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**Language Learning Strategies:
A study of older students of German
at the University of the Third Age**

**Ms Kim Ohly
2008**

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Abstract

Laslett's (1996) concept of the Third Age identifies learning as an important part of successful ageing. As an ageing population shows growing interest in language learning, so research into 'foreign language geragogy' (Berndt 1997, 2003) has expanded, although some early studies of older adult language learners proved inconclusive (Singleton 1989).

The current study investigates older language learners of German and their use of language learning strategies. It modifies Graham's (1997) strategy categorisation into cognitive, metacognitive, social/affective and communicative.

A mixed method approach involved questionnaires, think-aloud protocols and interviews: 72 learners (all over 50) of German and other languages at the local University of the Third Age provided background information and reported on their strategy use. Think-aloud protocols illustrated how older learners employed learning strategies whilst working on a variety of tasks (reading, speaking, listening, writing). Interviews elicited student perspectives on learning strategies and wider issues such as motivation, beliefs, anxiety and past experiences.

The study concludes that:

- The research instruments were broadly suitable for exploring strategies among older learners, showing individual and general tendencies in language strategy use. Think-aloud protocols may require some participant training.
- Older learners did not employ essentially different learning strategies from other adults; differences were more apparent in affective areas such as motivation.
- It was possible to identify a list of typical strategies employed by older learners.
- The subjects adopted mainly metacognitive and cognitive strategies, adapting them to their individual learning needs. The range of communicative and social/affective strategies was limited, perhaps because think-aloud protocols allowed fewer opportunities for them.

The findings help to identify key implications for supporting the older language learner.

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1 Rationale

Studies of language learning involving older learners (foreign language geragogy, the study of learning languages in older age) have recently become more common, focusing so far on aspects such as motivation, language learning biographies, specific problems and socio-economic characteristics (Berndt, 2000a, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2003; Arthur & Hurd, 2001). However, research on older language learners – whom I will define as aged over 50 - has still not given sufficient coverage to learning strategies, although such strategies can be valuable instruments for supporting learners' progress and increasing learners' autonomy. Examining the use of these learning strategies more closely may provide more information on the ways in which older learners approach language learning and may therefore provide more insight into individual learner differences.

As a former teacher of a beginners' German class at the University of the Third Age, I realised how different it was to work with older, mature students who are mostly in their sixties, in contrast to younger university students aged around 20. The generally high level of motivation expressed in steady attendance records, regular homework and very active participation in the classroom was very noticeable. Surprisingly, it was not only an interest in language, culture and literature itself, but the desire to communicate with wider family relations, such as grandchildren and daughters-in-law, which appeared to be students' main driving forces.

Older learners actively expressed and displayed differences in approaching language learning. Some preferred an approach closer to grammar-translation focusing on texts rather than on speaking or listening materials. Others preferred to deduce grammatical rules themselves rather than have these provided by me or a book. Some also talked or mumbled almost constantly during class, repeating or exploring variations immediately with the German language input provided. So a variety of techniques or strategies were used by students in the process of language learning. Students also reported different approaches when we talked about why and how they made decisions about building phrases or sentences in German or how they did their homework or why they misunderstood something. The majority also seemed to be 'false beginners', having had previous experience of the language, either at school or on self-study courses. Most of the students appeared to be used to learning languages, having mainly studied Italian and French.

The literature on language learning contains little information about the language learning process in this older age group. This lack of general literature is due to the current tendency to support language learning at an early age (from primary school up to A-level). However, classes involving older students are different in various ways as these students bring with them to the classroom their life experiences, expectations, motivation and ideas about what and how to learn.

Another issue is the age gap between me as their 'young' German tutor and my students as 'older' learners. The commonly expected pattern of 'old teaches young' - a result of older people having many more years of expertise in a specific subject area - did not apply in this case. Here the traditional role of old expert and young learner was reversed. This reversal affects the way we teach, learn and communicate. The students displayed such an eagerness to learn that I had to remind myself not to overload them with too many things to learn at once. Thus a rethinking of roles was initiated for both the students and me.

I experienced similar feelings when working with older and younger students of the 'Continuing Studies for Seniors' at the University of Dortmund, Germany. Students there enrolled for one or more of a variety of subjects such as sociology, pedagogy, history and social gerontology. The level of motivation expressed in active participation during lectures and in further informal follow-up talks outside lectures was remarkable. In discussion with students aged over fifty, the exploration of theoretical models of ageing led to intensive debate about every aspect of each model. A class on the same theme with students aged around twenty was dominated by presentation of facts. Consequently, the topic was dealt with more quickly. However, the older students' deeper engagement with the ideas brought more personal aspects to them, leading to a more lively and controversial discussion when compared to life as experienced by the older students. These experiences tied in with the idea that learning is different for older people: younger adults learn in a more factual, memorising way, whereas older adults tend to learn in a more connective way, embedding facts into wider contexts to make sense of what has been learned (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). This difference between younger and older adult learners might equally be the case for older adults learning foreign languages.

A general insight into and better understanding of the learning processes of older language learners is important if good language learning provision for this group is to be established in response to increases in current and potential future demand. The rapid increase in the

proportion of the population in the UK aged over 50 impacts on education, specifically, on the language learning sector, as languages are among the most popular subjects chosen by this age group (Sargant, 2000; Aldridge, 2001). However, little is known about how these students learn a second language or about how they can be taught efficiently. Contradictory assumptions about individuals' ability to learn a foreign language, once they are over 50, further contribute to the difficulty in assessing their real potential. Some of my older learners found learning very hard due to difficulties with memory and hearing. Others reported that they found their age ideal for learning a foreign language as they could fully commit to intensive study. So learners' self-image, as well as others' images of them play a part in defining the learner's position and role as an older learner. There may also be connections with current beliefs such as 'young is beautiful' (Blaikie, 1999: 186), older people cannot learn any more and are less flexible and innovative (Victor, 2005: 153).

Research on older adult learners (50+) seems to me to have been neglected in studies of Second Language Acquisition in favour of work on young learners and young adult learners. The term of Second Language Acquisition I refer to here is the very broad idea of language learning and acquisition as, for example, used in Stern (1983: 15-20). Second Language Acquisition or foreign language learning / acquisition embraces all the different forms of learning or acquiring any language(s) other than the first, whether in an intranational or an international language learning community (Stern, 1983). The often-made distinction between "acquisition" - typically a naturalistic and largely unconscious process involving a first, second or foreign language - and "learning" - a conscious process often involving formal class contact - is not required in an examination of learning strategies used by learners all of whom are following formal classes.

Research into language learning has been strongly polarised. At one end, it focuses on very young language learners (aged up to about 16). At the other end are the adult language learners (16+). The latter are mainly treated as a single group of learners without any differentiation in terms of age. This bipolarity emerged from Lenneberg's concept of a critical period hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967). His hypothesis assumes that the ability to learn languages after puberty is restricted due to neurological processes which lead to brain maturation, limiting the faculty of language learning (for further discussion of this hypothesis see 3.2). Studies focussing on specific aspects of language learning in older age, for example, pronunciation, vocabulary or syntax, show a much more complex, at times contradictory, picture (Singleton, 1995) than Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis would

have predicted. Sometimes the older group demonstrated better results in a shorter time than the younger group when certain language skills such as reading, vocabulary or syntax were compared. However, research into the language skills was fragmented (Bellingham, 2004: 58), the age groups investigated did in the main not fall within the third age span (50+) and often involved immigrants (e.g. Pilar García Mayo et al., 2003; Moyer, 2004) who learned languages for purposes which differed very much from those who were learning a language as a leisure activity. In order to test Lenneberg's concept, the participants selected in these studies were mainly around the age of puberty, and the results were expected to either confirm or refute these assumptions.

To fill a gap in knowledge of the learning processes involved in adult language learning, it is essential to differentiate students generally referred to as "adult learners". This study concentrates on one element of how older adult students approach language learning, in other words their use of language learning strategies. Various classifications of language learning strategies are offered in the literature (e.g. Wenden & Ruben, 1987; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Graham, 1997; Cohen, 1998; Macaro, 2001; more on the classifications in chapter 4.2). These differ in terminology, scope and underlying models of cognitive processing. None of these models has ever been explicitly applied in research to adult language learners above 50 years old. However, there has been an ongoing discussion about the nature and potential of language learning strategies and their teachability, from initial research identifying the characteristics of the successful language learner in the 1970s up to the current focus on learner autonomy (Benson, 2001: 7). The underlying assumption is that if students employ learning strategies effectively, their learning process can be enhanced.

Traditionally, learning strategies are associated with the cognitive factors influencing individual language learning. They are linked to cognitive learning styles, which are different types of preferred ways of learning, such as auditive or visual. Bausch et al. (2003: 460) consider the cognitive-analytical learning approach to be an advantage of adult learners. Concentrating on the cognitive aspects of language learning, the present study focuses on the use of language learning strategies, leaving aside the influence of the material used in class, the teaching method and style and the impact of training in learning strategies. A study encompassing all the variables influencing language learning would far exceed the scope of a doctoral thesis.

To begin with, the focus is, therefore, on cognitive aspects, as this is the area where language learning strategies research originated. The learner is characterised by some as a “problem solver”, a cognitive agent trying to work out ways of learning and maintaining another language (Ellis, 2001: 76). However, it is now understood that cognitive studies explain only one part and have to be complemented by an understanding of the affective domain, which is presented later in section 3.1 on learner differences. In addition, the interactions, processes and conditions in the individual environment are understood to influence learning and provide an active and dynamic context in which learning takes place (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004: 55). Therefore, consideration has to be given to the affective as well as cognitive aspects influencing language learning if a clearer, more holistic picture of the language learner is to be achieved: “Neither the cognitive nor the affective has the last word, and, indeed, neither can be separated from the other.” (Arnold & Brown, 1999: 1). Looking at the connections between use of language learning strategies and age of learner, guiding research questions are:

- Which strategies are used by older language learners?
- Are there any differences between learning strategies used by older adults and those used by younger learners?
- If the strategies used by older adult learners are different, which characteristics of the older learners might explain this?

It is assumed that a study on older adult language learners will provide a better understanding of these issues and will shed light both on the strategy use of this learner group when learning a language and on the learning context. Increased insight into strategy use by older learners may be used in future to maximise the language learning potential of such students. A beneficial consequence of this for older language learners would be better understanding and provision, particularly with regard to aspects of the wider context, such as language pedagogy, or teaching material. Older learners include students over 50 who are described as Third Aged, a term referring to a group of people within society displaying certain social characteristics (Glendenning, 2000: 1). What these characteristics are and how such a group began to develop will be presented in the following chapter.

2 Social context of ageing

In order to give a clearer picture of the situation of older language learners, this chapter provides information about recent social developments of relevance to the present study. Areas covered include demographic trends, as well as the main characteristics of the period of life known as the “Third Age”. To provide an idea of the position of language learning within the adult learning context, aspects of education and educational institutions are also presented.

Statistics show that life expectancy had risen within the last few decades, from 72 years in 1970 to 78 years in 2002 (Unicef, 2004). The average life expectancy for people born in the UK in 2004 is 76 years for men and 80 years for women (Census, 2001). This trend is expected to continue. Current demographic developments indicate a rapid increase in the proportion of the UK population above 60 years old (Census, 2001). Longevity is one of the main factors contributing to the increasing proportion of older people in society and has shifted the age structure of the population. Traditionally, the population graph was shaped like a pyramid, with younger people forming the base and relatively few older people at the top. Currently, this model is undergoing a radical alteration, as the proportion of younger people becomes smaller and the proportion in the older age group increases. Forecasts predict, by about 2024, the proportion of people in the UK younger than 20 and the proportion older than 60 will be equal, with each age group forming more than 20% of the population (Hatton-Yeo, 2000: 53). A decline in birth rate is contributing to this development (Unicef, 2004). This demographic change has never happened in history before but the trend is expected to continue.

With such an increase in the population over 60, the literature within the field of social gerontology has expanded during the past 40 years aiming to describe, theorise and define this growing group and its activities in their social context (e.g. Tartler, 1961; Cumming & Henry, 1961; Havighurst, 1972; for a general overview of theories on ageing in sociology, see Estes et al., 2004; Victor, 2005; Findsen, 2005). The concept of the Third Age was developed mainly by Laslett (1996), setting the context for the present study and the background to the site where the study takes place, the University of the Third Age.

Learning in later life developed as a part of educational gerontology, including aspects such as memory, intelligence, learning aptitude and adult education. If the term educational gerontology is understood in a wider sense, then factors such as stereotypes of old age and training of practitioners working with these age groups are also included.

2.1 The Third Age

The idea of phases of life has been discussed throughout the world and across the centuries, across religions, philosophy and literature. Various divisions of life into different phases and related social roles have been suggested. In psychology, Erikson's (1982; also Erikson et al., 1986) theory of personality development has been widely used and discussed across disciplines. He identifies eight stages, covering the whole lifespan from early infancy to late adulthood. Each stage is characterised by a pair of conflicting dilemmas which have to be worked through. Erikson's (1986) seventh stage corresponds to the Third Age as used by Laslett (1989, 1996) and is dominated by a conflict between generativity (the need to be productive, creative and caring about others) and stagnation (a sense of pointlessness, frustration and preoccupation with oneself).

In social gerontology (e.g. Laslett, 1996 with his humanistic position on the positive aspects of ageing), the Third Age is now seen as one of four main phases in life. These four phases are based on forms of social involvement and their definition as it has evolved during the last century. However, it has to be borne in mind that any division of the life cycle into phases and certain functions also depends on the individual and therefore may vary. The First Age stretches from birth to early adulthood, usually up to the end of the main educational period. The end of this phase in the UK today tends to coincide with the acquisition of a university degree or vocational qualification. The first phase is therefore dominated by general socialising purposes, preparing young people for their working life. In most western industrialised societies, the Second Age is a phase mainly dominated by work demands and ends with the start of retirement (Hurrelmann, 2002) at around 60 years for woman and 65 years for men. Any learning in this phase tends to be directly or indirectly related to vocational needs. The beginning of the Third Age coincides with retirement. For most people with "reasonable" economic backgrounds this is "a phase in life to be negotiated by the individual" (Phillipson & Biggs, 1999: 161). In Western Europe, this phase can be characterised by decreased social demands except for those chosen by the individual and dictated by their individual circumstances. Rosenmayr (1983) introduced the term "late freedom" for this now expanded phase in society. The Fourth Age is the last stage

in life, mainly concentrating on the end of the life course, when the range of activities becomes more limited as a result of increasing physical and / or mental restrictions.

Originally, the term Third Age was used to describe those past the statutory retirement age. Currently, the divisions into each phase are in a state of flux. Typical 20th century life patterns, starting with schooling, followed by a fixed career path and ending with a few years of retirement, are breaking down. Uncertainty dominates working life and forces people not only to stay in education for longer, but also to return to it throughout the whole of the Second Age. This has resulted in the transition from one phase into another becoming increasingly blurred. It also requires high levels of flexibility on the part of the individuals in addition to “increasing skills in self-management, to be good at anticipating and responding to change, and perhaps above all to be good learners” (McNeir, 2001: 23). Despite this blurring of boundaries, the idea of four phases of life is still accepted as a way of grouping age stages in society. Naturally, the four main phases differ from individual to individual: Third Agers are as diverse in terms of class, ethnicity and education as the rest of the population (Baltes & Baltes, 1990: 8).

As it became apparent that the social characteristics of this group were equally applicable to younger people, the term Third Age was expanded to include those aged over 50 (Glendenning, 2000: 1). Increasing similarity between older and younger generations in terms of trends such as modernisation, youthfulness, travel and sport has contributed to the phenomenon referred to as “Verjüngung” (‘rejuvenation’) (Veelken, 2000: 26; Tews, 1999: 137). This phenomenon includes features such as general activities as well as health or skills acquired. Therefore, depending on the aim and area examined, different age delineations may be employed. Social gerontologists with an interest in further education, such as Newman et al. (1997) and Veelken (1998: 66), subdivide the Third Age into two phases the “young old” (50 to 75 years old) and the “old old” (over 75). Although this division is based on calendar age, it is not suggested that all representatives of these phases form socially homogenous groups. On the contrary, an increase in individualisation is one of the main social characteristics of these age groups (Tews, 1999; Findsen, 2005: 51) because of their varying lifestyles, biographies, values and experiences. Chronological age is therefore “too undifferentiated to capture age: Life age does not do justice to the vast range of differences among persons with the same chronological age” (Schneider, 2003: 810).

The Third Age has not only become longer, it has also developed qualitatively. In western societies, social prosperity has led to greater personal wealth for some pensioners. Currently, more retired people than ever before have the financial means to remain active and to fulfil a variety of social needs. This prolonged period contributes to continuing personal fulfilment in later life, which has positive effects on health. At the same time, the improvement in general health contributes to that period of life being more active (Aldridge & Lavender, 2000). A study by the British government in the 1990s (Aldridge & Lavender, 2000) links health and participation in formal learning, concluding that formal learning is beneficial for society and public health (also Schuller et al., 2004; McNeir, 2001: 89).

Conclusion

The emergence of the Third Age is seen as one of the major social developments of the last century (Laslett, 1996). Various factors have played a role in this phenomenon. Laslett (1996: 99) sees the arrival of the Third Age as a “collective circumstance as well as a personal affair”. However, individual differences in factors such as social class, health, ethnicity, education and personal circumstances all contribute to the diversity in how this period is lived by each person. Phillipson & Biggs (1999) describe how views of ageing have changed between the immediate post-war period and the present day. The image of older people as passive receivers of welfare benefits has changed. They are now seen as active members of an increasingly powerful sector of society. It is understood that ageing and its roles, the status attributed to these and the processes involved are all socially constructed (Findsen, 2005: 3).

It is the concurrence of social factors such as longevity with a decrease in overall birth rates, which has led to a “greying society” and to the development of the theory of the Third Age, which is employed in this study. This theory considers various aspects of ageing, among which learning is identified as an important factor for “successful ageing” in later life and stresses the importance of individual factors. It acknowledges that increases of individual time after retirement, usually coinciding with fewer childcare responsibilities, as well as more wealth and better health, all contributed to the crystallisation of the Third Age. Older people in the UK can now expect to live with relatively few restrictions, given overall improvements in health, fitness and productivity. Their children tend to be living independently without any need for further care. Therefore, this period is often seen as less restricted than others in a social and individual sense. McNeir (2001: 22) remarks that “most people will now spend more of their lives outside the workforce than in it: a dramatic

reversal of the picture a generation earlier”. The period of the Third Age now covers about a third of the lifespan. It is a time for personal fulfilment, for undertaking things which could not necessarily be enjoyed earlier as intensively as desired, such as travelling, taking up hobbies or following dreams such as learning another language. These chosen activities become “a more important part of an individual’s identity and self-concept” (Hendricks & Cutler, 2003 cited in Dorfman & Kolarik, 2005: 345). Learning is one of the many options now at our disposal.

2.2 Learning in later life

Lifelong learning has come to be seen as a key factor for successful ageing since the emergence of the Third Age during the last decades. The terms education and (lifelong) learning are used interchangeably in the present study as they are not necessarily clearly distinct, although education can often be related to more formal context of learning whereas learning can be understood fairly broadly as “a process employed by adults to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and aptitudes” (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982 cited by Findsen, 2005: 11). There follows a brief overview of some aspects of the debate on lifelong learning which situates the adult language learner within learning in the Third Age.

Learning in the Third Age serves social, communal and individual purposes (identified by Laslett, 1996). Learning in this context is understood broadly:

It is not teaching, not training, and not even education in its narrow didactic sense. It has a much wider scope. It has a social, economic, political, personal, cultural and, of course, educational meaning in its widest sense. (Longworth, 2003: 12)

Socially, learning throughout the whole of life is now seen as essential for participating in a rapidly changing society (Hatton-Yeo, 2000: 1). Adaptation to these changes through learning is seen as a constant need, while at the same time “lifelong learning is itself a signifier of the uncertainty and change” (Edwards & Usher, 2001: 284). Further highlighting the notion of social equity, the DfEE (1998: 11) identifies learning as essential for the creation of an “inclusive society” in which older people participate equally:

In the past older people may have been marginalized, or segregated within society. We need to encourage groups like the U3A to enable older people to claim learning opportunities for themselves, not to see retirement as the beginning of the end, a final gloomy chapter in their lives. (Noble, 2000: 101)

Moreover, Laslett (1996) emphasises the idea of education as being future oriented, pointing towards the social need to support future generations in the Third Age.

Lifelong learning is a key element of development from an industrialised to a knowledge-based society in which economic growth is accelerated by rapid technological change (EU, 2002). It is suggested that economic prosperity is linked to a better educated society (OECD, 1998). For the individual, learning is understood as a means which can lead to a better quality of life. It has also been identified and promoted as a way of supporting active ageing with wider communal and societal benefits (Hatton-Yeo, 2000: 1). Jarvis (2001) identifies learning as being fundamental to the constitution of an individual:

But learning is as crucial as breathing to the human being. It is the process whereby individuals develop their own minds, sense of self and identity, biography and their own history. Learning is the very basis of our humanity – it is the process of internalizing the external world and being able to locate ourselves within it. (Jarvis, 2001: 201)

Emphasising in the same spirit the idea of education as a basic human right and need, UNESCO describes learning as an “intrinsic human value”, which “add(s) meaning and value to everyone’s lives” (UNESCO, 2000). For the individual, learning also represents personal fulfilment, a form of life enhancement and a way of taking personal control over one’s path in life (Hayes, 2000: 30; similarly Edwards & Usher (2001: 276) underline the empowering effect of learning). It is also related to individuals’ position and status within their own (family) sphere, as well as within the wider social environment. The positive relationship between health and learning in older age has been identified to benefit the individual as well as society, and can even contribute to increasing the life span (e.g. Schuller et al., 2004: 55; also Swindell, 1997 for research into the impact of the U3A and improvement of the quality of life of students, cited in Findsen, 2005: 19). As Schneider (2003: 812) concludes: “People learn to deal with reality in a rational manner and to solve problems appropriately.”

The overall level of education of older people in the UK is expected to rise in future (OECD, 2006: 3). As those with more educational experience grow older, people in the future can be expected to take on more learning opportunities when they reach their Third Age. In 1992, the Carnegie Inquiry (Schuller & Bostyn, 1992) stated that only 1 in 10 people over 50 years old participated in formal learning. The numbers participating has decreased in the past decade due to further changes in the provision of learning opportunities offered by local authorities, resulting in an increased popularity of the U3A (following the 1992 Act, Arthur, 2001: 10).

Educational provision for those studying in later life tends to differ from provision made for those studying earlier in life. This is related to the difference in overall educational aims for older learners. Many learners in their Third Age do not see gaining certificates and taking exams as their main purpose when taking on courses, unlike those joining the employment market, who need standardised qualifications. Though some older learners are keen to achieve formal qualifications, for others learning is more about deepening and widening their expertise in subject areas that they have had no chance of developing hitherto. This aim of learning is expressed explicitly in the objects of the University of the Third Age, a voluntary organisation specifically set up to provide learning for those in later life. The U3A sees the objective of educational provision as being to “provide (...) the resources for the development and intensification of their intellectual, cultural and aesthetic lives” and by this to “make effective and satisfying use of their freedom” (Manley, 2003).

Other learning institutions catering for older people existed in the UK before the University of the Third Age. The Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), local educational authorities (LEAs) and many colleges have been providing adult education courses for many years. With the foundation of the Pre-Retirement Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (PRA) in 1964, educators responded to the pre-retirement movement aiming to prepare early retirees for retirement (Phillipson, 1985: 143 in Glendenning, 2000). Beginning in the 1970s, the Forum for the Rights of Older People to Education (FREE) aimed to provide a forum for information sharing about educational / learning opportunities for older people (Glendenning, 1985: 109). Following a change in the funding situation for adult education in 1992 (Further and Higher Education Act 1992), the whole market in adult education had to adjust. Consequently, extra-mural departments either disappeared or became centres and departments for lifelong learning, and courses which received funding were required to lead to certification and to be vocationally oriented. However, for many older learners these courses did not provide for their learning needs appropriately. As a consequence, these developments have led to an increase in the popularity of the University of the Third Age within the past decade, partly because of its low annual membership fees (The University of the Third Age, 2004: 18).

Summary

The notion of education and learning in later life places the older language learner within a society in which the importance of lifelong learning has increased, both for the individual and for society (social, communal, individual). There are various reasons for the importance

of learning in older age: the continuation of society, the increase in population numbers of this age group and their social characteristics. The value attributed to learning by individuals should not be underestimated, and this is closely linked to how quality of life is perceived and improved.

2.2.1 The University of the Third Age (U3A)

In this climate of demographic change, there are not sufficient institutions providing learning opportunities for people willing to continue learning in the Third Age. The University of the Third Age (U3A) partly fills this gap.

The U3A is the main participating institute in the present study as it provides learning opportunities for students mostly aged over 50 and in their third age. The U3A was founded in 1981 by Laslett and Coni following the model of similar provision for older learners in France, the Université du Troisième Âge. In contrast to the French model, the U3A in the UK is a private, non-governmental, self-supporting, charity organisation. As stated in a document on the objects and principles of the U3A, the term university is used in “its original sense, meaning a corporation of persons devoted to a particular activity, not necessarily intellectual” (Laslett et al., 1981: 1) and the university claims “faithfulness to the original principles of that institution, and especially adding to knowledge on research” (Laslett, 1984: 2). Examinations are not undertaken and qualifications not awarded as the emphasis is on “intellectual, aesthetic, self-developmental” activities (Laslett, 1984: 1). Laslett bases these ideas on the four-stage life-course model (as discussed in section 2.2) in which the third age presents a time of “self-fulfilment, of self-cultivation, and of an individual being able to do that which is chosen by herself or himself” (Laslett, 1984: 2).

A branch can be set up wherever there are enough members to support and run it. In February 2006, 574 groups existed in the UK and 153,443 members were registered. The aim is to “provide education and social activities to those no longer in full-time employment and as such there are no age restrictions” (participating U3A in South England, Programme 2005-2006: 2). Students can embark on a variety of different courses, from watercolour painting, through Latin or Russian, to playing chamber music or listening to jazz. The course programme depends on the availability of volunteer tutors. This is due to the principle stated by one of the founding members, Laslett (1984: 1): “Those who can teach shall also learn and those who learn shall also teach.” In principle, any student can act as a tutor, depending on their enthusiasm and expertise. There is no formal qualification required

for tutoring, or for enrolling as a student. This self-supporting system functions because most of the student-tutors have many years of (professional) experience or interest in the subjects they offer. Every student can have an input into how their study group is organised and which topics and issues they would like to cover.

The more members enrolled, the wider the range of programmes offered. Courses can be chosen individually in accordance with each learner's interest, time and mobility. An annual membership fee is charged to maintain the financially self-supporting system. There is a maximum number of courses for which a student can enrol in any one year.

The role of the tutor is not as rigidly defined as it is in other formal educational institutions or in the French version of the U3A where (often) younger professionals / experts in specific fields teach older learners. Although a tutor officially initiates the class, the course can be run flexibly by all participating students. Classes often take place in a member's house. The number of students per study group is relatively small (with 6 to 15 members on average) and the atmosphere is deliberately informal. Discovery and learning are seen as group activities shared with the tutor. This informality is enhanced by the tutors being students themselves and around the same age as the students. A national survey in 2003 showed that 60% of all U3As are located in the south of the UK (The University of the Third Age 2004: 18). Among the languages, French was the most popular language studied with 444 students, followed by German (209), Spanish (181) and Italian (127). The students learning in the context of the U3A can be identified as what Jarvis (2001) calls "sages" in that they actively seek opportunities to engage in learning.

The local U3A used in this research was one of the first to be founded in Britain on the 22nd of March 1982. As declared by the Trust in 1983 the objects of the organisation are

To advance the education of those no longer in full time employment through courses of study in academic and artistic disciplines as shall be required by them, and to pursue and publish research both on general matters and into various aspects of ageing. (Mitchell, 2003: 6)

It currently has around 2000 members and in 2005/6 provided more than 217 courses. These included educational and recreational classes, as well as opportunities to improve fitness and to join organised trips and (international) exchanges. Monthly lectures on a variety of topics by invited speakers are a special feature of this local U3A. The U3A has strong links with other local and regional educational institutions, one of which is an Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Ageing.

At the participating U3A, languages are among the most popular courses offered. Italian, Greek, Latin, Spanish, Arabic, English and German are available at various levels. Students pay an annual membership fee of £30 and can enrol for up to 5 classes in any year. The institution provides learning opportunities as well as informal occasions when students socialise outside the classes, such as garden parties, meetings and tutor groups.

Summary

I selected the U3A as the main participating institute due to its focus on providing learning opportunities for older learners in particular and the insider knowledge I had gained about the organisation from my time as a U3A tutor. Its set-up, organisation, range of study groups and participants are strongly linked to the social and demographic changes which have occurred in the UK over the past decades, leading to the crystallisation of the concept of the Third Age. On the one hand, representatives of this age group share characteristics with younger people, including an interest in travel, study and consumption; on the other hand, they possess features which they do not share with younger people. Those changes relevant in the context of (language) learning are presented in the following section.

2.2.2 Age-related individual differences in learning

It is often assumed that abilities, skills, memory and cognitive potential decrease significantly in old age. These assumptions are partly based on negative stereotypes and misconceptions about ageing (see, for example, Elliott, 2000). However, if age is a social construction so are its connotations, including deprivation, deterioration and dependency. Changes in the cognitive area, such as “slowing of processing speed, decline in working memory and spatial ability, and decrease in sustained and divided attention” (Chaffin & Harlow, 2005: 318) have been studied in relation to changes related to ageing. As summarised by Tomporowski (2003), older people can learn as well as younger people, only the general process of learning is slower.

Critical educational gerontology argues against negative, constructed assumptions and emphasises the actual learning potential of older people. Performance of tasks depends more on factors such as intensity of training and general activity of the individual than age:

After 40 years of measurement the Seattle study is showing that cognitive decline is not inevitable either and that where intellectual decline has been shown to exist, it is possible through carefully planned instruction strategies at the ability level to reverse the process (...).” (Glendenning, 2000: 43)

Studies in plasticity which focus on intelligence and memory show potential for learning and training in older age (Chaffin & Harlow, 2005: 318; Reuter-Lorenz & Mikels, 2006: 255). However, there is evidence that some abilities are affected by physical ageing processes. Quadagno (1999) summarises factors which may influence the ability to learn:

- A loss of neurones in older age in an area which is involved in learning and memory
- Visual and hearing deficits.

Quadagno (1999) adds that limited access to intellectually stimulating activities and resources when young can negatively affect learning ability in later life. Learning ability is strongly influenced by genetic heritage, so certain intelligence remains consistent over life course. Acknowledging the losses related to physical changes in older age, Findsen (2005: 28) points out that they occur “in spheres where speed and agility matter but there is also a corresponding opportunity for positive changes in other domains of life”.

The main areas influencing learning and, in particular, language learning in older age are memory and intelligence. The following summary concentrates on areas particularly relevant to language learning in old age.

Intelligence

Intelligence used to be seen as a relatively given and stable phenomenon which could be tested and classified using standardised categories. With the understanding of intelligence as less normative came the idea of multiple intelligences (for example, Gardner's, 1999 identification of linguistic intelligence). This changed the formerly rather static image of intelligence, which became blurred: Intelligences are now understood to be “potentials – presumably, neural ones – that will or will not be activated, depending upon the values of a particular culture, the opportunities available in that culture, and the personal decisions made by individuals and/or families, schoolteachers, and others” (Gardner, 1999: 33). Intelligence relates not only to the individual but is influenced and shaped by environment, culture, experiences etc. The “human mind is better thought of as a series of relatively separate faculties, with only loose and non-predictable relations with one another, than as a single, all purpose machine that performs steadily at a certain horse power, independent of content and context.” (Gardner, 1999: 32).

Consequently, when psychological researchers in the 1990s studied age and the cognitive abilities (which include intelligences), a multi-dimensional position was chosen rather than a simple focus on the processes involved in mental deterioration in old age, as summarised by Kruse & Wahl (1999). One of several theories of intelligence was presented by Cattell (1971) and Horn & Cattell (1967). They differentiated between fluid and crystallised intelligence. The fluid dimension includes the capacity for information processing. This is mainly biologically determined and has various aspects, for example recognising connections, drawing conclusions and speed of perception. The crystallised dimension includes the knowledge- and experience-dependent cognitive side, such as vocabulary, general knowledge and understanding of connections and relations (Kruse & Wahl, 1999: 180).

Baltes (1993) further developed the concept of this division and renamed the fluid component “mechanical” and the crystallised “pragmatic”. He then tested this model empirically. The results of his longitudinal studies in the nineties showed that components of pragmatic intelligence displayed stability over time and sometimes even a slight rise (Kruse & Wahl, 1999: 181), whereas mechanical intelligence might deteriorate but not noticeably. These findings were confirmed by other empirical studies. Kruse & Wahl (1999: 182 with reference to Baltes & Lindenberger (1997)) propose that the structure of intelligence is divided into five dimensions: consciousness, speed of perception and memory represent parts of the mechanical intelligence; fluency of words and knowledge can be linked to the pragmatic intelligence.

There is enormous individual variation in intelligence in older age. As intelligence is multi-dimensional, performance depends on the combination of complex individual systems, from genetic disposition to social environment. Cognitive plasticity research investigates the individual mechanisms involved in adapting to changes in the environment. Findings in this area underline potential cognitive flexibility in old age. Even more, results emphasise the potential benefits of training these abilities:

elderly people – even under the effect of clearly age-related limitations are still capable of maximal cognitive productivity – are able to benefit short and long-term from new learning situations and specific interventional programmes. (...) [Plasticity research] built a foundation for a culture of ageing which supports existing potential and can therefore be preventive, corrective and optimising (Singer & Lindenberger, 2000: 42) (my translation).

In support of the idea of adaptation and compensation, Gardner (1999) states that “it could be that multiple intelligences decline in importance as well as in visibility, but I believe that the opposite is true. As we age, our intelligences simply become internalized.” (Gardner, 1999: 112)

As old age cannot be separated from previous phases of life, learning in later life may be seen as a continuation of previous experiences. Each individual has a certain cognitive potential, which can be trained in youth as well as in old age. Therefore, a combination of memory and skills training can be beneficial for supporting cognitive training of older people as well as younger ones. The more highly trained an individual is when younger, the better their prospect for further development in older age. This idea is supported by Aartsen et al.’s (2002) study on cognitive functioning and everyday activities. They state that higher levels of education could be related to higher levels of cognitive functioning in general. The close link between better cognitive functioning and everyday activities can even impact on the overall state of health, leading them to conclude “that better health was related to higher levels of cognitive functioning and higher levels of everyday activity” (Aartsen et al., 2002: 158).

Memory

Memory is an area which is assumed to become less reliable as we grow older. With increased chronological age, more “senior moments” or memory failures are expected (Victor, 2005: 153), although this might be related to other areas, such as conscientiousness or self-esteem (Pearman & Storandt, 2004: 4). People start noticing a decline in their cognitive and memory functions when they are around 50 (Ponds et al., 2000: 77). However, various studies show that subjective losses in cognitive abilities do not necessarily correlate with performance on cognitive (memory) tests (Ponds et al., 2000: 79). Meijer et al. (2006: 292) found in their memory study that people with higher education performed better than those who had less education. Further, individual self-control of internal and external factors have been identified as contributing to stronger or weaker results in memory tests of older adults, and the importance of goal setting to perform better (West & Yassuda, 2004).

Older people sometimes exaggerate their memory failures (stated by Hertzog, Hulstsch and Dixon, 1987 in Ponds et al., 2000: 68). Similarly, Hurd reports a strong belief in negative

effects of age on learning in her survey of language students at the OU (Hurd, 2000a). Hoyer & Roodin (2003: 275) list four main reasons for this mismatch between self-expectations / perception and memory-test-performance.

1. Memory failures in everyday life could be confused with deficits caused by health, such as an increased loss of vision or hearing.
2. Memory failures are commonly expected to increase as age increases.
3. Memory tests may test the complexity of the subjects' environment rather than the state of their memory. The busier the life of the subjects, the greater the demands on their memories. Further, subjective memory loss appears to be more evident in tasks which are out of the ordinary (Kruse & Wahl, 1999: 186). Similarly, Long & Shaw (2000: 654) state that, when performance on more "practical intelligence" is involved, age differences are reduced.
4. Hoyer & Roodin (2003: 275) highlight the inaccuracy of the common understanding of how memory works: an inaccurate model of the memory may lead to predicted results which may not necessarily reflect the way in which memory actually works.

Changes in memory mainly relate to the efficacy of working-memory, specifically the rate of recall, which is related to underlying molecular-biological changes (Schneider, 2003: 815). Once learned and stored, information takes longer to retrieve in an older person (Quadagno, 1999: 153). Although younger and older age groups retrieve the same amount of information, there is an age-related difference in retrieval times in short-term memory. Short-term memory (sometimes used interchangeably with working memory, for example by Long & Shaw, 2000) is used here in contrast to the term long-term memory. Only current information is stored in short-term memory. If relevant, information can be moved into the long-term memory where it is stored, once learned, for a longer time (Schneider, 2003: 815). Kruse & Wahl (1999: 186) confirm that free recall of information in their studies was reduced, whereas no relevant differences could be found for pure recognition.

The type of information being processed has to be differentiated. Semantic knowledge, for example, is not affected by any age-related loss. The short-term memory can still make "active use of cognitive processes such as recognising and storing word information, using syntactic information, connecting pronoun references, building overall text structure, integrating and restructuring information, assessing inferences and adapting reader goals" (Grabe & Stoller, 2002: 18). In contrast, the capacity to integrate details of information is affected by age (Kruse & Wahl, 1999: 186). So far, empirical research has not produced any

indication of the reason for this. Long & Shaw (2000: 625) show that the controversy of older adults having a better knowledge of vocabulary is due to their longer life experience on one hand, but that they also have deficits in verbal learning, in particular concerning the “difficulty in the acquisition of new material” (Long & Shaw, 2000: 625; already raised by Light & Burke, 1988: 247).

In their model of “selective optimization with compensation”, Baltes & Baltes’ (1990) understand existing vocabulary knowledge as a pragmatic rather than a mechanical side of cognition (with reference to Horn, 1982; Horn & Cattell, 1967; see also chapter 2.2.2, page 15). As the short-term (or working memory as Baltes & Baltes refer to it) is part of the mechanical aspect of cognition, it shows deficits with increasing age. However, older adults who increase their use of previous vocabulary knowledge can “outperform the young” (as reported in Long & Shaw, 2000: 654). Despite brain maturation processes, training and use of the memory can compensate for age-related deficits (Schneider, 2003: 816). Baltes (1993) recommends making more use of pragmatic aspects of cognition in order to improve performance. Aerobic exercises are identified as beneficial, particularly, when practised over time (Woo & Sharp, 2003: 328). The working and using of memory are understood as a

recreation of patterns in a decentralised way across the brain. (...) it is not that patterns are stored in the mind: rather, they are in the environment, and our brain interacts with the environment to produce the appropriate pattern—that is, to act intelligently/competently. (Gonczi, 2004: 21)

Summary

Overall, the picture of learning in older age shows great variation and individuality, depending on the task and the specific area of focus. The experiments on which the findings are based have investigated performance in everyday areas with the aim of gaining a general insight into problem solving, speed, retrieval and other factors. In the main, studies highlight that, with training, older people can access their learning potential despite deficits caused by molecular-biological changes which affect particularly the speed of the short-term memory. As for language learning in later life, deficits in short-term memory and problems with new vocabulary can be compensated for by making use of other individual resources, such as existing vocabulary knowledge. What this means for the individual adult language learner is presented in the following chapter.

3 Adult language learner

As adults, language learners already have at least a first language and therefore have the advantage of experience in language use and learning. Learning a foreign language requires that they “restructure, reconsider, and re-evaluate the structure of the linguistic system, possibly in both languages” (Bialystok, 1991: 75). De Keyser (2000: 501) emphasises that adults have to apply “verbal-analytical problem-solving skills to the process of language acquisition” if they want to succeed in learning their target language. He further considers that these verbal analytical skills vary depending on individual differences between learners (De Keyser, 2000: 501).

Within second language research, those over the age of compulsory schooling have been treated as one category: adult language learners. The potentially 50 or more years of language learning in an adult learner’s life have not been differentiated. This lack of interest in a more age-specific look at older adult language learning processes is partly due to Lenneberg’s (1967) critical period hypothesis (discussed further in 3.2) which deals with the age factor in second language acquisition. Consequently, studies of adult language learners have focused mainly on young adult language learners and have not been conclusive. Moreover, different language areas have been targeted and participants selected from different ages and backgrounds, e.g. immigrants, school children, college students with a focus on areas such as pronunciation, grammar or speed of acquisition only. For language learners of any age, the same general areas are expected to be of relevance. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the categories and the individual learner differences which influence individual learners as they learn another language. This overview shows where the age factor is located within second language learning research.

3.1 Learner differences

Age is one of a set of factors relevant to learning a language. Individual factors contributing to the learning process include intelligence, aptitude, cognitive style, motivation, attitude, age and personality (Skehan, 1989; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Wenden, 1991; Cotterall, 1999; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Robinson, 2002), even though the individual terms and classifications vary. The ways in which these factors can influence the learning process and learning outcomes may depend on the importance of a single factor or on the interactions between several factors, whatever the age of the learners. However, it has to be borne in mind that previous findings on individual learner differences relate mainly to

younger learners. These individual differences need to be put into the context of wider, exogenous factors, including classroom setting and input, method used and teacher's personality. The grouping of the individual differences under affective, biographical and cognitive provides a clearer presentation of the complex factors involved. However, it is understood that individual factors have an effect on each other within and across the groups.

Affective factors

The affective category contains factors such as anxiety, attitude and motivation, learner beliefs, plus personality characteristics, which can also be subdivided further, such as extroversion or introversion and creativity. Affective factors involve all the "purposive and emotional sides of a person's reactions to what is going on" (Stevick, 1999: 55). It is thought that the affective influences the cognitive side and vice versa (Arnold & Brown, 1999: 1). Oxford (1990: 140) even states that the "affective side of the learner is probably one of the very biggest influences on language learning success and failure". The importance of affective factors has been raised since the beginning of the discussion on learning strategies (see Naiman et al., 1975 and Wenden & Rubin, 1987).

Anxiety can be one of the most "pervasive" obstructions in the learning process expressed as "uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension" (Arnold & Brown, 1999: 8). In principle, it is understood that a high level of anxiety can have a negative effect on the learning process: performance in writing, fluency in speaking, self-confidence (Oxford, 1999: 61) and can thus, overall, restrict optimal learning.

There is no such thing as facilitating anxiety; all anxiety in that environment is likely to be debilitating because language learning is such a complex and emotionally involved process. (Oxford, 1995: 69)

In contrast, positive emotions are expected to facilitate learning (Arnold & Brown, 1999: 2). Horwitz et al. (1991: 31) identify a special foreign language anxiety differing from anxieties in other areas as foreign language anxiety is closer to the individual owing to the "disparity between the 'true' self as known to the language learner and the more limited self [that] can be presented at any given moment in the foreign language". Hurd states that particularly beginner learners often display higher levels of this form of language anxiety than more advanced students (Hurd, 2003).

Attitude and motivation have been recognised as further affective factors that are crucial contributors to success in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Attitude towards (language) learning can be influenced by certain positive or negative

values attributed to learning or to a particular language and culture. Motivation is characterised by an engagement with chosen activities displaying persistence and effort in order to achieve a particular goal. Clear goals and the expectation of success can even lead to higher motivation. Motivation is also related to the concept of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), a state of optimal motivation. It is understood that motivation can change over time and interact with other individual differences, influenced by the learning context. Distinctions are made between instrumental and integrative motivational orientation (Gardner & Lampert, 1972), the first relating to learning to participate in the target language and culture, the latter to gain e.g. a certificate or advancement in one’s career. Another distinction used for motivation is the extrinsic and intrinsic dichotomy, where intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual, in contrast to extrinsic where rewards present a motive for learning, as e.g. in the form of certificates. Personality factors such as extroversion and communicativeness have been used to describe good language learners (Skehan, 1989). However, there are also successful language learners who do not score highly on the extrovert personality scale, according to Lightbown & Spada (2006: 60).

Learner beliefs embrace what language learners think promotes or hinders their language learning, but learners also hold beliefs about their own potential to succeed and self-confidence. These beliefs can impact on other aspects such as learning behaviour and expectations of learning outcomes, and in addition, strongly affect other affective factors, such as motivation, attitude or anxiety (Cotterall, 1999: 495).

Further, several aspects more related to personality traits might also play a role in how an individual learns a language, although their importance and direct impact is yet unclear (Dörnyei, 2005: 218). Among those are the tendencies for:

- a tolerance of ambiguity (the ability to deal with uncertain and confusing situations),
- willingness to take risks and communicate (willingness to communicate with others even at the cost of making mistakes),
- creativity (including aspects such as flexibility, originality, associations),
- self-esteem (self-belief about one’s own abilities and attributes) and
- an individual’s “ego boundaries” (Ehrman, 1999: 69) (the idea of oneself)

These may all influence learning behaviour, expectations, motivation, attitudes and beliefs.

Biographical factors

Biographical factors affecting language learning include gender, past (language) learning experiences and age. Past (language) learning experiences are considered often to have a positive effect on further language learning. Bialystok & Hakuta (1999: 171) argue that literacy is the most elementary basis for any learning progress. Age has always formed part of the discussion of language learning and the need to learn a language at an early age, preferably during childhood or before the onset of puberty, has been stressed. Only a few researchers express advantages, such as a wider vocabulary, of learning a language in adulthood and none of these specify a particular age span. Empirical studies show that a more cognitively oriented learning approach facilitates faster progress at the beginning of the learning process (Harley, 1986: 26). Similarly, Edmondson (1999) identifies a “difference between speed of acquisition and ultimate attainment”, older language learners may take more time but they can achieve similar results to the younger (teenage) learners. Felix (1982) claims that the process whereby an adult learns a language, although slower regarding the end-result, does not appear to be limited by any biologically determined restrictions concerning language learning in general. Supporting the idea of learning potential in older age, Broughton is positive regarding the disposition of adult learners to learn other languages:

mature personality, many years of educational training, a developed intelligence, a determination to get what they want, fairly clear aims, and above all strong motivation to make as rapid progress as possible. These are formidable qualifications which far outweigh any disadvantages, and make teaching adults a challenging and satisfying experience. (Broughton, 1978: 187)

Here Broughton identifies a number of factors which constitute a good language learner as being more important than age. However, until recently, the older age learner group of 50 years old and older had not explicitly been focused on. (For a fuller discussion of the age factor see section 3.2)

Cognitive factors

Cognitive factors affecting language learning include aptitude, learning styles and learning strategies. These key terms are introduced briefly only to demonstrate the variety of factors influencing language learning and their relation to learning strategies. Cognitive factors are closely interrelated with the affective aspects and can be supported by these, as e.g. when self-esteem is fostered (Arnold & Brown, 1999: 12).

Aptitude refers to general ability to learn a language, consisting of a multitude of constituent skills, as shown in one of the most common aptitude tests, the MLAT/EMLAT (see also Stern, 1983; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). However, the concept of aptitude in language learning is not universally accepted and thus the contribution of aptitude towards success in language learning remains unclear (Skehan, 1998). People who perform very well in one foreign language do not necessarily do so in others and people sometimes show preferences for certain forms of language use, such as speaking or reading only.

Learning styles are understood as functioning modes which differ according to the individual. Research into learning styles has proved difficult as it depends on what is understood as a learning style and on the typology used. For this reason, I outline only briefly some different typologies as a wider discussion would distract from the main topic of the present study.

Cohen (2003: 279) defines learning styles as “general approaches to language learning”. Usually, they are divided into field-dependent and field-independent modes. Reid (1987) distinguishes visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile learning styles. Honey & Mumford (1992) present four styles, the activist, the reflector, the pragmatist and the theorist. Although their approach originates from experiences in management training it is claimed to also be valuable for language learning purposes. Based on Willing’s (1987) classification of learning styles, adult learners tend to prefer the analytic and authority-oriented mode rather than the concrete or communicative one (similarly Berndt, 2001a). However, Berndt considers this more a cohort than an age-related effect. Future studies are needed to examine this further, and to analyse whether today’s communicatively trained language learners will demonstrate the same or a different preference in their learning style in older age (Berndt, 2001a). Bausch et al. (2003: 460) identify a cognitive-analytical learning approach as an advantage of adult learners. Older learners have the ability to analyse and reflect on language input and, consequently, to improve and speed up their language learning by this. Kolb (Learning Styles Inventory, 1999) presents a categorisation of different learning styles within a theoretical framework of experiential learning which has been widely used within adult learning in general. To sum up, proponents of differences in learning styles and types assume that certain learning strategies can be used to support certain types of learning styles.

Learning strategies present another cognitive factor among individual learner differences. They can be interpreted as certain techniques applied by learners to improve their learning and application of the language, in contrast to learning styles which dominate the general learning type by which individuals can be classified. Learning styles are seen as more innate to a person, whereas learning strategies can be learned and to some extent trained. As learning strategies are the main focus of the present study, there is a more detailed discussion in chapter 4.

3.2 Age as a variable in language learning

The general indifference to language learners over 50 years old has been based on two assumptions. One is that the older the learner, the less likely they are to be able to learn a foreign language. This idea of reduced learning ability goes back to Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis which assumes completion of brain maturation at the age of puberty. Following this completion, any later language learning would be restricted in later life (Lenneberg, 1967; further discussion on this in Birdsong, 1999 and Singleton, 2003). Areas identified by Lenneberg as affected are phonological performance in particular, but also morpho-syntactic understanding as demonstrated in follow-up studies of the critical period hypothesis (Johnson & Newport, 1989). Restricted later language learning is seen to be related to a neurological inflexibility in very early adulthood which, consequently, affects the cognitive conditions for language learning. Due to individual differences in the age of maturation of various aspects of language learning, such as pronunciation, morpho-syntax and vocabulary (more details of different language aspects in De Keyser, 2000: 500), Johnson & Newport (1989) introduce the term "sensitive age" rather than "lateralization", as used by Lenneberg (1967). In this way, they aim to acknowledge that language sensitivity declines over a period rather than at a clear-cut age. To clarify the age of brain maturation with regard to the capacity to learn languages, most studies employing the critical period hypothesis test learners aged between ten and twenty (for example Harley, 1986). In most cases, the participants involved are also immigrants who have to learn the target language in order to remain in the country (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Birdsong, 1992).

Even within research into the critical period hypothesis, researchers disagree about the existence of a critical or sensitive period and positions range from acceptance to rejection. Some evolutionary proponents, such as Hurford (1991, 1999), argue for a sensitive period of general language learning. Others, such as Bialystok and Hakuta (1999), doubt the existence of any critical period. They state that differences in final attainment are due to variations in educational levels rather than to brain maturation, as there are many individuals who

achieve high proficiency levels in foreign languages after puberty (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1999: 171). Schumann (2006) acknowledges that there are differences in the brains of individuals so that some seem to be better equipped for language learning than others regardless of their age:

It might be that late starters who are high achievers simply have different brains than late starters who are low achievers. The high achievers might have certain neural hypertrophies that provide advantages in postcritical period SLA. (Schumann, 2006: 315)

Especially with regard to cognitive factors, Bialystok and Hakuta (1999: 171) see a strong relation between learners' degree of literacy in their L1 and their final mastery of a foreign language. Singleton (2005: 269) questions the "notion of a CP [Critical Period]" given the variety of many "mutually contradictory versions". This diversity stems from different ages for the onset and offset of the critical period as well as various interpretations regarding neurological localisation and lateralisation processes and stages.

The other widely underlying expectation is that native-speaker proficiency should be the ultimate goal of any language learner (although challenged in recent years, e.g. Davies, 1991). Nevertheless, this achievement is exceptional and usually linked to a strong dedication to the learning process of the individual learner, regardless of their age. Although some younger, teenage learners may achieve a high level in certain areas such as pronunciation, grammatical accuracy and mastery of vocabulary they, like older language learners, will not necessarily achieve native-speaker proficiency in all language areas. Among older language learners, high attainment of language proficiency is not as rare as one might expect following Lenneberg's hypothesis as Bongaerts (1999: 154) demonstrates with regard to accuracy in pronunciation of Dutch learners of English and French), despite Birdsong's statement that "age of acquisition is negatively correlated with attained proficiency level" (Birdsong, 2005: 320).

The achievement of a high level of language proficiency depends on the individual learner and the interaction of multiple factors, including personal circumstances, abilities, skills, motivation, anxiety, language exposure and experiences. Thus age alone seems not to be the only factor in predicting the level of proficiency that can be attained in a second language. In her study of young adult immigrants (between 25 and 35 years old) in Germany, Moyer (2004: 75) interprets age of language exposure as an indirect rather than a direct factor. Age is only one of a combination of individual as well as general language learning processes

which influence ultimate language mastery. However, understanding of the effects of age on the language learning process remains patchy and undefined. The influence of age on the ways in which languages are learned is unclear, as is its relation to other areas such as motivation, attitude, learning styles and exogenous factors, such as variations in the amount and type of target language input.

Cohen & Dörnyei (2002: 171) state that “in typical classroom environments where the amount of exposure is relatively small, older learners seem to have the advantage over their younger peers, that is, here, older is better”. Many studies include both young and adult language learners (Lenneberg, 1967; Johnson & Newport, 1989; Singleton, 1989; Long, 1990; Singleton & Zsolt, 1995). However, only rarely does the adult language learner group consist of learners aged over 50 (Bellingham, 2004: 57) and then their number is extremely small. These studies mainly aim to show differences in final achievement as measured by a language test.

Brown (1983) compares learners of Spanish aged between 18 and 30 with learners aged over 55. He identifies more similarities than differences in the learning processes involved and in students’ final attainment after an eight-week long Spanish course in Mexico. One of the main differences is that the older learner group is more oriented towards support from outside when choosing learning strategies.

Scott’s (1994) study focuses only on the auditory memory and auditive perception of learners of Spanish. The participants are aged between 19 and 25 and between 50 and 71. The younger learners perform better in the auditive task, whereas both groups perform equally well in the memory task. However, only some language skills are investigated and for the most part do not involve participants over 50 years old. The study only provides some general impressions of the ways in which older learners over 50 approach language learning.

Berndt’s study (2003) can be interpreted as the first attempt to establish an age-related theory of language learning which could support a foreign language geragogy. In her study she concentrates on older learners (50+) of German at the University of the Third Age in Rome. Using interviews, she identifies characteristics of older language learners and highlights their high level of individuality. This approach allows participants to provide information on a variety of topics, including language learning history, motivation,

difficulties and progress as well as information about themselves. Therefore, Berndt's study covers a variety of aspects of language learning, from motivation to language learning biographies, specific problems and socio-economic characteristics (Berndt, 2000a, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b, 2003). Berndt concludes that older language learners can often revert to complex implicit and explicit learning experiences in their past. To make students consciously aware of these experiences Berndt (2003: 223) promotes working cognitively. Incorporation of learning biographies, learning strategies, differences of (language) learning in later life and aspects of differences and similarities between L1 and L2 enable older students to become independent and (self-)conscious learners who are in control of their own (language) learning.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the importance of age within second language learning. It can be concluded that age is only one of many learner differences affecting learning. Other factors include motivation, anxiety, attitude and personality. All these factors are combined differently in each individual language learner and affect, with various degrees of intensity, the ways in which each person learns a second language.

Although some studies appeared to address the age factor, the majority focus on young adult learners. Except for a few studies, those aged over 50 have not been studied sufficiently, mainly due to researchers focusing on Lenneberg's (1967) critical period hypothesis. Berndt (2003) is the first to identify the needs of older language learners and the wider implications for learning processes in older age. However, the cognitive aspects of language learning, specifically the use of language learning strategies by older learners, remain unresearched. Insights into affective factors, such as motivation or anxiety among older language learners, remain patchy in the literature on language learning on individual differences (Berndt, 2001b, 2003). However, there seems to be an understanding that despite the differentiation of individual aspects affecting language learning into cognitive and affective factors, a clear-cut separation remains difficult as one impacts on the other.

4 Language learning strategies

Having presented the social context for the older adult language learner and the context for language learning strategies as one aspect of individual learner differences, I will now focus on some of the most influential studies into learning strategies to provide an overview of

- the nature of learning strategies
- approaches used within language learning strategy research
- classifications of learning strategies.

The focus will be on those empirical or theoretical studies (such as Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Graham, 1997), which aimed to provide an insight into the nature and use of learning strategies. Various classifications and their implications for language learning are explored giving special consideration to the applicability of the common models for learners above 50 years old.

Studies aiming at strategy training and on how far these techniques are teachable, learnable and transferable to improve learner performance, are excluded from this presentation of learning strategies unless they contributed to the theoretical understanding of language learning strategies. Inclusion of this aspect was rejected for the present study for two main reasons. Firstly, strategy training can involve a range of activities, including repetition of previously learned material, the collection of a list of possible strategies or reflection on how well or bad certain strategies worked for specific language tasks. Thus where strategy training begins and ends depends on the definition, the perspective and the purpose of the strategy training. Secondly, there was the difficulty of accurately tracing back any strategy training participants might have had during their varied language learning experiences, ranging from their upbringing in changing language environments to school, work or personal opportunities. A systematic review of interventional studies is presented in Hassan et al. (2005). In the realm of learner autonomy and discussion around characteristics of the good language learner a considerable body of literature on language learning strategies has developed over the past 30 years. Learning strategies are recognised as crucial techniques for independent learning processes to improve learning and use of a foreign language.

4.1 Understanding of language learning strategies

Cohen (1998) presents language learning strategies as actions “taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall and application of information about that language” and later as “specific behaviour that learners select in their language learning and use”. He further specifies learning strategies as “conscious or semi-conscious thoughts and behaviours used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of a target language” (Cohen, 2003: 279). Thus Cohen includes any actions and thoughts towards learning and using the target language under learning strategies. Similarly, Wenden & Rubin (1987) who were among the first to discuss learning strategies, understand them as a learning behaviour which enables students to engage in their own learning and thus control it. Their focus is on enabling students to improve independent learning. They use the term “technique” instead of “strategy” which points to their practical understanding of strategies as a rather observable phenomenon. Chamot & Küpper (1989) see learning strategies equal to “a cognitive activity, as thoughts and behaviours which, more specifically, students use to comprehend, store and remember new information and skills”. Oxford (1996a; 2003: 339) combines under this term all those “techniques used by individual learners to facilitate the comprehension, retention, retrieval and application of information in the second or foreign language”. However, Oxford (2003) has a stricter understanding of learning strategies, as her definition does not include actions towards enhancing learning in a wider sense, unlike Cohen’s (2003). Weinstein & Mayer (1986) summarise any actions which can help memorising words, comprehending or producing any smaller or larger texts in the target language under language learning strategies. They further make a strong link to the affective side involved in language learning and the use of learning strategies as these can effect “the learner’s motivational or affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organises, or integrates new knowledge” (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986: 315).

Other researchers (e.g. Tarone, 1980; Faerch & Kasper, 1983) identify learning strategies by contrasting them with what they are not. Faerch & Kasper (1983) and Tarone (1980) distinguish between learning, communication and production strategies. Tarone (1980) views learning strategies in a narrower sense as “attempts to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence” rather than to simply communicate. To fulfil communication aims, production strategies are utilised, while for negotiation communication strategies are applied.

Graham (1997) sees learning strategies as opposed to study skills. Study skills are the more visible, overt techniques whereas learning strategies are inner processes and more difficult to observe. However, this distinction between overt and covert is not as clear-cut as Graham (1997) suggests, as she also includes observable strategies such as naturalistic practice opportunities (talking to native speakers of the target language) under learning strategies. Her understanding of the nature of learning strategies is based on O'Malley & Chamot (1990) and the underlying model of cognitive processing provided by Anderson (1983) (more on Anderson's model in chapter 5.1.2).

Macaro (1997) separates learning strategies and communicative strategies: "The former helps you learn, the latter helps you speak and keep a conversation going". His understanding of learning strategies is narrower than that of Cohen (1998), Oxford (1990) and Wenden & Rubin (1987), including only those techniques which directly support the learning of the foreign language, not the application of the target language in communication. Table 1 presents an overview of the different understandings of learning strategies since language instructors and researchers began to discuss learning strategies as a characteristic of the good language learner.

Author(s):	What is understood under the term language learning strategy:
Naiman (1978)	"more or less deliberate approaches"
Tarone (1980)	"an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language" Learning strategies are contrasted to production strategies which aim to "to use one's linguistic system efficiently and clearly" and communication strategies which are seen as "a mutual attempt to agree on a meaning in a situation" where common language structures are not available.
Færch & Kasper (1983)	Distinguish between learning strategies as plans which help the learner to discover the rules (pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, phonological) of the target language and gradually come to master these and Communication strategies which refer to the ways a learner uses the inter-language system whilst interacting
Weinstein & Mayer (1986)	"the learner's motivational or affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organises, or integrates new knowledge" used for simply memorising words, comprehending or producing any smaller or larger texts in the target language "have learning facilitation as a goal and are intentional on the part of the learner"
Wenden & Rubin (1987)	"a form of learning behaviour which enables students to engage in their own learning and thus control it"
O'Malley & Chamot (1990)	"special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them to comprehend, learn, or retain new information."

Oxford (1990)	all those techniques students employ to improve their learning progress in the foreign language
Graham (1997)	“Study skills are the more visible, overt techniques whereas learning strategies are inner processes and more difficult to observe.”
Macaro (1997)	learning strategies help to learn in contrast to communicative strategies which help to speak and keep a conversation going
Cohen (1998)	taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall and application of information about that language

Table 1: Learning strategies by author

For the present study, I draw indirectly on one of the most widely cited understanding of learning strategies as presented by O’Malley & Chamot (1990) where learning strategies are seen as “the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990: 1). Their understanding includes any actions which might enhance the learning and application of the target language. They interpret language learning and learning strategies as a cognitive activity in a wider sense, including affective aspects, such as self-talk as a form of self-encouragement in their category of social / affective strategies. Further, I mainly refer to Graham (1997) who based her understanding on O’Malley & Chamot (1990) and further developed it. Her classification contains one more category than that of O’Malley & Chamot (1990) which will be presented in the following section. In my understanding of Graham (1997) and O’Malley & Chamot (1990) the terms “strategy” and “technique” can be used interchangeably, both referring to a way of engaging in language learning and language processing and language application in the target language.

4.2 Classifications of language learning strategies

Following the different assumptions on the nature of learning strategies and their terminology, various overlapping classifications are offered. They are presented in chronological order (see table 2 page 35), starting with one of the first classifications by Naiman et al. (1978) and finishing with Graham’s (1997) system which is applied in the present study.

Naiman et al. (1978, 1995) differentiate between five learning strategies in general and several techniques for language learning in particular. The understanding of learning strategies embraces general approaches to language learning and language use whereas the techniques then subdivide tricks used to learn certain language skills, such as vocabulary or listening. Their classification is not based on any cognitive model, rather empirically

derived from a study with 34 interviewees of various levels of language proficiency. Participants were of a mixed age group, 13% were between 51 and 65 years old. All were related to the university, most had experiences of French, 18 had also learned Latin.

Rubin (1987) and Wenden (1987) divide the techniques affecting language learning into direct and indirect. The direct ones are for immediate application when a language is used (e.g. paraphrasing), and the indirect ones are applied to self-study (including strategies such as planning or selecting).

Cohen (1998) divides language learner strategies into strategies of language learning and those of language use, adding the self-motivating strategies (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002: 178) as they contribute greatly to the success of a language learned. Language learning strategies start from the point at which identifying necessary learning material occurs and continues to the point at which committing it to the memory is undertaken, “referring to the conscious and semi-conscious thoughts and behaviours used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of a target language” (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002: 178). Language use strategies are split into retrieval, rehearsal, cover and communication strategies.

Author:	Classification / subdivision of language learning strategies:
Naiman et al. (1978)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Active task approach 2. Realisation of language as a system 3. Realisation of language as a means of communication and interaction 4. Management of active demands 5. Monitoring of L2 performance and several techniques which are observable forms of language learning behaviour, such as sound acquisition, grammar, vocabulary, listening comprehension etc.
Tarone (1980)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning strategies 2. Communication strategies 3. Production strategies
Færch & Kasper (1984)	Learning strategies are defined by the criteria of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formal reduction (e.g. paraphrase) 2. Functional reduction (e.g. meaning replacement) 3. Achievement or compensatory strategies (e.g. code switching)
Weinstein & Mayer (1986)	Cognitive strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rehearsal - organisation - elaboration processes

Wenden & Rubin (1987)	Understands strategies as techniques which can be: 1. Direct (e.g. clarification) 2. Indirect (e.g. creating practice opportunities)
O'Malley & Chamot (1990)	1. Cognitive: operate directly on incoming information, manipulating in ways that enhance learning 2. Metacognitive: higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity 3. Social/ affective: represent a broad grouping that involve either interaction with another person or control over affect
Oxford (1990)	Direct strategies: 1. Memory (e.g. to create mental linkages) 2. Cognitive style (e.g. analysing, practicing) 3. Compensation (e.g. overcome difficulties in speaking) Indirect strategies: 1. Metacognitive (e.g. planning, evaluating learning) 2. Affective (e.g. encouraging oneself) 3. Social (e.g. asking questions, co-operate with others)
Macaro (1997)	Making sense of the L2 input Pre-communicative Study / revision / redrafting skills As opposed to three communication skills
Graham (1997)	1. Cognitive strategies (e.g. inferencing, narrow focus) 2. Metacognitive strategies (e.g. monitoring, problem identification) 3. Social / affective strategies (e.g. anxiety reduction, risk taking) 4. Communicative strategies (e.g. paraphrase, code switching)
Cohen & Dörnyei (2002)	1. Strategies for language learning (e.g. memorising, selecting material) 2. Strategies for language use (e.g. retrieval, rehearsal, cover, communication) 3. Strategies for self-motivation (e.g. self-talk)

Table 2: Classification of language learning strategies by author

One of the models and classification system of learning strategies often referred to is by O'Malley & Chamot (1990), based on Anderson's model of cognitive processing (1983). They classify strategies into cognitive and metacognitive strategies, according to the skills listening, speaking, writing and reading. Learning strategies are seen as a cognitive skill, which can be learned itself. Strategies are seen as relevant to successful language learners at all levels and vary according to the stage of competence in the learning process.

Based on findings by Rubin (1981) and Naiman et al. (1978), the classification of learning strategies by O'Malley & Chamot (1990) differentiates learning strategies into the following three categories:

1. Metacognitive strategies
2. Cognitive strategies
3. Social/ affective strategies.

Metacognitive strategies are those strategies which help the learner to control, plan and evaluate their processes of learning and applying the language, but also to monitor their strategy use. They cover such strategies as listening for key words or concentrating on some key words in written texts in order to get an idea about the content presented. They involve further planning how to organise ideas in a target language and monitoring the progress of this. While monitoring occurs simultaneously as a certain task is undertaken, (self-) evaluation is the process of checking for achievement of the intended aim. Metacognitive strategies are important in the context of guessing and finalising any communicational act on the basis of only limited knowledge of the language and monitoring one's performance and progress. Nisbet & Shucksmith (1988: 17) even stress monitoring as the "key process that distinguishes good learners from poor learners", because it shows their "ability to analyse the demands of the task and to respond appropriately, that is, to recognize and manage the learning situation."

Cognitive strategies enable learners to work with the target language, to make it accessible to them in various ways. They can be used for two main purposes: one is what O'Malley & Chamot (1990) refer to as "elaborating" strategies which help to comprehend, retain or produce any language or link new material with already known material. The other main purpose of cognitive strategies involves mainly strategies for vocabulary retention. Among the strategies for elaboration inferencing, transferring, translation and imitation can help to understand new or difficult learning material. Under vocabulary learning strategies techniques such as repeating and memorising, imagery and contextualisation are listed.

Social strategies include strategies such as clarification, problem-sharing or verification, which are more relevant for interactive ways of enhancing learning and reducing anxiety, involving teachers as well as peer learners or native speakers.

Affective strategies can help to control the affective side of language learning. Learners can use affective strategies to reduce anxiety when acting in the target language or when being in unfamiliar situations. Strategies such as self-talk can serve towards a "redirecting of negative thoughts about one's capability" and encourage positive thinking by "reassurances

that the task performance is within reach” (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990: 8). There are overall fewer examples in the category of social / affective than in the cognitive or metacognitive categories although this is by no means related to social / affective strategies being less important than the others. However, it could be related to more emphasis in the past on researching the cognitive and metacognitive aspects of learning strategies as they could be easier to access. In addition, the preference for questionnaires or strategy inventories as research instruments for investigating learning strategies may have supported the dominant practice of collecting information on cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The investigation of social / affective strategies therefore requires a different approach (more qualitatively oriented) and participants who are willing to express and share their emotional side.

O’Malley & Chamot (1990) developed their classification on the basis of a study with 70 ESL high school students in the USA. The study involved student and teacher interviews and aimed to collect data on the strategy use and the interaction with the language proficiency of the participants. Differences in levels of language proficiency did not affect the strategies employed. Throughout, the use of cognitive strategies dominated (52.8% cognitive, 30.1% metacognitive, 17.1% social / affective) and intermediate students showed a more intensive use of metacognitive strategies (O’Malley et al., 1988: 221).

Graham (1997) expands the classification of O’Malley & Chamot (1990) by adding the fourth category of communicative strategies complementing the other three introduced by O’Malley & Chamot (1990). She also adds further strategies under each category. The category of communicative strategies subsumes all those techniques which can help to overcome any communicational breakdown, such as paraphrasing or code switching. The term of communicative strategies had already been introduced in Tarone’s (1980) ideas of learning strategies. Graham’s (1997) understanding differs from Oxford (1990) in the basic classification of the strategies, as shown in table 2 (page 35). With the addition of gesture and mime Graham (1997: 174) includes strategies expressed by body language into her strategy inventory. Graham’s (1997) interest in language learning strategies derived initially from the observation that the transition from GCSE-level to A-level, a transition from a lower to a higher level within secondary education, seemed to present a difficulty for many students. These difficulties differed depending on gender and level of language proficiency of the participants. Questionnaires were initially undertaken with 600 students and 100 teachers, followed up by think-aloud protocols and interviews with 24 students of German

and / or French and 9 language teachers. Graham (1997) concludes that there are differences in strategy use between genders and between levels of language proficiency. Further, she identifies the factor of anxiety as greatly influencing the use of strategies. Similarly, MacIntyre & Gardner (1989) conclude that the use of cognitive strategies is affected by anxiety.

Learning strategies used by older language learners

As learning strategies are not necessarily observable from outside but occur often as inner processes which are dependent on various individual factors it “is unlikely that a single list would apply to all learner types” (Macaro, 1997). Berndt (2001a) explains the use of learning strategies in relation to previous language learning experiences and emphasises that any previously learned language is considered to be supportive (as already suggested by Naiman et al., 1978 and 1995). Those learners with a high level of experience have a more analytical approach than those without. The less experienced show a clear preference for the use of translation. Berndt’s view of learning strategies is narrower and covers only those processes which occur internally while the learning subject is processing the organisation of knowledge (Berndt, 2001a). Other strategies are summarised under learning techniques, such as the process of note-taking.

Hurd (2000b) also points out that “more mature learners may well be metacognitively aware”. The hypothesis following from this is that older adult learners may use learning techniques to an increased extent and may transfer strategies from other, even non-linguistic areas. In addition, if they have an increased awareness of the learning processes involved, then raising this awareness could be used as a means to support mature language learners in their learning efforts.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented some main ideas on the nature and the classification systems for language learning strategies. The earlier notion of the good language learner and his/her strategy use is now replaced by the idea of the effectiveness of strategy use which is dependent on a variety of factors (Wenden, 1998: 21). Correlational studies which linked frequencies of strategy use to levels of proficiency proved uninformative (as Yamamori et al., 2003: 384 report). External factors, such as task purpose and task difficulty play a role (Kellermann, 1991: 157), but also individual learner differences, such as learning styles, background knowledge and many more variables which can influence the effectiveness of

strategy use in a specific as well as general way. The multi-labelling in classification and terminology can partly be related to the problems of researching and finding adequate research instruments which can provide accurate information about ongoing inner processes of learners, as Macaro (1997) claims. Perhaps this is one of the reasons behind the diversity in definitions, classifications and terminology of language learning strategies. In addition, issues concerning underlying learning and cognition processes still remain unresolved (see also 5.1.2).

However, O'Malley & Chamot (1990) offer one of the first taxonomies which is based on a theory in cognitive processing (Anderson, 1983). For the present study, Graham's (1997) model with the subdivision into metacognitive, cognitive, social / affective and communicative strategies will be adapted (based on O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The terms strategies and techniques are understood to be interchangeable. How far the classifications and the underlying cognitive model are applicable for learners above 50 years old is until now unclear. As yet, no single study has focused on strategy use by learners in their Third Age. Further, many years of interest in this area have yet not solved satisfactorily how to methodologically deduce the information required, despite the application of resourceful research instruments such as (strategy inventory) questionnaires (as e.g. the SILL by Oxford, 1990 or Chamot & O'Malley, 1990: 62), think-aloud protocols or interviews. The advantages and disadvantages of each of the research instruments and approaches in the context of researching language learning strategies will be discussed in the following chapter.

5 Methodology: language learning strategies

There has been a great deal of research into language learning strategies over the past 30 years (see literature review chapter 4). The main purpose in strategy research has been to assess the effectiveness of using and teaching strategies, to support (especially weaker) language students in their learning, in addition to identifying the nature of language learning strategies. However, within strategy research, learners over 50 have not been included. Findings, therefore have applied to younger adult learners or teenagers.

In addition, findings within the literature of learning strategies are diverse for three main reasons:

- 1) the difficulty of defining the nature of learning strategies (see chapter 4)
- 2) differences regarding categorisation and labelling (see chapter 4)
- 3) the underlying mental processes involved in the application of learning strategies which still remain unresolved (see chapter 4).

Despite all these difficulties, research into learning strategies has provided insights into how best to apply and use them, and indications of which strategies are employed by successful language learners. This has been achieved by small- and larger-scale research approaching strategies in a mainly qualitative way which has produced more descriptive results. As a basic theoretical framework for the underlying mental processes, Anderson's model of cognitive processing has been applied by the mainstream research into learning strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990 and Graham, 1997).

This chapter covers wider methodological considerations underlying the present study, including epistemological issues, ethics, sampling, triangulation and methods.

5.1 Methodological approach used for the current study

As with any empirical research project, I had to begin by considering underlying presuppositions about how I thought I could succeed in answering my key research questions (see chapter 1, page 5). For this, the assumptions underlying my understanding of paradigms, theoretical frameworks, research design, data and the way in which I dealt with these issues had to be addressed first.

Trying to find out how older learners apply learning strategies requires capturing strategies while they are being used. At this stage I could not know if I should expect the strategies used by older adult learners to be similar to or different from those used by younger learners, who are the main object of interest in the literature on learning strategies. This determined the ontological setting for the nature of the enquiry. Asking how I could then find out more about this phenomenon, led me into the epistemological part of the research project, asking what kind of knowledge I could gather. I decided for the more interpretivist paradigm understanding that “all phenomena can be studied and interpreted in different ways” as “realities are not abstract objects” (Burgess, Sieminski & Arthur, 2006: 55). This position is opposed to the positivist which can generally be described as “modelled on the natural sciences”, assuming underlying universal laws which can be observed and reported neutrally (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 4; also summarised in Grix, 2004: 80). This decision was taken as the enquiry aimed to gain an understanding of what strategies were used rather than providing causal explanations for them.

Explanation depends rather on identifying causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions.
(Sayer, 2000: 14)

This would then lead to a more descriptive understanding of the phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1998: 204). Working within this paradigm allows:

- Subjectivity in participants’ description of the phenomena under scrutiny.
- Understanding of the influence of the researcher on the research, acknowledging that opinions, attitudes and values play a role in the research process.
- identifying links between agents (participants) and their social environment and structures.

Data obtained on this basis aims “to produce true accounts” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 263). Accounts provided by participants “can be read for what they tell us about the phenomena to which they refer” as “everyone is a participant observer, acquiring knowledge” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 124, 125).

Within the interpretivist paradigm (Burgess, Sieminski & Arthur, 2006: 55), structural background for learning strategy use can be provided by identifying themes and relating them to older learners and their characteristics within their social situation as language learners. Strategies can then also be compared to those found in younger learners using Graham’s (1997) categorical framework, based on O’Malley & Chamot (1990).

I decided on a more qualitatively oriented methodology which offered the following advantages in contrast to a purely quantitative methodology (as Grix, 2004: 122 lists for qualitative studies):

1. Description and discovery were the underlying aims of the enquiry.
2. Data was expected to be subjective as it involved individuals who approached language learning and practice in different ways at various levels of proficiency.
3. The enquiry was to be undertaken as a small-scale study to allow in-depth insights.

A qualitative approach further allowed contextualisation by making links between the phenomena observed, the individual and the wider social context. Miles & Huberman (1994) point out the advantage of such “thick descriptions”: they are “vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader” (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 10). The outcome is open-ended at the beginning. Focus can be given to processes in a more intense manner, revealing structures and relations of even more complex phenomena (Denscombe, 2003: 38). However, generalisability and reliability of findings (meaning the possibility of their replication by another researcher) were expected to be limited, owing to the study taking place in a particular setting, with a non-representative sample, at a particular point in time and aiming to explore new ground.

Next, I decided on the procedures which would provide the information on strategy use and details about older adult language learners. Questionnaires made possible the collection of larger amounts of data and further the assessment of the representativity of a smaller group selected from among the learners of different languages. On the basis of their analysis a more in-depth procedure could continue with a smaller sample of students of German only, chosen from those to whom questionnaires had been sent. Self-report procedures were identified as the most suitable method for the kind of data which the present study aimed to obtain. Self-reported accounts brought also the advantage of providing further information on the learners involved.

Self-report data has proved invaluable in uncovering some of the affective and cognitive factors involved in L2 learning, factors that are not readily observable in language behaviour. (Ellis, 1994: 674)

There is also no other study in the literature on verbal reports and language learning strategies used by older learners. Thus it was of further interest to test the value of this kind of self-report with older learners.

A smaller sample of older learners of German as representatives for older language learners could then be included for eliciting more in-depth information about strategies in use in think-aloud protocols. Follow-up interviews with the same smaller sample then provided a clearer picture about reflections on strategy use and characteristics of the older adult language learners.

It was unclear how a longitudinal study could have been conducted as restrictions regarding continuous student participation and availability of funds over a longer period of time prevented this. For the same reasons multi-sites were excluded from the present study although they could in some cases have provided a firmer basis for generalisation. Further, there was the difficulty of finding appropriate sites for data collection where the density of learners of the appropriate age span was sufficiently high to be included.

Alternative methods: Observation and diaries

I decided against observation and diaries for the present study. As language learning strategies are claimed to be rather complex inner processes, classroom observation has proven to be ineffective with language learners (Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1981; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Graham, 1997; Chamot, 2001). Classroom observation (regardless of whether the researcher takes on the role of complete participant or of participant-as-observer) might give an insight into the final decision made by learners but not into the ongoing processes leading up to this, or how and why they came to do it in this particular way. As Cohen reports, classroom observation reveals little information on how language learning strategies are applied "because many learners do not say revealing things in class, if they speak up at all" (Cohen, 1991: 110). The occurrence of strategy use by a learner is not naturally visible through certain gestures or any form of physical behaviour. Strategy use is also not automatically audible as students do not necessarily talk about it. Further issues regarding the memory and perception of the individual researcher and influencing factors such as the researcher's personality, personal management and previous experiences further eliminate the use of observation for the purpose of the present study. Also the time spent in the field compared to the occurrences of strategy use recorded in a class will not secure sufficient and complete data. One has to be aware also that students might just happen to learn something about the learning processes involved when they attend a class, however incidentally or unintentionally that might be (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

In general, diaries are identified in the literature on language learning strategies as another effective instrument of self-report for data collection on strategy use. As Graham (1997) points out in her study, the findings based on learner diaries are comparable but not generalisable and are subjective and individual as they merely allow an insight into the diarists' interpretation. Diary accounts are also incomplete due to memory lapses or the reluctance of diarists to include certain information (Oxford et al., 1996: 21). Graham however emphasises their special suitability for advanced learners. The benefit of diary use emerges once students have become familiar with the process of keeping them. Graham (1997) recommends a period of at least two four-weeks duration as an appropriate period to apply this instrument, that is once the skills of appropriate diary keeping have been acquired by students. Diaries involve practice in record keeping and a high level of commitment and accuracy, but also time for the learners and researchers (in the process of analysis). Diaries can be used where changes over a period of time are central, such as in evaluating the effectiveness of strategy training or increasing learners' awareness of strategy use (Nunan, 1992: 120; Oxford et al., 1996: 20). However, for the present study diaries were not included, as language learning strategies are not necessarily seen as phenomena which change over time. It is further expected that results from these may not justify the high levels of training and commitment required, especially considering the short term times and different levels of proficiency involved.

A triangulated approach of questionnaires, think-aloud protocols and interviews, was identified as most appropriate in line with the key research questions guiding this enquiry. Theoretical considerations on what implications such a methodologically mixed approach brings with it for the enquiry will be dealt with in the following paragraphs.

Triangulation

The focus in the present study is on individual strategy use aiming at gaining an insight into:

1. What students think they do to enhance their language learning (questionnaire).
2. What students actually do when they are employing language learning strategies (recorded think-aloud protocols).
3. Which wider issues students link to the context of learning strategies (interviews).

The combination of several instruments can put the researcher in the best position to gain the best possible outcome of research (Eisenhardt, 2002: 9), as weaknesses of each method can be minimised. Data gained through one instrument can be supplemented, supported, filtered, questioned, compared or contrasted by findings from the other methods. Data from different sources can be corroborated by the evidence from others. Consequently, findings can be more firmly grounded and provide more breadth and depth. However, each of these instruments generates highly subjective and individual data, depending on each participant. Accounts cannot necessarily be taken “at face value” for what they are, but have to be seen in the context of the individual participant (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 19). Participants can be influenced by emotions, they can change what they think or what they say they think of a phenomenon.

Triangulation can therefore contribute to maximising credibility and validity by making a more effective use of the strengths of each method with “new data that throw[s] fresh light on the investigation and provide[s] a spur for richer and deeper analysis” (Bloor, 1997: 49). Further, reliability and generalisability can be increased as a detailed analysis of each data set obtained by the different instruments can be compared against each other and against data from other secondary sources (literature on learning strategies and older adult learners). Triangulation can be seen here as “an attempt to relate different sorts of data in such a way as to counteract various possible threats to the validity of our analysis” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 232). Generalisability in this context refers to comparing data rather than making general statements about all older language learners and their strategy use (as also emphasised by Graham, 1997). Reliability refers to providing sufficient details about the data and the processes involved in obtaining them to enable other researchers to assess the consistency of the study undertaken (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 288). Details are sufficient when “informed judgement about the degree and extent of that fit in particular cases of interest” can be made (Schofield, 2002: 182), i.e. by providing a thick description. Reliability in a narrow, more positivistic position, does not apply to the present study, as a qualitative study can not be fully replicated due to differences in participants and time. Schofield even comments that any qualitative study to which this understanding of replicability applies “would therefore be a bad/useless one” (Schofield, 2002: 174). However, links between the instruments and their findings require a cautious analysis, as Knight (2002) remarks:

If social phenomena are coloured by context, if chameleon-like they change, if observers legitimately see differently, then triangulation should produce more complex accounts and it is likely that there will be disagreements. (Knight, 2002: 127)

For the present study a triangulation of multiple investigators and sources (as explored by Denzin, 1978) would be desirable but is excluded due to the circumstances of the study as a PhD project with limited resources in funding and time. The methodical triangulation (Denzin, 1978) or mixed method approach applied here does not purely compare data on the same issues from different sources to support the validity of similar types of collected data. For the present study, mixed methods were also applied to collect a diverse range of data using the following instruments:

- Questionnaires with older language learners of various languages
- Think-aloud protocols for speaking, reading, listening, and writing with students of German
- Concluding interviews with students of German.

As an additional way to increase the validity of the project, reactivity and reflexivity are acknowledged: “as researchers we are likely to have an effect on the people we study” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 18). Minimising and monitoring reactivity therefore contributes to issues related to validity by “making the role of the researcher as active participant in the research process become clear” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 18). Impression management and the personal characteristics of the researcher are also relevant in the context of reactivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 83, 99).

Ethics

Ethical considerations included issues of (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 264):

- Informed consent and confidentiality
- Privacy (of participants and institutions involved)
- Harm (towards involved parties, participants, researcher, institutions)
- Exploitation

As Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) emphasise, there is always an element of “trade off” involved between protecting informants and collecting data required to add to the knowledge in a specific area. Aspects of informed consent of informants include their right to withdraw and basic information about the study (appendix C). Further, reassurance was given that data collected would be used for the present study only. Privacy and

confidentiality of participants and institutions was guaranteed by anonymising any names. Where results for individual participants or quotations are presented in the following analysis and findings sections, pseudonyms are used. The level of any harm, physical and psychological (for participants, researcher and institutions) was rated as low due to the topic of the study which was general enough not to be seen as offensive to any parties involved, the same for issues related to providing access to the accounts in the form of publications.

My roles as a former tutor of some of the participants, data collector and analyst in one person may have affected data collection and influenced data analysis. Students' willingness to participate in this project, their attitude, intensity, expectations and trust may also have been influenced by their previous knowledge about me. From my point of view, my personal management of the participants - handling their anxiety, trust and expectations of me and the study - was certainly eased. This familiarity may also have had a positive influence on the success of the data collection instruments applied and have helped me to extract more detailed information from participants. On the other hand, one danger of knowing some of the participants was that information based on previous knowledge could be confused with the data collected for this research.

Sampling

The aim was to achieve a high density of language learners over 50 years old over a confined geographical area (demographic criterion linked to geographical). To select a sample with these characteristics an opportunity sample was chosen as this best fulfilled all criteria necessary for the practicability of the study. Within qualitative research, opportunism in accessing and controlling settings is essential to achieve investigating "these realities in whatever form they present themselves" (Holliday, 2002: 24).

For a more in-depth analysis, I then focused on a smaller sample comprising only students of German. By this means, I could select "individuals from a larger population with the purpose of investigating features of that population in greater detail" (Coombes, 2001: 34). The sample of students of other languages had to be selected as a comparable group to students of German. I needed to identify a sample which was small enough for an in-depth approach, but also big enough to allow comparisons on further issues regarding generalisability, validity and reliability. As Knight describes it, the sample has to be "sufficiently large to be trustworthy and sufficiently small to be affordable" (Knight, 2002: 120).

Pilot study

The basic research design and research methods were tested in a pilot study to ensure that they were appropriate for the purpose of the present study. The pilot was undertaken in 2003 with five beginner-level German students at the U3A. At the time I was the tutor of these participants. Most of them had already had previous experience of learning German. The pilot served three main purposes:

- 1) to test the instruments developed by me,
- 2) to test the suitability of these instruments for the target group of older participants
- 3) to gain a clearer insight into the kind of data that could be obtained by using these instruments.

In general, the instruments used proved appropriate for their purpose, of the study and the target group. To allow participants as much of their own input as possible, inventory questionnaires of learning strategies were not used. I developed the questionnaire (based on Dörnyei, 2001: 122), adjusting and refining it for the main study. Examples were provided for the questions relating to specific language learning strategies used in section B (see questionnaires in appendix D) in order to increase participants' confidence when answering these questions.

The pilot think-aloud protocols focused only on speaking and reading for two main reasons. Firstly, they involved one more productive (speaking) and one of the more receptive (reading) language tasks. Secondly, these language skills allowed me to collect data retrospectively for the speaking and concurrently while the think-aloud protocols were undertaken for the reading. This selection was therefore expected to provide a useful range of different kinds of data. To a much greater extent than anticipated, the presence of the researcher while undertaking a task had a significant influence on task performance and on the processes of thinking and speaking aloud (what Ericsson, 2002: 985 refers to as the "overshadowing" effect). Students tried to interpret the researcher's facial expressions and to seek verbal reassurance or help with appropriate answers. The main study was designed to minimise these effects by providing participants with the equipment to undertake the tasks at home, in the absence of the researcher. In addition, I decided to include only those students for the main study who were not currently tutored by me. This approach was intended to minimise the pressure on individual students' performance and to avoid the impression of a test simulation while students were undertaking the think-aloud protocols.

Interviews with two students of German proved very useful for contextualising and expanding the data gathered in the questionnaires and the think-aloud protocols. By this means, participants' personal beliefs about relevant issues for language learning and the link between their language learning biography, experiences, expectations, difficulties and motives could be added. This data was used to contextualise the strategies employed by students.

So far, I have presented the layout of the current study from epistemological considerations to alternative methods and reasons for a triangulated approach. The pilot study confirmed that the methodological approach could be applied for the context aimed at as anticipated, with only a few changes and expansions. In the following, I will discuss each of the methods selected individually, first questionnaires, then think-aloud protocols and interviews, as the methodical issues raised by each instrument bring with them implications for their application (and consequently analysis) in the present study.

5.1.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a popular tool for researching language learning strategies and other aspects of second language learning as they are “easy to construct, extremely versatile, and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly in a form that is readily processable” (Dörnyei, 2003: 1). The anonymity of respondents allows one to cover even quite sensitive topics (such as age). Questionnaires can be distributed time- and cost-effectively with a high level of information density, especially when they are used for collecting facts, attitudes or opinions. As Dörnyei (2003: 10) explains, they can also be used for different settings, people and topics as long as the format is laid out in line with the target group aimed at, with brief questions in plain English, focusing on the research questions.

The disadvantages of questionnaires are mainly to do with problems of reliability and validity, such as:

- The simplicity of answers obtained can limit the depth required to understand the link with the wider context.
- Unclear answers remain as they cannot be clarified with respondents immediately.
- Respondents do not necessarily fill in answers as accurately as required.
- Answers can be biased, limited, untruthful, useless or too general.

However, in the present study questionnaires were included to “collect background/biographical data” which could then be prepared for “open-ended interviews” (Knight, 2002: 93). Data on wider issues around strategies had to be included, as the choice of strategies depends on a variety of factors to which the questionnaire could make links, such as educational experiences, motivation, goals, attitudes, learner beliefs (also raised by Levine et al., 1996: 35). Cohen & Dörnyei (2002: 170) further emphasise the importance of (prior) language learning experiences as these “components determine how fast and how well we are likely to master the L2” (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002: 170), thus touching again on the notion of the ‘good language learner’. The influence of motivation for languages plays another important role in that “where there is a will, there is most likely a way” (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002: 172). This aspect was included to find out how participants perceive themselves in this respect, in addition to what kind of self-image they have of themselves as language learners and thoughts they express on their general ability to learn languages.

Most questionnaires used in strategy research so far are focused mainly on applying a strategy inventory without necessarily considering the contextual information in which strategy use is embedded. For the present study, I decided against using a strategy inventory as I could not assume that the same learning strategies were going to be employed by the older learners, as for the younger learners in other studies where such inventories were used, e.g. SILL by Oxford (1990: 283-291). Therefore, a more open approach was favoured, avoiding a limitation of the range of strategies at the earliest stage possible and allowing participants to respond unrestrictedly (Williams et al., 2004) in their own words and thoughts. For this purpose, I developed a questionnaire which took into account aspects relevant for understanding the context of learning strategies and was at the same time appropriate for the different participants involved and the aims of the study.

5.1.2 Think-aloud protocols

Working with the assumption that inner processes are involved in language learning and strategy use happens within the learners, think-aloud was selected to collect information on these processes. When using think-aloud protocols other insights can be provided into what a person thinks from what a person does during the protocols. Think-aloud protocols [TAP] have been widely used in different disciplines, such as psychology, education, cognitive sciences (e.g. Bowles & Leow, 2005: 417).

Within second language research, verbal reports have been applied to obtain data about L2 reading and writing (e.g. Nassaji, 2006), L2 strategies (Oxford, 1990: 193), studies into awareness and other topics (Bowles & Leow, 2005: 418).

There are various forms of think-aloud or verbal protocols as they are referred to in a wider context. Gilhooly & Green (1996) understand verbal protocols as

transcriptions that are derived from recordings of the participants' speech while they are carrying out a task under thinking-aloud instructions (Gilhooly & Green, 1996).

Think-alouds (which can involve introspection or retrospection or both) are instruments to allow more insight into those inner, mental processes going on while a learner is trying to solve a language task. Via TAPs the information processed is assumed to be accessible while still in the working memory. Graham (1997) refers to the working memory as the short-term memory but this is simply a difference in labelling rather than the object of reference. However, some psychologists, e.g. Bopp & Verhaegen (2006: 229) attribute different functions to each: the working memory can store and process, whereas the short-term memory is for storing information only.

Some strategies might be applied but these are not necessarily apparent, as they are already sufficiently automated to be stored in long-term memory, as opposed to the conscious working memory (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The understanding of the thinking and thought processes involved in the think-aloud protocols is based on Anderson's (1983) model of cognitive processing which will be presented briefly in the following paragraphs.

Cognitive model (Anderson)

From the theoretical point of view, underlying models of thought and cognition processing follow two main streams. One presents the serial (e.g. Ericsson & Simon, 1993) and the other the parallel thought model suggesting multiple simultaneous thought processes (as summarised in Gilhooly & Green, 1996). However, I will not elaborate on this differentiation at this point, as this would broaden the main focus of this study beyond the original parameters. Independent of the underlying model, it is important to recognise that both result in thinking and thinking processes.

O'Malley & Chamot (1990) base their understanding of learning strategies and the procedures involved during think-aloud processes on Anderson's model of thought control from cognitive psychology, called Adaptive Control of Thought, ACT (Anderson 1990).

Anderson recognises two different forms of knowledge: declarative and procedural. Declarative knowledge is consciously accessible and stored in small chunks. It can be applied to a variety of situations and explicitly recollected: “Wissen, das punktuell und als Ganzes erworben wird, das bewußt abgerufen werden kann und über das man zu reden vermag” (knowledge which one can learn partially or as a whole, which one can recall consciously, which one can talk about) (Timmermann, 2000: 177, my translation). Declarative knowledge entails facts and events and is linked to the associative memory. Lexical memory also refers to the declarative aspect. In opposition to that, procedural knowledge is not consciously accessible and can therefore be called automatic. This form of knowing is fixed to certain contexts, such as subtraction used for maths only. The procedural mode can be acquired differently: “sukzessive und implizit durch Übung, [es] ist automatisiert und der Reflexion und Beschreibung durch den Anwender weitgehend entzogen” (learned by successive and implicit practice, it is automatised and not accessible by reflection and description of the user) (Timmermann, 2000: 177; my translation). Motor skills and habits are organised within this form of knowledge. Procedural knowledge is consequently less flexible than declarative knowledge.

Supporting the idea of automatisisation, Anderson (1990) argues from a cognitive psychological stance that, in the process of repeated use, knowledge compilation occurs which can then lead to acquired knowledge changing from declarative into procedural knowledge. In the context of language learning this would mean that the more often certain phrases and structures have been practised the more automatic they become (Skehan, 2003). For TAPs that would mean that only those thoughts and thinking processes involved in language understanding and production which still count as declarative knowledge can be identified. Roodenrys et al. (1994) further add the age of acquisition as a determining factor for accessibility and articulation rates for words. This could then mean that acquisition of a language at an earlier age speeds up the rate of accessibility of words.

Anderson's (1983) model of cognitive processing involves two separate areas, working / short term memory and the long term memory, for two different types of knowledge, declarative and procedural. For TAPs mainly the short term memory with its declarative knowledge is central. As for the different ways of deducing knowledge from there, various forms of TAPs have been used.

Variations of think-aloud

Gilhooly & Green (1996) differentiate between think-aloud and introspection. Introspection requires more training of the participants in order to report in the necessary format, whereas think-aloud focuses on the individual self and requires only everyday terms to be used by the participants. Introspection allows learners to “provide unanalysed, unedited insights into what they are doing. The self-observation method (introspection and retrospection) has the intention of involving the learner more in the analysis process” (Cohen, 1991: 110).

Graham (1997) sees no clear-cut differentiation between introspection and think-aloud (similarly Nunan, 1992: 115) and both can therefore be applied effectively in strategy research. As a disadvantage students might forget to mention certain strategies used after the event took place, as they get carried away with other previous or concurrent thoughts whilst reporting. Someren et al. (1994) point out that think-aloud “requires concurrent verbalisation and discourages interpretation on the part of the subject.” (Someren et al., 1994: 22). For retrospection “information must be retrieved from long-term memory and then verbalised” (Someren et al., 1994: 22). The loss of some thoughts of the original process might occur, while more time may be needed to retrieve thoughts again. However, this contrasted form of retrospection is not clearly separable from think-aloud. During the work on a given task, learners tend to mix all three approaches, although one or the other might dominate depending on various factors, such as the specific task, the stage of the task or the ease with which learners are able to carry out a specific task. Learners

might by simply externalising thoughts going through their head, then make inferences about the processes involved and finally make an observation which would suggest an element of looking back on what they had done. (Graham, 1997: 43)

Similarly, teenage students in Branch’s (2000) study reported mixed preferences for concurrent or retrospective forms of thinking aloud. Critics of this instrument refer mainly to its limited reliability and validity on the basis of three main issues (Ellis, 1994):

1. There is the notion of incompleteness of verbal reports, as they do not allow insights into automated processes or guarantee a complete account. As Someren et al. (1994: 30) emphasise: “only the contents of working memory are verbalised instead of the entire cognitive process”. They link this incompleteness to the problem that

sometimes verbalization does not keep up with the cognitive process (...). This is consistent with the observation that occasionally protocols contain ‘holes’ of which it is almost necessary to assume that an intermediate thought occurred here.” (Someren et al., 1994: 33)

2. Seliger & Shohamy (1989) also mention the issue of truthfulness or lack of validity due to flaws in the application of the TAP (as reported in Ericsson & Simon, 1993). However, Schooler et al. (1993) even suggest incorporating an interval of two minutes devoted to an unrelated activity as this brief interval further strengthens and clarifies the report given by the participants.
3. Reporting on what someone is doing whilst doing it may also impact on the task being undertaken, although Ericsson & Simon (1993; also Ericsson, 2002) claim that the report does not necessarily interfere with the task performance. They further emphasise that “verbalisation could be expected to be accurate only if the report was made concurrently with the task-related cognitive activity” (Gilhooly & Green, 1996). Leow (2004: 38) refers back to Ericsson & Simon (1993) denying any impact of the think-aloud on the underlying processes, except that under think-aloud it “may take longer to complete a task” (similarly Ericsson, 2006: 228). Another reason for taking more time could also be that more than one language system is activated during the process of think-aloud, especially if it is undertaken involving two different languages. As Cook & Bassetti (2005) state for writing:

When L2WS [second/foreign language writing system] users are using one of their two writing systems, both Ws are simultaneously activated in their minds at some level: readers are slower at recognising L2 words whose orthographic patterns are legal in both their writing systems than those that are legal in only one of their writing systems. (Cook & Bassetti, 2005: 47)

The concentration on verbal processes in TAPs leaves aside any consideration of body language. It is acknowledged that individuals express thoughts and emotions through body language. However, this aspect was excluded from the present study. A study recording non-verbal as well as verbal expression could provide additional data on individuals' affective responses and maybe on the subconscious thoughts underlying any verbally expressed ideas.

To summarise, the method of TAPs is seen as a suitable way for eliciting information about inner thinking and connecting processes. Insights into the processes of the working memory can be of specific interest for the context of foreign language acquisition as Ellis (1997) states:

- Language learning demands the learning of sequences.
- The working memory allows short-term maintenance of sequence information and
- The short-term rehearsal of sequences promotes the long-term memory

In language learning research, verbal reports have been used mainly to explore reading and writing processes or as a pedagogical tool for raising awareness of language learners (e.g. Kucan & Beck, 1997; Oxford, 1996: 3). TAPs have been used in a number of studies of language learning strategies (e.g. Rubin, 1981; Graham, 1997). Owing to the difficulty of accessing those inner processes involved in strategy use, Macaro (1997) claims that “no single research instrument has yet been found which can provide a definite taxonomy”. As a working basis for undertaking research into learning strategies, I follow Graham’s (1997: 47) understanding of think-aloud which she defines as “comments made by students while performing a language task”.

Depending on the individual task given, a range of different learning strategies can be applied. Some of them are more often found with one of the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Overall, the use of strategies is relatively widespread. The production of TAPs depends on the specific tasks given to trigger the thinking processes. Further theoretical considerations specifically related to the language tasks will not be introduced here but referred to during the analysis, as and where appropriate.

5.1.3 Interviews

Interviews were adopted to supplement and further illustrate the data obtained by the questionnaires and TAPs. Interviews are particularly useful for providing a forum for individual informants to elaborate on their personal thoughts, in this case on their view of what is relevant for their language learning and their strategy use, and consequently what their beliefs are and what they decide is important to mention. For this study, interviews enabled me to look at the students more ‘holistically’ by understanding their strategy use as a part of their ongoing learning processes influenced by other factors as well. Therefore, individual interviews were preferred, because by this I could elicit more precise and differentiated information compared to group interviews or focus groups. Group interviews make possible the collection of larger amounts of data in a limited period of time. However, there can be logistical difficulties in setting them up (appropriate times and places). There is also the danger of certain participants dominating the group processes and, as a consequence, limiting the quality of the data obtained. Usually, group interviews serve a

different purpose: e.g. an interest in mainstream trends as opposed to individual opinions. However, group interviews allow the researcher to remain more in the background and therefore reduce his or her direct influence on the data elicitation process.

Individual, semi-structured interviews were chosen for the present study. The semi-structured format allowed me to:

- Ensure that theoretical aspects of relevance for strategies based on the literature were covered.
- Ensure that theoretical insights about older learners, as suggested in the literature, were included.
- Provide informants with space to explore and develop their own thoughts.

The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that a researcher has control over the main topics to be covered without restricting the order or way informants report their accounts (Yates, 1998: 167). “The influence of the researcher on what is said” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 129) can therefore be minimised and informants can express their positions in their individual words. Accounts collected can also be in greater depth and provide additional information which can help to understand the embedding of strategy use in a wider context, clarify any ambiguities or complexity (Merriam, 1998: 74). As emphasised by Yamamori et al. (2003: 383), strategy data collected in questionnaires and structured interviews is limited: it provides information on frequencies, but “the frequency of strategy use might not tell the complete story” (Yamamori et al., 2003: 383). Often this format follows initial unstructured (pilot) interviews in which issues of importance for the specific topic have emerged.

I decided against the two other models for interviews, the structured and the unstructured. The nature of a structured interview can be seen as being close to the format of a questionnaire. The interviewer controls the agenda with the same interview guide and the same questions for all informants in exactly the same order (Yates, 1998: 167). Information collected in this way tends to be scaled or yes-no. The unstructured format is at the opposite end of the spectrum to the structured. Only minimal interview prompts are prepared by the researcher, the informant controls the interview process.

Semi-structured interviews complement the data gathered through the questionnaire as they provide more personal information on wider issues, such as learner beliefs, learning history, longer-term strategies used etc. Information obtained through this instrument can therefore be related to information collected in the questionnaire and also open up a wider understanding of the complexity of strategies as they are embedded into the whole person of a learner. This highly individually oriented format brings also a high level of subjectivity with it:

Thus the interview-respondent interaction is a complex phenomenon. Both parties bring biases, predisposition, attitudes, and physical characteristics that color the interaction and the data elicited. (Merriam, 1998: 87)

Consequently, the accounts presented by informants display not merely a “self-presentation of the interviewee” but “a self-preserving self-presentation” (Wengraf, 2001: 117).

Summary

The overall aim of the present study is to present detailed accounts of the strategy use of older language learners and highlight any patterns emerging. Further, information about salient features of older learners was collected to provide a more comprehensive picture. To collect data a qualitatively oriented approach was chosen, which allowed for triangulation. Questionnaires served to generate general insights into learning strategy use and related issues for older learners of different languages. TAPs set out to shed light on the use of learning strategies, when applied by a sample of those who responded to the questionnaire. Concluding interviews further provided contextual information on the factors influencing learning strategies and the relevant background of older learners. The theoretical framework used for the data collection then allows “to discover the correct manner of interpreting of whatever data we have” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 131). Subjectivity and bias were identified as continuous elements at all stages of the project and will be referred to at different points throughout the text wherever appropriate.

6 Data collection

Having introduced the underlying theoretical and methodological framework of the current study, this chapter will now focus on the process of data collection, including aspects such as access and the site(s), the sample and participants, and a presentation of the methods used for data collection.

6.1 Access

The choice of the location was determined by the access it provided to a relatively high number of older language learners in a geographically concentrated and easily accessible area. The small scale of the study enabled a single researcher to undertake the project within a relatively limited period of time. Preference was given to those institutions where German for adult learners was offered. The U3A (see section 2.2.1) in a university town in the south of England was chosen as the main site for the study owing to the high concentration of older learners enrolled there. Two other local further education colleges were also involved, one of which offered a broad range of courses from GCSE to vocational training, while the other offered mainly secondary-level qualifications alongside a range of courses in an adult education programme. The total number of students of German studied was 27. A further 45 adult learners of other languages (modern Arabic, French, Italian, Russian and Spanish) allowed a comparison between German and the other language groups. All the learners in the study were adults aged over 50 (for more details on participants see section 6.2). Those groups studying German are referred to as German groups and students of German. Students of other languages are referred to as other language students (or participants) and other language groups.

I arranged unrestricted access to the U3A orally with the university office several weeks before the data collection was to begin. College A and their German tutors were contacted in writing some weeks (September 2004, see letter in appendices A and B) before the beginning of the study. One student from college A agreed to participate. Two German students from college B also participated, a third withdrew before the start of the data collection owing to lack of time.

Data collection took place between October 2004 and July 2005. At the beginning of this phase, I visited participating German courses at all three institutions in order to build a rapport with tutors and students and to hand out questionnaires to participants. The

questionnaires were to be filled in at home and returned to me either in class or through the post. All questionnaires for the students of other languages were administered by post and returned to me in stamped, addressed envelopes.

	German language groups (27)	Other language groups (45)	Time
Access negotiated	U3A and two further colleges	U3A	Summer to winter 2004
Questionnaires administered	Personally distributed and collected, some returned by post	All distributed and collected by post	Nov 2004 to Jun 2005
Think-aloud protocols administered	Personally distributed and collected, some returned by post	Did not participate	Feb 2005 to Jun 2005
One-to-one interviews	All carried out personally	Did not participate	Jun 2005 to Aug 2005

Table 3: Administration and time schedule of data collection

During the next phase of data collection, 15 sets of language tasks (reading, writing, speaking and listening) together with instructions on how to undertake the TAPs at home were handed out to participating students of German. The tasks and reflections on them were recorded at home by students on audio tapes provided by me. Four TAPs were recorded in my presence as participants did not have appropriate recording facilities at home. Recorded protocols were either collected by me or returned by post.

During the next stage of data collection, 21 German students of varying levels of proficiency were interviewed individually in order to gain a more rounded picture of older learners and individual differences.

As I had tutored one of the classes at the U3A for three years, a third of the German students were known to me which eased negotiating access with the parties involved. Contact had included occasional social activities outside the classroom during the year.

Data collection took longer than anticipated, stretching over a period of 11 months. The personal way of distributing and collecting the German questionnaires contributed to a prolonged phase of data collection.

6.2 Selection of participants

Selection was undertaken in two main phases. As age was central to the study, participants had to fulfil two criteria: being over 50, the age at which the third age is considered to commence; and being learners of any language. An appropriate sample of all students who were enrolled in any language class at the local U3A was identified as appropriate for this age range. As everyone on the site was included, this form of sampling could also be described as “site sampling” (Knight, 2002: 122). 69 students of varying languages and different levels of language proficiency decided voluntarily to take part in the first stage of the research project, for the questionnaires. At this stage, students of all languages were included to provide a general picture of issues on language learning and learning strategies.

For the following phase, a smaller sample of 27 (out of 33) students of German was selected from this group of all language learners, to participate in the more in depth study for which think-aloud protocols and interviews were used in addition to the questionnaires:

<i>Language class</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>U3A</i>	<i>College 1</i>	<i>College 2</i>	<i>Questionnaire</i>	<i>Think-aloud</i>	<i>Interview</i>
Arabic colloquial	intermediate	2			2		
French Express Yourself	near-native	5			5		
German Conversation	near-native	8			8	2	7
German Literature	near-native	5			5		1
German	intermediate	11			11	10	10
German AS-level	Advanced	0	1	2	3	3	3
Greek Modern	intermediate	2			2		
Greek Speaking	intermediate	1			1		
Italian Advanced	near-native	3			3		
Italian Advanced	near-native	4			4		
Italian Intermediate	intermediate	4			4		
Italian Elementary	beginners	4			4		
Italian Beginners	beginners	2			2		
Russian 2	intermediate	3			3		
Russian 4	Advanced	2			2		
Russian Continuation	near-native	3			3		
Spanish Conversation	near-native	6			6		
Spanish Beginners	beginners	4			4		
Total number of participants:		69	1	2	72	15	22

Table 4: Students grouped according to language, level of proficiency, institution and data collection method

I then focused on students of German only, based on the following criteria:

1. German is the language where I have expertise in teaching and researching.
2. A comparison of the data obtained from students of other languages and students of the German groups would allow me to highlight any differences in strategy use which might be related to differences in language systems and characteristics of older language learners. Further, issues of representativity and generalisability of the small sample could be addressed.
3. In order to take account of the hypothesis that different stages of language competence involve different sets of learning strategies (Chamot & Küpper, 1989: 99), levels from beginner to near-native were included.

Of these 27 students of German, 24 were students of the local U3A, three attended German classes at the two other institutions, College A and College B. These three students were of a different level to the German groups at the U3A.

All language classes were divided into four levels: beginners, intermediate, advanced and near-native. These titles were adjusted for clarity and consistency (e.g. one group labelled themselves 'elementary' but was classified as 'beginners'). The level identified was that of the main element of the language course. For example, if conversation was the main aim of a study group, the 'near-native' descriptor referred to aspects of speaking, not to other skills, such as writing. This idea complied with Bialystok's understanding of language proficiency as "dynamic and context-dependent" (1991: 77) including the linguistic level of the learner as well as the specific situation of language use.

Gender was not central to the study and was therefore not one of the main criteria for selection or analysis of data. Independent self-taught learners were excluded from this study for practical reasons, as were older distance learners, for example those from the Open University.

The project was carried out in accordance with the Ethical Guidelines of the British Association of Applied Linguistics 1994 (<http://www.baal.org.uk/goodprac.htm>). All participants were informed of these both orally and in writing. It was pointed out to each individual participant that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time (appendix C). All participants gave their written consent to their participation in the study and none of them withdrew once the data collection process had begun.

6.3 *Methods used*

In order to uncover language learning strategies employed by learners of German, mixed methods were applied to support the explorative nature of the study. The study is original primarily because adult learners older than 50 and their use of learning strategies were under scrutiny. However, to study language learning strategies the same instruments were applied in the present study as for learning strategies in general (including mainly young adult learners). A variety of methods was used to trigger the collection of different data and thus provide a better understanding of the experience of older language learners from different perspectives.

6.3.1 Questionnaires

The German questionnaires (appendix D) were given to students during class to maximise the response rate (about 82%). This approach had proved successful in the pilot study (see section 5.1). Students filled them in at home and returned them to me in the following weeks. Even the provision of self-addressed stamped envelopes might not have boosted the response rate to the same extent. This was illustrated by the lower response rate (about 31%) of other language questionnaires (Arabian, French, Greek, Italian, Russian and Spanish).

Questionnaires (appendix D) were adjusted for the other language students so that they related to the appropriate language. Students could choose to fill in only sections B and C if they had already filled in a questionnaire for any other language. As agreed with class tutors, questionnaires and stamped, addressed envelopes were left at the office of the U3A to be administered by the tutors, accompanied by a thank-you letter (appendix E). Three students filled in a questionnaire for a German class as well as for another language. The time frame for processing all questionnaires is outlined below:

Questionnaires	Time	Participants
Handed out	November 2004	Students of German (27 out of 33 responded)
Collected by me	February 2005	
Distributed by post to tutors	April 2005	Students of other languages (45 out of 144 responded)
Returned by post	May 2005	

Table 5: Distribution and collection of questionnaires, including time scale

Each questionnaire included two copies of a consent form, which included information on the research project, the planned time scale and contact details of the researcher (appendix C). One copy was returned with the filled-in questionnaire, the other was to be kept by participants.

The questionnaire consisted of eight pages, separated into three main sections on:

- A) experiences of previous languages learned
(language, institution, certificates, media, contact)
- B) issues related to learning the current language,
(strategies used, strengths and weaknesses, time spent on learning)
- C) demographic characteristics
(age, gender, nationality, occupation, professional qualifications, other interests).

The main areas covered were identified as basic elements of any questionnaire on language learning by Dörnyei (2003: 122). A section on learning strategies was added in line with the focus of the present study.

6.3.2 Think-aloud protocols

A selected sample from the German groups (mainly students at intermediate and advanced levels) then participated in the TAPs to provide an insight into processes of strategy use while working on certain language tasks. Interviews and TAPs were not video-recorded as the focus was on verbal protocols rather than body language. In addition, video-recording might have changed the behaviour of participants and produced negative feelings towards the procedure and the study.

Reading, writing, speaking and listening were selected as the main skills for language use. Although TAPs were mainly applied for research into reading and writing, speaking and listening were also included to cover the whole range of different language skills. The same method for data elicitation had to be chosen for all language skills to avoid discrepancies evoked by the use of different methods. The pilot study (in chapter 5.1) demonstrated that different language skills were likely to prompt the use of different learning strategies. The emphasis was on following or concurrent reflection whilst undertaking the language tasks: on the way students solved the tasks rather than how well they performed on them. For the listening in particular retrospective TAPs were collected due to the impossibility of listening and concurrently reporting about inner thoughts without missing parts of the listening

extract. Participants could either use their first language (L1) or the language they were studying (L2) to express their thoughts in order to minimise constraints on TAPs produced by their individual language proficiency and confidence.

15 students from the German groups made up the sample, 10 at intermediate level, three at advanced level and two at near-native level (appendices J, K, L show the TAPs employed for the present study). Everybody in the German groups was given the opportunity to take part in the TAPs. As participation was voluntary, some decided not to undertake these language tasks, mostly students of the advanced German groups. They felt either beyond the level of doing any tasks specifically focusing on their understanding of language in use or did not like working with particular language skills to which they attached no importance. The German beginners were excluded for the present study as I was their tutor. This situation would have been expected to influence the data collection.

	Intermediate German students	Advanced German students	Near-native German students	
warm-up	Alice Kurz in Tübingen	Alice Kurz in Tübingen	Alice Kurz in Tübingen	
reading	Mein Bruder das Gewohnheitstier	Weihnachten bei Thomas Walter in Leipzig	Wuppertal - ein Standort präsentiert sich	
speaking	Leben in C, Vorteile und Nachteile	Leben in C, Vorteile und Nachteile	Leben in C, Vorteile und Nachteile	
writing	Was lieben Sie an der deutschen Sprache und was nicht?	Was lieben Sie an der deutschen Sprache und was nicht?	Was lieben Sie an der deutschen Sprache und was nicht?	
listening	Interview about "Leisure activities"	Interview about "Generationen"	Interview about "Generationen"	
Number of participants:	10	3	2	15

Table 6: Think-aloud protocol participants, by level of language proficiency and task

Participants were allocated to a level depending on the class they currently attended (as described in section 6.2). The TAPs for each level contained five language tasks: a warm-up reading task plus tasks relating to reading, speaking, writing and listening. A warm-up is recommended to accustom participants to the procedures involved during the protocol (Leow & Morgan-Short, 2004: 36). The underlying hypothesis was that different strategies would be triggered, depending on the language skill used as the production of TAPs is strongly related to the task and instruction provided (Green, 2002: 125). The inclusion of these four major language skills also catered for individual participants who had different skill preferences.

The tasks were ordered to allow students to move from a more receptive task (reading) to the more proactive task (writing, speaking and listening). In the same way as Graham (1997: 18) tasks were chosen because:

- They suited the different levels of the participants,
- the general topic area accommodated individual interests,
- they were challenging enough to trigger any German language production.

To ease comparison, speaking, writing and warm-up tasks were nearly identical at all levels (see appendices J, K and L).

Warm-up reading: advanced and intermediate-level students received the same extract.

Intermediate students were given a slightly shortened version so that they would not expend too much time and energy on the warm-up task. The shortened version was also designed to avoid feelings of frustration which could have affected students' attitude or which, at worst, could have caused them to give up without attempting the main TAP tasks.

Writing: participants were asked to describe in three paragraphs what they liked and disliked about the German language.

Speaking: participants were asked to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of living in the city where the study took place, allowing students to express themselves at any level of proficiency.

Reading and listening: These tasks varied, depending on the students' level. Each task was intended to provide participants with topics so general and similar that they could be undertaken without specialist knowledge of a subject.

Intermediate students were given an extract from daily life which allowed them to understand at least parts of the text, if not all of it. Phrases and vocabulary related to everyday life activities, such as getting up, getting dressed and going to work by bus. New vocabulary and phrases were introduced to trigger the use of strategies to overcome comprehension difficulties. Grabe & Stoller (2002) report that "skilled readers need to have receptive mastery of 95% or more words" to allow reading

comprehension of a text. Advanced and near-native students received a text on *Weihnachten* and *Wuppertal* which included some subject-specific words.

Two extracts were selected for the listening task. Both were recorded at the beginning of side B of the tape provided for the participants to record their think-aloud protocols on. The topic for intermediate students was spare time and weekend activities. This was presented as an interview involving a woman and a man. The speed and language presented in the interview reflected everyday language (appendix J). The extract for advanced students also contained a short interview in male and female voices. This extract dealt with ageing and its effects on society (appendix K).

Consideration was given to the time required to finish all the tasks, to avoid stretching individuals' concentration over too long a period. However, tasks had to be complex enough to provide participants with a suitable challenge so that they would experience challenges to their understanding of grammar, vocabulary or syntax at times. Participants were asked to summarise the German content in English. This allowed me to understand the level of participants' comprehension of the extracts presented.

In order to minimise the effects of the presence of the researcher while undertaking the language task, students were asked to carry out the tasks at home and were provided with audio tapes on which to record their TAPs. This approach was chosen to avoid "overshadowing" (Ericsson, 2002: 985) by the researcher when too much control is exercised by the instructions/example provided and repeated comments during the protocol process (The presence of the researcher during the performance was identified as contributing to this effect in the pilot study, section 5.1). Further, the interaction between the researcher and the participant can be shaped by cultural and personality factors, as TAPs are a "human methodology" (Smagorinsky, 1994: 6, 16). The collection of these recordings lasted several months as some students had difficulty finding the appropriate technical equipment while others had conflicting commitments such as family and holidays.

Only two near-native students were asked to complete the TAPs. Half of the near-native participants had taught German or had learned German when they were young. German had influenced them throughout their lives. These students also described themselves as "maintainers" of German: they were not learning the language and grammar, instead they were working on maintaining their standard. These participants preferred to be interviewed

rather than complete tasks which reminded them of the early stages of their ‘journey of learning German’. Based on classroom observations, I concluded that these participants’ German was so good that the TAPs would not produce sufficient evidence of overcoming difficulties with language tasks. The processes involved when these students used German could be called automatic, in contrast to a controlled form of cognitive processing (Eysenck, 2001: 77). Processing German automatically means not being aware of language production taking place. It becomes a natural response to a situation in which the language is required, and such students do not have to stop and control their language output before using the L2. However, two near-native students were asked to complete the TAPs as both had started German when over 50 and had achieved very high levels. Thus their strategy use could be expected to shed light on how they had achieved this command of German, with reference to the notion of the “good language learner”.

6.3.3 Interviews

After the think-aloud protocols, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with some students of German. These were intended to reveal any aspects of students’ learning which had not been covered and to provide contextual information for understanding older language learners.

All students who had undertaken TAPs were interviewed to corroborate data provided by the different research instruments and to collect feedback on the TAPs. Six more near-native students were selected according to the information they provided in their biographies which promised interesting insights into how they had mastered German again, some after breaks of as long as 30 years.

<i>Level</i>	<i>Think-aloud</i>	<i>Interview</i>
Near-native	2	8
Intermediate	10	10
Advanced	3	3
Total:	15	21

Table 7: Number of participants in TAPs and interviews by level of language proficiency

A cross-section of interviewees was selected to present a range of interesting issues. Some were considered to be relatively typical, others were considered to be atypical. Interviews took place at pre-arranged times at either the interviewee’s or the interviewer’s home, whichever suited participants best. Public locations were not considered owing to the noise

levels (music) present which would have affected the clarity of the recording. All interviews were recorded on Olympus DSS 2000 recorders and then transferred onto a PC for transcription and analysis.

Data collected in these interviews were mainly unstructured and only partly predefined by the theoretical concepts used (see interview prompts in appendix N). The wording of the questions was adjusted to individual respondents and situations, including a mix of questions as differentiated by Merriam (1998: 77), such as

Interpretive: “Would you say learning German now is different from what you expected?”

Ideal position: “What do you think the ideal language learner would be like?”

Devil’s advocate: “Some people would say that people of your age don’t need to learn a language any more. What would you say to them?”

Hypothetical: “Suppose someone wanted to start learning German and didn’t know how. What would you say to them?”

Summary

This chapter focused on processes involved in the collection of data for learning strategies as used by older learners. The main site of the study is a branch of the University of the Third Age as most of the students there are within the target age bracket for the present study. 72 older students of various languages were selected to participate in the questionnaires. Out of this sample, a smaller group of 15 German students of various levels of language proficiency participated in the think-aloud protocols. These were followed by concluding interviews with 22 German students (of which 15 took part in the think-aloud protocols as well).

7 Analysis

In this chapter I present the analysis of the data in three main blocks in correspondence with the research instruments employed to obtain the data:

1. Questionnaires (chapter 7.1)
2. Think-aloud Protocols (chapter 7.2)
3. Interviews (chapter 7.3)

Interviews further complemented information about older language learners which served to embed the learning strategies in a wider context. The data collected was mainly qualitative. The analysis also included checking the data on possible correlations between the variables. However, no such correlations could be found between the factors involved, such as length of TAPs and number of strategies identified or gender and strategy use or number of languages previously studied and strategy use. The data is presented quantitatively whenever this was the clearest way to support an argument, highlighting frequencies or distributions of the findings.

The analysis was undertaken following Knight's (2002) approach:

In the interest of simplicity, though, analysis is treated as (1) indexing or coding the data (2) developing and reflecting on interpretations of the data. (Knight, 2002: 182)

Coding refers to the marking of similar themes and topics to be grouped in one category, with other themes being separated and contrasted. All themes gathered from the different data collection instruments can then be related, supplementing or contrasting with each other. Finally, findings can be considered in relation to issues identified in the literature on language learning strategies and older language learners.

The main approach to interview analysis used in this study was content analysis, with an emphasis on conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis followed Wilkinson & Birmingham (2003: 68) by focusing on frequencies of concepts extracted from any verbal products.

Wilkinson & Birmingham (2003: 68) described the following analytical steps:

1. Select level or unit of analysis
2. Identify the concepts involved
3. Decide whether to code for incidence or frequency of concepts
4. Establish coding rules
5. Code information
6. Analyse results.

Often, inter-rater analysis involving more than one researcher is expected to support the validity of the analysis and the findings of the present study. Such analysis would then provide different views of and insights into the data (e.g. in Meijer et al., 2006: 222). However, the involvement of a second coder does not necessarily support the validity of the analysis, as Brice (2005) emphasises. A second rater can add a different understanding and, consequently, different set of codes owing to two main factors. Firstly, the rater who collected that data has a more in-depth knowledge of the situation at the time the data was collected, the personality / character / impression of the participants, their reactions and emotional state. Following from this, a second coder who was not present during data collection could interpret the transcripts differently as only the words are accessible as a basis for the coding. Secondly, reading of the same sentences by different people is bound to lead to different codings and interpretations, let alone the additional time and resources required. Brice (2005: 167) reports agreements in her inter-rater analysis of 72.5% and 81.5%. Where raters apply different codes there is scope for discussing and improving the coding scheme used.

As there was only one investigator involved in the current study, rater analysis (or coder stability) was applied by analysing the data in two main blocks with a break of some weeks between periods of analysis. This approach was designed to uncover any discrepancies and overlaps between the first and the second analysis and thus to ensure a consistent procedure of analysis. Rater analysis can support the validity of the data analysis and its findings.

7.1 Questionnaire analysis (for all languages)

The questionnaire response rate was high with 27 out of 33, i.e. about 82%, of the participants of the German groups and 45 out of 144 or about 31% of students of other languages returning them within a period of one week to three months. This response rate can be rated as fairly normal according to McNeill (1985), giving a response rate of 30 to 40% for postal questionnaires and around 80-90% for face-to-face administered questionnaires. Answers were filled in as anticipated by the researcher. Some participants attached separate sheets and letters to explain more clearly either answers to specific questions or wider issues raised by the questionnaire. Questionnaire results include students of German as well of other languages. Where there were differences important enough to highlight, I will distinguish students of German from students of other languages.

Some students produced very precise accounts of how they enhance their learning, others just mentioned a key word or referred to a previous section if they had already described what they did in their answer to another question. It is not known to me to what extent the participants had been trained in the use of learning strategies, specifically language learning strategies. Participants either could not remember any such training or were not conscious of what they had done when they studied in the past. Only some of the participants identified an approach which they had applied to various languages. However, as a former tutor of German at the U3A I was aware that the German students may not have been specifically trained in language learning strategies.

Various factors may have contributed to variations in the style and completeness of the answers provided in the questionnaires. Some participants commented on the usefulness and 'perfectness' of the examples given, suggesting that some answers may not have been filled in as they have been considered less 'professional' by the participants than the examples provided. Consequently, the examples may have produced an adverse effect by reducing the number of strategies described by each participant. Participants may have judged that other techniques they used were of no interest in this context.

In addition, they may not have been aware that some techniques were worth mentioning as language learning strategies, either because they were perceived as too ordinary or because they were used unconsciously. However, it must also be taken into account that people who fill in questionnaires on any topic do so for a variety of reasons and have varying amounts of time and effort to expend on the questions.

As tentative trends, differences and similarities emerged, they were expressed quantitatively where possible to ease interpretation of the findings. In accordance with the research questions, the general background of the participants is presented first, followed by findings on strategy use and wider language learning issues as covered in the questionnaire. Some of the wider issues raised, such as memory and learner beliefs, are discussed in the interview section to avoid duplication of information.

7.1.1 Background of the participants

The sample of older learners in the current study indicated that they were well educated, and active in a variety of ways in making use of their time. This high level of education of participants in the present study (60% with university degrees or higher qualifications) is above national average. The Carnegie Inquiry identified that about 60% of people aged 50-69 had no qualification in 1993 (Carnegie Inquiry into the third age, 1993: 52). Participants in the current project appeared to be middle class conforming to the general trend that

Adult education, whether vocational, academic or hobbyist, is still a middle-class preserve (Maxted, 1999: 19).

Voluntary learning is perceived to be part of the culture pattern of higher socio-economic groups (Maxted, 1999: 62).

As expected, those who were already fairly well-educated in their youth stayed on and / or returned to education now as they are older (also confirmed by Findsen, 2005: 3). Moreover, social prosperity is seen in relation to the level of education: the higher the level of education the higher the level of prosperity achieved (as Schuller et al., 2004: 4 report from McMahon, 1999).

German students reported slightly more experience of language learning than students of other languages (see table 9, page 74). It could therefore be assumed that the majority of the students had participated in some form of adult education and could thus be classified as (continuous) learners, in contrast to non-learners. Supporting this hypothesis, Maxted (1999) reports that people who discontinue with learning in later life were more likely to have left full-time education earlier than those he classifies as learners: "Those who are already well-educated are much more likely to continue with education and training throughout their lives." (Maxted, 1999: 34) More education throughout life can further have impacted on individuals' cognitive abilities (specifically verbal) for three main reasons: A more complex neural network may have developed, a more active lifestyle may have been adopted and a more resourceful "capacity in the form of a more elaborate set of basis skills or cognitive strategies" may have become accessible (Meijer et al., 2006: 287). The mean age of participants in the German groups was 68, for the other language participants it was 65. The overall average age of participants was 66. Most students were between 61 and 75.

	Female	Male	All participants
56 - 60	3	0	3
61 - 65	20	2	22
66 - 70	16	9	25
71 - 75	7	5	12
75 - 80	4	2	6
81 - 85	0	0	0
86 - 90	0	2	2
	50	20	(two did not reveal their age)

Table 8: All participants by age group and gender

All participants except four were of British nationality. Their level of education was high. 4 students in the German groups and two in the other groups had PhDs. Fifteen of the other German students and 27 of other language students (nearly 60% of participants) held a university degree. Most other participants had some professional qualification. 31 students are former teachers or lecturers, 13 had been involved in administration, seven had a background in allied health professions. Students' other professions varied from manager to legal adviser, police officer or housewife. Overall the level of education of the participants in the present study was about four times higher than the average level of education in the UK (OECD, 2006).

Participants were asked to name three hobbies. Similar hobbies were grouped and the following activities were found to be the most popular:

- Gardening (cited 22 times)
- Reading (cited 23 times)
- Music (cited 17 times)
- Travel (cited 16 times)
- Walking/hiking (cited 15 times)
- Art (cited 11 times)
- Sewing/knitting/embroidery (cited 9 times)

All these activities and the overall levels of education could be interpreted as indicators that the social background of the participants was mainly well-educated middle-class. Similar characteristics are reported in the Carnegie Inquiry (1993: 62) (also Victor, 2005: 213).

Past language learning experiences

22 students had experiences of learning three languages, 15 had learned two languages, 15 had learned four languages and 11 had learned five. All participants had some previous experience of learning a language.

Number of languages learned	Students in German groups	Students in other language groups	All students
1	0	3	3
2	5	10	15
3	9	13	22
4	6	9	15
5	5	6	11
6	0	3	3
7	1	1	2
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	1	0	1
mean	3.8	3.4	72

Table 9: Total number of languages learned by students

This can partly be explained by the fact that most of the students had studied one or two languages while they were at school. The majority had French as their first foreign language (23 of the 27 German students and 43 of the 45 students of other languages). 17 learners of other languages and 10 learners of German had studied German as their second foreign language at school. Latin having been the fourth of the languages most often learned was due to the requirements of the school curriculum in Britain at the time when participants attended school. When the mean number of languages learned by students of German is compared with the mean number of languages learned by students of other languages, students of German appeared to have a tendency to have studied one more language than the other students. This was mainly related to one of the German students having studied ten languages.

The majority of all participants had a variety of previous language learning experiences, mainly with the major Western European languages: 64 had learned French, 50 German, 27 Italian, 22 Spanish and 24 Latin (a similar distribution of past languages learned is reported in Naiman et al., 1978, 1995). These were followed by Russian which 15 of the participants had studied.

<i>Language learned</i>	<i>Number of students who learned this language among the 27 participants in the German groups</i>	<i>Number of students who learned this language among the 45 students of other languages</i>	<i>Total number of students who learned this language</i>
Afrikaans	1	2	3
Arabic classic	2	1	3
Arabic modern	1	2	3
Bantu	0	1	1
Chinese	0	1	1
Dutch	0	1	1
French	24	40	64
German	27	23	50
Greek classical	4	0	4
Greek modern	0	3	3
Indonesian	0	1	1
Irish	0	1	1
Icelandic	1	0	1
Italian	6	21	27
Latin	12	12	24
Romaic	1	0	1
Russian	3	12	15
Spanish	6	16	22
Swedish	1	2	3
Turkish	0	1	1

Table 10: Individual languages studied by students of German, students of other languages and all students

Most of the languages mentioned by fewer than 15 participants had been started because of relatives and partners or owing to periods of living or working in another country (except for Arabic modern).

For most of the participants in the German groups, German was either the second or fourth foreign language they had learned during their life:

	<i>1st foreign language learned</i>	<i>2nd foreign language learned</i>	<i>3rd foreign language learned</i>	<i>4th foreign language learned</i>	<i>5th foreign language learned</i>
Number of students giving German as their:	2	12	2	10	1

Table 11: Participants of German groups where the language currently studied is in the following position of all languages learned so far

This split can be linked to about half of the German groups working at a very high level (near-native), having started German at school or at some stage early in their life and the other half having started German as a new language later in their lives, since retirement.

Most of the students (15) of other languages were currently attending classes in their third foreign language. Overall, classes attended seemed to be more mixed than those attended by

students of German, with roughly equal numbers working on their first, second, fourth and fifth foreign language.

Number of students giving the language they were currently learning, either	1st foreign language learned	2nd foreign language learned	3rd foreign language learned	4th foreign language learned	5th foreign language learned	7th foreign language learned
- Arabic - Spanish - Russian - Italian - Greek - French or - modern Arabic as their:	6	8	15	9	6	1

Table 12: Participants of all other languages where the language currently studied is in the following position of all languages learned so far

Five participants from the German groups and three students of other languages had a first degree in languages.

Reasons for studying a language now

Students from all groups gave the same reasons for learning the language:

	German groups (27)				Other language groups (45)			
	agree	neither	disagree	no answer	agree	neither	disagree	no answer
I'm interested in the culture.	15	7	1	4	30	8	1	6
It is of practical use for me.	16	2	3	6	30	2	7	6
I'm interested in language learning.	14	5	4	4	26	7	7	5
I enjoy the other students' company.	10	8	2	7	22	13	2	8
I have studied the language in the past.	19	0	4	4	26	0	11	8
I have family who speak this language.	3	1	11	12	11	2	15	17
I have friends who speak this language.	13	1	6	7	18	1	13	13

Table 13: Reasons for learning another language

Nearly two-thirds of all participants gave all the above reasons for learning the language, excluding the one relating to having family who spoke the language. Family who spoke the target language was the least cited factor; more participants agreed that friends were a

catalyst. The importance of culture, practical use and interest in language learning in general was about equal for both groups, roughly half agreed to these motives for learning the language. The option giving any other reasons was not widely taken up, some specified their cultural interest by saying that they liked literature, films or music. One student of German began her study of German when she became co-ordinator of a twinning exchange programme involving her English town and a German city.

Any changes of motives for learning a language over time were not captured by this questionnaire. However, the interviews were intended to produce more relevant data on this issue.

7.1.2 Language learning strategies used

Graham's taxonomy (1997: 175) was applied, although some difficulties were encountered. Some strategies were so ambiguous that they could be allocated to two or more categories. Participants, for example, who used *list making* also did *masking* and *rote-learning* with the same list of words. (Strategies are marked in italics. A comprehensive list of strategies can be found in appendix P.) Strategies often appeared quite complex and their application involved several steps. One student, for instance, applied a metacognitive strategy by selecting and planning in which format he would record vocabulary and deciding on which words, phrases and sentences he ought to focus. As his job involved hours of driving, his next step was to record vocabulary onto an audio tape to which he could listen in the car. Vocabulary was either in German with a gap for the student to give the English translation or vice versa. Either whole sentences were recorded or small extracts. The range of strategies covered by this activity could include *self-testing* and *listening* to the audio material.

In some cases students answered vaguely about strategies, such as reading, listening to tapes or TV, or using a dictionary. If these activities were more specific, such as 'reading the newspaper daily', they were classified as metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Reading the newspaper daily is a metacognitive activity in that it involves planning but it is also cognitive in the sense that reading entails applying and using the language (*resourcing*).

The largest number of strategies was employed to support the learning of vocabulary, and the smallest for listening. This was the case for students of German and for students of other languages, as shown in the table below.

Aspect of language learning	Strategy category	Students of German	Students of other languages	All participants	Total number of strategies applied
vocabulary	Cognitive	20	36	56	62
	Metacognitive	2	2	4	
	Social / affective	0	2	2	
structures/ phrases	Cognitive	15	15	30	37
	Metacognitive	2	5	7	
	Social / affective	0	0	0	
speaking	Cognitive	10	9	19	28
	Metacognitive	2	5	7	
	Social / affective	0	2	2	
writing	Cognitive	10	6	16	23
	Metacognitive	5	1	6	
	Social / affective	1	0	1	
listening	Cognitive	5	4	9	16
	Metacognitive	6	1	7	
	Social / affective	0	0	0	
					166

Table 14: Strategies applied by students of German and students of other languages to different aspects of language learning

This focus on vocabulary retention strategies was not intended when the questionnaire was designed. Questions regarding language learning strategies were very general in order to avoid excluding strategies (see questionnaire, Appendix D). The focus on vocabulary retention strategies can be interpreted as being due to the expectations which participants brought to the questionnaire, and thus be related to learner beliefs. However, at least in the case of reading, research by Laufer (1997: 37) has suggested that vocabulary is the most important factor as “lexis was found to be the best predictor of success in reading, better than syntax or general reading ability”.

Since participants did not provide any communicative strategies, this category was omitted from the table above. The number of social / affective strategies (*verification, clarification* and *risk-taking*) is minimal, only 5 of a total 166 strategies. This can mainly be linked to the research instrument and, possibly, to the learner beliefs again. The format of the questionnaire, sitting down on their own with pen and paper, may lead participants to think more of cognitive / metacognitive strategies. Learners might more easily think of what they do on their own when using strategies, probably judging social / affective and communicative strategies as not necessarily of the same importance.

Cognitive strategies dominate the table, except in the case of practising listening. This dominance may have been due to the open-question format of the questionnaire being more likely to trigger memories of these strategies than of communicative or social / affective

ones. Another hypothesis is that cognitive strategies could be recalled more easily as they were more consciously accessible. A further explanation is that adult learners preferred a more conscious and therefore more cognitively oriented way of language learning.

The majority of students reported one or two strategies for each aspect of learning.

	<i>Number of strategies used</i>	<i>German groups (27)</i>	<i>Other language groups (45)</i>	<i>All participants together (72)</i>
vocabulary	1	13	17	30
	2	3	12	15
	3-5	7	7	14
phrases and structures	1	10	26	36
	2	8	5	13
	3-5	2	0	2
speaking	1	11	20	31
	2	9	11	20
	3-5	4	8	12
writing	1	9	18	27
	2	7	7	14
	3-5	4	3	7
listening	1	9	21	30
	2	6	16	22
	3-5	7	2	9

Table 15: Number of strategies related to aspects of language learning in questionnaire responses from students of German and students of other languages

The focus on a limited number of strategies could point to students relying on a small number of strategies. This could be explained by students applying only those strategies they were used to. Alternatively, participants may have avoided being distracted by the huge variety of techniques from which they could choose in different situations. Again, the layout and format of the questionnaire may have encouraged students to report only a few of the strategies they actually employed. A questionnaire can provide only a limited source of information because its format captures information at a certain time and this is not necessarily identical to the same data which would be obtained if the same questions were posed at another time.

7.1.2.1 Learning strategies for vocabulary

Vocabulary strategies differed more between participants with different proficiency levels than they did between students of German and students of other languages. Beginners and intermediate-level students mainly used:

- *List making* in a notebook (e.g. new words, old words, words from classroom)
- *Listing by attribute* (e.g. gender, word field, grouping and colouring)
- *Repetition* (e.g. class notes, old exercises, re-reading lists)
- *Rote learning* (e.g. memorising by covering up one language, learning L1 and L2 together)

The higher the level of language proficiency of the students, the more intensive the use of material and resources to memorise vocabulary. Further, more varied activities were undertaken in order to learn words in use rather than separately and out of context. The higher the proficiency level, the more activities such as reading or listening to audios cassettes /CDs / conversations were reported as ways of improving vocabulary. Although the questionnaire contained a question asking specifically about media resources used for language learning, most participants did not supply an answer. However, on the basis of those who did answer, it can be said that books, audio/CDS and videos were the main sources used, the internet was less popular (see appendix G).

The majority of strategies for vocabulary learning were cognitive. Only four metacognitive strategies were reported, two social/affective strategies and no communicative strategies.

		German groups (25 of 27 participants answered this question)	Other language groups (36 of 45 participants answered this question)	All participants together (61 of 72)
Number of different strategies:	Cognitive	20	36	56
	Metacognitive	2	2	4
	Social/affective	0	2	2
	Communicative	0	0	0
Number of participants who used:	1 strategy	13	17	30
	2 strategies	3	12	15
	3-5 strategies	7	7	14

Table 16: Strategies for learning vocabulary according to questionnaire responses from students of German and students of other languages

Again, most of the participants identified one strategies. For vocabulary learning there were more students who applied three to five strategies than there were for the other language skills. One of these students was Penelope, who is a former teacher of French. Another, Parker, had severe hearing difficulties and compensated for this by regular (daily) and intensive home study, especially vocabulary training and translation. Only Linton, one of the German group, used flash cards for vocabulary. He had applied the same technique successfully to all 10 languages he has studied.

The relatively high number of participants answering the question relating to their vocabulary learning strategies may indicate the high status attributed by students to this activity. As Cohen (1991) stated: "Many adult learners feel that vocabulary is the key to success." (Cohen, 1991: 115) The difference in strategy use between learners at different

levels of proficiency suggested that vocabulary learning was a central issue when learning another language and that only the way of doing it varied.

7.1.2.2 Strategies for structures and phrases

As their level of language proficiency increased, fewer students of other languages answered this question, simply saying that they did not know that they did not do this or giving no answer at all. However, the low response rate may have indicated that participants were either not sure what to fill in, were not aware of the strategies employed to learn phrases and structures, or thought that they had covered this topic in the previous section (some referred back to the vocabulary strategy section).

The distribution was similar to that observed earlier with the majority of students reporting cognitive strategies, only a few reporting metacognitive strategies and none social / affective or communicative strategies.

		German groups (20 of 27 participants answered this question)	Other language groups (31 of 45 participants answered this question)	All participants (51 of 72)
Number of different strategies:	Cognitive	15	15	30
	Metacognitive	2	5	7
	Social/affective	0	0	0
	Communicative	0	0	0
Number of participants who used:	1 strategy	10	26	36
	2 strategies	8	5	13
	3-5 strategies	2	0	2

Table 17: Strategies for learning structures and phrases according to questionnaire responses from students of German and students of other languages

Among the cognitive strategies, the more advanced students again preferred to use activities, such as reading or watching TV or videos to practise phrases rather than memorising them as the less advanced participants did.

Among the metacognitive strategies it was noticeable that the answers depended very much on the individual and varied accordingly. One student reported *inferencing* from L1 (English) making use of the similarities between L1 and L2. One student, Daniel, selected certain phrases for their amusement value.

7.1.2.3 Strategies for speaking

Again the use of cognitive strategies dominated.

		German groups (24 of 27 participants answered this question)	Other language groups (39 of 45 participants answered this question)	All participants (61 of 72)
Number of different strategies:	Cognitive strategies	10	9	19
	Metacognitive	2	5	7
	Social/affective	0	2	2
	Communicative	0	0	0
Number of participants who use:	1 strategy	11	20	31
	2 strategies	9	11	20
	3-5 strategies	4	8	12

Table 18: Strategies for speaking according to questionnaire responses from students of German and students of other languages

Various resources were utilised, making best use of and adapting the media to the individual's purpose. One of the German advanced learners, Steve, relied on a computer to help him listen, speak and memorise. 19 participants from other languages and 10 from the students of German used tapes / CD / radio repeatedly to listen, repeat and speak. One recorded herself onto audio tape to check her spoken language. An active approach was taken by all students to create and take as many *naturalistic practice opportunities* for applying their target language in an authentic setting. Students of German reported, for example, making holiday bookings on the phone, eavesdropping in cafés and practising imaginary conversations alone or with a partner. Four of the students of German and four of the other language students confirmed that they read passages from books aloud as the example for this question suggested. One student of modern Greek also used a mirror while reading aloud to check pronunciation visually.

Metacognitive strategies were used more frequently by students of other languages than by students of German. Again, it was mainly students at the more advanced levels of proficiency who made use of metacognitive strategies by *creating practice opportunities*, such as:

- *Creating practice opportunities* by visiting Russia / Italy / Spain / Greece
- talking to speakers of the target language
- talking to themselves silently or aloud in the bath or on other occasions
- seeking language exchange partners
- attending different language classes
- *self-diagnosis* with the idea of recording themselves on tape
- *attending to errors* when corrected by their class teacher
- *selective attention* to ensure a frequent use of memorised phrases
- *attention* on better speakers in the class
- *focusing* on certain language features, such as stress.

It could be thought that those participants who had already achieved a higher level of language proficiency were more aware of their use of metacognitive strategies. At the same time, their more advanced ability to apply their target language opened up more opportunities to explore more different metacognitive strategies. However, a definite explanation for the variations in the report of metacognitive strategies for the language skill of speaking would require a larger sample size where participants of different levels of language proficiency could be specifically compared.

About two-thirds of the participants appeared to rely on only one or two strategies. However, at the time they completed the questionnaire, students may have not remembered other strategies they used to support speaking.

7.1.2.4 Strategies for writing

In the German groups, only 20 of 27 participants answered the question on writing techniques and only 29 of 45 students of other languages responded. These responses related to the class these students attended, some of which focused on reading, others on speaking only. Some participants at beginner level stated that they had not yet done much writing; very advanced participants also had no interest in developing or using their writing skills in the target language any further.

However, the students who did answer this question appeared to be very active and to use a variety of resources to improve their writing skills:

- additional grammar exercises,
- *translations* from L1 into L2 or from L2 into L1
- *resourcing* by dictionary use
- daily calendar with phrases and explanations in target language
- reading
- *creating practice opportunities* by attending weekend intensive courses
- writing résumés or travel logs.

The number of metacognitive strategies was higher for writing than for the other language skills studied, but the focus was on two main categories, reported by almost every student:

- *Reading through errors* in written work as corrected either by the class teacher, a (pen-) friend or family member
- *Creating practice opportunities* by attending weekend courses at which written work was corrected.

		German groups (20 of 27 participants answered this question)	Other language groups (28 of 45 participants answered this question)	All participants (48 of 72)
Number of different strategies:	Cognitive	10	6	16
	Metacognitive	5	1	6
	Social/affective	1	0	1
	Communicative	0	0	0
Number of participants who used:	1 strategy	9	18	27
	2 strategies	7	7	14
	3-5 strategies	4	3	7

Table 19: Strategies for writing according to questionnaire responses from students of German and students of other languages

One student also listed *planning* for the overall structure and *language repertoire monitoring* to support the use of known words and structures; another referred to *self-diagnosis* as she claimed not to have any more potential for improving her writing.

One participant in a Greek class also emphasised the usefulness of reading corrected homework aloud to reinforce the corrections. Parker, who learned Arabic and also attended a German group, remarked on the importance of making mistakes:

I explore the exercises given on my course at the U3A to test the rules I'm learning to the limit. I thus make more than the average number of mistakes but making mistakes is one of my best ways of learning. (Parker, Questionnaire)

Only seven of all 48 did not explicitly refer to the use of corrections to improve their writing. Josephine, one of the German students, noted that corrections were not effective for her as she could not remember them again later. This appears to be a difference between younger and older learners. Graham (1997 based on findings by Cohen) reports that research showed that "students pay little attention to such corrections" (Graham, 1997: 68).

The majority of participants reported using one or two strategies. It seemed that overall, students relied on a small number of strategies to improve their writing.

7.1.2.5 Strategies for listening

Only two more cognitive strategies were reported by all participants. Strategies included:

- *Resourcing* by listening to audios / CDs / radio
- Watching films / videos
- Listening to native speakers.

Most students used two listening techniques for their practice. The more advanced they were, the more irregular and casual this use was. At beginner and intermediate levels students made extensive use of audio tapes / CDs, videos and films. However, the intensity and frequency of use varied. Participants emphasised the need to listen regularly if they were to benefit. The ways in which students made use of tapes varied. Some listened repeatedly to the same audio tape, then changed to another before returning to old tapes after a certain period of time. One student highlighted the importance of tapes becoming increasingly difficult. Others varied between listening with transcripts and without, linking listening with reading on some occasions.

The differences between metacognitive listening strategies used by students of German and those used by students of other languages suggested that a greater variety of strategies was used by the German groups. The other language groups included *creating practice opportunities* by attending Russian church ceremonies and listening to fellow students / teacher in class or neighbours in France. In addition, students of German also mentioned:

- *creating practice opportunities* by eavesdropping in cafés / trains / buses
- *scheduling/organising* their listening by following a routine of changing tapes, sometimes with, sometimes without transcripts
- *attending to errors* in their conversation group
- paying *directed attention* when listening to German conversations by analysing grammatical structures at the same time.

		German groups (23 of 27 participants answered this question)	Other language groups (39 of 45 participants answered this question)	All participants (62 of 72)
Number of different strategies:	Cognitive	5	4	9
	Metacognitive	6	1	7
	Social/affective	0	0	0
	Communicative	0	0	0
Number of participants who used:	1 strategy	9	21	30
	2 strategies	6	16	22
	3-5 strategies	7	2	9

Table 20: Listening strategies according to questionnaire responses from students of German and students of other languages

The wider range of metacognitive strategies reported here by the German groups could be related to the way the data for the questionnaires was collected. The students of German were approached by me individually and met me on more than one occasion, whereas the students of the other languages did not know me personally. Therefore the direct contact with me and a clearer idea of the context of the data might have resulted in a greater effort put into answering the question on this by participants of the German groups.

7.1.3 Summary of questionnaire findings

The questionnaire focused on two main areas: the backgrounds of the older language learners and the language learning strategies they employed. Overall, there were more similarities than differences between students of German and students of other languages. So students of German could be seen as representative of older language learners, despite differences in the languages learned.

Most participants were aged between 61 and 70. They appeared to be well educated with nearly 60% having university degrees or higher qualifications. 31 (nearly half) of all participants were former teachers or lecturers, showing that lifelong learning in later life may be related to learning at a younger age (also stated by Maxted, 1999: 34). Socially, participants were identified as middle class. Students appeared highly motivated to learn and to be active, as indicated by the high number of other U3A classes attended and additional interests listed. The weekly study time of more than 20 minutes invested by 50 of the 72 participants supported the image of the active older language learner in the present study. 52 participants learned between two and four foreign languages, mainly French, German, Spanish, Italian, Latin and Russian. Contact with foreign languages was mainly sought by

travelling abroad: some students had lived in countries where their target languages were spoken. The majority of students shared similar motives for learning, including an interest in the culture and language of the target language country, an interest in group learning, previous experiences of the language and the influence of friends. The internet was the least popular language learning medium used.

A third (33%) of all participants stated that they did not find any of the four language skills particularly easy or difficult. For the others, speaking and listening were seen to be more difficult at lower levels of language proficiency, but there was no such difference for reading and writing. Intermediate learners of German found memory problems a weakness, whereas students of other languages referred to a range of different aspects of learning that were not memory related (more on difficulties identified by individuals in section 7.3.4).

Participants reported using a wide range of strategies which varied according to language tasks, language and level of proficiency. Cognitive strategies dominated throughout. Listening was exceptional in two ways. Firstly, fewer strategies were reported and, secondly, more metacognitive strategies were reported by the German groups than by students of other languages. A common feature was repetition of certain language activities using a variety of (additional) media and creativity to adjust the practice to the individual's needs at that time. This showed how dedicated the participants were regardless of the language or their level of proficiency.

Participants actively sought opportunities to use their target language outside the classroom in self-initiated situations (eavesdropping, travel, role-plays etc.). A variety of resources and strategies were applied, with the focus on one to two strategies for each language skill. It could be seen that these participants were highly motivated learners as demonstrated by their "direction and magnitude of human behaviour, that is, the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it" (Dörnyei, 2001 cited by Dörnyei, Czisér & Németh, 2006: 9).

Students reflected on their language learning in different ways, including *self-diagnosis* and identifying approaches they could envisage applying. Participants appeared to be aware of what they aimed to get out of their learning and how to go about this. To achieve their goals, time and energy were invested in a variety of ways, which differed from individual to individual.

Overall the questionnaires provided a general picture of the strategy use of older learners, although I would have expected a wider range of strategies. It could be hypothesised that the open, less prescriptive format of the questionnaire triggered less variety of learning strategies than if a strategy inventory list had been used. However, this would have contradicted the more explorative nature of the present study and could be a way of taking this project further.

On the basis of the questionnaire results it became clear that TAPs would provide a more direct insight into learning strategies applied. The diversity of contextual information about individual language learning backgrounds highlighted the need for in-depth interviews. Both these phases of the research focused on a smaller sample of participants, selected from within the German groups and presented in the following chapters.

7.2 Think-aloud protocol analysis (German participants)

The TAPs supplemented the other forms of data collection by providing information about two main aspects of the study: the use of learning strategies as applied by individual participants and the usefulness of this instrument for research involving older participants.

Protocols recorded on audio cassettes by participants were transcribed by myself, providing the clearest possible transcripts for analysis (a sample protocol is attached in appendix M). Similar to Bracewell & Breuleux (1994: 59), the transcription expressed the lexical and semantic structures, followed by a segmentation into clauses, small sequences to facilitate the analysis and then, finally, the production and numbering of all sequences for each individual in one record. The guidelines for the transcription were:

1. Punctuation was used sparsely, only where pauses and direct lowering of intonation indicated a break.
2. No paragraphing was used.
3. The original German text was reproduced in italics to separate it visually from students' reflections and from the material they produced in L2.
4. Spelling reflected how words were heard by the transcriber / me, even if this was not the correct spelling in English / German.
5. Sentences were transcribed as expressed by participants. There was no amendment of syntax or completion of unfinished comments.
6. Additional expressions, such as sighing or expletives, such as 'well', were transcribed when they were long enough to indicate where participants took time to think or had difficulties.

Quotations in this chapter are accompanied by the speaker's pseudonym and the source specified by the task (reading, writing, speaking listening), plus 'TAP'.

In the next phase of analysis, annotations were produced alongside the transcripts:

1. Identification of incidents of strategy use by underlining
2. Description of strategy use by describing key characteristics
3. Grouping of the strategies found by characteristics
4. Comparison with Graham's (1997) strategy inventory and classification system.
5. Identification of differences in strategy use between the strategy inventory by Graham (1997) and the strategies found in the present study

Once the process of transcribing and annotating all transcripts was complete, transcripts were revisited and summarised to provide a picture of individual participants and of the general use of learning strategies. Despite the step by step analysis of the TAPs laid out earlier, it has to be acknowledged that the different stages of segmentation, coding and data analysis are not completely separable from one another. All the processes involved in the TAP analysis occur iteratively, linking to and influencing each other, one step having an effect on the following ones. Moving between different stages of analysis is also required at times to check the appropriateness and applicability of the analysis as undertaken so far. This represents one of the characteristics of qualitative data, which requires a detailed and at the same time general view on the data collected to allow making sense of the diversity as well as patterns running through. Such an open and data driven approach to coding was chosen as it could not be assumed that the same strategies would be used by the older participants as by the younger learners studied by Graham (1997). This approach identified additional strategies not listed by Graham. As strategies differ from individual to individual, it is not surprising to find variations between Graham's and my own list.

I acknowledge that counting incidences of strategy use does not necessarily have any bearing on their appropriateness at that time, nor does it provide evidence about the level of proficiency of their user. The classification and labelling of individual strategies depend very much on the individual researcher (as shown in the literature on learning strategies in chapter 4 and the methodology of researching them in chapter 5). As a consequence, each stage of the analysis process had its own uncertainties.

The first stage of analysis focused on identifying any indicators of difficulties with the task. These were the basic units for analysis, the segments which were identified as "the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself - that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 345 as cited in Merriam, 1998: 180).

During the second stage of analysis, when describing strategy use, the sometimes complex nature of the strategies applied meant a simple description was not always possible due to the complexity and the links involved in an individual utterance.

So basically what I've been doing was trying to catch the odd word or phrase that I understand at the rate of which German is spoken. And then building that together with my knowledge. (Josephine, listening TAP) (underlined are the incidents of strategy use, the units for analysis)

In this case, the combination was split into the two underlying strategies applied here, *selective attention* and *word elaboration*. These were treated separately, although they were combined in use. Some participants read the whole passage aloud. This counted as only one incidence of a strategy use: *reading aloud in L2*.

Translation was necessary to assess students' understanding of the reading and listening extracts. However, translation was used in different ways and was classified into different strategies. It could be used as:

1. a thought in L1 which was then translated into L2
e.g.: "I think the prepositions are difficult. I hope prepositions is the same, probably isn't. Prepositionen sind sehr schwer." (James, writing TAP)
2. a means for students to assure themselves that they had understood or constructed something correctly
e.g.: "die Sprache is not so easy, die Sprache ist nicht so einfach zu verstehen, not so easy to understand" (Isabel, writing TAP)
3. a way of triggering further thinking if a word or phrase was unclear
e.g.: "Mein Bruder das Gewohnheitstier. Breaking up the word Gewohnheitstier. Yeah, I'm still not sure what that means. Flat sharer or something like that." (Robert, reading TAP)

Similarly, Kern (1994: 44) concluded from his student TAPs that translation helped them to maintain concentration and to retain information which was already understood while other problems were tackled. Further, Kern (1994: 44) added that translation supported the students' confidence: they were reassured that they had understood the text correctly when they put it into their L1.

At the third stage of analysis, the grouping of strategies relied at first on key words selected from the descriptions of strategies. For the example

Der Preis des Häusers, des Häusers? ist sehr hoch. (Amy, speaking TAP)

the descriptive terms used were "repetition" (the action undertaken) "for grammar" (area of language identified as difficult) and "accuracy check" (reason for using repetition at this point). One strategy had then to be identified which included these three aspects. In this

example, repetition was used to monitor the correctness of the grammatical form applied. Thus, this aspect was identified as the main reason for the use of the strategy, which was initially “monitoring of grammatical form”.

In the fourth stage of analysis, the strategies identified were compared with the strategy inventories of Graham (1999) and O’Malley & Chamot (1990). This comparison allowed classification of the strategies identified in the present study into the following categories: metacognitive, cognitive, social/affective and communicative. Differences between strategy use by the older participants in this study and the younger students in Graham’s study were identified at this stage.

As a research instrument, the application of TAPs in the present study raised a variety of issues. These included:

- absence of the researcher/facilitator,
- provision of instructions,
- inexperience of participants,
- procedure involved,
- tasks presented,
- requests to translate during the tasks,
- technical issues.

These issues are briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.

Reactivity

The absence of the researcher during the process of think-aloud reduced the immediate pressure on participants to produce material on the spot, which they had felt pressured to do when I was present during the pilot study (see section 5.1). Another advantage was temporal flexibility as there was no need to arrange appointments with 15 students. However, three of the 15 TAPs were recorded in my presence. This was done to avoid excluding these participants from the TAPs simply on the grounds of lack of access to appropriate recording equipment. In these cases, I avoided interfering or commenting, either verbally or via facial expressions or gestures by sitting at some distance with my back to participants during the recording.

Instructions

Students reported that they had tried to help me as their former tutor and researcher by carrying out these protocols as correctly as possible. The instructions proved not to be clear enough in some cases, although all the participants managed to produce protocols. Furthermore, some participants put themselves under pressure by wanting to perform very well. One reason for this may have been that I had previously been their tutor for German. Participants also expressed a strong wish to provide as much useful information as they could. Even though it was emphasised that the tasks were not intended as tests, some participants experienced emotions as if they were sitting a test. Being asked to produce output in German without preparation highlighted the difficulties some participants experienced when speaking or writing German rather than understanding it. One student decided to give up after feeling that she had failed the writing and speaking tasks.

The process of doing TAPs was new to all participants. Providing more than one example as a warm-up task might have given the participants a clearer idea of the procedure and what was expected of them. Another approach would have been to train participants on how to approach the think-aloud. More guidance and training or an example might have helped particularly with the speaking and listening tasks, as for these, TAPs had to be undertaken retrospectively. For the language skills of writing and reading where TAPs could be done concurrently training is not required if participants are adults (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995: 11). It could be thought that a more explicit emphasis on this link between the language skill and the form of TAP in the instructions could have eased carrying out the listening and speaking TAPs. However, any form of preparation and special training might have led to a duplication of TAP versions which students had used for practice rather than the production of 'genuine' individualised TAPs. In most cases the instructions were clearly understood, the difficulty lay in the practical application of the instructions to the multi-tasking involved.

Task design

The basic design of the tasks appeared to be appropriate to the range of participating students, providing suitable language in the given extracts for them to understand, while simultaneously leaving sufficient unknown parts for problem solving.

All participants managed to carry out the tasks as required, with varying amounts of difficulty. As anticipated, the tasks provided enough flexibility to elicit individual students' ideas and performances and a range of language learning strategies. The background knowledge required and the text types involved proved general and approachable for all participants. The warm-up task successfully eased participants into the think-aloud process by providing a readily accessible language for all levels.

Right, I feel that I can understand the passage. So I feel quite encouraged by that. (Tina, warm-up reading TAP)

The translations required of participants for the reading and listening task clarified the extent to which they understood the extracts. However, the manner in which the participants complied with this request varied from very detailed translations to rather general summaries.

Reflection

The extent to which participants reflected during and after the tasks varied tremendously. One of the longest protocols was 3,068 words long and one of the shortest only 468 words long. Individuals undertook the protocols at different speeds, and the overall time spent on each task also varied. Sometimes there was silence or very slow verbalisation. Someren et al. (1994) showed that in these moments “information is non-verbal and complicated” and then “verbalization will not only cost time but also space in working memory because it becomes a cognitive process by itself” (Someren et al., 1994: 33). As a consequence, the processing of the original task can be incomplete or disrupted. It may be hypothesised that this is related to students' personalities – with more outgoing and extrovert students producing more extensive TAPs than introverted, less talkative participants - or to their confidence in the target language. Those less confident in the target language would then produce rather shorter TAPs than those learners who are more confident and do not mind ‘exposing’ themselves more.

The lack of familiarity with TAPs and the fact that none of the students had received training in what was involved meant that participants were also expected to multi-task. While undertaking TAPs, they had to manage five activities at the same time:

1. Manage the technical side of recording the protocols.
2. Undertake the tasks.
3. Produce a translation in L1 of the L2 extracts.
4. Think and reflect while carrying out the language tasks.
5. Express their thoughts verbally while the tasks were undertaken.

Albinet's et al. (2006: 691) study seems to confirm that multi-tasking can have a slowing down effect on older adults, more than on younger (although in their study participants performed only two tasks concurrently, a motor and a cognitive task). Moreover, Krampe & Charness (2006: 726) point out that "negative age-effects tend to be more pronounced if tasks require more complex processing". Participants in the present study were very aware of the multi-tasking required for the protocols and one participant summed it up as follows:

I'm sure I'm going to have problems with this because I find just using the technology of the tape recorders stressing me out, let alone doing the German. (Tina, warm-up TAP)

Therefore, a few preferred to reflect on the tasks and their ways of managing them afterwards rather than concurrently.

Overall, despite the difficulties described above, all participants successfully recorded the protocols as required with a sound quality that was sufficiently audible for transcribing the TAPs. They also supplied enough incidents involving the use of language learning strategies. The TAPs appeared to put pressure on participants owing to the multi-tasking involved. This may have been most difficult for older participants who prefer to carry out one task at a time. It is not known how the number of incidences of strategy use related to the number recorded in other studies because the literature on language learning strategies does not provide any clear figures on them. However, to provide some guiding figures, White (1995: 213) employed a specific form of TAP, the "yoked subject technique", and reported 837 instances of strategy use within 37 verbal reports from distance language learners.

The difficulties involved in quantifying strategy use were related to the difficulties inherent in the use of TAPs, as explained above. Further, the instrument provided very rich verbal data which can be difficult to code and analyse, especially if there is only one researcher to assess the data as there was in the present study. Thus, the figures provided in the following sections present distributions and tendencies rather than precise frequencies. The tables and figures are used to illustrate and structure the following chapter.

7.2.1 Learning strategies applied

The intensity and distribution of language learning strategies applied by individual participants depended very much on the skill worked on, as shown in the table below.

<i>Task / Strategy category</i>	<i>reading</i>	<i>writing</i>	<i>speaking</i>	<i>listening</i>	<i>Total:</i>
Metacognitive	37	74	31	26	168
Cognitive	50	84	24	10	168
Social/ affective	1	4	2	1	8
Communicative	0	0	0	0	0
Total:	88	162	57	37	344

Table 21: Numbers of strategies employed for the think-aloud protocols, according to the skill, excluding strategies for warm-up

Listening showed the lowest occurrence of strategy use as compared to the three other skills. Time played a key factor, particularly for listening, as information was only accessible during the time of the recording. Only Tina, one of the intermediate students, decided to control this factor herself by stopping in between sentences when she listened to the recording for the second time. The variety of learning strategies was more limited than the range for other language skills. In the main, key words had to be heard and understood, then inferences could be used and words could be linked to contexts. However, if insufficient key words or not the most important ones were understood, it was more difficult to apply any learning strategies whilst listening. In the case of other language skills, students had more time to work on them at their own pace and the chance to leave aside unknown items and return to certain passages. Where strategies were used for listening, they were often metacognitive, participants explaining how they usually approached listening, such as concentrating on key words, focusing on the general context at first and then on the details at the second listening. Further, students identified general problems they faced when listening, such as hearing difficulties.

The low use of social / affective and communicative strategies was related to the participants recording the TAPs on their own without partners with whom they could interact. As Stevick (1999: 51) identified, any form of feedback provided by a partner can have a direct impact on the intensity and use of these strategies. Consequently, if there is nobody to communicate with then there is no opportunity for the use of communication strategies. Therefore, the low occurrence of such strategies can be directly linked to the data

collection approach. Based on the results of the TAPs, I am unable to make any statements regarding the use of communicative strategies by the older learners. To investigate this aspect further, a TAP study with participants in interactions with each other or another person might shed light on the aspect of communicative strategies.

The social / affective strategies applied were mainly for *self-assurance*, *self-encouragement*, *self-talk* or indirectly addressing 'another person', at times me as the researcher.

Besonders wenn, two nns. (Amy, writing TAP)

I'll have a go. (Tina, writing TAP)

And I find it very difficult to think of anything I can say in German. (James, writing TAP)

Metacognitive and cognitive strategies dominated in all skill categories, most notably in the reading and writing, which showed more than twice as many uses of strategies as reading. This high occurrence may have been related to the nature of the skills. Writing involves activities such as planning, structuring, searching for alternative expressions and self-correction:

I suppose the first thing I should do is think of some ideas and then put them into reasonable sentences, I hope. (Robert, writing TAP)

Deutsch zu lernen. Komma muss ich da schreiben. (Parker, writing TAP)

Reading relies on activities such as *deducing* word meaning from the word stem, *deducing* meaning from previous passages in the extract or deciding to leave an unknown word aside and return to it later:

Heutzutage is not a word I could construct myself but it is perfectly obvious what it means and I have met it before. (Josephine, reading TAP)

And heutzutage, hmmm, the rest of the day? Heute is today and. I don't know exactly. (Steve, reading TAP)

I can manage without knowing what that means. (Jessica, reading TAP)

Again the time factor may have been relevant, as participants could undertake reading and writing at their own pace, whereas they may have felt pressure to move on when speaking and consequently not have allowed themselves much time for thinking and conscious strategy use. Also, reflection on the speaking was undertaken after the speaking itself, due to the difficulty of articulating thoughts relating to content and reflection at the same time. This linear protocol may have resulted in the omission of some of the thinking procedures involved which were originally applied. Omissions were possible due to the time elapsed between the actual working on the tasks and the reporting of the thoughts.

It can be hypothesised that the dominance of metacognitive and cognitive strategies was related to the fact that writing and reading were the language skills in which participants had been most intensively trained. Most participants felt more confident with writing and reading than with listening and speaking. Only for Parker, the student with the highest level of proficiency of German, speaking made no difference to his writing. As a research tool, it could be that TAPs are most suitable for certain language skills where time can be used more flexibly, finishing the given task and return to parts of it again and again, if necessary, such as for reading or writing, but not for listening, and only partly for speaking.

Graham (1997: 43) ascribes a more central role in learning to metacognitive strategies than, for example, communicative strategies. Walker (2001) specifies the role of metacognitive strategies by identifying them as “the key to learner independence” (Walker, 2001: 89; cf. also Hurd, 2000a: 42) She identifies strategies such as *planning* and *monitoring* as more important. Chamot & Küpper (1989: 17) in their study on effective and ineffective learners, emphasised that the number of strategies used by individuals was not the only criterion for effectiveness, because the adequate use of strategies in individual situations and the appropriate selection of these strategies both contributed to the effectiveness with which learners used strategies.

The high occurrence of cognitive and metacognitive strategies can also be interpreted as supporting the idea of adults learning more independently by relying more on their own thinking and problem-solving resources.

Self-monitoring in its various forms dominated the metacognitive strategies. An item was either spoken out loud, double-checked against another context or corrected once the right form was found.

Inferencing was dominant among the cognitive strategies. All kinds of knowledge, in the widest sense of the term, were made use of in decoding meanings or producing an output in the target language: rules about prepositions and cases, word-stem families, known words in any other language (L1, L2, L3, etc) or personal experiences related to travelling or family. (Appendix P presents a list of all strategies identified in the current study.)

7.2.2 Differences in strategy use between tasks

The frequency of strategy use as well as the kind of strategies applied varied according to the language skill required, as shown in the previous section. The link between task undertaken and strategies produced by the participants has already been noted. To gain a clearer picture of this relationship a more detailed discussion of strategies applied to each individual language task is presented below.

7.2.2.1 Reading task

This task mainly triggered the application of cognitive strategies (50 in total as shown in table 21, section 7.2.1). Among these, some were used by the majority of the participants. These included *omission*, *inferencing* and *deducing* and *contextualising*.

I can manage without knowing what that means. (Carol, reading TAP)

Sounds like catch or take or something. (James, reading TAP)

Not sure about und kämmt sich. Probably from kommen, past tense. (Bob, reading TAP)

In a logical sense, was founded and there was also an institute for climate change. (Amy, reading TAP)

Some students made remarks not only about the context of the reading passage, but also about how they felt when tackling it:

Well, in fact, I did understand the passage, I enjoyed it, I thought it was quite fun. (Tina, reading TAP)

The end of this is much easier than the beginning. (Tanja, reading TAP)

Certainly a creature of habits. (Sean, reading TAP)

In the current study, no link between level of proficiency and reading strategies could be identified, in contrast to the findings of O'Malley & Chamot et al. (1985 in Bowles & Leow 2005: 423). Cohen (1991) has stated that "second language learners, particularly those with less proficiency in the second language, seem to forget the successful strategies they employ in their first language when faced with second language tasks" (Cohen, 1991: 109). But here it was difficult to define exactly which strategies were transferred from L1 to L2 and to what extent strategy transfer occurred.

As reading was the second most popular type of leisure activity, as reported in the questionnaire (see section 7.1.1), it might be expected that reading strategies would be transferred from L1 reading to L2 reading. However, the current study did not permit any comparison as no data was available on the participants' level of proficiency in reading in

the L1. However, if students' enthusiasm for texts and reading was transferred to the L2, this may partly explain the reported levels of confidence relating to the reading task in the TAPs. As Guthrie et al. (1999: 250) found: "One of the major contributions of motivation to text comprehension is that motivation increases reading amount, which then increases text comprehension."

7.2.2.2 Writing task

For the writing task, 74 metacognitive and 84 cognitive strategies (see table 21, section 7.2.1) were used with roughly equal frequency. Most participants tried first to think of something to write in English and to structure this before trying to translate it into German with the vocabulary and structures known.

It's really very difficult. And I'm afraid the tape will run out if I really write three paragraphs. First one, I must try to think in English. Hmmm. And I find it very difficult to think of anything that I can say in German. (James, writing TAP)

Ich muss auf Englisch immer denken, übersetzte dann zum Deutschen – selbst wenn ich eine deutsche Phrase erkenne. (Steve, writing TAP)

Translation was a strategy used by all participants, except for the most advanced one who stated: "Ich übersetze nicht, ich schreibe nur auf Deutsch (...)." (Parker, writing TAP). Thinking in the target language is one of the characteristics of the good language learner (as listed by Naiman et al., 1978). The same is true for first focusing on the content and then on the language structure (Graham, 1997: 65).

Overall, students appeared to be used to writing in English (or German), which allowed them to approach the writing task with a clear idea of how they would usually undertake a piece of writing:

Usually, when I write things I would try to do it in rough, then put it down looking up each word and working out the ending of any adjectives and so as I'm going along. Then last of all would sort of work out the word order, see if I've done that right. (Tina, writing TAP)

I'm going to write down just a few key words. (Parker, writing TAP)

While reading the written text aloud, the production was monitored, as here:

At the end I was checking whether this was audible. (Josephine, writing TAP)

When students experienced difficulties in expressing their thoughts in German, they applied a variety of strategies:

I'm madly using foreign word with a German aspect to them. (Josephine, writing TAP)

Dinges is the word for things in Dutch. (David, writing TAP)

Self-correction and monitoring of their work was a feature of all the writing protocols:

Nein, das könnte zweideutig sein. (Parker, writing TAP)

Well, it's probably the wrong preposition again. (Bob, writing TAP)

I feel I'm using the same word over and over again. (Tina, writing TAP)

And then, then I probably want the dative. (James, writing TAP)

Ich hatte, das ist in der Vergangenheit, Plusquamperfekt, Deutsch immer als eine einfache Sprache betrachtet. (Parker, writing TAP)

Participants appeared to be aware of their potential for expressing their thoughts in written German, and of the limits to their known grammar and vocabulary:

Might be able to say that. (Tanja, writing TAP)

But I don't know the German word for spelling so I can't say that. (James, writing TAP)

Being aware of their limits in the L2 did not seem to restrict their desire to express their thoughts in the target language. Participants were willing to attempt this:

I don't think that I've got the vocabulary for that, but I put the point in anyway. (Josephine, writing TAP)

Masculine and I hope neuter is neuter. (James, writing TAP)

I'm not quite sure about wenn, so I'm going to use wenn. (Isabel, writing TAP)

Writing showed the most incidences of strategy use, twice as many as reading. As with reading, metacognitive and cognitive strategy use were balanced against negligible incidences of social/affective and communicative strategies.

7.2.2.3 Speaking task

Speaking proved to be one of the more demanding tasks for the majority of the participants due to their intermediate level of proficiency. This corresponded with the data from the questionnaires which indicated that increased levels of language proficiency were related to a lower level of difficulty experienced by students in speaking in the target language (see table in Appendix I). Although 33% of participants did not feel that any of the language skills was particularly difficult or easy for them (answer: neither) speaking was perceived as easier as mastery of the target language increased. One of the main reasons intermediate students gave for this difficulty was the rather artificial situation (similar effect of artificiality reported in Chamot, 2001: 29) of talking about a topic without any preparation and without a partner with whom they could interact. Having a partner would have helped them to find appropriate words as spoken output would have developed more easily during a natural conversation.

But if you are actually telling somebody about [our town] in a foreign language, they would automatically fill in the gaps for you, because they would, hopefully, understand the gist of what you were trying to say. (Penelope, speaking TAP)

In addition, hardly any of the students had been trained in class to talk alone. In class more emphasis is given to communication by means of dialogue rather than to monologues.

Being recorded while speaking added to participants' awareness that time was passing and the speed of their spoken language output in L2 was slower than when using L1. Eysenck (2001: 291) reported that a native speaker produces an average of two or three words per second. In the recording of the protocols in the current study the speed was far slower than that. The intermediate-level participants spoke slowly, allowing themselves enough time in between sentences and phrases to think of those that would follow. In the participants' own words:

Hard to try and think of things I knew the words for. (James, speaking TAP)

I wanted to say much more but I have to use German that I know to explain what I wanted about [the town I live in]. (Steve, speaking TAP)

I have to say that I'm not able to do a task like this without writing it down first. I haven't got the confidence. (Jessica, speaking TAP)

My main thoughts are that I don't have much vocabulary, but on this particular topic I have even less imagination. (Josephine, speaking TAP)

For speaking, differences were evident between the most advanced participant and the others. Monitoring and expression were aimed at achieving some semantic fine-tuning in the foreign language while speaking:

*I was trying to find alternatives to schön for example but it just wouldn't come.
(Parker, speaking TAP)*

*And I tried to find words strong enough to describe the ugly landscape (...).
(Parker, speaking TAP)*

Intermediate-level participants focused mainly on finding any, preferably correct, vocabulary for expressing their thoughts in German:

So I'm putting in English words between the German. (Tanja, speaking TAP)

I wanted to say hills and I said Berg which, I think, might mean mountains, I don't know. (James, speaking TAP)

Speaking is an important part of learning another language. However, some researchers classify good speaking as a rather unusual achievement, especially for older learners, mainly for reasons to do with accuracy of pronunciation and the need for immediate reactions (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The two near-native speakers were able to express themselves more easily than others during the speaking task. Both of them had begun German within the last 10 years and had lived in Germany for a continuous period of time; none of the intermediate participants had done this.

7.2.2.4 Listening task

Listening produced the lowest number of strategy uses (37) with a clear dominance of metacognitive strategies and no use of social/affective and communicative strategies. Higher levels of language proficiency can be related to a more intensive use of metacognitive strategies, according to Anderson & Vandergrift (1996). However, the low occurrence of social / affective and communicative strategies is directly related to the way the data was elicited, without any partner to communicate with. In addition, Graham (2006: 181) reports in her study on listening strategies of A-level students of French that they did not attribute much importance to listening strategies, had limited insight into their strategy use and were uncertain about how to tackle listening. She also found that listening was experienced as particularly difficult by learners of intermediate level of language proficiency (Graham, 2002).

Again, some of the intermediate participants commented on the artificiality of the task. They felt anxious about understanding the overall content as well as details, especially as a lot of them reported having difficulties in hearing the passages. Difficulties in hearing were mentioned as a problem by almost all the students, including the two near-native speakers. Listening to a recording required a lot of attention and put the students under pressure as they had to carry out a variety of activities at the same time.

Man muss sich so gut konzentrieren, besonders wenn man schwerhörig ist. Man denkt nicht, man nur übersetzt. Es war nicht sehr schwer zu verstehen. Für mich ist der Schwerpunkt zu hören (...) besonders ein Mann oder das Fernsehen. Das ist auch schwer zu, hmmm, künstliche Stimme sozusagen. (Parker, listening TAP)

The technical nature of the situation exacerbated some hearing problems, limiting the understanding of participants, especially those at an intermediate level.

I find what I call disembodied conversation, audio tapes, radio, telephone, very, very difficult because of hearing problems brought I suppose by age. (Bob, listening TAP)

Certainly a crucial factor in this context is lip-reading which accompanies every natural conversation, even between native-speakers of the same language without hearing difficulties. Eysenck (2001: 246) recognised that “visual information from lip movements is used to make sense of speech sounds because the information conveyed by the speech sounds is often inadequate”. Therefore, when in a situation where lip-reading is impossible and no information can be garnered from facial expressions, more attention has to be given to the sounds themselves, especially when a foreign language is being used. Partners in real-life conversations help each other by using gestures and body language to support meaning and nuances. They can also elaborate certain arguments when their partner does not seem to understand completely.

The pitch of a voice is another major factor in comprehension. Most participants reported that the female voice was easier to understand, it was clearer and the questions shorter. The male voice of the interviewee was not clearly audible throughout, particularly when he was laughing about being one of the most frequent visitors to the cinema. Most participants claimed not to have understood this section. Hearing ability decreases as people grow older and it becomes more difficult to make out unfamiliar sounds (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). As Bob explained, he applies certain tricks to deal with this disadvantage:

I'm not able to test the nuances of quickly spoken language. So I have to rely a little bit on very, very familiar phrases and clichés. (Bob, listening TAP)

Apart from hearing, remembering to mention what had been heard during the task was again a separate matter, as James described:

Well, part of the problem with that is trying to remember as well as to understand it. I think I certainly understood more than I remembered to say. Though I certainly didn't understand it all. (James, listening TAP)

Some of my difficulty is, I can't remember even if I understood what he was saying. Going through my mind was I thought to remember what it is he is talking about to say back in English even if I understand, English stopped some of my concentration. (Tanja, listening TAP)

Summary

Of all the language skills studied, listening provoked the fewest incidences of strategy use and was also rated as difficult by the majority of the intermediate-level participants. As with speaking, the students with the least experience of the L2 (those at intermediate level) experienced more difficulties with listening than did the very advanced ones (see table in appendix I). The current study confirmed that there was a difference in strategy use depending on the language skill used. For reading and writing, the majority applied a range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. For speaking and listening, the overall range of strategies was more limited and the number of strategies applied was lower. This could be related to the issues involved in using TAPs for those language skills, in particular the requirement to undertake the TAPs retrospectively, which might have caused some subjects to forget elements of the original listening process.

7.2.3 Individual differences between participants

Language learning strategies vary from individual to individual. After the focus on differences depending on language skills in the previous section, the following section presents differences within the sample group and examines the strategy use of individual students.

Certain students seemed to prefer using familiar strategies (around 15 to 30 per student). The most advanced of all think-aloud participants produced the think-aloud as well as the tasks mainly in German. Parker used the think-aloud to express his thoughts on the language in general, not only on the tasks. The table below shows an overview of strategy use by all 15 participants in the TAPs. They are divided into three main groups, depending on the intensity of strategy use according to the number of occasions of strategy use as identified in each protocol. Again, the numbers are provided to indicate groups and tendencies.

Incidences of strategy use:	Low frequency users (1 – 20)	Medium frequency users (21 – 40)	High frequency users (41 or more)
Intermediate level:	Penelope 7 Carol 5 Bob 10 Sean 7 David 5 Robert 12 Tanja 19	Isabel 26	Tina 48 James 67
Advanced:	Steve 7 Jessica 5		Josephine 83
Near-native:	Amy 19	Parker 23	

Table 22: Strategy use in the TAPs, including warm-up reading strategies, related to the study level of participants

Two-thirds of participants were classified as relatively low-frequency users, two students as medium-frequency, and three as high-frequency users of strategies. The table below shows the distribution of strategies used by the high-frequency users, separated by task.

	<i>warm-up (reading)</i>	<i>reading</i>	<i>writing</i>	<i>speaking</i>	<i>listening</i>	<i>total</i>
Tina (Intermediate)	9	15	12	10	11	57
Josephine (Advanced)	12	21	33	6	11	83
James (Intermediate)	1	15	38	9	4	67

Table 23: Strategy use of the three high-frequency strategy users by task, including warm-up reading strategies

Together, these three participants accounted for almost half of all strategy use. Josephine used the most strategies and also produced the longest protocol. She mainly applied cognitive strategies, mostly for writing, then for speaking. This was in contrast to her statement that she did not put much effort into the writing:

if I'm trying to write in a foreign language, in fact, if I'm trying to write my own language if I cease writing half way through a phrase there is quite a chance that I will completely lose the phrase, particularly if it was something that was casual from my point of view. It wasn't something really important for me to write down. (Josephine, writing TAP)

Josephine was aware of classroom-learned rules regarding grammar and made reference to these on a number of occasions. Deducing meaning from the wider context or general knowledge were strategies which she also applied often:

Using quadrat from quadratmeter to say square or rectangular. (Josephine, writing TAP)

But I think we treat it as an adjective. (Josephine, writing TAP)

The different strategy categories employed by the three high-frequency strategy users are laid out below with strategies used during the warm-up exercise excluded.

	<i>Meta-cognitive</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Social / affective</i>	<i>Communicative</i>	<i>Total</i>
Tina (Intermediate)	25	21	2	0	48
Josephine (Advanced)	23	45	3	0	71
James (Intermediate)	45	21	0	0	66

Table 24: Different categories of strategies applied by high-frequency strategy users. Excludes warm-up reading task

Tina and James employed predominantly metacognitive strategies. James's overall approach entailed a lot of translation for all tasks, including every sentence he wrote. Tina approached the tasks in an analytical manner, expressing explicitly how she planned to undertake each task and hypothesising about the approach which would work best. Like Josephine, she referred to grammar rules as learned in the classroom, but the overall range of strategies she applied was wider than that of Josephine. This may have indicated that this participant can be labelled as an independent learner. Her particular strength was at the metacognitive level: *structuring, planning, self-monitoring*.

Well, I've tried listening to it again and pausing it after each bit to try and work out what I've heard and see if I can then recognise it as meaning something. (Tina, listening TAP)

And Tier makes me think of animals, but doesn't make sense in connection with mein Bruder. (Tina, reading TAP)

By the time I got to the end of the passage I decided that Gewohnheitstier might mean sort of lifestyle. (Tina, reading TAP)

The strategies above (stopping the tape in between sentences and returning to unclear words after having finished reading the whole passage) were only applied by Tina, not by any of the other students.

Each of the **low-frequency users** of strategies showed too few strategies to highlight trends for individual participants as illustrated in the following table:

<i>Tasks/ Students</i>	<i>warm-up</i>	<i>reading</i>	<i>speaking</i>	<i>writing</i>	<i>listening</i>	<i>Total strategies used:</i>
Penelope (intermediate)	0	0	4	1	2	7
Carol (intermediate)	0	2	3	0	Not done	5
Steve (advanced)	0	3	1	3	0	7
Jessica (advanced)	3	3	2	0	0	8
Sean (intermediate)	0	2	4	1	0	7
David (intermediate)	1	Not done	2	2	0	5
Bob (intermediate)	0	2	2	5	1	10
Robert (intermediate)	0	7	1	2	2	12
Tanja (intermediate)	3	10	2	1	3	19
Amy (near-native)	0	4	3	12	0	19

Table 25: Strategy use by low-frequency users in the TAPs, separated by user and tasks

There were various reasons for low-frequency strategy usage, which differed from learner to learner. Penelope stated that she did not have any problems with the listening, therefore, did not need any tricks to work on the extract any further. The writing appeared to be too challenging for her as she had missed classes for some weeks prior to and during the study, as a result of ill health. Carol decided to finish without producing a protocol for the listening as she felt that she had already ‘failed’ the previous tasks by not generating enough language output or thorough thinking. Steve struggled with the listening and rated it as too difficult for him. He was not used to producing any language output by himself, therefore he made two attempts at the writing. As it took all his concentration to undertake the tasks, he did not feel in a position to comment very much on what he was doing either concurrently or afterwards. There might as well be an issue of lack of confidence or shyness in talking about how he went about tackling the tasks.

However, to further investigate the relatively high occurrence of low-frequency users within the present sample, a study involving TAPs with older participants who are more trained in how to undertake TAPs could provide a clearer idea of whether there is any relationship between low-frequency use and unfamiliarity with the research tool.

As the overall number of strategies found for each individual participant in this group was low, it was not possible to identify other patterns. All low-frequency strategy users were therefore considered as one group. The main characteristics of this group are explored below. The table illustrates the category of strategy used for each individual task by the low-frequency strategy users:

	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Social/affective	Communicative
All low users:	45	44	3	0

Table 26: Different categories of strategies applied by low-frequency strategy users during TAPs, excludes warm-up reading task

Again, low usage of social / affective and communicative strategies became apparent. Cognitive strategies were the main strategies applied. Metacognitive and cognitive strategies were used equally intensively.

The two **medium-frequency** users of strategies applied most strategies to the writing task:

	Warm-up	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Total:
Parker (near-native)	0	1	17	4	1	23
Isabel (intermediate)	0	3	15	6	2	26

Table 27: Strategy use of medium-frequency strategy users during TAPs, separated by user and task

Although both applied the most strategies for the same language skill, writing, they differed in the kinds of strategy applied. Parker predominantly used metacognitive strategies, Isabel mainly cognitive strategies.

	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Social / affective	Communicative	Total:
Parker (near-native)	13	9	1	0	23
Isabel (intermediate)	10	12	0	4	26

Table 28: Different categories of strategy applied by medium-frequency strategy users, excludes warm-up reading task

Parker's high use of metacognitive strategies may have been related to his higher level of proficiency which allowed him to focus more on structures and variation in vocabulary than on finding ways of constructing and understanding the L2.

Summary

All participants predominantly used strategies for reading and writing. They mainly used metacognitive and cognitive strategies, with few social / affective and communicative strategies. This was partly related to the design of the tasks, possibly to the unfamiliarity or lack of preparation of the participants for the requirements involved in undertaking TAPs. The complete lack of the use of communicative strategies came as no surprise, given that the speaking and listening tasks involved no partners to interact with. Because of the low levels of strategy use by two-thirds of the participants, no trends and special features could be identified for these. However, among the medium-frequency and high-frequency strategy

users two groups appeared, one more metacognitively oriented (Parker, Tina, James) and the other more cognitively oriented (Josephine, Isabel) regardless of the task undertaken and without any relation to their language proficiency.

7.2.4 General issues raised by participants

Certain themes emerged as common to most of the participants who undertook the TAPs. The same themes were raised in the interviews and partly in the questionnaires as well. Only those points are presented below which are specifically related to TAPs and would not fit into the wider discussion on similar issues in the interview section.

Anxiety and joy

Even though some of the participants found the think-aloud tasks harder than others, they all experienced positive as well as negative feelings towards them.

I'm finding that quite inhibiting because I know I'm not making a good job of it. (Tina, writing TAP)

I think I made a complete hash of the second task, but I try it further now. (Carol, speaking TAP)

Well, at that time, I had feelings of panic that I couldn't remember anything. This was the real problem. (David, I)

In one extreme case, a student felt too frustrated to continue and decided not to complete the remaining TAP. In other cases, students felt encouraged and enthusiastic when they managed to work out meanings and put sentences and phrases together in German.

Oh I see, the title says what languages is, it, also Sprache, also, I change langue to Sprache. And it looks feminine, and deutschen has little e, so I can put that right. So die deutsche Sprache ist Sprache. That sounds very funny. As the other thing, I like about it is that my grandchildren speak it. Say I just finish by saying that. Ich mage, now I can happily say, die deutsche. (James, writing TAP)

Student protocols like the one above demonstrated a link between expressing confidence as emotional boost and applying a strategy successfully.

Aber es ist sehr zufriedenstellend, wenn man die Wortordnung ein bisschen beherrscht. (Parker, writing TAP)

It's a challenge to read them and fun. (Sean, writing TA)

On the other hand, the following quote clearly expressed the frustration when a strategy did not work and how emotionally dissatisfying this could be for a learner:

Then what you want to say and you can't find the word for it. When you try to break them [long words] up and you know when German is inaccurate as well, inhibiting. (...) And one feels a fool (...). (Penelope, speaking, TAP)

I didn't find the vocabulary too difficult, but I was worried that I couldn't speak the required amount of time. And I do worry about the ending. (Jessica, speaking TAP)

Hearing

I have problems with my hearing, but that's another problem with learning a foreign language as you get older. I find even with French I have to listen carefully, because I don't always pick up all the words. But then that happens in English too. (Penelope, listening TAP)

Even though this participant was a former French teacher and had been exposed to French from early childhood, hearing and listening to a language had changed over the years for her. Tina also commented that voice and pitch affected the clarity of the listening extract.

The man I'm finding even more difficult than the lady. I'm not sure whether that's because of his delivery being faster or what. (...) So maybe it's my hearing as well as my lack of comprehension of hearing German. (Tina, listening TAP)

Memory

Trying to remember vocabulary in German is easier if it's in a meaningful context. (Penelope, speaking TAP)

And my memory being as it is I may have forgotten some of the questions and answers. (Isabel, listening TAP)

Some participants refer to their memory as being “bad as always” or being “worse than it used to be”. This may have been a rhetorical point learners felt they could take refuge in when they thought that they should have known something but did not. Blaming memory sounded in some cases like a plausible and socially acceptable excuse for not having understood or for not having been clear about something that they might have expected to know.

I do find the actual structure of the language easy to understand, but remembering is extremely difficult. I think it's partly old age and partly that I was never good at remembering. (Tanja, writing TAP)

I find as I get older, it gets difficult to remember arbitrary lists unless I can put them in some kind of context. (Penelope, speaking TAP)

The issue of memory is closely related to the age factor. It was, however, difficult to determine where the reflections on age originate. The topic of the present study itself may have triggered thoughts about memory, particularly when it concerned a weak memory. On the other hand, participants may have felt that they were expected to raise this issue or that it was necessary to highlight this, maybe also because as a researcher I was much younger than the participants. It may simply have been a case of students expressing what they really thought, their own perception of their memory ability. Apart from general remarks on memory and differences between learning when younger and older, some students expressed explicitly the types of difficulty they were currently experiencing and contrasted them with their experiences as younger learners:

The difficulty I found with writing and talking is, actually, that I can't do it any more. I was able to do it when I was younger, but now I can't. (Josephine, writing TAP)

Personal interests

Participants' individual strengths in German appeared to be strongly linked to their personal interest in the language and to the reasons they were learning German. Two students who were very interested in travelling to Germany and in all aspects of sightseeing, landscape, and getting around that country had no difficulty in performing very well in the speaking task about advantages and disadvantages of living in their town. This was an area of their lives they would have thought about and talked about before. Therefore, they had the ideas and the words ready, either as a result of practice in the classroom or because they had travelled to Germany on various occasions. In contrast, another participant found this task particularly difficult as his interest in the German language was mainly motivated by his hobby and former profession:

Ich bin Astronom und ich weiss die Werde [Wörter], der Fernrohr, die Fernrohr, der Spektroskopie. Ich weisse nicht kleine Werde und ich kann sprechen nicht anderes Dinges. (David, speaking TAP)

Dialogue with absent researcher

I'm sorry about that. Particularly the long gaps, that's because I write very, very slowly, particularly when I'm trying to write German. (Josephine, writing TAP)

Although I was (in most cases) absent at the time of the recording process, participants addressed the absent person in their protocols in various ways. Some commented on the way they carried out the task, some on the poor recording quality, others on their hope that they were doing what was expected. It was often not easy to distinguish whether participants were doing self-talk or addressing the researcher indirectly.

7.2.5 Think-aloud with older participants

In general, think-aloud with older language students proved a useful research instrument for extracting information regarding language learning strategy use. However, it was important to address certain issues in order to use this research tool successfully with older participants, especially those with low levels of language proficiency. These issues varied, depending on the language skill studied.

For the study of listening, the quality of the recording was of central importance to compensate for any decrease in the hearing ability of older participants. For the study of speaking, an interactive opportunity would have allowed more natural communication which might have eased verbal production. For the study of reading and writing, no special considerations related to the age of the participants were identified, except for the obvious need to choose topics of interest.

The requirement to produce output in the L2 without preparation should be considered carefully, as older participants may be more conscious of their own expectations and those imposed on them by the researcher, however subtly these are presented:

I think to do a task like that you really ought to have a little bit of preparation. Everything has flown out of my mind, if they were ever in there. (Penelope, writing TAP)

Analysis of TAPs could involve a second researcher in order to corroborate findings with an inter-rater reliability check in contrast to the intra-rater check, which was undertaken in the present study. This could contribute to improving the reliability and validity of TAP data. Such an approach could also highlight more clearly where differences in coding and labelling between the raters occur to demonstrate the subjectivity in interpretation of the data.

7.2.6 Summary of think-aloud findings

The tasks were laid out appropriately to accommodate the mainly intermediate level of 10 participants, as well as the advanced and near-native standards of the other five. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies were predominant, whatever the task. The limited use of social/affective and communicative strategies could be linked to how the TAPs were set up, without partners to whom students could listen and speak. Most strategies were used for the

reading and writing tasks. Various reasons can be put forward for this dominance, including the time available to undertake the tasks, or the effects of participants having received more training in these tasks, or preferring them to the others. It is also possible that a more receptive task like reading requires less real-time processing and thus allows more capacity for reflection and verbalisation. For the other receptive task, listening, this factor could not apply due to the nature of listening where the control of the flow is (usually) out of the hands of the listener. It could further be hypothesised that the participants in the present study were mainly trained in reading and writing due to the fashion which dominated the way languages were taught at the time they went to school and started learning languages.

TAPs varied from individual to individual, as did the intensity of strategy use. The majority of learners (10) were classified as low-frequency users, two were identified as medium-frequency users and another three as high-frequency users of strategies. The level of participants could not be linked to the intensity of strategy use or the category of strategies applied. However, differences between learners may have been affected by:

- tasks set and the effects of concurrent (as applied for writing, reading) and retrospective thinking-aloud (applied for listening and partly for speaking)
- individual participants' preference for certain language skills
- links to personality types (analytical, outspoken, introvert, etc.)
- reasons for learning German (which did not necessarily require all four language skills included in the current study).

Use of the research instrument was heavily dependent on the individual researcher, the interpretation and the research question. However, the analysis is not claimed to be fully conclusive due to difficulties in identifying, describing and classifying the strategies, and to the nature of language learning strategies. Especially as I was the only researcher involved, analysis was time consuming and there were opportunities for variations in the interpretation. However, only future similar studies will be able to show if inter-rater analysis might produce different results. Consequently, the analysis entailed a relatively high degree of subjectivity and bias. On the other hand, the diversity and flexibility of the data produced were advantages of the instrument. These benefits were reflected in the richness of the direct insights into the thinking processes of the participants. This is equally true for the older participants, such as in the present study.

7.3 Interview analysis (German participants)

The preceding chapters have presented an insight into the inner processes involved in students' application of learning strategies during the TAPs. This present chapter considers other detailed data on strategies and analyses how participants talked about the strategies they applied. Interview data was used to expand on the issues relating to older learners which had been raised in the questionnaire responses and TAPs.

21 students of German took part in the interviews:

<i>Level of language proficiency</i>	<i>U3A</i>	<i>College A</i>	<i>College B</i>	<i>Interview</i>
Near-native	8	0	0	8
Advanced	0	1	2	3
Intermediate	10	0	0	10
Total:	18	1	2	21

Table 29: Interviews with participants by institution and level of language proficiency

All students who had undertaken the TAPs were interviewed. In addition, six near-native participants from the German groups were included. The other near-native speakers were not included as they had been tutors of German, began with German as children or were not available due to other commitments. Each interview took between 20 and 50 minutes and was recorded on an Olympus DSS recorder. These recordings were transferred as DSS files onto a PC and transcribed by me. Transcripts were produced using the criteria below, with the intention of presenting an illustration of the interviews in a simple and reader-friendly manner (Appendix O shows a sample interview transcript).

- Texts were presented in a reader-friendly written format.
- To capture the flavour of the interview, incomplete or ungrammatical spoken output was transcribed as it was heard by the researcher during the interview.
- To allow the written text to flow like the spoken one, punctuation was only used when a speaker clearly indicated a break between thoughts or phrases.
- Pauses, overlaps of turns and differences in volume or tone of participants' speech were not marked.
- The same pseudonyms were used for participants' names as had been used in the previous research instruments.

Quotations in this chapter are accompanied by the speaker's pseudonym and age, plus the letter 'I' (as an abbreviation for 'interview').

For coding of the transcripts, I used content analysis which involved "the simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document's content" (Merriam, 1998: 160). Learning strategies and recurrent themes relating to older language learners were identified as relevant characteristics for the current study. As Merriam emphasised "devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves." (Merriam, 1998: 179)

Analysis was undertaken at the same time as transcription of the interviews. This ensured that ideas which emerged while listening to tapes and producing transcripts fed directly into the identification of themes and the process of analysis. This approach allowed issues which were covered by several participants to be grouped into themes. As the interviews included very extensive information, data was grouped into five following main themes:

1. Learning strategies (metacognitive, cognitive, social/affective, communicative) (chapter 7.3.1)
2. Previous language learning experiences (learner beliefs) (chapter 7.3.2)
3. Older adults learning German (motivation, enjoyment, difficulties) (chapter 7.3.3)
4. Age and language learning (memory, speed, hearing, structure, third age) (chapter 7.3.4)

These themes are examined in detail in the following chapters.

7.3.1 Language learning strategies reported in the interviews

Throughout the interviews students expressed

- motivation and drive to learn and use the target language
- consciousness about how best to organise and time their learning and language use
- focus on their individual reasons for study
- pragmatism about their individual potential and limitations.

Further to these generally positive approaches to learning and studying the language chosen, participants reported that they employed a variety of learning strategies which are presented in the following section separated into three categories: metacognitive, cognitive and social / affective.

Metacognitive strategies

Participants mainly reported using metacognitive strategies for language learning, including *planning, monitoring, creating practice opportunities, amending errors and attending to errors* (see list in appendix P).

The weekly rhythm, daily study and repetition seemed to be main factors for ensuring learning and practising the language most efficiently.

I find that with the list of German words I don't know and then I try and learn them before I go to bed and I don't get it during the night perhaps learn about 5 out of 20 and the others are still getting muddled or not quite right. Then I can look at them the next morning and I think I don't know it but I think some of them are still in my mind and kind of bounce back. (Tina, I, 60)

All intermediate students reported some degree of regularity about the days on which they did their homework for the class. Some completed it in the hours following a class. Others attended to it the next day to let newly learned material sink in before reinforcing it with homework. Three students used their weekly homework more as a preparation for the next class by completing it the day before. Four of the near-native participants reported that they included German in their daily routine, maintaining their use of the language:

- watching films / videos in French / German
- listening to the French radio every morning
- reading books / newspapers every day (either alone or in a group).

None of the advanced students described such a regular approach to learning German. However, they did say that they were aware of the need for such routines and of the repetition involved in improving their language proficiency. Josephine, for example, reported that she had done this for Spanish in the past:

You write them [vocabulary] down on a card and you hope that you learn those and the next day you learn them again and then the next day you learn them again and then the next week you learn them again. And then the next month you learn them again. All this time I had this bunch of cards, because it grew as the months went by. (Josephine, I, 62)

Similarly, Daniel, a near-native user of German, described how he had approached learning a new language independently, emphasising the high level of planning and persistence involved:

I bought myself the Daily Express cassettes (...) and played them while I got dressed and while I sat on the loo and while I shaved and all these things which you normally waste your time. But I worked hard, every evening 10 minutes with the grammar book, which went with the series. (...) I'd got the first 1000 or 1100 words or little phrases by heart. (Daniel, I, 89)

He had successfully applied the same approach to Russian.

Participants were also aware of strategies that did not work for them, such as having homework corrected by the teacher (Josephine, advanced) or using flash cards (Parker, near-native) (*strategy monitoring*). *Self-diagnosis* was applied to identify areas of strength and weakness linked to learning the target language:

I don't find German grammar easy. Because it is so rigid. But German conversation and putting German into context is what actually interests me. (Paula, I, 66)

I've got that sort of mind which understands grammar, English grammar and. I think if somebody says this is in the dative and it's the indirect object or something I know what they're talking about. (James, I, 75)

Analysing one's individual preferences also highlighted individual learning styles:

Yes I'm a very logical person. (...) I did all the exercises checked the answers trying to read it and work out why they were different to mine to work out why I was wrong. You know I was going back in saying why is it that and not this. (Tina, I, 60)

Cognitive strategies

In the interviews, participants reported using a range of cognitive strategies, including *resourcing*, *naturalistic practice*, *highlighting* (as in appendix P). All intermediate and advanced participants made use of resources in addition to the ones used in class. As the questionnaires had indicated, participants used reading and grammar books, CDs and audio tapes and, sometimes, internet resources to enhance their learning. The more 'traditional' ways of learning vocabulary through *list-making*, *masking* and *rote-learning* proved popular for all levels of language proficiency, again to different extents and with a number of variations. Rick, who had learned German when he was in Austria doing his National Service, used mainly *rhymes* and *rhythms*.

The way I did it or do it is the Eselsbrücke. If you can associate it with something that brings it back to mind. Of course after a while you can drop the association and know the word. (Rick, I, 68)

The importance of learning words and phrases in a meaningful context was emphasised, especially when learning in later life was compared with learning when younger:

I had a good memory, a very good memory as a child. And I do get cross with myself. But I'm sure it's learning things in isolation. If you're learning things the more you cross-reference. (Penelope, I, 69)

At all levels of language proficiency students made use of *naturalistic practice opportunities* and often tried to create situations in which they could practise their language.

Oh yes I do a lot of that [eavesdropping in town]. If I sat next to somebody or if I go to London quite often to see a friend of mine on the train, yes, I'm listening hard and try working out what they're saying. Oh yes, I do that whenever I can. (Robert, I, 68)

But I mean going to Germany is always a very enjoyable experience. (Sean, I, 73)

It's part of me you know I have a German doctor, we have a German veterinary surgeon. I have met various other people who are German. (Paula, I, 66)

At the end of the study, Parker began to organise an exchange visit to a German institution similar to the U3A to allow a group of people interested in the German language to visit their twin town.

Social / affective strategies

Among social/affective strategies the most important strategy employed by participants was persistence in all aspects involved in language study and usage. Despite the time commitments involved and their difficulties with memory, all participants express determination to persevere in their study and practice.

Anyway, one more thing to achieve really. (Carol, I, 77)

I just talked to people and made mistakes and allowed myself to be corrected. (...) you just got to be prepared to behave like a child and let proudly people laugh at you which most British people hate. (Daniel, I, 89)

The willingness to take risks expressed by Daniel was identified as a characteristic of a good language learner who is “prepared to take chances, to appear foolish in order to progress language proficiency” (Graham, 1997: 103).

Communicative strategies

No communicative strategies were reported in the interviews. This appeared to be due to the format of the data elicitation instrument which provoked more thoughts about the other strategy categories.

Summary

For all participants learning and maintaining the language was all about adopting a very active approach. Participants expressed a strong sense of engagement with the language they learned, involving initiative, willingness to plan and organise time, and working creatively with study materials. Students were aware of the advantages of approaching the language in their own way following their preferences for different media and techniques. Strategies reported in the interviews were mainly cognitive and metacognitive, only one social / affective strategy was mentioned (see also appendix P). Some strategies were difficult to tease out as they were used in chain-like combinations. One example was the way in which Tina learned vocabulary. She wrote a list of English words on one side of a sheet of paper and their German equivalents on the other side. She then learned these by covering one side and then going over and over them until she could recall most of them. She then left the words aside and returned to them the following day for reinforcement. This process included several steps: writing out, making a list, repeating the words and repeating them in the same way later. These combined strategy uses underlined the highly structured approach used by the majority of the participants in the current study.

7.3.2 Additional factors to consider

Strategy use in language learning has to be seen in the wider context of individual learner differences and of students' prior (language) learning experiences. There are important links with motivation and learner beliefs as these "are very closely bound up with experience" in a general learning context (Smith & Spurling, 2001: 24). Aspects of previous language learning experiences and the beliefs about what supports or prevents language learning, as expressed in the interviews with participants studying German will be presented in the following sections.

Previous language learning experiences

The data generated by the questionnaires (see section 7.1, table 9, page 74) showed that the majority of participants had learned at least one or two languages while at school. Their memories ranged from positive to negative and were clearly linked to the study of languages having been compulsory.

At school I hated languages. (Tina, I, 60)

When I was at school it wasn't that I was really positive about wanting to do languages. It was the least worst option of all the options available. (Robert, I, 67)

For Spanish and Latin I had very good teachers and I think they are the ones who inspired me to carry on with languages. (Jessica, I, 67)

Those who had learned Latin at school rated the experience as helpful for learning German, particularly when it came to understanding the grammar.

So I don't get bothered quite that sort of, you know the different cases and things like that. (Sean, I, 73)

Because I've learned Latin by rote I can recite my you know der die das etc. like a poem. And it's there and it comes back and I'm sure that comes from Latin. And I'm sure that people who haven't done Latin haven't got that. (Tina, I, 60)

All the near-native and advanced, and most of the intermediate German students, had had the opportunity to live in or visit a German-speaking country and other opportunities to learn German.

I had an interest in the language and of course we did take the children on a skiing holiday, I think I did say that, to Austria and there I came up against German then. And I kept wishing I knew and understood more. So that's why I came back to German. (Jessica, I, 67)

My mother had met a Hungarian refugee who'd spoke German. And in order

My mother had met a Hungarian refugee who'd spoke German. And in order to help her you know I had some German lessons but not for very long. (Carol, I, 77)

I ended up to be one of the last conscripts in a voluntary army (...). And I was on that project working in Austria and Germany for two years which is when I picked up German. (Rick, I, 68)

Learner beliefs

On the basis of their variety of language learning experiences, students expressed preferences and beliefs related to the different languages, their individual learner type and to different approaches to languages. Preferences were also expressed in relation to feelings and attitudes towards the various languages.

I think with German I feel more comfortable, I feel more me. I've never felt happy with the French accent. I don't feel a French person ever. (...) I feel quite natural with German, speaking German. (Jessica, I, 67)

I find German much more interesting than French anyway. I suppose to me German seems more logical and having that kind of mind, studying economics you sort of look into the logical processes of things. (Robert, I, 67)

They [languages] have different feels for me. French doesn't because it's the one I had since I was very young. German I always think of a rectangular language with corners and shapes which gives it the ability to see some things which are excellently plane to me. Spanish I feel circular, ovals and circles which is a much softer feeling. (...) I have a strong suspicion that any attraction to German is that of code breaking rather than anything else. (Josephine, I, 62)

Students' feelings towards certain languages were connected with differences between their mother tongue and any foreign language. The idea was expressed that a foreign language remained foreign, no matter how many languages one knew or what the level of proficiency was. Considering their language learning experiences, participants were aware of the time and effort involved in learning and continuing with any language.

All students identified the ultimate achievement in any language as being able to speak and communicate orally. This included thinking in the target language. Near-native participants reported that they thought in German as translation slowed them down in their thinking processes. Only Josephine, one of the advanced students, remembered that once thinking in the target language had had the opposite effect:

The only time that I've ever thought in a foreign language and knowing I was doing, but not when I was doing it, was in French. And it slowed down my thought processes. And that's what I noticed, I noticed I wasn't thinking very fast and wondered why. (Josephine, I, 62)

All participants had experienced problems with provision of language classes which had led to them giving up a language, commuting to continue their studies or taking a break of several years before starting again at a lower level. However, the wide range of languages and levels provided by the U3A appeared to provide what the participants had come to expect. Classes provided space and time for students to practise and learn German, as well as a safe environment in which to try out newly learned phrases and forms, encouraged by the tutor and fellow students.

And I think I do expect her [the teacher] to make me speak even if I don't want to. And she won't let us speak English. If we do try she won't let us. And that's what I want. So that I've got to speak. And I've got more confidence from the classes. (Jessica, 1, 67)

Students' first experiences with other languages had mainly been at school. About half of the German students had studied Latin at school which, they stated, helped their German especially when mastering German grammar. Only 6 of the 21 German students had had no previous opportunity to learn German before starting to study it at the U3A. Attitudes towards languages and language learning varied from positive to negative, with overall positive comments on their current learning situation and a variety of positive and negative experiences in the past. Students related these emotions to various factors, such as languages having been compulsory at school or working / living abroad or their individual learner types.

7.3.3 Older adults learning German

In many respects older adults learning German are the same as younger adults. However, the interviews clearly indicated that motivation and enjoyment played a central role in taking up and continuing the language. Students sought the challenge of learning German and were willing to invest time and energy in doing so. As Graham (1997) stresses, insights into relations between strategy use and task are important, but "we need to also consider their general approach to work in order to gain some insight into how they cope with the demands made upon them." (Graham, 1997: 77).

Motivation

During the interviews all participants displayed a strong will to put any possible effort into learning and continuing with German. Asked for the motives for their strong engagement students claimed a variety, often a combination of reasons:

1. Travelling in German-speaking countries
2. German-speaking friends
3. Language learning as a mental activity
4. German-speaking family
5. Time available to pursue whatever they like
6. Admiration of people who had mastered German

How strongly and in which combination each of the factors above influenced each individual differed from participant to participant. Learning German was not related to achieving certain standards or certificates, although some students aimed for the A-level or had other language certificates. The learning itself, working with the language, discovering new aspects by using various resources gave satisfaction and pleasure independent of standardised achievements.

Well I do enjoy learning German but I don't mind being bad at it it doesn't worry me or anything if I'm not going to be successful. (...) so it doesn't worry me that I'm not good at it. But I'm only enjoying it. (Tanja, 1, 68)

David's main motive for learning German was to read original texts for his hobby, history of science, Carol wanted to prove to herself that she is able to learn German, Steve expressed the view that learning German was better than spending all his free time in front of the TV, Penelope wanted, ideally, to be able to read Thomas Mann in the original one day.

Participants also reported that their initial motivation had changed over time. In James's case there was a shift from the external push to learn German for his grandchildren in Germany to enjoying the language learning experience itself. The majority reported that they first joined the groups to progress in and practise their language. Now they also stay with the groups as they enjoy learning with the others as a form of socialising. With reference to language learning in school, some participants stated that the only motivation to do language was to get through (e.g. Robert, Tina), others learned languages out of professional necessity (e.g. David had to work in Spain, Anne followed her husband to Germany for some years, Josephine lived abroad with her family when she was a child). Earlier reasons to learn any language were mostly not intrinsically initiated, very much in contrast to language learning now in their third age when students decided to do it for themselves, out of personal choice. However, participants (especially those at an

intermediate level of proficiency) also emphasised the lack of any necessity for using the language in everyday life. Learning the L2 in their native L1 environment constituted a hurdle, especially for the students who had started learning German when they were retired, despite previous or current occasional contacts with German native speakers.

It became clear that motivation was linked to the personal circumstances of each individual participant, independently of the standard of proficiency or certificates achieved so far. External pressure was not needed, students themselves created situations where the desire and the opportunity to learn and practise the language met.

Well I think it's because I applied for the class first and then had to do it. I think it was also the sheer panic that I would not be up to it with all these people they could all speak German like others used to be able to speak French at school and I never could. (Tina, I, 60)

Smith & Spurling (2001: 1) state that the “levels of motivation displayed by individuals reflect their social and economic experience in general, and their family experience in particular”.

Enjoyment of learning and studying

Participants expressed their pleasure and the fun they experienced through learning and practising German in class. These positive feelings were related to a combination of factors which made all the effort of learning, memorising and practising German worthwhile. The relaxed atmosphere in class and the company of the other students who come together for the same purpose contributed to the enjoyment of the learning experience, a view much more strongly emphasised in the interviews than the questionnaires.

I do enjoy the class and we do laugh quite a lot. It's good fun and I really enjoy that. It's nice to meet new people. (Isabel, I, 60)

We thoroughly enjoyed it and that's why we decided to go. And it lived up to our expectations we did enjoy the classes immensely. (Sean, I, 73)

At the same time, students acknowledged that it took a lot of effort and concentration inside and outside the class to maintain the learning process and inversely that this added to the pleasure of learning and practicing:

My wife thinks it's very good to keep the brain cells. But I enjoy it. (Bob, I, 74)

You know that you made a conscious effort and by the end of the lesson you're aware that that effort has been made. You know, I get satisfaction out of that, I think yes I really got to keep my brain going. So I've not found that a lazy option. (Robert, I, 67)

In addition, students reported positive feelings about becoming part of another language, where German opens up a new space for social participation. This aspect of learning, entering an additional culture and behaviour is specific to learning another language:

The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviours and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner. (Williams, 1994: 77)

Although some students had started German at school followed by a break of about 30 years, they were surprised at what they could still remember when they embarked on the language again, such as memorised verb forms or phrases. However fast or slow the progress, the tempo did not play a central role and was weighed very differently by each student:

Yes, because I think it gives a sense of achievement, however modest. It's nice to be able to do something you couldn't do last week. I think one should always look ahead. (Carol, I, 77)

I would like to be able to speak German. But there is no urgency to learn. However, well, it's, well, it's like a hobby really for me. I don't see why I shouldn't continue with it at my own speed. (Steve, I, 67)

But I must admit after 5 years of French I couldn't speak any French whereas I can speak more German now [after nearly one year] than I'm sure I could ever speak French. So it's coming faster than the French did. (Tina, I, 60)

It's frustrating, so frustrating. Because I want to do and I can't I don't remember as good as I should be. (Penelope, I, 69)

Some feelings of anger and frustration about slow progress or the necessity to repeat certain language tasks more often than expected owing to a poorer memory were expressed by nearly all, regardless of their level of proficiency. Despite these temporary moments of anxiety, all participants in the current study planned to continue with German, irrespective of the level they had achieved so far:

I'm really enjoying it, has got my motivation going and my confidence is coming back which I think is a good thing. So I carry on. (Isabel, I, 60)

Difficulties with German

It's so complex. I know all languages are, but any language which starts off with three genders that's a problem as well. And any language where the adjectives have to agree with the nouns. Any adjectives which need to go with so many different plurals instead of just s, you know, house – houses, book – books. But in German anything. And then prepositions I said on the tape. And then anything to do with word order is totally baffling. (Bob, I, 74)

As expressed in the previous statement nearly all aspects of grammar, ranging from prepositions, adjective and noun agreements, compounds and word order were highlighted as difficult areas of German, mainly by the intermediate students. Gender continued to be emphasised as difficult at all levels of proficiency. Opinions expressed in the interviews with the students of the German groups were nearly identical with the personal weaknesses raised in the questionnaire. Other language students also cited no talent for languages, boredom in class, no improvement, lack of discipline / confidence / time / practice opportunities as weaknesses.

On the other hand, it was the complexity of the grammatical system that played an important part in maintaining their interest in German. This focus on the systematic side of the language could be linked with the idea that the language can be learned even without any 'talent' for languages. Therefore intermediate students felt more at ease with reading:

I haven't got a good ear. Some people have got it if they hear something they know it sounds right. I don't think I have that. I find reading easier than listening or trying to talk. Comparatively easier. (James, I, 75)

Learning a language is a real challenge for me because I'm no natural I've got no linguistic ability. So I thought therefore that would keep my brain going. (Tina, I, 60)

However, speaking was identified as a difficult but desirable language skill, linked to a certain degree of anxiety:

I think it's always a bit more difficult. Well, you don't get to practise it much. You can always practise reading and writing, but actual speaking is difficult to practise. (Jessica, I, 67)

I would like to be able to speak it, you know, reasonably fluently without too many mistakes. (Carol, I, 77)

I feel embarrassed about speaking German. (Steve, I, 67)

The near-native-speaker students had already achieved fluency in speaking and expressed no anxiety. This correlated with the findings from the questionnaire (as in appendix I). Opinions regarding pronunciation ranged from very easy to quite difficult, compared to other languages learned.

But I've never used German and I haven't got my tongue around things. So if I sit down I can say ich but if it comes in a sentence. I mean I can say Loch and auch and sich but to actually read it. It goes. (Tanja, I, 68)

I think one of the things I like about the language is what you see is what you get. You pronounce everything, don't you. Not like in English. (Steve, I, 67)

Listening was stated as difficult by some intermediate participants for various reasons. For Tina this problem was related to her starting learning German on her own only with the book and the audio tapes. Others linked the problems to hearing difficulties.

Participants appreciated that classes were the (main) opportunity for the majority of the participants to practically apply their German regularly. As Steve pointed out, however, it is still important to have the option of explanations being given in English, particularly for the intermediate and advanced participants: "There are things when you're getting the gist of something is not quite getting there totally." (Steve, I, 67).

These older students of German appeared highly motivated, enjoying the challenges posed by learning and practising the language (similarly Berndt, 2003). As suggested in research on motivation, some students expressed a change of motives with language learning itself becoming more central (as a brain teaser) than any of the other more external factors, such as travelling, family, friends. Also the pleasure of the class and the other students played an important role in maintaining interest in the language. For the intermediate and advanced learners, anxiety was mainly related to being unable to speak as fluently as desired. The German grammar system was rated as difficult on the one hand but also as attractive for the same reason, in that it helped sustain one's interest in German.

7.3.4 Age and language learning

Participants showed awareness of the way they learned, learning strategies that worked or did not work for them (as presented in section 7.3.1), which were also related to their motives for learning German or learning styles. As the age variable was another focus of the present study, participants described areas they felt were related to their age. In the main, age-specific aspects raised in the interviews included:

- Memory
- Speed
- Hearing
- Concentration
- Third age issues

Memory

Students seemed particularly concerned about memory and memorising words and phrases when they were at an intermediate level of proficiency. These students expressed concerns about the procedure of memorising with an emphasis on the difficulty of recalling once learned information:

It's all to do with age. And the reason is, well, there's three reasons. One is getting the information in. I can understand it, no problem with that. But it's retaining it. (...) Then the second problem is when it's finally in there you can't recall it any more. (Bob, I, 74)

Thus, understanding the language system with its exceptions and varieties is not the main problem, but accessing material instantly when needed in a particular situation. Stevick (1999: 50) explains that rapid access to certain information in the memory can be difficult due to “cluttering”. Every recall activates a mix of “cognitive by-products” and affective stimuli, such as enjoyment or frustration. Access to even very well-learned facts can therefore be influenced by affective aspects.

However, all of the participants stated that they see learning and practising German also as a factor in boosting the memory and brain, to keep mentally active:

So it's useful. And we enjoy it. That's the main thing. And I'm sure it's keeping the brain ticking along. (Bob, I, 74)

Speed/ time

For the intermediate and advanced students understanding new learning material did not present a specific problem in itself. However, the time invested in learning may be longer compared to that required when learning at a younger age:

And I think memory is one of the things that go, but also just simple speed of working. Even holding a word in your head, you looked it up in the dictionary and you want to put it into your homework and then I've forgotten it already and I have to go back to the dictionary to look for it again. (David, I, 71)

But it is very slow progress I feel. [...] I wouldn't say that it's particularly difficult, it's just at times you feel a bit frustrated to be so slow to acquire and say what you want to say because you still haven't got to the stage when one can do that. (Sean, I, 73)

The greater amount of time needed for learning now was linked to a less reliable memory which would not retain new material as continuously as expected, compared to learning at younger age:

I can still learn it as quickly as I could but I forget so much more than I've ever used to. When I was younger I felt that I've learned it and it would be there a week later. Now it won't, that's it. (Tina, I, 60)

This impression may not necessarily be related to a poorer memory. Dark-Freudeman et al. (2006) identify the special situation of older adults when learning another language as having been accustomed to use a certain word or structure in their L1 (or other previous learned languages) which simply increases “the probability of uttering the English” (Dark-Freudeman et al., 2006) (or other previously learned language). As a consequence, adults have to do two things when they learn another language. In addition to learning they also have to unlearn certain often used pathways (Dark-Freudeman et al., 2006).

Also the near-native-speaker participants felt that there were differences in their use of German compared to when they were younger, particularly if they had had a break during which they did not use their German (in two cases for more than 30 years):

Actually I haven't lost my understanding. When I tune into the satellite station I understand very well. I've lost the ability to be able to speak fluently. (Rick, I)

However, as these students had already achieved a very high level of proficiency in German in the past, coming back to German meant that they could still communicate successfully in spoken German, only with restricted fluency. Jill and James had both passed their A-levels in German and French and studied languages at university and started on languages again after a break of about 30 years. Both expressed the usefulness of languages for keeping the brain active but did not state any difficulties regarding memorising or forgetting as they could remember everything of their languages once it had been activated. All other near-native students were using German mainly to prevent themselves forgetting the language.

To sum up, memory was an issue for all students. Those who were still in the process of advancing in their language studies to higher levels of proficiency described difficulties regarding memorising, recall and speed of learning. For the near-native students losing fluency by forgetting and decreased speed were the main issues.

Hearing

Difficulties with hearing were raised by the majority of the participants regardless of the level of proficiency. Problems were reported during the classes, whilst listening to audios or TV at home and contact with native speakers.

You know, one of the things about the tapes, (...) I don't hear them in English never mind in German. And of course with the languages as you know, a lot of them are clichés. (...) So really, I'm not at all convinced that at my age I shall ever be good at German. (Bob, I, 74)

Listening I'm finding a bit difficult possibly I sometimes wonder if it's starting getting on with age. My ears are not very good I miss the sometimes final consonants or something like that. (...) But I think it's also just not having a very good ear. Picking up things that are going quickly by. (James, I, 75)

Rost (2002: 8) links hearing to brain activities, arguing that impulses through hearing “play an important role in animating the brain” (Tomatis, 1991 refers to this role as “cortical recharging”). This animation occurs by the continuous “hearing forward” and “hearing backward” involved (Rost, 2002: 8) in order to understand heard text. In that respect, participants in the present study are indeed undertaking the right activity to maintain their brain active.

Quite surprisingly, however, Parker, who started learning German in his 50s when he was already deaf in one ear and partly deaf in the other, was among one of the interviewees with the highest level of language proficiency. His frequent exposure to natural German as it occurs in everyday life by commuting between England and Germany over a period of about two years in a fortnightly pattern might have helped to overcome this specific difficulty of hearing natural language in use.

Structure and concentration

Interestingly, nearly all participants mentioned on at least one occasion an application of a grammar rule or language regularity they had learned in class or from their tutors during the TAPs.

I think words ending in -ung are feminine. (Amy, writing TAP)

I used vocabulary from former lessons. (Sean, speaking TAP)

I remember heutzutage, because I wrote that in a homework last week and it means nowadays. (Jessica, writing TAP)

Grammar, grammar rules and meta-language seemed to play quite an important role for learning and using German.

Wird der Baum angeputzt, so that's a passive. (Josephine, warm-up task TAP)

Then he goes into his kitchen, is a noun. (Tanja, reading TAP)

That must be the past participle of ziegen. (Sean, reading TAP)

Structured learning with clear rules provided is remembered and readily accessible for use. This recourse to grammar rules could be interpreted as an argument for older students being rather cognitive learners, approaching language learning in a more analytical way, structuring their learning through regularities found in the language system.

Further, they have clear ideas on which stage in their learning they are at and how they could benefit and improve their learning:

But my mind doesn't work as fast as I'd like it too. I'm much better at reading, because then I can jump up and read another bit and then read up again and read more. But if I'm talking then I have to talk bababababa and then I can't stop and go back. This is my problem really. (David, I, 71)

Concentration was an issue not only for the time of the class but also for the self-study at home. Concentration itself is not necessarily problematic:

If I sit down and concentrate then I concentrate. (Tanja, I, 68)

However, arranging the time and making it a commitment to sit down and concentrate on practising German can be quite a different thing. All intermediate students reported that the class over one hour already stretched their level of concentration. In general, daytime classes as provided by the U3A were preferred by most participants, also for reason of less ability to concentrate on learning new material in the evenings.

Six of the intermediate students also explained that concentration now is different to when they were younger adult learners.

I have to sit down in a room and concentrate. I can't just listen to things while I'm doing something else. (Jessica, I, 67)

You're quite conscious of that it's harder to pick up the vocabulary. You have to make a conscious effort rather than absorbing it without consciously thinking I need to learn those words. (Robert, I, 67)

Issues around the Third age

All participants in the current study seemed very active, not only since they retired: "I've always looked at doing things rather than watching television." (Steve, I, 67). For most people, with the third age came the opportunity to organise their days without a prescribed schedule dictated by work. Within this free time participants now arrange their daily rhythm themselves which requires self-discipline.

The most important thing is the discipline. Because the fact that I have to do this, even if it is five hours work. If I have to do this every week, that's tremendously important to me. Because if I didn't have that discipline, I would never do it. (David, I, 71)

And surprisingly, although I'm retired, I don't have a lot of time in the daytime. I look after my granddaughter two days per week and I have quite elderly parents. So I have quite a lot of commitments in the daytime. So to have the class, then I have the homework to do. (Jessica, I, 67)

Discipline involved not only organising a daily routine, but also making the right choices from the many activities on offer.

There are other things to do because I spent one day a week making jewellery and I got a house and a husband and we do other things. So, but I like to be stretched. (Carol, I, 77)

Thoughts on keeping active and fit but also on the awareness of limitations of physical or mental flexibility that might restrict their choices at later stages in their lives were raised.

So I have that sort of slight panic that I'm no longer going to be able to keep fit or ride my bike or whatever. So what on earth am I going to do with myself. Certainly television won't keep me going. I like reading but not excessively. (Tina, I, 60)

Choices were made in the light of different factors, such as physical ability to continue, intellectual stimulation, social aspects or access.

Learning and attending classes offered more than simply keeping intellectually active. Learning represented a social activity in that everything related to the learning activity involved a form of socialising with other like-minded people.

You know some days we say oh we got that journey on the [motorway] ahead of us do we really want to be bothered but we always come back saying well it was worth going and we do enjoy it when we are there. So yes we enjoy the class very much. (Sean, I, 73)

It's contact. Just doing things. Excuse for not doing the housework. (Tanja, I, 68)

And I also come for the contact. It's good to get out of the house. And I think classes are very valuable. (Carol, I, 77)

For four intermediate students learning German was a new experience.

I never chose German. Which I regret now bitterly. You know when you're 13 you don't make wise decisions. (Tina, I, 60)

No, but I think you should try not to feel life is closing down, you know. You should look for new experiences, new opportunities all the time. (Carol, I, 77)

For the others in the interviews learning and practising German represented a return to an activity they had left aside for some time when they had other commitments in their lives.

7.3.5 Summary of the interview findings

German was a special language for most of the participants in the current study as they all grew up around the time of the Second World War. Some had memories of having been in Germany during the war, others of German prisoners of war at their parents' house or the wall in Berlin:

Well I was only 16 at that time and I didn't know any German. I went the year they've built the wall so it was all a bit traumatic. It'd been built about two weeks before I've been on a school trip (...). So we saw a different Berlin. (Tina, I, 60)

All participants brought a vast amount of experiences with German or other languages with them. Latin was referred to as the most influential language for learning German, especially regarding grammar. The format and intensity of the learning experiences varied. However, for German all participants appeared highly motivated, active and disciplined. The learning environment played an important role in maintaining interest in pursuing the language. The understanding of achievement varied between learners but was important to all, regardless of whether they were aiming for a certificate or not. The purposes for doing German were self-defined and the reasons showed changes over time. Participants identified memory, speed, hearing and concentration as main areas of differences in learning and practising a language when older.

Students presented themselves mainly as metacognitive learners. Individuals presented different ways of approaching the learning and practising of German. Monitoring and analysing the effectiveness in relation to their individual style and circumstances proved central. Among the cognitive strategies, repetition in various formats was applied, in conjunction with organising and timing the appropriate learning and practising activities. For this, a variety of resources were used, often chosen independently of the material worked on in class.

Older adult language learners appeared in many respects as independent (*resourcing, monitoring, analysing*). However, the structure provided by attending classes was viewed as equally important for continuing with German. The structured way of learning and practising with the emphasis on metacognitive and cognitive strategies could be interpreted as a way to compensate for losses in speed and hearing (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). However, there might also be an element of increased self-consciousness. Throughout the different phases of data collection there appeared to be a noticeable level of consciousness and self-diagnosis about all the issues raised. During the TAPs participants were very aware of what they were doing, how they went about doing it and how they felt the result was.

I can get the grammar correct provided I can look things up. So I need to look. (Tanja, speaking TAP)

But, I suppose, on the whole I got the gist of the interview, just one or two sort of phrases that I got stuck on and had to use guess work. (Isabel, listening TAP)

The results elicited from the separate research instruments will be summarised in the following chapter on findings.

8 Findings of study

The triangulation proved useful in various ways. Language learning strategies were identified using complementary methods of data collection, allowing participants to report (questionnaire), demonstrate (TAPs) and further elaborate (interviews) on their strategy use. In addition, the combination of research instruments allowed me to gain an insight into the applicability of these different research instruments in the context of older language learners and to compare the data collected by each instrument. This exploratory approach supported the collection of information on characteristics of older language learners. Learners of German were identified as representative of older learners of languages at the U3A on the basis of the questionnaire results, both in terms of their use of learning strategies and the wider context of their language learning. However the findings of the present study, being mainly of a qualitative nature, lead to further hypotheses rather than to the testing of those hypotheses, as Holliday (2002: 35) also emphasises as typical for qualitative studies. This chapter first presents findings on aspects on language learning strategies followed by a summary of issues which address the wider context of older language learners.

8.1 Language learning strategies

The concept of language learning strategies as used by Graham (1997) (based on O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) can be applied to older adult learners. It can be concluded that the theory of learning strategies applies to all language learners regardless of age and therefore complies with the supposition which underlies any theory: "While the content may be different in different contexts, the form of these theories will be the same." (Blaikie, 2003: 145) Strategy use depends on a variety of factors: the individual student, the research instrument, the task, the language skill and individual preferences. Older language learners seem to differ from younger learners in the characteristics which can be attributed to them rather than the strategies they use. However, overall trends were observed and 65 different strategies (appendix P) identified. As a comparison, Graham's (1997) list contains 104 different strategies; Oxford lists 138 strategies (Oxford et al., 1996: 22); but both their lists are based on a much bigger sample than the one of the present study with only young students as participants. Also it has to be clear that a greater number of strategies listed is not automatically an indicator of a more effective or better use of them. The figures are used here to simply illustrate the variety that can be found when researching learning strategies.

Dominance of metacognitive and cognitive strategies

The use of metacognitive or cognitive strategies dominated throughout. Oxford et al. (1996: 24) highlight the same phenomenon in their study of the learning strategies of younger university students of French. The low use of social / affective and communicative strategies in the present study may have been linked to the way in which the research instruments were applied. Applying the TAPs, as in the present study, proved limiting in two ways. First, TAPs were carried out individually, i.e. there was no partner to interact with. In addition, the delay in talking about strategies retrospectively for the listening and speaking tasks might have resulted in a loss of strategies reported due to the time difference of undertaking the tasks and reflecting on them. It therefore seems less likely that the dominance of cognitive and metacognitive strategies is characteristic only of older language learners. However, this dominance could also be understood as an indicator of the independence of the learners in the present study. As Smith & Spurling (2001) emphasise about older learners: "Anything they are going to do is going to be self-directed and voluntary, as an exercise in autonomy." (Smith & Spurling, 2001: 62) The more intensive use of metacognitive strategies by the older students could also be interpreted as an indicator for the potential of these learners to achieve higher levels of language proficiency:

Furthermore, one of the most important factors in becoming a proficient language learner appears to be the ability to stand back and reflect on one's own learning and assess which steps need to be taken to regulate it. (Graham, 1997: 85)

Variations in strategy use

The more past language learning experiences participants had had, the more intensive users of learning strategies they proved to be. Variations in strategy use appeared to differ more between levels of proficiency than between languages. Similarly, Anderson & Vandergrift (1996: 14) in their study of university students of French as a foreign language report an increase in strategy use as participants' language proficiency increases. However, the literature on language learning strategies does not seem to support a correlation between increasing strategy use and advancing language proficiency, since Chamot (2001: 32) reports the opposite effect in a longitudinal study with Japanese EFL students who used fewer learning strategies with increasing language proficiency for conversations (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990: 127 report varying results in their different studies regarding this possible correlation).

In the present study, those with higher levels of language proficiency displayed a more creative and intensive use of media and learning resources. Individual students showed clear preferences for or against certain media and adapted their use to their specific purpose and personal circumstances. If strategy use further depends on individual preference, two types of strategy users may be hypothesised from the TAPs: one more metacognitively and the other more cognitively oriented. However, the sample in the present study was too small to generalise this hypothesis appropriately. In addition, the majority of participants could not be clearly classified in this way as they applied only an overall low frequency of learning strategies.

The task dependency of learning strategies became evident from the TAPs in which writing and reading triggered the most incidents of strategy use, compared to listening and speaking. Different data elicitation methods confirmed the importance of vocabulary for the process of learning and practising another language. In the questionnaires the section on vocabulary learning evoked the most answers, in the TAPs most strategies were reported for reading and writing. The older participants used vocabulary learning strategies which were similar to those employed by the younger students in Graham's (1997) study, such as *masking*, *list making* and *rote learning*. However, Graham (1997: 77) concludes from her data that "some A-level students are not learning vocabulary in the most efficient manner" and do not necessarily retain vocabulary. Cohen (1991: 115) raises consciousness as an additional factor required: adult language learners are being more "consciously aware of the vocabulary needs that they may have" than younger learners. Bialystok (1991: 68) links this conscious awareness to the "higher levels of analysis" accessible by adult learners. For reading and writing, those students who were identified in Graham's (1997) study as "successful" applied metacognitive strategies that were similar to those of the older participants in the present study (for example *monitoring*, *substitution*, *resourcing*).

The interviews provided information about more general approaches to learning as well as supporting the findings of the previous instruments by further contributing information about particular learning strategies used. Participants expressed a positive approach to practising and learning the language in an individually structured way. In addition, opportunities for applying the language in any context were sought, combined with an intensive use of resources to enhance language practice. For younger learners, Graham (1997: 53) also reports *creating practice opportunities* and *naturalistic practice* as the chief

strategies used. Students supported their language learning not only by their persistence and focus, but also by awareness of their potential, their limitations and their ability.

Considering the different aspects of strategy use by the older learners summarised above, it is tempting to conclude that these participants seem to have been very effective language learners due to their intensive use of metacognitive strategies, the variety of strategies they used and their willingness to invest time and effort. However, as Graham (1997: 54) emphasises, it is more important to consider how learners apply learning strategies, in what combinations they employ them and whether they use them appropriately. To comment on the efficacy of strategy would require an assessment of the appropriateness of each incident of strategy application, but the present study did not aim to test efficacy. As learning strategies presented only one aspect of interest for the present study, further information was collected with relevance to the age factor to gain an insight into general characteristics of the participants as older language learners.

8.2 Characteristics of older learners

In general, older learners did seem to display more similarities to younger students than differences. However, it has to be borne in mind that the sample of participants involved did not present a representative sample of that age group within the population, as indicated by the particularly high level of education of participants in the present study. The majority of participants were connected to learning/educational settings, either professionally or through other interests. It therefore comes as no surprise that they continued to study and learn after they retired.

The further along the life course people are the more their previous life experience comes into play, and learning forms parts of complex patterns of cause and effect with a host of different factors interacting over time. (Schuller et al., 2004: 14)

Despite similarities in strategy use between older and younger students, certain attributes of the older learners who participated can be described as noticeable:

Active and resourceful: in finding ways to learn and practise the language and adjust (often additional) material to their purposes. Regardless of their level of language proficiency, participants seek as wide a range of practice opportunities as possible. Resourcefulness has also been identified as “critical” for persisting in learning activities for adult learners in general (Ponton et al., 2005: 118). This high level of

personal involvement “by promoting diverse and imaginative educational activities of their own” (Phillipson, 1998: 133) seems to be common among those who do take part in learning activities in later life.

Motivated and persistent: to learn and use German whenever there is an opportunity.

Students know exactly what they expect from their learning experience and work towards their personal goals, whether these are enjoyment, travelling, cultural interests or communication with family and friends. Similar motives for younger learners were identified by Graham (1997: 111) who chiefly mentioned enjoyment and communication in the target language as driving factors for engaging in language learning, with a few identifying external motivational factors of minor importance, such as exams or parents. Older participants highlighted the role of language learning as a mental stimulus, an instrument to keep the brain challenged while ageing. Intensive motivation has been identified as an important factor for progress and persistence in language learning. Smith & Spurling (2001: 2) remark that people with motivation “have a strong preference for their intended action, and against the attraction of alternatives; they show persistence, focus, and resilience in its favour; and they make strong efforts to complete the action.” A positive learning and practice attitude combined with motivation are identified as more important factors supporting language learning than age or exposure to the target language (also Naiman et al., 1978).

Disciplined: in organising their daily / weekly routine to set aside time for their language study. Regular classes, homework and fellow students were identified in the present study as important in maintaining this self-chosen discipline on a regular basis, regardless of the level of language proficiency of individuals. Students displayed a high commitment to their classes and to the aims they had set themselves.

Independent and experienced: in learning languages and learning in general throughout their lives. In which ways and to what extent strategies are transferred from previously learned languages is not clear, although the view of Cook & Bassetti (2005: 46) is that, for writing in particular, any multilingualism has an effect on all languages involved. Similarly, Koda (2005) claims that reading skills “once developed in one language, readily transfer to another language” (Koda, 2005: 313). The extent to which this is the case and the reasons it may occur remain unknown. Participants

reflected on and clearly expressed both positive and negative influences on their learning. Their choice of language(s) may have been initiated by external factors (such as family, work or school), however, pursuing the language(s) now was a voluntary pursuit. They were aware of individual limitations and potential. Overall, participants reported most limitations regarding their hearing, memory, speed of learning and reaction time.

All the above characteristics have to be seen as interrelated, both with each other and with the individual learner. Certain physical disadvantages related to the age of the students in the areas of memory, hearing or speed were compensated for by the individual effort and creativity students put into adjusting their learning and practice. It is difficult to identify where an individual's perceptions of a need for more time, and of their slower speed and unreliable memory originate. In general, continuity over a period of time is certainly required for any achievement in language learning, regardless of age. However, it can be hypothesised that students were (consciously or unconsciously) influenced by a negative image of older people as being slower in learning, memory recall and retaining newly learned material (as discussed in chapter 2.2.2 on memory). The age difference between me as the researcher and the participants, as well as the topic of the present research project may also have encouraged students to present this stereotypical position.

In contrast to the negative image presented of the processes involved in learning the language, participants presented a positive attitude towards (language) learning. For them, learning was more than just the acquisition of a certain skill. The older students were conscious of learning as a social activity, particularly within the context of the U3A. Overall, the effects of language learning and practice can be seen as representative of any form of learning undertaken during the third age. Schuller et al. (2004: 41, 43) identify an increase in overall confidence and self-esteem, a positive feeling about oneself which helps to maintain psychological health as people grow older. Collins et al. (2002: 45) state that an accumulation of experiences leads to a richer self-image. All these aspects were identified by the participants in the present study.

The concept of generativity as introduced by Eriksson et al. (1986) clearly plays a role for those who began to learn German for relations, such as grandchildren or their children's partners. Smith & Spurling (2001: 55) attribute importance to the role of generativity as it can lead to a "change in the characteristic settings of individuals' motivational systems":

In particular, it produces a marked change in older people's motivation to use their experience in helping younger generations to develop their motivation, and to establish their particular choices in learning and in life. (Smith & Spurling, 2001: 55)

In that respect, learning impacts both directly and indirectly on wider social and individual behaviour. Language learning thus affects the individual as well as their wider social participation. This will to participate in society both locally and globally, can be a strong motive for learning another language (Dörnyei et al., 2006: 17), an intrinsic motivation for integration, particularly in a time characterised by an increase in intercultural contacts.

The U3A provides an environment in which people can learn without any pressure regarding curriculum, qualifications or standards to be achieved. Participants welcomed this individual and informal approach as conducive to language learning, empowering learners to follow their interest in an environment in which most have similar socio-economic characteristics and similar reasons for pursuing a language. As Smith & Spurling (2001: 16) clarify: students can explore issues of individual interest (develop competence), belong to a community (feeling of affiliation) and try out new things (autonomy).

This thesis began with the observation that language learning in later life is a popular activity undertaken by many people in their third age. However, how older learners learn a language is less clear. It is known that, as at any age, there are a variety of factors (aptitude, personality, intelligence and learner beliefs for example) which influence people to take up and continue with the study of a language. The current study provides an in-depth picture of the language learning strategies applied by a particular group of older language learners, complemented by insights into learner beliefs, experiences, expectations and motives in order to allow an understanding of the wider context of the older adult language learner. Older students approach language learning very individually, showing more variation in their approaches to learning than younger students (also confirmed by Roberson, 2004: 15 in his study of older learners). However, older language learners share many similarities with younger ones and employ similar learning strategies. It can be concluded that individual differences between language learners increase with age. However, motives and beliefs appear strikingly similar to those of younger learners. The extent to which these findings on learning strategies and older language learners can be generalised is partly prescribed by the methodology and instruments chosen for the present study, which bring certain limitations with them, as presented in the following concluding chapter.

9 Conclusions

Language learners in the present study presented themselves as active “young-olds” or third agers, to use Laslett’s (1989) term. They displayed characteristics of this social group, such as experiences in professional and personal areas, active life styles and determination to follow their interests, one of which is learning. As identified in chapter 2.2, (language) learning in later life contributes to the individuals’ benefit (language learning as a brain teaser or personal satisfaction), as well as the community in the widest sense (family relations across borders).

Despite the at times inconclusive literature on age-related issues in language learning (chapter 3.2) the present study found out that older adult learners do not differ from younger ones in one area of language learning: language learning strategies (further discussion in 9.1). Learning strategies can provide powerful ways of improving the process of language learning and learning use, as demonstrated by the variety of ways in which participants employed them in the present study. It is worth emphasising that demonstrating how intensively students use a certain set of strategies cannot express how effectively they learn, or predict any level of language proficiency or achievement in the target language. Effectiveness always depends on the individual, the specific task, preferences, characteristics and many other factors (also stressed by Cohen, 2003: 281). However, in the case of older learners, learning strategies can help to compensate for age-related deficits in memory recall, flexibility or speed of reaction. As Smith & Spurling (2001) state optimistically:

While mental facilities reduce somewhat with advancing years, research evidence strongly suggests that growing experience of learning, and canny self-management, can offset nearly all the deterioration, until the final stage of a long life. (Smith & Spurling, 2001: 62)

9.1 Comparison of strategy use between older and younger language learners

The older participants in the current study and the younger students in other research (e.g. Graham, 1997; Oxford et al., 1996; Chamot, 2001) did not necessarily apply different sets of strategies, but the attributes which characterised the older language learners were different. Returning to the research questions set out to answer at the beginning of the study (chapter 1) I would like to summarise which learning strategies are used by the older learners to demonstrate that they do not differ essentially from the ones used by younger

students (as reported in most of the literature on learning strategies, such as O'Malley & Chamot, 1990 or Oxford et al., 1996) with a special focus on findings in Graham's (1997) study on younger A-level students. The strategies employed did not necessarily relate to any success or failure in overcoming difficulties with the language, but the way strategies were combined depended on a specific situation, on the individual and many other factors, such as task, individual preference and other aspects (also Graham, 1997: 163). Metacognitive and cognitive strategies dominated among the older students in the present study. Graham (1997: 164) reports less intensive use of metacognitive strategies among her participants, in contrast to the findings of Oxford et al. (1996: 24) where similar dominance was observed among young university students of French. Among cognitive strategies, Graham (1997: 164) highlights the importance of "explicit grammatical rules" and a small range of strategies for vocabulary, which younger students relied on. This finding can be confirmed for the older participants in the present study. However, the older students of the present study demonstrated a variety of ways in which they adjusted their learning strategies to their individual way of learning (and life), such as setting certain times aside for vocabulary learning, making vocabulary lists in a certain way which suited them individually and rehearsing them repeatedly or recording vocabulary on tapes to be used in the car. Further, resourcing is also reported to be employed in combination with other strategies to enhance vocabulary learning and language practice for younger students (Graham 1997: 164). In principle, the same is true for the older students in the present study. However, the intensity, extent and way of adjusting resources to the individual learner's needs appear to vary more among the older learners (e.g. often returning to previous coursework or making use of additional material chosen by themselves). The use of creating practice opportunities was attributed particularly to girls by Graham (1997: 165). Such a link could not be confirmed in the present study as no sex differentiation was considered (because of the smaller sample involved and its gender imbalance). However, the strategy of *creating practice opportunities* was applied by all of the older students (such as eavesdropping, travelling, visiting the Russian church etc.). Many reported more than one activity to widen their opportunities for using the target language. For writing specifically, Graham (1997: 165) also reports planning in L1 and translation as typical for her younger students. In this respect, older and younger learners do not differ. However, it remains unclear if this similarity could be related to the use of TAPs in both studies (Graham's 1997 and the present one) rather than to similarities between older and younger learners. This might be explored in future research into methods using TAPs for language learning strategy research.

Learning strategies are not necessarily a useful tool by themselves. Although older students in the present study presented a similar use and range of learning strategies as younger learners, certain aspects could be identified as different. These differences seem related to the other attributes older students displayed, affective factors, such as motivation, goals and persistence. When these strategies and attributes are combined it can be possible that “people will learn a language up to the level they find useful, and they will focus on those aspects which they find useful” (Kinau & Stefanowitsch, 2000: 259). As Kinau & Stefanowitsch (2000: 159) further states: There is no such phenomenon as a bad language learner, this is only a product if “someone (...) is being forced to do the wrong thing, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.” However, for the older language learners at the U3A this clearly does not apply. Language learning and language use present a social activity without any pressure to achieve certain marks: goals are self-defined. As language activities were self-chosen rather than prescribed by a curriculum, participants could be expected to be more self-conscious about them, contributing more attention and enthusiasm. In that sense older language learners can be described as more in control of their learning overall, including their choice, the effort put into the learning/ practice process, more self-aware of what they need to do to succeed and, consequently, in a way more intrinsically motivated.

It can be concluded that there is no striking difference between the strategy use of older students and that of the younger ones in other studies, such as Graham (1997) (see appendix P for differences between the strategy inventory developed by Graham (1997) and the present study). The present study seems to suggest that differences are more apparent in other areas of language learning, specifically aspects of motivation rather than language learning strategy use. Motivation changes over time (as expressed in the interviews, section 7.3.2), it is a dynamic process which develops rather than remains the same over time (Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2004: 32). Even though the decision to take up a language was initially motivated more externally (such as grandchildren or brain jogging) over time the pleasure of participating in an enjoyable, social learning activity developed as equally important, if not even more so.

Monolingual learning environment: Most students reported a lack of opportunities to use their German, despite the study having been undertaken in a university city where many German-speaking people live and come to visit. Nevertheless, naturally occurring chances to use German outside the classroom are rare and require a real effort of the students which

they are willing to make. Even when travelling to German-speaking countries, students of intermediate level of proficiency report limited opportunities for using their language, as English is seen as the lingua franca meaning that local people prefer practising their English with a native speaker. One participant stated quite realistically:

Nobody is going to speak Spanish to me. (...) So there's no point and I might be stopping doing Spanish and I might be stopping German. Then I have to think of some other intellectual pursuit. But it would be preferable if I could get in German somehow to a point where I could actually pick up a proper article and read it. (Josephine, I)

The classroom setting was consequently very important for the majority of participants in the present study, with one of the reasons certainly being that fellow students and tutors “are likely to provide language input that is comprehensible” (Cohen, 1991: 111), but also as a place for socialising.

Past (learning) experiences: Older language learners have a wide range of (language) learning, professional and individual experiences. These experiences can be mobilised to support language learning in later life, such as contextualising for vocabulary learning and making use of an increased “knowledge base” (Lauman Long & Shaw, 2000: 653). Bialystok (1991: 71), for example, emphasises the importance of schooling as “relevant to the advancement of control of processing over linguistic knowledge” as for this “objective examination of problems and selective attention to relevant information, irrespective of ordinary or commonsense meanings” is required. Further, occupation and social class seem to influence choices for or against learning in later life. The majority of the older students who participated in language learning in the U3A had previously been involved in education professionally, either as teachers or lecturers. Perhaps influenced by those experiences, they appeared to be very self-disciplined (a term which was also used by participants themselves in the interviews).

9.2 Limitations of the present study

As with any study involving fieldwork, findings can only be interpreted appropriately in relation to the design of the study and the research instruments applied, in addition to the effects of researcher and participants on the design, instruments and data collected. Overall, a mixed method approach, triangulation, proved to be useful for the present study in that detailed data regarding learning strategies and older language learners could be collected and studied from different angles:

- descriptively (questionnaires),
- in process (during TAPs) and
- reflectively (interviews).

As anticipated, the data collected by the three different instruments were rich and complementary. The questionnaire data proved a good resource, though the detailed supplementary information obtained using other research methods was needed to contextualise the aspects covered in the questionnaire. For the TAPs with older students, the technical problem of recording them successfully without increasing students' reactivity in the presence of a researcher had to be considered. Further, if participants in thinking-aloud had had more opportunity for preparation, there might have been a higher amount of occurrences of strategy use. For older learners, the request to concurrently solve language tasks whilst talking about how they were doing it, added to the difficulty of multitasking.

I walked across roads with 80 year olds who couldn't go on walking and talking and so would just stand still when actually one would them prefer to be doing the walking and wait for the talking afterwards. (Josephine, writing TAP)

For older participants, retrospective TAPs could have reduced this tension and produced more detailed retrospective TAPs. Further, the range of communicative and social/affective strategies for speaking and listening in particular was limited due to undertaking the TAPs without any partner. However, a careful trade-off had to be considered between adding an additional influencing variable (a partner/researcher to communicate with) or providing less obvious opportunities for the use of communicative and social/affective strategies. In addition, listening itself is such a complex process where information has to be interpreted rapidly to achieve understanding (Buck, 2001: 29). To enhance the use of communicative and social/affective strategies, the observation of two participants speaking and listening might be an alternative option for obtaining data on these strategies, followed up by a retrospective reflection.

The interviews added valuable insights into the wider context of learning strategies and language learning, including motivation, learner beliefs and past learning experiences. Collecting interview data individually rather than in groups resulted in more personalised in-depth data. However, the one-to-one interview situation might have prompted participants to report on what they thought was expected of them and to omit aspects which they rated as irrelevant.

Findings apply to students of German and students of the other languages at the U3A as identified in the current study. They are bound to the context in which they were collected and apply to learners in that setting at that time. The context of the U3A limits the application of the findings to this contextual setting at that time as “social situations are never sufficiently similar, across space and time, to make replication possible” (Blaikie, 2003: 254). As Merriam (1998: 201) emphasises for any qualitatively oriented study, “reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing”. A different cohort of students at another time could be expected to produce different data. This is due to students’ different experiences of language, their different reasons for language study, the setting of the sample in a university town, and to ongoing changes in society. However, conclusions drawn from a sample with certain characteristics (older language learners at the U3A) can lead to the understanding of wider phenomena (older language learners in general) under different circumstances and provide a glimpse of what features can be of general importance.

As strategy use differs from individual to individual, only general patterns can be identified due to the size and variety of the sample involved. Comparisons regarding language learning strategies can be drawn carefully with reference to the wider literature on language learning strategies which is mainly focused on younger learners. The present study cannot, therefore, deliver a standardised set of learning strategies for all older language learners as:

The goal is not to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issue would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation. (Schofield, 2002: 174)

By providing sufficient detail about the processes of data collection and analysis, an understanding of the foundation of the resulting interpretations can be gained which will lead to a consistency in results (Nunan, 1992: 14). Subjectivity on my part, the researcher, certainly shaped the data from this study. As I was the only researcher, the analysis of the

TAPs was validated by *intra-rater* reliability. An analysis supporting *inter-rater* reliability might produce a different insight (Leow & Mortan-Short, 2004: 37) into the strategy use of older language learners. Subjectivity was involved when identifying, coding and categorising incidents of strategy use. In addition, the higher occurrence of metacognitive and cognitive strategies may have been linked to the format of the research instruments which asked participants to reflect on their learning and practice activities.

Finally, asking how far I have answered the questions I set out to investigate in the beginning of the study (chapter 1) allows a check on the consistency of the research undertaken. With regard to the language learning strategies used by the older language learners, I identified these and a learning strategy list is available in appendix P. Further, the aim of the study was to describe how learning strategies used by older learners differ from those used by younger language learners. Given the limitations that are involved in comparing data obtained from the present study with the findings of other researchers, such as Graham (1997) or O'Malley & Chamot's (1990), findings could only be compared to a certain extent as the aims, participants, settings and the procedures involved in other studies varied from those of the present study (see 9.1). An explorative oriented approach was more suitable for the participants as it could not automatically be assumed from the beginning that the concept of language learning strategies would apply to the older learners as it does to the younger ones. Thus a research design had to be adopted which was sufficiently flexible for any input from the participants and at the same time provided a stringent framework for the study.

The most crucial difficulty, and consequently the most major limitation, relates to the nature of learning strategies. Their identification, labelling and classification provided opportunities for variation and inconsistency which remain unresolved. As discussed in chapter 4 and 7.2, this difficulty is inherent in the nature of language learning strategies, no matter which of the classifications is used.

As a general remark often forgotten in research involving human beings, I would like to cite Jarvis (2006) who comments that:

No one approach can tell us everything about learning, but we might be able to study learning from one perspective at a time. Each will throw some light on the whole but none will capture its complexity, which is as complex as human living itself. (Jarvis, 2006: 199)

9.3 Effects of the study on participants and researcher

Research involving participants affects all parties. The presence of a researcher with an interest in the topic area can bring focus but at the same time limits the scope and context of the phenomenon under scrutiny. A reflection on the effects of people involved in the study can support a better understanding of the research procedures and findings as it is a way of addressing subjective influences. Reflexivity into the processes involved during the study, particularly with a critical focus on the “self as a researcher” and “human being” (Guba & Lincoln, 2003), can help to contextualise the processes.

Having known some of the participants from previous German teaching not only made it easier to provoke interest in the research project but also increased participants’ willingness to become involved. Partly because of previous contacts and partly to limit intervention in the field, I took on the role of a neutral visitor with some knowledge of the U3A setting. The age gap between the participants and myself may have helped to maintain this neutral role. On the other hand, the age difference may have restricted access to certain information as the participants may not have shared certain thoughts with me, considering me as an outsider of a different age and living circumstances. However, the behaviour displayed towards me as the researcher was positive and I was always made welcome when I visited a group. Participants expressed eagerness to find out what fellow students thought about learning and practising a language at their age and to discover which kinds of technique they used to learn and maintain their language. It appeared that, even in class, students usually do not talk about how and why they are learning German, leading some to ask “Are others saying the same?” or “I suppose it’s the same for the others?”.

Talking about their experience of learning and practising German helped some students to clarify their current situation in various ways. During the interview process students reflected on what they do, how they go about doing it and why they do it. As a consequence, one participant realised that he needed more time to follow up his areas of interest, and that it would be better for him to do more reading in German at home. He decided not to enrol for classes the following year. Another participant came to the conclusion that it was helpful for him to learn with the computer as he had done so successfully in the past. Overall, students showed an interest in reflecting more on what they do to enhance their learning and practice. They felt it was useful for them to have participated in the study as it encouraged

them to reflect on this topic of how to engage in language learning. This can be seen as a positive outcome of the study which might support future learning processes (Chamot, 2001).

Complex and diverse theoretical aspects involved in learning strategies had to be transformed into comprehensible research instruments. Further factors influencing language learning are complex and intertwined, so that the present study had to take into account affective factors such as motivation, learner beliefs and learning experiences. Regardless of how diligently the study was undertaken from my side, all insights into learning strategies and the context of older learners relied on the good will and generosity of the participants.

9.4 Implications for older learners

Participants in the present study displayed a variety of general and specific ways of enhancing language learning. The students' characteristics suggest that older learners are resourceful and have many attributes to offer which can contribute positively to language learning: persistence, determination, self-discipline, motivation, experiences. Those who have worked with older students can confirm this. All of the participants had already managed career and family lives and brought learning experiences from various contexts with them. The majority had studied at least two foreign languages.

However, the participants, particularly the ones at lower levels of proficiency, were concerned by the disadvantages brought about by ageing, such as loss of hearing, unreliable memory and decreased speed of learning and recall. Individuals in the present study (such as Parker, who started learning German after retirement and achieved a near-native level of proficiency) showed that success in language learning can be achieved, aided by the use of learning strategies, despite these age-related disadvantages. Successful learners in the present study confirmed that there is no natural restriction to language learning in later life (Singleton, 1989: 251). Satisfaction achieved through learning can affect age-related disadvantages in a positive way. Thus, active ageing can then lead to successful ageing, with benefits for the individual as well as for the wider community and society.

Overcoming students' negative self-images of their own learning potential is important for older students and for those who work with them. Wurm et al. (2007: 157) state that the application of age stereotypes to themselves can impact on "their cognitive, functional, physiological, and psychological health", and "societal as well as individual views on aging can become self-fulfilling" (supporting results for this effect are also reported by Hess et al.,

2003). Therefore, a positive learning environment where older learners can feel understood and valued is essential.

In the context of language learning, some elements which can benefit older students who are learning a language are highlighted below:

- Control of their own learning and progress: Provision of clear rules and structures for the target language which learners can apply and vary independently.

I like getting homework, because you feel it's positive. If someone just says, well, have a look at the book and see if there's something you want to raise next week. Well, it's no good, you see. I like specific tasks. (Bob, 1, 74)

Language instruction can support such structures, which “promote the analysis of linguistic knowledge” (Bialystok, 1991: 71) in the target language as well as in other known languages. This can be supported by providing clear tasks and splitting up complex structures and grammar. Older learners can be encouraged to make use of their general knowledge, relating what they are learning to other languages learned or to life experience.

- Focus and attention: if students are able to choose what and how they learn, this can enhance the monitoring of input as well as “effective storage and retrieval of a message” (Rost, 2002: 15). Increased attention and focus can enhance individual students’ involvement in the language activity, thus intensifying the learning experience. Ideally, this will lead to fluency, which Bialystok (1991: 72) understands as “skilled control procedures for selecting and integrating information in response to problems.” Exchanging experiences to explore how individual learners manage their learning and progress amongst students can also contribute to an individual’s inventory of learning techniques. Using various channels, such as writing notes or reading a transcript while listening can also aid learning.

I don't actually remember what the previous sentence, but one and a half or sometimes even the previous sentence, was saying. (...) I wouldn't remember it without the notes and with the notes I can do it a bit later. (Josephine, listening TAP)

On the basis of the range of strategies applied by the older learners and their vast experience of a variety of areas, they appear to be well equipped to succeed in language learning:

One can expect younger adults to learn new material a little more quickly but that, given time and sufficient motivation, older adults will achieve equivalent learning outcomes. Hence the myth about the difficulty of learning as they get older, which many adults believe, is not well founded and should be dispelled. The positive perspective of the effect of expertise on performance and the need for just a little more effort to learn new material should be promoted with adult learners. (Boulton-Lewis, 1998: 27)

Perhaps the most important addition which can be made to the attributes older learners bring to the learning context is encouragement to believe that they can succeed. For language teachers this also implies that:

- They should not do things which the students would appraise as unpleasant;
- They should not do things that interfere with the students' goals in language learning;
- They should not do things that are beyond or below the students' coping ability,
- And they should not do things that would diminish the students' self and social image.

(Schumann, 1999: 38)

Effective language learning involves the whole individual learner and has to promote the cognitive (e.g. learning strategies) as well as the affective aspects (e.g. motivation).

9.5 Application of the findings and future research

The UK has an ageing population and, consequently, there are likely to be more older people wanting to participate in any form of (language) learning in the future. Their context regarding level of education, expectations, class or ethnicity might differ from those participating in learning today (also Victor, 2005: 329). Insights into how these learners learn and practise languages and what makes them special will help providers, such as the U3A, to be better prepared to respond to the demands of this learner group. The more that is known about underlying learning processes, the less older learners will wonder: "I'm not sure what age you shouldn't start a language." (Bob, I, 74). On the contrary, perhaps the evidence from the present study that older learners bring many useful attributes to language learning without being very different from younger learners with regard to language learning strategies may help to create a more positive climate for successful language learning in later life.

As Arthur (2001: 38) emphasises for tutors of older students, they will need "to ensure that learners want to continue to learn by creating a sense of success and achievement at every given opportunity". Language learning and practice among older students is certainly as

important for personal satisfaction and self-development as learning in general (Maxted, 1999: 22). Judging from the positive attitude towards learning displayed by the older learners in the present study and other areas where older learners are involved, there may be potential for intergenerational learning.

There are many issues for future research regarding older language learners. These include the following issues which could take the findings of the present study further and have been divided into two areas: firstly, further research into learning strategies and older adult language learners and, secondly, methodology of learning strategy research.

Learning strategies and older adult language learners:

- Appropriateness of learning strategies applied by older learners.
- Effectiveness of strategy training and use.
- Longitudinal study to identify differences in strategy development at different ages.
- Differences in metacognitive strategy use among older and younger students.
- Strategy transfer from L1 or other languages among older students.
- Differences in strategy use among a sample less highly educated than the one in the present study.
- Further study into the use of social / affective and communicative strategies.

Methodology of learning strategy research

- More quantitatively oriented approaches towards investigating language learning strategies to further investigate the nature of learning strategies.
- TAPs with older adult students including languages other than German.
- TAPs undertaken retrospectively to investigate differences when the multi-tasking is reduced.
- TAPs with older participants who have been trained in language learning strategies.
- Observation of listening and speaking strategies where participants work on a task in pairs of equal language proficiency followed by a retrospective reflection.
- Inter-rater analysis for TAPs with older learners.

As language learning strategies must be seen in relation to all the other factors influencing language learning (such as motivation, gender, cultural background, attitudes and beliefs, type of task, age, L2 stage and learning styles) generalisations are limited by the specific context of the study. Returning to the notion of the good language learner, it would be

interesting to investigate whether older language students can be identified as such. Cohen (1991: 111) lists the following features of the good language learner: knowledge of the world, a given topic, knowledge of the utterances which are likely in a given context and using earlier utterances as cues. Cohen summarises that good language learners “stay open to input, even if they do not understand everything” and “create interactions in which they can find out what they do not understand” (1991: 112). These features can be found among older language learners. Further, it would be interesting to investigate if the cohort of those students who started learning languages by Suggestopedia, Silent Way or Total Physical Response display a different approach to language learning in older age.

Having identified the learning potential of older students, one might ask why so many people in their third age feel it necessary to bother about another language.

So it's very difficult, a lot of fun, beautiful language. I wish I had started much, much earlier. But I should carry on with it. (Bob, I, 74)

It's learning without any sort of pressure. (Tanja, I, 68)

I've still got an incentive to improve my German. (Jessica, I, 67)

(Language) learning not only presents a form of brain teaser and is beneficial for individual health but also supports life in a growing and widening community:

Der Deutsche soll alle Sprachen lernen, damit ihm zu Hause kein Fremder unbequem, er aber in der Fremde überall zu Hause sei. (Goethe, 1977: 625)

(The German should learn all languages to be comfortable with foreigners at home and to be at home everywhere abroad.) (my translation)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter for participating institutions

(The name and address of the institution are anonymised and appear in italics.)

Mrs X

Further Education College

Study on adult (German) language learners above 50 years old

Dear Mrs X,

later than intended I am sending you an outline of the project on language learning strategies in writing (attached) to be distributed to the German language tutors at your college, as informally agreed at the beginning of August.

The study is planned to take place in October/ November 2004 and I would be very grateful if the letter attached could be distributed to the German tutors before the actual classes start so that I could get in touch with the tutors directly for further details.

You also kindly offered to send me some general statistical information on student numbers, age brackets, etc. This will be very valuable for me in order to understand the context of the students learning German at your institution.

Thank you very much for your co-operation in this matter.

Yours

Appendix B: Letter for German tutors

(The line spacing was 1.5 in the original letter, words in *italic* indicate where names are taken out of the original version to ensure compliance with the ethical guidelines.)

To all German tutors

Project: Language Learning Strategies used by older learners of German

I am a PhD student at the Open University, Milton Keynes, in the Department of Languages. I plan to undertake a study on language learning strategies, using as the target group students of German who are older than 50 years. As *your college* provides various evening classes for German within the Adult Educational Programme, I would greatly appreciate your support in approaching those learners who fall within the age group of my target students. Below, I detail how I propose to carry out the study.

The study would involve a questionnaire on general language learning experiences and some biographical information. Some students would be asked to participate in 'think-aloud protocols' which involve undertaking certain language activities and reflecting on them out loud during and after the activities. They cover all four language skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking. The tasks would be set in line with the students' level and could be compiled as one week's homework taking about 20 to 40 minutes. Finally, interviews would be set up to round off the data collection at the end with selected students.

The time scale for this project could be adjusted to suit individual classes. As a rough schedule, I would like to suggest the following time frame:

mid October 2004:	approaching students with the questionnaire
end of October 2004:	collecting questionnaires and handing out of audio tapes to record think-aloud tasks at home
beginning of November 2004:	collecting audio tapes from tutors/ students
mid/ end of November 2004:	interviewing some selected students

I can assure you that the project would be undertaken in line with the ethical guidelines of the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL, baal.org.uk/goodprac.htm). Student names would be anonymized and findings would be reported back to tutors and students.

Please contact me directly. I enclose a reply form and SAE which I would be grateful if you could just tick in the relevant box to save you time in responding. Thank you very much for taking the time to consider this request.

Ms Kim Ohly
Phone
e-mail
address

**Please fill in the details below and send back the form
in the envelope enclosed by the end of September 2004.
Thank you for your co-operation.**

Name of the tutor:	
Day and time of the class:	
Level:	
Book:	
Number of students older than 50 years (approx.):	
Total number of students:	
Contact details of tutor: (When and how would be best to get in touch with you?)	

Appendix C: Consent form and information for participants

INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT: *Language Learning Strategies used by older learners of German*

I am a teacher of German who is currently a PhD student at the Open University, Milton Keynes, in the Department of Languages. I plan to undertake a study on language learning strategies, using as the target group students of German who are older than 50 years. Much research has included younger learners and school children. However, little is known about how older learners learn another language and what strategies they use. Below I have outlined how I propose to carry out the study.

The study involves a questionnaire about your previous language learning experiences. In the next phase you would be asked to participate in 'think-aloud protocols' which involves undertaking certain language tasks (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and providing a commentary in English on your experience of doing them, during or after the activities. The tasks are set in line with the students' level and may take about 20 to 40 minutes to complete in total. They can be carried out at home at your own time and pace. Audio cassettes will be provided to record your commentaries. Finally, I may need to interview you to ask you to elaborate on your experience of the task and of language learning in general.

The planned time scale for this project is as follows:

beginning of December 2004:	handing out of questionnaires
mid of December 2004:	collecting questionnaires
beginning of January 2005:	handing out of audio tapes to record language tasks
mid of January 2005:	collecting audio tapes from students
February 2005:	interviews with some selected students

Thank you very much for your co-operation!

Kim Ohly
The Open University
Faculty of Education and Language Studies
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

If you have any further questions please contact me:
Kim Ohly
(Researcher's private contact details)

CONSENT FORM

The above project will be undertaken in line with the ethical guidelines of the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL, www.baal.org.uk/goodprac.htm). This means that every effort will be made to respect the rights, interests, sensitivities, and privacy of people who provide data, and that all information will be confidential and only used in relation to the above research project.

Please sign below to indicate that you consent to participate in this research project.

1. I have been informed about the aims and purposes of this project and my involvement.
2. I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, even if I agreed to participate at the outset.
3. I have the right to remain anonymous if I decide for it.
4. I give my consent to participate in the project outlined above.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

SIGNATURE AND DATE:

Appendix D: Questionnaire for German groups

(Appropriate spaces to fill in answers were provided in the original.)

Questionnaire

Language Learning Strategies

A Previous languages learned

1. Please give details of any foreign language courses you have taken.

language(s)	type of institution (school, college, university, etc.)	from (year)	to (year)	certificate/ exam passed

2. Apart from formal courses which of the following media have you used for independent study? (Please tick appropriate box and indicate over how many months you used them.)

Medium:	Language:	frequently	sometimes	months
Internet				
Audio cassettes/ CDs				
Video/ TV				
Books/ Newspapers				
Others (please specify)				

3. Have you had any other contact with the foreign language you have been studying outside formal study? (Please tick as appropriate.)

	language	from (year)	to (year)
Close (pen)-friends			
Relatives/ partners			
Regular business trips			
Travelling abroad			
Living abroad (for more than two months)			
Other (please specify)			

B About learning German

4. What are your reasons for learning German?

	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree
I am very interested in German culture/ society.			
It will be of practical use to me.			
I am interested in learning languages in general.			
I enjoy contact with the other language students.			
I have studied German in the past.			
I have family living in Germany/ a German-speaking country.			
I have German friends.			
Other reasons (please specify)			

5. Are there any aspects of learning German which you find particularly easy or difficult?

	very easy	easy	neither easy nor hard	difficult	very difficult
Speaking					
Listening					
Reading					
Writing					
Other (please specify)					

6. Please give at least three examples of things you find particularly easy or difficult in learning German.

Example: "When I speak I find it easy to construct sentences, but I can't remember the words I need."

**7. How do you learn *vocabulary* in German? What works well for you?
Please give as detailed an answer as possible.**

Example: "I write down new words in a separate notebook and memorize them every day by covering up half the column."

**8. How do you learn *structures and phrases*? Have you got a particular method?
Please give as detailed an answer as possible.**

Example: "I pick one phrase a day and try to create opportunities for myself to use it, even in my English surroundings."

**9. What works well for you to improve *speaking* German?
Please give as detailed an answer as possible.**

Example: "I repeatedly read the passages in the book aloud to myself."

**10. What works well for you to improve *writing* German?
Please give as detailed an answer as possible.**

Example: "I write e-mails to a German pen-friend using a dictionary and grammar book. She then corrects my writing."

**11. What works well for you to improve your *listening* in German?
Please give as detailed an answer as possible.**

Example: "I listen to a German radio programme every Friday evening and watch German videos occasionally."

12. What would you consider your strengths and weaknesses to be in language learning?

**13. On average how much time do you spend outside the classroom on each of the following tasks per week?
(Please tick where appropriate.)**

	less than 10 minutes	10 to 20 mins	more than 20 mins
a) overall time spent on learning German:			
b) Revision of the previous lesson:			
c) Writing:			
d) Listening:			
e) Speaking:			
f) Reading:			
g) Any other activities for language learning:			

(Please fill in the information required or tick appropriate box.)

1) Year of birth: _____

2) Male: Female:

3) Nationality: _____

4) Please name three hobbies/other interests/activities:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

5) Please state highest level of education:

6) Please state highest level of professional qualification:

7) Current/ previous occupation(s):

*In case I have further questions would you mind me contacting you via phone?
phone number: _____*

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!

Appendix E: Thank you letter for tutors of other languages

Dear Tutor

Thank you very much for distributing the questionnaires to your class.

There is a little pack for each participating student containing:

- 1) a consent form with some information about the research project (to be kept by the student)
- 2) a pre-paid envelope to send back the questionnaire
by 1 May
- 3) the questionnaire with a copy of the same consent form at the front to be signed and filled in by the students

If you or your students have any further questions please contact me.

Best regards

Kim Ohly

Phone

e-mail

address

Kim Ohly

The Open University

Walton Hall, Stewart Hall Building, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Appendix F: Table of opportunities for contact with the foreign language (questionnaire)

Students filled in question 3 on contact with the language they were learning very inconsistently, with information scattered and at times with more than half the participants not providing any answer. One reason for this could be that the question was asked too openly, so that some participants answered with reference to any language learned, rather than to the class at which the questionnaire was handed out. Answers were therefore rated during the process of analysis on the basis of the information provided. As opportunities for contact with the foreign language, students ticked:

		(pen-)friends	Relatives/ partners	Business abroad	Travelling abroad	Living abroad
German groups	Regularly since 1990	1	0	0	3	3
	Regularly until 1990	2	1	2	13	2
	Regularly in the past	0	0	3	3	3
	Only once	2	0	0	0	8
	No	0	0	0	0	0
	No answer	22	26	22	8	11
Other language groups	Regularly since 1990	5	1	0	8	2
	Regularly until 1990	7	6	0	22	3
	Regularly in the past	0	0	2	2	3
	Only once	4	3	1	3	10
	No	1	1	3	0	2
	No answer	28	34	39	10	25

Table 30: Different forms of contact with the foreign language

With so many answers missing it may be possible to say only that quite a lot of participants seemed to be motivated by travelling abroad rather than by business. However, assuming that the missing answers stand for 'no' than the majority of students would have very different reasons for studying the languages they learn, which were not listed here. Consequently, this question should have been asked differently to allow participants to fill in their own reasons. However, against this argument stands the fact that none of the participants filled in anything under the category of 'any other' reasons for learning the language. Thus, this category was omitted from the presentation in the table above.

Appendix G: Table of media used for language learning

Most participants make use of books, audio/CD and video to enhance their language learning. The internet is noticeably less popular. In the general population, more time is now spent on the internet than TV/radio. However it has to be considered that many participants did not tick any answer in this section on media use.

		internet	video	Audio/CD	books
German groups 27	Frequently	1	1	6	9
	Sometimes	5	13	15	14
	Never	2	2	1	0
	No answer	19	11	5	4
Other language groups 45	Frequently	1	4	19	17
	Sometimes	6	10	15	20
	Never	9	7	2	1
	No answer	29	24	9	7

Table 31: Different media used by German and other language students

Appendix H: Time spent on language learning activities during the week (questionnaire)

Language activity	Time used	Level 1 other languages (10)	Level 2 other languages (12)	Level 2 German (11)	Level 3 other languages (8)	Level 3 German (3)	Level 4 other languages (12)	Level 4 German (13)
Overall	Less than 10 mins	0	0	0	3	0	3	3
	10 to 20 mins	0	1	0	0	0	6	0
	More than 20 mins	9	11	10	5	3	5	7
	No time	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	No answer	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Revision	Less than 10 mins	4	2	4	3	1	7	4
	10 to 20 mins	1	5	2	3	1	0	1
	More than 20 mins	5	5	4	1	1	1	0
	No time	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
	No answer	0	0	1	1	0	5	4
writing	Less than 10 mins	1	2	2	2	0	4	3
	10 to 20 mins	5	3	5	3	1	3	0
	More than 20 mins	2	5	3	1	2	1	2
	No time	0	0	1	1	0	1	4
	No answer	2	2	0	1	0	6	4
listening	Less than 10 mins	2	1	3	4	1	2	2
	10 to 20 mins	4	3	5	1	1	2	1
	More than 20 mins	3	7	2	1	1	4	5
	No time	0	0	1	1	0	2	2
	No answer	1	1	0	1	0	5	3
speaking	Less than 10 mins	6	4	6	4	2	2	3
	10 to 20 mins	1	3	4	2	1	1	0
	More than 20 mins	1	4	0	0	0	3	4
	No time	0	0	1	1	0	2	3
	No answer	2	1	0	1	0	6	3
reading	Less than 10 mins	2	1	3	2	1	2	3
	10 to 20 mins	2	4	6	2	2	4	0
	More than 20 mins	5	7	3	3	3	6	9
	No time	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
	No answer	0	0	0	1	0	1	1

other	Less than 10 mins	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
	10 to 20 mins	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	More than 20 mins	0	2	1	0	1	2	0
	No time	2	2	0	4	0	3	0
	No answer	7	7	10	3	2	9	13

Table 32: Time spent on language learning activities during the week by language skill and language proficiency

Appendix I: Table of difficulties depending on the four language skills and level (questionnaire)

		Level 1 other languages (10)	Level 2 other languages (12)	Level 2 German (11)	Level 3 other languages (8)	Level 3 German (3)	Level 4 other languages (12)	Level 4 German (13)
speaking	very easy	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
	easy	0	0	1	3	0	4	3
	neither	7	3	2	1	0	7	3
	difficult	1	6	5	4	3	3	3
	very difficult	2	3	3	0	0	0	0
	no answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
listening	very easy	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	easy	2	3	0	3	0	6	4
	neither	4	4	3	2	1	5	3
	difficult	4	3	3	3	1	4	2
	very difficult	0	2	5	0	1	0	0
	no answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
reading	very easy	1	1	0	2	0	1	2
	easy	5	4	0	2	0	4	3
	neither	3	4	6	2	1	7	2
	difficult	0	2	5	1	2	3	4
	very difficult	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	no answer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
writing	very easy	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Easy	1	1	0	2	0	4	4
	neither	5	4	3	5	1	3	2
	difficult	3	4	6	0	2	7	4
	very difficult	0	3	2	1	0	0	1
	no answer	1	0	0	0	0	1	1

Table 33: Ratings of difficulty of language skills by levels of language proficiency and by German and other groups

Appendix J: Think-aloud tasks for intermediate German participants (Spaces and font size are reduced below.)

Dear participant

Thank you for participating in this project. Now I would like you to do some language tasks, including reading, speaking, writing and listening. Below you find the tasks and instructions for each of them. The basic idea is that you go through one task after the other in the order suggested below. While doing what the tasks require I would like to know what you think while doing them. Any thoughts coming up, ranging from "What does this mean?" or "If this text is about x then this word must mean y." or "Lucky me, we've just covered that topic in the last lesson." are valuable. All comments can be in English. So the main idea is to do a language task and think aloud on what you would normally do silently. This form of reflection is called 'think-aloud' and is used to understand processes behind learning or understanding anything in another language.

As you are doing the tasks and the reflection on them at home I would like you to record everything on the audio tape provided. Please ensure that your voice is recorded in an understandable way on the cassette. Take a short break between tasks if you like.

Please do not use a dictionary, any notes or German grammar, but mention whenever there is something you don't know and would have liked to look up.

Please read each instruction carefully before starting the task and enjoy the opportunity to use your German!

Warm-up task

Instructions:

This is a warm-up task. Please have the cassette recorder ready before you start reading and start recording on side A. Read the following passage in order to understand the text, either silently or aloud. As you read to yourself, tell me everything that is going through your mind – maybe something that you don't understand or losing track in mid-sentence. Tell me also what you do to overcome any problems. You can read the passage as many times as you like and go on recording as long as you wish.

Alice Kurz, Tübingen

Ich habe im Sommer Geburtstag und das ist immer nett. Dann machen wir ein Grillfest irgendwo im Wald. Jeder bringt etwas mit. Ich mache Salate und Brot und kaufe Getränke. Das ist dann immer sehr nett, vielleicht backe ich noch einen Geburtstagskuchen.

Text adapted from:

The Open University, Auftakt 3 Get ahead in German, Video Thema 5 Feiern Teil 2

Reading task

Instructions:

This is another reading task like the warm-up task above. Read the following passage in order to understand the text and to do the same as above. As you do this, tell me everything that is going through your mind. Please have the cassette recorder ready before start reading and don't look at the text before you are ready to record.

Mein Bruder, das Gewohnheitstier

Vor fünf Jahren hat mein älterer Bruder Franz in München eine schöne Zweizimmerwohnung gekauft. Einmal ist eine Freundin zu ihm in die Wohnung gezogen, aber schon nach einer Woche ist sie wieder ausgezogen. Seither wohnt mein Bruder allein in der Wohnung.

Franz steht jeden Tag um sieben Uhr auf. Er geht sofort ins Bad, wäscht sich und putzt sich die Zähne. Dann geht er zurück ins Schlafzimmer, zieht sich an und kämmt sich. Aufstehen, Waschen und Anziehen dauern bei Franz nie länger als fünfzehn Minuten. Nach dem Anziehen geht er in die Küche. Zum Frühstück isst er immer das gleiche: zwei Brötchen mit Butter und Marmelade. Dazu trinkt er Kaffee.

Dann verlässt er das Haus und geht fünf Minuten bis zur Bushaltestelle. Genau vier Minuten später kommt der Bus. Nach genau acht Stunden Arbeit im Büro fährt er dann täglich mit dem gleichen Bus wieder nach Hause. Kein Wunder, dass Frauen es bei Franz nicht länger als eine Woche aushalten.

Text adapted from: The Open University, Self-assessment tests for L130 Auftakt/L230 Motive, Text 2.

Speaking task

Instructions:

This task involves three steps. Firstly, talk about the following subject for about two minutes in German, while recording on the audio tape. Secondly, have a little pause of two minutes and stop recording. Then talk on to the cassette about what your thoughts were while doing the task (in English or German).

Leben in Cambridge: Vorteile und Nachteile?
(*Living in Cambridge: advantages and disadvantages?*)

Writing task

Instructions:

Please write three paragraphs in German on the following subject, again, thinking aloud as you do. Remember to speak aloud everything that goes through your mind (in English or German) while doing the task. Please have your tape recorder ready before you start writing.

Was lieben sie an der deutschen Sprache und was nicht?
(*What do you like and dislike about the German language?*)

Listening task

Instructions:

Please turn over your audio tape to the beginning of side B. This part has three parts. Firstly, you will listen to the passage. Secondly, please summarize, in English, what you understood. Thirdly, I would like you to tell me everything that was going through your mind as you tried to understand the passage: for example what you understood and what you didn't; how you were trying to work out the meaning of the parts you didn't understand.

The passage is at the beginning of side B. Please listen to the passage **once or twice** only, then put the player to 'record' and do the summary and think-aloud (in English or German). If you would like to listen to the text again, then please do so and record at the end again any thoughts you had this time while listening.

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this think-aloud!

Transcript of the listening extract for intermediate level:

Listening text for intermediate students (1,15 mins)

Interviewerin: Darf ich fragen: Was machen Sie heute Abend?

Mann 2: Was mache ich heute abend? Oh, da habe ich noch nichts geplant, aber vielleicht gehe ich noch ins Kino.

Interviewerin: Wie oft gehen Sie ins Kino?

Mann 2: Ich dürfte wohl einer der stärksten Kinogänger in Rostock sein. Also ich gehe bestimmt vier- bis sechsmal im Monat ins Kino.

Interviewerin: Und gehen Sie auch manchmal ins Theater?

Mann 2: Ja, aber hier in Rostock am liebsten zu Konzerten. Ins Schauspieltheater bin ich lange nicht gegangen.

Interviewerin: Was für Konzerte gibt es hier in Rostock?

Mann 2: Rostock hat eine sehr gute Philharmonie, also so mit klassischen Konzerten. Aber ich gehe auch sehr gerne in Rock- oder Popkonzerte.

Interviewerin: Und was machen Sie normalerweise am Wochenende?

Mann 2: Hm, am Wochenende gehe ich, wenn es eine gute Party gibt, sehr gerne immer noch tanzen.

Interviewerin: Und wie viele Stunden pro Woche sehen Sie fern?

Mann 2: Hm, Fernsehen spielt bei mir keine große Rolle. Also ich denk', nicht mehr als drei bis vier Stunden in der Woche.

Appendix K: Think-aloud tasks for advanced German participants

(Spaces and font size are reduced below.)

Dear participant

Thank you for participating in this project. Now I would like you to do some language tasks, including reading, speaking, writing and listening. Below you find the tasks and instructions for each of them. The basic idea is that you go through one task after the other in the order suggested below. While doing what the tasks require I would like to know what you think while doing them. Any thoughts coming up, ranging from "What does this mean?" or "If this text is about x then this word must mean y." or "Lucky me, we've just covered that topic in the last lesson." are valuable. All comments can be in English. So the main idea is to do a language task and think aloud on what you would normally do silently. This form of reflection is called 'think-aloud' and is used to understand processes behind learning or understanding anything in another language.

As you are doing the tasks and the reflection on them at home I would like you to record everything on the audio tape provided. Please ensure that your voice is recorded in an understandable way on the cassette. Take a short break between tasks if you like.

Please do not use a dictionary, any notes or German grammar, but mention whenever there is something you don't know and would have liked to look up.

Please read each instruction carefully before starting the task and enjoy the opportunity to use your German!

Warm-up task

Instructions:

This is a warm-up task. Please have the cassette recorder ready before you start reading and start recording on side A. Read the following passage in order to understand the text, either silently or aloud. As you read to yourself, tell me everything that is going through your mind – maybe something that you don't understand or losing track in mid-sentence. Tell me also what you do to overcome any problems. You can read the passage as many times as you like and go on recording as long as you wish.

Alice Kurz, Tübingen

Ich habe im Sommer Geburtstag und das ist immer nett. Dann machen wir ein Grillfest irgendwo im Wald, wo es eine Feuerstelle gibt. Jeder bringt etwas mit, Fleisch zum Beispiel. Ich mache Salate und Brot und kaufe Getränke. Das ist dann immer sehr nett, vielleicht backe ich noch einen Geburtstagskuchen.

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Reading task

Instructions:

This is another reading task like the warm-up task above. Read the following passage in order to understand the text and to do the same as above. As you do this, tell me everything that is going through your mind. Please have the cassette recorder ready before start reading and don't look at the text before you are ready to record.

Weihnachten bei Thomas Walter in Leipzig

Weihnachten ist für mich persönlich das Fest der Familie. Es war mir früher schon wichtig in den Weihnachtstagen mit der Familie zu feiern, zu Hause bei meiner Mutter, mit meiner Schwester zusammen und heutzutage mit meinem Sohn, meiner Tochter und meiner Frau. Das ist meistens der Weihnachtsabend; wir essen in Ruhe zu Mittag, danach gehen wir raus, ein, zwei Stunden spazieren.

Am Nachmittag wird der Baum angeputzt, dann werden alle aus dem Zimmer geschickt. Ich mache die Geschenke für die Kinder zurecht, die Kinder kommen herein und es ist erstmal Bescherung.

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Speaking task

Instructions:

This task involves three steps. Firstly, talk about the following subject for about two minutes in German, while recording on the audio tape. Secondly, have a little pause of two minutes and stop recording. Then talk on to the cassette about what your thoughts were while doing the task (in English).

Leben in Cambridge: Vorteile und Nachteile?

Writing task

Instructions:

Please write three paragraphs in German on the following subject, again, thinking aloud as you do so. Remember to speak aloud everything that goes through your mind (in English or German) while doing the task. Please have your tape recorder ready before you start writing.

Was lieben sie an der deutschen Sprache und was nicht?

Listening task

Instructions

Please turn over your audio tape to the beginning of side B. This part has three parts. Firstly, you will listen to the passage. Secondly, please summarize, in English, what you understood. Thirdly, I would like you to tell me everything that was going through your mind as you tried to understand the passage: for example what you understood and what you didn't; how you were trying to work out the meaning of the parts you didn't understand.

The passage is at the beginning of side B. Please listen to the passage once only, then put the player to 'record' and do the summary and think-aloud (in English). If you would like to listen to it again, then please do so and record at the end again any thoughts you had this time while listening.

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this think-aloud!

Transcript of the listening extract for the advanced participants:

Generationen

Interviewer:

Frau Doktor Stricker, was für mögliche Konsequenzen hat es, wenn die Zahl der Deutschen über 60 Jahre zunimmt und die Zahl der jungen Leute abnimmt?

Frau Doktor Stricker:

Nun, die demographischen Veränderungen haben wahrscheinlich große Auswirkungen auf die deutsch Gesellschaft. Es gibt wahrscheinlich im Jahre 2050 weniger Kinder und auch weniger Schulen und Kindergärten. Und der Arbeitsmarkt ändert sich: Wahrscheinlich gibt es deutlich weniger Arbeitnehmer. Wenn es mehr alte Menschen gibt, dann bekommen sie vermutlich weniger Rente. Und in Deutschland braucht man mehr Altenpflege und Altenheime. Und es hat auch Auswirkungen auf das Gesundheitswesen: Mehr alte Menschen bedeutet mehr Ärzte und mehr Krankenhäuser.

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Appendix L: Think-aloud tasks for native level German participants

(Spaces and font size are reduced below.)

Dear participant

Thank you for participating in this project. Now I would like you to do some language tasks, including reading, speaking, writing and listening. Below you find the tasks and instructions for each of them. The basic idea is that you go through one task after the other in the order suggested below. While doing what the tasks require I would like to know what you think while doing them. Any thoughts coming up, ranging from "What does this mean?" or "If this text is about x then this word must mean y." or "Lucky me, we've just covered that topic in the last lesson." are valuable. All comments can be in English. So the main idea is to do a language task and think aloud on what you would normally do silently. This form of reflection is called 'think-aloud' and is used to understand processes behind learning or understanding anything in another language.

As you are doing the tasks and the reflection on them at home I would like you to record everything on the audio tape provided. Please ensure that your voice is recorded in an understandable way on the cassette. Take a short break between tasks if you like.

Please do not use a dictionary, any notes or German grammar, but mention whenever there is something you don't know and would have liked to look up.

Please read each instruction carefully before starting the task and enjoy the opportunity to use your German!

Warm-up task

Instructions:

This is a warm-up task. Please have the cassette recorder ready before you start reading and start recording on side A. Read the following passage in order to understand the text, either silently or aloud. As you read to yourself, tell me everything that is going through your mind – maybe something that you don't understand or losing track in mid-sentence. Tell me also what you do to overcome any problems. You can read the passage as many times as you like and go on recording as long as you wish.

Alice Kurz, Tübingen

Ich habe im Sommer Geburtstag und das ist immer nett. Dann machen wir ein Grillfest irgendwo im Wald, wo es eine Feuerstelle gibt. Jeder bringt etwas mit, Fleisch zum Beispiel. Ich mache Salate und Brot und kaufe Getränke. Das ist dann immer sehr nett, vielleicht backe ich noch einen Geburtstagskuchen.

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Reading task

Instructions:

This is another reading task like the warm-up task above. Read the following passage in order to understand the text and to do the same as above. As you do this, tell me everything that is going through your mind. Please have the cassette recorder ready before start reading and don't look at the text before you are ready to record.

Wuppertal - ein Standort präsentiert sich

Wuppertal entstand erst im Jahre 1929 durch den Zusammenschluss mehrerer Städte. Das Wuppertal als Industriegebiet ist jedoch schon viel älter. Die Ursprünge seiner wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung reichen bis in das 14. und 15. Jahrhundert zurück. Schon 1527 gab es zahlreiche Bleichereien entlang der Wupper, ein dynamischer Anstoß für die Weiterentwicklung des Textilgewerbes. Mit der Industrialisierung entstanden zahlreiche Textilmanufakturen, die auch andere Produktionszweige wie Färbereien und Webereien und chemische Industrie förderten. Die Textilindustrie erlebte jedoch – wie die Kohleindustrie im Ruhrgebiet – in den letzten Jahren einen Rückgang. Das führte zu einem Strukturwandel.

Heute arbeiten sechs von zehn Angestellten im Dienstleistungsbereich, wie zum Beispiel Banken und Versicherungen. Aber auch Ausbildung und Forschung wurden intensiv gefördert. Die Bergische Universität wurde erweitert, ein Technologiezentrum gegründet und ein Landesinstitut für Klima, Umwelt und Energie eröffnet. Im Stadtverkehr bewährt

sich seit 1901 die Wuppertaler Schwebebahn, Wahrzeichen der Stadt und Symbol für den unternehmerischen Pioniergeist in Wuppertal.

Kommen Sie nach Wuppertal: Hier hat Geschäftssinn Tradition, und Kreativität kennt keine Grenzen!

Text adapted from: The Open University, Motive I L203, Lerneinheit 2: Das Wuppertal, 2002³, p 83.

Speaking task

Instructions:

This task involves three steps. Firstly, talk about the following subject for about two minutes in German, while recording on the audio tape. Secondly, have a little pause of two minutes and stop recording. Then talk on to the cassette about what your thoughts were while doing the task (in English).

Leben in Cambridge: Vorteile und Nachteile?

Writing task

Instructions:

Please write three paragraphs in German on the following subject, again, thinking aloud as you do so. Remember to speak aloud everything that goes through your mind (in English or German) while doing the task. Please have your tape recorder ready before you start writing.

Was lieben sie an der deutschen Sprache und was nicht?

Listening task

Instructions

Please turn over your audio tape to the beginning of side B. This part has three parts. Firstly, you will listen to the passage. Secondly, please summarize, in English, what you understood. Thirdly, I would like you to tell me everything that was going through your mind as you tried to understand the passage: for example what you understood and what you didn't; how you were trying to work out the meaning of the parts you didn't understand.

The passage is at the beginning of side B. Please listen to the passage once only, then put the player to 'record' and do the summary and think-aloud (in English). If you would like to listen to it again, then please do so and record at the end again any thoughts you had this time while listening.

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this think-aloud!

Transcript of the listening extract for the advanced participants:

Generationen

Interviewer:

Frau Doktor Stricker, was für mögliche Konsequenzen hat es, wenn die Zahl der Deutschen über 60 Jahre zunimmt und die Zahl der jungen Leute abnimmt?

Frau Doktor Stricker:

Nun, die demographischen Veränderungen haben wahrscheinlich große Auswirkungen auf die deutsch Gesellschaft. Es gibt wahrscheinlich im Jahre 2050 weniger Kinder und auch weniger Schulen und Kindergärten. Und der Arbeitsmarkt ändert sich: Wahrscheinlich gibt es deutlich weniger Arbeitnehmer. Wenn es mehr alte Menschen gibt, dann bekommen sie vermutlich weniger Rente. Und in Deutschland braucht man mehr Altenpflege und Altenheime. Und es hat auch Auswirkungen auf das Gesundheitswesen: Mehr alte Menschen bedeutet mehr Ärzte und mehr Krankenhäuser.

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Appendix M: Sample think-aloud transcript of Tina, including annotations

(The symbol ° is used where strategies were not included in Graham's (1997) strategy inventory)

Stage II of analysis: Description of strategies	Stage I of analysis: Transcript (underlined are incidents of strategy use)	Stage IV of analysis: Labelling of strategies
<p>Assessing difficulty expected</p> <p>Focusing on the task ahead</p> <p>Self-analysis which way does not work</p> <p>Planning approach</p> <p>Plan to read slowly in head</p> <p>Self-encouragement</p> <p>Assessing what is not understood</p> <p>Guessing from context</p> <p>Assessing importance of unknown word</p>	<p>warm-up</p> <p>This is the warm up task. I'm sure <u>I'm going to have problems</u> with this because I find just using the technology of the tape recorders stressing me out, let alone doing the German. But anyway, <u>I'll attempt to do the best I can. I can read it up loud</u> because <u>if I'm reading out loud I'm just going to be concentrating on getting the pronunciation</u>. And when I do that I do find that I'm actually not taking in the context at all. <u>So to do this I'm going to have to read this in my head very slowly</u> to get the gist of it and then to come back to you with any comments in a minute.</p> <p>Right, <u>I feel that I can understand the passage</u>. So I felt quite encouraged by that. <u>There are two words that I don't know. Ein Grillfest, I'm guessing</u> that is some sort of a barbecue and <u>irgendwo</u>, I have no idea about. I hope <u>that's sort of a filler word</u>, cause it doesn't seem to have any great bearing on the meaning.</p>	<p>Monitoring ability against requirements</p> <p>Self-encouragement</p> <p>Self-management</p> <p>Self-management or planning in L1</p> <p>planning in L1</p> <p>Self-encouragement</p> <p>Problem identification</p> <p>Inferencing by context</p> <p>omission</p>
<p>Planning how to approach task best</p> <p>Planning to read slowly</p> <p>Plan how to undertake task</p> <p>Learned from wrong approach in past</p> <p>Reminding herself to concentrate</p> <p>Taking unknown word apart</p> <p>Check meaning of word parts in context</p> <p>Identifying unknown words</p> <p>Assessing importance of word 2x</p> <p>Identifying unknown word adjusting word meaning to context coming back to title not understood after finishing whole text assessing own ability for task</p> <p>normally uses dictionary to check</p> <p>analysing normal approach of dictionary use</p>	<p>Reading</p> <p>Right, I'm going on to the reading task no. Again, <u>I'm going to read it in my head, slowly</u>. What I have to do is <u>I have to translate it as I go along</u> and at the end of each sentence see if I understood enough to make sense of it. What I found <u>in the past is that I tend to make wild guesses</u> and then go up completely on the wrong track. <u>So I'm going to do it very carefully</u> and see if I can work it out. I'm a bit put off because I'm stuck by the title. I have no idea what <u>das Gewohnheitstier</u> is, because <u>wohnen makes me think of living</u> or place that you live in. And <u>Tier makes me think of animals</u>, but <u>doesn't actually make any sense in connection</u> with <u>mein Bruder</u>. I hope I'm going to get on better with the rest in a minute. So I read it and then I'll come back to you.</p> <p>(Break of recording.)</p> <p>Well in fact, I did understand the passage, I enjoyed it, I thought it was quite fun. There <u>a couple of other words</u> that I didn't know the meaning of <u>seither</u> and, where was the other one, which was <u>sofort</u>? I'm hoping <u>they are filler words</u>, because they don't seem to be crucial. And <u>also Frauen</u>. I thought <u>Frau</u> was wife, <u>but in this context it probably means</u> sort of <u>adult female</u>. I hope I guessed that right. <u>By the time I got to the end of the passage I decided</u> that <u>Gewohnheitstier</u> might mean sort of lifestyle. I <u>found it quite difficult</u>, because normally when I read something any word that I'm not absolutely sure of I <u>check in the dictionary</u> as I go along. Even words I probably do know I check to make sure that I'm not going off on the wrong track by guessing incorrectly. So it's actually showing me that on a passage like this, anyway, <u>I don't need the dictionary quite as much as I thought I did</u>. So that's quite good.</p>	<p>Self-management</p> <p>Planning in L1</p> <p>Self-management</p> <p>Self-management</p> <p>Directed attention</p> <p>Word analysis</p> <p>Relate word to context°</p> <p>Selective attention</p> <p>Omission 2x</p> <p>Selective attention</p> <p>hypothesizing</p> <p>self-diagnosis</p> <p>resourcing</p> <p>self-diagnosis</p>

<p>Assessing what is involved in task</p> <p>Remembering normal approach for similar task</p> <p>Thought for content in L1</p> <p>Using material provided in question</p> <p>Repetition of known structure in L2</p> <p>Repetition of known structure in L2</p> <p>Thinking of structure in L1</p> <p>Using material provided in question</p> <p>Repetition of known structure in L2</p> <p>Thinking of content in L1</p>	<p>Speaking (stops recording between sentences in L2)</p> <p>Alright then, the speaking task. I'm rather dreading doing this because <u>two minutes aren't a long time</u> and also, normally, I find it difficult to put things from English into German without having <u>time to think about it and write it out first</u>.</p> <p>Because usually, <u>the first thing that I wanted to say</u> I found a concert in German and because I've thought about it and it's too complicated in a way and I've got to think of another way of, to say it that's within my ability of the vocabulary I've got and how much I can do. So I expect this is going to be quite hard. Anyway, <u>Vorteile. Die Gebäude sind schön. Hmm, es gibt viele gute Rasen. Im Sommer kann man den Fluss genießen.</u> It's hard to think of things that you can think of in English let in German. <u>Es ist einfach, mit Fahrrad zu gehen, weil es einfach ist. Man kann viele Sachen zu tun. Es gibt viele Museen, Kinos und Theater. Es gibt ausserdem viele Restaurants. Es ist einfach nach London gehen.</u> I think have to give up on <u>Vorteile</u> and <u>have to think about Nachteile</u>. Hmmm, <u>die Häuser sind teuer. Es gibt zu viele Autos. Der Verkehr ist Chaos.</u> I'm not quite sure if that's the right word in German, but I don't know anything else. So I've guessed that. <u>Man kann nicht das Auto parken. Es gibt nicht viele gute Laden.</u> Oh dear, that was really awful. <u>I can't think of anything else in English to translate it.</u> So I'm going to stop on this now.</p>	<p>Advance organisation</p> <p>Self-management</p> <p>Planning in L1</p> <p>Copying° word provided in question</p> <p>Repeating° same phrase</p> <p>Repeating° same phrase</p> <p>Planning in L1</p> <p>Copying° word provided in question</p> <p>Repeating° same phrase</p> <p>Planning in L1</p>
<p>Assessing task requirements</p> <p>Aware of how usually approaches writing / Usually plans before writing</p> <p>Using dictionary</p> <p>Checking endings for grammatical correctness / check for word order</p> <p>Self-encouragement</p> <p>Self-assessment of vocabulary</p> <p>self-analysis of problem with vocab</p> <p>check of structure</p> <p>remembering how to structure from school</p> <p>monitoring of appropriateness of structure</p> <p>check of production against requirements</p>	<p>Writing</p> <p>Now I'm going to have a go at the writing task. <u>Three paragraphs</u> sound like a lot. I'm not sure that I can think of enough things anyway, let alone enough to put them into German, but I'll have a go. <u>Usually, when I write things I would try to do it in rough,</u> then put it down <u>looking up each word and working out the ending of any adjectives</u> and so as I'm going along. Then last of all would sort of <u>work out the word order</u>, see if I've done that right. Because I'm doing this straight onto the paper I'm not quite sure whether I'll be able to manage that as I go along. But anyway, <u>I'll have a go.</u></p> <p>I feel I'm <u>using the same words</u> over and over. Simply, because I <u>haven't got a wide enough vocabulary.</u> So it's going to be a bit, very boring. I realised because I'm doing this straight onto the paper that I haven't really worked it out very sensibly and <u>soughed out the paragraphs</u> into thee likes and dislikes separable or done an introduction or a conclusion or whatever. All I can keep on <u>remembering is the English teacher at school</u> and the stress on how paragraphs should be, and how paragraphs should be organised. And <u>I'm just very aware</u> that I'm not doing it, even though it's in German. So I think that's, I'm finding that quite inhibiting because I know I'm not making a good job of it. I've given up, I <u>haven't done three paragraphs, I got three sentences divided into three bits.</u> But I don't know that I can do more than that.</p>	<p>Advance organization</p> <p>Self-management</p> <p>Resourcing</p> <p>Pattern application</p> <p>Pattern application</p> <p>Self-encouragement</p> <p>Sophistication monitor.</p> <p>Self-diagnosis</p> <p>Production monitoring</p> <p>resourcing</p> <p>style monitoring</p> <p>production evaluation accuracy</p>
	<p>Listening</p>	

Remembering key word heard	<p>Alright, well, I don't think I've understood very much of it. I think at the start the female was asking the men what he was going to do, I think, it was <i>heute abend</i>, so it was this afternoon. So there was <u>something about cinema</u>, but I didn't get the rest of it. And then she asked him how often he went to the cinema and then there was a joke which I missed. And then there's <u>something about four to six times a month</u>. So I'm not sure about that. And then she went on to ask him about the theatre and he said he went to concerts. And asked him about what type and he said something about philharmonia and classical and rock and pop. But <u>whether he said</u> that he went to them or whether they happened in the theatre, I'm not entirely sure about that. And then she asked him what, about weekends and then I got the word <u>party</u>. I think she asked him what he watched on TV, but I didn't get any more. And I think, I heard <u>Rostock</u>, but <u>whether that's where they were or whether that's where</u> he was working or living, I'm not sure whether that came into it. <u>But I'll have another listen</u>, I did go through it twice and see whether I can make more sense of it.</p> <p>Well, I've tried listening to it again and <u>pausing it after each bit</u> to try and work out what I've heard and see if I can then recognise it as meaning something. But it's <u>too fast for me</u>. I can't make any more sense than I could the first time. So I think that's just beyond me at the moment. The man <u>I'm finding even more difficult</u> than the lady. I'm not sure whether that's because of his delivery being faster or what. Or <u>maybe it's my hearing</u>, but I'm finding the bits which I got that I realise are mostly the things she said and I'm not understanding the replies he said. So maybe it's my hearing as well as my lack of comprehension of hearing German.</p>	Selective attention
Remembering key word heard		Selective attention (to what was understood)
Weighing alternative meanings		hypothesising
Remembering key word heard		selective attention
Remembering key word heard		selective attention
Hypothesising about interpretation of key word		hypothesising
Trying again, persevere		perseverance
Analysing difficulties		adjusting material to work on°
Adjusting recording to own speed		problem identification
Assessing difficulty of problem		
Analysing why task is difficult	problem identification	
Analysing why task is difficult	problem identification	

Appendix N: Interview prompts

1 Language learning strategies

1.1 Past language learning experiences

- positive or negative?
- school-related or work-related?
- experienced in language learning or new to language learning?
- easy or difficult?
- good or bad language learners?

1.2 Language learning strategies

- useful tricks or useless tricks?
- easy or difficult aspects of learning German?
- likes and dislikes of learning German?
- ways of organizing learning successfully?

2 Learning in later life

2.1 How is learning in later life experienced?

- positive – negative?
- difficult – easy (involving issues such as memory, stereotypes, time needed)?
- enjoying learning – not enjoying learning?
- used to learning – not used to learning?

2.2 What are the expectations for learning in later life?

- Purpose of / motivation for learning (e.g. certificates, mental activity, pleasure)?
- Learning environment (e.g. informal, structured, age-homogenous)?
- Good tutor characteristics?

Appendix O: Sample interview transcript with annotations

The brackets “{...}” indicate where parts of the interview were cut out for the simplicity of the presentation here.

transcript	annotations
<p>{introduction about confidentiality and anonymity; brief chat about the questionnaire}</p> <p>It was only when I took an early retirement from the probationary services having had enough of the strains and stresses on health grounds. It was sort of my 50th birthday that I thought well I've got quite a lot of petrol in the tank still. What am I good at what have I done? I didn't feel I wanted to go into any fresh fields. It was hard work revelling up particularly the German. French wasn't so bad my mother had been a French teacher. As she was a very versatile and enthusiastic lady. I suppose my father had no real interest in languages. He was a real English man, could you speak a little bit louder or shall I speak to you a little bit louder and hope you'll understand. But he never had sort of flair for it. So it came through my mother who encouraged me a lot with the French which was my first languages really at school I've done some Greek and Latin. I didn't really start with German until I was about 15, 16. I took German GCSE and then the two languages ran in tandem together for the remaining time at school till A-level. And I've got an distinction from my school to Christ College at Oxford when I was 18, 19 and I did French and German in tandem there through to my degree three years later. I think it would be, well it is very important for me to say that I was greatly inspired by both my French and German teachers at school particularly in the post-O-level period. There was a Dr Sanger for French and a Dr Garten for German. I have very fond recollections of them both. I suppose we were particularly lucky in that we had an outstanding pupil in the class who was multilingual and I probably learned as much from just listening to him as I did from the teachers. But you know I worked hard and enjoyed it. Looking back what I perhaps missed at that point was the opportunity for school exchanges which were fairly minimal. So my mother took the initiative in getting me into some private exchanges both to France and to Germany.</p>	<p>Early retirement at 50 Felt like starting something new Came back to German Mother was a French teacher</p> <p>French, German for A-level Greek and Latin at school</p> <p>Inspired by language teachers at school</p> <p>Enjoyed working hard for languages at school Private exchange to France and Germany through mother</p>
<p>{...} But I went straight from school to university to take up my exhibition in modern languages and to be frank I was a little bit disappointed although there was quite a wide field of opportunities. {...} I didn't apply myself as well as I should. I didn't find either my personal French tutor or my personal German tutor. Very personal we were actually taught in small tutorial groups this was at Oxford, three or four. I didn't warm to either of them in particular. So I lost some of the impetus and some of the enthusiasm that I have had. In those days it was possible to do very little over the second and third year, this was a 3 year course. I'm afraid I did that. And there was a bit of panic in my final year but I did actually get a reasonable degree in the end and was already thinking at that stage, well look I'm not going to teach languages, I wasn't that amened of the prospect of teaching in an open classroom situation. I knew that national service was looming and I thought well that'll give the time to think. I had the opportunity by joining a royal artillery of getting a transfer into the royal military police where I knew my German would come in useful. And in that way I got to spent about 18 months of national service in the Ruhr district around Dortmund, Iserlohn and a kind of unofficially unpaid assistant interpreter. The main interpreter was a German civilian employee. But in my time in Germany, socially I had a good time to progress with my language skills and I had the opportunity of meeting one or two German civilian police who we worked quite closely with in the British military police. They invited me to their homes and we, the time passed very pleasantly. I then following, I was in Berlin the time the wall went up, but my post-national service plans were to not for the time being pursue any of the languages I trained to be a probationary officer. Qualified for that at the age of 24, postgraduate diploma of social sciences and social administration. And then I worked for the next 24+ years in the probation service and there was no call for my languages in that period. And when I took early retirement just before my 50th birthday, very stressed out, I realized that I had some potential profitable time ahead of me. {...} I started to think, well if I can get my French up-speed and likewise the German which I had always enjoyed as much and had a better time in Germany. My German geography was rather better than my French geography. Maybe I could get under a way as a private tutor offering initially French and German, not too ambitiously, beginners up to GCSE. I got quite an encouraging response and then I also thought, well I always enjoyed English why not qualify as a teacher for English as a foreign language. So I took a course in London to do that and armed with three-plonged possibility we moved {here}. By that time I had been offering French, German and English for some years and had become quite confident as a private tutor, established quite good links with the local schools, had a steady number of pupils round about 10. {...} And since then things have really taken off, there had been time when I have had few referrals for German, a lot for English and a lot for French. But looking over the past 5 or 6 years overall it has been extremely enjoyable. I'm now very confident. I made many agreeable links with France but more particularly with Switzerland and Austria through my teaching of students from those countries coming {here}. And I have also taken an active part in attending pretty regularly classes run by the U3A {here}. There's a very wide and exciting choice of French classes on offer. I enjoy going</p>	<p>Lost interest in languages when studying French and German at Oxford</p> <p>National service in Germany</p> <p>Started doing language courses again</p> <p>Historic places he would like to visit in Germany left as not much travelling while busy with job earlier</p>

<p>there as a participant. And the same applies to German where there are far fewer of those courses at the moment. But luckily I found a couple of those. So I'm able to keep both languages ticking over nicely and have been able also, now as our children live independently, my wife and I and sometimes just on my own I have been able to visit particularly Germany more often. And there are still many places over there that I would like to visit, particularly Weimar and Goethe territory, happy memories of school. Fairly happy memories of the university and Berlin places like that. {...}</p>	
<p><i>I: So when did you start with Italian then? Was that with the U3A as well?</i></p>	<p>Learned Italian at U3A and private tuition</p>
<p>J: I did start Italian there. That was more sort of challenge. I've done I suppose. I started Italian and then my mother unfortunately suddenly died and she said well John you know you have more time now to apply to your languages again and why not try another one. She didn't specifically refer to Italian it wasn't a language she had ever done. But I thought about it and. I'd actually never been to Italy I have now. So I had given the Italian a go and probably got that up to GCSE standard. There's some private tuition in it as well. At the moment it is on hold. I would say my Italian is more of a sideline. Hopefully it helps to lubricate my linguistic agility but as one gets on I think that obviously has its' limitations and I do find it quite hard to take on new linguistic techniques although I did Latin at school and I've done French for many years I still find Italian quite a tuff challenge. So for the moment it's in no particular order, it's English, French and German.</p>	<p>New language to stay used to learning languages</p>
<p><i>I: Did you find it difficult to come back to languages after the gap of almost 30 years?</i></p>	<p>Always felt more at ease with German</p>
<p>J: I certainly did. But I think the German was the main challenge partly because French was my main languages normally I also, I always had a, I always got on better with the German, I think I still do to be honest. And it really was a challenge after all those year to open a German dictionary to encounter the syllabus again which had changed particularly for AS level and beyond. A great move away from the class of literary text to modern topics, environmental issues, drug dependency, homelessness, things like that. And the new words that had come into the language in the past 30 years none of them I'd touched even if they were around when I was at school, compound nouns are tuff at the best of times. And also German grammar had become very rusty indeed, much more so than the French. So that needed a lot of oiling. {...} But I think with the passage of time and that's been ironed out and I think the old rustiness has been erased and I'd become familiar with the new words. And the new syllabuses. So it's been a very worthwhile experience.</p>	<p>Different language to come back after 30 years</p>
<p><i>I: So what did you do to overcome the rustiness?</i></p>	<p>Started with re-reading German books from school/university</p>
<p>J: I think my initial approach was to re-read some of the texts that I had read before. I remember reading Storm's Der Schimmelreiter again I remember I didn't particular enjoy that. And then not re-absorbing myself in the classics but getting one or two modern German novels, trying to get into those, reading German newspapers, getting abroad, spending some time abroad with a former pupil who was now living and working in Germany that sort of thing. So I did that as well as getting my ear in again. That sort of thing. But there were times I must say where I thought this is hard work. I've never been in business and I don't strictly offer business French or business German. Least of all business German. But it's been hard work. I bought myself some reasonably advanced sort of German tapes, since coming {...} I go to every possible German film I can to and try to ignore the English subtitles. And it's back in the bloodstream now. It's, I think I've got there. Yes it's been a challenge {...}</p>	<p>Reading German newspapers Travelling to Germany, Switzerland German tapes, goes to German films Hard work getting it all back</p>
<p><i>I: When you came back to languages where would you say you were then?</i></p>	<p>could still understand but some areas of grammar needed revision, eg. modal verbs, passive</p>
<p>J: Well I think the difficulty. I mean when I was looking at German texts I recognized most of it I could make a reasonable stab at translation from German into English. And words were coming back quite readily. But the English into German and some of the German grammar constructions with modal verbs and things like that I did find tough again. And I realized you know how well had I learned these things in the first place. But because I don't remember it. The actual learning process. I mean other things are a lot more clearly about German classes. But it was. I mean there are an immense number of resources that one can dip into now. I'm not an internet person so maybe I'm missing out a lot on that. I don't watch language programmes on television. I love films and to a considerable extent theatre as well. But I do make a point often just to go to a German film because it's in German. Might not be particularly well-known or recommended one but for me it's still a linguistic exercise.</p>	<p>no internet, TV language programme user</p>
<p><i>I: What were the areas you felt difficult about when you came back to German?</i></p>	<p>gender, agreements most difficult, also word order</p>
<p>J: Yes genders and agreements. But word order needed a little bit and some of the verbs particularly in the passive needed, subjunctive. And sometimes, oddly enough, feeling because I might be re-reading a classic book from Goethe or so, oh yes this is bit of a deja-vu I recognize the style. So I turned to modern novel and might be struggling a little bit with the grammar and indirect speech and who was saying exactly what. That was sometimes tricky. But I still take pleasure in referring things out I have a very good reference library for both languages and I can usually find what I want. And I enjoy the process of actually finding it, furriting away. I also have a fairly good memory. Although it's. And I don't find because they are so different. I think that's quite important. I don't find that the {...}</p>	<p>likes using books, novels, dictionaries good memory</p>
<p><i>I: Is there still something in German you hadn't done but you would still like to do?</i></p>	<p>wants to read more German books and visit more places in Germany</p>
<p>J: Yes I would like to. I think if I don't have a lot of time to read books that I chose. I might be re-reading books because they are for specific pupils or they are the set book for that particular term</p>	<p>practicing with various</p>

<p>in the U3A course for that particular term. But my preference would be to specialize in terms on I spent my reading time on modern German novels. And in terms of visits to Germany I've mentioned earlier there are still some places I would still like to get to.</p> <p><i>I: I would like to talk a bit more about how you went about re-learning German when you came back to it.</i></p> <p>J: It was practice, looking at the exam syllabuses. They say last year's A-level papers have changed now. You need to do that. You don't have instant access to those things as if you are a class teacher. Yes I did that. I wasn't an internet person. So I'm more you know a book person. And in some ways I feel I've sometimes been motoring on knowledge that I've been able to get back to the surface rather than absorb more recently. And been doing it to certain extent sort of intuitively. But perhaps it may only happens once my tutoring days my finish or diminish it may happen that I will be seriously getting down to reading some novels.</p> <p><i>I: What do you advice your students on how to learn?</i></p> <p>J: I think depending on the student's situation {...} Why don't you tune in for an evening class in one of the adult local education colleges. Surprisingly a surprising number cannot find a local German class. {...}</p> <p><i>I: Just coming back to your Italian learning experience. Was that different from what you'd have expected?</i></p> <p>J: I enjoy the learning experience. I mean teaching is also a learning experience. I enjoy not wearing the teacher's or tutor's head. I enjoy being a participant. You see it's quite relaxing {...}</p> <p>Yes I think I feel a considerable sense of satisfaction at having returned something that. I enjoyed my time at school particularly and I had outstandingly good language teachers. There I was very, very lucky. And I am pleased now that I have been able to fall back on. I wasn't. I don't think while I was in the probationary service I saw that necessarily as a life job and at that time languages were never far from my mind. So it gives me a lot of pleasure thinking how grateful I am to those particular teachers now {...}. And it's very nice to enjoy what one's doing, to enjoy it a lot. I wouldn't go as far as to say it's a job and a hobby but I would say that it certainly spilt over, the proportions of a hobby, especially on the cultural side.</p> <p><i>I: So your motivation has increased?</i></p> <p>J: Yes I would think so. I think we are living in a very stimulating university life {...}. I hoped this would happen. I was I mean I always thought that it was going to be a challenge. In my thoughts I knew it was going to be good. {...}</p>	<p>resources when coming back to German remembered once learned material more than learning new things now</p> <p>feels language classes are helpful to get into a language</p> <p>enjoyed learning Italian as a learner</p> <p>Enjoys languages as a hobby and for the cultural side</p>
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Appendix P: List of all language learning strategies

Complete alphabetic list of all learning strategies reported and employed by all students in all research instruments. The classification and labelling follows Graham (1997). Those strategies which were already listed in Graham's (1997) strategy inventory are marked with an "x". Some of the strategy descriptions are copied from Graham (1997), others are descriptions by me, particularly of those strategies which were not listed in Graham (1997).

Strategy (classified after Graham 1997)	Description	Questionnaire (by skill reported for)	Think-aloud protocol (by skill used for)	Interview (by skill or practice reported for)	Listed in Graham's (1997) strategy inventory
METACOGNITIVE					
Advance organisation	Examining aspects of a forthcoming language task prior to embarking upon it properly (e.g. thinking about what is required for this task, thinking about possible responses beforehand)		writing speaking	speaking	x
Amending errors	Writing out / repeating orally the corrected version	writing speaking	writing speaking		x
Attending to errors	Attending to corrected homework (e.g. reading corrected homework out loud in class)	writing			x
Auditory monitoring	Using one's ear to make decisions on correctness of language use		writing reading		x
Creating practice opportunities	Deliberately taking on practice opportunities (e.g. going to classes regularly, doing homework, writing resumes of short stories, writing a travel log which is corrected, pen-friends, greeting cards, e-mails to relatives or friends, attending the Russian church, monologuing while driving, self-talk in bed or on train, singing songs in target language, leaving book out on table, pretend to be the person who's turn it is in class, eavesdropping)	vocabulary speaking writing listening		practice speaking	x
Directed attention	deciding to concentrate fully on a task, prior as well as during undertaking it		writing listening		
Double-check monitoring	Looking back over the task at decisions made or possibilities already considered		reading Writing		x
Language repertoire monitoring	During the task, assessing whether one knows enough of the L2 to complete it fully (e.g. lack of vocabulary, grammar, imagination)		writing speaking		x
Personal elaboration	Making judgements about or reacting personally to the material presented (e.g. commenting in L1 on the content, reacting emotionally to the topic or information provided)		reading speaking writing		x
Planning in L1 / L2	Making plans for the completion or structure of a language task (e.g. deciding to use L1 words to keep the flow, taking notes)		speaking writing listening	writing reading	x

Problem assessment	Assessing the importance of a problem encountered during a task for finishing it (e.g. assess if unknown words carry crucial meaning for the understanding of the text)		reading speaking		
Problem identification	Identifying elements of a task that hold the key to its successful completion (e.g. using well known and practiced words / structures only)		speaking writing		x
Production monitoring (accuracy)	Checking accuracy of a language production, grammatically, phonologically (e.g. recording own speaking and listening)	speaking	writing listening		x
Production monitoring (meaning)	Checking through a language production after finishing it (e.g. after writing checking if the meaning expressed matches the meaning intended while writing)		writing		x
Production evaluation (delayed)	checking the L2 production after leaving it aside at first (e.g. leaving a phrase for the moment and returning to it after finishing the text)		writing speaking listening		x
Reading in L2	Reading aloud in the L2		reading		x
Reading through errors	Looking where the mistakes were made (e.g. homework, travel log, resumes)	writing			x
Reviewing	Revisiting finished class work / notes / previously learned material	vocabulary			x
Selective attention	Deciding on which problem in the target language to focus on (e.g. using new words more often, using corrected phrases immediately, focus on stresses in words only, self-monitoring for article agreements only)	vocabulary speaking	reading speaking		x
Self-diagnosis	Identifying by themselves what learners should do to improve (e.g. spending more time in Greece, need personally interesting topics, learns better by seeing / hearing)	listening writing speaking	reading writing speaking listening		x
Self-management / philosophising	Ensuring that a task is carried out in a way that has been identified as potentially successful Theorising about how best to learn a language (e.g. needs more reading to improve language use, needs to think in L3 rather than in L1 first, daily 30 min, learn vocabulary list before going to bed to come back to it straight in the morning, reading brings all important aspects of a language together, practice every evening when brushing teeth)		speaking writing listening	practicing vocabulary reading	x
Sophistication monitoring	Checking that one's language production goes beyond basic requirements (e.g. searching for the most unusual and precise word)		speaking		x
Strategy monitoring	Deciding on which strategies to use before tackling a task (e.g. choosing to use very simple and familiar phrases, deciding to listen to recording in chunks rather as a whole, focusing on known words before tackling unknown ones)		speaking listening reading		x

Style monitoring	Checking that one's language production goes beyond basic requirements (trying to find more stylistically adequate words)		writing			x
Translation for monitoring	Translating a L2 production after finishing it to monitor the correctness		writing			
COGNITIVE						
Between parts elaboration	Relating parts of the task to each other (e.g. relating key words to understand unknown phrases)		reading			x
Contextualisation	Remembering new item by recalling situations when they were learned (e.g. situations in class, general context, relating words to everyday activities, contextualise by words in meaningful groups)	vocabulary	speaking reading	reading vocabulary		x
Formulaic phrases	Making use of or noticing prefabricated chunks of language to comprehend or produce language (e.g. using clichés)			speaking listening		x
Highlighting	Marking certain words / phrases			reading vocabulary		x
Hypothesising	Suggesting possible meanings / solutions for a task (e.g. from key words / familiar words / clichés)		listening			x
Imitation	Following the model of a native speaker / writer to improve one's own language performance (e.g. imitating like a child incl. mistakes)			listening speaking		x
Inferencing	Making use of available information to guess the meaning or usage of unknown items		reading			x
Inferencing by context	Guessing from the general context of a passage	vocabulary	reading	reading speaking listening		x
List-making	Listing words / phrases / notes without grouping them (e.g. after class, list in kitchen, transfer onto flash cards, record on audio tape)	vocabulary writing				x
List-repetition	Repeated reading through ungrouped list	vocabulary				
Listing by attribute	Compiling a list of L2 words grouped by certain criteria (by word field, by difficulty of remembering, by gender, by topic)	vocabulary				x
Masking	Memorising while covering one side of the list	vocabulary		vocabulary		x
Multi channelling	Using two ways of using the language material at the same time, such as listening to an audio while reading the transcript (e.g. writing down a word while saying it, writing an essay and memorising it, dictation of a read passage, writing down read words, listening to audio while reading transcript)	vocabulary reading writing		listening		
Naturalistic practice	Practicing target language in authentic settings, such as watching films/ videos, listening to the radio, reading books (e.g. listening to fluent speakers)	vocabulary speaking listening		reading		x

Novel associations	Relating new items to other concepts by means of strange associations (e.g. aided by sound or meaning)	vocabulary		vocabulary	x
Omission	Skipping unknown L2 items		reading writing		x
Pattern / rule application	Using learned grammatical rules to complete a task (e.g. testing limit of applicability of grammatical rules, analysing word structure)	vocabulary writing	writing reading		x
Pot luck	Making a wild guess about the meaning of use of a word at random (e.g. using a phrase / gender not known well)		reading speaking writing		x
Reading aloud	Reading a text aloud (e.g. with a mirror, in the class)	speaking			
Recombination	Combining items previously learnt in a new way (e.g. pattern drills)	speaking	speaking		x
Repetition oral / aural	Repeating certain aspects over and over to aid memorising (e.g. repeat listening to older audios regularly, listening to increasingly difficult audios, repeating word list in the evening and morning, regular practice, one time with audio and other time with transcript)	vocabulary		practice listening speaking	x
Repetition as copying	Repeating language material or parts of it provided to trigger time to think (e.g. copying title question to start a text, repeating oral question to structure oral language production)		speaking writing		
Resourcing	Using reference sources, such as audios, books, internet, previous coursework, CDs (e.g. repeating / answering aloud to an audio / CD, listening in car, easy readers, reading with translation, revision, flash cards, notebook, dictionary)	vocabulary speaking listening reading		reading grammar vocabulary	x
Rote learning	Memorising by heart	vocabulary speaking			x
Self-testing	Producing L2 or L1 in response to an L1 or L2 prompt	vocabulary		vocabulary	x
Substitution	Trying out alternative approaches or solutions, selecting different words or phrases to accomplish a language task			writing	x
Transfer	Using knowledge of another language to assist in the understanding of the target language (e.g. French, Latin, Dutch)	vocabulary	writing		x
Translation	Translating from one language into the other to produce a L2 output		reading	writing	x
Word analysis	Breaking down a word into its components (e.g. looking for the word stem, word family)		reading speaking		x

SOCIAL / AFFECTIVE

Clarification	Seeking for clarification, repetition or explanation about an item from a teacher / native speaker / peer	vocabulary writing	speaking		x
Perseverance	Desire to continue with learning / the task despite difficulties		reading speaking		x

Risk-taking	Being prepared looking foolish or being incorrect in one's use of the L2 (e.g. use new words in conversations to test their usability in different contexts, reframing sentences, behave like a child)	vocabulary	speaking writing	speaking listening practice	x
Self-encouragement	Repeating positive statements to oneself to gain more confidence in the L2 performance (e.g. self-assurance that what one is writing complied with what is required)		writing reading		
Self-talk	Talking to / asking oneself questions to trigger thinking in the right direction		reading writing		(x)
Silent rehearsal	In oral work, silently repeating a word / phrase to oneself before producing it	speaking vocabulary			x
Verification	Asking a more advanced or native person to check language production (e.g. friend, brother, teacher, husband)	writing speaking			x
COMMUNICATIVE					
Circumlocution / paraphrase	Compensating for a lack of L2 knowledge by rephrasing one's message (e.g. using a better known phrase / word instead of another one)		speaking writing		x
Code switching	Filling gaps in L2 with words in L1		speaking writing		x
Replacement	Replacing unknown grammatical form or word with the correct form in the L1 (e.g. using the English plural -s for nouns)		writing speaking		

Table 34: Alphabetic list of strategies by category and research instrument