

**STUDENT VARIABILITY AND THE
LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTRE :
A CASE STUDY**

Richard DUDA

Résumé

Cet article analyse les emprunts effectués par les utilisateurs du Centre de Ressources son et vidéo de l'Université Nancy 2. Ces emprunts évoluent dans le temps en fonction des exigences des enseignants et du développement personnel des étudiants. Une analyse complémentaire des styles d'apprentissage des étudiants fournit des indications quant à la nature de ce développement. Des hypothèses sont émises sur le type d'étudiant susceptible d'être intéressé par un outil tel que celui qui est proposé par l'Université Nancy 2.

The University Nancy 2 hosts the largest University Language Resource Centre in France (Riley, Zoppis 1976 ; Carton, Cembalo 1986). Trends in materials selection by students using the Centre should therefore provide some help with decision making by resource centre managers and designers when they set up and equip their centres.

The Nancy Centre provides courses, sound recordings ("documents") and video programmes ("TVPs" i.e. Television Programmes). All requests for materials by the students are recorded, so data is readily available for analysis. Computer Assisted Language Learning materials are also provided, but have not been taken into account in the statistics analysed in this article.

The vast majority of students using the Centre come from the English Department of the University and the statistics presented here only concern requests for English language materials. These students do not take part in any formal learner training schemes and are only provided minimal advice on how to use the Centre. Therefore chance and advice by peers, as borne out by data in Duda (1991), plays an important role in the selection of materials by the students.

11,941 requests for material were recorded during the period October 1993-May 1994. Data for the first week in April 1994 and for June 1994 are not available due to technical problems. An estimated 500 requests may be computed by averaging out the weeks preceding and following the week in question. By comparison with the month of June 1993, an estimated 1,200 requests were probably made in June 1994. The overall total is therefore in the vicinity of 13,600 requests. The following pie charts however are based on the 11,941 recorded requests.

The distribution of requests is as follows:

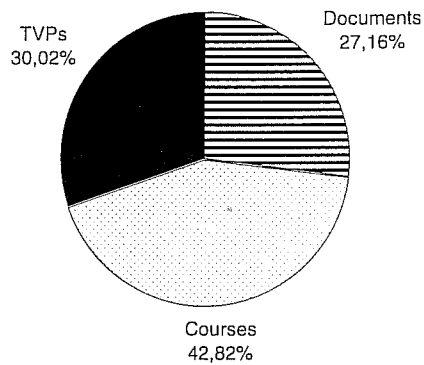


Chart 1 : Requests by whole population irrespective of year of study.

This would seem to indicate that courses are the main staple for the students. However, if requests by first-year students are deducted from the total number of requests, the following distribution appears:

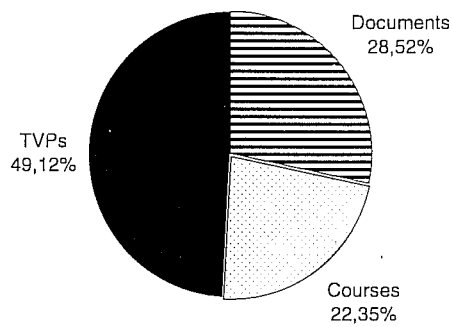


Chart 2 : Requests by whole population minus first-year students.

There is therefore a considerable increase of requests for video materials. This is borne out by a comparison of requests by first and second-year students:

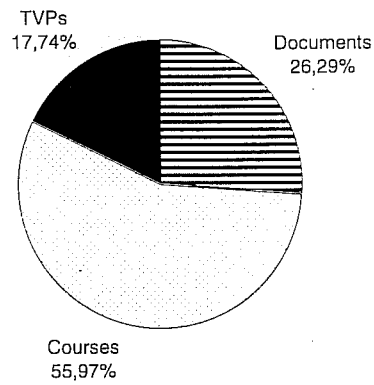


Chart 3 : Requests by first-year students.

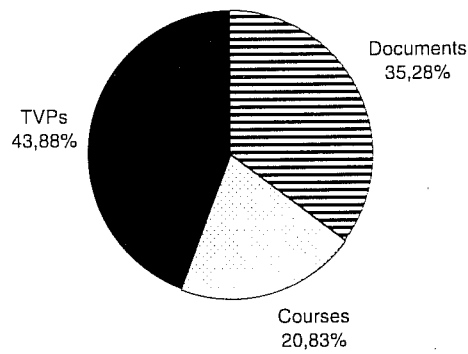


Chart 4 : Requests by second-year students.

The main reason why first-year students choose courses is that they are required to do so by their teachers. Once "teacher-control" recedes, students start choosing videos predominantly.

This is confirmed by the chart for requests by non first or second year students:

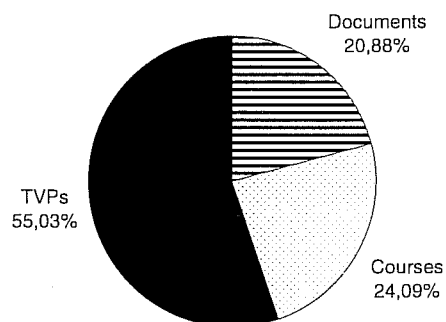


Chart 5 : Requests by non first or second year students.

This data correlates with evidence that second, third and fourth year students are more "audile" than "visual". A questionnaire submitted to the students in Autumn 1990 (Duda, 1991) and based on an abridged version of Narcy (1991:28-29, see Annex) provides the following data:

	Visuals	Audiles	Total number of students
First year	85.35 %	13.48 %	89
Other years	53.37 %	42.85 %	56

This data is based on the answers to questions 1 to 5 which attempt to identify "visuals" as against "audiles". Recourse to video recordings is indicative of a greater audile ability as understanding a video recording is often a matter of understanding its soundtrack, especially when there are no written materials supporting the videos. (Visual ability often, if not usually, applies to the written not the graphic medium in the case of language learning activities).

Narcy's questionnaire also attempts to identify "serialists" and "globalists" (questions 6 to 10), learners who are "dependent" on or "independent" of educational institutions (11 to 13), the "shy" and the "extroverts" (14 to 16), "perfectionists" and "realists" (17 and 18).

The data in Duda (1991) provides evidence that first year students are predominantly visuals, serialists, introverts and perfectionists (Table 1).

Visuals	85.39 %	Audiles	13.48 %
Serialists	55.05 %	Globalists	40.44 %
Dependent	32.58 %	Independent	49.45 %
Introverts	39.32 %	Extroverts	37.07 %
Perfectionists	43.82 %	Realists	40.44 %

Table 1: Responses by first-year students to Nancy learning styles questionnaire (abridged).

Total number of respondents: 89. Percentages do not total 100 as some respondents were undecided.

The statistics for non first-year students (Table 2) indicate that there are fewer respondents who identify themselves as visuals, serialists, etc.

Visuals	53.57 %	Audiles	42.85 %
Serialists	50 %	Globalists	48.21 %
Dependent	21.42 %	Independents	75 %
Introverts	46.42 %	Extroverts	42.85 %
Perfectionists	35.71 %	Realists	48.21 %

Table 2: Responses by non first-year students to Nancy learning styles questionnaire (abridged). Total number of respondents: 56.

Contrary to the data for first-year students we can see a predominance of "realists" as against "perfectionists" If we now assume that being visual, serialist, dependent and perfectionist is akin to being a "rule-former", whereas being audile, globalist, independent and realist seems to be a reasonable (re)definition of "data-gatherer" (Hatch 1974, Ellis 1990), it would appear that there are fewer rule-formers among non first-year students. Is this a desirable/undesirable effect of university education or does it reflect the disappearance of rule-formers as users of the resource centre? In other words, does the resource centre as it stands not favour the audile against the visual, the globalist against the serialist, the independent against the dependent, the realist against the perfectionist? An alternative interpretation might be that students actually change as they use the resource centre (and incidentally

become more experienced students) rather than that the resource centre discourages the rule-formers.

The answers to these questions obviously require a longitudinal survey of the students using the resource centre.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Alice Lemay for providing the statistics used in this paper and Adélaïde Ventosa for devising the pie-charts.

ANNEX

QUI ETES-VOUS ? COMMENT TRAVAILLEZ-VOUS ?

Pour chaque alternative qui vous est proposée, cochez celle qui correspond le plus à votre comportement.

-
- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1) Vous préférez lire le texte de ce que vous entendez. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Voir et entendre une scène/conversation vous suffisent. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
-
- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 2) Vous cherchez à écrire mentalement ce que vous entendez. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Vous ne cherchez pas à écrire mentalement ce que vous entendez. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
-
- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 3) Quand vous lisez en anglais, vous n'entendez pas mentalement. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Quand vous lisez, vous entendez mentalement ce que vous lisez. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
-
- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 4) Vous aimez regarder la personne qui vous parle. Vous suivez le professeur des yeux. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Vous n'avez pas besoin de regarder quelqu'un pour le comprendre. Votre regard se "balade" pendant les cours. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
-
- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 5) Quand on vous donne le chemin, un plan vous paraît impératif, vous le faites au moins mentalement. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Quand on vous donne le chemin, vous mémorisez ce qu'on vous a dit, pour le retrouver au fur et à mesure que vous avancerez. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
-
- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 6) Vous préférez lire le texte de ce que vous entendez. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Voir et entendre une scène/conversation vous suffisent. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
-
- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 7) Faire des fautes vous tracasse. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Faire des fautes ne vous tracasse pas pour le moment. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
-
- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 8) Vous avez tendance à apprendre par coeur. | <input type="checkbox"/> | En général, vous n'apprenez pas par coeur. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
-
- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 9) Vous structurez mentalement les mots et les tournures avant de parler ou écrire. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Vous parlez/écrivez spontanément sans trop prévoir ce que vous allez employer. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
-

- 10) Vous pensez qu'il faut apprendre avant de parler. Vous pensez qu'il faut parler pour apprendre.
-
- 11) Vous vous satisfaites des ouvrages scolaires. Vous essayez de trouver d'autres situations de contact avec la langue.
-
- 12) L'Ecole/l'Université sont indispensables pour bien apprendre. La vie est le meilleur endroit pour apprendre.
-
- 13) Vous suivez les consignes de l'enseignant. Vous improvisez de temps en temps pour modifier l'ordinaire de la formation.
-
- 14) Vous n'aimez pas beaucoup parler en groupe. Parler en groupe ne vous gêne pas trop.
-
- 15) Quand vous avez du mal à exprimer quelque chose, vous avez tendance à vous faire. Quand vous avez du mal à exprimer quelque chose, vous essayez comme vous pouvez.
-
- 16) Vous ne connaissez pas d'autres langues ou vous les avez apprises sans grand succès. Vous avez appris d'autres langues avec de bons résultats (même au niveau scolaire).
-
- 17) Vous pensez qu'il faudrait tout retenir. Vous pensez que le but n'est pas de tout retenir.
-
- 18) Vous êtes déçu de ne pas toujours tout comprendre clairement Vous admettez sans trop de peine qu'il reste des choses que vous ne comprenez qu'en gros.
-

D'après Narcy 1991