Erasmus community : from a community of pratice to a learning community

Agnès Bracke
Université Bordeaux 3 – TELEM EA 4195
Agnes.Bracke@u-bordeaux3.fr

Sandrine Aguerre
Université Bordeaux 3 – CLLE - ERRSàB UMR 5263
Sandrine.Aguerre@u-bordeaux3.fr

Research domain

Second language acquisition : French as a foreign language learning and teaching,

- In an action-oriented approach
- With an interest for pragmatic aspects of language
- In order to understand and support French Learning in a Study Abroad context in France / in Bordeaux.

Research aim/objective

Reseach aim/objective :

- Using the concept of Practice community, to analyse how Erasmus students, involved in social activities related to « study abroad » in Bordeaux, learn French Language.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Action oriented approach

CEF, 2001.

- Language learners are « social agents » who have tasks to accomplish.
- CEF *classifies social activities* as occurring in four domains : *educational, public, personal, professional.*
- Language use is part of social activity and language acquires its meaning in context.
- *Language learning occurs in tasks and contexts related to the above domains*

2. Communities of practice.

- *situated* perspective on cognition and learning : « any knowledge, however theoretical it seems, is the product of a social space and a social practice and doesn’t exist in itself » (Berry 2008).

2. Communities of practice

Wenger, 2005.

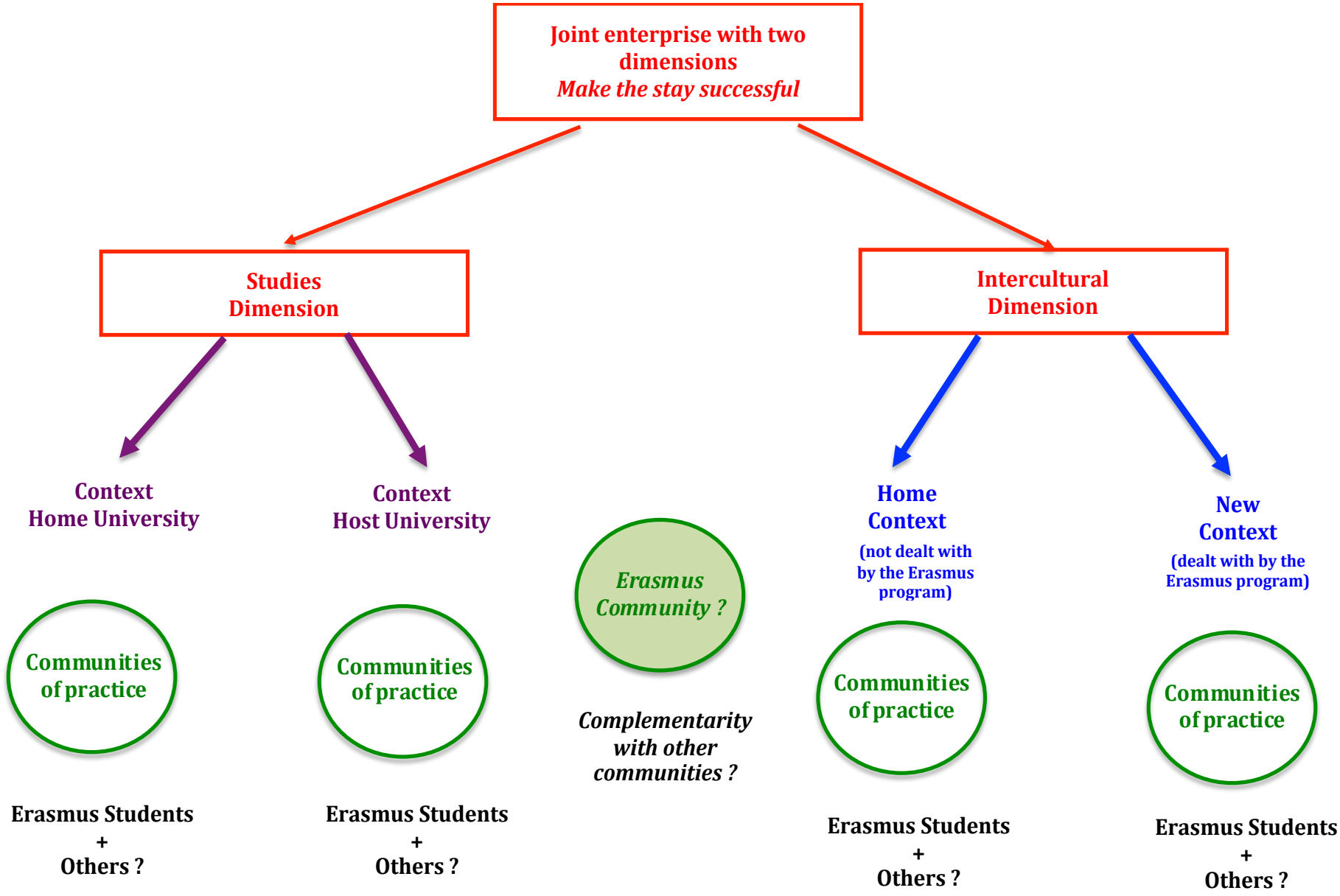
- In a given social context, individuals take part, on a personal level, in a social life that is organised to succeed in a **joint enterprise**: they perform activities, they talk, they think and produce *artefacts* that display the **shared experience**.
- This **collective learning both produces and structures practices** in the group of individuals.
- Learning becomes a way and a condition for the integration of new members.

2. Communities of practice

- Communities of practice are **a specific level of analysis** : neither a specific interaction (a conversation or an activity) neither a defined social or historical group.
- It is defined by three characteristics : ***joint enterprise, shared repertoire, mutual engagement***.
- One person can belong to several communities of practice.
- In a social group, there would be a constellation of practices (i.e. several communities of practice related to each other, for different possible reasons (historical, organisational, institutional, geographical, competition or collaboration reasons)

Erasmus program as a *constellation of practices*

- Erasmus program is a *constellation of practices*: different people share *enterprises* (administrative or not) on an individual level.
- Erasmus students, because of their *Erasmus status,* can either form or join different communities of practices, that will be set in different domains, mainly *educational, personal and public*
  - ***These domains are parallel to the 3 major settings in which students are believed to have access to communicative interaction (according to Kinginger 2009) : 1) educational institution and classrooms, 2) places of residence, 3) service encounters and other informed contact with expert spealers.***


Joint enterprise with two dimensions
Make the stay successful
Studies Dimension
Intercultural Dimension
Context Home University
Context Host University
Erasmus Community ?
Home Context
(not dealt with by the Erasmus program)
New Context
(dealt with by the Erasmus program)
Communities of practice
Communities of practice
Communities of practice
Communities of practice
Complementarity with other communities ?
Erasmus Students + Others ?
Erasmus Students + Others ?
Erasmus Students + Others ?
Erasmus Students + Others ?

3. Pragmatic aspects of language use

- Situated approach : language's only meaning is in context.
- **Influence on language teaching = How to help users / learners to make pragmatic choices in order to communicate effectively and appropriately in the situation?**
- Teacher task = help the students to process ***decontextualisation*** and ***recontextualisation*** of the linguistic structures.

Strategies

- CEF 2001 : « any organised, purposeful and regulated line of action chosen by an individual to carry out a task » (p9).

- Strategies about pragmatic use of language = discursive strategies (discourse = specific to different situations).

Discursive strategies

- Reference to both linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge that needs to be shared to maintain (conversational) involvement (Gumperz 1982).
- But a difficult notion to define and delimit precisely :
  - All kind of competence (production, interaction, comprehension, mediation, etc.)
  - All levels of discourse management (planification, actual speech or redaction, revision)
  - All linguistic levels (*micro* and *macro*) : it ranges from choosing a word or a structure to general discourse organisation, via building metaphors all along a text, etc.

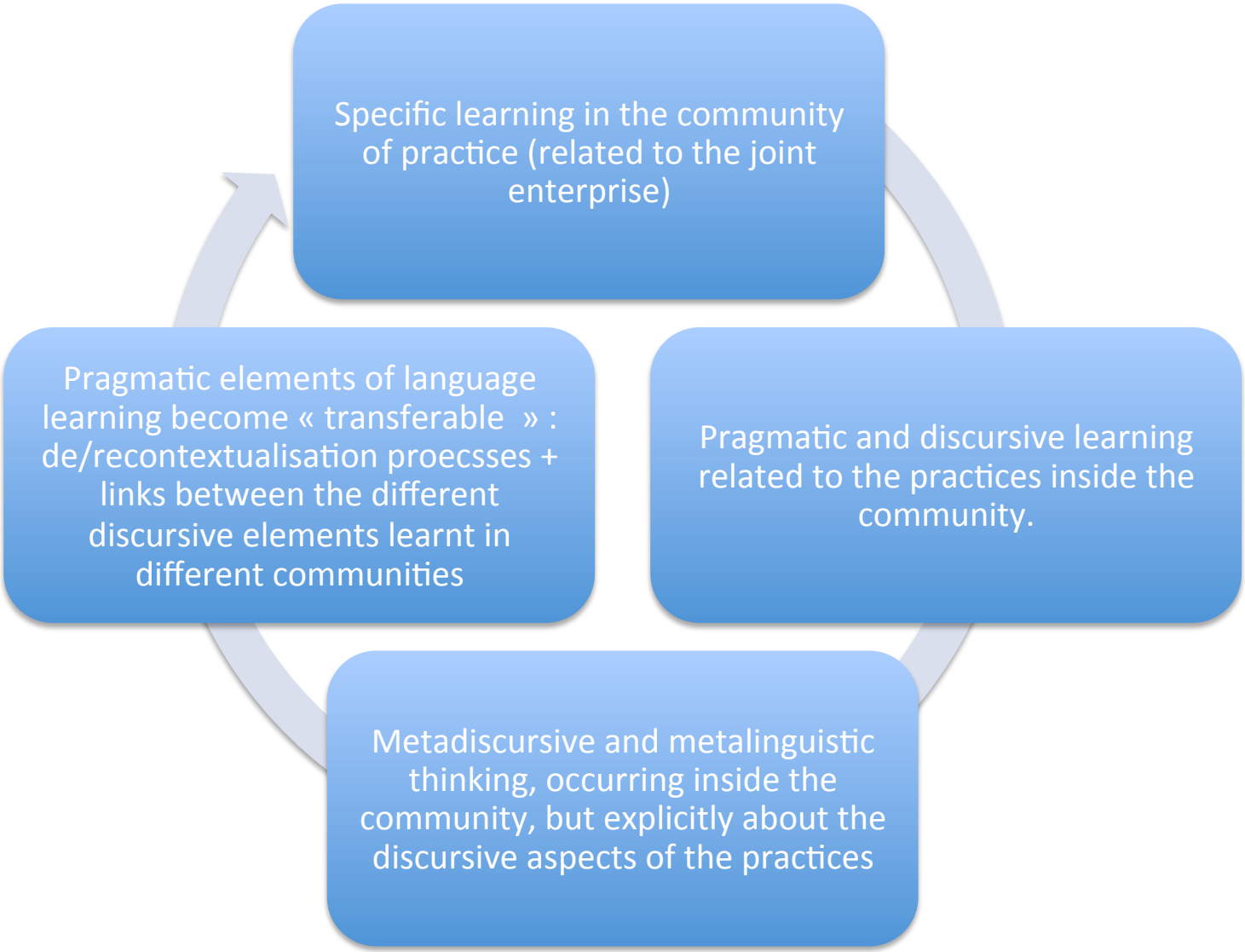
  + It is impossible to make an exhaustive list, as they vary according to the aim of the studied discourse.

Discursive strategies and SLA

In (French?) SLA litterature, it is referred to as «strategies of communication ».

- Tendency to divide « communication strategies » and « learning strategies ».
- This difference needs to be questionned (Gaonac'h 1991)

➔ Language learning and Communities of practice.



➔ 2 different but related dimensions :

By joining different communities, Erasmus students will learn how to perform different social activities in this new context. This learning will include learning of discursive practices.

- 1. « communities of practices » : what communities of practices do the Erasmus students in Bordeaux join?
- 2. In these communities, do they develop some reflexive thinking about the discursive practices they are learning?

PROTOCOL

Context : Erasmus Program in Bordeaux

Erasmus program in Bordeaux : 25 institutions

- 13 for vocational training only
- **12 for vocational traning and studies**, with an average of 1478 students a year taking part in the Erasmus program (leaving or coming to Bordeaux).

➔ pre-study with 6 institutions representative of the « study » mobility.

Pre-study

2 objectives :

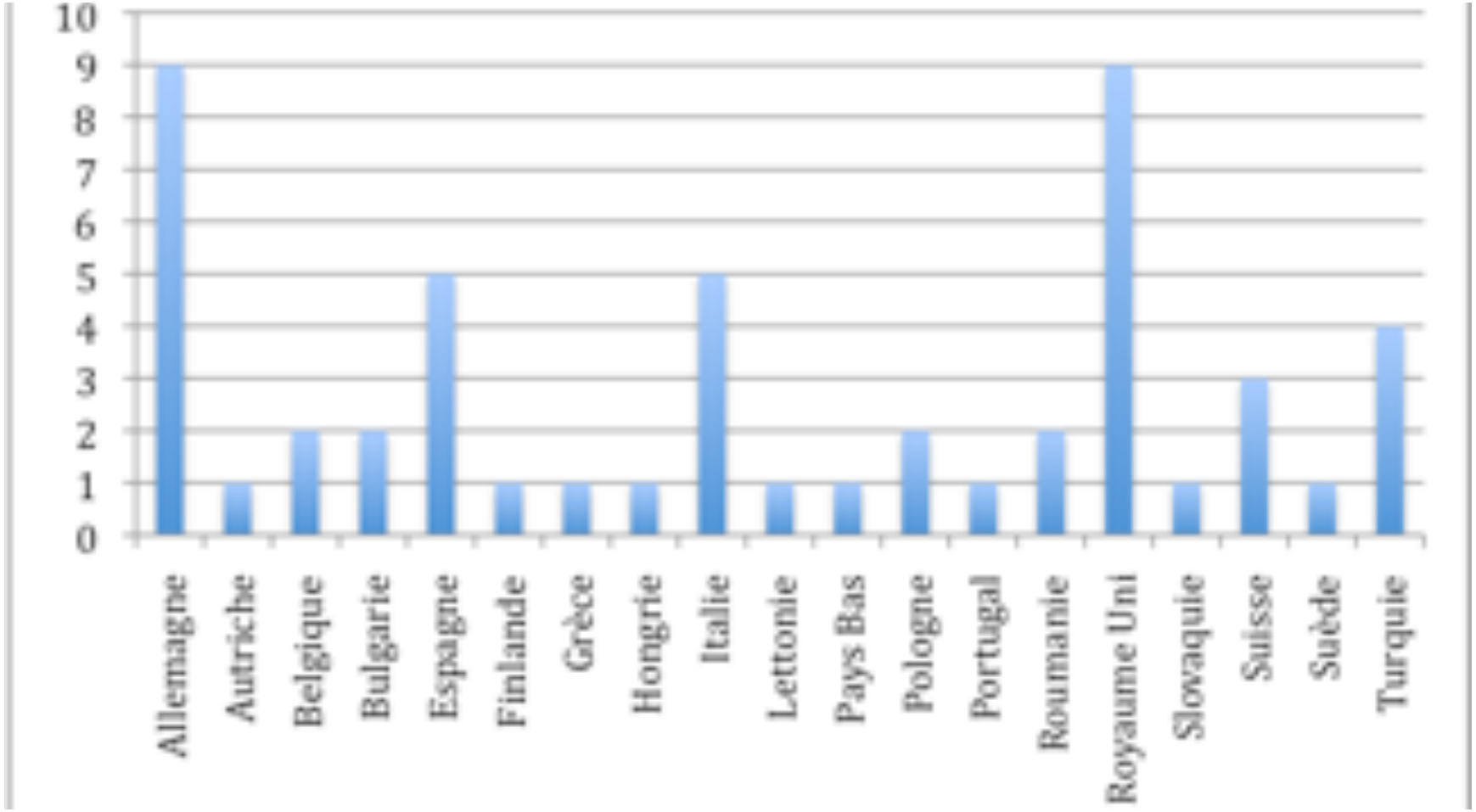
- Methodological :
  - make the different people in the « Relations Internationales » Department sensitive to our research.
  - Test our methodological tools (surveys and semi-directed interviews)
- Epistemological : test the pertinence of our hypotheses.

Protocol

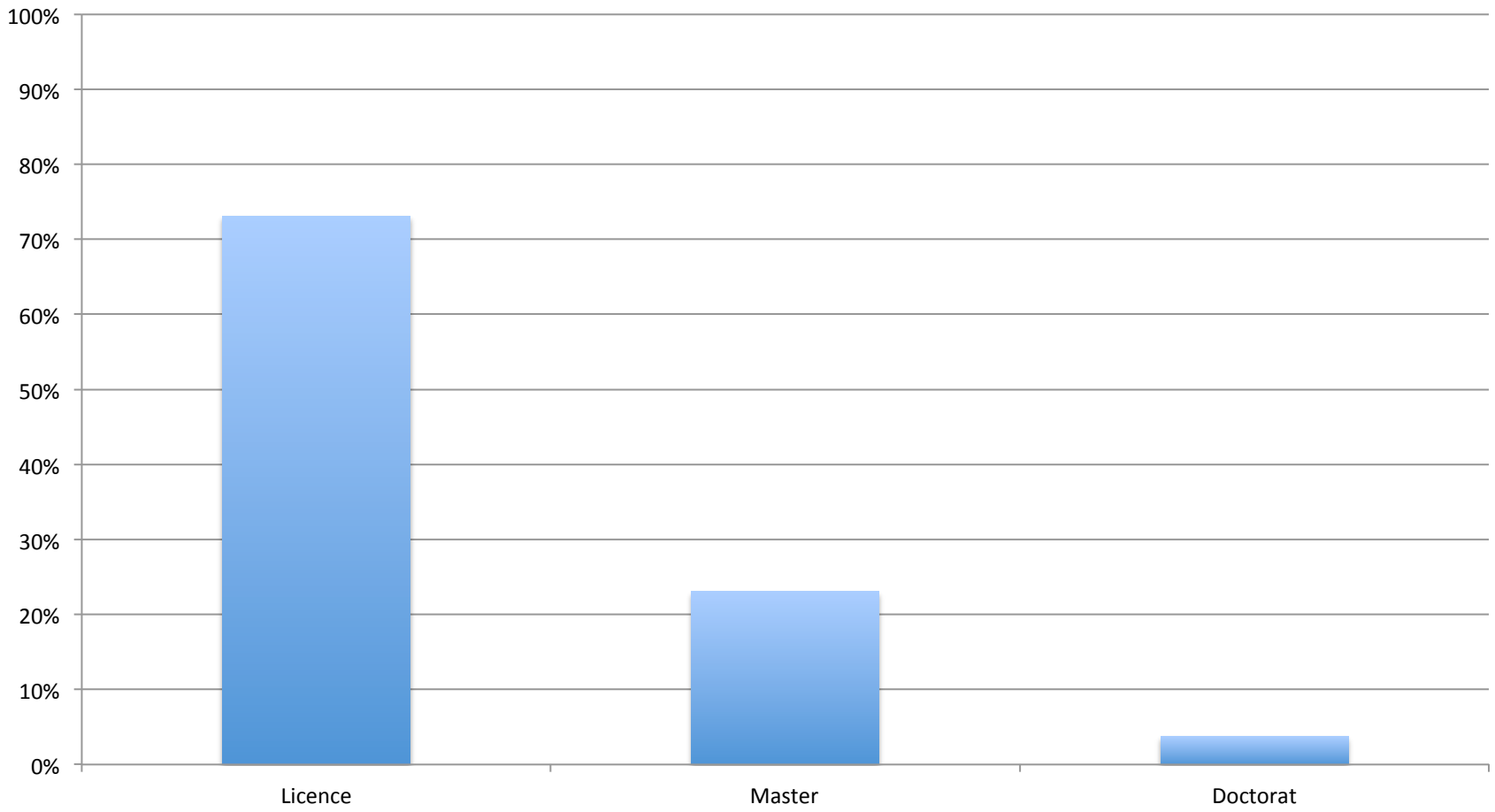
- On line submission of the questionnaire, via email to Erasmus students, forwarded by the RI departments.
- Questionnaire :
  - 1st part ask questions about who they did the different (broad) social activities with, and what language they used.
  - Questions about their attitude toward French learning and talking, and strategic management of the communication.
- 52 answers : incoming students - higher education institutions in Bordeaux; no discrimination based on the subject they study.

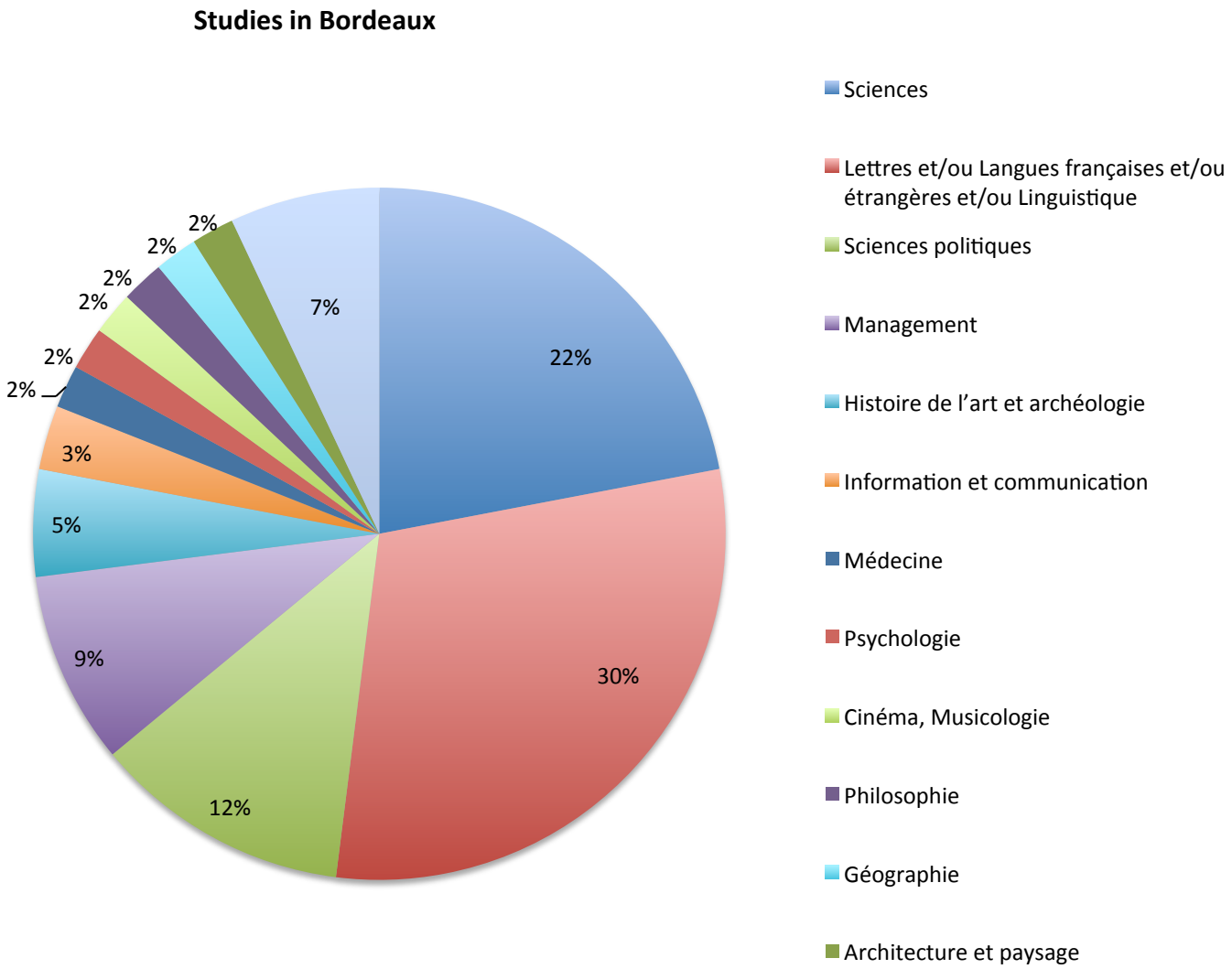
- **Note** : Questionnaire submitted around 20th March 2013= very first phase of results exploitation.

Population


10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
Allemagne
Autriche
Belgique
Bulgarie
Espagne
Finlande
Grèce
Hongrie
Italie
Lettonie
Pays Bas
Pologne
Portugal
Roumanie
Royaume Uni
Slovaquie
Suisse
Suède
Turquie

Degrees




Studies in Bordeaux
22%
30%
12%
9%
5%
3%
2%
2%
2%
2%
2%
7%
Sciences
Lettres et/ou Langues françaises et/ou étrangères et/ou Linguistique
Sciences politiques
Management
Histoire de l'art et archéologie
Information et communication
Médecine
Psychologie
Cinéma, Musicologie
Philosophie
Géographie
Architecture et paysage

A/ SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

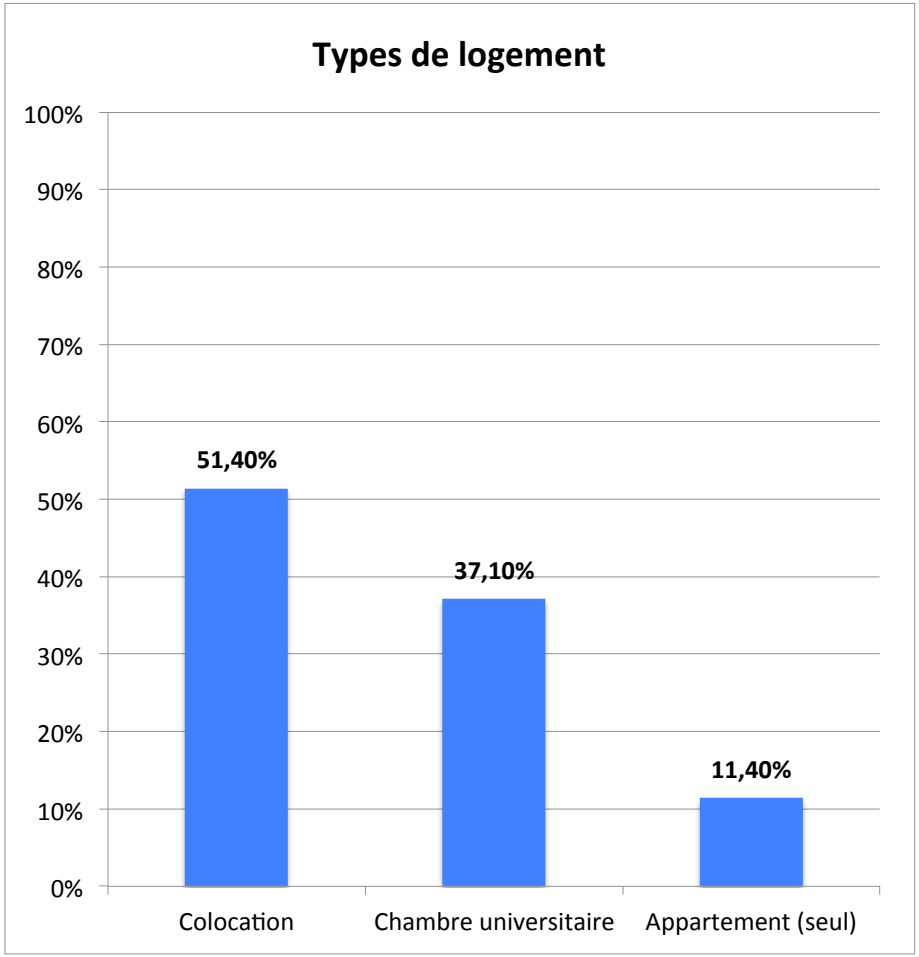
A/ Social activities, interlocutors and Communities of practice

Erasmus students will be in touch with various interlocutors, depending on the social activities they will undertake.These activities will relate mainly to three domaines : ***educational, personal, public***

Hypotheses : Where the students live (personal domain) has an influence on the communities of practices they join in the other domains.

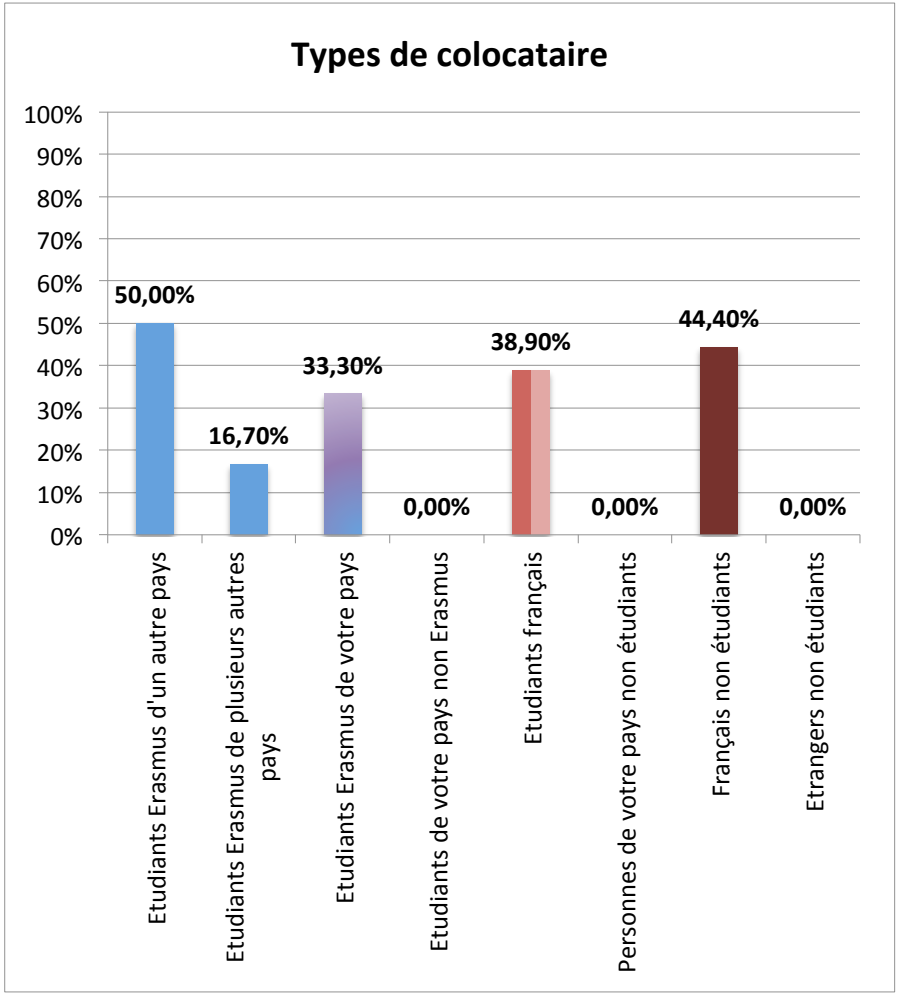
- 1) the place of residence has an impact on the variety of interlocutors the students have access to in the ***personal domain and in general***.
- 2)When personal domain allows a variety of interlocutors, this variety is passed on to the ***public domain*** and has no impact on the ***educational domain***.
- 3)when personal domain offers less variety, our population will center its interaction on Student population, ***both in the educational domain and public domain***.

General situation for « accomodation »



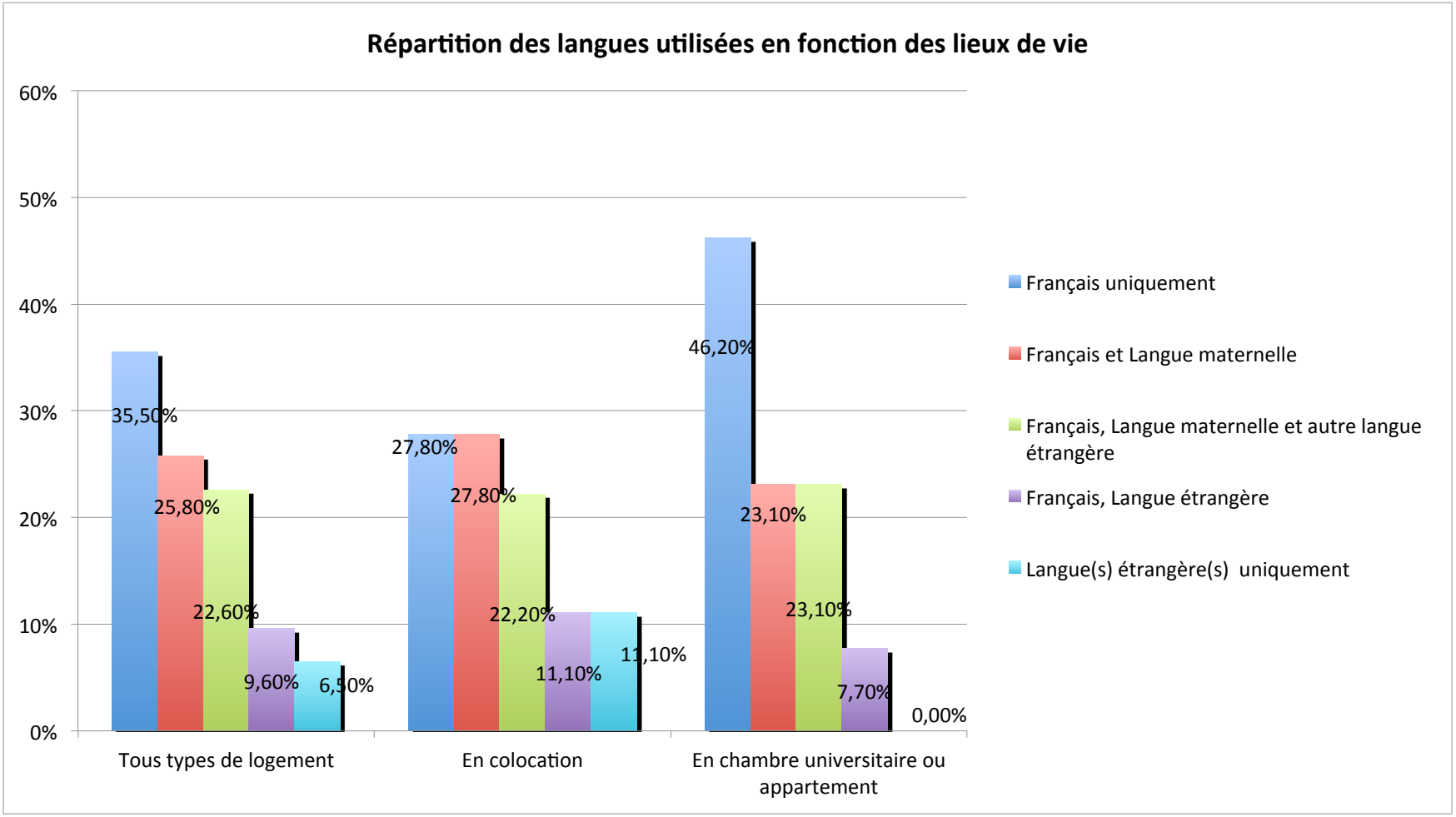
- 27,5% said they were not happy with their accomodation.
- Among those, 55% are in an individual flat or in a University Room.
- Among those, 60% say they wish they had lived in a shared house / flat.

In shared houses or flats :



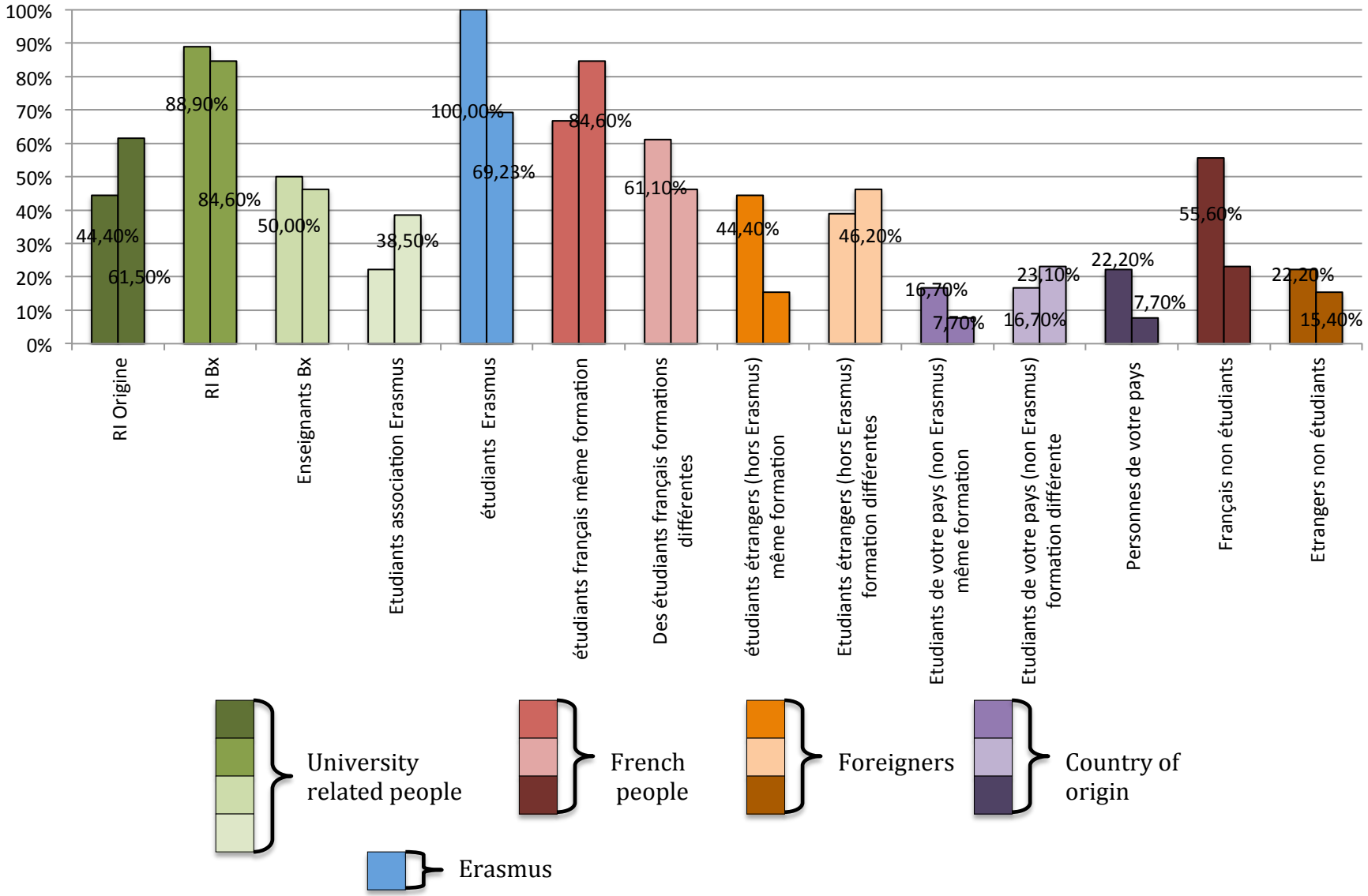
When in a shared house / flat : 3 equal tendencies :

- Tendency to live with other Erasmus students
- Tendency to live with French, either student or not :
  « French » characteristic more important than « student characteristic »
- Tendency not to live with people from their country, unless they are Erasmus :
  « Erasmus » characteristic more important than « home » characteristic.



Note about the language spoken in the different places of residence : the choice of sharing a house with foreign people means they will not talk exclusively French.
It is interesting, as far as foreign language learning is concerned, as it is consistent with the **evolution from an « immersion perspective » towards a « plurilingual » approach**.

Left hand side : students sharing a house or a flat
right hand side : students living in a *ChambreU* or on their own.



1st hypothesis confirmed

- Students who live in a shared flat do communicate with more diverse people.
- Students who don't live in a shared accomodation tend to communicate more with students (French or foreign) and with Students Associations)
- ➔ this tends to confirm our hypothesis that students who have less variety in the personal domain have more intensive interaction among students.

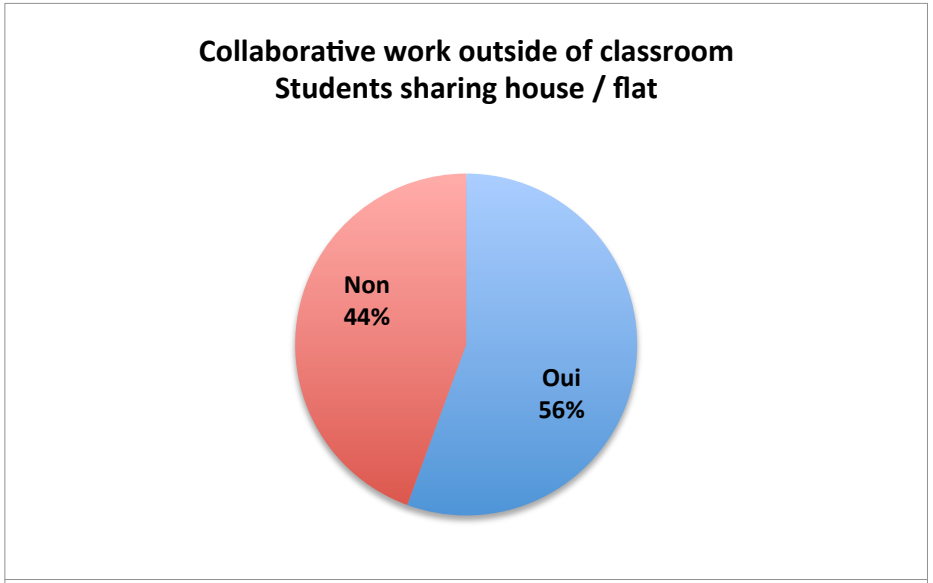
Educational domain

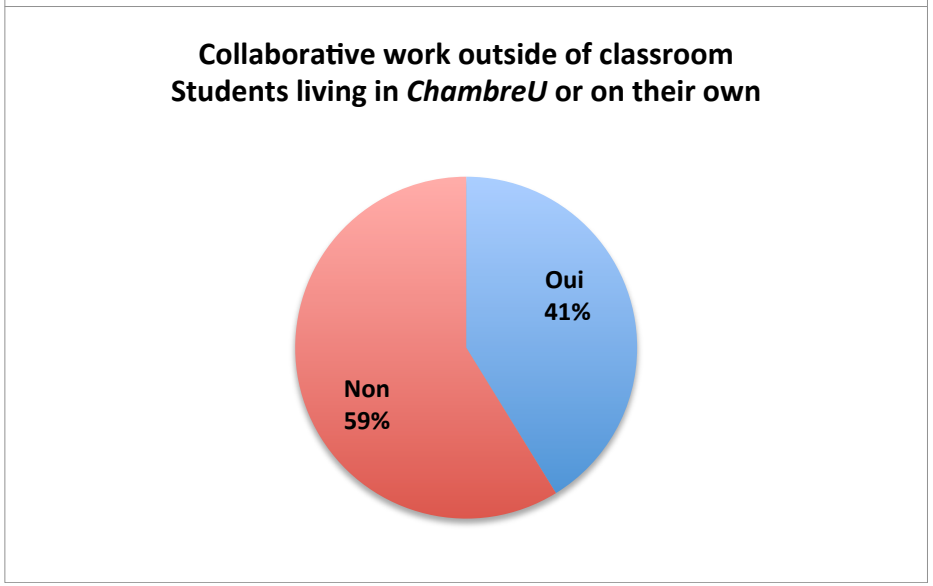
Investigated social activities :

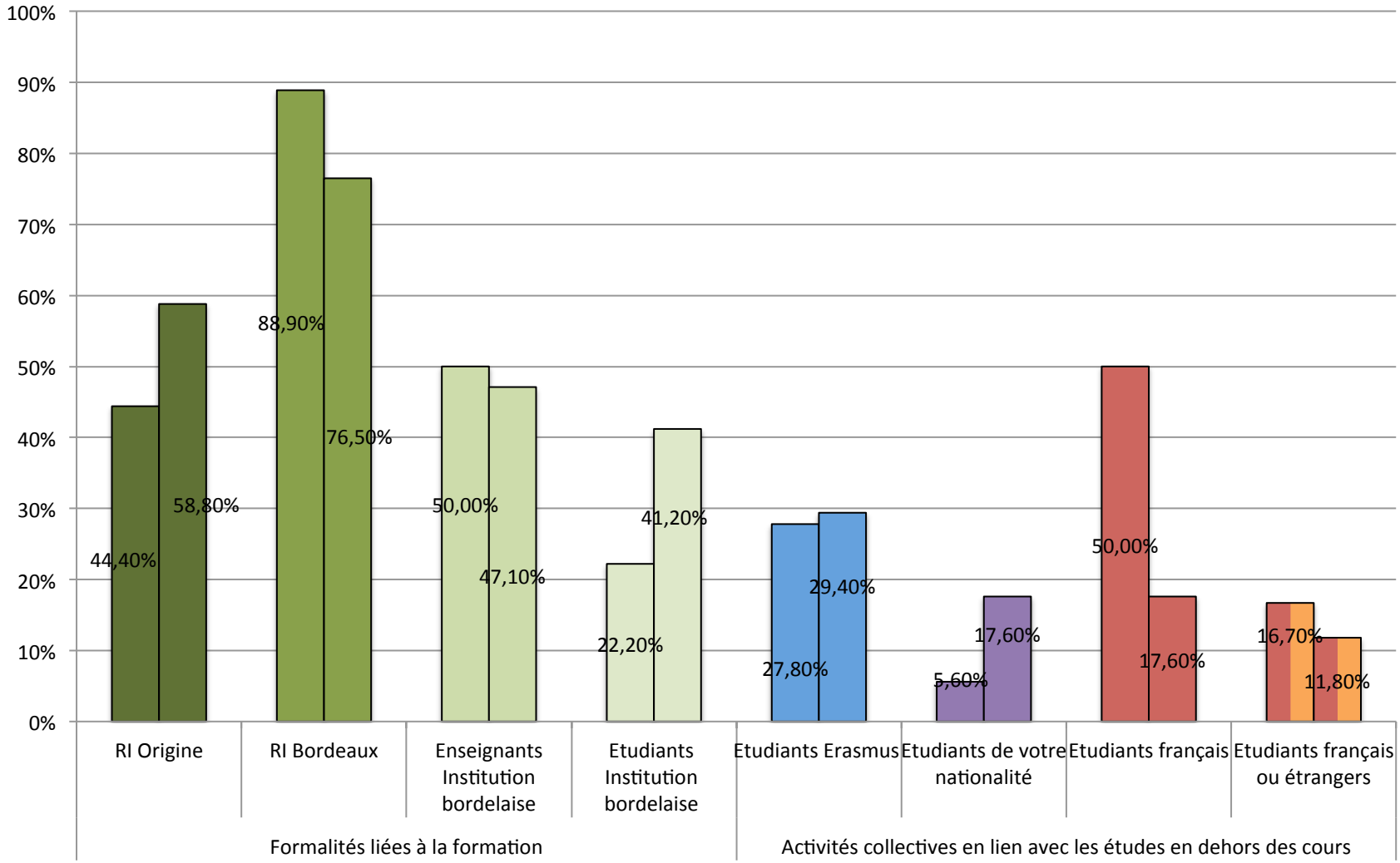
- Collaborative work outside of the classrooms (informal aspects).
- Administrative aspects of their stay (institutional aspects)

Collaborative work outside of classroom

- Overall, **not much spontaneous, informal practice in educational domain.**
- When they did, they did it mainly with French students (70%), then Erasmus students (59%), and less with students from their home country (23,5%) and with groups including other foreigners students (29,4%).
- **Students living in shared accomodation do it more than the others.**
- RQ : Further investigation would be needed to understand the role of the host institution in the involvement in such practices.






Activités sociales dans le domaine éducationnel (colocation / chambre universitaire ou appartement)
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
44,40%
58,80%
88,90%
76,50%
50,00%
47,10%
22,20%
41,20%
27,80%
29,40%
5,60%
17,60%
50,00%
17,60%
16,70%
11,80%
RI Origine
RI Bordeaux
Enseignants Institution bordelaise
Etudiants Institution bordelaise
Etudiants Erasmus
Etudiants de votre nationalité
Etudiants français
Etudiants français ou étrangers
Formalités liées à la formation
Activités collectives en lien avec les études en dehors des cours

Educational domain

When comparing « shared accomodation students » and « non shared accomodation students » :

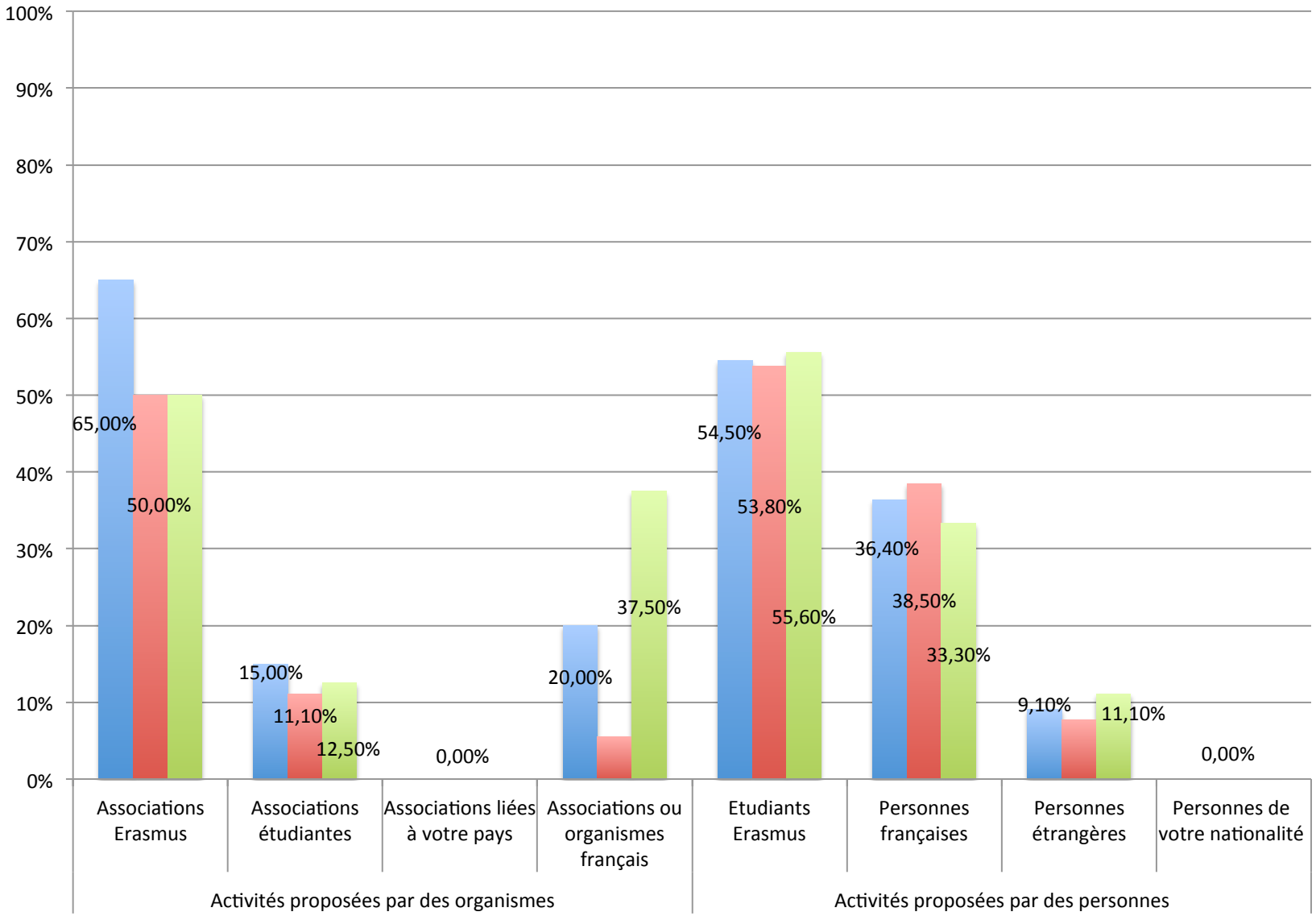
- No significant difference in the numbers of Erasmus or foreign students they interact with.
- A lot more interaction with French students for « shared accomodation students » **v/s** a lot more interaction with students from their home country for « non shared accomodation students ».
- comparing the interaction with institutional interlocutors (administrative activities) :
  - The results are sensibly the same for RI of the host institution, and for theachers, but it seems to be easier for « shared accomodation students » to deal directly with host RI.
  - Significant difference : « non shared accomodation students » use their home institutions more, and they resort more to the institutional offer of support.

Public Domain.

Investigated social activities :

- Activities in order to discover Bordeaux and the area.
- Activities related to their home culture

Activities to discover Bordeaux and the area
(All /"shared accomodation students" /"non shared accomodation students")

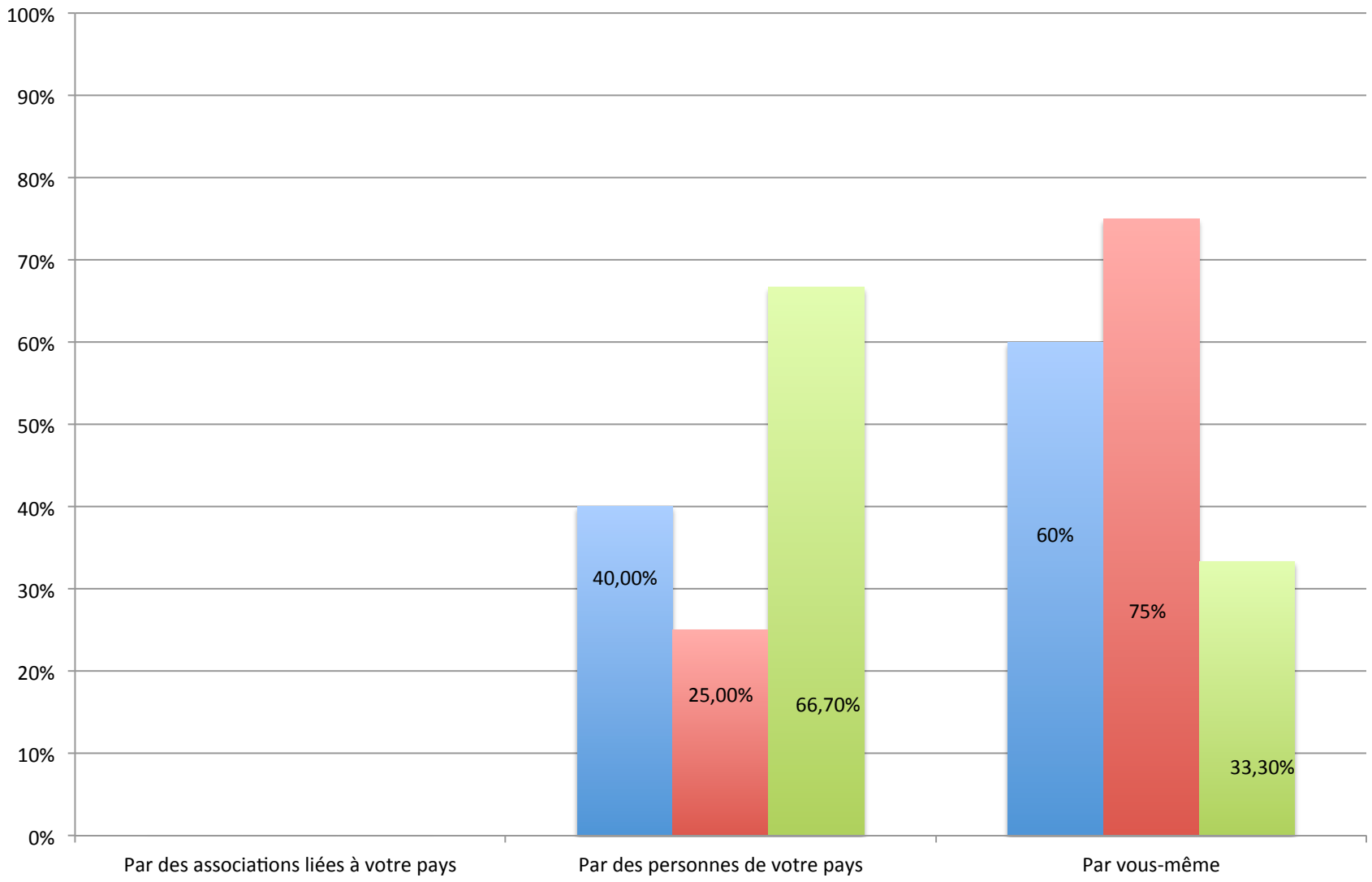


Public Domain : activities to discover Bordeaux

- Not much difference between « shared accomodation students » and « non shared accomodation students », except :
- « non shared accomodation students » resort more to institutional interlocutors = like in the educational domain, when they have less people to give them information or help them out in their personal domain, they resort to more institutional means in the public domain.

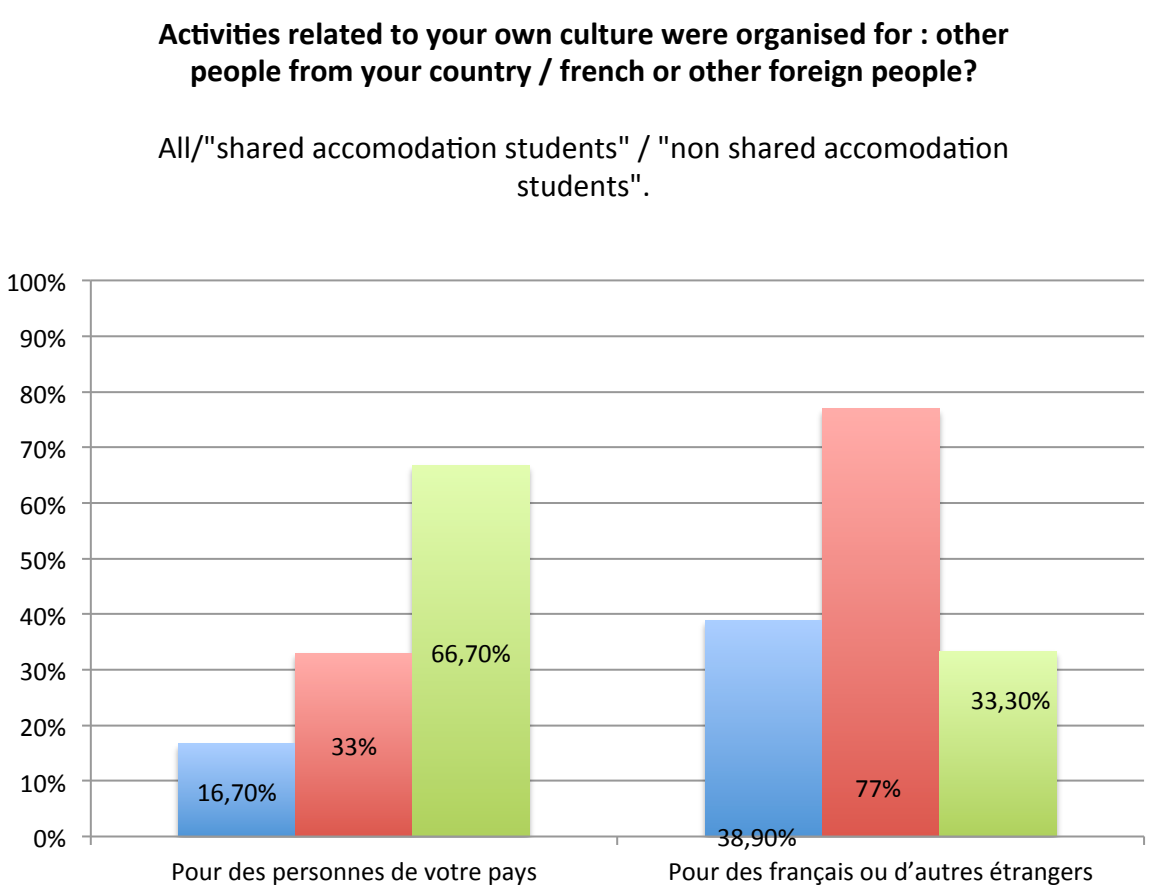
➔ **as the « informal and improvised » characteristics of communities of practices are important (Brown & Duguid 1991), we can say that « non shared accomodation students » have more troubles joining existing informal communities of practices in Bordeaux / the host country (or at least forming communities with host country residents).**

Activities related to your own culture were organised by... (assocations/ people from your country / yourself?)
all/ "shared accomodation students" / "non shared accomodation students"



Public domain : activities related to their own culture.

- As in the educational domain, « non shared accomodation students » tend to rely more on people from their own country, with less involvement in the organisation of these activities.
- On the other hand, « shared accomodation students » tend to be a lot more active in organising such activities, which suggest they have a stronger « mutual engagement ».



- Moreover, the aim of the activities organised by « shared accomodation students » clearly was to share this « expertise » with other French and foreign people : once again, this category of student seems to be part of a community of practice more diverse, ***pluricultural***, and in which they have a more important participation.

Conclusion on hypotheses A/

2)When personal domain allows a variety of interlocutors, this variety a) is passed on to the ***public domain*** and b) has no impact on the ***educational domain***.

- A) is **confirmed** : « shared accomodation students » take an active, informal and « expertise sharing » part in pluricultural communities of practices.
- B) is not confirmed – or **the variety is also passed on to the educational domain** : the bigger proportion of French students for the « shared accomodation students » compared to the « non shared accomodation students » does not mean that they interact less with Erasmus students. They resort to less institutional offers of support, which mean **they function in others, more informal, communities of practice.**

- 3)when personal domain offers less variety, our population will center its interaction on Student population, both in the educational domain and public domain.

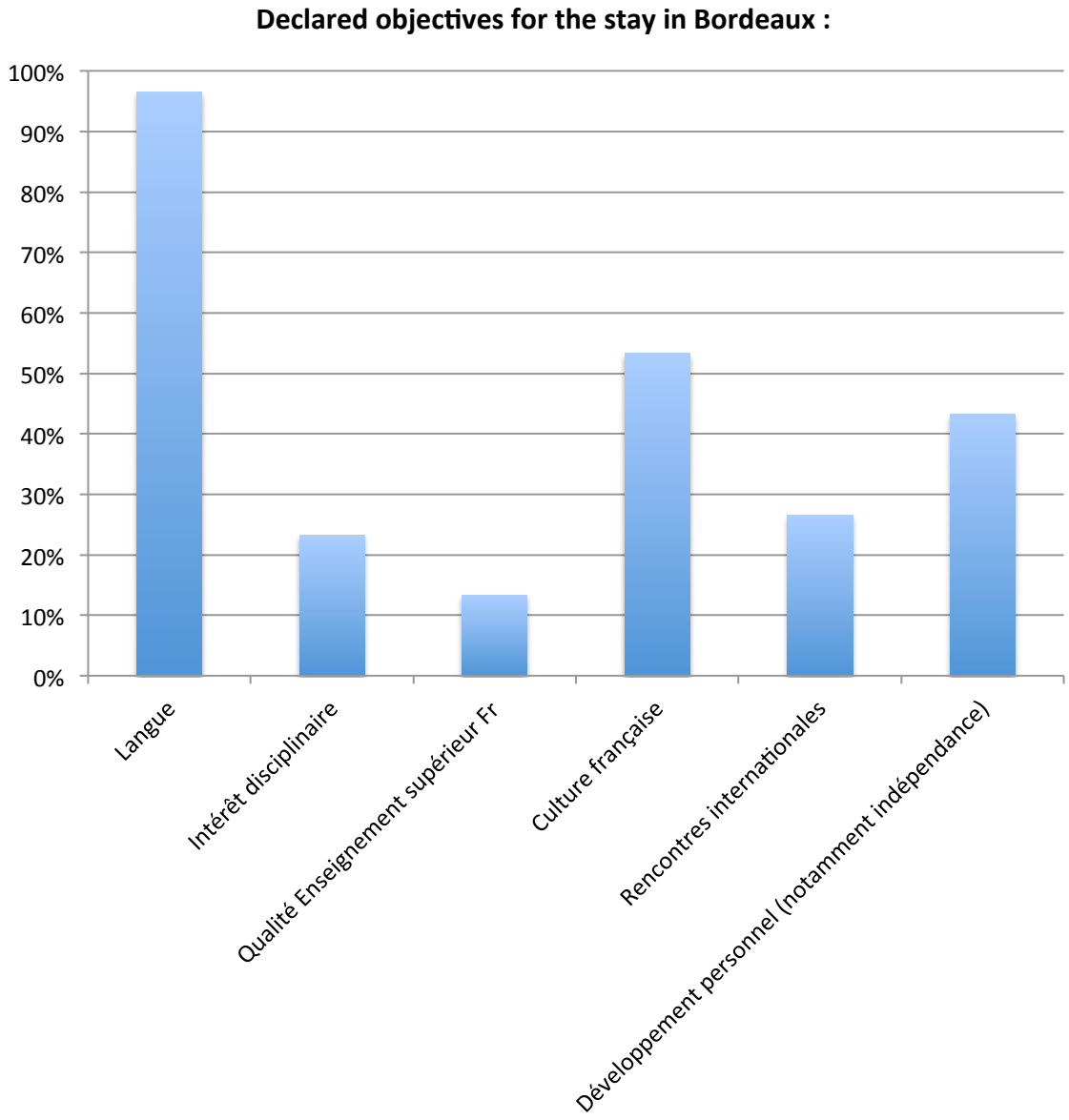
It is **confirmed** : « non shared accomodation students » seem to have more trouble in joining pluricultural communities and tend to resort more to people from their own country or to institutional interlocuteurs, both in public and educational domains.

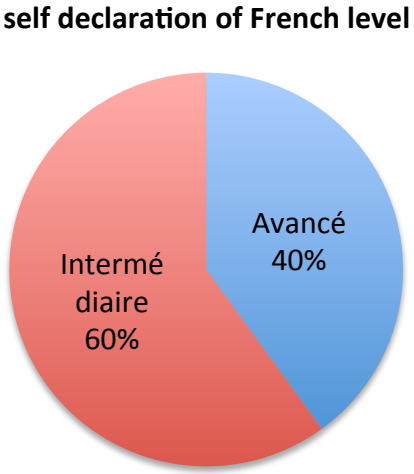
B. ATTITUDES TOWARD LANGUAGE LEARNING

B/ Attitudes towards language learning

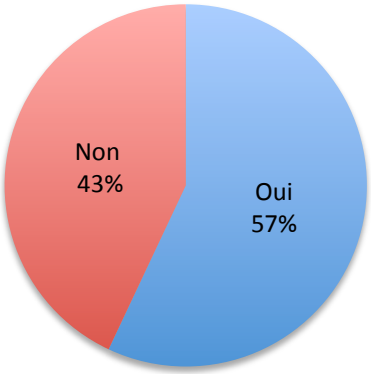
Hypotheses :

- 1. During an Erasmus study abroad stay, learning French is an objective for the students. They will try to take advantage of their stay to enhance their linguistic competence, by registering to French lessons and/or by trying to find as many situations as possible to practice French
- 2. Because they are confronted with « real life contexts », they will notice and care about the pragmatic dimension of language.

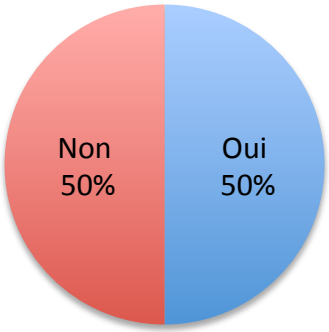

Declared objectives for the stay in Bordeaux :
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Langue
Intérêt disciplinaire
Qualité Enseignement supérieur Fr
Culture française
Rencontres internationales
Développement personnel (notamment indépendance)


self declaration of French level
Avancé
40%
Intermé
diaire
60%

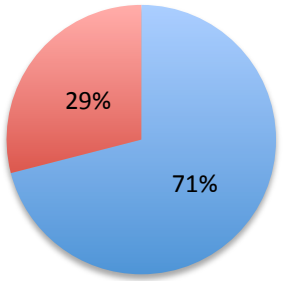
Attendance to French lesson during the stay (general population)



Attendance to French lesson during the stay (advanced students)

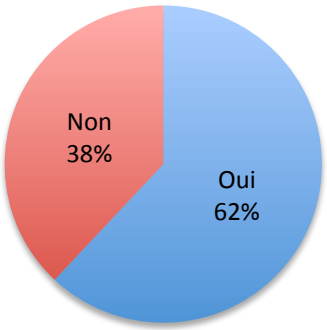


Advanced learners :
Blue : Language schools
Red : Compulsory French classes in their institution

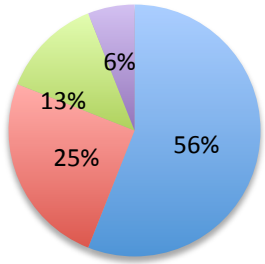


Overall, they tend to attend French classes, although it is not the case for a very significant majority of students.
When they do, it is usually because they chose to.

Attendance to French classes during their stay (intermediate students)

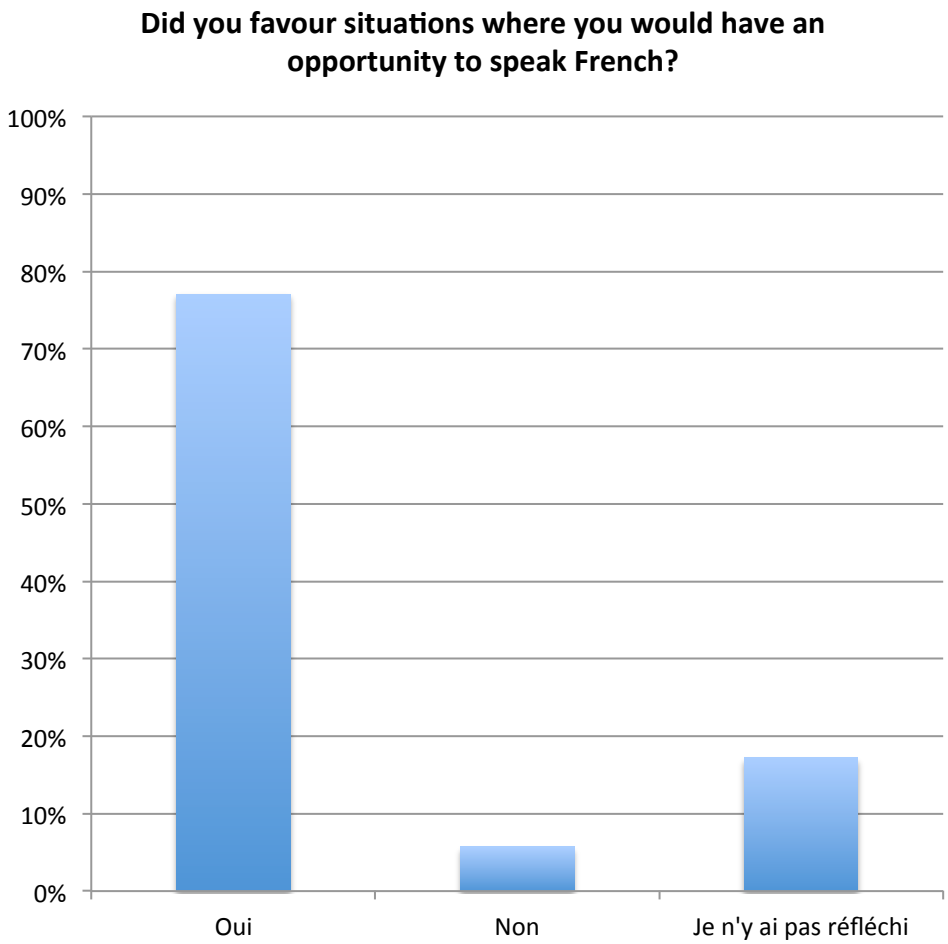


Intermediate learners :
Blue : language schools
Green : optional French classes in their institution
Purple : Classes in an association
Red : compulsory classes



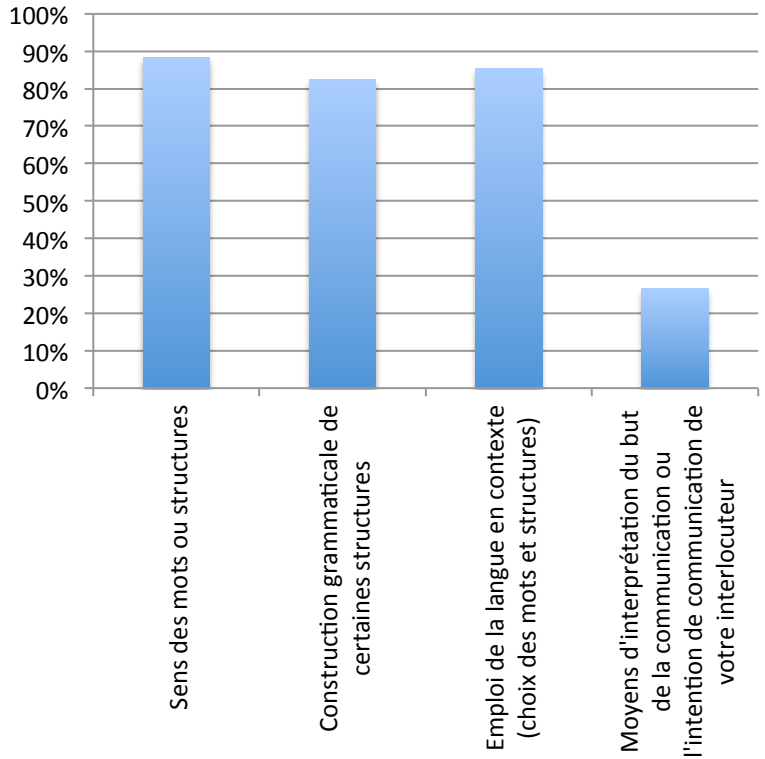
Hypothesis 1 confirmed :

- Erasmus students in Bordeaux do try to improve their linguistic competence.
- **« real life situations » seem to be, not unexpectedly, more important for them than formal classroom situations.**
- A minority of students (11,4%) declared no attendance to French class, and not having favoured situations where they could practice French.



Discussions, during their stay, about language issues :

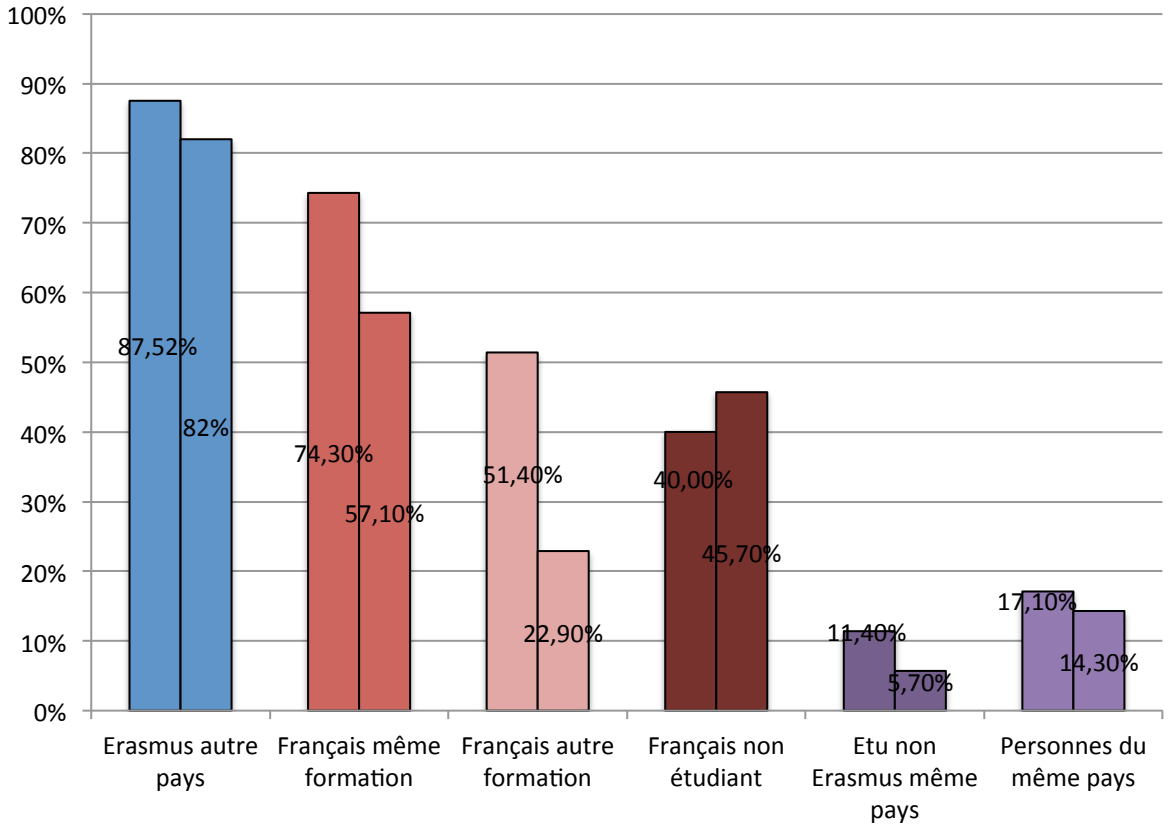
- **Use of structures in context** is as important as the meaning of words, and a little bit more important than grammar structures.
- Last item (issues to interpret the situation, for example the aim of the situation) is difficult to understand and to deal with. They may not have been confronted to this kind of issues, or not realised it.



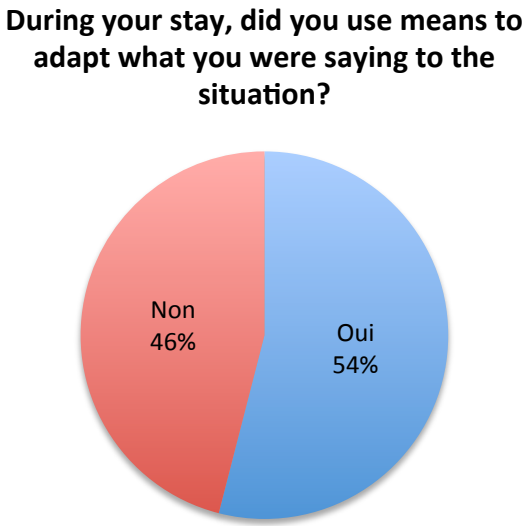
People they talked to about these issues :

- All kind of interlocutors are called upon.
- Noticeably, French non student are more identified as interlocutors about language issues than as interlocutors in general.

Left hand side : « interactions in general »
Right hand side : « interactions about language issues »

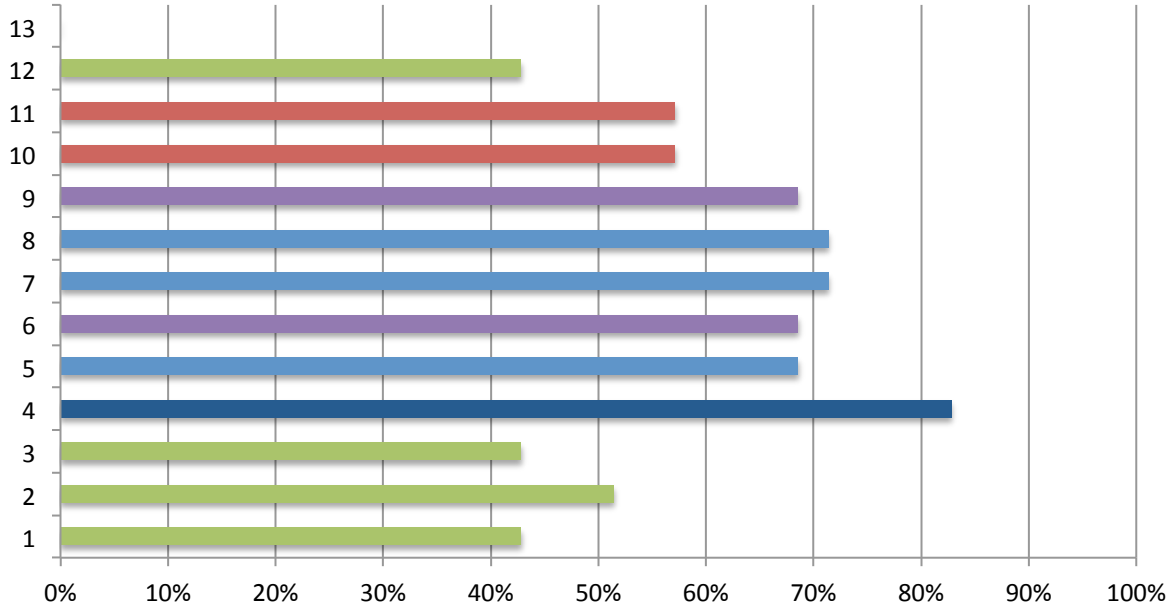


- A little bit more than half the students declare they used means to adapt their speech to the situation. Some were able to give examples (open question).
- **= Not very high awareness of discursive strategies (less than expected)**
- No significant variation if we confront :
  - people who attended French classes with people who didn't
  - Advanced learners and intermediate learners.



When the strategies are pointed to for them, they do recognise those they used .

1.	Ask yourselves questions about the status of the person you were talking to, in order to adapt your langage	**42,85%**
2.	Wonder how to organize what you wanted to say (what are you going to say or not say, and in which order)?	**51,42%**
3.	Use your mother tongue or another foreign language to get round a problem in French language	**42,85%**
4.	Ask the person you're talking to to rephrase something you didn't understand	**82,85%**
5.	Rephrase something the person you were talking with said, in order to make sure you understood	**68,57%**
6.	Rephrase something you said in order to make sure the person you're talking with understands you	**68,57%**
7.	Use gestures and facial expressions to understand what the other person is saying	**71,42%**
8.	Use the context (where you are, who you are with, what you are talking about, what you already know about it) to guess the meaning of some words or sentences	**71,42%**
9.	Use gestures, facial expressions or objects around you in order to get people to understand you better	**68,57%**
10.	During a conversation, check with someone if a word or an expression you already know is appropriate in this situation	**57,14%**
11.	During a conversation, when you come across a new word or expression, ask if it can be use in any context or situation	**57,14%**
12.	Avoid using a certain word or structure because you are not sure it is appropriate in the situation	**42,85%**
13.	None of these strategies	**0%**

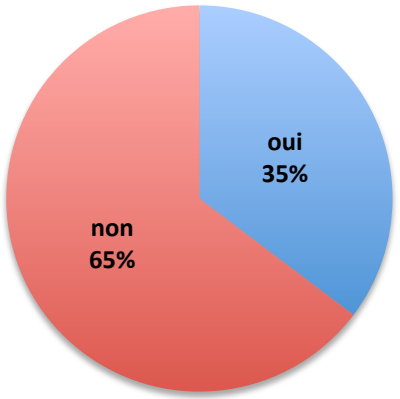


Group of strategies, in decreasing order of use :

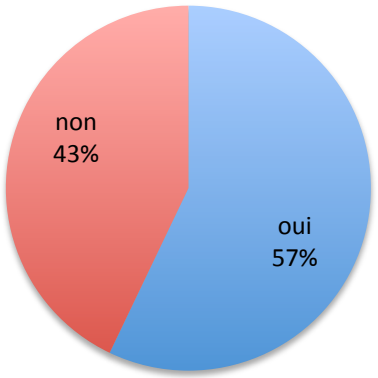
- Dark blue : ask the interlocutor to reformulate.
- Light blue : comprehension strategies
- Purple : strategies to enable the interlocutor to understand.
- Red : Strategies to analyse new language structures in order to use them in new contexts.
- Green : production strategies

- Few students (a third) declare having discussed this strategies with someone.
- ≠ 85% discussed issues of language use in context.
- **= it looks like pragmatic dimension of language use is something they deal with, but do not reflect upon, or at least do not reflect upon by talking about it with other people.**

Did you discuss these strategies with anyone?



Would you have been interested in working on these strategies in the context of language support for Erasmus students?



Conclusion on hypothesis B2

2. Because they are confronted with « real life contexts », they will notice and care about the pragmatic dimension of language.

- They do notice and deal with the pragmatic dimension of language use.
- A bit more than half of them go as far as taking it into account in their language learning autonomous process (strategies to analyse new structures in order to use them in other contexts)
- However, this « care » seems to be a « care in use », and it does not look like it is exploited at a metalinguistic level.