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Exploring intercultural communicative competence in a distance language learning environment

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EXPLORING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN A DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This study explores intercultural communicative competence in a distance language learning programme at the Open University in the UK. The research was based on two cohorts of distance language students of German, one at beginner and one at advanced level. This study uses an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative research methods through the use of questionnaires and in-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews.

It was established that the conceptual framework of intercultural communicative competence developed by Byram (1997b) and his collaborators is the most comprehensive and viable framework for this project. There is evidence in the literature that this framework has been used successfully in different contexts (Byram & Morgan, 1994; O'Dowd, 2006; Sercu et al., 2005a). Little research has been conducted on the development of intercultural communicative competence in adults, with the exception of Aarup Jensen et al. (1995). So this project addresses a gap in the research into intercultural communicative competence among adults. Furthermore, it focuses on a programme of language study at a distance, which is another area for which only limited research evidence could be found.

The findings of the project, both the quantitative and qualitative aspects, demonstrate that these learners gained knowledge through the study of a prescribed package of course materials, and that there is evidence of the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence of varying degrees, as stipulated in Byram's conceptual framework. The findings also demonstrate that the framework of intercultural communicative competence would benefit from the

addition of a sixth dimension to encapsulate the experiences and diverse

backgrounds that specifically adult learners bring to the study of a modern foreign

language: experience of life *or savoir s'appuyer sur son expérience*.

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1 Introduction

The aim of this project was to explore intercultural communicative competence among adult learners of German in a distance learning programme, and the effect a standardised programme of learning could have on the students' intercultural communicative competence. For this study two different cohorts studying German at the Department of Languages, The Open University, were chosen: beginners and advanced learners of German. The research hypothesis and research questions are described, and a rationale for the amendments that were made in the course of the project is also given. The literature review discusses a number of relevant concepts and theories and argues that the concept of intercultural communicative competence developed by Byram (1997b) is the most suitable and comprehensive for the purposes of this project. In the section on research methodologies, this project is discussed in relation to action research, or more specifically, practitioner research. A rationale for using a mixed research methodology containing quantitative and qualitative research tools is provided. A further section reports on the methods used to collect data and the reason why a second round of collecting both qualitative and quantitative data for the advanced German cohort had to be carried out. Section 6 presents the data gathered, then analyses and discusses them, generating a number of findings. Reflection on the scope of the research follows, and further research issues, as well as the implications for practice are discussed.

2   Research hypothesis and research questions

The basic hypothesis for the project was: *Adult learners of a language at a distance can gain in intercultural competence through the study of a standardised pack of materials which aim to enhance the students' intercultural communicative competence*.

The original research questions were:

1   Are all aspects of Byram's conceptual framework of intercultural learning (Byram, 1997b) *(savoir comprendre, savoirs, savoir s'engager, savoir être, savoir apprendre/faire)* applicable to the research subjects (adult distance learners of German)?

2   How is it possible to assess intercultural communicative competence (ICC) gains in a distance learning environment, and what would be suitable measures for assessing them, especially when the ethical issues raised by the assessment of ICC are borne in mind?

3   To what extent do adult learners on a distance language programme in German gain intercultural competence through the pursuit of a prescribed programme of study? And to what degree do they bring intercultural competence to their study as part of their varied life experience?

The draft title for the project was as follows: *Evaluating intercultural competence in a distance language learning programme*. In the light of the work conducted in Year 1 of the project, this was refined further and changed to: *Exploring intercultural communicative competence in a distance language learning programme.* The hypothesis was amended to: *Adult learners of a language at a distance can gain additional intercultural communicative competence through the study of a standardised course with pre-prepared materials that aim to enhance their intercultural communicative competence*. This change was to accommodate

the difference between intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence as stipulated by Byram (1997b). He defines intercultural competence as the 'ability to interact in [one's] own language with people from another country and culture' (Byram, 1997b: 70) while someone who demonstrates intercultural communicative competence is someone who is 'able to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language' (Byram, 1997b: 71). He argues that the relationship between the two is 'one of degrees of complexity and the ability to deal with a wider range of situations of contact in the latter than in the former' (ibid.). This project aims to explore intercultural communicative competence in the target language through contact with speakers of this language, so this amendment clarifies and encompasses the project more adequately than the original hypothesis.

Similarly, the original research questions evolved in the light of the work undertaken in Year 1. The initial findings of the project demonstrated that all aspects of Byram's conceptual framework are applicable to the research subjects in one form or another, but that the evaluation of certain aspects of the framework is more complex than others. Thus the focus shifted from the evaluation of intercultural communicative competence gain in a distance learning environment (and establishing suitable measures for these gains) to an exploration of the learners' intercultural communicative competence and the possible gain in the various aspects of the theoretical framework. This shift was also necessary because these are **adult** learners, with a range of life experiences and a variety of opportunities for intercultural experiences. This needed to be acknowledged and more clearly accommodated in the research questions. So the questions were amended as follows:

1. To what extent do the learners in the German distance language programme at the Open University bring intercultural communicative competence to their study as part of their varied life experience?

2. To what extent do adult learners of a distance language programme in German gain intercultural communicative competence through the study of a prescribed programme of study?

3. To what extent are the five *savoirs* of Byram's conceptual framework evident in the research subjects (adult learners of German at a distance) and measurable within this particular learning environment?

3   Literature review

The literature review starts with a brief discussion of the various disciplinary perspectives from which intercultural communication has been analyzed. It is followed by a short section on culture. The review then focuses on intercultural communication in education and training, two very different settings. This is followed by a discussion of intercultural management education, contrasting it with foreign language learning. It continues with a description of the concept of differences in national cultures developed by Hofstede (1980a, 1980b, 1991). It then discusses discourse analysis as another concept used in intercultural communication, with reference to the work of Scollon and Wong Scollon (1995), Bremer et al. (1996) and Roberts (2009). It moves on to present the concept of culture pedagogy, which Risager spells out in a more recent publication (Risager, 2007), building on her previous work (Risager, 2006). The model of intercultural learning developed by Kramsch (1993, 1998) is introduced and critically evaluated, followed by a description of the conceptual framework of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), established by Byram (Byram & Morgan, 1994;

Byram, 1997b) and later further developed into the concept of 'education for intercultural citizenship' (Alred et al., 2006; Byram, 2006, 2008). Further sections deal with associated areas of work relating to intercultural communicative competence: the assessment of intercultural communicative competence, intercultural learning in adults, intercultural communicative competence and online communication, and attitudes and stereotypes.

Intercultural communication and culture

Intercultural communication[1] is not confined to one particular academic subject area. On the contrary, 'intercultural competence, and related concepts such as cosmopolitanism, citizenship identity and *Fremdverstehen*, are fast becoming a frequent subject of study for a range of theoretical disciplines, such as social psychology, language learning and teaching, and sociology and political science' (Risager, 2009: 15). Apart from foreign language learning, intercultural communication is also prominent in the field of business studies and related fields (see for example Bennett, 1986, 1993; Bennett et al., 2003; Bond & Hofstede, 1989; Hammer et al., 2003; Hofstede, 1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1991, 2001; Jack, 2004, 2009; Jandt, 2004; Merkin, 2005; Mughan, 2009a, 2009b; Roberts, 2009; Scollon & Wong Scollon, 1995; Tomalin, 2009). Humphrey (2007) identified seven different models of interpersonal communication in an intercultural setting and sixteen different approaches to intercultural communication competence standards and criteria. It follows that it would be beyond the scope of this literature review to reflect upon and discuss in detail all the approaches and research findings in **all** these disciplines. Instead the literature review will focus on conceptual frameworks

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[1] Intercultural communication is used here to encompass all the different terms that are used in various disciplines that deal with intercultural learning, acknowledging the fact that there is no one universally agreed definition of what intercultural communication, intercultural learning or intercultural competence means.

relevant to intercultural communication and provide an overview of the historical

development and current thinking on issues in the field in order to identify the most

relevant concepts for this EdD project.

This study is not concerned primarily with the definition of culture, and

acknowledges that various – often conflicting – definitions of culture exist. In a

recent volume Hu and Byram (2009) refer to the different concepts of culture that

are described in their publication: 'The central question is not only a matter of

conceptualising culture as a dynamic and heterogeneous system ... . It is the way

in which culture is understood epistemologically which is more decisive: either as

constantly re-created from within ... or as an entity to be defined from an external

viewpoint.' (Hu & Byram, 2009: xix).

A basic definition of 'culture' is provided in this thesis, supported by some broad

definitions relevant to the context, but without any claim to offer a comprehensive

overview of the discussions around the concept of culture. Similarly, the term

'competence' is used in different ways (see Fleming, 2009a), and has recently

gained in importance in educational policy and assessment (Fleming, 2009a: 4). It

is outside the scope of this project to discuss the issues around the term of

competence in more detail.

Seelye (1997), one of the best-known authors dealing with cross-cultural learning

in the language classroom, refers to these many definitions, and states that

'culture emerges as a very broad concept embracing all aspects of human life'

(Seelye, 1997: 15). The Britannica Concise Encyclopedia defines culture as an

'…integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that is both a

result of and integral to the human capacity for learning and transmitting

knowledge to succeeding generations', consisting of '…language, ideas, beliefs,

customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals,

ceremonies, and symbols' (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2008,

http://search.eb.com/ebc/article-9362009) Kaikkonen (1997), following Nicklas

(1991) and Kaikkonen (1991) (quoted in Kaikkonen, 1997: 49) defines culture from

the individual and community point of view in the context of intercultural learning

as 'a common agreement between the members of a community on the values,

norms, rules, role expectations and meanings which guide the behaviour and

communication of the members. Furthermore, it includes the deeds and products

which result from the interaction between the members' (Kaikkonen, 1997: 49).

Another pair of models is described by Jin & Erben: 'The two best known models

of culture are the "iceberg" and the "onion" models.' (Jin & Erben, 2007: 293).

These have featured prominently in Hofstede's work. He sees the iceberg model

as consisting of three layers which sit on top of each other: the first layer is human

nature which is universal and inherited, the second layer is culture which he

regards as specific to a group or category and the final layer is personality which is

specific to an individual and both inherited and learned (Hofstede, 1991: 6). The

'onion' model defines culture as having values at its core, with rituals as the

second layer, heroes as the next and symbols as its outer layer (Hofstede, 1991:

9). He subsumes rituals, heroes and symbols under 'practices' (Hofstede, 1991:8).

'Seelye ... divides culture into two categories: "big C" and "little c". "Big C" refers to

the products of a culture, such as literature, ballet, and the fine arts which result

from interpersonal interaction with a given culture. "Little c" refers to an individual's

daily cultural behaviors and beliefs which include typical food and clothing

preferences, manners, and values. Seelye's understanding of culture presents a

fuller picture of the culture of a community because it views culture as a means as

well as a result of societal interactions' (Jin & Erben, 2007: 293).

Intercultural competence: education vs. training

As mentioned above, the concept of intercultural competence has differing origins, has been developed from the viewpoint of different subject disciplines, within a variety of educational settings and with various foci (see Risager, 2007 for a comprehensive overview from the late 19th century until today). The most prominent work has taken place within foreign language education. Over the last twenty years, the work that was originally undertaken by Byram and others (see for example Byram, 1989; Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991; Byram & Morgan, 1994) has evolved from a focus on foreign language education; it has since been applied more widely to English language teaching (Corbett, 2003), to education for citizenship (see for instance Starkey, 2003, 2007) and education for intercultural citizenship (see Byram, 2008). The discussion of intercultural competence in education has taken place both in (Western) Europe and elsewhere (see for example Lo Bianco et al., 1999; Liddicoat, 2005, 2004). Intercultural training in business has developed as a reaction to the increasing internationalisation and globalisation of trade and commerce and greater mobility of the workforce. Although the distinction drawn between education and training is not new (Holliday, 2009), a discussion of the different implications for the acquisition of intercultural competence has come into focus only recently. Feng et al. (2009) address the distinction between education and training in this field, Fleming (2009a) writes that the two sectors, although not completely different, have developed different aims, methods and discourse: 'This disparity could be described at the very least as a difference in emphasis but in many cases had led to what seemed to be an unbridgeable chasm' (Fleming, 2009a: 1). He argues that training and education are best seen 'in a dialectical relationship rather than in oppositional or hierarchical terms. It is important not to dispense with "depth"

concepts embodied in the notion of "education" such as understanding and

meaning but it is also important to retain "surface" notions of action and

experiential immediacy' (Fleming, 2009a: 8-9). He represents the relationship

between training and education on the one hand and surface and depth on the

other hand in the following graph.

Surface..Training

Depth...Education
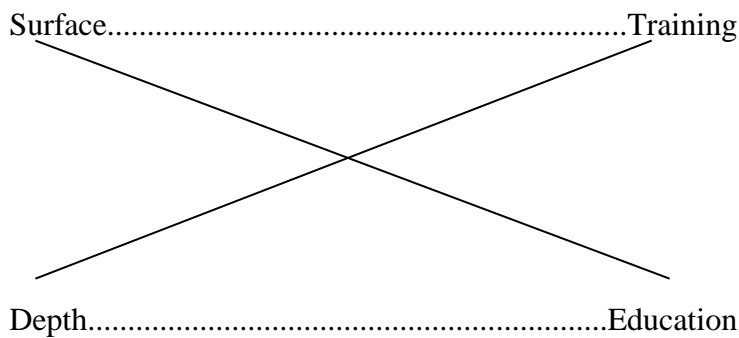
(Fleming, 2009a: 9)

Fleming suggests that the understanding 'of principles and deep reflection must

lead "back to the surface"' (ibid.) in intercultural competence. He considers the

'tension and differences between advocates of "education"' and "training"'

(Fleming, 2009a: 10) as unhelpful.

This literature review will discuss intercultural competence in education in more

detail below.

Intercultural communication in various contexts

Intercultural management

Mughan (2009a) identifies the differences between the fields of foreign language

learning and intercultural management: 'When we examine the academic literature

of the respective fields, however, we find significant variations and gaps which

rather undermine the assumption that intercultural communication might act as a

bridge between language learning and international management' (Mughan, 2009a: 31). He points out that the dichotomy of global efficiencies and local responsiveness lies at the core of these new global organizations and argues that local responsiveness poses 'great demands on the global organization and international managers' (Mughan, 2009a: 33). This has also necessitated a shift in the focus on organizational research away from a scientific approach to a social constructionist one (ibid.). He continues by saying that 'language has become a critical element in the understanding of organizations because of its association with concepts of power, leadership and social identity in contemporary cultural theory' (ibid.). Tietze (2008) adds to this view that 'language effects also shape the experience of social inclusion or exclusion' (Tietze, 2008: 56). Mughan refers to several studies that highlight the fact that international organizations and managers have encountered language problems for many years (Mughan, 2009a: 38) and reports on an empirical study that was undertaken as part of the ICOPROMO project on multicultural team work and use of languages (see Section on Testing and assessing intercultural communicative competence below for a brief description of the ICOPROMO project). He concludes as follows:

> ' It is clear from the responses to our survey that managers are inclined to
> see language issues as inextricably linked to both intercultural and
> international management issues. Yet there are evident conceptual and
> theoretical gaps in the literature pertaining to international management and
> interpersonal communication (understood as foreign language and
> intercultural competence). ... The apparent disdain of mainstream
> management researchers for foreign language skills as an issue in strategic
> management theory is difficult to explain. At the same time there is little
> doubt that management practitioners understand the importance of these

skills and address this matter by employing able linguists, translators and

services whenever necessary' (Mughan, 2009a: 44).

He contrasts the crisis in the language teaching profession with the need for global

organizations to recruit able linguists and argues for further research into this area.

The language needs of businesses in the UK have been investigated using

surveys (see for example Hagen, 2005, and CILT, 2006). Mughan (2009b) also

reports on a study undertaken with British small- and medium-sized businesses

and their approach to the use of languages other than English in their operations.

He points out that while native speakers of other languages embrace the learning

of English enthusiastically 'English native speakers are often at a loss to choose a

foreign language that will improve their communication with a large number of their

trade partners' (Mughan, 2009b: 35) and writes that 'the global use of English as a

business linguae francae [in original, UB] forms an attractive basis for native

anglophone decision-makers to disassociate themselves from the necessity of

learning foreign languages at all; on the other hand, it is felt to be essential to learn

the languages of trade partners in order to succeed in international businesses'

(Mughan, 2009b: 37). The findings of the study demonstrate that the companies

which were most successful in multiple markets and cultures were likely to have

owner-managers with a higher education qualification who also had language

skills (even though they did not always use them), and had experienced other

cultures by working abroad, trips to other countries 'and frequent interaction with

members of other cultures at home and abroad' (Mughan, 2009b: 49).

Other writers in this area include Jack (2009) who reports on a module he taught

to business students on the critical understanding of intercultural competence,

referring to Barnett (1997) and the latter's concept of critical being; in the same

volume Tomalin (2009) focuses on various tools that can be used for intercultural business training.

Differences in national cultures

Hofstede (1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1984, 1991, 1998, 2001) developed his framework of intercultural communication in the late 1960s and early 1970s using a large scale, questionnaire-based study in over 50 subsidiaries of IBM around the globe. He concludes that national cultures in the workplace vary in four different dimensions

1   power distance

2   uncertainty avoidance

3   individualism vs. collectivism

4   masculinity vs. femininity (see McSweeney, 2002: 3)

In a later study (Bond & Hofstede, 1989) a fifth dimension (short-term vs. long-term orientation) was added to the concept.

Despite its popularity and widespread acceptance, both within the international business world and the academic field of business studies, Hofstede's concept of intercultural communication has been widely criticised for the assumptions he made: '[Hofstede] treats [the concept of national culture] as implicit; core; systematically causal; territorially unique; and shared' (McSweeney, 2002: 3). It is indeed questionable whether in today's multi-layered and complex societies, many of which are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, one can assume the existence of **one** national culture with certain characteristics. Hofstede's original study and data collection did, after all, take place in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Merkin, 2005) – a historical period significantly different from today in terms of the internationalisation and globalisation of business, trade and mobility. It is also a

matter for concern as to whether all – or even a significant majority of the members of a nation (and a 'national culture') – will conform to the five dimensions of his framework. Jack (2009) echoes and elaborates on these concerns about Hofstede's framework from the perspective of students using this framework:

'Epistemologically, I believe that a "dimensional" approach to culture, which allows us to plot or map representation onto some kind of continuum, presents students with unhelpfully fixed categories of analysis that essentialize culture and divest it of its key processual and political contingencies. In privileging the individual as the core unit of analysis, the reality-constitutive properties of dialogue and social interaction are steadfastly ignored. With particular regard to Hofstede, moreover, I am convinced that [...] it is impossible to take his cultural dimensions as self-evident of statistically sound evidence for national culture.' (Jack, 2009: 100-101)

Despite its popularity in the contemporary business world and with some academics (see Merkin, 2005: 259), the framework appears to be rather narrow, has been strongly criticised for its approach and does not seem to have had an impact on the development of intercultural communicative competence in educational settings, which is the focus of this project.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has been used in a variety of settings to investigate different aspects of intercultural communication. Three examples will be discussed briefly here to illustrate its use. Scollon and Wong Scollon (1995) use a discourse analysis approach in their writing on intercultural communication from an American perspective. Their background lies in the academic field of applied sociolinguistics

and they limit their discussion to the analysis of discourse in English between
native American speakers of English and non-native speakers, mainly from China.
They concentrate exclusively on business communication between professionals
in these two countries and focus on misunderstandings and mis-communication,
with a target audience of 'professional communicators across discourse systems'
(Kramsch, 2002: 280). Little reference is made to other forms of intercultural
communication, such as social discourse or discourse between different age
groups, and no attempt is made to provide an overall framework of human
discourse which would allow the reader to locate their approach in a broader
context. There seems to be only limited objective evidence to support many of
their claims, including over-general observations such as 'North Americans eat
their salads before their main courses, while the French eat theirs after the main
courses. Many a westerner has eaten too much during the first few courses of a
Chinese dinner …' (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 1995: 30). They do not refer to
relevant studies or make comprehensive use of research literature. These over-
generalisations could be interpreted as bordering on stereotyping, as they seem to
make the assumption that there is a 'typical' North American, ignoring the fact that
in the USA business people may come from many different cultural backgrounds
and ethnic groups, and are by no means exclusively descendants of British
immigrants who speak English as their first language.

Their approach and specific focus on American and Chinese business
communication is undoubtedly significant in terms of the globalisation of business
and the increased collaboration between companies from different parts of the
English-speaking and Asian worlds. It appears, however, to be too narrowly
focused on Sino-American business communication to be transferable to an
educational setting. Kramsch comments on the importance of the book as having

brought 'sociolinguistics to the attention of a broader, non-academic world of professionals engaged in communication across cultures' (Kramsch, 2002: 282). A European project on discourse analysis and understanding among immigrants has been reported by Bremer et al. (1996). An international research team conducted this study in the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden with the aim of analysing the 'processes of understanding in interaction between minority ethnic workers and majority group members' (Roberts, 1996: 1). The findings illustrate the different strategies used by these immigrants when dealing with first language users, often in official situations. Although the study offers interesting insights into the coping strategies of the participants, they are not relevant for this study.

Using video-recorded real life interviews, Roberts (2009) uses a discourse analysis approach to investigate narratives in British job interviews and the challenges these culture-specific narratives pose for migrant workers. She concludes that '[t]he cultural norms of the British job interview are realised in the taken for granted assumptions about what is acceptable narrative structure. How the self should be presented in a gatekeeping encounter relates both to new organisational cultures of the "entrepreneurial self" and to the wider institutional discourses that control how "to be" in formal encounters' (Roberts, 2009: 28). As a result of her research, two DVDs with authentic job interviews have been disseminated widely for training purposes and awareness raising (Roberts, 2009: 29).

In summary, discourse analysis provides an important tool to analyse speech acts and interaction in intercultural communication, but is not relevant or suitable for this EdD project, which does not aim to analyse speech acts and intercultural interaction.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

This model is discussed here as one example of the seven concepts of intercultural communication identified by Humphrey (2007) since it has also been developed into an assessment tool (Hammer et al., 2003) and it is being used to evaluate intercultural competence in a German context in the DESI study (Nold, 2009); this study in Germany will be discussed in a later section on testing and assessing of intercultural communicative competence.

Bennett introduced the concept of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986), arguing that education and training in intercultural communication 'is an approach to changing our "natural" behavior' (Bennett, 1993: 21). He proposes a developmental model which 'is phenomenological in the sense that it takes as paramount the meaning which is attached by people to phenomena ...' (Bennett, 1993: 24). His model for intercultural competence consists of six dimensions: Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration (Bennett, 1986, 1993) and introduces the concept of a cultural worldview (Hammer et al., 2003: 423). The first three orientations are regarded as ethnocentric, the final three as ethnorelative (Bennett, 1993: 30-46). The first stage of '[d]enial of cultural difference is the state in which one's own culture is experienced as the only real one. Other cultures are either not discriminated at all, or they are construed in rather vague ways' (Hammer et al., 2003: 424). As a result, cultural differences are either not experienced at all, or are associated with 'a kind of undifferentiated *other* such as "foreigner" or "immigrant"' (ibid.). Individuals with a Denial worldview are not interested in cultural differences. 'In a more extreme form of Denial, the people of one's own culture may be perceived to be the only real "humans"' (ibid.). Bennett argues that Denial of cultural differences is typical of monocultural primary socialization. The second state, Defense, is a 'strong commitment to one's own

thoughts and feelings about culture and cultural difference' (Humphrey, 2007: 24).

Bennett suggests that people in a state of Defense experience cultural differences

on a stereotypical level (Bennett et al., 2003: 249). 'Consequently, people in the

Defense state are more openly threatened by cultural differences than are people

in a state of Denial' (Hammer et al., 2003: 424). In the state of Minimization

individuals assume 'a basic similarity among all human beings' (Bennett et al.,

2003: 249). Differences between cultures are regarded as superficial,

'*menschliche Wesen werden als im Grunde genommen gleich angenommen*

[human beings are basically seen as alike, UB translation]' (Hesse, 2009: 167) and

certain 'religious, economic, or philosophical concepts' (Hammer et al., 2003: 425)

are assumed to be applicable across cultures. '*Acceptance* of cultural difference is

the state in which one's own culture is experienced as just one of a number of

equally complex worldviews' (ibid.) whereas Adaptation means that 'one's

worldview is expanded to include relevant constructs from other cultural

worldviews' (ibid.) and people 'are able to look at the world *through different eyes*

and intentionally change their behavior to communicate more effectively in another

culture' (Bennett et al., 2003: 251, italics in original). The sixth stage is Integration,

in which 'one's experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out

of different cultural worldviews' (Hammer et al., 2003, 425). This stage describes

the 'attempt to integrate disparate aspects of one's identity into a new whole while

remaining culturally marginal' (Bennett, 1993: 60). Hammer et al. (2003) reported

on the development of the intercultural development inventory based on the DMIS

which, according to their findings, is a stable measurement of intercultural

competence.

Bennett's DMIS model has been criticised for being linear and rather general, not

taking into account the specificities of foreign language learning:

'Milton Bennett's 'Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity' ist

zudem ein sehr allgemeines Modell, das auf Fremdsprachenlernen sowie

den ihm inhärenten Konstrukten etwa des *Third Space* (vgl. Kramsch,

1993), der Interkultur oder der Bewusstmachung von Lern- und

Erwerbsschritten keinerlei Bezug nimmt. Es scheint eher auf das Training

für interkulturelle Wirtschaftskommunikation zugeschnitten zu sein ...' [In

addition, Milton Bennett's model DMIS is a very general model which does

not take into account foreign language learning nor its inherent constructs,

such as the Third Space (see Kramsch, 1993), interculture or the realization

of steps in learning and acquisition. It seems to be more appropriate for

training for intercultural business communication, UB translation] (Witte,

2009: 55).

This is in contrast to Hesse (2009) who states that this model can generally be

used as a basis for empirical studies of intercultural competence: 'Damit erhält die

Klassifikation der Bennett'schen Stufen – bis auf *Integration* ... und unter Verzicht

auf die Annahme der Reihenfolge – empirische Evidenz auf der Grundlage einer

stratifizierten repräsentativen Stichprobe von Schülerinnen und Schülern der

deutschen Bildungsgänge' [Therefore the classification of Bennett's stages – apart

from Integration and dispensing with the acceptance of the sequence – gains

empirical evidence on the basis of a stratified representative sample of students in

the German educational system, UB translation] (Hesse, 2009: 170-171). He

furthermore suggests that linking this work to the framework developed by Byram

would be of great value (ibid.).

The criticisms of Bennett's model as being very general and linear in the

development of intercultural communicative competence appear to be valid: the

complexity of acquiring intercultural communicative competence is not adequately

reflected and it does not refer enough to the specificities of foreign language learning, thus making it an unsuitable tool for this study.

Culture pedagogy

Risager (2007) provides a comprehensive overview of the international development in the field of what she terms 'culture pedagogy' since its beginning; the main issues will be summarised here. Risager states that in the 1970s a 'pragmatic culture-anthropological approach' (Risager, 2007: 40) emerged in the USA, of which Seelye has been an important proponent. The development of culture pedagogy in Europe has had two different foci: a Western one which looks towards the USA and an Eastern one which looks towards the Soviet Union (Risager, 2007: 46). She reports on discussions which took place in West Germany in the 1970s about the need to de-ideologize the teaching of *Landeskund/Kulturkunde* (Risager, 2007: 48) and the emphasis on political education as an overriding educational goal of foreign language teaching (Risager, 2007: 49). In the USSR and the GDR the work of two Russian authors dealing with Russian as a foreign language (Veneščagin and Kostomarov, 1973, quoted in Risager, 2007: 58-63) has been influential – they start from a linguistic point of view and argue that '*sprachbezogene Landeskunde* (linguistically oriented *Landeskunde*)' (Risager, 2007: 59) should be an additional aspect of foreign language teaching, along with four other elements: lexical, grammatical, phonetic and stylistic aspects. Their view is linked to a Marxist-Leninist theory of culture (ibid.). At the same time, discussion in France revolved around the theme of *civilisation* (see Risager, 2007: 63-68), where the term *civilisation* is regarded as a broader, more historical concept than culture (Risager, 2007: 66).

In the 1980s, despite 'highly different national starting points for culture pedagogy' (Risager, 2007: 73), a major focus of different debates was what Risager refers to as 'the anthropological concept of culture' (ibid.). She comments on the weakness of the field of intercultural communication at this period (which in her view continues in part until today) as follows: it consisted of 'a positivist-oriented view of communication linked to a holistic and functionalist view of culture' (Risager, 2007: 75). She notes a shift of emphasis from 'the culture-specific' (which culture pedagogy had emphasised up until then) towards 'the culture-general' (which intercultural communication emphasised most). 'In other words, there was now a greater focus on the psychological aspects of intercultural competence: ability to adapt and the development of a general awareness of cultural differences. On the other hand, specific knowledge of the target language countries was toned down to a certain extent' (Risager, 2007: 75). Risager concentrates on four different writers in her discussion of trends in the 1980s in Europe: Melde (1987), Zarate (1986), Galisson (1991) and Byram (1989) (the last-named will be dealt with in more detail in a later section of this literature review).

In summary, Risager states that Melde is 'the first person within culture pedagogy as a whole who has attempted systematically […] to find a theoretically based solution to the problem of integration in language teaching' (Risager, 2007: 83) which Risager, despite some reservations about Melde's work, considers 'an innovative high point for the German social and critical approach to culture pedagogy' (ibid.); however, Melde's work does not appear to have had a wide impact outside specialist academic circles in Germany. At the same time in France, Zarate developed a 'predominantly (social-)anthropological approach to culture pedagogy which emphasises that there is a difference between acquiring one's native culture and acquiring a foreign one.' (Risager, 2007: 85). Zarate has

been influential in the debate around intercultural communication as she makes

the case that one acquires one's own culture largely implicitly, while one has to

acquire a foreign one explicitly: 'To learn a foreign culture is to develop from an

ethnocentric to a relativist standpoint and thereby become conscious of one's own

identity' (Risager, 2007: 85). Risager's main criticism of Zarate is that 'she does

not make any attempt to combine language teaching and culture teaching into a

whole' (Risager, 2007: 87).

Galisson (1991) approached the subject from a linguistic and semantic angle,

emphasising the importance of vocabulary. Risager argues that 'Galisson's

theoretical and methodological basis is too loose, and [that] he does not have an

eye for the pedagogical danger of ending up giving very narrow, monocultural and

uncritical language teaching' (Risager, 2007: 91).

She criticizes the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

(Council of Europe, 2001) as being unclear about the concept of the relationship

between language and culture and between language and culture teaching and for

its lack of a theoretical foundation (Risager, 2007: 143).

Risager (2007: 155-158) decribes the work of Crozet and Liddicoat (2000) in

Australia, who advocated an intercultural pragmalinguistic approach, and who also

made reference to the work of Kramsch, Byram and Zarate. However, the work of

Kramsch, Byram and Zarate do not play 'any particular role in their concrete

conceptions about culture teaching' (Risager, 2007: 156). She concludes that

Crozet and Liddicoat represent a 'reductionist understanding of the cultural side of

teaching' (Risager, 2007: 158).

In her book, Risager argues that the national paradigm of what she terms 'culture

pedagogy' as originally assumed needs to be replaced with a transnational, or

global one, because 'modern language studies take place in a world increasingly

influenced by internationalisation and globalisation' (Risager, 2007: 1). This means that 'language and culture pedagogy must learn to understand their field of reference from a transnational and global perspective' (ibid.). She refers to Hannerz (1992) and Appadurai (1996) and their theories of cultural flow (Risager, 2009: 17-22). Byram has also referred to them explicitly in a recent book (Byram, 2008).

Intercultural learning

Kramsch (1993, 1998) has developed a model of intercultural learning which signifies a post-structuralist shift of paradigm (Risager, 2007: 106), adopting a linguistic, discourse-analytical approach (ibid.). She starts by rejecting the traditional divide between language teaching and the teaching of culture:

> 'Whether it is called (Fr.) *civilisation*, (G.) *Landeskunde*, or (Eng.) *culture*, culture is often seen as mere information conveyed by the language, not as a feature of language itself; cultural awareness becomes an educational objective in itself, separate from language. If, however, language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching. Cultural awareness must then be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency' (Kramsch, 1993: 8).

Kramsch (1998) asserts that 'the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives' is language (Kramsch, 1998: 3) and that cultural identity is exemplified in language and language use (Kramsch, 1998: 65). In her view, culture cannot be regarded as a consensual, monolithic system that is shared by all individuals who live in a particular societal environment but, following Fiske (1989), as a 'confrontation between groups occupying different, sometimes opposing positions

in the map of social relations' (Fiske, 1989: 38, quoted in Kramsch, 1993: 24).

Kramsch shares Fiske's view that 'the process of making meanings (which is, after

all, the process of culture) is a social struggle, as different groups struggle to

establish meanings that serve their interests' (ibid.). She sees culture as a 'social

symbolic construct, the product of self and other perceptions' (Kramsch, 2003: 24).

She identifies two directions which the teaching of culture in the language class

has taken: 'One has focused on cultural information: statistical information

(institutional structures and facts of civilisation), highbrow information (the classics

of literature and the arts), lowbrow information (the foods, fairs, and folklore of

everyday life)' (Kramsch, 1993: 23-4). She argues that '[t]his view of culture has

favored facts over meaning and has not enabled learners to understand foreign

attitudes, values and mindsets. It has kept learners unaware of multiple facets of

the target group's cultural identity. It has left them blind to their own social and

cultural identity, implicitly assuming a consensus between their world and the other

(Tajfel, 1982)' (Kramsch, 1993: 24). She criticises the notion that language

learners are merely regarded as imperfect native speakers and states that '[i]t is in

this development of the foreign language learner as both a social and individual

speaker that we have to see the emergence of culture in the language classroom'

(Kramsch, 1993: 28).

Her conceptual framework is related to three intellectual traditions: the critical, the

pragmatic and the hermeneutic (Kramsch, 1993: 183) which can be summarised

as understanding others, making oneself understood and understanding oneself

(ibid.). Guilherme (2002) summarises Kramsch's model as concerned 'with

dialogue and the production of meaning' (Guilherme, 2002: 139). Kramsch

sketches out a four-step approach to cross-cultural understanding which she

locates in 'a third place' (Kramsch, 1993: 233). She challenges the myth of the

native speaker as a model for the foreign language learner or teacher (Kramsch, 1993: 9) – a criticism which is shared by Byram who writes 'the authority of the native speaker needs to be challenged because they do not "know" their culture any more than they can be said to "know" their language' (Byram, 2003c: 61). Kramsch has been criticized for failing to provide sufficient analysis of 'the relationship between linguistic practice (as cultural practice) and cultural context' (Risager, 2007: 111), the lack of value she ascribes to factual knowledge (ibid.), her preference for literary texts and the fact that one should only deal with cultural reality to the extent that it is expressed through language: 'If teaching is built up round literary texts, it can well end up consisting of various exchanges of opinion and understandings of the texts, without any overall educational aim' (Risager, 2007: 111). Kramsch suggests that the language teacher is responsible only for the teaching of culture as it is mediated through language, but sees no role for approaches based on social sciences and anthropology (see Risager, 2007: 127). Despite these criticisms, Kramsch's work on the nexus between culture and language has been influential and shaped current thinking in foreign language teaching. It is an important aspect of the writing on ICC, reflected in the work of Byram and others.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

Most influential in the development of a concept of ICC within an educational setting in a European context has been the extensive work of Byram and his collaborators. This goes back to the late 1980s and early 1990s, when a project to investigate cultural studies in language teaching was conducted by Durham University; this led to numerous publications (Byram, 1994, 1989; Byram & Leman, 1990; Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991; Byram, Taylor & Esarte-Sarries, 1991;

Buttjes & Byram, 1991). 'Byram deals with the "hidden dimension of foreign language teaching": the cultural dimension and its significance for the general education of the students' (Risager, 2007: 92). He argues that language and culture are interrelated and should be taught in an integrated way (Byram, 1989: 23). The development of a comprehensive theoretical framework began with a theory of language and culture learning for secondary school teaching (Byram & Morgan, 1994). On the basis of findings from empirical research, they argue that the educational potential of language-and-culture teaching was not being fulfilled (Byram & Morgan, 1994: 3). They found that young people acquired some information, but very little knowledge of the foreign culture through language classes (ibid.). Byram defines the conceptual framework of ICC in a later book (Byram, 1997b) where he refers explicitly to intercultural communicative competence and states that 'someone with Intercultural *Communicative* Competence is able to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language' (Byram, 1997b: 71). Here, he differentiates between the attitudes, skills, knowledge and education that are needed to become an intercultural speaker by introducing five different *savoirs* (Byram, 1997b: 33-38). In a later volume, Byram et al. summarise the different *savoirs* as follows:

> 'The *components of intercultural competence* are knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups, values which are part of one's belonging to a given society.
>
> The foundation of intercultural competence is in the *attitudes* of the intercultural speaker and mediator:
>
> *Intercultural attitudes (savoir être)*: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own values,

beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and

naturally correct ones, and to be able to see how they might look from the

perspective of an outsider who has a different set of values, beliefs and

behaviours. This can be called the ability to "decentre". […]:

Knowledge (savoirs) of social groups and their products and practice in

one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes

of societal and individual interaction. So knowledge can be defined as

having two major components: knowledge of social processes, and

knowledge of illustrations of those processes and products; the latter

includes knowledge about how other people see oneself as well as some

knowledge about other people.'

(Byram et al., 2001: 5-6, italics in original)

Particularly significant for the intercultural speaker or mediator are 'the attitude of

decentring' and 'the skills of comparing' (Byram et al., 2001: 6). The skills of

comparison, of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) refer to the 'ability to

interpret a document or an event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to

documents or events from one's own'. (ibid.)

They argue further that

'it is equally important [for learners] to acquire the skills of finding out new

knowledge and integrating it with what they already have. They need

especially to know how to ask people from other cultures about their beliefs,

values and behaviours; these can be difficult to explain because they are

often unconscious. So intercultural speakers/mediators need *skills of

discovery and interaction* (italics in original)' (ibid.).

These are defined as *savoir apprendre/faire*: the 'ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.'(ibid.) They finish with a definition of critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) as 'an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries' (Byram et al., 2001: 7). Byram elaborates further on this conceptual framework by providing examples of what an interculturally competent speaker should be able to do (Byram, 1997b: 56-73). In a later publication, Byram (2008) argues that the term 'intercultural speaker' can be paraphrased as an 'intercultural mediator' (Byram, 2008: 68). He defines the best mediators as 'those who have an understanding of the relationship between, on the one hand, their own language and language varieties and their own culture and cultures of different social groups in their society and, on the other hand, the language (varieties) and culture(s) of others, between (inter) which they find themselves acting as mediators' (Byram, 2008: 68). Sercu (2004a) provides a useful summary of the conceptual framework and advocates the addition of metacognitive strategies as part of *savoir apprendre/faire* (Sercu, 2004a: 75). Byram's conceptual framework has the advantage of drawing on different disciplinary perspectives both implicitly and explicitly:

> 'Firstly, it draws on the social psychological tradition of wanting to cover knowledge, skills, and attitudes (and the relations among them) in models of the individual in social life. Secondly, it emphasises the interpretation of texts and events as an important part of intercultural competence. Moreover, it includes an ethnographically inspired component: discovering and/or interacting with the foreign culture, and last, but not least, it places at

the centre – especially when applied to education in schools – political

education and critical cultural awareness' (Risager, 2009: 27).

Risager argues that his later work represents 'a partial break with the concept of

culture Byram has previously represented' (Risager, 2007: 121) and that he has

moved to be more practice-oriented in his view of culture (ibid.). However, the

difference in emphasis between his earlier and later work could equally be

attributed to the fact that his theoretical framework has evolved on the basis of

additional research and evidence. This is borne out by Byram's book on education

for intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008) in which he compares and contrasts

being intercultural with being bicultural (Byram, 2008: 58-73) and relates

intercultural communicative competence to the principles of education for

intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008: 186). For him, to act interculturally 'requires

a willingness to suspend those deeper values, at least temporarily, in order to be

able to understand and empathise with the values of others that are incompatible

with one's own' (Byram, 2008: 69). He then attempts to provide an integrated

framework of education for intercultural citizenship based on political and language

education without presenting 'a comprehensive design for either, but to show the

conceptual relationship between them and provide a basis for curriculum planning'

(Byram, 2008: 177). He suggests that education for intercultural citizenship

expects to create change in the individual which involves 'psychological and

behavioural change, including change in self-perception and understanding of

one's relationships to others in other social groups' (Byram, 2008: 187).

The work of Byram is the cornerstone of the development of intercultural

communicative competence in a European educational context. His work has

shaped current thinking on the subject – demonstrated by the many contributions

to the concept that have followed (for instance Alred et al., 2003, 2006; Byram,

1994, 1997a, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Byram & Risager, 1999; Byram, Planet and CoE, 2000; Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001; Byram & Grundy, 2002; Dervin & Suomela-Salmi, 2006; Fay & Davcheva, 2005; Jiménez Raya & Sercu, 2007; Jordan, 2002; Roberts et al., 2000; Sercu, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e; Zarate 2003, 2004) and a variety of national or international projects (see Interculture and INCA projects in the UK, http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/interculture/ and http://www.incaproject.org).

Sercu works with the model of intercultural communicative competence proposed by Byram and Zarate and argues for rethinking the notion of 'culture' in foreign language teaching (Sercu, 2000: 40). She suggests moving towards a dialogic model which regards culture as a process (Sercu, 2000: 41) in secondary school teaching and formulates requirements for a pedagogy of intercultural learning (Sercu, 2000: 75). Sercu discusses autonomous learning and intercultural competence and the implications for course development (Sercu, 2002a; 2002b) and suggests a variety of criteria that need to be met for successful autonomous learning in the context of intercultural communicative competence.

Testing and assessing intercultural communicative competence

The assessment of intercultural communicative competence has been a central topic in the literature of the field. Humphrey (2007) identified sixteen different standards and criteria for assessing ICC. This section will introduce a selection of these standards to demonstrate the various approaches and international projects that have taken place, and then discusses the over-arching desirability of testing intercultural communicative competence.

Bennett developed the **Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)** on the basis of his intercultural sensitivity model (Bennett, 1986, 1993) which has been reported by Hammer et al. (2003). 'The inventory is a set of statements that allows an individual to assess his/her developmental stage of intercultural sensitivity' (Humphrey, 2007: 40).

Nold (2009) reports on the development of an intercultural assessment tool as part of the **DESI (Deutsch-Englisch-Schülerleistungen-International)** study (Nold, 2009: 173), based on Bennett's work on intercultural sensitivity and the IDI. The assessment tool was split into two components to allow students to demonstrate their intercultural sensitivity irrespective of their level of English: 'One component was to be focused on the interpretation and judgement of critical incidents that would require as little English as possible. This component is called "intercultural competence" or more specifically "intercultural sensitivity" in DESI ...' (Nold, 2009: 175). The other component focused on socio-pragmatic behaviour in English (ibid.) and involved linguistic knowledge of English. One of the findings of the study was that the two components are related to one another in a particular way: 'To a certain extent the level of socio-pragmatic language awareness determines the level of intercultural sensitivity, but not vice versa (Hesse/Göbel/Jude, 2008: 187)' (Nold, 2009: 176).

The ICOPROMO project (http://www.ces.uc.pt/icopromo) focused on intercultural competence for professional mobility with the aim of enhancing the mobility of professionals. It identified two target groups: a primary target group consisting of 'undergraduate students, recent graduates, young professionals from multiple disciplinary areas (within the scope of Social Sciences), foreign language/culture

educators and trainers and human resource managers' (ibid.). Secondary target groups were identified as the same as the primary target group but from other disciplines such as science and technology, experienced professionals, employers, European and other international organisations and NGOs (ibid.). This international project focused on 'strategies directed towards intercultural sensitivity and on mediation competences closely linked with language learning and the professional world' (Humphrey, 2007: 43). The researchers in this project 'attempted to define intercultural competence for professional mobility; firstly, by analysing existing models and by proposing their team models as well as a whole project model and, finally, by developing materials aimed at professional education in the field, while attempting to articulate the ideas collected and put forward with the target groups in each context' (Guilherme et al., 2009: 194). Guilherme et al. focused on interaction between individuals within a multicultural group who worked on a professional task.

Feng and Fleming (2009) report on another project aimed at assessing intercultural competence among students of what they call Confucius Heritage Culture countries (Feng & Fleming, 2009: 236), the **SAILSA project (Self-Assessment of IC for Living and Studying Abroad)** and to 'develop an integrated model for assessment' for this particular purpose (ibid.). The project based its work on Byram's model (1997b) first to generate the research questions, and then to devise the instrument itself (Feng & Fleming, 2009: 241). The assessment instrument for self-assessment by Asian students before studying at a British university consisted of a psychometric tool kit, a suite of critical scenarios and an autobiography of intercultural encounters (Feng & Fleming, 2009: 249). They suggest that their work provides an 'integrated model in the sense that it is

developed to combine the merits of current assessment tools and models and incorporate[s] the approaches to assessment *of* IC with assessment *for* IC' (ibid.).

The **INCA project** (see http://www.incaproject.org/) developed a framework for assessment and a set of tools described as tolerance of ambiguity, behavioural flexibility, communicative awareness, knowledge discovery, respect for otherness, and empathy. For each of these areas, three different aspects are defined and elaborated on: motivation, skill/knowledge and behaviour. The project provides two versions: one for assessors and one for assessees.

The **LOLIPOP project** (see http://www.lolipop-portfolio.eu/index/html) has developed 'a multilingual, online, interactive version of the European Language Portfolio with an enhanced intercultural dimension'. Its stated aim is to support learner autonomy and self assessment as well as reflection on language and intercultural learning in a higher education context (ibid.). Byram (2009) identified the LOLIPOP and INCA projects as two European projects that 'have offered their solutions to the problem of scaling intercultural competence' (Byram, 2009: 215). He observes that there is 'still a strong social demand for scaled quantified level of competence in all aspects of education ...' (ibid.).

Byram and Morgan (1994) write about assessment of what was then called 'cultural learning' in which the importance of knowledge, both factual and the appreciation of the significance of facts (Byram & Morgan, 1994: 135-136) is acknowledged: '[The learners] need to know historical and geographical facts about the society and its institutions, facts about socialisation through formal ceremonies, religious and secular ...' (Byram & Morgan, 1994: 136).

Sercu has made a contribution in the area of testing and assessing intercultural communicative competence (Sercu, 2004a; 2005c). She argues that an approach to testing these competences on the basis of test theory, i.e. constructing tests that are reliable, valid and practical has limitations (Sercu, 2005c: 149-150). She starts from Byram's five *savoirs* (Byram, 1997b) and concludes that '[a]ssessing the development of intercultural competence does indeed present various challenges. Whereas most educators know how to assess knowledge and skills, awareness and attitudes are seldom part of traditional assessment. Because the latter are less subject to qualification and documentation, indirect, rather than direct, indicators are usually required' (Sercu, 2005c: 151). She suggests different types of assessment for the various components of intercultural communicative competence (Sercu, 2005c: 154-159). This is an elaboration of the work done by Byram & Morgan (1994) and Byram (1997b). Byram has already suggested that there are issues around assessing certain aspects of ICC (Byram, 1997b: 9). This is because of the ethical issues around testing behaviours, and the question as to whether attitudes can and should be tested because '[e]xaminations serve as keys to further opportunities of education or vocation, and many teachers would resist using a measure of attitudes as an examination test on which such future opportunities depend' (Byram & Morgan, 1994: 138). Similarly, the fact that the separation of the three elements to be assessed (knowledge, skills and attitudes) does not necessarily work in practice (Byram & Morgan, 1994: 148) throws up questions about the best ways of assessing intercultural competence. As Byram himself (see for example Byram, 1997b, Byram, 2008) and others, like Sercu (2004a, 2005c), point out there are various challenges in adequately assessing the *savoirs* in an institutional context. Byram suggests that it 'may ultimately be appropriate to assess only part of what we define as ICC' (Byram, 1997b: 9). He

reiterates these views more than a decade later when he writes that 'it is intuitively desirable to assess an individual's knowledge (*savoirs*) whereas it might appear undesirable to assess his or her willingness to decentre and suspend (dis)belief (*savoir être*).' (Byram, 2008: 221). He states that the assessment of *savoir être* may be problematic for the following reasons:

> 'To assess a disposition, a willingness to act in an approved way, to be "open", to be "curious", can be interpreted as ideological, reflecting a particular set of values that is not necessarily shared by all social groups. In some countries it is not acceptable for people to be open to other cultures and beliefs. The imposition of openness as "good" through a system of assessment that may allow or prevent access to a career or further education, would be hegemonic.' (Byram, 2008: 221-222).

Byram argues that the question of values remains problematic in the evaluation of intercultural communicative competence and distinguishes between assessment and evaluation:

> 'If someone were to be assessed as being "non-judgemental" or accepting a "non-universality of cultural values", this is a values position in itself. Someone who believes that there are universal values would be deemed to fail on this relativist criterion. In other words, the views of the assessee are not simply being categorised as being at a particular level of performance, an assessment. They are being evaluated as acceptable or not, and it is here that the distinction between assessment and evaluation is useful' (Byram, 2009: 219).

Byram distinguishes then between business and education as two areas in which intercultural competence is important and states that '[e]ducation systems have an acknowledged responsibility to address questions of values and are usually

expected to pass on the dominant values in a society to its younger members, a function which the business world does not have' (Byram, 2009: 220) although he suggests that business also reflects the dominant values in a society (ibid.).

The discussions in the literature around the assessment of intercultural communicative competence are either based on traditional forms of assessment, knowledge-based, or have an emphasis on analysis and reflection, which allows the testing of some of the *savoirs* and test deep learning. The more challenging aspects of intercultural communicative competence are to be assessed through a portfolio and self-assessment approach (see Byram, 2008: 224-225). Byram himself was centrally involved in the development of the autobiography of intercultural encounters (Byram, 2008: 224) in which users are 'invited to describe and analyse the [intercultural] encounter reflecting on their own experience and how they imagine the "others" involved understood the experience' (Byram, 2008: 224), the detailed documentation for these intercultural encounters is appended to his book 'From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship' (Byram, 2008).

Intercultural learning and adults

Despite the considerable literature available on the various aspects of intercultural communicative competence, there is practically no evidence of how the general concept could be transferred to a distance language learning environment and limited evidence regarding particular issues to be addressed with adults. It has been argued that adult learners 'often have specific aims in their language learning, even at the beginning stage, which brings evaluative attitudes to the fore' (Byram, 1997b: 46), although no evidence is provided for this suggestion. Byram states that this offers 'a possible basis, too, for the development of a concept of

"world citizenship" and "global education" in the foreign language curriculum'

(Starkey, 1988, quoted in Byram, 1997b: 46). Aarup Jensen et al. (1995) appear to

be the only writers who deal explicitly with adult learners of languages in this

context. Aarup Jensen et al. (1995) published a volume dedicated to intercultural

competence for adults as the outcome of a two year Lingua project between the

Universities of Aalborg, Leuven and Bayreuth. They define 'adult learner' in broad

terms: 'ordinary and open learning students in higher education […], adults in job

settings, refugees and immigrants, the independent adult learner, and

teacher/trainers of adults as learners of intercultural competence themselves.'

(Aarup Jensen et al.,1995: 7). The emphasis lies on job-related needs for

professionals who might have to act in international and/or intercultural settings

and need qualifications (Aarup Jensen, 1995: 32). They argue that adult learners

are 'a special target group, with special interests and needs which to some extent

differ from those of children and young people' (Aarup Jensen et al., 1995: 9). As

adults lead complex lives, their learning programmes need to be flexible (Aarup

Jensen et al., 1995: 10). The maturity and established identity of adults is seen as

a possible stumbling block for the acquisition of intercultural competence (ibid.). As

an 'adult's identity is often related to a series of different social contexts' (Aarup

Jensen et al., 1995: 13) they consider it possible that adults have 'a larger choice

of previous, present and future identities to enact, around which to create a co-

membership, also in the intercultural encounter' (ibid.).

This conceptual framework of adult intercultural competence follows Byram's

model in stressing the importance of taking the cultural background of the learners

into account (Aarup Jensen, 1995: 31), also stating explicitly that knowledge, skills

and behaviours are an integral part of intercultural competence. In addition, it is

said that language proficiency is essential for successful intercultural interaction

(Aarup Jensen, 1995: 33). For these adult learners the '[r]ules for social situations, knowledge about patterns of social relations and the more overall ideology of the society in question constitute some of the cognitive background aspects of intercultural competence' (Aarup Jensen,1995: 33).

> 'The culture actor should, ideally, be able to act appropriately and respond adequately in intercultural situations, should be aware of rules of conduct and of the pragmatic aspects of linguistic proficiency, and know about politeness, conversational structure and speech styles, and the knowledge should not only be declarative (knowing what) but also procedural (knowing how).' (Aarup Jensen, 1995: 38-9).

In her view, learners' attitudes (both autostereotypes and heterostereotypes) should be consciously acknowledged (Aarup Jensen, 1995: 39). She contests the notion of promoting empathy with the foreign culture but considers 'a reduction of ethnocentrism and an increased understanding of others [as] relevant and recommendable goals' (ibid.).

Lorentsen (1995) points out the applicability of intercultural competence in one's job, one's life as a 'citizen in an open European society and as an adult in individual personal development', as well as the focus on learning and teaching (Lorentsen: 1995, 105-106) and on meta-learning (Lorentsen, 1995: 107). She stipulates that learning activities must be very clear and flexible and broad, the pedagogy must focus on adults that learn, on access to relevant learning resources as well as support for individual, autonomous learning so that these learners resume control and responsibility for their own learning process (Lorentsen, 1995: 116).

> 'Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the thoughts on intercultural competence in modern foreign language pedagogy all in all provide the

prerequisites for reaching the goal of the cultural *actor* set up for modern

foreign language learning for adults. Intercultural competence theorists

define active performance and self-involvement as important parameters for

learners of foreign languages' (Lorentsen, 1995: 117).

Lorentsen asserts that modern open and distance learning methods are

particularly capable of achieving the objectives of intercultural competence,

because here adult learners can determine individually 'why, what, how, where

and when something should be learned' (Lorentsen, 1995: 111). Aarup Jensen et

al. (1995) emphasize the importance of qualifications and business-orientation.

The significance of the work of Aarup Jensen et al. lies in the fact that they have

dealt explicitly with adult learners and the development of intercultural

communicative competence which is specific to them. Despite a considerable

literature search, Aarup Jensen et al. appear to be the only authors who deal with

intercultural communicative competence among adults. Although their work has

been in the public domain for more than ten years, there is little evidence of Aarup

Jensen et al. having made an impact on the academic debate in the field.

However, their work is clearly relevant for this project.

Other areas of work in intercultural communicative competence

Teachers of languages and Intercultural communicative competence

A further research focus in ICC has been on teachers and educators, their

intercultural communicative competence, and practice (see for example Byram &

Risager, 1999; Diaz-Greenberg & Nevin, 2003; Fay & Davcheva, 2005; Jiménez

Raya & Sercu, 2007; Lazar, 2003; Méndez García et al, 2003; Sercu et al., 2005b;

Sercu 2005a, 2005b, 2005d, 2005e; Sercu & St. John, 2007). Most prominent in

this particular field is the work of Sercu and her collaborators (Sercu et al., 2005b)

who have run an international project with participants in seven countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Mexico, Greece, Spain and Sweden). This project used web-based questionnaires to address three main issues: teachers' current self-concepts and how these relate to the 'envisaged profile of the intercultural foreign language teacher' (Sercu, 2005b: 6); to what extent teachers' practice is directed towards intercultural communicative competence, and the degree of willingness to 'interculturalise foreign language education, and identify the factors that appear to affect their readiness' (ibid.). The main findings of this investigation showed that foreign language teachers may be 'favourably disposed' (Sercu, 2005b: 10) or 'unfavourably disposed' (Sercu, 2005b: 11) towards intercultural learning and that this difference of disposition delineates two distinct types of teacher.

The 'unfavourably disposed' teacher clearly believes that intercultural skills cannot be acquired at school and that there is no 'positive effect of intercultural competence teaching on pupils' attitudes and perceptions. The only effect they see is a negative one: intercultural competence teaching reinforces pupil's already existing stereotypes' (ibid.). On the other hand, the 'favourably disposed' foreign language teacher believes in the importance of teaching culture alongside language and that these two aspects can be integrated.

The data revealed that 'no clear relationship appears to exist between teachers' beliefs regarding integration and the way in which they actually shape their teaching practice. Teachers who are clearly willing to interculturalise foreign language education are not yet teaching towards the acquisition of intercultural competence' (ibid.). Sercu concludes that current teaching practice among those foreign language teachers sampled cannot yet be considered to be intercultural and recommends professional development to improve the practice of current

secondary school foreign language teachers (see Sercu, 2005e: 175-6). Central to

Sercu's position is the notion that such professional development needs to target

teacher beliefs to instigate changes (Sercu, 2007: 51). She argues that teacher

training will need to play an important role to support new and in-service teachers

to allow for a gradual move towards an integrated pedagogy for the teaching of

language and culture at secondary level (Sercu, 2005e: 178). In a subsequent

edited volume (Jiménez Raya & Sercu, 2007), action research is suggested as

another possible means for professional teacher development in this area (see

Flamini & Jiménez Raya, 2007).

Intercultural communicative competence and online communication

With the advent of computer-mediated conferencing and new media in general, a

growing body of research focuses on international telecollaboration between

learners of languages, and reports on various issues and the challenges of such

projects (see for example, Belz, 2005; Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003; Hauck,

2007; Lewis, 2006; Müller-Hartmann, 2000; O'Dowd, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2003,

2000; Ware & Kramsch, 2005; Zeiss & Isabelli-Garcia, 2005).

O'Dowd (2006, 2005, 2003, 2000) and O'Dowd and Ritter (2006) report on various

telecollaboration projects which seem to be the first projects in telecollaboration

that use Byram's conceptual framework to assess the intercultural learning of a

sample of students from Spain and the UK in an online exchange project (O'Dowd,

2003)

> 'Taking into account these principles of key characteristics of intercultural
>
> learning, Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence
>
> can be seen as a representative model of what elements the process of
>
> intercultural learning should aim to develop in learners. […] Firstly, the

> model … offers a comprehensive approach that deals with the skills,
> attitudes, knowledge and critical awareness which have been seen to
> constitute intercultural competence. Secondly, Byram's main work on the
> model offers not only objectives for each of the components, but also
> suggests modes of assessment for each part. […] Finally, the model has
> already been put into use extensively in foreign language classrooms. As
> such, it has become a common point of reference in the literature on
> intercultural learning, thereby confirming to a great extent its relevance and
> practicality. (O'Dowd, 2003: 120)

Although his reasons for the use of Byram's concept are compelling, his claim that Byram suggests modes of assessment for each part of the framework appears to be overstated, as Byram has pointed out the particular difficulties in assessing certain aspects of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997b: 9, Byram: 2008: 222). O'Dowd (2006) reports on online telecollaborative exchanges and their effect on learners' intercultural communicative competence. Using a mainly qualitative approach (O'Dowd, 2006: 98), he worked with three different groups of learners at a German university who were engaged in online exchanges with partner institutions. He concludes that network-based language teaching activities support the development of the students' intercultural communicative competence (O'Dowd, 2006: 221) but adds that 'the definition of culture, and the skills of interaction and analysis which are necessary for the success of intercultural telecollaboration, do not come naturally to students' (O'Dowd, 2006: 222). He argues that the teacher plays a crucial role in providing explicit guidance to the students (O'Dowd, 2006: 223).

Attitudes, stereotypes and language learners

Another strand in the literature deals with attitudes and stereotypes among language learners. This literature review concentrates mainly on those writings related to the learning of German (see Coleman, 1996; Cullingford & Husemann, 1995; Husemann, 1994; Löschmann & Stroinska, 1998; Sammon, 1998; Schulz & Haerle, 1996; Tenberg, 1999). Coleman (1996) conducted a large-scale survey of British and European students in the context of the year abroad, which came to the conclusion that a significant minority of the students continued to hold stereotypical views of other nationals which, in some cases, even hardened during their period of residence in the countries of the target language and cultures (Coleman, 1996: 107 cites the example of students of French). An edited volume by Byram & Feng (2006) looked at a variety of practical and research issues around studying abroad. The evidence in the literature shows that there are particular Anglo-German stereotypes and issues that need to be addressed.

Reflection and conclusion

This literature review has demonstrated that there has been very limited research on the particular subject of adults and their acquisition of intercultural communicative competence, with the notable exception of Aarup Jensen et al. (1995), who deal comprehensively with the differences that apply to the development of intercultural communicative competence among adults, as opposed to younger people. In addition, there is still very little research evidence on the challenges of developing intercultural communicative competence in adult distance language learning environments. Although there is a growing body of research on international telecollaboration at a distance, the fact that these projects are situated within face-to-face HE environments means that they differ

considerably from distance learning and teaching environments and do not address the particular circumstances of learners who learn a language at a distance. It has been established that the framework used by Hofstede (1980a, 1980b, 1991, 2001) to highlight differences in national cultures would be unsuitable for this research study. Similarly, the use of a discourse analysis approach as exemplified by Scollon & Wong Scollon (1995), Bremer et al. (1996) and Roberts (2009) would not be appropriate for use in this particular research study. The discussion of Kramsch's concept has highlighted her significant influence on contemporary thinking about the teaching of culture and language. However, it can be argued that Kramsch, in giving primacy to literary texts over knowledge of the world (other than that acquired through the study of literary texts), neglects the role of the teacher and teaching in the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence; her work falls short of suggesting a comprehensive framework for teaching ICC. In contrast to Kramsch, Byram's concept of ICC strongly emphasizes the need for knowledge of the world, is steeped in the theory of political education (*politische Bildung*) and offers a comprehensive framework for the teaching of ICC. It suggests practical ways of assessing and evaluating the different components of ICC (albeit with varying levels of precision and success). Risager summarises his approach as being 'critical of society and aware of the political aspects of language teaching' (Risager, 2007: 120); she also points out that it shows a cognitive, evaluative and action orientation (see Risager, 2007: 122). The considerable body of research and multitude of international projects undertaken since the inception of the framework demonstrate that it has been enormously influential in language teaching and learning in Europe and beyond, and has shaped contemporary thinking and practice in the field. Sercu and her collaborators have provided

empirical evidence for a disjunction between the support which language teachers express in principle for intercultural communicative competence and their day-to-day practice. This led to her arguing for particular ways of addressing the professional development of teachers and trainee teachers to address this gap. O'Dowd provides a useful insight into the possibility of applying the theoretical concept of ICC in an online environment for international telecollaboration. Although it is argued here that Byram offers the most comprehensive and practice-oriented conceptual framework, some shortcomings in this concept need to be acknowledged. The concept of ICC has been questioned, in general terms, with regard to its relevance within a German educational context in foreign language learning (see Edmondson & House, 1998; House, 1997; Hu, 1997; and Hu, 2000 for a comprehensive discussion of the issues raised). More recently, Rathje wrote on 'the controversial concept' (Rathje, 2007) from a business perspective, albeit with a rather narrow focus on the debate within parts of German academia and almost exclusively referring to German literature. The DESI study (described above under Testing and assessing intercultural communicative competence) does, however, clearly demonstrate that the debate in foreign language learning in Germany has moved on and accepted the relevance of the ICC concept as defined by Byram and his collaborators (see Nold, 2009).

Byram has been criticised for not defining culture precisely and for some discrepancies between his earlier and more recent view of language and culture. As to the latter, one could equally attribute these differences between his earlier and later thinking to the evolution of his framework on the basis of further practical experience. This is particularly evident in Byram's work on the autobiography of intercultural encounters (Byram, 2008, 2009) where he relates his framework to political education and intercultural citizenship. It is questionable whether an

explicit definition of culture is actually necessary for what Byram is aiming to achieve, i.e. to equip students with the skills and attributes to analyse cultural practice and reflect on their own as well as the target cultures in order to give the learners a critical insight into the world (see Risager, 2007: 127). A further, more recent, criticism which Byram acknowledges in the foreword of Risager's book (Risager, 2007) is that he bases his concept largely on national cultures - see Belz (2007) who argues that equating culture with nation 'does not adequately recognise or value nation-internal diversity ... or the existence of ideologically or ethnically bound groups that span national borders' (Belz, 2007: 137). Belz points out that the initial dichotomy of the tourist and the sojourner downplays the fact 'that not all language learners are in the privileged position of travellers to foreign lands' (Belz, 2007: 136). In addition, she criticizes the distinction Byram makes between intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence as 'it downplays ... internal diversity among members of the same speech community' (Belz, 2007: 138) and questions the validity of an 'assessable threshold of intercultural competence' (ibid.).

In part, the focus on national cultures reflects the period in which the framework was developed: in the late 1980s and early 1990s the phenomenon of globalisation was in its infancy and was less dominant than nowadays. The fact that the framework had been based implicitly on national cultures does not, however, devalue the concept of ICC, as the five *savoirs* can accommodate a more transnational and global perspective, as confirmed by Risager (2009: 28). This is also, for instance, reflected in the teaching of ICC at the Department of Languages at the Open University, where there is no assumption that the students all share the same culture (i.e. being acculturated in the UK). Equally, there is no assumption that there is one monolithic target country culture; in the Spanish or

German programmes, for instance, the teaching assumes multiple cultures based on different geographical areas (e.g. Spain, Latin America, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and minority groups in countries such as Canada and Australia).

Byram has responded to these criticisms by linking his original framework to political education and intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008).

The conceptual framework of ICC is based on a model of formal education which is dominant in Western Europe. Linking the model to political education and to intercultural citizenship means that the responsibility of the educator is emphasized, whose role it is to provide learning opportunities that allow for the development of ICC skills in a school or university setting. This poses questions about the roles that both personal experiences of the learners and informal learning play. Although the focus on formal educational settings is understandable when one looks at the origins of the framework in secondary education, I would argue that it does not fully take into consideration the impact of informal learning and life experiences of learners, especially adult ones.

Despite these criticisms, Byram's concept of ICC remains the most relevant one for this project which aims to explore the intercultural communicative competence of adult learners in a British institution of higher education.

Contribution of the research to the theory and practice of education

The Open University, UK, has been offering language courses since 1995. Since then it has established itself as the largest provider of part-time language study in Great Britain. It has developed a variety of qualifications and awards that range from certificates and diplomas to a BA in Modern Language Studies. In 2009, approximately 8800 students were enrolled on courses in English, French,

German, Italian, Spanish and Welsh. The Open University has a market share of almost 50% in the part-time higher education market in the UK. In its first years of existence, the then Centre for Modern Languages focused almost entirely on teaching, which in this case meant the development and delivery of a comprehensive suite of courses, initially in three languages: French, German, and Spanish. Very little research was undertaken. This has changed over time and since 2001 the staff in what is now the Department of Languages have produced more than 200 research publications in various relevant fields of distance language learning and teaching, including a limited number in the area of intercultural communicative competence among distance language learners (Álvarez et al., 2008; Beaven and Álvarez, 2002; Álvarez and Garrido, 2001; Baumann and Shelley, 2006, 2003; Baumann, 2007; Garrido and Álvarez, 2006; Ros i Sole & Truman, 2003; Shelley and Baumann, 2005).

The literature review has established that the conceptual framework for intercultural communicative competence, as defined by Byram and his collaborators, has been hugely influential in shaping theory and practice of ICC in Europe and beyond. The review has furthermore demonstrated that there is still very limited research evidence on ICC among adult learners of languages despite almost twenty years of investigating and researching intercultural communicative competence. Aarup Jensen et al. provide the most significant work in this area but appear to be the only researchers who have explicitly dealt with adult learners in this context. But their work does not seem to have made an impact on the academic debate in the field.

Similarly, distance language learning (especially of languages other than English) is another under-researched field, partly because there are relatively few

institutions globally which teach languages solely at a distance, and not in a dual or multiple mode of some kind (with both campus and extra-mural students). Research question 1 addresses the issue of the life experience of these learners and how much intercultural communicative competence they bring to their study of German. This is particularly relevant for this study for several reasons. It is an issue that did not feature prominently in the development of the ICC conceptual framework of Byram and his collaborators, who based their work on secondary school children. The conceptual framework was developed with a strong emphasis on formal education and the role which (secondary) education can play in making pupils interculturally competent. Unlike children, adults have gained considerably more life experience by a variety of means – at their workplaces, through regular contacts with communities of users of other languages and customs, or personal contacts via friends and family, in addition to their formal education. Adults bring to their study already-formed perceptions and views of the world and their environment, whereas children are normally still in the process of forming their worldviews. Although many children nowadays live in multi-cultural environments and are likely to have been exposed to some intercultural encounters, adults will have had more opportunities for intercultural experiences in a greater variety of settings, including travel and work abroad.

Research question 2 focuses on the potential impact of a prescribed learning programme which is administered in an identical form to large cohorts of adult learners. All students of a particular German course will receive the same materials (whether print, audio-visual or increasingly online) with the same learning outcomes. The course materials aim to support the acquisition and development of ICC. Therefore, the evaluation of whether such learning materials achieve this aim is important.

The third research question deals with the five *savoirs* which typify ICC according to Byram's concept, investigating whether they can be captured and to what extent they can be measured in such a programme.

So this project contributes to research into both ICC and distance language learning; it deals explicitly with adult learners and their approach to ICC which, it is hoped, will fill a gap in the existing literature and contribute to theory and practice in the field.

4 Research methodology

Discussion of the research methodology will begin with a definition of action or practitioner research and will then relate this EdD project to this conceptual framework. It looks at the constituent aspects of practitioner research: these are reflection and self-reflection, learner development, teacher development and theory building, and also relevance. This section then outlines the research methods used in this project. It reflects on quantitative and qualitative research methods and – particularly – on questionnaires and their design for quantitative research. It also discusses semi-structured interviews, conducted by telephone, as a qualitative research method.

Action or practitioner research

To provide a methodological framework for the EdD project, it was deemed useful to explore the theory of action and practitioner research in relation to the project, and to assess the relationship between this project and those forms of research.

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Defining action or practitioner research

This section discusses the extent to which this project's research approach is related to action research and to what extent it differs from it.

The methodology of action research, also described as 'practitioner research', was based originally in the discipline of social psychology but has been taken up and applied in a variety of settings (see Lamy & Hampel, 2007: 157).

In general, it appears that research, backed up with theory, plays a less significant part in teaching, particularly at school level, compared to other professions: 'Indeed, what little evidence there is suggests that most teachers regard research as an esoteric activity having little to do with their everyday practical concerns.'(Carr & Kemmis, 1986: 8). This is comparable, to some extent, with practice in higher education where teaching-related research is not necessarily held in the same high regard as research in literature and linguistics. It is, of course, evident that more research into practice in language learning at university level has been undertaken since Carr & Kemmis made their observation more than twenty years ago.

There are many definitions of the concepts of action research and practitioner research. Lamy and Hampel quote Benson (2001) who, although not an authority in this field, nevertheless provides a particularly clear definition of action research:

> 'Action research has five distinctive characteristics
>
> 1.   it addresses issues of practical concern to the researchers and the community of which they are members.
>
> 2.   it involves systematic collection of data and reflection on practice.
>
> 3.   it is usually small-scale and often involves observation of the effects of a change in practice.

4.   it often involves analysis of qualitative data and description of events and processes.

5.   its outcomes include solutions to problems, professional development and the development of personal or local theories related to practice.

In language education, the action researcher is often a teacher acting in the role of teacher-researcher. […]' (Benson, 2001: 182, quoted in Lamy & Hampel, 2007: 158).

Carr & Kemmis (1986) see action research as rooted in critical theory with the goal of emancipation (see McKernan, 1996: 4) and emphasize self-reflection with the aim of improving practice: 'Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.'(Carr & Kemmis, 1986: 162). Crookes (1993) distinguishes between two trends in action research for second language teachers:

'The first is an older, relatively conservative line, which finds action research equivalent to research done by a "teacher-researcher". The second is a newer, more progressive line where the term "action research" is used to refer to aspects of critical education practice, that is, education and educational research which is committed to emancipating individuals from the domination of unexamined assumptions embodied in the status quo […]' (Crookes, 1993: 131).

Although the aim of action, or practitioner, research is to engage teachers in research, it has been pointed out that much of the published work is actually

'published singly by university researchers and [is] intended for academic audiences' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990), quoted in Crookes, 1993: 132).

The EdD and practitioner research

Allwright stipulates that practitioner research is not a research method but that 'it describes crucially a relationship of identity between the people being investigated and the people doing the investigation' (Allwright, 2005: 357). In this respect, the EdD project does not follow a practitioner research paradigm, since the relationship of identity between the research subjects and the researcher is not crucial. It is, however, stipulated in the literature that there are no major methodological distinctions between regular research and what Crookes (1993) – in contrast to Carr & Kemmis (1986) – defined as 'the more conservative line of action research': 'All the normal tools of social science or educational research can be brought to bear, to the extent that the teacher doing action research is familiar with them or wishes to use them' (Crookes, 1993: 132). In general, this EdD project follows this more conservative line of practitioner research, employing a combination of methodological tools used in social science and educational research. The project does not, however, have the emancipation of individuals as its prime aim: it aims rather to improve practice in distance language learning. Allwright (2005) developed principles for practitioner research in the field of language learning and second language acquisition which extend the definition of practitioner research quoted above. He called this concept 'exploratory practice' (Allwright, 2005; 353) and defines it as follows: 'exploratory practice offers an epistemologically and ethically motivated framework for conducting practitioner research in the field of language education. It does not offer a technical framework in itself, but it does make practical suggestions …' (Allwright, 2005: 361).

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This EdD project follows the principle of conservative practitioner research in that it addresses the concern of how and whether adult learners of a language at a distance are able to develop their intercultural communicative competence. This is an issue 'of practical concern' (Benson, 2001: 182, quoted in Lamy & Hampel, 2007: 158) for me as a researcher and practitioner of distance language learning and for teaching and the distance language teaching community as a whole. However, this project differs in one important aspect from practitioner research, which is concerned largely with classroom practice and the role of the teacher in such a setting: This study looks into distance language learning, which means that the normal definition of classroom practice (i.e. one teacher teaches a class of students) does not apply. As a distance language learning practitioner, I am not directly involved in what is termed 'tutoring' groups of students at the OUUK. Instead I have been centrally involved in developing the teaching materials (including an increasing amount of materials located in the Moodle-based Virtual Learning Environment of the Open University) which the learners study at their own pace in a location of their choice. This has an impact on the immediacy of the study, how it will inform practice and how the findings of this study might change practice. The bulk of the materials (whether print or audio-visual) have a lifespan of up to ten years and cannot be changed easily during this lifecycle. In addition, the production process of these distance language courses at the Open University usually takes up to three years. Although the advent of online learning and the increased use of the university's Virtual Learning Environment might allow for more rapid changes in the future, it will not be possible to integrate any findings from this study immediately but only with some delay.

Allwright developed a range of design criteria for exploratory practice which include 'appropriate criteria for any proposal to integrate research and pedagogy'

(Allwright, 1992: 8-12, quoted in Allwright, 2005: 364). In this project, Byram's conceptual framework for intercultural communicative competence provides these criteria which are based on pedagogy and used for a research investigation. Other key aspects of practitioner research are the promotion of reflection, learner and teacher development and theory building (Allwright, 2005: 364) which will be discussed in the sections which follow.

Reflection and self-reflection

In general, reflection plays a key role in any research project. In this project it manifests itself in a variety of ways: changes in the title and consequently readjusting the focus of this research investigation provide one indication of reflection. The amendments to the methodology used imply another level of reflection. Reflection is further demonstrated in the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

It has been stated that individual practitioners must be committed to self-critical reflection on their educational aims and values for practitioner research to be successful (Carr & Kemmis, 1986: 31). Kraft (2002) describes the process of critical self-reflection in more detail and suggests that it needs to include an 'analysis of personally held beliefs, values and assumptions' (Kraft, 2002: 177). This will be undertaken as described below.

Learner development

The aim of learner development is particularly important in relation to the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence. Any student of the distance language courses at the OUUK, for example, should not only gain additional knowledge about the societies in which the target languages are

spoken, but will also be encouraged repeatedly to reflect on her/his own values and beliefs, to compare and contrast her/his own life within society with that of the countries where the target language is spoken, thus developing him- or herself as an individual. The research design and the methodology used allows for the participants to report on both their knowledge gain **and** their personal experiences of intercultural encounters, especially through in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Teacher development and theory building

As this is one of the few investigations to have been carried out into adult distance language learners and their intercultural communicative competence, the findings will add to the available evidence in the overall research field of intercultural communicative competence. In addition, the findings of this study will be transferable to other distance language learning at the OUUK and other distance education institutions and are also relevant for adult language learning in different settings. This will impact on my personal development as a teacher but also has the potential to inform the teacher development of other distance educators in my department and the part-time tutors who deliver the tuition of these courses.

It is anticipated that this study will contribute to theory building in this area – which is another criterion of exploratory practice (see Allwright, 1992, quoted in Allwright: 2005: 364) – by producing evidence which could lead to adjustments or amendments of Byram's conceptual framework in order to adapt it to the particular circumstances of adult language learners at a distance.

Relevance

A further design criterion that Allwright (2005) mentions is relevance:

' The least to hope from our work is that teachers bringing research into their own teaching will ensure that what they explore is relevant to themselves, regardless of what concerns academic researchers, and of course that is also relevant to their learners, who may well have interesting puzzles of their own to explore.' (Allwright, 1992, quoted in Allwright, 2005: 364)

Although in my current role as Head of Department, I am less directly involved in distance teaching than before, my academic background is in distance language education as a practitioner, course designer and developer. This project is thus directly relevant to me and via my work and that of my academic colleagues, to distance language learners at the Open University in the UK who are taught intercultural awareness and are implicitly and explicitly dealing with intercultural encounters and their own intercultural communicative competence. Furthermore, a main aim in the learning outcomes of these distance German courses (in line with all other language courses at the OUUK) is the furthering of intercultural communicative competence. I have been involved in integrating the teaching of intercultural communicative competence into the German courses at the OUUK from the beginning of the German programme, moving from a rather implicit to a more explicit approach in the teaching and learning of intercultural communicative competence at a distance. It is apparent that I believe in the value of teaching intercultural communicative competence and intercultural awareness to this target group, who differ considerably from secondary school pupils and standard undergraduate students in terms of their life experiences and their backgrounds. As both a researcher and a practitioner, I have an interest in finding out to what extent this aim can be achieved, and to clarify the similarities and differences between these learners at the OUUK and other language learners who engage in

intercultural encounters through exchanges, residence abroad or virtual

encounters.

Self-reflection

The aim of the following section is to provide an insight into my background, which

has shaped the preconceptions of this project. In the following, a distinction is

made between my personal background and experience, and the values and

beliefs which are related to my professional life.

I am male, white, German, belong to the professional class, have worked all my

life in education and mainly in higher education, with a variety of qualifications

from German and British HE institutions, which have provided me with an insight

into two different educational systems. As a child, teenager and student I lived in

Germany and experienced the German educational system from primary to

university level, which shaped my values and beliefs. As a school boy, attending a

grammar school (*Gymnasium*) in a small town in the 1970s, I had very few

intercultural experiences, as almost all the pupils and all the staff were of German

origin. Reflecting on this experience now, this certainly shaped my school life,

more especially as there was a certain mismatch between the younger, post-1968

teachers whose educational aims were liberal and emancipatory, and the older

teachers, steeped in the tradition of Humboldt, who had more conservative views

and believed strongly in traditional educational values. As the educational system

in Germany was (and still is) highly selective and competitive, one of the aims of

any grammar school was to filter out those pupils who did not achieve the

necessary grades to progress through the system. The teachers who educated me

at secondary level and prepared me for the German equivalent of A levels saw

their role as preparing young students for university study and thus for good

professional jobs in an elitist way. Although the rhetoric of the post-68 generation of teachers was anti-elitist, they nevertheless conformed to the traditional values and beliefs inherent in the selective German schooling system.

Similarly, as a student studying German and history to become a grammar school teacher in the 1980s at a traditional German university, I did not enjoy many intercultural experiences. The overwhelming majority of students in these subjects were white German nationals; students from ethnic minorities or from other countries outside Germany were extremely underrepresented in these course subjects. One reason for this might be that to become a civil servant in Germany at the time (a status that all teachers, including grammar school teachers, had to achieve) it was necessary to be a German citizen.[2]

The teacher training I received at university was appropriate to a career as an academic specialist in the subject field and followed the same curriculum as that for Masters students, with the addition of a very limited amount of pedagogy as part of the course. Teaching practice and first hand experience of school routines was limited to two four-week work experience placements, in which I mainly observed classroom activities but did not teach. At that time the grammar school teacher was deemed to be a subject specialist who passed on this expertise to her or his students with the elitist aim of preparing the best students for HE study with high selectivity. Only the most competent learners were able to progress while the rest were filtered out through the secondary schooling system. Gaining classroom practice was entirely confined to the equivalent of the PGCE (studying for the *Zweites Staatsexamen*) which was the first time after more than five years of sound academic training that I stood in front of a group of pupils and had to

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[2] This does, however, not mean that it was impossible to become a teacher without German citizenship but at the time one could not get the civil servant status as a non-German, but would be employed under different conditions as *Angestellter im Offentlichen Dienst* (employees in the public service).

conduct classes (supervised and unsupervised). For this I was extremely well prepared with regard to subject knowledge but less well in terms of educational knowledge and teaching methodology. Even in the late 1980s the overall majority of the students I taught at this particular grammar school were white Germans. In addition, none of the teacher trainers or fellow trainee teachers were non-German or from an ethnic minority background. So I gained very little intercultural experience over my altogether seven years of higher education and training in Germany.

It was only after teaching practice that, by chance, I had my first intercultural encounters as I moved into adult and migrant education. This offered job opportunities at the time for trained teachers of German due to the massive influx of ethnic German migrants, mainly from the then Soviet Union and Poland. This means that it was only after I finished my formal education in Germany that I had any experience whatsoever of the considerable cultural differences between different groups of people and ethnicities[3] (and learners).

I have gained extensive intercultural experience through living in the UK and New Zealand for more than nineteen years. I had very limited knowledge of British attitudes towards Germans and Germany before I came to work in the UK. As a German living in the UK, one inevitably becomes aware of attitudes and stereotypes held towards Germans by the media, which reflect public opinion to some degree. The image of Germans as portrayed in the media contrasted with many of my personal experiences, where no latent anti-German feelings were expressed (probably due to the fact that I moved mainly within educated,

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[3] Although the learners on this intensive adult education training programme were officially deemed to be Germans and had thus received extensive formal tuition in the language and the culture of Germany, it was clear that this was a political stance of the German government which did not necessarily reflect the reality of these people, who were in the majority migrants from the Soviet Union and Poland with some, sometimes dubiously defined German ethnicity.

academic, middle class circles). During my stay in Manchester and working in a

large and very multi-cultural Department of Languages I gained further insights

into different attitudes and values among people from different cultures.

When moving to the Open University in 1995, I was initially struck by the

dominance of white Anglo-Saxon staff at the university. It was then that – for the

first time – I became very actively aware of my Otherness. An example is that

when having lunch with other German colleagues in the canteen and speaking

German, people looked somewhat surprised at this table of 'foreigners' speaking

in a language other than English. I encountered another instance when studying

for a MBA with the Open University Business School. When attending a residential

school as a student, the tutor commented to me on the first night in the bar that he

was surprised to meet a German with a sense of humour. I responded to that by

saying that having a sense of humour was exactly why I was living in the UK and

not in Germany. By then I had accepted that it was easiest to respond to such

stereotypical statements with humour. This experience was, however, more

striking than anything I had encountered in the media or in anecdotes told by

German friends living in the UK because this OU tutor was tutoring a very

international group, including people from five different nations and diverse cultural

backgrounds from Europe and Asia.

As a practitioner and researcher in higher education in general, and in distance

education in particular, my educational aims, beliefs, values and assumptions are

also directly related to those of the institution I have been working for since 1995.

The Open University has the following mission statement:

> The Open University is open to people, places, methods and ideas.

> It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-

> quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and

fulfil their potential.

Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnership it seeks to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open and distance learning.

The Open University is famous for its educational ethos which entails offering a higher education experience to those learners who have not had the chance to study at tertiary level. This central aim manifests itself in the institution's open access policy where students can enrol on any module of the undergraduate programme of the Open University without prior qualifications (such as A levels or similar). This policy applies to all language courses at the university and has shaped my professional values and beliefs, which have been reflected in my work as a course writer and course team chair with overall responsibility for the syllabi and design of those courses that I worked on. The courses have not been designed with one particular type of student in mind but rather so as to be suitable for a wide range of adult learners with different backgrounds and experiences who bring their personal life experiences to their learning. The courses clearly acknowledge that there will be different types of learners with different learning styles and different learning needs, which the courses try to accommodate by means of a wide variety of approaches and activities. My values and beliefs are congruent with the institutional mission insofar as I believe in educational opportunity and the promotion of social justice through the language learning opportunities provided by these distance language courses, which lead to a wide variety of qualifications to suit the different needs of our diverse learners (certificates, diplomas and a degree in Modern Languages), allowing those learners to fulfil their ambitions and their potential. My assumptions are that people from all backgrounds are able to learn a modern language and can gain valuable

insight and knowledge into other cultures and societies by doing so. This allows

them to interact with speakers of other languages and understand differences and

similarities between their own lives and society and those people who live in the

societies where the target languages are spoken.

My values, beliefs and assumptions are similarly defined by my personal and

professional experiences as a German national living in the UK and working for a

UK-based university. In that respect I have had direct experience of negotiating

intercultural encounters in my various roles in two universities in the UK and one in

New Zealand and dealing on a daily basis (both privately and professionally) with

attitudes and stereotypes about Germany and the Germans. The public perception

of Germans has shaped my stance towards stereotypes and my approach to

intercultural learning. I don't hold the view that stereotypes are bad *per se*. On the

contrary, I regard them as a necessity to help individuals to shape their view of the

world. Stereotypes become problematic when they cannot be altered by reality

and encounters between people from different backgrounds.

Thus, my interest in the academic subject of ICC has, at least partially, evolved

from my personal and professional experiences of living abroad.

Outline of research methods

What are the most appropriate research methods for the purpose of this study?

The decision on the best research methods needs to be based on current thinking

on research methodology as well as the particular features of this study.

Although it 'does not seem that long ago that some researchers challenged

positivist assumptions which in turn led to the juxtaposing of qualitative and

quantitative methods or vice versa' (Burgess et al., 2006: 56), it is now accepted

that qualitative and quantitative research methods can be combined according to preferences and needs (ibid.).

Creswell (2003) argues that to 'include only quantitative and qualitative methods falls short of the major approaches being used today in the social and human sciences' (Creswell, 2003: 4) He states that 'the situation today is less quantitative *versus* qualitative and more how research practices lie somewhere on a continuum between the two' (ibid.).

For this research project a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has been chosen because 'recognizing that all methods have limitations, researchers felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods' (Creswell, 2003: 15). The literature on research methods discusses at length the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches. This EdD project follows a complementary approach in combining qualitative and quantitative data: complementarity is defined as 'where two different sets of data are employed to address different but *complementary* aspects of an investigation …' (Brannen, 2007: 284, italics in original).

The main research instruments used in this study are questionnaires (for the collection of quantitative data) and interviews (for the collection of qualitative data). The following sections start by providing a brief rationale for using two different cohorts from the German programme at the OUUK; the main research tools are then discussed in more detail.

The German programme at the Open University

OUUK study is organised into independent modules (named courses) for which students can enrol. In recent years, the institution has put greater emphasis on awards and programmes and coherent pathways of study. The German

programme at the OU consists of four modules that take students from beginners'

to advanced level (A1 – C1 in terms of the Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages, see Council of Europe, 2001). The courses are as

follows: Beginners' German (L193 *Rundblick),* Intermediate German, Upper

Intermediate German and Advanced German (L313 *Variationen*). These courses

can lead to different awards at certificate and diploma level and can be studied as

a strand in the BA Modern Language Studies. All students of German, in line with

common practice at the OU, are assigned a personal tutor who is responsible for

the delivery of the optional tuition and the marking of all assignments for her or his

tutor group.

When this project was being developed, I considered it important to investigate

more than one cohort studying one module. There were two reasons for this. First,

previous research work on the ICC of a single course cohort had already been

undertaken (Baumann & Shelley, 2006; Baumann & Shelley, 2003; Shelley &

Baumann, 2005). Secondly, investigating modules at different levels would allow

for more far-reaching conclusions with more implications for practice.

More than 1,200 students were enrolled on the four courses making up the whole

German programme in 2006/7. The decision to gather both qualitative and

quantitative data impacted on the scope of this project. Surveying four courses

with over 1200 students using a total of eight questionnaires and interviewing at

least 24 students would have been unwieldy, and might possibly have generated

an excess of data. With an assumed return rate of 50% and using pre- and post-

course questionnaires, at least 1200 questionnaires would have needed to be

processed within a tightly defined timeframe. This was deemed both impractical

and impossible. Therefore, I decided to concentrate on the courses at the entry

and exit points of the German programme at the OUUK. This would still allow me

to gather comprehensive data on two cohorts (the largest and the smallest in the German programme) and to encompass the full proficiency range of the German programme. In addition, I anticipated that there would be measurable differences in aspects of the students' intercultural communicative competence, due to the variation in their exposure to studying German at a distance with the OUUK. The students on the beginners' course are most likely not to have already studied German at the OU whilst the advanced learners are very likely to have had previous experience of studying German at the OU. While a number of beginners might well have had experience of studying another language at a distance, the overall distinction between those having the experience of studying German at a distance, and those not having this experience, is still valid. An additional reason for selecting these two cohorts is the difference in their linguistic levels and their knowledge of German-speaking countries. Byram states that learners need to have cultural knowledge and the ability to acquire new knowledge (Byram, 2001b: 6) to become interculturally competent. Selecting these two cohorts allows for a comparison of these groups of learners who arrive at their study with different levels of knowledge about Germany and other German-speaking countries. Selecting beginners' and advanced cohorts of German students at the OUUK also brings the importance of language proficiency for successful intercultural interaction, (as stipulated by Aarup Jensen (Aarup Jensen, 1995)) into the equation.

Quantitative research through questionnaires

'**Questionnaires** are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers' (Brown, 2001: 6, bold in

original). Questionnaires are particularly useful instruments in yielding factual, behavioural and attitudinal responses (Dőrnyei, 2003: 8) but it is 'harder to produce a really good questionnaire than might be imagined' (Bell, 2005: 136). Dőrnyei points out that the main attractions of questionnaires are their unprecedented efficiency: '[…] By administering a questionnaire to a group of people, one can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour' (Dőrnyei, 2003: 9). On the other hand, there are disadvantages to using questionnaires – they are unsuitable for probing deeply into an issue (Dőrnyei, 2003: 10) and long responses are not possible (Dőrnyei, 2003: 15). They can suffer from low returns (Brown, 2001: 6), especially if the respondents are unmotivated, unreliable or have literacy problems (Dőrnyei, 2003: 11). With questionnaires, there is little or no opportunity to correct the respondents' mistakes (ibid.), and issues such as social desirability bias, self-deception, acquiescence bias, halo effect, and fatigue effects might occur (Dőrnyei, 2003: 12-15). Similarly, self-administered questionnaires need to be 'completely self-contained and self-explanatory, because on-the-spot clarification is not possible' (Brown, 2001: 6). The questionnaires employed for this study are self-administered (Brown, 2001: 6) and the target population is the two cohorts of beginners' and Level 3 German students at the Open University (see Creswell, 2003: 156). The questionnaires were in English to ensure that the linguistic proficiency of the participants did not have an impact on their ability to respond to the questions. The questionnaires were sent to the two cohorts at the beginning of their study and a shortened version of the questionnaires was sent to respondents to the first questionnaire at the end of their respective courses. The research instrument for this study was designed specifically for this project (Creswell, 2003: 157). Layout and questionnaire design have been influenced by the expertise and practice of the

OU Institute of Educational Technology (IET) whose advice on best design was sought at the outset of the project. Examples of previous IET questionnaires were studied in the development of the questionnaires for this project. Although these questionnaires were not piloted – which is deemed highly desirable (see Creswell, 2003: 158) – similar research instruments have been successfully used in related research studies (see Baumann & Shelley, 2006; Baumann & Shelley, 2003; Shelley & Baumann, 2005) which indicates that the questionnaires were a suitable instrument for gathering the data required for this project.

It was intended that factual data would be gathered from the questionnaires as well as behavioural and attitudinal responses. Factual information was gathered, for example, about the learners' educational backgrounds and their reasons for studying the respective courses (see pre-course questionnaire L313, Appendix 3).[4] Behavioural responses were gathered to find out whether the study of a particular distance German course had an impact on the students' reflection on their own culture and customs (Question 3, see Appendix 4), which may be an indicator for changes in behaviour and attitudinal views. The students were asked about potential changes in attitudes both directly (Question 25 and 26) and indirectly (Question 24, see Appendix 4), by inviting them to assess what a typical person's view of Germans might be.

The length of the questionnaire and the time necessary to fill it in were considered during the design phase. Any questionnaire that is more than 4-6 pages long and takes more than 30 minutes to complete 'may be considered too much of an imposition' (Dőrnyei, 2003: 18) – the questionnaires (pre- and post-course) for

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[4] The examples used below to illustrate the questionnaire design are almost all taken from the L(ZX)313 *Variationen* post-course questionnaire.

L313 *Variationen*[5] conformed roughly to the recommended length, though

because of the spacious layout, they made up eight and nine pages respectively,

with one and one and a half pages allowed for open-ended comments. The pre-

and post-course beginners' questionnaires were, however, well in excess of the

recommended length, consisting of fifteen pages. Their length was determined by

the multi-faceted research planned by a number of colleagues at the time when

the questionnaires were designed, and also institutional constraints: students are

not supposed to be sent more than one batch of questionnaires per academic

year. The good response rate to these questionnaires implies that their length has

not had a strong detrimental effect.

The questionnaires employ a variety of question types: closed questions, multiple

choice and some open-ended questions. Likert scales were used (see Dőrnyei,

2003: 36) for the questions about general attitudes towards Germans (see

Question 24, Appendix 4). It was deemed important to include some open-ended

questions to allow the students to respond in more detail, because 'open-format

items can provide a far greater "richness" than fully quantitative data.' (Dőrnyei,

2003: 47). In accordance with good practice, these items were placed at the end of

the questionnaire (Dőrnyei, 2003: 48) (see Question 27, Appendix 4).

With regard to capturing knowledge gain, the questionnaires for the beginners and

advanced learners of German complemented each other to allow for a comparison

of different approaches, and to reflect the different levels of the courses. For the

beginners' course, two knowledge-related questions were put into the post-course

questionnaire (Questions 33a and 33b, see Appendix 2). These questions asked

the students to name five things that they had learned through the course about

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[5] Please note that the course descriptions L313 *Variationen* and L193 *Rundblick* will be used throughout and include both the L and LZX versions of these courses. The different codes relate to the mode of optional tutorial delivery: L courses were at the time offered with face-to-face tuition, LZX courses offered synchronous online tuition.

German-speaking countries and five things they had learned about German-speaking people and cultures. The questionnaires for the advanced cohorts used a variety of open-ended, closed and multiple choice questions. The same questions were asked in the pre- and the post-course questionnaire, thus capturing possible knowledge gain in considerable detail, and facilitating measuring the difference in knowledge at the beginning, and after studying the course. This approach reflects the assumption that knowledge and potential knowledge gain is of a higher and more specific order in an advanced language and culture course than in a beginners' language course.

The development of the questionnaires had to accommodate good practice in questionnaire design as well as one of the aims of the project: to collect quantitative data on those aspects of intercultural communicative competence that lend themselves to this format. The underlying concept was developed by Michael Byram (Byram, 1997b) whose five *savoirs* define an individual who can communicate competently in intercultural situations. The questionnaires aimed to tap into some aspects of the students' knowledge (Questions 5 – 23, see Appendix 4), especially knowledge items that were explicitly featured in the course, as well as attitudes (Questions 24-27, Appendix 4). The questions about course-specific knowledge formed part of the pre- and post- course questionnaires so as to establish whether any knowledge gain can be observed: '[Learners] need to know historical and geographical facts about the society and its institutions, facts about socialisation through formal ceremonies, religious and secular …' (Byram & Morgan: 1994, 136).

Qualitative research through semi-structured telephone interviews

It was decided to supplement the questionnaire data for this project by using

interviews, conducted in English, particularly as these 'can yield rich material and

can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses' (Bell, 2005: 157)

Interviews are defined as 'procedures used for gathering oral data in particular

categories (if the interview is well planned and structured in advance), but also for

gathering data that was not anticipated at the outset. Interviews can be conducted

with individuals, in groups, or by telephone.' (Brown, 2001: 5). They offer

considerable advantages in terms of adaptability because responses can be

developed and clarified (Bell, 2005: 157), the researcher is given 'the opportunity

to meet the subjects of [the] research' (Wisker, 2001: 165) and they can be used:

- 'to supplement information provided in a questionnaire

- to help pilot a questionnaire, interview a few people to test out the areas
  and questions

- to follow up a questionnaire – select who to interview for in-depth or variety
  of responses following the broader information produced in a questionnaire

- to add to a variety of other methods such as questionnaires, observation
  and documentary analysis, by closing in on a smaller sample dealt with in
  depth.'

(Wisker, 2001: 165)

As the research subjects are geographically dispersed and studying part-time, the

use of group interviews or focus groups (see Bell, 2005:162-3) was deemed

unfeasible for practical reasons, because these would have necessitated face-to-

face or online meetings, and increased inconvenience for the students. The

organisation of such meetings was considered impractical within the time

constraints (and would have had substantial financial implications to cover costs).

So individual interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate way of gathering qualitative data. Because of the physical location of the students and the researcher, and to minimise the time commitment and inconvenience for these learners, the telephone was used for these interviews. The literature on research methods and data collection distinguishes between different types of interviews, ranging from completely unstructured to completely structured interviews (Bell, 2005: 161). Semi-structured (Wisker, 2001: 168) or guided or focussed interviews (Bell, 2005: 161) were considered the most appropriate approach for the gathering of more in-depth qualitative data, because the 'freedom to allow respondents to talk about what is of central significance to them rather than the interviewer is clearly important' (ibid.) and

> '**semi-structured, open-ended interviews** manage to both address the need for comparable responses – that is, there are the same questions being asked of each interviewee – and the need for the interview to be developed by the conversation between interviewer and interviewee – […]. With a semi-structured, open-ended interview there are a series of set questions to be asked and space for some divergence, with the interviewer then returning to the structured interview question.' (Wisker, 2001: 168, bold in original)

Byrne (2004) suggests that 'qualitative interviewing is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals' attitudes and values – things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire' (Byrne, 2004: 182) and that well-conducted interviews can 'achieve a level of depth and complexity that is not available to other, particularly survey-based approaches' (ibid.). Gillham (2005) justifies the rationale for undertaking what he describes as 'distance interviewing' (Gillham, 2005: 5) in terms of lower cost and

the fact that other access might be difficult to achieve (ibid.). He argues that the

main issue that researchers should consider is 'fitness for purpose' (ibid.). The

analysis of qualitative data usually involves both data handling and interpretation

(Gibbs, 2007: 2). Thus Gibbs stipulates that there 'is no separation between data

collection and data analysis' and that '[a]nalysis can, and should start in the field'

(Gibbs, 2007: 3). This is reinforced in Brannen (2007) where she suggests that

'interpretation occurs at *all* phases of the research process, not only at the writing-

up stage' (Brannen, 2007: 292, italics in original). This project, however, differs in

that there is a clear division between the collection of data and its analysis, and

the interpretation which happens after the data has been collected. Gibbs

discusses the challenge of transcribing interview data in terms of the amount of

time this takes, as well as arguing that transcribing is an 'interpretive process'

(Gibbs, 2007: 10). As transcription involves a change of medium issues of

accuracy, fidelity and interpretation are integral to the process (Gibbs, 2007: 11).

Further issues revolve around the nature of interviews. They are 'by their very

nature, social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective

(and prospective) *accounts* or *versions* of their past (or future) actions,

experiences, feelings and thoughts' (Rapley, 2007: 16, italics in original). 'This

raises the important methodological issue about whether interview responses are

to be treated as giving direct access to "experience" or as actively constructed

"narratives" involving activities which themselves demand analysis (Holstein and

Gubrium, 1995)' (Silverman, 2006: 146). For the purpose of this project it is

accepted that, by and large, retrospective accounts of the interviewees' pasts are

created as a form of narrative which provides indirect access to the experiences of

the participants. A second characteristic of qualitative interviews relates to the

person of the researcher. 'The qualitative researcher, like all other researchers,

cannot claim to be an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text of their research report.' (Gibbs, 2007: 91). Rubin & Rubin developed the concept of 'responsive interviewing' and argue that '… researchers need to continually examine their own understandings and reactions. Personal involvement is a great strength of the responsive interviewing model, because empathy encourages people to talk, and yet active involvement in the interview can also create problems …' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 31). In order to overcome these problems, researchers need to be 'explicit about their preconceptions, power relations in the field, the nature of researcher/respondent interaction, how their interpretation and understanding may have changed, and more generally about their underlying epistemology.' (Gibbs, 2007: 92).

Gillham points out that researchers 'are inevitably making some kind of interpretive construction of what the interviewee says' (Gillham, 2005: 6) and that this should be done with 'system, rigour and reflection, and with careful attention to representative selection from the interview transcript' (ibid.). The self-reflexivity of the researcher is a key factor in the research interviews that needs to be taken into consideration: '[R]eflexivity is the recognition that the product of research inevitably reflects some of the background, milieu and predilections of the researcher' (Gibbs, 2007: 91); this has been discussed above in the section on self reflection.

The interviews were designed to be semi-structured to allow for the most efficient collection of data, whilst giving interviewees a chance to elaborate on certain aspects. A set of questions was designed for the interviews which allowed for the collection of comparable responses and offered enough flexibility for interviewees to talk about issues that they found important. To achieve the necessary level of comparability, both sets of interviewees – Level 3 students of German and

beginners German students – were asked the same questions. In order to get an

accurate record of the telephone interviews, and with permission from the

interviewees, all interviews were recorded (see Bell, 2005, 164). The questions

were designed to elicit answers relating to the five different *savoirs* in the model of

intercultural communicative competence developed by Byram (1997b). It is

acknowledged that ICC includes proficiency in the target language (see Byram,

1997: 71). This project did not employ specific measures to investigate the

participants' proficiency in German directly, although it would have been possible

to establish this by accessing the assessment data of the different cohorts. The

rationale for this decision is as follows: by the time the end-of-course

questionnaires were sent out and the interviews were conducted, both cohorts of

students (and the volunteers for the interviews) had finished their courses and had

amply demonstrated their proficiency through the continuous and end-of-course

assessment.

Byram (1997b, 2008) and others, such as Sercu (2004a, 2005c), emphasize the

particular challenges of assessing intercultural communicative competence and

suggest that it might be undesirable to try to assess **all** aspects of intercultural

communicative competence. This consideration is relevant for the approach taken

in this project, which aims to explore the acquisition of intercultural communicative

competence. It also influenced the development of the questions and their use in

the semi-structured interviews. While some key aspects of the model are

reasonably easy to identify and lend themselves to the interview format, other

savoirs are more difficult to engage with. In addition, it is important to note that

'these five *savoirs* should not be considered as isolated components, but rather as

components that are integrated and intertwined with the various dimensions of

communicative competence' (Sercu, 2002a: 63). The questions exploring *savoir*

être (attitude of curiosity and openness) were designed on the basis of asking students about their own cultural identity and daily routines and comparing and contrasting these with the German-speaking country the interviewees are most familiar with (Questions 1 to 3, see Appendix 5). These questions were drawn up to establish whether respondents were able to demonstrate an 'interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices' (Byram, 1997b: 50). The question on conversational behaviour when talking to a speaker of German (Question 4, see Appendix 5) relates to the 'readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction' (ibid.). As the telephone interviews offered a more in-depth opportunity for the students to respond to knowledge questions than the questionnaires, several questions were asked about s*avoirs* (knowledge), Question 5 (see Appendix 5) aimed at course-specific knowledge, Question 6 (see Appendix 5) asked whether the individual had encountered misunderstandings in her/his dealing with speakers of German (see Byram, 1997b: 51). A further question related to 'the processes of social interaction' (ibid.) in a German-speaking country on the basis of an invitation to either a dinner party or a large birthday party (Question 8, see Appendix 5). Two more questions were added to prompt the interviewees to rate their general knowledge of their own and German-speaking countries (Questions 9 and 10, see Appendix 5). These were included as a means of evaluating general knowledge about their own culture, and knowledge specifically about German-speaking countries.

The attitudinal dimension, as in *savoir comprendre*, was evaluated on the basis of asking what learners considered to be the most commonly held views or stereotypes about the British in German-speaking countries and about

Germans/Austrians/Swiss in the UK (Questions 11 to 13, see Appendix 5), thus using knowledge to identify ethnocentric perspectives, areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction and to explain the origins of – and cultural systems underlying – these perspectives or misunderstandings (Byram, 1997b: 52).

In order to evaluate the skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/savoir faire*), a question on how to find more information about a current affairs event and its consequences (see Question 14, see Appendix 5) was included, thus eliciting responses about the acquisition of new knowledge of a culture (Byram, 1997b: 52). However, a question like this cannot fully cover the range and complexity of objectives which Byram describes under this skill, especially with regard to interaction with interlocutors (Byram, 1997b: 53). His objectives were published in the mid-1990s, which might explain the strong emphasis on contact with interlocutors and the lack of acknowledgment that nowadays new knowledge can easily be acquired directly and without necessarily interacting with people from other cultures and/or countries through, for instance, the Internet and satellite television.

The final *savoir* – s*avoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness) – aims to 'evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries' (Byram, 1997b: 53). Two questions (Questions 15 and 16, see Appendix 5) attempt to gauge the interviewees' critical cultural awareness by asking them about newspapers and their stance in one's own country and in a German-speaking country. While this aspect of the conceptual framework is highly desirable within an institutional educational setting, it could be argued that it is one of the more difficult *savoirs* to investigate, both because students need considerable knowledge (both language- and content-based) in order to develop critical awareness, and because the ability to maintain

a critical stance might be a trait of their personalities rather than something they could have learnt through a course. This raises issues about the extent to which a trait of this kind should be taught, or at least encouraged in a programme of study.

This section has defined the project in relation to the concept of practitioner research. It has established that some key aspects of this project define it as an example of practitioner research: it uses a methodological approach that is embedded in social science and education research, it is of relevance to me as a practitioner and researcher and it aims to ultimately improve practice. This project is committed to critical self-reflection on the part of the researcher and it will, it is hoped, contribute to theory building.

Using practitioner research as a framework to reflect on methodological issues has also identified some important divergences from the concept of practitioner research as it is generally understood. This project does not focus on research subjects who are co-terminous with the researcher; it deals with distance language learners. As a practitioner, I am not a classroom teacher who teaches German to a group of students. Instead I am a course designer and developer and writer who produces distance learning materials for large cohorts of diverse learners with different needs and backgrounds - which has an impact on the immediacy that can be achieved in informing and improving practice.

This section has outlined the methodological approach to using a combination of research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, in the form of questionnaires and semi-structured telephone interviews. The use of longitudinal data was considered at the outset of the project but it was decided to abstain from collecting longitudinal data for a variety of practical reasons: students can opt in and out of studying with the OU, thus there is a potential lack of continuity which make the collection of such data more challenging. The time constraints of this EdD project

offered another reason for not collecting longitudinal data: all data were supposed to be collected within the first and second year of the project which would be a rather short period for a longitudinal study.

5 Data collection

This section describes the processes of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data for the two cohorts investigated, German beginners and advanced students at the OU.

Data collection for L193 *Rundblick* (German beginners)

The pre-course questionnaire for L193 was sent to 500 students of whom 243 returned their questionnaires – a return rate of 49%. The post-course questionnaire was sent to all those students who had returned the pre-course questionnaire. 123 students returned the post-course questionnaire – a return rate of 51%. These questionnaires were designed for a large and multi-stakeholder research study and aimed to capture a huge variety of data. Appendix 1 contains the relevant sections of the pre-course questionnaire for the beginners' course and Appendix 2 shows the relevant sections of the post-course questionnaire for this cohort.

The qualitative data for this cohort were more challenging to collect. It was anticipated that it would be difficult to schedule these interviews before Christmas 2006, because the post-course questionnaire was supposed to be administered up to, and until December. Interviews would normally take place after the questionnaires had been distributed, so as to not interfere with the response rate. In terms of the timing of the questionnaires, it became clear that the interviews

would have to be organised and carried out before the results from the post-course questionnaires were available. However, this caused a problem that had not been anticipated. As a list of students returning the post-course questionnaire was not available, it was necessary to cross-reference manually the pre-course questionnaires which had been received with those students who had submitted their final TMA. This was extremely time-consuming and delayed the approach made to students willing to participate in an interview. Out of this sample, e-mails were sent to ask for volunteers for the semi-structured interviews. The poor response rate necessitated a second e-mail shot in the run-up to Christmas – this was clearly unfortunate timing. Altogether six interviews were conducted successfully, although the failure of the recording equipment meant that data from one interview had to be compiled from memory and notes taken during the interview.

The differences between the rates of response to the request for interview between the Level 3 and the beginners German students are quite striking. Volunteers among the Level 3 students were easy to find. There does not, however, seem to be any immediate explanation as to why the Level 3 students were more willing to give up some time for an interview than the beginners. An initial thought was that the beginners might all be new to the University, and thus unwilling to engage with the interviews. A check on the student identifiers revealed that this was not the case – the majority had studied OU courses previously. It might be that greater familiarity with, and experience of, the German language courses encouraged the more advanced students to respond positively to the request for interview.

Data collection for L313 *Variationen* (advanced German)

The initial data collection for L313 *Variationen* in 2006 via pre- and post-course

questionnaires yielded insufficient results – the pre-course questionnaire was sent

to the entire cohort of 137 students and was returned by only 26 of them. Eight of

these students could not be identified and were therefore not sent the post-course

questionnaire. The overall return rate (just over 20%) was considerably lower than

anticipated and disappointing. A variety of reasons contributed to this return rate,

which is below the normal expectation in Open University surveys: this is 35-45%.

Although these students were not surveyed again during their year of study (in line

with university guidelines), a certain amount of survey fatigue might have set in:

almost the entire course population had been studying with the OU previously, the

majority for several years. It is likely that they had been subjected to a number of

surveys in the course of their study. In addition, in the age of the Internet and

online surveys, paper-based questionnaires look rather dated and are not

particularly attractive; they take longer to fill in. Similarly, workload might have

been an issue: these students had to juggle the demands of a 60 point course with

their other commitments and may thus have been less inclined to spend time on

additional tasks that did not relate directly to the course. However, the major

contributing factor to the low rate of return was the lack of follow-up, as this can

'increase the response rate by as much as 30%' (Dőrnyei, 2003: 78). This

omission, and not having sent reminder letters or e-mails to the cohort at the

beginning of their period of study, proved to be serious weaknesses in the data

collection for Level 3 German students.

The low return rate in 2006 necessitated a new round of quantitative data

collection in 2007 and subsequently new interviews with students from this cohort.

The pre-course questionnaire was sent to the entire cohort of 132 students, of whom 58 returned the questionnaire – a return rate of 44%. Those 58 students were sent the second, end-of-course questionnaire. Thirty returned this questionnaire – a return rate of just below 52%. E-mails were sent to a selection of the students who returned the second questionnaire, eliminating any students who had stated that they were Germans or from German-speaking countries. Six students were interviewed, the interviews were recorded with their informed consent and later transcribed.

As a result, the data collected for the two cohorts of German students at the Open University are from two different presentations: 2007 in the case of Level 3 German and 2005/6 in the case of Beginners German. This does not, however, impair the validity or comparability for two reasons: first, both courses were well established, had been presented for several years and consisted of reasonably stable cohorts, which did not change significantly from year to year. Second, a rough comparison of the Level 3 data for 2006 and 2007 indicated that there were no significant differences in the responses between the two cohorts.

6   Findings and analysis of findings

This section starts with the presentation of the findings of the quantitative data from the pre- and post-course questionnaires for the beginners' cohort. This is followed by the results from the qualitative data from this cohort. The interviews are reported under five headings, each representing one of the *savoirs*. The quantitative, questionnaire-based data for the advanced German learners is given below, starting with the findings from the pre-course questionnaire and followed by the results from the post-course questionnaire. For ease of reporting, the

knowledge-based questions from both surveys are reported together in this part of

the section. As for the beginners' cohort, the interview data are presented under

each of the *savoirs*. The final part of this section forms the analysis and discussion

of the findings.

Beginners German quantitative data

Pre-course questionnaire

Most students in this sample (n=243) stated that they had some previous

knowledge of German. This ranged (in descending order) from some simple

phrases (43%), a few words (35%) to phrases for getting by when shopping or

travelling (31%). Thirty four percent said that their previous knowledge was based

on contact with native speakers, followed by self-study (32%) and from school

(29%).

Fifty seven percent of the respondents had no formal qualifications in German; of

those who had gained a formal qualification, this was mainly at GCSE level or

equivalent. The majority of the learners had no previous experience of distance

learning (63%).

In response to the question about personal experience or contact with German-

speaking countries, the learners cited holidays most often (59%), followed by films,

plays or TV (35%), and friends and relatives in German-speaking countries (33%).

The reason given most often for studying the course was for pleasure or interest

(79%), followed by wanting to speak German while visiting the countries (72%),

intellectual challenge (65%), and being able to read in the target language (53%).

Gaining credits for a qualification in German was mentioned by just over half of the

sample (52%).

As a source for cultural knowledge, these learners cited visits to German-speaking countries (74%) most often, followed by direct contact with German speakers (68%), general education (60%) and books, films, music (59%).

Students claimed familiarity with German history (60%), food (58%) and books, films, and music (48%). Daily habits and routines were mentioned by 33% of the participants.

Forty two percent of the participants had been involved in a situation where there was a misunderstanding or breakdown of communication because of cultural differences.

When learning a language, the majority of the learners thought that learning about the culture and customs of a country would be 'essential or very important' (80%) or 'quite important' (15%), only 4% of the sample found this 'useful but not essential'.

Post-course questionnaire

After finishing the course, the sample of students (n=123) was asked once again for their reasons for studying L193 *Rundblick*. For pleasure and interest was the most commonly cited reason (81%), followed by being able to communicate when visiting a German-speaking country (79%) and as an intellectual challenge (70%).

Background of students

The majority of the responding students described themselves as English (72%), followed by Scottish (9%), Welsh and Irish (3%) and British (2%).

Knowledge gain

Almost 83% of the respondents felt that they knew more about German-speaking countries, their cultures and their people after studying *Rundblick*, than they had before embarking on the course. Seventeen percent declared that they did not know more about Germany after having studied the course. The reasons for this can be summarised in one student's response: 'I already knew about German culture before the course'. Their knowledge had been acquired mainly through travel ('I have spent several holidays in Germany and acquired a good knowledge of people and country already'), family contacts ('... my family are German....'), town twinning and having lived in a German-speaking country.

The students of the beginners' German course were asked to name five things about German-speaking countries that they remembered learning during the study of the course, and five things about German-speaking people and their cultures they also remembered learning. Forty one percent and 44% respectively did not provide any responses to these two questions.

Those students who listed particular points that they had learned while studying *Rundblick* chose answers that covered a very wide range of topics – which necessitated a reasonably broad categorisation. Geography in general, including specific geographical locations, such as cities, towns or the island of Rügen, and the different landscapes of German-speaking countries were mentioned most often (77%), customs, traditions, rituals and celebrations, such as Easter, Christmas and specific festivals were mentioned by 34%, different ways of speaking German, including accents, dialects and the formality of the German language, were noted by 26%, followed by migration (22%) and areas in which German is spoken (21%); food and drink were mentioned by 18%. All other points were mentioned by less than 13% of the respondents.

In response to the question about five things these learners remembered learning about German-speaking people and their cultures, again the answers were very varied and needed to be grouped into broad categories. There was an overlap in responses with the previous question. The most frequent response related to customs, traditions, celebrations and festivals (54%); health and leisure and working life were mentioned by 25%, followed by food and drink (23%), family and family history and accommodation (19%) while other answers were all mentioned by less than 13% of the respondents.

Over 91% found that reflecting on other cultures and their customs could help them in reflecting on one's own culture and customs. 78% found learning about cultures and customs 'essential or very important', 14% 'quite important' and 6% 'useful but not essential'.

Attitudes towards Germans

When asked whether changes had taken place in their attitudes over their period of study, 24% of the students responded 'Yes' while 76% answered 'No'. Of those who confirmed a change in attitude, all said that studying the course had played a role in this. One student summarised the impact of study as follows:

> '*Rundblick* has played a major role in this. To a large extent I think it is impossible to study a language without gaining at least some insight into the people who speak it and the countries where it is spoken.' Another learner commented: 'I only really knew about the stereotypical German before the course, so had no real knowledge about Germans (as I don't believe in stereotypes!). The course has broadened my understanding of German culture and people ...'.

A learner wrote that through the course s/he had learned 'to consider German-speaking people as real people, not stereotypes' while another said: 'I had thought German people rather severe and aggressive but the interviews I heard on *Rundblick* suggest that this is not the case'. Another student made the point about German speakers not necessarily being German: 'I am more aware that German speakers are not necessarily German. Although this is obvious, I'd never spent any time thinking about people's life in Austria and Switzerland'.

One respondent compared and contrasted Germany with her or his own country, the UK: 'Their way of life is similar in many ways to our own. It is good to have the knowledge of a different culture, yet be made aware that in many respects, such as patriotism, we are as one. I was not as informed as I am now'.

Those commenting on this question who had recorded no change in their attitudes offered various reasons for this. Such comments as 'I was and remain very eager to learn the language' and 'I have always loved and enjoyed Germany and German people. I do not need to change my opinion about them' and 'I am already interested in all aspects of German culture' reflect the fact that these learners came to the study of German already having an interest in aspects of German cultures or the cultures of other German-speaking countries. Students pointed out that they approached *Rundblick* with knowledge of Germany and German-speaking countries, as exemplified in the following two comments: 'I was personally quite exposed to German speaking countries' way of life and cultures' and 'I have known a number of German people in the past which has given me some insight into what the Germans are like as a people.' Another respondent stated: 'I never had any attitude about Germans in the first place'.

The emphasis on liking aspects of German cultures and the people of Germany, combined with personal experience through contacts (friends, family), having lived

there, or regular visits was a recurrent feature in these open-ended comments, as summarised in the following excerpt from a student: 'I believe that my attitude to the Germans agrees with the commonly held attitudes where these can be considered positive ... but differs from the commonly held attitude in some of the "negative" qualities'.

Table 1 (see Appendix 6) spells out the responses to what these learners considered the most commonly held attitudes about Germans among the British people. Thirteen students (11%) did not fill in this part of the questionnaire: the most common reason cited was: 'I can't answer these questions as I don't know what most people think...'.

The summary of the findings takes this into account and gives the figures in percentages of the overall number of answers. The 5-point Likert scale used in the questionnaire was reduced to three columns, in which 1 represents the answers given under 1 and 2 (e.g. very aggressive, fairly aggressive), 3 represents the neutral answer (neither … nor) and 5 combines points 4 and 5 on the Likert scale (e.g. fairly non-aggressive, non-aggressive).

Ninety three percent of the respondents thought that British people perceive Germans as hard-working, 93% saw Germans as efficient, 93% believed Germans to be thorough, 92% felt they were serious, and the same number (92%) regarded them as formal, whilst 87% perceived them as environmentally friendly and 84% as direct, blunt.

Beginners' German qualitative data

Six volunteers from the beginners' cohort were interviewed. They were all asked the same questions in English and their responses were recorded with their

consent. One of the recordings failed, so that a written summary was prepared

immediately after the end of the interview. The recordings were then transcribed.

These semi-structured interviews focused on all five aspects of the conceptual

framework of ICC. Four questions explored the learners' characteristics of curiosity

and openness (*savoir être*), six questions related to various aspects of knowledge

(s*avoirs*), three referred to their skills of relating and interpreting (*savoir*

comprendre), one to the skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*)

and two to critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). Appendix 5 contains the

interview questions used.

The interviews lasted between 10 and 45 minutes and provided varied responses.

The interviewees were aware of my role and my background, although this was

not made explicit in the interviews, other than identifying myself as a German

academic working at the Department of Languages. When the participants found it

difficult to relate to a particular question, I usually supplied personal experiences

that I had had whilst living abroad. I was aware that any question relating to British

stereotypes about Germans had to be phrased in such a way that it did not relate

to the individual, so that answers were as unbiased as possible, despite my being

German. The same approach was applied in carrying out interviews with the

advanced learners of German.

The findings are reported here under each of the five *savoirs* that are used to

describe the ICC framework. A sample interview is provided in Appendix 9.

Savoir être

When asked to define their own cultural identity, all respondents offered some

broad description: 'I am Welsh', 'English', 'I would say that I'm British'. In two

cases interviewees emphasized the fact that they were British rather than English.

One of the respondents did not use 'English' or 'British' as a category to describe himself. Several interviewees mentioned 'European' as one descriptor of their own cultural identity, for which one student provided the following explanation: '… I'm British but I feel quite strongly Scottish, but more than that I think European because all my children have gone abroad and now live in France.' Others offered more elaborate definitions of their own identity which included gender, ethnicity ('I'm white'), occupation ('policeman'), place of birth ('I was born in London'), and place where one lives or has been living ('I have always lived in London'). When asked about her cultural identity, one respondent defined her own identity as English 'on the basis of where I lived, my education, how I feel about myself, I suppose my predilection of [sic] reading and music.'

The interviewees were most familiar with Germany and Austria. One of them was unable to define German (or Austrian) cultural identity, other than saying that it is very diverse: 'I really could not [describe German cultural identity] … I think, you know, it's so diverse now, I would find that very difficult to define, especially without giving it a great deal of thought'. One interviewee focused on Austrians and stressed the similarities she identified between her own identity and Austrian identity: ' … I mean I don't have a sort of picture in my mind. I think they're European and they're very like me, I think. I don't feel that they're apart from me or different'.

One student stated that the Germans are very proud and that there was a clear North-South divide between the people in Germany; she regarded Germans as very friendly and compared and contrasted German culture with her own culture: '… they have a slightly different sense of humour from ours. … they have a different attitude in a way to health than the attitude that we have and it all came out in the course …'.

One participant referred to her personal experiences of Bavaria and described them as 'extremely friendly and open and generous'. This interviewee compared the British and Bavarian lifestyles: 'They have a much better way of living than we do in Britain'. A similar comparison relating to work-life balance was made by another respondent who felt that there was a better work-life balance in Germany and 'a better quality of life, less competitive, more health conscious', 'less struggle to find living accommodation, better standard of food and accommodation', 'safety and affluence'. Another interviewee thought that German cultural identity would be defined by issues around food, music, community and education.

When asked about differences in daily life and routines between the UK and German-speaking countries, one person could not think of any examples. The other interviewees considered various differences and similarities in daily life and routines between German-speaking countries and the UK, such as a 'more extended family life' and more 'sitting around the table in the evenings than we [British] do'. One student made the following observation: 'The table seems to be more the centre of the house as opposed to the sofa or the television but that might just be because I was visiting but that was the impression that I had'.

The fact that Sunday is regarded as a 'rest day' in Germany, unlike in the UK, was observed by one student: '… that makes me think as well that on Sundays, Germany … people in Germany do not do things that people in Britain would do…'. One interviewee talked about the start of the day ('I would think they probably get up early'.) and commented on the perception of Germans as hard-working: 'I think we all have a general feeling that Germans work harder than us, whether this is true or not, I don't know …'. She also compared other aspects of life in Germany with the UK; 'I think they take life more seriously than us. […] I think they probably do things more thoroughly, I think their education system is

likely to be better than ours … everybody seemed to go about their business purposefully and there is no waste of time …'.

Different eating habits, especially with regard to breakfast, were mentioned by some of the respondents.

Two interviewees stated that they did not adapt their behaviour when they were speaking to a German speaker compared to an English speaker, others mentioned speaking more slowly and precisely, pronouncing words more correctly, facing the speaker and using more visual cues, such as facial expressions. The difference between the formal form of address and the informal one was mentioned by one participant ('I'm very conscious that if I try to speak German I must stay in the formal') and one interviewee stated that she would behave differently without qualifying this comment.

Savoirs

In response to the question about what they had learned about German-speaking countries through the course, answers varied once more. They included having gained more general awareness about things in Germany, having learned about festivals, and realizing that there are German speakers in other parts of the world outside Europe: 'I wasn't aware that there were people in South America who spoke German'.

Geographical knowledge about different areas in Germany in general featured among the answers: 'Well, I've learned about the different areas of Germany … and I have learned that perhaps there's different kinds of German spoken in different areas and especially the Austrian German is different' as well as specific geographical features: 'I had never associated German … the German coastline

with seaside resorts and in the course there were several references to the seaside'.

One learner compared aspects of modern life in the UK and Germany, among them unemployment: '… one of the things that struck me was that they had some of the same problems that we have of modern life, …[I] suppose for most of my life Germany has been an example of full employment and economic growth and I hadn't realized that there was unemployment in Germany'.

Different dialects spoken in different regions and the treatment of old people in Germany were each mentioned by two interviewees. One learner emphasized the fact that she had taken the course to learn the language only: 'I took the course to learn to speak German really, rather than I think to learn about German-speaking countries'.

Two participants claimed that they had never encountered a misunderstanding when dealing with a German speaker, one of them saying that there had been none because the communication had always been in English.

One learner said that he would normally ask for clarification and observe his interlocutor's body language, while the other interviewees offered various examples such as transactions in shops being rendered unnegotiable because of linguistic misunderstandings, as in this example: '… the only thing that comes to mind is in a shop one day, I was asking for one thing and I could not make myself understood, and this particular person didn't speak any English, or appeared not to … we just didn't have a transaction'.

Participants saw dialect and accent in the UK as identifying the geographical area where a person comes from and its history: 'I suppose it's an area identification … and obviously at times it's used to make us feel very much more Scottish' and 'it signifies largely the history of the area'. One interviewee commented on the fact

that certain accents are considered 'trendy' (such as Estuary English and Irish), other interviewees mentioned the fact that dialects and accents might be looked down upon, and commented on the declining strength of most accents (apart from Geordie) in recent times due to people's greater mobility: 'None of the accents apart from the North Eastern accent, Newcastle, … are as strong as they used to be'. Generally, the interviewees regarded the role of accent and dialect in German-speaking countries as similar to that in the UK.

Overall, most of the learners who responded considered that the conventions of a dinner or birthday party would be the same in the two different countries ('I would expect to do what I would do here'). Those who perceived differences thought that a birthday party in the UK would be less formal than in Germany.

Learners rated their general knowledge about the UK as 'pretty good' or 'very good' while all of them felt that their knowledge of German-speaking countries was 'limited' or 'below average'.

Savoir comprendre

The questions concerned with the skills of relating and interpreting (*savoir comprendre)* asked students to think about commonly held stereotypes (both of the British in German-speaking countries and Germans in the UK) and their origins.

Two of the learners could not think of any stereotypes about the British; one said that 'most Germans don't have a stereotype about the Brits'. Another student said that 'there's far less stereotyping than there used to be, I think that most Germans now don't have a stereotype of an English person, certainly most young people'. Others mentioned a variety of issues, such as intolerance and looking back at the war ('I think they quite likely think that we're very intolerant and still have a very

childish attitude towards the war'), football hooliganism ('I don't know, it might have something to do with football hooliganism'), and heavy drinking ('a nation of drinkers and drunk people'). One participant commented that she was 'surprised that we don't consider how much like each other we are'.

The most commonly-held stereotypes about the Germans in the UK identified by these students was the lack of a sense of humour: 'I think possibly, the one I've heard most commonly is that Germans have no sense of humour'. Other attributes mentioned included being 'slightly cold', 'very efficient' and 'well organised', and being impolite or rude. Germans do not queue, they put beach towels onto sun loungers, and are well educated, 'stilted, formal to the extent of being aggressive' and have a rule-based society. The interviewees thought that there were no clear stereotypes of Austrians and the Swiss. One participant commented that the cause for this was lack of knowledge among the British public about the two countries: 'I think it very likely with our education system, half the young people don't know that Austria exists'. One learner felt that Austrians were regarded as a 'milder form of Germans'. Another interviewee compared the Swiss with the Germans, although she emphasized that 'the Swiss are such a mixture of people'.

Those who contemplated the origins of these stereotypes offered a variety of comments: Television and the media in general were regarded as creating some of these stereotypes: 'I think the media has a big lot to do with it'. The predominance in the public imagination of the Second World War, as perpetuated by the media, was also mentioned: 'Some of it must come from during the war because, well, so much of it is on the television and […] has been over a long period of time.'

The introduction of the package holiday in the Mediterranean featured as well: '… I also think that some years ago, when Germany started going South for their

holidays and British people started going South for their holidays … I think there was miscommunication'.

Another interviewee mentioned football as another cause: 'I also think that football has a very negative aspect [sic] on relations between countries, especially Germany and England'.

Savoir apprendre/savoir faire

The interviewees were also asked where they find information about current events in Germany. Most were informed of such events through the British media - radio, TV and print media ('I see it on television news, I read it in the newspapers, on the radio'), the German media ('…if I go to a hotel room which I sometimes do … they'll frequently have a German channel and although I don't understand a lot of what is being said, I will switch the television on and try …') their German partner, German friends ('well, I do have German friends who I email …') and the Internet ('I'd go onto Google.').

Savoir s'engager

One learner did not respond to the questions about how to assess the particular stance of a newspaper. The other learners mentioned other media, general knowledge about the reputation of a newspaper, and talking to other people as ways of gauging bias. The style of writing and use of language were mentioned, as well as the content of the newspaper ('… we have the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian*, now something that is headlines in the *Telegraph* might be, say, three inches in the *Guardian*, and vice versa. Sometimes it's the pictures that they show, the illustrations to the news, or it's adjectives that they use or … terms in general.'). The learners felt that they would take a similar approach to identifying

the stance of a German newspaper ('… if I were ever in a position I could cope with reading German newspapers, I would be able to identify something similar in the coverage, …, well, the choice of things that are on the front page …'). However, this would be made much more difficult by their restricted proficiency in German.

Advanced German quantitative data

The presentation of the findings from the sample for the advanced learners of German begins with the results from the quantitative data, collected via the pre- and post-course questionnaires. The findings from the pre-course questionnaires concentrate on the learners' experience of learning German and attitudes towards German-speaking people. The questions about gaining cultural knowledge are detailed and the findings will be presented together with the results from the post-course questionnaire, so as to allow direct comparison. The findings of the questions relating to attitudes towards German speakers follow. The qualitative data gathered through semi-structured telephone interviews are presented under the five headings for the description of the *savoirs* in the ICC framework used for this study.

Pre-course questionnaire

The experience of learning German

Sixty percent of the sample (n=58) had learned German at school, while 40% had learned German later in life. Fifty seven percent had learned German as adults, in addition to studying Open University courses. Eighty three per cent of learners had

studied the Level 2 OU German modules.[6] Seventy six percent said that they had

some qualification in German: these were wide ranging, with A-level being the

most common, followed by O level and GCSE.

Sixty four per cent of the students had lived either in Germany, or another

German-speaking country, for various lengths of time (between 3 weeks and 23

years) and a similar variety of locations, including South Tyrol, Switzerland and

Austria. Sixty two percent had travelled regularly to Germany or other German-

speaking countries. The students were also asked about which areas of German-

speaking countries they had visited. As one might expect, a huge range of areas

and locations in German-speaking countries were mentioned.

Seventy six percent of the students said that they had German-speaking relatives

and friends with whom they were in touch via different media (telephone, e-mail,

letter) and with varying levels of frequency (between 'once a year and Christmas

card' and daily telephone contact).

Thirty one percent had German-speaking business contacts, while 69% had none.

Those who had business contacts in Germany, or other German-speaking

countries, reported that the frequency of these contacts varied between

'occasionally' and 'daily'.

Table 2 lists the most commonly given reasons for studying the course. Students

could give as many reasons as they wished.

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[6] Originally, there was one Level 2, 30 point module which was then remade into a 60 point module. In order to allow students who had studied the 30 point version of the module, a top-up module was designed for a limited period. This is the reason why students had two different pathways to study Level 2 German at the OUUK.

Table 2 Reasons for studying the course

reasons for studying the course
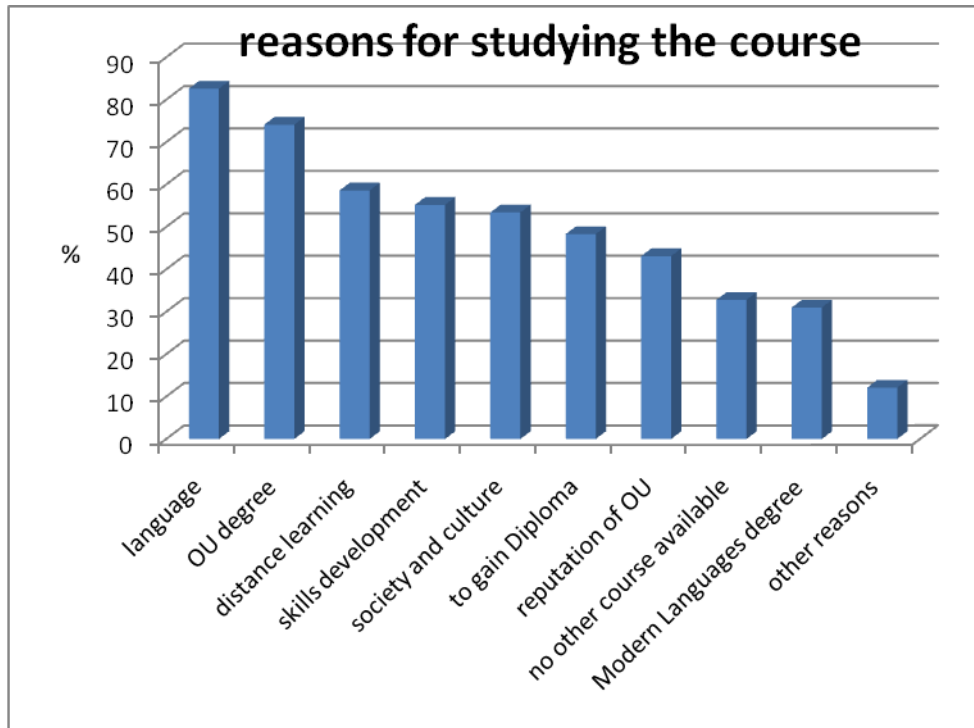
Key:

language = to consolidate and extend my knowledge of, and competence in the German language

OU degree = to contribute towards my OU degree

Distance learning = because distance learning suits me best

Skills development = to develop and extend my skills in analyzing, critically evaluating and synthesizing

written and spoken German

Society and culture = to develop my awareness of the society and culture of contemporary Germany

To gain Diploma = to gain an OU Diploma in German

Reputation of OU = the Open University has a good reputation

No other course available = because there was no other course like this available to me

Modern Languages degree = to gain a degree in Modern Languages

The reason most frequently cited (86%) was that the students wanted to extend

and consolidate their knowledge of the German language. The second most

popular reason for study was that the course contributed to on OU degree (74%).

Fifty nine percent of the respondents stated that distance learning suited them

best. The fourth most often cited reason was the ability to develop and extend their

skills in analyzing, critically evaluating and synthesizing written and spoken

German (55%), whereas developing an awareness of the society and culture of

contemporary Germany (53%) was the fifth most frequently given reason. Fewer

than half the students were motivated by gaining a Diploma in German (48%), and

even fewer by the good reputation of the Open University (43%). Thirty three

percent said that there was no other course like L313 available and 31% wanted to

gain a degree specifically in Modern Languages.

Questions about gain in cultural knowledge

The knowledge-related questions in the questionnaire (see Appendix 4, Questions

5-23) covered eight areas (see Table 3 below) which mirror the course structure.

As the course does not deal exclusively with Germany, some questions related to

other German-speaking countries.

Table 3 Knowledge questions

Politics and structures
German history
The German language
Immigration and emigration
Arts and architecture
Post '45 literature
Science and technology
Germany and Europe

Students were asked a number of questions about each of these areas to gauge

their possible gain in knowledge. Open-ended, closed and multiple choice

questions were used here. The findings will be compared with the findings of the

post-course questionnaire and reported in that section.

Attitudes towards Germans

As for the beginners, attitudinal data were collected on a five point Likert scale.

The students were asked to consider what a compatriot might think about

Germans, and what their attitudes towards Germany and German people would

be.

Nine percent of the respondents did not answer this part of the questionnaire for a

variety of reasons, such as 'I can't speak for the British people', or 'I have no idea

what most people in this country think about Germany', or because they were not

British. Some left certain adjectives out with the explanation: 'I only marked a few

because most people understand that there are great differences between, say,

Prussians and Bavarians'.

The summary of the findings takes this into account and the figures presented are

a percentage of the overall number of answers for each set of attributes. The 5-

point scale was reduced to three columns, in which 1 represents the answers

given under 1 and 2 (e.g. very aggressive, fairly aggressive), 3 represents the

neutral answer (neither … nor) and 5 combines points 4 and 5 on the Likert scale

(e.g. fairly non-aggressive, non-aggressive).

As Table 4 (see Appendix 7) shows, answers to the pre-course questionnaire

revealed that the Germans were predominantly held to be environmentally-friendly

(98%), thorough (98%), efficient (96%), hard-working (96%), tidy (94%), serious

(94%), clean (92%), prosperous (91%), reliable and inflexible, rigid (both 90%). As

far as humour is concerned, 88% of the respondents thought that the Germans

were fairly or very humourless.

Forty nine students added open-ended comments to the answer about how their attitudes compared to those they described in the previous question. The main themes of these comments are summarised with relevant short excerpts below. Many students commented on the reasons behind the stereotypical views that many British people hold about Germans: 'Many British people still base their opinion about Germans in the Second World War'. Another student commented: '... [the British are] still viewing them with old fashioned principles relating to the previous wars'.

The majority of learners who offered comments stated that their attitudes differed from those of other British people in a positive way: 'My reactions are certainly different and I do not feel the same way as my fellow Brits. This is because I have been living in Germany for a very long time and therefore have established the true German thinking, culture and attitudes they have'. The fact that a considerable number of these students had first-hand experience of living in Germany and/or working with speakers of German came up as a reason for their different perceptions in a number of comments, such as: 'I can beg to differ after living in Germany and having worked with Germans'.

They said that they were less inclined to generalise, and found it impossible to put labels on Germans as a whole: '...I think that speaking a language makes you more aware of its native speakers as individuals, makes it harder to make sweeping statements about them as a group'. One student summarised his/her efforts made to persuade fellow Brits that Germans are not like their stereotypes: 'I have tried for many years to persuade my work colleagues and friends that Germany and Germans are different to the perception in most British people's mind, exemplified by the gutter tabloid press, such as the *Sun*. I have mostly

failed'. This comment ended on a more positive note, saying that this was good news for the student and his/her partner when they holiday in Germany.

One student summed his/her attitude up as follows: 'Actually visiting Germany and studying German gives a more enlightened idea of Germany and its people', while another student stressed the importance of study: 'As a student of German I feel that I have been able to get beyond stereotypes and learn about real Germany – its history and diversity' while another student stated: 'I think there is a lot of truth in the term "travel broadens the mind" but learning a language has this effect, too'.

One respondent mentioned the effect of the 2006 Football World Cup explicitly, as it was successfully hosted by Germany: 'Thankfully the Football World Cup last year [in 2006] was a mechanism which allowed Germany to show its true self, thus bringing the old clichés to the grave'.

Post-course questionnaire

The post-course questionnaire was returned by 52% of the students who had returned the pre-course questionnaire (n=30) – the majority being English (67%), 10% Irish, with one Scottish, one Welsh, one German, one French, one Polish, one Hungarian and one student who described herself/himself as British.

When asked about their knowledge about German-speaking countries after finishing the course, 97% thought that they knew more about German-speaking countries, their cultures and their people. The one respondent who answered with 'No' stated that s/he had not gained any knowledge because s/he grew up in Germany.

Similarly, 97% of the students believed that learning about other cultures and their customs can help them to reflect on their own culture and customs.

Questions about gain in cultural knowledge

The findings reported in this section are based on data from both the pre- and the

post-course questionnaire. These data are compared to ascertain whether the

claim that these learners had gained knowledge about Germany and other

German-speaking countries can be substantiated empirically.

German politics and structure

Students were asked about the reasons for the development of the German

Federal system at the beginning and after the end of the course. In the first

questionnaire, 74% of the respondents identified the fact that Germany was made

up of many small states and political units in its history as the main reason for the

development of the Federal system; this figure increased to 83% after the study of

Variationen. Fifty eight percent claimed that the Allies had set up the system in

1945 at the beginning of the course, this rose to 80% after the end of the course.

Students were asked to identify the main German political parties on the basis of

brief descriptions. The Green party was identified most often (91%), while just over

half were able to identify all the other political parties. Asked again after the end of

the course, all students (100%) were able to identify the Green party correctly,

while 80% identified the CSU, 70% the CDU, 67% the SPD, 63% the FDP and

PDS respectively; the REP party was identified by 53% of the respondents (see

Table 5). Overall, the students increased their knowledge of German political

parties, the percentage of correct identification of the parties rose between 7% for

the Liberals and 23% for the CSU, with the exception of the right-wing

Republikaner where the level of identification stayed the same.

Table 5 The political parties in Germany in 2006/7 named by advanced German students in %, pre- and post-course questionnaire
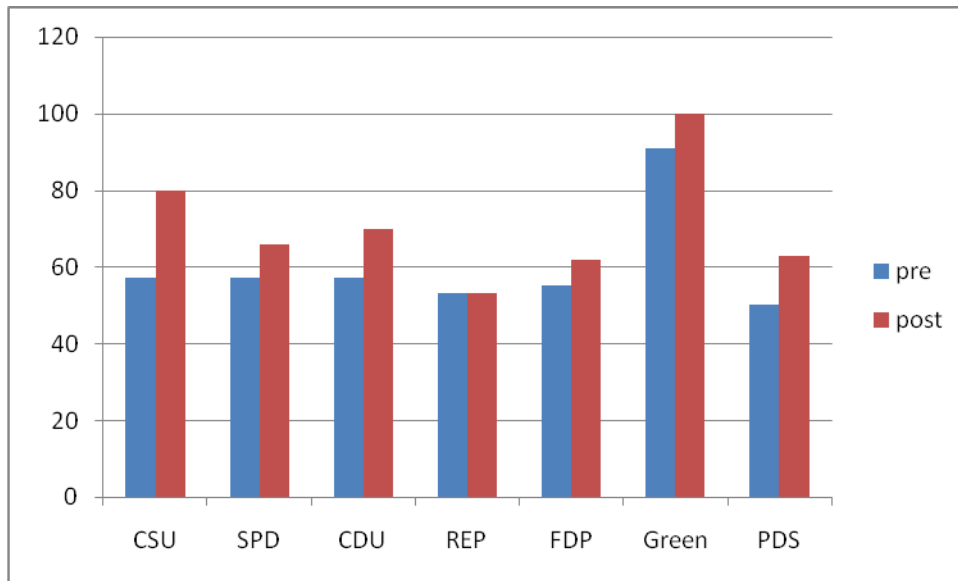
Students were asked to name three German chancellors who had been in office since 1949. The best known Chancellor – both before and after the study of *Variationen* – was Helmut Kohl (72% and 90%). Adenauer was identified by 43% pre- and 60% post-course, while Willy Brandt scored 43% at the beginning of the course and 27% at the end. Merkel and Schröder became better known – they were mentioned by 40% of the students at the end. All the other chancellors were mentioned by less than a third of the respondents (see Table 6).

Table 6 German chancellors named by advanced German students in %, pre- and post-course questionnaire
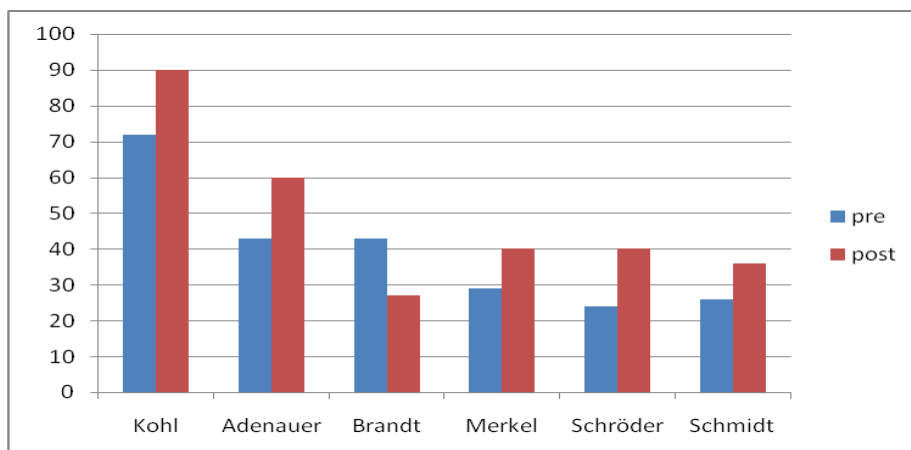
German history

Students were asked about the German *Sonderweg* – an historical concept which was taught in the course. There was a substantial increase in understanding over the course: the percentage of students who said that this concept provides evidence for Germany's historical development being substantially different from other European countries rose from 36% to 67%, while the percentage of no answers decreased from 48% to 20%. The number of students who said that the *Sonderweg* provided proof of Germany's elites being anti-democratic and authoritarian rose from 21% to 33%. 34% said that it offered an explanation as to why Germany was the only European country to give up a democratic system of government after 1929.[7] This figure rose to 43% in the post-course questionnaire. At the beginning of the course, 48% of the students summarised the causes of the uprising in the GDR in 1953 with varying degrees of detail and accuracy, while 52% did not answer this question. At the end of the course, 73% of the respondents summarised the causes of this event, mostly citing the increase in production norms as the main cause, while only 27% failed to provide an answer.

The German language

At the beginning of the course, 91% of the respondents gave the answer that dialect is an integral part of regional identity, followed by 72% who felt that people were taking an active interest in preserving and maintaining their dialect. Just under half (47%) believed that dialects were dying out all over Germany as a consequence of the internationalisation of the media. Twenty nine percent said that many Germans speak only dialect and not standard German. When asked again after the course, there was no significant change in the learners' views of

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[7] Please note that the phrasing in the questionnaire was erroneous, as Germany was not the only country in Europe to give up a democratic system.

the role of dialect in forming regional identity (93%), however, the number of

respondents stating that Germans take an active interest in their dialect rose from

72% to 90%. Similarly, the percentage of respondents thinking that German

dialects were dying out rose from 47% to 66%. The percentage of students who

believed that Germans only speak dialect fell from 29% to 17%.

In the pre-course questionnaire, just under half (48%) did not provide an answer in

response to a question about a German ethnic minority that had lived in Germany

for over a thousand years with its own traditions and language (the Sorbs). Twenty

four percent could identify the Sorbs and where they were located. The other

answers were incorrect (28%). This changed dramatically after the course: all

students (100%) identified the Sorbs correctly and most of them could specify their

location.

Immigration and emigration

At the beginning of the course, 33% of the respondents identified the correct

answer about the Potsdam Agreement stipulating the removal of Germans living in

the former German areas east of the Oder-Neisse line. Thirty six percent gave no

answer and 31% ticked incorrect statements. When asked again after the study of

the course, 77% were able to identify the correct answer.

A similar increase in knowledge can be seen in the correct definition of the term

Aussiedler as ethnic Germans living in parts of the USSR and other Eastern Bloc

countries: this rose from 69% to 97%.

The percentage of students able to identify accurately the countries of origin of the

so-called *Gastarbeiter* rose from 79% to 97%: Turkey was mentioned most often,

followed by Yugoslavia, Greece and Italy.

When asked about the major changes in the pattern of immigration into Germany between the 1950s/1960s and today, 64% considered that the countries of origin of the immigrants had changed, with 52% opting for a shift from unskilled to skilled labour requirements and 45% for the regulations for admission having changed. The percentage of correct answers changed significantly in the post-course questionnaire where 87% ticked countries of origin, followed by changes in regulation (80%) and a shift from unskilled to skilled labour (77%).

Arts and architecture

The first question in this category related to Dresden and its architectural sites. Respondents were asked to name up to four famous architectural sites there. There was a significant change in the answers before and after the course. The three most popular sites mentioned in the pre-course questionnaire were the *Frauenkirche* (28%), the *Dresdner Zwinger* (26%) and the *Semperoper* (17%) while 43% did not answer this question. After studying the course, 67% named the *Dresdner Zwinger*, 60% the *Frauenkirche* and 47% the *Semperoper*. Thirty seven percent named the *Taschenbergpalais* as one of the Dresden architectural landmarks at the end of the course (see Table 7).

Table 7 Architectural sites in Dresden in %, advanced German students, pre- and post-course questionnaire
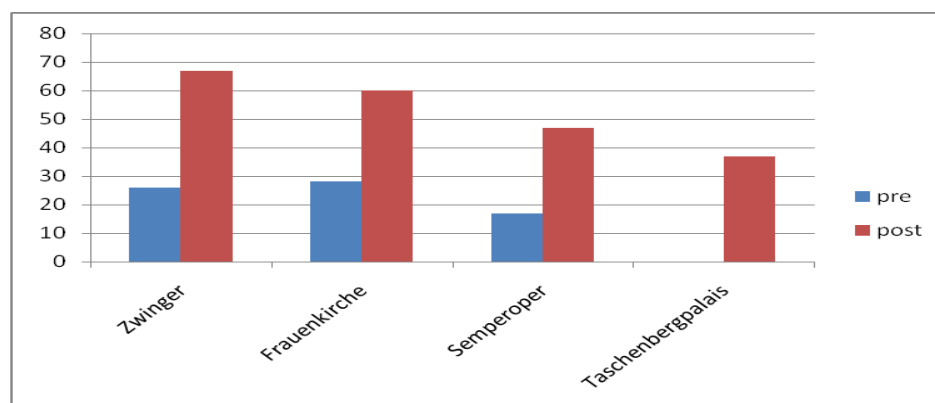
When asked about artists who had lived and worked in the GDR, 57% of the students gave no answer in either questionnaire. Generally, there were not many correct answers: a few students could name Wolf Biermann, Franz Fühmann and Bertolt Brecht. In the post-course questionnaire, Wolfgang Mattheuer and Caspar David Friedrich were mentioned most frequently, the latter incorrectly as his life and work predated the GDR by more than a century; all other artists were mentioned by only a couple of students.

Post '45 literature

Questioned about the *Gruppe* 47, there was a considerable change between the two sets of results. Initially, only 10% of the students identified them as a group of writers and critics, 50% did not respond to this question while the remaining 40% offered incorrect answers. Asked again after having studied *Variationen*, 53% of the respondents provided a correct answer, 37% offered an incorrect answer and 10% did not respond.

Students were also given a list of names of women writers from German-speaking countries and asked to identify those who achieved literary fame after 1945. Fifty two percent provided no answer at the beginning, 34% identified Christa Wolf and 24% Elfriede Jelinek, 14% identified Ingeborg Bachmann. Again, there was a clear gain in knowledge at the end of the course: 93% of the respondents could identify Christa Wolf, followed by 63% identifying Elfriede Jelinek and 37% Ingeborg Bachmann.

Science and technology

At the beginning of the course students were able to name the following German Nobel prize winners in descending order: Albert Einstein, Max Planck and Conrad

Röntgen; but more than half (55%) could not provide an answer at all. In response to the same question in the post-course questionnaire, 73% of the students mentioned Albert Einstein, followed by Conrad Röntgen (53%) and Max Planck (43%). Christine Nüsslein-Vollhard who featured in the course, but not in the initial responses, was mentioned by 30% of the respondents in the second questionnaire. Generally, the students were aware of a wider spread of names at the end of the course.

The Transrapid was correctly identified as a magnetic levitation train by 40% of the participants at the beginning and by 80% at the end. At the beginning 24% provided no answer and 36% gave an incorrect answer, whilst at the end of the course only 20% gave an incorrect answer.

Germany and Europe

Whereas the majority of students were unable to name the prestigious prize usually awarded annually in the city of Aachen (60%) at the beginning of the course, at the end 87% correctly identified the *Internationaler Karlspreis*: an increase from 24%.

In the first questionnaire, only 12% of the students could name at least one winner of the prize, while 88% did not answer. In the second questionnaire, a third of the respondents were able to name Winston Churchill as one of the prize winners, 20% gave no answer while the rest of the answers were spread across sixteen prize winners in addition to Churchill.

Attitudes towards Germans

As with the pre-course questionnaire, the five-point Likert scale was consolidated into a scale of three (see Table 8, Appendix 8). Figures are given in percentages, to allow for comparability across the different sample sizes.

Respondents indicated that the Germans are commonly seen as efficient (100%), environmentally-friendly, hard-working, serious and prosperous (96%), clean, humourless, reliable, thorough and tidy (93%).

The respondents were equally divided when asked whether their attitudes towards Germans had changed during the course of study. There was also an almost equal split in response to the question about whether studying the course *Variationen* had played a role in this. 50% said 'Yes', 46% said 'No', 4% did not answer this question.

All the students offered open-ended comments of varying lengths in their answers to the question as to whether their own attitudes towards Germans differed from those of the average British person. The main points will be summarised below.

Students emphasized that they did not share the negative views that their compatriots held about the Germans and gave reasons for this:

> 'Yes, my attitudes are different. This is due to studying languages (and hence other cultures) from school onwards and through working in an international environment. Studying *Variationen* has given me a greater understanding of the history of Germany (and enabled me to position it in the broader European historical context) and a much better appreciation of continental European attitudes towards the European Union'.

Apart from studying languages and cultures and working in particular environments, students commented as well on the fact that they had first-hand

experience of German speakers through living in the country: 'My attitudes to German people is [sic] based on living in Frankfurt for over a year'.

Respondents commented on the attitudes of the British media: 'I find in particular the attitude of the British press, TV and radio frankly Neanderthal as it relates to Germany', and the influence of Anglo-German history: 'In general, British people's attitudes towards Germans are still very much shaped by "memories" of the Second World War – or rather the media's reconstruction of it'.

They stressed the similarities between the UK and Germany – both are European countries – and reflected on their attitudes, shaped through their study and travel: 'As a student of German who has visited Germany several times and who has German friends, I am perhaps more tolerant and understanding of the "average" German than the average British man or woman'.

One student commented that the process of attitudinal change was a long and slow one, requiring improved insights into aspects of German life and culture: 'Since studying German (this course plus its OU predecessors) my attitudes have definitely changed. I have much deeper and wider insights now, and generally have a much more sympathetic view. This was a long and gradual process'.

Advanced German – qualitative data

The six interviewees were asked identical questions relating to the five *savoirs* (see Appendix 5). Two of the interviewees were male, four female; one of them was Irish, the other five were British. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and lasted between 25 and 75 minutes. A sample interview is provided in Appendix 10.

Savoir être

When invited to describe their own cultural identity, most students began by mentioning their nationality ('I am English, white English', 'I am partly Scottish, partly English', 'I am Irish, I am a quarter English') and then defined their identity in more detail by adding different aspects to this first definition: the places they live in ('I would consider myself a Londoner') and where they were born ('Well, I am born and bred in Dublin'). Another respondent defined herself as follows: 'I am very much a person from the Southern part of England. And the environment that I have worked in means that I've had lots of connections with people from other parts of Europe'. This quotation exemplifies the dimension of the individuals' professional identity which came up in several of the interviews ('I am a retired school teacher', '... the work that I have done has had a big impact on my identity...') as well as feeling European: 'And I suppose I think of myself first as Scottish, second as British and probably I also think of myself as being European'. In addition, ethnicity ('I am white English'), education ('It is important to me that I had quite a lot of education.') and family background ('I suppose my marriage and my family...') were mentioned. One student said that he grew up with several cultures: 'My mum was German, although we never spoke German together and my dad was native English.' The student from Ireland stressed how different she was from British people: 'I am quite different from, you know, British people'. When asked about German cultural identity, students gave varied responses to this question and emphasized the lack of a single identity: 'Well, there isn't one single one'. Students then elaborated on the influence of the various regions and thought that Germans had a strong local or regional identity: '[It] seems to come out quite strongly actually that it was a country of region ... of various regions, so there is a sort of, I suppose, there is greater German cultural identity. But there is

also regional, localised feeling of sense of belonging, I think it is'. This strong

regional cultural identity was compared with the UK: '... Germany has quite a

strong regional cultural identity, much like there is in Britain ...'. This similarity

between the UK and Germany did not match the experience of another

respondent: 'In my experience, Germans identify much more with their region,

their land rather than their country, more so than the English, British people,

English people. They would say I am British, I am Welsh, I am Scottish but they

wouldn't go beyond that'.

Students frequently mentioned the influence of history in shaping German identity,

such as the legacy of the Second World War and the German *Sonderweg*: 'I think

there is the historical background that comes into it. The idea of *Sonderweg*, the

fact that they didn't have the same sort of revolutions within the country that

enabled France to shake free of its aristocracy at the time of the revolution...'.

Two of the interviewees differentiated between West and East Germans and

stressed the importance of the East-West divide in German identity. The

Westerners were regarded as more materialistic and proud: 'I see the Westerners

as [a] very much materialistic, proud race, people who see their way forward as

leaders within Europe. The Easterners are very different. ... Just after the wall

came down and reunification I was there [in the East, UB addition]. And I found

them bewildered by the concept of Western democracy'. Another student shared

these observations and compared East Germans with the English: 'West

Germans, in general, seem to be much more confident, and East Germans

actually more like the English, Anyway, they are more, sort of, unassuming and,

you know, modest'.

One student based her responses on Austria, as she was more familiar with

Austria than with Germany. She said that Austrian identity is closely linked to the

history of the Habsburg monarchy. When prompted, she mentioned the relatively short period of Germany's existence as a nation, being unified only in the late 19th century. She talked about football and international tournaments, such as World or European Cups, and the 'incredible team spirit' which she considered to be a German characteristic. She also considered that religion had shaped German identity: 'There is again a North-South divide there. Obviously the Northern half of Germany is protestant, or, you know, *evangelisch* ... or even Calvinist ... Whereas the South, particularly Bavaria and obviously Austria, is Catholic'.

When asked about differences in daily life and routines between German-speaking countries and their own country, students identified work as one area which was different. They perceived differences in terms of the start and finishing time of work; there was also a clearer separation between work and leisure: 'They have a work culture, it starts when you get there and it stops when you leave. There is a very clear divide between the two'. Punctuality was also regarded as different: 'You have an appointment and you have to be somewhere at 9 o'clock, it is 9 o'clock and that is big, that was one thing I noticed'.

Germans were perceived as having more of a routine and 'German people like to do things what they call "properly"'. They were seen as more regimented than the British and more organised: 'And people like to be more organised. There is less room for ... deviation from the rules'.

Eating habits were also seen as different, with many Germans having lunch as their main meal and generally eating more bread than the British. They also made a point of Germans celebrating festivals such as Advent. This led another respondent to conclude: 'They seem to have more sense of traditional culture'.

When asked whether they would adapt their behaviour when talking to a German speaker, the interviewees offered different responses. Half of them would not

adapt their behaviour, the other half would. One student said that she would not adapt her behaviour, apart from the initial handshake. Another argued that it depended on whether German or English was being spoken. One student said that it depended on whether he knew the person or not: 'Okay, there is a difference between whether you know the person or not. I don't if it is obviously someone you know, say my friend in Berlin, then I'd say it is fairly natural'. Those who reflected on a change in behaviour most frequently mentioned adapting their language ('You know because you are speaking a foreign language, [I] reacted more formally or diffidently than perhaps I would do in this country'). Other adaptations of language use would be: avoiding certain idioms, colloquialisms and not assuming the same cultural knowledge as with a British counterpart ('I would try to avoid as much as possible ... real colloquialisms ... you also got some expectations about what they understand about your culture, so that ... you are unlikely to launch into some discussion about politics that you might do with somebody from Britain'). One student reported that she had been told that she changed her facial expressions and use of hand gestures, depending on which language she used, while another with extensive international experience suggested: 'I suspect, I'm a bit of a chameleon'.

Savoirs

All interviewees said that they had learned new things from studying the course. The importance and variety of regions was mentioned ('… a lot about the different areas of the country, which I was quite unaware of.', 'I really, I actually really enjoyed the unit that was about *Ostfriesland*'), but history, German literature and language were also mentioned: 'That was a very interesting part how the language

had developed. I did know something about that before but it was good to hear about this in more detail'.

German history featured in the response from this student – a resident in Germany for over a decade – who commented on the importance of the many small German states and the impact this had on Germans: 'I'd been living there for fourteen years and I hadn't consciously … noticed that *Kleinstaaterei* played such a fundamental role in the way people think, the way people identify, what people identify with in Germany.' Another participant talked about the uprising in East Germany in 1953: 'I don't think I'd ever even heard of the uprising in Berlin, in East-Berlin in 1953. I heard about Hungary and about Czechoslovakia and that was it'.

A student commented on learning more about migration: 'I knew superficially about it but now I know a lot more about [the] history of immigrants in Germany'. Most students did not initially think that they had ever experienced any misunderstandings. However, when prompted, they recalled a variety of situations which were based on either linguistic or cultural misunderstandings. One example given was the different use of the word 'friend' in English and in German: 'The English people say "I have got a friend" [about] someone you just know and get on with reasonably well. But again the German definition of friend is a lot tighter'. Another example revolved around the word 'missed' which sounds like a swear word in German ('*Mist*'); a further example was to do with the formal use of the German language: 'I remember people being shocked when people hadn't been addressed formally'. Humour was identified as another source of misunderstandings: 'Over the sense of humour. I used to find that quite frequently I would burst out laughing when they saw no reason to laugh'.

The interviewees talked about the roles of dialect and accent in the UK and Germany: some thought that regional dialects in the UK have a slightly negative connotation, depending on the dialect, being denigrated and perceived as uneducated: 'Some accents have stigmata attached to them … For instance, Liverpool, Irish is looked upon as … to sound uneducated. Cockney may be uneducated but it's friendly and affable'.

They related dialect and accent to class and geographical location in the UK: 'It is a class marker and a marker from what part of the country you come'. Generally, the students believed that accent and dialect were used in a similar way in the UK and Germany as markers of geographical origin and for a particular region. One interviewee commented on the difference between the use of dialect and accent in the UK and Germany: 'It always astonished me that [in Germany] I can always ask for [dialect speakers] to speak High German and they will always do so without blinking an eyelid. If you did that in this country to a Geordie or a Scotsman you probably get a very sharp, rude response'.

Students did not perceive differences in social conventions and rules between the two countries as significant; however, being punctual ('Punctual means early in German') was considered to be important behaviour in a German-speaking context.

One interviewee stated that invitations to someone's home would be issued more quickly and easily in a British context than in Germany: 'Another interesting thing is that relatively early on we'd invite people to our houses'. Another observation was the convention that one would not offer birthday wishes before the actual birthday in Germany, while this would be quite normal in the UK: 'People would pretend that the birthday wasn't happening until the day. Which is quite strange because the Brits will say "many happy returns for tomorrow because I won't be able to see

you tomorrow" and that just can't happen in Germany'. Students mentioned a

higher level of formality and addressing people using the polite form of 'you' in

German. One interviewee identified a difference in dining etiquette: 'I'd be very

careful over table manners because they differ between the two countries … how

to hold your knife and fork, where to put your hands on the table'. The same

interviewee recalled differences in drinking etiquette, too: 'The Germans will wait

so if you don't want any more, in Germany … they don't top it up'. Two of the

interviewees said that they would read up on etiquette for social occasions or ask

colleagues and friends who were knowledgeable about such issues to avoid

making any mistakes.

The interviewees rated their knowledge of their own country as very good, though

they felt that their general knowledge about German-speaking countries was

slightly less advanced.

Savoir comprendre

Students gave different, and slightly contradictory answers to the question as to

how Germans might perceive the British. One learner discussed the image of the

British held in Hamburg: 'In Hamburg they think the British are rather … fine

mannered, … very cultured and very polite'. This was then followed by a comment

about food and drink: 'We drink Guinness all the time, which is nothing to do with

England but it's an English beer for them, … our food is terrible'. This image of the

good mannered Brits was not shared by other students: '… probably that we are

lazy and somewhat disorganized … that we are quite laid back compared with

Germany'. Another interviewee declared that the stereotypes she used to hold

were dissipated over time 'because they are human beings like everybody else'.

She then offered an image of the British as 'reserved, with fixations about

conversations about the weather, difficult to get to know'. Others felt that Germans would probably not have particularly positive views of the British, citing football hooliganism, unregulated Anglo-American capitalism and the British willingness to engage in wars and being 'still colonialist', 'they just have an empire' and 'are not brilliant with languages'. Another student thought that the image of the British in Germany would be 'uncouth, … not very good mannered, impolite, loud, boorish, ignorant'.

When asked about commonly held views of the Germans in the UK, the importance of the two World Wars and football were mentioned several times: 'I think here, … the impressions are getting set by the media. They still tend to hark back to two World Wars, one World Cup'. The role of the media and football was also raised by another student: 'You can … glean it sometimes, you know the awful tabloid headlines every time there is football on and they always drag up 1966'. One respondent commented about the war: 'It is almost as if England hasn't moved on'.

Other stereotypes that featured in the students' responses were 'arrogant, humourless' as well as 'punctuality and rules and regulations, always obeying the rules'. Germans were perceived as 'very orderly and disciplined, militaristic' and very 'efficient, almost robotic'. A particular image of the Germans was evoked by one respondent, who thought that the typical British stereotype about Germans included 'eating sauerkraut, lederhosen, feathered hats and playing brass bands and speaking in a heavily clipped German accent'.

Another student reiterated the importance of the Second World War and the consequences of the negative view of the Germans:

> 'Generally people feel the Germans are terribly good at engineering, vastly
>
> efficient and arrogant and it is difficult in Britain to discredit the whole

business of the war because people's perception, even if they weren't alive

then, is coloured by it. And so it is, I think, Germans tend to get seen as

aggressive even if they are just perhaps efficient rather than aggressive.

And in general I think there is a very negative view. To be honest, to the

extent that you frequently get asked Why are you studying German?'.

Fewer students offered an opinion on typical views held about Austrians and

Swiss – though Austrians were linked to the image in the film *The Sound of Music*

('I think a lot of the stereotypical ideas about the Austrians comes through the way

they are represented through the media, like the *Sound of Music*, they are music

lovers, they enjoy themselves up on the hillside'). Other features of Austria

mentioned were that they had a nice countryside, they ate cakes, wore lederhosen

and were 'very good at skiing' which led one respondent to summarize this

perception as a 'holiday image'. The Swiss were seen as being very well off,

having very strict banking laws – which meant that they attracted money from all

over the world –, having cuckoo clocks and chocolate.

In general, students thought that most stereotypes originated from the two World

Wars and, to some extent, from football. They thought that these stereotypes were

based on ignorance and were slowly changing; nevertheless, they are still being

perpetuated through parts of the British media, and in the way Germans are

portrayed in comedy programmes: 'Lots [of stereotypes] have built up over a long

period of time and because [of that] stereotypes now are often fairly out of date by

a long, long way. I think quite a lot of them date back from a hundred years ago, or

certainly fifty years ago. And they then just kind of get passed on, like folklore … or

they are like myths and old stories that you are getting told when you are a child'.

One respondent pointed out the purpose of stereotypes: 'People like to look back,

People have these images, people have that firm image in their heads onto which to hook things. And people … just like to work with these images in your head because life gets a lot more uncertain if you haven't got these images in your head'.

Savoir apprendre/savoir faire

The six interviewees drew on different media to inform themselves about current affairs. Some depended almost entirely on Internet sources, subscribing and bookmarking certain websites in German-speaking countries: 'Internet, yes, I suppose that is the main, my main source of German news'. Students bookmarked and received a variety of different Internet sites, including daily online services from *Deutsche Welle*, *Der Spiegel* and *Stern* or a variety of German, Austrian and Swiss daily newspapers:

'I bookmarked the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and *der Standard* and the *Neue Zürcher*, so if I had time I could just look and see what was going on there and if there was something interesting that had been touched upon in the English speaking media but I wanted to find out a bit more I could look it up …'. While this student had a complementary approach, using German-speaking media as well as British, others used primarily British media to keep themselves up-to-date: 'I often read the international pages in the weekend papers'. Others talked exclusively to friends or business contacts about current affairs: 'Almost entirely through contacts with friends. I have a lot of friends and we are in frequent contact.', 'Yes, yes, what is the economic situation of the country and things like comparing what is happening in Germany, Angela Merkel to the time in Britain when we had Margaret Thatcher. Yes, I have discussed it with German colleagues and with my Swiss colleagues I discuss Swiss issues, European issues'. One learner gained

information about current affairs from his own, often German students: 'I try to get all my information from my students, because I am not the kind of person to sit down and read the newspapers in any great detail'.

Savoir s'engager

The interviewees described in some detail how they would recognize a particular bias in the British print media, relying heavily on knowledge acquired from a variety of sources, including analyzing the media at university: 'I actually know how … I grew up with them and plus when I went to college … we spent a great deal of time picking apart newspapers…' or talking about this in the family: 'I am aware of bias in other newspapers from discussions with my husband who is interested in that sort of thing'. Another student summed up the different influences on newspaper bias as follows: 'What my parents said, what other people have said, what other papers say about each other and through what I have read before'. They suggested that there were certain pointers to the stance of a newspaper, such as commentaries ('It is clear from the columnists'), criticism of certain policies and parties ('I guess I would pick up the stance on the government', 'it is usually the editorial stance of the paper which will generally … not be … supportive of the government'), and the language used: 'The tone and the choice of idiom. You know the *Express* would use [a] sort of slightly … teacher-like tone and they would use … quite a lot of idiomatic language … whereas the *Times* and the *Financial Times* and maybe also the *Telegraph* tend to express themselves a little bit more, well in more interesting prose I suppose you could say'. One student mentioned as well the ownership of the newspaper as an indicator of the political stance.

When asked how they would recognize a particular stance in German-speaking media, they acknowledged that this would be more difficult without living

in the country and having the cultural context that they had in their own country: 'It would obviously be much harder because you are not so familiar with the individual politicians and the events that are taking place'. One student stated that she would not be able to recognize such a bias 'unless it was really blatant' while others suggested that their approach to finding out about this would be similar to the one used for British media: 'I suppose, I would go about it in the same way than I would look at it [in the UK] and I would look at what they wrote about politics, and that is where I start'.

Several interviewees referred to their own experience and perceptions of any possible bias of newspapers and magazines in German-speaking countries. One learner opined that German newspapers would be 'reporting news without going into a great deal of commentary'. One student quoted a concrete example of how he discovered a certain bias when researching for his extended essay at the end of the course. At the time, migration was very much in the news and the government planned to hold a so-called integration summit to which ethnic minority groups were invited, this was boycotted by some Turkish groups:

> '[the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*] was very, very scathing about them [the Turkish groups boycotting the summit, UB] and how ridiculous they were and […] that [it] is really setting back the course of integration […] I almost just took it as that, yes, it was very persuasive, yes, it makes pretty good arguments, but it was only presenting one side of the story. And it was only then that I found another article from the *Stern* [which] actually said "well, there is another point of view" and it explained why these groups are boycotting it …'.

Analysis and discussion of findings

The data collected for this project offered considerable insights into the learning of these two different cohorts of students, their background, pre- and post-course knowledge, attitudes, values and beliefs. The quantitative and qualitative data collected provided a wide range of responses to the research questions and the research hypothesis. The quantitative data collected through questionnaires offer considerable evidence to identify those aspects of intercultural communicative competence that could be evaluated by this methodological approach, in particular background data, knowledge, knowledge gain (*savoirs*) and attitudes. The qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews by telephone covered all five *savoirs* and made substantial and rich data available, demonstrating the validity and viability of the framework for ICC as used for this study. The analysis and discussion of the findings begins with a discussion of the quantitative data and then move on to analyzing and discussing the qualitative data.

Questionnaire data

Aims and motives

Both the similarities and differences between the two student samples are considerable. One obvious difference between the German beginners and advanced students was their motivation for studying. The beginners' top reasons for studying the course did not change over the life of the course, identifying these learners as wanting to learn German primarily for pleasure, for travel and as an intellectual challenge. Gaining a qualification in German, learning German for work-related reasons and living in a German-speaking country were less important to these students. For Level 3 students of German, gaining a qualification was of greater importance. Seventy four percent studied the advanced German course to

gain an OU degree, although not necessarily one in Modern Languages (quoted by 31%) or the lower ranking Diploma in German (48%). They wanted primarily to consolidate and extend their knowledge of the German language (88%), while awareness of German-speaking societies and cultures was quoted by 53% as their motivation. Only 52% of the beginners' cohort mentioned gaining credits for a qualification in German as their reason for studying. This finding offers evidence that both beginners and advanced adult learners of German still have a strong focus on linguistic proficiency, whereas the acquisition of knowledge and awareness of German-speaking countries and their cultures is less important as a reason for study. One of the beginner level students of German summed up his or her attitude very clearly: 'Had I wished to learn about German culture or geography – I would have chosen a different course. My aim was to improve speaking skills'. This mindset, which is shared by a considerable number of OU distance language learners, contradicts what the literature analysed in the literature review for this project stresses: That culture and language learning are inseparable and a strong emphasis is put on culture teaching (see for instance Kramsch, 1993 and Byram, 1997b). However, this is not reflected in the views of a considerable number of these adult learners, even those advanced students of German studying a course with a very strong emphasis on culture learning. This reflects a tension between theory and practice in current language and culture teaching which merits further attention. It demonstrates that learners believe that mastery of the language and acquiring proficiency can be achieved as a skill, without engaging in learning about culture. In this study, the vast majority of the students reported a gain in knowledge, but learning about culture was not the **prime** motivation for studying their respective courses.

Knowledge and knowledge gain

Generally, the advanced students brought more first-hand experience and knowledge of Germany and German-speaking countries to their study than the beginners. Sixty four percent of the advanced students of German had lived in Germany or German-speaking countries, while most of the beginners had experienced German-speaking countries primarily as tourists. As a finding, this is not surprising if one considers the different levels of the courses and the target audiences, but rather confirms what one would expect from these different cohorts. However, this is the first time that such evidence about the German programme at the Open University and its students has been recorded.

The questionnaires were used to gauge only certain aspects of the five *savoirs*, with a focus on knowledge (*savoirs*) and attitudes. The learners on both courses felt confident that they had improved their knowledge of German-speaking countries through studying their respective courses. On completing their respective courses, students reported that they had gained in knowledge, though not to the same extent: 83% of the beginner students confirmed the acquisition of new knowledge, while virtually all but one (97%) of the advanced students said that they had learned new things about Germany and German-speaking countries.

There are a variety of possible reasons for the differences between the two cohorts of students about the acquisition of new knowledge. As the university has an open entry policy for its undergraduate programme, students are free to choose what course they want to study. So a number of students came to the study of the beginners course *Rundblick* with some prior knowledge, both linguistic and cultural. This is confirmed by the results of the pre-course questionnaire: over 19% of the learners came to the course with a previous qualification in German, 31% knew phrases 'to get by', 20% could already hold a basic conversation in a social

setting and 43% knew some simple phrases. Motivation and learner expectations might have played a role in this context as well: several of the beginner students wrote in their questionnaires that they wanted to learn the language, not the culture(s). This was exemplified in this comment made by a learner in one of the interviews: 'I did not undertake the *Rundblick* course in order to know more about the German culture etc. ... The reason for undertaking the course, however, was to come to grips with the language itself'. Given their linguistic entry level, it is likely that the majority of the students had to concentrate on the linguistic content of the course, paying less attention to the cultural content. It must be acknowledged, however, that language proficiency plays an important role in the intercultural communicative competence of adults (Aarup Jensen, 1995). Another fact that might account for the difference between the two cohorts lies in the nature of the courses. The course for beginners focuses on language acquisition and the content, although an important part of the course design, serves primarily as a context for the learning and to motivate these adult learners. Cultural information is an integrated, but ancillary element of the course materials. In contrast, the advanced German course *Variationen*, while still aiming to further the linguistic knowledge of the students, features cultural content as a major design factor, which is reflected in the assessment. At the end of the course, students of *Variationen* write a 3000-word mini-project about a topic of their choice in the target language. These topics are all covered in the course materials. Although 83% of the beginners claim to have gained knowledge about German-speaking cultures, 41% and 44% of them failed to provide a single item of content learnt in the course in response to the two questions in the post-course questionnaire. This is in contrast to the findings of the advanced German cohort,

who all gained additional knowledge through the course content and demonstrated it. This will be discussed later in this section.

What might account for the substantial difference between the two cohorts in measurable knowledge gain? It is true that the two questionnaires took different approaches to ascertaining the cohorts' respective knowledge gain – and this is one critical factor that may go some way to explaining this finding. The two questions in the beginners' questionnaire were relatively open and unspecific, i.e.: 'Describe five things that you have learned about German speaking countries that you particularly remember learning during the study of the course' and 'Describe five different things that you have learned about German-speaking people and their cultures that you particularly remember learning during the study of the course.' On the other hand, the questions for the advanced level German course were very precise and offered a variety of multiple choice and some open-ended questions. In addition, the same questions were asked at the beginning and the end of the students' study. The difference in approach was partly dictated by the fact that the beginners' questionnaires were used not only for this project, but also covered other areas of research interest. As the questionnaire was already well above what Dörnyei (2003: 18) suggests as an ideal length, it was not feasible to include a large number of detailed questions. The difference can also be explained by the different foci of the two courses: whereas the beginners' course focuses on language acquisition with the addition of cultural content, the advanced course teaches about German and German-speaking cultures whilst still enhancing the linguistic proficiency of the learners.

The results demonstrate clearly that if one wants to capture and measure detailed knowledge gain, it is necessary to ask detailed questions before and after the course. While more than 40% of the beginner cohort did not specify any concrete

facts that they remembered from studying the course, the remaining 56% and 59% provided a wide range of details about German culture that demonstrated their knowledge gain. This supports the notion that, generally, language learning cannot be divided from culture or content learning. It also provides evidence that a prescribed body of materials designed especially for distance language learning has an impact on the learners' cultural knowledge. This is borne out by the details the students mentioned. Here are a few examples: in their responses students of *Rundblick* referred specifically to the Island of Rügen and the city of Rostock, both of which were featured in the course materials. Similarly, a whole chapter was devoted to customs and traditions, including Easter and Christmas, which again were frequently mentioned by learners. Health, leisure and working life were other topics in the course which the students recalled in their answers in the questionnaires.

The advanced students of German acquired new knowledge through the study of the course as demonstrated in their replies to the knowledge-based questions in the pre- and post-course questionnaires. Their answers in the questionnaires established that the students gained new facts and insights in all eight of the areas that were covered in the course. This did, however, vary – for example, knowledge about the reasons for the development of the German federal system improved through the study of *Variationen* and significantly more students could identify the main German political parties and name German chancellors. The fact that Willy Brandt was identified by fewer students at the end of the course than at the beginning is surprising and without any apparent reason, apart from the fact that their choice was limited to naming just five German chancellors. Equally, the number of those displaying knowledge about the 1953 uprising in the GDR, the Sorbs and migration went up. Students knew more about sites in Dresden,

aspects of post-1945 literature in German-speaking countries and famous scientists and Nobel prize winners. There was less knowledge gain in the area of German language and dialects.

Attitudinal change

The questionnaires for both cohorts contained a list of attributes commonly ascribed to Germans. The students were asked to fill in what they thought would be the typical view of a British person with regard to these attributes and invited to write open-ended comments reflecting on their own attitudes, compared with those of the British public at large. As investigating attitudinal data, which is related to commonly-held stereotypes, tends to be controversial, the question was deliberately designed to ask the students about what they thought commonly-held views were and not about their own. They were invited to comment and reflect on their own attitudes in comparison to those common British attitudes in a separate open-ended question. Thirteen percent of the beginners' cohort and 9% of the advanced respondents did not fill in the list of attributes. As quoted in the findings, the most commonly given reason was that these learners could not, or did not wish to offer comments about an entire nation's viewpoint: 'I can't speak for the British people'.

Most respondents from the beginners' cohort felt that their compatriots would characterize Germans as efficient, hard-working and thorough (93%[8] each), followed by formal and serious (92% each) and environmentally friendly (87%). The advanced students of German thought that Germans would be viewed as environmentally friendly (98% and 96% in the pre- and post-course

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[8] Expert advice was sought to ascertain appropriate measures of statistical significance. Following this advice, only changes of more than 7 per cent were considered to be significant. The beginners' cohort was asked these questions only in their post-course questionnaire.

questionnaires), thorough (98% and 93% respectively), efficient (96% and 100%) and hard-working (96% in both questionnaires). Serious (94% and 96%) featured as well as tidy (94% and 93%), while the score on prosperous increased from 91% to 96% in the post-course questionnaire. Germans were perceived as humourless by 88% of the pre-course respondents and 93% of the post-course respondents. In other words, there were no significant changes in the scores of the attributes between the pre- and post-course questionnaires from the advanced students, apart from the score with regard to formality, which increased from 51% to 89%. Considering their more extended experience of learning German and their greater exposure to contacts with Germans, it is surprising that only just over half of the advanced students found Germans formal at the beginning of the course. It might be the case that their previous experiences of meeting German speakers and their contact with friends and families (and to a lesser extent with business partners) might have caused them to regard Germans as more informal. Studying the course and being exposed to authentic materials in which the polite form of address (*Sie* versus *du*) was prominent might have altered these learners' perceptions. Students commented on the greater level of formality in German-speaking countries, as exemplified by this student's response in the post-course questionnaire:' My attitudes would tend more towards the centre for most of the questions. The one exception is that I find Germans very formal. ... I think the formality is part of the language, having a more formal expression than English'. Beginners and advanced students of German agreed on four attributes they associated with Germans: efficient, hard-working, thorough and serious. But beginners were less convinced than advanced students that the average Briton saw Germans as environmentally friendly. The greatest differences in scores between the two cohorts concerned perceptions of formality and sense of humour.

At the beginning of the course, the advanced students regarded Germans as less formal than at the end of the course (see above). The beginners' score is similar to that in the post-course questionnaire of the advanced students. While 66% of the beginners thought that Germans are perceived as having no sense of humour, the score for the advanced students was 88% in the pre-course and 93% in the post-course questionnaire. As to the perception of Germans being humourless, no clear reason for the difference between the two samples could be identified. Despite studying German humour and satire in the advanced German course, the percentage of respondents who thought that the average Briton would perceive Germans as humourless rose slightly.

Twenty four percent of the beginners' sample agreed that their attitudes had changed, and all of them attributed the change in their attitudes to the course. About 50% of the sample in the advanced course agreed that their attitudes had changed during their study, and half of those said they believed that this attitudinal change was due to the study of the course *Variationen*. The difference between the two cohorts in the number of students reporting attitudinal change is surprising. This could perhaps be explained by the different sample size – the beginners' cohort (n=123) was much bigger than the sample of the advanced students (n=30), which demonstrates the limitations of reporting such findings in percentage points.

If only less than a quarter of the beginners and half of the advanced students do think that their attitudes have changed, it confirms the view that attitudes among adults do not necessarily change through the study of a course, since they come to their study with values and beliefs already firmly established.

The fact that the advanced students' scoring indicated little change (with the exceptions mentioned above) over the course seems, at first, a contradiction,

since half these learners reported a change in their personal attitude after the course. However, this is not the case. The students were asked what they thought the public perception of Germans among the UK population was when they scored the list of attributes, but **not** about their personal views. As a potential measurement tool for attitudinal change, the list of attributes was not successful. However, the main value in including it was for it to serve as a means of getting students to reflect on (stereo)typical British views of the Germans, and to compare and contrast these views with their own perceptions. This is borne out by the richness of the open-ended comments from both cohorts. They stress the difference in their attitudes towards Germans compared with the average Briton, as in the following quotations: 'My attitudes have no resemblance to most UK residents' [views] about Germans and Germany', 'yes. I do think my attitudes are different – I have witnessed humour which most Brits don't see. I have also experienced real friendliness which some British have never witnessed. I think the British attitude can antagonise any foreigner – just shouting English words! So perhaps because I try to communicate in the language my experiences are different'.

Those that confirmed a change in attitude commented on a range of issues, such as Germany's stance on war – which was not covered in the course: 'I have also been very interested as one to be deployed to Afghanistan with the British army to learn of German attitudes to their own deployment in that country which is very different to our own (social workers in camouflage etc.)'.

Interview data

The qualitative data from the in-depth semi-structured interviews of an opportunistic sample of six students from each cohort provided a very rich source

of data. These interviews were conducted in order to gauge the level of ICC that the students gained and/or brought to their study of German. The interview questions related explicitly to all five areas (*savoirs*) that define the ICC framework, thus complementing and enhancing the quantitative data collected for this study.

The decision to ask both groups of interviewees the same questions was beneficial in that a set of data that was comparable across the different cohorts was obtained.

So how did the interviewees demonstrate their command of ICC in the course of these interviews?

Identities and behaviours

Regarding *savoir être*, all interviewees in both samples were able to define their own cultural identity in broad terms. They provided a wide range of definitions which included place of origin, place of where they lived, ethnicity, occupation, education, and geographical location. The students generally demonstrated a differentiated sense of their own identity. Several students in both samples referred to themselves as European in addition to English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish. When one contrasts this with the normally rather anti-European sentiments expressed among the general British public, it indicates that these students perceive themselves differently from the general public and therefore show an ability to de-centre (Byram et al., 2001: 5), which is an important aspect of having an intercultural attitude. There were no major differences in the basic responses of the two samples, although advanced German students were slightly more elaborate and detailed about their identity and referred more often to their professional identity than the beginners.

There were some differences in the way in which the two groups defined German cultural identity. In each sample, the students were most familiar with Germany and Austria. One of the advanced students of German defined Austrian cultural identity initially. At the beginners' level, two of the interviewees were unable to offer any definition of German identity other than stating that it is diverse, while all Level 3 students were able to define German cultural identity in more detail. Beginners mentioned the pride of Germans, a North-South divide, attitudes to health and work-life balance. Advanced learners of German, on the other hand, emphasized the lack of a single identity and the strong regional focus of German identity. They talked about history as shaping German cultural identity and differentiated between East and West Germany, as well as mentioning religion as a factor shaping the German sense of identity. Overall, this group of advanced learners of German was considerably more sophisticated and elaborate in its definitions of German cultural identity than the beginners. This can be attributed to two factors: the life and work experience of the advanced students and the impact of the content of the Level 3 course. Advanced students had had more first-hand experience of Germany, had gone beyond visiting the country as tourists, had worked with German speakers in the UK or other countries outside Germany, and had frequently worked and lived in German-speaking countries. They had many more personal contacts with German-speaking individuals than the beginners. The Level 3 course deals in some detail with concepts of identity, regionalism and one's home (*Heimat*), which is likely to have made students more aware of what shapes German identity.

With one exception among the interviewees from the beginners' course, all students offered some ideas about differences in daily life and routines between the UK and Germany, or German-speaking countries. Work, punctuality and the

earlier start of the day in Germany featured among the answers of both sets of interviewees. Eating habits were also mentioned by the two samples. Overall, the responses from the advanced learners of German were slightly more elaborate than those of the students beginning to learn German.

Half the Level 3 students stated that they adapted their behaviour when talking to a German speaker: one interviewee would only adopt the routine of shaking hands, and another argued that it depended on the language used. Similarly, two of the beginners would not amend their behaviour when talking to a person from Great Britain or from Germany. The other beginners' students provided examples of their adaptations which were language-focused, e.g. speaking more slowly and precisely, using standard pronunciation. But they also said that they would face the speaker and rely more on visual clues. The focus on language also featured among the interviewees of the Level 3 course, that is, avoiding idioms and colloquialisms. But students also mentioned that they would be more cautious about what to expect of their counterparts in terms of cultural knowledge and understanding. This demonstrates an awareness of the culture-bound nature of language. The analysis of the findings clearly implies that these learners possessed an attitude of curiosity and openness (*savoir être*), whether at beginners' or advanced level of language learning, although the findings suggest that the Level 3 group demonstrated a slightly higher level of *savoir être*. The fact that Level 3 learners gave some more elaborate responses can be attributed to their greater exposure to German culture(s) and the knowledge they brought to the course and, to some degree, to the course they studied.

Byram (1997b, 2008) raised concerns about the desirability and acceptability of assessing this *savoir*. However, the research method used here, semi-structured interviews, **explored** the learners' willingness to decentre and suspend (dis)belief

without making value judgements about behaviour. It thus demonstrates a way of dealing with this important aspect of intercultural communicative competence without raising ethical issues.

Knowledge and knowledge gain

All the students interviewed provided qualitative evidence of knowledge gain (*savoirs*). They stated that they had learned about German-speaking countries through their respective courses and offered a variety of examples of knowledge gain. The importance of regions in Germany was mentioned by both samples, as well as the variety of German dialects and accents. The interviewees from the beginners' course mentioned the fact that German is spoken in countries other than Germany, Austria and Switzerland. One interviewee referred to unemployment and economic growth in Germany which she contrasted with the generally-held view of Germany as a country of full employment.

Not surprisingly, knowledge of German history was greater among the Level 3 learners than among the beginners. The advanced learners did, of course, study German history in their course. As for having encountered misunderstandings, two of the beginner interviewees claimed never to have encountered any misunderstandings, whilst most interviewees from the advanced German course also claimed initially to never having been involved in a misunderstanding. However, when prompted, almost all interviewees recalled a variety of encounters in which communication had been impeded or broken down. Some examples from the advanced students showed in-depth knowledge about both cultural and linguistic misunderstandings, as demonstrated in one student's answer about the conventions in using the term and concept 'friend' in the two different cultures. He observed – rightly – that this concept is used more loosely in the UK than in

German-speaking countries, where the term '*Freund*'[9] is more tightly defined, usually as a person who is close to you and contrasted with the term '*Bekannter*' or '*guter Bekannter*', which is used for less close friends.

Both samples linked dialect to class and geographical location in the UK and to geographic location in Germany.

The main responses regarding the differences in social conventions at dinner or birthday parties in Germany and the UK were similar in both groups of interviewees: both believed that there are no significant differences between the two countries. However, the advanced students of German provided a level of detail and insight that was not evident among beginners, demonstrating knowledge of conventions about wishing someone a happy birthday and having a birthday party, as in this interviewee's response:

> 'People [in Germany] would pretend that the birthday wasn't happening until the day. .. Which is quite strange ... Because the Brits will say "many happy returns for tomorrow because I won't be able to see you tomorrow", and that just can't happen in Germany. ... I was very surprised when I went to a pub and one of my colleagues, it was their birthday, and they bought me a drink. ... Apparently on a birthday *man gibt einen aus* which is quite, totally foreign for us. For us, we would give the birthday boy or the birthday girl a drink ...'.

This suggests once more that these advanced learners had gained a greater personal experience of German social conventions first-hand through visiting or living in Germany or other German-speaking countries.

As one would expect, the beginners all rated their knowledge of German-speaking countries considerably lower than the Level 3 students, and both groups of

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[9] As German differentiates between the male and female form of nouns, the term '*Freund*' here is used generically to include both male and female friends. The same applies to other terms used in German here.

interviewees rated their knowledge of the UK more highly than their respective

knowledge of Germany and other German-speaking countries. The difference in

the ratings of knowledge of German-speaking countries between the two groups

reflects the different level of linguistic proficiency and exposure to German-

speaking countries.

Overall, the interviews provide clear evidence for *savoirs* (knowledge),

complementing the quantitative data, which also show knowledge gain and

confirm Byram's statement about the desirability of assessing an individual's

knowledge (Byram, 2008: 221).

Dealing with stereotypes

The gauging of *savoir comprendre* focused on the discussion of most commonly-

held views about the British in Germany, and about the Germans, Austrians and

Swiss in the UK (and Ireland, as one of the respondents was Irish). Two of the

students who were beginners were unable to suggest any views that Germans

might hold about the British, or were of the opinion that the Germans have no

stereotypical views of the British; the rest of the sample of beginners' students

offered various responses. They thought that the British might be perceived as

intolerant and having a childish attitude towards the war, or be seen as football

hooligans and heavy drinkers. The interviewees from the advanced group agreed

on football hooliganism and drinking, but also felt that German stereotypes about

the British might include terrible food, Anglo-American free-market capitalism, a

willingness to go to war and being bad at languages. The findings indicate that the

advanced students of German offered a wider range of responses and saw their

own country with a more critical eye. Obviously, the responses from both sets of

interviewees were based on a critical reflection about their own countrywomen and

–men. There was no indication that these views were based on actual discussions with Germans, or first-hand knowledge of what typical German stereotypes about the British might be.

The answers about typical views of Germans among the population of the UK yielded similar responses from both groups of interviewees. Those from the beginners' group named lack of sense of humour, being cold, efficient, rude, formal, arrogant and well organised as stereotypes about the Germans, which also featured in the list of attributes in the questionnaire. The sample of advanced students of German also cited humourlessness, arrogance and efficiency as stereotypical views about the Germans. Only one of the respondents thought that eating sauerkraut and wearing lederhosen represented the typical German. These perceptions contained a mixture of positive and negative stereotypes about Germans. Images of the Second World War, football and the advent of the package holiday in the Mediterranean were proposed as reasons behind these stereotypes. The role of Germany in Europe was also mentioned as one reason for Germans and Germany being regarded in a negative way: '[Younger British people] think [the Germans] are trying to lead us towards a Europeanization that most of the British are against'. Another interviewee reinforced this view and commented on the relative paucity of information about Germany provided in the British media: '... we get very little about what is going on in Germany in the media in this country. But there is this awareness of Europeanization which is focused mainly on France and Germany as telling us how to behave and we don't like to be told how to behave'. Students in both samples regarded the portrayal of Germans in the media, both print and TV, as responsible for the perpetuation of these stereotypes. These findings are confirmed by the open-ended comments provided in both sets of questionnaire responses. One Level 3 student offered a very apt

and concise rationale for these stereotypes, saying that people like to work with these stereotypical images in their heads 'because life gets a lot more uncertain if you haven't got these images in your head'.

Interpreting the findings suggests that these interviewees showed evidence of the learners' ability to compare, interpret and relate documents and events from another culture (*savoir comprendre*) as demonstrated by this interviewee's reflection on the origin of stereotypes: 'Lots have built up over a long period of time and ... stereotypes now are often fairly out of date. I mean stereotypes about ourselves, our own country are often out of date by a long, long way. So I think ... quite a lot of them date back from a hundred years ago ... or fifty years ago ... and then they get passed on, like folk lore ... or they are myths and old stories that you are getting told when you are a child'.

Discovery and interaction

With regard to the skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre*/*savoir faire*), the two samples found out about current affairs in Germany in different ways. The interviewees at beginner level relied most heavily on British media (both print and TV), but also used German media (as far as they could understand them), German partners or friends and the Internet. This clearly reflects these students' level of linguistic proficiency. The use of German Internet sites was far more frequent among the advanced learners of German, who either read German newspapers and magazines or subscribed to German news alerts, although some of the interviewees in the advanced group depended on the reporting of German current affairs in the British media to the same extent as their beginner counterparts. Talking to friends, one's German students and business contacts about current affairs in Germany and other German-speaking countries also

featured among the advanced learners of German, as in this response: 'through the [British] media, through the radio and largely through my students, and fortunately I work with a lot of German students'. Generally, the more advanced students of German seemed to provide more insights and more detailed reflection on the role of the media in providing access to another culture than did the beginners. None of the learners in either interview sample who relied on the British media commented on the quality of the coverage of German current affairs in the British press, although several had criticised the role of the British media in perpetuating stereotypical views of Germans and Germany.

Although the findings indicate that these students possessed the skills of discovery and interaction, it is debatable whether watching British TV, listening to British radio, or reading British newspapers allows learners to acquire sufficient amounts of new knowledge about German-speaking countries, since there is relatively little coverage of German affairs in the media. I would conclude that there is some evidence of *savoir apprendre/savoir faire* in the beginners' sample and more evidence among the advanced sample, but that this is less pronounced than for the other *savoirs* discussed so far, as evidenced in this response from one of the interviewees: 'Certain things make it to the news here. ... Disaster tends to make it into the British media. Politics not very often. Occasionally, I mean if it is something big, otherwise personally sometimes I see things on the Internet ... and that's probably largely how I find out'.

Critical awareness

The learners in both samples gave similar answers to the questions that attempted to gauge critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) by looking at bias in British newspapers: they both cited the style of writing, the use of language and idioms,

commentaries, criticism of certain policies and ownership of newspapers, exemplified in this response: 'I would find it [the political stance of a British newspaper] difficult because I am less interested, so I don't go looking for political bias. I tend to take newspapers factually, ... I am aware of bias in other newspapers from discussions with my husband who is interested in that sort of thing. But I don't really know very much about it'. Another interviewee commented: '... I have a good idea which one has which stance ... [interviewer: Through what?] ... what my parents said, what other people have said, what other papers say about each other and through what I have read before'. Both samples acknowledged that they would find it more difficult to recognize a particular stance in a German newspaper ('It would obviously [be] much harder because you are not so familiar with the individual politicians and the events that are taking place. Yeah, I think I wouldn't be able to recognise [a bias], unless it was really blatant'). They agreed that they would use similar means as for British media to detect such a stance. As would be expected, the interviewees in the advanced group were able to provide more elaborate responses due to their higher level of linguistic proficiency and greater experience in reading (journalistic) texts written in German. There is some evidence of critical awareness among both groups, with a higher level of sophistication among the sample of advanced learners as reflected in the comments from one of the advanced learners:

> 'I have been reading recently in German. They ... are reporting news without going into a great deal of commentary. And in fact, I take the example of [the German weekly magazine] *Stern*, looking at that and researching for my *Hausarbeit*. There were articles there, looking at opinion articles there, they ... tended to not have all the same sort of stance. Some of them seem to be pro-integration and immigration and some of them were

anti. So a variety of view[s]. I'd say the sources I was reading were fairly, if

not completely, impartial and unbiased, they expressed a range of

opinions'.

Conclusion: adult learners and intercultural communicative competence

This project had three research questions to be addressed, as follows:

1) To what extent do adult learners bring intercultural communicative

   competence to their study as part of their varied life experience?

2) To what extent do adult learners of a distance language programme in

   German gain intercultural communicative competence through the study of

   a prescribed programme of study?

3) To what extent are the five *savoirs* of Byram's conceptual framework

   evident in the research subjects (adult learners of German at a distance)

   and measurable within this particular learning environment?

The findings indicate beyond doubt that all of these learners brought some

intercultural communicative competence with them to their study. This affirms the

point that Aarup Jensen et al. made: adults are a 'special target group, with special

interests and needs which differ to some extent from those of children and young

people' (Aarup Jensen et al., 1995: 10).

Whether they were beginners or advanced students of German, these adults

learning at a distance, had gained substantial life experience and experience of

dealing with cultural differences. Many had gained first-hand experience of

travelling or living in German-speaking countries, often for extended periods of

time, especially those learners at advanced level. Many of the learners in both

samples had regular contacts with German speakers through friends and family, or business contacts.

The open-ended comments in the questionnaires and the interviews support the conclusion that these learners embarked on their respective courses in possession of a degree of intercultural communicative competence, though beginners less so than the advanced students.

In response to the second research question, this study demonstrates that students on a prescribed course of distance learning study acquire ICC to a degree. This is self-reported by a sizeable percentage of the students surveyed, who acknowledged their attitudinal change to the study of their respective courses – this was also confirmed by the interview data. An important conclusion was that maturity and having an established identity as an adult do not need to be regarded as stumbling blocks for the acquisition of ICC (see Aarup Jensen et al., 1995: 10). There is, furthermore, evidence of the acquisition of the five *savoirs* as indicators of ICC among the participants in this study. This is also reflected in the answer to the third research question. The two distance language courses these learners had studied had had an impact on aspects of their ICC, notably knowledge, which confirms the notion that modern open and distance learning methods may be capable of supporting the acquisition of ICC (see Lorentsen, 1995: 111). These distance learners retain control over their own learning and can determine their learning progress through the course.

It is also apparent from all the data that the personal experience of these learners plays a role in their intercultural communicative competence.

The final research question addresses the five *savoirs* of the ICC framework. The qualitative and quantitative data gathered for this study show that all components

of Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence are evident among the sample. In an educational context, prominence is given to knowledge and knowledge gain (*savoirs*). There is clear evidence for not only *savoirs*, but also for the other four dimensions of the ICC framework, albeit with some variations between the two cohorts, where the advanced students showed more sophistication and elaboration than their beginner counterparts. This can be attributed to the differences in language proficiency and exposure to the cultures of German-speaking countries.

In spite of the fact that the ICC framework was originally developed for secondary school pupils, the findings of this study demonstrate that the ICC framework is applicable to adult distance language learners. However, the data also imply that the framework would be more easily applicable to adult learners were a sixth element to be added that takes account of the life experiences which the learners bring to their study: *savoir s'appuyer sur son experience*.

7   Scope of the research

This section discusses the research methodology and whether it has proved to be effective in generating the data needed for this study. It reflects on the limitations of the research approach in the light of the findings and the constraints under which this project was conducted.

Were the chosen research methods valid and did they deliver the data necessary for this study? Overall, the findings indicate that the research methods were fit for purpose (see Gilham, 2005) and addressed the research hypothesis and research questions. Sufficient amounts of relevant data were collected, although this

necessitated a second data gathering exercise in 2007 for the advanced cohort, because the first round of data collection yielded insufficient quantitative data. This has already been discussed in some detail in an earlier section of this thesis. The argument that the two cohorts are comparable, despite being surveyed and interviewed in two different years remains valid, as these were courses with a stable cohort. It would, nevertheless, have been preferable to have collected the quantitative and qualitative data for the two cohorts in the same year.

Opting for a mixed research methodology with the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods was justified, since it generated complementary data for the different aspects of the conceptual framework under consideration and the interviews, in particular, offered 'rich material' which 'put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses' (Bell, 2005: 157).

The title of the project was amended at the end of the first year of the study. The original title was as follows: 'Evaluating intercultural communicative competence in a distance language learning programme'. As the evaluation and assessment of intercultural communicative competence pose particular challenges and in the light of the design of this project, the title was amended to 'Exploring intercultural communicative competence in a distance language learning programme'.

The amendment of the title of the project, the research hypothesis and the research questions were necessary and justified, especially in the light of the controversy about the assessment of intercultural communicative competence in an educational environment (see Byram, 1997b, 2008). Byram himself raised concerns about the desirability and acceptability of assessing *savoir être* because it reflects a particular set of values that are not universal and thus not necessarily applicable across different cultures. It is clear that the assessment of this *savoir* in

tests which might 'allow or prevent access to a career of further education, would

be hegemonic' (Byram, 2008: 222) raises substantial ethical issues.

Overall, the research instruments used (questionnaires and interviews) matched

the five *savoirs* reasonably well. Asking students to rate average British attitudes

to Germany and the Germans is, however, an indirect measure and can only offer

an oblique insight into their views. It is arguable that the open-ended comments in

the questionnaires were actually more valuable in giving the students an

opportunity to reflect and elaborate on their own attitudes. Similarly, the

interviewees were asked to reflect on stereotypes held by the Germans about the

British and by the British about the Germans. Such a focus on stereotypes, even if

individuals are invited to distance themselves from stereotypical views, may

ultimately not capture attitudes entirely adequately, as the focus lies on

perceptions and not on actual behavior when encountering people from another

culture. However, within the context of this project, it would have been impossible

to devise more direct measures of participants' attitudes. The ethical issues about

the desirability of measuring attitudes in an educational context remain valid.

The decision to restrict the exploration of intercultural communicative competence

within a distance language learning programme to two cohorts instead of the four

groups potentially available remains equally valid, as the quantity of data collected

through the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews was already

considerable. Gathering data from all students of German at the OUUK would

have made a detailed analysis of the data impossible within the time constraints of

this EdD project. Selecting students from the entry and exit level of study has

meant that this study encompassed the spectrum of student experience in this

context. The analysis of the data and the comparison of the two cohorts show that

this was a reasonable and justified decision.

Reflecting on the collection of quantitative data, there are several aspects that

could have been improved. The questionnaires sent to beginners were part of a

larger investigation of different aspects of learning among the student population.

Questionnaires intended to provide evidence for a wide range of research interests

and which are drawn up by a large number of stakeholders do not take best

practice into account and can be unduly lengthy. But because of institutional

constraints on the multiple surveying of students, it was not possible to opt for a

tailor-made questionnaire for the entry-level students that might have suited the

research purposes of this EdD project better. Alternatively, it might have been

possible to re-run the beginners' questionnaire at the same time as the second

round of collecting data for the advanced cohort. This was considered briefly, but

time and institutional constraints would have made this difficult and largely

unfeasible. The fact that the return rate for the beginners' questionnaires was good

confirmed that the decision to stick with the available data was justified. An online

questionnaire might have been a better solution, but at the time this was not

feasible. The areas of the questionnaires dealing with knowledge gained were

uneven. They yielded interesting and complementary responses but it might have

been better to have adopted an identical approach for the two cohorts and to have

used specific questions, both before and after the course, as well as more open

questions such as 'What have you learned about German-speaking countries' for

both cohorts to see what results would have been generated.

Questions 33a and 33b in the *Rundblick* questionnaire which were about

knowledge gain could have been more tightly drafted. The overlap in students'

responses indicates that the questions did not differentiate sufficiently between

German-speaking countries and German-speaking people and cultures, as had

been intended. It had been anticipated that the first question would stimulate

answers about geography and similar features, while the second one would focus on traditions, festivals and everyday life. This proved to be incorrect. The two questions were too vague and imprecise to generate differentiated answers from the students. If the project were to be repeated, these questions would be reformulated. This could be done either by providing specific headings under which students could record their knowledge (e.g. geography, German towns and cities, food and drink) or by making direct reference to the course materials and asking the learners to note down items they recollected from each of the twelve topics they had been taught throughout the course.

The advanced questionnaires were perhaps slightly too detailed and overly focused on knowledge gain, thus overemphasizing this part of the ICC framework. This could be improved by being more selective about the areas of course content that were best addressed through a survey. In designing the questionnaires for the advanced cohort of students, consideration was given to questionnaire design and how best to approach this form of data gathering. In addition, the content of the course was taken into consideration. The mixture of multiple choice, lists and some open-ended questions which required the students to provide short written answers was chosen deliberately. Overall, this design worked and yielded relevant and detailed data. Nevertheless, there are limitations to this approach which need to be acknowledged. If the project were to be repeated, the questionnaires could be improved. For example, trying to capture relatively complex concepts such as the German *Sonderweg* or historical treaties, such as the Potsdam agreement, in one or two short statements is almost impossible and does raise questions about over-simplification. Another example is the statement about the potential impact on dialect of the internationalisation of the media. This is a statement that is probably true for many developed countries in which dialect is spoken and not at all specific

to Germany. Similarly, asking for the names of German scientists who have won a Nobel prize, or for the names of winners of the *Karlspreis* is to some degree superficial. Although the findings clearly indicate that the questionnaires for the advanced students of German fulfilled their purpose in focusing on knowledge-based data, and that there is value in using a quantitative method for capturing these data, the questionnaire would be redesigned were this project to be repeated. The principle of encapsulating the entire course content in the questionnaires would be abandoned and replaced by a focus on probably only three or four of the content areas in the course. This would then allow for more elaboration and sophistication in the questions and responses without requiring students to spend more time filling them in.

The adequate return rate for the advanced German student questionnaires and the data collected indicate clearly that, despite some misgivings, those aspects of the conceptual framework of ICC which were explored here were covered adequately in the data collection and complemented the rich data collected through the semi-structured interviews. Were the project to be repeated, online questionnaires would be used.

The decision to abstain from the collection of longitudinal data is still valid, despite the desirability of collecting such data. The reality of dealing with large cohorts of distance learners who opt in and out of studying and the lack of direct contact between researcher and research subjects justifies this decision. Some of the quantitative data collected emphasized the recollection of facts, thus relying quite heavily on memory. Although this is typical for an educational setting with an emphasis on knowledge gain and assessment, it would have been beneficial to investigate alternative ways of gathering data without requiring learners to retain facts in their memories.

The qualitative data for this study were collected post-event and were all self reported. It has been accepted that interviews are social encounters and retrospective accounts of events (see Rapley, 2007) which provide indirect access to the experiences of the respondents. However, in a context in which the research subjects are adults with rich and varied life experiences who study part-time this is the only viable way of tapping into those experiences. The selection of interviewees for both samples was random, based on their willingness and availability to participate in telephone interviews. If this study were to be repeated, it would be preferable to be more targeted and draw up detailed criteria for the selection of the interviewees in advance to ensure a wide range of participants. The use of interview analysis software (such as NVivo) was considered and eventually rejected, as tagging the responses would have entailed a disproportionate investment of time and effort, without guaranteeing more comprehensive results than were secured by simply annotating the transcripts of the interviews. However, were the project repeated, it would be appropriate once again to consider seriously the use of qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo or ATLAS-ti.

There are three other aspects of the research methodology that need to be considered: the use of telephone interviews instead of face-to-face interviews, the role of the researcher/interviewer and the fact that the researcher had no previous knowledge of the interviewees and vice versa. Telephone interviews rely entirely on the spoken word, offering no visual cues or non-verbal interaction between interlocutors, as neither interviewer nor interviewee can see each other, which means that a 'layer of meaning [is] stripped out' (Gillham, 2005: 103); one loses much of the 'interpersonal chemistry so vital to generating the motivation and interest of a face-to-face interview' (ibid.). One should also be mindful that

telephone interviews require a high level of concentration (ibid.). In the context of this study, there were no real alternatives to telephone interviews. The data collected suggest that, despite the lack of non-verbal communication, interviewer and interviewees managed to establish an interpersonal rapport evoking wide-ranging and detailed responses to the questions. The interviewer ensured that the students were telephoned at the agreed time, explained the purpose of the interview, and checked again whether it was convenient for the student to talk. These volunteers were happy to talk on the telephone – perhaps because they might have had telephone, or other remote tuition.

The interviewer/researcher was German and speaks English as a second language which means that the interviewees would be aware of his German origins. In addition, in an interview situation, there can be a power imbalance which may advantage the interviewer and disadvantage the interviewee. The researcher was aware of this and made every effort to address any possible issues arising from it, not least by foregrounding all relevant factors. It was made obvious to students from the beginning that the interviewer was German. Secondly, the interviewer strove to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere during the interview with evident success, as manifested in the attached sample transcripts. Thirdly, all interviews followed the same format, focusing on the same questions, asked in the same order.

The researcher did not know the students and vice versa. This had both advantages and disadvantages. The researcher had no preconceived ideas about the interviewees, other than their gender, which made for objectivity. However, this meant that he could not tailor any of the questions to the particular circumstances of the students, other than by responding to answers from the interviewees. Paradoxically, the need to prepare reasonably generic questions which could be

asked in all interviews could also be regarded as an advantage of these telephone interviews, since this approach facilitated the relatively easy collection of comparable data for both cohorts.

The findings for the five *savoirs* of the ICC framework used in this project show that, overall, the methodology was successful and provided sufficient data. In addition, the data indicate clearly that adult life experience is an important aspect of these students' intercultural communicative competence. Although the interview data evidenced the existence of the learners' skills to discover and interact (*savoir apprendre/savoir faire*), almost all of the beginners and a sizeable proportion of the advanced students relied on the British press for finding out more about current affairs in Germany. As the students themselves claimed that coverage of German current affairs is limited in the British media, it raises the question of how advanced their skills of discovery are. The findings for critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) are less pronounced than for the other *savoirs*. This seems to be an aspect of ICC that is more difficult to capture within the methodology used. Considering the findings here, there is some doubt as to whether the questions and the interview format were the best approach for capturing the students' critical cultural awareness. It may be possible to refine the questions but, in my view, this is unlikely to yield more sophisticated results. It might be more appropriate to consider several questions which cover a number of different aspects of this *savoir*, rather than just concentrating on newspapers.

8   Further research issues

The findings of this study indicate the need for further research in three areas: the ICC framework, distance learners of languages and part-time tutors on distance language learning courses.

The ICC framework

This study has demonstrated that the life experience of adult learners plays a significant role in their intercultural communicative competence and that a sixth *savoir* would be beneficial as an addition to the existing ICC framework. Research into recording the exact nature of the learners' life experience in more detail will be needed to explore this important dimension of adult learners' ICC. This aspect could be further investigated through using the autobiography of intercultural encounters technique (Byram, 2008: 240-245). This technique appears to be particularly suitable for adults studying in a distance environment, as it encapsulates a wide range of potential encounters, is self-reported post-event and allows for self-reflection.

The fact that a significant number of mature students in this study divorce language from cultural learning is another area that needs to be further investigated. This is not in accord with the large body of literature and academic research in this field, which clearly assumes that these two aspects are intertwined. The reasons why these learners believe that one can separate language learning from culture learning need to be investigated through further research, to influence future practice in this field and in the distance learning of languages among adults in particular.

The aspects of critical cultural awareness and, to a lesser extent, the skills of discovery and interaction merit further investigation, as the findings in this study suggest that these two areas of the ICC framework were slightly less developed and evident than the other three aspects.

Distance language learners

As the Department of Languages teaches French, German and Spanish from beginners' to advanced level, it would be beneficial to undertake further research into different cohorts of learners from the other languages and to compare the findings. This might reveal what similarities and differences may exist between the intercultural communicative competence of these cohorts. Furthermore, as the Department also offers Italian and now Chinese, it would be interesting to compare cohorts from these languages with the other three languages and to undertake further comparative research into the intercultural communicative competence of beginners' cohorts.

In addition, another study of the intercultural communicative competence of distance learners of German could be undertaken with modified methodology, using different questionnaires and interviews with a clearly-defined target audience.

Although there would be considerable challenges in collecting data for a longitudinal study, it would be helpful to focus on a sample of OU distance language learners, follow them through from beginners' to advanced level, ascertain whether it is possible to gain evidence for the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence over the course of their learning and find out more about how this might be related to their study activity.

Part-time tutors of distance language courses

Although direct tuition forms only a small part of the overall distance learning experience of OUUK students, it would be valuable to undertake a study of the intercultural communicative competence of the large pool of part-time language tutors at the Open University. They are a vital link between the institution and the students and the learners' first point of contact, providing guidance and feedback on the students' assignments. Studies with foreign language teachers have shown that even those who have a positive disposition towards the teaching of intercultural communicative competence do not necessary translate this into classroom practice (see for instance Sercu, 2005d). This was also demonstrated in a more recent study of established teachers of English in the UK, USA and France (see Young & Sachdev, 2009, unpublished). An investigation into the intercultural communicative competence of the OU tutors and whether ICC plays a role in their practice would thus be valuable.

9 Implications for practice

This research explored the extent to which adult distance language learners acquire aspects of intercultural communicative competence through the study of a particular course. These learners are under-represented in research on ICC which more often focuses on secondary school children, undergraduate students between the age of 18 and 24 and secondary school teachers (or trainee teachers). The findings of this study illustrate the extent to which these mature students bring ICC gathered throughout their varied life experience to their study, and the extent to which they develop this further.

The findings will have direct implications for distance language learning practice and also have a potential impact on the wider education sector.

One direct outcome would be the inclusion of more explicit and detailed learning outcomes spelling out aims and objectives relating to ICC, and the incorporation of more relevant learning activities in distance language learning materials. This will impact on the design of all courses in all languages taught at the Department of Languages at the OUUK. However, creating relevant learning outcomes is only one area that will impact on practice. This research indicates that a considerable number of learners do not necessarily see the relationship between culture and language learning, so more work needs to be undertaken to raise students' awareness to ensure that they are able to see the nexus between the learning of culture and the acquisition of language proficiency clearly, as language is culturally determined. This could be included in the core course materials, or form part of the materials offering an introduction to language learning at a distance, which currently focus heavily on the development of relevant study skills. These findings with regard to the nexus between language and culture learning might be applicable in other educational settings, raising learners' awareness about the important link between language and culture, whether they are school children, traditional undergraduates, or adults.

Activities that encourage the comparison of the learner's own culture and background with that of the cultures in those countries whose language they study should be given more prominence in all the language courses developed by the Department. As evidenced by this study, more attention should be given in the materials to the explicit development of critical cultural awareness. Similarly, it might be beneficial to encourage learners at all levels to draw on a variety of media – not solely English and UK-based – to develop their ability to discover and

interact still further. This might equally apply to learners in other, non-distance settings. It is likely that greater focus on the development of critical cultural awareness might need to be given in classroom settings and in the development of materials for classroom or independent settings.

It would also be beneficial to include the autobiography of intercultural encounters in the course materials produced by the Department of Languages, although this needs further consideration, as it might become rather repetitive for those learners who follow several courses in one language, or study more than one language.

If the findings are to have an impact, awareness raising and staff development among staff who develop these courses will need to take place. Again, it is likely that authors of teaching materials for classroom environments would benefit from targeted staff development on how to produce materials for learners and teachers that focus on intercultural communicative competence beyond what is already on the market and in use.

Similarly, there are further implications for the delivery of courses and staff development and training for part-time staff who teach on these courses, as one cannot take an intercultural attitude for granted. Dissemination through staff development days and sharing of best practice, developing a pool of tutorial materials which reflect intercultural communicative competence, and bringing the experience of the learners explicitly into the classroom will be important. E-learning resources could play a vital role in achieving such a goal.

The recently developed national occupational standards for intercultural working, developed by CILT – the National Centre for Languages (http://www. http://www.cilt.org.uk/standards/intercultural.htm) need to be analysed in more detail to ascertain whether these standards could be used in full, or partially, in our courses.

The findings of this research project have established that the ICC framework as developed by Byram is applicable to adult learners. It has also demonstrated that for adult learners the addition of a sixth dimension into the framework, reflecting the individual's experience of life, would be beneficial. This has potential implications for the entire education sector, as this should be reflected in teaching materials as well as in teaching practice. To some extent, the autobiography of intercultural encounters already taps into the personal experience of individuals of different ages and it might be possible to integrate this into core teaching materials for classroom, distance and independent settings.

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Appendix 1
Pre-course questionnaire beginners German, Parts A and F

Rundblick: Pre-Course Questionnaire

Please use a ballpoint pen to complete the questionnaire. Do not use fountain or felt pens as the ink may be visible on the other side of the page. The questionnaire will be read with the help of a scanner so please fill it in as described. Please put an 'X' in the appropriate box keeping within the boundary of the box. For example: ☒. Do not spend too long on each item. If you make a mistake and cross the wrong box, please block out your answer and then cross the correct box.

For example: ■   ☐   ☐   ☒   ☐

Part A: Learning German

Although Rundblick is a course for beginners, we realise that students may well have previous experience of German. If you yourself do not, please respond "No" to Question 1 and then go straight to Question 6.

		Yes	No
1	Do you have any previous knowledge of German?	☐	☐

2   If you answered "Yes" to Question 1, how much previous knowledge do you have? Please put a cross against all the options that apply to you.

All that apply

- A few words   ☐

- Some simple phrases   ☐

- Phrases for getting by (e.g. when shopping or travelling)   ☐

- Basic social conversation   ☐

- Basic work-related conversation   ☐

- More extensive conversation   ☐

- Other (please specify)   ☐

3   If you answered "Yes" to Question 1, how did you gain this previous knowledge? Please put a cross against all the options that apply to you.

All that apply

- From school   ☐

- From college   ☐

- From contact with native speaker(s)   ☐

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- From self-study   ☐

- Other (please specify)   ☐

4   If you answered "Yes" to Question 1, did you gain formal qualifications?
        Please put a cross against all the options that apply to you.

                                                                        All that apply

- No formal qualifications   ☐

- CSE, GCSE or O-Level   ☐

- Below O-level   ☐

- Other (please specify)   ☐

5   If you gained a qualification, please give the year that you obtained it:

6   Have you had personal experience of or contact with any German-speaking countries?
        Please put a cross against all the options that apply to you.

                                                                        All that apply

- I have been on holiday in a German-speaking country   ☐

- I have lived in a German-speaking country   ☐

- I have friends in a German-speaking country   ☐

- I have work contacts in a German-speaking country   ☐

- I have watched German films, plays or TV (either in the original   ☐
  language or in translation)

- I have looked at German newspapers or magazines   ☐

- Other (please specify)   ☐

Part F: Your thoughts about culture in German-speaking countries

Whether you have had contact with German-speaking countries or not, you will already have
formed some impressions about them.

28   What aspects of the culture of the German-speaking world are you familiar with?
        Please put a cross against all that apply,

                                                                        All that apply

- Books, films, music etc. ☐

- Media and Internet ☐

- Sport ☐

- Local festivities and folklore ☐

- History ☐

- Habits and daily routines ☐

- Moral or religious beliefs ☐

- Family life, life at school, etc. ☐

- Food ☐

- Other (please specify) ☐

29   Have you ever been involved in a situation where there was a misunderstanding
      or breakdown of communication because of cultural differences?

	Yes	No	Don't know
	☐	☐	☐

30   Please indicate how you would complete the following statement:

- When learning a language, learning about the culture and customs of countries wehre it is
  spoken is

essential	very important	quite important	useful but not essential	not important at all
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix 2

Post-course questionnaire beginners German, part F

*Rundblick***: Post-Course Questionnaire**

Please use a ballpoint pen to complete the questionnaire. Do not use fountain or felt pens as the ink may be visible on the other side of the page. The questionnaire will be read with the help of a scanner so please fill it in as described. Please put an 'X' in the appropriate box keeping within the boundary of the box. For example: ☒ . Do not spend too long on each item. If you make a mistake and cross the wrong box, please block out your answer and then cross the correct box.

For example: ■ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐

Part F: Knowledge of German-speaking countries and cultures and attitudes towards Germans

This section invites you to tell us what you have learned about German-speaking countries and cultures and to give us your view of the most commonly held attitudes about Germans in the UK.

31 Now that you have finished studying *Rundblick,* do you think that you know more about German-speaking countries, their cultures and their people than before you started?

Yes No

☐ If 'Yes', please go to Q33 ☐

32 If 'No', please explain briefly why you think you have not gained any new knowledge about German-speaking countries.

| |
| |

33a If 'Yes', please describe five things about German-speaking <u>countries</u> that you particularly remember learning during the study of the course.

1.
2.
3.
4.

5.

33b   If you ticked 'Yes', please describe five things about German-speaking <u>people and their cultures</u> that you particularly remember learning during the study of the course.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

34   Do you think that learning about other cultures and their customs can help you reflect on your own culture and customs?

Yes	No	Don't know
☐	☐	☐

35   Please indicate how you would complete the following statement:

When learning a language, learning about the culture and customs of countries where it is spoken is …..

Essential	Very important	Quite important	Useful but not essential	Not important at all
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

36a   Do you think that your attitude towards Germans has changed over the last twelve months?

Yes	No
☐	☐

36b   Do you think that studying *Rundblick* has played a role in this?

Yes	No
☐	☐

37   Please explain your answers to questions 36a and 36b. Give as much detail as you can.

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38 Your nationality:

Scottish	☐	Welsh	☐	English	☐	Irish	☐
German	☐	Austrian	☐	Swiss	☐		
Other	☐	*(please specify)*					

Attitudes about Germans in the UK

39 What do you think are the most commonly held attitudes about Germans among people in the UK today?

Below you will find a set of five-point scales with adjectives and their opposites at each end. The adjectives relate to qualities which have been quoted when describing typical Germans. If, for instance, you think that most people in the UK think Germans are very aggressive, then put a cross in the box under 1. If you think that most people think Germans are neither aggressive nor non-aggressive, put a cross in the box under 3. If, on the other hand, you believe that most people consider Germans to be Non-aggressive, put a cross in the box under 5.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Aggressive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Non-aggressive
Arrogant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Meek, humble
Brave	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Cowardly
Boring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Amusing
Clean	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Dirty
Environmentally-friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Environmentally-indifferent
Conservative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Progressive
Cruel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Kind
Democratic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Undemocratic
Direct, blunt	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Indirect
Easy-going	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Inflexible, rigid

Efficient	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Incompetent
Formal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Informal
Friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unfriendly
Hard-working	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Lazy
Humorous	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Humourless
Patriotic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unpatriotic
Polite	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rude
Racist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Non-racist
Reliable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unreliable
Reserved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Open
Serious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Frivolous
Thorough	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Careless
Tidy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Untidy
Prosperous	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Poor

40 **In your answers to the questions above about attitudes, you noted what you felt to be commonly held opinions about Germans in the UK. As a student of German, how do your attitudes compare? Please give as much detail as you can.**

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please use the postage-paid envelope provided and return to: The Survey Office, Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University, FREEPOST ANG 5175, Milton Keynes, MK7 6YR. UK

Uwe Baumann U0142715

Appendix 3

Pre-course questionnaire advanced German

L(ZX) 313 Variationen 2007

Instructions

Please use a ball-point pen to complete the questionnaire. Do not use a fountain or felt tip pen as the ink may be visible on the other side of the page. The questionnaire will be read by a computer scanner, so please fill it in as follows. Place a 'X' in the appropriate box, keeping within the boundary. For example: ☒ If you make a mistake and cross the wrong box, please block out your answer and then cross the correct box. For example: ☒ ☐ ■ ☐

Your P.I number:
The boxes are all over the place!
Your experience of learning German

1   Did you learn German at school?   Yes   No

                                                              ☐   ☐

2   Have you learned German as an adult in addition to the OU courses?

                                                Yes   No

                                                ☐   ☐

      If Yes, please give details ie in evening classes, with the Goethe Institut.

3   Please list the Open University courses in German you have studied

                                                Yes   No

      L130 Auftakt……………………………   ☐   ☐
      L203 Motive……………………………...   ☐   ☐
      L230 Motive and L231 Motive top-
      up……………………………..   ☐   ☐

4   Do you have any qualifications in German?

                                                Yes   No

                                                ☐   ☐

      If Yes, please give details ie O Level, GCSE etc

Previous experience of Germany and German-speaking countries

5   Have you lived in Germany or/and German-speaking countries?

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                              Yes   No

                              ☐

If Yes, please give details, including the length of time you spent there.

6   Have you travelled regularly to Germany and/or German-speaking countries

                              Yes   No

                              ☐   ☐

If Yes, please give details, including how often and for how long

7   Do you have German-speaking relatives or friends?

                              Yes   No

                              ☐   ☐

If Yes, please give details about how frequently you are in touch

8   Do you have German-speaking business contacts

                              Yes   No

                              ☐   ☐

If Yes, please give details about how frequently you are in touch

9   Which parts of Germany or German-speaking countries have you visited?

       Please give details

Studying German with the Open University

10   What are your reasons for studying L313 *Variationen?*
       (please cross all that apply)
       To gain an OU Diploma in German…………………………………………………   ☐
       To contribute towards my OU degree…………………………………………   ☐
       To develop my awareness of the society and culture of contemporary Germany..   ☐
       To develop and extend my skills in analysing, critically evaluating and
       synthesizing written and spoken German…………………………………   ☐
       To consolidate and extend my knowledge of, and competence in the German
       language………………………………………………………………………   ☐
       To gain a degree in Modern Languages…………………………………………   ☐

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Because distance learning suits me best…………………………………………….. ☐

The Open University has a good reputation…………………………………………. ☐

Because there was no other course like this available to me……………………… ☐

Other (please give details…………………………………………………………… ☐

Knowledge about Germany and the Germans

These are knowledge-based questions based on what you might already know about Germany and the Germans, or that you will come across while you study the course. It is important that you fill in what you already know, even if you have just started the course and you can't answer all of the questions, in order to assess what you already know at the beginning of Variationen. This is NOT an exam, so just select an answer for the multi-choice questions, or give short answers, please! If you are not sure, just move to the next question.

Politics and structures

11   What are the main reasons for the historical development of the Federal administrative and
        political system? (Please cross as many answers as you think are correct)

The outcomes of the 1848/1849
revolution………………………………………………   ☐

Bismarck's
policies………………………………………………………………………………   ☐

Germany being made up of many small states and political
units…………………   ☐

The German desire to be
independent…………………………………………………..   ☐

The Allies set up this system in
1945………………………………………………….   ☐

12   Please specify which German political party is best described by each statement by
        matching
        its name with the statement. For example if you think statement (i) is PDS please write C in
        the box. [C]

Parties

A	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	**E**	CDU
B	CSU	**F**	FDP
C	PDS	**G**	REP
D	SPD		

Statements

(i)   A party which has a stronghold in one particular region of Germany and has
        been the ruling party in this region since
        1957…………………………………………..   ☐

(ii)   This party has a tradition which dates back more than a century and has been in
        opposition for a large part of the post-war period…………………………………….   ☐

(iii)   Founded after the Second World War, this party describes itself as supra-
        denominational and has been in government for a large part of the post-war
        period……………………………………………………………………………..   ☐

(iv) This relatively new party has not yet managed to get elected into the *Bundestag*, despite some success in local and regional elections…………………………….. ☐

(v) A fairly small party, which has nevertheless formed coalitions in post-war governments……………………………………………………………………….. ☐

(vi) A party with an environmentally-friendly range of policies which merged with a smaller grouping in 1993………………………………………………………… ☐

(vii) The successor to a party founded in 1946 - this party is a focus for criticisms against Western society…………………………………………………………….. ☐

13 Can you name three German Chancellors who have been in office since 1949?

_____

_____

_____

German history

14 What do you know about the Germany *Sonderweg* as a historical concept? (please cross as many answers as you think are right)

It serves as a justification of the German belief that they are a master race……… ☐

It provides an explanation as to why Germany was the only European country to give up a democratic system of government after 1929…………………………….. ☐

It is a synonym for the success of the German industrial revolution……………….. ☐

It provides evidence that Germany's historical development was substantially different from that of other European nations………………………………………… ☐

It offers an explanation for the re-unification of Germany after the end of the Cold War…………………………………………………………………………………….. ☐

It justifies the argument that Germany had no democratic tradition……………….. ☐

It provides proof that Germany's elites were anti-democratic and authoritarian….. ☐

15 In June 1953 there was an uprising in the GDR. Can you summarise what the causes were (very briefly)?

_____

_____

The German language

16 Which of these statements about German dialect are true? (please cross as many answers as you think are right)

The use of dialects in Germany is more widespread than ever…………………….. ☐

People are taking an active interest in preserving and maintaining their dialect…. ☐

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Due to the internationalisation of the media, dialects are dying out all over Germany………………………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Local dialect is an integral part of regional identity……………………………….. ☐

Many Germans speak only dialect, not High German……………………………… ☐

17   What is the name of the ethnic minority group which has lived in Germany for more than a thousand years and has its own language and traditions? Where is it based?

_____

_____

Immigration and emigration

18   The Potsdam Agreement stipulated that…
      (please cross one option only)

Germans living in the former German areas east of the Oder-Neisse line should be removed…………………………………………………………………………. ☐

Germans living in parts of the USSR should be removed………………………….. ☐

Germans in East Prussia should be penalised by forfeiting their possessions….. ☐

Germans and Poles should live together in the former German areas east of the Oder-Neisse line……………………………………………………………………… ☐

The Allies agreed to establish a new homeland for displaced Germans…………. ☐

19   Aussiedler are…
      (please cross one option only)

Ethnic Germans living in Austria…………………………………………………….. ☐

Ethnic Germans living in parts of the USSR and other Eastern Bloc countries….. ☐

Workers who have been invited to come to Germany to work for a fixed period of time………………………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Poles who wanted to emigrate to West Germany………………………………… ☐

Refugees from developing countries seeking German citizenship………………… ☐

20   Which countries did the majority of the so-called *Gastarbeiter* come from?

_____

_____

21   What are the major changes in the pattern of immigration into Germany between the 1950s/1960s and nowadays?

Shift from mainly unskilled to skilled labour requirements…………………………….. ☐

Immigrants coming from different countries than before……………………………. ☐

Regulations for admission have changed……………………………………………. ☐

Changes in birth and death rates mean that the population of Germany is growing more slowly………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Art and architecture

22   Dresden is famous for its architectural sites. Can you name four of them?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

23   Which artists can you name who lived and worked in the GDR?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Post '45 literature

24   What was the *Gruppe* 47
         (please cross one option only)

It was a group of writers based in Berlin………………………………………………… ☐

It was a group of writers working with Bertolt Brecht……………………………….. ☐

It was a group of writers and critics…………………………………………………… ☐

It was a group of poets who were trying out new forms of writing………………… ☐

It was a group of politically-aware writers who were trying to write a manifesto for the future of Germany after the war……………………………………………… ☐

25   Which of the following women writers achieved literary fame after 1945?
         (please cross as many options as you think are right)

Christa Wolf……………………………………………………………………………. ☐

Elfriede ☐

Jelinek…………………………………………………………………………

Ingeborg
Bachmann………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Annette von Droste-
Hülshoff…………………………………………………………… ☐

Sophie von
Laroche…………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Irene
Trauermann………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Isabel von
Daumann…………………………………………………………………. ☐

Leni
Riefenstahl………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Vicki
Baum……………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Science and technology

26   How many names of German Nobel Prize winners for science and technology can you
        remember?

_____

_____

_____

27   What is the *Transrapid*?
        (Please cross one answer only)

It is a new German motorway
system………………………………………………………… ☐

It is a new highspeed railway which links Hamburg and
Berlin…………………….. ☐

It is a new type of highspeed train which will link Hamburg and
Berlin……………. ☐

It is a magnetic levitation train developed in
Germany……………………………… ☐

It is a new type of ship designed for fast journeys on German
rivers……………… ☐

It is a rack-and-pinion railways designed especially for use in
Bavaria…………… ☐

Germany and Europe

28   What is the name of the prestigious prize which is usually awarded annually in Aachen?
        (Please cross one answer only)

Internationaler
Friedenspreis…………………………………………………………… ☐

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Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels…………………………………….	☐
Schlegel-Tieck-Preis………………………………………………………….	☐
Internationaler Karlspreis…………………………………………………………	☐
Internationaler Preis fur europäische Integration…………………………………	☐

29   Name two winners of this prize

1 _____

2 _____

Attitudes towards Germans

30   In this final section we should like you to consider what your fellow countrymen and women in Britain think about the Germans. What are their   attitudes towards Germany?
Below you will find a set of five-point scales with adjectives and their opposites at each end.
The adjectives relate to qualities which have been quoted when describing typical Germans.
Mark the point on each scale according to how you think the average British person rates them. For instance, if you think that most people in this country think Germans are Very aggressive, then put a cross in the box under 1. If you think that most people think Germans are neither aggressive nor non-aggressive, put a cross in the box under 3. If, on the other hand, you believe that most people consider Germans to be Non-aggressive, put a cross in the box under 5.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Aggressive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Non-aggressive
Arrogant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Meek, humble
Brave	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Cowardly
Boring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Amusing
Clean	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Dirty
Environmentally-friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Environmentally-indifferent
Conservative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Progressive
Cruel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Kind
Democratic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Undemocratic
Direct, blunt	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Indirect
Easy-going	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Inflexible, rigid
Efficient	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Incompetent
Formal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Informal
Friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unfriendly
Hard-working	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Lazy
Humorous	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Humourless
Patriotic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unpatriotic
Polite	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rude
Racist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Non-racist

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Reliable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unreliable
Reserved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Open
Serious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Frivolous
Thorough	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Careless
Tidy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Untidy
Prosperous	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Poor

31   In your answers to the questions above about attitudes, you noted what you felt to be the typical British man or woman's attitudes towards Germans. As a student of German, how do your attitudes compare? Do you feel that your reactions are very different? Why do you think this might be?

Please tick here, if you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview ☐
Thank you very much for your help. Please return the questionnaire as soon as possible using the reply-paid envelope (To: Uwe Baumann, Department of Languages. The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA)

Uwe Baumann   U0142715

Appendix 4

Post-course questionnaire advanced German

L(ZX)313 Variationen 2007/2

Instructions

Please use a ball-point pen to complete the questionnaire. Do not use a fountain or felt tip pen as the ink may be visible on the other side of the page. The questionnaire will be read by a computer scanner, so please fill it in as follows. Place a 'X' in the appropriate box, keeping within the boundary. For example: ☒   If you make a mistake and cross the wrong box, please block out your answer and then cross the correct box. For example: ☒ ☐ ■ ☐

PI Nr

Your nationality   **English** ☐   **Scottish** ☐   **Irish** ☐   **Welsh** ☐

                          German ☐   **Austrian** ☐   **Swiss** ☐

                          Other   ☐   **(please specify)**_____

1   Now that you have finished studying *Variationen*, do you think that you know more about German-speaking countries, their cultures and their people than before you started?

                                                         Yes ☐

                                                         No ☐

2   If 'No', please explain briefly why you think that you have not gained any new knowledge about German-speaking countries.

3   Do you think that learning about other cultures and their customs can help you reflect on your own

culture and customs?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

The intended learning outcomes are given for all Open University courses. Please have a look at a few of these outcomes relating to L313 *Variationen* and cross them according to whether you feel you have achieved those learning outcomes Completely, Fairly Completely, Partly or Not at all.

4	**Knowledge and understanding**	Completely	Fairly Completely	Partly	Not at all

When you complete your studies of L313 *Variationen* you will be able to

	Completely	Fairly Completely	Partly	Not at all
Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of, and an ability to critically evaluate, aspects of the arts, history, institutions, linguistic situation, geography, sociology, economics or cultures of the societies of the countries where German is spoken ……………………………………………	☐	☐	☐	☐
Show that you know about and understand some of the ways people behave in those cultures and societies and can compare them you're your own	☐	☐	☐	☐

Knowledge about Germany and the Germans

These are knowledge-based questions based on what you might already know about Germany and the Germans or what you will have come across while you studied the course. This is NOT an exam, so just select an answer for the multi-choice questions, or give short answers, please! If you are not sure, just move to the next question.

Politics and structures

5 What are the main reasons for the historical development of the Federal administrative and political system? (Please cross as many answers as you think are correct)

The outcomes of the 1848/1849 revolution…………………………………………… ☐

Bismarck's policies………………………………………………………………… ☐

Germany being made up of many small states and political units………………… ☐

The German desire to be independent…………………………………………….. ☐

The Allies set up this system in 1945……………………………………………. ☐

6 Please specify which German political party is best described by each statement by matching

its name with the statement. For example if you think statement (i) is PDS please write C in the box. ☐ C

Parties

A	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	**E**	CDU
B	CSU	**F**	FDP
C	PDS	**G**	REP
D	SPD		

Statements

(i)   A party which has a stronghold in one particular region of Germany and has been the ruling party in this region since 1957……………………………………..   ☐

(ii)   This party has a tradition which dates back more than a century and has been in opposition for a large part of the post-war period…………………………………….   ☐

(iii)   Founded after the Second World War, this party describes itself as supra-denominational and has been in government for a large part of the post-war period…………………………………………………………………………..   ☐

(iv)   This relatively new party has not yet managed to get elected into the *Bundestag*, despite some success in local and regional elections…………………………….   ☐

(v)   A fairly small party, which has nevertheless formed coalitions in post-war governments…………………………………………………………………………..   ☐

(vi)   A party with an environmentally-friendly range of policies which merged with a smaller grouping in 1993…………………………………………………………………   ☐

(vii) The successor to a party founded in 1946 - this party is a focus for criticisms against Western society………………………………………………………………..   ☐

7   Can you name three German Chancellors who have been in office since 1949?

_____

_____

_____

German history

8   What do you know about the Germany *Sonderweg* as a historical concept? (please cross as many answers as you think are right)

It serves as a justification of the German belief that they are a master race………   ☐

It provides an explanation as to why Germany was the only European country to give up a democratic system of government after 1929……………………………..   ☐

It is a synonym for the success of the German industrial revolution………………..   ☐

It provides evidence that Germany's historical development was substantially different from that of other European nations……………………………………………   ☐

It offers an explanation for the re-unification of Germany after the end of the Cold War……………………………………………………………………………………..   ☐

It justifies the argument that Germany had no democratic tradition……………….. ☐

It provides proof that Germany's elites were anti-democratic and authoritarian….. ☐

9   In June 1953 there was an uprising in the GDR. Can you summarise what the causes were (very briefly)?

_____

_____

The German language

10   Which of these statements about German dialect are true?
       (please cross as many answers as you think are right)

The use of dialects in Germany is more widespread than ever…………………….. ☐

People are taking an active interest in preserving and maintaining their dialect…. ☐

Due to the internationalisation of the media, dialects are dying out all over Germany…………………………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Local dialect is an integral part of regional identity…………………………………... ☐

Many Germans speak only dialect, not High German………………………………. ☐

11   What is the name of the ethnic minority group which has lived in Germany for more than a thousand years and has its own language and traditions? Where is it based?

_____

_____

Immigration and emigration

12   The Potsdam Agreement stipulated that…
       (please cross one option only)

Germans living in the former German areas east of the Oder-Neisse line should be removed………………………………………………………………………………. ☐

Germans living in parts of the USSR should be removed………………………….. ☐

Germans in East Prussia should be penalised by forfeiting their possessions….. ☐

Germans and Poles should live together in the former German areas east of the Oder-Neisse line…………………………………………………………………………… ☐

The Allies agreed to establish a new homeland for displaced Germans………… ☐

13   Aussiedler are…
       (please cross one option only)

Ethnic Germans living in Austria…………………………………………………….. ☐

Ethnic Germans living in parts of the USSR and other Eastern Bloc countries….. ☐

Workers who have been invited to come to Germany to work for a fixed period of time……………………………………………………………………………………………….. □

Poles who wanted to emigrate to West Germany…………………………………… □

Refugees from developing countries seeking German citizenship………………… □

14   Which countries did the majority of the so-called *Gastarbeiter* come from?

_____

_____

15   What are the major changes in the pattern of immigration into Germany between the 1950s/1960s and nowadays?

Shift from mainly unskilled to skilled labour requirements………………………….. □

Immigrants coming from different countries than before……………………………. □

Regulations for admission have changed…………………………………………. □

Changes in birth and death rates mean that the population of Germany is growing more slowly…………………………………………………………………….. □

Art and architecture

16   Dresden is famous for its architectural sites. Can you name four of them?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

17   Which artists can you name who lived and worked in the GDR?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Post '45 literature

18   What was the *Gruppe* 47
        (please cross one option only)

It was a group of writers based in Berlin……………………………………………… □

It was a group of writers working with Bertolt □

Brecht……………………………..

It was a group of writers and critics………………………………………………………… ☐

It was a group of poets who were trying out new forms of writing………………… ☐

It was a group of politically-aware writers who were trying to write a manifesto for the future of Germany after the war……………………………………………… ☐

19   Which of the following women writers achieved literary fame after 1945?
       (please cross as many options as you think are right)

Christa Wolf………………………………………………………………………………. ☐

Elfriede Jelinek………………………………………………………………………………… ☐

Ingeborg Bachmann……………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff…………………………………………………… ☐

Sophie von Laroche…………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Irene Trauermann……………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Isabel von Daumann…………………………………………………………………. ☐

Leni Riefenstahl………………………………………………………………………. ☐

Vicki Baum…………………………………………………………………………….. ☐

Science and technology

20   How many names of German Nobel Prize winners for science and technology can you
       remember?

_____

_____

_____

21   What is the *Transrapid*?
       (Please cross one answer only)

It is a new German motorway system…………………………………………………… ☐

It is a new highspeed railway which links Hamburg and Berlin…………………….. ☐

It is a new type of highspeed train which will link Hamburg and Berlin……………. ☐

It is a magnetic levitation train developed in Germany………………………… ☐

It is a new type of ship designed for fast journeys on German rivers……………… ☐

It is a rack-and-pinion railway designed especially for use in Bavaria…………… ☐

Germany and Europe

22   What is the name of the prestigious prize which is usually awarded annually in Aachen? (Please cross one answer only)

Internationaler Friedenspreis…………………………………………………. ☐

Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels………………………………… ☐

Schlegel-Tieck-Preis…………………………………………………… ☐

Internationaler Karlspreis…………………………………………………… ☐

Internationaler Preis fur europäische Integration………………………………… ☐

23   Name two winners of this prize

1 _____

2 _____

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Attitudes towards Germans

24   In this section please consider what your fellow countrymen and women in Britain think
      about the Germans. What are their attitudes towards Germany? Below you will find a set
      of five-point scales with adjectives and their opposites at each end. The adjectives relate to
      qualities which have been quoted when describing typical Germans. Mark the point on
      each scale according to how you think the average British person rates them. For instance,
      if you think that most people in this country think Germans are Very aggressive, then put a
      cross in the box under 1. If you think that most people think Germans are neither
      aggressive nor non-aggressive, put a cross in the box under 3. If, on the other hand, you
      believe that most people consider Germans to be Non-aggressive, put a cross in the box
      under 5.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Aggressive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Non-aggressive
Arrogant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Meek, humble
Brave	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Cowardly
Boring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Amusing
Clean	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Dirty
Environmentally-friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Environmentally-indifferent
Conservative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Progressive
Cruel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Kind
Democratic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Undemocratic
Direct, blunt	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Indirect
Easy-going	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Inflexible, rigid
Efficient	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Incompetent
Formal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Informal
Friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unfriendly
Hard-working	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Lazy
Humorous	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Humourless
Patriotic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unpatriotic
Polite	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rude
Racist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Non-racist
Reliable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unreliable
Reserved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Open
Serious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Frivolous
Thorough	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Careless
Tidy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Untidy
Prosperous	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Poor

2   Do you think that your attitudes towards Germans has changed over the last seven months?
5.   Yes ☐   No ☐   No ☐

26   Do you think that studying *Variationen* has played a role in this?
          Yes ☐   No ☐

Uwe Baumann   U0142715

27   In your answers to the questions above about attitudes, you noted what you felt to be the
        typical British man or woman's attitudes towards Germans. As a student of German, how do
        your attitudes compare? Do you feel that your reactions are very different? Why do you think
        this might be?

Please tick here, if you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview ☐
Thank you very much for your help. Please return the questionnaire as soon as possible using the
reply-paid envelope (To: Uwe Baumann, Department of Languages. The Open University, Milton
Keynes MK7 6AA)

Appendix 5

Interview questions for semi-structured telephone interviews

Name of student: Date:

Course studied

Contact phone number:

Introduction:
Thank you for agreeing to the interview. <check whether student agrees to interview being recorded> The development of intercultural competence is one of the learning objectives of the course you have studied. So in this interview I'll be asking you about different aspects of cultural identities to find out more about your ideas about cultural differences and similarities.

Savoir être (attitude of curiosity and openness)

1   Could you briefly define your own (cultural) identity?
         Prompts could be: nationality, mother tongue, ethnicity, gender, family/relationships, place of birth, where you live, age, hobbies, job, etc.

2   Which German-speaking country are you most familiar with. How would you briefly define its cultural identity?

3   Could you provide a few examples which show differences between daily life and routines in German-speaking countries and your own daily life?

4   When you meet a German speaker, and have some kind of conversation with him or her, do you behave exactly as you would with a speaker of your own language or do you adapt your behaviour? If so, please explain how and provide a couple of short examples.

Savoirs (knowledge)

5   Could you name at least three things that you have learned about German speaking countries through studying *Rundblick/Variationen*?

6   When you meet a German speaker, how you ever encountered a misunderstanding? If so, can you tell me more about it? Did you resolve the misunderstanding? If so, how? If not, why was that?

7   How would you describe the role of dialect and accent in your country? And is this different in German-speaking countries?

8   Imagine you are invited to a social occasion in a German-speaking country by someone who is not a very close friend
         a) a dinner party at home
         b) a large birthday party
         What rules and conventions would you follow? How do they differ between the two types of invitation? How similar or dissimilar are they to the rules and conventions in your own country?

9   Using a scale of 1-5, in which 1= limited, 2= below average, 3= average, 4= pretty good, 5= very good, how would you rate your general knowledge about your own country (e.g. politics, history, geography or similar)?

10   How would you rate your knowledge about German speaking countries?

Savoir comprendre (skills of relating and interpreting)

11   What do you think is the most commonly-held stereotype about the British in German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland)?

12   What do you think is the most predominant stereotype about the Germans/Austrians/Swiss in the UK?

13   What do you think are the origins of these stereotypes?

Savoir apprendre/savoir faire **(skills of discovery and interaction)**

14   Last year there was a general election in Germany which led to a change of government and a grand coalition. How do you find more information about such an event and its consequences? (prompt for German-speaking media, Internet, talking to friends, relatives, business contacts or similar)

Savoir s'engager **(critical cultural awareness)**

15   Most newspapers, wherever they are based, have a particular stance. How do you recognize this with papers in your own country?

16   How do you recognise it when you are reading something from a German-speaking country? How do you handle it?

Appendix 6

Table 1 Summary of attitudinal data in % for L(ZX)193 *Rundblick* post-course questionnaire

	1	3	5
aggressive	59	33	8
arrogant	76	20	4
brave	32	59	9
boring	45	39	16
clean	83	15	2
env.-friendly	87	11	2
conservative	55	31	14
cruel	32	43	25
democratic	56	41	3
direct	84	16	
easy-going	7	32	61
efficient	93	6	1
formal	92	6	2
friendly	26	50	4
hard-working	93	6	1
humorous	7	27	66
patriotic	68	27	5
polite	51	25	24
racist	43	40	17
reliable	79	21	
reserved	50	36	14
serious	92	8	
thorough	93	7	
tidy	83	16	1
prosperous	78	22	

Appendix 7

Table 4 Summary of attitudinal data in % for L(ZX)313 *Variationen*, pre-course questionnaire

	1	3	5
aggressive	59	33	8
arrogant	78	20	2
brave	27	67	6
boring	73	22	4
clean	92	8	
env.-friendly	98	2	
conservative	63	31	6
cruel	31	55	14
democratic	57	37	6
direct	82	16	2
easy-going		10	90
efficient	96	4	
formal	51	49	
friendly	22	55	22
hard-working	96	4	
humorous	2	10	88
patriotic	61	24	14
polite	43	39	18
racist	35	55	10
reliable	90	10	
reserved	55	39	6
serious	94	6	
thorough	98	2	
tidy	94	6	
prosperous	91	9	

Appendix 8

Table 7 Summary of attitudinal data in % for L(ZX)313 *Variationen*, post-course questionnaire

	1	3	5
aggressive	61	25	14
arrogant	75	25	
brave	25	63	11
boring	79	11	11
clean	93	4	4
env.-friendly	96		4
conservative	50	36	14
cruel	36	54	11
democratic	44	52	4
direct	81	19	
easy-going		18	82
efficient	100		
formal	89	11	
friendly	21	50	29
hard-working	96	4	
humorous		7	93
patriotic	61	36	3
polite	61	25	14
racist	50	39	11
reliable	93	7	
reserved	61	29	
serious	96	4	
thorough	93	7	
tidy	93	7	
prosperous	96	4	

Appendix 9

Sample interview with a student (Beginner German)

Interviewer: So just in this interview, I'm just asking a few questions about different aspects of cultural identity, so as to find out more about your ideas about cultural differences and similarities. First of all, how would you define your own cultural identity, you know, nationality, ethnicity, place of birth and so on?

Student: Well I'm English and I was born in London, and I suppose I'm white … I don't know …

Interviewer: No that's sounds fine, that's fine. And tell me which German speaking country are you most familiar with, would that be Germany, Austria, Switzerland?

Student: Erm, I've been to Austria, but I've been to Germany, so yes Austria I suppose.

Interviewer: And would you very briefly define cultural identity in Austria, what do you think of when you think of an Austrian?

Student: Erm, I don't know, I mean I don't have a sort of picture in my mind, I think they're European and they're very like me I think. I don't feel that they're apart from me or different.

Interviewer: I don't know, that's really interesting. Now you know about your daily life and routines in England, but how about the difference between daily life and routines in German speaking countries that you've come across. What's different about daily life in Germany?

Student: Erm, oh dear … well I suppose there's so many little things … things like perhaps their eating habits. They eat perhaps slightly different sort of things for breakfast and er … gosh, I don't know, this is going to be very difficult …

Interviewer: No, No, it's not, it's fine, that's the sort of thing we're after, so little things like eating habits are different. OK, anything else you can … you probably think of something when you've put the phone down …

Student: Yes exactly yes … no I didn't expect you to be asking me things like this, it's rather a …

Interviewer: Bit different. No it's just we're just trying to get some feedback on what sort of, you know, cultural differences people have become aware of, as a result of the course.

Student: I see. Well erm … I don't know, I just find that very hard to answer I think … I can't think that there's anything that I'm totally … very aware of.

Interviewer: OK, no that's fine. When you meet a German speaker, I guess you've met and spoken to quite a few Germans, and had some kind of

conversations, do you behave as you would with a speaker of your own language, or do you adapt your behaviour in any way?

Student: No I behave the same.

Interviewer: Behave the same, OK. Can you think of three things that you've learned about German speaking countries through your study of *Rundblick*? Anything, any three things that you can think of that you didn't know before?

Student: That I didn't know before?

Interviewer: Uhuh.

Student: I don't … I honestly, I can't think of anything.

Interviewer: It could be anything to do with, you know, the way of life, or something about Germany itself.

Student: Erm, well I've learned about the different areas of Germany, obviously seeing the map and seeing the different sort of county type areas … I didn't know that before and I've learned that perhaps there's different kinds of German spoken in different areas and especially the Austrian German is different. And I suppose, I don't know about culture, I've learned more about the geography really.

Interviewer: No, that's fine, so that was to do with the different regions of Germany.

Student: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. OK. And when you've been engaged in conversation with Germans have you ever had misunderstandings, you know, which might have arisen from your conversation?

Student: No, I mean I haven't spoken to anybody in German.

Interviewer: OK.

Student: All my … because I didn't know any German before I did the course, the people I've spoken to have been good English speakers, so no there haven't been any misunderstandings.

Interviewer: Right OK, no, opportunities for misunderstanding … OK, you mentioned dialect just now, how do you describe the role of dialect and accent in England and is that any different in Germany? Obviously there's lots of dialects in both countries … do you think [they] have a different affect or operate differently in England and Germany?

Student: I think so … it's basically the same language and it's basically understood, isn't it, by everybody. I'm sure that Germans understand Austrian Germans.

Interviewer: Yes. Some would claim not to.

Student: Sounds different.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Student: I mean there's a few words that are different but I mean mostly it sounds the same.

Interviewer: Yes, ok. Have you been invited to any social occasions in Germany?

Student: Erm …

Interviewer: Anybody, you know, a dinner party or a birthday party or anything.

Student: Well not in Germany, in Austria.

Interviewer: In Austria, yes in Austria.

Student: I've been to a party in Austria yes.

Interviewer: And, erm, did you think there were any different rules or conventions compared with this country, you know, were the social conventions any different?

Student: No it was very, very much the same. I wouldn't have known I was not at home, frankly.

Interviewer: OK so they're very, very similar to the conventions here?

Student: Yes. Mind you the people that were there were very … let's say European, … Austrians speak a lot of languages and so maybe they weren't typical.

Interviewer: Not typical German or Austrian people?

Student: No, I don't …

Interviewer: Yes, ok, well I guess that's getting more and more general isn't it? Using a scale of one to five, in which one is not very much and five is very good, how would you rate your general knowledge about England and then compared with that, how would you rate your knowledge about German speaking countries? England first of all. How good is your general knowledge? Just one to five.

Student: Erm, five being a lot?

Interviewer: Five is very good yes.

Student: Yes, ok, well let's say four, I should think.

Interviewer: Four. OK, and what about your knowledge of German-speaking countries, how would you rate that?

Student: Erm, well I should think probably fairly low, I would say perhaps only one.

Interviewer: OK then. The famous issue of stereotypes, what do you think the stereotype is of the British in German speaking countries? What do they think about us?

Student: Ah I don't know, I don't know what they think of us. I think that they …

Interviewer: And what about the other way round, what do you think is the most commonly held stereotype of Germans, Austrians etc, in the UK?

Student: Erm, I think possibly, the one I've heard most commonly is that Germans have no sense of humour. Their trains run on time. Erm … and they have a very sort of rule based society.

Interviewer: Rule based society, yes … OK … where do you think these stereotypes come from? Where do you think they originate from?

Student: Erm, well I think they become perhaps back from the war, I don't know, but I mean they're largely born out of ignorance, aren't they, because people didn't travel so much and then they got fixed ideas.

Interviewer: That's right yes. Now you remember that last year there was a general election in Germany which led to a big change of government, the grand coalition led by Frau Dr Angela Merkel, are you interested in events like that? How would you find out about it?
How would you get information about what's going on in Germany?

Student: Well I see it on television news, I read it in newspapers, on the radio.

Interviewer: You don't have any friends that you might ask about it?

Student: Oh no, no.

Interviewer: No, OK. Right, and finally, newspapers, now I'm sure you're aware that all kinds of newspapers have a particular stance or bias and I'm sure you could recognise that with newspapers in this country, you know, what's the difference between *The Telegraph* and *The Sun* … would you be able to recognise that in any German language newspapers?

Student: No.

Interviewer: No, ok, ok, fine, anyway, thanks ever so much, you've given me some really interesting answers. Thank you very much indeed.

Student: Is that it?

Interviewer: Yes that's it. Thank you very much indeed.

Appendix 10

Sample interview with a student (advanced German)

Interview Student X
22 November 2007

Interviewer: Ok, let me explain a little bit what I am doing and why I am interested in talking to students who have finished with the Level 3 German course. What I am trying to establish is intercultural learning and intercultural learning has an element of knowledge but it is experience. And I am trying to figure out whether actually we teach appropriately and I want to compare in my study sort of the experience and the knowledge of students who do the beginners' course and the students who do the highest level course. That's briefly the background. And intercultural competence is one of our objectives in the course. What I want to talk about with you tonight is whether this is met by what we are doing. So this is all about identity, culture etc. I'd be very grateful if you could sort of start by defining your own cultural identity.

Student: That is rather difficult. I am English, white English, I don't really know… yes, fairly sort of reasonably well-paid job, professional job, married, just got, just got a new baby actually <interviewer: congratulations>, I don't know, in terms of culture, I wouldn't ...

Interviewer: I am more after the identity. I mean you mentioned your nationality, your ethnicity, certainly relationships. What about things like where you come from, where you were born or where you live now.

Student: I live in London.

Interviewer: So you would consider yourself to be a Londoner?

Student: I would consider myself to be a Londoner. I have lived in London for over twenty years now, twenty-three, twenty-four years. I was actually born in Scotland but I moved from when I was six months old, so .. I lived as a teenager in a small town just outside Portsmouth, went to university at Exeter, fairly smallish town there, I suppose. So that's my background. But when I moved to London, I got a job here, I always liked London, I suppose. It is a big city, lively, always lots going on, lots of things to do, people to met, interesting place,

Interviewer: It certainly is. Ok, that will do me nicely. Thank you very much. Can I assume that you are most familiar with Germany or is it Austria and Switzerland as well?

Student: Mostly Germany.

Interviewer: Ok. Now we move into sort of the question how would you define German… Germany's identity, or Germany's cultural identity? What are sort of issues that come to your mind if you are asked: Ok, what is the identity of Germans?

Student: <laughs> I know that is one of the big subjects that came up in the course quite a bit. I think Germany is quite, is quite varied. So it is rather hard to speak, you know, of a single German culture or identity. That seems to come out quite strongly actually that it was a country of region .. of various regions so there is a sort of, I suppose there is greater German cultural identity. But there is also regional, localised feeling of, sense of belonging. I think it is, you know, is obviously language is one thing that sort of largely sort of brings it all together. But there is a lot of differences in Germany, differences in Germany, obviously … the sort of separate, well actually since the Second World War the separate historical developments of East and West and coming together since, since 1990, but there are still big, big differences between East Germans and West Germans. In fact, the people, Germans that I know actually were East Germans, they come from East Berlin. That I probably know individually, the Germans that I know. And you can still tell, tell West and East Germans apart in terms of their, their, the ways they think and express themselves.

Interviewer: Can I ask you a supplementary question? Do you think it has anything to do with the general East West divide or in your experience is it, sort of, too blunt to say, ok, all Easterners and Westerners do think differently.

Student: Yeah, I think, obviously that is too much a generalisation and it would be based largely on my personal observations. West Germans, in general, seem to be much more confident, and East Germans actually more like the English. Anyway, they are more, sort of, unassuming and, you know, modest, you know. But perhaps again that might have been the environment they grew up in and obviously the experiences, they still slightly perhaps feeling, you know, slightly almost second class citizens on the losing side.

Interviewer: Ok, anything else that comes to your mind? I mean you mentioned things like regions, the language, the East West thing?

Student: It is, religion, I think comes into it as well. There is again a North South divide there. Obviously the Northern half of Germany is protestant, or you know evangelisch, sort of things, or even Calvinist sort of background down there. Whereas the South, particularly Bavaria, and obviously Austria is Catholic, that has a, the history of Germany going back to the 19th century and before was rather you know divided along these lines. Obviously, Austria was the biggest German-speaking state for a long time and then there was the rise of Prussia and Prussia was swallowing up the Northern half of it. And the other half what is now in Germany Bavaria and so on were never part of Prussia, and in 1870 joined Germany. And part of this was the history of the sort of religious divide, going back quite a long time. So going back to the original question. There is obviously a German national identity and feeling, people you know are Germans, but firstly, in my experience, Germans identify much more with their region, their land rather than their country, more so than the English, British people, English people. They would say I am British, English, I am Welsh, I am Scottish but they wouldn't go beyond that. So I first said that I am English and only after a bit of prompting, I said yeah I would consider myself a Londoner.

Interviewer: I would first say that I am from Oldenburg and then say that I am German. This is an interesting difference. <yeah>

I want to move you on to the next area that I would like to explore a little bit. And that is differences in, between daily life and routines, in your case, in Germany and your own daily life in London. Can you think of any particular example?

Student: Ehm, oh, again not drawn on a lot of experience of daily life in Germany. So this might be based on, almost, preconceptions.

Interviewer: That's fine, that is what I am after.

Student: Ok, I would say, again in what I have seen, the Germans tend to have much more of a routine than I would say I had. You know, this, in terms of work it is much the same anyway. But in their free time, it seems to be, my friends in Berlin, they have this little allotment, it is almost stereotypical, and they go there and spend much of the weekend there on what is more than an allotment, you know, it is, it got a little summer, I'd say shed, it is a bit bigger than a shed but not really a house, and they spend a lot of time looking after that. And, and they, they, they tend to be quite sociable, they have a circle of friends that they spend a lot, a relatively small circle of friends they spend a lot of time with. I am thinking, ehm, English people, perhaps have a wider circle of friends and acquaintances, not so close with them. Ehm, what else? But, I wouldn't say that I knew a great deal about that sort of thing.

Interviewer: I think you highlighted quite a few interesting things. You said that work in your view is the same.

Student: Ehm, well, in the sense if you have a job that takes up a large part of the day. It is again part of a stereotype, I suppose, that … actually I will draw, I spent a few days in Austria actually with a, Siemens, a work related thing. They have a work culture, it starts when you get there and it stops when you leave. There is a very clear divide between the two. Whereas you know I think in England work seems to intrude rather more into life outside. Certainly in my experience.

Interviewer: Very, very interesting. I want to move on to the next question. Ehm, that is about behaviour and behaviour adaptation. When you meet someone who speaks German or a German and you have some sort of conversation with this person, would you say that you behave exactly as you would with a speaker of English or would you say you adapt your behaviour?

Student: Ehm, okay there is a difference between whether you know the person or not <interviewer: sure> Ehm, I don't, if it is obviously someone you know, say my friends in Berlin, then I'd say it is fairly natural. I wouldn't thinking that I was behaving really any differently than if I would if they were English. Obviously, apart from speaking in German which obviously is different. Ehm, but no, I'd say that was, that was normal. If it someone, you know we actually went on holiday to Dresden this summer, based on, based on the course actually, and the stuff about Dresden. We thought 'Oh, let's go and have a look'. And there it is, of course, different, you are talking to people, you know, obviously that you don't know, I was a stranger. I think I actually acted probably more, ehm, again it is partly, you know because you are speaking a foreign language, reacted more formally or diffidently than perhaps I would in this country. But this is just to say that it is part of being on holiday and speaking a different language really.

Interviewer: Ok, I hope you enjoyed it.

Student: Oh, it is great. I had this impression that Dresden is still this bombed-out shell.

Interviewer: No, no, they have done a lot over the years. It is actually really, really nice.

Student: Oh yes, it came as a great surprise.

Interviewer: Now the knowledge part of *Variationen.* Can you give me three things that you have learned from this course?

Student: Okay, ehm, quite a lot about Dresden. And it was the thing I wrote my *Hausarbeit* on was immigration in Germany since the Second World War, the conditions of the particular Turkish *Gastarbeiter* there. I knew superficially about it but now I know a lot more about history, of immigrants in Germany. Particulary, I read the book by Günter Walraff '*Ganz unten'* which is quite shocking really, just come across the everyday nasty racism that Turkish people experienced in the 1980s. Ehm, I think, again, from what I could what I was learning from the course, things have improved quite a lot in the last decade, I would say. So that was a large area. Ehm, Dresden was very interesting from the history of the town and the history of the Saxon princes and so on which I knew nothing about before then. Thirdly, I suppose, the .. German literature a bit more. Obviously, I read a few books by Heinrich Böll. But this made me go out and read a book by Milena Moser *Putzfraueninsel*, as a result, it is actually quite an easy read. I thought why can't all German writers write like that.

Interviewer: That is the same with English authors, though.

Student: Yes, some are a lot easier than others. So that was again an interesting thing for me. And I suppose, it is the fourth thing, really is the, is the region, I suppose I knew superficially about regional variety but I learned an awful lot about in a lot more detail about the different areas of Germany and their history as well. It actually encouraged me, I have just finished a book, it is in English, called the Iron Kingdom, it is about Prussia, just came out last year, I think.
Who's his name? Charles Clark or something like that. It got quite a lot of reviews in the Germany press as well. It is about the rise and fall of Prussia from the 16th century to 1947, whatever. It was about Prussia mostly but also about its relationships, you know, with the rest of Germany. So it is encouraged me actually. I mean, I really enjoyed the course a great deal. And I learned an awful lot from it but it also encouraged me to go out and learn even more.

Interviewer: That is something I would like to put as a quote on the website. Great, thank you very much, so we seem to have done the trick there. I mean that is the design principle but obviously the students have a huge variety of interests and it is sometimes quite hard to know what to do to meet as many as possible. I want to move on to misunderstandings. Have you ever, when meeting and talking to a German encountered a misunderstanding?

Student: Probably.

Interviewer: Do you remember something?

Student: Nothing that, nothing that springs immediately to mind actually. I might have to think for a bit.

Interviewer: I give you a sort of example, eh, where I certainly encountered my first major misunderstanding when I moved to England. I was living and working in Manchester at the time and my English wasn't particularly good. I think well, the understatement of the year. But I waited for the bus and the bus arrived, I go in and say my spiel for the 'ticket to the centre city please' and this rather big and tall bus driver says '60 p, love'. And I took, well, decided immediately 'No, I am not going on this bus' which, of course, was a complete misunderstanding, not 'love' was, had for me a particular connotation and not knowing the context I had not cottoned on to the fact that this is like 'mate', 'chap' or whatsoever in Manchester. That for me was a real misunderstanding and I needed to sort of check this out. Does this trigger any memories?

Student: Well, I did have so, ehm, yeah, I am not quite, yeah it was slightly embarrassing, again in, ehm, with my friends in Berlin because obviously people I've not met that often. We have been in touch, when did we first meet? 1989 I think it was, or 1990 and but it was, we have only seen them every four years. And have kept in touch by letter and now by e-mail. But it is the same thing there really, the English people say 'I have got a friend' someone you just know and get on with reasonably well. But again the German definition of friend is a lot tighter. So they were talking with, some people came around to the house or whatever just chatting away and when they went away I said 'oh, it's nice to meet your friends' and they said 'oh, they are not really our friends, just people we know'. Oh does that mean, you know, what do you think about me? Does that mean that I don't quite classify, get classified as a friend either because I am just someone you don't meet every often. So that is in terms of the use of a word, you know, comes down to the closeness of a relationship.

Interviewer: And obviously, you talked to them and resolved the misunderstanding.

Student: I did, I did ask does that mean that we are just, we are not real friends, just '*befreundet*' and, ehm, actually it was a little embarrassing because I didn't get a straight answer.

Interviewer: Germans certainly distinguish between '*Freund*' and '*gute Bekannte*'. It is something, that is probably my second misunderstanding when I lived here because I talked about acquaintances and that is a concept that is rather negative.

Student: Yeah, English people would be quite insulted by that.
Interviewer: Yeah, that is a very interesting point, thank you. Ehm, you talked about language and regional variety and so on. I want to sort of do this a little bit more. And I wonder whether you could describe a little bit the role of dialect and accent how you perceive it in the UK.

Student: Ehm, in the Uk. It's, <interviewer: does it play a role?> Well, obviously it is noticeable, you can tell, tell roughly where someone comes from. Ehm, I think it possibly, there are some, and there are some, I suppose, regional dialects when you hear them, you, you, it's usually negative conception come up. Again, if it is an accent from Norfolk or Devon, you think some sort of rural, rustic, behind the times people. If it is from Birmingham, generally, has got a bad reputation, yeah, Birmingham, Black Country accent, you know is looked down on. And ehm, obviously if you come across a Glaswegian accent and so on, well, actually there I did know someone from Glasgow and found him very hard to understand a lot of the time. So, ehm, it's, it's, I think there is probably lots and lots of different accents, most of which, you know, probably, it's just the way you know, shows where you come from, doesn't mean very much but there are a few which are thought of negatively. And there is probably the received pronunciation, the upper class accent, the people who are also not liked for the opposite reason, stuck up toffs, so it's it does colour, I suppose, a bit people's perceptions.

Interviewer: Fine. What about comparing this with Germany?

Student: Ehm, I come from the outside. My first, for me, the first thing about it is the, is just whether they are easy to understand. I suppose, actually, the people I have met and spoken with most I actually find the Berlin accent is quite easy for me to understand and also Saxon. This might be quite interesting, I actually quite like the Saxon accent. I find it very easy to understand. I did, read, I was in Düsseldorf three years ago for a few days and I met someone who came from that area and then we met someone who came from Saxony. We sat chatting and that was all okay and then she said afterwards 'Don't you find her accent terrible, isn't it awful? She said that this woman had broken up with someone recently because he couldn't stand her accent. So very unfair. And I didn't have a problem with it. But obviously, I wouldn't say that I know many people from other regions but probably when they speak to me, ehm they speak in *Hochdeutsch* which is easy to understand. I have never been to the areas where, it started off from the Frisian islands and I have obviously never heard anyone from there speaking, apart from in the course but I have been to Munich and I have been to, we went on holiday, last year actually, to Switzerland. And in Zurich, so the German part of Switzerland, and I was speaking in German and the people speaking back to me in German, they obviously go out of their way to speak proper German because I, I could understand quite easily.

Interviewer: Ehm, so would you say that the role of accent and dialect is actually very similar in the UK and Germany or German-speaking countries?

Student: Well, in the sense that obviously people from different parts of the country, oh, that is obviously again based on not very much, it possibly has a bigger role in Germany in terms of, you know, people's opinions of people based on how they speak. There seems to be more of a variety than in English. But that is my perception, it might be hard to follow. Foreign people coming to England actually find it very difficult to understand people from Manchester, you know, they have a slightly different accent but apparently it is incomprehensible.

Interviewer: Yeah, I sometimes wondered whether they speak some sort of Chinese rather than English. But it is expectation as well, you are used to a certain

accent. For a foreigner like me, it is standard English and then you hear all the regional variety. Ok, that's great. Ehm, I wonder whether we could move on about something about social occasions in Germany. Talk a little bit about what you would do and what the rules and conventions would be. Let's imagine, ehm, you are invited by someone who is not a very close friend in this more English sense to a dinner party at their home. What rules and conventions would you follow?

Student: Ehm, well, first, I suppose, I don't know really to do anything particularly different. I suppose you always bring a gift, especially if you don't know the people particularly well, so you maybe bring flowers and chocolates for a woman and maybe a bottle of wine or perhaps if it is a more important occasion a bottle of whisky or something for the man if it is something like that. Eh, I think, poss…, it really depends on what the sort of relationship is, maybe I might dress smarter than just going round to someone's house in this country. Ehm, I suppose, once, you know, once you are there, if they are no particularly close friends or acquaintances then you, the language might be a bit more formal, you might use *Sie* rather than *Du* you know. And I suppose, it might be, I don't know I'd be I would act particularly different if it was a similar situation in England. Can't think of anything that I would particularly do differently.

Interviewer: That is fine. The other sort of invitation would be to a rather large birthday party. Would you perceive a difference between the dinner at home and a large birthday party?

Student: Ehm, they are different occasions. Ehm.

Interviewer: Do they have different rules?

Student: Well, I suppose if it about a birthday party, it tends to be a much more relaxed affair. It's, ehm, but I don't know. I don't think I would act particularly differently than it is an English. No, I can't think of anything.

Interviewer: Ok. You sort of said this already. For you it is more or less the same. Ehm, whether in the UK or in a German-speaking country. Can you think of anything in terms of, ehm, yeah, differences, even small. I mean one thing, that I always wonder about and have never come to a conclusion is arrival time.

Student: Ehm, I think, ehm, well, actually, this is probably me, well, obviously if it is a dinner party and they say 7 o'clock then you know you should be there at or quite near to 7. Ehm, so I am usually fairly prompt at these things. So if someone says to me come around at 7, so I will be there at, one minute past 7. If it is a birthday party, it tends to be, it tends to be a little more come when you feel like it. So you come a bit later. So again, depending on the level of familiarity, I turn up fairly soon after 7.

Interviewer: Excellent. Ok, let's move on to the next question. I am going to use a very quick and simple and simplified, I want to use a scale of 1-5 in terms of your knowledge. 1 is limited, 2 below average, 3 average, 4 pretty good 5 very good. So how would you rate your general knowledge about your own country on this scale?

Student: Ehm, about 4 I should think.

Interviewer: What about German-speaking countries?

Student: Ehm, probably about 3, I learned an awful lot last year. I probably would have said 3 last year but I knew a lot less than I know now.

Interviewer: Well, this is part of the process. That's great, thanks.
Ehm, I want to move on to stereotypes, briefly, now. And I wonder whether you have any concept or any hunch what would be the most commonly held stereotype about the British in Germany, Austria or Switzerland?

Student: Ehm, that is interesting, you are seeing from the other way round. Ehm, yeah, I think, probably, okay, stereotypes about the British, probably not particularly positive ones these days, I think. Probably uncouth, is the first word that springs to mind. Yeah, really not very good mannered, impolite, loud, boorish, ignorant, yeah, okay.

Interviewer: That's very much based on the holiday experience. What about in your view the most commonly held stereotype of Germans? In the UK.

Student: Well, yeah, I think, unfortunately I think the Germans don't have a very good again stereotypes here. I think here, it's the impressions are getting set by the media. They still tend to hark back to two World Wars, one World Cup, sort of thing, you know, they see the Germans probably as loud, arrogant, humourless. I mean on the positive side, I mean efficient, almost robotic, so again not particularly positive stereotypes.

Interviewer: That suits me nicely. You mentioned already one thing but I want to, if I may, to explore this a little further in terms of the origins. You mentioned the media. So what are your thoughts on the origins of these stereotypes?

Student: Well, that, I think, and I just remember because it struck me. I was watching a couple of months ago there was a comedy, stand up comedy series on television, the pub landlord and he did all sorts of sketches and one of them, for some reason, he got on to Germans. And he was doing this routine of a German trying to sing Twinkle, twinkle, little star but he was doing it again like an almost German military officer, you know .. and everybody in the audience was in hysterics and thought it was extremely funny because it is just tapping you know a perception that British people do have, it is just .. the media will always hark back to this competition, when it is a football match, back to the Second World War sort of thing. Ehm, which just doesn't apply. Even when we play against the French it is not even as near, I suppose as nasty

Interviewer: In some

Student: <inaudible>

Interviewer: Closeness so probably can create snide remarks, Ok, that is fine. Next thing is about things that are definitely not in the course. But keeping how you keeping yourself informed about current event, for instance, like general elections two years ago, How do you keep up to date?

Student: You are talking about Britain or Germany?

Interviewer: No, Germany.

Student: Ehm, yeah I do subscribe to, but I haven't managed to read it for the last few days, I do get the daily sort of things from *Deutsche Welle* and actually now *Spiegel* and *Stern*. So I get three daily summaries of the news in German. During the course I spend more time reading them than I spend reading about news in English. So over the last week or so I haven't been keeping up to date.

Interviewer: That is Internet based online?

Student: Internet, yes. I suppose that is the main, now, my main source of German news. I have been keeping up fairly closely with the latest series of railway strikes. And obviously I know about the election two years ago and the events SPD and CDU/CSU and the grand coalition

Interviewer: Is talking to your friends something that keeps you up to date?

Student: Ehm, not so much because we don't, or we might actually meet up this year but we haven't been keeping in touch that much really. And when we do it is always news about family and rather than the general situation.

Interviewer: What about German TV?

Student: No, I don't have satellite, if there is a film on in German and I happen to be around I obviously watching it but in terms of news and current affairs. I have watched a couple over the Internet, ehm, but that again happens almost by, just happens in an article

Interviewer: That's fair enough. This online availability increasingly replaces TV or satellite TV for many people, so a fairly normal experience. However, I want to move on to a more traditional medium which is newspapers. And, ehm, there are two questions related to that. I mean, newspapers always have a stance or, if you want to formulate it less neutral, a bias. If you buy a newspaper in the UK, how do you recognise the stance or the bias of this paper?

Student: Ehm, you usually know anyway.

Interviewer: Sorry, can I, I don't want to interrupt you too much. But this is exactly what I want to unpick a bit more: you usually know. How?

Student: Well, how, ehm, it is usually the editorial stance of the paper which will generally be ehm, well not usually supportive of the government, they will be critical of the government, they will be critical of some government policy, ehm, form and express a particular point of view and they say, if it is a paper like the Daily Mail, they will always be attacking, you know, a Labour government. Regardless of what they do and generally supporting the, Tory policies. If it is a paper like the Guardian or the Independent, they tend to be more, broadly supportive of, supportive of this current government but they will have criticisms, their criticisms will be generally on, ehm, yes, on questions of how things are

done, point of detail then the general, the general trust of policy. On whether and how they disagree with the government of the time and what policy they are pushing and how that fits in with the general political spectrum.

Interviewer: Let's move that to a German-speaking context. Ehm, how do you recognise, ehm, this kind of stance when you are reading something in German in a German newspaper?

Student: Ehm, I, it will be harder, because I don't, once, the things I read online actually tend to be, I'd say, much more impartial than the stories you get from an English newspaper. I don't think I could read, you know, if I was getting an English news service it would be to me, I think, much more biased than the ones I have been reading recently in German. They all seem to be fairly, they actually, they are reporting news without going into a great deal of commentary. And in fact, I take the example of *Stern* looking at that and researching for my *Hausarbeit*, There were articles in there, looking at the opinion articles there, they were fairly, they tended to not have all the same sort of stance. Some of them seem to be pro-integration and immigration and some of them were anti. So a variety of views. I'd say the sources I was reading were fairly, if not completely impartial and unbiased, they expressed a range of opinions.

Interviewer: *Deutsche Welle* is obviously very different, it is by definition neutral, because it is funded by the government and *Spiegel* and *Stern* I grant you they are more into facts and impartial. I don't know whether you have come across any German daily newspapers?

Student: Well, yeah, I mean, ones I have read a few times but it is harder to read it online because you have to subscribe to it, but *TAZ,* the Berlin paper, that is obviously more radical paper and had a left, left of centre point of view. Ehm, I, I don't tend to read papers, I understand, I think *die Welt,* is it *Die Welt,* is meant to be more right of centre?

Interviewer: Yeah, as far as these judgements go is, has a more conservative outlook which makes quite interesting reading because how do you handle this with a grand coalition but this is a different point altogether. Ehm,

Student: I also came across some articles by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* which seems to be, I'd say, right of centre but it is on a fairly small sample.

Interviewer: I want to sort of look a little bit more how you discover the sort of stance, let's stay with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and *TAZ.* I mean you are absolutely right about the media you mainly use, but obviously you have had experience of these two type of daily newspapers which differ. What for you triggered this assessment, ok left of centre, or slightly more right of centre. Were there particular points that triggered that?

Student: Ehm, ok, the *FAZ, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* was about the, ehm, ehm, the integration *Gipfel*, the summit, the second one where some of the Turkish groups boycotted it and it was very very scathing about them and how ridiculous they were and they are cutting their own throats and that is really setting back the course of integration, it was very, very, yeah, well I actually think it was

very one-sided but it was very, very critical of them. I almost just took it at that, yes, it was very persuasive yes it makes pretty good arguments but it was only presenting one side of the story. And it was only then that I found another article from the Stern where actually said well there is another point of view and it explains why these groups are boycotting it and in fact there were other groups in, the SPD as well, the Greens and the Left party who also supported them. So you know there were two sides of the story. But the Frankfurter obviously only giving one side of it.

Interviewer: Very interesting and very valid point. Thank you. So basically you assess like here in the UK on reading the content. And obviously you are quite a high level speaker of German so it is easier to do it. If you are still struggling with the language which then makes it much harder to figure out whether there is … Right, I have come to the end of my questions. Is there anything you want to ask me?