

Making our way through
multilingualism – reflexivity and
decision-making of language
students

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Declaration

I, Sibylle Ratz, declare that I have composed this thesis myself and that this work is my own. I further declare that it has not been submitted for any other degree or personal qualification.

This work has been given prior ethical approval by the research ethics review panel of London Metropolitan University and the research integrity commission of Edinburgh Napier University.

Abstract

This thesis investigates reflexivity and decision-making of language students by examining the interplay between what students care about (their multilingual ‘concerns’), and how they understand and act on their structural environments (through multilingual ‘projects’). The research is based on a longitudinal study with ten undergraduate participants during the four years of their language-related programmes at a Scottish university. Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews and visual methods. Recent contextual changes linked to Brexit and the Coronavirus pandemic were considered.

The investigation was motivated by the desire to improve student support and draws on a pragmatic approach. This allowed the author to combine data analysis methods from the narrative and realist schools of thought. Crafting narratives of each student provided the means for a holistic understanding of the multilingual experiences of the students. The narratives were further analysed through commentaries; and these were based on a framework building on critical realism and Margaret Archer’s theory of reflexivity. The framework enabled the author to separate out themes and address research questions linked to ‘concerns’, ‘projects’, and structural forces.

More precisely, the author focussed on the students’ developing understanding of their communicative competency (as an example of an individual ‘concern’), on how students actively managed their linguistic repertoire (as an example of a multilingual ‘project’), and on the way students reflected on and made highly heterogeneous decisions where conflicts between ‘concerns’ emerged and necessitated a change of ‘projects’ (for instance during study abroad or due to the structural changes of Brexit and the Coronavirus).

The analysis contributes to the structure and agency debate, as it pays attention to causality and enables the reader to retroductively understand the decisions students made around multilingual matters.

Responding to the initial motivation for this study the author outlines innovative areas of student support which align with the findings from the study.

This study sits at the crossroads of disciplines and is informed by theories relating to education, language learning, and multilingualism. The concluding suggestions will be relevant to scholars and practitioners from the higher education sector and others interested in the decision-making process of young people.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction and motivation

The era of globalisation, combined with the internationalisation of universities, have led to an increasingly heterogeneous student population. This is particularly true at universities in the UK and in programmes involving language learning. As programme leader of an undergraduate language programme at a Scottish university I was aware of the diversity across the students, and the starting points for this study were an interest in the many facets of multilingual development and an ambition to improve student support.

The students, as participants, and their trajectories are therefore at the centre of this study, which took place throughout the four years of their undergraduate programmes. In the following, I will briefly introduce the backdrop of the study, and show how this frames the central question around structure and agency which I address in this study.

Next, I present an outline of the entire structure of the thesis linking this to the research aims, the research questions, the framework for my investigation, and the methodology for the analysis. Finally, I will discuss the unexpected contingencies of Brexit and the Coronavirus pandemic which emerged during the research process, and I will explain how these external factors influenced and extended my investigation process and findings.

This interdisciplinary study is informed by theories relating to the fields of education, language learning and multilingualism, and the analytical framework was influenced by a philosophical approach developed within sociology. My research and the insights I gained enabled me to identify areas of support. These will be explained in the conclusion of this thesis.

2. Backdrop of the study: Globalisation, internationalisation of universities, mobility, and language learning

As mentioned, the diverse experiences of the participants of this study are influenced by processes of globalisation and must be viewed against the backdrop of the internationalisation of universities.

Globalisation has been defined by Altbach et al. "as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions" (2009, p. iv).

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The increasing internationalisation of higher education is linked to globalisation and has been described as the “process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003). Specifically, higher education institutions and governments have introduced a variety of programmes and policies to respond to globalisation and support internationalisation (Altbach et al., 2009).

This is reflected in the rapidly increasing mobility rates among students over the past decades: OECD figures show that “the total number of internationally mobile students in tertiary programmes increased from 2 million in 1998 to 5.3 million in 2017” (ICEF Monitor, 2019). Up to the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, the growth rate worked out as 5% annually. Given the above-mentioned significance of the role of the English language in the era of globalisation it is not surprising that English-speaking countries such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom represent the top destinations for internationally mobile students (OECD, 2020).

The language programmes at the centre of this thesis can be perceived as an excellent example of an integrated response to internationalisation, as they include a compulsory year abroad, and have an established network of inter-institutional partnerships which support the residence abroad, overseas placements, and double degree options. However, the reality is that in the UK internationalisation is viewed predominantly in terms of incoming students. Furthermore, languages other than English do not easily fit in with the above-cited characterisation of globalisation and its explicit reference to the role of English. This has led to an increasing volatility of language programmes in the UK.

Generally, outgoing mobility figures in the UK are low: In 2018 2% of UK students were enrolled abroad, compared to around 18% international or foreign students who were enrolled in the UK (OECD, 2020).

In the context of this study, internationalisation and globalisation are reflected through the mobility and migration experiences of the participants (see also chapter 3 where I critically discuss the terms ‘mobility’ and ‘migration’). On the one hand, seven of the ten participants migrated to the UK from EU countries to take up their entire undergraduate studies (this process is also termed ‘degree mobility’). These students are among the figure of 18% international students enrolled in the UK. On the other hand, all students were expected to spend a year abroad as part of their degree programme (also referred to as ‘credit mobility’), and thus contributed to the 2% of students enrolled abroad.

While the concept of credit mobility has been widely researched (see chapter 4 of this study) the aspect of degree mobility has received little attention. This is due, in part, to the fact that there are few accurate registers including all full degree international students. Notable exceptions are for instance quantitative studies from Norway (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021; Wiers-Jenssen, 2013) where the authors have investigated motivation aspects and employability prospects linked to degree mobility. Similarly, Perez-Encinas and Rodriguez-Pomeda (2021) carried out a quantitative analysis of the motivations and needs of degree-seeking Chinese and Indian students and Grabher et al. (2014) analysed data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics to analyse the balance and imbalance of degree mobility flows across EHEA (European Higher Education Area) countries from a bilateral and regional perspectives.. Other researchers have focussed on small-scale and qualitative studies, investigating for instance learning experiences beyond the classroom (Nada et al., 2018), or the differences in motivation between students engaging in degree and credit mobility (Brooks & Waters, 2011) or the long-term biographical and social processes which lead to students seeking degrees abroad (Carlson, 2013).

As mentioned, the experiences of many participants in this study involve both degree and credit mobility. To my knowledge, this “double” mobility has not been explicitly investigated to date. Additionally, these students were required to master English as a matter of course, while also working on additional target languages. The motivation for studying languages other than English has received some attention so far (for instance Duff, 2017; Klapwijk & Van der Walt, 2016), and scholars have also contributed to a more holistic understanding of multilingual skill-sets from a broadly post-structuralist perspective (for instance Aronin, 2016; Henry, 2017). However, an in-depth analysis of student experiences crossing several languages and mobilities is sorely missing.

By focussing on individual trajectories, the current study makes an important contribution to developing an understanding of the complexities surrounding mobility, migration, and multilingualism amongst students. These experiences necessitate decision-making – the investigation of which lies at the heart of this study.

3. The debate between structure and agency, and the role of reflexivity

As programme leader I was aware of the diversity (see above) regarding the linguistic entry level of my students as well as their previous experiences with mobility, multilingualism, and intercultural encounters. I suspected that these differences influenced the further trajectory of the language students, but it was apparent that other structural factors were

also important, for instance whether people needed to work alongside their studies, or how well established their networks were, or whether the support system of the university worked for them. Furthermore, there were clear differences in the interests, plans, and motivations of the students. My perceptions of the students matched Duff's description of language learners as "complex social beings", and "creative actors invested in, and in possession of, a range of linguistic and cultural resources, subjectivities, goals, agency, and opportunities that can be harnessed, transformed, or rejected, as circumstances allow or require" (Duff, 2017, p. 602). However, I wished to go further than detecting and describing these complexities. I became particularly interested in how students made their decisions within the tensions of these resources, their aims, and their circumstances. In effect, I found myself grappling with the age-old debate between structure and agency.

As I will discuss in later chapters I realised that other scholars of language acquisition do address issues of structure and agency, but these are not comprehensively theorised (as critiqued by Block, 2013). During my reading I became increasingly interested in Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity which approaches the structure and agency issue from a sociological and critical realist perspective. Archer calls for a clear separation of structural and agentive forces, and she suggests that the power of reflexivity is the most important agentive force of the people (Archer, 2003, 2004, 2007).

Drawing on Archer's literature enables me to contribute to the debate between structure and agency. I extend Archer's theory to the area of multilingualism and develop a framework of multilingual reflexivity which is suitable for the longitudinal nature of this study. By applying this framework, I systematically explore the relationship between structure and agency, as I investigate the role of reflexivity in the students' decision-making around multilingual matters, such as programme choices, language learning, mobility, and migration.

4. The structure of the dissertation, research aims and research questions

To recap, the underlying motivation for this study is to investigate the multilingual development and decision-making of language students and to improve student support. The structure of this thesis is as follows.

In chapter 2, I introduce the epistemological framing of the study, which I characterise as broadly pragmatic. My research is mainly motivated through possible consequences for the future (improving student support), and various scholars suggest that a pragmatic approach

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is best suited to combining procedures from various schools of thought in order to provide “a more workable solution” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). I explain how I make use of narrative analysis as this approach can show participants as positioned (Kingtoner, 2015), but also to exercise some agency (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). However, I also integrate methods put forward by the Critical Realist school of thought. Consequently, I begin the thesis by examining some of the contrasts across pragmatist, narrative, and critical realist approaches, as well as their synergies for my own framework of investigation. In chapter 2 I also explain my own positionality and bias.

In chapter 3 I firstly present and discuss key concepts of my investigation, such as multilingualism, migration and mobility, structure, agency and reflexivity. Secondly, I explain and critically examine several theories on multilingualism. These theories reflect the tensions between sociological forces and individual agency. I observe that the notion of reflexivity is marginalised in most of these theories, and I introduce Archer’s theory of reflexivity, where the concepts of structure, agency, and reflexivity are fully theorised.

In chapter 4 (‘Reflexivity in the student context’) I continue with my literature review, but now focus on papers specifically linked to the student experience. These papers are based on motivational and / or identity approaches to language learning and I pay specific attention to two questions:

- a) How dominant are the concepts of reflexivity, structure and agency in these studies?
- b) How much attention do the studies pay to motivations (concerns) and how are these linked to decision-making?

I identify gaps in the literature around these questions, as I realise that while reflexivity is sometimes mentioned in the studies, the actual reflective process is not made explicit. Furthermore, while many studies mention motivational aspects, as well as changes within motivations, a causal link to decision-making and reflexivity is lacking.

To address these gaps in the literature, the above questions become the research aims of my own investigation, namely:

Research aim 1: To investigate the reflexive process of language students.

Research aim 2: To examine the link between concerns (motivations), decision-making and reflexivity in the area of multilingualism.

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In chapter 5 I present my 'Framework of multilingual reflexivity' which responds to my research aims. My framework builds on Archer's theory of reflexivity but focusses on areas of multilingual decision-making.

Specifically, this framework allows me to address the following research questions:

Research question 1: What does a particular **concern** (such as gaining multilingual competency) mean to my students? How does this concern change over the four years of the study?

Research question 2: What are examples of **conflicts** between concerns (motivations) linked to multilingualism, and how is the conflict resolved?

Research question 3: What sort of multilingual **projects** are the participants aiming for? How are such projects linked to their concerns? How do the projects change over time?

Research question 4: What sort of **structural changes** become triggers for changes within the constellation of multilingual concerns?

Research question 5: What **evidence is there for reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

In Chapter 6 I explain the methodology of the thesis. I describe the data collection procedures and consider the ethics of working with my own students. I finally explain how I craft narratives of each of my students and supplement these with commentaries based on critical realist analysis, underpinned by my framework of multilingual reflexivity. These procedures serve to fully explore the process of decision-making amongst the students.

Chapter 7 provides more specific background information to the study: I introduce the participants, and I discuss relevant variables across the cohort. Additionally, I reflect on the notion of 'cohort theory' (Fulbrook, 2011) in relation to my participants. Finally, I present a timeline of events which impact on the study. In table form I show how the progress of the study interlinks with the students' university trajectory, but also with world events.

In chapters 8-10 I present my analysis in the form of ten narratives (one for each participant) and five commentaries. The commentaries explicitly address the research questions and draw attention to findings which are implicit in the narratives. They highlight the development of individual concerns and show how these may come into conflict with each other (chapter 8). They show how concerns inform multilingual projects (chapter 9),

and how the students reflect on the affordances and restrictions of their environment as they take decisions affecting their trajectories (chapter 10). The analysis suggests that the reflective process is not always easy and straightforward, and that the students' mode of reflexivity changes over time.

Finally, I draw together the main findings from the study in chapter 11, which is the conclusion to the thesis. The chapter also serves to highlight the contributions to knowledge this study has made, and I suggest how the current debates may develop further in future. In this chapter, I respond to my initial motivation for this study by outlining innovative areas of student support. These align with the findings from the study and will contribute to enabling a *modus vivendi* for students during their multilingual trajectory.

5. External factors which arose during the research process: Brexit and Coronavirus

I was accepted as a PhD student in October 2015. During the first year of my enrolment, as I planned my longitudinal data collection, I expected the forces of globalisation and internationalisation to be the main ideological underpinnings of this study. The referendum on Brexit in June 2016, and in particular the fact that the majority of UK voters opted to leave the EU, took me by surprise and strongly influenced the political landscape over the period of data collection. The participants of this study had been offered their university places prior to the Brexit vote, and they were informed that the vote did not change their conditions of study. However, their university course now took place during a time of great uncertainty, as there was no agreement about what Brexit actually meant ("Brexit means Brexit" became the slogan of the ruling party), and what impact this would have on the future migration status of the students. This was particularly worrying during the students' third year of study (which most of them spent abroad), as the UK repeatedly threatened to leave the EU under a "no-deal scenario", and there were no assurances whether EU students on their year abroad would even be allowed to return to the UK to complete their final year.

The UK finally withdrew from the EU in February 2020 under transitional arrangements, and EU students were offered various settlement schemes (some of these subject to conditions). However, during February and March 2020 the spread of the Coronavirus led to a general lockdown in the UK, which meant that students had to isolate in their student flats or return to their families. This led to considerable difficulties for the students as they

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were completing their final assessments and their dissertations while facing isolation, further uncertainties regarding their UK settlement (if they returned to their families abroad), and an economic downturn with few opportunities to find work.

These external factors were completely unplanned, but they significantly impacted on the study. The uncertainties and ideological shifts linked to Brexit and Coronavirus greatly influenced the reflexive processes and decision-making of the students, and this is evident throughout the analysis, but particularly in chapter 10, section 1, where I consider Brexit as a structural force, and chapter 10, section 2, where I focus on repercussions of the pandemic. Furthermore, the lockdown situation meant that I needed to carry out all the final interviews online, and the implications of this are explored in chapter 6. Finally, I became aware of the mental health strain that students were under as they experienced the lockdown, and their possibilities for agency were greatly impaired. In my findings I describe how this influenced the mode of reflexivity for some. I decided to extend the data collection timeframe for the two narratives I discuss in chapter 10, section 2, to incorporate developments which took place in the aftermath of the first lockdown. All these processes and findings are detailed over the next chapters and summarised in the conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter 2: Epistemology and my own positionality

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the backdrop to this study in terms of student mobility in the era of globalisation, and I presented an overview of the main themes and the structure of the thesis. In the current chapter I firstly discuss my epistemological approach to this study. My mode of research can be described as pragmatic, and this allows me to combine features of narrative and critical realist thinking. I introduce the pragmatic, narrative, and critical realist schools of thought and highlight their relevance to my analysis, which aims to improve student support. In this chapter I secondly discuss my own positionality and multilingual background. In doing so I do not attempt to distance myself from the culture and norms which have shaped my thinking throughout this thesis but remain committed to them. However, I attempt to describe and understand this positionality in such a way that its influence may be recognised by readers of this thesis, and the norms which I take for granted at present remain “susceptible to later modification” (Rosiek, 2013, p. 695).

2. The pragmatic approach

2.1. General features of the pragmatic approach

Pragmatism as a philosophical approach originated in the US in the 1870s and was initially based on the writings of philosophers such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. The pragmatist approach has been described as a third research paradigm which can combine quantitative and qualitative research arguments rather than focus on the duality between the two positions (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie maintain that many, if not most, qualitative and quantitative researchers agree on several major points of former philosophical dispute. The authors, therefore, argue for a pragmatic and balanced or pluralistic position. They suggest that such a point of view allows research approaches to be “mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16).

In fact, Reichardt & Rallis (1994) have described many commonalities across these fields which I fully endorse in my own research. These include firstly the theory-ladenness of facts (i.e., I acknowledge that my framework and background knowledge strongly influence what I observe). Secondly, the underdetermination of theory by facts (I am aware that my set of data can be explained by many different theories). Thirdly, the belief in the fallibility of

knowledge. Fourthly, a commitment to understanding and improving the human condition, as I recognise the importance of producing knowledge and informing others. Furthermore, I agree with the widely held view that “the world is complex and stratified, and often difficult to understand [and there is] the need for rigor, conscientiousness, and critiques as we undertake the difficult task of creating knowledge” (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994, p. 88).

Many additional characteristics of pragmatism have been put forward, and I will refer to two further points which demonstrate the compatibility of my own research with a pragmatic approach.

Firstly, Johnson & Onwuegbuzie describe how pragmatism recognises “the existence and importance of the natural or physical world as well as the emergent social and psychological world that includes language, culture, human institutions, and subjective thoughts” (2004, p. 18). This point refers to the tension between structure and agency and is a main focus of my study. All approaches in social science address this relationship between the outer and the inner world in some way, and I will return to this point in the sections on narratives and critical realism below, and also in my chapter on methodology (chapter 6).

Secondly, major pragmatists, such as the above-mentioned Peirce, James, and Dewey, were primarily interested in the effects or practical consequences of the ideas they discovered. Understanding real-world phenomena helped them “in deciding which action to take next” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Other scholars agree that the anticipated consequences of the research are central: “Beginning with what he or she thinks is known and looking to the consequences he or she desires, our pragmatist would pick and choose how and what to research and what to do” (Cherryholmes, 1992, p. 14). The emphasis of pragmatist research lies firmly in the future “in the horizon of possible consequences that might follow from our inquiries” (Rosiek, 2013, p. 693).

Rosiek (2013) suggests the following structure for conducting a study based on the pragmatist approach. A pragmatic researcher will typically start by describing the motivation for the study, then select a framework and a method to guide them, and finally reflect on how the product of the inquiry affects our ongoing experience and has consequences for the future.

2.2. Features of pragmatism in my own research

My own research contains three prominent features of pragmatist studies, as described above.

Firstly, I follow Rosiek's structure for conducting a study orientated towards pragmatism by starting with the motivation and then moving on to a framework and methods: I described my motivation for the study in the introduction to the study. This motivation is linked to my personal background (see below in section 5 under "my own positionality bias") and my professional role as a linguist and an educator, and centres around improving support for students during their multilingual trajectory. In the introduction I also briefly introduced the group of participants and outlined the particular setting and time frame of my research (I introduce the participants briefly by name below (section 5.2), and in much more detail in chapter 7. After describing the motivation and setting the scene, I discuss and reflect on relevant literature in chapters 3 and 4, and this enables me to refine my research questions and construct a framework. The framework has been constantly revised during the data collection and analysis phase. The methods I apply to conduct this data collection and analysis are explained in chapter 6. Rosiek maintains that methods and frameworks are matters of judgement and intuition, and that they are generative as new relations and ideas are created:

These novel relations are the product – in part – of the exercise of our judgment, judgments that intuitively anticipate future consequences, but that are also products of a sedimented past (2013, p. 699).

The judgments need to be made available for critical examination and transformation, as they are never infallible. Finally, in the conclusion, I will elaborate on how the product of this inquiry has affected my ongoing experience by drawing attention to processes I was unaware of beforehand. Specifically (and this will be explained in detail) the research has shown me how reflexivity is always linked to individual concerns, and how the constellation of concerns can evolve and change depending, in part, on contextual forces.

Secondly, the motivation for my own research lies in the future, as is explained in the introduction and the conclusion of this paper. While the main body of this study seeks to explain decision-making in terms of structural and agentic powers, I will focus on possible consequences of this research in the conclusion as I outline how relevant support can be offered to students. This support will enable them to become more adept at navigating the context and responding to contextual changes and contingencies while reviewing their underlying and often evolving multilingual concerns.

Thirdly, pragmatists specifically argue for mixed methods research which puts together insights from both quantitative and qualitative procedures and “provides a more workable solution and produces a superior product” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Such a mixing of methods may occur at various stages of the research, such as during the data collection and during the analysing and interpreting of the data.

As will be shown in more detail later, my own approach follows such a mixed-methods approach. For the data collection I use a variety of qualitative methods (interviews, observations, visual methods), but I also make use of a survey. Furthermore, the data analysis consists of narratives as well as more analytical commentaries, which Bruner (1986) has linked to the narrative and paradigmatic cognition, respectively (see below, and also chapter 6 on methodology). I, myself, categorise the data analysis methods as belonging to the narrative and realist school of thought, and I will elaborate further on this in the following sections.

3. Narrative research

3.1. General features of a narrative inquiry

My analysis is based on narrative research. Generally, the definition of narratives is complex and there are no rules regarding the epistemological or ontological significance of narratives (Andrews et al., 2008; Benson, 2014). Researchers may use narratives as a paradigm in their own right, or they may use narratives as a complement to other research methods, and this may position their actual research in various traditions (combining, as I have done, narratives with realist or pragmatist approaches).

Despite the broad range of possible approaches and uses, Lieblich et al. have defined the common features of narrative research as follows:

Narrative research, according to our definition, refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview or a literary work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters). It can be the object of the research or a means for the study of another question. It may be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality. (1998, pp. 2–3; italics in original text)

In fact, I am doing many of the above things. I am crafting narratives and these are, to an extent, the object and outcome of my research. However, I am also using narratives for the study of a social phenomenon (language learning in undergraduate courses), during a

specific historical period (including the contextual changes through Brexit and Coronavirus), and to explore the personalities of my students (by focussing on their reflexivity).

Advantages of using narratives in research are that they have aesthetic value, are accessible and appeal to larger audiences. They also have reflective value for the researchers, and the readers are shown alternative ways of being (Pavlenko, 2007). Rather than focussing on abstractions, narratives present the participants as humans with feelings (Pavlenko, 2007), as humans who are positioned in respect to history of gender, race, and class (Kinging, 2015; Norton, 2013), and who are shown to exercise some agency, for instance in their second language learning (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Furthermore, narratives can (at least partially – and I critique this point in chapter 6 on methodology) address the power imbalance between the researcher and the research participants: “they are transformative as they shift the power relationship between researchers and participants, and between teachers and learners, making the object of the inquiry into the subject and granting the subject both agency and voice” (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 180).

3.2. Narrative inquiry in my own research

My own research can be categorised as narrative research, but it involves two sides of the coin which are interrelated.

On the one side are the narratives. I craft the narratives from interview data, but also from visuals, observations, and communications as I am interested in gaining an insight into the experience of my participants (narrative analysis). My crafting process pays attention to the dimensions and aspects suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006; see the section on methodology for further details).

I then compose commentaries as the other side of the coin. The commentaries further analyse the narratives (again, see the section on methodology) as they are based on my framework and a particular area of interest for each narrative. They allow me to draw attention to individualities, but also some of the commonalities in the narratives. These commentaries, as well as the framework and the research questions are based on a realist approach to science (as will be explained below) which allows me to investigate reflexivity and causality as main themes. This means I investigate the trajectories from a retroductive perspective, but also explore possibilities for the future.

To recap, I am using narratives in order to gain an insight into the experiences of my participants (in particular their multilingual development) but also to analyse their decision-making. The narratives, the framework, and the commentaries can be seen as

“stepping stones” (Jackson, 2016) towards gaining an understanding of the multilingual development of these particular participants as they take decisions as individuals in a certain setting and period of time. Combining narratives with further commentaries is highly compatible with the pragmatic underpinning of my research and my motivation to improve student support.

In the chapter on methodology I will return to the subject of narrative research, and I will expand on the difference between creating narratives as the object of research (this is what Polkinghorne, 1995, calls 'narrative analysis'), and using narratives as a means for the study of another question (Polkinghorne refers to this as 'analysis of narratives').

4. Critical realism

Critical realism has emerged as an approach since Roy Bhaskar's initial publication of *A Realist Theory of Science* in 1975. Over the past decades it has developed into a multi-disciplinary movement in philosophy and the social sciences, though it has had little application in linguistic and intercultural communication research.

As mentioned above, critical realism enables an investigation of causality and of the interplay of agency and structure in a unique way. I will outline some of the key features of this approach below firstly in more general terms, and secondly applied more specifically to research on social phenomena. As I explain the defining concepts, I will show how these influence my framework and the analytic commentaries I compose.

4.1. General features of critical realism

4.1.1. *The transitive and the intransitive dimensions*

Characteristic of all realist approaches is the ontological belief that there is a durable, pre-existing world which we do not fully know or understand. Bhaskar refers to this as the “continued independent *reality of being*” or the “intransitive or ontological dimension” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 3; italics in original text). Quite separate from this is the transitive or epistemological dimension of science, which is relative and consists of theories and discourses. Critical realist approaches should not conflate the world with our experience of it. A strict separation of both enables critical realism “to combine and reconcile *ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgmental rationality*” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 3; italics in original). This belief is in fact crucial to my own approach as it allows an independent conception of structure (and this belongs to the dimension of the real). However, in my framework and my research questions I seek to understand this structure through the transitive dimension of science.

4.1.2. The powers of the real

A further specification between the real, the actual and the empirical dimensions is necessary. According to critical realism, the real (as above) “is whatever exists, be it natural or social ... the real is the realm of objects, their structures and powers” (Sayer, 2000, p. 11). In the transitive dimension of science we try and discover these structures and powers. The powers exist, but they are not always active (these powers could either belong to the realm of necessity when they necessarily lead to a result, such as water boiling at a specific temperature; or to the realm of possibility or potential where they may lead to a result, but this does not necessarily happen).

In contrast to this, the actual is what happens if and when these powers are activated.

The empirical is what we experience, or our way of explaining the real or the actual. This can be based on observation, or on plausibility (sometimes entities cannot be observed, but the effects are observable and can only be explained as the products of such entities). Sayer explains how the separation between these dimensions allows us to gain an understanding in various dimensions of time. Firstly, we can try to explain what actually has happened by identifying causal relationships (more will be said about causality below).

Secondly, we can also look to the future:

A crucial implication of this ontology is the recognition of the possibility that powers may exist unexercised, and hence that what has happened or been known to have happened does not exhaust what could happen or has happened. The nature of the real objects at a given time constrains and enables what can happen but does not pre-determine what will happen. Realist ontology therefore makes it possible to understand how we could be or become many things which currently we are not. (Sayer, 2000, p. 12)

I will say more about the powers of the real below (i.e., powers of enablement and constraint coming from structure, but also powers of reflexivity and rationalisation coming from the people). These are crucial points as I seek to understand these powers and how they shape decision-making of the students. This also fits in well with the pragmatic nature of my research where I additionally look for consequences of the research in the future by trying to identify possibilities of intervention to optimise student support.

4.1.3. The stratification of the real

A third crucial feature of critical realism (and again related to the former features) is the understanding of reality as stratified and differentiated. On the one hand this means, as mentioned before, that the real, the actual, and the empirical are all present and must not be conflated. Discovering when and under what conditions powers necessarily become

activated, rather than possibly becoming activated allows us to pay attention to necessary antecedents of facts (horizontal stratification). This could enable us to eliminate certain facts if we know that they necessarily lead to a negative outcome.

On the other hand, is the realisation that there are always many powers at play, and often this interplay leads to the emergence of new properties at a higher-order structure which cannot be reduced to the underlying conditions and powers. Bhaskar refers to this process as vertical stratification and he maintains that “the higher-order structure is real and worthy of scientific investigation in its own right” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 6). This point concurs with theorising from complexity theorists (as will be discussed in chapter 3), and my analysis confirms the suggestions of scholars such as Henry (2017) who describe the concept of multilingualism as an emerging property which cannot be reduced to the separate languages which are being learnt (see the section on multilingualism under ‘key concepts’).

4.1.4. Causality

Causality has already been described as a key interest of critical realism (and I will say more about this in the next passage where this is applied specifically to social research). I have already stated that powers of objects may or may not be activated depending on conditions. However, there are few closed systems in the natural world and no closed systems in the social world. This means that amongst many existing conditions, we do not know which conditions are relevant. “Explanation depends ... on identifying causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions” (Sayer, 2000, p. 14). I have described (above) and repeat again that this has implications for the past and the future.

My analysis concurs with Sayer’s view of causality which allows me to explain what happened in hindsight (though I might of course be wrong in my judgment), but I do not know what the future holds due to the openness of most systems. This means that events are not pre-determined but depend on contingent conditions. The same mechanism could produce different outcomes according to context or the spatio-temporal relations with other objects which have their own causal powers and constraints, and these may trigger, block, or modify a mechanism or action.

4.2. Critical realism in social phenomena

I now turn to several features of critical realism which are particularly relevant for social research and this current study.

4.2.1. *Causality and the powers of people*

Firstly, I have already maintained that causality must nearly always be considered in an open system. Archer (1998a) argues that society, in particular, will always remain open precisely because it is peopled. She refers specifically to the powers of people within a society which are different to the powers of objects, and should be considered as causal: “there are properties and powers particular to people which include a reflexivity towards and creativity about any social context which they confront” (Archer, 1998a, p. 4). Bhaskar also refers to causal powers of people which may generate human actions. These causal powers are emergent features including such things as reasons, intentions, and plans of human beings. Acknowledging the emergent features of powers as particular to people “allows us to see reasons as causes, but causes which may, for instance, be rationalizations” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 8). This is an important point for me as it allows me to look for reflections, intentions and plans as reasons for decision-making without being accused of what Archer calls “instrumental rationality” (Archer, 2007, p. 14). Of course, I must not (and do not) neglect the powers of structures which may constrain or enable any intentions and plans, and identifying these powers is a major challenge of this research.

4.2.2. *The interpretive dimension of social research*

Critical realists acknowledge that in the investigation of social phenomena an interpretive dimension is necessary. This is because these phenomena are different to natural science in that they cannot be measured or counted. Instead, they are intrinsically meaningful, and need to be understood. Sayer explains that critical realists need to enter the hermeneutic circle of those whom they study. This means that there is a “‘fusing of the horizons’ of listener and speaker, researcher and researched, in which the latter’s actions and texts never speak simply for themselves, and yet are not reducible to the researcher’s interpretation of them either” (Sayer, 2000, p. 17). However, in contrast to the interpretive sciences, critical realists presuppose material commitments and settings, as well as the presence of a non-discursive and material dimension to social life (there is no conflation of agency and structure). Critical realists are divided in their opinion of whether we should only study mechanisms which have been experienced by ourselves and our agents or not. Some state that we should not study factors (such as constraints and enablements) which influence us if we have not conceptualised them. However, Archer disagrees and maintains that it is also worth analysing structure and

detecting the causal efficacy of properties which do not depend upon consciousness of them ... [It is then possible] *additionally* to explain the

hermeneutic *struggle* to make sense of our environment, and to make nonsense of it because usually not all is revealed to consciousness and sometimes that is because it is shaped outside our conscious awareness (Archer, 1998a, p. 18; italics in original).

These points are exactly the reason why I use both narratives and commentaries in my analysis. Narratives provide an interpretive view of social phenomena as it is linked to the experiences of the participants. The commentaries, however, allow me to take a step back and look at the social structures of which the students are trying to make sense through their reflexivity; and I acknowledge this sense-making is not always possible, particularly in the uncertain times during which the research took place. Brexit and the Coronavirus epidemic are precisely such mechanisms which we can study through the effects they have on people, rather than through the peoples' conceptualisation of them (see also chapter 7, section 3 on 'cohort theory'). In fact, the key feature (as will be seen in my analysis) is the uncertainty which these forces present the students with.

4.2.3. Multidimensionality, conceptuality, and abstraction

I have already written about stratification as a key feature of critical realism. Linked to this, Sayer encourages critical realist research to be multidimensional, but also to abstract the various components in our heads: "only when we have done this and considered how they combine and interact can we expect to return to the concrete, many-sided object and make sense of it" (2000, p. 19). Sayer suggests that we think about the nature of our abstractions (what are the one-sided components of the concrete object), and the mode of abstraction (the way we carve up and define our objects of study).

Abstraction is the principle behind my framework and my research questions (see chapter 5). These allow me to focus on different components and gain an understanding of what might contribute to decision-making, and how particular conditions and factors about a certain context allow a certain action to be taken.

4.2.5. The transformative power of critical realism

A final point on critical realism is the understanding of this approach as a transformative model of social action. In particular the separation of structure and agency as ontologically and analytically distinct entities allows us to nevertheless understand that they interact and combine in complex ways. Reed summarises the transformative power of critical realist research as follows:

Thus, the contribution of critical realist research lies in the intellectual capacity to construct the analytical narratives that identify the conditions under which the endemic contradictions and tensions between structure and agency are translated

into 'live' forms of discontent that have the potential to change the situations in which agents are operating. (Reed, 2009, p. 437).

While critical realists do not agree on whether the truth is actually in the "real" (the nature of things – some believe it does, and some do not), they agree on the fact that truth is not to be found in the methods we use to arrive at the truth (Potter & Lopez, 2001). This means that our perceptions are fallible (as mentioned above about the transitive entities), and widely held assumptions can prove to be wrong.

Again, this points to possible consequences of the research into the future. For instance, the analysis will show how one of the students believes that a language needs to be mastered for her to pass a module taught in this language abroad (chapter 8, section 2). If this belief was broken, or the concept of 'mastery' had been critiqued, she might not have taken the decision to cancel her year abroad.

5. My own positionality and bias

5.1. The pragmatist approach to positionality

I have discussed above the various modes of thinking which I draw on in this thesis while following a pragmatist approach.

Rosiek (2013) suggests that reflexivity and an acknowledgement of the researcher's mediating role are key features of the pragmatist approach. He maintains that scholars necessarily make judgements regarding their framework and methods, and these judgements are never infallible, but are influenced by our sedimented past (see above). In order to critically assess this mediating role, Rosiek maintains that a pragmatic researcher must interrogate "the cultural and historical origins of our habits of knowing [as] a necessary component of inquiry" (2013, p. 694).

However, according to Rosiek, pragmatists do not distance themselves from the culture, ontology and norms they use, but attempt to understand and describe them in such a way that later scholars may recognise and modify them. So, while pragmatists may willingly affirm ontological and normative commitments, these are always seen as contingent and may be subject "to transformation through ongoing inquiry" (Rosiek, 2013, p. 695).

Following Rosiek's suggestions for conducting pragmatist research, I now turn to considerations of my own positionality, my past, and personal experiences which naturally influence my current interest in multilingualism.

5.2. My positionality and interest in multilingualism

I grew up as a bilingual child living in England with German parents until the age of ten. I do not have any recollection of actively learning either English or German and I was a pupil in an English primary school where I learnt to read and write in English. However, when we moved to Germany, I struggled at first with the written aspects of German. I always felt emotionally very close to the English language, but for a while I was no longer speaking English on a regular basis, and I remember a feeling of loss when I realised during a holiday that my English was less fluent than it had been. During my schooling in Germany, I learnt Latin, English, and French, and while I enjoyed Latin, and could mostly relax in the English classes, I struggled with French and confounded expectations that bilingual children ought to be good at other languages.

I chose to study English, Russian, and Geography at university. While I always enjoyed English and did well in the subject, I had to work very hard at my Russian, and again experienced the fact that I did not have an advantage over other learners that came from a monolingual background. I spent a semester abroad in Russia, and have been on holiday in Russia a few times, but never felt completely confident as a speaker. I now live in the UK and use both English and German on a daily basis. While it is my ambition to keep a high level in both languages, I sometimes find myself struggling for words in conversations on more specialised subjects in either language. Russian plays a smaller role in my life, but the language has been significant at various stages of my life. For instance, during this study, I became involved in a one-off Erasmus exchange between my university and a partner university in Russia. In fact, one of my participants took part in the semester-long student exchange and I was able to visit her while participating in a one-week teaching mobility exchange.

How does my personal history influence my research questions and my design? I am personally very interested in the concept of multilingual identity and the way in which languages form a theme throughout one's life. In my personal life, multilingualism has often played a role in my decision-making, and I am interested in how the desire to learn and use different languages impacts on the trajectory of other people. In my role as a language lecturer, I am particularly keen to find out more about the interplay between the multilingual motivations of the students, and their reflections on their developing concerns and their changing contexts.

Due to my own background, I am interested in many aspects of my participants' experiences. Before I explain these, I would like to briefly introduce the participants (who I

refer to by pseudonyms), and their nationalities, in table 1 (more specific information on the cohort is given in chapter 7).

Eve	UK
Frederica	Irish /UK / permanent right to residency in Switzerland
Jade	Italy
Leanne	British Crown Dependency
Lotti	Germany
Margarita	Italy
Rita	Poland
Ruby	UK
Sanjay	Italy
Tilly	Spain

Table 1 – Names and nationality of participants

During my life I changed countries several times and had to function in a different language, and I can relate to the international students who moved to the UK at the beginning of their studies. I can also relate to students who grew up bilingually but find any additional languages demanding (see Tilly’s story in chapter 8). I can imagine the feeling of loss which students might experience who have a “hidden” or family language which seemingly plays a secondary role in their identity, and which they no longer use very often (see Jade’s story in chapter 9, or Sanjay’s story in chapter 10). I am full of admiration for the students who have successfully learnt several languages and are interested in learning additional languages (see for instance Lotti’s and Jade’s stories in chapter 9). Finally, I am very interested in the experiences of students coming from a monolingual background and who have chosen to learn languages at university (see Leanne’s and Eve’s stories in chapter 8, or Ruby’s story in chapter 10). While I do not personally share the experiences of the last group, I hope to better understand their particular language learning trajectory. However, while there will no doubt be some similarities in the experiences of students from similar backgrounds or linguistic starting points, I have set out to write narratives which will convey the unique voice of every student, and my aim is to describe the individuality of each case (Polkinghorne, 1995). Reflecting on the experience of the students will no doubt evoke memories of my own background, and I am aware that my viewpoint will be subjective.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I presented and discussed the epistemological framing of my thesis. I showed that a pragmatic underpinning will allow me to design a framework and generate research questions based on my judgement, and this judgement will be informed by the

Chapter 2: Epistemology and my own positionality

literature review I conduct in the following two chapters. I am aware that my judgement is shaped by norms and commitments and a 'sedimented past' which I have attempted to outline above, but of which I am not fully conscious.

I have also given a brief overview of the narrative and critical realist schools of thought. The pragmatic underpinning allows me to include elements of these seemingly contradictory approaches into the writing of the narratives and commentaries in chapters 8-10.

I will continue to pay attention to different approaches as I critically review relevant literature in the subsequent chapters

Chapter 3: Key concepts and theories

1. Introduction

After considering my epistemological approach and positionality in the previous chapter I now turn to a review of relevant literature in chapters 3 and 4. In the current chapter I firstly introduce several key concepts of this study. These concepts relate to multilingualism, migration and mobility, as well as structure, agency, and reflexivity. In this overview I explain how my understanding of these concepts is reflected in the analysis.

I then explore relevant theories linked to multilingualism. These are associated with the areas of motivation and identity, and some are based on holistic modelling. In line with the focus of this study, I pay attention to how the theories conceptualise structure and agency, and I consider whether an element of reflexivity is included. The themes of motivation and identity are introduced in this chapter as they feature strongly in many current papers on language learning in the student context (which I review more specifically in chapter 4). Motivation and identity are also prominent in my own framework for understanding trajectories of language students.

In the current chapter I also present and discuss Archer's model of reflexivity (Archer, 2007). Unlike the previous frameworks this model was not developed specifically for linguistic purposes, and it focusses on the role of reflexivity in individuals. As will be shown, this final theory is of interest to the study, as the roles of structure, agency, and reflexivity are theorised comprehensively (Block, 2013), and I suggest that this theory is transferable to the investigation of multilingual development.

2. Key concepts

2.1. Multilingualism

The concept of multilingualism in many of its manifestations (Strani, 2020) is central to this study. I will briefly discuss how scholars have described the actual phenomenon of multilingualism, then I will outline some social and political dimensions of multilingualism. I then turn to multilingualism and language learning before introducing the concepts of language constellation and multilingual repertoires. Finally, I critically explore the concept of communicative competence.

2.1.1. The phenomenon of multilingualism

In his theory of changing language in a changing society Blommaert (2010) clearly distinguishes two understandings of multilingualism.

The first angle (which is the traditional view on languages) understands languages as indexical and separate (this is linked to the structuralist tradition based on Saussure's view of languages as fixed entities). Blommaert calls this the "*sociolinguistics of distribution*" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 5, italics in original text). From this angle it is possible to study language distribution as a snapshot "in which things are in place, so to speak" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 5). A definition of multilingualism in this sense would be to know more than one language (and 'language' remains abstract and idealised).

The second angle to language pays attention to recent forces of globalisation and has been described by Blommaert as the "*sociolinguistics of mobility*" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 5, italics in original text). The emphasis is no longer on individual languages as linguistically defined objects, but on concrete resources or "actual language resources deployed in real sociocultural, historical and political contexts" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 5). According to this second perspective, multilingualism is better defined as "the complexes of resources people actually possess and deploy" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 102) and these resources include "concrete accents, language varieties, registers, genres, modalities" etc. As we will see later in this chapter, (section 3.3) scholars have drawn on complexity theories in an attempt to describe the emergent qualities of this 'mobile' concept of multilingualism which understands languages as interdependent, but also takes notice of the changeable and emergent nature of the system.

Both approaches to language (as described by Blommaert) are relevant to my study, and my analysis demonstrates how the students often veer between a more indexical and a more mobile understanding of multilingualism as they reflect on their multilingual trajectory. My own understanding, however, coincides with the mobile and holistic view of languages. My interest lies in the development and emergent nature of the students' multilingual resources during their trajectory. I also consider what multilingualism means to the students and how their reflexivity on this concept and their evaluation of the structural affordances enables them to use and enhance their multilingual resources.

2.1.2. Social and political dimensions of multilingualism

As mentioned above, multilingualism has not only been described as a phenomenon, but has also been researched with a focus on its social and political dimensions.

In terms of their social dimensions languages are understood as "living, dynamic and porous" (Strani, 2020, p. 19), as they symbolise and express cultural and social realities.

Blommaert (see above) and other scholars (for instance Blackledge & Creese, 2014) are interested in language in practice rather than in competency. Strani explains that multilingualism, in this sense, is “not something that people can have or acquire” (2020, p. 20), and Kramsch (2009) refers to this aspect of multilingualism when she suggests that a multilingual subject has access to multiple “embodied understandings of social reality and a broader and more varied range of options than others to act on these understandings” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 124).

The term heteroglossia is linked to this understanding of multilingualism. The term has been used recently by sociolinguists to “better understand the diversity of linguistic practice in late modern societies” (Blackledge & Creese, 2014, p. 3), and to present an alternative lens „through which to view the social, political and historical implications of language in practice” (Blackledge & Creese, 2017, p. 1). However, Blackledge and Creese remind us that Bakhtin’s original use of “heteroglossia” (Blackledge & Creese, 2014) was concerned with language practices reflecting different social realities within a language (i.e. the languages of social groups), rather than across languages or dialects.

In my own analysis I am aware of the social dimension of multilingualism, and the narratives will highlight how the participants often express their desire to enhance their language skills to ‘better understand’ other cultures. Similarly, in the sense of Bakhtin’s ‘heteroglossia’ they are interested in learning not only ‘formal’ language, but also slang and dialect to access and partake in different speech communities. However, this process is never straightforward; in fact, I will discuss in chapter 4 (section 2.2) how Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) have used the term ‘negotiation of difference’ to show that an understanding of the worldview of the other culture necessarily also means becoming critical of one’s own worldview.

This thesis also highlights various political dimensions linked to multilingualism. Strani suggests that the dynamism of multilingualism manifests itself in the contingency “upon power differentials that affect the status and legitimacy of languages and their speakers” (2020, p. 20). Due to the forces of globalisation people regularly come into contact with a multitude of languages, however globalisation “also creates a context of linguistic commodification in which only a handful of languages are considered to be the desired / necessary linguistic capital for a global environment” (Pauwels, 2014, p. 310). This can be observed very directly in the availability of language learning opportunities in the higher

education sector, as well as in the motivation for learning particular languages (see next point).

2.1.3. Multilingualism and language learning

The four years of undergraduate education frame this study in terms of time, space, and access to formal language learning. All participants are language students and in fact this is one of the few common features¹ amongst them (see chapter 7 on the profile of the participants). Cenoz and Gorter (2015) have introduced a useful framework for considering multilingualism in the context of education which considers both the concepts of ‘being multilingual’ (i.e. using languages during education) and ‘becoming multilingual’ (through learning additional languages and linguistic skills). It is important to note that while these two concepts can be seen as two ends of a spectrum, and researched separately, they can also be considered simultaneously, as students learn languages while using (the same or other) languages (Block, 2015a). This is compatible with the experiences of the students in this study who are constantly using and practising various languages. In fact, in chapter 9 of this study I specifically analyse the trajectories of two students in terms of how they use, manage, reflect on, and learn a variety of different languages.

The educational setting has implications for language learning motivation and offering which I consider below after a brief reflection on the term ‘plurilingualism’.

2.1.3.1. Terminology: Plurilingualism vs multilingualism

At this point a brief clarification of terminology is necessary. In educational contexts the word ‘plurilingualism’ has been used by some authors as an alternative to multilingualism. When this term is chosen, the similarity to multilingualism is usually acknowledged, however added emphasis is given to the values of linguistic tolerance and intercultural education in language education (Council of Europe, 2007). At the same time, the term plurilingualism is said to challenge the discourses of deficit, enabling educators to “open up spaces for a plurality of languages and cultures in their classes” (Marshall & Moore, 2016, p. 4). Furthermore, the term has been used to call for the end of “hard boundaries” between individual languages in language education (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013, p. 592), and to counter the monolingual ideology of language teaching as well as the ideal of “the native

¹ However, one student (Eve) dropped the language element of her studies after she cancelled her year abroad. In the final interview she maintains that she is still committed to language learning and would like to take up her languages again in the near future.

speaker as the only legitimate objective” (Council of Europe, 2007, p. 46). Instead, a plurilingual approach aims to “draw on learners’ metalinguistic awareness and experiences as plurilingual speakers” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013, p. 596) in order to learn English and other languages in a more efficient way.

While I wholeheartedly agree with the above mentioned aims of plurilingual language teaching, this thesis does not focus on questions of language policy in education. Therefore, I have opted for the more widely used term multilingualism.

2.1.3.2. Language motivation and language choice in education

The concerns (which can roughly be understood as motivations) for language learning, and the language affiliations of the participants are of particular significance throughout the analysis in chapters 8-10.

I have already mentioned that language choice and language motivation are linked to the political dimension of multilingualism. This idea of specific foreign languages offering ‘cultural capital’ was first expressed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). The notion was further developed by Norton when she coined the concept of ‘investment’ (Norton, 2013; see later in this chapter). ‘Investment’ is different and more ambivalent than the term ‘motivation’ and reflects the idea that the relationship to a target language is socially and historically constructed. ‘Investing’ in the foreign language will result in an increase in resources and opportunities.

However, research has shown that there are many other factors in play, and Duff emphasises that individual language combinations “represent potential investments by learners in distinct local, ancestral, national, transnational, and cosmopolitan identities, as well as particular communities of speakers” (2017, p. 599).

The analysis of the students’ narratives will confirm that their language choices are nuanced, vary across the group, and change over time. The students’ appreciation of individual languages depends very much on what they care about; and the economic usefulness of particular languages is only one part of their heterogeneous constellation of concerns, as they construct a multilingual sense of self (Henry, 2017) and accumulate multilingual capital (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) not only through language learning, but also through experiences of mobility and migration (see below).

2.1.3.3. Languages on offer in higher education settings

Linked to the question of language choice is the critical consideration of the pool of languages which are actually on offer in the higher education landscape (see above under

‘political dimensions of multilingualism’). Generally, language-learning policies are shaped by the competing forces of globalisation (Duff, 2017; Liddicoat, 2013). In fact, Pauwels suggests that “the dominance of English and its status as global lingua franca may reduce the need or desire to acquire skills in another language” (Pauwels, 2014, p. 310). If languages other than English are learnt at all, choices for students are often limited to colonial languages.

Many scholars concur that there is an urgent need to revert this trend and include migrant, minority or heritage languages (Strani, 2020) in higher education offerings. Furthermore, it is necessary to conduct more research into the motivation for and the teaching of heritage languages (Duff, 2017; P. MacIntyre et al., 2017; Montrul, 2010). As mentioned above, and as will be seen in my own analysis not all learners are satisfied by the very limited range of foreign languages on offer.

2.1.4. Language constellation and multilingual repertoire

Pauwels suggests that the ‘new’ paradigm of multilingualism introduced by Blommaert (above) allows us to not only examine the dynamics, fluidity and transience of language constellations, but also “the linguistic repertoires people use to make meaning and mark (non-)alignment, and (dis-)affiliation” (Pauwels, 2014, p. 309).

The concepts of language (or multilingual) repertoire and language constellation are key in my analysis of the students’ multilingual development (see in particular chapter 9), and I adopt Aronin’s definitions (2016) as follows.

Aronin describes the multilingual repertoire of an individual as the totality of their languages and skills, including rudimentary skills. This is comparable to what Cenoz & Gorter refer to as plurilingual competence in education, and which the Council of Europe has put forward as an aim in language education in the EU (2007), i.e. “to acquire a unique competence that encompasses different languages: national, minority, European, and non-European languages, which are referred to as the speaker’s linguistic repertoire” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013, p. 594).

Furthermore, Aronin refers to the dominant language constellation of an individual as the set of languages they use as their most important vehicle languages which “function as an entire unit” (Aronin, 2016, p. 146). I will show in the analysis how the students make use of

their repertoires in their day-to-day lives, and how their dominant language constellations change over time due, in part, to their experiences of mobility and migration.

2.1.5. Communicative competence

The concept of communicative competence is of particular importance in this study, as all students express their desire to develop their communicative skills. In fact, the concept of communicative competence is the concern I examine critically throughout chapter 8, as I trace the development of the students' understanding of the concern (linked to my research question 1) and show how this concern comes into conflict with other concerns of the students (linked to my research question 2).

Similarly, to the term multilingualism, the concept of communicative competence has multiple dimensions which I will briefly elaborate on.

Benson et al. (2013) have defined communicative competence as the wish to achieve proficiency in terms of grammatical correctness, fluency (i.e. maintaining a conversation), and socio-pragmatic competence (which is linked to the ability to project desired identities). This definition corresponds with some of the students' understanding of this concept, particularly at the beginning of the study. Their desire to become linguistically competent is very much linked to the idealised first angle to multilingualism which Blommaert describes as the sociolinguistics of distribution (see above). This can mean striving to achieve the competence of an idealised native speaker (see for instance Leanne's narrative in chapter 8), or to develop a formal version of the language which the students understand as 'good' (see for instance Rita's narrative in chapter 10).

However, Benson et al. base their definition of communicative competence on an indexical approach to languages (Blommaert, 2010), and this appears as a limitation.

In this study, it is helpful to view the concept of communicative competence from a more holistic angle encompassing the entire multilingual repertoire of the students (Jessner, 2008) and including for instance the need "to communicate with others who may not share the same starting points of interpersonal and interactive practices" (Liddicoat, 2017, p. 25). This links back to the fact which has been described above that for language learners the process of becoming multilingual is inextricably linked to the phenomenon of being multilingual (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015).

The type of competences which students with more than one language possess has also been referred to as 'multicompetence' (Cook, 1992). However, a shortcoming of this term is that the emerging nature of becoming multicompetent or multilingual is not expressed in Cook's understanding of 'multicompetence' which he defines as "the compound state of a mind with two grammars" (Cook, 1992, p. 557). I therefore use the term 'communicative competence' in this thesis as it has a wide reach and can be applied to one or more languages, as well as to the developing nature of 'becoming multilingual' (see Leanne's narrative in chapter 8 where she comes to see the development of communicative competency as a lifelong project). The term, as I understand it, includes linguistic-pragmatic competence, in particular cultural sensitivity (see below) and the ability to mediate and negotiate meaning in context.

In fact, it is a major observation of this thesis that the students' understanding of 'communicative competence' develops throughout their trajectory. Increasingly they develop "multiple normative orientations" (Blommaert – cp p. 221) in their linguistic ambitions and appreciate even rudimentary knowledge of a language (see for instance Lotti's narrative in chapter 9).

In the following I give a brief overview of the terms 'intercultural speakers' and 'cosmopolitan speakers' as relevant concepts in the development of the students' communicative competence.

2.1.5.1. Intercultural speakers

I have mentioned that all participants express their ambition to enhance their communicative competence, and that they often link this desire to their enjoyment of communicating in different languages and their interest in other cultures.

Given this interest, it is fair to say that the students in this study either already are, or are hoping to become not just multicompetent language users, but also 'intercultural speakers' (Byram et al., 2001). The concept of 'intercultural speaker' is of particular interest in this study, as it specifically moves away from the idealised native speaker as a "representative of one monolingual discourse community" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 27). Wilkinson (2020) highlights the agency of intercultural speakers who she defines as language learners who are "not 'just' 'deficient' native speakers", but who "use that language knowledge, along with a sensitivity to cultural and linguistic difference, in communication with others". Recently, scholars have added that intercultural speakers use their multilingual skills not only to communicate with native (L1) speakers but also with other L2 speakers through a

lingua franca (Baker, 2015). Competences of intercultural speakers include being able to perceive and cope with both difference and similarity (Holliday, 2016; Wilkinson, 2020).

2.1.5.2. Cosmopolitan speakers

We will see in the analysis that some of the participants can also be characterised as cosmopolitan speakers, and this term has been developed by Ros i Solé (2013) as an alternative concept to the 'intercultural speaker'. Ros i Solé maintains that the notion of the intercultural speaker inherently points to differences between cultures which need to be overcome. However, cosmopolitan speakers are "defined by their multiple cultural alliances and the development of a nomadic and borderless lifestyle" (Ros i Solé, 2013, p. 327). The author describes the notion of the cosmopolitan speaker as linked to the phenomenon of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1025, I explain this term in relation to the cohort in chapter 7). Cosmopolitan speakers are essential in communities which are made up "of socially and culturally complex individuals who cannot be pigeonholed in particular ways and ... often cohere and participate in different communities simultaneously" (Ros i Solé, 2013, p. 327).

2.2. Migration / mobility

As mentioned in the introduction, the experiences of 'mobility' and 'migration' are highly relevant to the participants of this study, and I now turn to a critical discussion of these terms.

Migration and human mobility both refer to the geographical movement of people. However, in public discourse a distinction is often made where mobility is associated with those who have access to resources and travel, while migration is linked to those who are less privileged. Canagarajah (2017, p. 5) observes: "The mobile are welcome everywhere and have the resources to shuttle across borders as they please; migrants seek opportunities and refuge elsewhere." Faist (2013, p. 1640) further reflects on this dichotomy as he suggests that mobility in the modern welfare society is associated with "euphemistic expectations of gain for individuals and states" while migration calls for "social integration, control and the maintenance of national identity".

However, this binary distinction between the more agentive concept of mobility and the more deterministic concept of migration is often problematic. I will demonstrate this in terms of the cohort of this study by looking at the interplay between "degree mobility", and "credit mobility" (Nada et al., 2018) below, and I also reflect on the contextual changes

which Brexit imposes. Finally, I consider the term vertical mobility and how this is often linked to geographical mobility. In all these areas, the students experience tensions between agency and structure and their reflective responses are explored in chapters 8-10.

2.2.1. Degree mobility

In the introduction to this study, I presented some facts regarding the internationalisation of university education. Students (particularly EU students) choosing to spend their entire undergraduate or postgraduate programme in countries other than their own are usually not considered as migrants, and this type of movement is often referred to as “degree mobility”. Other scholars prefer the term “sojourning” which Gu, Schweisfurth & Day have defined as “taking up temporary residence in another culture” (2010, p. 10). However, this distinction between mobility (sojourning) and migration is less straightforward in terms of the non-UK students in this study. In the overview of the participants (see chapter 7) I show how some students completed their schooling in countries outside the UK. Two students (Sanjay and Margarita) arrived in the UK 4 years before they began their studies and spent these years working in various jobs. As EU citizens they were entitled to work, live, and settle in any EU country. In their narratives it becomes clear that there is always a combination of reasons why they chose to move to the UK, but some students also mention the difficult economic outlook of their native countries. Does this make them migrants or mobile young people?

Towards the end of the undergraduate course some of the EU students left abruptly, due to the pandemic, and it is uncertain whether they will return. Other students stayed for longer but intend to move on in the not-too-distant future. The remaining students reported in their final interviews that they were still undecided as to whether they will stay in the UK or not. If they make the UK their permanent home, do they then count as migrants? And from which point onwards? As we have seen, the dichotomy between migration and mobility is problematic, and there is a great deal of fluctuation between the two concepts. Furthermore, the Brexit developments provide contextual changes (as discussed below) which massively impact on migratory opportunities and which students reflect on in their narratives.

2.2.2. Credit mobility

All students planned to participate in a year-long Erasmus² exchange in the third year of their studies. Scholars describe this type of student exchange as a special case of mobility

²The UK withdrew from the Erasmus programme post-Brexit.

which is also referred to as “credit mobility” (Nada et al., 2018) and is characterised by more regular to-and-fro movements. This type of exchange usually reflects the agency of the students who embark on it. Murphy-Lejeune (2002, p. 38) suggests that, even though there are some similarities in the initial stages of migration and student exchanges, “the end result may be qualitatively quite different, particularly in the context of the European construction”.

For all the participants the year abroad is compulsory. This is usually perceived as positive, (in chapter 10 Rita refers to the year abroad as “just amazing” and one of the reasons she chose the programme). Despite the initial enthusiasm, we can see how the compulsory nature of the year abroad is later perceived as a structural barrier by some students. Two students (Eve and Rita) did not spend the entire year abroad for reasons which are discussed in the narratives, and this means that they were forced to change programmes (see the participant profiles in chapter 7 under “programme of study”). Lotti’s narrative similarly gives evidence of how her study abroad experiences are influenced by structural barriers, as visa problems prevented her from travelling out to her second destination in time for the start of the semester.

2.2.3. Brexit and mobility

The immigration status of the cohort changes during the course of the study as the Brexit developments unfold. This means that the ease of mobility for young people becomes curtailed as structural barriers are imposed. During the transition period the non-UK students are able to apply for settlement schemes while they are in the UK, and this gives them some security if they wish to stay in the UK (though the details were still in the making during much of the study). On the other hand, the UK nationals are set to lose their automatic right to live, work and settle in EU countries. In future, if they wish to partake in migration or mobility, they will need to apply for work visas, and this creates new barriers.

2.2.4. Vertical mobility

So far, I have discussed geographical, or horizontal, mobility. Since this is a study on university students, I would like to add a few words on vertical mobility, which is associated with a rise in social class. Canagarajah has outlined how vertical mobility is often implicated in horizontal mobility, and he observes how there “are social discourses that associate the desire for or possibility of geographical mobility as a sign of social / class mobility” (2017, p. 5). Canagarajah warns that this conclusion is not always valid, and migrants often end up in worse economic conditions and with a reduced social status than they enjoyed previously. However, in terms of my own study, it is fair to say that all students do recognise the

advantages of their various forms of mobility (whether this is degree mobility or credit mobility, or both). The rich international experiences they gain enables them to enhance their skills and develop what Murphy-Lejeune has described as “mobility capital” (2002, p. 51).

I have shown above that both the mobility experiences and the knowledge of particular languages are perceived as increasing the cultural capital of individuals. It is clear that these two are linked and Canagarajah refers to the ‘nexus of mobility and language’ as he suggests that language knowledge facilitates the flow to particular target countries (Canagarajah, 2017). This becomes a focus of the analysis in chapter 10 (Brexit as a structural force) where the students reflect on the relative importance of various languages as they contemplate where their future is likely to play out.

However (and linking back to the section on language motivation above), I argue that it is not always the case that the identification with a particular future destination matches the preference for learning just this language. Henry (2017) describes how actually learning several languages and developing a multilingual identity can also motivate the learning of individual languages, even if these are not perceived as immediately useful. This multilingual identity is related to the previously discussed notion of the cosmopolitan speaker. Lotti’s narrative (see chapter 9) is an example of how the student develops a multilingual identity as she widens her linguistic repertoire to include Russian and Mandarin as minor languages without expecting to reach a level where she can use them for communicative purposes.

2.3. Structure, agency, and reflexivity

I complete this section on key concepts by pinning down my understandings of the notions of structure, agency, and reflexivity, which are key to my framework and analysis.

2.3.1. Structure

Ushioda maintains that most current theories “view language learning as a sociocultural and sociohistorically situated process, rather than as primarily a cognitive psycholinguistic process” (2009, p. 220), and this suggests that learners are often shaped by cultural and historic structures.

Scientists are epistemologically divided about whether structure and agency can be separated. Archer, as a critical realist, calls for a clear distinction between the two. She refers to structure as ‘the objective world and society’ which possess their own properties and powers (Archer, 2000).

Several authors (Block, 2015c; Cots et al., 2021) claim that structure is no longer given its due attention in literature on language learning as there has been “a shift away from a concern with larger social structures to an interest in the individual agent” (Block, 2015b, p. 23).

In fact, Block argues that there is no clear definition of ‘structure’ to be found (Block, 2013, 2015b), and suggests a comprehensive model which comprises the following realms: economic structure (realm 1, based on a Marxist analysis); physical structure (realm 2, including geographical terrain and physical objects); social structure (realm 3, including religion, education, family, and employment); psychological / embodied structure (realm 4, including cognitive abilities and embodied dispositional formations, for instance Bourdieu’s habitus); and “sociocultural configurations which emerge in the ongoing interactions among individuals” for instance in Bourdieu’s fields, or in communities of practice (realm 5).

My own understanding of ‘structure’ is based on Archer’s conceptualisation as I examine the objective world and the society of the students and aim to understand what these offer and deny. This understanding includes many of Block’s points above, as I consider the geographical spaces, the social, cultural, and historic contexts, and further contingent factors which impinge on the students’ situation.

2.3.2. Agency

Larsen-Freeman (2019) agrees with Block’s sentiments (above) that agency has become more prevalent in recent studies. However, in contrast to Block’s view she suggests that specifically in language learning studies, the role of agency is still being neglected with language learners having been construed “as nonagentive for a long time” (2019, p. 62).

I am drawn towards Larsen-Freeman’s definition of ‘agency’ as “the capacity to act in the world” (Evan Thompson, quoted in Larsen–Freeman, 2019, p. 62). Related to multilingualism, this could include the capacity of individual agents to negotiate their engagement in particular contexts (Norton, 2013) or to play a vital role in shaping their learning environment (Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

However, my understanding of ‘agency’ is also influenced by Archer’s suggestion (see section 4 of this chapter) that ‘reflexivity’ is the most important agentive force of the people (Archer, 2000) which enables us to choose appropriate projects (courses of actions) (Archer, 2003). In order to incorporate this notion, I propose to define ‘agency’ as “the

capacity to reflexively act in the world” and I suggest that the act of reflection leads to a different action as would have occurred without it.

2.3.3. Reflexivity

Finally, I adopt Archer’s definition of ‘reflexivity’ as “the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa” (Archer, 2007, p. 4). Much more will be written about Archer’s theory of reflexivity below, but generally she proposes that the power of reflexivity is vital in mediating the role of objective, structural, or cultural powers.

3. Key theories on multilingualism – the tension between structure and agency

I have already mentioned that scholars disagree about the prevalence of ‘agency’ and ‘structure’ in research on language learning. More will be said about this now as I introduce and discuss relevant frameworks and consider the degree of importance which is assigned to each feature, and I also pay attention to whether the ‘reflexivity’ of the agents is considered.

3.1. Structure and agency in motivational theories

Various scholars (for instance P. MacIntyre, 2010; P. MacIntyre et al., 2017) suggest that two complementary perspectives have dominated language learning motivation over the past 60 years. These are generally referred to as the socio-educational model (Gardner, 2010) and the L2 self-system (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) I will briefly introduce these theories and analyse the roles of structure, agency, and reflexivity respectively.

3.1.1. The socio-educational model

Gardner has been refining his socio-educational model (2010) since the 1960s. This model has been described as a socio-psychological approach (MacIntyre et al., 2017) which seeks to analyse factors such as commitment to education, social and cultural factors and emotional reactions in order to investigate second language motivation. Gardner describes the importance of the local cultural milieu, as this is linked to various attitudes towards languages and their speakers and provides specific formal and informal types of language learning activities. These range from the specific programmes offered in schools to the languages spoken in daily social interaction.

Gardner explains how the concept of the Integrative Motive is at the centre of his model. This is an emotional construct and can be measured through questionnaires. Questions relate to the following aspects: attitudes towards target language groups and a willingness

to take on certain new characteristics of these; attitudes towards learning situations; the desire to expend effort, as well as the enjoyment of language learning; language anxiety; and the social environment (for instance parental attitudes).

While this approach closely examines the structural environment and shows how this influences motivation for language learning, the quantitative nature of this theory does not comprehensively explain the agentive possibilities and the process of decision-making of individual learners.

3.1.2. The L2 Motivational Self System

The 'L2 motivational self-guides' were first suggested by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) and provide a motivational perspective for L2 learning which understands possible life scenarios and mental imagery as linked to the future use of the L2. This theory is derived from The Possible Selves theory put forward by Markus and Nurius (1986) and is based on the concept of "imagining". Markus and Nurius have suggested possible selves as representations of individuals' ideas about their potential and their future. This includes ideas about what they might become (expected self), but also what they would like to become (hoped-for self), and what they are afraid of becoming (feared self).

Dörnyei and Ushioda transposed these selves to the area of L2 learning and distinguish between the ideal L2 self, the ought-to self and the learning experience. The ideal L2 self is who a learner desires to become in terms of language ability. In contrast, the ought-to self is who the learner feels obliged to become based on external pressures. The learning experience has an important role to play as this describes both past and current experiences of the language learners and extends to any subsequent learning experiences, either enhancing or weakening the selves.

Studies based on the Possible Selves Theory view structure as a constricting force, as it may confine the pool of available selves. The pool is dependent on the "individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and ... the models, images and symbols provided by the media and ... the individual's immediate social experiences" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). However, 'imagining' as a form of reflexivity may also establish possible selves which are "less tied to behavioural evidence and less bounded by social reality constraints" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 964). 'Imagining' can therefore transcend structure, and the individual is free to imagine "the self under various alternative outcomes" which may contribute to decision making (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 966). This implies that the subject is aware to some extent of the structural possibilities.

Questions of agency and a link to reflexivity are addressed in this theory: “In general, the phenomenon of agency ... could be interpreted in terms of the individual’s ability to develop and maintain distinct possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 962).

However, several scholars are of the opinion that the role of context is not prevalent enough and needs further scrutiny (Norton, 2013; Thompson, 2017).

3.2. Structure and agency in identity theories

Identity theories broaden the focus of investigation and consider the individual language learner within the context of the larger social world. Often this relationship is portrayed as a struggle for power with language learners desiring specific identities (which they cannot always achieve) and entrance to communities (which is not always granted). Theoretical constructs such as Norton’s theory of investment (Norton, 2013) help to explain this process and the inequitable relations of power which exist and are negotiated across sites. For my own perspective on identity in relation to my framework see chapter 5, section 4.1

3.2.1. *The original model of investment*

I have briefly touched on the concept of investment above under 2.3.1.2. Bonny Norton developed her original theory of investment as a sociological construct of language learning in the 1990s (Norton, 2013). The theory is based on her study with immigrant women and seeks to investigate their situation in the real world as well as in the language classroom.

As in other models of motivation (such as the psychological construct discussed above and developed by Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) Norton’s theory of investment addresses the desire of the learners to acquire symbolic resources in order to increase their capital and social power. Based on the concept of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991) Norton describes how learners “imagine who they might be, and who their communities might be, when they learn a language” (2001, p. 422).

However, in Norton’s research it becomes evident that previous models of motivation did not sufficiently address questions of power imbalance associated with the language learning process. Norton therefore complements the psychological motivational constructs with a sociological construct which “demonstrates the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitment” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37).

Norton specifically poses questions such as what opportunities exist for learners to interact outside the classroom, how these opportunities are socially structured, and how learners

act upon these structures to use or resist opportunities to speak. These questions are linked to the degree of investment in the target language and to the changing identities of the learners over time and space (Norton, 2013). Norton extends this understanding of investment to investigate classroom practice. She shows how a learner who might be highly motivated to learn a particular language may be prevented from investing in the learning through racist, sexist, or homophobic language practices of the classroom.

Norton defined identity in the context of language learning as follows: Identity is “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 4). This definition has clear links to the concepts which are of interest here. To ‘understand’ implies reflection; ‘the world’ implies structure, and to ‘construct’ implies agency. Additionally, the definition accounts for change (‘across time and space’ and ‘possibilities for the future’).

To summarise, identity theories are linked to reflexivity, even if reflexivity is not the main focus of the theory. We will see in the next chapter how identity theories are often applied in research of language learning amongst students (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2017; Benson et al., 2013; Chik & Benson, 2008; Jackson, 2016). The authors frequently address questions linking reflexivity, structure, and agency. However, a shortcoming is the fact that the reflexive element is usually underdeveloped.

3.2.2. The three-part model of investment

Norton’s original concept of investment (as described above) was based on her research with five immigrant Canadian women in the 1990s. During this time migration was seen as a one-way movement from the country of origin to the host country. Learning the official language of the country of settlement was crucial to integration and meaningful employment. In her research on investment Norton demonstrated how language learners claim the right to speak in the language of power by asserting their identity in the host country. However, since this early research there have been many shifts in the global economic order which have led to new power relations on macro and micro levels. Several researchers have shown how language ideologies, linguistic capital, and interactions within multilingual and multicultural environments have been reshaped (Kramsch, 2013).

Examples of these shifts are the rise of the internet as well as more affordable travel costs which have allowed learners to cross space more easily in online and offline encounters.

Chapter 3: Key concepts and theories

The distinction between native speaker and learner is less clearly linked to the distribution of power, as speakers may now “participate in a greater variety of spaces in both face-to-face and virtual worlds and assert themselves to varying degrees as legitimate speakers” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 43).

Further shifts were associated with the financial crisis of 2008 which led to an increase in precarious work conditions, exploitation, and inequality (and of course the current spread of the pandemic further exacerbates these shifts).

As a response to the changing global context the former model of investment was expanded by Darvin and Norton (2015). The key constructs which are examined in order to understand investment from this new perspective are identity, ideology, and capital; and investment (figure 1 reproduces this) is now seen to occur at the intersection of these three constructs (Norton & De Costa, 2018). The model is multi-layered and multidirectional and intends “to lay bare what is becoming increasingly invisible” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 41) by demonstrating how power circulates at both micro and macro levels of society “constructing modes of inclusion and exclusion through and beyond language” (Norton & De Costa, 2018, p. 92). This critical lens enables researchers to analyse the microstructures of power which are evident in communicative events. These microstructures are linked to larger ideological practices and various forms of capital which impact learner and teacher identity. This model also allows the researcher more nuanced research regarding the intersection of categories, such as ethnicity, gender, and class.



Figure 1- Darvin and Norton's 2015 model of investment (2015, p. 42)

In the following I will give a brief description of the three concepts which shape investment according to this model.

Ideology is the dominant way of thinking which organises and stabilises a society, but also determines who is included or excluded.

The notion of **capital** is based on Bourdieu's theory on "Language and Symbolic Power" (Bourdieu, 1991) which was originally published in 1977, and it is seen as a tool for both social reproduction and transformation.

For Bourdieu (1986), capital is power and it extends from the material/economic to the cultural and social: *Economic capital* refers to wealth, property, and income; *cultural capital* refers to knowledge, educational credentials, and appreciation of specific cultural forms; and *social capital* refers to connections to networks of power. (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 44, italics are original)

The different types of capital can have different meanings to individuals "once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate" (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4, cited in Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45). These meanings are what Bourdieu calls *symbolic capital*, and this conceptualisation explains "how capital itself is fluid and dynamic, subject to—but not completely constrained by—the dominant ideologies of specific groups or fields" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45). This symbolic capital is particularly important for the theory of

investment, as what might be recognised as symbolic capital in one place may not be recognised in another place as people travel through space and time.

The view of **identity** still coincides with Norton's original definition of identity in the 1990s where it is defined as "**multiple**, a site of struggle, and continually changing over time and space" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45). However, the later model emphasises even more strongly that identity is a struggle between habitus and desire, between competing ideologies, and imagined identities.

Darvin and Norton's three-part model of identity is useful for my study as it pays attention to the different macro influences which form the learning process and shows how these are related to power flows. The individual is located within this "complex web of power" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 51) which shapes the investment of the learner. However, it is clear from the above that the learner is very much positioned within this model, and that the role of agency has decreased in comparison with the original model.

3.3. Complexity theory

The preceding models generally have an indexical view of language learning, as they conceptualise the process of learning a single language. I now turn to theories which attempt to holistically describe the use and acquisition of several languages at the same time. Scholars have evoked examples from meteorology and ecology to describe these complex systems. This type of modelling can incorporate a larger number of variables and an understanding of the interdependency of these while accounting for the constant flux of the systems and the emergence of unexpected factors. In her attempt to combine cognitive and social aspects of language learning Larsen-Freeman (2011) was the first to model language development on complexity theory in 1997 and she summarises the main principles of complexity theory in the following words:

Complexity theory seeks to explain complex, dynamic, open, adaptive, self-organizing, nonlinear systems. It focuses on the close interplay between the emergence of structure on one hand and process or change on the other. Language, its use, its evolution, its development, its learning, and its teaching are arguably complex systems. Thus complexity theory offers a way to unite all these phenomena. (Larsen-Freeman, 2011, p. 52)

This summary explains the importance of understanding structure and change in complexity theory. Agency is not mentioned, and I will come back to this point in 4.4.

In the following I present three examples of research on multilingualism from different disciplines which make use of the complexity modelling approach (and particularly the emergence factor) and provide insights relevant to my own study.

3.3.1. Complexity theory and language acquisition

Herdina and Jessner (2002) and Jessner (Jessner, 2008) base their theory of multilingual language acquisition on the complexity theory which they refer to as Dynamics Systems Theory (DST). They critique the long tradition of monolingualism in second language acquisition research which often presupposes linear progression and a static view of languages.

Similarly to the definition outlined above, Jessner (2008) lists the following fundamental properties of DST: the interdependency of all parts, the constant flux of the parts and the system, and the emergent nature of new components of the system, which in turn influence all parts of the system. Based on the DST Herdina and Jessner (2002) have developed the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM) which transposes the principles of complex modelling more explicitly to multilingualism and which is able to integrate all languages that learners use and learn. The authors argue that in situations where languages are learnt simultaneously these cannot be conceptualised as separate systems but must be understood as interdependent subsystems which are in constant interaction and belong to an overall multilingual system. These different language subsystems not only influence each other in terms of crosslinguistic influence, but they also provide the basis for the emergence of the so-called Multilingualism factor (M-factor or M-effect).

This emergent M-factor encompasses everything that differentiates a multilingual from a monolingual system and refers to “all those qualities that develop in a multilingual speaker / learner due to the increase in language contact(s)” (Jessner, 2008). These qualities include metalinguistic awareness and the knowledge of this awareness, leading to skills of language learning, language management and language maintenance. The M-factor contributes to qualities of divergent and creative thinking, interactional and pragmatic competence, communicative sensitivity and flexibility, and translation skills. All these qualities and skills are vital factors for the “catalytic effects that bilingualism can show on third language (L3) learning” (Jessner, 2008).

3.3.2. Complexity theory and motivation

Complexity thought modelling also forms the basis of Henry's approach to L2 motivation and multilingual identities (Henry, 2017). Henry critiques the monolingual bias which is prevalent in previous motivational theories of language learning. Due to this bias the motivational systems for different languages are treated separately, rather than cognitively interconnected, and we fail to recognise that developing a multilingual identity can lead to L2 motivation. Instead, and following a complexity thought modelling approach, Henry proposes that "the motivational systems of the learner's different languages need to be conceptualized as interrelated systems that are simultaneously constituents within a higher-level multilingual motivational system" (Henry, 2017, p. 548). In his modelling of the multilingual motivational system Henry refers back to the 'L2 motivational self-guides' (see above). Henry expands this theory through the addition of the multilingual component, and he explains how the presence of L2 motivational guides lead to the forming of multilingual self-guides through processes of emergence (with emergence being a key factor of complexity theory). Multilingual self-guides emerge when interactions between L2 and L3 self-guides take place (for instance through knowledge transfer, linguistic support, or through the influence of attitudes and beliefs about multilingualism).

An example of an emerging multilingual self-guide having a negative effect on learning a third language occurs when two languages (L_x and L_y) are learnt simultaneously and the ideal L_x self-guide becomes chronically dominant, posing a threat to the L_y self-guide. The emerging higher order multilingual motivational self-guide becomes indifferent to multilingual competence. This might occur in an English-dominated world where the learner does not see the necessity for learning a further language other than English. In this case the overarching multilingual self-guide "can be understood as a *contentedly bilingual self* (Henry, 2017, p. 553; italics in original text), reinforcing the negative attitudes towards L_y.

In contrast, an example of the development of an ideal multilingual self will occur when the relationship between two ideal L_x and L_y self-guides is harmonious and they complement each other. This will lead to the emergence of a multilingual self-guide which contains the aspiration to become multilingual, and Henry calls this "an *ideal multilingual self*" (Henry, 2017, p. 554; italics in original text).

Henry acknowledges that students who perceive themselves as becoming multilingual are outnumbered by those who lack these desires or simply do not have the educational

environment for these opportunities. However, he suggests that the potential of multilingual self-guides should be further utilised in education by focussing on the transformational potential of possible selves.

3.3.3. *Complexity theory and identity*

A final relevant approach to multilingualism based on complexity theory is Aronin's concept of multilinguality (2016). Aronin suggests that multilinguality is a form of identity which is different from the kind of identity typical for monolinguals or bilinguals, and the linguistic component is crucial for shaping this identity. In fact, multilinguality comes from linguistic behaviour and includes personal characteristics such as idiosyncrasies, disabilities, and blessings, articulations, being dyslexic, having perfect pitches etc. However, it is not purely linguistic, as it also incorporates other physiological, psychological, and social features. These include cognitive behaviour, acquisition processes, and facets, such as age, gender, and memory. In fact, it

includes *everything that causes and accompanies* [the knowledge of two or three languages, and embraces] *everything that results from* using and learning several languages, both in the present and also potentially in the future; [it is] an individual characteristic, based on one's linguistic assets, abilities and experience, and expressed through actions, perceptions, attitudes and personal life scenarios, both real and possible (Aronin, 2016, p. 145; italics in original text).

Henry (2017) has described a link between multilinguality, as described by Aronin, and his own "Multilingual Motivational Self System" (Henry, 2017), based on the motivational self-guides proposed by Dörnyei (2009), as each of these concepts include personal life scenarios, whether they are real or possible.

Multilinguality is an emergent property of multilingualism (Jessner, 2008). Multilinguality is itself a complex system and must be seen as a whole; however at the same time there is a remarkable interplay between identity facets (such as nationality, age, gender etc) which can be modified, "forced to the forefront, or hidden away by language-related factors" (Aronin, 2016, p. 145).

3.3.4. *Structure and agency in complexity theory*

All three theories discussed in this section were based on complexity theory and described the emergence of a new factor which is reliant on the knowledge of more than one language but cannot be explained in a linear fashion following from one of these languages (as mentioned in the previous chapter, this is compatible with "the stratification of the real", a key feature of critical realism, and relevant to my analysis in chapters 8-10). There

is some overlap between the three theories I presented here, but they can be attributed to different perspectives on the language learner: The M-factor or M-effect was theorised in regard to language acquisition (Jessner, 2008), the multilingual self-guide in relation to motivation for language learning (Henry, 2017), and multilinguality in relation to identity (Aronin, 2016).

As mentioned above, the focus of these theories is to understand the processes involved when a learner switches from an indexical view of languages to a multilingual understanding. Structural and environmental conditions were referred to in the general description of complexity theory above but did not play a prominent feature in the applications I have described. However, the authors all recommend that the learning environment should be developed in order for multilingual emergence to take place. While reflexivity is not mentioned explicitly, Jessner describes metalinguistic awareness, and the knowledge of this awareness, as key components in the modelling of the M-factor.

Agency, in contrast, is hardly mentioned in complexity theory. In a later text, Larsen-Freeman (2019) refers to this omission and describes how agency itself can also be viewed as a complex system. Larsen-Freeman puts several reasons forward, for instance she maintains that agency is related to the affordances in the context and cannot be separated from them; it has emergent qualities; it is spatially and temporally situated (i.e., it is influenced by the past, engages with the present and orients to the future); it changes through iteration; and it is multidimensional (i.e., it is interlinked with intrapersonal and external factors).

3.4. Multifaceted theories

So far, I have discussed language acquisition frameworks from the areas of motivation and identity. I now present two further frameworks which take a holistic view of influences on the language learner.

Both theories integrate agentive, as well as societal and environmental, factors on the language learner. However, the final concept of affordances most explicitly shows how the learner must be aware of these factors to succeed. The theme of awareness of the environment continues in section 6 which focusses specifically on reflexivity.

3.4.1. *The Douglas Fir Group framework for multilingualism*

The Douglas Fir Group framework (2016) is in some ways similar to the previously discussed three-part model of investment, in that it examines the range of sociological (and other)

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influences on language use and learning. In fact, Bonny Norton contributed to the development of the framework as one of 15 scholars from various disciplines with an interest in second language acquisition.

The Douglas Fir Group framework was devised as a transdisciplinary and problem-oriented effort which addresses real-world issues of language learning. Individual strands of the framework are treated as valid and distinct (for instance coming from the fields of anthropology, cognitive science, education, and sociology) and at the same time the framework “seeks to integrate the many layers of existing knowledge about the processes and outcomes of additional language learning by deriving coherent patterns and configurations of findings across domains” (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 20).

This framework (figure 2 reproduces this) distinguishes three levels (micro, meso, and macro characterised by concentric circles) which influence each other and are mutually dependent.

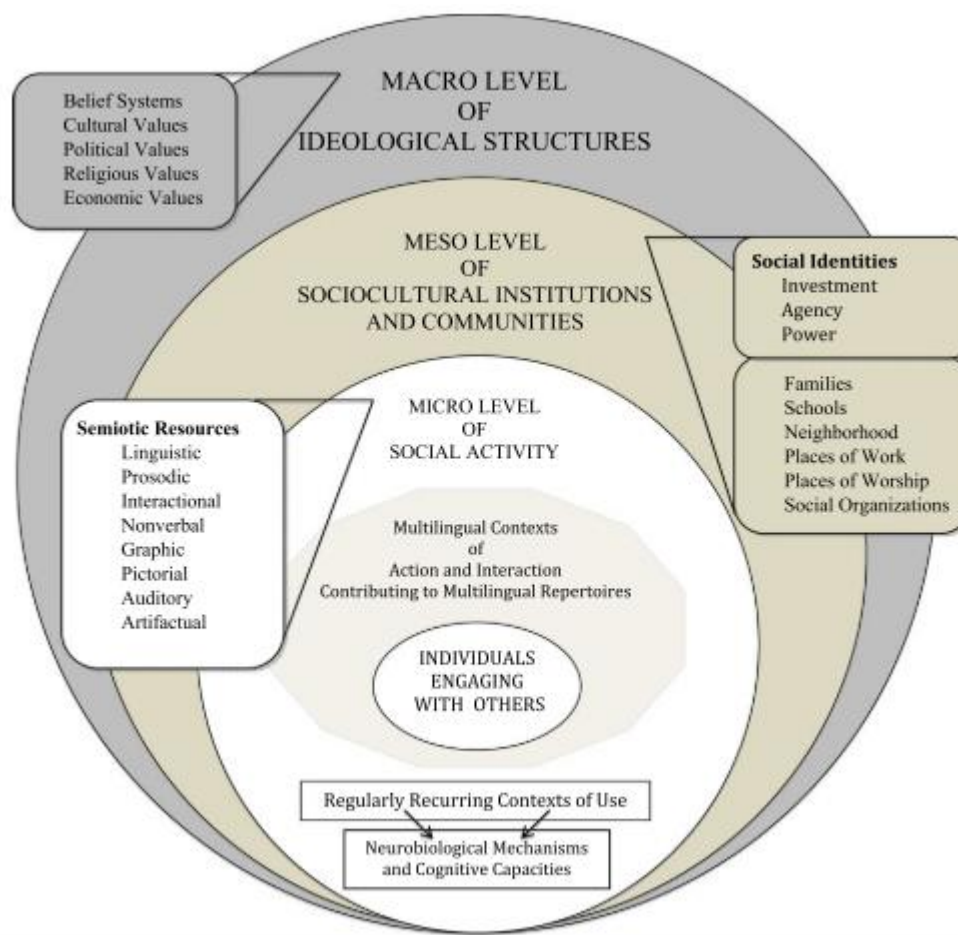


Figure 2 - *The Multifaceted Nature of Language Learning and Teaching* (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 25)

The micro-level is seated at the centre of the Douglas Fir Framework. This level describes how individuals engage with others. From this perspective L2 learning is described “as an ongoing process ... of social activity ... in specific multilingual contexts of action and interaction, resulting in recurring contexts of use that contribute to the development of multilingual repertoires” (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 24).

The meso level is represented as a concentric circle surrounding the micro level and this is where sociocultural institutions and communities are seated and where they are shaped. At this level the social identities of persons are formed by their degree of participation in the institutions and communities, and questions of investment, agency, and power affect and create these social identities. “Together, these institutions, communities, conditions and possible identities provide or restrict access to particular types of social experiences” (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 24).

Finally, the macro level (represented as the outer concentric circle) is the seat of the all-encompassing ideological structures which influence language use and language learning. These ideologies “both shape and are shaped” by the sociocultural communities and institutions at the meso level, but also by the agency and actions of individuals at the micro level.

We can see that “agency” is included in this model more specifically, alongside the slightly more passive conceptualisation of ‘investment’. However, there is no real clarification of how ‘agency’ is linked to the structural forces which are clearly visible on all of the levels; furthermore, the role of reflexivity is marginalised.

3.4.2. *Affordances*

I now review the theory of affordances as the final model of the language learning process in this chapter.

The concept of affordances was developed by Aronin and Singleton (2012) and addresses the language learner, motivational aspects, and the social context which together can account “for the diversity of language learning outcomes and patterns of language use” (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 319). Aronin and Singleton explain how the term ‘affordances’ was originally invented by Gibson who used it to describe how the physical world is perceived by animals, and by extension by human beings. Thus, the term was first used to examine what the environment offers, provides, or furnishes, and how these affordances are made use of (or not).

By applying the concept of affordances to multilingualism, Aronin and Singleton transpose one of the key points in Gibson’s thinking. This is the idea that information about the self accompanies information about the environment, and that these two are inseparable. Aronin links this point to Jessner’s (2008) theory of linguistic and metalinguistic awareness (discussed above). This double-edged awareness “turns the attention of the language apprentice towards the language(s) she/he is concerned with and towards him/herself as a language learner and language user”. In the context of affordances, information about the self translates to having an active role in the language learning enterprise. Just as animals need to be aware of their surroundings to successfully eat, hunt or hide,

so language users and language learners need to be aware of their needs, of where they stand with regard to other languages and other speakers, of their progress as language acquirers, and of the prospects for further language acquisition and for language use (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 315).

Aronin and Singleton call on second language teachers to supply the affordances for students to be able to observe themselves, and to become critical of their skills and to reflect on their learning aims.

In multilingual research, affordances can encompass all types of interactions with the environment including emotional, evaluative, physical and cognitive interactions. The list of examples is long, and the authors propose that more research should be carried out. However, they suggest that affordances may include

events and happenings, assumptions and common knowledge, school buildings and libraries, curricula, knowledge of languages other than target languages, the degree of professionalism of language teachers, the availability of textbooks and dictionaries for learners, computers and monitors for listening to and observing correct pronunciation, native-speaker interlocutors, cognates between the languages known by an individual, and supporting parents (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 319).

For affordances to have an impact, relevant affordances typically must be available in sets; and for language learning such a set would include different types, including actions, material objects, emotions, as well as social affordances of a particular community or country. The concept of affordances can for instance be used to explain how multilinguals can transfer knowledge to further their learning, or how the choice of language is established in a particular setting.

Aronin and Singleton's theory shows that learners of language not only need to be presented with affordances, but they also need to be able to observe themselves in the light of the affordances and reflect on their learning aims. Thus, it combines a conceptualisation of structure (affordances), reflexivity (knowing which affordances are useful), and agency (making use of these). However, there is, to my knowledge, still no explicit model which links motivation, reflexivity, and the use of the affordances.

4. Archer's model of reflexivity

Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity (Archer, 2007) does not relate specifically to language learners but is very well suited to questions of language learning and multilingualism, as it addresses some of the shortcomings in the above frameworks. One of the criticisms which has been levelled against theories of language learning (as described above and mainly based on postmodern thinking), is that they do not account for causal forces which are not immediately evident beyond "the surface level of the empirical" (Zotzmann, 2017, p. 87), for instance reflexivity. In contrast, Archer's theory is based on

critical realist thinking (see chapter 2) and fully recognises the causal powers of structure, agency, and reflexivity.

4.1. The three-stage model of reflexivity

Archer's three-stage model of reflexivity explicitly addresses the relationship between structure and agency (Block, 2013; Zotzmann, 2017) and clearly defines reflexivity and its function. Her theory encompasses a motivational aspect (Archer refers to this as people's 'concerns') an agentic component (as individuals reflect on and carry out 'projects'), and the role of structure in shaping the environment. To be precise, and for future reference, Archer defines people's 'concerns' as "what they care about most" (Archer, 2003, p. 130), and people's projects as something involving "an end that is desired, however tentatively or nebulously, and also some notion, however imprecise, of the course of action through which to accomplish it" (Archer, 2003, p. 6).

Archer bases her theory on three stages: As mentioned above, Archer defines 'reflexivity'

The Three-Stage Model

1 Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and *inter alia* possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to

2 Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: nature, practice and the social.

3 Courses of action are produced through the *reflexive deliberations* of subjects who *subjectively* determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* circumstances.

Figure 3 - The Three-Stage Model (Archer, 2007, p. 17; italics in original text)

as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (Archer, 2007, p. 4). Archer proposes that the power of reflexivity is vital in mediating the role of objective, structural, or cultural powers.

This three-stage model (figure 3) is central to my own analysis, and I will elaborate further on the individual stages.

Firstly, (in relation to stage 1) Archer conceptualises structure as an objective force which pre-exists and moulds the situation of the individual. This contrasts with other poststructuralist theories (such as the complexity theory outlined above) where there is no absolute distinction between language learning processes and the environment, and where

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these are in constant flux. (I have addressed these epistemological differences chapter 2.) However, Archer does acknowledge that the social environment emerges through human action (it does not arise randomly), and is the result of past actions which “are deposited in the form of current situations” (Archer, 1995, p. 201). These past actions are responsible for the distribution of advantages and disadvantages, the operations of institutions, and how they may obstruct or assist individual agents. This means that at any given time, agents perceive the situation they find themselves in as objectively shaped by structural and cultural properties.

Secondly, (stage 2) the agent defines their own constellation of concerns by asking themselves “what do I want?” This entails a process of discernment (an inconclusive moment of review), deliberation (exploring implications of pre-selected concerns and ranking concerns), and dedication (prioritising the prime concern and relegating or eliminating others). It is possible that the motivation for a project is influenced by ideologies of which the agent is not aware. However, according to Archer, it is not necessary for the agent to know about all the ‘unacknowledged conditions’ and particularly when these conditions are advantageous the agent might never reflect on these. On the other hand, when the conditions are disadvantageous it will become unavoidable for agents to reflect on them (see stage 3).

Finally, (stage 3) the subject will determine a course of action (project) through reflexive consideration of the concerns. At this stage agents “deliberate about their objective circumstances in relation to their subjective concerns” (Archer, 2007, p. 21). The powers of reflexivity are used to consult the projects, and these may be adapted, adjusted, abandoned, or enlarged. This stage has mostly been neglected by sociologists who focus on the majority of agents and their reactions to their circumstances. However, Archer sees this stage as essential to understand exactly what agents do as individuals.

4.2. The individual as an active subject

Archer’s theory centres on three points which explain how individuals make their way through the world, and she maintains the following. Firstly, we have unique personal identities deriving from singular constellations of concerns (I will explain Archer’s concept of identity in chapter 5). This means we are radically heterogeneous as subjects. Secondly, our subjectivity is dynamic as our goals are modified in the light of “their contextual feasibility, as we see it” (Archer, 2007, p. 22). Thirdly, mostly we are active rather than passive subjects.

Many of the theories discussed above share the view of the language learner as a highly unique person with a dynamic subjectivity. However, I suggest that Archer's theory more clearly positions the subject as active, and the power of reflexivity is key here (as will be shown at various points throughout this research project).

4.3. Modes of reflexivity

A central proposition in Archer's theory is that reflexivity is not homogenous. I will briefly expand on the different modes of reflexivity which Archer proposes and which were initially based on interviews with twenty subjects in a small-scale project. In follow-up research Archer developed an internal conversation indicator which allowed her to identify "clear practitioners of each dominant mode of reflexivity" (Archer, 2007, p. 329) through questionnaires. She then carried out qualitative research by interviewing representatives of each mode and investigating the courses of action they take, their stances towards society, and consequences of these.

It is important to state that Archer explicitly does not condone psychological reductionism and instead argues that the dominant kind of internal conversation which an individual engages in will change over time and will depend on "various combinations of 'contexts and concerns', neither of which can be reduced to individual terms" (Archer, 2007, p. 315).

Archer distinguishes the following modes of reflexivity (table 1). These will feature at various points throughout my analysis, and I will return to these in the conclusion of the work.

Communicative reflexivity	The internal conversation requires completion and confirmation by others before resulting in courses of action.
Autonomous reflexivity	Internal conversations are self-contained, leading directly to action.
Meta-reflexivity	A critical reflexivity on one's own internal conversations and one's own effective action in society.
Fractured reflexivity	The internal conversations intensify distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action.

Table 2 - Modes of reflexivity (Adapted from: Archer, 2007, p. 93)

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I firstly critically examined concepts related to and covering multilingualism; mobility and migration; and structure, agency, and reflexivity. I explained my

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understanding of these concepts, as they are key to my framework and my research questions. I will refer back to these concepts throughout the analysis in chapters 8-10.

I then turned to relevant theories of multilingualism and language learning and discussed their conceptualisation of structure, agency, and reflexivity.

My overview showed that most of the theories incorporated these elements, however they were not clearly defined, and particularly the role of reflexivity was marginalised.

In terms of multilingualism, some theories understood language learning as an indexical enterprise, while others (in particular complexity theories) adopted a more holistic view of languages, with multilingualism emerging as a distinct feature.

Several of the language learning theories discussed showed how desires (Norton, 2013) or future concepts of the self (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Henry, 2017) or language learning aims (Aronin & Singleton, 2012) are seen as vital to motivate the language learner.

In the final section I returned to the question of desires and future concepts, as I presented in some detail Archer's model of reflexivity. In this model 'concerns' are seen as the driving force for the development of future plans or 'projects' (Archer, 2007). Archer's theory is similar to the theory of affordances in that it calls for a clear distinction between the agent and the environment, however Archer specifically focusses on the role of reflexivity to mediate between 'concerns' and 'projects'.

I will return to Archer's theory in the next chapter (chapter 4), as I review literature around the student experience and study abroad, and I focus further on the issues of reflexivity and concerns. In fact, reflexivity and concerns are at the centre of the questions I pose throughout chapter 4.

Following chapter 4 on the student context, and my further investigation on concerns and reflexivity, I will present my own framework of multilingual reflexivity in chapter 5. I apply this framework in my analysis (chapters 8-10) of the multilingual trajectory of my participants. However, I will also refer to other models and concepts which I discussed in the current chapter as I analyse the narratives of the students:

- The various understandings of multilingualism, and experiences of mobility and migration, will influence the students' projects in relation to individual languages, as well as their entire languages constellations.

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- Notions of language acquisition, motivation, and identity will influence the projects that the students deliberate on and pursue.
- Emergent changes will occur in terms of language development.
- Structural forces will impact on students' multilingual projects at the meso and micro level.
- Overall, the participants will be at least partly aware of the structures which shape their environment, and they will reflect on the impacts of these structures, as they become agents in adapting and pursuing their multilingual projects.

As explained in the previous chapter my analysis incorporates narrative, critical realist, and pragmatist features, and my own thinking is linked to a “person-in-context relational view” which “may usefully build on different theoretical perspectives in an integrated though not indiscriminate way” (Ushioda, 2009, p. 221).

Chapter 4: Multilingual development in a student context: Reflexivity, concerns, and change

1. Introduction

1.1. Focus of this chapter

In the previous chapter I reviewed recent approaches to multilingualism with a particular focus on how structure, agency, and reflexivity are conceptualised. The chapter ended with a discussion of Archer's Theory of Reflexivity which provides a framework for resolving the tension between structure and agency.

In this chapter I further develop the theme of reflexivity by reviewing a range of recent papers relating to language learning and development in the student context. These papers generally approach multilingualism in an indexical fashion, and this monolingual bias is still typical of most studies on language development (Henry, 2017). The papers I examine are broadly based on motivational or identity approaches (see previous chapter), and this allows for a consideration of structure and agency (though this is not always made explicit). Furthermore, the papers I have selected generally contain some consideration of reflexivity – often equating this with consciousness, subjectivity, awareness, or criticality (Dasli & Diaz, 2017).

The first question I pose in my review of these applied papers is therefore:

Qu 1: How dominant are the concepts of reflexivity, structure, and agency in these papers?

Furthermore, we have seen that concerns (what the individual cares about) are key to Archer's theory of reflexivity, and motivations, aspirations and goals also featured in the approaches discussed in the previous chapter. My second question relates to this aspect:

Qu 2: How much attention do the studies pay to motivations (concerns), and are these linked to decision-making?

In my review of these papers, I repeatedly return to Archer's Theory of Reflexivity as a point of comparison.

1.2. Structure of this chapter: The dimensions of time and space

As mentioned, I respond to the above questions in this overview of literature by investigating relevant papers in the student context. Given the focus on multilingualism the studies are also chosen for their link to the dimensions of time and space.

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Time and space are seen as key dimensions in both narrative and critical realist theories (see chapter 2). They are also significant for the investigation of multilingual learning (Canagarajah, 2017), and in fact studies in this area generally either adopt a comparative approach within a particular stage in time (this could be within one space or context, or comparing spaces and contexts), or (more rarely) a longitudinal approach (Lee & Kinginger, 2018) across time and often space.

In section two of this chapter, I discuss research which broadly concurs with the comparative approach (subsections focus on the transition to university, the year abroad, and reintegration after the year abroad). A focus of these papers is students' adaptation to change, and the links to motivations and reflexivity.

In section three I turn to diachronic studies, by discussing the longitudinal multilingual development spanning several contexts or spaces. In these papers the underlying motivations (or concerns) of the students are represented over a longer time span, and I examine how or whether these change. Again, these processes are linked to reflexivity, structure, and agency and I use Archer's model of reflexivity as a reference point.

In the conclusion (section four) I will summarise the main points I have made so far and outline the gaps in the literature which emerge from this review. These gaps will inform my own framework for investigating the multilingual trajectories of my participants which I present in chapter 5.

2. The dimensions of space and time in comparative studies

As mentioned, the dimensions of space and time are significant in research on multilingual development. While space can be considered in the broader sense of context or structure, I am equating it here primarily with a geographical destination. Space in this sense is particularly relevant to language students and the inherent mobility of their programmes.

Before I identify the different spaces which are relevant to this study, I emphasise that the timeframe of my investigation is merely a period within the students' lifetime of multilingualism (Jackson & Oguro, 2018b). Prior to their university studies, students already encountered diverse contexts and spaces, and these have clearly had an impact on the previous multilingualism of the students and the development of their reflexivity. Following their graduation, students will again move on to diverse spaces and contexts. The four years which my research covers can broadly be divided into three geographical spaces: 2 years of university in Scotland (beginning with a transition phase into university); a third year of study abroad (SA – beginning with a transition phase); and a final fourth year of university back in Scotland (beginning with a period of reintegration). Table 2 shows the typical geographic spaces encountered by the participants during their university course and includes the pre- and post-study period (see also timeline of the study in chapter 7).

<i>Pre-study</i>	School / life in UK	School / life in other European countries (non-English-speaking)	School / life in other European countries (English-speaking or bilingual)
<i>Phase 1: 2 years</i>	University in Scotland		
<i>Phase 2: 1 year</i>	SA	Placement Abroad combined with SA	SA combined with Double Degree
<i>Phase 3: 1 year</i>	University in Scotland		
<i>Post-study</i>	Work / Study in UK	Reintegration to Work / Study at home (non-UK)	Transition to Work / Study in new country

Table 3 - Geographical spaces of students. The period covered in this study is highlighted in purple.³

³ In reality, there are many variations of the above model. Some students did not enter university directly after school but spent a year or more of the pre-study phase working (either in their country of origin, or in the UK, or during a gap year abroad). Others chose different pathways during their university time (as is revealed in the narratives of Eve, Lotti, and Rita). It should also be mentioned that students do not stay statically in any of the geographical spaces, but will travel to other destinations during their holidays, or even during term-time, and social media allows them to always stay in touch with their networks across different spaces. Finally, the pandemic had a huge impact

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Accordingly, the literature I examine is divided into the following sub-sections: Transition to university (subsection 2.1 and relevant to phase 1); SA (subsection 2.2 and relevant to phase 2); post-sojourn reintegration (subsection 2.3 and relevant to phase 3). In subsection 2.4. I review papers suggesting educational interventions during these various phases. In my discussion of the literature, I focus on the questions outlined above around reflexivity and concerns (motivations).

2.1. Phase 1: Transition to university, a new set of references

As can be seen in the first row of table 2, students of this study arriving at university may be continuing in the same country and language of instruction (school in the UK), or they may come from a different country and language of instruction (school in other European countries - non-English). Some students also arrive from a different country in Europe but have attended a school which was either bilingual or where tuition took place in English (school in Europe – bilingual).

Entering university provides a new environment with a new ‘culture’ for all students. Vygotsky and other members of the sociohistorical school of psychology see culture as an artifact which “permits the achievements of previous generations to find their way into the present” (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). As we have seen in the previous chapter, this sentiment is shared by Archer who views the social environment as the result of past actions which are deposited in current situations (Archer, 1995).

Depending on previous expectations or knowledge of university, the transition to the culture of the university might therefore be more or less easily achievable. There are two layers of considerations here which may have an impact on how students manage transition. Firstly, some students (whether international or UK) belong to the first generation of their family to study at university, so there is less shared knowledge about university life compared to those students who have prior knowledge through their family. Secondly, international students might come from families where their parents have studied at university, but where the university environment differs strongly from the UK environment, so their received knowledge might not be relevant. Additionally, there may be a language barrier which needs to be overcome. Part a) below discusses the general

on the geographical space of the students in the fourth year of the study, as students were confined to their rooms or their parents’ houses during lockdown.

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transition to university, while part b) discusses literature dealing with the transition of international students. Finally, in part c) I summarise the approaches taken in the research and their connections to the concepts of reflexivity, structure, agency, and motivations.

2.1.1. General transition to university

A body of literature deals with the general transition to university and possible support for students. I discuss two papers, where the focus is on the formation of student identity (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012; Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007) during transition, and I pay attention to questions around reflexivity and motivations.

Firstly, the study by Scanlon et al. (2007) looks at the adaptation process which is needed when students face the new “culture” of university (as discussed above). Various barriers are described which students encounter upon entering university, and these barriers are associated with the structural environment and students’ sense of displacement (for instance, having only a small amount of face-to-face time in lectures, lectures being dispersed over several campuses, the student body being very diverse, and many students working part-time). Due to these factors, students experience a loss of continuity, and taken-for-granted realities, compared to their school surroundings.

However, and this is in line with most theories of transition, students generally do manage to enter a new phase of social and academic connectedness to the university after a period of transition. This new connectedness is linked to the formation of a new identity. The authors emphasise the fact that students need to rapidly establish “social contacts and relationships in order to build a new sense of self within the new learning environment of the university” (Scanlon et al., 2007, p. 237). This re-forming of student identity is described as an agentive response to the new learning environment, and where this does not happen students are “at risk of dropping out” (Scanlon et al., 2007, p. 239).

Clearly, both structure (the learning environment) and agency are present in this conceptualisation of identity formation. The reflexive process however is only hinted at (students needing to build a new sense of self), and there is no specific mention of the students’ goals or concerns.

In a second study, Briggs et al. (2012) draw on a similar conceptualisation of identity: Students need to form a new sense of themselves as students, and peer interaction is an important factor in developing this student identity. The authors develop a model of transition which shows how the learner identity is formed through influences of both the

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school (or college) and the university. For these influences to impact positively on the learners' identity formation, various conditions need to be met, such as students imagining themselves as a higher education learner, aspiring towards this, developing expectations of higher education life, and acquiring the knowledge and skills to underpin higher education learning. All these elements enable them to commit to and take up higher education. In a second phase, they need to adjust to demands of higher education learning and its environment, gain autonomy, and develop academic and social confidence as higher education learners. These elements enable them to achieve success and experience belonging as higher education learners, and to secure their higher education identity.

The proposed model is useful in that it pinpoints areas of intervention for both schools and universities and demonstrates how these can support the pathway to a higher education identity. Structure is an important theme, as the model shows how a positive environment is necessary for the identity development of the student. Furthermore, interaction with the staff and with peers is seen as vital for the identification to take place, and this would imply agency on the side of the student. Reflection is also implied in many of the elements which lead to the identity formation, such as 'imagining, aspiring, developing expectations, committing, adjusting'. Some of these terms hint at motivational aspects on a general level, however, there is no mention of individual concerns of the students as a basis for their reflexivity.

2.1.2. Transition to university for international students

While all students undergo a period of transition upon entry to university, I have argued above that there are additional factors which impact on those students who are embarking on an undergraduate degree course from a different country and often a different language of instruction.

Again, several authors choose to apply an identity approach to investigate this period of transition. Some of these focus more on reflective factors, i.e. Bond (2019) reports on a programme intervention which enables international postgraduate students to reflect on their identity development. Other studies are interested in the development of agency, i.e. Choi (2019) traces the journey of Asian students acquiring academic literacy and becoming "capable and qualified students" in the UK (2019, p. 9). A third group of studies highlight structural factors, and an example of this is Crowther's investigation of investment (2020). The author analyses how the investment in language development changes for two Chinese

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students in the US, according to their structural experiences of acceptance versus rejection respectively.

I discuss two papers in more detail which investigate the process of transition to university for international students and where the concepts of structure, reflexivity, and identity are integrated to an extent. The first paper is once more based on an identity approach, and the second paper applies a motivational approach.

The authors of the first paper (Gu et al., 2010) worked with international exchange students across four UK universities to explore their experiences, and identify critical influences on their adaptations. The authors showed how there were some elements in this transition period which were typical for all first-year students (such as having to manage family life, social life, and university life, while simultaneously developing a new sense of /self). However, there were also elements which were specific to international students. Firstly, their perceived language ability impacted on their sense of self; secondly, they experienced increased challenges to their social, and sometimes professional identities (particularly when students had a professional career in their own country); and thirdly, they were unfamiliar “with societal values, structures and systems” (2010, p. 16). For some students these difficulties led to feelings of rejection and loneliness, and they adapted by forming bonds with people they perceived as culturally similar to themselves. This happened “despite their willingness and efforts to integrate with British and international students from countries other than their own” (2010, p. 16).

However, and in line with the general research on transition of first-year students (Scanlon et al., 2007), most international students did manage to re-construct their sense of self and form a new identity as a higher education learner. The process is similar to the general cohort, but needs to additionally include language mastery, and in some cases a greater adaptation to the social and academic environment.

In this study we can trace several concepts which are of interest. Firstly, the process of transformation is described as agentic for the international learners when they successfully manage the various (structural) influences on their life and exercise “their own agency and resilience to achieve and succeed” (Gu et al., 2010, p. 18). The participants are reported as undergoing a “strategic adaptation” (2010, p. 19) or creating “a coherent trajectory” (2010, p. 20) out of the fragments and contradictions they encounter. This suggests that there is a reflexive process going on, however, this is not fully explored, even

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if one of the participants describes how the experience of studying abroad opened up her “thinking processes” as she compares her present and past self.

Furthermore, the authors conclude that the adaptation is an individual process and that “the nature of each individual’s motivations and experiences can be major factors” in the adaptation process (2010, p. 19). However, the individual motivations (or concerns) are not specifically mentioned and related to agency, and nor are motivations or agency linked to the reflexive process.

The second study which investigates the transitional phase of international students was conducted by Woodrow (2013) in Australia. This study specifically looks at the changes in motivation regarding language learning and academia, as these students move across different contexts, within their new geographical space. The author collected data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews over a period of 18 months, during which mainly Asian students transitioned from a language-learning and content-based instruction to a solely academic setting.

The study describes how shifts in the academic and social motivations of the participants drive academic engagement. The motivations are described as both intrinsic and extrinsic and are influenced by personal and social factors (influence of parents or peers), or more structural factors (such as the affordances through instruction across the various contexts). This focus on concerns can be linked to agency, and the link with structure is clearly present in the study. Reflexivity, though, is not fully explored, as the students who were interviewed at three stages of the study were not necessarily the same students, and the specific development of individual students in terms of their agency or reflexivity could not be followed.

2.1.3. Concluding remarks: Reflexivity and motivations in literature on transition (phase 1)

All papers discussed in relation to phase one of students’ university course include some elements of reflexivity, structure, or agency. However, these are often not mentioned explicitly.

Mainly, the papers draw on an identity approach and describe how agency is needed for the students to form new identities as they adapt to new structures (Briggs et al., 2012; Gu et al., 2010; Scanlon et al., 2007). Authors often refer to a ‘sense of self’ which needs to be developed, and this, in itself, alludes to reflexivity, even if the term is rarely used. However,

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it is implied that students can base their decisions on reflections, and this is particularly evident in the paper by Gu et al. on the identity formation of international students (Gu et al., 2010). The authors indicate the role of reflexivity through words such as 'thinking process', 'strategic management' of influences, or 'coherent trajectory'. Nevertheless, compared to Archer's model of reflexivity, decision-making and reflexivity are not clearly linked or investigated.

In contrast, Woodrow's study (2013) is based on a motivational approach. The author explains how motivational changes occur through extrinsic and intrinsic elements, and improvements to the structural environment are suggested. Again, the reflexivity of the students is not specifically investigated, but the motivations (which form the basis of this approach) have some similarity to the concerns in Archer's theory.

It is interesting to note that in this section on transition to university there was a (small) body of literature specifically investigating the experiences of international students. In papers focussing on the following phases of university language studies, international students are no longer considered separately from the general student body.

2.2. Phase 2: Study Abroad

In this next section I discuss literature on study abroad (SA)⁴. This rapidly growing body of research has helpfully been summarised by state-of-the-art articles, such as a recent paper by Isabelli-García et al. (2018). Their review covers investigations of language learning during a SA period of one year or less. It includes themes such as methods of research, variables linked to language learners (for instance anxiety, motivation, and attitudes), learner identity and “the shift to language learner agency” (Isabelli-García et al., 2018, p. 442), SA learning environments, and the role of SA in undergraduate language curricula.

In my own overview I will focus on selected papers which are related to reflexivity and the interplay of agency and structure, and I also pay attention to whether the concerns of the students are mentioned. Most of the papers are from the field of identity research.

2.2.1. *Multilingual identity in SA*

We have seen above that identity work is particularly linked to processes of transition (for instance during the transition to university even where there is no language learning involved). Most scholars agree that SA does not pose serious challenges to a young person’s identity, due to its temporary and voluntary nature (Kinginger, 2013a, p. 343). This is in contrast to identity work occurring during longer term migration in combination with language learning, be it for degree mobility (Gu et al., 2010), or other forms of migration (Block, 2007a; Norton, 2013; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Nevertheless, a body of SA literature does investigate changes in identity, and suggests that a sojourn abroad can lead to identity-related development (for instance Benson et al., 2013), though to a lesser degree than during long-term migration.

What, exactly, is meant by identity in terms of language learning and SA? Barkhuizen (2017) differentiates two different approaches to identity in a SA context. Some studies view

⁴ The majority of SA flows involve students studying in a country where their own first language (L1) is one of the official languages. Research on this phenomenon will not be considered in this literature review as my interest lies in multilingualism. A large part of language-focused SA research either concerns students who are studying in a country “where English is spoken as one of the official languages, predominantly the US, UK, Canada, and Australia” (Isabelli-García et al., 2018, p. 440), or reflects experiences of US or UK students studying in countries with different non-English target languages. There is less literature on students from non-English speaking countries studying in a non-English environment which is different from their own L1, or on multilingual developments where students are dealing with more than two languages at a time.

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identity as a variable which determines the success of learning a foreign language. I discuss below whether this approach may limit the role of agency and reflexivity. Other studies conceptualise “identity as an important outcome of SA, especially in contexts where SA involves the learning and use of a second language” (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 102). Again, I will elaborate below.

2.2.2. Multilingual identity and SA – looking at variables

An example of the first view of identity is Kinginger’s research on American students in France (Kinging, 2008). Her detailed account of the case histories of six exchange students “shows remarkable individual variation in documented learning outcomes” of language learning (Kinging, 2008, p. 13), and her study seeks to discover reasons for this variation. Kinginger demonstrates how the participants have varying approaches to studying abroad which are connected to their language learning identity. She relates these approaches to whether they conform to the ‘dominant discourse’ of seeing SA in the tradition of a Grand Tour, or to an ‘alternative discourse’ which is based on inquisitiveness and a willingness to meaningfully engage with the other culture. This approach to the experience of SA is shown to have a direct impact on the outcomes in terms of language learning.

Other identity-related variables which are examined in SA research are age, gender, aptitude and motivation in terms of possible predictors of language gains (see Isabelli-García et al., 2018; or Kinginger, 2013a, or 2015, for overviews and discussions of such studies). Prior experience with mobility has also been named as an identity-related variable, and I will discuss the usefulness of this element in section 3.1.

Interestingly, prior linguistic experience is underrepresented as a variable in SA literature. In part, Murphy-Lejeune pays attention to this factor when she examines the mobility capital of her participants (2002), and Block (2007a) poses the question of whether there is a difference in the second language identity of students who are monolingual or multilingual. Other components which Kinginger (2013a) identifies as being underrepresented as markers of identity in the SA literature are race and class (more recently, however, studies by Goldoni, 2017; and Quan & Menard–Warwick, 2021 explore the impacts of race, ethnicity and class on the SA experiences of individual students).⁵

⁵ Some of these variables (race, class, prior experience) appear in the narratives of my participants, as they reflect on their own multilingual development.

2.2.3. *'Negotiation of difference' and reflexivity*

Isabelli-García et al. (2018) suggest that concentrating on identity categories is helpful in offering insights into possible variations but still takes “a relatively unnuanced view of language learners” (2018, p. 458), and does not investigate in depth the concepts of reflexivity or agency. Structure is often perceived as a barrier (particularly where variables such as gender or race are examined). Kinginger (2010, 2013), however, argues that there is scope for examining agency, even where the focus is on identity categories. She concludes that engagement is key, and she expresses concern that the SA experience of many US students often does not lead to engagement (for various reasons which she explains) with the host communities. Kinginger suggests that unsuccessful engagement (with little reflection and agency) leads to an impoverished experience, whereas a meaningful SA experience would involve both language learning and greater cultural awareness. However, these reflective and agentic developments can only take place through ‘negotiation of difference’.

‘Negotiation of difference’ has been defined by Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) as “the interplay between reflective positioning, that is, self-representation, and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to reposition particular individuals or groups” (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 249). According to Block (2007b), ‘negotiation of difference’ is vital in order to develop one’s identity in response to the new environment, and this requires investment in learning (Norton, 2013), active participation, and engagement (Kinger, 2010). This leads to an understanding of the worldview of the other culture, but also becoming critical of one’s own worldview. Kinginger shows how negotiating difference can be uncomfortable and a source of ambivalence or anguish, however, “it can also generate significant insight of the kind that is routinely attributed to programs of education abroad: intercultural awareness, empathy, global civic engagement, and language ability” (Kinger, 2010, p. 217).

I have already mentioned Kinginger’s case study of American students in France (2008). In this paper she shows how some students avoided challenges to their core values by socialising with compatriots and concentrating on their identity as tourists. However, other students embraced “language competence as access to literary or interpersonal worlds of difference” (2008, p. 106), and negotiated their way through these differences. This led to personal growth as well as language gains for these students.

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Another example for ‘negotiation of difference’ to successfully take place is Kinginger’s study of Alice (Kinging, 2004, cited in Kinginger, 2010). This study focusses on the category of ‘class’ in the examination of Alice’s study abroad experiences, and describes how Alice, a working class woman, “risked everything for a chance at language learning and global awareness” (Kinging, 2010, p. 225). The student became extremely agentive in her approach to study abroad and managed to overcome structural barriers as she developed her identity in the chosen domains.

In both studies reflexivity is not specifically conceptualised, but the fact that the students are able to choose their goals, and achieve them, implies that they reflect on their trajectory (and the word ‘reflective’ is included in Blackledge and Pavlenko’s definition of ‘negotiation of difference’ above).

I suggest that, while the terms are different, the concept of ‘negotiation of difference’ has some similarities to Archer’s theory of reflexivity: Both include elements of self-determination and responses to the (new) structural environment. Both are based on goals (or concerns). Reflexivity yields similar results in both theories: in Archer’s model the reflexive response to the new structure may lead to a change in projects and this necessitates agency. Reflexivity may even lead to the development of new concerns, or a new prioritisation of the ‘unique constellation of concerns’. In Kinginger’s model, reflexivity also leads to a new understanding of structure and a new alignment to this, which is described as the negotiation of difference and a development of identity. However, as mentioned, this reflexive process is not fully investigated or described.

2.2.4. Identity as an outcome of SA – framework for second language identity development by Benson et al.

According to Kinginger’s analysis of ‘negotiation of difference’ above, SA can lead to changes in identity. In their framework on second language identity, Benson et al. (2013) refer even more explicitly to identity change as an outcome of SA. I will discuss this model in some detail, as it strongly influences my own framework which I put forward in chapter 5.

Benson et al. define second language identity (later referred to as “multilingual identity” in Barkhuizen, 2017), as “any aspect of a person’s identity that is connected to their knowledge or use of a second language” (Benson et al., 2013, p. 28). This means that any change in the multilingual identity (for instance in terms of L2 related proficiency and personal competence) also leads to a change in the general identity of an individual.

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This holistic view of the learner is in line with current trends in SLA research which view learners as a 'whole person' (Coleman, 2013, 2015), rather than "an independent processor of linguistic information" (Isabelli-García et al., 2018, p. 458).

Benson et al. outline three domains of identity which are closely linked to language learning and have the potential for development during SA (figure 4 below reproduces this). These are: (1) identity-related L2 proficiency, or pragmatic competence; (2) linguistic self-concept, which includes attributes such as self-esteem, confidence, or communicative autonomy; and (3) L2-related personal development, such as personal growth, intercultural competence, or academic development.

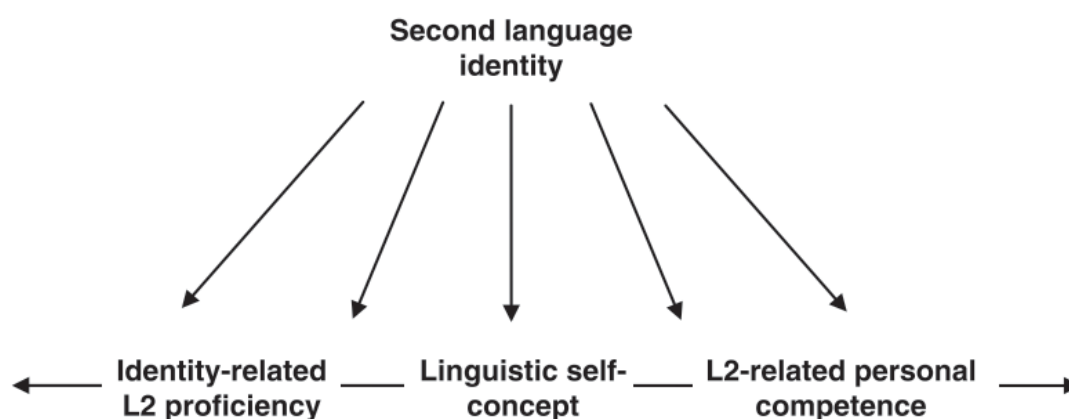


Figure 4 - Potential identity-related second language outcomes during study abroad (Benson et al., 2013, p. 42)

This model of multilingual identity development has similarities with Archer's model of reflexivity, even if the terminology is different. Firstly, the linguistic self-concept is where reflexivity is anchored, and where beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions, and their changes during SA are examined. An individual's motivations (or, in Archer's terminology, 'concerns'), are located in this area. Additionally, the linguistic self-concept will form and reflect on linguistic projects and consider enablements and barriers. Secondly, the domains of both identity-related proficiency (pragmatic competence) and personal competence are linked to agency, and learners select and carry out projects to develop these domains.

The domain of pragmatic competence enables learners to choose and express an identity that will be recognised in a linguistically and culturally unfamiliar setting. However, this is not always a smooth process, and the literature suggests that identity-related conflict can arise when structural barriers are perceived and students are not able or willing to conform to certain linguistic behaviours (Kinginger, 2013b; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). Other projects

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more broadly linked to the domain of personal development (academia, friendships etc) also require agency, while the linguistic self-concept constantly reflects on whether these projects can be carried out or need to be changed.

Benson et al. (2013) illustrate their framework by presenting and analysing narratives of students during SA. The concepts of structure, agency and reflexivity are audible throughout these narratives. For instance, both Joey and Cindy are able to project “a sense of who they are as people” (Benson et al., 2013, p. 69), and thus clearly express agency. Angelina demonstrates reflexivity by speaking about her goals; she is aware of her proficiency gains and “feels that she has the ability to take control of doing things with English” (Benson et al., 2013, p. 87).

2.2.5. Concluding remarks: Reflexivity and motivations in literature on SA (phase 2)

The papers discussed in this section on multilingual development during SA contained elements of reflexivity, structure, agency, and motivations but there were important differences when compared to Archer’s theory of reflexivity.

Identity development was a central aspect in this set of papers, and several papers focussed on identity variables to explain individual differences in multilingual development during SA. This approach has been criticised for focussing purely on structural difficulties rather than on individual agency. However, the concept of ‘negotiation of difference’ was helpful to describe a process of reflexivity on structural differences which can lead to a change in worldview and the crafting of new identities. ‘Negotiation of difference’ could be likened to Archer’s concept of reflexivity; however, I conclude that there are differences. Firstly, Archer clearly defines and separates structural and agentive forces (including reflexivity), and this allows for a clearer investigation of causality (this critical realist stance was explained in chapter 2). In contrast, ‘negotiation of difference’ tends to combine the positioning and the re-positioning, so that the mechanism remains unclear. Secondly, the reflexive process is not fully investigated, and motivations (goals / concerns) and projects are not always clearly outlined.

Benson et al. (2013) present a tripartite framework of multilingual identity development which encompasses the “potential that the knowledge of more than one language implies” (Benson et al., 2013, p. 29). This framework covers the linguistic self-concept, as well as identity-related multilingual proficiency and personal competence linked to multilingualism. I argued that this framework includes elements of reflexivity through the

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self-concept (which contemplates its own abilities and goals in the context of SA), as well as agency and structure (projects linked to proficiency and personal competency are carried out in the structural environment of SA). This model is the closest so far in incorporating, structure, agency, reflexivity, and concerns. However, the actual process of reflexivity is again not fully conceptualised.

I will return to the framework by Benson et al., and associated goals, when I outline the framework of my own investigation.

2.3. Phase 3: Reintegration into university life

In my review of literature relating to the spaces of language students I now consider studies on reintegration after SA.

Reintegration marks the third period of transition for students of languages. In phases 1 (adjustment to university) and 2 (study abroad) students encountered different barriers and enablements and had to adjust to these. We have seen how scholars often worked with identity theories to analyse how students manage these adjustments, and how this could lead to identity development. I will elaborate on Archer's view on identity in chapter 5. In short, Archer's understanding of personal identity is closely linked to an individual's concerns and Archer equates the identity of a subject as "the being-within-this constellation-of-concerns" (Archer, 2007, p. 87). Identity development is linked to a new understanding, or a re-prioritisation, of concerns and this is often triggered through reflexivity on the structural environment.

Identity development (or re-prioritisation of concerns) is also necessary after SA (phase 3). On their return to university students once again face fresh barriers and enablements which may well be very different to those they encountered during their first engagement with university, particularly if a re-prioritisation of concerns took place whilst abroad. According to Archer, such contextual changes call for an intense period of reflexivity to become agentive through new projects.

Several studies are helpful to identify the new structural and interpersonal barriers students encounter upon their return. An example of this is Campbell's (2015) analysis of post-sojourn language networks, and the factors which contribute to the choice of languages within these networks. However, the studies I have selected for closer discussion focus on change and reflexivity during this period.

Many of the studies discussed previously were based on identity theories. In this section the range of approaches varies: In part a) Lee and Kinginger (2018) consider reintegration through the lens of the activity theory. In part b) two studies draw on the Possible Selves Theory (Campbell, 2016; Du, 2019). As in the sections above I will discuss how the approaches chosen in the papers relate to 'reflexivity', 'structure', and 'agency', and to goals or motivations. Finally, in section c) I will discuss similarities or differences to Archer's theory of reflexivity.

2.3.1. Activity theory and reintegration – being stuck in the past

Lee and Kinginger (2018) draw on activity theory, as described by Lantolf (2000), and based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and Leonteev's elaborations. The activity theory accounts for "the nature and development of human behavior" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 8), and it is different from determinist theories (where the individual's mind is perceived as controlled by society), and extreme realist theories (where the individual mind is seen as isolated from society, and individuals have an inherent free will).

Sociocultural theory states that the connection between the world (objective form) and an individual is mediated through "social semiotic artifacts, including language" (Lee & Kinginger, 2018, p. 579). This means there can never be an objective contemplation of the material world, as every understanding is shaped by the socially conditioned worldview of the individual. Human behaviour can be understood on three hierarchical levels: activity (which concurs with motives), action (which concurs with goals), and operations (which concur with conditions, and which include affordances and constraints).

The paper by Lee and Kinginger (2018) investigates the case of Kevin who returns from his SA in Japan which he perceives as having been successful. Initially his motives for signing up for a language class are to continue and improve his Japanese. However, the class does not offer him the type of conditions needed for his actions (he is not happy with the materials or with the level of his fellow students). Ultimately, his motives change, and he becomes stuck in the past, as he relies on his memories for passing tests, rather than carrying out research tasks.

While this paper serves well to describe Kevin's changing motives in response to the environment, a shortcoming of the activity theory is that the reflexive element is not expressed specifically. While his changing motives appear to be dictating his actions, the authors do not consider how Kevin deliberates (or not) on his projects in response to the changing motives, and therefore his agency appears limited.

2.3.2. Possible selves theory

Campbell (2016) and Du (2019) investigate individual differences in the long-term impacts of SA experiences by drawing on the Possible Selves theory which was discussed in the previous chapter (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The authors demonstrate how reflection on SA experiences can strengthen the passion for foreign languages and interest in foreign countries, but only if the experiences are aligned to the students' visions of their possible selves.

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In Campbell's study various cases of returnees from Japan to the US are compared. In one example a negative SA experience led to a reduced desire to engage with the L2. However, the motivation to engage in language learning can also be dynamic, and two further examples demonstrate how a "feared possible self" can influence behaviour: One participant realised she had not had sufficient interaction during her SA, and made up for this by seeking out networks after her return, as she was worried about being "someone unable to use Japanese" (2016, p. 6). A further participant was described as having a "feared possible self-concept as someone who can no longer speak Japanese" (2016, p. 9), and this motivated her to keep up language exchanges and engage in self-study in order to maintain her language skills.

We have seen that Campbell's study suggests that a negative L2-self can lead to increased motivation to learn the language after the return from SA. However, Du's study is more pessimistic and suggests that the L2-selves which were formed during SA are likely to be fossilized, and negative experiences usually decrease motivation on return. This is particularly the case when there is a "lack of opportunities for critical reflection ... of the participants' impressions of the host country and people" (2019, p. 135). The author therefore calls for increased interventions by programmes offering guided reflection sessions (see suggestions in section 2.4 below).

2.3.3. Concluding remarks: Reflexivity and concerns in literature on reintegration (phase 3)

The papers and theories discussed in this section related to the Activity Theory and the Possible Selves Theory. These approaches contain aspects of reflexivity, structure, and agency, as well as motivation, and a comparison with Archer's theory of reflexivity reveals similarities as well as differences across the approaches.

The Activity Theory and Archer's theory of reflexivity share the idea that human behaviour can be explained, in part, through cognitive processes which Archer calls reflexivity. Furthermore, they both agree that motivations (concerns) are the basis of human activity. However, the Activity Theory (based on the Sociocultural Theory) does not consider the cognitive, structural, and agentic forces as separate entities, but is interested in explaining how behaviour is always mediated through artifacts (such as language, numeracy, cultural understanding etc), and these artifacts also influence reflexivity. In contrast, Archer is interested in the act of reflection itself, and for this she maintains that it is necessary to contemplate agency and structure separately.

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The Possible Selves theory (as discussed in the previous chapter) suggests that structure is an objective force which confines the pool from which future selves can be imagined. However, different experiences may lead to a broadening of this pool. When new selves are imagined, for instance through critical reflection, it is possible for change to occur. This change is similar to Archer's theory where future imagining of the self is vital to deliberating on projects. However, Archer's theory is more analytical, as structure, agency and the reflexive act are clearly defined and put into relation with each other.

2.4. Programme interventions before, during and after SA

Before I move on to longitudinal studies, I would like to give a brief overview of studies which acknowledge the significance of reflexivity and engagement (agency) amongst language learners and propose programme interventions to promote these features. (For a discussion of whether these interventions are compatible with Archer's theory of reflexivity see section 3.6.)

As we have seen in the previous sections, students do not always develop their linguistic or intercultural skills before, during, and after SA. Educators are increasingly called on to take an activist stance in supporting students to become more interculturally minded (Jackson & Oguro, 2018a; Roberts et al., 2001; Root & Ngampornchai, 2013; Vande Berg et al., 2012) and reach language learning goals (for instance Allen & Dupuy, 2012; Kinginger, 2010).

Such interventions can firstly take place at home. Fostering reflexivity and agency is usually an integral part of language learning, and educators coach students to develop language learning strategies and improve their discourse patterns in the language classrooms. Additionally, educators have reported on the benefit of facilitating relationships with the FL community through telecollaboration (Allen & Dupuy, 2012), or of combining linguistic and intercultural learning aims (Byram & Wagner, 2018). An example of the latter is a programme of language teaching where students work on projects which require linguistic resources, but where students also critically reflect on the use of language by the students themselves and the sources they work with (Risager & Tranekjaer, 2020).

Other interventions can take place during SA. As mentioned above, Kinginger (2010) emphasises the importance of 'negotiation of difference' during SA. She suggests that it is not possible to develop intercultural awareness or symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2009) without a deep appreciation of others (implying reflexivity). Students should be encouraged to engage actively, in the local language, with the host communities, and programmes should encourage this engagement. This would mean designing studies which

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include the students' host families, teachers, and programme administrators. Quan & Menard-Warwick have responded to this challenge, and illustrated the processes by which a multilingual SA participant developed "meta-awareness of her performative, symbolic, and critical translanguing competence" (2021, p. 366) through structured critical reflections and local engagement during her programme abroad. Furthermore, Di Silvio et al.'s study on homestays (2014) suggest a number of measures to encourage students to become proactive, but also to train hosts to linguistically support students. Du and Jackson pay even more attention to structure and suggest that it "is essential for host institutions to actively nurture a campus climate that is welcoming and inclusive" (Du & Jackson, 2020, p. 12).

Allen and Dupuy (2012) consider the interaction with the environment as they set tasks which require students to communicate with their host community. Additionally, they train students in ethnographic inquiry and require them to carry out an ethnographic project whilst abroad. All tasks aim to enhance the agency, the reflection, and the criticality (Dasli & Diaz, 2017) of the students.

A further example of a programme intervention during SA is 'project perseverance' (Belnap et al., 2016) where a set of activities enhanced the language learning experience of students during their study abroad in Jordan. Students were taught the skills of mindfulness and were encouraged to engage in extra-curricular speaking opportunities, as well as reflection sessions. Most interventions were seen as successful in enhancing self-efficacy. The authors claim that both self-efficacy and the power of reflection are extremely important for the students to progress in their speaking proficiency and "to become more joyful and effective learners" (Belnap et al., 2016, p. 297).

The importance of reflection in the post-study abroad phase is likewise receiving increasing attention. Wilson et al.'s study, for example, draws on the experiential view of learning (2016) and suggests that learners must first be immersed in an experience, and then be encouraged to reflect on the experiences in order to develop new skills, attitudes or ways of thinking. The study describes how students returned to "a relatively barren after-international study landscape" (2016, p. 4). Instead of being provided with meaningful opportunities to reflect on their changes they felt pressured to conform to the traditional study abroad narrative of exhilarating adventure "resorting to drastically oversimplified, sometimes merely sentence-long accounts of their exchange" (2016, p. 10). This caused them to quickly settle in their old ways and they were unable to uphold their "newly developed values, ideals, and even senses of self" (2016, p. 11). The authors suggest a

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rigorous post-sojourn programme to facilitate experiential learning with language elements as well as opportunities to bring learning home. Examples are community-building events and encounters with incoming students from abroad, as well as those who stay at the home institution without study abroad opportunities.

Similarly, Hampton (2016) describes a project to stimulate meta-reflection and agency amongst students after SA. SA students collaborated with schools and were asked to gather realia from their year abroad. During the post-SA phase, the students worked together with teachers to turn these into inspiring learning resources for secondary school language learners at home. According to the author, this task was conducive to lifelong learning habits, and students acquired a level of global citizenship by recognising difference, taking on social responsibility, engaging in dialogue, and developing respect for others.

Finally, Du (2019) calls for guided reflection sessions for students returning from study abroad in order to prevent the fossilisation of L2-selves. During these sessions students “are encouraged to critically re-examine their views of the host environment, reflect upon their inner selves, and seek alternative interpretations of their experiences” (2019, p. 136).

In section 3.6. I return to the topic of interventions in the context of longitudinal studies, and I will relate these interventionist approaches to Archer’s theory of reflexivity.

3. The dimensions of space and time in longitudinal studies

After having considered papers which focus on a particular period of time and space in the linguistic development of students, I now turn to diachronic research which includes a period of SA. (If the time abroad consists of a period of internship or teaching this will be referred to as “YA” standing for “Year Abroad”.)

Longitudinal studies can be based on two different types of data collection. Firstly, data can be collected over a considerable period of time before, during, and after the study abroad (Allen, 2013; Chik & Benson, 2008; Jackson, 2016; Sung, 2019). Alternatively, researchers may contact alumni a number of years after they have completed their studies in order to research the long-term effects of having studied abroad (for instance Alred & Byram, 2006; Barkhuizen, 2017; Coleman, 2013; Ehrenreich, 2006).

Longitudinal research is of particular interest to my study. I firstly look at the significance of SA experiences for the long-term development of multilingual concerns (3.1.). On the one hand, students may experience a confirmation and strengthening of their linguistic and intercultural concerns (3.2. and 3.3). Alternatively, these concerns might change over time (3.4. and 3.5.). Section 3.6. once more discusses a series of programme interventions designed to enhance reflexivity over a longer period. In section 3.7. I summarise the main points of the longitudinal research on multilingualism in relation to my inquiry around reflexivity and concerns.

3.1. Is the Year Abroad significant for the long-term development of multilingual and intercultural concerns?

Alred and Byram’s (2006) study provide a long-term analysis of the YA on intercultural competence (though not multilingual) development. Twelve previous students were contacted ten years after their teaching assistantship in France.

Generally, the authors show that there is strong evidence of the significance of the YA in the lives of the participants. According to this study the impact on the later life depends on the degree of enjoyment throughout the YA. Alred and Byram demonstrate how students with positive experiences tend to follow careers allowing them to be intercultural mediators (meaning their concerns around interculturality were strengthened) whereas students who did not enjoy the experience will often find themselves in careers or circumstances where being interculturally competent is not a frequent demand (this concern became less important). These findings concur with Du’s more recent, but also

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more time-limited findings in relation to linguistic concerns. This was discussed above in regard to fossilised L2 selves (Du, 2019).

3.2. What makes the Year Abroad an enjoyable experience?

Alred and Byram explain the difference in enjoyment in part through reference to 'tertiary socialisation' (which typically takes place as individuals mature in adult life). The authors describe this as a process by which students gain intercultural competence whilst abroad, and it enables participants to become mediators not only between the two cultures, but also in different situations in their subsequent life. The authors claim that the YA is more likely to strengthen a process of tertiary socialisation (and with it the concern of becoming interculturally competent) where it has already begun, i.e., for students with previous experiences abroad. "[W]here tertiary socialisation has not already begun, the YA can have a counter-effect of reinforcing secondary socialisation and identification with the society/ies and culture(s) of origin" (Alred & Byram, 2006, p. 228). Other authors (for instance Ehrenreich, 2006) agree that prior international experience is conducive to strengthening the concern of intercultural development.

However, not all scholars concur. Murphy-Lejeune discusses the advantages of "mobility capital" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 51ff) in her large-scale study of mobility within Europe. She concludes that linguistic knowledge is more important than intercultural experience for students to benefit from their year abroad. Additionally, Holliday (2018) warns against being simplistic in the distinction between students who are already 'international' or 'intercultural' prior to their SA experience. Holliday argues that everybody develops profound intercultural competence in everyday life from an early age: "we can engage with, contribute to, and position ourselves within culture wherever we find it" (Holliday, 2018, p. 207). This means that the interest in interculturality (or the concern linked to its development) can be present in anyone.

However, the year abroad can be an opportunity for educators to make specific interventions which may enhance the development of interculturality (see the section on interventions below).

3.3. The lasting impacts of SA in confirming multilingual concerns

In contrast to the nuanced findings above, a body of literature emphasises the positive lasting impacts of SA in terms of multilingual concerns, such as language skills, the development of interculturality and personal competence, and career benefits.

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3.3.1. The Senegal Study

Firstly, Coleman's Senegal study was designed to address the fact that only few studies exist which investigate the long-term impact of SA (Coleman, 2013). The study maintains that SA significantly impacts "whole people and whole lives". All students who had previously (between 1985 and 2009) participated in a work placement or university study in Senegal as part of their French degree were contacted with the request to fill in a questionnaire on their SA experience. Fifty individuals returned the questionnaires (82.5% response rate). In addition, five in-depth telephone interviews took place. Eighty percent of respondents "viewed the stay abroad as a turning point in their lives", with the experience having "a huge impact on their subsequent trajectory in educational, geographical, personal and professional terms" (Coleman, 2013, p. 35). The topic of subsequent employability highlights the lasting influence of the SA experience. Most respondents thought that the year abroad had been a factor in finding their first and subsequent jobs, and often it had been seen as a significant or even determining factor. All respondents viewed their time abroad as a good investment, and the concerns around multilingualism and interculturality remained significant. Virtually all valued their skills in their employment, and more than three-quarters were currently in a job which required cultural mediation.

3.3.2. The student Max

Secondly, Barkhuizen's short-story based narrative analysis (Barkhuizen, 2017) also explores the long-term multilingual identity development during and after study abroad, but concentrates on the story of one participant and gives an in-depth analysis of how multilingual concerns (of being able to adapt to different behaviours) persist long-term. This study applies the three-dimensional model of multilingual identity (Benson et al., 2013) which was introduced and compared to Archer's Theory of Reflexivity above.

The student Max takes part in two interviews during his SA as a Hong Kong student in New Zealand. Based on the analysis of an extract from the interviews Barkhuizen demonstrates how Max develops his sociopragmatic and personal skills and is able to host an international night in New Zealand using both Chinese-style and Western-style jokes. His self-concept now embraces this knowledge of himself as being able to combine two identities and become proactive in an international environment. A third interview takes place four years after Max's return to Hong Kong. He has now completed his degree, carried out further studies, and started working in the media industry. In this interview Max

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reflects on how he managed to adapt between the different university tutorial styles in Hong Kong and New Zealand. In an extract from this interview, Barkhuizen demonstrates how, since his return to China, Max sometimes fell back into what he calls ‘the Chinese way of behaviour’, where there was no expectation to participate actively in tutorials. However, his behaviour and sense of self fluctuates, and he says that the experience abroad “definitely put a seed inside me” (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 110). He explains that he can still behave in a proactive way, and he still embraces multilingual concerns. In fact, the paper ends with a fourth communication between Max and the researcher Barkhuizen one year later. Max is now working for a national sports association where he needs to communicate in English daily.

3.3.3. *Serena*

A third paper which looks at the long-term multilingual and intercultural development of a single student is Jackson’s narrative case study of ‘Serena’, a Hong Kong language student, during, before, and after her SA in the UK (Jackson, 2016). As in the previous papers, the initial multilingual concerns of the student are strengthened during and after her SA.

The paper uses situated learning theory (also known as the community of practice framework – CoP – proposed by Lave & Wenger, 1991) to explain the SA outcomes. According to this theory, the acculturation and L2 socialisation of exchange students is viewed “as a process of progressively gaining competence and membership in various CoPs within the host community” (Jackson, 2016, p. 334). Agency is important, but attention within this theory is also paid to power relations, as the right to enter or participate in a community is not always granted. The application of this theory is compatible with identity theories, as it helps to explain identity changes, or the development of a hybrid identity, during SA.

Data was collected through interviews before and after the SA, and through email correspondence during SA. An additional interview was conducted three years after Serena’s return to Hong Kong.

Serena was linguistically highly competent but had hardly any international or intercultural experience before her SA. Her multilingual aims for SA were to “make significant gains in her English language proficiency and intercultural understanding” (Jackson, 2016, p. 338) through making friends with people from other cultures and gaining exposure to English.

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In her post-SA reflections, Serena demonstrated that some of her initial stereotypes about the British had been challenged, and that she had successfully managed to join English-speaking CoPs, mainly through the communal kitchen in her dormitory. According to the study, Serena had made significant progress both in her intercultural and her linguistic development, and this was due to “individual dimensions (e.g. personal characteristics and attributes, motives, language attitudes, depth of investment in sojourn learning) and external elements (e.g. host receptivity, access to CoP, degree of mutuality with hosts)” (Jackson, 2016, p. 345).

In a final interview three years after her return from the UK Serena describes how her SA experiences influenced her further trajectory by increasing her confidence and strengthening her desire for future opportunities abroad: “In her estimation, she had become more open-minded and reflective during the international exchange program” (Jackson, 2016, p. 345).

Jackson’s approach and explanation of Serena’s development shows some similarity to Archer’s conceptualisation of reflexivity. Both theories differentiate between individual dimensions or powers which are connected to agency, and external elements or structural powers. However, Jackson does not establish a clear connection between reflexivity and decision making. Reflection is purely described in hindsight as Serena makes sense of her trajectory within the boundaries of structural opportunities (and sometimes barriers).

3.4. Multilingual development across different contexts

Section 3.3. discussed papers which demonstrated a strengthening of initial multilingual concerns during SA. Sung’s (2019) case study also shows how multilingual concerns are maintained during SA. However, this study will be considered separately, as it provides a detailed examination of particular contexts which are conducive (or not) to the reinforcement of multilingual concerns.

The study focusses on Liam’s experiences as a language student. Liam is from a Cantonese-speaking family and studies English at a Hong Kong university. The data for this narrative inquiry was collected over a period of two years (spanning before, during and after Liam’s SA) through various methods including six in-depth interviews.

Findings highlight the difference between the second language development of the student firstly during his first two years of study in Hong Kong (contrasting the context of his university campus versus his work-place environment), and secondly during his SA

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(contrasting the context of his language course versus his home stay environment). The study takes an identity approach and compares Liam's L2 investments and identity negotiations across these contexts.

The analysis gives evidence of how Liam struggles to negotiate an academic identity as a competent student in the university classroom, or as an L2 speaker with English-speaking international students on campus. This is because he is reluctant to invest in relationships which he does not perceive as meaningful or genuine. However, the student also works part-time in an international English-speaking environment, where he is successful in negotiating a professional identity as a capable salesperson in the L2. In this context, he views the English speaking opportunities as relevant and authentic, and they allow him to "develop a desired professional identity as a valued and capable staff member of a large international department store" (Sung, 2019, p. 7).

During his third year at university Liam studies abroad in the UK where he succeeds in developing a language identity "as a proficient L2 speaker of English" (2019, p. 9) by actively participating in the exchange programme. This positive experience is linked to the fact that the topics of his lessons are of interest to him, and he receives encouraging feedback. Additionally, he manages "to negotiate a desirable social identity as a result of his social and emotional ties to the host family" (2019, p. 9). Both contexts during his SA help him to overcome his reluctance to speak English with native speakers of English, as he became less worried about making mistakes.

Several interviews reveal that Liam's investments in English language practices across contexts were encouraged through his "vision of an imagined community closely linked to a career with an international airline and an imagined identity associated with a cosmopolitan life in the projected future" (Sung, 2019, p. 9).

Sung's understanding of L2 identity in this paper is based on Norton's definition of identity (Norton, 2013; see previous chapter) where identity is negotiated and constructed in specific contexts which often prove sites of struggle. This understanding of identity is closely linked to the concept of investment and implies an agentive approach. In fact, the author explains that Liam's trajectory across different contexts demonstrates his selective investment in specific practices and "could be taken as manifestations of personal agency" (Sung, 2019, p. 12). Liam chooses to invest heavily in contexts which yield a good return in terms of being able to accumulate cultural and social capital. This accumulated capital

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allows him to construct a desired identity and envisage a future within an imagined community.

Sung's conceptualisation of agency implies reflexivity and is described as Liam's "choice to turn away from investing in L2 classroom interactions and seek out opportunities to practice English outside the university classroom, especially in the workplace and in study abroad" (2019, p. 12). The use of the word "choice" in Sung's analysis of Liam's trajectory is very similar to words used by Archer when she describes the deliberative process which establishes the prime concerns (Archer, 2007, p. 20) of the individual, and the projects to realise the concerns. However, I point out once more (as in previous discussions of identity theories), that the term 'reflexivity' is not used in Sung's paper. We gain insights into how the L2-identity is formed, and the theory of investment sheds light on some of the concerns of the students. However, the actual process of reflexivity and decision-making is not made explicit.

3.5. Changing goals in longitudinal studies

In contrast to the previous two sections, I now turn to two papers where students experienced a change in their multilingual concerns during their SA.

3.5.1. *Ally: a Hong Kong student in the UK*

The first study I discuss is Chik and Benson's account of Ally (Chik & Benson, 2008), a Hong Kong student, who completed a three year undergraduate course at a British university. The authors employed a narrative approach to show how the experiences of the student "developed over time and across contexts" (2008, p. 168), and to highlight the perspective of the student. The data was collected through three interviews over a period of four years, with the first one taking place before Ally's departure, and the final one after her return to Hong Kong. Ally's story focusses on the identity development of the student, and on the changes in the goals and expectations she expresses.

Initially, Ally had hoped to become a native level⁶ speaker of English and mix with British people. However, experiences of discrimination and being positioned as an EFL speaker were factors in her change of goals. By the time of the final interview, Ally had returned to Hong Kong and reflected on the fact that she had not become a native speaker or developed close contacts with Britons. However, she was satisfied with the outcomes of

⁶ The term "native speaker" is not critically discussed in the paper. See for instance Canagarajah (2013) for a more nuanced discussion of the native / non-native binary.

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her stay and perceived herself as a confident and competent speaker of English, particularly in comparison with other Hong Kong competitors.

This study clearly shows how goals can shift through structural circumstances, and how this is linked to the behaviour of the student. When expressed in Archer's terms, Ally's concern in relation to multilingualism shifted from wishing to become a native speaker abroad, to wishing to become a competent L2 speaker in her home country. The shift is linked to the fact that she would have needed to immerse fully in British communities to fulfil her first concern. However, experiences of discrimination prevented this, and she was more successful with projects related to her course and her newly evolving multilingual concern. It is doubtful, whether this shift in concerns and projects was fully reflected on at the time. In the second interview (whilst abroad) she clearly expressed her anger at being discriminated against, and this indicates that she is aware of the structural barriers she faces, causing her to change her behaviour and projects. By the time of her third interview (after her return to Hong Kong) she explained how her cultural background became important to her while she was abroad. She felt that she had improved her English and no longer felt a need to make friends with British people.

It seems that Ally's change of behaviour and projects (mixing with compatriots rather than with native speakers of English) is only retrospectively linked to a shift in multilingual concern (as expressed in the third interview). This suggests that her behaviour at the time can more accurately be described as reactive and can only be seen as agentic when it is belatedly reconciled with the concern. Benson and Chik (2008) come to a similar conclusion when they suggest that Ally's trajectory has several constraints to her agency. On the one hand, there was the barrier to her adopting a native speaker identity through discrimination in the UK, on the other hand her multilingual concerns were also influenced by her compatriots who expected her to conform to a Hong Kong identity of a person who has studied overseas.

To summarise, this longitudinal study suggests that behaviour may be determined by structural barriers at a given point in time (and this prevents a project taking place, and a concern being fulfilled). However, when reflection takes place at a later point in time, the

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concern might have shifted, and the behaviour seems agentic from the retrospective viewpoint of the individual⁷.

3.5.2. German assistant teachers in the UK

Ehrenreich (2006) similarly investigates the long-term impact of a year abroad (YA). In her study she analyses data gathered through retrospective semi-structured interviews with 22 German previous teaching assistants at various stages of their careers. In relation to the current study, the following points are relevant.

Ehrenreich employs a 'small social life-world' as her analytical lens (Hitzler and Eberle, 2004, quoted in Ehrenreich, 2006). Through this lens, the assistant year is viewed as a temporary and purposive 'fragment' of the lifeworld, which is constituted intentionally and is goal-directed. How assistants evaluate the meaningfulness of their year abroad depends on the goals and intentions they associate with the year. However, assistants are not always fully aware of these goals and intentions. In the retrospective interviews nearly all students name language and culture as their main motives for going abroad, as well as their interest in trying out their teaching skills. Generally, the participants' answers reflect their high professional ambitions. Later in the interviews, students are asked about their most important experiences during their year abroad. Most participants now mention personal development, growth, (inter)cultural experiences (though this is often ambivalent), and teaching experiences (though these are often disappointing). Language is mentioned only by a few of the participants, whereas the assistant network emerges as a new, very important, but highly ambivalent 'relevance'.

As in the paper by Chik and Benson (2008), it appears that the notion of what is important changes for the students. Ehrenreich emphasises that "some of these reinterpretations of initial relevances are also indicative of processes of adaptation to certain non-ideal contextual factors" (2006, p. 190). Despite these changes in their relevances, most of the participants were very positive or even enthusiastic in their overall evaluation of the year abroad and, in keeping with the framework of the 'small social life-world', this shows how the goals have indeed shifted within the 'fragment' of the lifeworld.

⁷ The narratives of Lotti and Eve in my own study concur with this development of anger and later reconciliation with structural forces.

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The similarity between ‘relevances’ in the study by Ehrenreich (2006) and the ‘concerns’ in Archer’s theory are obvious, and it is clear that a shift in such relevances is not only possible, but can make sense to the individual.

3.6. Programme interventions and the development of self-regulatory strategies in language learners

In section 2.4. I discussed examples of programme interventions which were specific to certain phases in the trajectory of students. However, many programme interventions span the time before, during and after SA and, accordingly, I will discuss these examples in this section on longitudinal research.

3.6.1. *Examples of longitudinal programme interventions*

Allen (2013) has investigated how ‘good’ language learners are agentive in their self-regulation strategies, and how agency and reflection are linked to language-learning motivation both medium and long term. The author collected data from three advanced level learners of French over a period of four years and included the time before, during, and after SA (with the final interview taking place three years after SA).

Findings showed that during SA students were poor at goal setting and motivation-maintenance strategies, even if they gave evidence of language-learning strategies (particularly regarding fluency). However, following SA and during their further careers, the students maintained their language learning motivation, and all continued to use learning strategies and were agentive in their learning. The author acknowledges that this shift is not universal and that it is fairer to say that SA “has the *potential* to bring about a critical awareness of the role of agency in one’s language learning” (Allen, 2013, para. 68; emphasis in original text).

Allen suggests that students should be encouraged to reflect by writing blogs, either as components in specific assignments, or as beginning or end-of-semester activities. Furthermore, the study recommends combining reflection with discussion, either with peers, or with interlocutors, such as teachers or lecturers.

Further interventions have been linked to the successful running of an entire programme (Jackson, 2006). Jackson demonstrates how she integrated pre-sojourn workshops, on-going support during the sojourn, and systematic debriefing into her course of studies. Students were required to constantly reflect on their learning through diaries, and the reflections indicated an awareness of students’ strengths and weaknesses as intercultural

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communicators. In the debriefing sessions students discussed how they might improve future encounters across cultures, and educators identified areas of language learning which could be improved to prepare students better for their time abroad.

The IEREST project (IEREST, 2015) similarly aims to support students through educational and reflexive resources before, during and after their year abroad in terms of reflexivity and intercultural learning. The authors of the project concluded that some of the most promising intercultural learning moments occurred in classroom contexts which were facilitated by educators (Borghetti & Beaven, 2018).

3.6.2. Archer's theory of reflexivity and programme interventions

The authors of the papers discussed above (and in section 2.4.) emphasise the importance of reflexivity and self-regulation for successful language and intercultural learning in the study abroad context. They maintain that programme interventions can foster reflexivity and language learning through setting tasks which promote agency and engagement. While reflexivity is of course also central to Archer's theory of reflexivity, there are important points to make about her theory in relation to the interventionist concepts.

Firstly, Archer's model of reflexivity assumes that people mostly have clearly defined constellations of concerns which they attempt to realise by carrying out projects. Through reflexivity they prioritise their concerns, and plan and evaluate their projects. When structural barriers are viewed as insurmountable, the projects are altered. In relation to the papers discussed above the question arises as to whether participants in SA actually have language and intercultural learning as major concerns. In fact, several authors have questioned whether participants privilege their identities as language learners during SA, as they might not "position themselves primarily as language learners" (Kinging, 2009, p. 113), but be more focussed on other aspects of SA, including adventure, romance, relationship building, and self-discovery (Coleman, 2013). According to Archer's model of reflexivity it is unlikely that interventions to foster reflexivity or perseverance can be successful if the aims of the intervention are incompatible with the ultimate concerns of the student during SA.

Secondly, all the authors above maintain that reflexivity can be encouraged and fostered. This idea seems at odds with Archer's interpretation of reflexivity which she characterises as being "universal and continuous to human beings" (Archer, 2000, p. 194). However, I argue that an interventionist approach can be combined with Archer's theory. This is because Archer distinguishes between four different types of reflexivity, and not all of

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these are equally conducive to a successful course of action (see previous chapter). Individuals leaning towards ‘communicative reflexivity’ require confirmation by others before undertaking courses of actions, and those practising ‘meta-reflexivity’ are critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and about effective action in society. Both these groups might benefit from the proposed support in reflexivity if the aims of the intervention are aligned to their own underlying concerns. On the other hand, those practising ‘autonomous reflexivity’ are characterised as subjects who sustain self-contained internal conversations which lead directly to action. This group is less likely to benefit from external interventions. In fact, they are already able to successfully reflect on their environment and take action to realise concerns. Lastly, Archer suggests that ‘fractured reflexivity’ is a mode of reflexivity which causes people to lead conversations “intensify[ing] their distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action” (Archer, 2007, p. 93). Presumably, for students suffering from fractured reflexivity intensive face-to-face coaching might be more appropriate than interventions leading to more reflexivity. Archer shows how humans can fluctuate between different types of reflexivity, and interventions from programmes (again if they are aligned to the individual’s concerns) might be helpful to foster a more autonomous form of reflexivity. (I will elaborate on this in the conclusion of this thesis.)

Thirdly, Archer describes the “fragility of our commitments and fallibility of our self-knowledge” (Archer, 2003, p. 149), and these points suggest that a form of mentoring might be conducive to strengthening these commitments and gaining clarity about what we care about (again, I will return to this point in the conclusion of this thesis).

3.7. Concluding remarks: Reflexivity, structure, and agency in diachronic studies

The studies in this section investigated multilingual development across time and space (including SA), and identity development once again appeared as a major theme (particularly in terms of multilingual and intercultural identity).

All subjects in the studies displayed qualities of reflexivity, as they looked back at their development during and since their SA. Furthermore, all described the importance of SA in their trajectory, however, not all remained committed to their initial multilingual concerns. For some, concerns around language learning and intercultural development were strengthened, while for others different concerns came to the forefront. Ultimately, even more long-term studies (in the form of life stories) are needed to properly investigate the

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development of multilingual concerns. However, if such studies are conducted retrospectively, the nature of agency and reflection needs to be treated with caution. In hindsight, subjects may feel that their change of concerns was voluntary. In fact, structural barriers may have prevented the realisation of previous projects leaving the subject with little choice but to abandon previous concerns, and to embrace new concerns instead. This is a development which resonates with Archer's findings and she suggests: "Only retrospectively may we acknowledge that we have almost imperceptibly curtailed our concerns in the light of our circumstances." (Archer, 2003, pp. 147–148)

A further theme in this section was the discussion of programme interventions which are designed to enhance reflexivity and self-regulation (but often neglect structural forces). I argued that this approach is, in part, compatible to Archer's theory of reflexivity. According to Archer, reflexivity is natural to everyone, but it is fallible, as individuals are sometimes unsure of their priorities, or misjudge the structural environment and their own possibilities for action. Interventions fostering self-regulation could address these shortcomings and strengthen certain types of reflexivity, however the interventions must be aligned to the concerns of individuals and improve the awareness of the structural conditions.

Chapter 4: Multilingual development in a student context: Reflexivity, concerns, and change

4. Conclusion: Reflexivity and motivations in a student context

4.1. Gaps in the literature

I structured this chapter around the concepts of 'space' and 'time' as I had observed that studies either focus on a particular 'space' and phase of 'time' (as discussed in section two of this chapter), or they may focus on developments taking place across several 'spaces' and spanning different phases of 'time' (as discussed in section three of this chapter).

I now return to the two questions I had posed at the beginning of this chapter:

Qu 1: How dominant are the concepts of reflexivity, structure, and agency in these papers?

I observe that where studies were limited to a particular phase and space, the focal point was often the adaptation to these during transition (to university or SA) or during reintegration (after SA). Thus, change was an underlying theme in most of these studies and even more so in the longitudinal papers. Change is linked to new experiences of structure, and questions regarding the interplay of structure and agency arise in the papers I have selected. Structure is often seen as a restricting force. Examples are unfamiliar settings and language barriers (for instance Gu et al., 2010), non-acceptance in communities of practice and even discrimination (for instance Chik & Benson, 2008), or disappointing intercultural experiences (for instance Ehrenreich, 2006). However, many studies show that students express a degree of agency by adjusting (for instance Scanlon et al., 2007) and embracing difference (for instance through "negotiation of difference" in Kinginger, 2010), or investing in certain contexts (for instance Sung, 2019), or indeed changing their initial plans (see below).

In terms of 'reflexivity' I selected papers which include this concept in some way (even if the term itself is not always used, or the term is not fully conceptualised), and most of the papers were linked to identity or motivational approaches. I used Archer's theory of reflexivity as a reference point and compared individual papers and approaches to this theory. It became clear that reflexivity is often mentioned in relation to context (structure) and agency in terms of imagining (for instance Briggs et al., 2012), reflective positioning (for instance Kinginger, 2010), or choice (for instance Sung, 2019). However, the actual reflective process is not described.

This is the first gap in the literature, and the reflective process is one point I intend to address in my own framework.

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Qu 2: How much attention do the studies pay to motivations (concerns), and is this linked to decision-making?

Many, though not all of the studies included an investigation of motivations, and these were often linked to reflexivity (as in investment theories, or possible selves theory). In the longitudinal section I discussed studies which show that such motivations (concerns) can be strengthened through the experiences abroad. However, this is not always the case, and concerns are also changeable. Examples for concerns in the area of multilingualism are the wish to develop academically (for instance Briggs et al., 2012; Choi, 2019), to develop language skills (for instance Chik & Benson, 2008), to develop interculturality (for instance Ehrenreich, 2006) and personally (for instance Kinginger, 2008), to gain experience for a future career (for instance Sung, 2019), and to make friends and broaden networks (for instance Coleman, 2013; Jackson, 2016). However, it is often not clear how aware individuals are of these motivations (reflexivity) and how this influences decision-making.

As mentioned above, Barkhuizen et al. have put forward a second language identity framework which combines a reflexive element with domains around linguistic and personal (academic) development. The authors describe how projects in these domains can be formed, and monitored, through the reflexive self. Nevertheless, the process of how decisions on projects are made, and how decisions are linked to reflections on concerns and structural circumstances is still underdeveloped.

This absence of a clear link between concerns, decision-making, and reflexivity is the second gap in the literature, and in my own research I intend to pay attention to the links between these notions.

4.2. Further procedure

Following this review of the literature around reflexivity and multilingualism in the student context my own investigation of 'multilingual development' will be influenced by Benson et al.'s tripartite model (2013) and Archer's model of reflexivity (more of this in the next chapter). In my framework (see next chapter) I will specifically investigate developments involving all the languages my participants are using and learning.

In my research I will address the gaps in the literature which I have identified above. I will pay attention to the reflexive process of students (their consideration of structure and agency and the way they conceive of and carry out projects), and I will also take note of

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their concerns (the things they care about) in relation to multilingualism. As this is a longitudinal study, I will particularly consider changes which take place in relation to reflexivity, structure, agency (projects), and concerns.

Finally, in the conclusion of my research I will return to the issue of programme interventions and student support. I have shown above how interventionist approaches are in part compatible with Archer's theory of reflexivity and I will consider the question of how programme interventions can be further improved to match the concerns of the students.

Chapter 5: Framework of multilingual reflexivity

1. Introduction

In this thesis I explore the narratives of young people's multilingual development over four years by focussing on motivations, reflexivity, and decision-making. This exploration takes place in the context of undergraduate education (including a year abroad), during a specific time in history which includes the political uncertainty of the Brexit negotiations and the unfolding global pandemic. The timeline in chapter 7 provides information on the timescales of these processes in relation to the students.

In the previous chapters I reviewed literature on multilingual development both generally, and more specifically linked to the student context. The review focussed on recent studies which were often based on identity and motivational approaches. Such studies usually address questions of structure and / or agency, but these are often not fully conceptualised. Furthermore, many studies include elements of reflexivity without clearly defining the concept, or they neglect the motivational underpinning which drives reflexivity.

I identified this lack of clarity as gaps in the literature, and my own analysis therefore has two research aims:

Firstly, I wish to further investigate the reflexive process.

Secondly, I wish to examine the link between concerns (motivations), decision-making and reflexivity in the area of multilingualism.

To address these points, I have developed a framework of multilingual reflexivity. My framework builds heavily on the theory of reflexivity proposed by Archer (2000, 2003, 2006, 2007) which suggests that reflexivity can serve as the missing link combining structure and agency.

However, my framework also draws from relevant literature on multilingualism discussed in the previous sections, for instance the second language identity development (SLID) framework proposed by Barkhuizen and his colleagues (Barkhuizen, 2017; Benson et al., 2013), different understandings of multilingualism (Aronin, 2016; Blommaert, 2010), and motivational approaches to language learning (Henry, 2017). These studies are particularly helpful as they suggest multilingual motivations (Archer calls these 'concerns'), and I will elaborate on this below.

I will now briefly re-cap relevant points of Archer's theory of reflexivity before introducing my own model of multilingual reflexivity and decision-making. This will lead to the research questions which I address through my thesis.

2. Archer's theory of reflexivity

In chapter 3 I presented and discussed Archer's theory which conceptualises reflexivity and suggests that individuals can make agentic decisions affecting their trajectory.

Archer subscribes to the critical realist line of thought (see chapter 2). In her three stage model (Archer, 2007; see chapter 3, and figure 3, for a detailed description) Archer suggests that there are two sets of causal powers, those connected to the objective world (generating constraint and enablement), and those connected to the agency of the people (most importantly reflexivity). Even though both sets of powers exist independently, they can only be investigated in combination (Archer, 2000).

Archer seeks to understand reflexivity by "open[ing] out the 'internal conversation'" (Archer, 2000, p. 319). She does so by gaining insights into individuals' concerns (which Archer defines as 'what people care about') and their structural awareness (of constraints and enablements), by identifying their projects ('courses of action which involve an end which is desired') and practices, and by investigating the way in which subjects reflect.

These processes are changeable, and Archer describes how individuals discern and adjust their projects in the light of their perception of a (changing) environment, but also how they prioritise and re-prioritise their constellation of concerns. Through an analysis of the reflexive process, she gains insights into why individuals behave in certain ways.

I have already introduced the different types of reflexivity (or internal conversations) which Archer suggests, and she links these to the trajectory of individuals. 'Communicative reflexivity' is linked to 'social immobility'; 'autonomous reflexivity' is linked to 'upward mobility'; and 'meta-reflexivity' as associated with 'lateral mobility' or 'volatility' (Archer, 2007, p. 315). Archer concedes that it would be simplistic to ascribe a certain type of reflexivity to each individual, but that the type of internal conversation changes over time and is dependent on several external and contextual factors. In my own framework I will occasionally refer to these types of reflexivity, however my main interest lies elsewhere.

3. My interests and research focus

In a similar way to Archer, I will open up the internal conversation of my students (see research question 5 below), but I focus on questions of multilingualism and related concepts. These will inform my framework and my research questions below:

I am interested in the types of concerns (motivations) which can be linked to decision-making in the multilingual development of the students. My definition of ‘concerns’ incorporates Archer’s notion of ‘what people care about’ or ‘what people want’, but can also be equated to the terms ‘motivation’ or ‘desire’ (and I have often used these terms interchangeably earlier in this thesis). However, in my thesis I pay particular attention to how the students themselves understand their concerns, and how these understandings of their concerns change over time. The analysis will show that changes in this understanding lead to revisions in the students’ decision-making around their multilingual trajectory (see my examples of multilingual concerns in figure 6 and research question 1 below).

I also aim to investigate how concerns may come into conflict with each other when the young adults experience structural changes (see research question 2 below). I will investigate the extent to which they reflect on their changing circumstances over time and across space; how they weigh up their concerns; and how this affects their projects and practices in relation to multilingualism.

I further pay attention to the multilingual projects of the students (see research question 3 below). I have already mentioned that Archer’s definition of ‘projects’ involves “an end that is desired, however tentatively or nebulously, and also some notion, however imprecise, of the course of action through which to accomplish it” (Archer, 2003, p. 6). Archer’s notion of projects covers many timescales and levels of complexity, as they may relate to the different orders of natural reality (nature, practice, and the social). My own definition deviates somewhat from this, as I again relate it to multilingual aspects. Mainly, I focus on the students’ development of their multilingual repertoires as examples of long-term projects. However, I also consider projects on different timescales which are either more clearly defined (such as the students’ year abroad), or more open-ended (such as their career plans). The courses of actions which the students choose to progress their projects involve reflexivity and decision-making, both of which are key points in my analysis.

Finally, given that the study takes place in a particular historical context, I am interested in the students’ reflections on the unprecedented contextual changes linked to Brexit and the

pandemic situation (see research question 4 below), and how these reflections inform students' decisions.

It is important to keep in mind that all these deliberations are not purely rational processes; in fact (as we will see in the narratives) they are emotionally charged.

4. My framework of multilingual reflexivity: Making our way through multilingualism

4.1. Some considerations of identity

As mentioned in the previous chapters, scholars have often linked questions of structure and agency to definitions of identity (for instance Norton, 2013). At this point, a caveat is necessary. I consider questions of identity and related theories of language identity as extremely relevant to language learning, and an interest in language identity initially motivated me for this study. However, in the course of my research my interest shifted, and I focussed on the area of reflexivity as I investigated how the reflexive process informs decisions of the students linked to language learning. This shift is linked to my pragmatic approach and the wish to improve student support based on an understanding of the students' reflexive process. The concept of identity is therefore not the focus of this study, and my discussion of identity below as put forward by Archer and Benson et al. respectively is brief and filtered. My aim is to clarify how my framework is influenced by the conceptualisation of identity of these scholars.

Archer's understanding of personal identity is linked to the values or concerns of an individual. She describes the identity of a subject as "the being-within-this constellation-of-concerns" (Archer, 2007, p. 87). Archer suggests that, ideally, humans are aware of their concerns and that these remain relatively stable during an individual's lifetime, though the prioritisation of these concerns may change (Archer, 2006). The act of prioritising our concerns, and the singular solutions we take through reflexivity secures "our strict identities as unique persons" (Archer, 2000, p. 318). This implies an understanding of identity which is linked to reflexivity and agency. However, Archer also posits that personal identity is not achieved by everyone and that such an achievement of personal identity is impossible until maturity (Archer, 2003).

This makes the current study particularly interesting as the participants are young adults who are undergoing development and are dealing with changes. Changes might take place in the structural environment, but at the same time we can expect an increasing (self-)

awareness of the students and shifts in their concerns. According to Archer's understanding of identity, we will see a development in their personal identity linked to their constellation of concerns (and to their understanding of these concerns), but there will also be changes in their mode of reflexivity, their awareness of structural changes, and their agentic projects.

In terms of multilingualism, Benson et al. have very broadly defined L2 identity as "any aspect of an individual's personal and social identity that derives from the potential that knowledge of more than one language implies" (Benson et al., 2013, p. 29), and this broad definition has informed their model of second language identity development. Their model then focusses on particular aspects, such as development of communicative competence, development of an L2 "sense of self", and L2-informed personal development.

I will adopt Archer's understanding of identity by putting the concerns of individuals at the forefront of my investigative framework. However, I pay equal attention to the reflexivity, which leads individuals to pursue and adjust their projects and practices, and to the structural environment which drives reflexivity. Similarly, to Benson et al., I will focus on those concerns which are linked to multilingualism. My framework allows for a re-prioritisation of concerns through reflection, as changes occur, and can be visualised in figure 5.

4.2. The framework



Figure 5 - My framework of multilingual reflexivity

My framework is influenced by Archer's three-stage model but allows for a greater attention to change. Figure 5 demonstrates how the three elements of reflexivity, constellation of multilingual concerns, and changing structural forces, are all interlinked. The important element of time is not shown as a separate cog but appears in the same cog as reflexivity. Any cog can set the framework into motion, so change could start through a process of reflexivity, through changes of structural forces, and through a re-prioritisation of concerns. Projects may change at any time through reflexivity.

Furthermore, I will pay attention to the individual constellation of multilingual concerns. An example of how this constellation can be visualised is presented in figure 6.

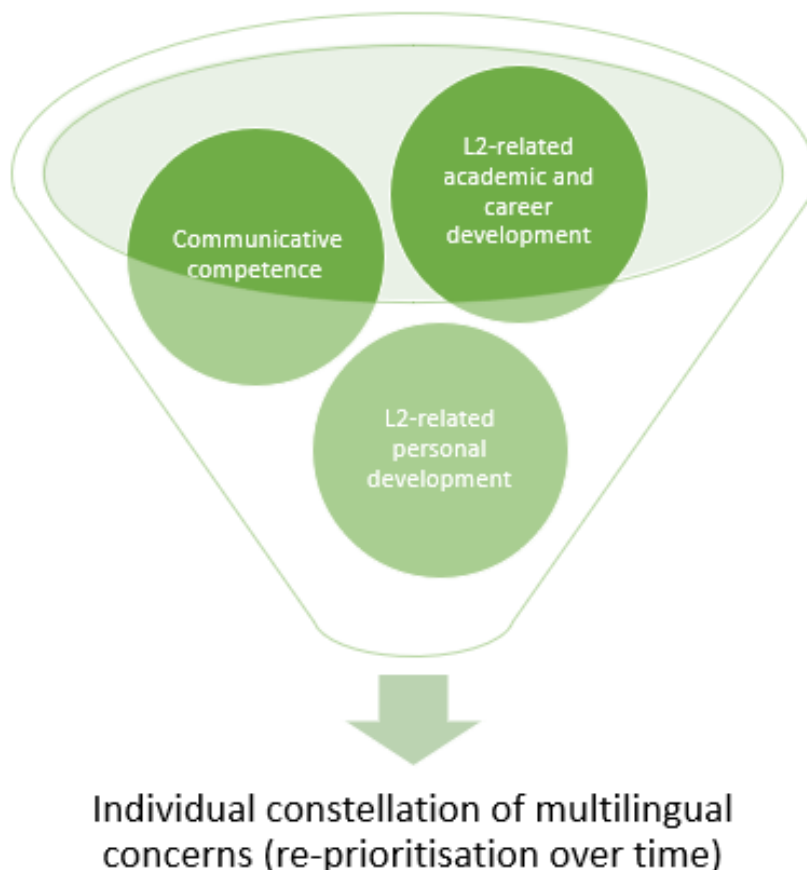


Figure 6 - Individual constellation of multilingual concerns

In the conclusion of the previous chapter, I summarised the multilingual motivations which feature in the papers I reviewed. Inspired by these papers, and loosely adapted from Benson et al.'s framework, I put forward in figure 6 three clusters of multilingual concerns (though these are interlinked and could be distributed differently). These concerns mainly relate to what Archer has described as the practical and social orders⁸. The first cluster relates to concerns regarding L2-related personal development. Examples are the wish for personal growth through experiences of travelling and living abroad (particularly through the use and learning of language in interaction), or the wish to gain intercultural competence, and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). The second cluster is linked to communicative competence (see my discussion in chapter 3, 2.1.5). Communicative competence can be linked to a specific language, or can be considered across languages, and includes proficiency in terms of grammatical correctness, or fluency

⁸ Archer maintains that concerns relate to the orders of nature (providing for the body), practice (regarding skills, but also ensuring subsistence through work) and the social (generating positive self-worth).

(i.e., maintaining a conversation), socio-pragmatic competence and the ability to project desired identities. The third cluster of concerns is in the area of academic and career development, for instance the ability to achieve an identity of someone with a language-related degree and who can work professionally with languages.

Naturally, each individual also harbours concerns which are not directly linked to multilingualism, and the narratives will give examples of how the multilingual concerns interplay with other concerns in the overall constellation of concerns, which can be seen as a complex system (Larsen-Freeman, 2011). An important example of this are concerns relating to physical well-being, which come to the forefront in the current epidemic, as will be seen in chapter 10, in the section on “Coronavirus as a structural force”.

In chapters 8-10 of this thesis, I will demonstrate how the participants reflect on their multilingual concerns and on structural forces, and how these reflections lead them to pursue certain projects and adopt certain practices. Over time and across different spaces the structural environment changes for my participants and this may lead them to alter their projects or pursue different projects and practices and / or lead to a different prioritisation of their concerns.

5. Applying my framework and research questions

In chapter 2 I explained my academic approach and in chapter 6 I will outline the methods I have applied in this study.

As I will explain in much more detail, I have composed a narrative for each of my participants. The narratives were formed and condensed in several steps and focus on reflexivity and particular significant episodes.

I will also explain why I do not wish to pool the cases and, consequently, I refrained from thematic analysis of the narratives. Instead, I respect the individuality of my participants (Riessman, 2016). I add my own voice as a researcher (compare Jackson, 2016) by adding commentaries to the narratives. The commentaries are based on my framework of reflexivity (Figures 5 and 6), and the research questions which I pose.

Below are the research questions for my analysis which arise from my framework of multilingual reflexivity and the close reading of the transcripts. The questions are linked to Archer’s Three-Stage Model (see Fig 3) but focus on the key concepts of my own model in the following way: Multilingual concerns (and conflicts between concerns) are reflected in research questions 1 and 2; multilingual projects are reflected in research question 3;

structural changes are reflected in research question 4; and reflexivity is reflected in research question 5.

Research question 1: What does a particular **concern** (such as gaining multilingual competency) mean to my students? How does this concern change over the four years of the study?

Research question 2: What are examples of **conflicts** between concerns linked to multilingualism and how is the conflict resolved?

Research question 3: What sort of multilingual **projects** are the participants aiming for? How are such projects linked to their concerns? How do the projects change over time?

Research question 4: What sort of **structural changes** become triggers for changes within the constellation of multilingual concerns?

Research question 5: What **evidence is there for reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

In response to these research questions, I now introduce the structure of the analysis chapters (chapters 8-10). The analysis is divided into 5 sections where I present two narratives, respectively, followed by a commentary, and I focus on one of the research questions (1-4) above. Additionally, all chapters address research question 5. As can be seen the concept of change (see figure 5 describing my framework of multilingual reflexivity) is key to the analysis of the students' decision-making in all sections.

Chapter 8, section 1 (Focussing on research question 1): Communicative competence as a multilingual concern. In the narratives, Leanne and Tilly reflect on how they wish to become communicatively competent as their structural conditions change. Their understanding of the concern develops, as they alter their projects and practices.

Chapter 8, section 2 (Focussing on research question 2): The emerging conflict between the concerns of academic development and communicative competence. As they move across geographical spaces, Eve and Frederica reflect on the barriers and enablements which they perceive, and they deliberate on their priorities within their constellation of concerns as they alter their projects.

Chapter 9 (Focussing on research question 3): The development of multilingual repertoire as a project. In this chapter Lotti and Jade reflect on their concerns and repeatedly alter their multilingual repertoire, as well as the ensuing practices.

Chapter 10, section 1 (Focussing on research question 4): Brexit as a structural force. Sanjay and Rita reflect on possible consequences of the Brexit situation for their projects. The uncertainty of their future causes them to re-prioritise their concerns and alter their projects.

Chapter 10, section 2 (Also focussing on research question 4): The coronavirus pandemic as a structural force. Finally, Ruby and Margarita reflect on the impact of the very recent pandemic situation. The pandemic leads to structural changes which cause them to re-examine their concerns and alter their projects and practices.

However, before I proceed to the analysis chapters I will explain the methodology I applied (chapter 6). I will then introduce the participants and give an overview of the timeline of the study (chapter 7).

Chapter 6: Methodology – Data collection and analysis

1. Introduction

In chapter 2 I considered the epistemological underpinning of this study. I showed how I characterise my approach as pragmatic, and this allowed me to combine narrative and critical realist thinking as I addressed my research aims, established my framework and formulated the research questions. I remain mindful of the differences in narrative and critical realist thinking, as I explain my approach to methodology in this current chapter, and narrative and critical realist thinking will permeate through my analysis in chapters 8-10.

This current chapter is divided into six parts. After this brief introduction, I consider the ethics of working with the participants over the course of this study and describe the selection process. I then turn to the specifics of the data collection where I made use of a survey, interviews, visuals, and email communications. In the next section I critically consider the process of mediation from narrative, critical realist, and pragmatist points of view, and I clarify my own approach to this. I then turn to the data analysis procedures, and I explain how I composed the narratives and supplemented these with commentaries based on critical realist thinking. Next, I put forward criteria relevant to an evaluation of my approach before concluding this chapter in the final section.

2. The participants – ethical considerations and selection

In this study I worked with 10 undergraduate students over 4 years (see the following sections, and chapter 7). I am very aware that there is a power imbalance between myself and the participants. My role in this research was not limited to being a co-constructor of meaning as a researcher, but I was simultaneously a lecturer at the university where the students were studying, and to some students and at various stages I was also programme leader, year tutor, year abroad contact person, dissertation supervisor, and / or German lecturer. All students taking part in the research did so voluntarily, and I was granted ethical approval from both London Metropolitan University and Edinburgh Napier University. As such, I was very careful to inform the students at various stages, and to fully guarantee the voluntary nature of their participation. The cohort of 10 students was selected from the pool of 45 students who had shown interest in the original survey (see below) by applying “maximum variation sampling” (Seidman, 2013, p. 56). This meant that I ensured I had representatives of all languages and language programmes taught at the

university, and a spread of multilingual versus monolingual backgrounds⁹ (see chapter 7). While I am certain that no one was coerced into taking part, some questions remain open in respect to the power imbalance between myself as lecturer and the students, and these are possible limitations to the study: Were the students who volunteered to take part particularly pro-active in comparison with those students who chose not to put their names forward? What were the students' motivations for taking part? How difficult might it have been for students to admit that they wish to withdraw from the project? Did the students portray themselves in a certain way to me, for example with a trajectory moving towards either satisfaction or disappointment (Polkinghorne, 1995)? At the end of the study did they think of themselves as having failed if they did not develop sufficiently in their chosen language(s)? Did they think I considered them as having failed? How honestly did they talk about their anxieties? How openly did they express discontent with the programme, their learning, teaching, their cohort, or their study abroad institution? Was there a potential conflict of interest in my role as a researcher and a tutor of the students? Did I treat the students differently to the general cohort?

While I cannot fully answer these questions, I kept them in mind during the study, and always asked for permission before arranging interviews. I had, in fact, recruited more participants than strictly necessary in order to be able to carry out the investigations with fewer participants if some of the students withdrew for any reason. One student did drop out of university after the first year. Two other students changed programmes, though they were happy to carry on with the interviews regardlessly.

3. Data collection

I opted for a longitudinal study as the appropriate tool for addressing my research questions and the notion of 'change' (see previous chapter). Collecting data longitudinally allowed me to follow time as it evolves. At the same time, the various data collection methods at different points in time and across different spaces allowed the participants to repeatedly consider the past (for instance childhood experiences), the present, and future imaginings.

The timeline (chapter 7, section 4) shows the dates of the individual interviews, but also indicates the stages of the students' studies, their locations, and the unexpected contextual changes through Brexit and the Coronavirus. Apart from the interviews I also made use of

⁹ Incidentally, far less students with monolingual than with multilingual backgrounds expressed an interest in participating in the research project.

a survey, visuals, and communications through email exchanges, and the data were used to craft the narratives and inform the commentaries. Clandinin & Connelly refer to these data collection methods as field texts and they say that these “may be more or less collaboratively constructed, may be more or less interpretive, and may be more or less researcher influenced” (2000, p. 95). I will further consider the interpretative nature of the data below in the section on ‘mediation’.

I now turn to the practicalities of the data collection methods and explain how these allowed me to pay attention to the notion of time and the different spaces the students encountered.

3.1. Initial survey

In September 2016, one week prior to induction week, I posted preliminary information about my longitudinal project on the Moodle site for “Languages Joint Degree Programmes”. The induction session for all languages students took place in a lecture theatre on the campus of the university, and for most students this was a new location. During the induction session, I introduced the research project in a power-point presentation and handed out a questionnaire to students where they could register their interest in receiving more information about the study. 65 students filled in the questionnaire, of these 45 expressed an interest in receiving further information about the project.

The questionnaire referred to the past, present, and future of the students, and questions addressed their schooling, their past language learning experiences, their current language levels, and their expectations around their language learning programmes. I also asked how they imagined their future in the medium- and long-term and how languages might be involved in their future lives. Some of the questions on the questionnaire referred to places, and I asked about the countries and places where students had undertaken their schooling, or where (which country / what sort of place) they think they will be living in five- or ten-years’ time.

The questionnaire enabled me to gain a first impression of the cohort. It is possible that the enthusiasm (or alternatively the anxiety) of the unknown setting influenced some of the answers the students gave in the survey. In regard to the ten students who actually took part in the study I was able to refer back to the survey during the final interview when I asked them to comment on the plans they had written four years ago (this is explained in the narratives and the commentaries).

3.2. Interviews

3.2.1. The pilot study

In 2015 I carried out a pilot study and interviewed eight language students in their third and fourth year of studies. The experiences I gained helped me to plan the questions and parameters for the longitudinal study. In my evaluation of the pilot study (where interviews had taken place in cafes or open spaces) I had become aware of the importance of surroundings. I realised that there were issues of privacy with holding interviews in spaces where the comments of the students could be heard. Also, the background noises made the transcription process difficult.

3.2.2. Location and mode of interviews

The interviews for the main study took place roughly once a year (see the timeline for specific details). Following my experiences from the pilot study, I conducted the interviews during the first and second years in rooms of the university which I could reserve for the purpose of the study. Students were familiar with these rooms, and I hoped that they would feel at ease in these surroundings.

All students were abroad during the third year of their studies (though Eve and Rita returned early) and I was able to visit the majority during this period and conduct interviews face-to-face (I had received some funding and also used private funds). These interviews were either conducted in rooms of the partner universities or, if this was difficult to organise, in quiet areas of a café suggested by the students. However, some interviews took place via video link.

There was no interview with Eve in third year (this is explained in her narrative).

Francesca visited Scotland between her first and second semester abroad, and I conducted the third interview with her at the home university.

The range of interview modes (online vs. face-to-face) and locations gave me an opportunity to reflect on the contrasting settings. While I feel that all interviews were successful and students readily talked about their experiences, I suggest that the face-to-face interviews on location had additional benefits. Firstly, having the opportunity to travel to the destinations and experience the surroundings motivated me further for the study. Secondly, since I was new to these surroundings, the power balance shifted towards the students who were more knowledgeable about practical aspects of their environments. Thirdly, since I was able to gain an impression of the students' contexts I could also more readily enter their hermeneutic circle (Sayer, 2000). This was particularly the case during

two Erasmus teaching exchanges which I engaged in during the study. During these week-long exchanges I visited Lotti in Russia (her first of two exchanges), and Margarita and Jade in France. Both stays allowed me to meet with teaching staff from the partner universities and to gain personal experiences of the teaching methods and surroundings. Additionally, I met the students several times informally prior to the interviews. The informal meetings alerted me to particular themes which were important to the students and which we discussed further during the interviews.

I had planned to conduct the interviews in year 4 face-to-face in a similar environment to the initial interviews. However, by this time the spread of the pandemic had meant that we were in strict lockdown and physical contact was not allowed. All final interviews were conducted online using a variety of platforms according to the preferences of the students. Generally, this went well, though occasionally there were connectivity problems, and this meant switching to audio only in Margarita's interview. In my estimation, the mode of the final interview did not have a large impact on the interview relationship as I had by now established a long-standing connection with the students and had, in fact, met most of them at university only a few weeks earlier. However, the lockdown itself and the ensuing uncertainties certainly influenced the mood and the reflections of the students. Two students had been completely isolated during lockdown (Sanjay and Jade) and both reported struggling with their mental wellbeing during this time. I am very grateful that the students still agreed to take part in the interviews.

3.2.3. Interview questions

Interviews are useful "to capture the complexities of the realities under consideration" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016, p. 77).

In my data collection, and during the crafting process I had my evolving research questions in mind. Preliminary research questions were influenced by Benson et al.'s research on second language identity (2013), and during the first round of interviews the questions related to language background, experiences with language learning, motivation to learn languages and expectations in regard to linguistic and cultural adaptation. Over the following years, I became acquainted with Margaret Archers' work on reflexivity, and I developed my own framework, as my research questions evolved. This led me to add questions relating to reflexivity and decision-making. For instance, I asked students how they came to certain decisions they made.

Further important aspects of the interviews in the second, third, and fourth year were reflections about the year abroad in third year. Prior to the year abroad, we discussed expectations and preparations, then during their stay abroad students reflected on their present experiences, and after their return they evaluated their experiences and contrasted them to their expectations and their current situation. During the final interview students often acknowledged how their present experiences were formed by the experiences during the year abroad, as these sometimes led to feelings of nostalgia (as in Sanjay's case) or to a mix of emotions ranging from relief, to regret about not having spoken more in the target language, or euphoria about having had a great year abroad.

The generic interview scripts for all interviews can be found in the appendixes (and all questions were then adapted to the individual participants).

3.2.4. Length of interviews

Seidman (2013) suggests considering time in the practical planning of the interview. I agree that setting a specific amount of time for the interviews helped me and the interviewees to focus on the questions and answers. It also seemed courteous as I was aware that students have busy lives and need to know how much time to set aside for the interviews. I usually suggested that the interviews take between 30 and 60 minutes. However, I always ended on an open question where I asked whether the participant would like to add anything we had not covered before, and occasionally this did lead to the interviewee to elaborate and exceed the proposed time.

3.3. Visuals

3.3.1. Advantages of visuals

In addition to the interviews, I used visuals in my research. Visuals can present a research method in themselves in that they are "powerful records of real-world, real-time actions and events" (Aries et al., 2011, p. 2), and the analysis of films, photographs or paintings can serve to investigate social history, historic changes, or contemporary phenomena.

However, visuals are also used to provide stimuli for speaking activities, and for instance in language teaching the work with selfies has been described as enhancing the reflective process, and representing an "'open sesame' to a whole world of embodied experiences and memory" (Victoria, 2021, p. 101).

My own approach was to use images as visual elicitation in order to gain an understanding of the perspectives of my informants (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). This process (see below)

provided insights into how the participants reflected on their experiences during and after the year abroad, and I noticed how their priorities changed.

3.3.2. Use of visuals

Three students agreed to send me weekly visuals via WhatsApp during the first part of their year abroad (up to the time when we conducted the interviews). I usually sent the students a quick reminder every week (assuring them that it was absolutely fine to miss weeks if they had nothing relevant), and this additionally proved a good strategy for staying in contact with the students. I then used these photos as visual elicitation during the interview which I conducted while the students were abroad. In preparation for the interview, I printed the photos on separate pieces of paper, and I then asked the students to choose some photographs which they felt most relevant to their experiences, and to comment further on them.

As mentioned earlier, the final interviews took place online during lockdown. In preparation, I re-printed the photos for each student into a booklet and sent these to the students, asking them to keep them ready for the final interviews. During the interview I reminded them of which photos they had chosen as the most relevant ones in the previous year and to comment further on these.

3.3.3. Themes chosen for the visuals

As mentioned above, the visuals served to convey the experiences of the students during their time abroad, and three students sent weekly snapshots which we used in the interviews of years 3 and 4. The photos covered a variety of themes which are all related to the context of the year abroad. These are for instance metaphors of travelling (aeroplanes, airports), or depictions of physical objects (the university buildings, the dormitories, cinema tickets). They often conveyed emotions, such as exhilaration (a bungee jump), frustration (complicated timetable schedules), sadness (a friend leaving at the airport), happiness and friendship (activities with friends or partners), serenity (a calming scene in a park), or incredulity (protests of the yellow vest movement in France).

It was noticeable that many photos depicted other people, and in the interviews in years 3 and 4 the students explained how the relationships to these people either intensified or declined during the formative time of the year abroad and the return to the home university.

3.3.4. Shift in significance of themes over time

I was surprised how the significance of particular pictures shifted over time. For instance, in the year three interview Leanne selected as extremely relevant the image of her friend leaving at the airport two weeks after arrival. The friend had decided to cancel the year abroad and Leanne described this sudden departure as incredibly sad and “a punch almost out of nowhere” (Leanne, interview 3). However, when I asked Leanne about the image again one year later, in the final interview, she said: “it’s funny really, I think now, perhaps, having been such a long time I kind of forget Sally [name changed] was ever there” (Leanne, interview 4). In fact, Leanne now chose completely different pictures to represent her experiences, and these were far more uplifting, such as pictures of her with a good friend on the beach, or of her travelling, or of a cinema ticket.

This example shows how visuals can be useful to reflect on experiences over time and to elicit their changing relevance in relation to the current mood. During year 3 Leanne was going through a difficult phase where she was calling the year abroad in question for herself. However, by year 4 Leanne had a far more positive evaluation of her year abroad, and completely different memories constituted this meaning for her.

3.4. Communications

The final method of data collection were occasional communications from the participants. These were mostly unplanned. Sometimes a student had reflected further on a theme from an interview and felt they wanted to add something. At other times students had got in touch with me in my role as a representative of the university, and I then asked whether I could use the communications for the narratives. For instance, Eve and Rita both told me about the changes they had made to their year abroad plans by email. Finally, some students sent me updates of what they were doing after the final interview, as they knew that I was interested in how their life had progressed.

Particularly the final communications have an interesting relation to time, as they articulate how the actual study is just a small section in the life story of the individuals. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) have described how difficult it is for the researcher to know how far to probe into the past and the future and also to decide when to finish with the data collection. In this study I continued to include data right up to the final communication which I received from Margherita in June 2021.

4. Mediation

The relationship between the researcher and the participant (often referred to as ‘agent’) is complex and even where research strives to be participant-centred, most scholars agree that the voice of the agent never speaks for itself. It is evoked through data collection processes, and then analysed through narrative or other processes. In the following, I will review what different researchers from the narrative and critical realist perspectives have written about the interaction, or mediation, between the researcher and the participant. I will then consider my own approach while bearing ethical questions in mind.

4.1. The relationship between the researcher and the participant in narrative research

In chapter 2 I described how narratives can be characterised as transformative, as the object of narrative inquiry becomes the subject, and is granted “both agency and voice” (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 180).

However, the researcher is of course omni-present in narrative research, and Clandinin & Connelly (2000) describe it as the task of the researcher (rather than the agent) to discover and construct meaning in the field texts by asking questions of meaning and social significance. They describe the author as the mediator who must pay attention to the question of ‘voice’ and find a balance between the perspective of the agent, and the influence of the author.

Clandinin and Connelly maintain that a relationship of trust between the researcher and the agent must develop over time in order for the shared ‘voice’ to emerge. This is described as “a process of self-insertion in the other’s story as a way of coming to know the other’s story and as giving the other voice” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). As the researcher becomes part of the process, the two narratives of the participant and the researcher “become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5).

Ideally, the collaborative nature of the research process can promote equality between participants, and a feeling of connectedness. Pavlenko maintains that narratives “shift the power relationship between researchers and participants,” (2007, p. 180).

Unfortunately, not all participants feel empowered by this relationship, and some even feel silenced or misunderstood (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Mosselson (2010) has suggested that we should think critically about who is actually included in a research project, how the participants have been described, and what the author has disclosed about themselves.

Then we must pay attention to the fact that the field texts themselves may show certain gaps (Josselson, 2007). In fact, Jackson & Mazzei (2013) caution that during the interview process researchers should hold the assumption that every story which is told is in place of another story which is not told. Every interview is, by nature, a selective process and therefore the 'exact words' of the participant do not mean that we are hearing the true voice of the participant. Mazzei and Jackson assert that "we are *always already* shaping those 'exact words' through the unequal power relationships present and by our own exploitative research agendas and timelines" (2012, p. 746; italics in original text). In fact, the authors suggest that the notion of 'letting participants speak for themselves' is a naïve claim.

4.2. The issue of mediation in realist research

While a strong form of realism may suggest that we are able to step outside of our limited perspectives to see reality in an unmediated way, most realists reject this notion. They clearly acknowledge the role of mediation between researcher and researched when seeking to understand social phenomena. Sayer (2000) for instance suggests that social scientists must enter the hermeneutic circle of those whom they study in order for the mediation process to take place. This indicates a degree of relativism in the critical realist approach.

However, Cruikshank highlights the critical realist angle by suggesting that not all perspectives in relativism are equal. Instead, they offer varying degrees of truth about the external reality. He claims that a relativism which equates what is 'true' with what 'works' runs into the danger of being able to justify any form of political system "whether liberal or fascist and racist." (2001, p. 221). In contrast, "a moderate realism underpins the attempts by the social sciences to understand social relations, gender, power, inequality access to resources, institutions, etc." (2001, p. 224). Cruikshank therefore argues for a relativism driven by the desire to improve the human condition. While such attempts at understanding are naturally subjective and may always be hotly contested, the author maintains that "such attempts are more useful than dogmatic prescriptions, postmodern deconstructions and pragmatic relativism" (Cruikshank, 2001, p. 224).

4.3. A pragmatist approach to researcher reflexivity

How, then, can I critically acknowledge this mediation processes (which is recognised by both narrative and critical realist thinkers), maintain trust with the students (a central concept of narrative researchers) while remaining committed to my desire to improve

student support (which, I argue, is part of the human condition, and is a concern of critical realism)?

I explained in chapter 2 that my own approach is inspired by Rosiek's version of pragmatism which he refers to as "pragmatism's reflexive realism" (2013) and is committed to the aspects outlined above. A central point of this reflexive realism is the need to interrogate the influence of one's cultural and historical origins on one's "habits of knowing" (Rosiek, 2013, p. 694), as these origins permeate throughout the mediation process. Accordingly, and in a wish to increase the transparency in my own research, I had outlined my own positionality, and some of my own origins in chapter 2. I concur with Ely's sentiments, when she suggests that in order to maintain trust with our participants "we are to write not as unknown, all-knowing forces but as people who share our stances, methods, feelings, biases, reasoning, successes, and failures" (2007, p. 15).

This leads me to the next section where I turn to the data analysis while bearing the question of mediation in mind.

5. Data analysis

I now turn to the data analysis. The longitudinal nature of the study allowed me to investigate how the structural conditions, the students' concerns, their projects, and their reflexivity changed over time, and I used both narratives and commentaries to highlight these changes. The narratives allowed me to represent a certain continuum through their inherent attention to development over time. However, in the tradition of critical realism I also clearly distinguish between specific points in time, and I use commentaries to differentiate between structural and agentive forces at these different points in time.

5.1. Short discourse on narrative analysis

At this point I insert a short discussion of the thinking around narrative analysis. Where narratives are constructed as the outcome of research (narrative analysis) they are understood as presenting their own narrative truth which convince us through their lifelikeness or verisimilitude. Bruner (1986) has called this form of knowledge narrative cognition (which he refers to as a paradigm in its own right), and he has separated this from the paradigmatic cognition which aims to convince through empiric proof based on a well-formed argument, a rational style of discourse, evidence, and systematic conclusions.

Clandinin & Connelly are regarded as key representatives of narrative analysis and they maintain that this approach enables a focus on experience: “experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of thinking about it” (2000, p. 18). Narrative analysis begins with experiences, however, since these are often difficult to observe directly, narratives enable the researchers to describe the nature and meaning of experiences “from the perspectives of those who experience them” (Benson et al., 2013, p. 13). The actual description of experience through the narrative writing is seen as an intervention into this experience which adds “meaning to experience, thus changing the content and quality of experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 44). This does mean (as discussed above) that a certain mediation of the researcher is necessary. Social and cultural influences are acknowledged and critiqued in narrative analysis but only as they influence the lived experience.

Narrative analysis uses a variety of data which may consist of actions, events, happenings, and multimodal narratives (Barkhuizen et al., 2013), but the actual analysis will produce stories (these can be biographies, histories, or case studies). The use of emplotment (i.e. creation of plots) and narrative configuration (Polkinghorne, 1995) are the primary analytic tools in narrative analysis. The different levels of time are always combined in narrative inquiry: “Events, people, and objects under study are in temporal transition and narrative inquirers describe them with a past, a present, and a future” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 34).

5.2. Crafting the narratives

There are many approaches to crafting narratives (as shown for instance by Lieblich, 1998; or Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002), and these can be more plot-based, providing a problem and a solution, or more descriptive. Connelly & Clandinin favour the latter version which they refer to as the “inductive mode”, where data “more clearly tell their own story” (1990, p. 11). The authors suggest that the three-dimensional space structure (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is most suitable for conveying the personal and social experience of the participant. This approach centres on Dewey’s philosophy of experience and entails three central aspects:

- (1) Continuity - past experiences are analysed in respect to how they shape the present and will influence the future; this aspect refers to the dimension of ‘time’;

(2) Situation or place - specific physical places in the storyteller's landscape are analysed; this aspect refers to the dimension of 'space';

(3) Interaction - the transcripts are analysed for both personal experiences and interactions of the individual with other people; this aspect has a 'reflexive' component.

Clandinin & Connelly also refer to these three dimensions as 'becoming', 'context' and 'relationship', when they suggest that the final plotline should "emerge from the tensions of people, places, and things in relationship, in context, and in becoming" (2000, p. 146).

I have already mentioned above that in the crafting process attention must also be paid to voice (J. D. Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) (this can belong to the researcher or the participants, and a balance must be found); and audience (the needs of the audience must be satisfied without neglecting the balances of voices).

Every year after carrying out the interviews I wrote draft versions of the individual narratives. After the final interviews had been conducted, I experimented with writing several versions of the entire narratives spanning four years. My crafting during the first years were influenced by Clandinin & Connelly's three-dimensional space structure. However, in later years I consciously tried to separate the participants perceptions of structural influences from descriptions of their agentive processes, as is suggested in critical realist research (Archer suggests separating 'objective' and 'subjective' forces). I also tried to describe how the participants reflected on their circumstances to make agentive decisions. I then realised that particular narratives lent themselves to highlight specific areas of interest (an example of this is Leanne's evolving understanding of what it means to become 'multilingually competent', and the influence of this on her decision-making). This insight led me to further develop my research framework to match these areas of interest, and also to further condense the narratives to focus on individual themes (while at the same time trying to preserve the complexity of each trajectory).

Despite these developments in my thinking, I paid attention to 'time' and 'space' in the crafting process: The narratives follow the timeline of the interviews and have been broken up according to time and locations. This reflects a critical realist view on time where the attention is focussed on particular points in time with a clear distinction between "antecedence and consequence ... and the demarcation between pre-existing conditions and current actions" (Archer, 1998b, p. 14). While I focus on specific points in time, there is

still a sense of narrative continuum as the participants often reflect back and forth over time and space.

I have tried to centre the narratives on the voice of the participants, often using quotes from the interviews, or from written statements they have sent me. An early version of the narratives was shared with the participants and approved by them.

However, the later version of the narratives focusses on particular themes and during this process my own voice has become stronger, as I selected relevant experiences and continued to condense the stories.

I am further aware of the interpretative nature of conducting interviews (which provided the main data for the narratives), and that the participants might well have portrayed themselves in a certain way to me, and in a different way to their friends, but this does not mean that any of these positionings are “untrue”. From a narrative researchers point of view each narrative which I have written about the participants contains its own truth. From a critical realist point of view each narrative and commentary belongs to a transitive dimension of science which contains its own discourse and theory.

5.3. Analysis of narratives

Polkinghorne (1995) argues that narrative inquiries are not necessarily linked to narrative cognition (or ‘narrative analysis’) where the narratives stand for themselves and convince us through their lifelikeness or verisimilitude (Bruner, 1986). In contrast to narrative analysis, Polkinghorne describes how narrative research is often based on the paradigmatic mode of thought. He calls this approach the ‘analysis of narratives’, where data consist of narratives or stories, but the analysis will typically use thematic analysis to produce “paradigmatic typologies or categories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5).

Research is in fact, highly diverse, and Lieblich (1998) has referred to myriad dimensions along which narratives can be crafted, and further analysis of narratives can be carried out including, but not restricted to, “contents; structure; style of speech; affective characteristics; motives, attitudes, and beliefs of the narrator; or her or his cognitive level” (1998, p. 9). Lieblich describes several approaches of which only some are based on categories and content or form analysis, while others focus more holistically on content and/or form. I will describe my own approach in the following section.

5.4. Crafting the commentaries based on a Critical Realist Approach

As already mentioned, the process of repeatedly re-writing the narratives had enabled me to focus and adapt my research questions around particular areas of interest and to further develop the framework. I mentioned in Chapter 2, 2.4.3 that abstraction is a key feature of critical realism and this means narrowing down the research objects to one-sided components, and also to think about the way we carve up and define our objects of study (Sayer, 2000). When I introduced the framework in chapter 5, I explained the focus on particular components in the individual narratives.

I decided to further analyse the narratives and strengthen the realist dimension of my research by supplementing the narratives with commentaries based on a critical realist approach (this was my 'analysis of narratives'). In these commentaries I address the research questions and make the components of research for each commentary explicit.

As mentioned above, analysis of narratives often (though by no means always) takes place through thematic analysis based on categories and typologies (Polkinghorne, 1995). I had considered this approach for the commentaries in my own analysis but have refrained from it for various reasons. Firstly, this would mean pooling the narratives, and I am specifically interested in following the decisions of the individual students based on the interplay of structure and concerns, and their narratives. Secondly, thematic analysis is linked to the paradigmatic cognition (Bruner, 1986), and seems incompatible with the idea of mediation which is recognised not only in narrative analysis, but also in critical realist and pragmatic thinking (see above). I have therefore crafted the commentaries in a more holistic manner, based on the individual narratives, but focussing on particular aspects and responding to specific research questions.

Thus, the commentaries provide a further dimension to this research in that they move away from the 'insider' or subjective world of the participants, towards the 'outsider' world of 'explanation'. However, I would like to point out that these two approaches (narratives versus commentaries) do not tell two different stories. In contrast, they tell the same story, but while the narratives 'demonstrate' how the participants undergo their multilingual trajectory across time and space, the commentaries focus on understanding causally how decisions can be formed through reflexivity. By focussing on specific components, i.e., a particular concern, project, or structural force alongside the causal power of reflexivity we come to understand how reflexivity becomes a generative mechanism. In Archer's words:

“in realism ‘understanding’ becomes a matter of grasping the causal efficacy of ‘people’” (2000, p. 310).

I repeat that both the ‘insider’ voice of the narratives, and the ‘outsider’ world of explanation are mediated, and as a researcher I have a ‘voice’ which is subject to my own interpretation and normative commitments. This ‘voice’ is of course still shared with the participants whose trajectory I seek to analyse. However, I argue that in the commentaries the balance of this voice is further weighed towards myself as a researcher seeking to find causal explanations by applying the framework I put forward.

6. Evaluation of my approach

As mentioned above, my research is based on a pragmatic approach which combines elements of narrative analysis with a critical realist framework. How would researchers in these areas judge their work to be effective? I will give a very brief overview of the criteria put forward by narrative, critical realist, and pragmatist scholars and explain their meaningfulness to my own research.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) have discussed several criteria which can be used to judge narrative texts. Among these are apparency, verisimilitude and transferability, and they maintain that this takes the emphasis off generalisability. A good narrative is also described as “having an explanatory, invitational quality, as having authenticity, as having adequacy and plausibility” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 185). However, wakefulness is named as the main criterium which should be used to judge the whole process of the narrative inquiry:

it is *wakefulness* that in our view most needs to characterize the living out of our narrative inquiries, whether we are in the field, writing field texts, or writing research texts and wondering about what criteria to use in a particular narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 185).

I have considered what exactly Clandinin & Connelly mean by this term. Elbaz-Luwisch interprets this wakefulness as “foregrounding the authors’ own experience and struggles and paying close attention to the dilemmas of their students”. Additionally, the participants’ narratives should be honoured, by

watching for possible distortion of those narratives by the constraints of the ‘grand narrative’ on the one hand, and of formalist theoretical positions on the other; and by placing people, their ideas and hopes, their lives and experience, firmly at the center of inquiry (2010, p. 275).

I concur with Elbaz-Luwisch' interpretation, but I suggest that wakefulness also implies that the researcher should apply common sense to the whole research process, and ensure that it is manageable, critical, and yields results which are meaningful. In my study it will also mean keeping a wakeful eye on my participants to ensure that the study is not a burden, but a positive contribution to their experience at university.

Interestingly, Clandinin & Connelly warn against the illusion of causality (which may emerge from the temporal sequence) and which should be avoided (Crites, 1986, p.168 quoted in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 185). This brings the beliefs of the authors in direct conflict with scholars of critical realism, who are particularly interested in causal qualities of their research (Archer, 2000; Sayer, 2000). Ultimately, critical realism is critical of the social practices it studies and attempts to identify false understandings in society which lead to false actions. A criterium for critical realist research is then to uncover such mechanisms. Only when such false understandings are uncovered can these beliefs and actions be changed (Sayer, 2000). In fact, Lopez and Potter have argued that this transformative aspect of critical realism adds a pragmatic dimension to the approach. They maintain that critical realism "is meant to have practical implications – for how problems are framed, for how research is to be conducted ... and ultimately for what policies are pursued" (2001, p. 216).

In fact, this leads us back to the pragmatic approach which I started out with. In pragmatism, the anticipated consequences are central (Cherryholmes, 1992; Rosiek, 2013).

This guides my own analysis as I seek to understand the experience of the students in a wakeful mode while I simultaneously attempt to uncover causalities in order to improve student support.

7. Limitations to my research methodology

I have already pointed out some limitations to my research methodology above, as I considered the selection process of the participants. I present further limitations below, and I will return to a discussion of these in the conclusion to this thesis.

7.1. Causality and predictions for the future

I have described above my interest in causality as I seek to understand decisions of the students retroductively. This approach leads me to consider the causal powers of structural changes and students' agency (including their reflexivity). However, this retroductive analysis remains explanatory of highly individualistic situations, and predictions for the future of similar cases remain very tentative.

7.2. Abstraction of components

I have described above how I selected specific themes for each narrative, according to my own impression of the interpretative value of these themes. I recognise that this approach may misrepresent the experience of the students, and by concentrating on particular themes I may also miss other themes which could be equally conducive to the analysis.

7.3. Replicability

This thesis is unique in that the data collection took place during unprecedented structural changes. While this can be understood as a strength of the study (see chapter 11 under 'historical contributions') it can also be seen as a limitation as the results are not replicable through similar follow-up research.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered the ethics of working with my participants, and explained my data collection processes, considered questions of mediation, and explained how I analysed the data. Furthermore, I have laid out some of the criteria by which I judge my own work, and some limitations to my methodology. Throughout this chapter I discussed several key differences, as well as synergies, between narrative, critical realist, and pragmatic approaches. I have located my own study in the pragmatist tradition, and this allows me to work with narratives (which focus on the worldview of the participants) and commentaries (where I focus on specific components of research and causal explanation). Both methods of data analysis enable me to address my research aims and questions.

I now introduce the participants and relevant variables before presenting a timeline which includes the dates of the interviews and key contextual developments (chapter 7). This leads directly to my own analysis which I put forward in chapters 8-10.

Chapter 7: Cohort profile and background information

1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to analyse reflexivity and decision-making amongst undergraduate language students, and the analysis in chapters 8-10 is very much focussed on the concerns, experiences, and trajectories of the individual students. This is in line with the epistemological underpinning, and the combination of a narrative approach with a critical realist analysis (see chapter 2) is suited to investigating individual, rather than collective, experiences.

However, a criticism which has been levelled against Archer's theory of reflexivity is that socialisation is minimalised as an explanatory factor in her analysis (W. Atkinson, 2014; Caetano, 2015). While I am careful not to generalise, I suggest that a certain knowledge of the cohort and particular variables in respect to their background and previous experiences is relevant to better understand several similarities and differences in the narratives of my participants. In a unique way, I present and discuss ten narratives (rather than a single case), and this inevitably leads to the observation of similarities and differences which can, according to Josselson (2007), lead to the emergence of patterns.

Describing the cohort is, however, complex and indeed the concept of "super-diversity" seems an appropriate notion. This term was first coined by Vertovec (2007, p. 1025) to describe the diversification of diversity amongst migrant communities not only in terms of ethnicity, but also in terms of additional variables such as their immigration statuses, their entitlements and restrictions of rights, and their divergent labour market experiences.

Under key concepts in chapter 3, I reflected on the concepts of migration, mobility, and language, and the nexus of these areas. I propose that these concepts are best thought of as fluid in relation to my cohort (and this will become clear in the analysis chapters which show how students repeatedly re-position themselves in relationship to the concepts) and I suggest that the term "super-diversity" is therefore a fitting characterisation of the students.

I focus below on variables which are perhaps easier to pinpoint (age, gender, programme of study, nationality, target language during university learning, target country / institution for year abroad). However, even these areas are often characterised by fluidity.

Despite the diversity I have mentioned above, there are also unifying elements across the group in terms of the institutional context, and the contextual changes around Brexit and

the pandemic. In section 3, I add some reflections on “cohort theory” and consider whether and to what extent these contextual changes generate a common experience. The timeline in section 4 of this chapter highlights key events as the students progress through their university course, and Brexit and Covid-19 unfold.

2. Variables

I now present several variables to introduce the cohort. Throughout this study, I use pseudonyms for the participants, and some of these were suggested by the students themselves.

2.1. Age, gender, and nationality of students at the beginning of the study

At the beginning of the study the students are between 17 and 21 years old. 9 students are female and 1 is male. I reproduce here table 1 which introduces the students and shows their nationality.

Eve	UK
Frederica	Irish /UK / permanent right to residency in Switzerland
Jade	Italy
Leanne	British Crown Dependency
Lotti	Germany
Margarita	Italy
Rita	Poland
Ruby	UK
Sanjay	Italy
Tilly	Spain

Table 1 – (reproduced): Names and nationality of participants

2.2. Former schooling and language learning

Both Tilly and Frederica attended international (English-speaking) schools in their home countries (Spain / Switzerland). Rita’s school in Poland was a specialist school for languages. Sanjay, Margarita, Jade and Lotti attended schools in Italy / Germany where they learnt various languages. Eve, Ruby and Leanne attended schools in the UK where they could specialise on language learning during their final years.

2.3. Transition to university

Five students (Tilly, Frederica, Rita, Ruby and Leanne) commenced their undergraduate programmes immediately after they finished high school. The other students took some time out: Jade spent a year in Italy (her home country) learning English, and Lotti spent a year in Germany (her home country) doing an internship. Eve spent a gap year in

Switzerland as an au pair. Sanjay and Margarita moved to the UK and worked in various jobs for several years before applying to university.

2.4. EU membership

At the beginning of the study nearly¹⁰ all the members of this cohort are nationals of countries which belong to the EU (see Table 1 above). Their nationality, and in particular their status as citizens of the EU, initially grants them rights such as the freedom to work, live and study in other member states. Faist (2013, p. 1644) reminds us of how nationality is often the distinguishing feature between access to such privileges: “one of the most important meta-mechanisms ensuring the social closure of rich vs. poor around the globe is legal citizenship, usually called nationality”. After the UK’s departure from the EU at the end of the study, all students lose their reciprocal rights. UK students are no longer able to work and study in EU countries without first obtaining a visa. The same applies for EU students wanting to work and study in the UK.

This affects the students differently across the cohort. One student (Frederica) already has the dual citizenship, so she is not affected by Brexit. All of the other non-UK students now need to apply for the settlement scheme to be allowed to remain in the country post-Brexit. Margarita and Sanjay have already spent enough time in the UK to be eligible for the settled status. The remaining students first need to apply for the pre-settled status and will only gain the settled status after five years. During this time, they retain the right to remain in the UK, but they may not leave the country for a lengthy period of time. This leads to difficult choices as the pandemic unfolds, and for instance Lotti decided to forego her prospects of the settled status as she planned to commence her postgraduate studies outside of the UK.

2.5. Programme of study

All students begin their studies at the same Scottish university in September 2016. Table 4 below shows the undergraduate BA (Hons) programmes which they initially enrol on.

¹⁰ Leanne is from an island which is linked to the UK but does not formally constitute part of the UK or the EU. However, a reciprocal arrangement means that she is entitled to work, live and study in the UK. She is the only student who needs to pay fees for her studies, as the Scottish student fees are free for Scottish students and EU students (but not for students from other parts of the UK or Leanne’s home island).

Eve, Rita, Ruby, Sanjay	International Business Management and Language
Frederica, Jade, Lotti, Margarita	Languages and Intercultural Communication
Leanne	Language with Tourism Management
Tilly	Languages and Intercultural Communication with Marketing Management

Table 4 - Programme of study at the beginning of year 1

By the end of their four years of undergraduate study some students have changed to different BA (Hons) programmes (Table 5). This change is linked to reflexivity, and the narratives show how students reflect on the enablements and barriers which they perceive as they transfer to different programmes. However, they do not always feel they are agentive in their decision. For instance, Eve says: “we didn’t have much of a choice” when she describes her decision to cancel her year abroad and this automatically triggers a change of programme.

Frederica, Ruby, Sanjay	International Business Management and Language
Jade, Lotti	Languages and Intercultural Communication
Leanne	Language with Tourism Management
Margarita	Languages and Intercultural Communication with Marketing Management
Tilly	Marketing Management with Language
Eve	Flexibly Managed Course (specialising in Business Management with Marketing Management without Language)
Rita	Flexibly Managed Course (specialising in Human Resources with Language)

Table 5 - Programme of study at the end of year 4

2.6. Target languages during university learning

Table 6 shows the languages which students learnt during their university course. This does not include languages which students learnt informally or in other contexts. If a language is not learnt over the entire four years of the programme, I have added the period of tuition in brackets. Language choice is a consideration which is discussed throughout the analysis chapters, and also specifically in chapter 9.

Eve	Spanish (2 years)
Frederica	German
Jade	French, Spanish (1 trimester), English (1 trimester), Mandarin (2 years)
Leanne	Spanish, French (3 years)
Lotti	French, Spanish (2 years), Mandarin (1 trimester), Russian (1 year)
Margarita	French, German (1 year), Spanish (2 years)
Rita	German
Ruby	German
Sanjay	French
Tilly	German

Table 6- Target languages during the four years of study

2.7. Target country / placement type for year abroad

Table 7 shows the students' destinations during their year abroad. Again, the choices of the students are discussed in the narratives.

Eve	Spain (cancelled after 10 days)
Frederica	Germany
Jade	France
Leanne	Spain
Lotti	Russia (1 semester), Canada (1 semester)
Margarita	France
Rita	Erasmus internship in Germany (1 semester), 2 nd semester in German is cancelled
Ruby	Germany
Sanjay	France – dual degree
Tilly	Germany

Table 7 - Target destinations for study / placement abroad

3. Cohort theory

As mentioned above, the shared contextual background impacts on the experiences of the students as the unprecedented events of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded.

However, we will see in the narratives that these events do not affect the trajectories of all students in the same way.

A helpful construct for understanding the tension between individual choice (agency) and structural forces is the 'cohort theory' which Fulbrook (2011) refers to in her research on the life stories of individual Germans at various periods of the twentieth century.

The author looks at specific cohorts which she characterises as 'sore-thumb generations' or 'cohort clusters', and she defines these as

members of particular cohorts which 'stick out' in the historical record, groups of people born within a few years of each other who tend to play a highly visible historical role in some way, with striking differences in their outlooks and actions from those born a few years earlier or a few years later (Fulbrook, 2011, p. 7).

She emphasises that the members of these clusters may themselves not be aware that they are participating in a common generational experience, and the category is actually "imposed by external analysis, which may or may not find echoes in the subjective consciousness and discourse of those involved" (Fulbrook, 2011, p. 8). Fulbrook suggests that cohort clusters face particular challenges caused by major historical events (for instance war) and that these challenges are experienced by different cohorts in distinctive ways related to age (which she describes as biological and linked to social life-stages). However, she stresses that there are also other distinctions which may be very relevant to the experience of a specific time in history (such as 'race' in the Third Reich).

Importantly, Fulbrook emphasises the fact that while people are shaped by common challenges, they may in fact respond very differently as individuals to these challenges. She maintains that "individuals have degrees of choice about the ways in which they make their lives through often uncomfortable times" (2011, p. 11). These choices are however "coloured by the varying discourses of the day and by the ends they seek to achieve within any given context" (2011, p. 11). Fulbrook further highlights the tension between structural, cultural, or historic forces and individual choice (agency) as she maintains that "the issue of generation remains an intriguing one, getting to the heart, as it does, of the possibilities of malleability and (self-)transformation of human beings in ways which are heavily patterned, if never entirely determined, by changing historical environments" (2011, p. 10).

In my own research, the cohort theory is a relevant concept as the events of Brexit and Covid-19 present major historical events which massively intrude on what people consider to be their private life. I argue that my participants belong to a particular generational cluster. At the beginning of their studies, they specifically embarked on courses which implied mobility in their work lives. However, their course of studies was then framed by the Brexit vote and the Coronavirus pandemic. We may therefore refer to them in terms of a 'sore thumb generation' (see Fulbrook's explanation above). Brexit represents an uncertain future for many as they need to navigate through the new restrictions on their right to movement. The pandemic introduces even faster and more severe restrictions on personal freedoms and career choices at a hitherto unprecedented scale (see chapter 10 where I pay attention to both forces). I agree with Fulbrook's suggestion that the cohort is

shaped by these life-changing events, while there are still distinctions which are relevant to the individual students' experiences.

One such variable which perhaps has not been addressed so far, is the degree of financial security which the family background of the students can offer. This has an impact for instance on whether the students have the resources to continue their education with postgraduate study, or gain further experience through unpaid placements, during a challenging economic environment with few jobs available. A further variable might be the attachment of a student to their family, as Ruby's narrative shows how her concern not only for herself, but also for her family, leads her to cancel a placement abroad.

While the narratives show that all students disagree with the ideology of Brexit, the actual impact on them also varies depending on several factors. As mentioned above, some students (Sanjay and Frederica) are still free to move between the UK and the EU as they either have settled status or dual nationality, and Brexit does not affect them personally. Also, the relevance of having the right to stay in the UK varies across the EU students. If, for instance, the economic outlook in their country of origin is bleak, or they have formed a strong attachment to the UK (as in Rita's case), they will feel potential barriers more strongly than if they were planning to move to a different country anyway. While we have to an extent defined the cohort in terms of age, we can also see that two students are a few years older than the others (Margarita and Sanjay), and this differentiates them from the others as their desire to start earning money and settle down seems stronger than for others.

So, depending on the individual distinctions and motivations, the impact of the contextual changes varies. Canagarajah describes how each context provides "different scales of consideration nested or overlapping with each other We have to determine which contextual scale becomes relevant at what point" (Canagarajah, 2017, p. 12). Reflexivity is crucial here, and this is the missing link which has not been explored fully in Fulbrook's analysis of cohort clusters. In contrast, the framework proposed in this study serves well to fully focus on reflexivity while analysing the relevance of various variables, but also the contextual changes on the trajectory of the students.

4. Timeline of events

Dates	Contextual events: Brexit and the Coronavirus pandemic	Events relating to the study and the trajectory of the participants	
Jan 2016 (later for international applications)		Deadline for university application	PRE-STUDY
May – July 2016		Deadline for acceptance of offers	
23 June 2016	The UK holds a referendum on whether to leave the European Union: 52% of voters vote to leave; Prime Minister David Cameron resigns after the results are announced		
13 July 2016	Theresa May becomes Prime Minister		
Sep 2016		All students: Start of university course; Students are informed about study and can register their interest. Briefing sessions with individual students	YEAR 1, 2016-17
Oct / Nov 2016		All students: Interview 1 in Scotland	
29 March 2017	Theresa May invokes Article 50, starting the two-year process for the UK to leave the EU in March 2019.		
8 June 2017	A snap general election is held in the UK. Unexpectedly, the Conservative government loses their majority; formation of a minority government with a confidence-and-supply arrangement with the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland.		
19 Jun 2017	Brexit negotiations begin		

Sept 2018		Beginning of 2nd year of university course	YEAR 2, 2017-18
8 Nov 2017		Lotti: Interview 2 in Scotland	
Jan 2018		Lotti: Commences 5-month exchange with university in Moscow	
27 Feb – 17 April 2018		All students: Interview 2 in Scotland (except Lotti)	
18 May 2018		Lotti: Interview 3 in Moscow	
Sept 2018		Beginning of 3rd year of university course All students: Embark on year abroad (except Lotti). Lotti: Due to visa complications spends semester 1 back at her home university in Scotland. Eve: Cancels her year abroad after 1 week and returns to her home university.	YEAR 3, 2018-19
Nov 2018	Brexit withdrawal agreement is published and endorsed by the 27 other EU member states. However, the agreement still needs to be passed by the UK government to achieve an “orderly” Brexit at the end of March 2019.		
19 Nov 2018		Lotti: Interview 4 in Scotland	
20 Dec 2018		Rita: Interview 3 while she is in Germany	
Jan 2019		Rita: Cancels her second semester abroad and returns to her home university. Lotti: Embarks on her semester abroad in Canada	
Jan – March 2019	The withdrawal agreement is defeated several times in the UK House of Commons; a “no-deal” exit looms.		
Feb - May		Lotti: Interview 5 All students: interview 3 during study abroad (except Eve, Rita, Lotti).	

Chapter 7: Cohort profile and background information

March – April 2019	Two extensions to the Article 50 withdrawal period are granted, lasting to 31 October 2019		YEAR 4, 2019-20
24 May 2019	Theresa May announces her resignation as Conservative Party leader due to being unable to get her Brexit plans through parliament and several votes of no-confidence		
24 July 2019	Boris Johnson forms a new government and becomes Prime Minister of the UK		
Sept 2019		Beginning of 4th (final) year of university course; All students back in Scotland	
28 Oct 2019	European Council agrees to a third extension of the Brexit deadline until 31 Jan 2020		
12 Dec 2019	General election; Conservative party gain a landslide majority of 80 seats under the leadership of Boris Johnson who pledges to “get Brexit done”		
Jan 2020	Revised withdrawal agreement is approved. The UK withdraws from the EU on 31 Jan 2020, and transitional arrangements begin for the period ending on 31 Dec 2020.		
Jan 2020	The Foreign Office advises against all but essential travel to China; the first two cases of Covid 19 (2019-nCoV) in the United Kingdom are confirmed.		
11 March 2020	The World Health Organisation declares the virus a pandemic		
19 March 2020	The Scottish government announces the closure of schools and nurseries by the end of the week. The university suspends face to face teaching	Several students return to their families	
23 March 2020	A general lockdown in the UK commences		
April / May 2020		All students: Final interviews (online)	

Chapter 7: Cohort profile and background information

End of April 2020		Students submit their final assessments and dissertations (Sanjay is granted an extension until August)	
From end of May 2020	Gradual lifting of some lockdown restrictions in Scotland		
June / Sept 2020		Students graduate	
Sept 2020		Communication from Ruby – she has cancelled her assistantship abroad	POST-UNIVERSITY
Nov 2020		Communication from Margarita	
From mid Dec 2020	Nationwide lockdown following the outbreak of a second wave of Covid 19		
1 Jan 2021	End of transitional arrangements following Brexit, implementation of new trade deal with the EU		
Jan – June 2021	Gradual easing of restrictions in Scotland	Communications from several participants	

Table 8 - Timeline of events

5. Conclusion

In chapter 7 I introduced the students and presented various variables which are relevant to their background and socialisation, as well as their trajectory over the course of the study. The variants give evidence of the diversity across the cohort, and I have reflected on the appropriateness of the term 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007) in relation to the cohort. Furthermore, I have considered the 'cohort theory' which was put forward by Fulbrook (2011) and suggest that this is a relevant model to address the influences of the structural upheavals which the cohort faced over the time of the study. However, I also concluded that the role of reflexivity is not adequately covered in this model, and I intend to address the concept of reflexivity fully in my analysis in the following chapters. The current chapter also presents a timeline of the students which includes key dates in the students' programmes of study and in the structural environment of the students.

I now turn to the analysis of the students' data. The analysis is presented in three separate chapters, and these correspond to the three cogs of my model in figure 5 (see also the introductory remarks to the analysis, which follow). Chapter 8 focusses on the students' concerns, chapter 9 focusses on a project of the students (their multilingual repertoires), and chapter 10 focusses on structural forces (Brexit and Coronavirus).

Introductory remarks to chapters 8-10

I now proceed to the analysis of the students' trajectories, and in doing so I link back to my framework for multilingual reflexivity and the research questions which I introduced in chapter 5. My framework focusses on several themes, which I will address in the following chapters. This abstraction of various components has been suggested by Sayer as an approach in critical realist research which encourages a multidimensional investigation (see chapter 2).

To aid clarity, I re-produce Figure 5 below. In the following chapters I focus on one of the cogs below. In chapter 8 I investigate multilingual concerns, as the largest cog below (see also Figure 6 on multilingual concerns in chapter 5). I do so firstly by focussing on the concern of communicative competence, and the development of this concern (in the narratives of Leanne and Tilly – section 1 of chapter 8), and secondly by focussing on the conflict between different concerns (in the narratives of Eve and Federica – section 2 of chapter 8). In chapter 9 I pay attention to multilingual projects (represented by the middle-sized cog below). In fact, I focus on a specific multilingual project of the students, namely the development of Lotti's and Jade's multilingual repertoire. Finally, in chapter 10 I turn to the influence of structural forces (represented by the smallest cog), namely Brexit (in the narratives of Sanjay and Rita – section 1 of chapter 10) and the Coronavirus pandemic (in the narratives of Ruby and Margarita – section 2 of chapter 10).



Figure 5 (re-produced) - My framework of multilingual reflexivity

In each section of analysis I address two research questions, one of them related to either concerns, projects, or structural forces, and the other related to reflexivity and the decision-making process of the students. I then present two narratives (as mentioned above) which I have crafted by paying attention to the experiences of the students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These narratives provide the data for the commentaries which follow the narratives in each section, and specifically address the research questions and the theme of each section.

The quotes for the interviews are the students' unaltered words, and I have preserved pauses where they mattered. However, I have mostly removed filler words (such as 'like'), or markers of hesitation ("umm" and "uh"), or repetitions of words. My decision to standardise the quotes in this way was linked to the fact that I wanted to improve the readability and concentrate on the content of what the students were saying, without being distracted by these filler words. It was also due to personal preference, as I myself do not like to be reminded of the amount of hesitation markers, and repetitions I use in my speech, and I thought it would be fairer to the students to concentrate on what they were

Introductory remarks to chapters 8-10

saying, rather than on how it was said. However, I am aware that filler words serve a function in conversations, and this reduction may reduce the capacity to interpret the interviews when returning to the quotes at a later point (Seidman, 2013). This limitation is mitigated by the fact that in my original transcripts I have left many of these filler words and non-verbal signals, so I would return to these if further analysis is needed.

Chapter 8: Analysis of the students' trajectories – multilingual concerns

1. Communicative competence as a multilingual concern

1.1. Introduction

In the current section I work with the narratives of Leanne and Tilly and I address the first question from my framework, which is linked to the cog in the framework labelled “Individual constellation of multilingual concerns” (figure 5).

Research Question 1: What does a particular **concern** mean to my students? How does this concern change over the four years of the study?

The particular concern I am focussing on is the desire to **gain multilingual communicative competency**. This concern is chosen as during the first interviews all students mentioned this concern in regard to their target languages.

I also pay attention to the last question (which will feature in all the discussion sections):

Research Question 5: What evidence is there for **reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

I critically discussed the term ‘communicative competence’ under ‘key concepts’ in the literature review, and I also put forward different aspects in Chapter 5, as I explained my framework. Benson et al. (2013) have described ‘communicative competence’ as the wish to achieve proficiency in terms of grammatical correctness, fluency (i.e. maintaining a conversation), as well as socio-pragmatic competence (i.e. the ability to project desired identities). I highlighted that this concern can also be viewed from a more holistic angle encompassing the entire multilingual repertoire of the students (Blommaert, 2010; Jessner, 2008; Liddicoat, 2017), and skills of the intercultural speaker. I will return to these points in the commentary where I consider various aspects linked to the research questions above. However, I first present the narratives of Leanne and Tilly.

1.2. Leanne's story

Leanne is from an island linked to the UK and has chosen ‘Languages with Tourism’ as her undergraduate programme in Scotland. This means she is taking modules in French and Spanish and in tourism. She studied both languages in school and says they are “my best subject and I’ve always found it easy and it’s logical and it makes sense, ... something I enjoy doing at the same time”.

Interview 1 (October 2016)

Leanne is aiming for a high degree of communicative competence, and she is inspired by the international students on her course who are studying in English, even though this is not their first language. In terms of speaking French and Spanish she wants “to be able to do it without thinking”, to understand different accents and natural language, and to speak without people recognising that she is from Britain: “if I said ‘oh, I’m from Britain’ they’d like ‘oh, I didn’t know that’”. Improving her communicative competence is a central concern to her. She strongly disapproves of people in the UK who don’t bother with other languages: “it really annoys me”. In future she would like to pass her language skills on to her children.

Her desire to improve her languages is linked to concerns of personal development. She wants to become culturally “more Frenchy, a bit more Spanishy”, “just throw myself in it”. At the same time, she is interested in tourism and combining this with her interest in languages

The future ambitions link all these concerns: she would like to work in Tourism and speak her languages with her job, “so at least it’s not a waste”. (Ideally, she would like to live in Spain, but she says she would go anywhere for a job).

Speaking opportunities

Leanne reflects on a constraint she is facing. There are a lot of Spanish and French speakers at the university who are not willing to speak in their languages to her, but will switch to English, and this affects Leanne’s opportunities to improve her communicative competence. This attitude of speakers of other languages contradicts Leanne’s own strength of feeling against the dominant role of English as a global language. On the one hand, Leanne speaks critically of her UK compatriots: “it’s arrogant actually to think that English is the best language and everyone else should talk it, so that you don’t have to learn”. On the other hand, she feels that speakers of other languages do not give her the opportunity to learn their language.

At this stage, this does not lead Leanne to question her overall project, but it does mean that she needs to be persistent. For instance, she describes how she approached various students who were speakers of Spanish and French, and finally found one Spanish student who will speak to her in Spanish: “that’s worked well because I can understand what she’s saying and then talk back and then if I get something wrong, she corrects me”.

Leanne understands that these students are in the UK to practise English, and with another student she addressed the problem by offering a solution which benefits both: "I think a lot of the Spanish, and French especially, they want to speak English and so, cause I said to someone, I was like 'oh can I message you in French?' and they were like, 'oh I want to practise my English, I prefer it', and then it was like 'oh, but I want to practise my French, like, do half-half'".

Interview 2 (at the end of Leanne's second year, March 2018)

Leanne is still committed to her languages, but her project has altered slightly. She is now focussing more on Spanish, and she is still hoping to reach a level where it is natural and effortless ("I'd love to actually sound Spanish"). In terms of her cultural development, she is less concerned now with "becoming" French or Spanish, and rather wishes to become "accepted". She is still hoping to combine tourism with her language skills.

Leanne's hopes for the year abroad in terms of speaking opportunities

Despite working really hard on her languages, Leanne reflects again on the constraint she is facing in terms of speaking opportunities. She describes how Spanish speakers in the UK won't speak to her in Spanish. It seems that she has resigned herself to this more than at the beginning of her studies: "if they sat next to me speaking Spanish and then if I speak Spanish, they immediately revert to English, it's quite annoying, but there's nothing you can do about that".

Leanne is now pinning her hopes on the next year where she will be studying on a Spanish island: "I'm going to speak only Spanish and I'm going to learn in Spanish". Leanne's ambition is to return fluent: "if I don't, I'm not going to beat myself up about it, but it will be because I tried my hardest and it just didn't happen".

Initially, she had considered splitting her year abroad between France and Spain, but she is now planning to spend the entire year in Spain: "I decided I may as well just go to Spain and become super super good in Spanish, and instead of like not as good as I could in both of them". If she can, she will continue with French: "it seems like a waste to just stop French", but her preference is clear: "if the French proves too hard to study, I'll just drop it and do something else".

In order to improve her communicative competence in Spanish she plans not to join an English clique. However, she is planning to visit all her classmates at different Spanish destinations to get to know Spain better.

Leanne's hopes for the year abroad in terms of her personal development

Further constraints which Leanne is reflecting on are her university course and her network of friends. She had expected her course to link her languages more specifically with tourism and feels that the language courses are very general and do not cover specialist topics or vocabulary. She says about her current network of friends: "no one has any ambition to go anywhere else"; "they don't socialise as much"; "I live in a flat full of people who are Scottish and most weekends I'm just on my own".

These factors are a cause of disappointment and Leanne believes she might have chosen the wrong university. However, this has been an incentive to learn from her mistakes and reflect very carefully on her choice for her year abroad: "I knew I had to get it right this time"; "I did tons of research".

Leanne considered her destination abroad (for the following year) very carefully and matched it to her concerns. She says she looked at various factors (location, connectivity), but the offering was the most important aspect for her: "at the end of the day, the course is more important I think, so yeah because in [her destination for the year abroad], I can do more specific hotel tourism related stuff which is, now I realise, more what I want to do, and I can do French". She is also planning to share a flat where people are sociable and speak Spanish: "I don't want to live with English people".

Interview 3 (during Leanne's year abroad, February 2019)

When I interview Leanne towards the beginning of her second semester abroad, she has just received the news that she failed some of her modules from the first semester and is very deflated. She is disappointed with her lack of progress in Spanish, and she is exhausted from the effort she is putting into speaking (which is often not reciprocated) and her module work (where she is receiving criticism). Just completing the year abroad is now a goal in itself.

She is very critical now about her multilingual project of working with different languages in tourism and could contemplate abandoning it altogether and returning to a monolingual life: "maybe I'd just rather stay at home, get a job and just have a normal life". However, she concedes very quickly that she might get bored and return to languages in the future. Spanish is still important to her, and she still plans to speak Spanish with her children. She is reflecting on her multilingual project, and French has gained importance as a back-up language.

Barriers to speaking

Leanne has encountered several constraints which have made it impossible for her to completely immerse herself into the Spanish language as she had planned. Firstly, she found the local dialect very hard to understand at the beginning and this affected her plans to speak Spanish. Her very first encounter with her landlady was difficult: "I was like 'what? Are you talking Spanish?'" .

She had hoped to speak Spanish in her flat, but it turned out that her flatmate (a German native) couldn't speak Spanish very well and they ended up speaking English. Also, all the "welcome stuff" at the university was conducted in English: "my whole intention was to speak no English and it completely did not happen after all" .

Speaking with natives is not only difficult in the university environment, but also around town, as locals and waiters will always revert to English when they hear Leanne's English accent. Even her language buddy only speaks to her in English despite their arrangement to speak in both languages: "she just wouldn't ... do the Spanish, ever". Leanne feels this is a lack of respect and compares this with her own linguistic accommodation to whatever language a customer wanted when she worked in a pub over the summer.

Adjusting her practices

Leanne is now using different strategies to improve her linguistic competence. She is reading books and trying "so hard" to change her accent, so that people will speak to her in Spanish. She is improving her speaking by simplifying her messages in her head (and, incidentally, this is also helping her to express herself in English). Taking modules in Spanish during the first semester had been difficult for her, particularly given that she had very limited linguistic input before the start of tuition: "maybe that's where it started to go wrong". After failing some of the modules she has changed her choices for the second semester and is taking more tourism-related modules in English and more language learner modules in Spanish where she is concentrating on writing. She is also taking some French language courses which are taught through the medium of Spanish and English, and she describes this as "a whirlwind of languages". She is learning French at a level she had already completed in the UK, but this is helping her to gain the credits she needs and at least maintain her level. She is keeping to a strict routine and planning her study time and her free time carefully to make the most of her time abroad, but also to give herself the best chance of passing the year.

Concerns in the areas of intercultural development and friendships

Leanne is combining her desire to improve her linguistic competence with her concerns around personal development. She has made “a conscious decision” to go to the cinema twice a month and visit another island every month. She is undertaking these activities with two very good friends who are also learning Spanish and are supporting her emotionally. After she had “had a meltdown” due to the language-related criticism of a teacher, she decided to go to the Carnival with these friends: “we had a super time, and I was like, ‘it’s fine’”.

Interview 4 (during lockdown, at the end of fourth year, April 2020)

This interview takes place towards the end of Leanne’s final year of studies which was spent back in the UK. She reflects again on how she managed to turn the year abroad around and find enjoyment: “I managed to fix what was wrong in the first one [semester] and then get the good bit out of the second one”.

Reprioritisation of concerns

Leanne reflects on how personal concerns, such as friendships, influenced her wellbeing during the year abroad strongly. The break-up of a long-term relationship affected her badly, but on the other hand new friends became very meaningful to her, and she talks in particular about one friend: “I never realised that she would end up being so important, like she ended up being, like I spent most of my time with her by the end”. Travelling had initially been a strategy for her to cope with the year but became a means in itself: “I think that’s how I felt at the time, it was getting through it, but when I look back at it, it was just great travelling”. In retrospect, she thinks the experiences she underwent made the year abroad worthwhile: “it was worth going for the personal development”; “[I’m] still happy I did it”.

Communicative competence

Leanne describes how she modified her expectations in the area of communicative competence and accepted the fact that she had not reached the degree of fluency she had hoped for: “I think my initial goals was to be like, kind of just doing, like thinking us not having to think about stuff in Spanish as much, and I do think I am closer to that, but not, not to the level I expected I would be really”. By changing her modules during her time in Spain to language learner modules she actively improved her learning environment, and this benefitted her confidence: “I felt as good as the rest of the class, instead of worse than

the rest of the class this time, so, yeah definitely improved". Defining herself as a learner and taking language classes in two languages (French and Spanish) helped her to meet other language learners (in the French classes) who were supportive of her and spoke to her in Spanish.

Amending her multilingual project in fourth year

Leanne describes how several students returned from their year abroad and had also not reached the degree of fluency they had hoped for. This led a couple of them to drop Spanish in their final year despite having good grades. Leanne, however, now has a different attitude: "so I think we're all in the same boat, it's just whether, ... how we perceive it, like to me I've just got to keep learning whereas for them they're like 'no, if we haven't got it now, we're not going to get it'". She relates how she now feels fluent in listening and reading "I can understand next to everything, and I can read fine, like I just, I read in Spanish as much as in English now, just books, and I can like watch series and stuff". In terms of speaking, she says "it's still a case of recalling vocab in order to articulate".

She is now committed to keeping up her languages. During fourth year she has continued reading in Spanish, watching films on Netflix, listening to Spanish music, following Spanish people on social media, reading the news in Spanish, and communicating with people from her exchange university in Spanish.

Generally, she feels that her mind has broadened, and her concerns have altered: "I don't really want to just be a mum to bilingual children anymore". She feels these changes have come through the year abroad, rather than university: "I think definitely the getting to see there's more to life than just getting a job and then having a family has come from the people that I've met who are actively avoiding that [laughs], and maybe that there is more to life than, than what I was brought up with, perhaps."

Thinking about her future

Now that her university has finished, she is looking towards the future. Her initial plans for the summer included travelling, taking an intensive language school in France and teaching at a friend's language school. She had also planned to apply for jobs. However, the Coronavirus situation has changed her plans completely: "all the jobs, I had jobs lined up and they've all cancelled".

She has now decided to do a Masters in International Marketing and to keep up her languages in her free time.

Leanne's multilingual project

An important part of Leanne's life now is being multilingual: "it just feels [pause] normal, like it makes sense somehow, it's definitely an advantage, it's a skill, also it seems like being bilingual, ... it's quite an accomplishment in the UK". Other words she uses to describe this development are "achievement", "puts you a bit ahead of everybody else", "a cool party-trick", but mostly "just normal ... like I keep sending screenshots of funny memes and stuff to my friends, and then I realise it's in Spanish". Ultimately, she is happy with her multilingual trajectory: "I do enjoy it and I'm glad I've done it, a degree in languages and I'm glad I have my Spanish now. It's just a shame it's, it was a struggle, perhaps, because it wasn't so easy at the start, maybe".

Her multilingual project is now less specific: "I don't think I would restrict myself to a tourism job anymore. I would kind of do anything that I could do". She believes she could work and live anywhere as a native English speaker. However, she is also confident about using Spanish in a working environment: "I know that my language is good enough and I know that if I go back then I will continue to pick it up and it will get better".

1.3. Tilly's story

Tilly grew up in Spain, she has a Spanish father and a Dutch-British mother. She describes herself as bilingual in Spanish and English, with a passive knowledge of Dutch. She has travelled widely with her family as they have relatives around the world.

Growing up bilingually, Tilly experienced the tension between belonging (by speaking Spanish) and being different (by speaking English). This caused her to refuse to speak English with her mother until the age of fifteen. However, at this age she noticed that she really enjoys languages.

She now speaks English and Spanish with her mother and Spanish with her father. In Spain she visited a bilingual school (Spanish and English) where she started learning German during the last four years of school. She received exit qualifications from this school for the UK and Spain.

In her first interview Tilly speaks about a range of multilingual concerns. She is seeking communicative competence and acceptance as a speaker in several languages; she is committed to English, Spanish and German; she enjoys travelling and living in different countries; her academic and career interests combine languages and artistic subjects; and her wellbeing is linked to finding her niche, appreciating arts, having a supportive network

of friends. The following narrative focusses on developments in the area of communicative competence.

Interview 1 (October 2016)

Tilly initially chose the undergraduate programme 'Languages and Intercultural Communication with Marketing'. Shortly after beginning her studies, she made the conscious decision to change her programme to 'Marketing Management with Language (German)' as she decided she wanted to concentrate on just one language and take more modules within the business school that are linked to arts: "I really enjoy artistic things, ... so I thought that Marketing was like the artistic side of Economics."

Communicative competence and fitting in

Tilly lives in a flat with seven Scottish students who "treat her normally". Tilly is confident in English and has no problem with academic demands (as she attended a bilingual school). Nevertheless, she feels that communication with her flatmates can be difficult, as she lacks cultural references. To increase her knowledge and be able to follow conversations more easily she goes online and watches the news.

She explains how she feels foreign in any environment: "I'm already used to that feeling". In Spain this is because of her appearance and in the UK, it is because of her accent. However, she says that this is also an advantage: "it's a conversation topic, so that's a good thing to meet new people".

Projecting her identity in her languages

Tilly says that English, Spanish, and German are equally important to her, but she has different personalities in each language. She feels restricted speaking English as she cannot use humour or colloquialisms in the same way as for Spanish. Generally, Tilly feels more Spanish when she is in the UK than when she is in Spain. She enjoys the fact that in her university city in Scotland people are a lot more diverse than in the Spanish city she is from.

Tilly feels she cannot express herself properly in German yet: "that means that the other person would get a different image from me". Gaining practice with German is harder for her. Tilly describes how she took part in a language exchange when she was at school and how the linguistic experience was unequal. When she was in Germany people tended to speak to her in English ("everyone speaks English"). However, she says about the return visit: "the Germans were more forced to speak in Spanish than I was [in German], when I went to Germany".

Tilly has no firm plans for her future yet but is open to various scenarios: "I wouldn't care living here or in England or maybe Germany or America wherever I feel comfortable, but I feel comfortable everywhere I've been up to now, so that's a good thing".

Interview 2 (at the end of second year, March 2018)

Tilly now feels more comfortable communicating in English and Spanish and is focussing on German and preparing linguistically for the year abroad.

Communicative competence and network of friends

Tilly found her first year tough in terms of socialising, but she has got used to "the British people, the socialising here". She has noticed an improvement in her English skills for everyday communication and doesn't have to struggle for words as much. She has gained an understanding of cultural references (brands, slangs etc).

Generally, she is more content with her friendship group in her second year than she was in her first year. She is mixing mostly with international students, and this is due to the different circumstances: "[Scottish students] usually go home for the weekend or they already have their original group of friends ... but for international people, us, this is like our second language and our second home ... we've got different places we meet up or different timetables and routines". She mostly speaks English with her international friends. However, she feels that her accent is still noticeable, particularly when speaking to her international friends (rather than native English speakers).

She also has close Spanish friends and has moved in with Spanish flatmates. When speaking to each other they often interweave English words into their Spanish language (Spanglish).

Projecting her identity

Tilly repeats that she feels foreign wherever she is, but she has developed a feeling of belonging to Scotland. If people ask her where she is from, she now says: "I'm from [Scottish city]" before explaining that she's from [Spanish city]. Nevertheless, she also feels her Spanish connection more strongly in Scotland than she does when she is at home and there is always a degree of in-betweenness: "[in Spain] they don't understand some things I know about the British culture, and here vice versa". She feels that her personality changes according to whether she is speaking English or Spanish, and she thinks this has to do with the fact that she is still funnier in Spanish: "because of the sense of humour, it's really different in both countries and languages".

Improving her German

Tilly has many strategies to improve her German skills but communicating in German while still in the UK is difficult. Tilly regularly visits the Eurotalk society where each table is assigned to people wanting to speak in a particular language. This is good practice, but as most people at the German table are her classmates it is a bit limited: "I would like to ... see how I would be able to speak with a native German, or with a native Austrian for example to see because, with the people in my German class I already understand them, we already know how we speak, so I feel like that's my comfort zone". She is worried about not being able to speak German as much as she would like to during her year abroad: "But I'm sure if I try, I'll find a way".

Preparation for the year abroad

Tilly's year abroad project and her choice of destination are aligned to concerns around communicative competence, art and culture, and wellbeing. She plans to acclimatise by getting there early: "there's a lot of small things you don't realise between cities, like the transport, the people, the timetable, and what time do people eat, and just simply to see the ... atmosphere over there". While she is trying to go without too many expectations, she is resolved to make the most of her time there: "I want to try and say yes to everything, I want to try and experience everything, keep myself busy". At the end of her time abroad she wants to feel comfortable speaking German without resorting to English and Spanish. She has applied for student accommodation as she thinks this is a good place to meet new people (German and international) and she plans to join international societies. She feels that her previous experience with moving countries will benefit her.

Interview 3 (during Tilly's year abroad, May 2019)

Communicative competence in German

When I meet Tilly around half-way through her year abroad, she feels that she has improved her German. On a daily basis she uses mostly English and some German (though she would like to have more speaking opportunities) and very little Spanish.

Tilly's strategy of arriving early at her destination to familiarise herself with the language and the city before moving into university accommodation was successful. She took a private intensive course and stayed with a host family: "they told me everything ... I had like my time to get to know everything and that was good". She spoke only German with

her host family and the students in her course (where German was the only common language).

She talks about learning to communicate in German. She found it very difficult to understand at first, but this has improved considerably: "with time ... I can understand a lot faster". She has also made progress with speaking: "at the beginning I was nervous speaking it [and now] I can order things in German, and I'm comfortable with this". She now feels she can hold a conversation in German up to about 5 minutes, and then: "I run out of vocabulary, or topics". As in previous interviews she mentions that she learns best through using a language: "grammar is not my thing, I learn more by reading and speaking and listening".

However, after moving into student accommodation and starting her university welcome programme the German input has become more limited. Most of the students in her accommodation are international and the common language is English. After a German induction course her tuition is now nearly completely in English (apart from one language course per semester).

She would have liked to take some modules in German but says that the Erasmus students were guided towards the English stream, and she was too shy to ask to attend a course in German.

Communicative competence in English and friendship group

Even though Tilly is disappointed about the fact that she isn't speaking German as much as she would like to, she still feels she is benefitting from practising English: "it's good for me speaking English, as long as I'm not speaking Spanish".

She remarks how her circle of friends has changed: When she was in the UK she had Spanish friends, and now that she is in Germany, she has many British friends. Having British friends means that she can't mix languages anymore: "they won't understand, so I have to speak more English – English, or proper English".

Tilly talks about the importance of her social network: "you see everybody ... every day ... it's easy, like we go and do touristy things together ... that's good". They have travelled together extensively, and she feels she has made good use of her time and managed to visit nearly all the sights which were on her "list".

Interview 4 (during lockdown at the end of Tilly's final year, May 2020)

Reflection on the year abroad and her constellation of concerns

In this interview we look back at Tilly's goals for the year abroad. She feels she had a lot of fun, and she is happy with the outcomes of the year abroad: "I didn't have any set objectives, I just wanted to speak German a little bit and end up having a good overall experience, so I'm happy with that, I'm really yeah, it was a really good experience overall". She was glad that she made friends, went on trips, and visited places, this was "more important than the actual learning if that makes sense". It was easy meeting people during the Erasmus year as everybody was more open-minded. However, her own previous experience also helped as she feels "more comfortable with people from all around the world".

Friendships

Tilly describes how she changed her friendship group while she was abroad: "I stopped speaking with the Spanish people because I thought to myself that I didn't want to hang out with Spanish people while I'm away". After having previously mixed with Spanish people she was now interested in meeting international people: "I ended up having another friend group and they were all English speaking, like American English, Latin, and I ended up speaking mostly English and German throughout the rest of the year".

Communicative competence, projection of identity, and respect

Tilly describes how she had a linguistic advantage during her time in Germany, as she was proficient in English (also in an academic environment) and she could speak German: "I was lucky [laughs], I knew the perfect languages to get around".

Communication was now easy for her. This had been difficult during her first year where the people in her flat were all Scottish: "I could barely understand their accents at the beginning of the year, and they talked about things that I didn't understand". In contrast, the Erasmus crowd in Germany was much more mixed: "I felt like I could communicate with all of them fairly well, because I knew the British culture, I knew the German culture, I know the Spanish culture so yeah I felt really comfortable in that way because I could communicate with anyone without any struggle in terms of conversation topics, I could understand what the English people were talking about, understand what the Spanish people were talking about, so yeah I didn't struggle meeting people".

Communication was easy with an international group, but she also felt more “heard” and “respected” by the British students she encountered whilst abroad. She thinks they compared her to other Spanish people and concluded: “Oy, but you’re basically British”. This gave her the confidence to attempt jokes and make comments in English. She also had the advantage of knowing German and of having previous mobility experience: “my opinion was more valued ... I don’t know if it’s because the languages I speak, the experiences I’ve had, or just I was lucky, but yeah it was a lot easier”.

Communicative competence as a learner of German, and as a mediator

On the other hand, it was difficult to engage in authentic German speaking situations. Tilly describes how she got on well with two German students who she was doing group work with. However, they didn’t meet outside university: “it’s really difficult between the barrier of like Erasmus students and native students because I was telling them the places I visited, where I live blah blah blah, and they were like ‘ooh [Tilly’s accommodation] that’s really far away’, or ‘oh those places are like a typical tourist’ and ... they wouldn’t, never, hang out like after university”. Also, these students refused to speak German with her, saying that they needed to practise their English.

She understands that her situation would have been easier if she had taken more classes in German, but she was “just too scared” thinking she “wouldn’t understand it or get lost”. This is a matter of some regret.

However, she had two friends who (like herself) spoke a mix of languages, and she often spoke German with them. In her wider international group, she was the only person that understood German, and this was good for her language skills: “I always ended up being the translator ... being the one who had to read out the posters or the transport signs or, so I got very good at quickly understanding things ... that was mainly my job: the translator of the group”.

Returning after the year abroad: weighing up her concerns

Tilly enjoyed her time in Germany very much and contemplated staying there, even dropping out of university. However, she had become good friends with people from her university city in Scotland while they were all abroad, and in the end she was actually looking forward to coming back: “I was more excited to come back because I felt like [the time abroad] even helped me to have more friends here in [Scotland] than I did in second year”.

Language constellation and identity

During her fourth year Tilly has been speaking mainly English (outside of classes) but she is keen to keep up all three languages.

She is looking for people to speak German with: "every time I meet a German person, I try to keep contact with them, and I try to speak German and, but it's ... very difficult, they don't want to".

She has also spoken little Spanish ("just my family and my flatmates but I barely saw my flatmates") and she feels she has lost her Spanish "a lot this year". She does miss speaking Spanish (particularly now that she is in lockdown and is staying at her boyfriend's flat where everyone speaks English), but she knows that if she went back to Spain, within a week this would change: "Spanish would be my first language again and it, it would all be back to how it was before".

However, she is happy that her English has improved as she knows that she will be using English more than Spanish in the future. She now feels British and is applying for the British passport (but hopes to keep the Spanish one as well).

Tilly's multilingual project

Tilly's plans for the future had been to return to Germany after graduating, but because of the coronavirus she will now stay in Scotland and do a Masters, then hopefully look for work in Germany next year. She needs to keep up her German and is planning to find German series to watch. However, she knows that for her the best strategy is to communicate and she says: "my objective would be to find a German friend this year".

She feels her priorities have changed. Initially she wanted to "get good grades, get a good job, do well in uni and that's it". However now, other things are important to her: "be happy, meet people I like, enjoy life [laughs] if that makes sense, because I'm like, I'd rather enjoy myself and have a job, a really bad job, than have a really well-paid job and not enjoy it".

Finally, I ask her what being multilingual means to her now. She says: "[It means] feeling comfortable in several languages, being able to be yourself in different languages, yeah I don't know, being able to express yourself better, understand other people better, ... the opportunity to meet new people ... if I could learn more languages I would, like if it was easier".

1.4. Commentary

I now discuss aspects of the above narratives linked to research questions one and five (around the development of communicative competence and reflexivity), and I focus on the following aspects:

- What does the concept (concern) of communicative competence mean to these participants and what sort of multilingual repertoire are they aiming for? How does this understanding of communicative competence change over the four years? What are related projects and practices?
- What evidence is there for reflexivity around structural changes leading to amendments of their projects, changes in practices, or their concern of communicative competence (or more broadly their constellation of concerns)?
- What sort of structural changes (specifically reflections on constraints and enablements) become triggers for changes in the above areas?

1.4.1. *Understanding of communicative competence*

At the beginning of the narratives both students are committed to the concern of communicative competence. To Leanne this means reaching a level similar to speakers in her target countries, and she describes how this would allow her to completely blend into an imagined community of speakers in both of her languages (French and Spanish). Tilly is more experienced with speaking several languages and describes herself as bilingual in Spanish and English, and a learner of German. However, she is initially new to the Scottish environment and her concern around communicative competence is more nuanced, as she wishes to improve her communicative and sociopragmatic competence in English through a greater understanding of cultural references, brands, TV series etc. She would also like to be able to make jokes in all her languages and (like Leanne) feel accepted as a speaker. Both students seem to be motivated by a sense of a future L2 self (Dörnyei, 2009). Their ideal of wishing to join communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and “performing” identities in their target language, has been recognised in other studies which investigate students' identity ambitions during study abroad (for instance Benson et al., 2013; Coleman, 2015). At this stage, both students seem to view their languages as separate from another, and their L2 ideal refers to each language separately.

By the end of their studies both students have remained committed to their concern of communicative competence. However, more so than before, they understand this as a life-long project. For both, their multilingual repertoire includes more than one target language.

Leanne started from a lower language level. In the final interview she feels that she has reached a satisfying level in terms of understanding and reading Spanish, but she still needs to think before she speaks. French is at a lower level, but she is keen to keep developing it. This means that for both languages she still follows projects and carries out practices aligned with her concern around communicative competence (and this now has a greater emphasis on reading in her languages, communicating through text messaging etc). These practices allow her to reach a 'modus vivendi' (Archer, 2007) which she is content with.

Tilly still understands sociopragmatic competence as an important aspect of communicative competence, and she feels she can now more successfully engage in practices in English (jokes etc). Generally, she is immersed in the English-speaking environment and sees her future closely linked to the UK. She "feels" British and feels respected and heard when she speaks English.

In terms of German, Tilly's understanding of communicative competence now includes a more multilingual and intercultural aspect as she describes how she successfully engaged in practices as a mediator for her international friends while she was on her year abroad (Aronin, 2016; Kramsch, 1998; Liddicoat, 2017). She has reached a degree of fluency where she can sustain a conversation with a speaker of German for about 5 minutes. Like Leanne she is still committed to improving her fluency.

1.4.2. Reflexivity on structural constraints and enablements

There is clear evidence for reflexivity around structural challenges in both students' trajectories, for instance both repeatedly discuss the fact that speakers of their target languages are unwilling to speak to them in their languages.

Leanne devises several projects to overcome these difficulties, such as offering to take turns in languages, and for her year abroad she resolves to live with Spanish people and not speak any English at all. Despite her best efforts, she does not manage to access the speaking opportunities she had envisaged during her year abroad, and this, together with the fact that she failed some of the modules she took in Spanish, causes her to seriously question her projects and her concern of gaining communicative competence: "maybe I'd just rather stay at home, get a job and just have a normal life".

However, this episode also clearly shows how Leanne weighs up her concerns and considers other concerns such as surviving the year abroad, friendship, and travel, as she adapts her multilingual project for the year abroad. She changes her modules to ones that are more achievable, and she turns to her English-speaking friends. Together with these

friends she carries out practices reflecting a different version of communicative competence (going to the cinema, travelling to areas of Spain where less English is spoken, revising for Spanish classes). These adaptations are clearly linked to reflexivity (“I managed to fix what was wrong”; “I made a conscious decision”) and lead her to ultimately enjoy the year abroad.

Tilly starts her studies with what Murphy-Lejeune terms ‘multilingual capital’ (2002) through her ‘tertiary socialisation’ (Alred & Byram, 2006) and her multilingual upbringing. She has travelled extensively, and her starting point in English is high. As an international student in Scotland she is immersed from the start; however, she still reflects on the difficulties of projecting her identity, and in particular she finds it hard to convey her sense of humour in English (let alone German) (Barkhuizen, 2017). She works hard on this by reading about news and politics, watching British TV series etc. However, it is not until she is on her year abroad that she feels truly accepted by the group of British students she makes friends with. She realises that she is now considered as an expert by various groups: Her high level of English and Spanish (and her experience of living in the UK) are an asset when she is with the international group and bring her closer to the UK crowd. Her good knowledge of German makes her a valuable mediator and translator for both the UK and the international crowd.

In terms of German, Tilly anticipated (from prior experience) that it would be difficult to gain access to speakers of German whilst in Germany. Her plan of arriving early and taking a private class outside of university gives her the opportunity to speak German with other learners, and her host family also speaks German with her. However, once she is in the university environment, she (like Leanne) encounters barriers, particularly as she is studying in the English stream where the German students are keen to practise their English. Her solution is to continue speaking German with other multilinguals where the common language is German.

In the final interviews (when they are back in Scotland) both have overcome the structural barriers to an extent. Tilly is speaking English daily but is still trying to find someone to speak in German with. Leanne has stayed in contact with Spanish speakers from her year abroad, and converses with them regularly through social media.

1.4.3. Triggers for changes

For both students, the year abroad is a turning point in their understanding of communicative competence.

As mentioned, Leanne's inability to gain access to speakers causes her to keep revising her strategies at gaining communicative competence, and finally pinning her hopes on the year abroad. This expectation of study abroad leading to solid gains in linguistic progression is a widely held assumption, however it has also been put into question by many studies (see for instance Ozanska-Ponikwia et al., 2019, for an overview). Leanne expected her new structural environment to give her the opportunity to immerse in her target language, but she could not overcome the barriers she encounters (this is a similar process as described in the study by Chik & Benson, 2008). Leanne calls this a period of "trauma", and this very emotional phase causes her to reconsider her concerns and re-evaluate her projects. Archer describes how emotions can be seen as "commentaries on our concerns which supply the 'shoving power' leading to action (or the resistance resulting in inaction)" (Archer, 2007, p. 13). In fact, these disappointments do not cause Leanne to abandon her multilingual project altogether. Instead, the experiences of study abroad cause her to change her notion of communicative competence (focussing for instance on understanding) and she now understands multilingualism as a life-long project. Her year abroad also leads to a change in her constellation of concerns, and friendships as well as personal development gain importance.

This new understanding of communicative competence, and her new constellation of concerns sustain Leanne during her fourth year, where she describes how some of her classmates dropped Spanish even though they were doing well. These classmates had not been able to develop their concern of communicative competence, and their emotional commentaries (see above) led to the decision of abandoning their project of a language-related degree.

For Tilly, the year abroad is equally a turning point. It is only here that she is content with her communicative competence in all her languages and feels comfortable in situations using these languages. She now feels accepted as a speaker of English both with the international group and with the British group she has befriended. Furthermore, she uses German to communicate with other multilinguals. As described, her understanding of communicative competence now also involves the competence of mediating as an intercultural speaker and she can explain different points of view between the UK group and the international group and translate signs and notices.

1.5. Summary

I had posed the following two questions at the beginning of this chapter:

Research Question 1: What does the **concern** of gaining multilingual competence mean to my students? How does this concern change over the four years of the study?

Research Question 5: What evidence is there for reflexivity around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

I have shown, through the narratives and the commentary, how the concern of communicative competence changes for both students. At first, they think of this concern in an indicative way, and (particularly Leanne) aims for near-native competency. By the end of the study their understanding includes the insight that working on communicative competence is a life-long project, that it is possible to work on different aspects of this (such as reading and understanding), and that communicative competency can also be seen from a multilingual and holistic perspective including traits such as mediating and translating. The students have gained an understanding of the entire spectrum of their multilingual abilities, including the advantages of being a speaker of English, and the confidence that a working-level in other languages can be achieved.

In terms of reflexivity there was ample evidence showing how students adapted their projects as they reflected on environmental constraints (such as not gaining access to communities of practice). Other concerns, such as friendships, became important for the students, but ultimately both remained committed to a multilingual trajectory.

2. The emerging conflict between the concerns of academic development and communicative competence

2.1. Introduction

In this section I focus on the theme of conflicting multilingual concerns which lead to a change in students' trajectory. I present and comment on the narratives of Eve and Frederica, as I address research questions two and five from my framework of multilingual reflexivity, and linked to the cog on multilingual concerns (figure 5 in chapter 5).

Research Question 2: What are examples of **conflicts** between concerns linked to multilingualism and how is the conflict resolved?

Research Question 5: What evidence is there for **reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

Linked to my framework on multilingual reflexivity, I had identified three clusters of multilingual concerns (see figure 6 in chapter 5). These relate to communicate competency; academic and career development; and personal development. In the narratives, Eve and Frederica reflect on these concerns and deliberate on their multilingual projects, for instance the multilingual constellation they aim for (Aronin, 2016; Henry, 2017), or the life they are hoping to lead (Archer, 2007; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

As their structural environment changes and offers new affordances (Aronin & Singleton, 2012), the students again reflect on how this affects their concerns.

There is a point in the narrative of both students where they perceive the new environment as unsuitable for their constellation of concerns. Both now need to re-prioritise their concerns (Archer, 2006). For Eve this means actively changing her environment, with a huge impact on her trajectory towards her multilingual project. For Frederica this means re-thinking the balance between her academic development and her communicative competence, as she drops one of her academic ambitions.

In the commentary I analyse these processes in more detail linked to the research questions above.

2.2. Eve's story

Eve started learning French at a primary school in Scotland and additionally learnt Spanish for four years during high school. She took both languages up to Advanced Higher Level at school and had some exposure to the languages in authentic situations prior to university (during school exchanges, holidays, a gap year).

Eve started studying 'International Business Management and Language (Spanish)' as her degree at a Scottish university in September 2016.

Interview 1 (November 2016)

Eve talks about her motivation to learn languages: "I've travelled loads since I was young, to loads of interesting countries and I've just always wanted to be fluent in another language and be able to travel and live abroad and work abroad".

Previous experience of living abroad

Before starting university, Eve spent a gap year as an au-pair in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. She was employed by a British couple working in a very exclusive boarding school where Eve experienced a completely different way of life. She has positive memories about the lifestyle she encountered and the support network of the other au pairs, and her evaluation is positive: "I definitely think I made the right decision – going abroad for the year".

Spanish and future plans

Despite having been in a French (albeit Swiss-French) environment for a year, she has opted to take Spanish as her language at university: "I find Spanish a lot easier to speak ... I've always done much better, even though I've done French for longer ... I do enjoy the language more". Eve also feels that Spanish will give her better opportunities in the future: "with the places I want to work when I'm older, or when I leave uni even, I think Spanish will be a lot more useful than, than French". Eve can imagine living abroad in the future and she says that her friends at school "all kind of could see me abroad in the future". If she lived abroad she would be willing to immerse herself in the culture: "I'd definitely be happy to get into the way of life there and almost live my life the same, the same way".

Previous experiences of multilingual communication

Her family regularly visit their time share in Spain where Eve can speak Spanish with the reps: "they know I speak Spanish, and they refuse to speak English to me at times [laughs] cause they, they want to try and make me speak Spanish". Her family also encourages Eve to mediate between the languages: "my parents were always really excited [laughs] asking me what everyone was saying and trying to ... get me to translate for them and things". These holidays provide Eve with meaningful language input: "putting it into practice is always really helpful".

When she speaks Spanish with the reps and other locals however, she does have difficulties with the strong dialect and the speed with which people speak: "I can understand it, but I can't quite work out what I want to say in the language, it can be quite difficult". During her year abroad Eve had similar problems with the Swiss French dialect which was spoken locally. Communication was not always straightforward, and she felt that there were some misunderstandings: "a few times that they gave me a bit of a funny look and I was thinking well ... that didn't make any sense to you [laughs]".

Language learning

Eve is actively pursuing her language learning through materials provided by school and university. Additionally, she watches films in Spanish and follows her interests by listening to music and translating lyrics, looking up artists etc. While she finds grammar very important, she prefers using authentic materials as these are more interesting to her and she finds them useful for getting into the mindset of a different language.

Interview 2 (March 2018, towards the end of Eve's second year)

Language learning

Looking back, Eve feels that her progression in Spanish after first year was evident ("something did eventually just kind of click").

She has had some opportunities to practise her Spanish outside of class. Eve took part in a class trip to Madrid at the end of year 2 where she could visit some of the universities on offer for the year abroad. She mentions how she enjoyed using language during this trip: "it was actually quite fun to put that to the test".

During her annual holiday to the timeshare at the end of first year Eve had the opportunity to speak and eaves-drop into conversations: "I felt really comfortable for the first time just kind of going into speaking". She was able to mediate for her family more effectively, and this improved her confidence: "this actual proof 'oh, you're actually doing Spanish'". She has become a role model for her little sister, teaching her occasional phrases: "seeing that kind of influence I'm having on her is quite exciting".

However, Eve feels that her progression is less noticeable in her second year of language learning. This is due to a larger class size and a different focus of teaching with more essays and grammar exercises, and little contact time. She feels that in particular her speaking has not progressed: "when it comes to speaking, I can be quite shy, so sometimes it's a bit difficult to string a sentence together". Eve would have preferred "a bit more time with the

language, ... conversational stuff that ... we'll be able to use quite a lot when we're over in Spain rather than ... for our speaking exam".

On the other hand, she is pleased with her progression in terms of listening, as she is now more able to understand authentic language at natural speed.

She knows that it is important to keep up her Spanish over the summer and she has various plans for this: "I've got things like podcasts, things like my phone and my laptop where everything's in Spanish so I actually read it more, hopefully I'll be able to maybe read some books, listen to Spanish radio stations, things like that, just hearing the language and seeing it as much as possible".

Academic progression generally

Eve also reflects on other factors from her second year of university. The year has been academically more demanding, but she has learnt "to juggle everything, time-management" better and has noticed an improvement in her grades.

Preparation for the year abroad

Eve is looking forward to her year abroad: "I think it's going to be great ... I'm obviously nervous". Since she has already experienced living abroad, she is not worried about being homesick: "that kind of takes ... the nervousness of being away from home and going to a new place, and I can kind of focus more on the stresses of not actually understanding anything".

She selected her choices for the year abroad carefully based on the ranking of the university, and the availability of relevant business modules, but also considered external factors, such as the weather, the surroundings, and the fact that this was a region with no strong accents.

She is looking forward to the fact that she will be able to live on her own again (she is currently living with her family). She has started thinking about accommodation and would prefer halls: "'cause I think it's going to force me then to use my language more". However, she is also looking at alternatives on the private market with friends. She knows that this would be less beneficial for her language: "I think if I'm going to stay in a flat with my friends it's then going to be a lot of using English again, ... I am quite shy, when it comes to then, trying to make friends and, obviously using my language".

We also talk about how important dancing is to Eve. During her year abroad she is “hoping to either continue dance over there, or put that to use in some way”. This would give her language speaking opportunities, but also be enjoyable and help her keep up her skills. She is hoping to join in with other activities as well: “I’ve started looking into all the societies and things the uni offers”.

Academic expectations for the year abroad

In terms of academic progress, she is planning to do her modules abroad half in Spanish and half in English in the first semester and then more in Spanish in the second semester. On the one hand, she is quite concerned about listening to lectures in Spanish, but on the other hand she is hopeful that she will manage: “it’s going to be difficult ... but it’s going to be a quick way to improve, it’s what it’s for”. She is hoping to progress over the year: “the second semester might be a bit easier, and if we feel we can, we’ll just take as many [modules in Spanish] as possible, but then again, it obviously depends on what’s offered in Spanish and what’s offered in English”.

She says her measures of success will be “to get to the end of the year having passed everything and improved a lot in my confidence and my use of Spanish”.

Future plans

When thinking about her future, Eve says that Brexit had at times make her “almost question” her degree: “in that how useful will it actually be at the end of the four years, and will it actually be able to get me a job?” However, she is convinced that having the language on top of the business degree will make it stand out. Going abroad will improve the language and she thinks this will “really help when it comes to applying and hopefully having a career abroad in the future”.

Her long-term plan is still to live abroad: “for years and years I’ve always said I’m not staying in Scotland; I’m going abroad to work and live”. She mentions a specific interest in the US: “I don’t know if I’d go to Spain, ... I’m in the States quite a lot with family and I love it over there”.

She thinks that her Spanish will help her to achieve this aim, particularly if she were to move to the South coast: “it’s quite in demand as well ... businesses are very, very in need of people that can speak it, for trading reasons”.

Email exchange (September 2018, at the beginning of Eve's third year)

Unfortunately, things do not go to plan for Eve and at the beginning of her year abroad she communicates that she has encountered many problems and she is worried these will continue throughout the entire year. While she is working to resolve things with the partner university, she writes that she may have to look at transferring back to her home university. She knows that this would affect her choice of programme (which includes a compulsory year abroad), and she is currently looking into her options.

In a second email (two days later) Eve has taken the decision to cancel her year abroad: "unfortunately, it looks as if returning to [Scotland] is the best thing to do in terms of my degree, therefore I will be returning at the end of the week and beginning classes ... next week." Eve explains the reasoning behind this in the next interview below.

Eve returns to her home university and transfers to a customised programme which gives her the flexibility to choose her own specialism. The exact title of her degree will be determined at the end of her studies and will reflect the programme of modules she has taken.

Due to these circumstances, we do not have an interview in year 3 (as originally planned).

Final interview (April 2020, at the end of Eve's fourth year and during the fourth week of lockdown)

Eve is living with her family in Scotland and is finishing off her final assignments. She reflects on her decision to return from her year abroad and how this has affected her subsequent trajectory.

The decision to return to Scotland

Eve tells me about the difficulties she faced at the beginning of the year abroad. The main problem was that the exchange university did not offer any viable modules in English in the first semester. This information had not been clear beforehand as Eve was amongst the first set of students to study at this destination for semester 1, and everyone had expected there to be a mix of English and Spanish business modules. The information about the modules had emerged slowly during an induction meeting which took place in Spanish (and was therefore difficult to understand): "they weren't particularly organised, ... so what they thought was normal was completely different to the majority of exchange students ... none of us knew what was happening". Students sought clarity through their Erasmus contact

who could explain in English. The Erasmus coordinator tried to find some modules in English for the students, but it turned out that these were either not running or, in the case of Eve's friend, at a campus which logistically could not be reached.

Taking the modules solely in Spanish was not an option for Eve as she thought she did not have the correct language level. Eve asked for a meeting with the Dean of the business school and was told that she would need a C1 level for the modules. Eve was surprised: "that's not my level, so why are we allowed to study here if we're not at that level?", and he answered: "oh, but you'll learn". However, Eve was very worried that she would fail the modules. These worries grew when she was told by her university at home that if she did not pass the modules, she would need to repeat the year.

The partner university did try to help by offering several different modules in English ("childcare, education and geography modules"), however Eve felt that these would not meet the academic demands of her course: "I need to go back and write a dissertation, and I have to have a certain level of business, so ... that's not going to help".

Due to the constraints, Eve feels she had no choice but to leave: "It was just a case of either stay and potentially fail and not get your degree or, you know, or go back to your home institution, there was nothing that they could offer us in the correct ... degree". While one of the other exchange students (there were three of them) did decide to stay, Eve felt that this was not an option for her: "she accepted ... mainly like childcare and education ... and we were like 'that's fine, but we've got a degree to get when we get back'".

Eve's friend made the decision to leave first. Eve felt she too needed to decide very quickly due to flight restrictions and the necessity to return to her home university before the cut-off date for intake into the modules: "the decision was made on Wednesday morning [after the induction meeting on Monday], I had all of two and a half hours to pack everything up and leave and get to the airport and fly home". This whole period was extremely stressful: "it was a complete [pause] flash, and the most stressful and panicked three days I've ever experienced in my life".

Returning to Scotland and change of programme

Eve transferred to a customised programme and managed to enrol onto the modules she had chosen.

However, there were further difficulties with timetabling, causing her to miss more tuition: "weeks four and five I still hadn't actually been properly placed on modules, so it was then

trying to backtrack and catch up for four weeks". The late start at the university and the general stress impacted her work, causing her to receive lower marks than expected: "it affected the majority of third year".

The compensation claim

Eve and her friend were advised by the Student Union to make a formal complaint: "so we had a full investigation". This meant being interviewed several times, taking up a lot of time. They were eventually granted financial compensation for the expenses they had incurred through travel, deposit for a flat etc. Apart from the financial aspects, they felt that the investigation gave them some vindication and would hopefully ensure that other students did not face the same issues. The whole process was emotionally very stressful: "they signed me off at uni for severe stress anxiety because of that".

The stress anxiety meant that she had to defer her trimester 1 exams until the summer and this in turn meant she did not get a proper break during third and fourth year "to kind of reset".

As part of the compensation package the university offered to pay for language tuition during the summer. This would have enabled Eve to continue with Spanish in fourth year and beyond: "I wanted to do further, studying Spanish for my postgrad, eventually, so we were pretty set on still having Spanish". However, because Eve had to defer her exams and prepare for them during the summer, she couldn't take the language course. Eve then decided not to continue with Spanish in fourth year: "when I've not done it in over a year and that's a massive jump, there's no way I can". Eve knows that some people struggled with this course even though they spent their full year abroad: "even they've said it's really difficult, so part of me is kind of like 'I made the right decision', you know I'm quite glad I dropped it."

Not taking language modules in fourth year meant that she could not include 'language' as part of her degree title (as she had originally planned). She describes this as "a little bit gutting ... in that I'm not coming out with a language degree, which would have been ideal".

Coming to terms with what happened

Reflecting on the situation, Eve says that she was not prepared for the circumstances abroad: "there's all this stuff on culture shock and we were looking back, and we were like that's [laughs] absolutely nothing compared to what we experienced". She is regretful of

the fact that she missed out of the experience of living abroad (even though she thinks she made the correct decision).

Despite many difficulties, she has worked hard and in fourth year she has tried to readjust and reach “the mindset of it's done with, it's in the past, start a new year afresh and get through the final year”.

Throughout her studies she has continued with dancing, and teaches dancing, and she says this “has been getting me through uni as well ... a different focus”.

Further plans

Eve has been working in a retail shop over the past year, and while she is currently furloughed, she feels that she has a secure job with the firm. She has been put forward for internal development, which will hopefully lead to a promoted post. She feels that in a year's time (when the Covid situation has improved) she will have gained valuable experience and be in a good position to apply for a graduate scheme.

Despite not having been able to study languages in the past two years she knows that they are still advantageous: “I've got both my languages in numerous places throughout my CV”.

Eve intends to pick up her languages later: “I think I'll still push to keep my languages”. She mentions specific ways of doing this: “there's online courses and there's still exchange stuff that I could do next couple of years, so it's definitely not really shattered all, all my hopes of what I wanted to do previously”.

Eve is still keen to work in the US and she says that she will apply for internships once the coronavirus situation eases: “I'm kind of just wanting the experience of being abroad and working, hopefully a little bit better than my previous experience”.

2.3. Frederica's story

Frederica was born in England but grew up in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Her parents are from English-speaking backgrounds (Irish/UK and US) and speak to her in English, but Frederica speaks to her siblings mostly in French and thinks of herself as bilingual (French-English).

Growing up in a country which is officially trilingual, Frederica learnt German from an early stage. She travels frequently with her family and has been to Germany twice.

In September 2016 Frederica moved to the UK and started her studies in Scotland on the undergraduate programme 'Languages and Intercultural Communication' taking both French and German as target languages.

Interview 1 (October 2016)

Education and language learning

Frederica has been interested in pursuing both languages and business-related subjects throughout her education.

Growing up, she first attended a Swiss school, where languages are perceived as vital, and she received a solid grounding in grammar.

However, she struggled with the school system and later moved to an international (English-speaking) school in Switzerland. In her new school she was discouraged from taking maths and German, but she persisted: "I always, always got annoyed when people said I couldn't do it ... I decided I was going to take German and maths till the end of high school, just to prove them I could do it, ... and then I learnt to sort of enjoy it."

Between cultures

Given her international background, Frederica finds it hard to articulate who she is. She has a UK passport, but has never actually lived in the country, so she is keen to experience the system.

Frederica notices differences in the educational and cultural systems and attitudes without judging them. However, she does sometimes feel judged by others, for instance her flatmate will say: "that's because you're Swiss", to which Frederica replies: "I'm not Swiss but I could be". She says this sometimes "gets to" her. She feels people have prejudices towards the Swiss, generalising, and thinking they are rich.

She believes that nobody really accepts her as one of their own: "if I was in Switzerland and someone asked me where am I from, then it's basically a hard question because if I said I'm Swiss, then the Swiss would say I'm not Swiss, because ... I wasn't born there and I'm officially not Swiss, and it would be the same here in England, [people would] be like 'you're not an English person 'cause you haven't lived here', it's the same in Ireland, so it's

like there's no specific option, but personally I'd say I'm probably more Swiss than I am any of the others".

Speaking English and French

Frederica speaks English and Swiss-French at a native level. However, there are times when she struggles with any language she is speaking, sometimes losing a word, and going into a different language. Having no accent in English is not always helpful as it means that people won't make allowances for her, and she finds it difficult when people speak to her in a strong Scottish accent. In this case she may ask several times for clarification but in the end, she just guesses what has been said.

Social life

Frederica enjoys meeting people from different countries. At first, she thought this was because they "have a sort of common area", by all being international students, but she is realising that she makes no difference between Scottish students and other students. However, she likes talking and listening to people with different languages as she likes to try and "catch onto key words and things".

Interview 2 (March 2018, towards the end of Frederica's second year)

Frederica feels that she is adapting to the British culture by getting used to how you queue for buses or what to ask or not ask.

Change of programme

Frederica's mother had advised her to take French as her second language in year 1 so that the transition was easier for her. However, Frederica did not feel that this matched her multilingual interests (as she could already speak French). Frederica then changed her programme to 'International Business Management and Language' around halfway through her first year. This programme only has one language (German) and more business subjects (including maths). She says she is enjoying the modules but needs to work hard for them.

Social life

After changing her programme Frederica had to take extra modules to catch up, and she says it took her a year to realise that she was missing out on the social aspects of student life. In second year, Frederica is attempting to achieve a better balance between her university work and her social life. She is finally joining societies, such as Eurotalk, and meeting more people.

She reiterates that she enjoys meeting different people from different countries and using different languages: "I like to have friends for different things". In a way she is happy that there are only few Swiss people in Scotland as she isn't tempted to stick with people who share her background and mindset: "I notice a lot of the language groups tend to stay together whilst I sort of zigzag everywhere."

Enjoyment of languages

Frederica repeats that languages are very important to her: "I have to have languages, I like languages". She feels that she is making progress with her German language learning, and she has expanded her vocabulary and can understand more.

She wants to get to a stage where she "can actually transfer into it". She hopes to speak German fluently at the end of her stay abroad.

Plans for the year abroad

Frederica is opting for the double degree route (following set modules whilst she is abroad to achieve a degree from the partner university). She says she is very excited about studying abroad and she wants to become attached to her new destination in some way. However, she also feels a bit sad about leaving Scotland when she has just found friends.

During her year abroad Frederica is intending to travel, to visit museums and to find a Scout group to make the most of the year abroad: "it'll be fun, it's different".

Being at an international school during her final school years (where there were frequent new arrivals), and attending several different schools previously, helped her to adapt more easily to new environments. She says that it is easy for her to make friends.

She has also experienced moving internationally, and she knows what she needs to do in terms of bureaucracy (regarding bank account, phones etc.) and to combat homesickness (buy a DVD, a magazine).

Interview 3 (February 2019, between Frederica's first and second semester abroad)

Focus on double degree or on improving German?

In her first semester abroad, Frederica missed the introductory intensive German course (as she was working), and timetable issues prevented her from taking the semester-long 'German for Business' course. Instead, she took a general German language course, but she feels the topics weren't relevant to what she needed.

Being on the double degree route meant she had to take most of her business modules in English and was only allowed to take one finance course in German. Frederica found this course very difficult in terms of language and content, and she did not have the linguistic knowledge for the specialist vocabulary: "I didn't have a clue what they were saying". She is worried that she will fail this course. In retrospect she thinks she should have prepared herself better linguistically: "I think it would have helped if I had revised more, relevant vocabulary and things beforehand."

After the first semester, Frederica decided not to continue with the double degree, and to focus more on learning German instead. She feels the main reason for doing the exchange programme is learning German rather than doing courses in English (which she could have done at home).

When deciding whether to drop the double degree she describes doing pro and con lists in her mind. Her decision is then based on the relevance of the arguments rather than the amount of them.

Communicating in German

The university town in Germany is quite small and people generally don't speak English in the shops and around town. This means that Frederica has many opportunities to speak German.

She is using various strategies to communicate. This includes miming, describing things, looking things up beforehand, or during a conversation (by having a dictionary to hand or having her 3G switched on), listening to what is going on around her, reading signs and posters, talking until she is being understood. She describes how important it is for her to "tune in". At the beginning she often didn't do this and didn't realise people were addressing her.

Occasionally, people have switched to English when Frederica was trying to speak in German, and this was "slightly disappointing". This happened for instance at the introductory event where she was struggling with understanding and then someone in her group said: "'let's just speak in English'". This led her to consider the way she talks ("rambling on trying to describe things"), and she now tries to keep the sentences short.

Generally, she feels a lot more confident in German. She has no language anxiety and will go up to anyone and speak German with them. However, she also thinks she has an awareness of when she is annoying people.

She is trying to revise vocabulary about topics which interest other people: "I've since learnt to, just learn a lot of vocabulary about hobbies and activities and sports and things, and like football games". She wants to be able to speak more fluently "for a good ten minutes" without having to think about it as much. She also wants to revise the German grammar for the second semester.

Multilingualism

Frederica is speaking all her three languages daily: English and French with her flatmates and Erasmus friends, and German on campus and around town. She likes the fact that she has three languages: "you can constantly change". But she sometimes notices that she loses a word in one language and then "can only come up with it in the other two languages".

Adapting to life in German

She thinks the mentality she encounters in her exchange city is a mixture between what she has experienced in the UK and Switzerland, and she finds she fits in easily and can adapt. The unwritten rules are like Switzerland. However, other things are similar to the UK: "it's a bit more like [Scotland], people are more friendly". She likes the town and the people and her opportunities to travel.

Interview 4 (May 2020, at the end of Frederica's fourth year and during the eighth week of lockdown)

Frederica moved to Switzerland at the beginning of lockdown and is now staying with her family. She has completed all her assignments and submitted her dissertation.

Looking back to the year abroad – priorities

She believes it was the right decision to drop the double degree during her year abroad. Continuing with it would have meant giving up all her German language classes. Studying her business modules in German was also not an option, as she had found the finance module which she had taken in German too difficult: "I didn't understand a word of what was going on".

After having dropped the rigorous structure of the double degree she had more freedom in her choice of modules. This meant she could experience different parts of business which she "didn't necessarily even know existed".

She managed to keep a good work-life balance and she feels there was an adequate mix of English, French, and German. Having several languages made it easier for her to meet people, as the general language among the international students was English, but she also got to know several people through being able to speak in French to them: "there was this guy from Senegal that I met in one of my German classes so sometimes we'd go for lunch afterwards like just to talk".

She also "hung out" with her flatmates and they travelled together to various destinations in Germany. She feels she got the most out of the opportunities of living abroad.

Progress in German

Frederica was able to speak German frequently: "when I was outside the apartment I'd virtually, unless I was in class, I'd only speak German". Around town she would use German, buying tickets at the station or the cinema, in shops, and in the library.

She describes how she conversed with people in German: "I would force myself to talk to people when I saw them".

She says she noticed an improvement in speaking, understanding, and writing. In her language courses she practised writing essays a lot and was given new vocabulary to use and didn't have to look up as many words: "so I'd say it improved by that stage". She also enjoyed revising grammar and learning new topics.

She feels she achieved the goal she had set herself of "being able to converse in most situations, ... to be able to say what I needed to say". However, there are specific topics she would find difficult to discuss: "I'm still not sure ... if I'd been able to tell them everything I thought about politics".

Finding her place in the world

Frederica has now experienced living in different countries, and she knows she is able to settle in different environments but needs some time to adapt. She describes how she had to readjust to the Scottish system of academia after her year abroad. At her German university there were more tests and presentations of case studies. However, coming back to Scotland she was expected to write more essays: "I had to retrain myself to do that". She is open-minded about the virtues of these systems: "I think they're both good in different ways it's just you have to train yourself to do one or the other".

Being multilingual

Since leaving Germany Frederica has forgotten some of the new German vocabulary, and she is having to revise it "to use it again". She is keeping up her German skills by listening to the radio and she has made friends with Erasmus students from Germany and listens to their conversations. However, while she can easily switch between French and English, this is different for German: "I'm kind of thinking about vocabulary and grammar and everything."

When I ask her what it means to her to be multilingual, she says that her focus is on being able to talk to more people. Also, she feels she has more opportunities to "move around and go somewhere different". She compares herself to her monolingual cousin who wouldn't think of applying for a job in a different country. In contrast, Frederica thinks she wouldn't be so worried going somewhere new even if she couldn't speak the language. Having different languages is like "a confidence boost" and causes her not to overthink things.

As an example, she describes how she volunteered to support students to write an article in French, and then it turned out they wanted her to tutor in German instead. She teamed up with a native German and they worked together to support the students: "so it was kind of like 'don't freeze up', you just learn to deal with ... the situation".

Future plans

We talk again about Frederica's decision in her first year of university to change her course to IBM and German (rather than Intercultural Communication). In retrospect, she is happy she made this decision as she feels that her current course gives her more opportunities and she has studied various areas of business: "it doesn't focus you on one route".

I tell her what she wrote about her future plans four years ago. She had said she would like to work in advertising, creating adverts in the local language "according to the local culture". She had also said she would like to travel, feel at home "anywhere around the world" and "meet and befriend people from all backgrounds, cultures and languages".

When I ask her to comment on this, she says it sounds like a school pamphlet. She has since realised that she isn't creative enough to make her own videos or adverts, but she does enjoy working with software on computers. She no longer has a specific goal, but she could imagine working in an administrative setting where she "can use some of the software skills and language skills" and do "a German class on the side or something".

She is still keen to move to different places such as Berlin or Vienna, and “assimilate” and “talk with the locals and befriend them”. She wouldn't like to belong to an “international cluster” as is often the case in her home city. Again, she is not judgemental: “it's not that I have an issue with that, it's just that I'd like to maybe do both”.

2.4. Commentary

The narratives of Eve and Frederica give evidence of conflicting concerns which lead to a re-prioritisation amongst them. I will analyse this process by addressing the research questions two and five (see above), and I focus on the following aspects:

- Which concerns linked to multilingualism are important to these students at the beginning of their studies? How do these concerns come into conflict with each other and how is the conflict resolved?
- What are the more general multilingual projects of these students and how are these linked to their constellation of concerns? Does the conflict of concerns lead to a change in the multilingual projects?
- What evidence is there for reflexivity around the conflicts of concerns and structural forces? How does reflexivity lead to resolving these conflicts?
- What sort of structural changes become triggers for the conflicts?

2.4.1. *Conflicting concerns and the year abroad*

In the first interviews both students are committed to concerns which cover all three clusters from my framework. These include firstly developing as a person (Eve describes wanting to travel and become more confident, Frederica wishes to find a connection with people from diverse backgrounds and languages). Secondly both students have concerns in the area of academic and career development (Eve wishes to gain a degree which will enable her to work abroad, Frederica is keen to combine her language and business-related subjects into a degree pathway). Thirdly, they wish to develop their communicative competence, and Eve describes her enjoyment of Spanish (even though she is shy when it comes to speaking), whereas Frederica says that she loves languages and wants to improve her German.

To both, the year abroad is a project which brings these concerns together, and they are both excited about the project. Eve hopes to improve her confidence in speaking and to

pass all her modules. Frederica chooses a destination abroad which allows her to take a double degree (i.e., a degree at the partner university alongside her UK degree). This is presumably to improve her career options; however, she does not specify her reasons for taking the double degree.

However, for both students the conditions at the partner universities lead to a conflict in concerns. When Eve arrives at her destination for the year abroad, she discovers that the relevant business modules are (contrary to her expectations) only offered in Spanish. She is convinced that she will not pass them, even though the Dean encourages her to try. She is not prepared to take alternative modules from other subjects, as she is worried that she will not progress academically. She summarises the conflict when she says: "It was just a case of either stay and potentially fail and not get your degree or, you know, or go back to your home institution." At this point she prioritises her academic progression in Business Management, over her concern of reaching communicative competency in Spanish. However, she is still hopeful she can accommodate her concern around communicative competence in Spanish. She plans to catch up with Spanish by taking a language course over the summer in the following year (funded by the university). Unfortunately, over the next months the situation causes her mental health to deteriorate, forcing her to delay exams until the summer. Again, she feels forced to prioritise her academic business-related progress over her progress in communicative competence as she cancels her language course and focusses on her revision. The narrative demonstrates that this prioritisation of concerns is a highly emotional process (Archer, 2004).

Frederica's plans regarding her year abroad also change. During her first semester she realises that the double degree route means taking all her modules in English with little time left to concentrate on improving her German. She attempts one of the modules in German, but due to the subject matter being highly specialised she fears that she will fail the course. Frederica takes the opposite decision to Eve and prioritises her concerns of communicative competence and personal development over her career-related concerns. She drops the double degree route and opts for more diverse subjects and language courses. This gives her enough free time to meet people who she can speak to in various languages, and to travel, as she seeks to make best use of social circles during her time abroad (compare Coleman, 2015; Kinginger, 2010).

2.4.2. Multilingual life project

Archer describes how it is not possible to have complete knowledge about one's concerns until maturity (and even then they may still change), and this means that life projects (the 'modus vivendi' one wants to achieve) are changeable for younger people (Archer, 2003).

Eve initially describes her multilingual (life) project as working abroad, specifically in the USA. She thinks that her combined degree of international business and Spanish will help her to have a career abroad (Dörnyei, 2009), and that her skill set will be in particular demand on the South coast of the States. This project meets her entire constellation of concerns (see above).

During her studies she has not been able to progress with her language related studies and development and has had to prioritise her academic progress over her concern for communicative competence. By the end of the study, however, her constellation of concerns has only shifted (Archer, 2007), and not changed completely, and her multilingual project is much the same. She is still hoping to move abroad to the States. She talks about picking up her languages again and she says she is inserting her languages prominently in her CV to increase her opportunities of finding international work.

In contrast to Eve's rather stable life project (despite the shifting priorities of concerns), Frederica's life project is less concrete at the end of her studies. At the beginning Frederica said she would like to go into advertising where she can use her business skills as well as her language and intercultural knowledge. She would also like to travel and meet people from different backgrounds. At the end of the study, she feels that she has increased her self-knowledge (Archer, 2003) and thinks she is not creative enough for advertising. Her life project is now less specific but reflects her constellation of concerns in that she would still like to live and travel abroad, meet and befriend diverse people and use her business and language skills in a career environment.

2.4.3. Reflexivity on structural constraints and enablement

There is ample evidence for reflexivity in both students' narratives.

Eve chooses her university for the year abroad by reflecting on her priorities (academic offering, ranking of the university, location). However, it was not clear to her that the business modules would be offered only in Spanish in semester 1. She then feels under pressure to make a very quick decision and weigh up her concerns. Presumably, her friend taking the decision to return influences Eve's judgement and Eve describes her own decision-making as rushed "it was a complete flash". It is arguable that she might have

come to a different decision if she had let herself be advised by different people, for instance myself as her programme leader (compare Archer, 2007, and her analysis of “communicative reflexivity”). She could, for instance, have settled for some modules in English outside of her business area for semester 1 and tried some modules in Spanish as well. In semester 2 (where the offering in English is larger) she could then have made up credits if she had failed modules. However, this is probably also a matter of confidence (see below). Ultimately, she feels that she must choose between priorities, and in this choice the academic progression weighs more strongly.

Eve is again forced to reflect on her priorities when the summer catch-up Spanish course before year 4 takes place at the same time as her resit exams. Once more, she prioritises the academic progression over the pursuit of language competency and decides against the Spanish course, thinking it would impact her exam preparation. This means dropping Spanish altogether in year 4. When reflecting on this decision later she says that part of her thinks she made the right decision.

Frederica firstly demonstrates her reflexivity when she changes her programme in first year from Intercultural Communication (with French and German) to International Business Management with German. She explains that she did not feel that taking French as one of her languages in the former course was causing her to make any progress in terms of communicative competence (as she was already bilingual in French and English). Furthermore, she has always been interested in Maths and she feels that the new programme reflects this interest better. In fact, she had often been discouraged from taking Maths and German, and pursuing this programme is an example of what Thompson describes as ‘anti-ought-to-self’, or a learner’s oppositional behaviour in regard to what is expected of them (Thompson, 2017).

When I ask Frederica about how she came to the second decision (dropping the double degree half-way through her year abroad) she tells me how she makes lists of pros and cons in her mind and then weighs up the relevance of the arguments. When she reflects again on this process at the end of fourth year, she thinks she made the right decision. The double degree had acted as a barrier towards her engaging with the German language, as it restricted her to the English stream and difficult, as well as time-consuming, modules. Dropping this route enabled her to concentrate on developing communicative competence and she had realised that this was her primary concern. It can be argued that this was not a change with great impact, as the double degree route was an enhancement of her degree,

rather than an integral part of it, and (in contrast to Eve's situation) there was no change in her general trajectory.

2.4.4. Triggers for changes

Several scholars have described study abroad as a trigger for identity-related change (Benson et al., 2013; Kinginger, 2015). In my investigation the study abroad environment causes both students to re-prioritise their concerns, and Archer (2006) would also refer to this as a change of personal identity.

Eve clearly perceives the lack of offerings in English as causal for her having to make the decision between pursuing the language or the business degree. However, Eve's story often mentions the fact that she feels shy about speaking and not confident about her skills. It is possible that with more support and advice (see the sections on interventions in previous chapters, and my suggestions for student support in the conclusion to this thesis) she would have embraced the challenge of studying in Spanish (as other students did), and had she failed some of her modules, then solutions would have been found. Eve's resulting stress anxiety caused her to resit exams in the summer, which in turn meant that she did not feel confident to take a Spanish summer course alongside her exam preparation. Therefore, the three elements of study abroad, lack of support, and stress anxiety all contributed to Eve's decision-making during the final two years of her studies.

Frederica makes two programme-related changes during her narrative. The first one is when she changes her programme during her first year, causing her to study only one target language and more business modules. The trigger for this is not really a change of the structural environment, but rather her growing awareness of her concerns (Archer, 2003) and her realisation that the new programme reflects these better. However, the new programme means more work and less opportunities to engage with student life.

Frederica's second change comes during study abroad when she replaces her double degree route with a regular Erasmus exchange. This change is linked to the structural environment of this particular exchange opportunity which meant that Frederica had to either prioritise the benefits of the double degree (academic concerns), or her concerns regarding communicative competence and personal development. The latter were better supported through a "regular" Erasmus exchange. To summarise, Frederica's growing self-awareness of her concerns, as well as (for the second decision) her reflexivity on the structural environment of study abroad are triggers for decisions affecting her trajectory.

2.5. Summary

The research questions I addressed in this chapter were the following:

Research Question 2: What are examples of **conflicts** between concerns linked to multilingualism and how is the conflict resolved?

Research Question 5: What evidence is there for reflexivity around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

I have shown, through the narratives and the analysis in the commentaries, that the students' multilingual concerns matched all three clusters (personal development, communicative competence, career, and academic aspirations). At the beginning of their studies both students selected their programme to reflect these concerns (and Frederica changed her programme slightly during first year after reflecting on the fact that 'International Business Management and German' was more suited to her concerns than her previous programme). Both had seen their year abroad as a project which could enhance all their concerns, and Frederica had additionally opted for the double degree route.

During the year abroad the structural conditions changed, and the students reflected on their concerns, as they needed to rank these (Archer, 2007). Eve felt she could not combine her concern of wishing to gain communicative competency with her concern of academic progression and gaining business skills and knowledge. She prioritised her concerns around academic and career aspirations and returned home, even though this ultimately meant giving up her programme and her language studies. Frederica's reasoning was the opposite. She reflected on the restrictions that the double degree route imposed on her in terms of having to concentrate on business modules in English, and she chose to prioritise her concerns of developing her communicative and personal skills whilst abroad. This led her to give up the double degree option and transfer to a "regular" Erasmus exchange.

The narratives provide ample evidence of the reflexive process. However, this seemed more structured in Frederica's case where she describes making lists of pros and cons in her head. On the other hand, Eve's reflexive process seems to have been rushed due to time constraints. She was also influenced by her friend's decision to withdraw from the year abroad. However, she remained committed to multilingualism generally, and, in the final interview, described how she wanted to work on her communicative skills again in future.

Chapter 8: Analysis of the students' trajectories – multilingual concerns

This section clearly traces the conflict of multilingual concerns and shows how this is linked to a highly individualised process of decision-making through reflexivity. Additionally, this analysis is unique in that it shows the reasoning behind the cancellation of Eve's year abroad, and this is an area which, to my knowledge, has previously not received attention in the literature. Eve's experiences clearly call for a critical re-thinking of the year abroad, and suggestions are made in chapter 11 (conclusion).

Chapter 9: Analysis of the students' trajectories – the multilingual repertoire as a project

1. The development of the multilingual repertoire

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the narratives of Lotti and Jade. I pay attention to the cog in the framework of multilingual reflexivity (figure 5) which denotes multilingual projects, and I address the third research question, derived from my framework, alongside question five on reflexivity.

Research Question 3: What sort of **multilingual projects** are the participants aiming for? How are the projects linked to their concerns? How do the projects change over time?

Research Question 5: What evidence is there for **reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

The multilingual project I am focussing on is the multilingual repertoire of the students. I introduced the terms 'multilingual repertoire' (as the totality of languages and skills of an individual) and 'dominant language constellation' (as the most important vehicle languages of an individual) (Aronin, 2016) in the key concepts (chapter 3, section 2.1.4) of this thesis.

Over the four years of the study the multilingual repertoire develops and changes, and this is linked to the students' shifting constellation of multilingual concerns and accompanying emotions (Archer, 2004, 2007), as well as the changing structural environment (Aronin & Singleton, 2012). The students reflect specifically on language affiliations, communities of speakers, language awareness, language and culture, the interconnectedness of languages, and investment.

As before, I address my research questions in the commentary at the end of this chapter where I set out more specific sub-questions.

1.2. Lotti's story

Lotti is from Germany and started learning English aged seven and French aged twelve. She has frequently visited England and France.

In September 2016 she started her undergraduate programme 'Languages and Intercultural Communication' in Scotland choosing French as her main language and Spanish as her second language (from Beginners Level).

Interview 1 (October 2016)

Lotti is already fluent in English and German and at university she hopes to improve her French and learn Spanish. Regarding her future, Lotti does not have a clear project but says: "I hope that I will still live abroad, maybe not in the UK anymore, I hope that I will need my language skills at work and that it will involve travelling".

Reflections on English

Lotti has a strong emotional affiliation to the English language. She stayed with a family in the UK for 9 weeks when she was 15 and visited a school in England. She describes how she had to organise her stay herself: "I begged my parents for over two years"; "I remember calling the headmaster on his holidays at home". During her stay she experienced a friendly and "natural environment". She felt "supported" in her language learning (the mother would correct her English) and "accepted" in the new setting. She made many friends and returned frequently. She says this exchange was eye-opening for her: "that's when I really got into the culture and connected with the language ... it just clicked, kind of", but she says that it was not about learning the language: "my aim was ... just living there".

Now she is a student in Scotland and uses mainly English in her daily life. She feels university is so diverse that "it makes absolutely no difference" whether she speaks English to native speakers or to international speakers: "I see English ... or just in general language and communication as the way of connecting".

Reflections on German

Lotti does not feel comfortable speaking German in the UK if people are around who can't understand. In fact, she hardly speaks German at all: "I've got friends from all over the world, but not from Germany ... because that's not what I'm looking for, I'm just looking for international students, ... I want to talk in English".

Lotti reflects on her situation as an international student. She says she doesn't "really feel German" but is also "not afraid to say I'm German because that's, that's who I am". In fact, she does not define herself according to nationality, but more according to other groupings: "I just feel like I'm a student ... I would call myself a language student".

Learning multiple languages

During her nine weeks in England as a teenager Lotti first experienced learning one language (French) through the medium of a different foreign language (English). She found

this experience inspiring: "I was connecting all the words and the grammar, and it just really triggered my interest in languages".

At university Lotti still finds learning French in English "enriching and helpful". She is also enjoying Spanish as her second language from Beginner's level: "It's a lot of fun, I really like it".

She finds it easier to learn her second and third languages as she is transferring knowledge and learning strategies (regarding vocabulary and grammar) from English to French and Spanish.

However, her languages also influence each other, and she consciously separates the time she spends studying them: "Whenever I do Spanish and French on one day ... I need to do something else in the middle. I can't just switch it off".

Interview 2 (at the beginning of Lotti's second year, November 2017)

Lotti is one of four languages students who have elected to take part in a one-off Russia exchange in the second semester of their second year. This was advertised at the end of the first year as an additional semester abroad (students will still spend the entire third year in the country of their main target language, which is French for Lotti). To prepare for the exchange, the students are receiving Russian lessons. During their time in Russia they will continue studying languages and culture.

Reflections on English

English has now become natural to Lotti. She speaks English every day and is no longer actively learning vocabulary.

She says she could imagine a future in the UK as she feels connected with the country and the language. However, the Brexit debate is creating an uncomfortable atmosphere. She feels that the discussion is not against her personally. However, she does not like the direction it is taking: "I'm totally for just connecting and not shutting each other out".

The Russian exchange

Lotti's main motivation for the Russian exchange is to do something new and unknown. The opportunity fits in well with her interest in history and politics and she is keen to experience life outside of the EU. Lotti thinks this interest is something that defines her in the long-term: "I'm interested in, into cultures, and not just theoretically, talking about it,

but actually going to places and seeing: how do people live, how do they speak and just trying to understand it.”

However, she is anticipating that she will not feel at home in Moscow, and she admits that the decision to go there doesn't really make sense: “I feel like I've just arrived here, I kind of have my friends, everything's settled, and I'm still deciding to go”.

She explains how she needs to face difficult situations to develop as a person, and that it is in her nature to go for the difficult options. She feels like a constant wanderer, and it is her “wish to keep moving, and to keep seeing new things”.

Language learning

Lotti describes how her focus in French and Spanish is improving her listening and speaking skills by watching podcasts or the news. She thinks knowing French and English is helping her with Spanish: “I'm realising how much I can actually understand, even though I don't know all the vocabulary ... and tenses.”

Lotti will continue learning French and Spanish in Moscow. She is a bit worried about her progress. On the one hand, there are advantages: She enjoys the interconnectedness of languages, and it might help her to focus on French if she can't understand the instructions in Russian. On the other hand, she thinks it might be confusing given that Russian is so hard. She acknowledges the conflict between her multilingual approach to language learning and her desire to learn individual languages. She knows that she only has a limited amount of time and energy: “I can't put a hundred percent of energy into French, because then I won't have anything ... for the other two languages, so I'm just trying to balance it out, and that's also why I'm trying not to put too much pressure on the Russian learning”.

Lotti thinks going to Moscow in the knowledge that she won't progress very much with Russian will help her combat her perfectionism. She expects that she will be using English as the main Lingua Franca whilst in Russia, but also German (she has heard that many people speak it) and maybe some limited Russian.

Interview 3 (towards the end of Lotti's semester in Moscow, May 2018)

Lotti initially took a four-week intensive course in Russian, and her modules now cover Russian, French, and culture, but she could not continue with Spanish.

The experience of living in Russia

Lotti describes how living in Russia feels uncomfortable on many levels, and she thinks that she is suffering from culture shock. She had previously felt insecure when she came to Scotland, but the Russian experience is “on a totally different scale” and she feels “lost in the culture”. She has experienced a loss of control, partly because of linguistic problems, but also due to living in a more authoritarian system. For example, she was required to sign several forms without knowing what they were for, or her passport was taken away from her for six weeks to issue her with a visa.

She feels that she and the other three students from Scotland constantly stick out. They are referred to as “the Scottish students” which is not factually true as they are all international students.

She feels particularly exposed when she speaks to her friends in English. People often openly listen into their conversations saying “oh, I listened to your conversation, it was really interesting, that was good English practice for me, thank you”. This causes her to be cautious about speaking in public.

Lotti's emotional connection to English and German

The English language has become extremely meaningful to Lotti: “German is my mother tongue, English will never take that place, but in terms of ... the comfort and the, like dreaming in English and thinking in English, ... it showed me how important it is to me”. She misses being in the UK very much and is combating her nostalgia by watching series where the actors speak with an English accent.

She remarks on how she is no longer recognised as a non-native speaker of English in Russia. At the same time, she describes how her English is changing, as her peers are all international students: “we felt like we are influencing each other so much in terms of our vocabulary ... we were joking that our English is actually getting worse, because we're all not native speakers”.

German has also become emotionally important to Lotti. She watched German series “when it got really bad” and realised: “yeah it's part of me”. In Scotland she had avoided German people and had “wanted to be surrounded by English ... native speakers”. However, in Russia she formed a very close connection to one of the students in her group (who was also from Germany). Being able to speak German to her was “a massive comfort - we both felt that gave us so much”. When this friend decided to return to Scotland it was tough: “the sudden importance of German just left”.

She is using both English and German now as vehicular languages for French and Russian: "I sometimes just had my notes mixed in these three languages which was a complete mess".

The multilingual repertoire

Lotti is enjoying learning Russian but finds it very hard. Whereas her other languages go together well, the interconnection with Russian is limited (however, the German grammar helps her to understand Russian structures). She had previously wanted to learn Mandarin, but she now thinks she will stick with her current languages: "I feel like I'm more, being more realistic about what I want to do, and how much time I want to invest in things".

Lotti's French teacher and many students in her French class don't speak English, so the Lingua Franca is French, and Lotti describes this as "diving into the language". She sometimes meets up with one of these students and being able to communicate in French has formed a connection between them: "we talked about so many things where we first of all realised, we're really similar, but then we also realised that it doesn't really matter if you make mistakes".

Lotti is planning to spend the next year in Quebec. Her experiences in Russia have dented her confidence: "I'm scared to not be able to enjoy it as much as I want to ... physically or mentally ... I was really shown where my limits are".

She plans to focus on French for the first semester and would like to become comfortable speaking: "the main factor that's important [is] the time". She is unsure about which languages to choose for the second semester: "Do French first, maybe then Spanish, ... the question is yeah, do I continue to do Russian or not."

Interview 4 (back in Scotland, year 3, December 2018)

Unfortunately, Lotti did not receive her visa for Canada in time for her first semester and is now back at her home university in Scotland. She is currently taking Spanish, Beginners Mandarin, and a module on Scottish culture. She will travel out to Canada for the second semester.

English and the connection to the UK

Even though Lotti had wanted to spend this semester in Canada, she describes how she feels very much at home in the UK: "I know that this is my second home now".

The English language has become even more natural for her, and she is now confident about living in the UK: "I can live in the UK and I'm fine ... I can work and I can communicate

with people, and I don't have to think about it". Particularly after her experiences in Russia she enjoys not sticking out, and she thinks that even if she did, people in the UK would be more accepting.

German

Lotti's positive attitude towards German has remained: "it's not this holy thing that I always want to speak in English". In her daily life she speaks German with one of her flatmates and they switch seamlessly to English if the English-speaking flatmate comes in. In relation to English, she says: "before I was always kind of scared that I would lose it, and now it's just really natural, which is nice, it's a comforting thing to know".

Language constellation

Lotti describes English, German and French as her central languages, but she has also been able to pick up Spanish again: "Spanish suddenly has risen from nowhere again". She is unable to continue with Russian but is taking a Beginner's module in Mandarin. She also could not continue French at the correct level but is resorting to self-study and is attending a lower-level French module as a guest student.

In Spanish she is having to work hard as she missed one module during her time in Russia. She feels really motivated and is progressing well. She thinks this is due to the similarity between French and Spanish: "when I think about how long it took me to learn French, I actually learnt [Spanish] quite quickly".

She is confident now about the learning strategies that work for her ("I gathered that I can learn really well when I can listen and watch something at the same time"), but she has also realised that these methods aren't useful for Russian and Mandarin, and she has come up with new strategies. For instance, she uses a three-step system to learn the Mandarin words, the pinyin transcriptions, and the pronunciation.

Shifting multilingual concerns

In terms of her language constellation Lisa describes a certain split. She wants to achieve a very high level in some languages (English, French, German, hopefully Spanish), but she is happy for others to remain rudimentary and provide insights into culture (Russian, Mandarin, maybe others): "this whole thing shifted towards the culture a bit". She has realised: "my intention is not to be fluent in ten languages". She sees some languages "as a skill to use later", while others are "a hobby".

Expectations for her semester in Quebec

Lotti chose to study in Quebec because she “wanted something new ... again, it’s just that curiosity”.

The visa problems were emotionally hard to deal with. Her plans for Quebec are to just enjoy her time there, “to see lots of things”, and speak French a lot in her daily life.

She is planning to take modules in politics or sociology in French “I would love to actually study something that I’m interested in, in the language ... the motivation is different”.

Interview 5 (towards the end of Lotti’s semester in Quebec, year 3, April 2019)

Language repertoire

English, German, and French are now Lotti’s everyday languages and she communicates with speakers from all over the world studying in Quebec. She is trying to keep the amount of time she spends speaking these languages “quite equal” and she feels confident that she will be able to keep them: “before I was kind of doubting that it’s even possible to have three or more languages in your daily life, but I can definitely say that it is possible”.

In terms of module choices, Lotti’s expectations have not been met, and the university is only allowing Lotti to take French language courses (no content modules or other languages). She says she is “a little bit sad” that she cannot continue Spanish. However, she meets up with a Spanish-speaking group every Sunday and she manages to understand a lot. She thinks she could get Spanish up to a high level quickly: “I still want the four languages to be in my life ... but I’m more relaxed about it I guess”.

French

French is often the lingua franca in Quebec and Lotti has many opportunities to speak. She feels people are accommodating with the Quebecois accent.

She is doing an English-French language exchange with two girls from Quebec and they discuss topics around society and history. She also attends a French language course on public speaking, and she applies some of the strategies to speaking out of class as well.

Despite being disappointed about her limited choice of modules she feels that focussing on just one language (for the first time in five years) has made a big difference in terms of progress. She can now switch between English and French without hesitation, and she is no longer afraid of making mistakes.

The exchange experience

Lotti settled in Quebec quickly, and this was partly due to a friend who was already studying there and who shared her friendship group with her.

She feels that her experiences in Russia prepared her for her time in Quebec. She knows how to deal with the extremely cold weather, and she can “handle it better” when things go wrong.

In hindsight she can see that she was suffering from an immense culture shock when she came to Russia, but she also had high expectations. In comparison, she had low expectations for Quebec, and this helped her. She feels that the support system is working very well at her university in Quebec, and this is something that was missing in Russia.

Generally, she feels close to the Quebecois culture and is very interested in it. She thinks that people in Quebec seem very open-minded and interested (but she is aware that she may be living “in this uni bubble”) whereas in Russia she had felt like an outsider: “not welcomed, and also not integrated”.

She has not been home-sick once in Quebec whereas this was a real issue in Moscow. She says she would “love to go to another country ... where I know it’s going to be hard again to ... just see whether I could actually handle it”.

She is excited to “go back to Edinburgh and ... finish my degree”.

Interview 6 (at the end of fourth year, during the eighth week of lockdown, May 2020)

Lotti is now back in Germany with her family.

Multilingual repertoire

Lotti describes how her level in English, French, and German is now pretty equal: “first I only had, ... like two, and now ... I can kind of switch between three of them ... it’s kind of like I’m juggling, ... if I take another one, I might lose all of them”.

Nevertheless, she would like to pick up one of the other languages which she started (probably either Russian or Spanish), as learning languages makes her happy.

Lotti says that there are things that can be expressed better in another language. She stresses again that language learning to her “is all about the human connection”, and that a language “always opens a door”. Russian and Mandarin have added to her language

portfolio and given her cultural insights, but the experiences (particularly with Russia) have also taught her a lot about herself.

Speaking remains the hardest skill for her, but she also sees it as the most important part of language learning: “this is what I’ve learned, basically over four years, that my personal goal with the language is to communicate with people”. She hopes that knowing this about herself will help her with language learning in general: “because it makes me a little bit ... less focused on being perfect”.

English

Even if she occasionally still makes mistakes Lotti is now completely comfortable speaking English in many different contexts and coming back to Edinburgh after Quebec was just natural: “I didn’t even think about the fact that I would have to speak in English”.

Now that she is in Germany, she is not using English as much and she misses it more than her other languages. She finds herself dreaming in English, and she thinks this is the way her brain is compensating the lack of English in her life.

French

Lotti is happy with the progress she made in Quebec: “in retrospect, it was a very good decision only to focus on French, because that is how I actually got a lot out of it”.

She describes getting through the barrier of “not wanting to make any mistakes”. Instead, she is concentrating “on getting my message across and communicating with people”.

In fourth year, she was only able to continue with French, and she focussed on learning new vocabulary and practising interpreting and pronunciation. She reflects on how this was not her own choice: “I think it’s not me actively choosing how I learnt, ... I just adjusted to the modules that I had”.

Further plans

Lotti’s plan to do a Masters degree is partly linked to the current situation with Coronavirus. The Brexit situation has reinforced Lotti’s decision to find a course outside of the UK. Due to the amount of time she spent abroad on her exchanges, she is not eligible for the settled status in the UK, and Brexit has also made her question “the attitude towards Europeans or in general just non-British people coming to the UK”. However, she also says: “if I really want to and I think I do, I just know that I’ll come back anyways”.

She has been accepted for a course on Intercultural Communication in the Netherlands, and she describes this as “perfect” as she will be able to “choose between English, French, and German modules”.

She says that her plans from the beginning of her studies are unchanged. Languages are still her main focus, and she still wants to combine these with travelling. Her Masters will allow her to study modules on consulting and intercultural training, and she thinks this will enable her to use her languages in a practical way: “without going into translation, interpreting or teaching”.

She says: “basically I still think that I developed, and I changed a lot, but in a way, probably I didn't”. Previously, however, her plans were just a wish, and she says: “now I'm actually looking at, okay, how can I do this, what am I going to do for work, and I'm a ... bit closer to actually ..., doing everything in ... the future”.

1.3. Jade's story

Jade describes her background in the following way: “I was born in Italy, so I'm basically Italian, but my home country is the Philippines”. She has some passive knowledge of her heritage language (Tagalog) but grew up in Italy speaking mainly Italian with her parents. At school she learnt English, French, Spanish, and some German. She never visited any of these countries or met any native speakers during her school time.

In September 2016 Jade came to Scotland and enrolled on the undergraduate programme ‘Languages and Intercultural Communication’. French and Spanish are her target languages.

Interview 1 (October 2016)

Jade talks about her love of languages and her interest in learning how to use them, behave in different countries, and travel. Her future plans link her interest in languages with her sense of social responsibility: “I'd like to go to Africa, to help the French region, in the old French colonies to be better, because I know there are ... different kind of difficulties”. She says she chose to study in the UK to learn more about business and to later “create a non-profit association which helps everything basically”.

First experiences in the UK

After school Jade took a year out to take the IELTS test (a requirement for study in the UK). She had initially prepared herself through self-study but found that she needed to take private lessons to learn the necessary strategies. These strategies are still useful to her: “now I’m here and I notice that ... the things that I learn for my IELTS exam are the same, that I have to do here for my assessments, so for me it was useful”.

While Jade also watched movies and TV shows to prepare herself for spoken English, she had mostly concentrated on her formal and academic English, and this made communication difficult at first: “I had to understand how to speak in informal context”.

She was also unprepared for the Scottish dialect: “I didn’t know that there was another accent but the English accent, so I was very very shocked”. She describes her first communication with a taxi driver and how she “was afraid to be lost”. She uses humour to deal with some of the difficulties she is facing: “I can get used to this accent, it’s not a problem [laughs], but you know sometimes I have some laughs”. She occasionally tries to speak in the Scottish dialect herself: “just to be aware of their speech, their way of speaking”.

She has found part-time work at a conference centre to support herself financially. This requires her to speak “in a highly quality” and she hopes to further improve her register.

She is aware that the environment in which you learn the language is very important. She mentions discrimination at school when people mocked the way she spoke English. This led to language anxiety: “I think I’m not confident speaking in another language”. She has now concluded: “I have to speak in English in my way”.

Jade describes how moving abroad requires you to be very strong and to leave your “things behind, your relatives behind”. She calls this “a victory, but the same times there are sacrifices”.

Language repertoire

Jade has a network of Italian friends, and these have supported her transition: “if I were alone, I wouldn’t live, I think”.

Jade initially chose French as her first language and Spanish as her second language. She sometimes finds it difficult to cope with many languages at the same time: “because I have lots of languages in my head, sometimes I mix that”. It is also difficult to use English as her vehicular language (instead of Italian) when she learns Spanish.

Because of these difficulties, and because she wants to be able to “really understand” the academic assessments, she is planning to drop Spanish and instead take “English for professional purposes” in the next trimester.

Jade can transfer some of her knowledge between her languages, for instance the degrees of formality are similar in French and Italian.

Jade is in a French class with people who have travelled a lot. For her it is different: “the first French people I met in all my life were here”. Again, she is facing language anxiety: “I’m embarrassed to speak ... because maybe I care about this language so much that I don’t want to ... make some mistakes, ... so when I meet French people I just speak in English”.

Interview 2 (at the end of Jade’s second year, April 2018)

This interview takes place as Jade is preparing for her year abroad.

Mandarin as a new language

In second year, Jade was able to choose a new language. Ideally, she would have liked to take Japanese, but due to the limited choices she opted for Mandarin and is now very happy with this subject (“I love it”). She says it addresses her heritage and family background: “I felt closer to my Asian side”; “it fills up that empty space in my heart”.

She is disappointed that the university only offers Mandarin for one year: “I mean having a completely new language is ... really great, but I cannot continue”. She feels just having the basics are not enough: “I chose Mandarin also because I want to use that language in the future, in my life, I want to travel China, I plan, I want to do internship in China”. She also thinks she might like to carry out research in this area: “maybe in my dissertation I want to talk about Mandarin, or Chinese society”.

Italian

Jade is affected by the political situation in Italy and people’s comments on Facebook – this is impacting her relationship to Italy (“I really don’t care about Italy now”). Her only connection with Italy is the fact that her parents live there, and she says that she misses them.

She is also avoiding Italian people in Edinburgh: “here, is difficult for me to have a connection with Italian people, also because of my, my appearance, and sometimes I feel that when I am with other people I am, an outsider”. She feels that others disagree with

her on certain issues and don't accept that her experiences are different. She finds it hard to trust people, but she has some close friends who she thinks of as international, rather than belonging to a specific linguistic or cultural group: "I speak only with people that I respect".

Spanish and language awareness

Jade learnt Spanish for eight years at school but discontinued it at university. She says this was because she wasn't learning much, and she didn't like the method of teaching.

Jade describes how she has issues with Spanish-speaking colleagues at work. Often they assume that she understands, and speak to her in Spanish, even though it is an English-speaking working environment. She feels personally undermined by this lack of language awareness.

She says that she herself is very aware of whether other people can understand or not: "I work with my best friend, she's Italian, so when I'm with her I speak in Italian, but when I am with other, non-Italian people, we, ... switch in English ... I can feel when it's disrespectful or not".

English and interconnections with other languages

Jade's confidence in speaking English informally has improved and she doesn't need to translate things in her head anymore: "I'm so proud of it". However, she describes how speaking is generally a problem for her "also in Italian" and she sometimes speaks fast and "eats" or "cuts" words.

She is now more aware of mistakes she is likely to make in English and can self-correct. She still wants to progress ("I'm not fine") and this means that she has to prepare herself "like thousand times" before a presentation.

She generally enjoys writing: "I've always known that in writing in any language I'm better than speaking ... I love writing, and so I try to, to bring this kind of passion in other languages as well".

However, she thinks that the academic rules of writing in both English and French are limiting the way that she likes to express herself. She feels that she is losing the ability to express herself in Italian writing (which she thinks is more flexible and allows for more personal expression).

French

Jade sometimes has problems with interferences between French and Italian: "I speak in French thinking ... in an Italian way". She paired up with a French student in trimester 1, and this worked well, as the student was learning Italian, and could explain mistakes from the Italian perspective.

The French lecturer now sets speaking assessments where students cannot prepare specifically. Jade was very scared of these assessments but received high marks: "I think I'm now improving French in speaking".

At work, French customers often will not speak to her in French. Jade is worried that this will be the same when she studies in France next year. She is anxious as she has been told that you need to know French very well and she thinks people might not help her linguistically: "I'm afraid of discrimination".

Interview 3 (at the beginning of Jade's second semester abroad, March 2019)

Jade's language repertoire

Jade now uses English and French both at university and in her daily life, and she speaks Italian daily with friends and family. She is also continuing her studies in Mandarin.

However, Jade sometimes feels she is not proficient in any of her languages: "I strongly believe that it's also my personality, I cannot speak in general ... I'm not able to tell a story, a long story, because I put so much stuff and it's confusing sometimes to understand me ... I think that I will never be a kind of native speaker in any of these languages".

She describes how there is a difference between "speaking" and "expressing oneself". Regarding Italian, she says: "it's not that I cannot speak it in a native way, it's that I cannot express myself in a native way". For her it is easier to express herself in English where she feels less judged and is "more keen on talking about my feelings, ... my thoughts, the truth". She thinks this is linked to her "background experience": with Italian she grew up "in a place where you have to be careful in what you have to say". She feels that she behaves differently according to which language she is speaking, and this is an "internal conflict like who I am". On the one hand, she sometimes has a preference for a particular language, and this can work well with friends who are also multilingual, on the other hand, she would sometimes prefer to only use a single language in future – however, she knows this would be "kind of impossible".

French and adapting to life in France

At the beginning it was difficult for Jade to make herself understood in French: "I know that my pronunciation is not so French ... some people understood me and others not".

She prepared herself thoroughly for France and knew which bureaucratic processes she needed to follow. While things were not always straightforward, she has improved her confidence through overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, getting settled, adapting to a different academic system and travelling. She is taking up sports opportunities and has changed her diet to become healthier; and she feels that this is an adaptation to the French culture.

She took mostly French courses in semester 1, and in semester 2 she is taking modules in a mix of languages.

She can understand French very well now and is making progress with her writing, but speaking is still her weakest skill: "because it depends on who I have in front of me". Speaking with teachers is better than speaking with students, and she thinks this is because teachers perceive her interest in the subject: "it's an exchange of happiness".

While some French students don't interact with her much there are others (mostly language students) who she can communicate well with: "maybe because they're more interested also in, in your own languages". Jade also participates in French social networks: "for me it's ok writing in French". She thinks that English and Italian people sometimes perceive her as "weird", the Italians because of her appearance, and the English because of the way she speaks. However, for French people the fact that she studies in the UK, but comes from Italy, is "cool" and she has had no experiences of discrimination. In fact, she notices that most people are "welcoming new cultures" and "the black community here is more integrated compared for example to Italy".

Overall, she feels she has improved her French skills (even if not to the extent that she had hoped), but she is worried she will not keep up her fluency once she returns to the UK.

Spanish

Jade says: "I refuse myself to speak in Spanish for like two years, because of different kind of reasons". She points out that this is not because of the language, but because of particular people who force the language onto her. This has also happened in the Erasmus context where students from Spain refuse to communicate in the common languages (English or French). Jade describes this as disrespectful, and the attitude caused "a big fight" within the Erasmus group.

Languages as connection to “home”

Jade has found a small group of mostly professional people from Italy who she meets up with on Saturdays. This marks a change in her attitude towards Italian people and she enjoys being at ease linguistically: “after a long week, I need to stay with someone that understands my jokes”.

Jade is continuing her Mandarin studies and really enjoys the link to her Asian heritage (“I love it”). She describes how the teacher takes time to explain the language: “he can stay there for 3 hours explaining only one character if he wants, and I think it’s really helpful ... to understand the language”. Jade describes how she now needs to find her voice in Mandarin (just as she had to work on her French accent to make herself heard).

Interview 4 (at the end of fourth year, during the eighth week of lockdown, May 2020)

Jade has remained in the UK and is staying on her own during lockdown with hardly any contact and this has been a difficult time. She had to defer some of her assessments but is due to hand in her final piece of work shortly.

Multilingual repertoire abroad

Jade reflects back on her year abroad. She used all her languages during her exchange: “I was using of course French, Italian, and English, and sometimes when I met Spanish ... guys and girls ... I tried to recall my ... Spanish knowledge I tried to practise Mandarin of course. I failed, but I tried”.

She spoke French in many contexts. With international students the main foreign language was French, and not English. Taking up sports helped her to feel good physically and mentally and she spoke in French with the coaches and overcame her fear of speaking to teachers and older people.

She also increasingly communicated in French with her fellow students in class and she didn’t feel judged. If she didn’t understand she wasn’t afraid to ask: “sometimes there were students that, they were explaining and others that they weren’t, but that’s fine”.

She feels she really improved her French: “I was also starting to ... tell some jokes in French”.

Readjustment to the UK

When Jade returned to Scotland, she was keen to make a new start: "I tried this new approach to explore new things and meeting new people". She also became closer to her classmates from Scotland.

She tried to keep up her French skills by talking with Erasmus students in French. However, she feels she "kinda lost it after just maybe ... a month".

Jade again mentions not feeling entirely confident in any of her languages: "it's a mess, you master all these languages but ... I didn't fully master all of them that's the thing, ... I feel actually I don't have a language ... that I can speak fluently now". She feels she has lost Italian, particularly the written skills, and this also happened with English while she was in France: "it's like a cycle ..., I lost my English a lot, ... it was very, very difficult doing my fourth year [laughs] it was difficult to write reports and stuff ... linguistically I'm getting worse, that's my opinion". She feels she also lost vocabulary she used to have from her work environment.

She also misses Mandarin: "I lost it again ... it was one of the main achievements that I wanted to do, during Erasmus ... my highest marks were always with Mandarin compared with English modules or French modules ... I was proud of it".

Languages in a work environment

Jade applied for a part-time job in customer support, using French and English. She thinks if she had got this job her French would have stayed more fluent. Instead, she was offered a job for Italian and English. The job consists of: "replying emails, taking calls, doing chats, replying to reviews online and stuff like that". She has to deal with customers in Italian, but simultaneously enter data in English and she says: "this is very challenging sometimes".

The work is helping her to rediscover her Italian, but she says the first four months "were a nightmare". She thought: "I wasn't Italian enough or something like that, I wasn't qualified enough ... but I was like ... 'I'm a mother tongue', [laughs] like 'how'd that happen?'"

Future plans

Jade had lots of plans in place before Coronavirus started: She wanted to travel extensively and visit her heritage country, learn her heritage language, experience the culture there and get to know her relatives. Then she would apply for a Masters programme in Japan. Later she might work in Bali for a charity, and volunteer for the maritime team.

She still wants to carry out some of these plans: “my plans are reduced to nothing, but I’m still keeping the, the original one, like going to the Philippines ... that’s the ones that I would do for sure, Covid or not ... but about Japan and stuff no, I don’t know”.

If circumstances were different, she would also consider moving back to Italy: “it’s a nice country and nice food, problem is, I need a job and, even though you have a job it’s trying to survive with that job ..., there’s lots of things to pay”.

Her immediate plan is to survive the lockdown and keep her current job as she is afraid of not coping with her day-to-day life.

When I ask her what multilingualism means to her, she says: “it’s still a good thing”. She describes how the ability to speak other languages is good, impressive, cool, unique: “when, for example you can understand four ... people from different countries in the same room at the same time, I think that, even though it’s not fully mastered, but you can speak and interact, very useful, it’s a positive thing. It’s not positive when you feel that you cannot speak any of them though”.

1.4. Commentary

To address the research questions for this section, I pay attention to the following aspects:

- What are the students' multilingual repertoire and dominant language constellation at the beginning of the study, and how are these linked to their multilingual concerns? What changes are there in terms of languages and concerns over time?
- Are there other multilingual projects they identify with and how are these linked to their multilingual repertoire and their concerns? How do these develop over time?
- What evidence is there for reflexivity around the multilingual repertoire and around structural forces and changes? How does reflexivity lead to changes in practices and an amendment of the multilingual repertoire?
- What sort of structural changes become triggers for changes in the above areas?

1.4.1. *Multilingual repertoire*

At the beginning of the study, both students have learnt several languages over many years, yet their actual experience with using different languages in their daily lives is very

different. Lotti has used English extensively in authentic situations, and English and German form her dominant language constellation (Aronin, 2016). She has also been to France several times and is now taking French and Spanish at university. Jade learnt English, Spanish and French at school, but had not used any of her target languages in authentic situations before coming to the UK. She works hard on her English to add it to her dominant language constellation.

To both, concerns relating to communicative competency and personal development are important. Both wish to reach a high level of communicative competence in several languages (Lotti describes herself as quite ambitious and somewhat perfectionistic); and both wish to develop personally in the areas of cultural and intercultural knowledge. Jade specifically mentions that she wants to learn how to behave in different countries, and both state several times that they are interested in the communicative aspects of language speaking. They dislike situations of linguistic exclusivity, and in fact both display features of what Aronin calls multilinguality (2016), and Jessner has described as the Multilingualism factor (2008). This includes for instance metalinguistic awareness and communicative sensitivity as they strive to include other speakers through their language choices.

While both also clearly have academic ambitions as concerns, their career aspirations are still vague (see below).

Over the next three years, Lotti increases her language repertoire by adding rudimentary skills in Russian and Mandarin. This can be linked to her concern of gaining intercultural competency rather than wishing to use the languages in communicative situations. In effect, these languages are supporting her development as a person with a multilingual identity (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; Henry, 2017). Jade also picks up Mandarin, but for her this is motivated in part by a concern around her heritage connection (Duff, 2017; MacIntyre et al., 2017), and she continues Mandarin as an extra language during her year abroad.

The students have contrasting perceptions of Spanish. Lotti progresses intermittently, according to the opportunities provided by her environment (Aronin & Singleton, 2012). Jade, on the other hand, chooses not to invest in the language (Norton, 2013) following experiences of linguistic exclusion. During their time abroad both re-evaluate their first language (see below).

By the end of the study Lisa describes English, French, and German as being her dominant language constellation which she can “switch between”. She is keen to add Spanish to this,

and further develop her language repertoire by improving some of her more rudimentary languages, or even taking on new ones.

Jade manages to develop a dominant language constellation consisting of Italian, English, and French. She has a rudimentary knowledge of her heritage language, which she is keen to further develop. She has rejected Spanish but would like to further improve her Mandarin. Throughout the narrative, Jade expresses her self-doubt and her ambivalence about her speaking and writing abilities in any of her languages.

1.4.2. Multilingual life project

As mentioned, Lotti does not have a clear project for her future, but her ideas are linked to her concerns of multilingual communicative competency and personal development: “I hope that I will still live abroad, maybe not in the UK anymore, I hope that I will need my language skills at work and that it will involve travelling”.

When we discuss these plans again at the end of her studies, she is surprised at how relevant they still are to her. She has expanded her dominant language constellation, and her language repertoire, and has been offered a place on a multilingual Masters programme in intercultural communication in the Netherlands. The course is offered in her three dominant languages. She feels that she has been agentive about becoming “closer to actually ... doing everything in ... the future”.

Jade's long-term project is linked to international social justice and an aspiration to what Byram and Wagner call a sense of intercultural citizenship (2018). She is interested in a specific region (the previous French colonies in Africa), and she can see herself working in a non-profit association to promote social justice. This plan necessitates a good command of French and business-related skills.

By the end of her studies Jade is still very much interested in social justice. However, her focus has shifted to Asian regions. In the midst of the coronavirus uncertainties, she says that travelling to her heritage country and learning her heritage language is her first priority. Her project also includes learning Japanese and applying for a Masters on peace studies in Japan (which is taught in English). In future, she hopes to work for a charity in an Asian country, where English is spoken. Her amended multilingual project reflects her initial multilingual concerns, with the addition of the concern of developing a link with her heritage and creating a sense of “belonging” (Fail et al., 2004).

1.4.3. Reflexivity on structural constraints and enablements

Lotti's narrative gives evidence of several enabling factors which she is aware of: Due to her previous experiences she knew that she could transfer knowledge and strategies between languages (Herdina & Jessner, 2002). She chose the opportunity of taking two exchanges during her studies, and she reflected on her priorities when she acknowledged that going to Russia might not enhance her competency of French and Spanish but would increase her repertoire by adding some Russian. She also said that going to Russia would fit in with her concern of "wanting to experience new things" and going "for the difficult options". She subsequently chose the exchange in Quebec because this matched her concern of gaining competency in the French language (as she knew that she would be able to immerse herself there), but it also complied with her concern of again wanting to experience new cultures.

Lotti's unique trajectory allowed her to also pick up an intermediate level of Spanish, as well as rudimentary skills of Russian and Mandarin.

However, Lotti also encountered constraints which sometimes affected her wellbeing, and her language choices and progression (during the time in Russia or when she did not receive the visa to Canada in time).

Lotti reflects on the balance between the concern of communicative competence and intercultural development. She makes a clear distinction between languages she will use later where she wishes to reach a high level (her dominant language constellation) and those (such as Russian and Mandarin) which she sees primarily as a tool to understanding the culture. The dominant language constellation was partly determined through the structural circumstances (Spanish for instance could have been added to the constellation if Lotti had been able to learn the language throughout). On the other hand, the distinction is also due to Lotti's understanding that her three main languages fit together well, whereas others, such as Mandarin and Russian, are linguistically separate, and it would take a lot of time and effort to reach a comparable level. At the end of her studies Lotti reflects on her concerns related to career and personal development. Her autonomous mode of reflexivity (Archer, 2007) provides her with confidence, and she believes she will achieve future multilingual projects by thinking and acting strategically: "how can I do this, what am I going to do for work".

In contrast, Jade had not had the opportunity to travel and encounter authentic speaking situations in English or French before she arrived in the UK. She clearly reflects on her

situation and changes her modules to initially concentrate on English, rather than Spanish, as her second language. In her second year, she chooses Mandarin for one year (though she would have preferred Japanese) and reflects on how Mandarin “is close to [her] Asian side”. However, the university only offers one year of Mandarin, and Jade reflects on this constraint as, unlike Lotti, she has plans to use this language in several contexts for travelling, for research, and for an internship. During Jade’s year abroad, however, Jade is able to elect Mandarin classes again.

Jade reflects on the fact that she finds it difficult to express herself in any of her languages and often feels linguistically incompetent. Despite her self-doubts however, she is eventually able to adopt multilingual practices by working in a bilingual professional environment (Sung, 2019), and she is keen to keep developing her language portfolio with further Asian languages.

1.4.4. Triggers for changes

For both students, the changing structural environments of study abroad, as well as the experiences of inclusion or exclusion appear to be triggers for change.

Lotti managed to change her dominant language constellation from two languages (English and German) to three languages (English, French, and German) and to expand her language repertoire. Both periods of study abroad helped to develop her competency of French by providing her with authentic situations of language use; though her lessons and her self-study, were also important.

Jade had initially had no authentic exposure to languages and managed to jump from using only one language (Italian) on a daily basis to using three (English, French, and Italian) as her dominant languages while she was in France. Triggers for developing her skills were the authentic experiences of studying in the UK and in France. Furthermore the study abroad environment provided her with the opportunity to continue her Mandarin (Aronin & Singleton, 2012).

For Lotti the study abroad periods also triggered strong emotions (particularly during her first exchange in Russia). When she reflected on this period later, however, she concluded that this period helped her to develop personal competencies, such as coping with difficult situations, and cultural understanding. In fact, a shift in the constellation of Lotti’s multilingual concerns becomes apparent (Archer, 2004), as these concerns in the area of personal competency lead her to re-evaluate her language learning (at least in respect to Russian and Mandarin) and she see languages as providing insights into culture: “this whole

thing shifted towards the culture a bit". Her initial project (to travel and live in different countries) is further confirmed through her realisation that personal growth (to keep proving herself in difficult situations), and cultural understanding, are as important to her as her concerns of communicative competency.

For Jade, experiences linked to inclusion and exclusion are triggers to her evaluation of the languages in her repertoire. Throughout her story, she has encountered barriers of discrimination, for instance of being linguistically mocked or excluded (Goldoni, 2017). This causes language anxiety for Jade and leads her to reject Spanish (see above), even though this could have been a strong additional language. In contrast, she feels at ease when she is learning Mandarin both at her Scottish university and during her year in France, as she feels a connection with her Asian side.

Discrimination even contributes to a highly ambivalent attitude towards Jade's strongest language, Italian, and a wariness of the Italian group at her university in Scotland.

However, for both students the study abroad period also triggers a new evaluation of their first language. Lotti forms a strong friendship with a fellow German, and Jade feels accepted in a diasporic group of Italians. Both describe how using their first languages puts them at ease in these encounters.

To summarise, the new structural environments of study abroad are significant triggers for change (Kinginger, 2010). Firstly, they provide opportunities to adopt new practices (speaking in authentic situations and developing communicative competence); secondly, they provide opportunities for reflexivity (causing a re-prioritisation within the constellation of concerns, with the emerging importance of personal growth and intercultural competence), and thirdly they lead to a new affiliation with the students' first languages.

However, experiences of discrimination and being excluded also lead to a change in the constellation of concerns. For Lotti, the concern of personal growth becomes stronger as she wishes to keep proving herself in difficult conditions. For Jade, these experiences strengthen her concern of 'belonging'. This contributes to an emotional evaluation of her languages as she remains ambivalent towards Italian and Spanish, but is increasingly invested (Norton, 2013) in Asian languages.

1.5. Summary

I return to the two research questions I posed at the beginning of this chapter:

Research Question 3: What sort of multilingual projects are the participants aiming for? How are the projects linked to their concerns? How do the projects change over time?

I focussed on the multilingual project of language choices, and through the narratives and the commentaries I described the students' dominant languages at the beginning and the end of their studies. The development of these was linked to their concerns around communicative competency. However, both participants also accrued a multilingual repertoire involving other languages, and the constellation of these was linked to structural affordances, as well as concerns around intercultural competence, and a sense of belonging. The year abroad was seen as a period where new languages were added to the dominant languages, and concerns shifted, allowing a re-interpretation of the whole multilingual repertoire (including the students' first languages).

Research Question 5: What evidence is there for reflexivity around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

Both students reflected intensely on their concerns (what they want), and on their structural environment. For instance, Lotti's consideration of the pros and cons of going to Russia shows how she is agentive in her decision-making. Jade often expressed self-doubt, but this did not stop her from actively conceiving projects which supported her multilingualism. Examples of these are her language choices during study abroad, and her job as a multilingual customer advisor

Chapter 10: Analysis of the students' trajectories – structural forces

I now turn to the final cog in the wheel of my framework of multilingual reflexivity (figure 5) and investigate structural forces in relation to the students trajectories. Section 1 below focusses on Brexit, and section 2 on the coronavirus pandemic.

1. Brexit as a structural force

1.1. Introduction

In this section I address research question 4, combined (as previously) with question 5:

Research question 4: What sort of **structural changes** become triggers for changes within the constellation of multilingual concerns?

Research question 5: What evidence is there for **reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

Research question 4 has already been investigated implicitly in previous sections (with study abroad emerging as a significant trigger for change). However, in this section I pay specific attention to the structural changes linked to Brexit. I present the narratives of Sanjay and Rita, and in the commentary I analyse how the students reflect on Brexit, and how this leads to changes in their decision-making.

In some of the preceding narratives we have already seen how the Brexit process presents itself as an ideological structure which jars with the belief system of the language students. In studies on the multifaceted nature of language learning and teaching, ideological structures have been described as sitting at the macro level and influencing the agency and actions of individuals at the micro level (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Douglas Fir Group, 2016). We have seen this influence, for instance, in Lotti's narrative, as her reflections on Brexit and the perceived attitudes towards immigrants in the UK contribute to her decision to seek a Masters programme outside of the UK.

However, Brexit does not only represent a value system; it is, during the period of data collection, also a process linked with great uncertainty. The Brexit vote took place shortly before the students commenced their studies, and their initial expectations regarding free movement as language students were called into question. The exact consequences of the Brexit vote were still in the making during the four years of the students' studies, but the scenarios of an "unorderly exit" or a "no-deal Brexit" at times seemed likely outcomes. The uncertainty was particularly strong during the year that the students spent abroad (see

timeline of events). As the increasingly hard-line government risked triggering a “no-deal Brexit” it became apparent that its preferred alternative was a “hard Brexit” with considerable impacts on the immigration status of EU residents, the political stability, and the economy of the UK. In Scotland, there were additional tensions linked to the Brexit process. Voters of Scotland overwhelmingly rejected Brexit, and the Scottish National Party (representing the largest party in Scotland) as well as the Green party are currently campaigning for the independence of Scotland and a future within the EU.

In the narratives, Rita and Sanjay reflect on how the implementation of Brexit might impact the projects which they are pursuing, and which are aligned with their concerns. The narratives show how they repeatedly re-adjust their projects to take account of these uncertainties and maximise their future flexibility. We will also see how the evolving Covid-19 epidemic in the final year of the students' course further disrupt their projects. Even though the present section focuses primarily on the impact of Brexit, and the following section more specifically on the influences of Covid-19, I will show in the commentaries how these two external forces, with the uncertainties they represent, work together in complex ways which cannot easily be considered in isolation from each other. This is particularly the case during the final Brexit negotiations which were carried out in a quasi-secret manner while the attention of the public was taken up by Coronavirus pandemic. This meant that by the end of the study the economic and political outlook was far from clear for Sanjay and Rita.

1.2. Sanjay's story

Sanjay was born and grew up in Italy. His family is originally from Sri Lanka, and they returned to this country for two years when Sanjay was eight. During this time Sanjay visited the local school and learnt to read and write in his heritage language (Tamil). Throughout his school education, language learning was a particular focus, and his parents enabled him to attend private tuition in English, French, and German. He also repeatedly visited his relatives in France. By the time he finished school Sanjay was fluent in Italian, Tamil, French, and English, and also had an intermediate level in German.

After school Sanjay moved to London and spent several years working in various jobs starting as a lifeguard and working himself up to becoming an assistant manager in four years. He then came to Scotland for his university education and enrolled in the undergraduate programme 'International Business Management and Language (French)'.

Interview 1 (October 2016)

Multilingual aspirations

Sanjay wishes to further improve his languages in Italian, English, and French. His programme only includes one foreign language (French), but he is eager to keep up and improve German independently, and maybe move on to other languages later. He is particularly interested in achieving a formal level of his languages: "you need to understand which is good and which is not". However, he is also keen to understand local dialects, for instance at his job in a supermarket. He coped with the local slang in London, and this is giving him confidence with the Scottish accent: "when I hear Scottish people and I don't understand them, I'm not worried 'cause I know that I will understand them once I get used to it, 'cause I had that experience before". He is not shy to ask people to repeat what they have said, and he also listens to the local radio to learn the accent.

Currently he speaks Italian and English daily ("I haven't had the chance to meet French people yet"). He speaks in his heritage language with his parents, but not with other people and he describes it as a kind of family language.

Future plans

Sanjay says that knowing several languages will give him more flexibility with his career choices: "I want to have different options, in regard to work, I'd like to find work where languages are required, in terms of business". He regards the knowledge of his heritage language as an additional resource, because the language is "rare", but he does not want to live in his heritage country: "I wouldn't live [there] 'cause I was born here in Italy, I see Europe as my home". Specifically, he feels that France, Italy, and the UK are part of his culture. He is also keen to develop German: "I might go, live in Germany". Sanjay is mindful of the economic difficulties in Italy: "No one can find a job ... everybody is flying away from Italy ... my parents brought me up telling me that I had to leave ... one day".

How the present will enable the future

To meet his concerns of wanting to travel, speak languages and work in a business context, Sanjay has chosen a programme where he can combine Business Management with Language Studies: "I like to motivate teams, so I wanted a degree with Management ... that's why I chose International, 'cause I think I am international, and I can speak different languages, so that's why I chose languages". Ultimately, he hopes to pursue an

international career in Management: "I would like to go around, get experiences, and start new businesses around other countries".

He is planning to get involved with university activities and has already been elected as a programme rep and hopes to become a student ambassador. He feels that people will talk to him, and he can help them, sharing his international outlook.

Interview 2 (April 2018, towards the end of Sanjay's second year)

Multilingual repertoire and confidence

Sanjay can switch easily between English and Italian but has not reached this level in French yet: "French is still outside". He describes how he still needs to think before he uses complex grammar in French, whereas in English this is more automatic. He is hoping to be able to link French to the other languages after his year abroad.

He is working on his French language skills through his class work, but also by taking part in extra-curricular projects organised by the French lecturer (radio broadcasts, creative writing, writing for a foreign language magazine).

Sanjay says he is using Italian all the time. He feels more relaxed in this language, for instance when making jokes, but he notices how he is losing his regional Italian accent. His Italian identity has become more important to him since moving away from the country. However, while he now feels drawn to Italian people, he also has a strong sense of his international background: "I'm tending to go ... towards Italian people automatically but, yeah, definitely feel international, I wouldn't say 'I'm from here, I'm from there'".

Sanjay talks about losing his heritage language which he no longer speaks every day: "I'm not fluent anymore". He finds it very difficult to use this language outside his close family: "if I don't know them, I will be really shy".

Sanjay comes across as a self-assured person, but he says that shyness has been an issue in his life which he is only overcoming slowly. He notices this improvement during his work as a concierge as well: "At the beginning for example I didn't know what to say, I wasn't confident, so I was a bit shy, and I was passing on to colleagues. Now I know what I'm saying, so I'm, more confident now."

The extra-curricular projects he is engaging with, and his voluntary post as a campus officer, are supporting the development of his communicative competence in French and

English, but also his personal confidence. He frequently takes on a leading role in these activities and is learning “how to manage and organise”.

Plans for the year abroad

Sanjay chose the university for his year abroad as it is a prestigious business school. Also, he can opt to do a double degree. He thinks this will help him “with this Brexit issue”. As yet, he is unsure whether he should choose to study in English or French (he thinks it might be better to study in English, as his high level of English will make him stand out, whereas he is less sure of his French). Even if he studies in English, he is confident that he will improve his French: “it’s a small community, I can speak in French”. To achieve better fluency and to meet French people he is planning to join activities, clubs, a church.

In terms of adapting to the new circumstances he knows that his past experiences with changing countries and languages will be beneficial: “this is gonna be my fifth country I’m changing”. He is aware of the linguistic process he will go through during and after the Erasmus year: “I’ve done that before”. He knows “finding friends, keeping friends” can be difficult. He is unsure whether he will suffer from culture shock at his exchange university, but believes he has the confidence to deal with this: “I know how to overcome it”.

However, he is not looking forward to the practical aspects of the year abroad: “the only thing that bothers me is this, you know, changing, find a new home, and, you know, move all my stuff again ... and then I have to move back”.

Reflections on Brexit and language learning

Sanjay reflects on how Brexit might restrict his opportunities to work in the UK. He had contemplated dropping the French element of his course to concentrate more fully on the English language and on business-related specialisms: “if it wasn’t for Brexit ... I might have changed course”. However, given the political background he has decided to continue with French and take up the opportunity of gaining a double degree, as this will give him more options in future: “everybody’s leaving, so that’s why I kept French as a language, so I could travel and go somewhere else”. The future for him is closely linked to his European options: “I wouldn’t feel confident outside Europe ... I see the European Union as a positive thing but, you know, this happened, Brexit, that definitely affected me”.

In this context we discuss which languages might be useful to him in the future. While he is concentrating on his main languages (English, French, Italian), he could still imagine picking up German again (maybe when he is in France). However, he does not think Spanish is

relevant to him: "German and French are more useful than Spanish for the moment ... at least in Europe".

Interview 3 (during Sanjay's year abroad, April 2019)

This interview takes place halfway through Sanjay's second semester in France. He is very happy with his choice: the Business school which he is attending is prestigious, the teachers are helpful, classes are small, and the teachers and students are very diverse: "it's a kind of family ... I know pretty everyone in the school."

He also really enjoys his surroundings. The rent is cheap, the climate and the food are good, and he says: "the people ... are really nice".

Current multilingual repertoire and confidence with languages

Sanjay describes how he now feels confident in several languages and situations. He is using Italian, English, and French constantly and is taking a beginners' course in Mandarin.

He is realistic about his progress in French: "some days my French is good, some days it's not, like my English", but he also knows: "I can communicate". He is aware that he is not at the level of a native speaker: "I put my hands before, I say I'm not French", but he is confident that he has other communicative skills for instance in his part-time job as ambassador for the university: "I've got other soft skills, like catching people, talk to them". He thinks this is due to having lived in the UK: "I have this UK mentality".

He has also improved his listening skills in French by watching TV and films, and he speaks with his colleagues in French and often asks about slang expressions and informal language.

The double degree and language of instruction

Sanjay has opted for the double degree route which means that if he completes this year successfully, he will gain a degree from the university in France in addition to his UK qualification.

For this route he was able to choose between the French and the English stream. Initially, he planned to join the English stream, but then noticed that the teachers weren't confident with their English teaching, and that it would be better for him to switch to the French stream: "I will be having a double degree, which is even better because I will have improved my French". It took a while to become integrated in the French group which is small and close-knit, but he now feels accepted: "I have my group, I know who to study

with". His "British knowledge, especially about citing, and sources and things like that" has helped him to gain extra points for his group.

He knew that studying in French would be harder: "I just tried, challenged myself, and it worked out well". He was worried about the exams: "but I passed, I managed to pass, even though I didn't get a great mark, and I was even surprised because some people failed, some French guys failed, and I passed".

Networks

Sanjay is progressively speaking more French. In the first semester he mixed more with the Erasmus crowd (where the common language is English), but he has now started to meet new French people who he socialises with. He is taking part in extra-curricular activities offered by the university. For instance, he applied for, and was accepted, as an ambassador for the university. This role gives him opportunities to travel for marketing activities, and the working language is French: "I have to talk to other people that I don't know, so I started practising this way".

He is pursuing other networking activities as well which link his languages with his interests: "I'm using also my English skills here I organised some events here ... like a language café to help the international students learn French". He participated in a Brexit conference "to talk and to give the Scottish point of view", and he presented the graduation ceremony, where he was asked to do an introduction in English, and then present in French.

He is able to help other Erasmus students when they have a problem with French bureaucracy, as he can translate and interpret, and understands the system: "French ... bureaucracy is really hard, it's like the Italian one".

He enjoys the fact that his social circle is very international, but he also has Italian friends and finds this reassuring: "sometimes I feel I need to talk with Italians, so I go out with the Italian group as well". Generally, he feels his confidence has increased: "the fact that I speak more languages has helped me a lot here ..., I met people from other backgrounds, I don't have just my Erasmus friends, I also have my French friends, I have Italian friends".

Reflections on his future and Brexit

Sanjay had contemplated trying to find work in France but found the yellow vest movement disturbing. He was caught up in a traumatic situation where the police used tear

gas against protestors: “we were, I think, in the Burger King eating, and the gasses started to come in, and we were like, everyone started crying, and coughing”. Due to this experience, he finds it difficult to imagine living in France. He has lived in the UK long enough to be eligible for the British nationality, but he is unsure of the economic situation. He has noticed that a lot of the big companies are moving away, and he believes there will be fewer career opportunities in future.

He says: “it’s worrying me for the long term ... so probably I was planning to stay there, UK, but I might not stay there ... after my degree”. He is very happy about the double degree: “I will have the UK degrees, we don’t know how they are going to be recognised by the EU, so just as a back-up I have a French degree”.

He is also considering other countries: “Dublin is closer to the UK mentality, plus it will stay in the EU, and all the big companies are moving there”. Another option for him could be Belgium. Ultimately, his future plans depend on what is happening with Scotland: “if they are staying, if they’re leaving”.

Interview 4 (at the end of fourth year, during the eighth week of lockdown, May 2020)

Sanjay has remained in his student accommodation during lockdown where he has been struggling with isolation. This has caused him to defer his final dissertation.

Reflections on study abroad

Looking back to his year abroad, Sanjay describes how the final phase in France helped him to gain confidence and equilibrium. He had many opportunities to speak in French: “this flatmate, I was always talking, so I had the chance to practise”. Together, they organised meals for their friends: “we had to talk, and it came naturally”.

He mentions his volunteering activities again: “I was quite involved in activities ... I had to communicate in French, and I had to force myself and at one point in time, I think it came automatic”.

He was able to stay for an extra one and a half months after the end of the semester abroad and he “really enjoyed ... the last months over there”. Due to receiving grants he had fewer financial worries than usual. During this time, he managed to “visit more places, go outside a bit”.

He was also awarded the French degree in addition to the UK degree (which he is currently completing): “I definitely achieved what I wanted, probably achieved more than I wanted”.

Returning to Scotland – work and university

When Sanjay returned to Scotland, he managed to get a part-time job at a hotel where he had previously worked. His work environment was a real area of positivity: "I couldn't wait to start work, like I wanted to work ... just to do things, probably like talk and help and obviously to earn money as well, but that wasn't the primary goal".

Switching back to his home university after a really good experience abroad "wasn't easy" in many respects. He feels a nostalgia for the good times he had. He compares himself to other students from fourth year who went to their exchange university in couples or small groups: "they got to know each other", whereas he went on his own and made many friends at the partner university, but when he came back he "was kind of alone".

As he adapted "back to the system" in the UK he realised: "I had some weaknesses, for example academic writing ... I lost that skill". This affected his marks and the dissertation. "I lost some skills in the transition for sure."

However, he received useful feedback from one lecturer in particular: "I started to see things more critically and analytically, you know, so that helped definitely".

Multilingual repertoire

Using French is now natural to Sanjay, and he feels at ease in communicative situations which involve his three main languages (Italian, English, French). He prefers speaking over writing, and during his year abroad he "was getting more interested in the informal way" of speaking French. He knows: "if I wanna keep using the language I need to find a job that allows me to use different languages".

In fact, Sanjay talks mostly French and Italian with his friends. Apart from his work and his classes (some of which are in French) he realised: "I didn't talk that much English at all". Even the extra-curricular activities from the past year have required him to speak French rather than English (working as a language ambassador with a school, collaborating on a foreign language magazine). However, he did use English at work: "only at work I would say I was constantly using English".

I ask about his heritage language, but he reaffirms that this is a language which he just uses with his close family and is not relevant to his university life or in the job environment.

He is also considering taking up Mandarin or German again.

We discuss what multilingualism means to Sanjay. He feels that knowing extra languages has helped him to meet new people at university, but also been beneficial at work: "when people are in difficulties they will call me, especially in Italian". For Sanjay multilingualism has an important social aspect: "get to know people, their experiences, share my experiences in different languages as well".

Reflections on Brexit and Coronavirus, as well as future plans

Sanjay is currently struggling with the consequences of the Coronavirus crisis and the change in routine: "I work, I study and then I'm part of different panels at school and I do different activities ... so from doing everything to doing nothing it was quite hard".

The hotel which he worked for has closed due to the virus: "That was a, you know, a place for me to go and just, have a break for me, mentally, to talk to people and different things, but when they stopped that it was kind of, you know, bad."

Consequently, he had to defer the submission of his dissertation: "I was really excited to do it, which -, it didn't end well because I didn't finish on time, which is quite, you know, demoralising".

The virus is also affecting his plans: "I was thinking of doing something different, more managerial, ..., probably for a year, even staying in a hotel if they gave me a managerial opportunity". However, due to the difficult economic situation he is now looking at other options, for instance enrolling for a Masters degree, either in Scotland or in France: "I thought I wouldn't go back to study, ... but because of the situation I think it more logical probably to go back ... financing or project management ... something that I can use my languages as well".

Sanjay explains how his thinking about living in France has changed. After his year abroad he could have stayed in France but decided to return to the UK: "I didn't like one side of the French people, that they were like protesting, protesting for everything, that's the reason why I decided to come back, which I didn't like, the protesting and blocking the country for, you know, for everything". However now, in the coronavirus situation, his opinion of France is different: "it is more of a socialist country ... no matter how much they spend, but they help much more, their people than here". He is unsure now whether returning to the UK was the right decision: "especially, both things together Brexit and Coronavirus, which is not helping, so ... I'm still thinking 'did I do well to come back?' so I'm still thinking".

He does enjoy living in Scotland: "I think I wanna be based here, I think it's time for me to settle down and I think Scotland is the place for me to stay", but on the other hand he is not sure how viable it will be: "with the Brexit, the political situation, I don't know how competitive the British market is going to be".

He mentions several other countries he could imagine moving to (France, Belgium, Italy, Ireland, even Denmark).

Sanjay also talks about a completely different option: "teaching English, probably doing a teaching course". He has lately become interested in teaching through the extra-curricular activities which he has been involved with: "I like to teach, and I like to lead, kind of, I realise ... teaching gives you opportunities in the future as well, to grow".

1.3. Rita's story

Rita grew up in Poland speaking Polish as her first language. Her secondary school specialised in languages, and by the end of her schooling she gained a C1 certificate for English. She self-assesses her Spanish skills to be on a similar level, and her German skills at B2. She had opportunities to speak all her languages during several trips.

Rita moved to Scotland after she finished her secondary school and enrolled on the undergraduate programme 'International Business Management and Language (German)'.

Interview 1 (October 2016)

Rita's multilingual concerns

Rita wishes to stay or become fluent in various languages. English, Spanish, German, and Polish are her main languages, additionally she is teaching herself Italian and hopes to start with Japanese later: "in my life languages are super important ... I find a lot of joy in studying them and then using them".

She further wishes to develop personally by learning about languages and culture, and by travelling and living abroad: "I definitely enjoy meeting people from different cultures, because ... the world suddenly broadens."

It is also important to her to have a good education where she can combine business management knowledge and language skills.

Practices and choices

Rita is working on her language repertoire (particularly German and English) through many different strategies. Additionally, she is using Duolingo to learn Beginner's Italian, and tries to watch a film every week in Spanish to keep up her skills.

She chose her university course in Scotland for several reasons. Firstly, a friend of hers had good experiences in Scotland: "she was really happy". Secondly, studying in Scotland is free for people from the European Union: "this was really also very important for me".

However, she says: "the most important thing was that I want to have language school", and the structure of her programme allows her to acquire the necessary skills and spend a year in Germany. This made her think: "here I am, I have to be here."

Coincidentally, there are a number of reasons why she didn't choose to study in Spain: The economic situation is "not really good actually", the cost of studying is high (there was very little chance of receiving a scholarship), and the university of Barcelona (which is her favourite Spanish city) conducts its courses "not in proper Spanish, but in Catalan".

Communicative competence and integration

Rita describes how making friends is much easier with other international students because of the joint experiences: "they understand your situation ..., they know that it's new for you, that you had to do a lot of stuff here, that you had to change place of living, you had to leave your family, your friends, so they are very understanding ... I'm not saying that people from Scotland are not considerate, but it's totally different for them".

She is talking English most of the time, but has arrived with one friend from Poland, and she feels that it is "important to have somebody who speaks your language from time to time".

Understanding English in the areas of "bank, telephone, work" was easier than she had expected, and she thinks this is because people are accommodating. She doesn't find it too difficult adapting to different accents as watching YouTube clips had prepared her for variations in language, but she is not interested in "slogans, those teenager stuff" and prefers it when people speak "proper English".

Identity and future plans

We talk about her identity, and she says: "I'm from Poland, but I'm from Europe, that's important". She is disappointed with the political situation in Poland and "some people's behaviour". Being on the outside makes her even more critical of her government.

However, she treasures some of her traditions: "I would always be kind of attached to it". For instance, she values "the way they teach us languages".

She feels European rather than international, as she hasn't visited many countries outside Europe: "not like I'm a global citizen". She is quite open about the future, but really enjoys being in Scotland and could imagine a future here. She also wants to go to Japan "in some point of my life".

Interview 2 (March 2018, towards the end of Rita's second year)

Multilingual progress

Rita feels satisfied with her level of English in terms of speaking and working at a cinema has helped her to understand the Scottish accent. If there are occasional words she doesn't understand her strategy is to "try understand without understanding ... from the situation ... more like common sense". She still wants to improve her writing: "it's very useful in like workplace and everything".

She has friends from France, Poland, and Spain, and this helps her to exchange experiences and practice her languages. Her friendship circle includes British friends: "it's just like getting more and more equal".

She has transferred some of the strategies she previously used for English to German in terms of reading and watching videos.

She is planning to go to Spain for two weeks in the summer, and she is looking forward to speaking Spanish again. She also posts on Facebook with her Spanish friends. Currently, her ambition is just to keep Spanish up, as she does not have time to further improve it.

Planning the year abroad

Rita is carefully planning her year abroad in Germany. She has selected her preferred destinations (one semester on a work placement, the other at a German university) and has investigated travel options (this is important to her as she has a partner in the UK).

Rita is one of very few students who will go to two different destinations. She realises that this will mean moving repeatedly in the next eleven months. She thinks the placement will give her a professional advantage; and combining this with university study in semester 2 will enable her to "know two completely ... different people with different approaches to everything". During her time abroad she wants "to explore" and meet people and pass her exams with satisfactory marks. However, the most important thing will be the language

learning: "I would love like come back and just 'Oh, I can speak German whenever I want, I don't care about my mistakes, everybody understands me"; but at the same time, she says: "I really need to be sure that I know what I'm saying, that I'm happy with what I'm saying because otherwise ... [laughs] I'll be so angry with myself".

She specifically also wants to improve her everyday vocabulary: "right now I can talk about wastage plants or packaging in Germany, but I'm not sure if I can book an appointment in a hairdressers."

Thoughts about her future and Brexit

Rita is now envisaging a future in the UK: "I would like to stay for not only those four years of Bachelor degree but after". She is worried about the political circumstances of Brexit: "it's just so hard to see, if it's just gonna be ok to have a job here if you're not from Great Britain".

She thinks "it's quite scary", because she wasn't born here and has only been here "not even two years". She worries whether Brexit will influence her funding for a possible Masters degree; whether flights will become more expensive; whether she should try to become "more and more a resident of Scotland, rather than just an incomer". So far, she hopes "that everything's gonna be ok" and is going ahead with her plans for the year abroad.

Email exchange (September 2018, at the beginning of Eve's year abroad)

Rita started her year abroad in August 2018 with a one-month intensive course in German. This was a preparatory language course leading to her first semester placement. She had then planned to study at a German university in the second semester.

In September 2018 (while she was doing the intensive course) Rita sent me an email saying that she needed to change her plans: "My financial situation has changed, sudden expenses showed up and I will no longer be able to afford going back to Germany for the second term and I am looking for a possibility to come back to the home university for the second term."

In a second email a week later, she says: "I thought it through, and it would really help me a lot if I could do my second term at the home university so that I do not have to worry in advance for my finances." Apart from these worries she is happy with her experiences so far: "The course itself is really good. ... We talk only in German with the other people in my

group even during breaks or lunch which is really encouraging. It is a lot of hard work, but I can clearly see that it's worth every minute of studying."

Rita carried out the work placement during her first semester abroad but arranged to return to the home university (in the UK) for the second semester. However, this meant changing her programme (as her current programme includes a full year abroad) to a flexibly managed programme.

Interview 3 (December 2018, towards the end of Rita's placement abroad)

Two weeks prior to this interview I had carried out a support visit and arranged to meet Rita at a trade fair. She had been tasked to represent her firm (in German) together with two colleagues and I could observe how well she fitted in with her team and was able to communicate in German on a very high level. The actual interview was conducted via video link.

Arriving in Germany and initial experiences

Rita describes how the transition to Germany was made easy for her, with people at the initial one-month language course communicating in German but being accommodating. The course helped her to adjust to the German language. She became better at dealing with different accents of other learners and different dialects of teachers.

The work placement

Rita mentions that a limitation of the initial language course was that she had not been exposed to language in a professional environment. She describes the situation at the start of her placement when she was shown round and people explained what the departments were for and what their jobs were: "I did not understand a single thing [laughs] and I'm not sure if it was because of my German not really being business German, or whether I was like super-overwhelmed". Everyone was very friendly, though, and she settled in quickly. She feels that she now knows more about how companies and HR departments work: "if they said exactly what they said last time I would definitely be like 'Yeah, sure, I expected that'".

Due to her high level of German Rita was able to communicate in German from the very start: "that was definitely a surprise for them, they can actually like give me tasks in German and then explain them in German". She describes how just a few weeks into the placement she was the only one in the HR department: "everybody was ill or on holidays or

in home office". This meant she needed to learn very quickly: "what I need to do and how it needs to be done".

The work does not just include oral communication, but also writing emails. She was able to copy models from other people: "at first I was just looking what the other person is writing to those people, and then I just wrote the emails myself, knowing what should be, included in such ... email".

Contrary to her expectations she has found that a lot of people in the work environment are actually scared to speak English, and this makes it easier for her to speak German: "that's why I'm so thankful that I ... chose to do the internship, ... I'm so happy".

Multilingual repertoire and language usage

Rita has made friends (and remained friends) with an international circle of people, and she communicates in her languages regularly: "German is there, Polish is always there, English also is there cause I'm talking almost every day with my friends ..., we talk in English, or in German, and then obviously with my boyfriend ..., and then when it comes to Spanish ... I found a very, very good friend ..., he was also doing a placement and we always speak Spanish". She mentions again that she would like to pick up Japanese at a later stage.

Regarding her language learning aims, Rita consciously changed from being perfectionistic to not worrying too much about the mistakes: "I thought it's much better to have the approach that just say whatever you need to say and then, if they want to, they will get a grip on what you're trying to say".

Generally, she tries to use the key phrases which she hears people saying a lot. This strategy helps her to feel accepted linguistically. She is happy for people to recognise her as Polish, but at the same time is confident that she can properly understand and communicate in German: "I feel like I sound less and less, than the foreigner, more like, ok foreigner who came here and actually knows what they're talking about".

Changing her plans

As mentioned above, Rita changed her plan of staying abroad for a full year. She explains the things she considered: Firstly, she does not see her long-term future in a German-speaking country, so is worried that the vocabulary she would gain from studying in German in trimester 2 wouldn't be as valuable as gaining this vocabulary in English. If her plans were to change, she is sure she could adapt: "if one day I would need this knowledge

in German, I can, I can do it, like I can learn myself or something, but today I want to have this knowledge in English". Secondly, she mentions her financial situation which has changed. Thirdly, a full year in Germany might actually prove a barrier to her future in the UK as there is uncertainty about how this year might affect her immigration status, particularly if there is an unorderly Brexit whilst she is abroad. She will need to accumulate time in the UK in order gain settled status¹¹.

Rita has considered the consequences of returning to the UK for trimester 2 carefully. She will need to change her programme from IBM & Language to a flexibly managed programme. The new course will still allow her to continue with German in fourth year, and she feels being able to choose her own modules will help her to find a business and language related job in the UK. The exact name of the degree will be established at the end of her course to reflect her module selection.

She describes how she took this decision. She first reflected by herself: "the first person I need to talk with is myself", "I ... thought it through in my head", then she wrote to various people (her boyfriend, her best friend) and this helped her to sort through the arguments. Then she spoke to her mum on the phone, and tried to get opinions from different sources, including those staying in Germany for a whole year: "it was just a big group of people with me in the centre". One of the concerns mentioned by others was the title of the programme (IBM) which she was losing. She makes it clear that this was a long process of reflexivity: "it wasn't just me sat down and then wrote those emails [laughs], ..., no, no it wasn't". She goes on to say, "it was, I would say it was fifty – fifty, so it was fifty percent me, and my reasoning, and then probably fifty percent people like my mum, or my boyfriend, and all my other friends, and their opinions".

Interview 4 (May 2020, at the end of Rita's fourth year and during the eighth week of lockdown)

Rita has very recently submitted her final assessments and dissertation. She is spending lockdown at her boyfriend's flat.

Multilingual concerns

Rita remains committed to maintaining and developing her communicative competency in English, Spanish, German, and Polish as her main languages: "my main motivation is the

¹¹ During this period, EU citizens were allowed to apply for the EU settlement scheme to continue living in the UK after Brexit.

fact that I'm able to right now speak with so many people around the world". She is also taking concrete steps towards learning Japanese.

Alongside the language learning, Rita is keen to continue developing her personal competence by learning about culture, and by travelling and living abroad. She is hoping to spend a year in Japan soon: "with Japanese, it's just the bizarre culture, and just them being the way they are, just fascinates me ... it's just very interesting and it's a massive challenge".

She has now completed her degree in business management and language. She thinks it is better to combine languages with something else as this "gives you more employability ... you also need to bear in mind that you also need to pay bills".

A further concern which is mentioned explicitly in this interview is her general wellbeing.

Reflections on her semester abroad

Rita feels she benefitted from her placement on many levels. The work environment was very supportive, and the firm had experience with students on placement. Rita knows she improved her business knowledge and her German skills greatly.

Her main goal for the period abroad "was to not be afraid to speak", and she feels she was pushed towards this all the time, through the initial German course, through her company where everyone spoke German, and through her boss telling her "'you're gonna go to Nürnberg and you're gonna promote our company all in German'". This alignment of her own goals with the external situation "was a very good thing" to her: "it's probably the thing I'm most proud of".

She describes the mixture of emotions at the end of her placement abroad: "going from: 'oh my god I'm going back', and 'amazing, I did so well', and then: 'Oh I have to leave everybody, just go back'". Emotionally it was "very upsetting to say goodbye to a lot of people that I just didn't know if... I would meet again because a lot of them were from different continents and just very far away".

Returning to the UK

Coming back to Scotland was linguistically and emotionally positive: "I never left the English-speaking part of me, so it was, it was always like, yeah going home, and home is now Scotland ... I think it would be more difficult to go back to Poland". However, in some

respect she missed the placement: “working was sometimes more fun than uni because ... I knew what I was doing, and it was all better organised”.

She thinks changing to the Flexibly Managed programme was beneficial: “being a flexible managed student allowed me to take more HR modules than I probably could, if I stayed on IBM ... it wasn't as bad as I anticipated”.

Language projects and practices

Rita keeps up with her languages through several strategies such as reading, listening to music, watching YouTube, and communicating with people on Facebook. Her communications are sometimes a mixture of languages: “sometimes when I was lacking a word in Spanish I would write it in German”.

She says she always finds people she can practise her Spanish with, and the same is true for German. To her, speaking is the most important skill: “when you can speak, I'm sure everything else will come as well, like writing”.

She has very recently submitted her final assessments, and she is now trying to cope with the stress of the lockdown by being happy with small things “like being able to paint my nails [laughs] and just have time for things”. She is trying to find things to stay focussed on: “just trying to think, oh what I want to achieve and what I want to do, ... one of the things I'm trying to do like every day is like do some German, do some Spanish ... and do some Japanese as well”. She believes that you must keep the languages up: “once they die, ... it's not gonna go well”.

She is particularly focussing on her dream of moving to Japan for a year: “whenever it's gonna be possible”. She realises that two things will help her reach this dream: Teaching English or working in a business (which would require very good Japanese skills). Right now, she cannot work towards a teaching qualification (because of Coronavirus), however it is possible to start learning Japanese: “might as well start studying cause it's a long ... way to go”.

She is planning to gain language certificates over the next two years (a C1 or even C2 for German and Spanish, and “something in Japanese”).

She speaks in Polish with her family, and during lockdown they speak almost every day. She also has some friends she speaks to in Polish “probably on a daily basis”, and she says that the language is “definitely alive”.

Future plans

Brexit has affected Rita's plans. Initially, she was going to stay in Edinburgh to be able to support her sister (who had been planning to also study in the UK). However, her sister is now unlikely to be funded in Scotland, so will be studying elsewhere. This means that Rita and her boyfriend are more flexible: "we were either thinking of like finding jobs, and then within like a year or so moving to Japan".

Rita has always needed to contribute to her financial support: "I couldn't allow myself not to work". The coronavirus situation is affecting her job security: "my job is obviously closed since I'm working in hospitality", and it will be "obviously rather unstable" in the future: "There's no way to plan anything". Her initial plan was to go straight into a career, but this is difficult due to the economic situation: "I went to 'Indeed.com' to see what jobs there are and I was like 'not many'".

Because of the uncertainties she is looking into Masters courses which combine translation with business, even though she "wasn't really planning to do one".

Her choice of universities for postgraduate study is limited by financial considerations, but she is now eligible for the Scottish student loan, and she says that her parents will also help.

Returning to Poland could also be an option and would mean she could access cheaper education and have support from her family (though she also likes her independence): "I don't want to close any doors, I would rather have them stay open and then I can always, always choose which ones I want to go through".

We talk about the plans she had at the beginning of her course, and I tell her what she wrote down four years ago: "I will be teaching languages or working for an international company, the type of jobs would be sort of managerial jobs or I will run my own business, it's hard to judge where I will be because I haven't visited many countries, but today I see my - the future me - in Japan. Languages will be part of my work life in that I share my passion for other cultures and foreign languages among other people, and outside of work I will just enjoy being able to communicate with people all around the world".

When I ask her to comment on her previous plans, she is astonished: "not much changed". She is currently looking at Masters courses which could enable her to open a language school. She still doesn't know where she wants to be in the future, and she is still planning

to move to Japan. Also, she still hopes that languages will be part of her future job: “that would be incredible”.

The only change is that whereas earlier she was fairly unsure of her future, she now feels this is “hundred percent” what she wants.

1.4. Commentary

I return to research questions 4 and 5 (see above) as I consider the role of Brexit as a structural force by addressing the following aspects:

- Which concerns linked to multilingualism are important to these students at the beginning of their studies and how do these develop over the four years?
- What are the multilingual projects of these students and how are these linked to their constellation of concerns?
- What evidence is there for reflexivity around Brexit? What sort of barriers / enablements to their projects do the students perceive through Brexit and how does this lead to amendments of their projects and changes in practice? Does this affect their constellation of concerns?
- Which further structural influences (specifically reflections on constraints and enablements of these influences) become triggers for changes in the above areas?

1.4.1. *Multilingual Concerns*

The following multilingual concerns are expressed in the narratives of Rita and Sanjay and can be linked to the clusters of concerns from the framework (communicative competency, personal development, and academic development).

1.4.1.1. *Multilingual Concerns in the First Interview*

At the beginning of their studies both participants mention their ambition to gain communicative competence in several languages (the exact nature of these languages is discussed in the section on projects below). Gaining communicative competence means having “multiple normative orientations” (Blommaert, 2013, p. 194) for both students. On the one hand they are both interested in achieving formal and “good” language as they are invested in the opportunities that specific languages will bring them (Norton, 2013). On the other hand, they also strive to understand the Scottish dialect, and use languages to be able to communicate with people from around the world. This desire to learn the languages of different social groups corresponds to the development of heteroglossia in

the original Bakhtin sense (as described by Blackledge & Creese, 2014; see chapter 3, section 2.1.2).

In terms of their personal development, they wish to be affiliated with multiple groups (Hall, 1996; Ross, 2007): Sanjay characterises himself as international, though he is increasingly drawn to other Italians and sees Europe as his future home; Rita thinks of herself as European, but also acknowledges strong links to her Polish heritage and she wishes to experience the Japanese culture. Other concerns linked to personal development are their enjoyment of travelling and meeting new people from various backgrounds, and their interest in mediating between people and languages. Rita specifically also mentions an interest in different cultures and becoming more understanding towards other people.

In the area of academic development, Rita and Sanjay are committed to their studies and are interested in combining Business Management skills (they are studying these modules in English) with an additional focus on a particular language (French for Sanjay and German for Rita) as they imagine their future selves (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) as doing business around the world.

1.4.1.2. Multilingual Concerns in the Final Interview

At the end of their studies these concerns have not fundamentally changed, and this confirms Archer's suggestion that the constellation of concerns remain relatively stable during the lifetime of an individual (Archer, 2000, 2006). Rita and Sanjay stay dedicated to improving their communicative competence in a range of languages, though the importance of individual languages undergo changes due to reflexivity (see below). Formal as well as informal language use remain important to them, and particularly Sanjay mentions repeatedly that he is now more interested in colloquialisms and local variation than previously.

In the area of personal development, both describe an increasing confidence in their use of languages, and for Sanjay this is linked with overcoming a shyness which he had previously acknowledged, and becoming increasingly active (Byram, 2010) in taking part and leading various projects linked to multilingualism. Both students are of the opinion that learning a language is not enough. They are interested in broadening their cultural horizon and suggest you must experience living with a language to "understand a bit" (they both feel they have gained insights through their sojourns in various countries).

Both Rita and Sanjay continue to value having multiple identities, and they feel they have developed a strong link to the UK in addition to links to their home countries and their

identification as Internationals / Europeans. Sanjay realises during his time in France that he has “a UK mentality”, and he possesses “British skills” when it comes to university work, such as referencing. Rita describes her return to the UK as “going home, and home is now Scotland”.

In the area of academic development, they remain dedicated to their studies, despite some changes (see below).

1.4.2. Multilingual Projects

In this section I look at the development of the students' multilingual repertoire, their “year abroad” project, and their multilingual life project.

1.4.2.1. Multilingual Repertoire

As international language students, Sanjay and Rita can be characterised by superdiversity (Blommaert, 2013) and described as cosmopolitan speakers (Ros i Solé, 2013) as they deal with an impressive range of languages in their language repertoires. Sanjay begins his studies with Italian and English as his everyday languages, fluency in his heritage language (he calls this his family language), a good degree of fluency in French, and an intermediate level of German. Rita commences her studies with Polish and English as her everyday languages, an excellent level of Spanish, a proficient level of German, and an ambition to learn further languages in her free time (Italian and Japanese). Both manage to effectively use English for their studies and part-time jobs. Returning to the UK after her semester in Germany, Rita mentions that she feels integrated with the English language: “I never left the English-speaking part of me”, and she socialises with many English speakers. For Sanjay the transition back to the UK after the year in France was less straight-forward (“I lost some skills in the transition”), and he says that he hardly speaks English outside of university or work. Both are very satisfied with the progress they make with their target languages (French for Sanjay and German for Rita).

However, over the course of the study, the prioritisation within the multilingual repertoire changes (particularly the balance between English and French / German), and this is due to reflections on Brexit and other contextual features as they continue to follow their multilingual concerns (this will be discussed below). Furthermore, Sanjay increasingly places less emphasis on his heritage language, and he sees this as purely a family language, without “semiotic mobility” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 3) as he considers his future in Europe¹².

¹² The term ‘family’ language seems to imply a value judgement and Sanjay does not choose to invest in this language. This completely contrasts Jade’s attitude towards her heritage language (in

These fluctuations between languages appear to support theories which understand languages as part of a multilingual skill-set (for instance Aronin, 2016; Blommaert, 2010). While both students remain dedicated to the overall concern of gaining multilingual competency, their projects in terms of their repertoire are adaptable to the changing contexts and their career-related and personal concerns.

1.4.2.2. The Year Abroad Project

Sanjay and Rita both have concrete multilingual projects connected with their year abroad and these are linked to their concerns of developing communicative competency, personal skills (particularly travelling and gaining insights into other cultures), and academic development. Sanjay's project is to achieve an additional degree in France (which is possible through the double degree arrangement between the two universities). While he is in France he changes from the English stream to the French stream. This not only allows him to fully immerse in the French language in academia, but also to demonstrate this through the degree he achieves in the French language.

Rita had initially planned to spend two semesters in Germany, firstly carrying out a placement with a German company, and secondly studying at a German university. She changes her plans and returns after the first semester (see reflections below), but she is still very satisfied with the linguistic, personal, and academic / career development which she feels she achieved: "the whole experience was amazing". Research has shown (for instance Mitchell, McManus, & Tracy-Ventura, 2014) that the type of placement can be linked to the degree of L2 acquisition during the year abroad, and it is evident that the students' choices enabled them to integrate into local communities and maximise their linguistic immersion.

1.4.2.3. The "Life Project"

At the beginning of their studies both Sanjay and Rita describe future plans (their "life project") which are still vague but reflect their concerns and centre around using their languages, travelling, and being entrepreneurial. Sanjay mentions that he would like to "start new businesses around other countries", and Rita's plans include many options, such as running her own business (starting a language school), working for an international company, or teaching. They are both open to where they will live, though Sanjay says this would be a European country, whereas Rita can imagine moving to Japan.

chapter 9). In the conclusion of this thesis, I suggest that further research into attitudes towards heritage languages is needed.

By the end of their studies, many contextual features have changed (see below), and some features of the “life project” have been adapted through reflexivity. To both, the UK has become a place where they could imagine settling down. However, for Sanjay this is very much contingent on jobs. He is now also contemplating going into teaching. Rita says that her plans are still much the same as they were, however in the immediate future she is thinking of taking a Masters course. She still hopes to move to Japan temporarily with her boyfriend. Both participants have managed to secure the settled or pre-settled status in the UK, so would be able to return or remain in the UK for the long-term.

1.4.3. Reflexivity around Brexit

As EU nationals, the Brexit process causes a great deal of uncertainty for both Sanjay and Rita. The Brexit vote took place in June 2016, after the students had already been accepted on their course, and just three months before they start university in the UK. Sanjay has already lived in the UK for four years by the time he starts university, whereas Rita moved to the UK to start her course. At this point (as outlined above) nobody knows what form “Brexit” will take, but as events unfold it becomes increasingly clear that there will not only be a withdrawal from the EU, but also from the single market and the customs union. This means, amongst other things, the free movement of people within the former EU will end.

In the narrative, Sanjay reflects on the uncertainties which the political situation is causing for him. Before going on his year abroad he talks about how he might have altered his university project by changing his course, dropping the French language, and cancelling his year abroad to concentrate his efforts on the English language, if his future in the UK had been more certain. However, he is observing how “everybody’s leaving” and he perceives the economy as fragile. Sticking with his course and gaining a double degree during his year abroad is helping him to increase his options for his future. He sees this future in Europe, and he knows that having two degrees in French and English respectively will give him the opportunity to work in various countries. Additionally, he has lived in the UK for long enough to be able to apply for the settled status, and even the UK nationality if he wishes.

In contrast, Rita has only lived in the UK since the beginning of her studies and would not qualify for the settled status. She is in a relationship with a UK citizen and sees her future bound up with the country. While the pre-settled status is open to her, she reflects on whether this is enough to give her the right to work in the UK: “it’s just so hard to see, if it’s just gonna be ok to have a job here if you’re not from Great Britain”. Currently, her

undergraduate fees are covered by the Scottish funding agency, but she is worried whether she would still be able to access a loan for a potential Masters course in Scotland.

It is also not clear what will happen if indeed an “unorderly exit” takes place whilst Rita is abroad. As the UK government urges businesses to prepare for all eventualities there are no hard assurances about what could happen to EU students during their year abroad. It is unlikely that they will not be allowed to return for their final year, or that their fees will no longer be covered, but on the other hand, the situation is worrying. Rita reflects on whether it might be better for her to become “more and more a resident of Scotland, rather than just an incomer” to evade these uncertainties.

Both Sanjay and Rita have an excellent experience abroad and are linguistically accepted in their target communities. Sanjay changes his course to the French stream and passes his course in French and achieves the French degree. Rita manages to fully participate in the HR department of the German-speaking company during her placement.

However, Rita takes the decision to return to the UK after the placement. This means altering her “academic project” and not continuing with the second semester abroad (which would have taken place at a German university). Since the full year abroad is a compulsory part of her programme, she needs to change her course to a flexibly managed programme, though she can still take German in her final year, and she is able to choose HR as her specialism. There is ample evidence in the narrative of her reflections on this decision, (“I thought it through”; “it wasn’t just me sat down and then wrote those emails”; “it was, I would say it was fifty – fifty, so it was fifty percent me, and my reasoning, and then probably fifty percent people like my mum, or my boyfriend, and all my other friends, and their opinions”). The narrative sets out multiple reasons why she took this decision. There are financial considerations, but the decision is also linked to her seeing her long-term future in the UK, and English skills therefore being more valuable than German skills (and, in fact, she has already proved her German skills in a working environment). While Rita does not explicitly mention her reflections on the Brexit uncertainties, she does express huge relief when she is back in the UK as the deadline for a possible “unorderly” Brexit approaches (personal observation).

Sanjay achieved the French side of his degree during his third year abroad, and contemplated remaining in France, finishing with a three-year Ordinary degree from Scotland. However, he made the decision to return for his fourth year and gain the Honours degree. He initially explains that he was alienated by his experiences with the ‘Yellow vest

movement' and the constant protests in France. However, in his final interview he reflects on this decision to return in the light of the difficult situation he is facing in the UK due to Brexit and the Covid-19 situation: "especially, both things together, Brexit and Coronavirus, which is not helping, so ... I'm still thinking 'did I do well to come back?' so I'm still thinking". He cannot make up his mind as to whether this was the right decision for him, as these two unforeseen structural changes are causing immense barriers to his plans. He has lost his part-time job in hospitality, and the economic situation is dire. He thinks that the political circumstances in France would have been more beneficial for him: "it is more of a socialist country ... they help much more, their people than here".

As mentioned above, the concern of gaining multilingual skills remains constant, however, the priorities within their repertoire change due to the students' reflections. For Sanjay, French is temporarily (in interview 2) seen as less important than English as he considers cancelling the year abroad and concentrating on a future in the UK. However, his reflections on Brexit and the barrier this might cause to his concern of achieving a multilingual career lead him to realise the importance of French and the opportunities it offers. For Rita, German skills remain important, but a multilingual repertoire with a main focus on English more appropriately reflects her concerns (see below).

1.4.4. Further triggers for changes

When Rita first explains to me why she is cancelling her second semester abroad she mentions that her financial situation has changed, and she can no longer afford to stay for the full year. She later mentions additional factors, and it becomes clear that there is no single trigger for her change of plans. She assures me that she has carefully considered the linguistic and academic consequences for her studies. As she weighs up the benefits and disadvantages of altering her study abroad project, she clearly examines whether the revised project still reflects her concerns. She is obviously still dedicated to improving her multilingual competency, but several triggers have caused a re-prioritisation within her multilingual repertoire project (with English becoming more important than German). She now sees her future more closely linked to the UK and an English-speaking environment, rather than with Germany. Even without the Brexit uncertainty, she might well have come to this decision, given that she is now in a steady relationship, and thinks of Scotland as her "home".

This growing sense of feeling "at home" in the UK can also be seen as a trigger for Sanjay in interview 2, when he considers dropping French and concentrating on English. However,

his reflections on Brexit stop him in his tracks and he decides that it is important to keep his options open, by continuing with his French studies and pursuing his year abroad project and the double degree in France. Sanjay seems less certain of his priorities than Rita, and while he is in France he contemplates a future there, but eventually rejects this due to the unease he feels with the Yellow Vest movement. However, during his final interview the coronavirus pandemic (as well as reflections on Brexit) lead him to mull over this decision again and wonder whether a life in France might have been better suited to his concerns and his life project. He has memories of being integrated in the French community, and he also thinks he might have received more economic support in France.

Ultimately, the coronavirus pandemic is an unexpected catastrophe which presents an immense trigger for change for both Rita and Sanjay (and for the rest of the cohort), as it becomes difficult to carry out the projects they had in mind. Travelling is very limited, jobs are hard to come by, and the only project which remains open to most students is postgraduate studies. Archer calls such an external change of circumstances a “nodal point” (Archer, 2004, p. 352) which prompts the internal conversation to be re-opened. Progressing to postgraduate studies can easily be aligned with the concerns of both students, even if it is not something they had originally contemplated in the immediate future.

To summarise, not only reflexivity on external factors (the financial situation, the Brexit uncertainties, and the coronavirus pandemic), but also a shift in concerns trigger changes in the projects of the students. The shift in concerns means that previously undisclosed, or new, concerns have emerged in the area of personal well-being. The students describe their wish to settle down somewhere they feel at home (Sanjay) or within a relationship (Rita). These new concerns can be seen alongside the constellation of multilingual concerns, and at times become priorities. They influence (or contribute to influencing) the multilingual repertoire the participants are envisaging and the projects they put in place in order to realise this (i.e., Sanjay's reflections on the importance of French, his double degree, and whether he should have remained in France; and Rita's reflections on returning to the UK after one semester abroad and changing her course of studies).

However, there is also evidence that the re-prioritisation of concerns is a process which is not straightforward. Balancing concerns around well-being (for instance feeling at home in a particular place) with concerns around career progression is always challenging. However, in these uncertain times it is difficult to form projects even if the priorities were clear. By

the end of the study, Sanjay is not sure whether he did the right thing to move back to the UK from France as he contemplates his future: "I'm still thinking".

1.5. Summary

At the beginning of this section, I posed the following two research question:

Research question 4: What sort of **structural changes** become triggers for changes within the constellation of multilingual concerns?

Research question 5: What evidence is there for **reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

The structural changes I focussed on were the consequences of the Brexit vote in June 2016, and the uncertainties which lasted throughout the students' undergraduate studies. We have seen that reflexivity on the uncertainties of the Brexit situation cause Sanjay to focus on increasing his options. He does this through reviewing his multilingual repertoire and remaining dedicated to French. He also chooses a study abroad year which allows him to opt for a French degree in addition to his UK qualification. For Rita, the Brexit uncertainty is at least a contributing factor to her choice to return to the UK after just one semester abroad, even if this means changing her programme of study.

Both students are clearly strategic in their reflexive process, and this is linked to what Archer (2007) has termed 'autonomous reflexivity' (self-contained internal conversations which lead directly to action). For Rita there is also a strong element of 'communicative reflexivity' as she discusses her decision making with many other people. Sanjay, on the other hand, appears to change his mode of reflexivity towards the end of the narrative, and in the context of the coronavirus lock-down. While he clearly reflects on many different destinations for the future, his reflexivity also tends to be backward looking as he wonders whether he made the right decision about returning to the UK after his year in France. He can, in fact, be characterised as a 'meta-reflexive', who is critically reflective about his internal conversations, or even a 'fractured reflexive', whose reflexivity causes disorientation and does not lead to purposeful action. In the following section we will see that this consequence of the lockdown is, unfortunately, typical for young people who no longer feel agentic during the lockdown restrictions. It is, however, in Sanjay's case a temporary development; and Archer (2007) indeed proposes that the modes of reflexivity are subject to change.

2. The Covid-19 pandemic as a structural force

2.1. Introduction

I now introduce the final two narratives and I pay attention to the same two research questions as in the previous section:

Research question 4: What sort of **structural changes** become triggers for changes within the constellation of multilingual concerns?

Research question 5: What evidence is there for **reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

However, my focus in the commentary of this chapter are the structural changes linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. I investigate whether and how Ruby and Margarita amend their projects, and whether this necessitates a re-prioritisation of their concerns.

The global health crisis evolved extremely fast in the last trimester of the students' undergraduate course and beyond. The decision of the government to implement a lockdown at the end of March for an unspecified amount of time had many significant consequences, not least that all face-to-face teaching finished abruptly.

The pandemic plays out at various levels. Firstly, there is the immediate threat to life, and this is perceived particularly strongly at the beginning of the pandemic where it is not yet known that students are relatively safe due to their young age. Secondly, during lockdown students are by law prevented from travelling, and socialising with friends. They need to choose whether to return to their families (who often live abroad) and lose their peer support system or stay at their term-time address (which often means living in isolation during the lockdown). Thirdly, international students returning home might lose their right to return as the Brexit negotiations are ongoing and the settled status is only granted to those who accumulate a certain amount of time in the UK. Fourthly, the restrictions as well as the general downturn of the economy mean that most students lose their part-time jobs, and / or cannot find work or placements as they had hoped to. This has a severe impact on their career plans.

It is unsurprising that the general situation is causing a mental health crisis among young people (Mind, 2020). The US scholar and investigative journalist Naomi Klein (2020) describes this rupture in the following words:

Today, millions upon millions of young people are beginning their adulthood with the ground collapsing beneath their feet. The service jobs so many young adults depend on for rent and to pay off student debt have vanished. Many of the

industries they had hoped to enter are firing, not hiring. Internships and apprenticeships have been cancelled via mass emails, and promised job offers have been revoked. (2020, para. 12)

At the time of the final interviews (April / May 2020) it is widely expected that the return to normality would not be immediate (with the phrase of the “new normal” being coined) but would be introduced gradually over the rest of the year. At the point of writing (September 2021), this expectation has not been fulfilled and some restrictions remain in place. However, a cautious optimism rests on the implementation of a vaccination programme which commenced in December 2020.

I have included the final two narratives in full. However, the Coronavirus pandemic only impacts on the students during their final year, and the commentary refers mostly to the final section of the narratives as well as to relevant communications which I received from the two students after the final interviews and up to the end of February 2021. In the commentary I address the research questions from above.

2.2. Ruby's story

Ruby grew up in a small town in Scotland. She learnt both German and French at intermittent stages of her primary and secondary schools, and she passed her Higher exams in both languages (French in fifth year and German in sixth year). After school Ruby matriculated into the programme BA (Hons) International Business Management and Language (German).

Interview 1 (November 2016)

Language learning and exposure

Ruby describes how she could only take one language at a time at school. She decided to pick up German again for her Higher exams after a lengthy gap mostly because she was enjoying her language learning: “I thought ‘why not?’ cause I enjoy French, I might as well do German now”.

The nature of her schooling meant that she could not take an Advanced Higher course in either of her languages, and this meant that her language level at the beginning of her studies was lower compared to some of the other (mostly international) students in her class.

Her school did not offer language exchanges and she did not visit Germany before starting university. Overall, she had little exposure to authentic communicative situations. Since

starting university she has met a few German people and has had positive experiences: "everyone I've met seems friendly".

Multilingual concerns

Ruby talks about her interest in language learning. Her main aim is to become fluent in German: "I'd like to be able to just speak in German without having to think about it really". Her university course only allows her to take one language and she is focussing on German as she had studied this in her final year at school and she also found German easier and more enjoyable than French. She is currently not pursuing other languages.

Ruby is also interested in learning more about other countries. This is linked to her interest in travelling: "it's good to just go somewhere new and learn more about it". Ruby has travelled extensively with her family and been to France regularly, but also to Spain, Portugal, Ireland and "all over Scotland and England". She will spend her third year in Germany but is not thinking ahead to this in detail yet: "I imagine a few things will be different, but not really sure".

Ruby says she does not have concrete plans about her career. She chose her course as it allows her to combine business studies with her ambition to learn German. She is hoping to try out different areas of business during her studies. She thinks that by fourth year she will "kind of know what I like and what I don't like, and it'll be easier to think about jobs".

Communication

Ruby has tried communicating in French during holidays. If communication doesn't work out she either switches to English or will "just try and reword it to get them to understand".

At the moment she is using several strategies to improve her speaking. These include memorising and working on her accent. She is keen to meet more German-speaking people as she thinks this will motivate her to learn more German. She is also working on her grammar. However, she says that this isn't "the most fun aspect of learning a language".

Interview 2 (March 2018, towards the end of Ruby's second year)

Language learning, progress, and communication

During her first year, Ruby took part in a class trip to Berlin and this included a visit to a German university.

She is trying out many different methods for her language learning (such as Duolingo and German vocabulary playlists) and she notices an improvement in her German speaking

skills, saying she “can keep up a conversation”. She has also improved her listening skills: “I think now I can kind of understand most of what’s being said and can have a response to it”. She is also practising listening to different accents.

To improve her speaking, she regularly attends meetings of “Eurotalk” (and she is also part of the organising committee for this society). During these meetings people choose which language they would like to speak and sit at a table dedicated to the language. She describes this as a supportive environment (“because everyone’s trying to help each other learning everything”). This helps her to improve her fluency but is also useful for her class work: “we can practise any work we’ve got to do for class”. Additionally, she is meeting up with people from her German class and they practise German together or organise German film nights.

Networks

Ruby says that she now feels at home in her university city. She has found a part-time job and often works at weekends, so doesn’t go home very much. She is mixing with many international students (“there’s hardly any Scottish people at uni”) and has found it easier to socialise with people from her German classes rather than with people from Business Management: “it’s a smaller group and we all kind of had similar interests and we’re studying German, and with the group work and everything we got to know each other and started spending more time with each other”.

Education and career

Ruby says that she is enjoying her studies. The business modules are sometimes difficult, but she says: “they’re mostly like interesting and once you study enough, it’s fine”. She particularly likes the fact that she can link her business and language knowledge in some of the modules (such as World Economy, but also German).

She is now thinking she might want to work for an international business in future.

Generally, she thinks Brexit will weaken the economy, and this might cause her to move away from the UK later: “I’m kinda ‘hmm, will I stay in the UK?’”

The year abroad

Ruby is currently planning her year abroad. She has chosen the partner university because of the location and the size. It is not too small (“there’s loads of people you can meet”), but also not too big (“I feel as though a bigger city such as Berlin is something I would get lost

all the time and have no idea where I'm going"). Additionally, she will have the opportunity to achieve a double degree if she follows the programme set by the partner university: "I think it will be good, it's just gonna be a lot of work, but I think it'll be worth it".

She is planning to arrive before the semester starts to get to know the city. Her parents will help her move and her mother will stay for the first week to ensure she gets a good start.

She will be taking an intensive language course at the beginning of the year abroad, and then she is planning to take a mixture of English and German modules. Whilst she is abroad, she hopes to visit other countries, and to meet up with the others from her German class.

Her aims for her year abroad are to become fluent in German, meet new people and find out more about living in Germany. She is aware that there will be a lot of Erasmus students, and that there is the danger of "speaking English more than I do German", but on the other hand she thinks it will be good to be able to talk to someone from your country "if you maybe feel a bit stressed out".

Brexit is scheduled to take place in the middle of her year abroad. This makes things uncertain for her: "it is a bit of a concern, but I'm trying to stay calm about it, I think it will be ok".

She is both excited and nervous about going abroad: "it's gonna be fun, and I'm looking forward to it".

Interview 3 (May 2019, during Ruby's second semester abroad)

This interview takes place during a support visit. We have a chat in German and then carry out the interview in English.

Language learning progress, communication

Ruby is positive about her language learning in general and says that it is fun to learn the language. When she first arrived, she tried to force herself to speak German as much as she could, for instance to the hotel staff, her landlord, and later on in shops and in the street. She is practising her spoken German now by going to a 'Stammtisch' where they speak in English for half the time and in German for the other half of the time.

She speaks a lot more freely: "towards the end of the first semester it started to click in a lot more". She knows she won't be completely fluent by the end of the year, but she says: "I'm just trying to like almost think in German, rather than think in English and so I find it

easier to just kind of talk in German now". She is now less concerned about making mistakes: "it's not the end of the world".

Education abroad and adaptation

Ruby took part in an intensive course at the beginning of the year, and she says this "was a good way to kind of just get settled in ... and try and get used to using German". However, she could not take the recommended Business German language course in semester 1 because of timetable clashes. She is taking this course now in semester 2 instead, and she thinks that both the language input and the content would have been very useful to her in semester 1.

She is currently taking modules in business subjects in both English and German.

She tells me that she was shocked at the amount of hours she has at the university. This is considerably more than she was used to from Scotland, and she often feels exhausted and finds it difficult to organise her time. She is struggling with the finance related modules which are necessary for the double degree: "and that's not my strong subject, it's not something I enjoy". She finds the mathematics quite hard; however, this is making her realise that there are other areas of business which she enjoys more and can do better in.

Studying in German means that she must understand the topic, rather than just understand individual words. She describes how she found it difficult at first, but she developed strategies like going over the notes and trying to understand the topics before going into class, and this helped a lot. There are some overlaps between the modules she took in Scotland and the modules from Germany. This makes it easier for her to follow the modules in German. Also, the lecturers who teach the modules in German all have very clear accents and are easy to understand.

She is improving her level of writing by starting a report in simple German, and then adding "more sophisticated vocabulary and verbs".

Travelling and networks

As a student, Ruby has a semester ticket and this means she can travel in a large region around her city for free, including several destinations in bordering countries. Ruby has made many friends from around the world, and they have travelled extensively (though she would like to travel even more).

She enjoys spending time with the international students. She describes how it is difficult to speak in German with the other Erasmus students, as people tend to speak only English.

Generally, the Erasmus students are inclusive and only speak in their mother tongue if they are unsure of a word: "you don't feel excluded". She is aware of the fact that a lot of the international students aren't English native speakers, and she tries to be accommodating: "if they don't understand me, I'll speak a bit slower, or, or just make sure I sound clear, because there's not many people who understand [laughs] the Scottish accent all the time".

Thoughts about the future

We talk about Ruby's plans for when she returns to Scotland. She is hoping to find a part-time job to afford the rent, and she thinks having German will be beneficial. In the past, when she looked at job offers, language skills had often featured. However, she thinks languages are not just good for jobs "but just for life itself". She says: "I think in Scotland most people just speak English, and so if you can speak another language, it's like a talent".

Brexit

There were a lot of uncertainties when the UK was preparing for a no deal Brexit, and Ruby was receiving letters from the study abroad team with conflicting advice about what this would mean about her immigration status. She found this quite unsettling. The topic of Brexit also comes up frequently in the business modules. This is sometimes awkward for her when people ask her what she thinks about it: "I'm kind of like 'och, again'".

Interview 4 (May 2020, at the end of Ruby's fourth year, during the eighth week of lockdown)

Ruby has returned to her family in Scotland during lockdown. She has now completed all her assignments and handed in her dissertation.

Year abroad adaptation and personal growth

Thinking back to the year abroad she describes how after a period of settling down things went well for her: "you've got the new classes, you've got to make new friends, and you've got to kind of get to know your way around everywhere, but after the first couple of months it had calmed down, and I really started to enjoy".

Ruby describes the study abroad experience as a turning point in her life. She used to be "more quiet, not so sociable", however, in Germany she was thrown into a completely new

situation: "it was a huge difference, because I didn't know anyone, and... it's just, a new place, ... so that definitely really helped, like, with the learning experience and improved my confidence, ... you know, I managed to survive a year abroad ... that's something to be proud of".

Year abroad and language learning

Ruby describes how she enjoyed using the language in authentic situations and noticed an improvement: "at the start of the year it was definitely, like, really stressful". When she was travelling in Germany or going to a restaurant, she also interpreted for some of her friends who didn't speak German.

In terms of language learning she is happy with the results: "I improved my German quite a lot, ... to learn more about Germany and travel, and just learn more subjects at uni that I found interesting. So, for me that was a success." One area of regret is that she mostly socialised with international students: "I would have probably liked to have made more German friends, but other than that I think [pause] the year went quite well".

She also improved her business German: "I was learning more of business vocabulary, and... it kind of, helped me to improve my German understanding".

Year abroad, academic progress and double degree

When she was studying in German, she found that the lecturers were really understanding of the fact that she was an Erasmus student. She describes how one of the modules was "tricky", as it covered international business law in German, and this required specialist language, but she received support: "the lecturer was really nice and he gave us some extra help with the coursework, ... I thought that it was really interesting because I got to learn more about law, which was something I'd never done before". She felt she really improved her German in this module.

Ruby had originally opted for a double degree during her year abroad. This meant following the syllabus from the German university and, if successful, receiving a degree from Germany in addition to her Scottish qualification. However, the German programme included a lot of specialist mathematical modules. After failing one of these modules, she had to change her exchange status to a regular Erasmus exchange.

Returning to Scotland

Ruby describes taking her last exams and moving “all in one week”. She then had to start thinking about her fourth year at university: ““it was definitely kind of weird, because you go from having, like, this... life in Germany, and that’s all done, and... now, you’re back home, and then you’re getting ready for fourth year uni, so it’s a bit of a... weird period of time”.

However, she looked forward to her fourth year. The transition was eased by the fact that she became good friends with a student from her home university whilst they were abroad. The friendship lasted during the final year at university: “once we came back to Edinburgh, we started to hang out a lot more, so that was nice”.

On her return she felt that she could share her experiences with her friends, a lot of whom had studied abroad in the same year: “we all kind of, when we first got back, were talking about it, ... sharing our experiences and stuff which was good”.

She describes how she sometimes felt a bit lost at the German university and didn’t quite know “how things worked with, like, the exams and stuff”. In this respect, it was good to be back at her home university where she knew “everything was in place, and sorted”.

She has experienced two university systems and thinks that both of these can be stressful for the students. In Germany a module was often assessed by a single exam, which meant that there was a lot of pressure around this assessment. However, when she was back in Scotland, she sometimes felt overwhelmed by the amount of coursework: “there’d be weeks where I have, like, two or three pieces, due, and I’m like, ‘oh my God’”.

Language learning in year 4

Once she returned to Scotland for her fourth year, she used additional strategies for her coursework in the German classes. These included reading online forums with useful words and phrases and learning phrases and vocabulary from her notes. She also installed a German keyboard and German proof-reading onto her laptop which made report writing quicker.

She feels that she has made further progress with German in fourth year. Her report-writing improved, and she has also enjoyed interpreting which was introduced as a new skill: “you’re hearing these words, and you’re trying to figure out, based... on the rest of the sentence, what could this word mean, and... I found that really useful and really fun”.

She now speaks German confidently. She is realistic and thinks her German will never be as good as her English but enjoys the communicative aspect: "it's so interesting to meet people who speak different languages, and – see their perceptions on... how these things work, ... that's been really good".

Interest in education

During the last two years Ruby has taken part in several extra-curricular activities which were linked to schools and raised her interest in education. For instance, she kept in touch with a high school in Scotland during her time abroad by writing a German – English blog about her experiences. The aim of the initiative was to inspire school children to keep up their language learning. A further project involved working with a class of German students and helping them to write an article for an international newspaper in German. Ruby describes how she improved her own German thanks to these activities and revised her vocabulary by helping others. Working with schools has motivated her to apply for an assistantship with the British Council and after her graduation she is planning to spend a further year in Germany as an assistant teacher.

Reflections on her career Brexit and Coronavirus

Since the beginning of the lockdown Ruby has been staying with her family. Even during the difficult times in lockdown Ruby has not felt completely overwhelmed: "I've kept on top of all my coursework and managed to finish everything".

The Brexit situation continues to add uncertainty to her plans. She describes what it was like during her year abroad: "they kept on, pushing back the deadline for Brexit, .. that was a bit of added stress ... thankfully, obviously, it didn't... happen while I was studying abroad". However, she doesn't know how this will affect her future, as she is keen to work in Germany or another country: "So that might mean getting visas, and... Europe working permission and stuff, and... what, I've heard, sometimes that can be really difficult to do."

The Coronavirus pandemic is causing additional stress: "lots of things are getting cancelled, and they're not quite sure what's gonna happen over the next few months". She had planned to visit some friends she had made abroad who live in Ireland and Spain, but now she says: "we're all stuck in our houses". She is worried about the economy and the job market: "it's not exactly a good thing to hear when you've just... finished university, and you're looking for a job".

She is fortunate that her job as an assistant teacher with the British Council will go ahead: “now I’m trying to ... relax and ... and... keep an eye on the news updates about Germany, ... I might have to travel there and then go into quarantine or something, or... they might... make us all sit separately on the plane, put masks on, just for safety. But... for now, they’ve said we’re gonna continue our plan to start in September”.

I remind her of the plans she had had about her future in first year. At that point she had written: “[I will] probably work for a business or something, hopefully an international one, where I can use my language skills so I’ll be travelling a lot, and I don’t know where I’ll live, but I might end up living in Germany.” I ask her to comment on this, she says that she is “still kind of unsure with... certain aspects of it, cos of Coronavirus, but... and Brexit”. She is less sure now whether she would still like to work for a company in business, and could imagine an interpreting role, or else “teaching might be a consideration”. She says that this would depend on whether she enjoys the year as a teaching assistant. She is open to various options and has recently looked into courses for translating and interpreting, and teacher training.

Postscript

Ruby was due to start her post as a language assistant in Germany in September 2020. However, I received an email from her shortly after her starting date:

I have decided not to do the assistantship in Germany this year. I went last week to move with my parents, and after seeing what things were like, I decided to go home with them. There were too many things going wrong like lack of social distancing and cleaning hands, my flat didn’t feel very safe and flights to Scotland were being cancelled till March next year. This led to me deciding to return home. I’ve contacted the school and the British Council and they’ve said they understand my decision and would like to invite me back in the future.... I really was looking forward to the job, but I was worried if something bad happened to me or my family, and there would be no way of getting to each other.

Ruby has since been accepted for a postgraduate course in Scotland as a teacher of German. She tells me that she is really excited about this prospect and is due to commence the programme in August 2021.

2.3. Margarita’s story

Margarita was born and grew up in Southern Italy with Italian as her first language. During her schooling she learnt English, French, Latin and some German and took part in two school trips to London and Paris.

She moved to the UK after high school to live with her brother. For the next three years she worked in various jobs, started college, and took an English course to pass her IELTS exam. In September 2016 she started the undergraduate degree: 'Languages and Intercultural Communication' focussing on French and German.

Interview 1 (October 2016)

Multilingual concerns

Margarita is committed to improving her language repertoire: "I'm now fluent in English and pretty fluent in French as well and I'm [laughs] trying to improve my German step by step". She is also keen to learn Spanish: "I'm really interested in it, and I just want to learn". She feels that she would be able to learn it very quickly, as it is so similar to French: "I know I could just learn it in three, four months in Spain".

She is enthusiastic about grammar and the theory behind languages and culture.

Additionally, she wants to develop personally, become "open-minded" and "do some life experience".

Communication / language etiquette

Margarita lives with her brother but tried to avoid Italian people during her first three years abroad. In her first job she realised she didn't have an opportunity to speak English. She actively changed the situation: "I just went like 'ok, I need to do something' and I just went and leaving some CVs and I got a job in a restaurant". She began working in a multilingual team where the common language was English, and she became "really fluent in English".

She is very aware of language etiquette and thinks that "it's not really polite or nice that you speak a language that the other person doesn't understand". She has experienced this herself with Polish colleagues, however she knows that it sometimes also happens with Italian: "I tend not to do the same, but sometimes it happens".

Adaptation to life in the UK and her Italian heritage

Margarita describes how her personality changed when she became more confident speaking English in the workplace ("I just started to be myself") and her colleagues remarked: "'you were so shy ... and now you're like an explosion'".

She feels that she has changed a lot since coming to the UK: "I think I'm Italian culturally, but mentally I feel like ... I see myself changed a lot ... and I think that's good for what I like and the kind of person I am". Sometimes she now finds it difficult to relate to her former

friends when she is back in Italy on holiday: "I feel like I'm not a part of the group anymore".

Language learning

Margarita talks about the increasing role of English in her life. This has now improved so much that she has started to "think in English". Living and working in the UK for a number of years means that she now knows words related to particular experiences in English, but not in Italian: "sometimes I feel I don't really know my own language anymore".

Margarita describes the strategies she has in place to improve her English. At first, she tended to mainly listen, and then she asked her colleagues about certain expressions. She also listened to songs and watched movies with various language subtitle combinations, and eventually without subtitles.

She describes how she sometimes gets "too stuck into grammar". She says: "I want to get into the language, ... I want to go behind". This sometimes makes learning more difficult as she wants to know everything at the same time.

Interview 2 (February 2018, towards the end of Margarita's second year)

Language constellation

Margarita has changed her language combination and is now studying Spanish from Beginners' level instead of German. She made this change for a number of reasons: She found German very hard and felt her level was lower than the rest of the class (she had only learnt the language for a short period of time in school and hadn't engaged with the language for three years before university). She also didn't see the point of learning it, as she believes that Germans speak English very well. Finally, she feels that Spanish is more useful to her as her boyfriend would like to move to Spain in future ("so what's the point of such a struggle?").

Language learning

Margarita has been learning French for 10 years, so she feels very confident with this language: "I'm quite fluent".

She is also happy with her progress in Spanish, and she is motivated to learn: "for Spanish I'm fine, I'm more keen on learning it because it's the first time I actually learnt Spanish".

She is trying to think in French and Spanish in order "to get into the language the most I can". She describes how Spanish is very similar to Italian "but at the same time it's not",

and she sometimes makes up words to test whether they are correct in Spanish:

“Sometimes it is, sometimes it's not the right word, so I'm just like give it a try.”

While she feels she is coping well with French and Spanish, she also struggles with the mix of languages: “I feel like my brain is not able to cope with that anymore”.

Academic progress and thoughts about her future

Margarita changed her studies from Languages and Intercultural Communication to the “with Marketing” route. This is because she enjoys Marketing, but also because she thinks combining Languages with Marketing will provide her with better “opportunities for a good job”. (She mentions translating for Marketing companies as a possible area of work.) She thinks this degree will be internationally recognised (even after Brexit).

Due to her programme change Margarita needed to take additional modules in second year and she describes how her workload was tough (“I was kind of struggling”). However, she was optimistic that she would manage: “I took a challenge ... that I was sure I could accomplish”.

She can't really imagine a future in the UK as she feels that she needs the sun. She is also unhappy with the perceived culture in the UK (getting drunk a lot, not taking real interest in other people, customers calling her “doll”). Generally, she does not feel at home.

Communities of practice and responsibilities

Margarita is currently speaking more Italian than English. Her parents moved to the UK due to the economic crisis in Italy and she lives with them. Margarita says they “didn't integrate”, and she often needs to help them linguistically. She also has an Italian boyfriend, and she has mostly Italian friends at university. She says: “this kind of affects my English now ... sometimes my English instead of going forward, went back (laughs)”. She feels she would still like to work on her pronunciation and her grammar: “there was some grammar that I think I missed, somehow”.

Preparation for the year abroad

Margarita has mixed feelings about the year abroad which she will spend in France. On the one hand, she is excited and thinks she won't have a culture shock “because I already did this experience”. On the other hand, she has lived in Edinburgh for four years: “I learnt how to be an adult here”, and she is not sure she is psychologically ready for another move: “I'm

already stressing now". However, overall she is confident: "I think I will be fine, I mean, I will enjoy it probably".

Whilst abroad, she is aiming to improve her French (speaking and writing), and to be able to dedicate more time to her studies. She is also planning to find a job in France ("definitely I will be working") as this will help her linguistically as well (she experienced this in the UK).

She will be staying in student accommodation for the first time: "I was also thinking to use this opportunity to experience this life environment". She thinks it will be good for her to live with others because there might be "concerns about my relationships and all this sort of things" and she wants to "enjoy the experience and not "be by myself all the time".

Interview 3 (March 2019, at the beginning of Maria's second semester abroad)
Language learning and use of languages

Margarita describes how her level of French was already high prior to coming to France and she was able to understand and speak in French straight away. She is now using Italian, English, and French daily. Additionally, she is taking language modules in Spanish.

She says that she always speaks in French with French people. Her contacts are through uni, or in public places and restaurants but she doesn't have close French friends. She is hoping to speak more French during her remaining time but feels that people aren't really that nice to her: "if they see that you're a foreigner ... they kind of make fun of you" and this causes her to speak less French. She mostly speaks Italian with her friends, and sometimes English with the Erasmus students.

However, she is taking most of her modules in French. Many of these are language modules (for instance translation or interpreting), but she is also taking a journalism module and a module about teaching French as a foreign language ("which was interesting as well"). She feels she is improving naturally: "I don't really put much effort".

She finds it a bit hard to keep up her English as she is not speaking it very much: "I mean I remember the word, I have it there, but I can't say it, or I just can't remember".

Generally, though, her multilingual skills are improving all the time and she says that it is normal for her now to speak and even think in different languages. In the future, she would like to add another one or two languages to her repertoire, maybe go back to learning German or learn Portuguese: "it's just normal to speak different languages".

We discuss whether some languages are more important to her than others, and she says that English seems to carry a larger weight than other languages, and she always researches words “in English first” and then finds the translation in Italian.

Adaptation to France and the academic system

Margarita perceived her first semester as very stressful: “too many classes and I wasn't very happy to be here, because it wasn't even my first choice, I wasn't happy with the university itself”. The choice of modules was very restricted and did not include Marketing modules. She feels that most of the modules aren't linked to her degree “apart from languages” and there also aren't any Intercultural Communication modules: “so I feel I kind of wasted a little bit of my time”.

The process of choosing her modules and organising the timetable has been frustrating and very complicated: “I stressed out about the university a lot”. She also feels less supported by the lecturers in comparison to the UK system, with emails often not being answered.

In contrast, the second semester is turning out to be more enjoyable and less stressful as she has fewer modules, and she now knows how the system works.

Environment

There are other environmental factors which she is unhappy with. She describes how her room was dirty and full of vermin when she arrived, and she had to start cleaning it before moving in. She generally feels uncomfortable in the university environment and describes the building as cold and dirty and “not even responding to the health and safety laws”.

Margarita was shaken by the protests of the yellow vest movement: “I was so shocked when I first saw them because there was like the police ... and they had the guns”. The protests disrupted the daily life, people couldn't take the tram or travel on the roads, and students were worried that their exams would be cancelled: “it was a nightmare”. She witnessed frightening scenes when people became violent and “someone actually threw tear gasses into a shop ... and there were kids as well”.

Reflections on Scotland and the future

Margarita's perceptions of Scotland are changing: She describes how she was keen to leave Scotland (because of the weather and the culture in general), but after a month away she started to miss it “because of the organisation ..., the banks”. She also misses the way

people behave: "in [Scotland] people are nice, I mean, they are kind", and she thinks this is priceless. She describes her ambivalence: "I feel home, but sometimes I don't feel home."

Generally, she is looking forward to getting back to her normal life "which is not exciting, it's work, university, then home, but still, it's better than just university". She is keen to be back with her partner and she also wants to be economically independent again.

It's hard for her to make plans for the future due to the political uncertainties: "I don't know what it's going to be like with the Brexit". She will either do a Masters in Scotland or go to Spain and improve her Spanish and "do an experience, a life experience there, maybe do the Master there too".

Interview 4 (June 2020, at the end of Maria's fourth year during the eight week of lockdown)

Margarita now shares a flat with her partner and their dog and is staying in Scotland.

Reflections on the year abroad and personal development

Margarita describes again the negative experiences she had during her first semester abroad: "it was like hell for me ... I didn't like the environment; I didn't like the university".

However, her second semester was better, as she had become used to the system and was able to take control: "I already experienced everything and I already knew how to sort everything out if I had any problems, ... I was feeling much better and actually liked it". This was a period of acceptance: "I didn't like the system, to be honest, but then at the same time I was like ok, this is the system, I need to do it whatever, I'll do the way they want". She now realises that she needed a period of adaptation for her Erasmus year even though she had gone through this experience when she came to the UK: "it was still different because, I, after seven years in UK, I was used to a certain way of doing things".

While she has mixed feelings about the year abroad, she thinks that overall it was good that she went: "so I could actually live the language, live the culture, but I don't feel like it really changed much for me, in my language skills".

Looking back she thinks getting to know people was the most important part of the experience for her: "this is something I'm really grateful for and it probably is one of the most beautiful thing I will remember about my Erasmus, that I managed to, to discover some people that I already knew or just new people, and it meant, it brought me new relationships, which I will gladly take with me".

Year 4: re-adjustment to life and uni

Coming back to fourth year “was good and bad at the same time”. On the one hand Margarita was really pleased to get back to her home university (“I remember the first day we went to back to uni, I think I hugged some of the [university] walls ... [laughs] I was happy to be back”). However, the final year turned out to be very demanding: “I went back to my normal life, I wasn't by myself anymore, then I had to work, I had to study, so again it was just very stressful all over”. She had lost the motivation for her studies during her year abroad (as she wasn't studying anything that was really related to her course), and she feels she never really got the motivation back.

She says she now has feelings of nostalgia: “when I look back actually many times during this year I said: ‘oh I wish I was back in France’”.

Combining work and studies, including long commutes, has been difficult. After a long day at work, she also needed to look after her dog. She found it very hard to focus: “many times I was reading and reading, and I wasn't understanding anything”. She describes how she started having mental blocks: “I wasn't being productive”. However, she needed to continue working: “I couldn't just not work, I had to work anyway”. For the first time she couldn't meet deadlines, and she thinks this was also due to the accumulated stress of the previous years: “maybe this one was the final year that I needed to push and, I pushed too much over the years and this year it was just, too much and I kind of left things behind ... I couldn't really handle everything”.

Year 4: using languages professionally

After her return to Scotland, Margarita found a job as a customer advisor for French where she supports French customers and needs to speak and write in French every day.

While the job is demanding she also finds it enjoyable and professionally fulfilling. She feels that these criteria are important to her, and she can imagine staying in this job for a little while longer.

She also thinks that her work has improved her French skills: “I'm more confident when I speak ... every day I'm speaking some French with the customers ... I'm writing French every day”. This is also beneficial for her French language modules, even if the written skills required for her job (writing emails) are different from the written skills she needs for her university course (writing reports).

Multilingual development

Margarita continued Spanish as an additional language whilst abroad and made good progress with this. While she couldn't continue Spanish in her fourth year, she is keen to return to this and maybe German at a later point in time. She feels confident in her three main languages (Italian, English and French) and is proficiently using them in a work context. She is interested in multilingual issues and wrote her dissertation about translanguaging.

Reflections on her future and impact of coronavirus

The Coronavirus situation has caused Margarita a great deal of worries which affected her work: "I couldn't really focus into actually getting uni work done, and even at work". This was because she has family in Italy and family in the UK, so she was trying to gather as much information as possible. She was upset that she couldn't "say bye to all my lecturers, my friends, that's something that made me upset". Also, she can work best at night and used to do this in the library, and she finds she can't concentrate in the same way in her home.

However, she feels she can accept the lockdown situation: "I guess you just have to, to accept things with the way they are at the moment and think that's the priority, you will have other times to celebrate and whatever". She knows that the most important thing is that they are safe. Also, she feels that not too much has changed for her as she lives with her boyfriend and their dog, and she has been pretty busy with working and studying. She is glad that the lockdown wasn't as strict as in Italy and she could still go out for walks.

We talk about her plans for the future. She feels she wants to make something of her university education beyond waitressing ("nothing wrong with it, I've done it for so many years, it's just like after all this, you know, effort that I made, I just want to get where, at least closer, to where I wanted to be"). She doesn't feel she needs to have the most ambitious job, but at least she wants to do something with languages. In that sense she is happy with her current job as she feels she is learning something new all the time "improving in some fields and speaking languages". She thinks she will take a year before she makes any plans, and then maybe do a Masters course (which could be online). She feels that she would need this qualification for most jobs.

For the future she also wants to "be in a place where I am actually happy to live in". We talk about where this place would be and she says that she is not happy in the UK anymore:

"I want, need some hot weather and a different lifestyle, because I really miss being outside and going to the beach and just the kind of life that you do when you're in a hotter country". She also feels the UK does not have anything to offer her anymore (though she might come back later): "I don't like it here anymore and I really want to leave. I think this is also what influenced me on the past year". She needs to agree plans together with her boyfriend and they both could imagine living in either Italy or Spain. The economies of these countries have suffered a lot due to the Coronavirus, so it will be difficult to find a job, but Margarita thinks when they have made the decision to go, she will just leave, irrespective of whether she has a job. This had worked for her in the past: "when I will decide to move away, I will just move and then look for a job like, what I did when I was here".

On the one hand, due to the fact that she is nearly 26, and in a stable relationship, she wants to "settle down, choose where you want to live, get your job, and eventually you know I want to have a family at some point". On the other hand, she says she still has plans: "I still want to travel, I still want to, to discover new cultures, new places and I still want to have a good job".

Postscript

Margherita stays in touch and in November 2020 she sends me an update regarding her plans (see appendix 5). She tells me that she did not take the year's break (as she had originally planned), but decided to start a Masters course in Marketing at her previous university straight away. Her decision was based on various facts. Firstly, she wanted to keep working and "save money before leaving for good". Secondly, during the pandemic she felt that it was not the right time to move to a different country. Thirdly, she could access a student loan in the UK. Finally, she felt that she wanted to finish her studies as soon as possible ("I am not turning any younger"), as she wished to settle abroad for good and find a "more stable and profitable job".

Maria emphasises her love of languages and intercultural studies, even if her Masters is in the field of Marketing

...everyone should know at least one or two languages beside the mother tongue, it's useful, it's smart and stimulating and it's fun. Languages open up a world of personal, social, and work opportunities, and knowing that many universities in the UK are taking them off their programme is heart breaking ... I wish people, especially young people will see the importance of languages as much as I do, and will continue studying them in a way or another.

I receive a further communication from Maria in June 2021 stating that she is due to leave the UK with her partner shortly.

2.4. Commentary

In the preceding section I examined the reflections of the students on the evolving Brexit situation. This was initiated through a pro-Brexit vote which took place after the students had already been accepted on their course. As mentioned, students reflected both on the perceived ideology of the UK after the Brexit vote, but also on the expected impact of Brexit on the economy and on their status (UK students are set to lose their EU membership, and EU students lose their right to free movement to the UK).

The evolving pandemic represents a further unprecedented change in circumstances, and I have outlined above how this affects students' health, their social life, and their economic situation, and how this has mental health implications for many students.

Archer (2004, 2007) differentiates between three orders of reality which people interact with – the natural, the practical and the discursive. Archer then distinguishes between different types of concerns which can be identified with these three orders. Concerns regarding the natural order relate to physical well-being (such as the urge to run when in danger); concerns regarding the practical order relate to performative achievement (this is usually linked to the material world, and an example would be desiring to learn the piano); finally, concerns regarding the discursive order are related to self-worth and these play out in the social world (related concerns are vested in projects around career, family, community, club or church). The multilingual concerns I have previously described are usually related to the practical order (attaining fluency and correctness in a target language) as well as the social order (attaining communicative competence, pursuing personal and academic / career development). The natural order has so far been neglected (though some of the anxieties around moving abroad could be attributed to this realm).

I suggest that the pandemic relates to the first-order concerns (as it poses a threat to life). Furthermore, the barriers it presents in terms of travelling and finding work impact second-order concerns (as students have less opportunities to practice their languages and skills) as well as third-order concerns (the fear of unemployment linked to the economic downturn presents a loss of self-worth).

Archer describes how these three orders do not always dovetail harmoniously. This can cause a dilemma and lead individuals to reflect on their concerns, deliberate between these and prioritise their concerns. All concerns are accompanied by emotions (Archer, 2004), however, Archer maintains that humans have the power to reflect upon emotionality itself, and through reflexivity they can deliberate on their emotions and distinguish between ultimate concerns and subordinate ones. Emotions are therefore helpful in providing the “pushing power” to choose between concerns. At the end of this (often painful) process humans need to arrive “at some relationship between their ineluctable concerns with which they can live” (Archer, 2004, p. 344). An example might be a student making a choice between following the urge to retreat from the pandemic (a first-order concern) and accepting a job in a supermarket as this will support their self-worth and ensure their economic survival (third-order and first-order concerns).

In my analysis I will show how the coronavirus represents barriers which trigger reflexivity around ultimate concerns, and I will examine how the participants are forced to make choices between these. I will also consider emotionality and mental health implications in response to the following aspects:

- Which concerns linked to multilingualism are important to these students at the beginning of their studies and how do these develop over the four years?
- What are the multilingual projects of these students and how are these linked to their constellation of concerns? How do these change as a consequence of the pandemic?
- What evidence is there for reflexivity around the Coronavirus pandemic? What sort of barriers and enablements to their projects do the students perceive? Do the changes in their projects also reflect a change in their constellation of concerns?
- Which further structural influences (specifically reflections on constraints and enablements of these influences) become further triggers for changes in the above areas?

2.4.1. Multilingual concerns

I again refer to the clusters of multilingual concerns which I had proposed in the framework (communicative competency, personal development, and academic / career development).

2.4.1.1. Multilingual Concerns in the First Interview

In terms of communicative competency, the narratives of both students reveal their enthusiasm for language learning. Ruby had little experience and exposure to communicating in languages other than English, but she learnt both French and German at school and is now keen to become fluent in German. Her focus on the one language suggests that she has, at this stage, more of an indexical approach to languages (Blommaert, 2010). Margarita is a few years older. She has already moved countries and adapted to English as her second language. Her narrative conveys her overall passion for languages, but also her interest in theoretical aspects, such as grammar and communication theories. While she is clearly concerned with gaining fluency in individual languages (she mentions particularly English and French), she additionally recognises the fluidity between languages as she describes how she could easily learn Spanish in a matter of months due to the similarity with Italian (her first language). Her understanding of multilingualism could be more adequately compared to what Blommaert describes as “the complexes of resources people actually possess and deploy” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 102). To Margarita, this complex understanding of multilingualism includes simplified versions of languages (such as rudimentary Spanish), as well as languages she enjoys analysing, but not necessarily speaking (such as Latin).

In terms of personal development, both participants describe their interest in different cultures. Ruby is less experienced, and at this point she expresses her interest in a more essentialist manner when she says she enjoys going somewhere new and learning about it. In contrast, Margarita internalises this curiosity and explains that she is hoping to become more open-minded, as she recognises that gaining a non-essentialist approach to culture represents a long journey of development (Holliday, 2016).

Finally, neither participant has a fixed vision of her future career, though both see these linked to languages and transcending borders. Ruby sees her studies as an opportunity to try out different aspects of business to find out what she likes, and Margarita hopes that she will find a job which enables her to travel and explore cultures and do something she enjoys.

2.4.1.2. Multilingual Concerns in the Final Interview

The final interviews and the communications demonstrate that both participants continue to be committed to gaining multilingual competency. Ruby remains dedicated to further improving and using her German but does not express a particular desire to pick up additional languages (though in interview four she mentions that she might be interested in

learning Dutch). Margarita has changed her language constellation (see below), but describes multilingualism as being fundamental for her, in that it brings her joy and knowledge. Both have spent a year abroad and describe how they have personally developed, for instance through international friendships and coping with a different academic system. For both students, their career concerns are still intrinsically linked to multilingualism. Ruby is now envisaging a more applied route (she mentions interpreting or teaching) rather than working for an international business. Margarita has chosen to further specialise in Marketing which she sees as compatible with her wish to travel and work internationally and multilingually.

2.4.2. Multilingual projects

In this section on multilingual projects, I focus on the “career projects” of the participants and discuss whether there is evidence that these were altered through reflexivity on the Coronavirus pandemic.

2.4.2.1. Career projects

Ruby has remained focussed on her concern of gaining competency in German. She successfully carried out a year abroad during her studies. In the final year of her studies, she applied for and was accepted as an assistant teacher in Germany by the British Council. This post would have commenced in September after her graduation in June and she saw this as an ideal opportunity to carry out a professional job in the uncertain economic situation of the pandemic. As a career project, the job meets her concerns of gaining further competency in the German language, but it also provides opportunities to develop her personal, intercultural, and pedagogical skills. In fact, she describes this as a chance for her to gain an insight into the teaching profession, before deciding whether this is a possible career for her. After her decision not to carry out the assistantship (see “reflexivity” below) Ruby adapted her multilingual project. She is still keen to use her language in a teaching environment, even without the experience of the year as an assistant teacher. She applies for a postgraduate course as a language teacher, and in her latest communication she writes that she has been accepted for the course.

Margarita similarly changed her career projects due (at least in part) to the Coronavirus crisis. Her initial plan was not to go straight into postgraduate studies, but to first spend some time working in her multilingual job and travelling. However, the Covid-19 restrictions meant that she could not change her place of residence, and the economic downturn also made her plans of just arriving somewhere and then looking for a job less hopeful. Like Ruby, Margarita remained dedicated to her concerns and also to her project,

but she changed her timescales and opted to go straight into her postgraduate studies, rather than taking these up at a later point in time.

2.4.3. Evidence for reflexivity

For both Ruby and Margarita, safety (in terms of the health threat of the epidemic) become an important concern during the final interview, and they reflect on how this means that they can accept the lockdown, even though it affects their concentration (Margarita), their immediate travel plans, and their general well-being. Margarita describes how she is fortunate in that she can still combine this concern of health with several of her concerns, as she is with her boyfriend, and she has a steady part-time job which involves using her languages. Despite the lockdown situation, both Ruby and Margarita have managed to complete their undergraduate studies.

However, the impact of the pandemic becomes more pronounced during the further trajectory of the students, and I will analyse the changes in decision-making which Ruby and Margarita take and their reflections on their circumstances.

In the final interview Ruby expresses how she is fortunate that her job as an assistant teacher is still going ahead in the circumstances, and how she will need to follow the restrictions in terms of travelling and quarantine. However, in her communication a few months later she comes to the decision to cancel the assistantship as the actual circumstances she encountered on arrival did not make her feel safe. She clearly expresses her emotionality about this turn of events: "I really was looking forward to the job, but I was worried if something bad happened to me or my family, and there would be no way of getting to each other". These reflections (and also her reflections on her emotions) lead her to prioritise her ultimate concern, and in this case her ultimate concern is the safety of herself and her family. Archer (2004) has described this concern about safety as a first-order concern (see above) relating to the natural order and physical well-being. Other concerns in Ruby's constellation of concerns relating to multilingualism can be related to the second order (gaining practical skills through living and working abroad) and the third order (relating to the discursive order through communicating and having a job which contributes to her self-worth). These other concerns have been temporarily put on hold (though in the communication Ruby mentions that she might take up the assistantship in a year's time). In the meantime, she is applying for a postgraduate course in teaching, and this new project will allow her to bring her concerns together in a more harmonious way,

as the course will take place in Scotland, where she is closer to her family, and she feels more confident about the social distancing procedures.

In Margarita's final interview she envisages taking a year off to work and travel, and then continuing her studies with a Masters course which she could potentially do online. She is very keen to move away from the UK with her boyfriend, live somewhere warmer, and find a job which she enjoys, and to her this is more important than following a prestigious career (even though she is keen to keep using her languages). These plans fit well with her multilingual concerns, in fact she is already living the life of a multilingual in that she speaks and works with English, French, and Italian daily.

Six months after the final interview, Margarita sends me an update on her circumstances and her change of plans (as described above). The communication (full text in the appendix) gives clear evidence of her reflexivity: "after a few considerations I decided to start the master in September ... my decision was made on the basis ... another major fact that led me to take the decision ... this was a major win for me ... I also considered the fact ...". As can be seen from these extracts there is not one reason alone which leads to this decision, and I will highlight several of these below. However, reflections on the Covid-19 pandemic at least contribute to her decision-making when she writes: "given the current pandemic it was not the right time to move to another country anyway". It seems that in Margarita's case the pandemic was not the principal reason for changing her plan (as it seems to have been for Ruby), but it provides further barriers which cause Margarita to stay put rather than move to a different country now.

2.4.4. Further triggers for changes

As mentioned previously, it is sometimes difficult to separate the Brexit developments from the unfolding pandemic as both combine to present an uncertain future in terms of economics, mobility, and ideology.

Ruby reflects on whether her previous plans of travelling and possibly living in Germany are still possible "cause of Coronavirus, ... and Brexit", and she also reflects specifically on the possible impacts of Brexit and how this "might mean getting visas, and Europe working permission". She thinks this could be "really difficult to do". However, her decision to cancel the assistant year is not linked to Brexit (as this is pre-arranged and the funding is still safe guarded), and in Ruby's final communication only the barriers caused by the pandemic are mentioned.

Margarita reflects on several factors, beyond those linked to the coronavirus pandemic, which have contributed to her decision to move her year of postgraduate studies forward, and to stay in the UK for a further year. These are financial and personal reasons: Firstly, she has a job in the UK, and staying for a while longer means that she can save up money for eventually moving. In fact, she can combine her job with studying, something which might not be possible in a different country. Secondly, she can receive a loan for her studies and living costs in the UK, and this would not be available if she studied elsewhere. Thirdly, she feels that she is at an age where she would like to “settle down” in another country with a “stable and profitable job”, and she reflects on the fact that a postgraduate qualification is often required for this. The sooner she can complete her studies, the earlier it is possible for her to move to this next stage of her life. As Margarita holds an Italian passport and also has the settled status in the UK, Brexit restrictions do not apply to her.

2.5. Summary

I return to the research questions I address in this section:

Research question 4: What sort of **structural changes** become triggers for changes within the constellation of multilingual concerns?

I focussed this section on the Coronavirus pandemic as a trigger for change, but I also considered the impacts of further structural changes.

The risks posed by the Coronavirus pandemic are crucial factors in Ruby's decision to cancel her assistant year. However, her underlying constellation of concerns does not change long-term, and she reflects that while she still has plans of working abroad in future, Brexit might be a restrictive factor.

Margarita modifies her “life project” due to the restrictions posed by the pandemic, but also because of financial considerations (as an external factor) and the desire to reach a point where she can “settle down” (as an emerging concern). This means staying in the UK for a further year and bringing forward her postgraduate studies. This modification does not change her multilingual concerns (in the communication she describes how languages and intercultural studies will always be part of who she is). However, the emerging concern of “wanting to settle down” now forms part of her constellation of multilingual concerns.

This emerging concern around emotional well-being has also been described in the preceding chapter, as Sanjay describes his wish to settle down, and Rita mentions her commitment to her relationship.

Research question 5: What evidence is there for **reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

Again, there are many examples of reflexivity in the narratives of the students. These are particularly evident in the written communications where both Ruby and Margarita clearly lay out their reasons for their change of projects. However, the communications also underline the “pushing power” (Archer, 2004, p. 344) of emotions which I have described above. For instance, Ruby describes her worry about not being able to be with her family if anything happens to them; and this weighs heavier than the job that she was looking forward to. In the final communication she speaks of her excitement when she is accepted on her programme as a teacher of German, as she anticipates that this will allow her to dove-tail her concerns, and find a ‘modus vivendi’ (Archer, 2007).

Concluding remarks to chapters 8-10

This chapter was underpinned by the framework for multilingual reflexivity and the five research questions I posed in chapter 5. I addressed these research questions following a pragmatic approach (as laid out in chapters 2 and 5) which allowed me to put together insights from different approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Specifically, I applied a combination of narrative analysis (the crafting of narratives) with a critical realist approach (a commentary on the narratives).

Each of the above five sections of chapters 8-10 focussed on two research questions and a theme related to the framework. I then concluded each section by returning to the relevant research questions and summarising the findings from the section.

In the final chapter of this thesis (Conclusion – chapter 11), I will outline the genesis of the entire study and highlight the main findings from this chapter. I will also return to the underlying motivation for my investigation, which was to improve student support, and I will make suggestions related to the findings from this chapter.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

1. Genesis of the study: motivation, research aims and research questions

In the introduction to my thesis I explained that the motivation for my research was to improve the support for students of languages. Over the years of working with students I have often been surprised by the decisions they take in terms of their language and programme choices, or their trajectories regarding mobility and migration. I reflected on the type of support which I could offer as they take these decisions, and I realised that I knew comparatively little about the specific situation of individual students, what really matters to them, and how this influences their decision-making.

I decided to conduct a longitudinal study with some of my students to find out more about these issues; however, the exact aims of this study developed gradually during the period of data collection.

My study is based on a pragmatic approach (this is explained in detail in chapter 2). Rosiek (2013) points out that motivation is often the starting point for studies linked to the pragmatic school of thought. He further describes how the pragmatic researcher will select the framework and the methods to guide them in their research through a combination of judgement and intuition. I was reassured when I read that Rosiek suggests that both the framework and the methods evolve over the time of the research as new relations and ideas are created. This completely reflected my own research trajectory.

The data collection for my study took place between October 2016 and May 2020 and covered the entire four years of the cohort's undergraduate studies (though I received further communications from some students until June 2021). I had not anticipated that the study would occur during such challenging times, and the aftermath of the Brexit vote (in June 2016), as well as the unfolding Coronavirus pandemic meant that the students faced extremely uncertain times during their undergraduate studies. These were elements which I wanted to specifically include in my investigative framework.

Before and during the data collection I reviewed literature on multilingualism generally, and also specifically in the student context. In terms of decision-making, I was particularly interested in questions of structure and agency, and I focussed on papers showing how learners navigate the constraints and enablements they encounter over time and across space. During my reading I identified **gaps in the literature** around the reflexive process of language students linked to their experiences of structure and agency. I also realised there

is little literature on what really matters to language students and how this is linked to their decision-making and reflexivity. In the course of my reading and data collection, the aims of my research became clearer to me. To address my motivation of improving student support I concluded that the following two research aims would be vital:

Research aim 1: To investigate the reflexive process of language students.

Research aim 2: To examine the link between concerns (motivations), decision-making and reflexivity in the area of multilingualism.

As I refined my research aims I became increasingly interested in Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity (Archer, 2003, 2004, 2007). However, I was also influenced by literature on multilingualism, such as theories of second language identity (for instance Benson et al., 2013; Norton, 2013), or theories on language motivation (for instance Aronin & Singleton, 2012; Henry, 2017).

The **framework** (see figures 5 and 6 in chapter 5) I developed to address my research aims is similar to Archer's theory of reflexivity, as it separates out structural forces, individual concerns (what people care about), projects, and reflexivity. However, my framework focusses on multilingualism (multilingual concerns and multilingual projects), and the changes which occur over time and across space and lead to decision-making. The timeframe includes the Brexit process and the beginnings of the global pandemic, and the spaces span mobility and migration trajectories (see chapter 7). Specifically, my framework allowed me to address the following research questions:

Research question 1: What does a particular **concern** (such as gaining multilingual competency) mean to my students? How does this concern change over the four years of the study?

Research question 2: What are examples of **conflicts** between concerns linked to multilingualism and how is the conflict resolved?

Research question 3: What sort of multilingual **projects** are the participants aiming for? How are such projects linked to their concerns? How do the projects change over time?

Research question 4: What sort of **structural changes** become triggers for changes within the constellation of multilingual concerns?

Research question 5: What **evidence is there for reflexivity** around structural changes, projects, and concerns?

To gain an understanding of the trajectory of the students I wrote a narrative for each student based on the data I had collected (mainly through semi-structured interviews, but also through visual elicitation, observations, and communications from students). I then considered which narratives were best suited to address the individual research questions. My discussion chapters (chapter 8-10) respond to the research questions and my framework as follows: Chapter 8 responds explicitly to research questions 1 and 2 by focussing on concerns (section 1) and conflicts between concerns (section 2). Concerns are recognised as one of the cogs in the framework which may trigger decisions. Chapter 9 responds to research question 3 by focussing on the students' multilingual repertoire as a key multilingual project (projects are represented in a second cog of the framework and are also related to decision-making). Chapter 10 relates to research question 4 around Brexit (section 1) and the Coronavirus pandemic (section 2). These structural changes correspond with the third cog in the framework. All three discussion chapters also address research question 5 on the role of reflexivity in relationship to concerns, projects, and structural forces (reflexivity appears in the cog linked to projects, and drives the projects which the students undertake).

Chapter 8 – 10 are, as explained above, divided into five sections, and in each section I present two of the narratives as I consider the research questions. I then discuss these narratives and the research questions through a commentary at the end of each section. In chapter 6 I describe in detail the procedure which I have used for the discussion section, and this is based on a combination of narrative and critical realist research.

I will now summarise the main findings for each of the research questions from above.

2. The research questions: main findings

Research question 1: To address this research question I focussed on the narratives of Leanne and Tilly and investigated how their understanding of communicative competency changes.

The narratives and the commentary showed that both participants remained committed to communicative competency as a multilingual concern throughout their studies. However, their understanding of what it means to be communicatively competent in a target language is different for each student, and changes over the time of the study.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

Leanne first strives for near-native competency in both of her target languages (Spanish and French), but later focusses on Spanish. When she is refused entry to communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) during her year abroad, this is emotionally difficult for her, and leads to a fresh evaluation of her constellation of concerns (Archer, 2004). Temporarily, the academic concern of achieving enough credits for her year abroad, as well as her concern of personal development through travelling and friendships become dominant, and this shapes her projects. However, Leanne remains committed to gaining communicative competency in languages other than English, and eventually understands this as a life-long project which she needs to keep working on. Her focus is now on different aspects of communication (such as understanding and reading) and she no longer seeks near-native proficiency, as she again broadens her multilingual interests to include multiple languages (Henry, 2017).

Tilly grows up in Spain speaking both English and Spanish, but after her arrival in the UK she often feels excluded due to her self-perceived lack of cultural literacy. By the end of her studies, her understanding of communicative competency has changed to include traits of interculturality, for instance mediating and translating (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Wilkinson, 2020). She feels communicatively competent as a multilingual (Henry, 2017; Jessner, 2008). Her repertoire includes Spanish, English, and also German (which she speaks at a slightly lower level), as she interprets for her international friends during her year abroad in Berlin.

Research question 2: To address this research question I analysed the narratives of Eve and Frederica and focussed on conflicts between concerns related to communicative competency and academic progression.

In the narratives and the commentary I demonstrated how Eve and Frederica both managed to balance concerns of communicative competency and academic progression during the first two years of their studies. For Frederica this meant changing her programme during her first year to align it more specifically with her interest in German and business studies, even if this meant temporarily paying less attention to the concern of personal development through friendships. However, during study abroad the new environment (Aronin & Singleton, 2012) no longer allowed the students to dovetail all of their concerns. Both students experienced a conflict specifically between the concerns of gaining communicative competency in their target language and academic interests. They resolved this conflict between their concerns in different ways. Eve decided to cancel her

year abroad and concentrate on her academic progression at her home university. Frederica exchanged the double degree route (which did not give her many opportunities to practise German) to a regular Erasmus exchange. This had a less rigid structure and allowed her to prioritise the concerns of communicative competency and personal development, as she had more time to engage in German and travel with her friends.

In the final interviews both students described how they remained committed to multilingual concerns. Eve specifically mentioned how languages remain important to her, despite her setbacks, and she is keen to further develop her communicative competency as she imagines herself working abroad (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

Research question 3: To address this research question I introduced the narratives of Lotti and Jade and paid attention to the project of their multilingual repertoire. I traced how this changed over the course of their studies in accordance to shifts in their constellation of concerns, and changes in their structural environment.

Both Lotti and Jade completed their schooling in countries outside the UK. As they commenced their studies they needed to adapt and use the English language in academia as well as their everyday lives, while simultaneously studying additional target languages.

Over the course of her studies, Lotti managed to include German, French, and English into her dominant language constellation (Aronin, 2016), while also accruing a language repertoire of more rudimentary skills in Russian and Mandarin, as well as a good level of Spanish. Jade's dominant language constellation expanded to include Italian, French, and English, and her language repertoire additionally spanned Mandarin, Spanish, and Tagalog as her heritage language. This broadening of the students' repertoires can be linked to various concerns. For instance, in the area of personal development both are committed to developing their intercultural competency, and they see this as linked to language learning.

The choice of languages is determined by structural affordances (Aronin & Singleton, 2012), i.e., the languages which are actually on offer over their course of studies. However, students also need to seek and make use of these affordances, and Lotti's decision to take an additional semester abroad in Russia is an example of how she reflected on her choices in accordance with her concerns (Archer, 2007).

The students do not perceive all languages as equal. Jade explained her interest in Mandarin with her heritage connection (MacIntyre et al., 2017), and this reflects concerns of personal development and belonging. Her attitude to Spanish is ambivalent, and she

chose not to pursue the language due to experiences of linguistic discrimination (Norton, 2013).

The narratives of both are interesting examples of how students can remain committed to the general concerns of multilingual competency and intercultural and personal development, while adapting the individual languages of their multilingual project. These individual languages are part of a multilingual skill-set (Blommaert, 2010). They are chosen and pursued as students reflect on their particular concerns, situations and experiences, as well as the affordances of their structural environment.

Research question 4: To address this research question I focussed on structural changes relating to Brexit and the Coronavirus pandemic. These were analysed through the narratives of Rita and Sanjay (in relation to Brexit), and Ruby and Margarita (in relation to the pandemic). However, the structural changes linked to the mobility experiences were also key in many of the narratives throughout the study (for instance in the conflict of concerns which I discussed above in relation to research question 2).

In Rita and Sanjay's narratives, the multilingual project of language learning shifts according to the students' reflections on the Brexit uncertainty. Both are multilinguals and came to the UK from different EU countries for their studies. In the course of their language studies both deliberate on whether they should focus more on a target language other than English and a future abroad, or whether their concerns are better matched by perfecting their English skills and maximising their chances of a future in the UK. The Brexit uncertainty is one of the reasons why Rita curtails her year abroad in Germany to accrue time in the UK. Her prime concern at this time is to have the option to stay in the UK. Gaining the settled status and having solid business skills in English are projects which are aligned to this concern; consequently, she decides to return to the UK after one semester, rather than spend a whole year abroad. Sanjay also reflects on Brexit, but he takes the opposite decision, as he believes that his year abroad in France, as well as the double degree route, will increase his options in these uncertain times. Broadening his option pool is aligned to his prime concerns around mobility and a future career. However later, during the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Coronavirus pandemic, he becomes increasingly uncertain about whether he previously made the right decisions.

In the narratives of Margarita and Ruby I concentrated on the developments since the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. When Ruby decides to cancel her assistantship in Germany, she explains this by her reflexivity on the structural environment and her

concern for the safety of herself and her family: “I was worried if something bad happened to me or my family, and there would be no way of getting to each other”. Margarita also changes her plans, and the pandemic is a contributing factor. Instead of spending the year travelling and moving to a different country, she brings forward her Master studies: “given the current pandemic it was not the right time to move to another country”.

As students reflect on the unprecedented contextual changes of Brexit and the Coronavirus pandemic the concern of personal wellbeing emerges in all the narratives. This concern is often linked with the wish to settle down or be close to family and partners of friends. The students strive to include this concern in their overall constellation of concerns, and this often means they make changes to their projects such as cancelling the assistantship (Ruby) or curtailing their year abroad (Rita). However, the general commitment to multilingualism never wavers as the students remain dedicated to the concerns of communicative competence, and personal as well as academic development. This is evident in their further plans for their careers and their life in general.

Research question 5: I addressed the final research question around the process of reflexivity in all the commentaries. I paid attention to how the students reflected on their subjective concerns and the objective structural forces as they made decisions around their multilingual projects. I can confidently say that there is ample evidence of reflexivity throughout. An example of this are Rita’s reflections on whether or not to cancel the second half of her study abroad. She considers what is important to her, as well as her structural situation; and this includes the Brexit uncertainty, her financial situation, and the anticipated linguistic outcomes of the two universities she is choosing between. Rita explains how the decision was partly made through her own reasoning, but also by talking through the decision with people around her: “I would say it was fifty – fifty, so it was fifty percent me, and my reasoning, and then probably fifty percent people like my mum, or my boyfriend, and all my other friends, and their opinions”.

I have described in chapter 2 how Margaret Archer distinguishes between four types of reflexivity, and I copy table 1 here once more for clarity:

Communicative reflexivity	The internal conversation requires completion and confirmation by others before resulting in courses of action.
Autonomous reflexivity	Internal conversations are self-contained, leading directly to action.

Meta-reflexivity	A critical reflexivity on one's own internal conversations and one's own effective action in society.
Fractured reflexivity	The internal conversations intensify distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action.

Table 1 (reproduced) - Modes of reflexivity (Adapted from: Archer, 2007, p. 93)

Archer suggests that the dominant mode of reflexivity each individual engages in changes over time and is dependent on many factors. In the context of the study, and to address the final research question, it is helpful to refer to these different types.

For instance, Rita's decision-making (which I described above) displays elements of both autonomous and communicative reflexivity from table 1. This is typical of other participants as well, as they are able to take autonomous decisions, but additionally discuss their decisions with significant others over the course of their studies. Often these significant others are people who share their multilingual interests; this influences the participants and helps them to refine their concerns and their decision-making. A good example are Leanne's reflections, as she talks about the multilingual friends she has made over the course of her study: "I think definitely the getting to see there's more to life than just getting a job and then having a family has come from the people that I've met who are actively avoiding that [laughs], and maybe that there is more to life than what I was brought up with, perhaps."

However, we have also seen that the reflexive process can be painful, and this is particularly the case when conflicts between concerns arise. Eve could be characterised as a communicative reflexive as her decision to withdraw from her study abroad was strongly influenced by her friend who made the same choice. However, the actual decision-making was rushed and took place under stress, and it is possible she might have found a different solution if she had thought about the situation more calmly or had asked other people for advice. She describes her decision-making as follows: "it was a complete [pause] flash, and the most stressful and panicked three days I've ever experienced in my life". The decision led to a long period of stress anxiety for the student.

Finally, we have seen the example of Sanjay's mode of reflexivity changing due to the Coronavirus lockdown. While he was previously autonomous in his decisions and took action according to his concerns and the environment, he later became unsure of his priorities and his plans. During this time his reflexive process can be characterised as fractured as he mulls over his past decisions: "especially, both things together Brexit and

Coronavirus, which is not helping, so ... I'm still thinking 'did I do well to come back?' so I'm still thinking".

The findings in relation to research question 5, therefore, suggest that while the students are clearly reflective, the reflexive process can also be painful and ambivalent.

Furthermore, the mode of reflexivity is subject to change, and significant others contribute to decision-making for most of the students (as suggested by Caetano, 2015). The reflexive process is an area where support for students is called for and I will return to this in section 4 below.

3. Theoretical contributions and significance of the study

This study makes several theoretical contributions to knowledge which I will outline below.

3.1. Methodological contributions

The methodology I apply in this study is based on a pragmatic approach which brings together narrative research and critical realism in a unique and structured way.

The pragmatic approach allowed me to begin with the motivation for my study, and to "pick and choose how and what to research and what to do" (Cherryholmes, 1992, p. 14) according to the anticipated consequences of my research (Rosiek, 2013). The intended consequence was to improve support for language students around decision-making; and the combination of narrative research (focussing on experiences) and critical realist analysis (focussing on causality) proved fruitful.

The narratives spanned the students' trajectories over the entire four years of data collection and were condensed to reflect certain themes from my framework (see below). Using narratives allowed me to study the phenomenon of decision-making around multilingualism in a specific historical period, and to explore the personalities of my students (in terms of their multilingual concerns and reflexivity). These stories are linked to narrative cognition and can be understood as presenting their own narrative truth (Bruner, 1986).

I further analysed the narratives through my framework (see below) and commentaries based on a critical realist approach. This approach suggests separating out themes and paying attention to how these themes are linked to causality. The framework I developed led to specific research questions around relevant themes; I then addressed the research

questions in the commentaries to the narratives. This analysis allowed me to understand how the themes I had selected (the students' understanding of their concerns, conflicts between concerns, specific multilingual projects, specific structural forces) could be causal to decision-making under certain conditions at a certain point in time. I was also able to trace the development of these themes across time, and to investigate change.

Thus, the pragmatic approach of combining narrative research and critical realist analysis is a unique way of addressing my aim of increasing student support:

Firstly, I managed to better understand the student experience through crafting narratives based on their interpretation of reality. Secondly, through the analysis in the commentaries I gained specific knowledge about which themes could be causal in triggering the decisions of the students. The critical realist approach also allowed me to step in and give my own interpretation of the social structures which the students were trying to make sense of. All these insights allow me to suggest improvements for student support (see section 4 below).

3.2. Contribution to the wider debate on structure and agency: My framework of multilingual reflexivity

Archer argues that reflexivity is the missing link between structure and agency, and she maintains through her research that we have unique personal identities which derive from singular constellations of concerns. This means that we "are radically heterogeneous as subjects" (Archer, 2007, p. 22). We are confronted by structural forces which we have not chosen, however "mostly, we are active rather than passive subjects" (Archer, 2007, p. 22) as we navigate our way through the structural environment by reflexively pursuing (and also altering) our projects in accordance with our constellation of concerns.

My research echoes Archer's sentiments, as I focus on the investigation of multilingualism and changes over time and across space. My unique framework is strongly influenced by Archer's three-stage model of reflexivity (Archer, 2003, 2007), and allows me to separate out the themes of reflexivity and multilingual projects, multilingual concerns, and structural forces. Furthermore, I outlined three clusters of multilingual concerns (though there are overlaps and these could be defined differently). The first cluster relates to concerns regarding L2-related personal development or the wish to gain intercultural competence. The second cluster is linked to communicative competence. The third cluster of concerns covers the area of academic and career development (more details are given in chapter 5).

Designing this framework allowed me to pose the research questions which I have outlined above. Applying the framework through my methodological approach (see above) and combining this with the longitudinal nature of my study (see next point), within a specific period of time and working with a specific cohort, led me to successfully address my research questions, and to interrogate the reflexive process itself.

My research has confirmed Archer's theory that reflexivity is the missing link between structure and agency, as it (mostly) allows students to actively navigate their way around structural constraints according to their heterogeneous constellation of concerns. However, I have also shown that structural forces can severely limit the choices of students, and also impede the reflexive process itself.

The research questions additionally enabled me to address themes which have been neglected by scholars so far (see next point).

3.3. The longitudinal nature of this research and thematic contributions
I maintained in chapter 4 that there are few longitudinal studies on student language learning (Lee & Kinginger, 2018). Of these, the majority focus on the long-term effects of study abroad, while studies tracing the trajectory of language students from their first year to their final year of studies (and beyond) are extremely rare. In this study, I managed to establish a long-term relationship with the research participants, and this allowed me to explore the following themes which, to my knowledge, have not been adequately discussed in research.

3.3.1. Withdrawal from study abroad / assistantship abroad

I have not come across any studies which analyse the reasons for and the consequences of a withdrawal from a year abroad from the perspective of the students. The narratives of Eve (see chapter 8, section 2) and Ruby (see chapter 10, section 2) allowed me to explore their trajectory before, during, and after their decision to cancel their year abroad / their assistantship. The decisions were connected to specific reasons, and my framework allowed me to investigate the causality which were linked to these decisions, as students reflected on their individual concerns, and the structural affordances during the particular time of their decisions.

3.3.2. Changes during the year abroad

Again, I have not discovered any studies which show how students change their trajectory during their year abroad. In the narratives we see how Rita shortens her year abroad to just one semester, and I analyse the causality leading to this decision. Furthermore, Frederica¹³ changes her year abroad from the double degree route to a “normal” Erasmus year, while Sanjay changes from the English route to the French route during the double degree year abroad. All these decisions can be understood retroductively as we gain insights into the long-term trajectory of the students, the development of their constellation of concerns, and their reflexivity on their structural affordances and constraints.

3.3.3. Changes in the students’ concerns

My framework allowed me to investigate the long-term development of students’ concerns (what they care about). While long-term motivation has been the subject of some of the longitudinal studies I discussed in the literature review, my method of research allowed me to hone into specific concerns (such as what it means to the students to be communicatively competent), and also to examine the balance between particular concerns. Again, it is the long-term nature of this investigation which is innovative, and I have provided ample evidence on how concerns and constellations of concerns change over time and are partly, but not wholly, dependent on reflections on structural forces.

3.3.4. Changes in the multilingual repertoire of the students

While the multilingual repertoire of students is investigated in several studies, I believe the current approach of linking the changes within the repertoire to the student’s long-term reflections on what they want, what they experience in their environment (for instance discrimination or inclusivity), and what the environment provides (in terms of learning opportunities) is unique. Examples are discussed in chapter 9 where I analysed developments in the multilingual repertoires of Jade and Lotti.

3.3.5. Changes in the mode of reflexivity

Archer has described how the mode of reflexivity is subject to change. However, my own in-depth investigation is unique in that it shows how the mode of reflexivity is also linked to structural challenges. This is the case when Eve has to come to a very quick decision

¹³ Ruby similarly changes her year abroad from the double degree route to the “normal” Erasmus year, but I focussed on different themes in the analysis of her narrative.

regarding her study abroad, or when Sanjay's reflections become increasingly fractured during the lockdown period. The mode of reflexivity links in with the next point.

3.3.6. Mental health implications

This was not an area which I sought to address when I planned this study, and I do not suggest that I am qualified to adequately discuss issues of mental health. However, questions of wellbeing emerged very strongly as I worked with the students, and it became clear that there is a strong link between students' well-being and their ability to dovetail their constellation of concerns within their environment. This study suggests that when conflicts between concerns cannot be resolved (as in Eve's case), or students cannot decide which concerns are the most meaningful to them, the reflective process can become fractured. Students then become unable to deliberate and carry out projects which they are content with. Again, it was the longitudinal nature of my research which allowed me to detect changes in the mode of reflexivity and link this to specific combinations of concerns and structural forces.

This study is also innovative as it investigates how the recent contextual uncertainties of the Brexit process and the Coronavirus pandemic were perceived by the students. The severe constraints which these contextual changes posed to the students' projects (see below) certainly contributed to the distress which some of the students experienced, and this sometimes impeded their reflexive process.

3.4. Historical contributions: analysing the effects of Brexit and Coronavirus on a 'sore thumb generation'

Finally, this study took place during a very particular period in history which was framed by the Brexit vote and the Coronavirus pandemic. The Brexit vote took place after the students had already been accepted on their courses, but before they commenced their studies, and it placed a question mark over their expectations regarding transnational careers. The Coronavirus pandemic further massively restricted the students' freedom of movement and limited their career and life choices in the final months of their studies and beyond.

In chapter 7 I presented the cohort theory and Fulbrook's definition of a 'sore thumb generation' (2011) as useful constructs to show how the trajectories of particular cohorts can be heavily impacted by world events (such as wars and epidemics). While these affect everyone, their influence is even greater on cohorts currently undergoing socialisation and

transitions. For these cohorts, such events lead to a heightened tension between structural and historic forces and their individual choices.

So far, there are very few publications on the consequences of Brexit and the Coronavirus pandemic on language students. (A notable exception is Plutino & Polisca's (2021) collection of articles discussing changes to study abroad and language learning during Covid times.) The current study makes a unique contribution to theory by presenting narratives of language students framed by the unprecedented contextual changes of the Brexit vote and the pandemic. Furthermore, I analyse these narratives by paying particular attention to the structural forces of the times, the individual concerns of the students, their developing reflexivity, and agentic projects.

4. Implications and consequences for the future

As mentioned above, this study is based on a pragmatic approach, and Rosiek (2013) has described how the pragmatic researcher typically starts with their motivation for the study, then selects an appropriate framework and methods, and finally reflects on how the product of the inquiry affects our ongoing experience and has consequences for the future.

I will briefly outline how this inquiry has affected my experiences by drawing attention to processes I was previously unaware of. I will then reflect on the consequences of this research for the future. This corresponds with the underlying motivation for this research, which was to improve student support.

4.1. My ongoing experiences

This study has allowed me to establish an intensive working relationship with ten students throughout their undergraduate studies. It has caused me to reflect on the power relationship which can be problematic when working with one's students (see chapter 6), and to try to ensure that students do not feel exploited or misunderstood during this process. I have attempted to keep students involved by sending them an early version of the narratives and asking them to comment on these. I have kept in touch with most of the students, and several attended a talk I gave in June 2021 where I presented some findings from the study. I am hoping that having the intense interview sessions was not only helpful for my research, but also gave the students a sense of being listened to during their studies. I would like to suggest, however, that the power relationship can sometimes shift towards the students. I, as the researcher, also underwent times of anxiety, as I was reliant on the students' continuing participation, and on their opening up their world to me as a researcher.

The longitudinal nature of this study has allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the development which takes place over the four years of undergraduate studies. I have become aware of how heterogeneous the students are in terms of their constellations of concerns, their reflexivity, the influence of structural forces, and the projects which they undertake. I had always expected the year abroad to be a period which triggers change in all these areas, and this was confirmed through my research. I managed to relate the study abroad period to processes such as conflicts of concerns, and the resolutions which students found. I also gained detailed insights into how study abroad can be linked to changes in the multilingual repertoire of the students. Furthermore, I gained an understanding of how the unforeseen and unprecedented challenges resulting from the Brexit vote and the pandemic were additional significant triggers for change. These changes contributed to a shift in the constellation of concerns (with the concern of wellbeing emerging as important for all) and necessitated changes in multilingual projects of the students.

The framework I developed was influenced by Archer's theory of reflexivity. Applying this framework has enabled me to understand why it is useful to separate out structure and agency as causal powers. In accordance with Archer's theory, I have understood reflexivity as the most important agentive power related to people, and I have described how changes in the structural environment (which individuals do not choose) or changes in their constellation of concerns can lead to an adaptation of agentive projects. However, I have also become aware of how the mode of reflexivity can change during the times of crisis (particularly in the lockdown situation).

The insights I gained from this research have strengthened my motivation to improve student support, and particularly the current crisis and its impact on students' projects and reflexivity calls for a pedagogical response.

4.2. Consequences for the future

As mentioned, working with my framework has enabled me to separate areas which affect decision-making amongst students. As a consequence for the future, I propose improving the support for students by paying attention to the following areas: The students' constellation of concerns, their projects, the structural conditions, and the reflexive process.

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In chapter 4 I gave an overview of the types of interventions previously suggested by scholars before, during, and after the study abroad period. These interventions related to some of the above areas.

Firstly, scholars suggested to promote reflexivity and engagement (projects) amongst language learners: Students were encouraged to establish language learning goals and develop strategies for their learning (for instance Allen & Dupuy, 2012; Kinginger, 2010), reflect on their language learning and engage in the communities of their target language (for instance Quan & Menard–Warwick, 2021; Risager & Tranekjaer, 2020), improve their self-efficacy (for instance Belnap et al., 2016), and reflect on their experiences after their return from abroad (for instance Hampton, 2016).

Secondly, scholars have called for improving the environment (structure) for students by working with partners abroad (for instance Di Silvio et al., 2014; Du & Jackson, 2020) and offering a rigorous post-sojourn programme (for instance Wilson et al., 2016).

Furthermore, a number of scholars have introduced a joined-up approach which spans the period before, during and after SA by integrating several interventions into their programmes (IEREST, 2015; Jackson, 2006).

However, while these scholars have addressed the general areas of reflexivity, agency, and structure, I did not find suggestions in the literature for supporting students around their individual constellation of concerns, the actual process of reflexivity, and the notion of change.

I therefore make the following suggestions for improving student support by integrating all the themes which I have identified as important factors for decision-making amongst students (concerns, projects, structural conditions, reflexivity), while also paying attention to change.

4.2.1. Holistic student support

I propose offering holistic student support which aims at establishing a relationship with the individual students, recognising their heterogeneity, encouraging reflexivity around their (developing) concerns, and aligning interventions to their concerns and modes of reflexivity. Ideally, students should have a continuous contact person throughout their studies. A mentoring programme with this continuous contact person should pay particular attention to the initial transition period to university, but also to the study abroad period

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(the pre-study preparation, the mobility period, and the re-integration phase after the study abroad).

The analysis in this study showed that the study abroad period with its new structural environment period was the most significant trigger for changes in the students' trajectories. New barriers led to conflicts between concerns and students were forced to prioritise some. Additionally, students sometimes had to change and adapt practical projects (such as how they develop their multilingual competency and repertoire). The analysis also gave evidence on how some students struggled with the reintegration to their university after their year abroad, particularly if their concerns regarding friendships and belonging had been well matched in their placements.

The mentoring sessions (I suggest roughly once per term) should aim at establishing what the students care about (their concerns). The conversations would identify projects which students could pursue to meet their concerns and include a discussion of obstacles or enablements which students encounter as they progress through their studies and enter new environmental spaces. In particular, sound advice should be given regarding suitable destinations and programmes abroad, and the advantages and challenges of particular opportunities (such as placements or double degrees) should be shared with students. Setting up meetings with students who previously studied at these destinations will be extremely helpful and will also give returning students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences.

Whilst I recommend focussing the mentoring sessions on academic and linguistic concerns, it is very conceivable that other concerns emerge which can either dovetail with the academic concerns or come into conflict with them. It is important for the educator to hear about conflicts in concerns or structural constraints which affect the student's progression and wellbeing. The educator can then either give advice or point the student towards other sources of support.

I suggest that the contact person remains aware of the student's mode of reflexivity. As mentioned previously, it is expected that a student's reflexive process (see table 1 above) changes over time and is dependent on contextual circumstances. However, support can be offered to students linked to all modes:

- Students who tend towards communicative reflexivity will particularly benefit from conversations around their concerns and their projects. I propose also encouraging

focus groups amongst students where they can share their reflections with others on their programmes.

- To support those students who are more autonomous in their reflexivity I recommend keeping students up-dated about opportunities which are offered inside and outside of the university courses (for instance through regular newsletters).
- Archer (2007) suggests that individuals leaning towards meta-reflexivity are often critically reflexive about their own internal conversations as they consistently engage in self-evaluation. Due to their heightened social awareness, it is harder for these students to define a satisfying *modus vivendi*, than for those tending towards communicative or autonomous reflexivity. Again, support could entail making students aware of opportunities which promote sustainability and social justice, and to support unconventional decisions which do not follow the regular trajectory.
- Finally, I suggest that the contact person remains conscious that students might enter into periods where their reflexivity becomes fractured. In this case referral to more professional help is called for so that students can re-gain a sense of what is important to them and become active in pursuing relevant projects.

Whilst supporting the student, the educator should be mindful of the fact that the concerns of the students may change, or that students might be fallible in defining what is important to them. Archer (2003) suggests self-knowledge and self-monitoring are vital for individuals to define their 'ultimate concerns' and to reach a satisfying *modus vivendi*. This is a process which is not achieved by everyone and is impossible until maturity. It is therefore important that educators support students in the process towards knowing what they want and how they can achieve it, particularly when this means circumventing and subverting causal powers of constraint.

4.2.2. Re-imagining of the year abroad

Most students reported a positive evaluation of their year abroad. However, Eve's narrative draws attention to serious issues as she felt she had to choose between either staying at her destination and failing academically, or returning home and missing out on the opportunity of her sojourn abroad. Clearly, students who are successfully progressing through their languages programmes should be provided with study abroad opportunities

which are manageable and fulfilling, rather than being left with the impression that they have been set up to fail.

A difficulty of the Scottish language programmes is that students do need to gain credits during their year abroad to progress to their next year. This is because their year abroad is a regular third year of their four-year course (this is different in England where the year abroad is an additional year, and the universities have more flexibility in setting their credit expectations). Possible solutions for the Scottish year abroad could be:

- Adding the year abroad as an additional year (similarly to the English system). This would mean that students need to spend a fifth year at university, but this model would allow educators and students a maximum of freedom in planning the year abroad. Students could, for instance, be encouraged to set their own objectives for the year abroad (and these could be aligned to their individual concerns). Objectives could include taking some courses abroad, but also participating in other extra-curricular activities to develop their language and intercultural skills. Students would then be asked to reflect on their objectives at the end of the year and self-assess how these met their concerns.
- Alternatively, a greater proportion of the credits needed for the year abroad could be assessed from the home university through reflective portfolios and language tasks. These could for instance require students to visit classes abroad and reflect on these, rather than having to pass the assessments abroad. Additionally, students could be encouraged to carry out ethnographic research or other culture-related projects, similar to ones suggested by educators in chapter 4, sections 2.4 and 3.6.
- A more radical solution would be to make the year abroad optional. If students opt out of the year abroad they would be expected to instead spend several shorter periods abroad and partake in projects which could replace one or two third year modules. Such projects could include intensive language classes, short-term work or teaching experiences, or participation in voluntary projects. All of these would be accompanied by clear objective setting prior to the start of the project and a reflexive report in the target language at the end of the project. Students would also be encouraged to take part in collaborative modules with a partner university (these could be partly online). Universities could advertise such opportunities and the projects could be aligned to the individual concerns of the students.

4.2.3. Support in times of crisis

As we have seen throughout the study, conflicts between concerns do emerge, and this is particularly the case when students perceive structural barriers to their projects. An example of this was shown through Eve's story. Her decision to return to her home university meant that she could not pursue her other concern of gaining communicative competency, and this (as well as the structural conditions of her return) led to a period of stress anxiety.

Additionally, we saw the example of Sanjay. During the lockdown period he found it difficult to judge which of his concerns were most important to him and he became unsure of whether he had made the right decisions. This led to a period of hyper-reflexivity which temporarily impeded his work and his wellbeing.

As educators, it is particularly important to remain in dialogue with students during times of change (for instance study abroad), and times of crisis (the pandemic). It is very possible that the concerns which emerge most strongly during challenging times are linked to wellbeing rather than linguistic or academic aims. As mentioned, adequate professional help is most appropriate in this case. However, initiatives aimed at strengthening a sense of belonging can also be vital. This study has shown that the changes in the constellation of concerns are often temporary, and students usually remain dedicated to concerns around multilingualism. Several students stated in their final interviews that languages 'open doors' for them. It is hoped that despite the contextual changes and the limitations which this cohort of students has encountered, they are able to reflexively decide which doors to use as they enter new spaces.

5. Limitations of the study

All research is characterised by unresolved questions as much as by the findings which the researchers present. Josselson (2007) maintains that it is vital for researchers to identify the 'frontiers of ignorance' by revealing what they cannot understand as much as describing the insights that they have gained. A meta-analysis of interpretive blocks "may point the way to new studies that could transcend the barriers" (Josselson, 2007, p. 14). Below, I re-visit some of these interpretive blocks and limitations of this study which (apart from the last point) have also been discussed in chapter 6, sections 2 and 7 under "The participants – ethical considerations and selection of participants" and "Limitations to my approach".

- Students were asked on their first day of university whether they would like to participate in the study, and it can be argued that the students who put their names forward were particularly pro-active and perhaps not representative of the entire cohort. This process of self-selection presents a limitation of the study.
- In this study there is a clear power imbalance (as discussed in the section on ethical questions) between myself and my participants. This could mean that the students are selective when they share their experiences, or they might say what they think I would like to hear. Furthermore, while all students read preliminary versions of the narratives, it is possible that they did not wish to contradict my version of events and, for instance, the reasoning I assigned to Eve's and Rita's withdrawal from the year abroad could be incomplete or falsely understood.
- I analyse the effects of Brexit and Coronavirus on the reflexivity of the students, and I acknowledge that the pandemic put the final interviews in a problematic context with some of the students struggling with health issues due to having been in isolation over several weeks.
- I have suggested that this study contributes to knowledge by offering insights into the decision-making of a particular set of students during a unique period of time. The research approach allows for the composition and analysis of each student's narrative as a heterogenous and individualistic piece of research, and we saw that the students often took opposite decisions in seemingly similar situations. While we can understand some of these decisions retroductively by investigating the causal powers of the structural situation and the student's agency, predictions for the future will remain tentative, and this is perhaps a limitation of this study.
- The approach I chose focussed on individual themes which I regarded as significant. This corresponds with the critical realist approach of abstracting various components before returning to the many-sided object and making sense of it (Sayer, 2000). However, this method of aligning the narratives and the commentaries to a specific theme necessarily meant neglecting other aspects of the students' trajectories. Furthermore, there is the risk of misrepresenting the experiences of the students by choosing a particular angle of interpretation, and I recognise this risk despite my desire to stay wakeful to the experiences of the students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010).

- The nature of this research makes it highly individualised, but at the same time not verifiable through a follow-up study. In particular, the specific contextual features of this study were unexpected and not replicable.
- Furthermore, while I can suggest improvements to the support structure of language students, the study has no influence on political and institutional decisions which have already been taken and which curtail the freedom of movement and the career and lifestyle choices of young people.

It remains to be said that I am devastated by the spread of the pandemic, and the physical and mental health crisis amongst the student generation of today. At the same time, I am amazed by the resilience this particular cohort has shown, as they reflectively made their way through multilingualism in the toughest of times.

6. Suggestions for further research

As mentioned above, this study contributes to knowledge in various domains: I investigated the role of reflexivity within the structure and agency debate, by focussing on multilingual decisions of students. A unique combination of narrative research with a critical realist approach allowed me to analyse these decisions based on a framework I developed, and which was influenced by Archer's Theory of Reflexivity. Furthermore, the longitudinal nature of the research enabled me to investigate various themes which have received little attention, such as cancellation and changes to the study abroad period, and changes in multilingual concerns, modes of reflexivity, and multilingual repertoires. Many of these themes have been shown to have mental health implications. Finally, the research makes a historical contribution by analysing the effects of Brexit and the Coronavirus pandemic on a cohort of language students, and their individual trajectories.

However, additional research into these areas is needed, and I suggest the following themes for future investigations:

- The study of multilingual trajectories with a focus on concerns, evolving projects, structural forces, reflexivity, and decision-making over an even longer period of time (including for instance the five years following the graduation of language students). As in the current study, particular themes could be followed up, such as the evolving nature of a particular concern, or conflicts between concerns, or the further consequences of Brexit and the pandemic on the trajectory of multilinguals. A study of this kind could investigate changes that may happen after students leave

the educational and institutional setting (where goals are often set by others) and transition to other settings and communities (requiring them to be more agentive).

- Cancellation of periods of study abroad. While the area of study abroad has received ample attention, the reasons for withdrawing from this opportunity are not well-known. I strongly recommend following up individual cases to improve support during and after such significant decisions, and to further re-imagine the year abroad.
- Mobility and migration of international students. This study has highlighted the complexity of several students' migratory background. Despite Brexit, universities in the UK are continuing to promote internationalisation and are recruiting many students from other countries. Further research on these students' concerns and their structural environment is needed to optimise the conditions for these students.
- The particular situation of second-generation migrants, and the link between their ethnicity / background and their attitude to their heritage languages. This area has been touched upon in this study. For Jade, experiences of discrimination led to a strong identification with her heritage language and the decision not to pursue Spanish. In contrast, Sanjay and Tilly did not express any motivation to engage with their heritage languages. Further research on the linguistic identity of second generation migrants could draw on critical race theory (for instance Goldoni, 2017) or the notion of 'Third Culture Kids' (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001).
- An implementation and evaluation of highly individualised support as outlined in above in section 4.2. Such an evaluation could additionally investigate the influence of mentoring on reflexivity and decision-making. An investigation of this nature would respond to a criticism which has been levelled against Archer's theory of reflexivity, in that Archer "does not acknowledge the importance of discourse, either orally in face-to-face situations or written, as a means of reflexivity" (Caetano, 2015, p. 9).
- Anxiety, reflexivity, and agency. As mentioned, mental health issues have featured in this analysis, and there was evidence that students entered periods of anxiety where their reflexivity was impaired, and their agency was restricted. During the current pandemic the number of students suffering from the debilitating effects of anxiety has risen considerably. A collaborative project between academic advisors

and mental health specialists is urgently called for to investigate how students can be supported through periods of anxiety.

- Further reflections on the ethics of this type of research. It is not clear what the impacts are of carrying out longitudinal research with one's own students over their entire undergraduate studies. This point becomes even more contentious if students are undergoing periods of crisis. Follow-up interviews with students could illuminate this point if students were willing to discuss their experiences as research participants.

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Appendix 1

Generic interview questions for interview 1

What is your language background?

Tell me about your previous experiences with learning and speaking languages.
(Excluding English) Have you ever felt that you are using your foreign languages rather than learning them?

Why did you choose your programme?

Tell me about your previous experiences with travelling.

How are you coping with the academic demands of studying?

Describe the ways in which you are improving your target languages.

How important do you think the languages you are dealing with are?

How much do you like meeting people associated with the languages you are learning?

How much would you like to be similar to the people who speak the languages you are learning as their home language?

How much do you feel part of your own culture?

Tell me about the sort of people you are spending time with since you started at university. Which languages do you speak with them?

Do you think you have changed since you started uni?

How much contact do you have with your friends from school and your family?

Is there anything else which you feel is relevant to your language use and learning?

Additional questions for international students:

Why did you choose to study in the UK?

How much are you speaking English and your own language(s)?

What did you do to prepare for the linguistic demands of studying in English?

What are you doing to now meet the linguistic demands of studying in English?

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Do you feel that you have contact with the Scottish / British culture? Are there any social activities you engage with which are different to what you would do at home?

Can you think of an experience when you felt that you were coping well with English, and an experience when you think you didn't cope so well with speaking English?

Questions partly adapted from: Klapwijk, N. & Van der Walt, C. (2016). English-Plus Multilingualism as the New Linguistic Capital? Implications of University Students' Attitudes Towards Languages of Instruction in a Multilingual Environment. *Journal of Language, identity & Education*. 15(2). 67-82.

Appendix 2

Generic interview questions for interview 2 prior to departure

How has uni been for you up to now?

What was important to you during these two years? – Any things you are proud of?

If your original plans regarding languages or programme changed, can you explain why you changed them, and how you now feel about changing them.

Do you think you established a feeling of home in Edinburgh / the UK / at the uni during these past two years? Please explain.

How have your languages developed over the past two years. (English – are you now at a satisfactory level, or do you have further ambitions with English? Go through individual languages)

How much are you using the different languages you speak?

Are there any learning strategies which you have found particularly useful (examples)

How do you feel about going abroad next year. (and specifically in regard to linguistic development)

Did you have any choice in regard to your destination? If yes, what influenced your choice?

What do you think is going to be important in order for the year abroad to be a success for you?

How are you preparing for your year abroad?

How are you planning to spend the summer before your Erasmus stay?

During your time abroad Brexit will go ahead – how do you feel about this?

Do you have any vision of the future (after you finish uni)? Has this changed?

Anything else which could be relevant to your language development?

Appendix 3

Generic interview questions for interview 3 (during study abroad)

If there are pictures: I suggest laying out the pictures during the interview, in case students wants to refer to any of them while we speak. I will also refer to the pictures in the last question.

What were your first impressions of XX?

What were your first experiences with Spanish / French / German in XXX?

Did you have any language anxiety?

Tell me about your uni course. Which modules are you studying in which languages? – How are you coping academically / linguistically? How are you progressing with your languages?

How do you feel about your XXX skills just now?

- Understanding
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

Are you still actively learning the language?

Go through different languages and also English (if applicable)

How do you feel you have settled in XX? (Did your experiences moving to Edinburgh help you)?

Examine ambitions, anxieties – have they been fulfilled? Have they changed?

What does it mean to you now to be multilingual? Has this changed for you?

Looking forward:-

What are your plans / ambitions for the rest of the time in XX?

Do you have any particular plans for the 4th year?

Photos: Pick about 3 photos which are the most relevant to you? Why? Was it hard to choose?

Appendix 4

Questions for final interview

Generic

Starter question

- We're now into the ... week of lockdown. Before I start with the questions, and just for context could you say a few words about how the lockdown has been for you and how you are.

The last time we spoke you were still abroad, and now you've (nearly) finished university.

- Please think back to the last few months during your time abroad. How did things go for you? What was important for you? [concerns]
- *Maybe prompt:* in terms of multilingualism?
- How do you view your year abroad now? [reflexivity]

For those students who sent me pictures during time abroad show pictures

- These three pictures (*identify*) were the ones you described as the most important ones for you. Can you comment on these pictures now?

Generic

- In what ways did you achieve (or not achieve) what you wanted from your year abroad? [projects – this could also be looking at changes in concerns]
- What was it like returning to uni in year four? (Maybe – is there anything the uni could have done to support you during this time?) [concerns / reflexivity]
- How have you been using / learning your languages and related skills during this past year? (Go through individual languages, and different skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening.) [multilingual development]
- What did you find useful when learning / using different languages? [reflexivity about language learning]

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- What has been important to you during this past year? [concerns]
- In what ways have you changed during the past four years? Are there any particular influences (circumstances / experiences / people) you can think of that might have changed you? [reflexivity on concerns / projects / structure]
- Where do you see yourself in the next year or so? In the longer-term future? [future concerns / imagining]
- Have you got any further plans linked to languages? [multilingual development]
- What does being multilingual mean to you now?

In case Brexit hasn't been addressed:

- Has Brexit changed your initial plans, and if so in what ways? [reflexivity on structure]

In case Coronavirus hasn't been addressed:

- What were your plans before Coronavirus? Can you describe any changes due to the pandemic?
- Anything else which we haven't covered yet?

MAYBE: revisit the very first questionnaires (on first day of uni) and ask to comment about the plans they had noted down.

Questions will need to be modified for some students: one student went abroad twice; another student carried out a work placement; three students attempted a double degree whilst abroad (however only one was successful in achieving this)

One student returned from her year abroad after only 10 days. For her the questions will be modified:

- How are you doing? Tell me about the last two years of uni. How have these been for you? [reflexivity]

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- Can you tell me about the time abroad, and the decision to return. [change in projects / concerns]
- What was it like returning to uni? (Is there anything the uni could have done to support you during this time?) [change in projects / concerns]
- You had to change to a flexibly managed programme? Could you tell me which subjects you concentrated on during the past two years? [emerging projects / concerns]
- If you think back to your entire uni experience - In what ways have you changed during the past four years? Are there any particular things you can think of that might have changed you? [reflexivity / changes]
- How do you feel about language learning now? [reflexivity / multilingual concerns]
- Where do you see yourself in the next year or so? In the longer-term future? [future concerns / imagining]
- Do you have any comments on Brexit in regard to your plans? [reflexivity on structure]
- Anything else which we haven't covered yet?

Appendix 5

Email from Margarita in Nov 2021

After doing my last years at Napier and completing all exams and dissertation I told myself oh no way I will go straight into a master degree, however four month later I started my maser degree in marketing!

Sometimes I ask myself why I did it though! To be honest last year was very difficult for various of personal reasons, thus I wanted to take one year break before going back to study, eventually after a few considerations I decided to start the master in September and be done with my studies. My decision was made on the bias that I had to stay for another year in UK anyways, so that I could keep working and save up some money before leaving for good, and given the current pandemic it was not the right time to move to another country anyway. Another major fact that led me to take such decision was the fact that here I could easily get a student loan for the master and living costs, which I can repay at any time when I have a job that allows me to give back the money, whereas if I had to go studying somewhere else I would have had to pay the money all in once or at least part of it with my own money, and this was a major win for me. I also considered the fact that waiting one more year would have meant finishing studying in 2022 rather than 2021, and as I am not turning any younger (I am turning 26 in December!!) I felt the pressure to have to finish as soon as possible so that I can then settle for good in another country and find a more stable and profitable job.

Overall, I had a good experience at Napier, thus I decided to go back there to pursue my master degree, beside two of my friends are back at Napier as well doing a master in Marketing too. I did not expect to be studying online, and this was frustrating at the beginning as I struggle to concentrate and how odd this may sound I really do not enjoy spending much time on the screen, it may be because I spend about 20 h per week on the PC for my job, I don't know but I am not a big fun of virtual learning, in fact I am only doing one face to face class and I love it. I am more a practical person I would say, I learn a lot by interacting face to face with people and listening to different opinions rather than by reading on a screen or even book. However I have to admit that I am impressed with how well organised Napier has been in adapting the teaching and learning to the new circumstances, the university and the lecturers have been doing a great job so far and that really helped us to go through this new learning experience smoothly. Obviously when you

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interact in the virtual lecture (you can either use the chat or talk) it is not the same, but still overall things have been fine.

I am glad I started this master because I think and feel, that nowadays (and upcoming days) everything is moving towards digital, social media, major influencers and all these aspects are covered in marketing. I consider marketing to be one of these industries that will never die, it will only keep changing and improving but it is an area that needs to be explored and considered continuously. I just wish we had the option to do a placement, but unfortunately that is not planned for my course. So far I can say that I am enjoying this post-graduate and I am looking forward to finish it and get a job in the field!

You may be asking and what about languages and the intercultural studies? They will always be part of who I am today. The study of intercultural is everywhere, one of my marketing lectures was about culture and society and my old friend Hofstede was there!! So, I went over the whole programme I did during my undergraduate once more, and I love when this happens. For what concerns languages again, they are who I am today, I feel good about speaking other languages, I feel smarter, cooler, more understanding, helpful, I feel happy when I speak other languages and I have fun. If I did not study languages I would not be doing my job, and I actually received many offers, especially in IT (I am not an IT girls at all!!) just because I speak French, they did not mind whether I had or not IT knowledge they contacted me because I speak French. In fact, when I learnt about the suppression of language teaching at Napier I was shocked, I could not believe it. Languages are fundamental, they are fun, they are knowledge, through them you get to know the world and other cultures, because let's admit it, to understand a culture you need to know and understand the language. Words hide plenty of meaning and values, and if you do not know them you only discover the culture partially. Furthermore, we live in world that is so globalized that the concept of one language one culture is no longer real. I perceive languages as a mean to colour the world and the surrounding environment and I am grateful I had the chance to study them for my whole education path, I had very good teachers both at high school and university, and should I have kids I will make sure they will be passionate at languages as much as I am, because everyone should know at least one or two languages beside the mother tongue, it's useful, it's smart and stimulating and it's fun. Languages open up a world of personal, social, and work opportunities, and knowing that many universities in the UK are taking them off their programme is heart breaking.

Appendix

I wish people, especially young people will see the importance of languages as much as I do, and will continue studying them in a way or another, and I wish that my language lecturers at Napier are doing fine despite the heart breaking news, you all been great thank you for your hard work and dedication.