Factors Affecting Second Language Acquisition:

An examination of the learning strategies that native English speaking teachers employ to assist with language difficulties abroad

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Abbreviations and Terminology

For the purposes of this research:

L1 refers to the *native language, main language, mother tongue, or source language* spoken by an individual.

L2 refers to a *second language or target language* (TL).

L3 refers to a *third language*.

C1 refers to the *native culture or main culture* of the individual.

C2 refers to a *second culture*.

CFA refers to *confirmatory factor analysis*.

IB refers to *International Baccalaureate*, a graduation program for international secondary schools.

LLS refer to *language learning strategies*.

SLA refers to *second language acquisition, or L2A, for L2 acquisition*.

TL refers to *target language*.

VHS refers to *Volkshochschule*.
Abstract

This paper addresses second language acquisition with a focus on the learning and coping strategies that native English speaking teachers employ to assist with language learning when they move abroad. Learning techniques that have proven successful with the participants in the study will also be examined.

Germany has a number of international schools (encompassing both primary and secondary) employing English speaking teachers, the majority of whom cannot speak German. As one needs to communicate with others for any number of reasons in today’s society, this can lead to communication problems. Factors such as differing levels of motivation to learn German and barriers to learning seem to be unique for each study participant.

Qualitative personal interviews were used for data collection. The findings indicate that learning German through courses, books, and tapes helps. There are also affective aspects which influence how successful one is in acquiring a second language, such as personality, motivation, and whether it is a priority for the learner to be able to fully participate in German culture.
Introduction

International (elementary and high) schools in Germany attract an interesting mix of teachers from around the globe. Many teachers are drawn to teaching abroad because of the very tangible benefits of increased earnings combined with the attractiveness of living in Germany and having the opportunity to travel around Europe during vacation time. However, due to a number of distinct language and cultural phenomena, this can often mean a drastic lifestyle change for many of these teachers.

Part of this change can be the inability to speak the new language. Those who do not speak German at all or not well are the inspiration for this project. It can be a struggle to try to maintain some remnants of normality when setting up a new life in Germany. Culture shock is common when people are not ready for, or cannot accept, change.

This is often due to routine events, which one takes for granted, such as shopping or making appointments which usually require speaking. If one does not speak German particularly well, as is the case with some of the participants in this research study, it can be a major problem. Insurance, phone, computer, travel and health issues are areas of concern for many expatriates. When one cannot speak German, one’s lifestyle can be very much affected. Unless the German communication partner is both willing and able to speak English, solutions need to be found to solve the language barrier. This usually either means finding a German friend to assist, or learning German and trying to cope on one’s own.

My own interest in the topic stems from my work as a teacher in an international school. I see my colleagues struggle and try to assist them as best I can. The majority seem to all go through the same basic mistakes, such as assuming that everyone has the same healthy enthusiasm towards speaking another language as they do, or that “things are the same as back home.” Many of these mistakes seem to be in regards to assumptions regarding customer service, shopping hours, and particulars such as the time frame necessary to process a document at a government office like the Auslanderamt (the office where foreigners must
register in the local city hall). I wanted to better understand the phenomenon, feeling that a better understanding may possibly provide some tools for change.

I conducted my study with several native English speaking teachers at an international school where English is the language of instruction to provide insight into the strategies they employ when faced with a second language. More particularly, what specific learning strategies do native English speaking teachers employ to assist with language difficulties when they move abroad?

**Mobility**

Mobility is, therefore, a key aspect for the study. This is directly connected to the European Union’s (EU) mission statements:

“The free movement of people, goods and services is a driving force behind the sustained development of the Community. A key priority of the European Union is achievable and effective mobility for EU citizens. The Community is working to encourage open and easily accessible opportunities for citizens to move around the Union for educational, professional, healthcare or other purposes.” (Health EU, 2009).

The EU encourages people to travel, experience, work, and learn in areas that are unfamiliar to them; particularly encouraged is trying to acquire another language. The EU mission statement also promotes European workers to be flexible in their workplace location. The EU statements assist the foreign teachers, who, for the most part, are non-EU nationals, to benefit from the ‘open border’ culture and atmosphere.

On a macro level in Europe, where skilled labour is known to cross borders regularly, this may be commonplace. It is taking this idea one step further, however, and employing not just fellow Europeans, but rather American and other non-EU English speaking teachers within Germany. On a micro level I will examine what this mobility means to the teachers themselves and what learning strategies they use to cope with a foreign language.
According to an EU study, approximately fifty percent of participants from member countries can speak a foreign language to a level of managing a conversation (European Commission, 2005). This study also found that Germans are slightly higher than the EU average, with approximately sixty two percent of inhabitants being able to speak another language, with eighty two percent of this group able to speak English (European Commission, 2005). Conversely, according to the National Association for Bilingual Education, the percentage of native English speaking Americans that can converse in a second language is drastically lower than the German and European averages. Approximately nine percent, of English speaking Americans know and can speak another language fluently (Associated Press, 2005). Despite the many Germans who speak English, my native English speaking teacher colleagues still feel inclined to at least try to learn German for mostly personal reasons that come with living in a foreign country and being an outsider. Many of them wish to understand and appreciate the culture.

Mobility is a key issue which frames this study. Mobility in this case refers to subjects benefiting from their education and qualifications to improve their living situation by moving abroad. This study is based on the ability of the participants to maintain their professional mobility by travelling and working when and where they desire. Personal mobility is important because of the freedom to choose where one works, the labour market point of view, as well as from an educational standpoint. The values of the EU are important because they allow the school to hire teachers, and, therefore, for the study to take place. Many industrialized countries share agreements in which some of its professionals such as teachers are legally able to cross some borders to work because their qualifications are reasonably accepted and transferable. The European Union (EU) has recently worked towards a goal of all workers gaining both the ability to transfer and work throughout any of its member states; in essence, the free movement of all labour participants. Visas and necessary legal paperwork
are still needed for most participants in this study, but they enjoy a lot of freedom in regards to their mobility.

To achieve the goal of becoming a truly knowledge-based society, the EU has implemented various education and linguistic programs in fifty-one countries to respond to the demand for personal mobility (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). The EU has also studied and worked to ensure that young people are assisted, encouraged, educated and enabled to study and work elsewhere throughout its member states. Many industries, including tourism and chemical, have their own reports or studies which convey their own concerns regarding (worker) personal mobility. The common themes of these reports are qualifications, communications, transferability and transparency.

Many EU countries have presented documents stating the value for a support system for international teacher mobility. This has a bearing on why the EU is attractive to foreign teachers on a professional level. Such overseas experience is always positive for the future of the professional teacher.

The EU considers the promotion of international mobility to be a key part of increasing the internationalisation of higher education (HE). This is in conjunction and cooperation with the Bologna Process, the Copenhagen Initiative and other programmes. Specific goals include transparency, permeability, and comparability of the varying educational systems in the EU. Because the EU makes it fairly easy for teachers to work and live in various countries, the issue of learning the language of one’s host country has risen in importance.
Previous Research in SLA

The literature indicates that there are four areas of importance in which to frame the topic: second language theory; learning strategies and learning style; cognitive strategies; and cross-cultural understanding.

Second Language Theory

In the early 1960s, researchers first recognized that language acquisition was a complex matter which could not be placated with a one-theory-fits-all kind of solution. As in most academic areas of research, the discussion evolved from one popular theory or belief system to another. It led to learner error becoming a focus and theories continued to evolve from there. Some initial theories were based on the premise that language learners slowly organized the language they heard, “according to the rules they construct(ed) to understand and generate sentences” (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, in Larsen-Freeman, 1991, p. 317). This relates to Selinker’s findings in which a learner constructs his or her own set of rules for comprehension (1971). Early theories merged into learner strategies to try to surmount the difficulties of L2 acquisition.

This convergence of theories resulted in the development of learning strategies. In searching the literature, certain useful terms have repeatedly emerged. One of these terms is LLS, or language learning strategies. Rigney and Oxford have both described these as the behaviour or often-conscious steps by language learners to improve the retention, recall, storage and use of new information (Rigney, 1978; Oxford, 1990). They used the term often-conscious, as opposed to unconscious behaviour. In the last few years a debate has emerged over whether something that was learned was in fact learned consciously or not.

Some researchers have weighed in on the matter. McLaughlin (1990) feels that the professional discussion is in need of a good cleaning up of the language in order to rid itself of discrepancies and redundancies in language theory, and practice. Conscious learning is often referred to as learning when the learner is conscious and cognitively aware, while unconscious
learning refers to learning that occurs unconsciously or of which the learner is not consciously unaware. For example, in regards to the argument of “conscious” versus “unconscious” learning (or mental states), no one has developed a theory of mind that is acceptable (Reber et al., 1985). In this case, a theory of mind refers to the clarification and defining notions of thoughts and the thinking process. Within such guidelines, therefore, McLaughlin (1990) argues the terms ought to be excluded from use in theory.

While many experts across disciplines (Psychology, Sociology, Psycholinguistics, Linguists, to mention a few) cannot agree on one exact standard for potential learners’ development of initial language learning, most concede that the disagreements do not focus on the biological or brain-based discussion, but rather on the issue regarding the particular ages (some say ‘stages’) of the learner. There are basic differences between initial (first) language learning and SLA. “While initial language acquisition relies mainly on neurological development over time, second (and subsequent) language acquisition relies on age only in associated characteristics and not in actual brain structure.” (McCain, 2000, para. 11). After two years of age, brain structures and other variances are of minor importance. Of more importance to second language acquisition (SLA) are (but not limited to) motivation, opportunity, environment, and personality (McCain, 2000). This discovery would later influence others’ findings.

More theories emerged that said that SLA was influenced by a variety of factors. In 1988 Spolsky published a general theory of second language learning. In doing so, he admitted that while it would be nice to have just one theory for the best way to learn a second language, unfortunately there is none. In his eyes, a theory “must account for all the successes and failures for the many methods used throughout the language-teaching world.” (p.378). Spolsky felt that language learning resulted not from any one single factor, but rather from the integration and interaction of a large number of factors. Spolsky’s statement appears in line with my participants’ experiences in learning German, as will be discussed in more detail.
further in the paper. Consequently, he proposed that a general premise of second language learning was best articulated as a multifaceted compilation of standard and clear-cut rules and conditions which “can be usefully stated in terms similar to the preference model in linguistics proposed by Jackendoff” (1983 in Spolsky, 1988, p. 378).

Spolsky’s 1988 general theory of second language learning is relevant for this study because it anticipates problems in advance while being comprehensive enough to include practical issues. It is also applicable to the study since Spolsky recognized that no one theory could account for the best way to acquire a TL. He argued that learning was the result of the combined efforts of many factors. Schumann further strengthened the versatility of the theory with the addition of cognitive processing. Schumann and Spolsky’s second language theories best explain how the participants learn. This will be revisited further in the findings section.

Learning Strategies and Learning Styles

An important aspect within the parameters of this project is what specific factors affect the acquisition of a second language for the participants in the study. Specifically targeted are the learning styles and learning strategies adults use when learning a foreign language. Learning strategies refers to learning strategies people use to learn (Oxford, 1990). In this particular study, it portrays how people can best understand a language ‘on the fly’ without any previous knowledge. Specific learning strategies refer to whatever physical or mental strategies, techniques, or ‘tricks’ subjects (teachers) either learn, create or use in order to achieve their goals or desired outcome(s).

All the possible factors affecting SLA need to be examined. These include age, aptitude, attitude and motivation, personality (moderate risk-taking and moderate anxiety are both beneficial), and cognitive style; “field dependence and empathy (are) beneficial in an untutored language learning situation.” (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, p. 332). Field dependence is when a learner is dependent on using the L2 in daily life. In other words, when faced with a situation where one is understood only in the L2, the chances that one will learn the language
will rise. The same holds true if one likes or admires the culture. This also holds logically true, as most individuals have a desire to both understand and be understood by others. Some of the participants may even purposely isolate themselves at times from other native English speakers to assist in the German learning process, which supports Larsen-Freeman. The factors of age, attitude, motivation, personality and cognitive style are all prevalent within the participant group. The extent to which the learner embraces the German culture is the next issue to be discussed.

Schumann presents an acculturation model on informal natural learning, which is important because it is one of the first to combine the importance of learner factors and acculturation (1978). This is important because for the first time in the history of the research the focus of the model finally shifts to the learner. Schumann contends that "the degree to which a learner acculturates to the TL (target language) group controls the degree to which he acquires the second language" (Schumann, 1978, p. 34), although he is referring to only ‘natural SLA’ learning, that is occurring naturally in the environs, and not through a classroom or direct language instruction (1986, p. 385). This model has served to contribute to further research regarding how language learning is approached. Inferencing, which is deducing new information from information one already knows, will now be discussed.

Inference became a popular theme in the 1970s. Carton (1971) described three types of inference: “Inter-lingual was information derived from similarities to another language; Intra-lingual was based on using analogy as applied to structures internal to the target language; and Extra-lingual incorporated non-linguistic information from the environment to arrive at some understanding of the language.” (Bialystok, 1981, p. 26). The term is used to suggest “unconscious inference” (Meissner & Reinfried, 1998, p. 101). It is a part of natural language learning; so much so that in regards to foreign language learning, it is “concerned with the acquisition of new morphemes and vocables in ‘natural’ contexts.” (Meissner & Reinfried, 1998, p. 101). Selinker (1972) developed Interlanguage (IL), likely building on the
FACTORS AFFECTING development of Carton’s first term, Interlingual. IL will be explained and discussed further in cognitive strategies. This is notable due to IL use by some of the participants.

Bialystok (1979) went on to find that language learners could enhance their ability to guess the meanings of unknown items by methodically exploiting various types of information. Three types of information which may assist with inference were identified by this theory: “information from implicit linguistic knowledge, information from other knowledge, and information from the response itself which is provided by the context of the passage.” (Bialystok, 1979, p. 261). This point is helpful for both adult learners and teachers of second languages, as it recognizes that, although a learner may not have the requisite knowledge to understand something in one manner, there may be another way or method to understand the same concept. This recognizes the learner as a thinking individual for what he/she can accomplish and apply previous knowledge. Through the application of logic, this assessment of the language learning situation may seem straightforward to anyone who has spent time studying a language.

The three aspects which were identified by Bialystok for the theoretical model of second language learning are: “the facilitative effects of the use of inferencing, the distinction between implicit and explicit knowledge, and the differential benefits according to the individual’s extent of monitoring.” (Bialystok, 1979, p. 261). The findings suggested that ‘optional’ monitoring was the key. That is, specifically how a student is able to exploit available information to his or her advantage. This again was important because it suggested that language learners had more control over their learning than previously thought. Bialystok (1981) defined inferencing as “the use of available information to derive explicit linguistic hypotheses.” (Bialystok, 1981, p. 26). The information referred to could be just about anything; it could be taken from the environment or the speaker(s), it may have to do with the meaning or structure of the language, and it could even be linguistic or non-linguistic. This is a key issue because findings in the study support the use of inference by the participants.
Bialystok studied four tasks: monitoring, formal practicing, functional practicing and inferencing. She found that although monitoring and inference strategies were used extensively, the strategy of performing functional practice was the most efficient (1981). She noticed that strategies had specialized effects, which meant two things: “Time spent on some of the strategies (was) more profitable than time spent on some of the others;” and “the language task involved determine (d) which of the strategies would be most beneficial.” (1981, p. 33).

Although practice was initially one category, Bialystok found that it was later separated to include formal and functional practice. Formal language was referred to as the formal language code and rules of the language, including morphology and phonology (1981). Accordingly, formal practice specifically targets the language code and the functions of rules. Functional language, however, was referred to as that used for communicative situations such as information or conversations. Functional practice occurs “when the language learner increases his opportunity to use the language for communication such as going to movies, reading books, or talking to native speakers.” (1981, p. 25). Bialystok found that performing functional practice had specialized effects and that some strategies were a better (more efficient) use of time than others (1981). This is relevant to my study because certain strategies were indeed targeted for this reason by participants, which will be discussed in the findings section.

Bialystok also examined the theories of second language acquisition that are often divided into two groups: processing theories and competence theories (1990). Bialystok studied the differences between them by analyzing Chomsky’s language and definitions. Chomsky’s criteria were based on performance and competence. Bialystok’s results led to a re-examination of the classification of competence theories using two criteria; mental structures and idealizations.” (1990, p. 643). This re-examination resulted in a rethinking of
classifying theories of SLA (1990). Learning styles and their role within SLA will now be discussed.

A number of learning styles have been identified. For example, Parry (1984) and Shipman and Shipman (1985) recognized no fewer than twenty dimensions of learning styles, which serve to support the other work in this area. Oxford (1989) summarized the role of styles and strategies in second language learning. Learning style in this case refers specifically to the four aspects which encompass the person’s being. In 1990, Oxford recognized the importance of learning styles and thus created a guide specifically for language learning, *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*, which although written for teachers, can also be useful for learners. This guide explains how learners learn and gives the reader information to assist in creating effective learning strategies regarding affective and social, cognitive, compensatory, memory, and metacognitive L2 learning strategies. These strategies were then followed by the development and rise in popularity of rule formation.

Rule formation became the popular theme and language learners were then assumed to acquire a second language through the formation of rules. Chomsky proposed that the acquisition process of a second language is one of rule formation, rather than habit formation. As Larsen-Freeman explains, learners are seen to play an active role in language learning by “forming and testing hypotheses in an effort to induce the TL (target language) rules from the TL speech to which they were exposed.” (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, p. 316). This formed the foundation for what was to follow. Perhaps rather telling, rule formation, for the participants in this study has been by far the dominant route to learning the German language.

*Cognitive Strategies*

Gardner’s socio-educational model (1985) gave high importance to such learner-oriented factors as motivation and attitudes, while recognizing the social dimension of acquiring a language. The key factor here was the level of integration and incorporation of the various strategies in order to maximize learning. This likely served as a level of understanding
FACTORS AFFECTING

for other researchers to start further discussion. The combination of learner-oriented factors with the social aspect of language learning is important because it relates well to the participants’ experiences within this study.

Different strategies demand (and develop) different skills. Under cognitive skills, writing may benefit from strategies such as substitution, deduction, self-monitoring and planning, while speaking may need self-evaluation, self-monitoring, circumlocution, paraphrasing, and risk-taking. Listening comprehension requires self-monitoring, selective attention, inferencing, and elaboration, while reading for comprehension needs summarizing, deduction, guessing, and reading aloud (Chamot & Kupper, 1989). As opposed to employing single strategies, successful learners often tend to use well thought out combinations of strategies that are tailored to their own needs, learning styles, objectives, materials available and the specific task(s) involved. Not all learners employ ‘well thought-out’ strategies; some probably use whatever fits the situation or they experiment with various strategies before they find those that work best for them. The strategies that subjects employ in order to make sense of, live in, and understand their environment are referred to as coping strategies. This research will not be considering coping strategies from a traditional psychological viewpoint.

O’Malley, Chamot, and Walker (1987), also found a relationship between some parts of cognitive application and SLA (O’Malley, J. M., Chamot, A. U., and Walker, C., 1987). Schumann (1990) discusses the cognitive interactionist model, which Roger Anderson (1988) developed for second language acquisition. Schumann raises some valid concerns, especially when comparing learners’ habits of transferring old language to new, via the common ‘one to one’ pattern, where conflicting patterns and information (grammar, word order) between the two languages often leads to problems for the learners.

Through close examination, Corder (1967) found that language errors contributed to the basic language system that learners used. Sometimes the learners may have gained from past mistakes that were recognized as such. When learners made a mistake, it was quite
reasonable that, unless immediately corrected, it could find its way into the language used. It is through this method, however, that seemingly small mistakes become deeply rooted, imbedded and hard to reverse. This is also known as ‘fossilized language’.

This led to the term ‘interlanguage’, which was coined by Selinker (1972) to demonstrate that learners use an entirely “separate linguistic system in their own right, (that are) not governed by the same rules as either the learners’ L1 or L2.” (Adjemian, 1976, in Larsen-Freeman, p. 316). Most anyone with experience in a second language ‘crash course’ has probably noticed (if not used themselves), how a separate, third language could exist alongside L1 and L2.

Selinker’s development of Interlanguage (IL) as a transitional, developmental process should be noted because this is often how participants’ language has evolved (1972). Selinker (1972) first developed the idea of interlanguage after noticing that there were, in effect, three different languages to consider: a native language (NL), a target language (TL), and the language a learner uses while developing his/her second language skills (the IL). Participants start with their NL, then learn a bit of a TL, and then start speaking IL transitionally, on the way to speaking the TL. This phenomenon may occur in different ways. One might substitute an English word in an otherwise German sentence because of a lack of knowledge in German vocabulary. It could also occur when learners use German words with English grammatical structure. In support of IL theory, a number of participants have claimed that it is easier to speak German to another foreigner than it is to speak to a native-speaking German, which could be attributed to the IL. Obviously for other native English speakers, this could be attributed to a sharing of a similar IL. It could also be that foreigners who are still using a form of IL are more forgiving of errors.

IL is viewed as a temporary state in language acquisition and is the command of the L2 at any given moment somewhere on the continuum from a true beginner to native-speaker competence. The place on this continuum changes as new concepts are learnt, and one can
FACTORS AFFECTING actually go backwards, until new structures are correctly internalized, then one moves forward and lands on a new location on the Interlanguage continuum. IL is concerned with language use and language learning. IL is viewed as a development process, and “has been defined as the learner’s systematic approximations toward the target language,” and, “is seen as a product or set of products (goals or targets to be achieved) that mark out the learner’s path as a member of a second language speech community.” (Davies, 1989, p. 448). Properties of both L1 and L2 are used in varying degrees. The interlanguage consists of: positive and negative transfer, strategies of L2 learning (e.g. simplification), and overgeneralization of the target language patterns (Mason, T. on Krashen, n.d.). With increased exposure to the TL, the L1 dialect can be replaced by the standard dialect of the TL. This is where learning and practical exposure practice is crucial, especially to the participants in the study.

Krashen argues that although informal practice can be helpful for learners; the characteristics of formal study are much more efficient at improving SLA in adults. “Informal environments must be intensive and involve the learner directly in order to be effective” (Krashen, 1976, p. 165). He goes on to claim that one is able to differentiate between “‘exposure-type’ informal environments and ‘intake-type’ environments,” with “only the latter provid(ing) true input to the language acquisition device” (Krashen, 1976, p.165). Basically, the classroom is able to provide a formal learning environment, as well as an “intake” informal environment (Krashen, 1976, p. 165). Intensive environments that directly involve the learner have been most successful for the participants in this study. As mentioned above, this could be a classroom, but only if the learner is involved. This could also be an informal social situation where the learner is actively and directly involved.

Other researchers went further into strategy research and arrived at some useful findings that supported the learners’ efforts. Oxford (1990), in a language learning strategy update, demonstrated that research linked the conscious use of foreign or second language (L2) learning strategies with language proficiency and achievement. Oxford then blended
current research to provide more information on how each of the following issues influenced the choice of strategies chosen among second language learners: gender, learning style, attitudes and beliefs, age and L2 stage, motivation, cultural background, type of task, and tolerance of ambiguity. Oxford (1994) found that it is probable that different kinds of learners (auditory vs. visual vs. global vs. analytic) likely gained from differing strategies. Expanding on the data in this area, Oxford (2001) developed six categories of language learning strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social (p. 359). This theory details specifically how students learn. Oxford’s findings are relevant because they are consistent with specific learning and a range of factors that influence the strategies used and reported by the participants.

Cross-cultural Understanding

There has been much discussion on the attitudes of the potential learners in regards to the target language. Some have theorized that it is difficult to learn a second language if disrespect or other negative feelings, which may stem from cultural bias or inacceptance of another’s culture, exist (Citron, 1993; Culhane 2004). Ethno-lingual relativity is referred to as “a perspective that is not limited by one’s own cultural and linguistic experiences, but rather is open to the contrasting cultural and linguistic patterns of other peoples” (Citron, 1993, p.1).

Citron (1993) maintains that this perspective assists in learning a language, for example: identifying a relationship between a gain in second language skills and the gains in acceptance of new cultural patterns. Personality studies show that a tolerance for language ambiguity and “ego permeability” (Citron, 1995, p.111) are useful to acquiring language. It is also important to understand just how the cultural and linguistic patterns may differ from one’s own native language. I agree with this theory, as the TL (German) is quite different from English grammatically and phonetically.

Citron postulates that if one indeed manages to ‘open up’, then learning a third or a fourth language is made that much easier. Apparently, as one opens up to other languages, our
“language cage” becomes more open, flexible and aware of other linguistic and cultural patterns. (Citron, 1995, p.113). When examining where difficulties arose in acquiring a second language, one issue was the lack of being culturally open. This was the ability to mentally bridge cultures and be open, accepting, and understanding (Citron, 1995). Citron’s recognition that difficulties arise in SLA when the learner lacks the ability to mentally bridge cultures is key. This theory is indeed reflected by the participants in this study. This will be further discussed under findings. Additionally, those participants who report sharing this openness think that it is an advantage by allowing them to have an easier time with language learning.

Culhane (2004) examined acculturation and its integrating factors. In doing so, he examined Berry’s working model for acculturation attitudes. He presented four particular acculturation patterns: marginalization, separation, assimilation, and integration (Berry et al., 1986, Berry et al., 1987). The four acculturation attitudes in Berry’s model are shown in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acculturation Attitudes</th>
<th>- Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Culhane, 2004).

Culhane presents the Intercultural Interaction Model, which demonstrates the interactive patterns among SLA learners (Culhane; 2001a; 2001b).
According to Culhane, potential L2 learners with a stronger integrative motivation (following Gardner’s model) would be expected to demonstrate this with a greater concern for contacting members of the L2 speech communities (as outlined by Berry). Likewise, students with a more instrumental-based motivation may show a greater tendency to remain within native cultural and language use contexts while studying an L2, as evidenced by less desire to interact with L2 speakers or to delve into cultural aspects of their speech communities.” (Culhane, 2004, para. 12).

Explaining the different categories of relationships that learners can have will hopefully further the knowledge of “learner behaviour within second language (L2) and Culture (C2).” (Culhane, 2004). Berry’s and Culhane’s theories are reflected by the attitudes of the participants. Those who have admittedly tried to integrate with the culture have been much more successful at L2 acquisition than those who have resisted integration. This will be further discussed under findings.
Background: Learning strategies and factors affecting Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

My own experience in SLA

I first moved to Germany in the year 2000 with basically no knowledge of any foreign language. I had taken one semester of French in high school, but since my college entrance did not depend on it at the time and the closest French population was approximately 3500 kilometres away, I decided it wouldn’t be very useful to continue with it. In moving, I realized that without learning German, I would miss out on a large part of the positive experiences of living abroad: the culture, the history, the local customs, and the many stories and traditions which accompany them. It occurred to me that despite completing college, university and various other professional accreditations, I had no solid idea of how to learn a second language. In my earlier youthful calculations, it had never occurred to me that learning a language would be much different from learning anything else, such as taking another course at university or learning a new sport, nor would be so valuable.

At this point it seemed necessary to literally start from square one in order to try to learn German. I didn’t mind putting in the effort to study, but I somehow couldn’t justify studying for hours each week, for months on end merely to pick up the basics of grammar and sounds, especially if I was only going to be in Germany a couple of years. Plus, working all day in an English-speaking environment, and being inside a classroom in the evenings meant I couldn’t do the things I wanted to do, such as being out and about enjoying what I found interesting about Germany, such as activities, sports, sightseeing and nature. What was the point of being in Germany if one is in a classroom the entire time, day and night?

But how could I learn German without spending the necessary (many) hours of reading, studying, practicing, and learning? Were lessons absolutely necessary or possibly avoidable? My logic was that if some children could supposedly pick up a language simply by living in the country, then why couldn’t I?
FACTORS AFFECTING SLA

Many SLA models have been designed to try to definitively answer the question: Which factors are the most important for SLA? Some of the major models include Krashen's “Monitor Model” (1981) and Schumann's “Acculturation Model” (1978). Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the field, no single model has yet emerged to gain wide acceptance. Further, it is not expected that anything will change in the immediate future.

Factors contributing to SLA

The basic factors of SLA, which include many detailed individual variations such as language aptitude, strategy use, anxiety, age, affective factors, personality factors, and motivation, will now be discussed.

Language aptitude has to do with intelligence as it applies to languages. Strategy use involves the methods, or ways (‘how’) one learns and communicates. Anxiety negatively affects language acquisition. Low self-esteem produces feelings of worthlessness through a combination of learning blocks, little progress and low confidence. This causes limited personal growth and even disinterest in the subject matter. A lack of self-esteem may cause a person to give up something before one has even started (Riding & Rayner, 2001, p. 196).

Age is an interesting factor. Generally speaking, according to David Singleton (1995), the younger the age of the learner, the better are the chances over the long-term for successful SLA. Lenneberg’s (1967) Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) states that, “claims that there is a critical period during which the human mind is able to learn language; before or after this period language cannot be acquired in a natural fashion” (Cook & Newson, on Chomsky, 1996, p. 301). If it is not accomplished in this set amount of time, then it is no longer possible. Although this particular critical period hypothesis is disputed by some researchers, the theory of an advantage for early learners is generally recognized as true. After examining published findings, Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) decided that SLA is not necessarily reliant on biologically important times, but rather the ability to learn seems to continuously decline over time as people age.
Strategy use is sometimes divided into learning strategies and communicative strategies. Learning strategies concentrate on learning the language. They may focus on areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and how to speak the language. Communicative strategies, however, assist in developing the ability to communicate. This may be cognitively recognizing that in a specific situation a certain response or answer is expected. As an adult may be more aware of these circumstances, it was not uncommon for participants claiming to commonly use communicative strategies (Oxford, 1994).

Affective factors address the learner’s emotional state and feelings towards the target language. Researchers, such as Krashen (1981), believe that learners have something which acts as an affective filter. That is, a learner who has a low level of anxiety, combined with good self-esteem, self-confidence, and a high level of motivation has a low affective filter and is likely to have an easier time trying to learn the language. Krashen believes that,

“Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition.” (in Schütz, R., 2007, paragraph 12).

Thus, anxiety, self-esteem, self-confidence, and motivation can all have an affect on SLA.

Personality factors can also affect success in learning an L2. In this area extroverts report achieving higher grades in language studies, whereas introverts, who are more prone to shyness, may sometimes fail to even practice the language, and therefore may never achieve a level that allows them to communicate effectively. (Naiman, N., Frohlich, M., & Stern, H., 1975).

Motivation is a highly studied and controversial topic, due partly to its relationship with psychology. In fact, Dörnyei (2001a), writes, "strictly speaking, there is no such thing as motivation.” Commonly, motivation is divided into extrinsic and intrinsic areas. Intrinsic motivation is often more effective in the long term than extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation has internal goals, for the inherent value, because it is the right thing to do, or for
FACTORS AFFECTING

the fun involved. Extrinsic motivation deals with external factors such as money, pressure, passing exams, or tangible rewards. Extrinsic motivation could be positively-based, such as providing rewards for certain actions. It could also be negatively-based, such as using threats against someone (Deci, 1971), (Petri, 1991).

There is a range of possible learning strategies, and many factors (including language aptitude, anxiety, age, affective factors, personality factors, and motivation) which affect the acquisition of a second-language. This study will focus particular attention to learning strategies and the factors of anxiety, affective factors, personality factors and motivation.

Focus of the Inquiry

The focus of this inquiry is the specific learning strategies the participants -- native English speaking teachers at an international school -- employ to assist with language difficulties when they live abroad. This research is to discover how active, thoughtful reflection, performed regularly, can be used for productive learning.

Smith (1999) describes reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action, one of Donald Schön’s important contributions to learning theory. Reflection-in-action is also described as “thinking on our feet”, and requires examining our “experiences, connecting with our feelings, and attending to our theories in use. It entails building new understanding to inform our actions in the situation that is unfolding.” (Smith, 2001. The Reflective Practitioner–reflection-in- and–on-action section, para. 2). The construction of new understanding underpins the learning strategies, be they physical or mental, that subjects (teachers) learn, create or use in order to achieve their goals or desired outcome(s). These outcomes may differ from participant to participant. Some may want to just be able to get by with German, while others are more ambitious and want to learn the language properly.

For the purposes of this research, learning strategies refer to the type of learning strategies people use; in this case, how people can understand a language ‘on the fly’ without any previous knowledge. The research will look at how they react and communicate when
they are faced with a foreign language and have all the typical signs of being a novice to the language. These include a feeling of discomfort when faced with having to speak the language, little knowledge of any grammatical structure or pronunciation of correct sounds, and an extremely limited vocabulary.

The subjects may view the opportunity to travel and work in another land as beneficial to their careers and their lives. Many come to Germany expecting to be able to travel around Europe on vacation breaks, and experience other cultures and lifestyles. The experience of working and living abroad also reflects positively on one’s curriculum vitae, or resume; it can demonstrate an adventurous spirit or independence.

*Purpose of the Inquiry*

The purpose of the inquiry is to shed more light on the specific learning strategies employed by the mobile professional, in this case teachers who travel and work abroad using English, yet still desire to learn German. It is fair to assume that most professionals coming to Germany expect to learn something about the people, the country and the culture. Indeed, that was the case for the majority of the participants.

The majority of teachers in this study move to Germany for a two year teaching contract. Although some may end up staying longer, most arrive expecting to leave Germany within a couple of years. This project does not refer to traditional ‘economic immigrants’ or ‘economic asylum seekers’, i.e. people arriving with the distinct purpose of staying in the country for years, possibly for life. This project will only examine teachers who are actively using mobility to their advantage for the following reasons: to improve their own skills, languages and overall quality of life, and to have new experiences.

*Research Methodology and Assumptions*

My own learning rests on constructivism, which Bryman refers to as the “ontological position that asserts that social phenomenon and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2001). According to Hoover (1996), when
experiencing a new learning opportunity, the student compares it with their current level of understanding. If the current understanding is different from the learning opportunity which confronts the student, then the student is able to compare and contrast and modify their understanding by noting any variances. One’s experiences are, therefore, the foundation for building additional meaning and knowledge. Further, any new knowledge is built upon prior knowledge which was gained from earlier learning situations. The schema that is created is seen as a dynamic, amenable structure (Piaget, 1968). It seems that the creation and building of a personal model of making meanings enables the learner to grasp potential concepts. I did not assume the same for all of the participants, however. Although many teachers are likely familiar with the philosophical foundations and modelling, as it applies to their own learning, some may just stumble along the best they can, trying to learn as they go along without consciously applying a constructivist approach.

The rationale behind this study is that while living in Germany, one’s benefits in better communication will often rise along with one’s command of the German language. This includes increased respect (both for self and from others), pride, and a higher feeling of connectedness with the local community. The local communities, (both in Germany and the school) often have foreigners from around the globe who are also struggling to learn German; some may even refer to this as a global community. Also, some international teachers may wish to escape their so-called, “English island,” (in reference to the teacher community at the school).

Setting

The setting is a private international school in Germany. The location is approximately ten kilometres from a middle size German city with a population of about six hundred thousand, of which approximately seventeen percent are foreigners (Newcomers Network, n.d.). Of course, not all of them speak English, but many do. The city also enjoys an active tourism industry due to the arts, shopping, and cultural sights.
Many teachers have moved to the nearby city for a couple of reasons: one is because the participant reported higher living quality and another is that it does not take much time to commute (as it is only a short distance away). Many participants also say that the city is friendlier, more liberal and has a more cosmopolitan atmosphere, which could be related to the number of foreigners living in the city. The motivation to practice German for the participants can be somewhat reduced due to the relatively high number of city dwellers, both locals and other foreigners, who speak English. Despite the city's more tolerant attitude towards non-German speaking people, some participants still do not take full advantage of this attitude and sometimes prefer their own English-speaking social circle.

The school location, however, is in a much smaller, older, and more conservative city that prides itself on tradition. There are not many foreigners, and the American teacher participants who live there have reported having a less than favourable reputation. The reason may be that some of them spend time together going out and enjoying themselves. As mentioned, the locals tend to be on the conservative side, so the teachers may be seen as ‘party-goers’. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that it has to have a negative bearing on their German-learning activities. But, as one participant quite rightly pointed out; if beginning learners of German all speak the same language (in this case English), then anything more difficult than simple communication can become very difficult, time-consuming and frustrating. Additionally, if there is no ‘source’ (such as a native German speaker, or a high-level bilingual speaker) from whom to ask questions and receive answers, this can lead to even more frustration. Such negativity is detrimental for the creation of a positive atmosphere, which is conducive for learning the German language.

There is a certain amount of bluntness (honesty) in the German culture which is often interpreted by English speaking foreigners as rudeness or arrogance (Newcomers Guide, 2009). Of course, not all Germans will behave in such a way, but the participants reported that
the chances of experiencing the German frankness is lower in the nearby friendlier, larger city centre.

English is the main language spoken on the school grounds for all subjects except the languages, French, Spanish, and German. Other teachers who are native speakers of other languages (French, German, and Spanish) regularly participate in English discussions with native English speakers.

Outside the classroom, however, German is commonly spoken by the native German speaking teachers (and the majority of the students). When communicating with English speaking teachers, however, most students will use English in relation to their ability. This means that beginning students who may not feel confident speaking English may speak a couple of words in English while the rest of the words may be in German. More advanced English-speaking German students will speak to English teachers in the English language most of the time. The same phenomenon occurs with the French and Spanish teachers, who often speak their native language to each other outside of the classrooms while on school grounds.

Approximately twenty five percent of the teachers at the school are native German teachers. The remaining teachers are mostly American, with a mix of other nations such as Australian, Irish, English, Scottish and Canadian rounding out the rest of the teaching staff.

Once outside the school gates, however, it is ‘back to reality’ for the expatriate teachers who don’t speak German, as few people will openly speak English ‘on the outside’. When questioned, many Germans will often say that they do not feel confident enough to have a conversation in English. This can also be true despite adequate conversational English language ability. Although some Germans may be shy about trying to speak English, or wary about being embarrassed or teased about their ability, it is unlikely that any of the study participants would ‘judge’ them. That is especially true, considering the German language difficulties which abound in this study group. Although some beginners may occasionally
resent someone speaking English to them, because it may ‘rob’ them of the opportunity to speak German, many other participants appreciate it when Germans try to make an effort, no matter how small, to help them out.

Applications for Second Language Acquisition

With the study carried out in Germany, it is unsurprising to find opportunities to use the German language literally around every corner. The chances to employ one’s German language skills in practical situations are immense. For the participants in this study, going food shopping, going out to restaurants, a post office, a movie theatre, using the public transit (bus and rail) system, hailing a taxicab, or speaking to neighbours are all common, everyday applications for the use of the German language.

During their time in Germany, this group of participants has needed to speak to a wide range of people in a variety of professions where participants can apply their newfound German skills. These include chiropractors, physiotherapists, skin specialists, sports injury specialists, general practitioner doctors, surgeons, nurses, customs personnel, phone company representatives, insurance agents, current and potential landlords, hairdressers, police and lawyers, not to mention shop assistants and, of course, neighbours.

Intricacies of the German language

To simplify the reader’s understanding of the participants’ difficulties, this section discusses the intricacies of the German language.

German can be a difficult language for English speakers to learn for a number of reasons. First, the grammar is quite difficult. For an English speaker, it seems that everything is backwards, because the verb often (but not always) comes at the end of the sentence. For example, “I must to work go” is the literal translation of a simple sentence. For an English speaker, it sounds like ‘olde English’, a little strange (Ager, 2008).

There are three articles, one of which needs to go in front of a noun. These articles are the equivalent of the definite article ‘the’, and specify masculine (der), feminine (die), and
Neuter (das). They also change form, depending on which case (there are four of them) is used. The same applies to the indefinite article ‘a’, or ‘ein’ in German which falls under the same case rules as the definite articles (Ager, 2008).

Some masculine-type nouns have non-masculine articles, and some feminine nouns have neutral articles. If this is not confusing enough, then consider that most articles can, and do change when the noun becomes pluralized. For example; das Mädchen (the girl) is neuter, but when it switches to the plural, ‘the girls’ become ‘die Mädchen’ – using the feminine article; and der Junge (boy) is masculine, becomes die Jungen (feminine), with adding an ‘-n’ to complete the transition to ‘boys’ (Ager, 2008).

If one travels around Germany, the regional dialects can be baffling. Germany has a number of regional dialects, which are difficult to understand, even for Germans themselves. There is, however, a standard version of the language, ‘high German’, which is usually taught in German language courses for non-German speakers. Unfortunately for the learner, that is often not the dialect they are exposed to when they are outside the classroom.

Being a German language learner myself, I have had a number of questions and thoughts regarding theories in the field of second language acquisition. For example; how and why were some learners successful when others weren’t? What factors influenced the learning outcomes? Is there an ‘ideal’ type of language learner? One of my theories was that there were certain methods which help in learning, even if they were not obvious and showed direct, immediate improvement. I also believed that there were certain characteristics and personalities which had positive or negative affects on SLA. Conducting this study and then analyzing the findings allowed me to expand my knowledge into SLA as well as test some of my own theories as outlined above.

In my literature review, I discovered theories that agreed with my previous thoughts and that would later support my study findings. The literature indeed supports my assumptions regarding certain characteristics assisting in SLA. For example, Larsen-Freeman
maintains that a positive attitude combined with an extroverted personality at ease to repeatedly make mistakes in practicing the language with native speakers is well positioned to learn a language (1991). However, an introvert who has a negative attitude and is too afraid or shy to practice with native speakers will have a difficult time trying to learn the language. Such mental aspects and personality differences set individuals apart right from the beginning of language learning, and some may find it much easier than others.

Schumann’s acculturation model is also supportive of the study’s findings. As mentioned, learner success is mostly dictated by the amount or level of acculturation by the learner towards the TL. Culhane’s (integrative motivation) and Citron’s (open perspective) findings are also supportive of my study’s findings.
Description of the Research Project

Qualitative Research Methodology and its Rationale

This inquiry used qualitative semi-structured interviews with native English speaking teachers who work at a private international school.

“Quantitative research usually emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data.” (Bryman, 2001, p.507). Accordingly, it will often be objectivist, deductivist, employ a natural science model, and possibly be influenced by positivism (Bryman, 2001). I did not choose quantitative research methodology for a number of reasons. One was because the nature of my study required qualitative research methods, which allow one to capture feelings, attitudes and motivational factors. These are very difficult to obtain using quantitative research.

Qualitative research interviewing generates rich data in the form of personal elaboration. In Bryman’s description of the nature of qualitative research, he writes, “The stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2001, p. 264). Since I was trying to establish a better understanding of the social world through the words of the participants, it seemed to be the best alternative overall. Qualitative research allows the researcher and the participant to establish rapport, to explore feelings and opinions, which are possibly suppressed or ignored in quantitative projects. The research topic is a bit sensitive, which justifies a qualitative method.

Ethnography and participant observation both seemed to suit my research. As I also work and spend a lot of time in the same environment as that of the participants, elements of participant observation and ethnography were observed in this study. Not only was I able to observe actions, speech, and learning strategies in use, I was also able to ask questions at any time. This was combined with semi-structured qualitative interviews to gather the data presented in this study.
Participant observation is when “the researcher immerses himself or herself in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions. Participant observation usually includes interviewing key informants.” (Bryman, 2001, p. 506). The goal is to achieve a closeness and familiarity with a group or particular community of individuals in their surroundings. Ethnography is when “the researcher immerses him- or herself in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions.” (2001, p. 503). It is a little more inclusive than participant observation, hence the name (2001). Ethnography combined with participant observation and semi-structured interviews are the models that come closest to my role in the study.

In my role in the community under observation, I am indeed ‘one of them’; that is, a like-minded colleague struggling with similar frustrations living in a foreign country. Participants experience many emotions in their time here, ranging from loneliness and sadness to excitement, adventure, and perhaps even feelings of pride and accomplishment. Most of us began our stay in Germany similarly, and the learning curve can be steep. There is a lot to learn in regards to culture, shopping, social etiquette and other similar issues.

An important factor when interviewing is the number of participants. A random sampling of participants is acceptable if one is surveying hundreds of people. A much smaller sample size, however, such as are often found in qualitative personal interviews, which are more intense in their collection methods and efforts, can produce rich sources of data.

**Recording and analyzing interview data**

To collect data, fourteen of the sixteen interviews were recorded using a small recording device. These were then downloaded to a computer, where they were transferred into MP3 format for transcribing. Of the sixteen interviews, field notes were only used for two
of them because it was not possible to use a recording device at that time. These two interviews occurred early on in the interviewing stage of the research.

The recordings and notes were then transcribed, analyzed and studied for findings. Once the data was transcribed, it was reviewed and interpreted for information, specifically learning and coping techniques, cultural feelings (or insights), barriers to learning and recommended learning techniques.

*Ensuring trustworthiness and credibility of research results*

In performing this inquiry, all possible measures to maintain scholarly protocols and results were taken. The procedures were consistent with sound research design. The research plan and theoretical basis received advisor approval. At the outset of the initial discussion with each participant, I explained the reasons for the study. The participants were provided with a transcript of the questions ahead of time in order to reduce stress and to encourage them to think carefully about the answers. A pilot interview was performed and the data analyzed on the quality of the interview. Some minor changes to the questions were made. After informing my supervisor and receiving approval, the rest of the interviews were completed.

Interviewer errors, through probing and prompting, are significant issues to consider prior to the interview process (Bryman, 2001). In performing the interviews, it is important for the interviewer to find the correct balance between asking questions (probing) and suggestion. Being too vague in one’s questions may leave the interviewee either confused or at a loss for how to answer, while suggestion may taint the trustworthiness of the results. The interviewee may go off on a tangent and may need help to re-focus and get back on topic. The process may take a little longer, but the ideas produced are genuinely those of the participant, with no suggestion from the interviewer during the interview process.
Interviewer and interviewee: factors to consider

The interviews were performed on school grounds almost entirely in private in mostly empty offices or classrooms. Two were performed under semi-private circumstances, due to shared offices. Recent literature has recognized that for volunteers to feel most comfortable, they ought to be given choices regarding location (Herzog, 2005). Accordingly, the choice was offered to speak off-campus at a location of the participant’s choice. The majority opted for an ‘easier to schedule’ choice; that is, on school grounds. From there, we arranged a time to meet that was mutually convenient.

Relationship between the researcher and participants

The researcher is a teacher at an international school in Germany, as are the participants. Some of the teachers teach primary, some middle school, and some secondary school courses. I have known the participants for various times, from a few months to up to almost five years. During this time, I have taught alongside some of the participants in partner classes and developed a pleasant working relationship with all of them. The relationship among most participants and the researcher could be described as relaxed and friendly.
The Qualitative Interview

Composing results-based questions

The questions are modelled around the subject as a learner. To facilitate concentration on the questions by the participant, compound and complex questions have been avoided and sub-questions have been used when necessary. Additionally, the questions have been worded in the researcher’s own ‘natural, relaxed language’, without using jargon or overly formal language. The aim was not only to elicit information, but also to put the participants at ease.

The definition of a qualitative interview is an interview in which the emotions and opinions are drawn out of the interviewee through a group of questions (Bryman, 2001). The chosen method was the semi-structured interview, which may use interview guides, but can also be more flexible in its execution, such as varying the order of questions, or asking “further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies” (Bryman, 2001, p. 507). Like any type of research, there are certain results that can be expected from using a specific type of research methodology. “Qualitative research usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2001, p.506). Therefore, rich data in the form of words is often produced through the accumulation of information obtained through the personal interviews.

Interview participant selection

An important factor when interviewing is choice of participants. A random sampling of participants is the method of choice if one is surveying hundreds of people. In a much smaller sample size, however, each participant chosen is part of the raw solution to try to develop a theoretical basis. In this situation, the participants must be chosen carefully. Therefore, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is used in situations whereby, “those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed” (Bryman, 2008, p. 415).
The participant selection in this study sought to have variety in its selection; subject teachers, the ages of students taught, the length of time employed at the school, and the overall experience level of the respective teachers. To achieve a wide variety of teachers, all of these criteria were important. Ages of the students taught and subject matter relate particularly to trying to achieve a participant gender balance within the study.

Although the majority of international teachers at the school come from the United States of America, teachers from other English speaking countries were also involved, such as the United Kingdom and Australia.

Most importantly, in keeping the inquiry valid, the participants had to meet basic criteria. Part of the criteria stipulated that the participants fit into the category of having difficulty communicating in the German language. That basically meant that most participants could not have studied the German language seriously nor have any German family or relatives. Teachers who started preparing for their expatriate adventure by studying German in the weeks leading up to the arrival in Germany were not disqualified.

The reasoning behind this is simple. My experience in Germany showed that those who were exposed to the German language while growing up often had an easier time learning: if a child is exposed to sounds, grammar, and the language at a young age (perhaps during babysitting or even during holiday visits), this would lend a huge advantage in trying to understand and cope in a new language. For the purposes of this criterion, I wanted to restrict the inquiry primarily to English speakers who had no significant previous knowledge. Those with more advanced language skills would have been disqualified.

Potential participants were approached personally with an introduction to the inquiry and a request for their participation. Some potentially valid subjects were unable to participate, due mostly to the aforementioned criteria. Most of the participants were approachable and positive about speaking about their experiences.
The original study planned for only eight interviews (four men, four women). Once the interview process was underway, however, there was an opportunity to enlarge the study. More teachers were eager and open to share their experiences with SLA than I had previously planned. Once word got around that such a study was being conducted, others approached me with a request to be included, as they were also interested in voicing their experiences and concerns regarding language learning. Being teachers, such research is also of professional interest to them.

Therefore, there were fifteen teachers (five men and ten women), which coincidentally also roughly reflects the teacher gender imbalance in schools. Upon interviewing teachers, I felt that the quality of data would benefit from a few more interviews, even if it meant more time transcribing and analyzing.

*Writing style and content*

This research study has been formally written up in a more relaxed writing style to facilitate readability for the end reader. Today’s academic papers are also being written in a friendlier, more accessible style, with more personal experiences and pronouns sometimes even included in published educational books and journals written by professors (Bryman, 2001).

As with any interview, despite all good intentions, responses and interpretations are not entirely objective. Due to my situational participation observation role, I was always on hand to discuss any further questions that may have arisen with any participants. Any questions that I had were able to be clarified ad hoc, and did not require any follow-up meetings. Because of my position, the availability of follow-up meetings added to my interview data and resulted in richer and deeper data.

This research study was inspired by Judy Kalman’s, “Learning to Write in the Street” (2000). Through her modelling style, I have attempted to use rich biographical notes to bring each participant alive.
Interview Questions and Results

The interview questions probed into participants’ language learning history and experience with the German language. Among the specific areas were: positives (personal assistance, kindness, humour, understanding), negatives, (personal feelings, purchasing difficulties, personal reactions, communication difficulties), methods and learning techniques, personal coping strategies, newcomer issues, assistance from others, the language barrier, and enthusiasm levels. The participants and the interview findings are discussed in the following sections.

Participant characteristics

Twelve (out of fifteen) teachers from the United States of America (US) were interviewed. The reason many American teachers come to work in Germany for a two-year contract is due to the tax-sharing agreement between the United States and Germany, which allows American teachers to pay US taxes (much lower) while earning Euros (currently a considerably stronger currency). Thus, this is just one more example of the American teachers using mobility to their economic advantage.

I will briefly showcase each person individually with his/her pertinent information (personal, demographic, professional) to give the reader insights into the participants.

My participants include five male and ten female teachers. Of the five men, three are from the US, one from the United Kingdom (UK), and one from Australia. Of the women, nine are from the US, one is from the Caribbean. The male teachers are Thomas, Bob, Dan, Ben and Ian. The females are Diane, Jenny, Tracey, Roxanne, Vivienne, Marie, Adelle, Janice, Laura and Amanda.
Findings of the Study

My study findings support that a greater degree of cross-cultural understanding will likely go a long way towards staving off frustration with the language and culture, which most participants have experienced at one time or another. Being more accepting, forgiving or more relaxed often means a much easier time in terms of absorbing the German language. This will be visited further in the findings.

Thomas

Thomas is a young American teacher about thirty years of age who teaches in the sciences. He started teaching at the school during the 2008-2009 school year with his American wife, Tracey. She is also a participant in this study. The couple chose to work in Germany because of the two year USA-Germany tax agreement and because it was a decent opportunity at the time. He is a good athlete who is friendly, intelligent, and coaches sports at the school.

There are German language learning classes offered to teachers by Rudiger, a German language teacher at the school. They are structured learning classes which focus more on aspects such as grammar rather than basic spoken German conversation. Thomas’ learning strategies have included labelling household items and Rudiger’s German classes after work. Thomas appreciates the classes because he enjoys learning how to use German verbs properly.

Since he lives with his English speaking wife, he has no need to speak German at home. He thinks that having a partner at home changes (improves) his life considerably, as opposed to some colleagues who are alone in Germany and unable to speak German, as they are both able to communicate in English.

His coping strategies include his easygoing manner, as it assists both him and Tracey in keeping calm and relaxed when stressed due to trying to communicate with others in the German environment.
He has a realistic view on language learning, and accepts that it is not an overnight affair, but rather something which requires patience, diligence and hard work over a longer time. The couple’s German lessons suffered for a few months after his wife fell ill for an extended period this past winter. He has enjoyed and remains enthusiastic towards learning German,

“It’s a situation that most Americans don’t put themselves into, or even try and (being) here it’s the best opportunity you’re gonna get to be in a foreign country and learn it at that point. You know, it’s going to be a whole lot different learning than back in the States learning from a teacher or learning from a book, it can come out more natural and more like learning the language.”

Thomas would recommend to others coming to Germany to take at minimum a short German course in a classroom, or to use a computer, book, or CD format prior to arrival. He thinks that this would help extraordinarily to “getting started” trying to learn the language earlier.

Thomas’ German speaking is assisted by his outgoing behaviour, willingness to speak in most situations and his ongoing German lessons. It is hindered, however, by the limited exposure he has to practice the language, as well as his living situation.

Bob

Bob is an older, experienced American teacher in his early fifties who teaches English. Bob also started teaching at the school this year. Although Bob wanted to work in France, he came over to Germany because this is was a good opportunity to get International Baccalaureate (IB) experience on his Curriculum Vitae. After he finishes his two-year contract, he will try to obtain employment in France. He is also here because of the US-Germany tax agreement. He enjoys walking and reading English literature. Bob is an outspoken critic of many things, and entertains the staff with his eclectic stories regarding his
decades of world travels and teaching experience. Although Bob speaks both French and Sinhalese, he is having difficulties learning the German language.

In his opinion, the only way for him to learn a language is through immersion, and unfortunately, he is teaching English all day. He muses, “Immersion is not possible in this working environment.” Bob feels that one of the best ways to learn the language is to get out of the city and go to the countryside, where there are small villages. He explains that he has not had sufficient time to adequately prepare himself to learn the language.

In an attempt to counter this, he is trying to learn German by using a communicative grammar and phrase book, taking Rudiger’s German class twice a week and practicing phrases with a second German teacher, Ludwig. He believes that his French, English, and Sinhalese language skills give him an advantage because he is able to make connections through their Greek or Latin roots. One of his techniques is to make notes in the margins of his Grammar book to help him remember details. For more practical ‘outside’ training, he likes reading direction and information signs. Despite Bob’s knowledge and techniques, he says that he is having difficulty learning the language. He contributes this to his age, adding that twenty years ago he would not have had as many problems.

Bob has an opinion that forms the basis of his coping strategy. It is that, “Language is very important, perhaps the most important aspect of people’s culture, and if they actually see someone making an effort to learn it, then they feel better about the alien living in their midst.”

Bob admits that he has noticed some teachers who, unfortunately for various reasons, don’t make any effort at all to learn German, and because he sees it as a lack of respect towards the locals, it noticeably bothers him. When questioned, participants often reply that it is a lack of motivation that prevents them from trying harder. Although, interestingly enough, no one participant admitted laziness was a factor. These participants in particular usually live
in a consistent routine, and manage their daily lives without enough inconvenience to encourage or necessitate them to learn more German.

Bob had some difficulty getting accustomed to the culture of the school and the country. It is not uncommon for teachers on a two-year contract to stop studying German altogether in their second year, as they begin to lose interest as they think about going home. He is unfortunately beginning to show some of these signs. Although at this point Bob’s formal practice of the German language may be commendable, there is a strong feeling that his informal practice is suffering, which is evidenced by his reluctance to speak German at school or when other English speakers are present.

Dan

Dan is an American in his early thirties who teaches English with Bob. He is an intelligent athletic man who enjoys jogging and travel. He also came over for the two-year tax program. He is now nearing the end of his contract. He has a positive outlook, which usually assists him greatly in learning the language. Unfortunately for Dan’s German skills, he came over to Germany with Amanda, his English speaking American partner, so this has hindered his chances to learn and practice the language. He is a relaxed learner who often looks on the positive side when it comes to a situation.

Dan joined Rudiger’s course for a few weeks when he first arrived, but found that after a day’s work at school, the last thing he wanted to do was to stay even later and try to do more work, even if it was for his own benefit. He suggests that this probably had something to do with his learning style, he found classroom learning unproductive.

Dan then pursued an online program with downloadable MP3 recordings to listen to during his bicycle commute to and from school. He would ride his bicycle, speaking, listening and repeating phrases that were played over his MP3 player. It worked for about two months, and despite finding it strange and difficult, he did pick up a few words.
Another of his techniques was to try to repeat words over and over to himself when he heard them in context, such as in a restaurant or a retail store. The repetition and familiar situations helped his understanding. He would also keep thinking, and repeating in his head, about specifically how he said certain words or phrases in a social atmosphere.

Dan’s coping strategies consisted of having a relaxed, friendly attitude towards problems. He doesn’t worry when something isn’t working exactly the way he needs it or expects it to work. His view is that things are often different when trying to solve a problem (for example, hooking up the internet at his apartment). While acknowledging that speaking difficulties may result in undesirable consequences, he thinks that it’s all part of the experience of trying to speak German. Again, his relaxed, positive attitude comes out even as we speak about possible frustrating situations.

He feels that German is a difficult language to learn. However, due to a combination of reasons, he does not feel bad about not learning German. One reason is that he feels that “its usefulness in the world is minimal.” and goes on to admit how his own biases have slowly emerged. As a conscientious, politically astute world traveller from America, he mentioned his feelings on how Germans are viewed internationally. In a not-so-subtle reference to the nation’s past, he conceded, “Germans are not looked upon highly in the world.”

The reasons why he has not learned more German mostly stem from cultural aspects. This is the first country he has travelled to that has not allowed him “the freedom to just have an accent and not say things perfectly, but try and understand (him)”. Thus, he feels that he often gets “shut down”, and is unable to even experiment with spoken German. It appears that he did indeed begin his time in Germany with a genuine desire to learn the language. Unfortunately, that quickly diminished, although he does not seem very upset over this change of events or his feelings. True in keeping with his relaxed positive attitude, he recognizes the barriers, and tries to approach them as just a part of the learning process.
Although Dan claims to have a good level of comprehension when trying to understand something (verbal instructions or a restaurant menu, for example), he can only speak a small amount of German. To his advantage though, he has intelligence and ability to communicate. I believe that Dan (maybe unknowingly) incorporates Carton’s (1971) extra-lingual inferencing, which is using non-linguistic environmental information to come to some sort of understanding of the language. I also think that he uses Bialystok’s inferencing to his advantage (1979). He is no stranger to travel and seems to manage quite well with his current level of German. Due to his somewhat negative behaviour towards Germany, he is mostly at odds with Schumann’s Acculturation model (1978).

**Ben**

Ben is a thirty year old Australian who teaches mathematics to senior students. In his quest to obtain IB experience, he takes his role in the school quite seriously and puts in many long hours. He plans to stay at least another two years at the school. He is an athlete who enjoys bicycling and soccer. He originally came to Europe as a backpacker, but stuck around and worked at different jobs until he started at the school three years ago. He is a personable, friendly, intelligent man who enjoys good conversation. Ben and his girlfriend met last year and recently moved in together. She is an American teacher who also works at the school.

Ben admits the lifestyle shock was difficult at first.

“You sort of lose track of what’s going on around the world and what is happening in the local community because of that language barrier you can’t read newspapers. It does make life not unbearable but sort of you have to go the extra yard.”

Ben has a high level of enthusiasm for learning German. Part of this is due to his pioneering ways. He really enjoys getting out and about, mixing in with the locals, and is not afraid to be alone. He feels that his love for soccer helps him because it is a genuine interest for learning all about the game in German. It is also a talking point for meeting the locals,
because in a soccer environment, it often leads to more discussion in German. This free spirit often leads Ben to situations where he can relax and be who he wants to be, which invariably is in a pub watching soccer with the locals.

To learn German, Ben prefers watching sports on television, particularly soccer. He also learns vocabulary from students, German friends, and self-study. He had taken Rudiger’s course upon arrival, and has also used flash cards to help with acquiring vocabulary. Ben’s major barrier in trying to learn German used to be his long work hours and lack of time and energy in the evenings. Now that he has an American girlfriend, his home life may become another barrier that prevents German practice.

Despite his long work hours and English speaking work and home environments, Ben is still trying to learn the language. He still has a high level of enthusiasm for learning German, although time and energy are other issues, as he is often very tired and has little energy left when he gets home after work. Like Bob, he sees that although he is making progress, he speculates that he would make more progress if he lived somewhere else in Germany, where even less English is spoken. He also recognizes the educational value (for his German learning) in spending less time with English speakers.

Ben’s coping strategies have been trying to keep an open mind, being aware that one makes mistakes, and not to let one be frightened by making mistakes. True to his adventuring spirit, Ben advises others, “if you are frightened by it, then first of all, you never are going to learn it, and secondly, you might as well go back home.”

Although Ben has an ambitious attitude towards learning German, his past informal and formal studying habits have been inconsistent. He has gone long stretches with little practice. This has had a negative impact on the advancement of his fossilized German language. Although he has been in Germany the third longest of all of the fifteen participants, his speaking remains an issue. To his credit, Ben continues to work at it, and refuses to quit.
He recently took a one week intensive course with Rudiger over a holiday. He continues to try to speak German, regardless of his level of awkwardness or embarrassment.

_Ian_

Ian came to Germany about two years ago from the UK. He was working as a private English tutor and at a local College for awhile, and then started at our school a few months ago. Ian is a tall, friendly, well-spoken, intelligent teacher with a dry sense of humour. He is very good at interacting with the students, and he seems to really enjoy teaching.

For language learning techniques, Ian has taken a one month basic German course. He went on to use basic study techniques for a few months to work on his grammar and vocabulary. At this point, however, he doesn’t do much to consciously prepare for or learn German anymore. On the positive side, he now has a girlfriend with whom he can practice and learn, when he is motivated. Since Ian’s girlfriend is bilingual and enjoys speaking English, however, Ian does not have much pressure to speak German. Language issues are mostly determined on his terms, and that means speaking English the majority of the time.

Unfortunately, although Ian cannot speak very much German, he has reached a point where he is satisfied enough with his current level so he has stopped studying. Due to his lifestyle situation with his partner, it is unlikely that enough motivation will be created to cause him to practice, either formally or informally, his German any further. He remains rather unmotivated to study German any further and politely apologized more than once for his lack of input towards language learning techniques, coping strategies or ideas. His situation is unfortunately what happens when motivation is lacking.

_Diane_

Diane is a twenty-eight year old American who is married to a German man. She originally came over for the two-year tax agreement, but decided to stay and follow her heart instead. She has been at the school, and in Germany, for six years now. She had planned to be
living back in the USA by now, but things have apparently changed (not uncommon for expatriates). She enjoys cooking, dancing, yoga, and karaoke.

Prior to her arrival, she purchased a six-hour audio tape set, “How to learn German”, in which she learned some of the basics, such as, “Where is the restaurant?” She only listened to the first three or four tapes. She also had a German dictionary, and a German colleague gave her a list of “about twenty verbs”, handwritten on a sheet with the translation. She would take those and conjugate them.

After about five months here, Diane’s desire to learn more German came from attending a family gathering with extended relatives of her boyfriend (and future husband), where everyone was telling stories, jokes and talking about the past. They were all laughing and she really wanted to be a part of it because she loves that sort of thing. Unfortunately, she couldn’t understand very much at all. That provided the motivation for her to step up her German knowledge. She joined a two-week intensive course; four hours every morning, with homework in the afternoons. After her course, she is proud that she “read a book in German, ‘Dear Germany’, which is about an American’s experiences in Germany”.

Her language learning techniques now include reading German fashion magazines, listening to German music, German news, watching German television like comedies that have been translated into German. Sometimes she will know what the storyline is, and she can pick up new words. One Christmas, as a present, her husband printed up all the verses to his favourite German music lyrics for her to read, practice, and understand what the songs meant. She also likes cooking, so she finds recipes and tries to translate them into German. Being a very musical person, she also “like(s) to turn English songs into German words.” She “will be singing an English lullaby and translate it, rather incorrectly as (she) translate(s) it literally into German, so it doesn’t always have the same meaning and sometimes makes (her) husband laugh, but it is fun.” She also thinks about the language, and how many verbs she can translate, for example. This helps her in terms of repetition and being aware of her knowledge.
She has followed the same learning technique as many other learners in making a script. She would write up a script at home, and then practice it. She once went up to the train station ticket office “and basically went up to the window and read it to them… they giggled and they spoke English to me, because they could see that I was trying hard.”

Diane’s coping techniques includes asking her German partner for the meaning of words. This works well for friends of hers. Her husband will tell her to pick up the dictionary, and she will reply, “Why? You know it, so just tell me!” She has also surrounded herself with Germans who speak English, and expatriates who were in a similar situation. Although she admits that, “there were nights crying from frustration of not being understood or feeling excluded from conversations.”

Although she has lived and worked in Germany for six years now, she admits her German is not too advanced and she can’t write very well. She “hate(s) having this limited vocabulary that doesn’t allow her to express (her) self clearly in an educated manner.” Unfortunately, she admits that she needs something else to further motivate her to take another class. While she is kind and friendly towards most everyone and will gladly speak German outside her home, she is admittedly stubborn and communicates mostly in English with her husband. Even when they’re apart, she will only write emails in English, for example. She willingly admits that it’s her fault, and she is responsible for what she has or has not learned.

Diane acknowledges the barriers that exist, such as some Germans who may want to practice their English skills on you. She also says that despite a feeling among some Germans that their English skills may be inferior to hers, they are almost always still better than her German.

Among the participants, Diane has been in Germany for the second longest duration, six years. Unsurprisingly, with her attitude and self-confidence, Diane’s German is among the best of the participants. She is able to converse at a basic to intermediate level in almost any
topic. As German is her third language, her actions subscribe to Citron’s open “language
cage” perspective, and is aware of other linguistic and cultural patterns in the main culture
(1995, p. 113). Despite her bouts of lack of motivation, she regularly demonstrates that she
has the outgoing attitude that is so important in trying to practice and learn a language while
actively using Selinker’s IL (1972).

Jenny

Jenny is a young American teacher who also came over for the two-year tax
agreement. She arrived right out of university and this is her second year in her first teaching
job. Jenny and Ben started dating last year, and they now live together. She enjoys bicycling
and walking. She is still very enthusiastic about learning German.

To improve her German, Jenny has taken some of Rudiger’s after school German
lessons. That didn’t last long, because Ben and she found a tutor who gave them private
lessons. She now has a tandem partner, where they speak thirty minutes of English, and then
thirty minutes of German. But, she says she is going back to do more exercises in the
workbook. It is much more educational for her, seeing and doing the exercises, just like being
back in school. She finds that along with practicing with friends; standard reading, doing
exercises, and then trying to get the pronunciation correct is the best method for her.

She later lost her desire to experiment much with the language due to an episode in a
pharmacy following a stay in a hospital. As a last minute decision, she wound up at the
pharmacy without knowing the German name of the item she wanted. The man was very rude,
so she ended up buying the wrong item, and it didn’t help solve her issue. In her words, “it’s
really nerve wracking, you know, cause (if) I am trying and they (I think they) can (also) try.”
She now likes to be more prepared.

As a coping strategy, she practices avoidance. That is, she frequents places (retail
stores, markets) where she does not have to speak much German. Jenny is not the first
participant to admit that “it’s really embarrassing when they don’t understand you or like when
there is someone in line and they know you’re a foreigner because of your accent.” The majority of participants in this research study have expressed feelings to this effect.

Although Jenny is outgoing among English speakers, due to a couple of negative episodes, she is now shy when speaking German in public. This has already caused her to speak less German, negatively affected her German-speaking informal practice time. According to Bialystok, performing functional practice is the most efficient manner to be successful at SLA (1981). If she can’t manage to overcome this issue, it will be difficult for her to learn German. Jenny’s progress is reflected best through Schumann’s Acculturation model on informal natural learning (1978).

**Tracey**

Tracey is a thirty-year-old American teacher who came to Germany this year with her husband, Thomas, for the two-year tax agreement deal. Chatty and pleasant, she enjoys swimming and basketball. The pair is very excited to have the opportunity to learn German. She has found everyone to be mostly “super friendly and very eager to help”. The major barrier for her is her own embarrassment regarding her failure to make herself understood in German. She wishes that she had done a short part-time course, like her friend Marie, prior to arriving.

She feels frustrated at not being able to make herself known, adding,

“I feel embarrassed honestly. I really wish I had been better about learning the language before I came…I could have taken an intensive course and I honestly wish I would have because I feel that in a way it is disrespectful to come into someone else’s country and not know the language and in a way I’m a bit embarrassed about that.”

Tracey sometimes asks people who speak both languages well to repeat a phrase in German for her to learn. She also tries to read fashion magazines. She will go through and try to figure out key words with her dictionary to try to “get a feel for it”. She says she’s “taught
FACTORS AFFECTING ESL (English as a Second Language) forever, so (she) know(s) facial expressions, hand gestures, pictures, you know.” I think that for her general communication is not so much an issue, as is specific communication in German. Thomas and she have studied a German book together by themselves, but it did not include any pronunciation. Tracey is now taking the after school German lessons with Rudiger. She also reads the newspaper, coupons, and even looks through the classified section of the newspaper searching for an apartment.

Her coping strategies include the calming influence of her husband, Thomas. She was sick for about two months this past winter, which sidelined her German learning. She sat at home, felt sad, homesick and sorry for herself. Unfortunately, she didn’t even try learning or practicing the language during that time. She is back feeling enthusiastic about studying and learning now. A self-described “super over-achiever, she is having a hard time with the fact that (she is) not yet fluent.”

Tracey’s combination of practicing and seeking out new ways to learn make her an ideal supporter for Bialystok’s inferencing (1979), and functional practice (1981). Although her sickness and negativity did not help her progress, her attitude and study habits prevailed, and she is back studying formally and practicing informally with her friends. Her preference for different methods of studying is reflected in Oxford’s language learning strategies for different learners (1994).

Roxanne

Roxanne is an American who is in her mid-twenties. She is in the first year of her planned two-year tax agreement deal. She is a social person who likes basketball.

Roxanne’s strategies include visual aids such as bringing a calendar to the dry cleaners, so the person can simply fill in the date they will be ready. She also uses a dictionary. She is a communicative person who may act out a little pantomime whenever she can’t find the word she wants. She has tried to attend Rudiger’s German class, but the class focusses more on (formal) Grammar and she wants more (basic, informal) conversational
German. She uses flash cards, a basic learning German book (Idiot’s Guide to Learning
German), and some listening activities from iTunes on her iPod, some learning clips on
YouTube and labelling stickers all over her apartment. Her students speak “really basic
German, so (she) pick(s) up on phrases and vocab (ulary) that way.” She hopes to get a
television soon, so she can practice by watching the news in German and other television
shows.

Roxanne has already noticed the effect her language efforts have on German’s
attitudes towards her.

“Whenever I attempt (to speak German), I feel that the native Germans feel a
little bit more at ease to help me in English if I try it and then they will answer
me. But, then if I don’t really try (to speak German) and start speaking in
English, they are less friendly, less inclined to help.”

She admits some of her coping strategies are not effective. As a matter of fact, they
have probably contributed to her above “noticing” of how she is treated differently. When she
has no more energy to try to speak or study, she stops speaking German altogether, something
that she refers to as, “a German strike”. She uses her phone, Skype and email to communicate
with friends and family back in America. Roxanne also likes to spend time with other teachers
and Americans. Despite her “German Strikes”, she still has a high level of enthusiasm and
confesses her desire to be fluent in German.

Being a social person, Roxanne’s learning is trying to live up Culhane’s integrative
motivation (2004), and Gardner’s socio-educational model (1985). She wants learning to be
enjoyable and she only wants to learn to speak German so she can communicate with locals in
social situations.

Vivienne

Vivienne is an American in her early fifties who came to Germany seeking another
place to live outside of the United States. She now has been here three years. She is applying
to have her qualifications recognized so she can immigrate to Ireland, where her family roots are from. Maintaining her health and increasing her longevity are important to her, and is reflected in her hobbies; fitness training, jogging and bicycle riding.

As a language teacher, she thinks she knows how to learn languages. Initially, she was somewhat motivated, and has tried flash cards, German books, compact discs and audio tapes to learn. Currently she likes reading news and fashion magazines. Because she is a visual person, another technique that she uses daily is reading signs and thinking about the meanings while trying to make connections. At first this didn’t really work, but as time progressed, her vocabulary increased, so that she could begin to make sense of her surroundings.

Her coping strategies include work colleagues or friends assisting her with German matters. She watches CNN, BBC, and the German news in English on Deutsche Welle. She communicates often with her friends in the UK.

Unfortunately, Vivienne says that she cannot remember things like she used to because she is too old. Also, she says her overall motivation to learn German has dropped off entirely, due to a variety of reasons, not unlike the others interviewed. She mentions that she is not motivated to learn when her German friends speak English to her, or laugh at her attempts at speaking German.

Her position is not unlike the other participants. After an initial burst of enthusiasm, her motivation has waned over time. The result has been a decreased desire to study, learn and practice. To replace her studying she has come to depend a lot on bilingual friends to help her get some tasks or chores accomplished.

Vivienne’s situation is unfortunately not uncommon. Despite her time in Germany, her IL fossilized very early and is still at a rudimentary stage. She is able to converse in German at only a very basic level. If she can, she will try to speak English most of the time, and that includes in German stores and society. Ultimately, it is her lack of motivation for the language that has caused her to stop practicing the German language, either formally or informally,
FACTORS AFFECTING

other than what is absolutely necessary. According to Culhane’s theory of integrative
motivation, her condition would be categorized as living within her group, separately from the
main group (2004).

Marie

Marie is an American who is approximately thirty-years-old. She came to Germany for
the two year tax agreement deal. She loves studying new languages, and views learning
German a challenge. Intelligent and witty, she likes training in kickboxing and other high
energy output exercises.

She luckily found out she was coming a few months ahead of time, so despite working
full-time, she took the part-time “Rosetta Stone” course. This combined with prepared
dialogue cards, flash cards, and repetition, gave her a reasonable foundation for her arrival.
Upon arrival, Marie signed up with Rudiger’s German course after school, and has been quite
consistent with her attendance and effort.

Her friend, Tracey, says that Marie is a very hard worker and is very good with
languages, and even admitted a bit of jealousy at Marie’s language skills and determination.
After speaking with Marie, I have to admit that I myself was impressed with her level of
preparation and enthusiasm. She is by far the standout participant among the group, in terms
of effort, enthusiasm and overall German learned in the limited amount of time she has spent
in Germany (about nine months). She is an inspiration for her friends and her study partners.

Marie is living up to most of the learning models presented. Through self-analysis of
her learning style, she makes the most of her learning strategies. She practices regularly and is
totally motivated, a real over-achiever, and will stop at nothing to learn the German language.
Marie typifies the learner who has truly opened up her “language cage” to be more aware,
flexible and accepting of another’s culture and linguistical patterns (Citron, 1995, p. 113). She
has already learned two other languages in addition to her native English, and German is now
her fourth. At the rate Marie is improving, she will soon be achieving the ‘highest’ level on
Culhane’s acculturation model, integration with the local population, while maintaining her own culture and heritage (2004).

*Adelle*

Adelle is an American who is approximately thirty-years-old. She is an outgoing athlete who enjoys swimming. She came to Germany three years ago, and will likely stay for at least another year or two.

Her techniques have included taking Rudiger’s German classes for awhile when she first arrived, during which she made some verb flashcards. The words she needs regularly she often learns by repetition, or by looking the meaning up in a dictionary. While not shy about making mistakes, she still will use friends to help translate for more difficult tasks. She also uses English-speaking professionals, such as doctors and hairdressers.

Because of a lack of motivation to study regularly, Adelle has admittedly put little effort into learning the German language. She does not seem unhappy with this homeostasis, but rather seemingly content, keeping busy by socializing with her fellow English speaking colleagues who live in the same small town near the school. Speaking honestly about her feelings, she thinks that learning German ―is great for those who are motivated to do it.‖

As she has little desire to practice, either formally or informally, her German fossilized quite early at a basic level. Despite her level of understanding, she can only speak a halting basic version of German, and has quite a limited vocabulary. Motivation is a crucial element to all learners, and the contrast between her and other learners, like Marie, is startling.

Adelle’s situation, within Culhane’s theory of integrative motivation, would be categorized as living within her group (English speakers), separately from the main group (German speakers) (2004).

*Janice*

Janice is a retired American teacher in her late fifties who came over for the two-year tax agreement. She enjoys sightseeing and socializing. When she first arrived, she had some
desire to learn German and practiced with a book and CD package, reading and following along. She is very visual, and likes seeing things spelled out. When she hears or learns new words, she will often write them down and review them over and over. She says that at her age, if she doesn’t, she will forget them quickly.

Janice tries to learn by watching German television and sometimes looking words up. She prefers shows that she is familiar with from back home, like *Law & Order*, as she has an advantage for understanding the basis and the language.

Her coping strategies have included frequenting the same markets, stores, and restaurants that are friendly and will at least try to communicate with her to accommodate her (English) needs, and using bilingual friends who can assist her. In addition to watching a lot of CNN, she spends a lot of time socializing with colleagues, and on the phone to friends back home.

Despite her communication difficulties, Janice has little desire to invest time in studying German. She attributes this to a few things. One is that she thinks the German language sounds unattractive. The second is that she feels that the people are not so friendly or helpful in regards to assisting beginners. The third reason is that she is only here for a two year period, so that once she was over the initial shock, and set up sort of a rhythm, there was not much encouragement or motivation for change. Unfortunately, she has lost most of her desire this way.

Janice is unfortunately not an uncommon example of a typical teacher at the school. There are many teachers who start with a short burst of energy, only to fall victim to a negative scenario (like getting yelled at in German), or motivation which allows them to simply let go of the desire to learn the German language. Her anti-German behaviour puts her at odds with Schumann’s acculturation model (1978). Within Culhane’s theory of integrative motivation, she would be classified as living separately in her (English) culture within the dominant (German) culture (2004).
Laura

Laura is a divorced mother of two in her early forties. She came to Germany about twenty years ago from the Caribbean. She enjoys exercise and socializing.

Her situation is different from many others. She came to learn the language over a long and slow process of acceptance. When she first came to Germany, she thought many people were rude. She also, “felt it was a real ugly language”, and “thought (that she’s) not going to make those funny noises!” Now she thinks that’s just the way the language and the Germans are from a cultural perspective.

In the next stage, through watching translated movies she recognized that jokes or emotions (sadness) were not translated with any real emotion. The next stage was the realization that her lack of language skills and ability to express herself were holding back relationships and personal communication.

So, after spending about four years at home watching “everything” on German television, she got tired of being an outsider and took a three-month intensive course. She thought that she didn’t have much to lose, so she tried to learn in earnest.

This and practicing with other foreigners and her own children has really helped her learning. She had a tandem learning partner many years ago, but because the partner spoke poor English and had little motivation to follow through and speak English, they spent most of their time speaking German to one another. In addition, she read children’s books and newspapers and tried to write in German. As a technique, she recommends that beginners “not be shy or afraid or anything. Yeah, you have to get out there. Get in contact, talk to people, invite people to your home and you just get a chance to learn and that is very helpful.”

Of all the participants, Laura has the best command of the German language. Her comprehension is good and her speaking understandable. She claims to still make a few mistakes, but her good-natured attitude allows her to relax and not worry too much about
them. She has really tried to live up to Culhane’s integrative motivation, so much so that she would likely be classified as being integrated in with the local population, while still proudly maintaining her own culture and heritage (2004).

Amanda

Amanda is a thirty-year-old American teacher who came to Germany with her partner, Dan, for a two-year tax agreement contract. Reserved and pleasant, she enjoys jogging and exercise. Despite studying German for four years back in high school, she forgot most of it, and “has real problems making herself known and understood in German”. Prior to the interview with Amanda, I had known her for about eighteen months, yet I was unaware that she had studied any German in the past. She was able to hide it quite well through her shyness.

Amanda employs a language learning strategy to practice her conversation skills. When she knows she must speak, she will often go online and prepare written lines for the upcoming probable conversation. She will check an online dictionary for spelling and pronunciation. When the dictionary is just not enough, she will use a free translation website, which works well and she is quite satisfied with. She thinks the most humorous part of the language barrier is the sight of someone like herself rehearsing her lines. She is honest and serious though, and doesn’t put too much pressure on herself.

“I hand write (my lines) and I have to practice for about ten minutes and I feel so stupid. But, I am laughing at myself, like this is so ridiculous, you know.”

She has also recently accepted mixing the two languages, (as in Selinker’s IL) English and German, which some Germans may do as well. For example, if she does not know the word in German, then she substitutes the English word into the sentence (some Germans will do this as well, but instead will substitute German for English words). When she watched
Janice use this technique successfully, she thought to herself, “If Germans can also do that to me, why can’t I also do that back to them?”

This is known as code-switching, and it happens to accommodate a lack of language knowledge and to aid communication. As Stockwell (2002) describes it, the choice of code is a communication tool, which can occur when someone switches from an informal to a more formal speech pattern. “Code-switching occurs when a speaker decides to change domains.” (Stockwell, 2002, p. 9). Probably the most common code-switching among people who speak or try to speak at least two languages occurs when these speakers switch between the two languages. This is done because a gap in language knowledge exists or when a speaker accommodates someone who has limited knowledge of the L2 and helps with interspersing words in that person's language to aid communication.

Apparently, this technique often works for Janice. I think it is because she tries to speak German. This likely relaxes many Germans who may otherwise shake their heads or walk away from someone speaking English. This happens even in retail stores and shops. There are many Germans who may have some understanding of English, and indeed may be quite good, but do not feel comfortable conversing openly with a stranger. By starting off in German, she demonstrates to all that she is making an effort. This relates to what Bob stated earlier, that by making a demonstrable effort, the locals, “feel better about the alien living in their midst.” When Janice does arrive at a problem word, she doesn’t let it slow her down. By that point, the German person in the conversation is hopefully a little more relaxed and is that much more willing to try out his/her English comprehension and take a guess at the word(s) in question.

Using IL is a valid strategy for trying to make oneself understood. One explanation behind why or how this IL technique works naturally is because comprehension and understanding are often ahead of the participants’ ability and confidence to make them understood in the L2. The participant knows what they want to say, but they are unable to
express themselves adequately. Participants may also sometimes underestimate their own ability to communicate and recognize meanings through another language.

Being flexible as well as aware of other cultures and linguistic patterns, Amanda is one of those learners who have already ‘opened up’ the “language cage”. German is now her third language that she is learning (Citron, 1995, p. 113). Amanda follows Oxford’s language learning strategies quite well, maximizing their benefit for her personal learning style (1994, 2001). The downside to Amanda’s learning is her shyness and tendency to not speak when she is nervous, as this steals away her valuable informal German practice time, which has already been pointed out by Bialystok to be crucial to SLA (Bialystok, 1981).
Barriers

Integrative motivation is to what extent people ‘embrace’ another culture and displays their level of desire and effort to want to be able to fit in. The degree of such motivation, if it is present at all, may explain how much effort someone puts into learning the language. After all, if we are motivated enough, we can overcome barriers. Extrinsic motivation is when the motivation to perform something is extrinsic, such as something physical like currency or food. Intrinsic motivation is when the motivation to perform something is intrinsically driven, i.e. for the sake of itself.

The participants arrived in Germany eager but with expectations. Most expected communication difficulties, and few thought that living in Germany would be easy. Many knew that attaining fluency would require perseverance, hard work and lots of practice. Not many accurately estimated just how arduous a process it would be to learn the German language, however.

Simply educating oneself in regards to the available language options can be difficult enough for expatriates who do not speak German, let alone finding the most cost-effective or time-efficient methods. Finding someone to provide assistance and help to play the role of a ‘middle man’ or some other form of ‘go-between’ can be crucial. That said, once choices are discovered, however, the learning process is able begin in earnest.

Finding both the physical and mental energy to spend a day working as a teacher in a classroom, and then continue by studying in the evening in another classroom can be difficult for some. It can also be difficult to continue to maintain the motivation to learn German; especially if one’s social life revolves around other English speakers, such as in the case of our participants. Therefore, working in a primarily English only environment can have a negative effect on those trying to learn the German language.

This study has unfortunately found that all participants have had at least one negative experience attempting to speak, practice, and learn German, at some point. As the
communication process is a very complex, multi-faceted issue with multiple parties, it is
difficult to assign blame or label specific detailed causes without significantly more data from
an in-depth study. It is possible, however, from the point of view of the participants, to state
with some certainty where and what the problems could be. These problems are referred to
here as barriers to learning.

It is difficult to state with objectivity specifically which barriers play more, or less, of
a role in hindering participants from learning German. Participants, however, have stated
which barrier(s) they find most of a problem. It is prudent to remember that negative
experiences have the ability to cloud or influence recollective memories. With that in mind,
this list is presented in no particular order of importance.

The first major obstacle to learning German, from the point of view of the participants,
is the willingness of the locals to speak English. This was recognized by all of the
participants. It is difficult to practice one’s German language skills if Germans switch from
speaking German to English as soon as they recognize an English word (or two) or notice an
English-speaking accent behind a voice. A possible explanation as to why this occurs is
because some Germans desire a chance to practice their English, or simply want to be helpful
or respectful. This is supported by Stockwell (2002, p. 33) where he had observed German
speakers who would readily switch to English when they perceived an English speaker
experiencing difficulties with German.

The second major obstacle to learning German from the point of view of the
participants is the lack of acceptance by some Germans. What happens when this occurs is
that the participants begin to speak, and the German, perhaps noticing that a conversation may
be difficult, will stop trying to communicate, sometimes even physically distancing
themselves by walking away. In a situation like this, more questions than answers remain.
Communications could have been broken off for any number of reasons. The prospective
German learners are left with a strange feeling and asking themselves questions such as, “Did
I do something wrong? Why is this person behaving in this manner? What can I do different next time to avoid this from happening?” Although this may not occur very often, it is highly off-putting to the participants who reported it. As already noted above, according to Citron and Culhane, any disrespect, negativity towards, or inacceptance of another’s culture will make it difficult to learn a L2 (Citron, 1993; Culhane 2004). Therefore, it is prudent and important for the participant to maintain a positive, open outlook, persevere, and not let the incident interfere with learning.

The third major obstacle to learning German, from the point of view of the participants, is not enough time. Some of the participants find after teaching all day, they simply don’t have enough time to do all the things that they need or wish to do each evening and still find time to study and learn. This relates to motivation. If an activity is not important (enough) to the (potential) learner, it will rarely make it to the ‘to do’ list. Larsen-Freeman’s (1991) belief that all factors, such as motivation and field dependence, need to be considered, is applicable in this situation. The participants in this study who claim to have not enough time are rarely field dependent. Perhaps unfortunately, this has allowed some participants to live in Germany without making any substantial effort to learn the language.

The fourth major obstacle to learning German, from the point of view of the participants, is having little to no energy by the end of the day. After teaching all day, many teachers want to go home and relax. Trying to muster up enough energy to study, learn or even do German homework can be quite difficult. This barrier is also related to the amount of dependence one has on the L2. If the only language of communication is the L2, then it will often increase in importance enough for the learner to find a way to study (either formally or informally) and learn the L2 (Larsen-Freeman, 1991).

The fifth major obstacle to learning German, from the point of view of the participants, is simply no desire. Lack of motivation to learn the German language has affected most participants at some time or another. Often times an uncomfortable feeling (due to not being
able to speak German), will cause the potential learner’s motivation to increase and create a desire to want to learn. There are a couple of participants who survive their daily routine without much stress or trouble, so any amount of incentive to improve has failed to build. This is what Larsen-Freeman (1991) was theorizing; that all factors affecting SLA, including motivation, attitude and personality needed to be considered. When there is no incentive or motivation, then it will be difficult to try to learn the German language indeed!

The sixth major obstacle to learning German, from the point of view of the participants, is the risk of embarrassment or humiliation when one puts oneself on display and makes mistakes publicly. Learning German required the participants in this study to try to speak German. Often times, this would be in a public situation with strangers. This required the participants to be mentally strong enough to resist whatever negativity (either real or imagined) they perceived as feedback. It is not easy to put oneself into a situation that can be frightening and embarrassing. It often takes a very committed and goal-driven person to want to put themselves into such a position again and again. This is when certain specific personality traits are desirable. Attitude and personality traits can greatly affect whether or not a learner will acquire the L2 (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). This can be a sensitive issue, and likely one of the reasons why so many participants give up, as opposed to struggling on trying learning German. Many teachers are not very shy people, yet this was an issue for some participants who were more on the quiet side, as opposed to gregarious.

The seventh major obstacle to learning German, from the point of view of the participants, is the difficulty of the language from the point of view of a native English speaker. Many participants have never studies a second language beyond a basic beginner course many years ago in high school, and even fewer speak a second language. Many participants claim that it’s just not a part of the culture whence they came. When one examines the German language from an English language perspective, it is not difficult to understand their position. The language is somewhat more complex, requiring the user to
remember more details than in English (one example is comparing ‘the’ to ‘der, die, and das’),
the knowledge of which most Germans simply take for granted. Unfortunately, the prior
learning experiences have not prepared most learners for this moment of SLA. In this barrier,
it would benefit the participant(s) to be able to absorb the new features of the L2. “Ego
permeability” and a tolerance for language ambiguity are positively linked to SLA in
personality studies (Citron, 1995, p. 111). Citron (1993) states a link between the acceptance
of new cultural patterns and L2 learning.
Barriers and Strategies in Table Format

The cumulative information is now presented here in table format, summarizing the findings of the study.

**Barriers to learning**

Table 1 displays the common barriers to learning German. First, more visible barriers are presented, followed by barriers and hindrances which are more hidden, overlooked or sometimes even forgotten.

Table 1 Barriers to learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visible barriers</th>
<th>Less visible, hidden or forgotten barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● English speaking partner or spouse</td>
<td>● Being stubborn and resisting speaking German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Social life through work (‘English Island’)</td>
<td>● ‘Enabler’ friends who translate or assist with tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Living in Düsseldorf versus living in Neuss (many foreigners versus few foreigners)</td>
<td>● Learning style in some classes or courses can be an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The sounds of the spoken German language (which some describe as negative, gruff, harsh)</td>
<td>● Learning at workplace in courses after work can be negative environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Lack of flexibility in the native users of the language to allow for learner attempts without perfection</td>
<td>● Germans who speak English when one is trying to practice one’s German with them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Although possibly intended as friendly, laughing at a beginner’s poor German may cause embarrassment and lower motivation to practice further</td>
<td>● Professionals who speak English – doctor, chiropractor, gynaecologist, dentist, hairdresser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language Learning Strategies for SLA

Various methods and language learning strategies for second language acquisition are summarized in the next table. Strategies range widely, including formal classes, informal learning as well as social and work possibilities.

Table 2 Language learning strategies for second language acquisition

| Relaxing & household | • Listening to German music  
|                      | • Watching German television  
|                      | • Labelling items in German in one’s household  
|                      | • Watching familiar shows that one is already familiar with (for example, common translated shows like the Simpsons, Law & Order)  
| Informal practice, books and other practicing methods | • Reading children’s books in German  
|                                                    | • CD and phrase book – listen and practice  
|                                                    | • Trying to write letters or emails in German  
|                                                    | • Trying to use German Yahoo, use German websites  
|                                                    | • Trying to read German language books, magazines (fashion), newspapers  
|                                                    | • Downloading and listening to German lessons on MP3 format for commuting  
|                                                    | • Find a ‘tandem partner’ with whom one can speak English for 30 minutes - then German for 30 minutes  
|                                                    | • Teaching self through using “flashcards” (double-sided cards with language information on both sides)  
|                                                    | • Teaching self at home through reading and studying workbooks (‘standard school techniques’)  
| Personal – socially | • Carrying an English-German pocket dictionary  
|                      | • Learning through speaking through practice with German friends  
|                      | • Practicing repeating and playing ‘charades’ to learn new vocabulary  
|                      | • Listening, remembering and repeating what others said and then repeat  
| Formal practice, coursework & instruction | • Two week full-time course  
|                                                   | • Online course – download lessons and practice  
|                                                   | • Personal tutoring – twice per week for 90 minutes  
|                                                   | • Personal tutoring – one week course 4 hours per day for 5 days  
|                                                   | • Course for teachers after school hours, at school, small class sizes of 4 to 6  
| At work | • Learning and practice through conversations with German students  
|         | • Learning and practice through conversations with German teachers - colleagues  

Coping strategies

This last table outlines varying types of coping strategies, ranging from avoidance, to emotional, and finally to overcoming and learning.

Table 3 Coping strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoidance-type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Watching CNN, BCC, Deutsche Welle (German news - but in English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Physical activities alone - bicycle riding, jogging, yoga, weight lifting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Speaking on the phone to friends or family back home or around the world</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Having enabler friends who translate and assist for tasks such as internet,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>electricity, insurance and banking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Avoid shopping at places that one likely has to speak German (Pharmacy)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>with unfriendly, rude or impatient people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Avoid frequenting or using the services of companies due to embarrassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or lack of confidence in the German language (retail stores, car rental).</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Crying (from frustration)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Discussing issues with partner to relax and calm down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Do not worry if things do not go as planned – assume they will be different</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from the start</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overcoming and Learning</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Playing sports with Germans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Going to the pub to watch sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Going out socially with Germans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Going out independently without other English speakers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Trying to speak German whenever possible, no matter how poorly one speaks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Developing ‘cheat sheets’ of anticipated conversations that one will have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(doctors, pharmacist, train, restaurants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Shopping more often at places that are friendly and forgiving to a beginner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foreigner’s accent, pronunciation and grammar (Farmer’s markets, Ethnic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>markets, some ‘German’ retail shops)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of the findings

Findings of the Study

As discussed in the literature review, there are many studies involving LLS and SLA. Very few of these studies look at the overall nature of how the language is learned, and the necessary practical steps involved in overcoming certain hurdles and issues. This study seeks to complement current research findings in regards to learning strategies and transitions in new language experiences. In particular, this study has tried to fill that niche by looking at LLS teachers employ when attempting SLA. The L1 for the participants is English, while the TL for this study is the German language.

There are a number of theories which support the findings within this study. Only the theories that have the most strength and relevance within this study will be presented. The theories presented here do not always show a clear connection between cause and effect. When asked, participants are usually clear about what methods they prefer to use. By contrast, however, many have difficulties articulating what is the most effective manner in which to learn the language overall. The soundest theories which represent my study’s findings will now be presented.

Schumann’s strengthening of Spolsky’s 1988 general theory of second language learning applies to this study because it recognizes that there is no one theory to account for SLA at the same time as including cognitive processing. The participants indeed did not follow just one theory of SLA in their attempt at learning the German language. There were diverse numbers of formal and informal methods used to learn the German language.

Larsen-Freeman (1991) believes that all factors that affect SLA need to be considered, such as personality, motivation, aptitude, attitude, age and cognitive style. Larsen-Freeman also contends that when a person has field dependence can only be understood (and is therefore encouraged to speak) in an L2, the chances for that L2 acquisition increase. Given these factors, I endeavoured to give full descriptions of my participants including their
approximate ages, personalities, what motivates them and their general attitudes towards language learning and living abroad.

Schumann’s acculturation model on informal natural learning, which combined acculturation and learner factors, was reflected in this study (1978). Those learners who were the most respectful and open towards their new culture usually acculturated the most, and consequently had more success in learning the German language. For example, Laura, Diane, and Marie have been open to the language and embraced the German culture and have enjoyed the benefits of speaking the highest level of German in the group. This is perhaps unsurprising because Schumann (1978), in reference to ‘natural SLA’ learning, found that acculturation is the most important aspect in language learning. The tendency for some of the participants is to take a three-month long course and then relax and take a break from formal studying. This is the time that informal German practice would happen. Some participants, however, failed to practice their German very much, either informally or formally, because of the large amount of time spent in their native English speaking groups (one of the barriers to SLA). Dan, Ben, Jenny, Roxanne, Vivienne, Adelle and Janice have recognized this as a barrier and something to improve on.

On closer examination of this specific issue, however, it is not just a simple aspect such as not enough motivation. This is often about friendship, hobbies and inclusion. When the participants go out together, it’s not just because they are friends, it’s also because their social circle is quite small. They do not have many friends outside the school environment. When questioned, many say that it is not easy to find and make good friends. Many cannot imagine what they would do without this ‘built-in’ social life that often comes with working at the school. Many claim to be lonely enough, and could not imagine living here without it. Many of the participants who claim to want to learn German do not wish to choose between it and having a social life.
Several of the participants value the use of inference when interpreting the language, for example Carton’s (1971) “Extra-lingual inference”. Bialystok describes extra-lingual inference as incorporating non-linguistic information from the surroundings to understand the language (Bialystok, 1981). Bob, Dan, Diane and Amanda are some of those who claim to make regular use of inference, as Bialystok defines it, for their benefit. Bialystok on inferencing: “the use of available information to derive explicit linguistic hypotheses” (Bialystok, 1981, p. 26). Some participants recognize the value in looking for clues regarding the situation, the time, the actors involved, the formality or informality of the situation, and any memories of other similar situations.

Bialystok found that the strategy of performing functional practice was the most efficient (1981). Functional practice is commonly used for information transfer. This correlates with the findings from the study. Those that perform little or no functional practice have the most difficulty with the German language, while those participants who claim to perform functional practice regularly have a better command of the German language. This is relevant to my study because certain strategies were indeed targeted for such activities; for example, in order to improve her conversational German, Roxanne practices her listening comprehension by listening to the radio and tapes and watching television and movies.

For probably all of the participants, the acquisition process of a second language has been similar to Chomsky’s theory of rule formation. Rule formation, as opposed to habit formation, has been by far the dominant route to learning the German language. For the most part, the participants often only ‘learn’ when studying formally, such as in classes, i.e. Rudiger’s class, or when studying and practicing themselves (such as Marie or Amanda). Of course, other informal learning could and likely does occur to some extent for some participants, but due to the circumstances of their living situations (often alone in Germany, or with an English speaking partner) and the various colleagues’ proximity to each other, it is not really given a fair chance. Most of the time spent away from the English speaking school
FACTORS AFFECTING

grounds is spent with English speaking colleagues. Unfortunately, informal learning is simply overshadowed by formal learning with these participants.

Gardner’s socio-educational model (1985), values motivation and attitudes (learner oriented factors) while acknowledging the social aspect of language learning. The mixture of learner-oriented factors with the social aspect of language learning relates well to the participants’ experiences within this study. The participants are social creatures for the most part, and enjoy meeting and talking. Therefore, one would think that a potential after-school participant German class would be well-attended. Apparently this is not always the case, due to a couple of factors. One is that the necessary motivation to attend after school classes does not appeal to all. Another is that the classes offered are not conversational, but instead Grammar or similar topics. Gardner’s model is correct in valuing the mix of motivation and attitudes of the learner for greater gains in SLA. If a different kind of German class were offered (more conversational), the motivation level might increase. In addition, if the classes were to explain some cultural factors, learners may have a better idea on how Germans see the expatriate teachers.

Selinker’s identification of another linguistic system, Interlanguage (IL) that is both different from the L1 and L2 is supported by the participants in this study (1972). IL is seen as a temporary state at any point on a continuum from beginner to native speaker fluency. While some may not be conscious of and admit to mixing English and German, Dan, Ben, Ian, Diane, Betsy, Vivienne, Marie, Adelle, Janice and Amanda are all users of IL.

As the L2 improves, sometimes the learner consciously switches back and forth between the languages (in this case English and German). This is known as code-switching. Luisa Duran (1994), admits that “both IL and code switching are probably strongly related and may appear more or less concurrently in the language life of the developing bilingual.” (p. 3) She chooses to use the term code-switching to denote, “that point in developmental time of
bilingual learners when they are conscious of such behavior and then choose more or less purposefully to use or not to use it.” (Duran, 1994, p. 3).

Many admit to using (mostly) what they think and hope is grammatically correct German with the occasional English word, in place of the unknown German vocabulary word. A few others will admit to stringing some German words together with English grammar, although this is usually only done by raw beginners or unmotivated participants. In support of the IL theory, a number of participants have claimed that it is easier to speak German to another foreigner than it is to speak to a native-speaking German. This is likely due to the errors which are made between the respective native languages and the IL.

Krashen’s supposition that the characteristics of formal study are more efficient than informal practice at improving SLA in adults supports the findings of this study (1976). Intensive environments that directly involve the learner have been most successful for these participants. The participants have reportedly learned more in formal study environments. Some participants speculate that it could be due to the possibility of being able to ‘tune out’ if and when the language becomes too difficult (Jenny), or one does not understand or is bored with the material (Diane, Ian). From the information from the participants, the informal method is probably best used by those who are able to stay focussed and have a high level of motivation.

Oxford’s finding that different learners learn in different ways is supported by most of the participants (1994). Bob, Dan, Tracey, Marie, and Amanda are just some of the participants who claim it is an advantage to focus on specific learning strategies. They state that this enables them to target their needs more efficiently and effectively within the time they have and devote to learning German.

Citron and Culhane both theorize that any disrespect, negativity towards, or inacceptance of another’s culture makes it difficult to learn a L2 (Citron, 1993; Culhane 2004). Some of the participants unfortunately have similar feelings towards the German
culture or language which has unsurprisingly had a negative effect on their learning. Indeed, those who have been open to the different cultural and linguistical patterns have been most successful in learning the German language. In addition, within personality studies Citron identifies the positive aspect of a tolerance for language ambiguity and “ego permeability” (Citron, 1995, p. 111). The participants in my study who have indeed opened up and become more aware and flexible seem to have had an easier time staying motivated to learn the language. Those who have remained unaccepting and resisted the different cultural and speaking patterns have had a more difficult time trying to acquire the German language.

Berry’s and Culhane’s theories are reflected by the attitudes of the participants within my study (Berry et al., 1986, Berry et al., 1987, Culhane, 2004). Similar to the findings of Citron, those who have tried to integrate with the culture and language have had much more success at acquiring the German language than those who have resisted integration. Marie, Diane and Laura are some of the participants who have attempted to integrate. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these participants express more desire or motivation to interact with L2 speakers (native German speakers) and integrate with the new culture, C2.

Scope and Limitations of the study

Within the study itself, a limitation was the number of people I could interview. Even though participants were chosen selectively, more interviews would statistically give me more chances at discovering quality information. After a certain number of interviews, the odds of discovering additional information would begin to level out, however, and the interview results would risk becoming redundant or repetitious.

The length of the interviews varied due to the differing motivational levels, and also because the participants, as professionals, were quite articulate, needing little prompting and since they were given the questions ahead of time, had had time to prepare full answers.
The SLA field encompasses a wealth of different aspects, theories, and studies, but I emphasized the barriers to and strategies of SLA. By doing this study qualitatively, I uncovered a wealth of information, including feelings and personal opinions, which may help others to understand the challenges of learning another language. There were also cultural connotations uncovered in the study; barriers that the participants faced that were not of their own doing, but were culturally influenced. Examining these issues could help teachers of German understand the problems better.

While language learning techniques and strategies may be similar, some of the strategies may be most applicable from Latin-derived alphabets, such as German, Dutch, French, Portuguese and Malay, as the written language may be (partially) recognizable and (somewhat) transferable to English. Conversely, in comparison to some other written and spoken languages that share none of the advantages of similar alphabets or sounds, the English speaking participants enjoy quite an advantage.

Having interviewed just 15 participants all from one institution, the study does not allow a generalization across the population. This is one study with one group of mixed native English-speaking teachers in one international school in Germany. On the other hand, the findings may interest other researchers who are thinking of conducting a similar study under similar research conditions elsewhere; for example, a group of international workers somewhere else in the developed world. This study may be used as a base for doing additional research, such as how do Germans feel towards those who are living in Germany and are attempting to learn the language to whatever extent possible. I see my study as a valuable contribution to the field of language learning and integrative motivation/acculturation.
Conclusions

The conclusions of the study are that there are many LLS, which eager participants can apply to learn the German language. Considering the amount of time studied, for some participants who employed LLS, the process of language learning has been relatively successful. For those participants who have been not as successful at learning the language, a combination of factors have likely been the cause; the level of motivation to learn German, their attitude towards Germany, and their planned length of stay in Germany have likely negatively affected their desire to learn the language.

Most valuable was when participants had a greater self-understanding of their preferred learning style(s), as they were better able to try to employ strategies that are best suited to their learning style immediately, and not waste any time in trying to find a preferred style.

For those participants who had a greater knowledge of LLS, it was beneficial because they were able to apply these strategies to either better or more effectively relax, communicate, or better understand the formal and informal learning situation(s).
**Recommendations**

Not many people move to Germany, let alone for two years. Therefore, this information is rather specific. There are similarities that exist, however, and there is possible value in applying this information to other language learning situations. I examined the language learning progress, which focussed mostly on grammar, comprehension, and the pronunciation of the participants. Potential learners of the German language enjoy a few choices today, which cater to almost all income levels. The various options and corresponding positives and negatives will now be discussed.

Prior to arrival, some participants recommend taking at least taking a short German course (in a classroom, computer, book, or CD format). These participants that recommended this were in unanimous agreement that this would help extraordinarily in “getting started” earlier.

The cheapest options are watching television, reading the weekly free newspapers, listening to the radio, and trying to speak to Germans as best and as often as time allows. A great way to speak to Germans is to try speaking with the neighbours, who may be very friendly. Another way is join a local club or sports team. It’s not important specifically what activity it is; the main point is that within the club system, Germans are more likely to display their warmth and friendliness to someone who shares the same activities they do.

One inexpensive option is to find a German-speaking ‘learning partner’ with whom one exchanges language instruction. This often works by the partners meeting up and speaking half the time in German and the other half of the time in English. One advantage is that partners can meet up anywhere and anytime.

Another inexpensive option would be the public library which has the usual ‘How to…’ language books and tapes. Membership costs are very low. This would be ideal for someone who is independent, learns at one’s own pace, or cannot sit in a classroom for any number of reasons.
The next option would mean purchasing tapes, books or complete programs to use on a constant basis wherever one is located. The ability to study wherever and whenever time allows is valuable, and some maximize this opportunity whether it’s commuting on public transport, sitting in a café or simply studying at home.

There are also very inexpensive local courses, through the Volkshochschule (VHS) with class sizes up to twenty students. This is often similar to what many North Americans know as ‘night-school’. One or two classes per week (three to six hours) are the most popular options. Some teachers have difficulty after a day’s work to work up the motivation to go and sit in a classroom for another three hours (especially if one’s homework is not completed!)

The next cost level would be in a small group setting of four or five students through a private teacher or tutor. This offers more personalized attention at a slightly higher cost.

The more expensive options for those who can afford it are private tutors, or private language centres, commonly referred to ‘Sprach-cafés’ (speaking or language cafés) here in Germany. They may offer similar courses to the above options, but also offer more expensive one-on-one tutoring, either in-house, or at one’s home or office.
References


Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me something about your experiences of being a newcomer in this country, when it comes to making yourself understood in the new language?

2. Are there, (or were there), any positive things about your language barrier? If so, what are they?

2a. Have there been any experiences which have been humorous because of the language barrier. Can you remember something funny?

2b. Can you think of something from your German language experiences that shows something positive like personal assistance, kindness or understanding?

2c. Can you think of something negative which may be related to your language barrier? Are there, (or were there), things you consider negative? If so, what are they?

3. When you wanted to buy (or order) something, and you didn’t know how to say it in German, what did you do? How did you react? How did the other person react?

4. What sort of methods (or techniques) have you used to try to learn words or phrases in German? How did you learn them? Did anyone help you with them?

5. What sort of methods (or techniques) have you used to try to learn words or phrases in German? Were you able to learn them? How did you learn them? Did anyone help you?

6. If you think of yourself as a newcomer, how have you coped? What have you done? Are there things you would have done differently?

Sub - Questions

1. How do you feel about learning the new language?

2. How much enthusiasm do you have for acquiring the language?

3. What have you done to learn the German language?

4. Is there anything else that you would like to add regarding your experience of coping with language barriers that we have not covered in this conversation?