Nature of Tasks when Teaching French with the *Café Crème* Textbook

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of the research was to find out the balance between the typology of the exercises and activities within the textbook Café-Crème.

Methods. We used the structural-tasks analysis, the theory of communicative curve and Markov chain statistical method.

Results. The textbook sequence reveals how tasks progress through different levels of communication potential, from grammar-focused exercises (State 1) to more contextual and communicative tasks (States 4, 6, and 7). The transitions provide insight into the textbook's structure and its approach to developing communication skills. Student's Book Focus (First Dataset) offers a more balanced mix, with greater emphasis on contextual tasks (State 4) and pragmatic activities (State 6). It also incorporates more open communicative tasks (State 7), though these often revert to grammar-focused tasks. Exercise Book (Second Dataset) primarily emphasises repetitive grammar-focused tasks (State 1), with limited but targeted transitions to higher-order tasks (States 4, 6, and 7). This book serves as a foundation, consolidating basic skills.

Conclusions. The exercise book lays a solid foundation for grammar and basic language structures (State 1), but it offers minimal direct pathways to higher-order communicative activities (States 4, 6, and 7). The student's book complements

this with more balanced task types, including contextual, pragmatic, and communicative tasks, though transitions could be improved. While the student's book attempts to bridge foundational tasks and communicative tasks, the transitions to State 7 (open communication) remain weak across both books. This indicates a need for more explicit scaffolding towards real-world communication. Both components of the book show significant clustering within each task type (e.g., repeating grammar exercises in State 1 or grouping receptive tasks in State 4). While this reinforces specific skills, it risks reducing variety and engagement.

Keywords: Birova´s communicative curve, exercises, activities, tasks, communication, textbook, student, French

View on Communication and Communicative Competence

Teaching communication in the classroom depends on various aspects and is primarily determined by the textbook activities chosen by teachers themselves. If we base our definition solely on learning aspects, rather than psychological or other factors, teaching communication could be defined in terms of task-based learning or communicative approaches, a process where learners learn language means and process them to analyse and understand utterances, and create new sentences. Teaching language is a process. Some students are briefly exposed to a new language, and they are able to communicate without the need for extensive practice or exposure to structural exercises. Some students must first practice a new language to build their own self-assurance before they can move on to effective communication. Within the school obligations and time framework, the crucial role is prescribed by the textbook and exercise book. There are different students with different learning styles, cognitive processes, and attitudes toward language learning. There are also different language problems, stages, and times. All of these things help students communicate effectively (see more in Aby, 2024; Bírová, 2016; Harb & El Hajj, 2024; Nunan, 1989).

In this investigation, we utilise the Café Crème (French textbook and exercise book from Massia Kaneman-Pougatch, Sandra Trevisi, Marcella Beacco di Giura, and Sylvie Pons, 1997) activities to analyse the communicative curve and demonstrate the activities implemented to achieve the communication objective (see textbook evaluation in Sheldon, 1988). To achieve this, we utilise the communicative curve theory developed by Jana Birova (2009) as part of her PhD research. Other studies concerning the communicative curve theory are published in XLinguae journal, in the Journal of European Contemporary Education, Journal of Language and Cultural Education, and in the proceedings of the 22nd FIPF World Congress (Birová & Kráľová, 2018; Bírová, 2016; Birová, 2010).

To measure the communication potential in the chosen language textbook and exercise book, as language teachers, we focus on developing competencies – linguistic, cultural, pragmatic, and communicative. That is why we map the proportion of these categories of activities, as well as whether they are structural or communicative. We assigned a value from 1 to 7 to each task, where a task assigned a value of 1 was a language-closed exercise without context. A task with a value of 2 is a culturally focused closed exercise without context. The value 3 indicates a close pragmatics exercise without context or a small context (max. 5 lines), focusing on practicing language pragmatics. The value 4 represents a contextual activity concerned with receptive skills. An intercultural contextual activity is represented by the value 5. A contextual activity that utilises pragmatic speech acts in a receptive context is represented by value 6, and any open communicative activity, such as a role-play or other interactive activity, is assigned a value of 7.

To illustrate and describe a sequence of activities that would likely lead students to communication (through pre-communicative and communicative activities), we employed the communicative curve theory described in Birova's (2009) dissertation work. Then, we used the statistical method of Markov chains. To illustrate the diagrams, we used the artificial intelligence software. The Markov chain describes the likelihood of transitioning from one type of task (rated 1–7) to another within the chapter. These transitions provide insight into how tasks are sequenced to develop communication skills. It addresses transitions, such as changing states, and provides a table (matrix) that illustrates the likelihood of changing from one state to every other state.

Students' book tasks (30 exercises and activities) and exercise book tasks (19 exercises and activities) comprise the Café Crème chapter, which we randomly selected for this analysis.

Analysis of the Café Crème Students´ Textbook Exercises and Activities

A randomly chosen chapter from the students´ textbook Café Crème and its values are attributed to the sequence of the tasks.

The first task is positioned at state 6 of the communicative curve tool – 1-4. The second task at state 6 – 2-6. The third at state 4 – 3-4. For the rest of the activities, these are the results of the analysis: 4 – 6, 5 – 6, 6 – 1, 7 – 7, 8 – 1, 9 – 1, 10 – 1, 11 – 1, 12 – 4, 13 – 4, 14 – 7, 15 – 1, 16 – 1, 17 – 4, 18 – 4, 19 – 4, 20 – 1, 21 – 1, 22 – 7, 23 – 4, 24 – 4, 25 – 4, 26 – 1, 27 – 1, 28 – 1, 29 – 7, 30 – 7.

The Markov Chain student's textbook Transition Diagram is demonstrated below.

Figure 1

Markov Chain Diagram of Task Transitions (30 Activities)
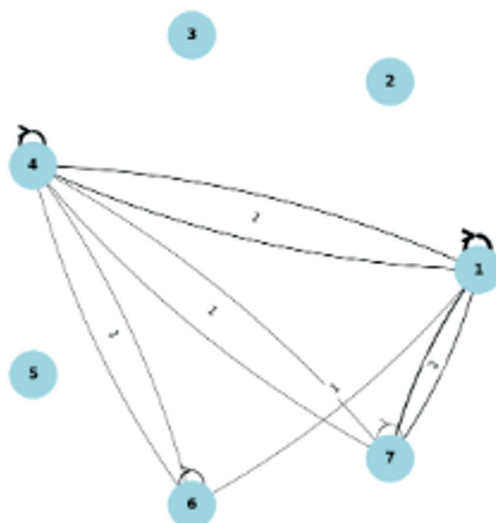
Source. Counted with Artificial Intelligence.

Dominant states are seen in states 1 and 4. Frequently occurring are 1 (closed grammar tasks) and 4 (contextual receptive tasks). They serve as "attractors" in the sequence, and the flow often returns to them.

The following can be thought of as the main transitions:

- from 6 → 1 (multiple times), demonstrating how pragmatics/receptive basis activities (6) rapidly fall back to closed grammar tasks (1)
- Starting from 1 to 1 (self-loop), there are a lot of grammar-focused tasks that follow each other
- from 4 → 4 (self-loop) — stretches of receptive/contextual activities
- from 1 to 7 and 4 to 7 — occasional shifts toward activities that are entirely communicative.

Open communicative activities (7) appear but are isolated. The chain typically collapses back to 1 or ends the sequence after a 7, which means it can no longer maintain communicative flow. 2, 3, and 5 activities are completely missing from the chapter. It means that the book does not develop or partially develops intercultural and pragmatic competence in learners.

The communicative curve is unstable; although tasks occasionally achieve a higher communicative potential (7), the sequence frequently returns to states centered on grammar or receptiveness (1 or 4). This suggests the didactic progression privileges the controlled practice, with only short "bursts" of open communication.

DISCUSSION

State 1 (Language Closed Exercise without Context)

The high likelihood of remaining in State 1 (58.3%) suggests that a substantial number of tasks are grammar-focused. The 16.7% probability of going to tasks rated 4 (contextual activities focused on receptive skills) indicates an infrequent progression to contextual tasks. Given that there is a 25.0% likelihood of progressing to open communicative activities (State 7), it seems that a greater emphasis should be placed on the use of grammar in these situations. The most frequent tasks are those that emphasise grammar, and there is a high likelihood of repetition before progressing to more complex tasks.

State 4 (Contextual Activity Focused on Receptive Skills)

A 50.0% probability of staying in State 4 indicates clustering of contextual receptive activities. The 20.0% likelihood of transitioning to States 1 or 6 implies a combination of progression to pragmatics-based tasks and regression to grammar-focused tasks. For State 7, there is a 10% chance of moving on to open communication activities. Clustering is a common occurrence in contextual receptive activities, which leads to the development of particular skills but limits the advancement towards open communication.

State 6 (Contextual Activity Working with Pragmatics, Speech Acts)

This 33.3% likelihood of remaining in State 6 is indicative of a well-balanced transition between contextual activities, revisiting grammar, and reinforcing pragmatic competence. It also suggests that there are no direct transitions to State 7. Gradually transitioning between pragmatic, contextual, and grammar-focused tasks, pragmatic tasks function as a midpoint.

State 7 (Open Communicative Activity, e.g., Role Play)

The probability of returning to State 1 is 50.0%, indicating regular regression from open communication to grammar-focused tasks. The 25.0% likelihood of transitioning to State 4 or remaining in State 7 suggests that there is a certain degree of progression toward contextual activities or the continuation of communicative tasks. As transitions to open communicative activities (State 7) occur, they frequently revert to foundational tasks (State 1).

Analysis of the Café Crème Exercise Textbook Exercises and Activities

The same chapter from the exercise book Café Crème was analysed, and these values were attributed to the tasks: $1 - 1, 2 - 1, 3 - 1, 4 - 7, 5 - 1, 6 - 1, 7 - 1, 8 - 1,$ $9 - 1, 10 - 1, 11 - 6, 12 - 6, 13 - 6, 14 - 7, 15 - 7, 16 - 4, 17 - 4, 18 - 6, 19 - 7$

The Markov Chain exercise textbook Transition Diagram is demonstrated below.

Figure 2

Markov Chain Diagram – Exercise Book (19 Tasks)
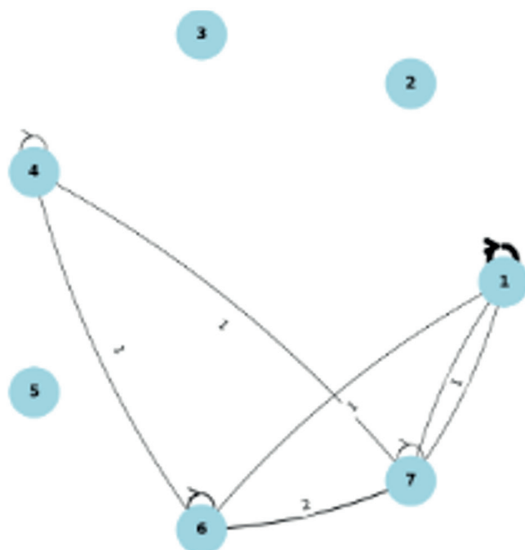
Source. Counted by Artificial Intelligence.

The sequence begins with a long run of state 1, and $1 \rightarrow 1$ is strong. Many consecutive closed tasks appear. From 1, the main outgoing steps are $1 \rightarrow 6$ and $1 \rightarrow 7$ (each occurs), so 1 sometimes escalates to a higher communicative potential. The transition from state 6 to state 6 exhibits a brief persistence at state 6 (self-loop present). The transition $6 \rightarrow 7$ occurs twice, indicating an upward move from pragmatic/receptive (6) to open communicative tasks (7). The transition $7 \rightarrow 1$ occurs (regression), and $7 \rightarrow 7$ also occurs (self-loop), so 7 is partly stable but can fall back to 1. There is a self-loop transition from 4 to 4, but it comes late in the sequence (after 7). Both the transitions $4 \rightarrow 6$ and $4 \rightarrow 1$ occur once, indicating that 4 can collapse to 1 or occasionally take steps upward (to 6). 2, 3, and 5 are not included in this exercise book sequence.

Compared with the students´ book, this exercise book is strongly anchored at state 1 at the beginning, but it does show a clearer upward progression around the middle:

1 → 6 → 7 (with 6 → 7 twice), and a later move into 4 where some local stability (4 → 4) occurs. However, backward transitions, such as 7 → 1 and 4 → 1, suggest that the communicative potential is not consistently maintained.

DISCUSSION

State 1 (Language Closed Exercise without Context)

With a state 1, there is a 77.8% likelihood of transitioning to a new task. This means that these types of tasks are often grouped in this chapter. Before moving on to more communicative tasks, students may complete basic language exercises repeatedly. Transitioning to tasks rated 6 or 7 has an 11.1% chance. Communicative or contextual activities are the outcome of only a small proportion of these grammar-intensive exercises.

State 4 (Contextual Activity Focused on Receptive Skills)

Activities involving receptive skills are occasionally clustered, as evidenced by the 50% chance of remaining at the same task type (rated 4). The 50% likelihood of transitioning to tasks rated 6 indicates that tasks that emphasize receptive skills frequently facilitate activities that involve pragmatics or speech acts, thereby maintaining a contextual focus.

State 6 (Contextual Activity Working with Pragmatics on a Receptive Basis)

The pragmatics tasks often build upon each other, strengthening specific aspects of pragmatic competence, as demonstrated by the 50% chance of staying at the same task type (rated 6). A shift towards more active communication is suggested by the significant correlation between open communication activities and tasks with a 50% chance of progressing to tasks with a rating of 7.

State 7 (Open Communicative Activity, e.g., Role Play)

The 33.3% probability of transitioning to tasks rated 1, 4, or remaining at 7 suggests a diverse range of transitions, including the potential to return to grammar-focused tasks (rated 1) or continue in the realm of open communication. This variability might reflect an effort to integrate both foundational

and communicative skills. Tasks rated 4 (receptive skills), 6 (pragmatics), and 7 (open communication) are strongly interconnected. This implies that scaffolding is effective in these communication-oriented, higher-level activities. According to the high self-transition probability in State 1, students may be subjected to extended periods of repetitive grammar exercises prior to participating in more practical applications.

Combined Analysis and Interpretation

Figure 3

Combined Markov Chain Diagram – Main Book + Exercise Book
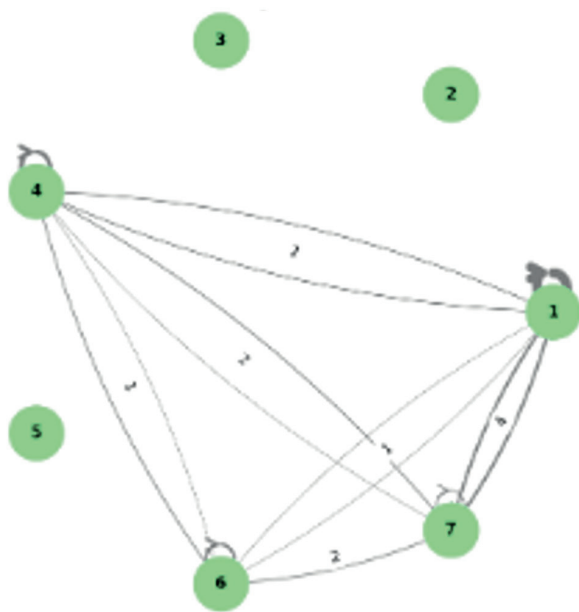
Source. Counted with Artificial Intelligence.

The Combined State Transition Diagram for both the exercise book and the student's book reflects an average of the transitions from both books. It showcases the overall flow of activities across all states, providing a broader perspective of how tasks are distributed and progress. Transitions to foundational tasks (State 1) remain significant, but there is also a noticeable flow towards advanced communicative tasks (State 7). Contextual and pragmatic tasks (States 4 and 6) serve as intermediaries, bridging foundational exercises with open communication activities, which can be seen as insufficient if students base their learning on process training.

Conclusion

Combining the data from the exercise book and the student's book provides a comprehensive picture of how both resources work together to guide students through the process of language learning and the development of communication skills.

Across both books, State 1 has a strong tendency to repeat itself, reinforcing foundational grammar skills. This reflects the exercise book's focus on drilling and practice.

Transitions to States 4 and 6 in the student's book suggest that these grammar-focused tasks eventually scaffold towards contextual or pragmatic activities.

Direct transitions from State 1 to State 7 occur but are relatively rare, indicating that foundational tasks do not consistently prepare students for open communication.

Tasks for clustered receptive skills (State 4) are a prominent feature of the student's book, enabling focused development in comprehending language use in context.

The changes from State 4 to State 6 in both books demonstrate a clear progression toward more advanced and practical applications of receptive skills. Progression from State 4 to State 7 is limited, reflecting a need for stronger scaffolding from receptive skills to open communication.

Both books include practical exercises, but the student's book has more of them. These tasks are a link between basic grammar and more advanced communication.

Transitions from State 6 to State 7 occur more frequently in the student's book, supporting the gradual application of pragmatic knowledge in open communicative tasks. Open communicative tasks are more common in the student's book, but still account for only a small portion of the sequences.

Regression from State 7 to foundational tasks (State 1) is observed in both books, particularly in the student's book, which suggests that communication-focused activities often revert to grammar-focused reinforcement instead of sustaining communication-based learning.

Recommendations for Teachers Using the Book *Café Crème* During the Lessons of French

We suggest that teachers enhance the integration between the two books and create their own activities to develop learners' higher-level communication skills and address missing communicative competencies. By viewing both books as complementary, the analysis highlights their potential to develop foundational language skills while progressively enhancing communication abilities. With more cohesive sequencing and stronger scaffolding, these resources could more effectively prepare students for real-world language use.

We recommend that teachers implement a more efficient scaffolding process that capitalises on contextual and pragmatic tasks to foster more expressive communication. This can be achieved by utilising the exercise book or self-invented activities.

In order to promote a comprehensive learning experience, educators are encouraged to implement a wider range of pathways, including contextual pragmatic activities and contextual activities that enhance receptive skills.

Teachers are expected to improve the lesson by creating extra pathways from grammar-focused tasks (state 1) to contextual (4, 5) or communicative (6, 7) tasks in order to guarantee that the grammar knowledge outlined in the exercise book is actively applied. So that students stay interested and interested in new things, teachers should adapt their lessons to fit each student's learning style and avoid putting too many similar tasks together (like State 1 or State 6). It is anticipated that teachers who use the exercise book will improve scaffolding by creating more precise, gradual progressions from foundational tasks (1, 2) to more advanced communicative tasks (6, 7).

We recommend reducing the frequency of returning to foundational grammar tasks after higher-level activities in the student's book. Instead, teachers are supposed to invent and focus on reinforcing advanced skills in communication contexts.

They should introduce more variety within each chapter or section by interweaving grammar, receptive skills, pragmatics, and open communication tasks to keep students engaged and ensure balanced skill development.

We recommend integrating more deeply with the context and communication. By creating tasks that effortlessly transition from comprehension to active application, it is possible to facilitate more seamless transitions between receptive skills, pragmatics, and open communication.

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