complex linguistic contexts, particularly in host countries where long-standing and deeply rooted representations of the languages of those countries hold sway and underpin a linguistic ideology (Beacco, 2001), based in this case on the idea of inequality of languages on the language market (ibid.). Present in common discourse and based on speakers' impressions, this point of view rests on the idea that there is a natural hierarchy of languages in which certain languages are more beautiful, are richer, are better than others at expressing sensations and aesthetic or literary emotions, are more suitable for elaborating a line of reasoning, developing a scientific idea and so on. French, which is taken as an example, possesses a rich history in this area. It has been represented as the language of distinction, of civilisation, the universal language, and enjoyed an unprecedented vogue particularly in the 18th century, as shown by the following words of D. Baggioni:

Until the third quarter of the 18th century, Europe, which set the tone in matters of taste, culture and science, believed it was living through an era of cosmopolitanism in which individuals' mother tongues did not constitute an indelible characteristic and where the improvement of human nature was progressing on all fronts and moving towards unification of the elites through a language of civilisation. As is generally known, Frederick II despised German, expressed himself only in the language of Voltaire and ordered that the Proceedings of his Academy (the Berlin Academy which he established in 1743) be published in French: "Science must speak the universal language, which is French." (1997:192).

According to D. Baggioni, learned Europe, in mourning for the Latin of the scholars, considered French to be a prestigious language capable of taking the place vacated by Latin (ibid.) and satisfying the need for a universal language². This view is based on epilinguistic judgements - elegance, rigour, precision, clarity, logic... supposed characteristics of French - mentioned among others by Rivarol³ (Lodge, 2006:244-247).

1.2 Social representations of language practices

Besides this particular linguistic context marked by hierarchical and non-egalitarian representations of languages, some specific linguistic characteristics are associated with migrants: plurilingualism and - a less well-known fact we shall now address - a variant of the host-country languages that mixes linguistic, generational and sociological aspects and directly involves the question of variability.

One characteristic often attributed to young migrants is a specific way of using French, which is described in varying ways, often with reference to places of residence. For example, it is referred to as *le parler des cités* or *le parler des banlieues* (council estate slang) or, more generally, *le parler jeune* (youth slang). Some terms have stronger socio-economic connotations than others, reflecting a precarious social situation, although this depends on whether the generational or residential criterion is uppermost. Besides its formal elements this variety of French involves specific language practices which call for a study of speech as a cultural⁴ phenomenon dealing with the question of the language community, its available

² This is also connected with France's geopolitical place in Europe between the 17th and 19th centuries.

³ *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française* presented to the Berlin Academy in 1784.

resources and its rules of communication (norms underlying the operation of interactions in a given group). Besides a descriptive approach to the language, an ethnographic study aimed at describing speakers⁵ communicative competence (Hymes, 1984) is therefore required. The communicative competence described here is a form of culture which has been described as interstitial, one of whose most salient characteristics is the language practices in question.

The language practices of young people, particularly young migrants⁶, have been viewed in France as belonging to the more general framework of an interstitial culture (Calvet, 1994, Lepoutre, 1997) which has developed on four fronts since the 1990s: musical, graphic, dress and linguistic. Only the last aspect is considered here.

Speech falling under this head displays two pronounced characteristics in terms of variation: on the one hand, the information curve and accentuation (Gadet, 2003a: 103-104 and b: 86, Fagyal, 2003) and, on the other, vocabulary. However, at the grammatical level, it shows little difference from popular French and possesses the characteristic aspects of oral varieties. Nevertheless, three characteristics distinguishing it from hereditary elements (Gadet, 2003a: 112) will be noted: verlan⁷, hybridisation and linguistic mixing through borrowings from languages of immigration - words taken from Arabic, African languages, Creole etc.

Verlan is not just a process of formal coding which inverts the dominant social norm. It is clearly distinguished from secret languages and school slang by its vocabulary and functions. While the teenagers who speak verlan best may also be the most dysfunctional in terms particularly of social and school norms, they are also the best integrated in the peer group and its culture. The importance of peer groups in the socialisation of young people has been underlined. These language practices, particularly verlan, are suitable for expressing real life, street experience and interethnic relations. In their linguistic borrowings they reflect the pluriethnic communities of the council estates (Melliani, 2000). In its play, initiatory and cryptic aspects, verlan plays an identity-forming function⁸ which has been widely reported since the early 1980s (Bachmann, Basier, 1984, Billiez, 1993, Lepoutre, 1997). Coarse language and obscenity are also typical and very noticeable in young people's exchanges, as so often in teenage talk. Noticeable here too is a type of generational provocation which contrasts with the style employed by adults, being distinguished both by its register and by an exuberant, voluble and noisy delivery stemming from a talkative culture derived from popular Maghreb and African traditions (Lepoutre, *ibid.*: 176). Speech is often dramatised, stagy and exposed to peer judgement. Ritual insults, gibes and verbal actions which are part of street culture take place in this context (Labov, 1993). It should be stressed that none of the characteristics described constitutes in itself an obstacle⁹ to acquisition of the host-country language and language of schooling¹⁰ despite the disapproval¹¹ surrounding them.

⁴ Assuming that the way a language is used is at least as important as its structure. This is also true of the standard French used in schools.

⁵ I.e. the knowledge needed by participants during a verbal interaction and used by them for communication.

⁶ See e.g. the work of F. Melliani.

⁷ Verlan is a particular form of back slang in which the syllables of certain words are inverted: e.g. tromé (métro).

⁸ This does not mean that these young people have only one identity and that verlan is the only language available to them.

⁹ Some are even highly literate.

¹⁰ Pupils know which variety to use in what context (Bertucci, 2003).

¹¹ In general, the use of this type of speech coincides with the feeling of a rise in linguistic incivility owing to the extreme nature of these practices (language with sexual or scatological overtones, insults) which is strengthened by behaviour patterns and modes of communication which do not conform to commonly accepted standards of civility. The loud (in both senses) nature of these language practices and the accompanying types of behaviour make adults feel excluded and misunderstood or even aggressive.

If the social circumstances of these migrant pupils are agreed to be somewhat specific, this means that the way they are taught must be set in context and adapted to take account of their variation from the norm. It is therefore proposed to review the ideas of norm and correct grammar with the aim of improving pupils' performance, reducing linguistic handicaps and thus giving priority to certain objects of study in the acquisition of the standard language. The approach will therefore be reversed, with the pupil as the starting point and the subject as the goal.

Variability and systemic change

We will endeavour to observe how variation occurs and take a fresh look at pupils' errors from the viewpoint adopted here. This necessitates reviewing the ideas of norm and correct grammar and seeing so-called linguistic handicaps in a different light.

Taking the French example, we shall assume for the sake of analysis that language teaching at school, which is almost entirely based on the written word, has now imposed written forms as being the only legitimate ones and therefore as embodying the language¹² (Gadet, 2003b). The result of this is to increase the difficulties of acquiring and appropriating the language, particularly because the variant forms are not used as learning tools. Nevertheless, we are not playing down the importance of the norm, ignorance of which may carry social penalties, particularly as regards access to employment, hence the importance of reflecting on how to achieve proficiency in the language of schooling:

It has to be distinguished between everyday language, which most bi- and multilinguals have commands of and "academic language", which characterises the language activities at school (Gogolin & Lange, 2010).

Using a set of examples drawn from a group of plurilingual, mainly Creole-speaking,¹³ pupils, we will show that difficulties in appropriating linguistic forms hide pupils' real competences, particularly textual, and that these difficulties constitute an obstacle to teaching which calls for analysis.

The assumption is accordingly made that pupils' difficulties in appropriating the written language increase their difficulties in performing the tasks required of them, particularly the production of written texts¹⁴, because of a lack of language proficiency. The causes of failure are to be found not in the assumed inability of pupils to carry out the task in question, i.e. construction of a narrative, but in their lack of prior knowledge of the language, which they need for performing a written textual activity. These errors are, however, interpreted here not as a sign of inability but as a form of attempted metalinguistic interpretation of the language's functioning by the writers. Nevertheless, the difficulties make pupils feel linguistically insecure and cause them to make less effort at expression, with resulting effects on their written production.

Two examples are proposed as an illustration. These concern appropriation of the categories of gender and number by Creole-speaking plurilingual pupils in written French production and the problems encountered by pupils in their written production.

¹² Particularly if it is assumed that standardisation has been directed mainly at the written word, which appears more homogeneous than the oral form, which is unstable and heterogeneous because of variation.

¹³ The families of these pupils were originally from La Réunion, which they left to seek employment.

¹⁴ Regardless of the subject.

The working assumption is that, far from dealing with errors, we find in these examples a variational system which may be considered to be governed by systemic developments and to possess its own coherence. The variation question therefore lies at the heart of the tension between that what may be regarded as communication and that which pertains to the language of schooling.

2.1 Appropriation of the categories of gender and number

The initial assumption is that beneath the various spelling errors lies a certain systemisation despite apparent instability. It seems that, generally speaking, these errors reveal major tendencies towards eliminating the differences between the oral code and the written code and the redundancies specific to the written word. This trend is reflected in concordant phenomena which have been observed in different sub-systems. Three major characteristics may be noted under the apparent diversity of errors: regularity, i.e. a tendency to alignment; differentiation connected with irregular distribution, particularly of the grammatical forms of number and gender; and standardisation, which is the opposite tendency to the previous one in that we see a movement towards the standardisation of micro-systems.

We are therefore witnessing a dual trend towards simplification and increasing complexity reflected simultaneously in an absence of discrimination and in assimilation, alignment and fixation. On the whole, such dysfunctions constitute fossilised features, although it is always difficult to conclude from a dysfunction in writing that there is a fault or error because there is always a suspicion that auto-correction may have occurred. In addition to this tendency there is the difference between the oral code and the written code, the difference between what is heard and what is written.

Dysfunctions relating to grammatical morphograms provide an illustration of the assumption.

French has consolidated the constructed or inflected parts of the word called morphemes (suffixes, prefixes, endings, verbal inflections) by means of morphograms, i.e. graphic supplements of morphemes (Catach, 1986). To grasp the distinctions between speech and writing, we must therefore contrast what is heard in oral production, namely morphemes, with what is written, namely morphograms.

The last-named offer the following advantages: graphic preservation of an *intermittent* morphology, i.e. one always hears what is only sometimes written; supplementary, often redundant, morphosyntactic information; flexibility and syntagmatic cohesion through the scattering of visual links over elements of the same nature and function; paradigmatic information through the construction of visual links on words having the same function and meaning (masculine and feminine alternation or radical and derived).

2.1.1 Marks of gender

As regards the question of gender, we see that this is a morphological characteristic invariably attached to every noun, albeit with some exceptions¹⁵. The names of things or concepts have an arbitrary gender only distantly related to their meaning. From the viewpoint of meaning, it constitutes a *fictional gender*, to adopt the expression used by Damourette and Pichon (1911-1950). The form of the noun does not allow recognition of the gender to which it belongs. Gender is indicated by agreement with the determiner and the adjective. It often happens, particularly in the case of nouns with an initial vowel, if the noun is not

¹⁵ French hesitates about the gender of *amour* (love), *délice*, (delight) *orgue* (organ) and *gens*.(people)

accompanied by an adjective or if the adjective is invariable in gender, that the gender is not indicated, e.g. *l'automne est triste* (autumn is sad).

As shown below, agreement of the adjective in gender provides a good illustration of our point and of the influence which the spoken language has on pupils' written production. We know that there are adjectives marking gender in writing only, adjectives marking gender in speech and adjectives that possess only one gender. Two types of errors are found in the table: the absence of an *e* and non-redoubling of the consonant.

Types	Oral marks	Morphograms Expected alternation	Proposed alternation
Gender in speech			
une route glissant, une petit fille, une tempête froid,	[-/t] [-/d]	t / te d / de	maintien des morphogrammes t et d du masculin au féminin,
une plaisanterie commi,	[-/z]	s / se	absence du morphogramme s,
de bon heure,	[ö/ Øn]	n / ne	pas de redoublement de la consonne au féminin,
Gender in writing			
la route littoral,	[a]	l / le	pas de redoublement de la consonne au féminin,
une des meilleurs classes,	[Or]	r / re	absence du morphème e,
une maison inconnu, la nuit venu,	[y]	u / ue	absence du morphème e au féminin après voyelle,

The next table presents the feminine agreements of the adjective with nouns identified as masculine, as indicated by the determiner.

Type	Proposed form	Expected form
Animate	un homme très gentille, un garçon nommée Pierre, le vieille homme, un corbeau noire, le hiboux perchée,	un homme très gentil, un garçon nommé Pierre, le vieil homme, un corbeau noir, le hibou perché,
Inanimate Gender in speech	un chemin étroite, un arbre glissante, un tournant glissante, des sacs très lourdes, au première étage,	un chemin étroit, un arbre glissant, un tournant glissant, des sacs très lourds, au premier étage,
Gender in writing	un passage horizontale	un passage horizontal

The errors just presented do not seem to form part of a system because they have contradictory forms. Agreement of the noun and determiner is normal and shows that the gender of the noun is correctly identified; the agreement of the adjective contradicts the preceding one. However, there are hesitations about two forms:

- *premier* because of the liaison with the following initial vowel noun, which may signify liaison;
- *horizontal* because it has only a written gender.

The number of occurrences is insufficient, however, to conclude that the adjective has a tendency to invariability.

2.1.2 Marks of number

The concept of grammatical number is marked in French by opposing singular and plural. Nouns are regarded as singular when the substance (being or object) which they denote is assumed to constitute a single unit at the time of speaking. They are regarded as being in the plural when they constitute at least two units. When not used in speech, a noun is not subject to the concept of number.

The number of nouns and adjectives is generally signified in speech by determiners, lexical alternations and sometimes by a final syllable or letter and by liaisons.

For determiners, the written form of number is *s* (sometimes *x*) pronounced in liaison before a vowel. This form is normally repeated on all elements forming part of the same group (syntagmatic and paradigmatic link).

The marks of number of the noun and adjective are almost exclusively written. We write in every case what is pronounced only in certain conditions. This redundant information is useful in cases of ambiguity, especially if we consider that there is no possibility of rectification in the written form, unlike the oral form. A number of nouns and adjectives still retain an oral mark of number. This aspect will not be further examined because it does not concern the corpus. It will be noted that the errors do not relate to the singular/plural variation but to the omission of *s*.

The syntagmatic marks of written number in the noun group are therefore:

- the determiners (graphically autonomous);
- the final alternations (graphically integrated);
- the liaisons (conditioned position infixes).

The determiner is sufficient to indicate the number

Proposed form	Morphogram	Expected form
des adieu, ses amie, les autre, des bandit, les bandit, les boie, des busard,	X s	des adieux, ses amies, les autres, des bandits, les bandits, les bois, des busards

It may also be noted that the determiner is sufficient in cases of agreement of the adjective and noun, hence forms such as *des grand ami* (great friends), *de vieu arbre* (old tree), *de nouveau camarade* (new friend) etc. Only the oral marks are present and the specific forms of writing (s or its graphic variants) are omitted. We are therefore witnessing a simplification process that eliminates redundancy phenomena. We note, however, the rare but persistent presence of singular forms with plural marks although there is no error in the determiner: *un corbeaux noir* (a black crow), *une petite filles* (a little girl), for example. Another series has forms in which the marks of agreement are unevenly distributed, resulting in inconsistent realisation of number in the written form.

Heterogeneousness in the distribution of marks of agreement over a syntagm

Proposed forms	Oral marks	Written marks	Expected forms
certain animeaux, certain animeaux tel que, aux arbre, une boîtes d'allumette, les même camarades, ces cheveux blanc,	liaison, forme du substantif au pluriel, " " liaison, 0 déterminant au pluriel,	morphèmes du pluriel + déterminant, " "	Certains animaux, certains animaux tels que, aux arbres une boîte d'allumettes, les mêmes camarades, ces cheveux blancs,

The forms proposed in the table above are exceptions to the rule requiring agreement in the noun phrase. It is therefore legitimate to wonder whether one is not dealing with an intermediate stage in the system which is unable to decide between generalisation of agreement by the determiner alone, as in the previous tables, and a sort of mixed form in which written marks alternate with their absence. Here too, the oral form of the plural of nouns is respected (*animeaux* - animals) and the two occurrences bear the mark of agreement.

Finally, four cases are presented in which invariable words bearing marks of agreement occur. They are grouped together although they belong to different classes: *beaucoup*s

(many), *trops* (too many), *les gazs* (the gases), *douzes* (twelve). The very small number of occurrences does not allow conclusions to be drawn. However, system instability is confirmed.

The following series shows forms in which agreement is not marked but which contain an expression of number through:

- the presence of an adverb of quantity: *beaucoup*;
- the semantic nature of the adjective *autre* (other), which expresses plurality.

Unmarked agreement

Proposed forms	Marks	Expected forms
d'autre fois, beaucoup d'autre question, d'autre camion,	0	d'autres fois, beaucoup d'autres questions, d'autres camions,

The presence of terms signifying plurality by themselves seems to make written marks of the plural unnecessary, as may be seen in cases where the determiner *quelque* (some) appears. Its presence alone is sufficient to indicate the plural and makes marks of agreement on the adjective and noun pointless: *quelque bon copain* (some good mates), for example. The plural is expressed through presence of the determiner. The written marks are felt to be redundant and pointless.

In a subsequent phase, an attempt will be made to understand why this corpus may be interpreted as a complex, elaborate system but one characterised by the persistence of fossilised features that appear to fix it at a certain stage in its development, thus helping to give the impression of a system that has reached a plateau.

The mode of expression chosen by learners in their narratives seems to be based on a pragmatic method of communication. The essential objective is to make oneself understood. It is therefore essentially functional. Respect for the morphological norm does not seem to be a priority.

This situation is paradoxical if it is considered that the school context produces a situation in which the pressure from the norm is very high.

What explanations can therefore be put forward?

2.2 Explanations: a systemic tendency within the language, the persistence of areas in the system where variation appears

A number of explanations can therefore be proposed at this stage. The first concerns what H. Frei in *La Grammaire des fautes* has described as the major tendencies of the language based on the concept of need: analogy, differentiation, economy, invariability and expressiveness (1929). Even if, as shown by F. François (1974:171), the opposition between these five needs can be boiled down to a contrast between two major functions, namely economy and diversification, and even if we may wonder about the concept of need and not entirely accept the psychology underlying the explanation of linguistic phenomena given by H. Frei, a large number of faults can still be attributed to the need for economy: syntagmatic,

through abbreviation, simplification or chain contagion, and paradigmatic in the relation between paradigms. While bearing in mind the critique by F. François, we note with interest the advantages of H. Frei's description of the system, which offers a dynamic overall vision of language events in which error is a phenomenon that compensates for the deficits of the standard language and reflects a certain systematicity guided by an empirical goal.

Another possible explanation is the persistence of areas in the system where variation occurs, as shown by R. Chaudenson for peripheral types of French. Distancing himself from H. Frei, he stresses that the important thing is not so much to identify needs as to pinpoint sectors which consistently display variation phenomena, "i.e. variables which may reveal similar or different variants depending on the place and time" (1989:64).

We should also note the analogy between sectors that consistently display variation phenomena and the most frequently encountered errors on the part of learners, in particular morphological regularisations. How are these dysfunctions to be interpreted? Are we dealing with features of popular or advanced French, with provisional grammars devised by pupils during learning? Such grammars would result from the situation of language contact and from liberation from the constraints of the norm in the formal or informal context of learning the host-country language.

2.3 A pragmatic method of communication

The question arising from the above analyses is the relationship with the norm and the latter's pressure on pupils. The work of H. Frei and R. Chaudenson addresses a context of liberation from the norm in which the extent of variation from standard French is inversely proportional to pressure from the norm. The pupils in question are placed in a context of strong exposure to the norm set by the school.

The real competences of pupils regarding execution of instructions are masked by their unequal mastery of the language of schooling. This is reflected at the linguistic level by short sentences, an unsophisticated syntax based on simple sentences and concrete vocabulary of low generality.

This is confirmed at another level of analysis by the general structure of the narratives, some examples of which will be given here.

On examination we realise that thematic structure prevails over linear-progression mode: "The rheme of a first sentence becomes the theme of the second, the rheme of which in turn supplies the theme of the next one" (Adam, 1990).

This may be seen in the following example¹⁶:

Once upon a time there was a man named Orpheus. Orpheus wanted to marry Eurydice but it was necessary for him to go to the castle. But the castle was surrounded by guards.

The theme-rheme progression is a pointer: the old information is presented first and the new information follows, thus meeting the criteria proposed by W. Klein (1989) for defining the pragmatic communication mode:

- place the elements which are linked from the viewpoint of meaning near one another (principle of semantic connectivity),

¹⁶ Extract from a composition by a Creole-speaking pupil.

- place the elements of clearly functional meaning systematically before or systematically after the elements of clearly lexical meaning (principle of coherent serialisation),
- place orientation elements (indications of place, time and modality) at the beginning of the utterance (principle of orientation),
- report events in the order they actually happen (principle of natural order).

Two other characteristics that also seem significant may be added. These are the presence of paratax constructions and semantically simple verbs¹⁷.

Events are recounted in the proposed extract according to the successive principle. The proportion of nouns and verbs is as indicated by the researcher: to each noun corresponds a verb. The overall structure is the paratax. While the previous extract shows some degree of linkage in the use of *mais* (but), the next example juxtaposes phrases without clearly defining, by means of a co-ordinating or subordinating particle, the relationship of dependency existing between them.

*J'arriva au collège un peut perdue je repéra l'endroit ou on nous appellé pour nous classé dans différente classes. Je retrouva Xavier, et dautre copain de CM2. J'étais joyeux de retrouver met ancien copain...*¹⁸

Another example will now be given of expression by pupils and their production of narrative texts. Analysis of the *incipits*¹⁹ of texts by migrant pupils educated in the first special-education class under normal conditions (Bertucci, 2005) has revealed that, apart from numerous spelling mistakes, the proposed *incipits* satisfied the constraints and requirements of the text fragment concerned through the use of a number of strategies. To mark the boundary of the *incipit* and its link to the first event, primary adverbs contributing to the structure of the text were sometimes placed after "*quand*" (when) or "*lorsque*" (when) to mark simultaneity, as in "*quand soudain*" (when suddenly). Where verb tenses are concerned, the break is marked by the switch from a secondary tense - the imperfect - to a primary tense, the past historic. The instructions regarding the person to be used²⁰ are more or less complied with. The functions of the *incipit* are therefore definitely present in pupils' texts. We note the presence of the information function through respect for place description and the presence of the seductive function where the aim is to interest the reader and, finally, we note the descriptions of character. In a 1997 article Marquilló had already observed comparable phenomena in texts by pupils attending reception classes and noted that despite many errors of different kinds the corpus of texts studied displayed a respect for instructions and for the chief characteristics of the genre concerned, namely the written word (ibid.: 162).

We therefore conclude at this stage that pupils' difficulties are due less to problems of interpreting instructions than to difficulties in mastering the language of the host country and the language of schooling. Such mastery is in this case the chief aim of teaching and the methodologies employed²¹.

¹⁷ From this viewpoint, the pragmatic mode is opposed to the syntactic mode.

¹⁸ Unaltered extract from a composition by a Creole-speaking pupil

¹⁹ Beginnings of narrative texts.

²⁰ This was the first person.

²¹ Particularly when we realise the importance attached in French language-education policies, as regards the teaching of French, to the explicit teaching of grammar and spelling, as shown by the following: "The Decree of 11 July 2006 on the common core of knowledge and competences describes grammar teaching as an essential and specific component of the curriculum, in keeping with the wishes of the Haut Conseil de l'Education" (*Bulletin*

In order to create a "tool box" for the schooling of migrant children, the points just set out suggest that the concepts of norm and correct grammar should first be redefined and that language teaching should make allowance for variations (Chiss, 1997).

It would therefore be desirable to consider modifying the approach to language teaching, especially as regards the written word.

Proposals

It is first suggested that the language spoken by pupils be taken as a basis and the spoken language taught according to a contrastive oral/written process.

It would therefore be relevant and productive to use the spoken word as a point of entry to the written word²². It will be assumed that a comparison of certain aspects of the spoken word, particularly as regards morphology, with points which represent difficulties for pupils and lead to errors in writing would lead to the identification of critical points on which attention should primarily be focused.

The following points might be considered:

The spoken language is characterised by fewer marks and differences in their distribution. There is a redundancy of marks in writing where in speech there is only an indication for a syntagm as a whole (Blanche-Benveniste, 1997:140). For the purposes of the demonstration, it will be assumed that there are two typologically different organisations which stress that the spoken word is an area of linguistic complexity and not just of simplification as compared with the written word (Gadet, 1993:4). A number of examples have already been given.

The difficulty is that the school's normative influence is unable to affect morphology totally in the particular context with which we are concerned and that, as already seen, the errors concerned make texts hard to read²³ owing to their large number. They therefore have a very heavy social and scholastic cost. However, error is inherent in all learning and spelling is no exception (Cogis, 2001:49), but a knowledge of the rules and their repetition by the teacher are insufficient to guarantee their assimilation.

3.1 Making allowance for the characteristics of the spoken language in language teaching

A knowledge of the characteristics of the spoken language is needed to construct an approach in which that language is compared with the syntax and vocabulary of the school's standard written language. The aim would be to usher pupils gradually towards the language of school by constructing a system of oppositions for syntax and lexical registers. However, it must be stressed that the grammatical tools available to schools are currently unsuitable for describing the spoken language (Chiss, 1997).

This proposal means adapting teaching practices to the existing conditions and to the pupil group concerned. It may require teachers to depart from the curriculum and from teaching practices directed at all pupils in which all are required to reach a maximum standard.

Officiel No 3 of 18 January 2007, see appendix for continuation of text).

²² Here the spoken word is not seen from the viewpoint of oral genres (Dolz, Schnewly, 1998) or from that of communication, but from that of its relations with the written word on specific points.

²³ This lack of readability due to the large number of morphological shortcomings penalises pupils even if the exercise is successful, as we have seen in the case of the *incipits* (Bertucci, 2005), and keeps them in a state of underachievement.

Under the tool box principle the chief aim is to supply teachers with a description of the language and of the various possible methods, which are regarded as resources and tools for use as the need arises according to the principle of a different teaching approach for each context. There is no question of formally prescribing a standardised, acontextual approach to language teaching.

Assigning a place to the spoken word in language teaching raises a number of questions. The intention is to rely on language descriptions which are within the reach of the speakers in order to facilitate learning of the standard language, which is still undeniably the goal.

3.2 Acquisition of the language of schooling: key objects of study

Morphology is a critical point and it is perhaps morphological shortcomings that help to indicate most clearly pupils' difficulties in mastering the language. Morphology is one of the vulnerable areas to be taken as prime targets in the teaching of standard languages. If it is accepted that pupils refer to specific typologies of the spoken word which they transpose into writing without allowing for the rules governing the written word, we will suggest going beyond the question of language levels and errors at school and taking the view that breaches of the written code might also be interpreted as assumptions by pupils about gender, number and verbal morphology, for example, with reference to another typology, the spoken word.

We should therefore think in terms of the teaching of second languages from a plurilingual and intercultural perspective.

3.3 Teaching of second languages and the development of plurilingualism

The development of a second language teaching approach could be a useful area of research, in close conjunction with mother tongue teaching. Second languages are present in many contexts, which are not confined to schooling arrangements for new arrivals. Owing to the diversity of the groups involved, they occur in a wide range of social situations which differ from the more standardised situations found in mother-tongue or foreign-language classes.

While host-country languages cannot be regarded as the languages in which pupils who have experienced situations of mobility²⁴ undergo initial socialisation, they are "the language of the natural environment, out-of-family social exchanges and the language of schooling" (Chiss, 1997:57).

Second language teaching contributes to reflection on plurilingualism by creating a new relationship between the languages present in school: the national language, the various languages learnt at school, high-status languages like English and the languages of migrants (Chiss, 2006:105). Second language teaching sheds light at the linguistic and teaching levels on hitherto neglected social situations and lends them educational legitimacy. Moreover, second languages help us to identify different language and teaching-related issues and establish links between them. They directly pose the question of the language of learning and schooling, which is that transmitted by the school. Second languages also raise the question of starting writing, access to literacy and the methods by which it is taught, all of which represents a major challenge to the integration of migrant pupils (Chiss, 2006:108). They can be the means of access to a decontextualised way of using the school language,

²⁴ Even though these languages may also be present within families.

less distant from social communication than the school language as ordinarily used, by stressing the affective and identity-related dimensions of language acquisition in addition to the cognitive dimension (id.: 110).

It therefore seems difficult to conceive of teaching the language of schooling independently of the other languages (Coste, 2006:13) and without thinking in more general terms about plurilingualism.

For the sake of completeness, we should accordingly also consider the recognition or even the organised and structured teaching²⁵ of the languages of the home²⁶ in order to promote acquisition of the host-country language while strengthening and highlighting the place of plurilingual migrant pupils. Far from constituting a brake on learning the language of schooling, teaching some of these languages, or at least the most widespread among them, would lead to the integration and recognition of these pupils²⁷. From this they would gain legitimacy and a status which they do not possess at the moment or which they can obtain only with difficulty and in doing so they could improve their relationship to the host-country language and avoid radical confrontation between the languages of the home and the language of school. Perhaps we should see a possible avenue here for combating exclusion. Studies have shown that many children, both French and non-French, whose families have experienced mobility would like to know and speak their language of affiliation²⁸. This is the case, for example, with certain African families who would like to be bilingual in French and African languages and wish to be admitted to language courses (Leconte, 1998). A comparable study has been performed in Switzerland of reception-class pupils, who also showed a desire to learn their mother tongue in order to "retain links with their country" and to "learn the language of the host country" (Gohard-Radenkovic, Mujawamariya, Pérez, 2002).

What ultimately counts, however, is not so much the method or technique employed as the spirit in which the situation is tackled. The important thing therefore appears to be to start with the learning situation and construct the teaching process. The direction would be from the child to the subject and not the other way around. The aim is less to teach a body of knowledge leading to learning the host-country language than to enable a migrant pupil to appropriate the language.

The deliberately provocative nature of this approach conceals quite important issues which we shall now try to address in order to strike a balance.

Pointing out differences does not mean setting a process of specialised education in train and should not lead to marginalisation of the teaching of pupils who may already be economically and socially marginalised.

²⁵ An aspect which will not be developed because it is not the main problem.

²⁶ Ultimately, the idea of *languages of the home* (Fioux, 2001) may be a means of escaping a perhaps over-rigid terminology for mother tongue or language of origin. It is effective here because it is distinguished from that of the language of schooling (without it being implied that there is no meeting point between the languages of the home and the languages of school).

²⁷ We know that international institutions like the Council of Europe recommend that provision be made for the opportunity to learn (initiate, maintain, develop) the so-called language of origin; such provision can take different forms, such as maintenance of family links and contacts with the country of origin, which is an asset for a professional future; in addition, for those children for whom this is the first language, psycholinguistic arguments may be advanced concerning interdependence between the level of development of the first language and acquisition of a second.

²⁸ Certain experiences may have given rise to complaints resulting from certain undesirable developments (Bertucci, 2007).

We must therefore devise an effective teaching process that recognises pupils' cultural and linguistic identity without imprisoning them in it and presents the same guarantees of quality and seriousness as traditional routes. It must enjoy the same institutional status as the latter, otherwise marginalisation will occur.

We must also remember that pupils' perception of the language to be learnt, i.e. the language of the host country, will greatly influence their learning process. Depending on their circumstances and personal histories, pupils will develop their own vision of the school and its role and plan their futures differently. Their will to assimilate or reject the language to be learnt will vary accordingly.

The essential need may therefore be to teach pupils to manage the plurilingual nature of their situation, adopting a global approach going beyond linguistic phenomena in which their difficulties are no longer regarded as simply linguistic. Pupils should be taught to analyse and understand their relationship with their mother tongue and the host-country language and position themselves in relation to them.

The introduction of a new approach must be carried out on the basis of existing teaching systems. To some extent, migrant pupils' difficulties serve as a pointer. Taking pupils' plurilingualism into account and promoting reflection about its function in learning host-country languages appear to be essential preliminaries insofar as this helps to enhance their identity and give them the feeling that their qualities are recognised. Here too it will be necessary to allow for variation.

It would be desirable to start from the learning process and, in order to create an interface between learners' repertoires and the language of schooling, formulate in explicit terms the representations which teachers and pupils have of the language of schooling.

Implementation of the guidelines provided by the European Language Portfolio may capitalise on speakers' plurilingualism by developing a plurilingual approach to language teaching and learning (Castellotti and Moore, 2005; Castellotti, 2006:70). This means ceasing to regard them as separate disciplines (Castellotti, id.: 73) and developing linked teaching of the different languages of countries other than the host country²⁹ and of the language of schooling as part of a global approach to language teaching (ibid.).

Reflection on teaching methods, strategies and tools, as well as on teacher training, is needed in order to make such teaching/learning possible. Action along these lines is by no means simple, given the aims assigned to mother-tongue teaching in the majority of cases, namely the "transmission of academic culture", "promotion" and "reproduction of a stabilised literary language (i.e. that written by good authors), [...] "development of logical reasoning", "completing the unification of speech" (Bronckart and Chiss, 2002:399). A reflection process should therefore be started which will lay the foundations for teaching of languages on a coherent basis, taking account of the status and place of host-country languages in their identity-forming function.

The development of a teaching approach to plurilingualism is a major ongoing project; plurilingual competence forms a complex heterogeneous whole and requires reflection on socialisation and social organisation generally (Véronique, 2005:394). The aim of linking and organising teaching content in curricula in terms of "learnability" has yet to be achieved (Véronique, ibid.: 391). According to this view, languages and subjects are not

²⁹ Regardless of their status.

compartmentalised but interdependent, leading to changes in the relative importance of subjects. The result could be a sort of *general grammar* geared towards building a different relationship with linguistic phenomena and open to diversity (De Pietro, 1998:332). Grammar would thus be a useful tool both for expression and for "language receptiveness, structuring and legitimacy" (ibid.), thus considerably altering its purpose. The study of variation and its systemic developments in conjunction with social norms is one of its aspects.

These may be possible lines of investigation for meeting the challenges of the contemporary situation and of mobility contexts, taking account of the scope and complexity of changes in language practices, the education system and social attitudes (Boutan and Chiss, 1998:3).

These proposals are predicated on openness and integration: openness both in general and to European and non-European migrants, and integration by combating the rejection, stigmatisation and exclusion of which migrant pupils may be victim. As regards the schooling of migrant children, it seems necessary to construct a plurilingual culture that makes use of all existing verbal repertoires in a complementary way, and allows all concerned to enjoy the benefits of the research already done. This process is aimed both at the development of plurilingual competence and at finding remedial solutions by working, if necessary, with pupils who may find themselves in situations of rejection and/or stigmatisation, which may affect their relationship to languages. It is essential to value the linguistic achievements of migrants and accept the idea that these may be an asset to learning. It will be assumed that their mother tongue plays a part in learning the language of schooling and that far from acting as a brake it may promote learning of the second language (Cummins, 1984). The studies performed all tend to show that bilingual pupils are more developed in their cognitive control procedures than monolinguals (Bialystock, 1991) and that the simultaneous presence of several language systems produces better metalinguistic capacities in terms of phonology, judgements of correct grammar and in categorisation tasks (Hamers and Blanc, 1983; Bialystock, 1991).

The ideal would be to construct a repertoire of complementary components in order to avoid divisions and the spiral into low self-esteem. Reflection linking language functions in migratory contexts (identity, communication, epilinguistic) with variation and systemic developments would also be valuable in showing the relationship with speakers' languages on the one hand and for teaching the languages of the host countries on the other.

We shall conclude this study with a number of proposals setting out the priorities for teaching the language of schooling.

3.4 Acquisition of the language of schooling: some avenues of investigation

Two areas should be targeted in the first place to promote the acquisition of the language of schooling. These areas are syntax and morphology.

In syntax, the language description we have been given should be examined on the assumption that not all points in the language are concerned and that what counts is the situation in which the utterance is made (Bertucci, 2008). At this stage, we should go more deeply into the concept of text genre in connection with the descriptions proposed in corpuses of pupils' writings. This would give the opportunity to examine preconceived ideas about pupils' language practices, notably their limited use of complex phrases, which is open to question and depends on the genre used, narrative or argument³⁰ (Gadet, 2003a: 40).

³⁰ At *collège* level, narratives are the main genre, which explains the predominance of the simple sentence.

Morphology is also a critical point³¹. It forms part of what J.-L. Chiss calls the "areas of vulnerability" of French (1997:68) and it is perhaps the violations of morphology which most clearly reveal pupils' difficulties in mastering the language of schooling and penalise them the most.

Ultimately it can be said that, in general, the school description of French should be examined and reviewed to take account of work on the non-standard language and oral aspects. It is not impossible that a certain tradition in grammar teaching has produced a fossilisation of knowledge. Both in France and in many European countries, pupils know rules and possess to a greater or lesser extent a grammatical metalanguage which, however, is not operational. The question therefore arises whether the learning of grammatical terminology should not be deferred. Language learning and mastery do not just mean acquiring terminology and pupils do not always identify under grammatical terminology the language events which it denotes. It would also probably be a good idea to know teachers' representations and practices during teaching of the language in order to see how far they lead to the construction of operational grammatical knowledge in pupils or to fossilised knowledge.

The aim would therefore be to identify a number of themes which cause problems in the learning of French. Because these themes present problems they can constitute areas of research and lead to reflection on the training content to be provided to teachers. It may be noted that these proposals are not unconnected with entries³² in the Diagnostic Writing Tool³³ available on the website of NALDIC (National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum. Working for Pupils with English as an Additional Language) in the United Kingdom, which can be used to assess the competences of migrant pupils in acquisition of the language of schooling. This suggests a relative degree of consensus³⁴, which should be verified at European level by more extensive investigation, on the aims to be achieved in order to master the language of schooling at three levels: the textual, phrasal and lexical. At this stage, regardless of the country concerned, the question put remains the same, namely how to deal with errors very similar to those described above in languages other than French, how to test pupils and assess errors and, ultimately, how can they be given a mastery of grammatical structures?

The table³⁵ below proposes a number of possible skills and competences which could be set as aims to be achieved by the end of *collège* (ISCED 2). The table shows the items proposed by the United Kingdom instrument (see also Annex 2) so as to reveal points of agreement in teaching the language of schooling. It is important to stress that the NALDIC document relates only to written production, while the extracts from French curricula concern both written and oral production, as indicated by the aims set out below. It is also important to mention that the French curriculum relates to all pupils at the end of level ISCED 2 whereas the tool proposed by NALDIC is based on the situation of migrant pupils who have reached an advanced level in the language of schooling. Even with these important qualifications, points of agreement can be discerned.

Different syntactic facts would doubtless be observed if pupils were asked to produce more argument-based texts.

³¹ Some examples of this have already been given.

³² The document is appended.

³³ 2009.

³⁴ However, this is not the result of explicit discussion.

³⁵ This owes much to the objectives set in school curricula for the end of the fourth year which can be viewed on the Ministry of National Education website.

Aims: be able to express oneself correctly and clearly in both oral and written production, be able to reason, argue, structure one's thought.

Competences	Knowledge and activities	Diagnostic Writing Tool
Oral expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take part in a debate to air an opinion and refute possible objections; - Present a brief statement aimed at a specific audience; - Read aloud or say something expressively. 	
Written expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compose an inventive or imaginative text or a text of practical interest, observing syntax and spelling; - Use the chief forms of discourse (narration, description, explanation, argument), possibly by combining them in the same text; - Develop a theme in several paragraphs; - In composing these texts, take account of the communication situation (who is the audience for the text? What is its purpose?); - Use punctuation. 	<p>Cohesion, linking ideas within and between paragraphs</p> <p>Accurate punctuation : full stops/capital letters, commas to separate phrases/clauses direct speech</p>
Read independently either the whole of, or extracts from, literary texts belonging to French, French-language or translated foreign literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognise a work of fiction and identify it in relation to another text; - Identify the genre of a text (literary and non-literary genres); - Identify types of discourse, their form and function (narration, description, explanation, argument). <p>Corpus Texts from antiquity Fairy tales and stories Introduction to poetry Introduction to theatre</p>	
Study an image	Approach to different types of still and animated images (tables, photographs, advertising, cartoons, films etc and their different functions (particularly narrative)	
Master language orally and in writing ³⁶	At the grammatical, lexical and spelling levels	
At the grammatical level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make correct use of fundamental structures (subject, complements of the verb and sentence, qualifiers and determiners of nouns) in simple and complex sentences: 	<p>Use of simple and compound sentences (e.g. using and, then, next)</p> <p>Use of complex sentences (e.g. using connectives such as: when, because, or at a higher</p>

³⁶ It will be assumed that "academic language is oriented towards the rules of written language, also when used orally" (Lange and Gogolin, 2010).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conjugate verbs of the first and second groups, common verbs of the third group; - Master elements which ensure the overall coherence of a text (pronouns, repeater words, linking words); <p>Knowledge</p> <p>The sentence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verbal/non-verbal sentence - Simple sentence (a single verbal nucleus) - Types of sentence (declarative, interrogative, injunctive, exclamatory) - Affirmative/negative sentence - Introduction to complex sentences (several verbal nuclei) <p>Classes of words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The noun and its determiners - The verb (infinitive, group, tense, person) - Pronouns - Qualifying adjective (agreement in gender and number with the noun) <p>Grammatical functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subject of the verb - Complements of the verb - Noun groups – adverbial phrase - Epithet - Subject attribute <p>Conjugation of the verb</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The infinitive and the three verb groups - The indicative (simple tenses and compound tenses) - The imperative <p>Values of verb tenses Situating oneself in time: past/present/future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The present - Past tenses - The future 	<p>level: if...then, although, in spite of the fact that...)</p> <p>Variation within sentences (e.g. change of word order, subject or length; use of phrases, clauses and connectives)</p> <p>Questions/exclamations</p> <p>Articles (a, an, the) used accurately</p> <p>Pronouns (it, this, they...) used so that it is clear what the pronoun refers to</p> <p>Tenses used accurately (e.g. irregular past tenses such as buy/bought, shake/shook)</p>
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At the lexical level	<p>Make exact use of the ordinary, concrete and abstract vocabulary</p> <p>Lexical domains Day-to-day vocabulary, vocabulary of emotions; literary genres (stories and tales)</p> <p>Lexical concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proper and figurative meaning - Variation, language levels - Noun repetitions and substitutes (in conjunction with the study of grammatical classes: nouns and pronouns) - Synonyms, antonyms, paronyms 	<p>Wide choice of vocabulary Ambitious use of a variety of verbs</p> <p>Accurate use of vocabulary – specialist, technical, concrete and abstract</p>
At the spelling level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Master the chief rules of grammatical and lexical spelling - Have spontaneous and effective recourse to verification tools (dictionary, spell check) <p>Grammatical spelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreements in the noun group (adjective, determiner, noun) - Simple subject-verb and subject-attribute agreement - Agreement of the past participle with être and avoir (simple cases) - Morphology of the verb in the indicative: first, second and third groups - Plurals in -aux, -eux, -oux - Punctuation <p>Lexical spelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accentuation of e - Upper case or lower case <p>Homonyms or homophones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distinguished by the accent: à/a; la/l'a/l'as/là; mur/mûr... - Other: et/est; mais/mes; on/ont; ce/se; ces/ses; son/sont... 	<p>Agreements used accurately (e.g. subject/verb – I take, it takes)</p> <p>Accurate use of plural form (e.g. geese, children, women)</p>

We limit ourselves to these few indications, which could be further expanded. In general, besides these teaching proposals, what we are calling for here is a new culture of evaluation and hence changes in the approach to error. These would target priorities to be worked on and do away with the constant urge to correct so that migrant pupils can develop their language abilities without feeling caught up in a process of stigmatisation and rejection. The result would be to promote integration and give pupils the linguistic tools they need for full participation in the exercise of democratic citizenship, which is incompatible with feelings of linguistic insecurity.³⁷

³⁷ See on this point the conclusions of the European Union Education, Youth and Culture Council of 26 November 2009 on the education of migrant children (2009/C 301/07).

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Sitography

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education.gouv.fr/bo/2007/3

naldic.org.uk/docs/resources/KeyDocs.cfm

Annex 1: Extract from Bulletin Officiel No 3 of 18 January 2007

available on the website of the French Ministry of National Education, which sets out the aims of grammar teaching

Implementation of the common base of knowledge and competences: the teaching of grammar

The Decree of 11 July 2006 on the common base of knowledge and competences describes grammar teaching as an essential and specific component of the curriculum, in keeping with the wishes of the High Council for Education (*Haut Conseil de l'Éducation*).

1 - An essential component of the curriculum

A knowledge of how to read, write and speak French governs access to all fields of knowledge and the acquisition of all competences. Mastery of the French language is therefore the first pillar of the common base of knowledge and competences; it lies at the heart of fundamental learning because it is an indispensable tool for achieving equality of opportunity.

Learning spelling and grammar must therefore lead pupils to understand that respect for the rules of French expression is not inconsistent with freedom of expression; on the contrary, it promotes precise thinking and rigorous and easily comprehensible reasoning. A pupil must possess a sufficient mastery of the tools of language, namely vocabulary, grammar and spelling for reading, understanding and writing texts.

2 - A specific component of the curriculum

In primary education a minimum of three hours a week and in lower secondary education 1 1/2 hours a week must be devoted to teaching conjugations, grammar, correct spelling and vocabulary.

Annex 2: NALDIC. Diagnostic tool developed for analysing the writing of more advanced learners. 2009

ITEMS

Cohesion, linking ideas within and between paragraphs

Use of simple and compound sentences (e.g. using and, then, next)

Use of complex sentences (e.g. using connectives such as: when, because, or at a higher level: if...then, although, in spite of the fact that...)

Variation within sentences (e.g. change of word order, subject or length; use of phrases, clauses and connectives)

Tenses used accurately (e.g. irregular past tenses such as buy/bought, shake/shook)

Nominalisation used appropriately

Passive voice used accurately and appropriately (e.g. I heated the liquid in the beaker (active)/The liquid was heated in the beaker (passive))

Accurate use of modal verbs (e.g. would, can, could, should, must, must have, ought)

Accurate use of comparatives (more/less + adjective, adjective + -er ending) and superlatives (most/least + adjective, adjective + -est ending)

Articles (a, an, the) used accurately

Pronouns (it, this, they...) used so that it is clear what the pronoun refers to

Agreements used accurately (e.g. subject/verb – I take, it takes)

Accurate use of plural form (e.g. geese, children, women)

Accurate punctuation: full stops/capital letters, commas to separate phrases/clauses direct speech

Questions/exclamations

Wide choice of vocabulary

Accurate use of vocabulary – specialist, technical, concrete and abstract

Ambitious use of a variety of verbs

