

**DECENTRING AND PROFESSIONAL REFLEXIVITY IN PRE-SERVICE
FRENCH-AS-A-FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION: A
LONGITUDINAL DISCOURSE-BASED CASE STUDY**

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Résumé

Cet article analyse le développement de la décentration, entendue comme la capacité à prendre distance de ses propres cadres de référence et à reconnaître la légitimité d'autres perspectives, chez un futur enseignant de français langue étrangère. S'appuyant sur quatre entretiens menés sur deux ans dans le cadre d'un master professionnel, l'étude combine analyse thématique et micro-analyse discursive pour retracer l'évolution des représentations de soi et de l'Autre. Les résultats montrent un passage progressif d'une posture d'autorité à une coprésence dialogique où le langage devient le lieu même de la transformation éthique. L'article conclut sur l'importance d'articuler réflexion guidée et pratique de terrain pour développer, dans la formation des enseignants, une réflexivité éthique et citoyenne.

Abstract

This article examines the development of decentring – understood as the capacity to distance oneself from one's own frames of reference and engage ethically with other perspectives – in a pre-service French-as-a-Foreign-Language teacher. Implemented within a two-year professional Master's programme (2020-2022), the study draws on four qualitative interviews analysed thematically and discursively to trace how guided reflection and field experience fostered professional reflexivity and ethical awareness. The findings reveal a progressive shift from monologic authority to dialogic co-presence, highlighting the interplay between linguistic form, affective stance and experiential learning. The paper concludes by discussing implications for fostering decentring as a professional and civic disposition in teacher education.

Introduction

Language education in the twenty-first century is marked by increasing linguistic mobility, transnational communication and the growing presence of multilingual classrooms in both physical and digital spaces. In such contexts, teaching a language no longer means transmitting a stable code but engaging learners in the negotiation of meanings across social, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Indeed, as recent scholarship in applied linguistics and teacher education has argued (Derivry-Plard, & Potolia, 2023), these shifts require teachers who are not only linguistically competent but also capable of mediating diversity, i.e. of creating the conditions for learners to explore otherness and question taken-for-granted perspectives (Byram, 1997; Kern et al., 2023). This evolution highlights the need to prepare future teachers for complex and dynamic classroom realities. Developing such readiness implies not only technical mastery but also the ability to reflect critically on one's own assumptions, teaching practices and positioning vis-à-vis learners.

To foster this reflective and relational dimension, the concept of “intercultural awareness” has long informed language pedagogy. However, this framework has been criticised for its conceptual vagueness and its tendency to essentialise cultures as bounded entities (Dervin, & Chen, 2023; Brudermann, & Aguilar, 2021). This has prompted a shift toward decentring as a broader ethical and relational stance: the capacity to distance oneself from one's own frames of reference and to engage with others' perspectives as legitimate sources of knowledge and meaning (Doubková et al., 2024; Liddicoat, & Derivry-Plard, 2021).

Although this ethical and dialogic stance is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of teacher professionalism in multilingual environments, there is still limited empirical research on how it develops during pre-service education as current studies tend to focus on either reflective activities (Farrell, 2024; Kim, 2020) or practicum experiences (Golombek, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2019) in isolation. It follows that little is known about how engagement in reflective and field-based activities fosters the process of decentring and, in turn, shapes teachers' evolving understanding of the Self-Other relationship.

To address this gap, the present study examines how a pre-service French-as-a-Foreign-Language (FFL) teacher redefined both his representations of learners and his own teaching role over a two-year professional Master's programme integrating guided reflection, classroom observation and fieldwork. To capture both the evolution of key themes and the fine-grained linguistic markers of *decentring* in the participant's discourse, this paper adopts a qualitative longitudinal design combining thematic coding with discourse micro-analysis. To this end, the research protocol adopted specifically seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the participant characterise “the Other” during his training?
2. To what extent did the combination of reflective activities and field practice lead him to revise this characterisation and his professional stance as a future FFL teacher?

To answer these questions, the article first reviews the theoretical background and clarifies the relationship between *decentring*, reflection and teacher professional identity formation. It then presents the study context, the methodological design, the main findings and their implications for pre-service FFL teacher education. The conclusion summarises the key insights and outlines future directions for research on how reflective and experiential pedagogies can help pre-service teachers navigate the tensions inherent in multilingual and multicultural learning spaces.

1. Theoretical Background and Rationale

The multilingual turn in language education (Conteh, & Meier, 2014; May, 2014) has foregrounded the need for teachers to mediate across diverse linguistic and cultural boundaries. In such contexts, teaching a language entails fostering learners’ capacity to negotiate meanings and perspectives rather than merely mastering grammatical systems. Yet, as Kern et al. (2023) remind us, intercultural communication cannot be assumed: interactional understanding depends on teachers’ ability to guide learners through ambiguity, difference and potential misunderstanding.

Within this evolving landscape, the notion of decentring has gained prominence. Initially linked to intercultural education (Byram, 1997), decentring has come to denote a broader ethical and dialogic disposition: the ability to take reflective distance from one’s own assumptions and to engage with others’ perspectives as legitimate sources of knowledge (Liddicoat, & Derivry-Plard, 2021; Doubková et al., 2024). This shift responds to critiques of “intercultural awareness” as conceptually vague and prone to cultural essentialism (Dervin, & Chen, 2023).

From a teacher education perspective, decentring thus represents both a professional capacity and an ethical stance. It therefore requires teachers to become aware of how their positioning, values and discourse shape classroom relationships (Varghese et al., 2005; Barkhuizen, 2017). However, such reflexivity is not spontaneous: it develops through structured opportunities for reflection and through engagement with the complex realities of practice (Farrell, 2024; Kim, 2020; Lewis et al., 2023).

To support teachers in developing such a mediating posture, the literature suggests that reflective activities help trainees articulate tensions between beliefs and actions, while field

experience exposes them to difference and unpredictability. Their combination creates a pedagogical ecology where awareness can emerge through cycles of “reflection-in” and “on-action” (Kolb, 1984; Farrell, 2024). Decentring thus becomes a process of dialogic reconstruction as teachers learn not only about others but also about themselves as relational actors¹. Recent scholarship further conceptualises decentring as ethical relationality (Dervin, 2022): a readiness to approach encounters with openness, humility and co-construction rather than evaluation. This perspective positions decentring at the intersection of discourse, ethics and identity. As such, it is less a transferable skill than a form of professional literacy sustained through language, emotion and reflection.

The present study adopts this framework to explore how one pre-service FFL teacher followed longitudinally over two years progressively enacted and verbalised decentring in his discourse.

2. Context of the study and Methodology

The study was conducted within a two-year vocational Master’s programme in FFL at a Parisian university. This programme prepares future language professionals to work in higher education, cultural institutes or associative environments where French is taught as a second or foreign language.

2.1. Educational Context

In response to institutional and societal demands for greater awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, an experimental training module was designed and implemented between 2020 and 2022. The module aimed to foster a decentring perspective through three interrelated components:

- Guided self-reflection: reflective logs, discussion forums and debriefing seminars encouraging students to question their assumptions about teaching and learning;
- Classroom observation (*job-shadowing*, 35 hours in the first year): systematic observation of experienced FFL teachers using an observation grid co-designed with the instructors;

¹ In this study, the term “the Other” refers to learners as they are represented and addressed in the participant’s discourse. *Otherness* designates the broader dimension of alterity (i.e, the recognition of difference as constitutive of self-understanding), while *othering* denotes the discursive processes through which such difference may be simplified, idealised or hierarchised (Grey, 2016; Dervin, 2022). Adopting this triadic distinction allows for a shift away from static notions of “intercultural competence” toward a focus on how relational positioning and decentring are enacted linguistically within the teacher’s discourse.

- Field-based work placement (approx. 200 hours in the second year): teaching or co-teaching activities in socio-educational or cultural centres serving multilingual adult audiences.

These components were complemented by tutorial sessions devoted to discussing field experiences and linking them to theoretical frameworks (e.g., mediation, learner autonomy, teacher identity, etc.). The pedagogical intention of the course was to bridge academic learning and situated experience so as to promote reflective, ethically aware professional growth.

2.2. Research design

In order to explore how the training module and the work placement could foster reflective decentring and openness towards otherness, a qualitative research component was embedded within the Master's course during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. This exploratory project aimed to document the developmental processes at play in pre-service teachers' discourses as they engaged in reflective and field-based learning activities. To capture this process, a qualitative, longitudinal case-study design (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009) was adopted, privileging interpretive depth and meaning-making over generalisation.

At the same time, a call for voluntary participation was launched at the start of the module among the 94 enrolled students, six of whom agreed to take part in the research. The present article focuses on one of these participants (pseudonymised as LL) whose trajectory offers a particularly rich and coherent longitudinal dataset for analysis. LL's case was selected because:

1. He was the only male participant, offering a perspective underrepresented in the cohort;
2. His participation was consistent across the two-year span, producing a corpus sufficiently detailed to allow a fine-grained discourse analysis.

While the single-case design limits generalisability, it provides what Duff (2014) describes as a "window of opportunity" to observe the micro-processes through which professional identity and reflexive awareness take shape. The longitudinal nature of the data also makes it possible to capture the progressive emergence of decentring as both a discursive and experiential phenomenon. In this sense, the study privileges interpretive depth over generalisation and seeks to uncover how linguistic and affective traces of reflection evolve within an authentic pedagogical ecology. The following analysis thus examines how LL's discourse developed over time, reflecting the gradual emergence of decentring through guided reflection and situated practice.

2.3. Data Collection

The main corpus consists of four semi-structured interviews with LL which were conducted at key moments in his two-year trajectory:

1. At the beginning of the first year (January 2021),
2. At the end of the first academic year (May 2021),
3. At the midpoint of the second-year placement (April 2022),
4. At the end of the placement (June 2022).

Timeline of the experimental training pathway					
Master's degree	First year (2020-2021)			Second year (2021-2022)	
Academic training	First term	Second term			
		"Classroom practice analysis" module (24 hours spread over 12 weeks)			
Hands-on experience	First term	Second term		First term	Second term
		35-hour job shadowing experience			200-hour work placement (spread over 2 months)
Timeline of the research protocol					
Interview dates		Interview #1	Interview #2		Interview #3
		12.01.2021	12.05.2021		15.04.2022
				Interview #4	15.06.2022

Table 1. Temporal organisation of the experimental training module/the round of interviews conducted with LL

The four interviews (totalling approximately 4.5 hours of recordings) were conducted in French via videoconference (Zoom). The interview guide included open-ended prompts about LL's perceptions of learners, classroom challenges, self-evaluation and experiences of change.

Interviews also incorporated stimulated recall (Henderson, & Tallman, 2006) and self-confrontation (Laurens, 2015) whereby the participant was requested to react to excerpts from his reflective logs, observation notes and short video clips from his teaching practice.

In addition to the interviews, several complementary sources were used to enrich contextual understanding and triangulate interpretations:

- The reflective journal written during coursework and field practice;
- Mentor feedback from the placement institutions;
- Teaching materials produced by LL (lesson plans, slides, activity sheets).

These documents were not systematically coded but served to contextualise the discourse data and verify the plausibility of the interpretations.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

The researchers involved in this research were also instructors on the course. To mitigate potential bias, data collection and first-cycle coding were therefore conducted collaboratively with a colleague not directly involved in teaching LL.

Besides, reflexive memos were kept throughout the project to document decisions, assumptions and analytical tensions (Tracy, 2010).

Eventually, all participants were informed of the study's aims and signed consent forms in accordance with the university's ethics guidelines. This is why pseudonyms were for instance used to ensure confidentiality.

3. Methods

Building on the qualitative, longitudinal case-study design outlined above (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009), the methodological focus here lies on how data were collected, prepared and analysed. The corpus consists of four semi-structured interviews with LL, conducted between January 2021 and June 2022 (Table 1), complemented by his reflective journals and practicum reports. All interviews were conducted in French, recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The analysis proceeded in three successive stages: thematic coding, selection of salient excerpts and micro-analysis, as detailed below. This procedure privileges interpretive depth over generalisation: the aim is not to quantify discourse change but to understand how professional stance and ethical awareness are enacted and transformed through language use. The corpus is thus approached as a dialogic space of meaning-making where identity, affect and power relations are continuously negotiated and co-constructed, rather than as a dataset for statistical comparison.

3.1. Thematic coding

The four interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2006, 2012). To do so, two researchers independently² tagged³ what they thought would qualify as “themes”⁴ in the corpus (C1) of transcripts (n=4), as shown in Figure 1.

² In other words, without intercommunication, not to influence each other.

³ Using *QDA Miner Lite*.

⁴ “A code is a container for a single topic, whereas a theme goes further in capturing dimension or meaning across multiple codes and in this way acts as an ‘argument’ about the ‘phenomenon being examined’” (Braun, & Clark, 2006, p. 18).

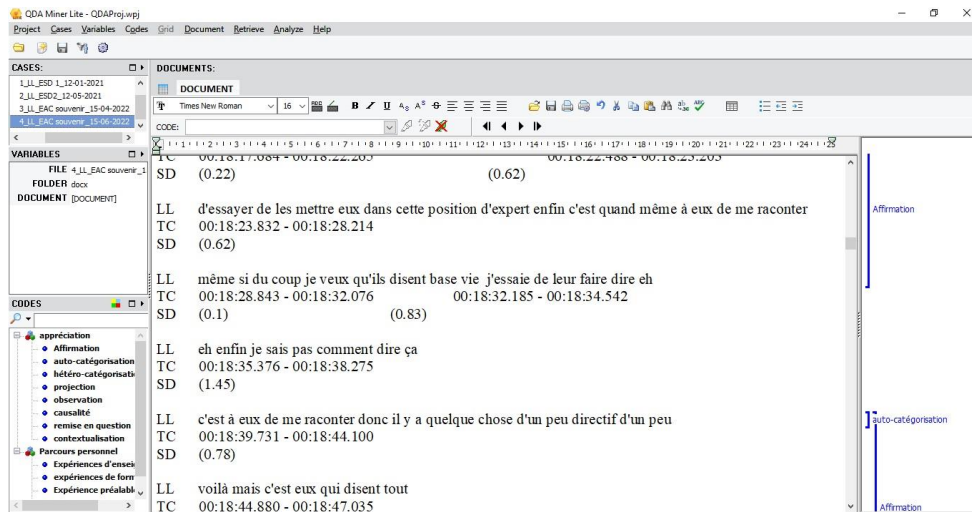


Figure 1. Using QDA Miner Lite to identify themes across the corpus

Following this, the researchers' double-blind analyses were pooled to allow for a discussion on the concurring/discordant themes identified and the level of agreement between them was calculated (Table 1). On this topic, the literature of the field (Norcini, 1999 for instance) generally recommends 80% agreement as the minimum acceptable interrater agreement. In this study, the level of agreement between raters is deemed "acceptable" since it amounts to 90.55% on average and the minimum rate measured per sub-corpus is 86.36% (see Table 4).

	Sub-corpus #1 (Interview #1)	Sub-corpus #2 (Interview #2)	Sub-corpus #3 (Interview #3)	Sub-corpus #4 (Interview #4)	Total C1 Average (%)
Number of similar tags	38	101	156	184	479
%	86.36	93.52	91.23	89.32	90.55
Number of dissimilar tags	6	7	15	22	50
%	13.64	6.48	8.77	10.68	9.45
Total number of tags	44	108	171	206	529
%	100	100	100	100	100

Table 1. Degree of agreement among raters per sub-corpus and all corpora combined

Eventually, for the needs of this research, the dissimilar themes and their corresponding excerpts within the C1 (i.e., 9.45% on average in this study, see Table 4) were excluded from the analyses. It follows that the results provided below are based on the concordant themes only. Besides, concerning the concurring themes, 10 of them were identified across the data. Appendix 1 provides details regarding the concurring themes identified and their meanings in the context of the study. It further includes original verbatim excerpts taken from the corpus (in French) and their translation in English to exemplify them.

3.2. Selection of concordant themes

After the first-cycle thematic coding, ten concurring themes were identified across the four interview subcorpora. They were then quantified and ranked according to frequency (see Table 2).

Themes identified in C1 (all four documents included)	# of occurrences per theme in subcorpus #1 and representativeness (%) in subcorpus #1	# of occurrences per theme (subcorpus #2) and representativeness (%) in subcorpus #2	# of occurrences per theme (subcorpus #3) and representativeness (%) in subcorpus #3	# of occurrences per theme (subcorpus #4) and representativeness (%) in subcorpus #4	Total # of occurrences per theme (all four documents included, decreasing order) and representativeness across C1 (%)
Statement (<i>affirmation</i>)	10 (26.32%)	29 (28.71%)	63 (40.65%)	59 (32.06%)	161 (33.68%)
Representation of others (<i>hétéro-catégorisation</i>)	8 (21.04%)	30 (29.71%)	32 (20.65%)	45 (22.83%)	115 (24.06%)
Self-positioning (<i>auto-catégorisation</i>)	5 (13.16%)	25 (24.75%)	11 (7.09%)	22 (11.96%)	63 (13.18%)
Reflexive repositioning (<i>remise en question</i>)			22 (14.2%)	19 (11.96%)	41 (8.58%)
Idealised or hypothetical self (projection)	10 (26.32%)	10 (9.9%)	6 (3.87%)	9 (4.89%)	35 (7.32%)
Previous pedagogical training (<i>expériences de formation</i>)			13 (8.38%)	12 (6.52%)	25 (5.23%)
Teaching experience (<i>expérience d'enseignement</i>)	5 (13.16%)	7 (6.93%)	6 (3.88%)	2 (1.09%)	20 (4.18%)
Contextualisation (<i>contextualisation</i>)				13 (7.06%)	13 (2.72%)
Future projects (<i>perspectives</i>)			1 (0.64%)	2 (1.09%)	3 (0.63%)
Causality (<i>causalité</i>)			1 (0.64%)	1 (0.54%)	2 (0.42%)
TOTAL	38	101	155	184	478 (100%)
Number of words uttered by LL per subcorpus	1425	3527	4898	8300	

Table 2. Quantification and classification of the themes identified (per sub-corpus and across the C1)

As shown in Table 2, “Statements” and “Representations of others” were the most recurrent categories in LL’s speech, while others (e.g., “Contextualisation”, “Future projects”) appeared only sporadically. As “Statements” mostly comprised neutral descriptive utterances, this category was excluded from further analysis. Similarly, the five least represented themes (“Causality”, “Future projects”, “Contextualisation”, “Teaching experience” and “Previous pedagogical training”) were removed as they accounted for 13.18% of the total coded segments and were therefore not statistically significant.

In the end, to ensure focus and interpretative coherence, four themes were retained for detailed qualitative analysis: (1) Representations of Others, (2) Self-positioning, (3) Reflexive-repositioning and (4) Idealised or hypothetical self. Together, these accounted for over 53% of the coded material, reflecting their centrality in LL’s discourse on teaching and alterity. The resulting secondary corpus (C2) was compiled by pooling all coded segments associated with these four categories (n=254). All original excerpts (in French) are also

available online for transparency and traceability⁵. This sequential approach allowed the researchers to move from thematic mapping to interpretive depth, examining how linguistic form indexed stance and ethical positioning.

4. Corpus analysis

The analysis combines a quantitative overview of recurring themes with a micro-discursive examination (Van Dijk, 1992; Fairclough, 1989) of how *decentring* progressively emerges in LL's representations of self, others and teaching.

4.1. Quantitative analysis of the concurring themes identified in the corpus

4.1.1. Overview of Thematic Evolution

Across the two-year trajectory, LL's discourse revealed significant shifts in both thematic focus and linguistic framing.

- References to the Other increased fourfold (from 8 to 45 occurrences), indicating a growing preoccupation with learners' identities and perspectives.
- Self-descriptive statements decreased proportionally, replaced by interrogative or modalised utterances ("*je crois que*", "*peut-être que*", "*j'ai l'impression que*"), signalling heightened reflexivity.
- Behavioural projections ("*je ferai*", "*je devrais*") gradually gave way to dialogic expressions ("*on essaie de comprendre ensemble*", "*on construit avec eux*"), evidencing a shift from prescriptive reasoning toward co-constructed understanding.

This quantitative evolution suggests a trajectory of increasing *decentring* – a move from monologic control to dialogic negotiation of meaning – which the following micro-analysis explores in detail.

Mentions of affective states ("*je me sentais plus détendu*", "*ça m'a travaillé*") also became more frequent, highlighting the emotional dimension of his evolving reflexivity. These quantitative shifts – modest in scale but consistent in pattern – suggest a progressive move from evaluative authority toward dialogic and ethical engagement with learners.

4.1.2. Linguistic Markers of Decentring

Across the corpus, three recurrent linguistic features index the unfolding of decentring:

- Modalisation and hedging ("*je pense*", "*peut-être*", "*je ne sais pas trop*") introduce nuance and signal openness to multiple viewpoints.

⁵ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bZaTqkS6EkYkxNDveTLPaH8P8GiIKfLH/edit?usp=sharing&oid=118259530723746943162&rtpof=true&sd=true> (last retrieved December 15th 2025).

- Reformulation and self-correction (“*ce que je voulais dire...*”, “*enfin, non...*”) show metadiscursive awareness and self-monitoring.
- Pronoun shifts (from *je* → *on* → *nous*) trace LL’s movement from individual authority to shared agency in classroom discourse.

These markers form the linguistic substrate through which decentring materializes: not as a declared ideal but as a discursive practice emerging through moments of hesitation, laughter or reformulation.

4.2. Micro-analysis of discourse

The present micro-analysis of discourse (Rioufreyt, 2019) examines how LL’s discourse enacts *decentring* across four dimensions: self-positioning, representations of others, reflexive repositioning and projection. Authentic excerpts from the C2 illustrate these linguistic and ethical transformations.

4.2.1. Self-Positioning (« *Auto-catégorisation* »)

At the beginning of the programme, LL defines his teacher identity through metaphors of control and assurance: “*Je me suis senti plus à l’aise, plus maître de ma classe*”.

This early confidence coexists, however, with uncertainty: “*Je n’ai jamais pu avoir ce positionnement-là, je me sens dans un flottement*”.

Such ambivalence signals the fluidity of a professional self still in formation. Over time, categorical self-ascriptions give way to modalised forms (“*Je pense que j’étais plus proche de ça, peut-être que ça a joué*”) and laughter becomes a recurrent self-regulatory cue (“*(rit) je ne sais pas trop comment dire*”).

The repeated acknowledgment of “*un côté un peu vertical et un peu trop directif de ma part*” indicates growing meta-awareness of power asymmetry. LL gradually redefines his role from *positionalité verticale* (vertical authority) to *présence partagée* (shared presence): an early manifestation of *decentring* whereby teaching becomes a co-presence rather than a performance of mastery.

4.2.2. Representations of Others (Hétéro-catégorisation)

In the first interviews, LL depicts learners through binary and homogenising lenses: “*des apprenants qui seraient privilégiés et donc émancipés et des apprenants moins privilégiés donc à émanciper*” (Subcorpus 4). This binary logic constructs the teacher as a benevolent guide, an orientation consistent with what Grey (2016) calls “the rhetoric of benevolent othering”. As the practicum progresses however, LL’s discourse grows more nuanced: “*des*

personnes très éloignées de l'emploi, des apprenants qui ont des niveaux jusqu'à C1, voire langue maternelle". He begins to name individual learners ("*une dame ivoirienne*", "*Awa*"), signalling recognition of singular subjectivities. His evaluation of one student illustrates this shift: "*sa force c'est d'être une professionnelle et c'est ça qu'elle pourrait apporter à la formation*". He immediately contrasts this with a critique of institutional discourse: "Et nous, on lui dit non, vous ne l'êtes pas vraiment parce que c'est pas la bonne phrase". This reflexive juxtaposition marks the ethical inflection of his decentring: learners are redefined not as deficient but as epistemic partners. The shift in pronoun use – from *ils* to *on* and *elle* – mirrors his move from hierarchical distance to dialogic inclusion. Such re-evaluation of learners' identities as knowers rather than receivers aligns with Byram's (1997) ethical dimension of decentring and with the relational notion of mediation (Liddicoat, & Derivry-Plard, 2021).

From a discourse-analytic perspective, these shifts in wording and interactional framing can be interpreted through Bakhtin's concept of *dialogism* (1981) and Goffman's (1981) notion of *footing*. LL's recurrent use of hedging ("*peut-être*", "*je pense que*"), self-reformulation ("*enfin, non...*") and laughter performs a repositioning of voice within a heteroglossic space where multiple perspectives coexist. Each reformulation signals a subtle re-alignment of stance (what Goffman would call a change of footing), indicating LL's growing awareness of the relational nature of meaning-making. In this sense, *decentring* manifests not only as a cognitive shift but as a linguistic and interactional practice through which the speaker negotiates his own authority vis-à-vis others.

4.2.3. Reflexive Repositioning (*Remise en question*)

Segments coded as *remise en question* reveal the densest traces of ethical and linguistic decentring. LL's discourse here is permeated with evaluative verbs ("*comprendre*", "*regretter*", "*douter*") and metacognitive expressions ("*je me rends compte que*", "*j'aurais dû*"), signalling an emerging capacity to take reflexive distance from his own practice. One pivotal episode involves a classroom incident: "*Je lui ai dit un peu de se taire... c'est quelque chose qui m'a beaucoup travaillé*". In French, the verb *travailler* in the reflexive or impersonal form ("*ça m'a travaillé*") carries connotations of emotional persistence and bodily resonance rather than purely intellectual reflection. Its recurrence positions reflexivity as an embodied process: something that *works on* the subject rather than something the subject consciously performs. This idiomatic framing encapsulates the affective and ethical dimension of decentring: the teacher does not simply analyse his experience but is *worked on* by it, echoing the notion of

learning as a dialogic encounter between self and experience (Bakhtin, 1981; Golombek, 2017).

From a discourse-pragmatic standpoint, these reformulations can also be interpreted through Bakhtin's (1981) concept of *dialogism* and Goffman's (1981) notion of *footing*. Each hesitation, self-correction or shift in pronoun signals a re-alignment of stance: a subtle negotiation between multiple voices within LL's own speech. Through these micro-movements, LL learns to hear himself differently, re-positioning his voice in relation to that of his learners and of institutional discourse. Decentring thus manifests linguistically as a change in *footing*: the speaker's ongoing effort to recalibrate his authority and relational positioning in interaction.

LL's subsequent self-correction then deepens this awareness: "*Peut-être que ce que j'aurais dû faire, c'est leur dire 'moi, on m'a parlé de base vie', plutôt que d'essayer de leur faire dire la bonne réponse*". Through this reformulation, he moves from corrective authority to dialogic humility, from transmitting knowledge to co-constructing meaning. Later in the trajectory, LL even questions the discourse of emancipation itself: "*Est-ce qu'on peut y ajouter une visée émancipatrice ? Est-ce que c'est conciliable de parler d'émancipation dans des formations comme ça ?*". This meta-level interrogation of pedagogical ideals signals an advanced stage of decentring: the ability to problematise one's own interpretive categories and moral positioning, transforming reflection into an ethical and dialogic stance.

4.2.4. Projection and Idealisation

Projection sequences provide insight into LL's imagined professional self and the tensions between aspiration and practice. Early reflections reveal admiration for confident models of teaching: "*c'est ce que j'aimerais être comme enseignant, cette manière très assurée de faire le cours*" (Subcorpus 1). Yet, this idealised image is often followed by self-correction or laughter ("*je crois jamais avec cette assurance-là quand même*"), showing a meta-awareness of the performative nature of authority. Over time, projection becomes less idealised and more pragmatic. LL describes iterative cycles of experimentation and learning: "*c'est une activité typiquement que je vais refaire; je vais le refaire en faisant attention à ça*". Later discourse also integrates temporal markers of anticipation and retrospection ("*quand je serai moins dedans*"; "*ça va m'entraîner à mieux m'en sortir les prochaines fois*"), indicating an increasingly longitudinal awareness of professional development. This movement from idealised projection to process-oriented reflection mirrors the shift from fixed self-concept to dynamic, decentered professional identity. Decentring here therefore takes the form of temporal reflexivity: the ability to view oneself across time as both actor and learner.

4.2.5. Negotiating Verticality (*Repositionnement du formateur*)

Throughout the corpus, LL grapples with the paradox of authority and collaboration: “*Un côté un peu vertical et un peu trop directif de ma part*”. Later, he acknowledges the difficulty of sustaining the balance between presence and withdrawal: “*À la fin, j’ai commencé à un peu plus parler alors que j’avais fait attention à m’effacer*”. His ironic aside (“*Je reste le formateur*” [rit]) acts as meta-commentary on the persistence of pedagogical asymmetry. This oscillation between distance and engagement epitomises *decentring-in-action*. Awareness itself therefore becomes transformative.

4.2.6. Interim synthesis

Across the four interviews, LL’s discourse evolves from certainty to reflexivity, from evaluation to interpretation and from monologic authority to dialogic co-presence. These developments manifest linguistically through:

- A growing use of modal and interrogative forms (“*je pense, peut-être, est-ce que...*”);
- The move from collective stereotypes to singularised learner portraits;
- And the appearance of pronouns and verbs of collaboration (“*on essaie*”, “*on comprend*”, “*on construit*”).

Together, these features show that *decentring* operates simultaneously on linguistic, ethical and temporal planes. It is linguistic, because it is inscribed in the fine texture of discourse; ethical, because it redefines the teacher-learner relationship as reciprocal; and temporal, because it unfolds through recursive cycles of experience, reflection and re-signification.

LL’s evolving discourse thus embodies *decentring* as both ethical reflexivity and discursive practice: the capacity to inhabit uncertainty, question one’s assumptions and engage with otherness as a legitimate source of meaning.

5. Discussion

This longitudinal micro-analysis offers a detailed view of how *decentring* – understood as the capacity to suspend one’s interpretive authority and engage dialogically with otherness – takes form through discourse, reflection and lived experience in pre-service teacher education. Beyond thematic evolution, the analysis highlights how *decentring* is linguistically and affectively enacted and how it materialises in the very texture of LL’s speech (his hesitations, reformulations, laughter and shifting pronouns).

5.1. Decentring as a Linguistic Practice

At the micro-discursive level, LL's gradual move from categorical assertions (“*je suis maître de ma classe*”) to hedged and dialogic formulations (“*je me demande si...*”, “*peut-être que j'aurais dû...*”) demonstrates that decentring operates first as a *linguistic practice* before it becomes a fully internalised disposition. The frequency of self-corrections and reformulations suggests that awareness emerges not outside language but *through* it: LL learns to hear himself differently. Such micro-markers embody what Fairclough (1989) describes as “reflexive discourse”, where speakers monitor how their utterances construct social and epistemic relations.

In LL's case, the shift from *je* to *on/nous* encapsulates this relational reorientation: authority becomes shared and meaning co-constructed. This finding echoes Liddicoat and Derivry-Plard's (2021) conception of the teacher as a mediator of meanings rather than a transmitter of knowledge. The classroom thus appears less as a space of performance and more as a dialogic arena where teacher and learners jointly negotiate knowledge, legitimacy and identity.

5.2. Ethical Reflexivity and Affective Work

The analysis further shows that decentring entails *ethical reflexivity* but also considerable *affective work*. LL's utterances (“*je ne suis pas sûr d'être à ma place*”, “*ça m'a beaucoup travaillé*”) reveal an emotional grappling with the contradictions of teaching in socially complex contexts. As Golombek (2017) and Farrell (2024) have argued, such emotional dissonance can become a fertile ground for growth when framed as an object of reflection rather than a sign of inadequacy. LL's laughter and self-irony – rather than mere coping mechanisms – function as semiotic resources for rebalancing authority and empathy.

This supports the idea that decentring is inseparable from *emotional literacy*: the ability to tolerate ambiguity, discomfort and loss of control as constitutive of relational teaching. Teacher education that legitimises these affective tensions – rather than pathologising them – creates the conditions for ethical development.

5.3. The Reflective-Experiential Interface

The findings also reaffirm that *decentring* is co-constructed through the interplay of field experience and structured reflection. Critical incidents encountered in practice (misunderstandings, failed activities, ethical discomfort) did not automatically produce awareness. They became transformative only when revisited through guided analysis, mentoring conversations and theoretical framing. LL's progressive re-interpretation of

“verticality” exemplifies this dialectic: what began as a feeling of imbalance (“*trop directif*”) became, through reflection, a conceptual tool for analysing power asymmetries.

This dynamic validates the pedagogical architecture of the Master’s programme where reflection and experience were intentionally intertwined. It resonates with Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle and with Farrell’s (2024) notion of *reflection-in* and *on-action*, suggesting that decentring flourishes at the intersection of conceptual and lived knowledge.

5.4. Temporal and Dialogic Dimensions of Professional Identity

A key contribution of this study lies in its longitudinal lens. The temporal layering observed in LL’s discourse – oscillating between retrospection (“*ce que j’aurais dû faire*”) and anticipation (“*la prochaine fois, je ferai attention à ça*”) – reveals that decentring is not only relational but also temporal. Through language, LL positions himself simultaneously as actor and observer, projecting forward while reflecting backward. Such recursive positioning aligns with poststructural views of teacher identity as dialogically and temporally negotiated (Varghese et al., 2005; Barkhuizen, 2017).

Moreover, LL’s evolving capacity to see himself in dialogue with his past and future selves exemplifies a deeper ethical shift: teaching becomes a reflexive continuum rather than a series of isolated acts. In this sense, *decentring* is not achieved once and for all; it is sustained through ongoing narrative reconstruction.

5.5. Pedagogical and Institutional Implications

For teacher education, these findings underscore the importance of embedding *discourse-based reflection* within training. Encouraging trainees to analyse their own linguistic practices (pronoun choices, modalisers, metaphors) helps them uncover implicit hierarchies and biases in classroom talk. By making the micro visible, educators can foster macro-level ethical awareness.

Institutionally, promoting decentring implies valuing dialogue over performance and vulnerability over certainty. The ecology of reflection observed in this programme (peer dialogue, mentor scaffolding and explicit theorization) provided the psychological safety required for LL’s transformation. Replicating such ecologies across teacher education settings could cultivate professionals capable of engaging ethically and adaptively with linguistic diversity.

Finally, this case invites a reconceptualisation of decentring as *democratic literacy* (Dervin, & Badrinathan, 2012): a civic competence grounded in linguistic awareness, empathy and

epistemic humility. As classrooms become ever more multilingual and multimodal, this form of literacy may be as crucial to the teacher's role as linguistic proficiency itself.

5.6. From Discursive Awareness to Ethical Praxis

In light of the findings, the study provides concrete answers to the two questions guiding this inquiry. First, LL's evolving characterisation of "the Other" shifted from a deficit-based and binary view to a recognition of learners as plural, agentic subjects. This transformation was discursively marked by increasing modalisation, individuation and self-reflexive repositioning. Second, the interplay between guided reflection and field-based practice emerged as a key driver of this change. The dialogic and experiential nature of the module enabled LL to move beyond prescriptive teaching models toward a relational, ethically grounded understanding of professional identity.

Recognising this interdependence invites a broader rethinking of what constitutes "professional growth" in language teacher education. As such, rather than being conceptualised as the progressive acquisition of pedagogical competences, this study shows that development can be reframed as the cultivation of *ethical relationality*: the ability to remain responsive to difference and to inhabit uncertainty productively.

This discussion thus directly responds to the initial research questions while also pointing to a larger issue: how pre-service teacher education can foster decentring not only as a pedagogical skill but as a professional and civic disposition. The following conclusion expands on these implications for future research and institutional design.

Conclusion

This longitudinal case study set out to examine how a pre-service FFL teacher's representations of self and other evolved through a two-year programme integrating guided reflection, classroom observation and field-based practice. By combining thematic analysis with discourse micro-analysis, the study traced how processes of decentring – understood as the capacity to suspend one's interpretive authority and engage dialogically with otherness – were enacted through the fine texture of LL's language. The findings reveal that decentring is not a stable competence or an abstract pedagogical ideal but a situated and recursive practice unfolding through language, emotion and interaction. LL's speech demonstrates how the micro-features of discourse – modalisation, reformulation, laughter, pronoun shifts, etc. – index broader ethical and epistemic transformations and his movement from evaluative to dialogic discourse illustrates that learning to teach involves learning to inhabit language differently. Besides, as LL moved from assertive to interrogative and from evaluative to

interpretive forms, his discourse reconfigured his teacher identity from one grounded in control and hierarchy to one based on shared presence, reciprocity and ethical listening. In this sense, decentring appeared less as a cognitive achievement than as a linguistically mediated process of self-displacement.

The study also underscores the interdependence of reflection and experience. Field practice alone did not trigger transformation; it was the dialogic interplay between lived tension and guided analysis that made awareness possible. The combination of critical incidents, peer and mentor dialogue and theoretical framing offered LL what Farrell (2024) calls “reflective space”: a discursive environment where uncertainty and emotion can become resources for ethical development rather than suppressed. Within such spaces indeed, emotional discomfort – expressed through doubt, laughter or hesitation – can become a driver of ethical growth and decentring may also emerge as an affective as well as cognitive act, requiring not only intellectual humility but also the willingness to inhabit discomfort productively.

Beyond the individual case, the study underscores the broader relevance of decentring as a form of professional and civic literacy. In increasingly multilingual educational landscapes indeed, the ability to mediate across difference entails more than intercultural awareness: it requires what Dervin (2022) terms “ethical relationality”: the disposition to treat every encounter with otherness as a site of co-construction rather than evaluation. Embedding such relational ethics into teacher education demands curricula that make discourse visible as both data⁶ and practice. As such, encouraging trainees to analyse their own linguistic positioning – how they speak about and with learners – can help them recognise how authority, empathy and recognition are negotiated through language itself, as shown in this study.

Besides, at the institutional level, fostering decentring calls for pedagogical ecologies that privilege reflection over performance, dialogue over transmission and vulnerability over certainty. The experimental module described here offers one possible model: a structured yet flexible framework where theory and experience intersect and where reflective language becomes the medium of professional transformation. Scaling such approaches would mean valuing longitudinal and qualitative forms of teacher learning alongside more traditional metrics of competence. Future research should therefore extend these insights through

⁶ On this matter, while the dataset (2020-2022) predates the current post-pandemic reality, its insights remain relevant in the current context as hybrid and multilingual classrooms are becoming increasingly common and require educators who can navigate alterity with reflexivity and empathy. This trend is also set to increase, given that “in the long run, many people are likely to have more opportunities to use their new language in online contexts than in face-to-face situations” (Develotte, & Kern, 2019, p. 281).

comparative and multi-case designs, exploring how decentring interacts with other dimensions of teacher identity, such as digital mediation, assessment and classroom management. Longitudinal work could also examine the sustainability of decentring once teachers enter professional life: whether and how reflective and dialogic stances endure under institutional constraints.

Ultimately, the trajectory of LL illustrates that learning to teach a language is inseparable from learning to inhabit language differently. To teach ethically in multilingual settings is to engage in ongoing acts of linguistic and relational translation, in which listening becomes as central as speaking. In this light, decentring is not an endpoint but a professional ethos: a way of being with others that sustains openness, humility and dialogue. Therefore, cultivating this ethos within teacher education is not only a pedagogical responsibility but a democratic one, affirming the role of language education as a space where understanding “the Other” begins with transforming the Self.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Background information about the concurring themes identified in C1

Higher-order groups	Themes	Tentative definitions	Examples taken from the corpus (<i>original verbatim quotations in French</i>)	Examples taken from the corpus (<i>our translations</i>)
LL's subjectivity (<i>appréciation</i>)	Statements (<i>affirmations</i>)	Utterances referring to objective facts, general truths or professional habits	<i>De manière générale, ils vont avoir besoin de raconter ce qu'ils ont fait. Il y en a qui veulent travailler dans la restauration collective ou qui veulent travailler avec les enfants ben pareil il faut raconter ce qui a été fait que ce soit à l'écrit ou à l'oral</i> (from Subcorpus #4)	Generally speaking, they will need to be able to describe what they did. Some of them want to work in collective catering, others with children, so it's the same idea – they need to be able to explain what they have done, whether in writing or orally.
	Self-positioning (<i>auto-catégorisation</i>)	Expressions related to the participant's perception of self or professional identity	<i>Il y a eu des cours où, par contre, je me suis senti plus à l'aise</i> (from Subcorpus #1)	During some lessons, though, I felt more at ease – more comfortable in my teaching role.
	Causality (<i>causalité</i>)	Segments referring to causal relationships between events or teaching decisions	<i>Alors là ils étaient débutants donc ça avait peut-être plus de sens de dire voilà, c'est ça les bonnes phrases à dire</i> (from Subcorpus #3)	At that point, they were beginners, so it probably made more sense to say, "These are the right sentences to use."
	Contextualisation (<i>contextualisation</i>)	Excerpts referring to contextual elements that situate an event, action or activity	<i>Donc là, le contexte est que on a c'est qu'ils ont eu une formation technique la semaine d'avant et ils sont allés faire des stages donc ils ont été nettoyer</i> (from subcorpus #4)	Here, the context is that they had technical training the week before and then they went on placement to do cleaning work.
	Representations of Others (<i>hétéro-catégorisation</i>)	Expressions reflecting the participant's views or representations of learners ("the Other")	<i>J pense qu'ils ont compris à quoi ça servait et que ça les intéressait</i> (from subcorpus #2)	I think they understood what it was for and that they found it interesting.
	Future projects (<i>perspectives</i>)	Mentions of future professional or academic plans	<i>J'ai postulé à des Alliances françaises du coup</i> (from subcorpus #3).	So I applied to several positions within the Alliance Française network.
	(Behavioural) projections (<i>projections</i>)	Statements describing the behaviours or attitudes the participant thinks he would adopt in hypothetical or future situations	<i>Ça pourrait me servir de modèle en quelque sorte, c'est un style d'enseignement que j'aimerais avoir</i> (from subcorpus #1)	I could use that [the teacher's approach] as a kind of model – it's the teaching style I'd like to develop.
	Reflexive repositioning (<i>remise en question</i>)	Segments where the participant re-examines his own actions or attitudes in specific situations	<i>Je pense que j'aurais dû faire des pauses avant d'aller dans des dispositifs aussi compliqués</i> (from subcorpus #3)	I think I should have given them breaks before moving on to activities that demanding.
LL's personal history / background (<i>parcours personnel</i>)	Previous pedagogical training (<i>expériences de formation</i>)	References to the participant's prior educational or training experiences	<i>Donc pour le français pour le ménage, je travaille et avec ma tutrice. Donc en fait ça se passe très bien entre nous mais quand je lui ai parlé de mon premier sujet de mémoire, elle l'a complètement dézingué</i> (from subcorpus #3)	So, for the "French for the cleaning sector" course, I work with my placement supervisor. It's going really well between us, but when I told her about my first dissertation topic, she completely shot it down.
	Teaching experience (<i>expérience d'enseignement</i>)	Mentions of the participant's previous teaching experience	<i>Je suis arrivé pas stressé parce que j'avais assez d'expérience pour ne pas stresser</i> (from subcorpus #2)	I didn't feel nervous when I arrived because I already had enough experience not to.