

Intercultural Competence A Floating Signifier

An Empirical, Multi-Dimensional
Approach in the Study Abroad Context

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Abstract

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As a result of globalisation in recent decades, intercultural and multilingual encounters have become part of our everyday lives. A harmonious coexistence and a successful career often require foreign language skills and intercultural competence to consciously perceive heterogeneity and to respond appropriately to these encounters. Especially in the field of language teaching, intercultural competence has become a highly diverse, widely used concept, and a consensus on its definition and role does not exist. This thesis therefore argues that current theoretical conceptualisations of intercultural competence with all the attendant characteristics and complex human traits have so far been too scientific and broad to serve as a useful tool for second language education research. The dissertation begins with a comprehensive review of the concepts of culture, competence and model from various academic discourses and continues with a discussion of models of intercultural competence.

In the light of an empirical study, current models of intercultural competence are critically analysed regarding their feasibility in the second language education context and their terminological and conceptual deficits. Based on the qualitative content analysis approach by Mayring, data collected from 27 students of German at Maynooth University, National University of Ireland are analysed and evaluated. All of these students participated in exchange programmes abroad. The three methods of eliciting information are individual, semi-structured pre-stay and post-stay interviews and an amended version of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters as adopted by the Council of Europe. The variety of experiences does not permit generalisation but the findings serve as incentives for an alternative approach to intercultural competence, which could be implemented into curricula at secondary and tertiary institutions to help develop teaching and learning objectives.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are commonly used throughout the thesis.

AIC	Questionnaire: Assessing Intercultural Competence
AIE	Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters
C1	Native Culture
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DESI	Deutsch Englisch Schülerleistungen International
DMIS	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
ELA	English Language Assistant
FEIL	Federation Experiment in International Living
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
IDI	Intercultural Development Inventory
IDP	Intercultural Development Plan
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LC1	Native Linguaculture
LC2	Second Linguaculture
LC3	Third Linguaculture
NUI	National University of Ireland
NUIM	National University of Ireland in Maynooth
PCT	Personal Construct Theory
YOGA Form	Your Objectives, Guidelines and Assessment Form

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0. Introduction

As a result of globalisation in recent decades, intercultural and multilingual encounters have become part of our everyday lives. One objective of foreign language education is, therefore, to prepare students for the challenges of a diverse, multicultural society with differing cultural reference points (i.e. social, linguistic, political, ethical). Especially in the field of language education, intercultural competence has become an integral part of curricula. Within the context of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001), educators even in the primary school sector are encouraged to foster their pupils' "willingness to relativise [their] own cultural viewpoint and value system" (Council of Europe 2001: 161) and help them move away from ethno-centrism (Council of Europe 2001: 172). In Ireland, the promotion of intercultural competence has been implemented into school curricula from primary school onwards (NCCA 2004) and the Irish Leaving Certificate German syllabus contains cultural awareness as one of its objectives to enable successful communication (The Department of Education and Skills 2016: 5–6).

It is assumed that intercultural competence development is fostered when students live in host countries and become involved in day-to-day life there, instead of remaining in their own cultural bubble (Hammer 2012: 133). Along these lines, a year abroad during undergraduate studies, for example in the framework of the ERASMUS Programme¹, is aimed at enhancing intercultural competence skills and the development of a European identity² (European Commission 2017: 5–10).

Due to the breadth of research in the field of intercultural competence, a truly comprehensive review is highly improbable, and certainly beyond the scope of this dissertation. The following synoptic overview presents recent research in the study abroad context, which reveals divergent results.

¹ The EU funded life-long learning programme ERASMUS (which has been part of the Erasmus+ programme since 2014) is an education and training programme that fosters student and staff mobility and European co-operation between higher education institutions. The programme's aim is to provide students and staff with the opportunity to extend their knowledge and improve their professional prospects. Students have the opportunity to acquire foreign language and intercultural skills in a new, culturally authentic environment. In doing so, students receive financial support and full recognition of the study programme by means of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

² As for the term "European identity", a constructivist approach relating to self-perceptions, subjective attitudes and perceived commonalities among Europeans is applied (Sigalas 2010: 245–246). "European identity" further refers to the attachment to Europe.

0.1 Selected Findings on Intercultural Competence Gain during a Stay Abroad

According to research (Bachner & Zeuschel 1994, Byram *et al.* 2002, Cohen *et al.* 2005, Coleman 1996, Fantini 2005, Hammer 2012, Jackson 2008, Kinginger 2013, Murphy-Lejeune 2002), contact with other worldviews as constructed and expressed by different cultural communities may result in a shift in perspectives and an appreciation of diversity. In this sense, a stay abroad has the potential to facilitate and increase intercultural competence development and in-depth language learning during third-level studies. It is assumed to be a life-changing experience that has a significant impact on subsequent life and career choices and therefore on society (Ecke 2014: 11).³

Bicknese's study (1974a/b) is one of the early attempts to implement pre- and post-programme surveys to investigate the changes in US junior year students' attitudes towards the German people and culture. In the framework of the study the students' initial expectations are compared with their subjective impressions right after their academic year in Marburg, and with their views one year after their return to the US. The findings of the study, e.g. the experience of culture shock, gaps between expectations and perceived reality, becoming Germanophiles at some point and having, in hindsight, a more positive view of their native culture (Bicknese 1974a: 325–326), are still of relevance in more contemporary studies.

Many studies (Badstübner & Ecke 2009, Brogan 2014, Chieffo & Griffiths 2004, Ecke 2013, Kinginger 2013, Medina-López-Portillo 2004, Williams 2005) have focused on the development of linguistic and intercultural competence of study-abroad participants (Badstübner & Ecke 2009, Ecke 2013, Kinginger 2013, Medina-López-Portillo 2004, Williams 2005) as opposed to their stay-at-home counterparts who serve as a control group (Brogan 2014, Chieffo & Griffiths 2004). In the framework of pre- and post-programme questionnaires, interviews and a photo-contest (Williams 2005) the programme participants are asked to assess their own learning expectations and perceived improvements. Their results, although not always statistically significant, indicate that participants of study abroad programmes have developed more intercultural competence skills in terms of personal growth, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural

³ The following overview focuses on studies conducted in the field of intercultural learning. For an overview of impacts on various skills of study abroad programmes see Ecke (2014).

awareness, functional knowledge of the world and intercultural communication skills than their peers, regardless of the nature and length of the particular study abroad programme. Participants of longer programmes unsurprisingly show more progress in intercultural competence development (Chieffo & Griffiths 2004, Ecke 2013, Medina-López-Portillo 2004). However, during the stay abroad the very high expectations of improvement in language skills are often not met in terms of perceived learning progress, whereas intercultural competence is acquired most effectively (Badstübner & Ecke 2009: 47–48). This result indicates that the participants regard the development of intercultural competence independently from second language (L2) acquisition.

Research (Cohen *et al.* 2005, Deardorff 2004, Hammer 2012) has further shown that mere contact with different cultures does not suffice to become an interculturally competent person. Hence, intercultural competence is not automatically developed but rather must be intentionally addressed. If it were, intercultural misunderstandings could be more easily avoided. Adequate preparation and mentoring which fosters reflection are required (Hammer 2012: 126–132) to enable students to make meaning of their stay abroad. As Block (2007) also acknowledges (see Chapter 3), a year abroad in the framework of undergraduate studies does not necessarily lead to the development of intercultural competence and a broadening of students' identity if learners are not aware of the potential challenges and do not intend to change.

Studies on learning and lived experiences of American (Ecke 2013) and Irish students (Conacher 2008, Walsh 1994) in Germany have shown that an academic year abroad does not automatically lead to a positive change in attitudes towards members of the target culture and language or intercultural development. In a recent study by Conacher (2008), the research group consists of six Irish students of German at the University of Limerick who studied at least two languages and went to Germany for either a whole academic year (two students) or one term (four students). Based on the assumption that expectations are high in relation to language competence, academic and personal maturity, and cultural sensitivity during a study stay abroad, Conacher (2008) investigates the interdependency of expectations and actual experiences. In her analyses, Conacher (2008) primarily focuses on identity changes and secondarily on L2 acquisition, which helps students to cope more effectively with the problems they face during their stay abroad. Conacher (2008) explores the experiences of these six Irish learners of German using interviews and the participants' cultural reports for the next generation of year-

abroad students in Germany. The participants are highly proficient in German (CEFR level B2) and very motivated to improve their language skills and to integrate into the German cultural community. They develop strategies to reach their goals such as making German friends, living with Germans, attending cultural events and classes for German native speakers. However, the Irish students also perceive barriers to fulfilling these aims, despite the friendliness of the Germans they encounter. They do not get in contact with as many native speakers as they had anticipated, mostly stay in foreign students' circles and perceive themselves to be an outsider group (Conacher 2008: 5–15). Participants claim that on average they use German only 52% of the time, and only 10% to maximally 55% of their friends are German native speakers. The majority of acquaintances (on average 49%) are English native speakers, and on average 21% are international students (Conacher 2008: 11). Conacher consequently discusses possible reasons for this pattern, such as the students' accommodation which could be supporting as well as hindering integration. Another reason could be that the interest in integration is higher among foreign students whose lives revolve around university, while the German students have lives beyond the university with already established social circles and family. Initiatives to facilitate foreign students such as specific language courses or excursions in fact prevent the integration process into normal student life as they do not foster joint efforts for international and German students. Nevertheless, the students enjoy their year abroad and feel it has helped their personal development in that they perceive themselves to have become more tolerant and open towards cultural diversity. Conacher (2008: 14–17) concludes that students need to relativise their expectations of their stay abroad and that host institutions could offer shared accommodation and courses for all students, such as translation courses, which would foster joint working groups. Furthermore, virtual forums and platforms could be introduced to allow students of partner universities and home institutions to get in contact with each other and exchange information.

In another recent study, Ecke (2013, cited in Ecke 2014: 129) investigates the changes in perception and attitudes of US students during a one-month stay in Leipzig. Based on pre- and post-programme questionnaires, Ecke (2013) compares the students' self-assessment of attributes that are assumed to foster intercultural competence. The findings show that the attitudes and assumptions about members of the target language cultures remain stable whereas those towards their own cultural community change significantly during their stay in terms of appreciating certain attributes of their own culture more. This

finding relates to Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (1993a) which defines ethno-centric stages at the beginning of intercultural experiences.

As for personality traits related to intercultural competence development, only "comfort with uncertainty" (Ecke 2014: 136) shows a significant positive change during the stay abroad. Hence, Ecke (2014) concludes that personality attributes often associated with intercultural competence development are not likely to change within the framework of a one-month stay abroad in already highly motivated students. This hardly surprising result goes hand in hand with the conclusions drawn by Bicknese (1974a/b), according to whom it takes about five months for students to notice any changes in personality aspects (Bicknese 1974a: 325).

In her study based on questionnaires and interviews on psychological effects of a study year abroad, Ayano (2010) shows that intercultural adjustment has, however, partly not been successful and students have suffered negative effects after their stay abroad, such as long-term depression and anxiety because of a lack of necessary knowledge and skills required for living and studying abroad. The goals of Japanese students studying in Britain to become fluent English speakers and make friends with host people could, for example, not be met. During their stay abroad, they felt lost, confused, isolated and imprisoned despite intentions of immersing themselves in the host culture (Ayano 2010: 110–112). Along these lines, another study by Coleman (1996, 1997) shows that the study abroad experience partly results in negative views and frustration towards the host cultural community due to unfulfilled expectations. In his study on the effects of residence abroad conducted by Coleman (1996, 1997) almost one fifth of the study participants consider contact with another culture as stressful and report no language gain (Coleman 1996: 45–47). They retain or even reinforce their stereotypes of the L2-speakers and their perception of them is less friendly than before. However, the majority of students (two thirds) are still satisfied with their stay abroad.

ERASMUS is based on the idea of creating a European identity among the participants, hence a self-identification as a European citizen. Various studies with a special focus on European identity in the study abroad context result in different findings. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 229) conducted a large-scale questionnaire survey in the study abroad context with Erasmus students of the University of Sussex. The results show that a year of studying in another European country enhances the European identity perception in

students and fosters their insight into European issues in comparison to the control sample of colleagues who stay at home. However, since the empirical evidence is drawn mainly from one post-stay survey only, it remains unclear whether the European identity has developed during the sojourn or if ERASMUS participants are generally more likely to hold a sense of a European identity in the first place.

A panel study with pre- and post-stay questionnaires by Sigalas (2010), conducted with 402 Erasmus students (161 British students at continental European universities, 241 continental European students in Britain) and 60 stay-at-home students at Reading University shows contrasting results. While participation in the Erasmus programme has increased the level of socialising with other European students significantly, contact with host country students has remained rather limited. Overall, ERASMUS is considered an enjoyable experience and no group reports significant adaptation problems. However, personal issues are primarily discussed with co-nationals, and close friendships with host country students seem to be the exception (Sigalas 2010: 252–255). In terms of a European identity, no significant changes can be reported in the self-identification as Europeans and the study reveals that Erasmus does not strengthen the sense of a European identity but rather undermines it for students going to the UK, a fact which needs to be investigated further in the future (Sigalas 2010: 241–243, 256, 261).

In a recent panel survey of Erasmus students on the promotion of European identity change, Mitchell (2015) focuses on the identification as European⁴ as well as the extent of identification with Europe.⁵ Overall, 1729 students from 28 universities in six countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the UK) have taken part in one survey prior to the ERASMUS stay and one survey six months into their ERASMUS exchange year. In contrast to Sigalas' study (2010), the data shows that participation in the Erasmus programme promotes both dimensions of European identity change after six months in comparison to the control group of students who did not go abroad. However, the study also shows no significant change for British Erasmus students who, for the majority, think of themselves in national terms.⁶ Furthermore, a negative association with a change in

⁴ In this context, Mitchell (2015: 331) refers to the cognitive element of Tajfel's (1978) definition of collective identity, see chapter 2.

⁵ In relation to this dimension, Mitchell (2015: 331) refers to Cram (2012) in that these two forms of identification do not necessarily correspond as one may identify as European without identifying with Europe, or vice versa.

⁶ These findings are particularly interesting in the light of the recent Brexit vote.

identification with Europe for students studying abroad in the UK can be detected, which complies with Sigalas' (2010) findings. Identification with Europe is enhanced by an increased awareness of Europe, contact with host country nationals and other Europeans, by a longer sojourn and greater satisfaction with the exchange. In contrast, socialising with co-nationals during the ERASMUS stay has a negative effect on the identification with Europe (Mitchell 2015: 330–343).

In sum, studies on a variety of study abroad programmes and their effects have so far provided fragmentary insights and partly contradictory results in relation to linguistic and cultural identity and personality development amongst students as well as challenges encountered during their study abroad. Yet, the underlying concept of intercultural competence has hardly been at the centre of research interest. But what exactly is "intercultural competence"? Although the term has been flourishing and is widely-used today, a consensus on its definition and role does not exist. In most studies the concept of intercultural competence has not been defined and elaborated on.

0.2 Rationale and Objectives

Current models of intercultural competence in the language education context define three dimensions: a *cognitive dimension* (knowledge about cultural norms and values and cultural self-awareness), an *affective dimension* (motivation and attitudes such as open-mindedness) and a *behavioural dimension* (analytical skills such as interpreting and relating). Attitudes, knowledge and skills ideally lead to flexibility and adaptability as well as an ethnorelative perspective (Deardorff 2009: 6) which then become visible in interculturally competent behaviour. However, the existing broad and holistic concepts of intercultural competence with all their attendant components and complex human traits are still rather theoretical. It could therefore be argued that current theoretical conceptualisations of intercultural competence (Bennett 1993a, Byram 2009, Deardorff 2004, Fantini 2005, Witte 2014) may be too scientific and broad to serve as a useful tool for second language (L2) education research.

Based on this rationale, the preliminary objective of the following study is to take one step back and explore current constructs of intercultural competence through a review of relevant literature and an analysis of data provided by a specific social group, BA German

language students at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth (NUIM)⁷ in their study abroad context. After their second year of German Studies these students were embarking on the ERASMUS or English Language Assistant (ELA)⁸ Programme in Germany or Austria for one academic year, with different expectations, hopes and aims. The first objective of this work is to provide a review of existing literature on intercultural competence in the light of terminological and conceptual deficits. Secondly, theoretical frameworks of intercultural competence models are examined for their practicability in the study abroad context and tertiary language studies. Thirdly, the theoretical findings are reflected upon with regard to the experiences and subjective points of view of language learners, in this case 27 Bachelor students of German Studies at NUIM. In the course of the analysis, this work investigates which components of intercultural competence students have acquired during their stay abroad and how they contribute to their effectiveness in intercultural encounters.⁹ The experiences will not permit generalisation but may provide information on how to facilitate intercultural learning in the future. The findings could furthermore serve as incentives for an alternative approach to intercultural competence, which could be implemented within curricula at secondary and tertiary institutions to help develop teaching and learning objectives.

In this sense, this exploratory work is aimed at students of languages and cultures, at their educators, language professionals and language programme designers alike. The critical reflection on intercultural competence in the light of real-life examples and their analyses in a stay abroad context may help to identify components for effective and appropriate interactions in intercultural contexts and contribute valuable information on practical suggestions for preparation or training sessions before a stay abroad.

⁷ The University was renamed to "Maynooth University, National University of Ireland" in 2014 but since the data was collected between 2012 and 2013, the previous name "National University of Ireland in Maynooth (NUIM)" will be used in this elaboration.

⁸ The English Language Assistant Scheme (ELA) operates between Ireland, Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. The ELAs are employed for 12 hours a week, conduct conversation classes, supplement classes with exercises and give pupils an insight into the way of life in their home countries.

⁹ In this study, an 'intercultural encounter' refers to an encounter with someone "who is perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself" (Barret *et al.* 2014: 16). These encounters "may involve people from different countries, people from different regional, linguistic, ethnic or religious backgrounds, or people who differ from each other because of their lifestyle, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age or generation, level of religious observance, etc." (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 16). Hence, these are interpersonal encounters in which the interlocutors interact on the basis of their affiliation to another set of cultures rather than on the basis of individual personal characteristics. In these encounters, intercultural competence is supposed to be essential for successful interaction.

0.3 Research Questions

The study investigates which key factors of intercultural competence students consider to be important and how they have contributed to their efficiency during their stay abroad. The main research question is:

- What is the relationship between the theory and practice of intercultural competence in the context of studying abroad?

Before investigating the key components of intercultural competence for this study group, the study focuses on an analysis of the underlying concept of culture itself. Based on a literature review, the next research question attends to the students' individual underlying concept of culture. The first subordinate research question therefore is:

- How do the participants of the study conceptualise culture in the study abroad context?

Along with questions on the understanding of culture, the exploration of the students' reflections and experiences are aimed at providing information on subjective aspirations which shed light on the individual definitions of success and concomitant skills to fulfill their aims:

- What aspirations do the participants have for a successful stay abroad?
- How do the students define success in the study abroad context and what strategies do the students use to achieve their aims?

Furthermore, it is estimated that language awareness is essential for successful (intercultural) interaction (Byram 1997, Fantini 2005, Kramsch 1998, Risager 2006, Witte 2014) but does not guarantee it (Zarate 2003:13). These assumptions lead to the next subordinate research question:

- What conclusions can be drawn on intercultural competence from subjectively perceived language learning progress and objectively measured language competence?

In addition, personality attributes and attitudes are postulated to form an important basis for the development of intercultural competence. In this sense, the concept is closely related to identity constructs and entails personal as well as interpersonal and social aspects, which is dealt with in the last subordinate research question:

- What impact does the stay abroad have on identity negotiation as reported by the students?

Every person has a variety of identities and one aspect of intercultural competence is the ability and skill to discover, understand and negotiate these identities (Byram 2009: 330) according to the context.

0.4 Methodology

The participants of this study are 2nd- and 3rd-year-students of German at NUIM who have come back from a stay in a German-speaking country or are embarking on an academic year abroad, acting as ELA or participants in the ERASMUS exchange programme. The three methods of eliciting information from the students are individual semi-structured interviews prior to their stay abroad, one-on-one post-stay interviews and an amended version of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE), as adopted by the Council of Europe, 2009. Altogether, 27 students participated in the study. Thirteen participants were 3rd-year-students and only provided one-on-one interviews upon their return while 14 2nd-year-students took part in individual pre- and post-stay-abroad interviews and were additionally asked to hand in an entry into the AIE-form on the reflection of personal intercultural encounters every three months during their stay abroad. The inclusion of a reflection on personal development through experience and on values, beliefs and behaviours is a crucial element of the research tools. Along with questions on the understanding of culture, the exploration of the students' reflections and experiences are aimed at providing information on subjective expectations and aspirations, individual goals and successes, skills and coping strategies, knowledge, language and cultural awareness, and changes in perspective in terms of identity, attitudes and values. The range of different temporal contexts (pre-stay, during the stay abroad and post-stay) allows for a wider picture of the object of investigation, even though the retrieved information to a large extent consists of retrospective data. Based on the qualitative content analysis approach by Mayring (2014), the gathered information is analysed and evaluated in relation to existing intercultural competence models.

0.5 Structure

The dissertation is divided into 6 chapters, which proceed as follows:

Chapter 1 addresses the theoretical framework of the concept of culture. It provides a historical overview of the semantics of the term and analyses a selection of anthropological and linguistic approaches towards it, which form the basis for the terminological discussion of intercultural competence components in L2 teaching.

Chapter 2 explores the underlying manifold and multifunctional definitions and terminological deficits of current concepts of competence, model and identity with regard to their implications for intercultural competence research.

Chapter 3 critically reviews a selection of models of intercultural competence in the language education context. Common key elements are identified and methods of assessment are considered with a view to ascertaining whether the highly dynamic and multi-layered construct can be assessed at all.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and study design. It provides information on the rationale of the study, the study participants, the research questions, the research tools and the research procedures.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical findings of the qualitative content analysis and discusses the results in comparison to previous work. Based on the information drawn from the interview excerpts and the reflections on intercultural encounters, the concept of intercultural competence is critically reflected upon in consideration of the specific target group and the particular circumstances.

Chapter 6 discusses the main findings and possible limitations and shortcomings of the study in terms of theory and methodology. It construes implications from these findings for language teaching and finally draws conclusions on further research in the promotion of intercultural competence.

1. Conceptual Challenges of Culture

Before the semantic intricacies of "intercultural competence" can be discussed in the language education context, it needs to be clarified what its components refer to in a socio-scientific and linguistic framework. Fundamental to any discussion about cultural issues is the term "culture" itself and its denotative and connotative meanings (Straub 2007: 7). Therefore, after a historical overview of the semantics of "culture", this chapter analyses a selection of anthropological, philosophical and linguistic approaches towards defining the term, which form the basis for the terminological discussion of "intercultural competence". The final section of the chapter examines the concept's theoretical significance and attempts to identify different layers of meaning and their implications for intercultural competence research.

The following depictions draw on different academic discourses – mostly anthropological traditions – to provide various perspectives and usages of the concept of culture, which is often used in an unreflected and indiscriminate manner. However, the conceptual discussion is limited to research discourse influenced by European and North American conceptions, and neglects indigenous conceptualisations since this thesis focuses on the European linguistic and cultural area where these conceptions are commonly used. In this sense, culture is regarded a phenomenon which has been created, passed on and transformed in the history of Western social sciences in a certain manner.

1.1 Culture – A Social Construct¹⁰

In everyday speech, the term "culture" is used without question and without controversy, and the etymological discussion of it is indeed rather uncontroversial. Etymologically speaking, the term "culture" is a derivative of the verb *colere* meaning "to till or to farm". Hence, the term is derived from cultivating land and denoted a material process before it was metaphorically transposed to affairs of the spirit (Eagleton 2000: 1). Modern conceptions of culture in the social sciences stem from the Ancient Roman orator Cicero who used it as an agricultural metaphor for human development towards a philosophical soul or character, the cultivation of the soul (*cultura animi*) (Cicero 45 BC). Hence, the

¹⁰ In this thesis, the use of the term "construct" is based on Levitin (1973) who defines "construct" as "not directly accessible to observation but inferable from verbal statements and other behaviors and useful in predicting still other observable and measurable verbal and non-verbal behavior" (Levitin 1973: 492).

Latin term *cultura* in a metaphorical sense relates to education and refinement of the individual and the cultural community.

Since then, however, a large number of alternative approaches to conceptualising culture have emerged. In 1983, Williams stated that "culture" is "one of the three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams 1983: 87) and it has indeed proved to be a notoriously difficult term to define, not only in the English language. Especially in the field of the social sciences the term "culture" is widely used and has since then referred to a gamut of human phenomena which are not directly attributed to genetic inheritance. Yet, there is no clear consensus about what culture actually means (Fantini 2005: 1).

One reason for this difficulty could be the term's relevance to diverse discursive and academic fields. The popularisation of the concept of culture and its diffusion in many disciplines of research such as psychology, sociology, politics, business studies and anthropology, to name a few, has led to manifold analyses of culture with different foci and perspectives. Consequently, a large number of diverse theories and models in a wide range of fields of research have evolved over the past decades. These days, the term is therefore used in a rather imprecise variety of ways, which adds to its fragility and leads to confusion.

In regard to an interdisciplinary concept of culture, Straub *et al.* (2007) claim that current interdisciplinary approaches have mainly focused on a mere juxtaposition of research perspectives, instead of analysing and correlating discipline-specific angles. Most research lacks the process of comparing, distinguishing and relating different viewpoints, as Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) point out by concluding that "[...] up to now, both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary theorising and research has been patchy" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009: 5). Yet, as Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952: 7) claim, it is not only inevitable but rather desirable that representatives of different disciplines emphasise different criteria and vary in shades of meaning. Considering its multiple meanings and multi-disciplinary use, a universally applicable model of culture has become obsolete.

Conceptual diffusion and a lack of lucidity are, however, not only a multi-disciplinary problem but also exist within individual fields of research. Even within single academic disciplines, the term "culture" is used in multiple ways, depending on research focus and

purpose. A survey on definitions of culture by the anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) resulted in 164 different definitions and even today, despite many efforts to define culture adequately, there is no agreement among anthropologists or socio-linguists regarding its nature and definition. Hence, even within academic disciplines the concept of culture is not consistent but may vary considerably.

Furthermore, difficulties of defining culture are not merely conceptual or semantic. Even though it is supposed to "function as a technical term [...] it is burdened not only by multiple meanings but also by its freighted political baggage" (Avruch 1998: 9). The sheer number of its understandings and usages entails different political and ideological agendas as well as manifold purposes such as the promotion of certain values or the protection of a dominant culture. Uncritical and unreflected usage of the term can therefore easily cause misunderstandings and friction due to underlying differences in value systems and intentions. Hence, a conscious awareness of the gamut of definitions and their various layers of depths is required.

1.2 The Complexities of Culture

According to Eagleton (2000), the complexities of the concept of culture originate from its uneasy interplay between polarities and its ambivalence. In his dialectic approach, Eagleton (2000) claims that culture encodes key philosophical issues focusing on partly antithetic "questions of freedom and determinism, action and endurance, change and identity, the given and the created [...] [and] a dialectic between the artificial and the natural" (Eagleton 2000: 2). Eagleton's (2000) concept comprises a natural and a social level in that nature produces culture, which in turn changes nature. The original meaning of culture in terms of husbandry suggests regulation as well as natural growth. "Cultural" then refers to what can be changed but the alterable substance has its own autonomous existence, which makes it something of a recalcitrance of nature. The term "culture", however, also stands for a matter of following rules, which again involves an interplay of the regulated and unregulated. This process entails a social component since following a rule is not like obeying a physical law but rather demands creative application of the rule in question. Neither rules nor cultures are sheerly random or rigidly determined but involve the idea of freedom (Eagleton 2000: 3–4). Hence, both "culture" and "nature" serve as descriptive as well as evaluative terms. Community develops culture, which in

turn shapes communities in that it reinforces a sense of community by means of structures, which guide aspects of thought and (inter)action. Tacit cultural knowledge then provides the basis for interpretive procedures, values, assumptions, emotions and patterns of interaction. By providing rules, cultures support the maintenance of order in a society but also provide ways for transforming order. In Eagleton's words, the term "culture" "comingles growth and calculation, freedom and necessity, the idea of a conscious project but also of an unplannable surplus" (Eagleton 2000: 5). Therefore, Eagleton's (2000) concept engages in epistemologically opposing positions like naturalism and idealism and involves a critical approach towards determinism and voluntarism; it inherently combines rationalism and spontaneity as well as rationality and passion (Witte 2014: 201–203).

Eagleton's (2000) concept of culture on a natural and a social level is closely related to Bourdieu's (1977a, 1990) dialectics between objective structures and subjective dispositions, in other words, between habitus and social fields (Bourdieu 1977a: 3). Both conceptualisations deal with the interpenetrative relationship of (social) agents and principles. Bourdieu (1990: 52–55) assumes that objects of knowledge are socially and individually constructed and "the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the habitus, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions" (Bourdieu 1990: 52). In more detail, habitus is defined as:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (Bourdieu 1990: 53)

The term "habitus" is understood as a product of history in terms of individual as well as collective practice (Bourdieu 1990: 54). It constitutes a cognitive system of dispositions¹¹, which entails habits, interests, beliefs, values, tastes, feelings, body language, thoughts and an understanding of the world. These behavioural, cognitive and perceptive patterns exist dialectically between object and subject, and are durable, transposable, structured

¹¹ The term "dispositions" refers to subjectively internalised structures throughout childhood and life in general.

and generative. Embedded dispositions, shaped by past events, provide conventional stimuli for predisposed reactions (Bourdieu 2000: 138). In other words, the historically shaped habitus provides a structure against which individuals develop strategies to cope with the social environment – the rules of the game: "The habitus – embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (Bourdieu 1990: 56). This present past tends to perpetuate itself in that the presence is shaped in perception, thought and action by experiences, which result in a constancy of action over time. Habitus is, therefore, both socially and subjectively produced as the body is part of the social world and the social world becomes the second nature to a person. It is derived from the individual histories of group members – hence dispositions on the individual level – as well as from a historically produced set of dispositions of a particular social group. Subjective experiences serve as a basis for the subsequent construction of the social world, which again influence a person's actions. In this sense, reality is socially construed in relation to the Other: The individual habitus is created by an interplay between the individual's will and structures of the social world surrounding him or her. Habitus, however, does not determine individuals' actions and thoughts; individuals can make choices within these structures of the social world, consisting of various social fields (domestic, academic, career, political).

People's actions, behaviour, thoughts and perceptions mirror their embedded social structures and their process of socialisation from childhood onwards. An individual is primarily socialised in the home and then in educational institutions where he or she initially acquires conscious and unconscious practices in the surroundings of their family and milieu of education (primary habitus). The individual habitus then develops from interaction with the social fields, which constitute relational social spaces that can overlap and entail specific tacit rules and structures. In this interplay between the social fields and the habitus, whereby the habitus is being structured by these social spaces and at the same time is structuring them, an understanding of the social world develops (Bourdieu 1990: 53–54, 2000: 150–151). Therefore, habitus is regarded as a fluid system which is unconsciously modified by subjective experiences over time. Yet, according to Bourdieu (1977a), habitus reinforces rather than modifies patterns: "personal style [...] is never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a period or class so that it relates back to the common style not only by its conformity [...] but also by the difference" (Bourdieu 1977a: 86). Individuals in similar contexts or in a similar surrounding have similar

experiences and therefore develop a similar, culture-specific habitus. Similar forms of social practices can be observed in different places at different times within a cultural community, which further indicates that there must be intersubjective accounts of knowledge and meaning (Witte 2014: 223), hence there exists a social consensus. However, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1996: 155), individuals are not aware of their habitus; yet only by means of reflection on one's own habitus can they develop the ability to observe social fields and gain a more objective view of their social world.

The history of the concept of culture has led to a gradual differentiation and specialisation of thought and the capacity of man, defined by something in common, such as origin, history, lifestyle, language, memories or expectations. The increasingly polyvalent concept of culture in this sense refers to the cultic and intellectual activities within a collective (Straub 2007: 12). It is impossible for any conscious human being to behave without responding to aspects of culture. Hence, culture is placed at the interface between a person and social environments, as an integral part of any action by any person in any situation. The development of individuals in this sense is an outcome of dialectical transactions with the social environment. People interpret particular situations, reflect on them and consequently react to them. Hence, individuals are shaped by their environment and retrospectively form it. This dynamism leads to the complexity of the concept of culture which makes it extremely difficult to define and study, as Clifford pointedly remarks: "Cultures do not hold still for their portraits" (Clifford 1986: 10), and assuming so leads to simplification and exclusion in terms of a selection of a temporal focus and the construction of a certain self-other relationship (Clifford 1986: 10). This approach mainly contributes to the idea of the importance of a change of perspective, which will be discussed in chapter 1.3.

At present, research on culture ranges from material manifestations such as literature, music, art or landscapes to the analysis of tacit knowledge, social norms, beliefs and value systems that affect all human activities and manifest themselves in differences and similarities in social worldviews. In this context, Altmayer (2009: 125) distinguishes between three paradigms of culture in contemporary social sciences which serve as a useful conceptual framework:

- Culture as *Bildung*
- Culture as Shared Meaning and Rules
- Culture as Thick Description – Socioculturally Woven Webs of Significance

1.2.1 Culture as *Bildung*

Comparable to the German concept of *Bildung* introduced by Herder (1785), the term "culture" is used in an exclusive sense with reference to an élite ideal, associated with the fine arts and philosophy. This conception is associated with urban life, hence civilisation, and is often called "high culture", referring to artefacts such as music, literature, paintings, architecture or fashion and their public presentation in concerts or exhibitions. Hence, it implies the process of becoming cultivated and is related to the secular process of human development.

In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), the English Victorian poet Arnold introduces the idea of culture in idealist terms by defining it as the pursuit of perfection. His approach can be interpreted as a claim for elitism, mirroring the inequalities within British society of the time – culture as human, artistic refinement, accessible only to the educated, affluent fortunate, while unavailable for many others. Only a small social group has culture, which here refers to special intellectual endeavours and art, the contemporary notion of "high culture" (Arnold 1869: 9–10). Arnold further contrasts culture with anarchy, which represents a lack of purpose, thus preventing people from striving for perfection. The term "culture" in this sense denotes a tool for people to overcome the status of anarchy or doing as one pleases which is rooted in the inability to imagine a world beyond one's limited, subjective perspective. Based on this notion, Arnold argues for social change and a state-administered system of education, which would nurture the uneducated English masses and cultivate their skills and talents (Arnold 1869: 51–68) – "turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically" (Arnold 1869: viii). The call for social change hence combines fine art with the overall objective of social utility and social improvement.

The broader interest in overcoming a narrow subjectivism and understanding the social body as a whole links Arnold's (1869) concept of culture with the theory of Tylor in

Primitive Culture (1871), which is foundational for social anthropology.¹² Tylor (1871) dismisses Arnold's exclusive view of culture in terms of social status divisions and promotes an inclusive approach:

Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (Tylor 1871: 1)

This definition encompasses all human societies and in further contrast to Arnold's conception, culture is not something that needs to be strived for, but everyone, no matter what social class they belong to, acquires it. According to Tylor (1871), all humans, regardless of their race, share the same capacities and intelligence but the difference lies in education. This assumption implies culture as acquired knowledge and the human mind as progressive. Tylor's theory (1871: 8–22) is predicated on the belief that all societies show the same development from savagery through barbarism to civilisation, which is used as a synonym for culture (a common concept in the English-speaking world since the 18th century). This progression does not occur at the same pace in all societies but its distinct stages are always the same. Tylor (1871) likens this development to the development of children to adolescents to adults, starting as primitives who cannot abstract matters and explain occurrences by means of projecting emotions. They are solely immersed in a world of singular objects. There is, however, no distinction between a high culture of the ruling social group and a low culture of the uneducated masses.

Arnold (1869), too, regards culture as progressive, but as an inward striving to grow and enlarge the scope of humanity – "not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming" (Arnold 1869: 13). Hence, no one can ever entirely acquire culture but needs to strive for development. This extremely inclusive view remained dominant in debate for a long time and paved the way for the modern understanding of culture.

Emanating from these concepts of culture, hierarchical dynamics such as rough versus refined, cultured versus uncultured or good versus bad need to be considered. Within this interpretative framework, culture may also be perceived in terms of possessions (fashion, products, titles) and refinement in terms of acquisition and purchase – "the quality of a human being can be shaped and framed but it can also be left un-attended, raw

¹² Interestingly, the definitions of culture by Arnold and Tylor refer to the study of their own society rather than the study of other, mostly colonised people, which was more usual at the time.

and coarse, like fallow land, abandoned and growing wild" (Bauman 1999: 6).¹³ In this sense, however, culture does establish social status expressed in class systems. Tylor (1871) does not consider its links to power and aspiration (through education) which may lead to discrimination.

Power relations and hierarchies are picked up on by Bourdieu (1986) in his elaboration on forms of capital. As mentioned in chapter 1.2, Bourdieu (1977a) divides the social world into so-called social fields, which imply structures to conform to but at the same time are dynamic and subject to constant change. To account for the immanent structure, hierarchies and power relations in these social fields, Bourdieu (1986: 46) introduces four different main forms of capital – economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. Capitals are understood "as the set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu 1984: 114) which are distributed differently among individuals across the social fields. Unequal distribution of capital results in different structures of social fields in terms of power structures and hierarchies, which are enacted and maintained by material and symbolic exchanges (Bourdieu 1986: 51).

According to Bourdieu (1986: 47), economic capital is directly convertible into money and refers to economic assets such as property rights. Its exchange is instrumental and of an obvious self-interested nature. In comparison, cultural capital constitutes the immaterial form of economic material and is convertible into money in certain contexts, e.g. educational qualifications. It relates to an individual's knowledge and experience, academic background or work life. Unlike economic capital, cultural capital is embodied and acquired over time, in the form of what is called culture, cultivation or *Bildung* (Bourdieu 1986: 48 and Moore 2012: 103).

Bourdieu (1986) further distinguishes three forms of cultural capital: (1) the embodied state, i.e. long-lasting dispositions of the mind or body such as lifestyle choices or accents, (2) the objectified state, i.e. cultural goods such as pictures or books and (3) the institutionalised state, "a form of objectification [...] [which] confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (Bourdieu 1986: 47), i.e. profits children with different class backgrounds can obtain in academia.¹⁴

¹³ See Eagleton (2000) in chapter 1.1.

¹⁴ Unlike embodied capital, habitus and its implicit rules do not exist materially "but are known only through their realizations in practice" (Moore 2012: 103).

Embodied cultural capital is formed by prolonged exposure to a certain social habitus and is acquired unconsciously or with personal investment. In other words, the embodied capital constitutes external wealth converted into a habitus but unlike economic capital it cannot be transmitted by exchange or purchase. Hence, cultural capital may be enhanced by economic capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), the socially most determinant educational investment is the domestic transmission of cultural capital. Certain abilities or talents are products of time and cultural capital invested by families. In this sense, the educational system contributes to the reproduction of social structures "by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1986: 48). Cultural capital requires time investment by the individual (i.e. in form of the mother's free time or prolonged schooling options), which is often enabled by the possession of economic capital and may pay off in the long term. Investment of time and energy into cultural capital is, however, only profitable when the investment is aimed at specific competences, i.e. knowledge of social connections and using them. A large cultural capital in terms of certain abilities, which result in a scarcity value in the distribution of cultural capital, then in turn secures material and symbolic profits of distinction for its owner. This hereditary transmission of cultural capital remains unrecognised as capital and is rather regarded as legitimate competence. In this sense, cultural capital functions as symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986: 48–49).

The economic and social yield of cultural capital further depends on social networks in terms of membership, relationships or friends, the so-called social capital. It refers to how cultural and economic capital are converted into forms of power-related social relations, which facilitate an individual's success (Block 2013: 32). Social capital is reproduced at occasions (e.g. parties), places (schools, clubs) or practices (sports, cultural ceremonies) which gather a rather homogeneous group of people. Hence, when a new member enters a social group, identity and habitus are exposed to redefinition and alteration.

Establishing and maintaining useful social networks involves effort and individual or collective investment, which may be a conscious or unconscious process. In order to reproduce social capital, there needs to be an investment into sociability and exchange and, again, a hereditary advantage is involved. Individuals with inherited social capital are inherently known and do not need to make the same effort with acquaintances as newcomers in a social field. Under certain conditions, social capital is convertible into economic capital.

Some goods and services can be immediately accessed on the basis of economic capital while others may not be obtained instantaneously and only by virtue of social capital (Bourdieu 1986: 54). However, according to Bourdieu (1986: 54), this instrumentalism of economic capital also exists for the other three forms of capital, but in their cases it is less transparent and denied in favour of intrinsic worth, disinterestedness and altruism. In this sense, Bourdieu (1986) argues that economic capital is at the root of all other forms of capital, which he defines as "disguised forms of economic capital" (Bourdieu 1986: 54). The transformation of economic capital into social capital presupposes time investment, attention, care and so forth. From a purely economic point of view, these efforts may be regarded as a waste of time but in terms of social exchanges these investments might result in profits in the long run, either monetary ones or other forms of profits.

Profits of social capital manifest themselves in useful relationships or in an association with a prestigious social group, which is linked to symbolic capital. Yet, social membership of a particular group does not translate into a habitus that confers symbolic capital in the same way for all its members (Moore 2012: 99). Symbolic capital constitutes the sum of economic, cultural and social capital and refers to honour, prestige or titles of nobility of an individual acquired over time. Unlike economic capital, titles of nobility cannot be transmitted by exchange or purchase (Bourdieu 1986: 47–52). However, symbolic capital constitutes economic capital in that hierarchies of discrimination within social fields are established. Social inequality and power relations within these fields are determined and reproduced by symbolic capital which functions in the same way as economic capital in terms of structured inequalities (Moore 2012: 99–111).

Within this understanding of culture as forms of different capitals, the concept still remains an epitome of design and artefacts with a normative aspect to it (Altmayer 2009: 125, referring to Kretzenbacher 1992). Normative versions of culture are, however, scientifically questionable, if not obsolete – particularly hierarchical concepts of culture, which proclaim an idealised universal historical development of humanity or differentiate between high and inferior forms of life. In the context of foreign cultural policy and cultural studies, popular culture extends the classical scope of culture as cultivation. It comprises comics and pop music, and deals with socio-political issues such as trade unions or environmental threats. However, this extended concept of culture has also been critically seized on recently, for example by the *Beirat Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (Goethe Institut):

Ein 'erweiterter Kulturbegriff', der seine Grenzen nicht kennt und keinerlei Korrektiv gegen Beliebigkeit enthält, ist als Grundlage der auswärtigen Kulturpolitik nicht geeignet. An seine Stelle sollte ein 'offener Kulturbegriff' treten, der ethisch verantwortet, historisch begründet und ästhetisch akzentuiert ist. (*Beirat Deutsch als Fremdsprache* 1992: 112, cited in Altmayer 1997: 3)

Although the *Beirat Deutsch als Fremdsprache* denounces the term as being arbitrary and infinite and advocates an alternative open concept of culture which is historically and ethically founded, concepts like "ethisch verantwortet" or "ästhetisch akzentuiert" are rather vague and imprecise in themselves too (Altmayer 1997: 3). Instead, Straub (2007: 22) calls for a concept of culture that helps to describe, analyse and explain various forms of human society.

1.2.2 Culture as Shared Meaning and Rules

The most important criticism of the concepts of Arnold (1869) and Tylor (1871) is that of Boas (1887) and his students, who insist on cultural particularity. Boas (1887) disagrees with the idea of a universal character of a single culture with different progressive hierarchic stages from savage to civilised, i.e. Western-European culture, and instead proclaims cultural pluralism by asserting the uniqueness of the many and varied cultures of different peoples and societies. He dismisses value judgments on cultures and advocates openness and tolerance in terms of cultural relativism. "Culture" is not an abstract, normative term, describing what is better or more correct and no one culture is superior to another. One should never differentiate between high and low culture, savage or civilised but should consider the plurality and relativity of individual cultures: "Civilization is not something absolute, but [...] is relative, and [...] our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes" (Boas 1887: 589). According to Boas (1940: 14–16, 253–256, 259), the term "culture" refers to a collective orientation system, which uniformly regulates the behaviour, perception, thinking, feeling and communication of members of a particular community and in this respect also narrows it. Every individual, no matter whether they belong to primitive or modern societies, possesses the same cognitive potential, the same mental hardware. However, how we deal with our mental programming, express it and behave, is modified by culture (Spencer-Oatey 2012: 7). In this sense, culture provides a matrix "for generating realities and structuring meaning (on a meta-level)" (Witte 2014: 204) and serves as a template for a subjective and social existence. Implicit knowledge creates tacit consent on conversational interpretive procedures, value systems, attribution patterns, schemata,

frames and norms which support a sense of community and guide aspects of thought and (inter)action (Witte 2014: 204). Consequently, "culture" refers to an entity – an often ethnically and nationally defined community of people. Along these lines the terms "German, American or Indian culture" are used and refer to a similar pattern of behaviour, thought and perception of Germans as compared to Indians which are to some extent significantly different (Altmayer 2009: 125–126).

Boas (1940: 219–225), who researched the structure of American Indian languages, assumes that cultures develop historically and in different ways, based on different kinds of interactions of people. The development of societies is therefore multi-causal and predicated on the importance of multiple events to account for progress as well as different kinds of development in cultures. The social environment mostly determines people's activities, which in turn influence and change the society people live in. The term "culture" is then understood as fluid and dynamic, produced by people as well as acquired by social learning. Therefore, it is not possible to understand others by judging them based on universal principles of a good life because there are various interpretations of it. Individual choices and actions can hence only be analysed in the light of individual cultural backgrounds.

Like Boas, his student Kroeber is a supporter of cultural relativism and an opponent of moral judgments on cultures. Individual historical contexts and dynamics are important in the analysis of culture. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), culture consists of explicit as well as implicit patterns of behaviour, which constitute distinctive achievements (e.g. artifacts) of communities:

The essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action. (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 181)

The term "culture" in this interpretation again constitutes a rather stable system of inter-subjective knowledge shared by a cultural community, providing a categorical framework for a model of reality (or realities). Existing knowledge structures consequently serve as a basis for the perception and interpretation of new experiences (see *Deutungsmuster*, Schütz 1932). Thus, a new form of culture needs to be acquired in order to successfully

cope with a culturally different environment, as members of a cultural community do not only use their subjective voices but rather collective frames.

Boas' scholar Benedict (1934) also veers away from the idea of cultural determinism and promotes cultural relativism and a comparative methodology. In *Patterns of Culture* (1934) Benedict examines the relationship between culture and individual behaviour, claiming that culture is "personality writ large" – "A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action" (Benedict 1934: 46). In this sense, personality (i.e. set of characteristics) is to the individual what culture is to a society, with traits varying from culture to culture. Culture has to be differentiated from human nature as well as individual personality and derives from social environment instead of genes. However, where exactly the borders between human nature and culture, and between culture and personality are is still a matter of discussion (Spencer-Oatey 2012: 7).

By means of the Zuñi, Dobu and Kwakiutl cultures Benedict (1934) illustrates how only a small number of the possible range of human behavioural patterns is incorporated into one cultural system:

If we are interested in cultural processes, the only way in which we can know the significance of the selected detail of behavior is against the background of the motives and emotions and values that are institutionalized in that culture. (Benedict 1934: 49)

Thus, every culture encompasses a system of underlying beliefs – institutionalised emotions, motives and values – which provides internal coherence; the personality of culture. Members of one cultural community share certain constituents like traits, beliefs and values, which define the individual's personality within the cultural framework. In turn, these members shape the behaviour and may change ideas and standards or choose to act against the norm, which marks and (re)defines cultures. In this sense, each member within a particular culture is understood in relation to its pattern or traits. To understand the processes within one's own culture and to investigate and analyse cultural patterns, it is essential to compare and contrast cultures and stress cultural differences without judging them (Benedict 1934: 56). In this sense, the term "culture" is again defined as progressive, yet without a prescriptive, normative aspect to it.

Boas' thoughts together with notions of Gestalt-psychology formed the basis for the works of French ethnologist Lévi-Strauss (1963) who is regarded the founder of structural anthropology. According to structuralists, the structure of human mental processes is the same in all cultures. In this context, Lévi-Strauss (1963) stresses the importance of universal, cognitive key binary oppositions (e.g. right/left, hot/cold, raw/cooked) of signs, which are fundamental for all cultural structures and meaning (= notion of semiotics). Every term is therefore defined in relation to its semantic opposite and both terms are ascribed symbolic meanings:

If, as we believe to be the case, the unconscious activity of the mind consists in imposing form upon content, and if these forms are fundamentally the same for all minds [...] (as the study of the symbolic function, expressed in language, so strikingly indicates) – it is necessary and sufficient to grasp the unconscious structure underlying each institution and each custom, in order to obtain a principle of interpretation valid for other institutions and other customs. (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 21)

The goal of structuralism is to identify underlying meaning and patterns of human thought and individual (inter)action – the hidden governing rules – by analysing cultural phenomena such as myth, marriage or totemisms. The universal categories and mental processes are assumed to be innate but their expressions in terms of these cultural phenomena vary and develop arbitrarily. Similarly, the movement of Gestalt-psychology claims that the whole is greater than its parts and all human conscious experience is patterned. In this sense, cultural phenomena cannot be identified in and of themselves, but form part of a meaningful underlying system (Sturrock 2003: 52).

Altogether, the concept of culture discussed in chapter 1.2.2 refers to a homogenising and deterministic orientation system of more or less cohesive social groups. In this sense, culture does not only refer to a set of artifacts of music, literature, architecture or arts but, rather, is understood as a matrix providing patterns of interpretation and construction of social practices in a cultural community (Witte 2014: 202). Hence, culture serves as a template for a subjective and social existence in terms of tacit knowledge on conversational interpretive procedures, value systems or patterns of interaction by group members. Subjective cognition is not restricted to the individual human mind but is rather socioculturally situated.

While this interpretation of culture enjoys great popularity in science as well as everyday conversation, it has also been exposed to criticism. Firstly, a conceptualisation of culture based on notions of one unifying culture shared equally among citizens falls into a trap of determinism and essentialism and does not grasp the complexity and dynamics of culture. Global networking makes the terms ethnic and national as suggested by this understanding of culture rather obsolete. The term "culture" in this interpretation further suggests a homogeneity within ethnic-national societies that does not exist, especially not in highly complex, modern industrial societies with their increasingly hybrid identities. This conception of culture also comprises the idea that cultures are clearly distinguishable from each other because they develop from a consistent principle, which is not the case. Instead, cultures overlap and interfere with each other. Furthermore, critics claim that a comparison of cultures inevitably results in universalistic and objectivist claims (Fox & Gingrich 2002: 2–5) in terms of generalisations on an ethnic-national level comparable to stereotypes and clichés (Altmayer 2009: 126).

In addition, the concept of culture relating to personality (see Benedict 1934) has since then been criticised for being too simplistic by understanding culture as a stable and highly integrate entity. It neglects the individual subjects by stressing the "normative force of traditional patterns of knowledge" (Witte 2014: 205). Another aspect worth considering is that if culture were an organic unity, it would determine behaviour. However, cultures do not exist autonomously beyond human beings, but become apparent in people's actions and are entangled with social, political and economic fields (Parekh 2006: 77–79).

Despite the proclaimed cultural relativism of Boas' concept, Parekh (2006: 201) further criticises that this concept of culture is too static. The fact that cultures develop and within them values, ideals and objectives may come into conflict and collide remains ignored. Furthermore, cultural relativism might not only result in tolerance and mutual recognition but also in value relativism, which ultimately prevents any rational debate on norms and values of societies. If all ways of life and courses of action were equal, there would be no reason to ban any of them (Straub 2007: 4).

Contemporary scholars who represent this understanding of culture are Matsumoto (2006) and Schwartz (1992):

Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves. (Schwartz 1992: 324, cited in Avruch 1998: 17)

In this definition, culture is linked with experiences and their individual interpretation. Individuals on the one hand inherit and learn meanings and encodements from the past generations and their contemporaries but at the same time they create them themselves. Hence, because individuals live in different experiential worlds and culture partly derives from this experience, culture is not uniformly distributed among people and people do not share the same cultural content. As a consequence, a single culture for a population does not exist but sub-cultures emerge (Avruch 1998: 17–19).

Matsumoto (2006) bridges the concept of culture discussed in chapters 1.2.2 and 1.2.3. According to Matsumoto (2006), culture is the product of interaction between universal biological needs and social problems. Over the history of time, people have faced distinct social problems as well as a universal set of psychological problems which they have had to solve in order to survive. Since people have had to deal with similar universal biological needs and social problems, it is likely that they have found similar solutions across cultures. Thus, many aspects of human mental processes and behaviours are universal. However, Matsumoto (1996) also recognises culture-specific mental and behavioural processes based on a difference in context. He defines the concept of culture as "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next" (Matsumoto 1996: 16). Ten years later, Matsumoto (2006) defines the term "culture" in more detail as consisting of:

the product of the interaction between universal biological needs and functions, universal social problems created to address those needs, and the contexts in which people live [...] a shared system of socially transmitted behavior that describes, defines, and guides people's ways of life, communicated from one generation to the next. (Matsumoto 2006: 219–220)

In this sense, culture is not rooted in biology but is a dynamic concept which changes over time. Matsumoto (2006) suggests an action-theoretical concept, which focuses on the

structure of meaning of actions, its prerequisites, results and consequences that are culturally constituted.

1.2.3 Culture as Thick Description – Socioculturally Woven Webs of Significance

In response to structuralism, representatives of post-structuralism deconstruct the idea of universal binary oppositions and knowledge structures and regard them as the (unconscious) particular products of human creation. From a post-structuralist perspective, the term "culture" refers to symbolic systems of meaning underlying human action in different contexts. Cultural communities are therefore not perceived as stable nor do they entail a unitary entity. Cultures aid their members toward the realisation of meaning, which is defined by a unique subjective state, understood by others who share a culture (Bruner 1995:7, cited in Witte 2014: 176). In this sense, this concept of culture entails a post-Gramscian stance.

The founder of the Italian Communist Party Gramsci (1971, 1999) introduced the term "cultural hegemony" to address the relation of culture and power under capitalism. Gramsci (1999: 625–630) concludes that in order to create and maintain a new form of society, a new consciousness has to be developed and maintained closely connected to culture, referring to both its aesthetic and anthropological sense. Culture serves as an invisible navigation system which guides people's ideas on how to make sense of the world, what is right/wrong, beautiful/ugly, just/unjust or possible/impossible. The dominant power succeeds in presenting its values and norms in a way that its definitions become common sense for the majority of the population and are accepted as general consensus (which helps maintain a status quo). Gramsci (1999: 209–215) refers to this process as culture becoming hegemonic. Yet, no culture is completely hegemonic as there are always counter-cultures with different sets of values and beliefs. Hence, in order to dominate, a class has to exert intellectual as well as moral leadership but still has to recognise the need for alliances and compromise. Hegemony results from this struggle for ideological domination. Culture therefore is an organic concept and not an epiphenomenon. Ideas, beliefs and systems need to be analysed in terms of an organic part of a society's basic economic structure. By means of reflecting on culture one can then succeed in understanding one's own historical values, rights and obligations which are socioculturally constituted (Morton 2007: 76–130).

The most influential theorist of this semiotic concept of culture is Geertz (1973), who defines culture as webs of significance that human beings spin for themselves (Geertz 1973: 5). At the core of social activity is the subject who does not have direct access to the outside world or reality (apart from pre-reflective bodily experiences), but reality is rather an interpretation based on object-centred mediation (Witte 2014: 222). During the interpretive process, people do not reinvent reality anew but rely on prior knowledge based on cultural symbols (mediated by language) and conditioning – a tacit unconscious interpretive frame, acquired in the course of socialisation. A culture's particular web of significance is maintained by symbolic modes which have been created by humans over many generations through a myriad of different experiences. People are, however, not necessarily aware of this discursive process of reality construction. Therefore, these shared reference points in the symbolic worlds facilitate understanding and are not questioned in general discourse but may also be the subject of discursive and controversial interpretation processes in case of a misunderstanding (Witte 2014: 210). Pearson (1996) supports this idea of an interpretive process and defines the term "culture" as "the ways that people in all societies draw upon a vast repertoire of knowledge to perform innumerable tasks, most of them so mundane that they take them for granted" (Pearson 1996: 248). Hence, everybody has internalised a culture that he or she imposes on situations without thinking – an idea which is also shared by Brislin (1990). "Culture", he says,

refers to widely shared ideals, values, formation and uses of categories, assumptions about life, and goal-directed activities that become unconsciously or subconsciously accepted as 'right' and 'correct' by people who identify themselves as members of a society. (Brislin 1990: 11)

Altmayer (2004) agrees with this understanding and defines culture as the epitome of knowledge or rather an interpretative repertoire which serves members of different social groups as an orientation system and a means to create reality. The term "culture" refers to construed meaning rather than observable behaviour of people. This interpretative repertoire consists of a variety of components which contain pattern-like, generic and abstract knowledge in particular fields of experience and are used for meaning attribution and interpretation in various situations (Altmayer 2004: 127–128). Within this dialectical process, a shared reality is developed.

By means of this approach towards culture, the complex, multi-faceted and dynamic roles the socially active subject engages with in his or her daily lifeworlds is analysed. The term "lifeworlds" implies that subjects enact their lives socially and episodically, hence in relation to other people (Hall, Grindstaff & Lo 2010: 5, quoted in Witte 2014: 207). In other words, cultural knowledge influences social and individual actions, which in turn form and maintain cultural knowledge.

Along these lines, Berger and Luckmann (1966: 13) introduce the term "social construction of reality" and argue that people are not born members of society but are socialised into pausibility structures, that is, conceptual understandings of the world and rational supports for these understandings (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 149, 174):¹⁵

I apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seem to be independent of my apprehension of them [...] The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene. The language used in everyday life continuously provides me with the necessary objectifications and posits the order within which these make sense and within which everyday life has meaning for me. (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 35–36)

The individual takes the reality of everyday life for granted and perceives it as an independent, given, coherent and objective reality, which in turn is shaped by socialisation. The social construction of reality is socially relative and context-bound as it is based on intersubjectivity and the interaction of one's own meanings and the meanings of others. As people interact, shared concepts and discursive patterns emerge which become habituated and embedded within a society, and often remain unquestioned. Cultural phenomena are not abstract constructs but are of a polyphonic nature, embedded into socially structured processes and contexts (Thompson 1990: 135, quoted in Witte 2014: 222). Therefore, society must be understood in its duality as an objective as well as a subjective reality and as an on-going dialectical process of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 15, 33–37, 149). Thus, every individual has a permeable culture. The focus is set on subjective processes of meaning making to better understand human behaviour (Witte 2014: 207, 210). In this sense, culture can only be analysed in an interpretive rather than a one-dimensional causal way, by deconstructing the complex network of human action.

¹⁵ "Reality" in this case is defined as "a quality appertaining the phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition"(Berger & Luckmann 1966: 13)

Also inspired by structural linguistics, Goodenough (1964) defines the term "culture" as follows:

[A] society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. Culture, being what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist of the end product of learning: knowledge, in a most general, if relative, sense of the term [...] [C]ulture is not a material phenomenon [...] It is the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them. (Goodenough 1964: 36)

According to Goodenough (1964), "culture" does not refer to a material phenomenon, i.e. it does not consist of things or behaviour or emotions, but rather it refers to a mental organisation of these phenomena. The social subject is equipped with different cultural frames by means of which s/he perceives and evaluates things. These social patterns provide a stabilising framework that individuals regard as a familiar field of action, i.e. the lifeworld. Analysing and understanding culture is then only possible from within this culture and its lifeworlds, from a native's point of view (Witte 2014: 223, 258).

Another representative of this approach towards culture is Parekh (2006, 2008) who understands culture as an active process of creating meaning, instead of a passive inheritance. Parekh (2008) argues for a pluralist perspective on cultural diversity in that cultures are at least partially multicultural in their origins and constitutions. The concept of culture refers to a historically created system of practices, values and beliefs which stabilises and structures individual lives and the moral and social world. Individuals are culturally embedded in a culturally structured world and organise their lives in accordance with its system of meaning and significance with special emphasis on cultural identity. However, he points out that while "cultural identity matters to people, [...] so do other things such as decent existence, justice, self-respect and the respect of others" (Parekh 2008: 156). Parekh's assumptions therefore do not imply cultural determinism but do indicate that cultures deeply shape and influence individuals and systems of meanings. These cultures furthermore do not exist in a vacuum but denote a complex, internally plural and fluid concept which develops over time in conscious and unconscious interaction (Parekh 2006: 336–338). Different cultures entail "different systems of meaning and visions of the good life" (Parekh 2006: 336) but no single culture embodies all visions of a good life and has access to the full range of human capacities and emotions

– hence, no culture is perfect or complete. Parekh (2006) therefore regards a dialogue between cultures as mutually beneficial as "internal and external pluralities presuppose and reinforce each other" (Parekh 2006: 337). Cultural systems need others to gain a better understanding of themselves, expand the intellectual and moral horizon and relativise themselves by becoming aware and reducing their own biases. Therefore, if cultures are self-critical and willing to engage in dialogue, they can learn from each other, have enriching effects and are best changed from within.

In this context, Geertz (1973: 3) introduced the term "thick description" into his semiotic theory of culture for reading the text of subjective meaning and cultural patterns. A "thick description of a cultural pattern" means that not just the behaviour but also the social context are described so that behaviour becomes meaningful to an outsider. The locus of culture lies in action. Social actions are then translated into cultural signs to which meaning can be ascribed. When this process of meaning ascription "reaches a degree of stability beyond subjectivity" and "the meaning of an action can be separated from the action as an event", cultural meanings are regarded as a "decipherable text" (Witte 2014: 216), created by members of a particular community. Social action is therefore conceived as a text and by reading these texts, experiences and interactions are woven into the text, resulting in a meta-text which may be translated into another, unfamiliar culture. This process of reading and understanding is an infinite, permeable process influenced by contextual changes. Geertz's (1973) concept of culture will be further discussed in chapter 1.3, which focuses on the intertwining of language and culture.

Inspired by Geertz (1973), the social-constructivist theory by Berger and Luckmann (1966), the distributive models of culture by Goodenough (1964) as well as the cognitive anthropology concept of Gadamer (1986)¹⁶, Hannerz (1992) developed his theory of cultural flow based on social organisation and distribution of meaning with reference to cultural complexity. Culture comprises the meanings which persons create and which, in turn, create people as members of societies (Hannerz 1992: 3). Societies are characterised by asymmetries regarding knowledge distribution which result in different perspectives

¹⁶ Gadamer (1986) introduces the concept of *Verständnishorizont* which includes a human being's socio-cultural environments. A person's interpretation and understanding of the world (= *Lebenswelt*) is the result of the complex interaction of various overlapping horizons of understanding. The universal horizon of a person's understanding of the world (= *Gesamthorizont*) is perpetually modified by encounters with other human realities in a person's history which is part of a larger history of interacting civilisations. The understanding of reality and oneself is not static but a dynamic process shaped by cultural perceptions.

and hence difficulties in communication. Complex cultures do not constitute "some single essence" (Hannerz 1992: 6) or coherence but are rather defined by their "moving interconnectedness" (Hannerz 1992: 167) and an "organisation of diversity" which is characterised by power structures (Hannerz 1992: 14). Hannerz (1992) further uses the hermeneutical concepts "perspective" and "horizon" to refer to the person's share in culture. Each human being is unique in personal experience and has a socially influenced perspective on the outside world. Hence, an individual's horizon is reflected by personal life experiences. On the individual level, society is therefore regarded as a network of perspectives. In this context, Hannerz (1992: 3) differentiates between an "internal" and an "external locus" of culture in human minds and in public forms, which are always interrelated. Whereas the external locus refers to meaningful, externalised forms of culture such as speech, artefacts and so on, the internal locus of culture refers to meaning in consciousness of concrete human beings. Cultural flow consists of the individual's externalisations of meaning and its interpretations by others. As people deal with each other's meanings and contribute to this flow, they become constructed as individuals and social beings and an endless flow of meaning is created (Hannerz 1992: 14). Hence, external and internal loci of culture are prerequisites for each other and change in interactions (Hannerz 1992: 4). The constant alternation between externalisation and interpretation then results in the creation and recreation of a social system.

In sum, Hannerz (1992) differentiates between three interrelating dimensions of culture which constitute cultural process and cultural complexity:

1. *ideas and modes of thought* as entities and processes of the mind – shared concepts, propositions and values as well as the mental operations of a community
2. *forms of externalisation*, the ways of meaning made accessible to the senses, made public; and
3. *social distribution*, the ways in which the collective cultural inventory of meanings and meaningful external forms – that is the way (1) and (2) together – are spread over a population and its social relationships; in other words how collective cultural inventory of meanings and meaningful external forms are distributed (Hannerz 1992: 7, *italics* in original)

Whereas Geertz (1973) focuses on the micro-level in terms of thick descriptions, Hannerz (1992) stresses the combination of micro- and macro-levels. Culture in this sense is discursive and serves as an explanatory linkage between phenomena at a social macro-level and the micro-level of individuals' actions. His model provides a good framework for Risager's (2006) notion of languages spread across cultures and cultures spread across

languages. Risager (2006) expands Hannerz's model by adding a sociolinguistic perspective in introducing the concepts of languaculture and discourse, which will be discussed further in chapter 1.3.

1.3 Culture and Language

The field of cultural studies can be divided into two general branches. One of them embraces approaches of anthropology, social psychology or business studies which either ignore an interrelationship between culture and language or only deal with it on a superficial level (Risager 2006: 18). However, language acquisition constitutes an integral part of the socialisation process (Witte 2014: 46). Based on this stance, applied linguistics and particularly sociolinguistics examine the inextricable interdependency between language usage and societal frameworks (Hinkel 2012: 882). This approach forms the basis for models of intercultural competence in association with language acquisition. Some representatives of this movement have been cited in previous chapters and will be discussed in more detail now.

The human capacity to acquire a language does not automatically result in its acquisition without any cultural code. Rather, cultural conceptualisations are reflected in semantics, language usage and structure. Since linguistic theory itself lacks areas to integrate culture as an autonomous factor into its concepts, researchers borrow concepts of culture from neighbouring disciplines such as different strands of psychology, sociology and mainly anthropology. This vast variety of definitions may enrich the potential of linguistic research but might on the other hand lead to significantly diverging judgments of people's intercultural competence (Busch 2009).

The idea that language with various, partly antithetical meanings, is a formative factor in the culture of its speakers can be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both German thinkers Herder (1785) and von Humboldt (1836) argue that language determines thought – an agenda which was later seized by Sapir and Whorf (1956) in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Herder's work could be regarded a starting point for the cultural turn of the twentieth century. According to Herder (1774, cited in Gesche 1993), reason and language develop

through the interaction of people with other people and nature – hence language and thought are interdependent. The mother tongue, acquired together with reason over a period of time, ties a person to his/her social surroundings and functions as a bridge between the inner and outer world. People learn to connect their own feelings and perceptions with linguistic signs, meanings and notions of their language community. Consequently, special thinking patterns and frameworks develop and serve as a basis for the perception and judgment of new experiences, languages and cultures (Gesche 1993: 139–141). Character and inclinations are in turn reflected in the use of language: "Thätige Völker haben einen Überfluß von modis der Verben; feinere Nationen eine Menge Beschaffenheiten der Dinge, die sie zu Abstractionen erhöhten" (Herder 1785: 364). In this sense, the underlying conceptions of languages differ and limit our perception which may cause misunderstandings and friction in cross-cultural communication.

Humboldt (1836) extends Herder's idea of a correlation between language and community in that language expresses the inner world and knowledge of its users. In this sense, language is the outward manifestation of thoughts and the inner mind, and is bound to nations or communities. However, Humboldt stands for the idea of linguistic relativism as he further regards language as both a creation of nations as well as individuals, a so-called free self-activity. Language is "the formative organ of thought" (Humboldt 1836: 66) by means of which worldviews are created. Humboldt (1836) further takes a progressive stance on L2 learning. To him, learning a new language entails gaining a new standpoint in the previous worldview because each language contains conceptualisations of a part of humanity. A contemporary linguist working with a truly Humboldtian notion is Wierzbicka (1979, 1996). In her research on semantic universals and conceptual distinctions in languages, she bases her concept of interrelation on the assumption that all human languages share the same approach to encode the same basic set of concepts in words. In this context, Wierzbicka (1979) introduces the term "ethno-syntax" and postulates 60 so-called semantic primitives as the universal basic building blocks of meaning (Wierzbicka 1996, quoted in Witte 2014: 253).¹⁷

¹⁷ These semantic primitives range from basic elements in the categories of substantives, determining elements, experiencing verbs, actions and processes, existence and possession, quantifiers, life and death, evaluation and description, spatial concepts, temporal concepts, relational elements and logical elements (Dirven and Verspoor 1998:43, quoted in Witte 2014: 253).

Structural linguistics, introduced by Saussure (1974), have additionally contributed to the discourse about language and culture. In his semiotic model, Saussure (1974) defines language as a system of abstract, systematic rules of a signifying system, which are implicit knowledge to its users. Linguistic or cultural meaning-units are signs that Saussure (1974) further divides into *signifié* (signified = the object, meaning, mental association) and the *signifiant* (signifier = the linguistic signs – perceptible content like a written word or sounds). They are arbitrarily intertwined in that the meaning of a sign is arbitrary and cannot be understood on its own, but rather in binary opposition based on a cultural code: "In a language, as in every other semiological system, what distinguishes a sign is what constitutes it" (Saussure 1974: 121). The abstract rules of the learned conventional cultural codes link external forms of language (speech sounds, printed words) and linguistic meaning. Hence, language, its expressions and mental conceptualisation are inseparable. Saussure (1974) further differentiates between language as *langue* (= grammatical rules that govern a language) and language as *parole* (= the act of speaking). *Parole* refers to the use of *langue* and would not be possible without it and vice versa. Members of one culture can quickly decode these structures of *langue* and produce or analyse it by means of *parole*.

Another significant development inspired by Saussurean linguistics is the focus on the mutual influence of language, thought and culture. Sapir's and Whorf's controversial conclusions in this context have become well-known under the name of the "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis", a linguistic relativity hypothesis with significant implications for subsequent research. Their conclusions are based on Whorf's research conducted on the Hopi language in America. Whorf (1941, 1956) investigated the relation between how Hopi people conceptualise time, how they talk about temporal relations and how this conceptualisation is manifested in the grammar of the Hopi language. In contrast to English or other Indo-European languages, the Hopi language, according to Whorf (1956: 153), contains no words, grammatical forms, construction or expressions that refer directly to what we call time, or to past, present, or future. From this lack of a conceptual category for the flow of time, Whorf deduces an explanation for differences in patterns of behaviour and cultural aspects, and concludes that differences in word meanings reflect the different thought processes, worldviews and beliefs of American Indians and

Europeans.¹⁸ The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis therefore claims determinism in that the structure of a language determines and shapes its respective speakers' perception of the world, thought patterns and actions:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone [...], but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection [...] Even comparatively simple acts of perception are very much more at the mercy of the social patterns called words than we might suppose [...] We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (Sapir 1929: 209–210)

In this sense, individuals as participants in a language community create their world and social reality based on their collective language habits. The structure of a language consequently influences how its speakers perceive, conceptualise and view the world as well as how they behave, even though they might not be fully aware of it. People are constrained in their way of thinking based on the language they speak even though they might consider themselves to be free in their interpretation of the world (Whorf 1956: 213). Thus, thoughts and actions are linguistically and socially mediated – no language continues to exist without a context of culture and vice versa.¹⁹

Nowadays, the linguistic relativity hypothesis is stated in stronger and weaker terms. The strong version claims that language determines all human thoughts and actions. Hence, linguistic categories determine and constrain cognitive categorisation. According to the weak version, linguistic categories, perception and thought are interrelated. In other words, language influences people's thinking and non-linguistic behaviour. These days, both extreme approaches of "language entirely determines thought" and "language does not influence thought at all" have mostly been abandoned.

¹⁸ Whorf's studies (1956) have been criticised for being based on anecdotal evidence and speculation, and not fulfilling scientific standards. In general, however, empirical evidence about the kind and extent of language impact on the cognitive level is rare.

¹⁹ One critic of Whorf (1956) is Chomsky, another representative of structural linguistics, who has also influenced the discourse about language and culture. Chomsky's (1968, 2006) notions of a universal and generative grammar and syntax refute Whorf's hypothesis of linguistic relativity. According to Chomsky (1968, 2006), innate linguistic structures - a "universal grammar" – enable humans to generate an infinite set of new expressions and grammatically formed sentences. Where Saussure distinguishes between *langue* and *parole*, Chomsky distinguishes the "surface structures" (the organisation into categories and phrases that is directly associated with the physical signal) versus "deep structure" (also a system of categories and phrases, but with a more abstract character) and "competence" (knowledge of a language) versus "performance" (language use, *parole*) (Chomsky 2006: 23–25, 63–68, 102–108).

An influential proponent of the sociocultural constructivist approach is Vygotsky (1986), who also focuses on the complex interplay of language and thought. Vygotsky (1986: 256) considers thought and speech as key components for human consciousness. According to Vygotsky (1986: 34–37) language is socially constituted and primarily regarded as a tool for expression, communication and social contact. In this sense, language also serves as a tool to construct, shape and transform the flow and structure of mental functions. However, thought is not merely expressed through words as the relation between thought and word is a living process; thought comes into existence through them (Vygotsky 1986: 218, 255):

The structure of speech does not simply mirror the structure of thought; that is why words cannot be put on by thought like a ready-made garment. Thought undergoes many changes as it turns into speech. It does not merely find expression in speech; it finds its reality and form. (Vygotsky 1986: 219)

External and internal realities (i.e. concepts, experiences, memories) are mediated through language as the most elaborated system of signs (Witte 2014: 14). Based on thought and language, individuals construct subjective realities which for them are objective realities. Objective realities are in turn validated in communicative encounters. In these encounters, the constructs of reality are on the one hand influenced by internalised concepts but language as a social tool makes them accessible to other community members (Witte 2014: 51). Hence, language also has an impact on the collective consciousness. On the one hand it contributes to the social cohesion of the speech community and on the other it allows for the structural coherence of intersubjective thought processes (Witte 2014: 396). These internalised concepts are not stable entities but constitute "an active part of the intellectual process, constantly engaged in serving communication, understanding, and problem solving" (Vygotsky 1986: 98). In this context, Vygotsky (1986: 108) also refers to "inner speech" as a means of concept formation and a tool for thinking abstract concepts (i.e. freedom) in precise terms, and for reflection on a meta-level. Based on internalised conceptual patterns of knowledge and experiences, individuals attribute meaning to certain situations, construct knowledge of self, Other and the world and develop coping strategies. Hence, language influences thinking and serves as a normative function on thinking patterns. These aspects lie at the "core of the symbolic order that constitutes culture" (Witte 2014: 61).

Language also entails ambiguity in that communication partners interpret language differently, based on their repertoire of interconnected meanings – "the senses of different words flow into one another – literally influence one another – so that the earlier ones are contained in, and modify the later ones" (Vygotsky 1986: 246–247). According to Vygotsky (1986: 245), the sense of a word is acquired from the context of its usage. Therefore, its sense might change in different contexts but its meaning remains more or less stable. However, Vygotsky (1986) neglects the idea that a word is part of utterances and therefore in itself is not a unit of mental functioning (Witte 2014: 107). Hence, Vygotsky's (1986) approach is too reductive – a criticism which is taken up by Bakhtin (1986) who focuses on speech units instead of single words in his analysis.

Bakhtin (1986) adapts Saussure's linguistic model for the analysis of cultural formations. Meaning in form of expressions (words, utterances) is always related to and embedded in a history of expressions by others in an ongoing chain of utterances (Bakhtin 1986: 68). Any kind of discourse is therefore polyphonic and responsive and cannot be separated from a community. When speakers select words in the process of constructing an utterance, they do not take them from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form but from utterances related to the speaker in theme, composition or style. The use of neutral dictionary meanings of the words in live speech communication is always embedded in particular situations and is individual and contextual in nature. Therefore, the unique individual speech experience is shaped and developed in continuous interaction with the utterances of others, taking into account possible responsive reactions (Bakhtin 1986: 87–89). During this process, intersubjectivity develops, which refers to the co-construction of shared realities. In this sense, any sign is so-called "interindividual" which means that it does not (only) belong to its producer but also to its listener. Different points of view, conceptual horizons and various social languages come to interact with one another in many different ways. This dialogism between the pluralistic self and Other always remains incomplete and extends into the boundless past and boundless future as past meanings are renewed in the future development of the dialogue (Bakhtin 1981: 356–367, Bakhtin 1986: 170).

The influence of Boas (see chapter 1.2.2) and Sapir also extends to the present. In the last few decades, anthropological linguists such as Gumperz and Hymes (1972) have focused on the interrelation of language, culture and society. According to Gumperz and Hymes (1972) the use of language and its analyses are inextricable from society and its cultural

norms. Together they introduce the method of ethnography of communication, focusing on the diversity of speech in real situations as encountered in ethnographic fieldwork, instead of the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences which ignores socio-linguistic variations. Comparative, ethnographic taxonomies need to be applied to investigate language systematically. In other words, communicative competence instead of linguistic competence comes into focus. According to Hymes (1974), it is important to understand language use in social contexts and focus on shared knowledge of an appropriate linguistic code in social contexts. Speech acts occur in specific contexts and can therefore not be analysed in isolation from the sociological and cultural factors that shape their meaning. Communities differ in their ways of speaking and code switching, in their roles and meanings of speech based on differing beliefs and norms (Hymes 1974: 444–46).

Gumperz (2001: 215) extends the idea of an ethnography of communication and introduces the approach of interactional sociolinguistics. He focuses on cross-cultural discourses in various social situations such as misunderstandings, and concludes that most of the misunderstandings are not caused by differences in syntax or semantics but rather by deviations in para-verbal (intonation, volume or rate of speaking) and non-verbal signs (body language) which he calls "contextualisation cues". Hence, speakers are not only competent language users but also social actors and interpreters based on varying beliefs and values (Gumperz 2001: 215–226).

Gumperz' ideas have in turn been taken up by Kramsch (1998, 2009a, 2013) in her notion of language as expressing, mediating and interpreting cultural reality. Language expresses reality in that the words people use refer to a shared stock of knowledge and common experience and reflect attitudes, beliefs and opinions. Language does not constitute an arbitrary sign system which is applied to a cultural reality outside the language (Kramsch 2013: 62). Rather, language is a symbolic system that is culture in itself and actively constructs social and cultural reality in interaction. In this sense, symbols represent the social and cultural reality of a speech community. Language gives emotions, beliefs, values and habits meaning and in turn elicits subjective responses in its users and receivers (emotions, memories, projections, identifications). Hence, language makes meaning and affects the way its speakers perceive and construe reality. In this sense, cultural phenomena and our selves are constructed. Language further embodies socially constructed cultural reality in that members of a cultural community create experiences

through language. They give meaning to these experiences in terms of verbal and non-verbal cues, which other community members understand. Thirdly, language symbolises cultural reality in that language as a system of signs itself has a cultural value. Speakers define themselves and others through their language usage and act upon the symbolic order of the speech community (Kramsch 1998: 3, Kramsch 2009a: 2–7). Culture then is "the meaning that members of a social group give to the discursive practice they share in a given space and time over the historical life of the group" (Kramsch 2013: 69).

Haarmann (1990) supports this understanding of culture and meaning making, and states that any experience or interpretation is preceded by meanings already given within a culturally relative tradition and mediated through language:

Language is not itself a model of reality, it is rather a stigmatic fixative of a model of reality which any individual carries in his/her mind. Since every individual is a member in a given speech community, it follows that the model of reality differs according to the cultural conditions in the individual communities. (Haarmann 1990: viii)

Thus, language and culture are intertwined in that language is embedded in a culture by mirroring the collective experience of its speakers.

Another famous sociologist and cultural theorist who investigates the interrelationship of culture and language is Stuart Hall (1997), who, like Geertz (1973), takes a post-Gramscian stance in dealing with cultural studies and its political dimension (not referring to a particular party line but to hierarchies and hegemonic power). Language operates within this framework of power and politics. Hall (1997) focuses especially on the concept of representation, which connects meaning and language to culture: "In language we use signs and symbols [...] to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings" (Hall 1997: 1). People develop conceptual maps by means of which they interpret or make sense of the world. If these conceptual maps differed entirely for people, they would not be able to share thoughts and express ideas with each other. People are able to communicate their ideas because they broadly share the same conceptual maps, in other words, they belong to the same culture (Hall 1997: 18). Based on these similarities of interpretation, a shared culture of meanings is developed and a social world constructed. In addition to a shared conceptual map, access to a shared language and a system of signs is required, which are then also involved in the process of

constructing meaning. Meaning, language and representation are therefore critical elements in the study of culture:

To belong to a culture is to belong to roughly the same conceptual and linguistic universe, to know how concepts and ideas translate into different languages, and how language can be interpreted to refer to or *reference* the world. (Hall 1997: 22, *italics* in original)

This notion of representation can be compared to Foucault's approach (1980) of studying discourse as a system of representation. In his analysis, Foucault (1980) focuses on the production of knowledge (rather than meaning) through discourse in the light of relations of power. Discourse, according to Foucault (1980), defines and produces the objects of our knowledge and constructs the topic. The focus is set on how people understand themselves in culture and how their knowledge about social and individual meanings is produced in different historical periods (Foucault 1980, cited in Hall 1997: 42–50). Therefore, the analysis of discourse provides information on underlying values and beliefs and on how knowledge, language and culture are used. As for the relation of language and power, Hall (1973, 1999) was particularly interested in how media messages and meaning (mainly on television) are produced, disseminated, interpreted and consequently reproduced. Based on the idea that people are simultaneously both producers and consumers of culture, he introduced a four-stage encoding/decoding model of communication (see Fig. 1) comprising the production, circulation, use (in terms of distribution or consumption) and reproduction stage of media messages. Hall (1999) considers this process a "complex structure in dominance" which is

sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains its distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence. [...]The 'object' of these practices is meanings and messages in the form of sign-vehicles of a specific kind organized, like any form of communication or language, through the operation of codes within the syntagmatic chain of a discourse. The apparatuses, relations and practices of production thus issue, at a certain moment (the moment of 'production/circulation') in the form of symbolic vehicles constituted within the rules of 'language'. (Hall 1999: 508)

The product is circulated in this discursive form and distributed to different audiences. This process requires means and sets of social production relations and once accomplished must be translated into social practices to be completed and effective (Hall 1999: 508). While each of these stages – "moments" – is necessary, they are relatively autonomous and have their own limits and possibilities in terms of their specific

modalities and conditions of existence, depending on institutional power relations. Based on this approach, Hall (1999) characterises the television communicative process as shown in Figure 1.

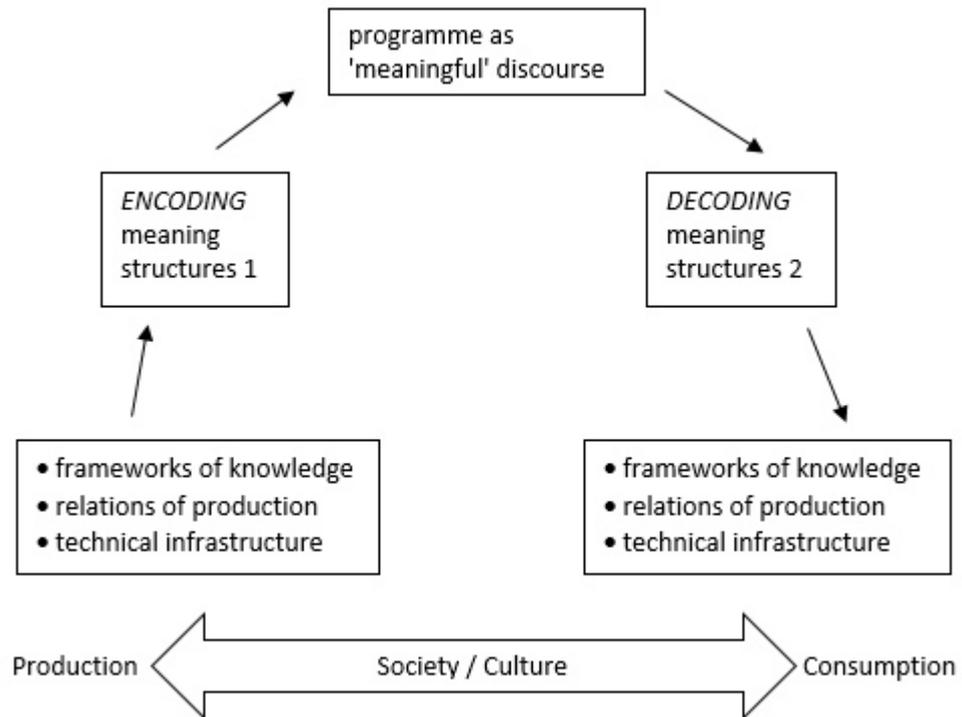


Fig. 1 Encoding/Decoding Model of Communication (Hall 1999: 510)

The circuit begins with the production of a programme and construction of a message. This production process entails a discursive aspect in that it is framed by meanings and ideas in terms of "knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience" (Hall 1999: 509) and so on, which frame the constitution of a programme. However, these structures do not constitute a close system but draw topics, events, images of the audience from other sources and discursive formations within a wider socio-cultural structure of which they form a differentiated part. In turn, the reception of television messages also contributes to the production process since it is the moment when the message is realised and meaningfully decoded. These decoded meanings may influence, entertain, persuade, instruct or persuade the audience with various consequences on the perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural level (Hall 1999: 509). Hall (1999) claims that each stage would affect the message being conveyed due to its discursive form and concludes that mass media serves

to perpetuate the dominance of those already in power and to shape cultural discourse. With time, meanings in connection with signs become part of the collective memory and make culture appear naturally real, so-called common sense. This process then constitutes an ideology and social control of which people are often unaware.

Another current researcher who works with a sociolinguistic stance is Risager (2006: 2), emphasising language spread – "languages spread across cultures" and "cultures spread across languages". In this context, Risager (2006, 2012) introduces the terms "linguaculture" and "linguaculture" and approaches language as a two-sided phenomenon: "we need at least two different concepts in the interface between language and culture: linguaculture (associated with a particular language) and discourse (always expressed in language, but potentially moving across languages)" (Risager 2012: 106).²⁰ A link between language and culture is therefore created in every communicative event (Risager 2006: 185). Risager's definition of linguaculture comprises three interrelated dimensions which are meant to encompass the full range of culturality of a language: (1) linguaculture, which focuses on semantics and pragmatics of language (in discourse), (2) the poetics of language, which is related to the kinds of meaning created in the exploitation of the interplay between form and content in language and (3) the identity dimension of language which is related to social and personal variation of language (Risager 2006: 115). Linguaculture is related to the first language and when an L2 is involved, the relationship between language and culture changes. People base their perspectives on the linguaculture of their first language and even with a high level of L2 competence, their linguaculture will remain an accumulation of life experiences (Risager 2015: 92–93). Irish people who learn German as a foreign language, for example, draw on their cultural and social experiences related to the German language (in the sense of Humboldt's idea of worldview).

Risager (2015) further differentiates between the "external locus" in terms of linguistic practice (oral/written) and the "internal locus" in terms of linguistic resources, which individuals develop during their socialisation. Linguistic practice is understood as "a continuing series of 'acts of identity' where people project their own understanding of the world onto the interlocutors by their choice of language variety [...] and consciously or

²⁰ See Herder (1774) and Humboldt (1836) in chapters 1.2.1 and 1.3. In 2006, Risager used "linguaculture" and then "linguaculture" in 2012. These terms are used synonymously. For reasons of simplification, "linguaculture" will be used in this thesis.

unconsciously invite them to react" (Risager 2015: 93). The two loci (internal and external) are inter-dependent since linguistic practice can neither be produced nor received without linguistic resources. In turn, linguistic resources cannot be developed without the experience of linguistic practice. Additionally, Risager introduces a third artificial locus, the notion of "the language" or "the language system", defined as a coherent whole (Risager 2015: 91–92). The idea that there is a language which can be used and studied as a natural object needs to be deconstructed. The language system is a family of discursively constructed notions, which have an impact on linguistic practice and linguistic resources as a kind of normative factor. The linguistic practice of a specific language is regarded as flows in social networks of people, developing through migration and language learning. German, for example, spreads internationally where there are German speakers as settlers, sojourners, students, soldiers etc., and where it is also acquired in terms of German as a foreign language. Speakers of German then put their language resources into new cultural contexts and use German in new ways under new circumstances. These transnational linguistic flows of different languages create complex multilingual situations, characterised by language hierarchies and power struggles among languages. Linguistic practice (i.e. language codes) flows and intermingles in social networks that may reach from one cultural context to another across the world (Risager 2015: 92).

To sum up, it is assumed that a differentiated concept of culture is formed through language, which constitutes a rule-bound sign system, a so-called language code, shared by speech communities. These sign systems do not present reality but are rather interpretations and constructions – arbitrarily or conventionally related to external items or abstract concepts. Discourses construct and circulate meanings and values in communication systems and form the social identities of individuals. Cultural community members are involved in the process of encoding, decoding and the interpretation of meaning – hence, meaning making constitutes a never-ending process.

1.4 Culture and Identity

Another term which is closely linked with language and the concept of culture in academic discourse is the complex construct of identity. The term "identity" has previously been discussed concerning the theses of Bakhtin (1986), Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Parekh (2006) in chapters 1.2.3 and 1.3. The majority of recent research (Block 2007, Kramsch 2009a, Peirce 1995, Parekh 2008, Tajfel 1978) on language and identity adopts a

social constructivist stance in that identity refers to the subjectivities and subject positions individuals inhabit and have been ascribed to them within various cultural contexts (Block 2013: 18). The concept of subjectivity is based on the idea of a human being as an embodied subject and refers to a subject's "perspectives, experiences, feelings, beliefs, memories, aspirations, and desires" (Witte 2014: 10), which are not subjective but are rather shaped by the language, culture and habitus of the surrounding social world. Hence, the concept of identity entails both personal and social dimensions: People use personal as well as social identities to present and represent themselves. The personal dimension refers to individuals' unique sense of who they are, which serves as a nucleus in interactions. Personal identities are based on personal characteristics (tolerant, open, etc.), interpersonal relationships and roles (friend, sister, partner) as well as autobiographical narratives (born to working-class parents, educated at an elite university) (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 5). They are not regarded as a fixed entity but subject to change and development, based on critical self-reflection and intersubjective evaluation (Bromell 2008: 151, 174). In comparison, social identity refers to an individual's self-concept based on knowledge of social group membership (ethnic group, religious affiliations, gender, ethnolinguistic identity, social class), along with the values and emotional significance people attribute to that membership (Tajfel 1978: 63). Hence, social identities are a result of socialisation in that individuals acquire the knowledge, beliefs, values and behaviours they share in a certain cultural group (Byram *et al.* 2002: 10). Personal identity and social identity are interlinked – the individual contributes to the group identity but also integrates aspects of the group identity into their construct of personal identity.

Group members identify with commonalities such as patterns of action or goals, which guarantee a certain group consistency, a maintenance of shared reality (Berger & Luckmann: 1966: 66–75, Witte 2014: 180). In this regard, Parekh (2008: 27) claims that on the one hand a certain sphere of solidarity empowers social groups but on the other, group consistency may result in a narrow notion of exclusiveness and authority. Turner (1982: 28) points out that human beings tend to "simplify cognitive representations of the social world by dividing persons into discrete social categories". Group-identification shows a tendency to work with exclusion and inclusion in terms of "us" and "them" (Parekh 2008: 27) which leads to in-group commitment and loyalty and out-group discrimination. Along these lines, Bolten (2012) argues that the understanding of cultural identity depends on the distance of perception – the closer one zooms into a group, the

more heterogeneous it appears. In this sense, group members tend to perceive their own cultural in-groups as heterogeneous and diverse, fully recognising individual differences within the group. Other groups tend to be deindividualised and perceived as a unified, homogeneous social entity with less diversity – a process which may lead to stereotyping and prejudice.

Individuals define themselves in relation to other people in their social environments. In this sense, individual uniqueness can be regarded as a dynamic constellation of multilayered collective identities – "a site of many overlaps and crossings-over" (Parekh 2008: 29). Identity is therefore not a stable construct but is discursively and socially construed through interactions with others in various cultural communities (Kramsch 2009a: 10, Witte 2014: 24, 173); it is subject to the negotiation and renegotiation of meaning. These cultural affiliations influence how individuals perceive others, other value systems and different ways of thinking and feeling. In this context, Hall (1996) notes that "identities are [...] points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall 1996: 6). Gee (1999) further differentiates between "socially situated identities" as "the multiple identities we take on in different practices and contexts" and "core identities" as the "continuous and relatively 'fixed' sense of self [that] underlies our continually shifting multiple identities" (Gee 1999: 39, cited in Block 2013: 18).

The concept of identity additionally relates to the perception and recognition of oneself by others (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 13, Witte 2014: 173–174). In this regard, positioning plays an important role. The term "positioning" refers to "the discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Davies & Harré 1999: 37). Individuals situate themselves but are at the same time situated by others based on their sense of what positionings constitute a coherent narrative at a particular time and place for a certain activity. These positionings vary from context to context and have an effect on the interaction (Block 2007: 18–19). Therefore, identity is not only contained inside the individuals and does not solely depend on the definition of others. Rather, both the self-generated subject positionings in combination with the subject positionings generated by others need to be considered (Block 2007: 26). If these ascribed identities differ from people's self-perceptions, people's well being and social adaptation might be negatively affected (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 13–16). When individuals move across sociocultural borders, their

perceptions of a taken-for-granted fixed, stable self may be disturbed and questioned because of critical experiences. The ensuing struggle and negotiation of difference ideally results in so-called hybrid identities (Papastergiadis 2000: 170, cited in Block 2007: 20–21).

Language plays a central role in subjective and social identity formation and the process of socialisation, as it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self and defines him- or herself in relation to the world. In interactions, language serves as a tool to communicate, reflect and modify one's own personal identity and to co-construct and change a group-identity. Since language is inscribed with social and cultural heritage, the construction of subjective and collective identities is ultimately a sociocultural process (Witte 2014: 187). In this sense, Leung *et al.* (2009: 144–146) distinguish between "language expertise", "language affiliation" and "language inheritance". "Language expertise" refers to an individual's command of a language in that he or she is accepted by other users of the language, dialect or sociolect. "Affiliation" refers to a speaker's identification with and emotional attachment to the language, dialect or sociolect. "Inheritance" refers to the language community without any emotional attachment or competence of speaking it. Like personal and social identity, language identity is a dynamic and open construct and the emotional attachment and competence may change.

In the context of L2 acquisition, Norton Peirce (1995) calls for "a comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the language learners and the language learning context" (Norton Peirce 1995: 9) – an approach which is also taken by Witte (2014). Witte (2014) argues that learning a new language is likely to have an impact on personal development and the individual's constructs of identity. While mono-linguals tend to take their cultural constructs for granted, language learners gain access to new social contexts, different points of reference and discourses. Learning a new language may therefore challenge existing perspectives and the learners' identities and cause them to redefine ways of understanding, perceiving and construing (Witte 2014: 177–178):

L2 learning involves reconstructing the categories of another linguistic system and the habitus of another socioculture, while at the same time deconstructing the internalized linguistic and cultural constructs. (Witte 2014: 302)

In this context, Norton Peirce (1995) draws attention to power relations between language learners and target language speakers in social interactions. She refers to

Weedon's (1987) notion of social identity which combines individual experience and social power:

Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. (Weedon 1987: 21, cited in Norton Peirce 1995: 15)

According to Norton Peirce (1995), language plays a significant role in social meaning making "as constitutive of and constituted by a language learner's social identity" (Norton Peirce 1995: 9–13). Norton (2000: 5) uses the term identity in reference to "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton 2000: 5). Based on her study on five immigrant women as language learners and drawing on Weedon (1987), Norton Peirce (1995) understands subjectivity in a post-structuralist way as a site of struggle, as diverse, contradictory and changing over time. The individual is not understood as a fixed, coherent core but rather exists and develops across time and space with reference to social relations of power. The larger and to a certain extent inequitable social structures in social interactions need to be considered. In this context, Norton (2006: 25) refers to Bourdieu's (1977b, 1984) notion of legitimate and illegitimate speakers, his focus on the power in structuring speech and on unequal relationships between interlocutors. According to Bourdieu (1977b), language and their speakers need to be understood in the context of social relationships (Bourdieu 1977b: 648–52, cited in Norton 2006: 25).

The multi-layered concept of identity as discussed in this subchapter is conceptualised "as a hybrid, dynamic and polyphonic narrative construct" (Witte 2014: 196). The only stable element in the concept of identity is its constant change, as aspects of identity are continuously "constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed, even if these complex processes remain largely on a subconscious level" (Witte 2014: 196). Different identity types are co-constructed on the individual as well as the collective level and ideally result in hybrid forms of identity, like intercultural spaces.

1.5 Résumé

The objective of this chapter was to provide a short overview on the myriad of multi-faceted approaches towards the concepts of culture in Western academic discourse, which form the foundations to the construct of intercultural competence. As already pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, this conceptual discussion is limited to a research discourse influenced by European and North American conceptions and neglects other conceptualisations, since the empirical study of this thesis focuses on the European linguistic and cultural area, where these conceptions are commonly used. In this sense, culture is portrayed as a phenomenon which has been created, passed on and transformed in the history of the Western social sciences in a certain manner. This exposition does not allow for a global comparative analysis of culture-specific pragmatics.

In these concepts discussed hitherto, culture is distinguished from both universal human nature and unique individual personality. Furthermore, in all concepts it is argued that culture is a social product, acquired in one's social environment and not inherited. However, exactly where the borders between human nature and culture, between culture and personality, lie – or if they exist or are definable – is still matter of humanistic debate.

The debate on terminology continues when it comes to the compound intercultural, with *inter* being the Latin prefix for between or among and referring to some form of relation of self and Other. In other words, it refers to a process taking place between cultures, a so-called interplay of cultures. Recent research (Hall 1996, Spencer-Oatey 2008, Witte 2014), however, agrees that culture is subject to change, is processual, complex and dynamic with overlaps and similarities. Cultures are not closed systems; on the contrary, they constitute a flow of exchanges and mutual influences with blurred and permeable transitions, which adds to the concept's elusiveness and fuzziness. A person is not only embedded in one culture but can be member of different cultures. Hence, the question is, whether current concepts of culture do not actually represent inter-culture itself. As justified as this objection is, it cannot be further discussed at this point but will be taken up again in chapter 3 on the models of intercultural competence.

There have been many attempts to conceptualise culture in different academic fields such as anthropology, psychology or economics and there seem to be various viable ways of approaching the concept. Interesting approaches in terms of the relationship between

culture and language have been provided by semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism which understand cultural patterns and products as a text that can be read or interpreted like a novel or poem (Witte 2014: 214). The presented concepts conceive culture in various ways, ranging from observable artefacts, knowledge and basic underlying, (partly) unconscious, assumptions to values and norms. Culture as forms of knowledge implies that individuals learn and then apply knowledge to new cultures in order to become interculturally competent. Culture as values and norms implies a certain level of unawareness. Values and norms provide templates for individual as well as social existence in terms of guiding how group members perceive, feel, judge and interact. This cognitive template indicates a sense of belonging and creates cohesion of a cultural community. Yet, it is often taken for granted without further reflection. In this sense, people read other cultures through their own cultural lenses entailing a cultural frame of reference. Intercultural competence then refers to a successful interaction of people who belong to different cultural communities with different underlying values and collective identities. In this context, Hansen (2000) argues that cultural stability is not so much created by binding values and norms but, rather, is formed by a certain creation of normality: "Das ist ihr wesentlichstes Kriterium und ihre wirkungsvollste und tiefste Leistung, [Kultur] definiert Normalität, und diese Normalität wirkt auf ihre Art ebenso bindend und verbindlich wie soziale und politische Strukturen" (Hansen 2000: 233). In this sense, the concept of intercultural competence refers to interacting between different forms of socioculturally constructed normalities.

However, many current researchers (Byram 2009, Kramsch 2009a, Spencer-Oatey 2008, Witte 2014) of intercultural competence claim that it is very difficult to define culture as "it oscillates in a multi-layered network of relations between the poles of the individual and society, action and structure, cognition and communication, action and interaction, processuality and interruption" (Witte 2014: 202). Hence, it is an extremely complex, dynamic, multi-layered and elusive concept, which is illustrated in Spencer-Oatey's (2008) broad definition:

Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour. (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 3)

Hence, culture is an extremely ambiguous and multi-faceted concept which is very difficult to grasp for academic purposes. In this sense, cultural analysis remains intrinsically incomplete and the deeper the analyst plunges into the concepts, the less complete they appear to become. Geertz (1973) enumerates ways to escape this dilemma, namely "turning culture into folklore and collecting it, turning it into traits and counting it, turning it into institutions and classifying it, turning it into structures and toying with it" (Geertz 1973: 3). However, these approaches are just escapes and the semiotic concept of culture remains elusive. Other researchers (Hann 2007) even suggest withdrawing from using the term culture in research altogether.

In the light of its elusiveness in the social sciences, researchers such as Segall (1984) argue for pragmatism and give up trying to define a universal concept of culture. Rather, the concept is so diffuse and abstract that it cannot be used to explain empirical findings. Instead, the social sciences should focus on what ecological and sociological variables might link with established variations in human behaviour (Segall 1984: 154, cited in Berry *et al.* 1992: 263). One could therefore argue that the manifold and different usages of the term point to an attempt to grapple rigorously with an elusive and fluid concept. However, this elusiveness and fluidity also stresses the richness of culture. In this sense, culture is a high-order factor that cannot function as an explanation or an independent variable but is a superordinate entity (Segall 1984, quoted in Kağıtçıbaşı 1996: 10).

In this dissertation, the term "culture" is understood as a dynamic construct with an "inherent complexity and fluidity" (Witte 2014: 203). Hence, the diversity of definitions is not only rooted in the multi-disciplinary use of the concept but the concept of culture itself implies processuality and is politically and ideologically loaded. In this sense, one culture cannot essentialistically be differentiated from other cultures but there are rather similarities and overlaps.

Along these lines, I would like to draw on the term "floating signifier" to do justice to the seemingly endless extensibility and applicability of culture. Based on Saussure's (1974) hypothesis on signification (see chapter 1.3), poststructuralists such as Lacan (1981, 1993) argue that the allocation of "signifier" to "significant" and their connection is arbitrary. Hence, signifiers do not present reality but other signifiers which point to objects, configurations and representations. This system of meaning is rather unstable so in order to avoid the problem of infinite chains of signification, Lacan (1981, 1993) introduced the

term "master-signifier", which stops the infinite chain of signification and serves as an "anchor point" in the centre of a signification system. Borrowing the Lacanian notion of master-signifier, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112) "empty signifiers" or "floating signifiers" are nodal points to stabilise the signification system. These signifiers are neither based on reality nor a specific significant but are rather defined by their lack of constant, objective or specific meaning. Instead, the meaning of "floating" or "empty signifiers" depends on the outcome of struggles of hegemony to give meaning (also see Gramsci 1999 in this chapter), but in themselves they do not bear any symbolic value. In this sense, floating signifiers are discursive constructs which do not simply exist but are the product of political disputes. Chandler (2007: 78) elaborates the concept of floating signifiers and states that they denote signifiers with "a vague, highly variable or non-existent signified". Thus, they are susceptible to multiple and even contradictory meanings for different people in different contexts, a semantic defibration – "they may stand for many or even *any* signifieds; they may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean" (Chandler 2007: 78, *italics* in original).

Culture in this sense serves as a floating signifier which does not bear any symbolic value in itself but is attributed different meanings according to its usage. In this sense, the actor's perspective becomes the focus of attention of the conceptual analysis. As part of this PhD project, the floating signifier of culture in the context of intercultural competence from the subjective points of view of language learners, in this case Bachelor students of German Studies at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth (NUIM) should therefore be examined.

2. "Competence" and "Model" in the Intercultural Competence Context

Chapter 1 demonstrated how there is still no consensus about what "culture" actually means and that there are manifold denotations attached to it. However, the manner in which researchers on intercultural competence define culture for their work is relevant for the further usage of the term. For instance, a distinction needs to be made between culture as knowledge and culture as patterns, norms and values. Culture as knowledge implies the idea that cultures are clearly distinguishable and that people can learn and then apply the knowledge of a new culture. If culture is regarded as an agglomerate of values or norms, people are not necessarily aware of it and it is not directly accessible to observation in itself but inferable from verbal statements and behaviour (Levitin 1973: 492). Furthermore, when culture is regarded as a dynamic and fluid concept, the question remains as to how different cultures can be distinguished from each other. The argument in chapter 1 went so far as to refer to the concept of culture as a floating signifier, hence a signifier with "a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified" (Chandler 2007: 78). These different aspects of meaning have an influence on how intercultural competence is conceived and implemented.

While chapter 1 focused on the semantically complex concept of culture, the objective of chapter 2 is to investigate the conceptualisations and various perspectives of competence and model in the light of intercultural competence. The following analysis of a selection of current approaches should uncover their underlying manifold and multifunctional definitions, terminological deficits and further implications. Depending on the underlying definitions of the terms "culture", "competence" and "model", educational objectives and the evaluation of intercultural competence can vary. However, like "culture", the terms "competence" and "model" are mostly used in an unreflected and indiscriminate manner in the intercultural competence context.

2.1 The Concept of Competence

The use of the concept of competence has been steadily growing in the last few decades and has been prominent in a number of fields such as in business studies, education and psychology, to name a few. Among educational scholars, "competence" has been the subject of many debates (Salisbury 2011: 24), as the term comes with manifold nuances

and possible meanings and it is not always clear upon what theoretical approach the concept's usage is based. Hence, in the same way as "culture", the term "competence" is used in various epistemological paradigms of different disciplines and constitutes an iridescence, dazzling concept (Hesse 2009: 161). It would therefore be wrong to hope for a common understanding and for common measurement techniques as the underlying concepts are too complex and the areas in which the concepts are used are too diverse (Erpenbeck & Rosenstiel 2007: XVII).

Etymologically speaking, the term "competence" is a derivative of the Latin verb *competere*, meaning "to meet" in terms of dispositions and characteristics, and "to be able to do something" in terms of capacities. *Competere* was also used to refer to the contemporary use of the English verb "to compete" or "to contend" for something. The latter use brings competition into focus, for example in terms of a job position or fulfilling various tasks. Roman jurists related the adjective *competent* to being responsible, authorised and lawful (Erpenbeck & Rosenstiel 2007: XVIII). *Competence* is used here to refer to responsibility or authority. In this sense, competence is neither static, consistent nor precise but ranges from power and authority to ability, skill and assets. Hence, even the original term implies a range of possible meanings which have been transferred to a myriad of contexts since then.

The term "competence" in psychology first appeared in the article *Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence* by White (1959) in which he defines "competence" as an organism's achieved capacity "to interact effectively with the environment" (White 1959: 297). In contrast to action instigated by genetically inborn drives (i.e. hunger, sleep, sex) which are regulated by biological processes, competences are self-organised or subconsciously acquired by the individual and attained through learning or training. Competent behaviour in this sense is directed, selective and persistent in order to satisfy an intrinsic need to deal with the environment. Relevant knowledge and skills alone do not warrant successful performance in complex environments. Rather, special abilities and skills which take into account specific, complex contexts are required in order to behave efficiently and effectively. In this context White (1959: 321) introduces the concept of "effectance motivation", which refers to being motivated to explore and influence one's environment. Competence is the result of this effectance motivation and therefore designates a motivational concept to satisfactorily interact with the environment by changing it in various ways. In his behaviourist approach,

White (1959) summarises all kinds of behaviour which contribute to dealing satisfactorily with one's surrounding under the umbrella term "competence". In this sense, the concept entails attention and perception, language and thinking, manipulating and changing the surrounding – all of which promote an effective – competent – interaction with the environment (White 1959: 317). Competence is a prerequisite for performance which is implemented by the individual based on self-motivated interaction with his/her surroundings. Hence, competence is more closely related to the concept of efficacy and social competence rather than a normative performance and refers to an ongoing process of interaction between an individual and the environment.

In the field of linguistics, the concept of competence has been extensively discussed by Chomsky (1965), and since then many researchers have integrated and extended this approach. Chomsky (1965) differentiates between "competence", an idealised speaker's or hearer's capacity and knowledge of his/her language and "performance", the actual use and production of language in concrete situations (Chomsky 1965: 4). Linguistic competence then constitutes a person's generic cognitive state which encompasses all those aspects of form (grammatical, phonetic, syntactic) and meaning necessary to produce speech. Linguistic performance relates to the way speech actually works. A speaker's linguistic capabilities form the basis for performance but in turn only become accessible and evaluable through performance. Chomsky (1965) further argues that performance can only be a direct reflection of the overall competence under ideal circumstances, in a completely homogeneous speech-community whereby the speaker/hearer knows the language perfectly and "is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic)" (Chomsky 1965: 3). In the ideal language system, people can theoretically produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in a language and distinguish grammatical from ungrammatical sentences even though they might have never heard them before. Natural speech, however, does not meet these requirements, as it constitutes a rather messy speech-environment and linguistic performance; therefore it does not reflect overall linguistic competence, as the actual linguistic performance of speakers is influenced by a variety of factors and not only by the underlying competence (Chomsky 1965: 4). Hence, the analysis of linguistic performance only allows for limited conclusions on the actual linguistic competence of a person.

The distinction between performance and competence used by White (1959) and Chomsky (1965) highlights a problem that is a key issue in the discussion of competence concepts. As Chomsky points out (1965), a speaker's linguistic capabilities form the basis for performance but in turn only become accessible and evaluable through performance. One of the main criticisms against the use of the term "competence" is that competence descriptions are inevitably reductive (Fleming 2009a: 6) because there is only emphasis on concrete outputs in terms of what people do and how people act. Performance models of competence are "intrinsically behaviourist" (Hyland 1997: 492) as they rely on observations and descriptions of behaviour. Along these lines, Barnett (1994: 75–76) argues that the ideas of competences, outcomes, performance and activities neglect understanding, capacity or imagination, which has led to an impoverished view of human action.

In this context, normativity and measurability play an important role and are prominent in the present competence debate. Performance provides inference to the underlying competences. However, as established, competences have an impact on performance but do not determine it. Just as it is difficult to predict people's concrete actions from their motivation, so too is it difficult to determine in how far their competences are indicative of future actions. Furthermore, Erpenbeck and Rosenstiel (2007: XVII–XVIII) discuss a form of attribution based on the judgment of an observer. Based on observable behaviours, the observer ascribes dispositions as competence to the physically and mentally self-organised actor. Therefore, from a methodological point of view, the distinction between performance and competence plays an important role in the measurement of competences. Since the assessment of competence depends on the ascription of observers, it raises the question of objectivity.

In linguistics, the most influential criticism of Chomsky's (1965) concept of linguistic competence and its differentiation between competence and performance is from Hymes (1972). Hymes opposes this dichotomy and argues that Chomsky's underlying idea of an ideal speaker or listener with perfect linguistic knowledge cannot be transferred to real-life communication. In contrast to Chomsky, Hymes claims that competence as well as performance are more so influenced by cognitive and social factors. Hence, theory and practice need to be combined and the interrelationship of influential factors on competence and performance needs to be empirically investigated:

It is not that there exists a body of linguistic theory that practical research can turn to and has only to apply. It is rather that work motivated by practical needs may help build the theory that we need. (Hymes 1972: 269)

Hymes broadens Chomsky's concept of linguistic competence by introducing the concept of communicative competence which includes a socio-cultural dimension. In addition to correct language use in terms of grammar (linguistic competence), communicative competence also comprises the competence of appropriate language usage, which relates to the knowledge of when to speak, what to talk about with whom, when, where and how (Hymes 1972: 277). Hymes suggests that the following four questions should be considered in a comprehensive study of language, culture and communication:

1. Whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*;
2. Whether (and to what degree) something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, hence actually *performed*, and what its doing entails (Hymes 1972: 281 *italics* in original)

The first question on formal possibility is related to grammatical and cultural rules. Any kind of communicative behaviour (verbal, non-verbal or para-verbal) is judged on obeying rules within a formal system (Rickheit *et al.* 2008: 18). However, as Searle points out (1995, quoted in Harden 2011: 78), these rules are part of a socially constructed reality based on collective intentionality and do not belong to the physical world. Native speakers might not be aware of this difference. In other words, the differentiation between "brute facts" which are independent from "the intentionality of the observer" (Searle 1995: 9, quoted in Harden 2011: 78) and "institutional facts" based on collective acceptance is not always evident to native speakers. Depending on the degree of competence, a native speaker is more or less successful with regard to communication (Harden 2011: 78). The second question on feasibility is related to underlying psycholinguistic factors (i.e. memory) and possible cognitive, emotional, behavioural and physiological influences on communication. The third question on appropriateness relates to communicative actions in specific social contexts. It refers to what kind of communicative behaviour is to be expected or desirable in a certain communication situation. The fourth question on actual performance in specific contexts refers to empirically observable data of communicative events (Rickheit *et al.* 2008: 18–21).

Unlike Chomsky, Hymes focuses on language acquisition and learned knowledge instead of a genetic disposition. Like Chomsky's analysis, however, Hymes', is based on native-speaker communication and despite a more detailed differentiation, the focus in Hymes' notion of communicative competence is still on performance. In the L2 learning context, this communicative competence has to be broken down into pieces of knowledge which can be learned first. In order to do so, a hypothetically perfect and overall communicatively competent native speaker has to be constructed to define separate levels of communicative competence progress for education purposes. Yet, such a division and classification of knowledge is challenging since language learners already have a repertoire of communicative competence in their native language on which they draw (Harden 2011: 80–81), and it remains vague what the standards for a perfect, communicatively competent native speaker should be.

In terms of communicative competence, another comprehensive concept has been provided by Wiemann (1977: 197). It is based on the idea that an individual is an actor who plays various roles in various contexts. The five relevant components for communicative competence are defined as interaction management, empathy, affiliation/support, behavioural flexibility and social relaxation. Results of Wiemann's empirical study suggest that interaction management plays a central role for communicative competence. The competent communicator is thus "empathic, affinitive and supportive, and relaxed while interacting" (Wiemann 1977: 211) and can adapt his/her behaviour to different situations to accomplish their own interpersonal goals. However, the terms empathic and affinitive are in themselves vague concepts which bear manifold meanings and need to be further explored.

In the past decades, a shift has taken place from a narrow concept of innate competence towards a broader concept of acquired competence and the concept of consciously learned competence (Harden 2011: 81). Next to the behaviourist definitions, which imply that competence can mainly be identified by performance, Bowden and Marton (1998: 105–106) broadly differentiate between three further approaches towards competence in education – an additive, an integrative and a holistic approach. While in the behaviourist approach, evidence of competence is solely based on performance, the additive approach focuses on underlying attributes such as knowledge or critical thinking capacities which form the basis for further transferable attributes. In this sense, the additive approach combines performance with knowledge which should, however, be

assessed separately. In the framework of the integrative approach, the assessment of knowledge and performance are integrated because of the context-specific nature of demonstrated competence. Competences are then regarded as general attributes which may be applied to specific contexts. The holistic approach is based on the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of parts. It conflates the latter two and combines knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes. The holistic approach integrates a person's self-perception of one's role in a specific context, the skills to fulfill these roles, the required knowledge and the effective performance within a specific context. In sum, according to Bowden and Marton (1998: 113–115), the term "competence" on the one hand refers to independent, observable behaviour and on the other hand to the previously acquired knowledge and skills to handle new situations effectively.

The concept of competence is therefore equated with a number of different meanings which range from effectiveness (goal achievement, success, efficiency) and appropriateness (legitimacy, acceptance, assimilation) to behaviour, abilities or skills to manage particular contexts (Deardorff 2009: 6). Hence, these skills, abilities or modes of behaviour are context-bound and are not regarded as universally applicable or valid. Thus, the application of these skills might be perceived as being competent in one context while not in another. With factual knowledge no longer meeting the requirements of a changing society, competences are commonly assumed to transcend levels of knowledge and skills and account for the effective application of knowledge and skills in a specific context. They refer to extended capabilities which include metacognition and reflection.

The term "competence" then refers to an individual's ability to adapt and adjust effectively to environmental and social conditions over time and to achieve goals (Spitzberg & Cupbach 1984: 35). In this sense, competence development may be influenced by individual traits, subjective motives and personal experiences. Researchers representing this view include, among others, Erpenbeck and Rosenstiel (2007). In their holistic approach, Erpenbeck and Rosenstiel (2007: X–XIII) claim that competences are not arbitrary action abilities for any possible learning or action domains but skills or dispositions which enable the person to act meaningfully and successfully in open, complex and sometimes chaotic situations. Competences are therefore not directly observable but relate to internal dispositions for self-organised actions of a person in that they enable him or her to act in a self-organised way under the conditions of (mental) uncertainty:

Kompetenzen sind in Entwicklungsprozessen entstandene, generalisierte Selbstorganisationsdispositionen komplexer, adaptiver Systeme – insbesondere menschlicher Individuen – zu reflexivem, kreativem Problemlösungshandeln in Hinblick auf [...] komplexe, selektiv bedeutsame Situationen [...]. Kompetenzen schließen Fertigkeiten, Wissen und Qualifikationen ein, lassen sich aber nicht darauf reduzieren. Bei Kompetenzen kommt einfach etwas hinzu, das die Handlungsfähigkeit in offenen, unsicheren, komplexen Situationen erst ermöglicht, beispielsweise selbstverantwortete Regeln, Werte und Normen als »Ordner« des selbstorganisierten Handelns. (Erpenbeck & Rosenstiel 2007: XI)

Self-organisation is the central idea of this definition of competence in that an individual initiates actions the outcomes of which are unpredictable due to the complexity of the individual and the situation. Therefore, competences are not static givens but are developed. They enable reflective, creative problem-solving in complex, selectively meaningful situations.

In the education context, another representative of a holistic approach is Weinert (2001), who defines competence as:

[...] die bei Individuen verfügbaren oder durch sie erlernbaren kognitiven Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten, um bestimmte Probleme zu lösen, sowie die damit verbundenen motivationalen, volitionalen und sozialen Bereitschaften und Fähigkeiten, um Problemlösungen in variablen Situationen erfolgreich und verantwortungsvoll nutzen zu können. (Weinert 2001: 26)

Individual competence includes a network of related knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and motivation. It therefore does not only comprise cognitive and social skills but also motivational and volitional aspects which are necessary pre-requisites to deal with specific problem situations.

Finally, a similar holistic approach towards the concept of competence in relation to intercultural competence is provided by Barrett *et al.* (2014) who understand competence in the following way:

[...] not merely as a matter of skills which are applied in a given context, but as a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action in any relevant situation. Competence is the capacity to respond successfully to types of situations which present tasks, difficulties or challenges for the individual, either singly or together with others. (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 16)

Intercultural encounters are one kind of these types of situations. According to Weinert (2001) and Barrett *et al.* (2014), intercultural competence would therefore constitute the individual potential to master situations which demand particular communication and self-reflection skills, understanding of others and mutual consideration due to different cultural backgrounds. Since intercultural situations may vary in many ways, competence is always receptive to enrichment or further learning through exposure to and interaction with these variations.

To sum up, two denotations of competences in the field of education can be distinguished. The theoretical perspective defines competence as a cognitive structure which facilitates behaviours. The operational perspective, on the other hand, regards competences as a range of skills that represent the ability to cope with complex, unpredictable contexts. Competence in this sense embraces knowledge, skills, attitudes, metacognition and strategic thinking (Westera 2001: 80) but also the ability to act and react spontaneously in a given situation in an appropriate, adequate and expected manner.

2.2 The Concept of Model

In recent years, models of intercultural competence have enjoyed great popularity in a number of academic fields, not least in the language education sector. However, in the framework of these works, a prior clarification on what the term "model" stands for is often neglected. Therefore, before analysing models of intercultural competence in chapter 3, a short overview of the concept's various meanings, its scholarly use and implications for fields of applications should be discussed.

Etymologically speaking, the term "model" is a derivative of the Latin noun *modulus*, a diminutive of *modus*. *Modus* literally means a measure, quantity or manner, *modulus* in turn refers to a small measure or standard. The original meaning therefore implies specification but also guidelines. Both meanings can be transferred to its contemporary usage. Based on the elaboration in the Oxford English Dictionary (quoted in Byram 2009: 217, accessed online on 2 May 2015), nowadays five uses of the term "model" can be distinguished. The first meaning refers to an ideal or perfect exemplar to follow or imitate, for example a model student or a fashion model. The second meaning refers to a model in terms of schematisation of reality, presenting in simplified terms the crucial factors or

characteristics of an entity, for example a description to make predictions or a representation of structure. In its third meaning, a model minimises the scale of a phenomenon without simplification. It reproduces every detail of an object, for example a 1:100 scale model of a train. The fourth meaning refers to model as a mould for reproducing identical copies of an entity. In its fifth meaning, model serves as an inspiration for the creation of something new, for example a human or nature morte model for an artist. These models can either be static or dynamic.

Models of intercultural competence could be of type one or two, but type four and five might be introduced into the conceptualisation too. Type one models of intercultural competence are implicitly prescriptive, basing their prescriptions on an idealised form of a native speaker (see competence debate in the previous subchapter). Type two models on the other hand, describe the phenomenon in question, but unlike type three models, do not go into every detail. In type two models, the needs are identified and then their description can be used prescriptively for learners as an attainable ideal or target. There are also traces of model four, in terms of the reproduction of behaviour in class. Ideas of type five models can be discerned in the debate on language development in terms of global languages and a *lingua franca*. An idealised form of a native speaker from model one is taken as a starting point but learners are encouraged to use the language for their own purposes. In this sense, the uniqueness of each learner is regarded as the uniqueness of an artist's model (Byram 2009: 217–218).

In the model discourse, a rough distinction between descriptive and prescriptive, normative models is made. Hence, when working with models of intercultural competence, it first needs to be analysed whether they are descriptive or prescriptive. Some models of intercultural competence imply a pedagogical intent while others describe characteristics of a culturally competent person (Byram 2009: 218). Norms and prescriptions might be implicit and models which first appear to be descriptive (for example Bennett's stage model in chapter 3 which implies implicit prescriptions towards ethno-relativism) turn out to be prescriptive after all. These underlying normative aspects need to be identified (Byram 2009: 218).

2.3 Résumé

The previous elaboration has formed the foundation for a discussion of intercultural competence with reference to the challenges and difficulties of conceptualisation and assessment in the following chapter. As discussed, research on intercultural competence can be based on a number of different concepts of culture, competence and model. The analysis of the concept of competence has shown that much confusion around the concept is due to a failure to recognise that meaning and interpretation of language require negotiation and exemplification in its actual context of usage (Fleming 2009a: 4). In this short overview, it has become clear that the semantic complexity of the notion of competence is partly due to the multi-disciplinary contexts and aligned purposes in which it is used. There are many diverse forms of usage, ranging from its casual everyday use for ability or capability to its use in education and training in terms of skills, or its use in professional profiles to meet complex demands within certain contexts (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 16). The meaning of competence relates to a combination of properties, assets, abilities, attitudes and skills, as well as to knowledge and expertise in a field. It can refer to individuals as well as organisations or institutions. Hence, it is also related to power, authority and success (Straub 2007: 37).

As for the conception of competence in the language education context, it is again used in a broad way, embracing knowledge, skills and attitudes with reference to what learners "can do" (Fleming 2009a: 4). There are parallels with the more general move in (language) education in aiming to make education programmes more transparent, transferable and democratic by specifying learning outcomes and objectives, and creating "constructive alignment" between objectives, course content and assessment processes (Biggs & Tang 2007: 5).²¹ As Harden (2011: 80) points out, the focus has changed from the level of an instrument of analysis to the level of an educational objective, which manifests itself in performance. Hence, there is a shift from a focus on learning input towards concrete learning outputs and goals and consequently also qualifications. In this sense, competences are embraced by educators as a new standard for curriculum design, training and professional development (Westera 2001: 75).

²¹ An example is the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) as a standard for comparing and transferring the academic students' performance at tertiary education institutes across Europe.

This development of competence in the language education context has been exposed to various forms of criticism. With a focus on evidence in terms of the previously discussed learning outcomes, performance and activities, descriptions of competence become too reductive and formulaic. People, however, are more complex than the sum of their actions and these competence approaches ignore mental capacities and the concept of understanding which are vital for competence actions (Ashworth & Saxton 1990: 10). Fleming (2006) further argues that there is no direct access to a person's consciousness; access is via the evidence of their behaviour and their actions. Yet, competence statements should not be interpreted as a total behaviouristic explanation, but rather as a device for articulating and unpacking what is meant by achievement or expertise in a given area (Fleming 2006: 51–52). Performed actions reveal information about attitude, understanding and underlying values.

Tacit knowledge and wide-ranging understandings are, however, not amenable to precise specification, and therefore broad conceptualisations of competence in the language education context have been introduced. A major contrary point of criticism in that respect is that despite the aim to create more transparency and clarity (Fleming 2009a: 6), there is still no clear definition and hence confusion about what exactly the concept of competence refers to. On the one hand, it refers to inner personal attributes, on the other to an act itself and to the outcome of actions (Fleming 2009a: 7). Hence, there is considerable polyvalence and fuzziness involved which makes it difficult to define. Harden (2011: 75) goes as far as to state that the concept of competence is so flexible and broad that its value as an instrument for serious research is virtually nil.

In terms of research, another point of criticism is the central pragmatic problem that there are hardly any empirically grounded models of competence for specific domains (Hu & Byram 2009: X), an argument which also pertains to the concept of intercultural competence. As a consequence, standards are being established which need to be met in order to be labelled "competent". However, appropriateness for the various target groups has not been adequately demonstrated. Furthermore, the idea of such standards conflicts with the understanding of competence as the individual ability to deal with unique, complex, unpredictable situations.

This problem further leads to difficulties with competence assessment. Due to the broadness of the concept and the confusion of its meaning, the question remains as to what exactly is being assessed and how accomplishment of competence is measurable, especially in the light of specific development objectives. In this framework, the aspects of reproducibility and transfer also need to be considered. Assessment is based on the assumption that a competence acquired and displayed in one context can be applied to another (Fleming 2009a: 7). However, success in one unique situation does not guarantee success in another. The definition of success further leads to another challenge with the notion of competence, namely its value-laden normative aspect. Hence, when using the term "intercultural competence" it first needs to be made clear to what the term "competence" actually refers, as it lacks a commonly used and accepted definition.

As for the concept of model, the different emphases set in intercultural competence models reflect the disciplinary academic background of researchers, such as linguistics, psychology or anthropology and the particular purposes of research. The spectrum ranges from component models to developmental and structural models. Relevant capacities, competences and skills are listed, assigned to affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions and partly defined in terms of progression phases. While some models focus on psychological dispositions, others put emphasis on competences, skills or knowledge. Individual-based approaches need to be differentiated from situational and interactionist models which, in addition to competences of individuals, focus on parameters of interactions in different contexts (Thomas 2003: 142–143). The characteristics of a range of intercultural competence models in the language education context will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

In this regard, the question of underlying values of models needs to be addressed. Models are value-laden constructs which are developed for different purposes in different contexts. The question of underlying values is also important in the light of parameters for assessment and evaluation. Hence, differences in the basic understanding of the purposes and relevance of intercultural competence inevitably result in different answers regarding the question on sub-competencies that are included, and how to learn or teach them (Rathje 2006: 5).

It has thus become clear that it is not only the concept of culture that is often defined in a very broad way and constitutes a so-called "floating signifier". Neither the term "competence" nor the term "model" can be transferred to arbitrary contexts by means of one single specific terminology and meaning. On the contrary, it is quite impossible to establish clear demarcations because the discussed notions form complex webs of meanings which partly overlap and change according to specific contexts and purposes. However, this central conceptual challenge and its consequences for the concept of intercultural competence have unfortunately largely been neglected in relevant research literature.

3. Intercultural Competence in Language Education

The previous chapters have established that the underlying concepts of intercultural competence bear manifold meanings and purposes, and therefore cannot be summarised in one single definition. One reason for this variety of definitions is the multi-disciplinary use of intercultural competence in a wide range of academic fields, such as business studies, economics and sociology. Therefore, a myriad of different approaches to defining and assessing intercultural competence exists.

Early research on intercultural competence is based on the experiences of Westerners working abroad in the 1950s. It was mostly motivated by perceived cross-cultural communication problems that made collaboration between individuals from different backgrounds more difficult. The scope of research was later expanded, ranging from studying abroad to international business contexts, such as expatriates living abroad or immigrant acculturation (Sinicrope *et al.* 2007: 1–2). Hence, the conceptualisations of intercultural competence "are highly diverse in their disciplines, terminologies, and scholarly and practical objectives" (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009: 4). This diversity leads to different answers as to what components and competencies intercultural competence consists of and how this competence can be learned and taught (Rathje 2006: 2). In other words, models of intercultural competence in business studies are not applicable in the field of education and vice versa. Yet, even within one discipline, in this case the field of education, a multitude of concepts exists.

The following discussion illustrates the diversity of models of intercultural competence in the field of L2 education. Depending on the underlying theoretical approaches, some models emphasise psychological dispositions and capacities, while others stress knowledge and awareness, or acquired skills based on underlying attitudes. These implicit differences in objectives and outcomes of intercultural competence inevitably lead to a myriad of assessment methods.

All in all, it is assumed that the construct of intercultural competence comprises an affective, a behavioural and a cognitive dimension.²² The following overview, however, suggests that the concept is much more complex than this view. Common key elements

²² The distinction into affective, behavioural and cognitive dimension can be traced back to Bloom (1965).

of current models of intercultural competence in the field of language education will be identified. Methods of intercultural competence assessment will then be considered with a view to ascertaining whether the highly dynamic and multi-layered construct, which in itself is culturally laden, can be assessed at all.

3.1 Fantini's (1995, 2005) Models of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Based on a review of intercultural literature, Fantini (2005) determines areas of convergence and divergence regarding intercultural communicative competence²³ and broadly defines it as "the complex of abilities needed to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini 2005: 1, Fantini & Tirmizi 2006b: 12, *italics* in original). In this sense, "effectiveness" refers to one's own view of one's performance in another culture (= an etic view) while "appropriateness" refers to the external perception of one's behaviour, in other words how one's performance is perceived by others (= an emic view). These perceptions on effectiveness and appropriateness might differ in various contexts and for different social groups, hence providing information on different cultural approaches to the same situation. However, the underlying concepts of culture and competence and their manifold meanings are not discussed in Fantini's work (1995, 2005) and it therefore remains ambiguous how they are understood. In this context, Norton Peirce (1995) has pointed out that appropriateness is not self-evident "and must be understood with reference to relations of power between interlocutors" (Norton Peirce 1995: 18; cf. Gramsci 1999 in chapter 1.2.3).

With most of the definitions of intercultural communicative competence, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006a) hold the view that intercultural communicative competence evolves over one's lifetime. Further, Fantini (2005) postulates phases of stagnation and even regression which are related to one's motivation and willingness to engage with the host culture. In this context, four levels of intercultural development (in relation to FEIL programmes, see chapter 3.1.1) are defined. Level 1 refers to the "Educational Traveler", a person who has participated in a 1–2 months exchange programme. Level 2 refers to the "Sojourner", a person engaged in cultural immersion for 3–9 months. Level 3 – "Professional" – refers to

²³ There is no consistent distinction between the terms "intercultural competence" and "intercultural communicative competence".

people who work in intercultural contexts, and Level 4 defines the "Intercultural Specialist", referring to a trainer engaged in training, educating, consulting or advising multinational students. However, Fantini (2005: 2) acknowledges that other levels and terms may be added or substituted according to the context they are used in.

Fantini's models (1995, 2005) encompass language proficiency and a variety of traits, characteristics and abilities which are considered essential to achieve co-orientation in linguistic processes. They distinguish between the ability to establish and maintain relationships, the ability to communicate with minimal loss or distortion of intended meaning and the ability to collaborate in order to accomplish something of mutual interest or need. A particular focus is set on the intertwining of language and culture in that language both reflects and affects one's view of the world just as culture affects and reflects what is encoded in language (Fantini 1995: 144–146). In this respect, Fantini follows Edward Hall's (1973: 97) stance of "culture is communication" and in turn, communication is culture. L2 proficiency therefore enhances intercultural communicative competence, as it allows for cultural development through interaction and communication. Dealing with another language confronts how one perceives, conceptualises and expresses oneself in alternative ways and consequently facilitates transcending and transforming one's view and understanding of the world. A lack of L2 skills on the other hand restricts one's worldview of differing conceptualisations encoded in other language systems. Fantini (1995) refers to "linguaculture" for this intertwining phenomenon and introduces the following input-output framework (see Fig. 2):

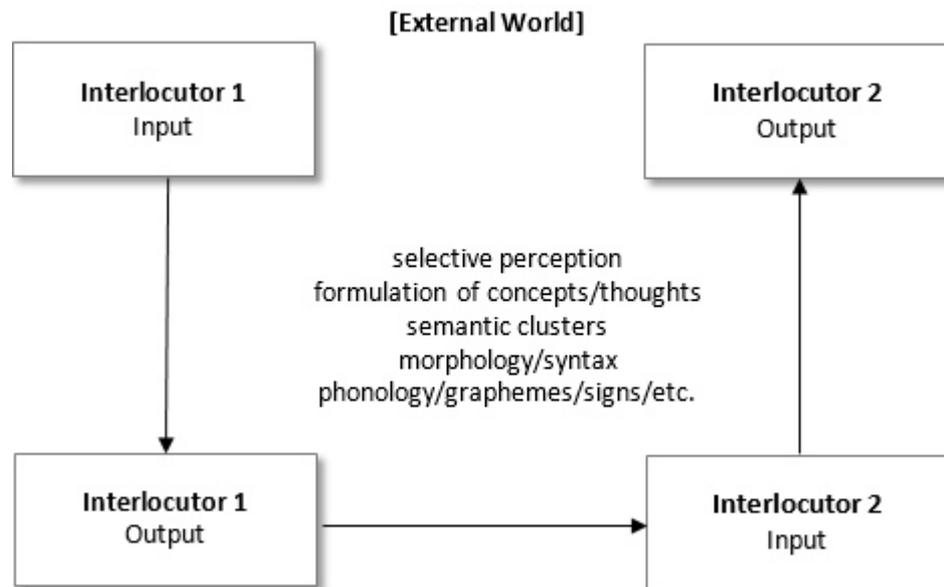


Fig. 2 Intercultural Interlocutor Competence Model (Fantini 1995: 146)

Individuals selectively perceive the external world according to their linguistic and cultural background and experiences. These perceptions are then formulated into concepts or thoughts, which are consequently translated and grouped into semantic clusters. These semantic clusters need to be made understandable by means of morphological forms which are ordered (syntax) and embedded into existing symbols (sounds, scripts, gestures, etc.) and finally expressed.²⁴ The interlocutor's process therefore moves from the perception of any given situation (input) to thoughts and expressions (output) through symbols, which in turn provides input for other interlocutors. Hence, proficiency in the host language or a *lingua franca* is required in order for an exchange of ideas to happen. If these interlocutors do not share a similar language-culture background, their underlying symbol systems might differ which could cause misunderstandings and frictions.

Traits and characteristics may facilitate the process of interlocution. Fantini (2005) distinguishes traits (= innate personal qualities) from characteristics, which are acquired and developed in one's cultural and situational context. In his study he considers tolerance, flexibility, patience, sense of humor, the ability to appreciate differences, suspending judgment, adaptability, curiosity, open-mindedness, motivation, self-reliance, empathy, a clear sense of self, perceptiveness and tolerance of ambiguity (Fantini & Tirmizi 2006a: 39). A distinction between intrinsic personal traits and developed and

²⁴ Compare Chomsky's (1965) framework of competence and performance.

modified characteristics is, however, rather blurred as it is not always clear which attributes form part of dispositions (i.e. traits) and which ones are solely acquired. These traits and characteristics are organised along the dimensions of awareness, attitudes (or affect), knowledge (or cognition) and skills (or behaviours) (Fantini 2005: 2). Awareness both emanates from learning in these affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions and in turn deepens them. Awareness of self constitutes the central dimension of cross-cultural development, which is enhanced through reflection on cultural differences and similarities. The ambiguity of traits and characteristics poses one of the major challenges to the educational efforts of intercultural competence. The question arises as to what aspects of intercultural competence can be nurtured and acquired and what aspects of intercultural competence constitute dispositions.

When communication between interlocutors is successful, Fantini (1995: 151) assumes a co-orientation of the interlocutors' worldviews (see Fig. 3). Hence, the more deeply the learner enters into an L2-culture (linguaculture LC2), the greater the effects on their native linguaculture (LC1). As a result, components of each linguaculture form cohesive, new worldviews and the transformation of the learners' mode of perception, knowledge, expression and interaction is promoted.

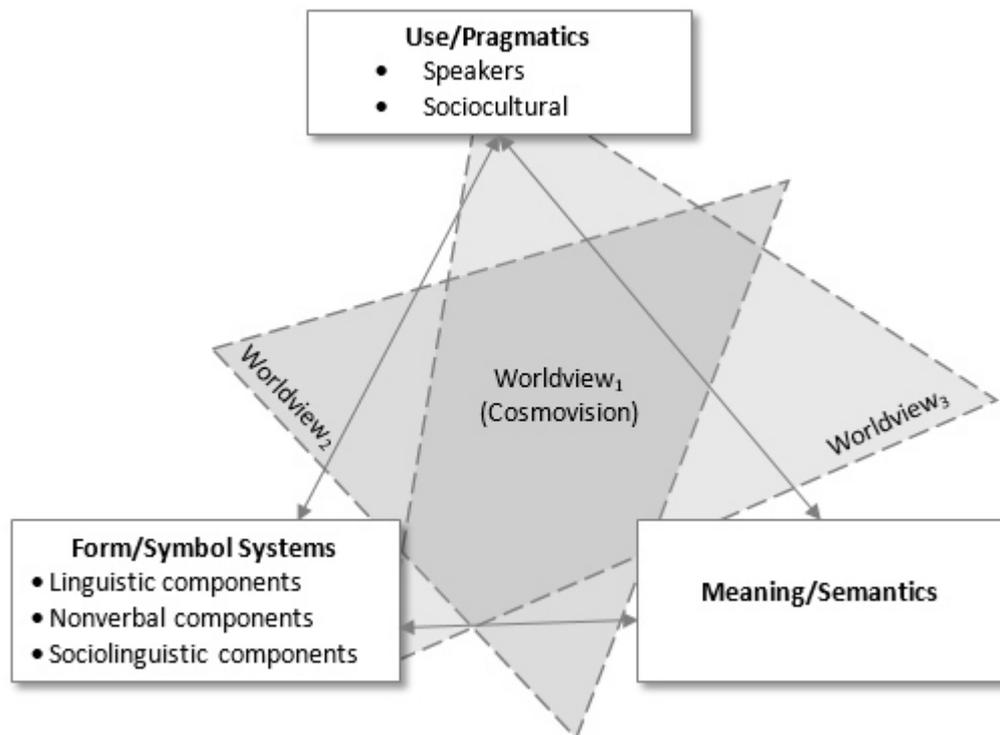


Fig. 3 Worldviews Convergence Model (Fantini 1995: 151)

Although these worldviews differ, the shaded overlapping area in Fig. 3 suggests that there are universal aspects shared by all human beings. Based on the configuration of these interrelated components, different worldviews are constructed. Yet, success in a native linguaculture (LC1) does not automatically guarantee success in another linguaculture (LC2, LC3, etc.) but requires intercultural competence. When the interaction with another linguaculture is successful, the overlaps of symbol systems (languages), denotative and connotative meanings and sociocultural norms will increase and the learners will be able to transcend and reconfigure their own worldviews.²⁵

Yet, as noted by Fantini and Tirmizi (2006a), the ability to establish and maintain relationships, to communicate with minimal loss or distortion of intended meaning, and to collaborate so as to accomplish something of mutual interest or need are also relevant and desirable in order to successfully function in one's own native surroundings on an everyday basis. Therefore, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006a) maintain that these abilities are basically necessary for everyone and important in all interpersonal relations. The fewer commonalities people share, the more complicated an interaction becomes (Fantini 1995: 3, 2005: 2, Fantini & Tirmizi 2006a: 12). In this sense, one could argue that intercultural competence can be equated with interpersonal competence or social competence.

3.1.1 The FEIL Project²⁶

In their elaborations, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006b) refer to the results of the FEIL (Federation of The Experiment in International Living) project which was conducted within an 18-month period²⁷ with British and Swiss participants of civic service programmes in Ecuador. The aim was to develop a comprehensive construct of intercultural competence and a tool for its assessment.

²⁵ See the concept of Third Space (Kramsch 1998) in chapter 3.2.

²⁶ The Federation EIL (Experiment in International Living) is an international non-profit association with organisations in 21 countries. FEIL offers a variety of activities from hosting international visitors to group travel programmes, L2 training, academic study abroad, au-pair homestays, and voluntary community service to individual homestays. Their mission is broadening horizons and advancing peace for different length of time (12 months maximum). The primary goal is to provide an opportunity to study languages and cultures first hand, to broaden one's horizon and to advance peace (FEIL 2015).

²⁷ From July 2005 to December 2006.

The hypotheses of the empirical study were that:

- intercultural competence involves a complex of traits, characteristics and abilities
- learning the host language positively affects intercultural development
- intercultural experiences are life-altering
- participant choices made during their sojourn produce certain intercultural consequences
- all parties in intercultural contact are affected
- service programmes offer opportunities for sojourners and hosts beyond traditional exchanges
- people are changed in positive ways as a result of this experience
- returnees lean toward specific life choices as a result of their experience
- returnees often engage in activities that further impact on others in positive ways
- their activities further the organisational mission (Fantini & Tirmizi 2006b: 7)

The gathered data were quantitative (statistics, collective profiles) as well as qualitative (open-ended comments, anecdotes, individual interviews), and provided information on how to refine the concept of intercultural competence and component interconnections, on how to identify attributes for successful intercultural encounters and the effects on the participants. The research was conducted in English, Spanish and German in order to avoid comprehension difficulties due to a lack of L2 proficiency. The collected data were then translated into English and coded to provide anonymity of the participants.

By means of a questionnaire and subsequent individual interviews on personal experiences, intercultural outcomes and implications for the participants' lives and work were investigated.²⁸ The survey questionnaire was based on the definition of intercultural competence as effective and appropriate interaction with those of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Overall, the dimensions of knowledge, attitude, skills and awareness were covered. The survey further considered proficiency in the host language and the correlation between levels of host language proficiency and other components of intercultural communicative competence development.

²⁸ The Questionnaire "Assessing Intercultural Competence" (AIC) (FEIL 2015) was used which will be elaborated on in chapter 3.7 Assessment of Intercultural Competence.

The research group consisted of 1 British and 4 Swiss volunteers, their host mentors and 8 British and 20 Swiss alumni of the programme with different backgrounds and L2 proficiency levels, who partly provided interviews (see Tab. 1).

Participants	Responses
British alumni responses	8 of 22 (+5 interviews)
Swiss alumni responses	20 of 76 (+1 interview)
Volunteers (at beginning)	3 of 5
Volunteers (at end)	5 of 5 (+2 interviews)
Mentors (of volunteers) (at beginning)	4 of 5
Mentors (of volunteers) (at end)	3 of 5 (+4 interviews)
Mentors (self) (at beginning)	3 of 5
Mentors (self) (at end)	4 of 5 (+4 interviews)

Tab. 1 Research Group and Number of Responses of the Feil Project²⁹

Altogether, 50 survey forms (sent by e-mail) were returned at the beginning and at the end of the volunteers' stay abroad and 16 follow-up face-to-face interviews were conducted. This method provided a dual perspective (internal and external) on volunteer development. The volunteers themselves specified their self-perceptions and were additionally assessed by their mentors on their intercultural competence development. Due to the small sample size, only the alumni data was statistically analysed, while the data sets of mentors and volunteers were used for qualitative data analysis which focused on the required abilities for intercultural success, personal development in terms of these abilities and language proficiency, as well as the impact of this intercultural experience on their lives.³⁰ The British alumni had participated in programmes of between 3 and 7 months in duration during the time period 2000–2005. The Swiss alumni did not provide information on their length of stay between 2000–2005. The sample group participated in 4 different projects in Ecuador, but it is not clear how long they stayed there and what projects they participated in. As far as information can be retrieved, the length varied between 3 to 7 months, and participants would all be on Level 2 of intercultural competence development (i.e. sojourner) of Fantini's (2005) 4 phases of intercultural development.

²⁹ See Fantini and Tirmizi (2006b: 19)

³⁰ For details on the T-test, one-way ANOVA and factor analysis see project report in Fantini and Tirmizi (2006b).

However, as Fantini (2000: 29–31) himself points out, the progress in intercultural competence development depends on individual choices and ranges from rejection of the host culture to profound cultural adjustments. Therefore, the distinction of four levels in terms of time spans is rather confusing and arbitrary as it does not provide any information on the level of intercultural competence attained as such but only on the time duration involved. It would, however, be wrong to conclude that a so-called sojourner cannot attain the same intercultural competence as a professional or vice versa, as time of exposure to an intercultural context is not solely responsible for intercultural competence development. How far one progresses in the development of intercultural competence depends on the complex interplay of underlying attitudes, knowledge, understanding and awareness, as well as skills. Consequent reactions range from rejection of the target culture to surface and profound cultural adjustments to losing the original identity and rejecting the native culture. Furthermore, in the framework of the FEIL study, information on component interconnections has not been retrieved and will be subject to further research.

The data demonstrates that proficiency in the host language is essential to developing intercultural communicative competence and that there are various levels of attainment of intercultural competence. All of the aforementioned hypotheses were confirmed and all of the investigated attributes were regarded as important for intercultural competence by the research participants. Furthermore, the participants attested to a development of these attributes and an improvement in language proficiency during their stay in Ecuador (Fantini & Tirmizi 2006b: 40–75). The motivation for engagement in the foreign culture increased and the participants established various personal relationships that had been maintained by the time the research was conducted.

However, some alumnis' stays abroad date back to the year 2000 and it is questionable if the process of intercultural competence development can retrospectively be retraced as such. In addition, the small sample size of volunteers (3 at the beginning and 5 at the end of the sojourn) does not allow for any generalisations.

3.2 Kramersch's (1998) Concepts of Symbolic Competence and Third Place³¹

Kramersch's (1998) concepts of symbolic competence and third place do not constitute a model of intercultural competence as such but have had an impact on and are intertwined with models and concepts analysed in the framework of this dissertation (Byram 1997, 2009, Witte 2014).³² The following discussion should serve as substantiation for the models described later on in the chapter.

Although Kramersch (1998) takes up the concept of communicative competence as elaborated by Hymes (1972), her approach is primarily based on the idea that the notion of one native speaker, one language and one national culture is a fallacy (Kramersch 1998: 26). Due to the dynamics of cultures in our society, the wide range of sub-cultures and the myriad of variations of language, it is impossible to define the model native speaker and compare success in L2 acquisition with developing native-speaker competence (Kramersch 1993: 181). The goal of L2 teaching should therefore not be to become a native speaker but an intercultural speaker who has developed the "ability to select those forms of accuracy and those forms of appropriateness that are called for in a given social context of use" (Kramersch 1998: 27). This idea of changing the ultimate teaching objectives goes back to Byram and Zarate (1997).

Originally, Kramersch (1993) developed the concept of third place based on the definition of culture "as membership in a national community with a common history, a common standard language and common imaginings" (cited in Kramersch 2009b: 224). A few years later, however, Kramersch rejected the notion of culture in terms of national entities, favouring a discourse-oriented approach whereby culture is constructed and upheld by the various discourses that give meaning to individuals' lives (Kramersch 2011: 356). Culture in this sense equates the meaning that members of a speech community attribute to shared discursive practices in certain contexts and over the historical life of the group that both enable but also limit the subjectively constructed range of possible meanings.³³

³¹ The terms "third place" and "third space" have been used alternatively.

³² "Symbolic" has two meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the representation of objective realities (objects and people, i.e. symbolic reality, symbolic Self, symbolic power) and on the other hand, symbolic forms construct subjective realities in terms of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, emotions and values (Kramersch 2009a: 7).

³³ Kramersch (2011) refers to Pennycook (1994) in terms of the concept of discourse: "Discourse is shared ways of organizing meaning that are often, though not exclusively, realized through language. Discourses are about the creation and limitation of possibilities, they are systems of power/knowledge (*pouvoir/savoir*) within which we take up subject positions" (Pennycook 1994: 128, cited in Kramersch 2011: 356).

The term "culture" does not refer to identifiable communities of practice but is rather regarded as a "mental toolkit of subjective metaphors, affectivities, historical memories, entextualizations and transcontextualizations of experience" (Kramersch 2011: 354) by means of which subjects make meaning of the world around them and share that meaning with others, in real-life as well as in cyberspace. Hence, culture is created and shaped by language and represents a site of struggle for the recognition as well as the legitimation of meaning. Morals, beliefs and cultural values constitute and in turn are constituted by the symbolic system used to express them (Kramersch 2009b: 107). By defining culture as discourse and the production and sharing of meaning, intercultural competence does not merely relate to attitude (tolerance, empathy, willingness to relativise one's own cultural frame), knowledge or understanding of oneself and the Other. The concept of intercultural competence also embraces multiple, changing and conflicting discourse worlds in which the circulation of values and identities across cultures, the inversions, and even inventions of meaning, are often hidden behind the common illusion of effective communication (Kramersch *et al.* 2008: 15).

In *The Multilingual Subject*, Kramersch (2009a: 247–248) assumes the relativity of self and Other in that they are intrinsically pluralistic, manifold and variable and can even be in conflict with themselves and one another. In order to be able to develop a sense of self, learners need to be able to recognise and accept themselves as individual subjects with emotions, feelings, memories and desires. Subjectivity is thus the conscious and unconscious sense of self as a product of socialisation in a cultural community and is subject to change in the framework of interaction with the environment: "We only learn who we are through the mirror of others, and, in turn, we only understand others by understanding ourselves as Other" (Kramersch 2009a: 18). Therefore, the self is a dynamic construct which emerges from perceptions, thoughts, attitudes and behaviour. These conceptions of self in turn have an impact on behaviour, self-esteem, motivation, perception of emotions and the relationship to others (Kramersch 2009a: 70). In other words, L2 learners cannot understand the Other if they do not understand the historical and subjective experiences which have made them who they are, and in turn learn who they are through encounters with the Other (Kramersch 2013: 60). Kramersch (2009a: 16–19) bases the concepts of third place and symbolic competence on Bakhtin's (1981) existentialist philosophy of relativity of self and Other (see chapter 2) and its principle of dualism (also see Clifford 1986, Bourdieu 1977a/b in chapter 1). Similar to Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "transgression" (Kramersch 2013: 62), "third culture" designates an oppositional

way of being and is located in language itself in terms of "textual identity, intercultural stance or symbolic competence" (Kramersch 2009a: 248). In this context, Kramersch (1993) introduces the metaphor of developing third spaces or third places (see Fig. 4) which relates to Fantini's (1995) Worldviews Convergence model.

When it comes to the development of intercultural competence and L2 acquisition, learners do not cast off their native cultural frames, attitudes, behaviours, acquired knowledge, skills and language. They do not simply adopt the concepts of the target language and culture. Rather, by learning another language, learners perceive the world through metaphors, idioms and grammatical patterns used by others but filtered through the subjectivity of their L1. Over time, L2 learners develop an intercultural perspective, which enables them to understand both their L1 and C1 contexts (first place) and the L2 and C2 contexts (second place). However, learners do not take on a new identity, instead a third place emerges which "grows in the interstices between the cultures the learners grew up with and the new cultures he or she is being introduced to" (Kramersch 1993: 236). Based on the knowledge acquired in the L1/L2 and C1/C2 context, learners thus take on an intercultural perspective, the so-called "third place". In other words a subjective blending of spaces within and between cultures occurs. The term "third culture" therefore refers to an identity which is a coalescence of the native and the target culture. Learners blend their understandings of the L2 constructs with their internalised L1 knowledge on cognitive, behavioural and emotional levels in the hybrid third spaces between language and culture frames (Witte 2014: 11).

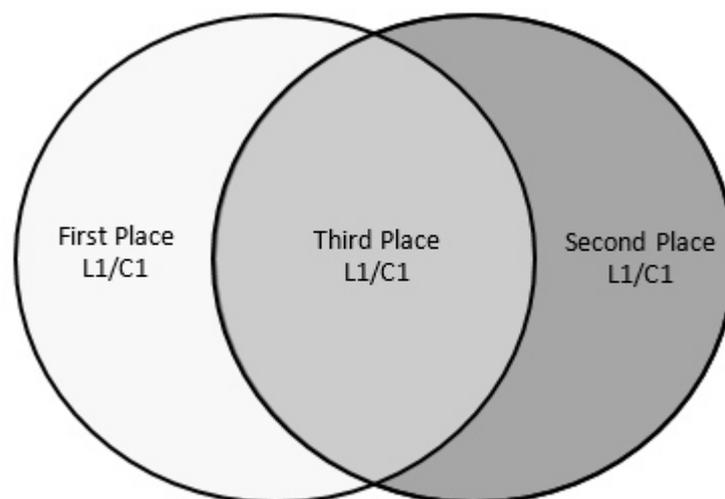


Fig. 4 Concept of Third Place (Kramersch 1998)

At the very core of intercultural competence lies this ability to adopt a third place beyond the dualities of L1/L2 and C1/C2 respectively (Kramsch 2011: 355), i.e. to take an insider's as well as an outsider's view on both the first and second cultures. Hence, the concept of third space and third culture does not eliminate dichotomies between native speaker/non-native speaker, L1/L2, C1/C2, or self versus Other, but instead focuses on their relations and heteroglossia. It constitutes a multiple and manifold symbolic place which is permeable and subject to change (Kramsch 2009c: 238). In terms of the creation of third place, learners do not just blend the existing elements of cultures and languages but also the blends of blends (or "idealized representations" Kramsch 2009a: 75). These third places are then used as a basis for the construction and negotiation of meaning, discourses and norms. Intercultural competence therefore encompasses a systematic reflexive component that includes subjective and aesthetic as well as historical and ideological dimensions (Kramsch 2011: 355). The metaphor of third culture captures the hybridity, conflicts and ambivalence of culture coalescence but still operates with stable definitions of cultural configuration. Kramsch (2009a: 220) regards the concept of third culture or third place as too static between two dominant cultures because it ignores the relational state of mind operating between languages. Hence, Kramsch (2009a) introduces the concept of symbolic competence, which includes a practical dimension and captures "the symbolic value of symbolic forms and the different cultural memories evoked by different symbolic systems" (Kramsch 2009a: 201). Unfortunately, it is not quite clear why the designations "third place", "third space" and "third culture" are used alternatively when they essentially refer to the same conceptualisation. Furthermore, as Witte (2014: 245) points out, the dimensions of symbolic mediation, dynamism, blending, hybridity and subjectivity could also be integrated into the metaphors of space and place instead of introducing the term symbolic competence. These spatial metaphors would enhance the constant blending of linguistic and sociocultural frames even more.

Symbolic competence looks "both *at* and *through* language" (Kramsch 2009a: 201; *italics* in original) and extends the moral and political imperative of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (see chapter 3.3) and Zarate's (2003) critical reflection on symbolic power in her concept of symbolic exchange of values.³⁴ Both Byram

³⁴ Zarate (2003) supposes an area of symbolic power between communicative and intercultural competence which allocates different symbolic value to languages, cultures and social identities of their speakers. While a particular language and culture might have a major status in one place, it might have a minor one somewhere

and Zarate partly represent a structuralist view of language as a sociological phenomenon and cultural given. However, this structuralist view neglects the discourse dimension, which for Kramersch (2009b: 116) is constitutive of the identity-oriented values that intercultural competence is based on. Kramersch (2009b) wants to locate morals, politics and symbolic power in native and L2 discourse itself.

On the one hand, the term "symbolic competence" refers to the process of positioning the self inside as well as outside the discourse of others. On the other hand, it refers to the ability to recognise the historical context of utterances and their intertextualities, and place them in their own historical and subjective contexts. Furthermore, it refers to the capacity to resignify, reframe, re- and transcontextualize subjective contexts and to play with the tension between text and context (Kramersch 2011: 359). Symbolic competence therefore goes beyond critical thinking and semiotic competence while also engaging "in the symbolic power game of challenging established meanings and redefining the real" (Kramersch 2011: 359). Discourse in terms of symbolic competence contains three dimensions – symbolic representation, symbolic action and symbolic power:

Discourse as symbolic representation focuses on what words say and what they reveal about the mind [...]. Discourse as symbolic action focuses on what words do and what they reveal about human intentions [...] discourse as symbolic power focuses on what words index and what they reveal about social identities, individual and collective memories, emotions and aspirations. (Kramersch 2011: 357)

Symbolic representation is defined as a referential function of language in analysing the making and organising of meaning through signs and symbols. Symbolic action refers to the pragmatic or interpersonal function of language (Kramersch 2011: 364-365). Symbolic power on the other hand relates to the power to change social reality through the use of multiple symbolic systems (Kramersch 2009a: 200). In this sense, symbolic competence comprises the following abilities:

else, which prevents mutual recognition despite an understanding of each other's words (Zarate: 2003: 104, cited in Kramersch 2009b: 116).

1. Ability to understand the symbolic value and meaning of symbolic forms and the different cultural memories evoked by different symbolic systems.
2. Ability to draw on the semiotic diversity afforded by multiple languages, to reframe ways of perceiving something familiar and as a consequence construct new realities, and to find a suitable subject position between languages.
3. Ability to look both *at* and *through* language and to understand the challenges to the autonomy and integrity of the subject (Kramersch 2009a: 201, *italics* in original).

Compared to primary socialisation, signs in L2 acquisition are dislocated from their natural context of occurrence. Hence, non-native speakers are often not aware of the hidden layer of imagined meanings, make different associations and construct different realities, especially at the beginning of the L2 acquisition process. When L2 learners adhere to the grammatical, lexical and social conventions of the symbolic system of the L2, they are given the symbolic power to be accepted by the speech community (Kramersch 2009a: 5–13). Consequently, interculturally competent subjects are regarded as symbolic selves which embody symbolic systems like language, as well as systems of thought and their symbolic power. As such, interculturally competent interlocutors are aware of symbolic power dynamics, subject positions, historicities and ideologies.

Hence, as already mentioned, Kramersch (1993) argues for intercultural speakers as a learning objective in L2 education, as L2 learners use their individual language system with different underlying objectives and purposes. Individual third cultures develop in spaces in which the learners can "express their own meanings without being hostage to the meaning of either their own or the target speech community" (Kramersch 1993: 13–14). Therefore, L2 learners need to be made aware of different semantics and norms, and should be encouraged to adopt a third perspective by means of meta-discussions on semantics, which discard the notions of self and Other in terms of own and foreign (Kramersch 1993: 223, 242–243). This differentiation between the own and the target community, however, implies separate entities despite the claim of transcending these boundaries. In this sense, culture is taught as an interpersonal process which again suggests conceptual intersections with the concepts of interpersonal or social competence.

As for didactics, the symbolic dimension of intercultural competence requires a discourse-based, historically grounded pedagogical approach in which the different life-contexts are considered. Alternatively, the lack of awareness of one's own discursive practices when learning about a foreign culture can lead to a limited understanding of the Other and ultimately of the self. Unquestioned meanings of C1 need to be challenged and learners need to be encouraged to construct new personal meanings with meanings of the target culture (Kramsch 2009c: 238–239; Kramsch 2013: 69). Language learners should be made aware of social and historical resonances in their L1 and should question the social categorisation of experience through L2 vocabulary and grammar. In this sense, comparisons between these L1 and L2 conceptualisations should be encouraged. Additionally, focus is set on the deconstruction of signs and their subversive reconstruction by means of various methods such as communicative activities, memorisation (of vocabulary, prose), translation and transcription, observation and reflection tasks in L1, multiple modes of meaning making and multiple modalities of expression (Kramsch 2009c: 238–239). Hence, reflection and meta-language are essential in order to acquire symbolic competence. However, the suggestions for implementation in the classroom remain quite vague and do not provide concrete measures. Moreover, it is questionable as to whether the necessary language skills required to conduct a meta-discussion are acquired in the L2 context.

3.3 Byram's (1997, 2009) Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Based on his experiences in the European context, Byram (1997) advocates for intercultural communicative competence, which is defined as "the ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries" (Byram 1997: 7). Byram has added the term communicative and focuses on interactions with interlocutors from the L2/C2 community. The model draws on the theory of communicative competence by Hymes (1972) (see chapters 1 and 2), the social identity theory by Tajfel (1978) (see chapter 2) and Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social and cultural capital (see chapter 1).

Byram's (2009) initial discourse on the underlying concepts of culture, competence and model provides a good introduction to the understanding of his model. The term "culture" in his model refers to a composite of three dimensions – a material, a social and a subjective one. While material culture consists of physical artefacts (goods, foods, tools,

art etc.), social culture is related to social institutions of a group (language, rules of social conduct, laws, religion etc.) and subjective culture is related to beliefs, norms, collective memories, values and attitudes which group members commonly use as a frame of reference in relating to the world. These cultural groups are internally heterogeneous, and individual group members appropriate a subset of this total set of cultural resources available to them in personalised ways. In this sense, groups of any size (nations, ethnic groups, neighbourhoods, tennis clubs, families, etc.) within a society may have their own distinctive cultures. Interlocutors belong to and identify with various cultural communities at the same time, hence cultural boundaries are fuzzy and affiliations fluid and dynamic, depending on the social context. Due to this context dependency, individuals use their personalised cultural affiliations and flexibly construct their own meanings of the world around them. These subjective constructions of meaning have a (limiting) impact on the perceptions of oneself and others. Hence, self- and external perception in terms of ascribed identities may differ and lead to discrepancies and misunderstandings which may cause friction (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 14–15).

However, despite the efforts to move away from the idea of culture as a homogeneous construct, the concept of culture which forms the basis of this model still implies homogeneity to some extent. The model refers to national memories in terms of collective memory which implicitly form boundaries. It also assumes boundaries between cultures, between self and Other, native and foreign, which do not exist as such (Kramsch 1998: 43). Hence, there is an underlying assumption of cultures as entities despite the acknowledgement of the concept's hybridity and permeable boundaries. These cultural boundaries may relate to different kinds of boundaries such as organisational boundaries (i.e. educational institutes, football clubs), professional boundaries (i.e. engineers, teachers) or regional ones.

An intercultural encounter takes place when people who are perceived to have any kind of different cultural affiliations interact with each other, either face-to-face or virtually. For effective interaction in these situations, intercultural competence is required. Competence refers to the capacity to respond successfully to situations that present tasks, difficulties or challenges for the individual. Since contexts may vary, competence is always open to enrichment and further learning through acting in response to a variation of variables (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 16). Competence in this sense is not merely considered to be applied in a specific social context but constitutes a combination of attitudes,

knowledge and understanding. The concept of model is used both descriptively and prescriptively. On the one hand, the abilities of an intercultural speaker are enlisted and described. However, there is prescriptive emphasis implied in teaching and learning objectives, and in the form of Kantian ethics in terms of the Categorical Imperative.³⁵

The comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is designed for the education context with an emphasis on teaching purposes.³⁶ In contrast to Hymes (1972), Byram (1997, 2009) also moves away from the idea of a native speaker as an implicit yardstick and standard for intercultural competence achievement. The objective of L2 education should be an "intercultural speaker", a term which was coined by Byram and Zarate for a working paper on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for the Council of Europe (2001), but which was not used in the end (Byram 2009: 321). The fact that someone is a native speaker does not make that person interculturally competent, as a person is not an authority on all the cultures within a country. Intercultural communicative competence, by contrast, requires a change of perspective on the self and Other, which comprises a cognitive as well as an affective change. In terms of language skills, language learners are not regarded as imitators of native speakers but rather as social actors who engage with other social actors in interactions which differ from interactions between native speakers (Byram 1997: 21). L2 learners would have to be "linguistically schizophrenic" (Byram 1997: 11) to abandon their own language systems and blend into the L2 system in a way to be accepted by native speakers as native (Byram 1997: 7–11). The concept of intercultural speaker is positioned precisely between the foreign and the native language and culture (Byram 1997: 115) and constitutes a hybrid construct. The intercultural speaker is a mediator of both languages and cultures, and develops a subjective space in between L1/L2 and C1/C2. Hence, the conception of an intercultural speaker is closely related to the concept of third space by Kramsch (1993), elaborated earlier on in this chapter, and the concept of *savoir être* in Byram's model (see Fig. 5).

³⁵ The Categorical Imperative says that humans should only act to that maxim whereby they can simultaneously want it to become a universal law. They should further act in a way that they treat humanity, whether in their own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end. Therefore, individual rational beings must act as if they were through their maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends (Kant 1993: 30).

³⁶ The Model of ICC was developed by Byram (1997) after his participation in a working group set up to create a working paper, which finally became the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* of the Council of Europe (2001) and has since been revised in Byram (2009).

In his model, Byram (2009) stresses that language and culture are intertwined in that language is regarded a central element of social interaction which carries cultural meanings and underlying values. Communicative competence and language competence therefore constitute integral, complementary parts of intercultural communicative competence, which is closely related to personal self-development. Additionally, in order to communicate effectively with each other in intercultural encounters, a *lingua franca* is needed. Hence, language competence and intercultural competence need to be considered in combination with each other in the education context. A more detailed explanation on how language and intercultural competence are interrelated is unfortunately lacking. As Kramsch (2009d: 117–118) points out, it is not quite clear how using a foreign grammar and vocabulary leads to a change in one's identity, if a structuralist view of language is adhered to. Change could only occur indirectly through participation in various social networks with different moral values.

Another reason for abandoning the ideal of a native speaker is that intercultural learning is considered a life-long process that is never complete. Thus, an ideal intercultural person does not exist as such. It is not possible to acquire all the necessary knowledge needed to interact with interlocutors of different cultural affiliations, as these individuals and their cultural identities are subject to changes and development. Furthermore, in postmodern societies no person belongs to only one culture, but is part of many different cultural groups, even if only in terms of different interest groups or professional groups. Individuals move from one cultural group to another with differing values and beliefs, and develop and change their identities and views in these societies on a constant basis.

The multi-dimensional Model of ICC (Byram 2009) (see Fig. 5) is divided into three main intertwined parts. Competences related to language are listed at the top of the model – linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. Byram (2009) had originally attempted to include non-verbal communication in his model but refrained from doing so as he recognised that many teachers would not see the need or feel qualified to teach it (Byram 2009: 322). However, he recognises the importance of nonverbal cues in intercultural contexts, something that has not been picked up on by many other researchers in the field.³⁷ Below the language competences, intercultural

³⁷ Mehrabian (1972), for example, claims that in case of inconsistencies between verbally and posturally communicated attitudes, the non-verbal component is more decisive in determining the total attitude

competence constitutes the central part comprising five sub-competences, the so-called *savoirs*³⁸ which refer to a set of cognitive (knowledge and understanding), behavioural/affective (attitudes) and reflective (critical awareness) components that enable individuals to:

- understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself;³⁹
- respond appropriately,⁴⁰ effectively⁴¹ and respectfully in interaction with such people;
- establish positive and constructive relationships with such people;
- understand one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural differences (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 16–17).

In this sense, Byram's concept of intercultural communicative competence comprises a moral (*savoir être*) and political (*savoir s'engager*) dimension as well as communicative competences (Kramsch 2009d: 117) and places a strong emphasis on values and critical cultural awareness.

Locations of learning, i.e. where and how intercultural communicative competence can be acquired, are listed at the bottom of the figure: in the classroom (teacher and learner interaction), in fieldwork ((teacher and) learner interaction) or independently (learner interaction).

(Mehrabian 1972: 108). In specific contexts, Mehrabian (1972) claims that communication is composed of 55% body language, 38% intonation and only 7% verbal communication.

³⁸ The French word *savoir* can relate to both knowledge (*le savoir*) and to know/understand (*savoir*).

³⁹ Barrett *et al.* (2014: 17) define the term "respect" as having regard for, appreciating and valuing the other.

⁴⁰ According to Barrett *et al.* (2014: 17), the term "appropriate" means that all participants in a situation are satisfied and the interaction occurs within expected cultural norms.

⁴¹ According to Barrett *et al.* (2014: 17), "effective" means that all interlocutors involved are able to achieve their objectives in the interaction at least in part.

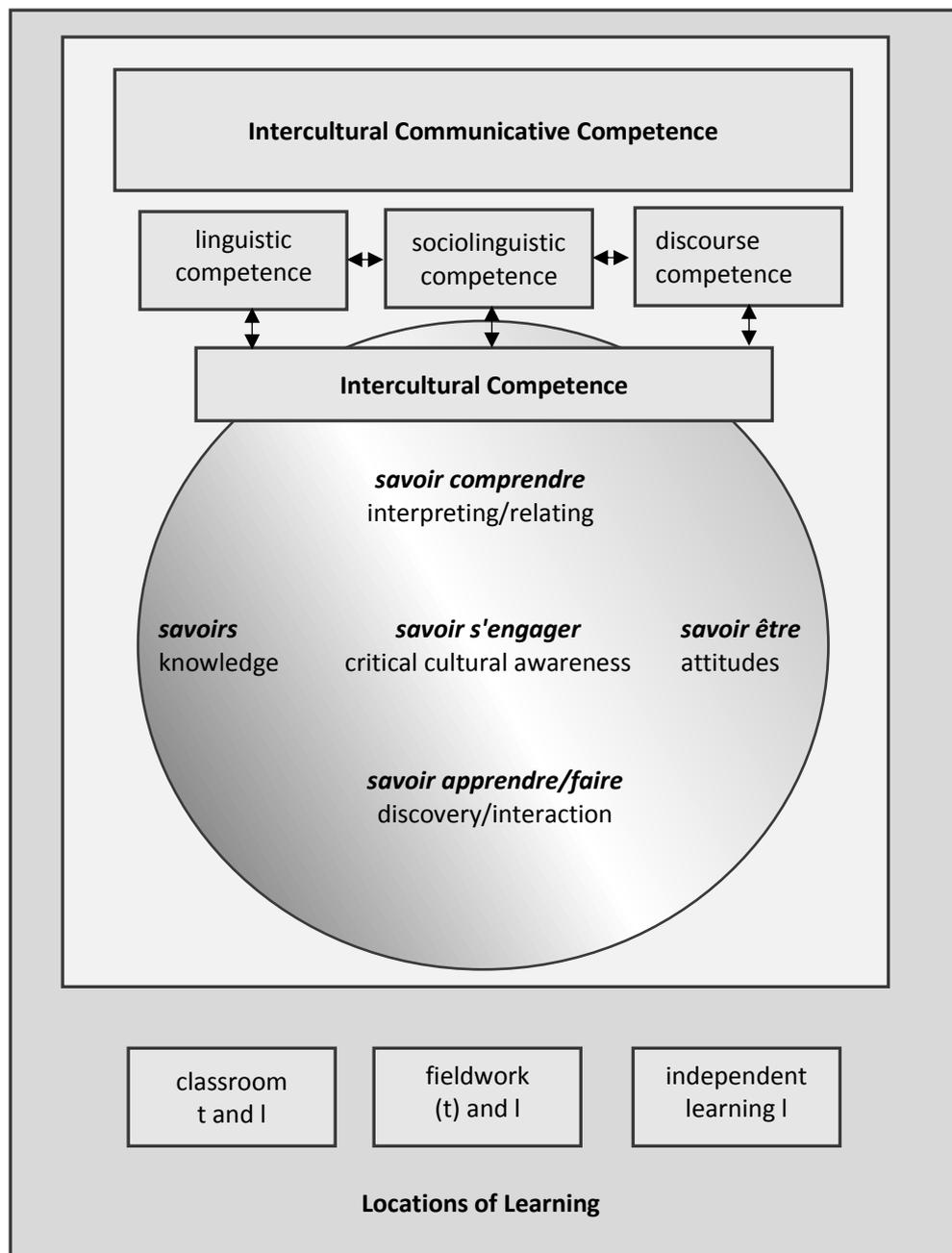


Fig. 5 Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Byram 2009: 323)

Knowledge (and understanding) / *savoir*: refers to the "knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country" (Byram 2002: 12). Knowledge relates to the rules of interaction and is defined as declarative knowledge. However, it also refers to procedural knowledge in terms of knowledge of the processes of social groups and identities in societal and individual interaction (i.e. how other people are likely to perceive someone and knowledge about other people) (Byram *et al.* 2002: 12). *Savoir* comprises the following indicative components for successful intercultural interaction:

- Understanding the internal diversity and heterogeneity of cultural groups,
- understanding one's own and others' assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations of any kind,
- understanding the impact of one's language and cultural affiliations on approaching the world and others,
- communicative awareness in terms of shared ideas being expressed in unique ways in other people's languages,
- communicative awareness in terms of people of other cultural affiliations following different verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions,
- knowledge of the beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products used by people with particular cultural orientations,
- and understanding of processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction and the socially constructed nature of knowledge (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 19–20).

Attitudes / *savoir être*: refers to the curiosity, openness and "readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (Byram 1997: 57). Hence, it is personality related and refers to the willingness and ability to relativise one's own values, beliefs and behaviours and change perspective (decentre) (Byram *et al.* 2002: 12). *Savoir être* comprises the following indicative components for successful intercultural interaction:

- Appreciation of cultural diversity and pluralism,
- respect for different meanings, beliefs and behaviours of people with different cultural affiliations,
- openness, curiosity and willingness to learn from those with different cultural affiliations,
- empathy for people with different cultural affiliations,
- willingness to question what is regarded as "normal" and taken for granted in terms of one's own meanings and beliefs,
- tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty,
- and willingness to engage and cooperate with individuals with different cultural affiliations and change perspectives (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 19–20).

Skills of interpreting and relating / *savoir comprendre*: refers to "the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own" (Byram *et al.* 2002: 13). *Savoir comprendre* comprises the following indicative components for successful intercultural interaction:

- Skills to decentre from one's own perspective and take others' perspectives into consideration (multi-perspectivity),
- skills to interpret other cultural practices, beliefs and values and relating them to one's own,
- skills to understand and respond to other people's thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings (empathy),
- skills to critically evaluate one's own and other people's cultural beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products,
- skills to act as a mediator in intercultural exchanges, including translating, interpreting and explaining,
- and plurilingual skills to meet the communicative demands of an intercultural encounter (intercomprehension) (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 20).

Behavioural skills of discovery and interaction / *savoir apprendre/faire*: refers to the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Byram *et al.* 2002: 12). *Savoir apprendre/faire* comprises the following indicative components for successful intercultural interaction:

- Skills to discover information about other cultural affiliations and perspectives,
- ability to change and adapt one's way of thinking according to the situation or context (cognitive flexibility),
- skills to adapt one's verbal and non-verbal behaviour to new cultural environments,
- linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills, including skills in managing breakdowns in communication (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 20).

Savoir apprendre/faire is therefore closely related to the development of the language competences at the top of the model (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences).

At the centre of intercultural competence is the fifth *savoir* which is fundamental for all *savoirs* and has a pedagogical impact. It can be compared to the purposes of *politische Bildung* in the (West) German educational system, namely the critical reflection of values, beliefs and behaviours of one's society, and, in the context of intercultural education, the society of other peoples.

Critical Cultural Awareness / *savoir s'engager*: refers to the "ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram 2009: 323).

Although dependencies and relations between the sub-competences are not mentioned within the model (2009), these *savoirs* are intertwined and cannot strictly be distinguished from each other, as becomes clear in the overlapping meaning of the listed components.⁴² Some of these skills are, for example, mentioned in the *savoir comprendre* section but can equally be ascribed to *savoir apprendre/faire*.⁴³ Furthermore, it is not quite clear what theoretical claims these *savoirs* are based on and there is no empirical evidence for them yet. In regard to their operationalisation, the *savoirs* need to be narrowed down for different target groups and L2 contexts.

A concept involved in all these *savoirs* is the concept of identity (see chapter 1). According to Byram (2009), every person has a variety of identities, as already pointed out above. Intercultural competence refers to the ability and skills to discover, understand and negotiate these identities within and across cultures (Byram 2009: 330). This creation of identity is based on the contrast of self and Other and is under constant development, which picks up on the idea of third space suggested by Kramersch (1993). In this sense, the acquisition of intercultural competence does not involve abandoning existing cultural affiliations and cultural identities and does not require the adoption of differential cultural practices, beliefs or values. Intercultural communicative competence moreover refers to the ability to understand people as unique complex human beings with multiple identities in order to interact successfully and appropriately with them. Attitudes such as openness and tolerance form the basis of intercultural competence but action is crucial:

⁴² Unlike in the version of 1997, where interrelations were indicated with arrows.

⁴³ Examples are: skills to act as a mediator in intercultural exchanges, including translating, interpreting and explaining or plurilingual skills to meet the communicative demands of an intercultural encounter.

By "equipping learners with the means of accessing and analysing any cultural practices and meanings they encounter" (Byram 1997: 19), they can act as cultural mediators.

Byram's model is not regarded as exhaustive. Byram (2009) himself acknowledges that only some characteristics are included while others, for example personality types, are omitted. Hence, the model represents a simplification of the complexity of intercultural communicative competence and is limited in its accuracy as a basis to determine the competences of a person and predict his or her success in intercultural interactions (Byram 2009: 324–326). There are more factors which contribute to making a person interculturally competent, for example personality and attitudes. In this context, the question again arises as to which characteristics can be attributed to personality and which ones to intercultural competence. Additionally, whether a person acts in an interculturally competent way is also context specific and situation-bound. A person might be very tolerant and open in one specific context but not in another, as different cultural and social groups and situations evoke different feelings and consequently different behavioural reactions. Hence, many different factors (context, personality, situation, motivation and so on) coalesce and do not allow for generalisations or guidelines for unique situations.

The pedagogical aspect of ICC is evident in the defined desirable outcomes of intercultural education in terms of learners who are aware of and able to deal with the relationships between themselves and their mutually underlying cultural values, constructions of meaning, beliefs and actions, and their interlocutor's systems of meaning (Byram 1997: 12). In order to facilitate the learning process, learners should be encouraged to seek opportunities to engage and cooperate with people of different cultural affiliations and perspectives in order to challenge and become aware of their own worldview (Byram 1997: 23, Barrett *et al.* 2014: 21).

However, despite the proclaimed emphasis on the pedagogical purposes of the model, it is still rather theoretical and the objectives are quite idealistic. First, the discussion on how to implement the model in the classroom is quite limited. There are no stages or levels of ICC for the various components and it remains unclear as to how these skills and attitudes should be developed, assessed and evaluated. Hence, despite its objective of serving as a pedagogical model, it does not provide any systematic guidance on assessment and measuring success (Witte 2014: 265). While knowledge is rather easy to

assess, attitudes and affective capacities are not. In this context, the question remains as to how the affective dimension can be developed in the classroom since it is difficult to rationally and cognitively control it. Furthermore, the process of decentering does not happen automatically but requires enriching teaching methods. Meta-level discussions are suggested in order to make values more approachable in terms of revealing deeply embedded value judgments which are often unconscious and might cause rejection (Byram *et al.* 2002: 17–18). Yet, these measurements do not necessarily guarantee a change of perspective. Furthermore, the task of teaching is not to change learners' values but to enable awareness, unless such values are contrary to respect for human dignity and equality as a democratic basis for social interaction. Regarding assessment the Model of ICC is therefore of limited use to educators and teachers, but it can serve as an incentive for reflection on differentiation and for personal development.

3.4 Deardorff's (2004, 2011) Models of Intercultural Competence

Based on a grounded-theory approach, Deardorff (2004) has employed the Delphi-technique to identify key components of intercultural competence and the best ways to assess the construct in the higher education context.⁴⁴ In the case of Deardorff's study, three rounds of the Delphi-method were implemented. First, a questionnaire was electronically distributed to higher education administrators who were engaged in internationalisation strategies in the US. The administrators were asked to rate knowledge, affective and behavioural traits of intercultural competence taken from literature reviews, and add components regarding the definition and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalisation at their

⁴⁴ The Delphi-technique by Dalkey and Helmer (1963) constitutes a data-collection technique which is based on the rationale that "two heads are better than one, or [...] n heads are better than one" (Dalkey 1972: 15, cited in Hsu and Sandford 2007: 1). It has been implemented in a range of fields such as business, education and the military, and aims at achieving consensus on a specific issue among the panel of experts. The method consists of multiple iterations, typically three (Hsu & Sandford 2007: 2), but the number of iterations depends on the degree of consensus sought after by the researchers. The process is anonymous and facilitated by electronic media usage. It further minimises group dynamics like group pressure, manipulation and conformity, as there are no group discussions. Rather, data is gathered from the Delphi-participants, who are then encouraged to reassess the outcomes of the previous round based on the feedback and opinion of the other panel members. Round one usually consists of an open-ended questionnaire for exploration of the subject. The gathered information is then coded and categorised, and converted into closed-ended questions for the second round. Often, a structured questionnaire based on a literature review is used. In round two, the panelists are asked to review the items from the first round and rate them (Likert-type scale) in order to establish preliminary priorities among the items and identify areas of agreement and disagreement (Ludwig 1994: 54–55, cited in Hsu & Sandford 2007: 3). In round three, the panelists are required to revise their judgments and give feedback on their individual choices, based on a list of remaining items and items achieving consensus. The panelists are provided a final opportunity to revise their judgments. The sample size is variable but usually ranges between fifteen and twenty respondents (Hsu & Sandford 2007: 1–4).

institutions. The results were collected, coded and analysed for round one of the Delphi-method. A panel of leading experts with different disciplinary backgrounds was invited to determine and agree upon essential components of intercultural competence.⁴⁵ In round two, the experts rated the items gathered from round one. In round three the participants could reassess their judgments based on a list of remaining items and items achieving consensus, and could give feedback on whether they definitely accepted or rejected the items that had emerged from round two (Deardorff 2004: 86–110, 167–168).

The Delphi-method, however, is a controversial tool, which has faced a lot of criticism that Deardorff herself (2004: 110–112) also points out in her dissertation project. The main criticism is that the Delphi-technique still reflects individual's opinions but forces consensus on the topic, which might not exist as such, for example in terms of terminology and definitions. It is unclear what concepts of culture or competence the findings are based on, since the terms are never clearly defined and the perceptions may vary between the participants of the study.⁴⁶ It could therefore be the case that a consensus has been reached based on very different assumptions and interpretations of the concepts. Additionally, experts might reach a consensus based on a lack of further definitions and unclear terminology of components such as flexibility, empathy or adaptability. These terms might comprise very different connotations for the individual experts and also within their academic disciplines. This probable difference in interpretation was ignored and the terms were used unreflectedly in the models as the Delphi-technique did not allow for a discussion and clarification of these underlying concepts. Hence, this consensus might also have been reached based on conflicting, underlying different notions of these terms.

The sample group who completed all three phases of the Delphi study and provided information for the model consisted of twenty experts with doctoral degrees in different disciplines. The majority of them had a background in communication studies, although there were several who had backgrounds in anthropology, education, psychology, business, international relations and political science (Deardorff 2004: 36, 167–168). Among these experts were Janet Bennett, Michael Byram, Michael Paige and Brian

⁴⁵ These experts were chosen based on practitioner and expert recommendations, membership of the International Academy of Intercultural Research, attainment of a PhD degree or equivalent, experience in intercultural research and practice, and publications (Deardorff 2006b: 244–246).

⁴⁶ Deardorff (2004) does provide an overview of the concept of competences, but does not state her underlying concept for the purpose of her study.

Spitzberg. This panel group composition limits a general validity of the study, especially since neither the experts nor the higher institution administrators constitute a random sample group. The experts mainly come from the US (apart from one British and one Canadian representative), which could lead to a distinctive US-bias in responses and hence a US-centric model of intercultural competence. There is no proof that non-Western literature and experts would agree on the importance of the same key elements. Hence, the study results in a rather narrow perspective, which does not allow for a transfer to a larger population.

The intercultural experts primarily focus on communication and behaviour in intercultural contexts. The list of items ranges from rather general attitudes and skills such as "cross-cultural empathy" or "skills to listen and observe" to more culture-specific items such as "understanding one's own culture" or "culture-specific knowledge" which are still expressed in general terms and can therefore be applied to any culture. Altogether, the panel of experts finally agreed on 22 items, among which only one item received a 100% acceptance rate – "understanding of others' worldview" (see Tab. 2).

Specific Components of Intercultural Competence		
Accordance	Disagreement	Item
20	0	Understanding others' worldviews
19	1	Cultural self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment
19	1	Adaptability – adjustment to new cultural environment
19	1	Skills to listen and observe
19	1	General openness toward intercultural learning and to people from other cultures
19	1	Ability to adapt to varying intercultural communication and learning styles
18	2	Flexibility
18	2	Skills to analyse, interpret and relate
18	2	Tolerating and engaging ambiguity
18	2	Deep knowledge and understanding of culture (one's own and others')
18	2	Respect for other cultures
17	3	Cross-cultural empathy
17	3	Understanding the value of cultural diversity
17	3	Understanding of role and impact of culture and of situational, social, and historical contexts involved
17	3	Cognitive flexibility – ability to switch frames from etic to emic and back again
17	2 ⁴⁷	Sociolinguistic competence (awareness of relation between language and meaning in societal context)
17	3	Mindfulness
16	4	Withholding judgment
16	4	Curiosity and discovery
16	4	Learning through interaction
16	4	Ethnorelative view
16	4	Culture-specific knowledge/understanding of host culture's traditions

Tab. 2 Items Agreed on (80%-100%) by Experts (Deardorff 2004: 187)

⁴⁷ In the original file it says "2" which I presume to be "3".

These key elements of intercultural competence were then categorised in the following way:

Attitudes form an important basis for the development of knowledge and skills required for intercultural competence. Based on the study, several key attitudes emerged – respect, openness, curiosity and discovery. Openness, curiosity and discovery imply a willingness to move beyond one's comfort zone and allow for a change of perspectives. Respect towards others relates to the appreciation of members of other cultural communities. These attitudes form the basis for the further development of knowledge and skills, as indicated in the process model of intercultural competence (Fig. 6 & Fig. 7) below.

Knowledge in the intercultural competence context relates to cultural self-awareness in understanding how one's own culture has had an impact on one's identity and worldview. This understanding is the point of departure for the understanding of the Other. The category of knowledge further comprises culture-specific knowledge, understanding of other worldviews and sociolinguistic awareness. The only item agreed upon by all experts, the understanding of others' worldviews, belongs to this category.

The **skills** mentioned by the experts complement the acquisition and processing of knowledge of one's own and other cultures. They are not culture-specific skills but relate to general skills for interaction such as attentive listening and observing, analysing, evaluating, interpreting and relating of specific information. In this context, the differing views on the importance of L2 skills need to be pointed out, as L2 skills have not been regarded as essential by all of the involved experts despite a focus on communication skills. Since the experts of the Delphi-study did not agree on the role of language in the intercultural competence development, it is estimated that language skills alone do not account for interculturally competent behaviour and communication. Yet on the other hand, "understanding others' worldviews" is the only competence 100% agreed on. Hence, the question arises as to how worldviews are defined and how they could be communicated and understood without language skills, as a shared language is required to exchange ideas on abstract concepts and attitudes.

The aforementioned attitudes, knowledge and skills ideally lead to **internal outcomes** in terms of adaptability, flexibility, empathy and an ethno-relative perspective. They cannot be observed and measured in themselves but contribute to the following desired external outcomes. **External outcomes** refer to observable behaviour and communication patterns, which lead to effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in intercultural situations. The overall external outcomes of intercultural competence are defined as "the *effective* and *appropriate* behavior and communication in intercultural situations, which again can be further detailed in terms of *appropriate* behavior in specific contexts" (Deardorff 2004: 193; 2009: 479, *cursive* in original). While effectiveness is determined by the individual, appropriateness is assessed by the other people involved in the interaction. This definition and differentiation of appropriateness and effectiveness is very similar to the aforementioned concepts of intercultural (communicative) competence (Byram 1997, Fantini 1995, Kramsch 1998).

The focus of responses on effective and appropriate communication could lie in the fact that the majority of researchers (40%) involved in the Delphi-study had a background in communication studies. Experts working in the business, religious or health care sector might have a rather different perspective on the concept of intercultural competence, as nurses, missionaries or businessmen need different competences to pursue their subjective goals in an intercultural context. It is therefore questionable whether intercultural competence more so constitutes overall social competence applied in different contexts to achieve individual aims.

Based on her findings, Deardorff (2004) designed her Pyramid Model (Fig. 6) and her Process Model (Fig. 7) to develop and assess intercultural competence in the higher education sector.

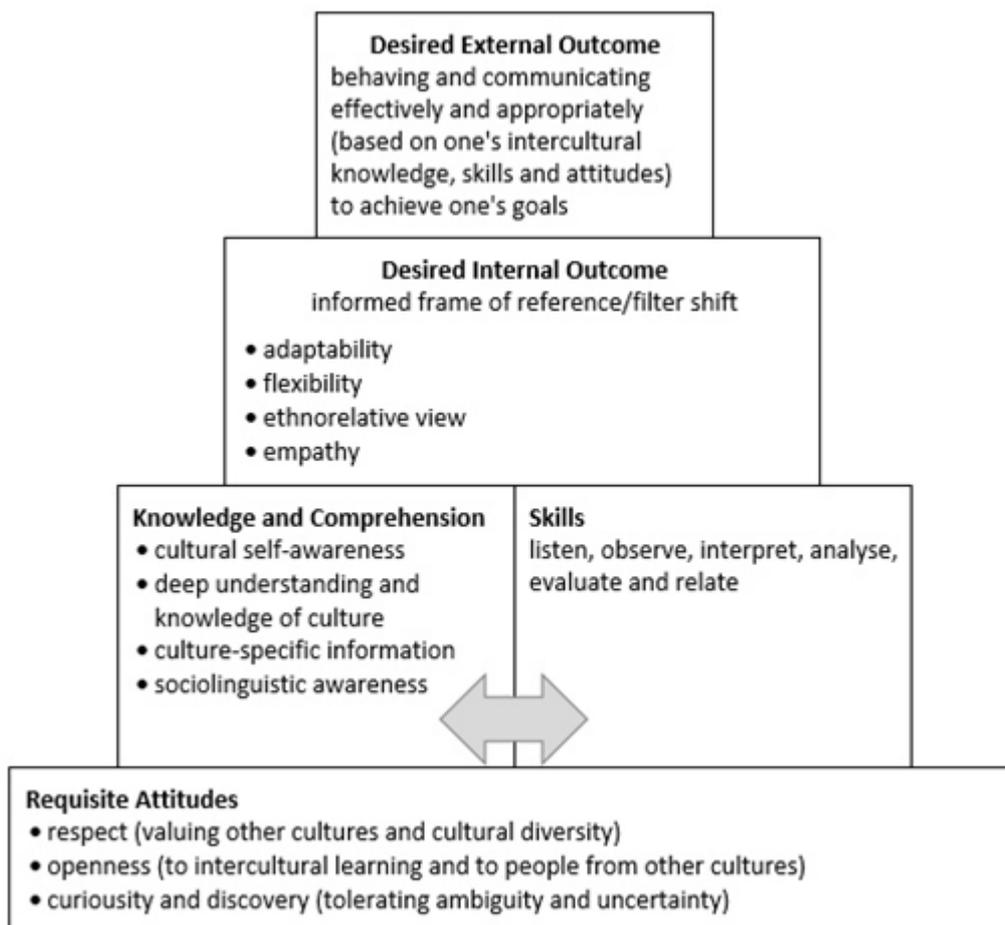


Fig. 6 Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 2004: 196)

Although the learners can enter the levels of this model at any point, the individual attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity and discovery) form the fundamental basis for intercultural competence development, as they have an impact on the way new skills are attained. These skills in turn help to acquire and process new knowledge about one's own and other cultures. A unique feature of this model is the differentiation between desired internal and external outcomes of intercultural competence in that an internal shift in frame of reference enhances the desirable, observable outcomes of intercultural competence – i.e. behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations (Deardorff 2004: 193, 2009: 479). Overall, the pyramid model appears to be based on a linear process of intercultural competence development and seems to neglect the complexity and dynamics of the concept – a requirement which Deardorff (2004) tries to meet in the second model suggestion, the Process Model (Deardorff 2004: 191–194).

Taken together, Deardorff's (2004) models indicate various degrees of intercultural competence (the more key elements a learner acquires, the higher the probability of intercultural competent interaction) that are not defined in more detail. The core component of intercultural competence development is attitudes in combination with the further key elements of knowledge and skills which result in desired internal as well as observable outcomes. However, Deardorff (2004) claims that intercultural competence is not limited to the key components mentioned within the frameworks as new elements (e.g. patience or critical thinking) can be added according to the intercultural context the model is used in. In contrast to other researchers (Kramsch 2009c, Witte 2014) who promote the development of a third space, Deardorff (2011) maintains and encourages cultural differences in terms of adaptability and an ethnorelative view.

Another point of criticism is that the variable selectivity and relationship between the components in Deardorff's models (2004) is not quite clear. The dynamics and relationships between the components are not analysed in their complexity and the particular dimensions are not clearly defined. There are semantic overlaps and a blending of the levels of action, understanding, knowledge and attitudes. The pre-requisite, foundational attitudes (openness, curiosity, respect) are, for example, almost identical to the desired internal outcomes (adaptability, flexibility, empathy). Hence, some concepts serve as foundations as well as desired outcomes of the model, which leads to confusion.

Deardorff (2004: 191–192) herself points out that the main criticism of existing definitions is that they are either too general or provide a disjointed list of attributes. Yet, this claim also holds true for these two models. It remains unclear as to what exactly constitutes the novelty of this concept, as the dynamics and the relationships between these key elements, for example understanding, awareness, respect, world-view, to name but a few are not precisely defined.

Finally, in regard to the educational mandate, Deardorff (2011) follows the general tenor that intercultural competence does not just happen but needs to be intentionally addressed through programmes, experiences and courses. Her models could serve as a basis for the guidance of a comprehensive and integrated approach in the higher education context. Yet, the question of how to implement these models in the classroom remains unanswered.

For the most part, the focus in intercultural competence education is on knowledge and products of culture which, however, is not sufficient for developing the skills to behave and communicating intercultural. Knowledge and skills may increase the probability of effectiveness and appropriateness of interactions but it is possible that a learner already possesses all the requisite attitudes and yet still shows minimally effective and appropriate behaviour and communication. Since the model is still rather broad, each key element needs to be further developed into more specific external outcomes based on the intercultural contexts in which it is used. In this sense, it remains vague how these models can satisfy the claims of an empirically-based reconstruction of intercultural practice.

While the models of intercultural communicative competence discussed thus far are component models, the following stage models by Bennett (1993a) and Witte (2014) focus on a progression in the development of intercultural competence. One well-known and widely used stage model is Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (1993a) which is rooted in the social science field of intercultural studies, but in contrast to the aforementioned models was originally business-oriented. It has been transferred to the education sector and has been increasingly influential in the study abroad context.

3.5 Bennett's (1993a) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

In terms of the underlying concept of culture, Bennett (1993a) draws on the constructivist definition of culture by Berger and Luckmann (1966, see chapter 2), who distinguish between an objective and a subjective culture in dialectic dynamics. Objective culture refers to institutional aspects such as political and economic systems and their products (art, music, cuisine etc). Its knowledge is essential but not sufficient to become a professional in intercultural contexts. Subjective culture on the other hand refers to the worldview of members of a cultural group, hence to the experience of social reality formed by a cultural group (see Fantini 2005 in chapter 3.1). Objective culture is internalised in the process of socialisation and subjective culture is in turn externalised in role behaviour. In this sense, objective culture is constantly created in a circular, self-referential process by members of a cultural community. Based on the concept of subjective culture, the concept of diversity refers to cultural differences in values, beliefs

and consequent behaviours which are acquired and shared within a cultural community (Berger & Luckmann 1966). This notion of culture is also related to Byram's (2009) differentiation between material, social and subjective culture.

Bennett's model (1993a) is based on Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (1963) which assumes that individuals create constructs about their lives and the world in order to make sense of concrete contexts and consequently make them predictable. It is not relevant what happens around someone but what meanings an individual ascribes to events. These constructs of meaning are extended, refined and revised over time when they meet conflict and challenges (Kelly 1963: 73, cited in Bennett & Bennett 2001: 15). Different cultural worldviews and their underlying beliefs and values are complex and need to be respected, understood and appreciated in order to enable mutual learning and understanding of different perspectives. Hence, an underlying "intercultural mindset and skillset" (Bennett & Bennett 2001: 6) is essential in order to behave appropriately in intercultural contexts. While "mindset" refers to cultural self-awareness of one's own culture and to attitudes such as tolerance of ambiguity and curiosity, "skillset" refers to the ability to analyse interaction and deal with cultural differences by behaviour adaptation.

Hence, like Fantini (1995, 2005) and Byram (1997, 2009), Bennett *et al.* (2003) assume a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness to constitute intercultural competence and focus on effectiveness and appropriateness in intercultural interactions. Considering these underlying notions, intercultural competence is defined as the:

ability to relate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts, which requires culturally sensitive knowledge, a motivated mindset and a skill set. Intercultural competence demands a mix of culture-specific approaches that stress the apprehension of particular subjective culture combined with culture general approaches that address the larger issues of ethnocentrism, cultural self-awareness and general adaptation strategies. (Bennett *et al.* 2003: 244)

The DMIS is based on observations of students and of a work force on how they develop into competent intercultural communicators in academic and corporate settings over the course of months and even years. The underlying assumption is that individuals will act differently in similar intercultural encounters depending on their personal construct of reality, which changes over time. Bennett and Bennett (2001) conclude that individual people confront cultural differences in predictable ways as they develop intercultural

communicative competence. The DMIS is therefore meant to serve as a framework for explaining subjective experiences in intercultural situations and predicting people's effectiveness in these settings over time (Bennett & Bennett 2001: 13).

By means of the grounded-theory approach, the individual observations were divided into six stages which outline positions on a continuum of an increasing sensitivity towards cultural differences. Each stage is "indicative of a particular worldview configuration" (Bennett & Bennett 2001: 14) which is associated with certain attitudes and behaviour. Yet, the DMIS does not define changes in attitudes or behaviour but describes the development of cognitive structures (see Fig. 8). It is based on the assumption that as an individual's perceptual organisation of cultural difference becomes more complex, one's cultural experiences become more sophisticated and the potential for showing interculturally competent behaviour in intercultural contexts increases.

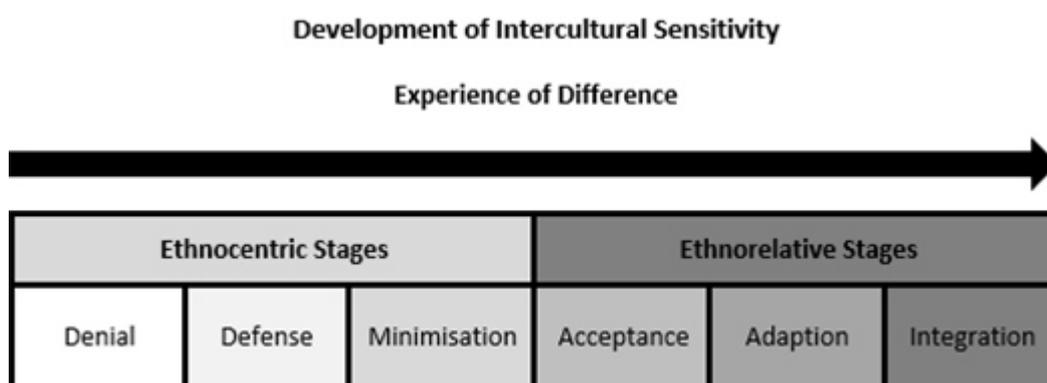


Fig. 8 Development of Intercultural Sensitivity Model (Bennett 1993a)

As outlined in Figure 8, Bennett (1993a) proposes six developmental stages which extend on a continuum from ethnocentrism (stages "denial", "defense" and "minimisation") to ethnorelativism (stages "acceptance", "adaptation", "integration"). In the ethnocentric stages, one's own cultural framework determines one's perception and understanding of reality (worldview) while in the ethnorelative stages one's own culture and other cultures are understood as relative to context. The stages along this continuum define how perception of cultural difference is organised into experience. Individual's experiences of cultural differences are complex and unique but, according to Bennett and Bennett (2001), can still be allocated to one predominant developmental position, although the perceptual strategies used may bestride more than one of the following stages (Bennett & Bennett 2001: 13–29):

Denial

In this first ethnocentric stage, cultural differences are either only perceived very broadly in terms of "foreigner" or "minority", not perceived at all, or even denied. Individuals at this stage are not interested in or even dismissive of intercultural communication and maintain isolation (psychological/physical) from cultural difference. Observations on cultural diversity are rather superficial and naïve. Furthermore, there is implicit genetic or social Darwinism used to justify inequalities and the superiority of members of dominant groups. However, people are not aware of these attitudes and assumptions and addressing them might evoke hostility on their part.

Defense

In this second ethnocentric stage cultural difference is recognised and polarised into stereotypical dualistic "us" versus "them" distinctions. Other cultures are denigrated and negatively evaluated in comparison to one's own culture, which is regarded superior, while "them" is perceived as inferior. Individuals on the defense stage feel threatened by cultural difference and are highly critical towards them. One's own worldview is regarded as exceptionally positive and therefore protected from change. The defense phase also occurs in reversal, where the dualistic thinking is identical – still polarised into "us" and "them" – but the poles are reversed. The culture an individual has originally been socialised in is heavily criticised and derogated while the previously unfamiliar and dismissed culture is being idealised and romanticised. In an international context, this development is called going native.

Minimisation

In the third and final ethnocentric stage, the individual acknowledges cultural differences on the surface (e.g. eating customs, clothing) but still assumes that underlying basic needs, values and beliefs are the same in all cultures. Individuals in the minimisation stage seem to be tolerant on a surface level, because they acknowledge and accept superficial cultural diversity. One's own cultural worldview is however regarded as universal and deeper cultural differences are ignored.

Acceptance

In this first ethnorelative stage, the own worldview is experienced as one of many equally complex constructions of reality. Based on the notion of an inherent cultural relativity, cultural differences are recognised and accepted in behaviour as well as underlying values and beliefs. Different viewpoints are regarded to be equally valid and the dualistic criterion of absolute truth is precluded. These differences are not necessarily agreed on or liked. They may still be judged and disagreed with but not from an ethnocentric point of view. Yet, the limited knowledge of cultural diversity at this stage does not allow for an easy adaptation to different cultural contexts.

Adaptation

In the second ethnorelative stage, the individual develops the ability to change perspective and to act outside one's own cultural context. Adaptation goes beyond the mere recognition of culturally diverse worldviews and involves empathy, sensitivity and pluralism. Learners shift their frames of reference to include alternative contexts and can imagine different cultural contingencies. A feeling for appropriateness is developed which leads to an adaptation of behaviour in interactions with different cultural contexts. The behaviour shifts naturally and authentically from one cultural context to another and is not contrived. In transition to the next stage, individuals adapt their behaviour to other cultures unconsciously and not deliberately. This ability to adapt, however, cannot be generalised, which means that individuals might easily adapt to certain cultural groups but might not be able to do so with another group. Hence, adaptive ability is context specific and does not predict general ethnorelativism.

Integration

In the final ethnorelative stage, the emphasis is set on cultural identity. Learners in this stage are aware of their own cultural fluctuations and liminality, which can be used for a meta-discussion on interculturality. The sense of cultural identity is detached from particular cultures and the individual's experience of self is expanded to include the flexible, intentional movement in and out of different cultural worldviews. A multitude of cultural frames of reference is available for the interpretation of phenomena. Hence, learners see their identities as under construction as they encompass the broad range of individual experiences.

To sum up, individuals positioned in ethnocentric stages regard their own culture as the central worldview and show a tendency to avoid cultural differences, either by denying that these differences exist (denial stage), raising defense against and denigrating these differences (defense stage) or minimising the importance of these differences (minimisation stage). In some cases, a reversal takes place and the people start disparaging the cultures they were socialised in. In the ethnorelative stages, individuals accept and respect cultural differences in behaviour and values (acceptance stage), adapt different perspectives through empathy and pluralism (adaptation stage) and finally integrate the concept of cultural diversity into their concept of identity (integration phase) (Bennett & Bennett 2001: 14–15).

The DMIS is a phenomenological model with no objective categories of right or wrong but is based on individually ascribed meanings to cultural phenomena (Hesse 2009: 166). While it *prima facie* appears to be descriptive, a prescriptive element subliminally exists in that individuals should develop towards the final stage of intercultural competence of integration with its underlying ethno-relative notion. The stage model comprises a dynamic continuum from least interculturally competent to most interculturally competent in which the interlocutor gradually changes perspective from a mono-cultural point of view to a pluralistic one. Overall, a unified development of different psychological and social dimensions is assumed, which, in the light of the heterogeneity of cultural contexts, is not actually the case. It is very likely that the level of intercultural sensitivity of individuals varies based on a number of different factors (personality, attitude, experience) which are partly independent from each other and partly relate to each other. Yet, the DMIS is limited to learner's cognitive and behavioural aspects, neglecting complex psychological and emotional aspects of intercultural learning. It does not focus on learners' complex experiences of cultural differences, which imply profound identity-related and emotional challenges for learners (Witte 2014: 322).

The level of intercultural competence that people show in their behaviour might also change according to the contexts they are in. This variation of contexts and the interrelation of different components in intercultural competence development, is, however, ignored. For example, it is quite possible that people show a higher level of intercultural sensitivity towards one cultural group and would be able to change perspective and act outside their own cultural context, while they are emotionally stuck on a defensive level towards another cultural community. Hence, underlying attitudes like

openness and flexibility which are manifested in behaviour may vary, based on mood, experience, personality or context, and these stages cannot be regarded as fixed and exclusive.

As other researchers have noted (Byram 1997, Fantini 2005, Witte 2014), intercultural competence development does not constitute a one-way continuum but includes phases of stagnation or regression, and this has not been considered by Bennett in his elaborations. Intercultural sensitivity progression cannot be as defined as grammar competence because it would not reflect the dynamic of intercultural contexts and development and would merely amount to a collection of generalisations. It could also be possible that individuals act on a higher level than they have actually internalised regarding values as well as underlying attitudes of openness and tolerance in terms of social desirability.

In this context, it should also be pointed out that the three ethnocentric stages and the first two ethnorelative stages imply that knowledge is added and expanded but an intrinsic change and transformation can only occur at the last stage. It is only during this stage that individuals seem to develop the intercultural sensitivity to see themselves within a range of various cultural and personal frames of reference (Bennett 1993a: 59–60). However, different aspects of one's identity are continuously integrated into a new cultural construction and not all of a sudden. Knowledge is naturally relativised and transformed in the sense of developing third spaces (see Kramsch chapter 3.2) that serve as a new basis for the subjective construction of the world.

Based on the notion of a linear process of intercultural learning in a prescriptive sense, the DMIS provides a rough model for curriculum and syllabus design for teaching and training purposes on how to achieve intercultural sensitivity in terms of completion of intercultural sensitivity stages. Yet, it remains unclear as to what the ultimate developmental goal in terms of intercultural sensitivity is, as none is defined. On the other hand, it is questionable if it is essential to assume an ultimate goal or if different cultures do not rather pursue different ideologically motivated ideals of interculturalism (Hesse 2009: 163). Either way, it is difficult to define exact developmental steps regarding cultural progression. In this sense, the underlying notion of fixed stages independent from any cultural context, target group or individuality is quite misleading as it proclaims static categories with predictable development in terms of a linear model whereby ethnocentric

worldviews gradually develop and are replaced by ethnorelative ones. In this regard, each intercultural learner is supposed to complete one stage before he or she proceeds on to the next stage of intercultural sensitivity. However, the DMIS cannot guarantee that accomplishment of these stages would result in intercultural sensitivity and personal growth.

Another point of criticism in relation to the DMIS is the negligence of L2 learning and L2 competence in the process of intercultural sensitivity development. Although the DMIS was originally designed for the business context rather than the L2 education context, the interconnectedness of language competence and intercultural competence is without a doubt relevant in every cultural context. As Witte (2014: 317–318) points out, it is questionable whether it is possible to profoundly understand cultures without approaching them through their central semiotic system. The DMIS does not elaborate on the role of language in the development of cultural sensitivity, the subjective negotiating for meaning and any possible constraints. Conversely, the lack of language proficiency limits speakers in the way they think about the world and act within it and restricts them to an ethnocentric approach (Fantini 2009: 459). This limitation can lead to cultural misunderstandings when habitual and pragmatic features are translated into the native language (Witte 2014: 318). Despite this negligence, the model has been transferred to L2 education where intercultural sensitivity is mostly developed with and through an L2 "as the central semiotic system of the foreign culture" (Witte 2014: 320).

Yet, Bennett does attach importance to the interrelation of language competence and intercultural sensitivity. In his article "How not be a fluent fool" (Bennett 1993b), he stresses the importance of the cultural dimension of language and takes the position that language, thought and perception are interrelated. Language serves as a communication tool and is a "system of representation which expresses and in turn shapes perception and thinking" (Bennett 1993b: 17). Hence, the way people perceive social interactions and even their own behaviour is closely related to the different conceptual structures of their languages (Fisher 1972: 99). However, the discussion on any interrelation ends there and he does not elaborate on the mutual impacts of cultural and linguistic competences.

Furthermore, Bennett's (1993a) model fails to properly integrate the conception of intercultural third space, something which has already been criticised by Witte (2014). The aspects of culture which relate to "blending linguistic, emotional, normative, value-

related and habitual categories" are mostly neglected (Witte 2014: 320). Therefore, Witte has reconceptualised Bennett's model (1993a) in terms of a description of pedagogic principles for progressively mediating and fostering intercultural competence in L2 learning. Witte's model additionally integrates concepts such as intercultural third space, inner speech, constructs of identity, genre, positionings and plausibility structures. In the framework of Witte's Model of Progressive Principles, the main ideas of the aforementioned models are combined into a new concept with special emphasis on the pedagogical aspect of intercultural competence education.

3.6 Witte's (2014) Model of Progressive Principles

Like the aforementioned models, Witte's (2014) elaborations are set in a Western culture context. The Model of Progressive Principles (Witte 2014) merges the notions and theories of component models (Byram 2009, Deardorff 2004, Fantini 2005), Bennett's (1993a) DMIS and Kramsch's (2006) Theory of Third Space. It is more differentiated than the above-mentioned models in that it combines concepts of intercultural third space, inner speech, constructs of identity, positionings and plausibility structures in relation to the social world. The general focus of Witte's model is on the negotiation of the meaning of constructs, patterns of construal and habitus with regard to other cultural systems and the internalised categories of one's own cultural circle. Consequently the L2 learner is able to "consciously and intentionally develop intercultural places" (Witte 2014: 253) which comprise the constructs of both (or more) languages and cultures.

Witte (2014: 322–383) specifically designed a descriptive model of intercultural competence development for language learners themselves as well as for teachers, curriculum designers and policy makers in the language education context. Yet, as the target group already suggests and by specifying objectives, there are also prescriptive elements involved. Since the target group is also quite heterogeneous, the model provides general incentives instead of being specifically tailored to any of these addressed groups.

In contrast to the notion of stages in the DMIS (Bennett 1993a), Witte (2014) uses the notion of principles, which do not represent fixed, distinct learning stages of intercultural competence. The term "principles" further implies that there is no clearly defined endpoint of development for each developmental phase. Overall, the model is divided

into 9 principles and the transitions between these progressive principles are understood to be porous and dynamic. Hence, the principles cannot be clearly separated from each other. Neither is progression regarded as necessarily linear but as cyclical or possibly even regressive in various contexts. Depending on the learner's individual zone of proximal development,⁴⁸ the subjective intercultural learning process occurs in different ways. Various principles may, for example, be regressed to or, on the other hand, skipped altogether and reverted to later on.

Members of the same cultural community share a system of meaning and notions of auto- and heterostereotypes⁴⁹ which remain unquestioned until they are challenged by intercultural encounters. During a stay abroad, for example, individuals are taken out of their individual cultural, behavioural and lingual comfort zones. Another context is L2 education, where deeply embedded aspects of culture can be challenged and learners can be constructively engaged in cultural dialogue. According to Witte (2014), the aim of intercultural competence development is, however, not acculturation but rather a "broadening of the (inter-)cultural foundations of construal with regard to cognition, emotion, identity, and behaviour" (Witte 2014: 368) in order to facilitate and foster the development of subjective intercultural spaces (see Kramsch, chapter 3.2). Witte (2014) regards the development towards intercultural competence an unfinished, life-long process without a precisely definable outcome, but identifies the following principles.

Principle 1 – Acknowledging ignorance (Witte 2014: 325–333)

Monolingual people are usually socialised and enculturated in cultural and lingual communities with intersubjectively mediated symbolic and linguistic systems of meaning, values, norms, beliefs, emotions and attitudes. The monolingual subject's thinking, feeling, perceiving and interacting mainly rely on this native internalised system of meaning which learners are unaware of. Based on these internalised cultural patterns, a deeply held system of reference to assess and judge aspects of the native and other cultures is developed. Interlocutors experience themselves as an integral part of a

⁴⁸ The term "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) was introduced by Vygotsky and refers to "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978: 86).

⁴⁹ While auto-stereotypes concern the alleged beliefs about one's own cultural community, hetero-stereotypes relate to the alleged beliefs about the members of a different cultural community (Lehtonen 1994: 173-182).

community which then constitutes their culturally shaped identity⁵⁰ and provides a basis for subconscious emotions and consequent conscious actions.

At the beginning of L2 learning and acquisition, language learners naively regard the value judgments, norms, attitudes and beliefs of their L1 cultural community as universally valid. This initial period of intercultural learning is therefore characterised by non-awareness of linguistic relativity and ignorance of alternative sociocultural configurations and systems of meaning. Hence, the socially acquired L1-mediated conceptualisations and values are typically transferred to the intercultural context at this early stage of intercultural competence development, thereby eliminating L2-mediated values and norms in their authenticity. This principle relates to Bennett's (1993a) ethnocentric stage of denial.

Principle 2 – First contact with the L2 and C2 in the classroom (Witte 2014: 333–338)

The core aspects for intercultural learning are intrinsic motivation or rather the willingness to invest in cultural capital, and an interest in the heterogeneity of cultures and languages.⁵¹ Whether a person intrinsically engages with another linguistic and cultural system depends on the circumstances and different lifeworlds the person lives in.

When L2 learners are exposed to a foreign language and culture for the first time, they are not personified *tabulae rasae* but have been socialised and enculturated in cultural and lingual communities. They have acquired the social habitus and social patterns which the L1 is embedded in. Before learning a new language, learners have usually heard, read or seen something about it and have subconsciously developed categories, stereotypes and expectations about the L2 cultural realities which influence their approach towards the new language experience and how they perceive and interpret the foreign language and culture (Savignon & Sysoyev 2002: 510, quoted in Witte 2014: 333). These concepts and expectations in turn have an impact on the intrinsic willingness to engage with another culture.

⁵⁰ "Identity" is again a multi-layered term which is located between a subjective and a collective dimension (see chapter 2).

⁵¹ In this context, Witte (2014: 239) prefers to borrow Bourdieu's (1997) notion of cultural capital in terms of a "willingness to invest in cultural capital" (Witte 2014: 329) because of its emphasis "on the sociocultural context which influences the degree of investment" (Witte 2014: 329). The conception of motivation refers to the internal psychological categories of a subject who is assumed to have a unitary identity.

The first encounter with an unfamiliar language and culture on a conscious, concrete level might take place in the classroom. This involvement with the unfamiliar culture and language can have a strong impact on the learner's constructs of personal and social identity (i.e. a threat or opportunity of reconstruction) and self-concept. At this very early period, L2 is still regarded an external construct to be learned and not an internalised web of cultural meanings. The L2 reality is still interpreted by means of one's own cultural frame of reference and the C2 is regarded as Other and different. In the process, superficial similarities in simple real-life contexts are discerned, as there are overlaps and commonalities of all cultures regarding universal aspects of human existence (i.e. birth, love, eating, education, communal life) or shared traditions. Although these overlaps might not be put into practice in the same way in different cultures, they help to facilitate cognitive and affective approximations to sociocultural constructs in the L2 context and enhance mutual understanding (Witte 2014: 339–340). However, learners might wrongly expect mutual understanding in shared contexts and are lulled into a false sense of security.

In this context, interlocutors need to become aware of linguistic relativity. It might be the first time that learners experience the limitation of being able to express their thoughts and ideas accurately in their full meaning. As a consequence, learners who seek to "define their linguistic identity and their position in the world [...] are [now] consciously and explicitly confronted with the relationship between their language, their thoughts, and their bodies" (Kramsch 2009a: 4–5). The different linguistic frame of reference and voice might have an impact on identity construction as intercultural and interlingual spaces open up and new layers of meaning in L2 and L1 are uncovered. This realisation that identities are subject to change might evoke different reactions in the L2 learners. They might (1) become more willing to engage with the foreign culture and language and develop their cultural capital but they (2) might be oblivious of any difference and not engage at all, or (3) on the other extreme, they might be frustrated as they become aware of their limitedness of expression and withdraw to the familiar L1 cultural community.

Principle 3: Initial links to the lifeworlds of learners (Witte 2014: 338–345)

The third principle focuses on the cultural frame of reference which serves as a basis for the construction and perception of experiences, things and memories, and consequently influences ways of interaction and discourses. The main purpose of this early phase of L2

learning is to raise the awareness that members of other cultural communities act differently based on different socialisation processes, values, beliefs, attitudes or norms. Since the L2 reality is mainly interpreted by means of one's own cultural frame of reference, the L2 culture is still largely regarded as Other. Superficial similarities of the learners' lifeworlds in different cultures can create understanding, which for this principle is confined to simple real-life contexts such as "In the restaurant" or "At the baker's". However, L2 learners might again wrongly assume that they will achieve mutual understanding because they share these real-life contexts. Yet, the mere command of the L2 grammar rules and vocabulary will not automatically achieve mutual understanding with the members of the target language culture (Johnson 2004: 174). As for language, the assumed low command of L2 in this principle limits the engagement with the Other and hence the understanding of sociocultural phenomena and cultural patterns of construal of the L2 cultural community.

Principle 4: Awareness of stereotypes and attributions (Witte 2014: 345–349)

At this stage, the focus is set on the analysis of cultural auto- and hetero-stereotypes. As previously mentioned, by the time L2 learners are exposed to the L2 in the classroom they will already have gathered information on the L2 target language community through media or personal experience. Hence, learners have adopted ideas and views which in themselves are value-laden and rarely objective. Furthermore, they will have developed an attitude towards their own cultural community. The internalised stereotypes reduce the complexity of constructs of the Other and once they are objectified, develop "an independent reality of their own" (Witte 2014: 345). Thus, new encounters are identified and categorised by these stereotypical characteristics which may result in misconceptions and misjudgments. A tendency in this process is to exaggerate the differences between groups and minimise or unconsciously underrate the differences within the group of others. In this sense, the L2 cultural community is regarded as different and a rather homogeneous entity whereas the heterogeneity within one's own cultural community is more acknowledged. These beliefs and stereotypes often become commonly accepted knowledge which is adopted unquestioned and appears to be a natural phenomenon. Hence, a discussion and reflection of auto- and hetero-stereotypes is essential in the L2 learning context (and in general) in order to become aware of the judgmental and subjective dimension of perception.⁵² In this context, the L2 classroom "can provide a

⁵² This goal is also part of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: the "ability to overcome stereotypical relationships" (Council of Europe 2001: 105).

platform for deconstructing, reconstructing, and co-constructing not only declarative, but more importantly, procedural knowledge about the other culture and speech community" (Witte 2014: 346).

Principle 5: Intercultural borderline experiences in the L2 classroom (Witte 2014: 349–354)

Subsequent to principle 4, existing native cognitive constructs are challenged and negotiated in order to develop genuine blended mental spaces. The focus is on reflecting the reciprocal dimension of intercultural competence in terms of the negotiation of meaning with regard to the Other, as well as on (re)defining one's own role and identity in the L1 and L2 context. Intercultural borderline experiences⁵³ enhance the potential to distance oneself from the internalised social and cultural frame of reference in order to change perspective and acknowledge other frameworks. These borderline experiences can be created by discussing the validity of culturally induced conceptualisations on a superficial (i.e. school uniform versus no school uniform) as well as on a more profound level (i.e. hierarchy structures). In order to extend the effect of these borderline experiences to the affective and behavioural dimension, reflection exercises (i.e. writing journals, meta-discussions) and authentic simulation tasks related to the learners' lifeworlds can be used. It is assumed that reflection facilitates a change of perspective and fosters empathy, which in turn broadens the subjects' understanding of the actions, emotions and behaviour of people in different cultural contexts. As a consequence, the L2 learner is able to "blend spaces between dominant cultural constructs and Discourses, while the dominance of internalised L1 conceptualisations is reduced, and for certain aspects even eliminated" (Witte 2014: 353–354).

Principle 6: Increasing awareness of linguistic and cultural relativity (Witte 2014: 354–361)

One major component of intercultural competence is the ability to reflect on one's identity and role in the L1 and L2 context, and to distance oneself from the internalised social and cultural frame of reference in order to change perspective and acknowledge other frameworks. For principle 6, the rather limited insights into the foreign cultural construals and patterns of action of the previous five principles are connected "to more complex units of intercultural construction" (Witte 2014: 354). By discussing the linguistic as well as cultural restrictions of one's own and the L2 cultural community's constructs, attitudes and actions, L2 learners gain more detailed insights into their relativity. As a

⁵³ In this context, the term "experience" refers to the cognitive development in construing meaning from patterns, values and attitudes inherent in other languages and cultures (Witte 2014: 349, 354).

consequence, learners are able to negotiate their own subjective positioning in-between two or more cultures (see the concept of "third space" in Kramsch 1998). They overcome an ethnocentric worldview and their monolingual and monocultural habitus on the cognitive as well as on the affective and behavioural level. It is estimated that intense and multi-faceted cultural experiences foster this identity development. Therefore, L2 teaching should comprise different explorative, multi-perspective and experiential methods of learning to promote the reflection of intercultural spaces and the awareness of linguistic and cultural relativity.

Principle 7: Challenging internalised cultural patterns of construal (Witte 2014: 361–367)

While the previous principles have focused on cultural patterns of restriction and enablement in terms of cultural constructs, principle 7 emphasises pedagogy and the acquired and internalised categories of the native culture. Room for collaborative negotiation of meaning and blended cultural spaces is provided by means of experiential learning situations which transcend the cognitive dimension and involve the affective and behavioural domain. The internalised norms, values, beliefs and attitudes of the learner's native cultural community are suspended and reconstructed in relation to different cultures. Hence, the learners' intercultural blended spaces become more refined and complex, as the perception of identity changes and the attitudes towards themselves and the Other become more receptive.

Principle 8: Developing subjective intercultural spaces (Witte 2014: 367–375)

This principle describes the process of adopting perspectives of L2 cultures and directing them towards the native cultural constructs, which are expanded and transferred to all cultures involved. Partial acceptance of divergence in terms of fundamental patterns of perception, construction and (inter-)action based on cultural differences is achieved. Hence, the learners develop elements of empathy⁵⁴ and openness towards other cultural constructs and a genuine interest without prejudice. Furthermore, they have acquired a deep knowledge of cultural, social and linguistic practices of different cultures and can shift between frames of reference (at least temporarily). In this sense, a subjective intercultural space emerges which refers to a subjective-intermediary field of "genuinely new knowledge, generated by the conscious subjective engagement with cultural

⁵⁴ According to Witte (2014: 368) the term "empathy" is related to the ability "to suspend deeply internalized values, norms, and attitudes with regard to certain constructs, situations, or experiences and to understand the values, norms, and beliefs of the other culture in their own right" (Witte 2014: 368).

patterns of construal of the cultures involved" (Witte 2014: 368). The L2 learners are able to adopt different frames of reference and can shift between different constructs of identity. In order to do so, they have to be given as much leeway as possible to collaboratively and subjectively negotiate meaning within the subjective third space.

Principle 9: Integrating intercultural competence into everyday life (Witte 2014: 375–383)

At this stage, L2 learners have acquired linguistic as well as social, cultural, pragmatic and emotional skills to negotiate their subjective intercultural third space. They are aware of cultural relativity and the ambiguities of constructs and positionings and transfer their skills to everyday situations. A new, subjective cultural view develops in a learning continuum and requires constant revision. This development of a subjective, intercultural third space also involves a transformation of identity in terms of a multi-layered cultural hybridity (see chapter 2).

Although this is the final paedagogical principle described, the development towards intercultural competence is regarded an unfinished, life-long process without a precisely definable outcome. While the first six principles focus on gaining awareness of the cultural patterns of restriction and enablement in terms of unknown cultural constructs, principles 7, 8 and 9 emphasise the acquired and internalised categories of the native culture. Furthermore, the last three principles stress the development of intercultural subjective third spaces, picking up on the heterogeneity and differentiation of lifeworlds.

However, the differences and interrelations between the principles and the involved concept of progression in terms of learning development are not distinct, for example between principles 4 and 5 or 6 and 7. In this context, information on how the principles are interlinked is missing and the dynamics between the principles are not described in more detail. There is no elaboration on reasons and forms of progression or regression on the various dimensions during the different principles, which could be helpful in the context of L2 education.

A novelty in Witte's (2014) elaboration is the integration of pedagogical interventions into the principles (apart from the last one). The following compilation by Witte does not constitute an educational concept or teaching recipe with precise instructions but provides an extensive overview on various pedagogical measures. Yet, information on the extent to which these measures have been empirically tested in terms of how they

actually contribute to affective involvement and the development of intercultural competence is missing. In general, the model and the following suggestions for pedagogical interventions therefore need to be understood as a theoretical framework that requires empirical evaluation.

Pedagogical Interventions

According to Witte (2014), L2 teaching should comprise different explorative, multi-perspective and experiential methods of learning to foster reflection, discussion of intercultural spaces and a growing awareness of linguistic and cultural relativity. The learners should be encouraged to "reconstruct their knowledge of their own internalized life-world by examining the cultural patterns underlying the life-world of people in another culture" (Witte 2014: 362). The variety of collected implementation options to foster intercultural competence comprises manifold didactic approaches and material to provide for different learning styles and preferences, such as visual, auditive or kinaesthetic learning types. These methods encompass different media and range from student exchanges and authentic text material, images or films to reflexive work on critical incidents such as writing diaries, journals and portfolios. Students are involved in role plays, project work, cultural games or scenarios and additionally use interactive media, such as facebook, Skype or online discussion forums.

As for the underlying concepts, it is not stated what precise definitions of culture and competence these pedagogical interventions are based on, which makes it difficult to discuss them in a scientific context. As a consequence, the target group for these measures is mostly not clear, as detailed objectives on what components of intercultural competence will be nurtured or measured are not defined. Furthermore, while some of the concepts, such as empathy (Witte 2014: 368) are elaborated on, others are used without reference to their exact contextual meaning, i.e. cyberspace.

In the myriad of interventions, different perspectives are addressed and the individuality of the learners is considered. The measures enable a direct dialogue with culturally diverse people and allow for reflection and discussion on a meta-level about cultural understandings in terms of sharing common conceptions about stereotypical assumptions. They help to trigger critical involvement with underlying values and worldviews of the learners' own culture as well as the L2 culture, because by engaging directly with the target cultural circle, learners develop a subjective understanding of the

Other. Diaries, journals or portfolios in particular provide the possibility of retracing and understanding one's intercultural development and individual learning process. They can also be taken as a new starting point for reflection and evaluation at a later stage. These methods should enable as much direct contact with (members of) the other cultural circle as possible. Especially interactive social media can act as facilitator in this respect.

These pedagogical suggestions by Witte (2014) share the basic objective of relating to the learners' lifeworlds and providing individualised, practice-oriented learning environments. Witte (2014: 336) refers to Taylor *et al.* (2013), who found a correlation between the students' involvement of their private selves in the classroom and their achievements and dedication. If the class atmosphere was not relaxed and encouraging in terms of letting the student engage with their private selves, their interests, fears or desires, students tended to disengage their inner selves from the learning process. A relaxed and constructive learning atmosphere facilitates the negotiation of new meanings, including new concepts of self. Educators and teachers additionally need to be aware that the initial encounter with different expressions, sounds or constructs of the L2 in the classroom may unbalance the self-concept and identity of the learners. Therefore, it is important to create a non-threatening, collaborative learning environment which enhances the learners' self-esteem and minimises potential face-losing situations, so as to ward off withdrawal into the safe haven of the L1 cultural context (Witte 2014: 334–338). An appreciation of the learners' subjective identities is crucial, because the engagement with the learners' inner selves makes the learning process more meaningful and personally relevant. Furthermore, the immersion in other cultural communities and exposure to as much authentic intercultural communication as possible is essential in order to facilitate cultural learning and promote an awareness of linguistic and cultural relativity.

Witte (2014) assigns these pedagogical measures to the respective progressive principles. Yet, the range of implementation methods mentioned applies to all the principles listed and not just to the ones they are allocated to. With small modifications, the pedagogical approaches could be implemented for every principle as they are equally important for all stages of intercultural competence and can be used as triggers on many different levels. The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) (Council of Europe 2009), for example, is listed in principle 8 (Witte 2014: 372–375) but could equally be implemented in previous ones. This instrument is based on Byram's (1997) Model of ICC and refers to the analysis of an encounter with a member of another cultural circle which has led to

confusion or a misunderstanding for the learner. It encourages students to change perspective and reflect on their experience of Otherness, instead of analysing hypothetical encounters or simulations.⁵⁵

Witte (2014: 362) further claims that a restriction to cognitive engagement would not suffice to suspend one's own cultural patterns, values, beliefs, norms and attitudes, because they also involve an emotional and behavioural dimension. However, how to involve these affective and behavioural domains is a tricky question. Witte (2014: 362–363) suggests that direct confrontation with differences in cultural norms, even if only in an artificially created context, has an impact on the learner's internalised norms, values, beliefs and attitudes, as the framework of the native cultural circle is reconstructed in comparison to the other culture (Witte 2014: 363). In case a stay abroad is impossible, complex simulation games are another approach to evoke holistic borderline experiences on the cognitive, affective and behavioural level. These games are based on the principle of "learning by doing" and aim to create awareness of cultural differences. Further objectives are to encourage learners to challenge their own bias in terms of attitudes, values, norms and behaviour, in order to broaden the participants' perspectives. Simple simulation tasks involve learners composing a CV of an imagined member of the L2 culture, based on authentic material. However, this exercise does not stipulate reflection on the learners' own identity and role in the L1 and L2 contexts.

Another didactic approach suggested by Kaikkonen (2001) is project work to enable cognitive and affective work on topics such as civil protests related to the Berlin Wall. Students are asked to focus on different specific interests of the protagonists at the time, i.e. politicians, investors, residents and ecologists, and take on their perspectives. By adopting these different roles to solve the same problem, learners are encouraged to identify with a particular perspective of another cultural context and in turn transfer it to their own. An even more elaborate method is "suggestopedia", where learners conceive a fictional member of the L2 cultural community whose identity they keep throughout the whole L2 learning process (Kaikkonen 2001, Larsen-Freeman 2000 cited in Witte 2014: 350–353).

⁵⁵ The AIE will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 4 as an amended version of it is one of the research tools implemented for the study in this thesis.

However, it has not been empirically proven that affective involvement in these activities takes place. Role plays themselves or negotiations and discussions on a meta-level do not automatically lead to an involvement of the affective dimension as learners can fulfill these tasks on a cognitive level. Furthermore, it could be regarded impossible to overcome stereotypes in artificial classroom settings by discussing differences on a meta-level or by conducting role plays as these value systems and cultural construals are usually more deeply and profoundly embedded and context-bound. A lasting change in cultural frame of reference cannot be achieved by sporadic exposure but, indeed if at all, by deeper, continuous involvement on the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimension.⁵⁶ Despite pedagogical efforts it will therefore remain challenging to foster openness for ambiguity and difference.

Underlying the model of progressive principles is a dynamic and distributed concept of culture in that cultures cannot be delimited from each other given that the borders between them are rather porous and blurred. However, sometimes the notion of culture is equated with countries such as on page 345 (Witte 2014). The usage of terms such as "L1" and "L2 cultural communities" also implies that there are two separate communities opposing each other. "L1/2 community" is still too general a term as we are confronted with many different cultural webs of meaning in any language, depending on the cultural context it is used in (i.e. pop culture, insider jokes within a group of friends). Hence, there are always many cultures involved in the perception, judgment and evaluation of the Other. Speakers of the L1 are part of a range of different cultural communities in which they move back and forth, adopting appropriate frames of references and identities. Therefore, the overall term "L1/2 cultural community" needs to be broken down into smaller, precisely defined linguistic cultural communities. The definitions of competence and model are not further elaborated on by Witte (2014).

In the context of L2 introduction, Witte (2014: 339–340) suggests building on similarities between the L1 and L2 culture in common areas such as schooling or living in a community. These overlaps facilitate at least a cognitive approximation to L2 cultural constructs as learners can draw comparisons "between the similarities and differences of the L1 and L2-mediated constructs and configurations" (Witte 2014: 340). However, even at the early stage of L2 learning, which according to the communicative approach (Council

⁵⁶ This stance is one of the lines of research in my PhD study.

of Europe 2001) usually starts with an introduction of oneself and socially appropriate rituals in the L2 culture and then continues with pragmatic communicative everyday situations, misunderstandings may occur (e.g. the social hierarchy of "du" versus "Sie" in German versus "you" in English). Hence, lexical items with indexical value need to be critically analysed regarding their cultural contexts and social implications in order to appropriately use and understand them. When ignored, these misunderstandings may lead to friction and tension. In this context, Witte (2014) suggests interactive exercises to enhance the social, interactive, emotional and cognitive skills of learners in intercultural learning (Witte 2014: 339–341).

As already mentioned, L2 competence is rather limited at the start. Non-linguistic media such as images could be implemented to try to overcome the restraining effect of minimal L2 competence and stimulate the use of learned, related phrases in the L2. Cultural complexities in the pictures could then be discussed more profoundly in the L1. By means of these visual incentives, Witte (2014) maintains that awareness and sensitivity for daily business and interaction in the other cultural community is raised (Witte 2014: 342–345).

In order to support intercultural competence development, learners have to be provided with resources for reflection and criticism, as well as opportunities to transfer their acquired knowledge into action. In relation to overcoming cultural bias, Witte (2014: 347) refers to Kaikkonen's (2001) project, which draws on the individual lifeworlds of the L2 learners. Monthly visits from native speakers provided the learners with the opportunity to discuss their perspectives and observations, including auto- und heterostereotypes. The learners were encouraged to make observations on the L2 culture and keep a journal of their personal learning experiences. Hence, the personal interests, views and attitudes of the L2 learners were involved in the learning process, which made the learning material more authentic and personally relevant than situations provided in textbooks. Alternatively, social media (e-mails, forum, chats, blogs) could be used to enable intercultural encounters, thus increasing the learners' awareness of personal cultural frames of reference, views, attitudes and stereotypes. These activities could possibly help overcome an ethnocentric worldview according to the lifeworlds of the learners. However, a change of attitudes and beliefs cannot be guaranteed.

In terms of working with authentic material in the education context, Witte (2014) claims that electronic media, especially the Internet, are particularly suited to provide (unregulated) access to authentic intercultural communication and to disembodied virtual spaces. These virtual spaces provide "unlimited opportunities for finding, retrieving, recycling, co-authoring, deleting, and sharing information" and allow for "immediate kaleidoscopic accumulation of isolated bits and pieces of information" (Witte 2014: 355). Virtual tandem learning partnerships, participation in interest-related forums as well as facebook and Twitter posts or blogs also provide an opportunity to immerse oneself into an authentic linguistic and cultural practice in an asynchronous learning environment. These authentic dialogues can serve as triggers to question one's own and the other's perspective, and as a consequence develop a blended third cultural place.

In this context, the cross-cultural initiative *Cultura* (1997) should be mentioned, which is a long-term, comprehensive project for university and high school students. *Cultura* (1997) is based on a common website, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding for each other's values, norms, attitudes and beliefs in a dynamic way. In the framework of this intercultural online project students in the US can connect with students in Germany, Italy, Mexico, Russia and Spain. The project is aimed at supporting students in understanding underlying value systems, beliefs, attitudes and frames inherent to other cultures and different patterns of (inter)action. Overall, the project involves interactions with a variety of materials and multiple (cultural) partners. Through the shared website, students explore and exchange their perspectives on a range of materials in online discussion forums and video conferences and construct an understanding of their partners' cultural construals. Students are given access to material (e.g. films, pictures, newspapers, opinion polls) and can add their own material, use the languages of their choice (L1 or L2) and analyse cultural differences in comparison to their own socio-cultural context (*Cultura* 2015).

In regard to *Cultura*, Witte (2014: 366–367) claims that the partners "will learn about each other in equitable, respectful, and balanced ways" (Witte 2014: 366) and that the initial forum interaction allows for an objective approach "to the other culture in which possible tensions and frictions are delayed" (Witte: 2014: 366–367). However, this success in intercultural competence development is based on unproven assumptions. As already mentioned, cultural conceptualisations are more deeply and profoundly embedded and context-bound. There is no guarantee that these activities will trigger motivation and that

the expected learning progress and achievements will ultimately be accomplished. Rather, there is a variety of components (personality features, previous experiences, motivation, socialisation and so on) that contribute to motivation for and success in intercultural involvement.

In this context, it could be argued that it is only when the subjects are detached or snatched from their own cultural surrounding that a change happens on an emotional and behavioural level. However, as Witte, referring to Block (2007) remarks,

even a year abroad as part of the undergraduate university program does not automatically engage learners in the sense of broadening their identity. (...) this can only be achieved if learners are *aware* of the potential challenges and actual changes facilitated by immersion, and if they are actively and intentionally seeking to broaden their intercultural awareness. (Witte 2014: 362, *italics* in original)

Hence, despite the experience abroad, intercultural competence development does not necessarily take place, as involvement in and awareness of social identities, individual and collective memories, emotions and aspirations is required. Some people have lived abroad for many years and still have not been affected by the culture they live in, or just unconsciously so. They build mental enclaves with members of their C1 community, do not step out of their original cultural comfort zone and do not integrate and immerse themselves into the new cultural surroundings. The reasons for this rejection of immersion are manifold and usually cannot be pinpointed to one specific aspect. Hence, the possibility of non-integration and non-development in terms of intercultural competence also needs to be considered when discussing intercultural competence learning.

As for the virtual space and social media, Witte (2014: 365) claims that because data are deposited in virtual spaces, they are detached from the social reality of the users, as virtual space elevates "the intersubjective space into infinity" (Witte 2014: 365). In this sense, the Internet can be regarded the "true transcultural space" which is detached from cultural and subjective restraints or boundaries, or indeed any culturally stabilising frameworks. This assumption could, however, be interpreted as contradictory to the claim that the users resort to their individual conventions and intents. Users' voices do not exist in isolation but are "culturally embedded in respect of their inherent structures, functions, and purposes" (Witte 2014: 356).

Furthermore, it can be claimed that given the contemporary usage of social media and virtual networks, cyberspace and virtual reality have become part of social reality. Identities are developed through interaction, which is also the case on the Internet. The new media provide new possibilities of self-representation (Vybírál *et al.* 2004, cited in Tyagi 2011: 203) and become an essential social variable for people, hence psychologically connecting the physical and virtual worlds (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, cited in Tyagi 2011: 203). The virtual data is integrated into contextualisation cues as well as individual and collective memories. Physical identities merge into virtual identities in that the individual is present as a virtual representation instead of a physical subject in the environment of the Internet (Vybírál *et al.* 2004). This virtual representation does not have an identity in the psychological sense but rather constitutes a cluster of stored and recorded digital data about the identification in the virtual environment (i.e. nicknames, chat history, status within a virtual reality) which is partly a projection of real ideas and feelings (Tyagi 2011: 203). In contrast, virtual representations may convert into actual identities. Once uploaded, material is manipulable and can be implemented in different cultural contexts. In this sense, these virtual spaces form a dynamic and digital culture of their own, and online interactions can be understood as "laboratories for the construction of identity" (Turkle 1995: 194). To illustrate this process with an example: People go out and, instead of having face-to-face conversations while sitting next to each other in bars, they are on their phones uploading pictures of their cocktails to share the atmosphere of their evening with their friends. These uploads then go viral on facebook or Twitter and are discussed with others, also in social reality. Hence, social media has become part of our everyday lives and reality has expanded to the virtual space.

In virtual worlds and created third spaces respectively new cultural patterns with underlying value and belief system are developed, which are also mirrored in the use of language and symbols (i.e. insider jokes, abbreviations, emoticons, hacker language). Due to the fact that these virtual worlds are accessible without the restriction of place and time (hence accessible from around the world at any time), these cultures of virtual worlds are more fluid and subjects can shift between virtual representations and plunge into different cultural contexts more easily. However, this development also occurs in real life, just at a different pace. Subjects shift between different roles and multiple identities and plunge into different cultural contexts, from being a family member to being a student in school, being a tennis player in a club or a gamer in the evening and so on. As for the pedagogical functions of social networks and virtual realities, Witte (2014: 371) claims

that social media such as Facebook and Twitter are truly authentic and do not normally serve a pedagogical function. However, learning groups and interest groups can be implemented and pedagogical functions can be integrated by uploading authentic material, setting up forum discussions and exchanging information in chats.

To conclude, these principles cannot guarantee learners' development of intercultural third spaces because there are a myriad of social and psychological factors which contribute to and influence a successful outcome in L2 and culture learning, such as intrinsic motivation, age, primary socialisation, personality, the perceived economic/educational usefulness, sociolinguistic conceptualisations and attitudes, to name but a few. Hence, language education per se does not automatically trigger the interest to engage further with the language and culture, and might even lead to resistance. Yet it is in the L2 education context that deeply embedded aspects of culture can be challenged and learners can constructively engage in cultural dialogue. In this context, the presented compilation contains very useful and multifaceted sources and impulses for educators, which enable them to read up on existing projects, carry out further research and eventually transfer the initiatives to their own teaching.

3.7 Assessment of Intercultural Competence

Since it has proved to be notoriously difficult to define the term "intercultural competence", the inherent challenges in aligning outcomes and methods need to be considered (Deardorff 2009: 487). Apart from knowledge and understanding, as well as attitudinal change that is restricted to certain incidents, discussions and contexts, it is thus questionable as to how intercultural competence can be assessed. It seems fairly easy to assess cultural knowledge in terms of superficial, factual, historical or statistical facts or information related to the arts and literature by a test of facts. Yet, there is still a range of possibilities within the factual information. Factual components of cultural knowledge, for example geography, food specialties and traditions are rather straight forward, but when it comes to concepts such as politeness, interpretations may vary within a cultural community due to differences in the social class system.

Another difficulty is the differentiation between dispositions in terms of traits and in terms of acquired characteristics. Declarative knowledge and understanding only make up a small part of what constitutes intercultural competence as defined in the models. Assessment becomes more complicated when the moral and affective dimensions of worldviews are concerned, because there is a difference between the application of attitudes and their existence. In other words, the ability to act appropriately in a cultural context does not necessarily mean the acceptance of a new worldview (Paige *et al.* 2003: 173).

Furthermore, it is essential to determine who and what is going to be assessed, in what context and for what purposes. One single method to assess intercultural competence is rather unfeasible, as different contexts require different indicators (Deardorff 2004: 200). Overall, existing tools focus on multiple dimensions that comprise the construct of intercultural competence and its development. While some stress the domains of knowledge and sensitivity, other tools focus on skills, attitudes and the personality of the learners. Forms of assessment are qualitative or quantitative in nature and range from self-assessment tools and peer evaluation to staff evaluation. The list of employed instruments is very comprehensive and would be beyond the scope of this chapter.⁵⁷ Here, only the assessment tools based on the models of intercultural competence previously discussed will be elaborated on.

In the context of language education, the assessment of intercultural competence serves many functions and purposes. On the one hand, assessment tools are employed for diagnosis and the identification of strengths and weaknesses; it can further provide feedback on students' progress. On the other hand, assessment is implemented for the placement of students on courses, and for achievement purposes or proficiency assessment in terms of learning outcomes (Byram *et al.* 2002: 29). According to the various foci and purposes, the assessment tools are manifold and are also used in combination: performance assessment (Byram 1997, Hammer 2012), portfolio assessment (Byram 1997, Jacobson *et al.* 1999), interviews (Fantini 2005), simulations (Ruben 1976), observations (of self and others) (Ruben 1976), scenarios and roleplays (INCA-project, see chapter 3.2), case studies and critical incidents (Cushner & Brislin 1996), or short attitude and personality surveys (Fantini 2005). Furthermore, self-

⁵⁷ For a list and description of assessment tools in intercultural competence see Fantini and Tirmizi (2006a: 87–93).

assessment tools in terms of self-reflexive or so-called self-report instruments such as diary entries, reflection essays and critical incidents (Council of Europe 2009) are implemented.

Depending on the underlying model of intercultural competence, different assessment tools have been conceptualised. Based on Fantini's models of intercultural competence, the instruments "Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC)" (see chapter 3.1.1) and the "YOGA Form" ("Your Objectives, Guidelines and Assessment" Form) were designed. The YOGA Form (Fantini 2001: 2–5) involves a two-way assessment in terms of a self-assessment by the learner and an assessment by an external evaluator. It primarily serves as a guidance before, during and after an intercultural sojourn, and helps to follow up on the development of one's intercultural competence. This form of assessment is based on observation as well as on performance – "*what is actually done and observed*" (Fantini 2001: 3, *cursive* in original), instead of professed intentions (what one thinks one might do in a certain situation). The learners themselves and external evaluators such as a native of the host language/culture, educators or peers, provide both an emic and an etic viewpoint (insider vs. outsider), which further helps to focus on both effective as well as appropriate behaviour. Before or early on in the cross-cultural sojourn, the participants rate themselves in the categories knowledge, attitude, skills, awareness and second language proficiency on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 ("no competence") to 5 ("native-like competence"). Based on their observations and knowledge of participant performances, an external person (usually the person in authority, i.e. teacher or administrator) evaluates the participants on a separate copy of the form. These two forms of evaluation (self and other) are then used as incentives for discussion and reflection of strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation is also used for the development of strategies that will help to maximise intercultural competence development. This evaluation process is repeated as often as regarded feasible and desirable during the learning process. The AIC (self- and other reported) (Fantini & Tirmizi 2006a, b, see chapter 3.1.1 FEIL Project) reflects the dimensions of knowledge, attitude, skills, awareness and second language proficiency on four developmental levels (educational traveler, sojourner, professional, intercultural specialist). In follow-up interviews, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006b) enquired about the learners' personal opinion on their development, their application of abilities in terms of intercultural success and the impact of their stay abroad (Fantini & Tirmizi 2006b: 37).

Byram's (1997) Model of ICC has served as the basis for various assessment tools such as the European Language Portfolio by the Council of Europe (2015), the AIE (Council of Europe 2009) and the assessment battery of the INCA project (2004). According to Byram (1997), portfolios are the most suitable assessment method, as they allow for a combination of specific (*savoir by savoir*) and holistic (intercultural communicative competence as a whole) assessment. Furthermore, portfolios demonstrate a learner's development of intercultural competence over a certain period of time and allow for a differentiation of levels of intercultural competence. They provide the possibility of combining assessment and teaching/learning, and they facilitate a combination of criterion-referenced documentation and objective tests. Portfolios further allow for the assessment of all *savoirs* of intercultural communicative competence, as they provide information on the learners' present state of knowledge, on their skills of interpreting and relating, interaction and discovery, as well as critical awareness and reflection (Byram 1997: 105–110). Like the YOGA-form (Fantini 2001), the AIE (Council of Europe 2009) deals with concrete actions and behaviour instead of professed intentions, and covers all *savoirs* in its guiding questions for reflection. Since the AIE serves as the basis for the empirical research conducted in the framework of this project, the instrument will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Another approach based on Byram's (1997) model of ICC is the assessment battery of the INCA project (2004) developed by Byram, Kühlmann, Müller-Jacquier and Budin. Within the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci II programme (Commission of the European Communities), the research project involved academic experts and engineering employers from Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and the UK, with the aim of designing a framework for intercultural communicative competence and suitable assessment tools for the needs of employers in multicultural and multilingual teams (Pechtl & Lund 2007: 467). The dimensions of intercultural communicative competence covered in the INCA battery are tolerance of ambiguity, behavioural flexibility, communicative awareness, knowledge discovery, respect for Otherness and empathy. Based on these dimensions, a framework of three performance levels (basic, intermediate, full) was developed. For the assessee version, the six dimensions were simplified by linking them with three strands of competence: openness,⁵⁸ knowledge⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The concept of openness comprises respect for otherness and tolerance of ambiguity.

⁵⁹ The concept of knowledge comprises knowledge discovery and empathy.

and adaptability.⁶⁰ In the framework of the INCA battery, the concept of culture seems to relate to language communities, which becomes clear with the use of the term native speaker in this context. Altogether, the assessment battery consists of three different approaches (Assessee Manual INCA 2004: 13):

- two forms of questionnaires that cover information on the learner's biography and an intercultural profile based on the learner's responses (3-point Likert scale)
- multiple-choice and open-ended questions on text- or video-based intercultural scenarios
- role-plays in which the learners' behaviour is evaluated.

However, since INCA is related to the business context, the project will not be discussed in more detail here.

Bennett's DMIS (1993a) has formed the basis for various assessment tools for intercultural sensitivity such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer 2012) which has, amongst other implementations (internationally across various disciplines), been used to help students and professionals during their sojourn abroad. It should also be pointed out that the IDI is one of the assessment instruments that has been statistically examined for its reliability and validity (Hammer 2012, Paige *et al.* 2003). The IDI is a 50-item survey for self-assessment using the five-point Likert scale and measures the respondents' level of intercultural sensitivity along the six-stage developmental continuum (see chapter 3.4). It is available in two versions, for the education and the organisation context, and for individuals as well as for groups. Upon completion, the respondents receive an individual (or group) profile report, which provides information on the level of intercultural competence the learner most strongly identifies with at that moment. The individual assessment includes context questions that allow for a personal description of cross-cultural goals, challenges and critical (intercultural) incidents, which involve navigating cultural differences and commonalities. For organisation or group assessments, individual and/or group follow-up interviews to assess similarities and differences within the group are conducted (Hammer 2012: 116–128). Based on the results of the IDI, an Intercultural Development Plan (IDP) is drawn up in order to provide guidance for further development of intercultural competence.

⁶⁰ The concept of adaptability comprises behavioural flexibility and communicative awareness.

An educational project which used the DMIS to assess the outcomes of a module on intercultural sensitivity is the DESI study (Deutsch Englisch Schülerleistungen International, Nold 2009). The study was conducted from 2001 to 2006, with each cycle covering a school year including one assessment at the beginning and one at the end of the school year. Overall, the sample consists of 9,623 students at grade 9 in different school types in the German school system. The main aim of the DESI study was to assess English language competence but one sub-category of the assessment dealt with intercultural competence irrespective of pupils' language competences.⁶¹ To this end, the intercultural tool was divided into two components. Students were given two construed critical incidents which depicted interactions comprising misunderstandings between members of two language communities. They had to analyse and evaluate these critical incidents based on optional answers, which would require as little English as possible. The component of socio-pragmatic language awareness, on the other hand, involved language competence in English. The empirical data shows that the level of socio-pragmatic language awareness has an impact on the level of intercultural sensitivity, but not vice versa (Nold 2009: 175).

In Deardorff's (2004) study (see chapter 3.4), the experts and administrators come to the conclusion that degrees of intercultural competence can be measured and its development should be measured over a period of time instead of a once-off assessment. Deardorff's (2006a) Process Model of Intercultural Competence is considered suitable for the assessment as it defines internal and external outcomes based on the development of intercultural attitudes, knowledge, awareness and skills. Assessment needs to go beyond the surface (i.e. declarative knowledge of food, greetings or facts) and relate to intricacies of deeper understanding (Deardorff 2009: 479–480). Thus, the research group further agrees that multiple and mainly qualitative assessment methods such as interviews, case studies and observations in combination with standardised instruments should be used to measure separate components of intercultural competence. However, what exactly an assessment of intercultural competence should involve is not covered in the data. Additionally, for assessment purposes the term success needs to be defined and the objectives need to be broken down into detailed context-related measurable

⁶¹ In the DESI-study the term "intercultural sensitivity" was replaced by "intercultural competence".

outcomes and indicators in order to conceptualise assessment methods. This process is not undertaken by Deardorff (2004).

In conclusion, the underlying model of intercultural competence, the specific contexts and purposes of assessment determine what components of intercultural competence are assessed and thus what form of assessment is used. Assessment may be conducted once or implemented as an on-going process in various ways and at various points of time. Since intercultural competence is perceived differently in various contexts, a general approach to intercultural competence assessment is not possible. Rather, context-specific approaches for specifically defined purposes are required (Byram 2009: 220).

The discussed assessment methods belong to the categories of self-assessment tools as well as external assessment tools and have their strengths and weaknesses. Self-assessment tools (i.e. self-observation, diary entries) are popular because they address the affective and moral dimensions and foster self-reflection (Byram 2009: 224–225). The learners evaluate their experiences and attitudes and no set educational standards have to be met. A weakness of self-assessment methods is a possible discrepancy between self-perception and the actual intercultural awareness and abilities acquired. No precise conclusions on intercultural competence acquisition can be drawn, because the selected examples do not necessarily reflect the holistic process of intercultural competence. In some circumstances, the self-assessment data remains confidential to the learner and hence this discrepancy of perception is not investigated and discussed, leading to a decrease in the possible learning effect. On the other hand, if the data is passed on to teachers or peers, learners might be reluctant to share their genuine feelings, fears and thoughts. Thus, there is the risk of an impact of social desirability, which might have an impact on all methods (diary entries, interviews, portfolios) used to elicit personal attitudes, thoughts and feelings. A focus on attitudes may imply that this form of assessment does not fulfill the requirements of objective judgment which adheres to the variables of reliability, validity and objectivity. Believing that there are universal values on the other hand, would be deemed to fail on such a relativist criterion, as in this case the assessee is also being evaluated on whether his or her response is acceptable or not (Byram 2009: 220–221). The assessment of being non-judgmental, for example, is value-laden in itself. Testing attitudes therefore also raises ethical issues, since assessment relates to an objective judgment of what has been taught and consciously learned, something that is not possible when attitudes and values are concerned. As Fleming

(2009b) points out, key concepts such as "empathy, openness, tolerance of ambiguity, readiness to decentre, willingness to engage with others and to try anything new are particularly elusive when subject to assessment" (Fleming 2009b: 9). In this context, Byram (2009: 219–220) questions the degree of control a learner has over the development of attitudes such as openness, empathy, flexibility of the mind, awareness or the ability to decentre. Therefore, it is debatable if an assessment of learning other than knowledge can actually be implemented in the L2 context since it is the only component that is directly observable. However, as Byram (1997: 111) points out, the simplification of competences to objectively tested components would have a detrimental effect.

External assessment (i.e. observations, performance assessments, interviews), on the other hand, are more influenced by exterior factors such as the assessors' emotional state or their attitude towards the assessee. One external assessment method is the use of critical incidents and performance tests to assess the level of intercultural competence, like in the DESI study. The learners are asked to choose the most appropriate response for a given incident from a range of given options. One weakness of this method is that these provided critical incidents do not relate to authentic contexts but are construed. This restricted range of responses harbours the risk of being too reductionist as productive interaction, negotiation of meaning are not involved in the concept (Nold 2009: 176) and no personal in-depth analysis is required. Conversely, on the surface this method allows for a more objective and reliable assessment than the description of personal critical incidents.

Despite the provided suggestions, the question of how intercultural competence can be assessed, apart from knowledge and a tendency or attitudinal change that is restricted to certain incidents, discussions and contexts, remains unanswered. The interplay of qualities and attitudes in the subjective mind and body can only be determined in specific contexts and it is not clear to what extent they are the result of purely rational decision-making; rather it is estimated that they become automatic reactions (Fleming 2009b: 9). In this sense, the display of particular characteristics in assessments provides more information on the learner's knowledge and understanding than on the underlying attitudes and characteristics. This idea is also supported by Kim (1992: 371–372) who claims that the dynamics and interplays in intercultural interactions need to be considered whereby no one single component determines the outcomes.

As a consequence, some scholars have claimed that its assessment is impossible (Byram 1997, Fleming 2009b, Kramsch 1993, Witte 2014) in its entirety, as it constitutes individual growth and relates to subjective experiences and construals. In this context, Schulz (2007) summarises the difficulty of intercultural assessment in relation to the concept's complexity in the following way:

Despite a vast body of literature devoted to the teaching of culture, there is, however, no agreement on how culture can or should be defined operationally in the context of FL learning in terms of concrete instructional objectives, and there is still less consensus on whether or how it should be formally assessed. (Schulz 2007: 10, cited in Witte 2014: 383)

It can be concluded that a complex construct such as intercultural competence can hardly be assessed in its totality due to its inherent dimensions of beliefs and attitudes, the concepts of identity, cultural frames of reference and blending of spaces. Hence, it is questionable if and how intercultural (communicative) competence should be formally assessed in language studies in the tertiary education sector. What is certain is that underlying concepts and concrete instructional objectives first need to be specified if assessment is considered essential.

3.8 Résumé

As discussed in this chapter, Western conceptualisations of intercultural competence reflect the Western way of life and its underlying values. They do not operate in a social vacuum but, rather, are inextricably linked and attached to the contexts they are employed in. Although the variety of theories and models provides language educators with multi-faceted approaches to understanding and investigating intercultural competence, this range also complexifies the discourse about it. There is no consensus on a precise definition of intercultural competence but there are common themes that emerge from the research literature which will now be expounded (see Tab.3–Tab.6).

	Intercultural Interlocutor Competence Model (Fantini 1995, 2005)	Worldviews Convergence Model (Fantini 1995, 2005)
Conceptual Model	co-orientational model	co-orientational model
Form of Statement	descriptive, normative	descriptive, normative
Underlying Concept of Culture	not discussed	not discussed
Dimensions Involved	attitudes knowledge/understanding skills critical awareness language proficiency	attitudes knowledge/understanding skills critical awareness language proficiency
Overall Aim	effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural and interlingual contexts	effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural and interlingual contexts
Main Focus	interaction of interlocutors aimed at creating a common referential world, reciprocal relationship between language and culture, life-long process	converging worldviews between interlocutors develop, life-long process
Pedagogical Implications	none provided	none provided
Assessment	AIC YOGA Form	AIC YOGA Form

Tab. 3 Overview of Models of Intercultural Competence (1)

	Concept of Third Place / Symbolic Competence (Kramersch 1998, 2009)	Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram 1997, 2009)
Conceptual Model	co-orientational model	co-orientational model
Form of Statement	descriptive, normative	descriptive, normative
Underlying Concept of Culture	culture as the meaning that members of a speech community give to shared discursive practice in a certain context	culture as a fuzzy, fluid and dynamic construct which comprises a material, a social and a subjective dimension
Dimensions Involved	dualism between self and Other attitudes knowledge/understanding skills critical awareness language proficiency	dualism between self and Other attitudes knowledge/understanding skills critical awareness language proficiency
Overall Aim	accurate and appropriate interaction in social contexts, subjective blending of spaces between cultures	change perspective on self and Other, become a mediator between cultures
Main Focus	hybrid third spaces between language and culture frames, construction of meaning, life-long process	communication and interaction across cultural boundaries, (mutual) constructions of meaning, beliefs and values, negotiation of identity within and across cultures, life-long process
Pedagogical Implications	yes	yes
Assessment	too complex a construct	AIE INCA Project

Tab. 4 Overview of Models of Intercultural Competence (2)

	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett 1995)	Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 2004)
Conceptual Model	developmental model	compositional model
Form of Statement	descriptive, normative	descriptive, normative
Underlying Concept of Culture	objective and subjective culture in dialectic dynamics	not discussed
Dimensions Involved	attitudes knowledge/understanding skills critical awareness	attitudes knowledge/understanding skills desired internal outcomes desired external outcomes
Overall Aim	enable mutual learning and understandig of different perspectives, behave appropriately in intercultural contexts	effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural contexts
Main Focus	development of an ethnorelative mindset and cultural sensitivity in order to relate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts, life-long process	ethno-relative view, empathy, flexibility and adaptability, behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately, life-long process
Pedagogical Implications	yes	none provided
Assessment	IDI	no tool provided

Tab. 5 Overview of Models of Intercultural Competence (3)

	Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 2004)	Model of Progressive Principles (Witte 2014)
Conceptual Model	co-orientational model	developmental model
Form of Statement	descriptive, normative	descriptive, normative
Underlying Concept of Culture	not discussed	dynamic and distributed concept of culture
Dimensions Involved	attitudes knowledge/understanding skills desired internal outcomes desired external outcomes	attitudes knowledge/understanding skills critical awareness language proficiency
Overall Aim	effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural contexts	conscious and intentional development of intercultural places a broadening of the (inter-)cultural foundations of construal with regard to cognition, emotion, identity and behaviour
Main Focus	ethno-relative view, empathy, flexibility and adaptability, behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately	negotiation of the meaning of constructs, patterns of construal and habitus with regard to other cultural systems and the internalised categories of one's own cultural circle, core aspect for intercultural learning is intrinsic motivation
Pedagogical Implications	no	yes
Assessment	no tool provided	too complex a construct

Tab. 6 Overview of Models of Intercultural Competence (4)

The review of diverse approaches to intercultural competence development presented in Tables 3–6 differentiates between compositional, co-orientational and developmental models, in vague reference to the typology of Spitzberg and Changnon (2009: 10–34).⁶² In compositional models, relevant hypothesised requisite attitudes, characteristics, traits, knowledge and skills considered important for successful intercultural interaction are enlisted. An example of a compositional model is the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence by Deardorff (2004). Deardorff (2004) assumes requisite attitudes which enhance the development of knowledge and skills that lead to internal and ultimately external outcomes – the effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural situations. The more components of this model a learner acquires, the higher the probability of intercultural competence development as an external outcome.

Co-orientational models share the features of compositional models but focus on communicative mutuality and shared meanings, hence intercultural understanding. In his co-orientational models, the Intercultural Interlocutor Competence Model and the Worldviews Convergence Model, Fantini (1995, 2005) enlists language proficiency as well as a variety of traits, characteristics and abilities considered essential to achieve co-orientation in linguistic processes. Kramsch (2009d) also takes a co-orientational approach in her concept of symbolic competence. This refers to the dynamic discursive process of constructing and reconstructing symbolic subjective meaning and subjective blending of spaces. Byram's (1997) Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence can equally be ranked among co-orientational models in terms of gaining the awareness and ability to deal with one's own and the others' constructions of meaning and becoming a mediator. Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2004) also falls into this category and stresses the multidimensionality of intercultural competence development. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett 1993) belongs to the third, developmental type of model. Six stages of progression (from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism) are specified, through which intercultural competence is hypothetically developing. Witte (2014) has designed another developmental model, the Model of Progressive Principles, which comprises nine progressive principles and combines concepts of intercultural third space, inner speech, constructs of identity, positionings and plausibility structures in relation to the social world.

⁶²Spitzberg and Changnon (2009: 10) differentiate between five types of models which have been reduced to three types of models for this dissertation.

This diversity of definitions is partly due to the dynamic and variable concept of culture (elaborated in chapter 1). In some models, the conceptual discussion on the definition of culture is left out altogether, yet there seems to be a general agreement on culture as a living concept which is situational, flexible and responsive to the exigencies of the worlds that a person is confronted with. Hence, culture reflects the demands of the various contexts it is used in (Avruch 1998: 20) and is estimated to constitute a complex, elusive and multilayered concept with no clear-cut, undisputed definition. It therefore remains questionable whether we can draw a line between different cultures, or if intercultural competence does not rather refer to every successful interpersonal interaction.

Although the overview provides "a rich conceptual and theoretical landscape" (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009: 44), these models are not mutually exclusive as they overlap and show commonalities. It has been shown that the models of intercultural competence attempt to account for the ability to step beyond one's own cultural frame and successfully deal with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Sinicrope *et al.* 2007: 2). Hence, despite the use of different terminology, the models share similar contents. They all make a claim for critical engagement with the foreign culture but also for reflection of one's own underlying cultural conceptions. This plea implies that one's own culture and identity and those of the Other are singularities – an underlying dichotomy of the own versus the foreign culture and language that does not exist as such. In regard to intercultural competence development, we deal with individuals. It is not cultures that meet but individuals whose attributes vary within a culture because of overlapping group memberships and a diversity of social and experiential settings that individuals encounter. Hence, culture is rarely the same for any two individuals, nor is it the same over a period of time (Avruch 1998: 154). In this sense, the scope of culture not only refers to "pseudo-kinship" groupings such as ethnic groups or nations but also to groupings derived from profession, region, class or religion. This broader notion suggests that individuals reflect and embody multiple cultures and that these cultures are psychologically and socially distributed in groups (Avruch 1998: 5). Thus, it could again be claimed that intercultural competence is germane to the concept of interpersonal competence.

Language competence and awareness are often regarded as essential for intercultural competence development by many researchers (Byram 1997, Fantini 2005, Kramsch 1998, Risager 2006, Witte 2014), yet not regarded as mandatory by others (Deardorff

2004). As far as aspects of language are concerned, body language such as gestures, facial expressions or the use of space are neglected in these models. However, as Matsumoto (2006: 221) points out, culture not only influences verbal communication but also nonverbal behaviour, such as emotional expressions and gazing. Body language complements verbal communication and constitutes the main information on feelings, thoughts and opinions expressed in interactions. It is mostly situated on a subconscious level and therefore difficult to grasp or impossible to unlearn and relearn in a way that can be employed in an automated manner. The meaning and interpretation of body language cues are agreed upon within cultural communities and interpretation patterns may vary which may contribute to misunderstandings.

Some of the estimated components of intercultural competence might be mutually exclusive, constituting opposing concepts in various contexts. While the ability to communicate effectively is mostly determined through individual perception, the ability to communicate appropriately is determined through the perception of others. However, in order to be effective and reach one's individual goals, a learner does not necessarily have to interact in an appropriate manner within a community; on the contrary he/she might be manipulative and calculating, and this contradicts the original rationale of the interculturally competent person who is understanding and respectful towards difference and appreciative of the Other. Hence, effectiveness might be related to power, and diametrically opposed to appropriateness. Empathy, flexibility and a change in perspectives might be helpful in order to achieve one's own aims but might not necessarily involve respect and appreciation of the Other. Effectiveness and appropriateness therefore vary from context to context, based on different communication structures and norms.

Furthermore, intercultural competence development is regarded as a life-long process that is part of continuous personal development (Deardorff 2004: 191). In this sense there is no pre-defined end point. Consequently, this assumption leads to the question as to whether a starting point can ever be assumed. In other words, under what circumstances and from what moment a person is regarded interculturally competent. For example, it is unclear if a foreigner who thanks the bus driver as he/she alights the bus in Ireland can be regarded as interculturally competent because he/she has acted in an appropriate manner by imitating the people in front of him.

Given the challenges inherent in clearly defining the concepts of culture and competence described in the first three chapters, it is consequently equally difficult to align assessment methods and define objectives and outcomes, which always depend on the underlying models of intercultural competence. The rather philosophical discourse on identity, patterns of meaning and blended spaces seems to stand in contrast to the pragmatic approach towards competence, achievement and performance. Furthermore, key components such as openness, empathy, tolerance of ambiguity or willingness to engage with others do not constitute contingent patterns of behaviour as they are related to more profound affective capacities, traits and values that emanate from instincts and emotions. Hence they are extremely complex to assess and develop as they cannot be rationally or cognitively controlled.

In addition, it remains debatable as to what the ultimate goal of intercultural competence teaching should be, or indeed if there actually needs to be any defined goals at all (Hesse 2009: 163). The extent to which teaching measures are conducive to cultural learning is vague. Recently, there have been attempts to provide operationalisation methods and practical recommendations for the classroom (Byram *et al.* 2002, Witte 2014). Yet, given the fuzziness of the concept of intercultural competence and its concomitant affective aspect it is difficult to define what exactly needs to be nurtured and in what way. Assessments which only test factual cultural knowledge do not provide any information or evidence on a person's overall intercultural competence. In order to cope with this challenge of summative assessment methods, dynamic methods such as role-plays, critical incidents and personality or attitude questionnaires aim to go beyond the cognitive dimension and address the affective dimension. However, it remains questionable how diagnostically conclusive these approaches ultimately are. As Fleming (2009b: 9–11) points out, the display of particular characteristics or appropriate behaviour in assessment contexts says more about knowledge and understanding than about habitual behaviours or emotions and does not provide information on the achievement of intercultural competence on all dimensions.

Exactly how many and what kinds of intercultural incidents learners need to be exposed to and what components need to be addressed in order to trigger a change in attitudes and a transfer of intercultural competence to prospective intercultural encounters has not yet been sufficiently studied. Hence, a comprehensive didactic concept does not exist as it always depends on the needs and requirements of the particular group.

Despite claims of descriptiveness and summativeness, these models are in fact normative in nature as there are certain ethical standards and norms to be met in order to (re)act appropriately and effectively. These norms may, however, vary for different cultural contexts. Intercultural competence alone does not guarantee successful intercultural interaction as systematic patterns of disadvantage and discrimination quite often exist due to disparities of power within populations (Barrett *et al.* 2014). The models seem to be based on an underlying premise of an ideal learner or, more generally, a human being who values other cultures, is respectful, open-minded and tolerant of ambiguity in ideal, equal socio-economic circumstances. In addition, the interculturally competent person is self-reflexive, empathic and motivated to take risks and plunge into intercultural interactions. He or she is understanding and knowledgeable, tolerant and flexible, and is skilled enough to shift perspectives and to analyse and interpret intercultural incidents which leads to sociolinguistic awareness and mutual understanding. All of these components have positive connotations and form attributes of a puzzle – an idealised ethical super human who sets the norms. The underlying concepts are, however, not precisely defined and it remains unclear what theories they are based on. Deardorff (2009), for example, invites the reader to add components which they consider important in intercultural interactions to her model. The models therefore seem to constitute arbitrary, elusive, hypothetical and incomplete lists of competences and attitudes which amount to a wooly conceptualisation of intercultural competence, which, as already discussed in chapter 1, could be described as a floating signifier.

4. Multi-Dimensional Study Design

In the previous chapters the persistent theoretical challenges of intercultural competence⁶³ in relation to its terminology, conceptualisation, assessment, goals and operationalisation have been discussed. In the field of language teaching, intercultural competence has become a highly diverse, widely-used concept, and a consensus on its definition and role does not exist. It has been established that current models of intercultural competence present an elusive, partly contradictory, hypothetical, context-free wish list based on the underlying idea of an ideal human being possessing ethically desirable personality traits and characteristics, the best-meant attitudes and dispositions, knowledge and skills. A theory on the reasons for this selection of attributes is, however, often not provided and there is often no explanation of the underlying concepts. Furthermore, a pragmatic problem presents itself in that there is scarcely any empirically grounded model of intercultural competence tailored to specific domains. Based on these conceptual and terminological challenges and complexities, the holistic concept of intercultural competence needs to be reflected upon in consideration of specific target groups and particular circumstances, which is the main aim of the study conducted in the framework of this dissertation.

4.1 Research Questions

Chapter 3 established that intercultural competence "does not consist of a simple additive combination of components" (Bennett 1993: 176) but represents a highly dynamic, hybrid construct as people's multiple cultural identities and blended intercultural spaces are subject to constant change and continuous personal development. Hence, it has been claimed that intercultural competence defines a floating signifier. This study therefore investigates which key factors of intercultural components students consider to be important and how they have contributed to their effectiveness during their stay abroad; it seeks to define the ingredients the floating signifier of intercultural competence is filled with in the study abroad context for a rather cohesive group.

⁶³ In the following chapters the term "intercultural competence" equates to "intercultural communicative competence".

The study provides evidence and insights into intercultural competence components derived from the research group's statements on their stay abroad experiences. The overall **MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION** of this dissertation therefore is:

What is the relationship between the theory and practice of intercultural competence in the context of studying abroad?

Before investigating the key components of intercultural competence for this study group, this study focuses on the underlying concept of culture itself. As established, there is no consensus on how culture is defined operationally in the context of L2 learning (Schulz 2007:10, cited in Witte 2014: 383) and a precise conceptual elaboration on culture is neglected in most of the models discussed in chapter 3. However, in contemporary research (Matsumoto 2006, Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, Straub 2007) there seems to be consensus on culture as a living concept, which is situational, flexible and responsive to the demands of the various contexts. It is not cultures that meet but culturally situated individuals with personal backgrounds, motivations, aspirations, dispositions and multi-layered, dynamic social constructions of themselves. The following study attends to the subjectivity of its participants and investigates their underlying concept of culture. The first subordinate research question therefore is:

How do the students conceptualise culture in the study abroad context?

Along with questions on the understanding of culture, the exploration of the students' reflections and experiences is aimed at providing information on subjective expectations and aspirations, individual goals and successes, skills and coping strategies, knowledge, language and cultural awareness, and changes in perspective in terms of identity, attitudes and values.

Efficiency in intercultural contexts postulates an interest in and sensitivity for cultural differences and consequently the willingness and preparedness to modify one's attitudes and behaviour (Bhawuk & Brislin 1992: 416). The willingness and motivation to engage with another linguistic and cultural system depend on the circumstances and the different lifeworlds the person lives in. They are not expected to change rapidly but are deeply rooted and only evolve gradually (Oxford & Shearin 1994: 14). In order to explore effective and appropriate behaviour, the willingness to engage in intercultural situations as well as

personal aspirations, expectations and goals need to be considered. During the stay abroad, for example, the students are taken out of their individual cultural and lingual comfort zones and put into a new, unfamiliar context which may affect their attitudes in different ways. The participants are likely to have different expectations – ranging from self-discovery to partying to native-like behaviour in a host-culture – and expectations in turn have an impact on the intrinsic willingness to engage with cultures and on the strategies to fulfill them. The second subordinate research question therefore is:

What aspirations do the participants have for a successful stay abroad?

A key element for motivation has shown to be success (Coleman 1997: 9) in that well-motivated learners perceive their success and are encouraged by it, which in turn encourages further efforts and success. Hence, motivation and success may reinforce each other. The participants may have different subjective notions of efficiency and success of their stay abroad, which influence their intercultural encounters. The next subordinate research questions therefore are:

How do the students define success in the study abroad context and what strategies do the students use to achieve their aims?

It is estimated that language awareness is essential for successful (intercultural) interaction (Byram 1997, Fantini 2005, Kramsch 1998, Risager 2006, Witte 2014) but does not guarantee it (Zarate 2003:13). Languages as the most complex sign systems play an important role in the discursive spinning of webs of significance. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural constructivist approach (see chapter 1.3), languages shape meaning in cultural contexts and have an impact on the co-construction of meaning and collective consciousness: "After all, languages are the background systems of our cultural worlds, and the world's thousands of distinct languages open up thousands, at least in part, of distinct cultural worlds" (Brockmeier 2012: 462). Furthermore, language serves as a tool to make subjective realities, values, thoughts and emotions accessible to other people. Grappling with another language challenges "how one perceives, conceptualizes and expresses oneself" (Fantini 2005: 2). The realisation of linguistic relativity may encourage a change of perspectives and the awareness that culture is a social construct which is "relative and not absolute" (Coleman 1997: 11). A lack of language skills may restrict one's worldview of differing conceptualisations encoded in language systems (Fantini & Tirmizi

2006b: 48–49). However, language skills and intercultural competence development do not necessarily coincide and good language skills do not automatically imply good intercultural competence or vice versa (Zarate 2003: 13), which would mean that native speakers are automatically interculturally competent. These assumptions lead to the next subordinate research question:

What conclusions can be drawn on intercultural competence from subjectively perceived language learning progress and objectively measured language competence?

Furthermore, personality attributes and attitudes are postulated to form an important basis for the development of declarative and procedural knowledge, skills and understanding required to act effectively and appropriately in intercultural encounters (Byram 1997, Deardorff 2004, Witte 2014). In this sense, intercultural competence is closely related to the concept of identity and entails personal as well as interpersonal aspects. Every person has a variety of identities and one aspect of intercultural competence is the ability and skill to discover, understand and negotiate these identities (Byram 2009: 330) and substitute them as the context requires. The self is a complex entity that exists both "independently of and intertwined within society" (Pellegrino Aveni 2005: 15). It cannot be defined in isolation but only linked to its environment and interpersonal relationships, society and cultures (Pellegrino Aveni 2005: 12). Since individuals are part of multiple social groups, they take on different identities in different contexts. Based on multiple attributions and affiliations, people define their individuality and position themselves in relation to other people in the social environment in terms of context-contingent attachments to subject positions (Hall 1996: 6) which are discursively and socially construed. The acquisition of intercultural competence therefore refers to the ability to understand interlocutors as unique complex human beings with multiple identities. The last subordinate research question therefore relates to the students' constructions of identity.

What impact does the stay abroad have on identity negotiation as reported by the students?

Despite the fact that all participants are students of German at the same institution, there are external components such as living conditions, social networks or extent of German

language use as well as internal components such as proficiency level of German or attitude towards host cultures that lead to diverging lifeworlds and concepts of identity.

4.2 Study Design

In the first three chapters the concept of intercultural competence was investigated from a theoretical point of view. However, the analysis highlighted the need for empirical research on specific groups and under specific conditions. Hence, my research questions and the following study design aimed to empirically test the assumed components of intercultural competence models in the study abroad context. It was of particular interest to gain insight into the students' world of experience, their subjective theories and constructs of intercultural competence as well as their progression. Before proceeding to discuss the study participants, the research instruments and the data analysis procedures in more detail, a general overview of the structure will be provided.

According to Geertz (1973), an interpretive study of humans' cultural reality needs to be based on emic, experience-near concepts, which reflect the way in which the subjects themselves consider their experiences to be meaningful (Brockmeier 2012: 440). Based on the stance that "it is only the actual participants themselves who can reveal the meanings and interpretations of their experiences and actions" (Dörnyei 2007: 38), I⁶⁴ wanted to explore these emic concepts of students in relation to intercultural competence. The students' self-presentations, perceptions and subjective estimations were taken as a starting point for research. In this sense, the agents themselves were regarded as experts and the study focused on primary data of subjective experiences, social commitment and interpersonal communication. In order to explore the students' subjective notions of, perspectives on, and perceptions of intercultural competence as well as their experiences, a qualitative research approach was chosen. A qualitative method of analysis enabled the investigation of complex processes, social phenomena and the construction of meaning (Dresing *et al.* 2015: 6). It aided me in finding out how the students evaluated intercultural competence, what aspects they regarded relevant, how they expressed their motives, presuppositions and patterns of argumentation (Dresing *et al.* 2015: 8). Since quantitative empirical studies cannot take these

⁶⁴ According to Dörnyei (2007: 193) it has become common in qualitative research to use the first person singular "I" instead of the impersonal "the researcher" when describing methods. I shall adhere to this usage in the following elaboration.

subjectivities into account, a narrative-based, qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014) approach was taken. In this sense, the interview data helped me to understand why the students told stories in certain ways. Additionally, it was possible to ask questions about further topics and include non-verbal cues such as periods of silence in the data analysis. In this context, Dervin's claim of the "researcher's naïve belief in his/her subjects' honesty" (Dervin 2010: 163) was considered.

Dervin (2010) further pointed out that "many definitions of intercultural competence [...] are based on what people have to say about what they feel about Others, what they have learnt about others [...] and not on *how* they say it" (*italics* in original, Dervin 2010: 163). The aim of this study additionally was to uncover subtle meanings and focus on individual diversity by means of a case study. A case study is

a description and analysis of an individual matter or case [...] with the purpose to identify variables, structures, forms and orders of interaction between the participants in the situation (theoretical purpose), or, in order to assess the performance of work or progress in development (practical purpose)" (Mesec 1998: 383)

In this dissertation project, the case study served both a theoretical and a practical purpose, involving a selection of methods, namely semi-structured individual interviews before and after the students' stay abroad and personal entries into an amended form of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) (see chapter 4.4 on research instruments), serving as incentives for further reflection. By means of in-depth content analysis (see chapter 4.5 on data analysis) of reported personal critical intercultural encounters during the stay, perspectives on the key factors necessary for effective and appropriate interaction with others with varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds were identified.

A case study design was implemented because the research project was based on the assumption that the stories told by the students in the interviews and outlined in the intercultural encounter forms provided access to their subjective experiences of cultural reality. In this sense, language represented reality but at the same time created it as students shaped their ideas and intricate thoughts, visions and imaginings (Brockmeier 2012: 444) and construed meaning while they were narrating their experiences. A case study approach allowed for the exploration and in-depth investigation of behavioural

conditions through the actors' perspective, which is not provided for in quantitative research results (Zainal 2007: 1).

Based on the findings of the literature study, the assumed components in models of intercultural competence were elaborated and put into interview questions referring to the students' lifeworlds in the study abroad context (for a detailed description of the enquired dimensions see chapter 4.4 on research instruments). Then, interview guidelines for a semi-structured one-to-one interview for third-year-students returning to NUIM after their stay abroad were developed.

Two weeks before the first interviews were conducted (in November 2011) an information session was held in the framework of the GN 310 module. Prospective participants (i.e. final year students who had come back from their year abroad) were informed about the procedure and objectives of the study and were given an information sheet (see Appendix A) containing the overall aim of the investigation, the tasks they had to perform, the potential consequences of their participation, the extent of confidentiality of the data and the basic right of the students to withdraw and refuse to participate at any time without any consequences.⁶⁵ The participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B) in which they agreed to the interviews being audio-recorded.

A group of 13 students who had returned from their year abroad (for more details on the sampling see chapter 4.3) agreed to serve as a pilot study group (Fig. 9) in order to test and refine the semi-structured interview guide, to ensure the questions were clear, unbiased and focused, and to try different interview settings (order of questions, office environment versus lecture hall, position of dictaphone). Participation in this project was completely voluntary and students could withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons. After the interview, the students were asked to provide feedback on the construction of the interview guide and the questions asked for possible amendments. These suggestions were considered in the revision of the semi-structured interview guidelines for the main study in March 2012.

⁶⁵ Prior to the start of the study, ethical approval was granted by the Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee which forms part of the Maynooth University, National University of Ireland, Ethics Committee.

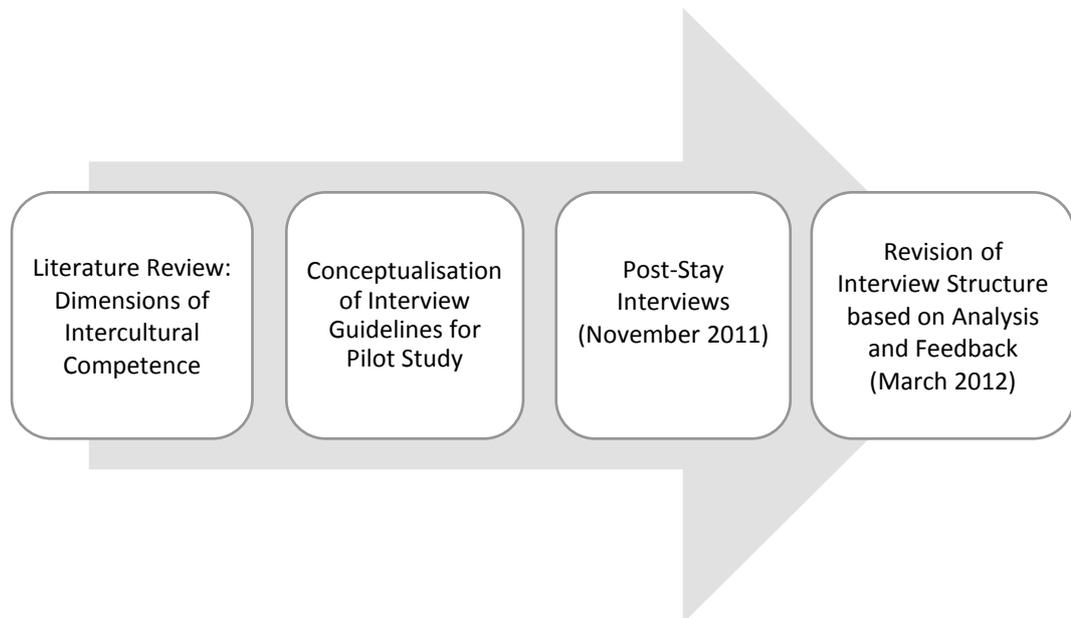


Fig. 9 Study Design of Pilot Study

However, as is common in qualitative research, a formally separate pilot stage as such did not exist (Richards 2005: 78) in this study. Since the research tools were hardly changed (two prompt questions were rephrased), the answers of the trial run group of 13 students were included in the final analysis of the main study.

The main study group consisted of 14 students who embarked on a year abroad for the academic year 2012/2013. In April 2012, an information session was held in the framework of the GN 210 module. Again, prospective participants were informed about the procedure and objectives of the study and were given an information sheet (see Appendix A) which contained the overall aim of the investigation and informed them of the tasks they had to perform, the potential consequences of their participation, the extent of confidentiality of the data and the basic right of the students to withdraw and refuse to participate at any time without any consequences. The participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B) in which they agreed to the interviews being audio-recorded and to the written data on the moodle platform and in the critical incident entries being filed.

As for the main study design, I conducted one-on-one interviews prior to the students' stay abroad and shortly after their return, covering again underlying concepts and dimensions of intercultural competence. The reason for implementing a pre- and post-stay inquiry approach was to analyse the development in the students' definitions of

underlying concepts of intercultural competence and their notion of effective and appropriate intercultural interaction. In addition, the students were asked to provide 3 reflections on critical intercultural encounters they experienced during their stay abroad. This approach could provide insights into an interval contingent sign in terms of participants reporting on an experience they had every three months (Bolger *et al.* 2003: 588). Furthermore, the concept of intercultural competence could be investigated from various points of views. The range of different temporal contexts (pre-stay, during their stay abroad and post-stay) allowed for a wider picture of the object of investigation even though the retrieved information mostly consisted of retrospective data.⁶⁶ This approach was based on the hypotheses of Bennett (1993a), Byram (2009), Deardorff (2011), Fantini (2005), Kramsch (2009a) and Witte (2014) that change happens over time when personal experiences are involved, with personal interaction being essential for the development. Again, participation was completely voluntary and students could withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons.

Overall, the students provided subjective accounts of 24 critical intercultural incidents for further analysis.⁶⁷ In order to facilitate communication among students and with me as researcher, the platform "Year Abroad for German Studies" on Moodle was implemented. On this platform, students could exchange their perspectives as well as ask questions, provide information and upload their completed critical intercultural encounter forms. However, as it turned out, students hardly availed of this opportunity, and staying in touch and exchanging information was most successful via Facebook. Upon the students' return to NUIM in autumn 2013, they were again interviewed in reference to their retrospective perspectives on underlying concepts of intercultural competence and their notion of effective and appropriate intercultural interaction in October 2013 (see Fig. 10).

⁶⁶ Since the pilot study participants' data were included in the overall data analysis, the main focus was set on retrospective data analysis. Altogether, 27 participants provided retrospective insights in the framework of their post-stay interviews.

⁶⁷ To preserve the students' anonymity, their information on intercultural incidents cannot be published in its entirety.

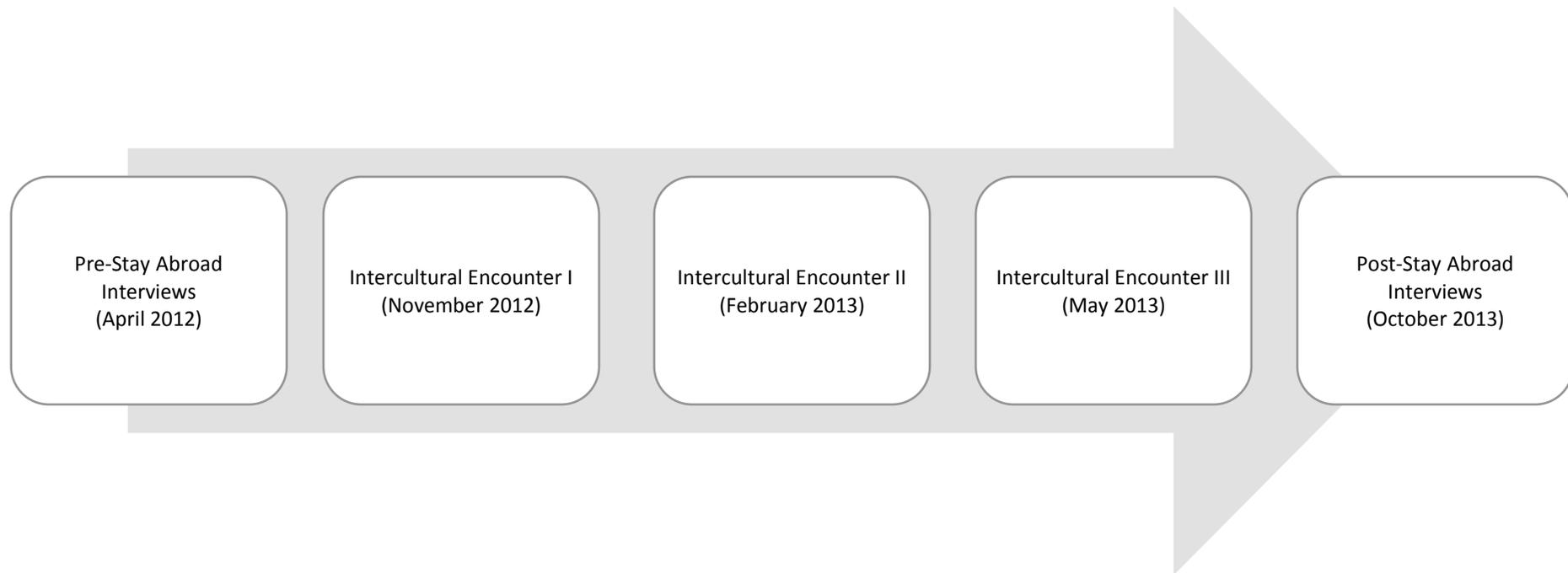


Fig. 10 Main Study Design

By means of individual semi-structured interviews before and after the stay abroad as well as an in-depth analysis of reported personal critical intercultural encounters during the stay, perspectives on key factors for effective and appropriate interaction with others with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds were identified. In this sense, the relationship between the individual and the surrounding social world from an individualistic perspective was explored, based on a collection of introspective data from the students.

Participants were entitled to copies of all recordings and their data would have been deleted if they had felt uncomfortable at any stage. Full confidentiality in terms of participation and personal details was guaranteed. To protect the confidentiality of the research participants and prevent anyone outside of the research project from determining the students' identities, the identifiable data (real names, places of study, age and nationality) were encrypted. Access to the data documents which linked the identifying information to the students' responses (interview transcripts and intercultural encounter forms) was limited to the individual students themselves or me as primary investigator. Hence, only the participating students and I could ascribe and identify individual students to their responses. The students could also contact the supervisor or myself concerning the procedures of the study at any time. In the following sub-chapters, the sample group, research instruments, the process of data analysis and quality criteria will be discussed in more detail.

4.3 Sample Group

Students of German at NUIM are encouraged to participate in the ELA (English Language Assistant) scheme or the Erasmus+ programme at higher education institutions after their second year of undergraduate studies. About 80% of students avail of this opportunity after having successfully passed their second year in the BA programme.⁶⁸

As previously stated, participation in this project was completely voluntary and students could withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons. The group was composed as follows: Altogether, 36 students were in their final year in 2012 and 16 of them had just come back from their year abroad in Germany and Austria. Three returnees did not want to participate in the study for private reasons. Four of the 13 students (5 female, 8 male) of the original pilot study group returning to NUIM after their year abroad in autumn 2012 had participated in the ELA scheme in Germany while the remaining 9 had taken part in the Erasmus programme in Austria and Germany. These 13 students provided data on their individual year-abroad experiences in relation to the construct of intercultural competence.

⁶⁸ The higher education institutions the students attended are: University of Vienna, Georg-August University Göttingen, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt/Main, Christian-Albrechts University Kiel, University of Leipzig, Ludwig-Maximilians University Munich, RWTH Aachen University, TU Berlin, Rheinische-Friedrichs-Wilhelms University Bonn, Eberhards-Karls University Tübingen, European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder and University Wuppertal.

The main study group consisted of students who went abroad for the academic year of 2012/2013 and returned to Maynooth in autumn 2013 for their final year. All of the 23 students of German who went abroad that year originally agreed to participate in the study. Of these 23 students, 9 students provided pre-stay interviews only and were therefore not included in the final interpretation of the data. The analysis of panel attrition showed that 6 of these students dropped out of college during the year or failed their second year and therefore could not go abroad while 3 students did not provide reasons for their drop-out. Of the remaining 14 students, 3 (1 female, 2 male) did not provide pre-stay interviews but provided post-stay interviews as well as critical intercultural encounters and were therefore considered in the final analysis. One of them was an ab initio student. Altogether, 11 students (7 female, 4 male) participated in both pre- and post-stay interviews and provided personal intercultural encounters. Hence, between the pre- and post-stay period, the response rate fell by 45%, which is quite usual in longitudinal studies (Dörnyei 2007: 53, 82). The sample size of 11 key informants who provided both interviews and contributed personal intercultural encounters goes along with Dörnyei's theory (2007: 127) in that a sample size of 6 to 10 participants is adequate and suffices in an interview study to provide for saturated and rich data to understand the (subtle) meanings in the investigated phenomenon. Since a majority of the study group participants took part in the Erasmus programme, the different contexts of ELA and Erasmus were not considered separately in the analysis of the data.

Altogether, the data of 16 female and 11 male students was considered in the analysis. The average age of the participants was 22 years. While most participants were Irish citizens, one was Finnish, one Polish and one a Czech citizen all of whom had lived in Ireland for some years – the Finnish and Polish students had lived in Ireland for approximately 6 years while the Czech student had lived in Ireland for 3 years. All of the students were fluent in English (C1 level). In addition to German Studies, the students were enrolled in a wide variety of study areas, ranging from Anthropology to Business Studies, Economics, English, European Studies, French, History, Irish, Maths, Music, Music Technology, Sociology and Spanish.⁶⁹

The reason for this choice of sample group was that a module on intercultural competence has only recently been integrated into the curriculum of language studies at postgraduate level at Maynooth University, National University of Ireland. Unfortunately, no module at

⁶⁹ In alphabetical order, not in order of frequency.

undergraduate level has been implemented to that effect. Outcomes of this study could provide useful insights into the concept of intercultural competence in the year abroad context and facilitate stays abroad in the future.

4.4 Research Instruments

The main study involved individual pre-stay-abroad (April 2012) and post-stay-abroad interviews (October 2013) as well as three reflections on critical intercultural encounters (November 2012, February 2013 and May 2013) that the students experienced during their stay abroad. By means of using different points of time for investigations – before, during and after the students' stay abroad – the dynamics and temporal variation of reflection could be captured.

The focus was on the students' individual stories, opinions, subjective experiences and feelings. These individual stories may have revealed twists, turns and contradictions and hence may have shown the context-specific variation of interpretations. The social environment was reflected in the subjects' mental processes and "the resulting attitudes, beliefs, and values" (Dörnyei 2007: 167–168). Access to the social surrounding was provided through the perceptions and interpretations of the individuals.

4.4.1 Semi-Structured Pre- and Post-Stay-Abroad Interviews

The primary method of eliciting information on the concept of intercultural competence was semi-structured pre- and post-stay-abroad interviews (for the semi-structured interview guides see Appendix C and Appendix D). The interview guide was based on the guidelines used by Feng and Fleming (2009) in the SAILSA project which aimed at providing a tool for self-assessment of intercultural competence in order to determine the readiness for studying at an institute of higher education abroad (Feng & Fleming 2009: 235–236). Additionally, it was derived from the models of intercultural competence elaborated on in chapter 3 (Byram 1997, 2009, Bennett 1993a, Deardorff 2008, Fantini 1995, 2005, Kramsch 1998, 2009a, Witte 2014). I discussed the interview guidelines with my supervisor and peer PhD students and amended them according to their suggestions. Furthermore, I incorporated the feedback and incentives on the procedure I received from the students after the pilot study interviews had been conducted.

Apart from one student who wanted to do the interview in German, the interviews were conducted in English in order to avoid the participants' inhibitions of speaking German and to facilitate them in expressing their thoughts and feelings in their native language.⁷⁰ In order to provide a natural setting and relaxed atmosphere, the students were interviewed in my office or in a small lecture room. If possible, the interviews were conducted right before or after their lectures to facilitate student participation. To record the interviews, a dictaphone was used which allowed for an easy recollection of the statements. Before I started recording, I made sure that the participants agreed to it and we both checked that the dictaphone was in working order. I told the students again that the purpose of the interview was to investigate their personal expectations, notions and experiences and that there were no right or wrong answers. Furthermore, I stressed the issue of confidentiality and informed the students that they could always come back to me and enquire about the process or results of the study if they wished to do so. The individual interviews took 23 minutes on average.

These one-on-one interviews were conducted to obtain "descriptions of the lifeworld of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale 1996: 5–6). The first few questions covered demographic data on the age, nationality, subjects of studies, linguistic background and participants' previous travels to be able to allocate the interviews. These questions were aimed at creating a relaxed atmosphere and encouraging the participants to open up their inner selves.

Based on guidelines for interviews by Hoets (2009), McNamara (2009) and Turner (2010), I used everyday vocabulary instead of technical words and started with general questions before moving on to more specific and sensitive ones. The interview mostly entailed open-ended questions focusing on experiences and behaviours before investigating opinions, values and attitudes. Furthermore, if possible, I tried to cover positive aspects before negative ones which was sometimes difficult as the students had different experiences.

Overall, the questions referred to the students' previous knowledge and their underlying understanding of the concept of culture, which was elicited by asking students about the importance of culture in their lives. Students were requested to define elements of their life that they viewed as part of their culture and how they acquired them. The questions

⁷⁰ The Czech, Finnish and Polish participant said that they were comfortable with expressing themselves in English since they regarded it their second native language at that stage.

further dealt with their understanding of the host culture and of stereotypes, and what differences they encountered or expect to face abroad based on culture. In the retrospective interviews, questions additionally referred to aspects of culture they understood better after their stay abroad.

Along with questions on the understanding of culture, the exploration of the students' reflections and experiences were aimed at providing information on subjective expectations and aspirations, individual goals and successes, skills and coping strategies, knowledge, language and cultural awareness, and changes in perspective in terms of identity, attitudes and values. As for motivation and the willingness to engage, questions referred to incentives and reasons for going abroad, the students' aims and goals for a successful stay and their strategies to fulfil them. In this context, students were also asked about their investment in German Studies and exposure to German in their free time before and after their stay. Within the retrospective interviews, students were asked if their expectations were met, what had influenced this outcome and how they dealt with perceived difficulties and conflicts.

As far as attitudes were concerned, the questions covered a possible change in perspective in terms of (dis)appreciation of their own and the host cultural communities, a perceived change of interests and a willingness to suspend (dis)beliefs. The aspects of skills and knowledge were covered with questions on perceptions of useful skills and knowledge for studying abroad in the fields of study, socialising/establishing relationships and life abroad in general. Students were further asked to share their experiences of culture stress and identify skills they employed to handle critical intercultural incidents.

Wedded to the concepts of attitude, skills and knowledge were the concepts of awareness and identity change which were elicited in the students' meta-reflections on their intercultural experiences, and the changes in interaction and in their identity concepts within different cultural communities. Last but not least, language awareness in terms of personally perceived language progress was covered and compared to more objective language performance results (grades of language modules and overall results) in the light of intercultural awareness.

The semi-structured interview guide contained a list of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts that should be covered with every interviewee but still allowed for

spontaneity and flexibility to elaborate on the interviewees' individual accounts and opinions. The individual topic complexes were picked up and addressed by me during the conversation, without a rigidly predetermined sequence. Rather, the focus was on the openness of the interview process. Hence, the interviewees could also form the course of conversation. During the interviews, I occasionally paraphrased the students' statements in order to clarify their exact meaning and to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding. To plunge deeper into certain aspects of the interviews, I used probes such as asking for clarification and elaboration of certain concepts, for example "You said that you have become more open-minded. What do you mean by that?". Sympathetic smiles and reinforcement feedback such as "oh, interesting" were used to elicit information on the underlying attitudes and feelings of the participants. I also implemented an empathic and appreciative approach in order to elicit honest accounts. However, sometimes I unconsciously made use of cues such as "That's a very good choice", which might have led to responses that students considered desirable from my point of view (see chapter 6 on a critical discussion of the research instruments). At the end of the interview, I thanked the students again for their participation and gave them some chocolate as a token of my appreciation.

4.4.2 Critical Intercultural Incidents

As a complementary approach to obtain information on intrapersonal processes in students' experiences of their daily lives and "estimates of within-person change over time" (Bolger *et al.* 2003: 581), a kind of electronic diary-approach was implemented.

This introspective method was introduced to elicit information on the concept of intercultural competence by way of reflection on personal critical intercultural incidents that students considered important during their stay abroad (see Appendix E for instructions and Appendix F for the template of the "Critical Intercultural Encounters" tool). The idea and format were borrowed from the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) by the Council of Europe (2009). The implementation of personal critical intercultural encounters should address the affective dimension and go beyond cognitive aspects as it encouraged reflection and the development of awareness in dealing with Otherness. The tool was primarily used for self-assessment and reflection of particular authentic incidents that demanded intercultural competence. These elaborations could give some indication of key concepts which influence interactions with others and of the process of comprehending and reshaping experiences with regard to the modification of the internalised patterns of thought and behaviour (Byram 2009: 224).

The template on intercultural encounters first focused on personality traits that students considered especially important and reasons for their importance. Then the students were asked to describe one particular critical intercultural encounter and the interlocutors involved. The questions related to knowledge and skills in terms of changing perspectives and imagining someone else's thoughts and feelings. The questions further dealt with adjusting and adapting one's behaviour to new situations, based on previous knowledge and a sensitivity to ways of communicating. In this context, Ruben (1989: 234) points out that the role of the interlocutor is not properly considered in most definitions of intercultural competence, which makes them rather monological. Despite the differentiation between the emic (effective) and the etic (appropriate) view, the definitions focus on the user of intercultural competence and neglect the role and influence of the interlocutor on interactions and the co-construction of discourse. This negligence was therefore considered in the tool of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) (Council of Europe 2009).

Attitudes and feelings were addressed in regard to becoming aware of one's own feelings, assumptions, preconceptions and willingness to get involved with others in terms of acting efficiently and appropriately. Awareness was further covered in a reflection on similarities and anticipated differences. Last, the participants were encouraged to share what they had learned from the experience and how it had changed them. The provided details should complement the information in the interviews on certain incidents and the students' subjective descriptions and interpretations of these interactions. Hence, a high degree of commitment to opening up and sharing their thoughts and feelings was requested.

4.5 Research Method and Data Analysis

After the data collection, the first step in its analysis was to transform all the recordings into a textual form (Dörnyei 2007: 246) according to applied transcription conventions. The F4 transcription tool was used to facilitate the transcription process of the interviews. By means of this transcription software, the replay speed could be reduced without distorting pitch and I could stop, pause and rewind the interview sections. These functions helped to understand the utterances and focus on various aspects of the conversation, such the exact wording, on intonation, emphases or pauses. Additionally, passages were automatically marked with time stamps and the interview partners' names were

automatically inserted in each speech block, which facilitated tracking the data. I listened to the interviews and checked the transcriptions several times to avoid semantic distortion of statements. The transcribed files were stored as MP3s.

As for the data representation, left out utterances of the original transcript were indicated with square brackets and three dots [...]. While I used the full names of students, places and colleagues in the transcripts, I left them out in the final analysis. Words in square brackets indicated the substitution of a category in place of a proper noun to remove identifying material from the interview [place], [colleague]. Pauses were indicated by suspension marks in parentheses (...) with the length of seconds shown by the number of dots.

When transcribing the interviews, I chose rules from two transcription conventions – by Dresing *et al.* (2015) and Kuckartz *et al.* (2008) – which were suitable for my data and scope of analysis. Every contribution, also short interjections received their own paragraph and there was a blank line between the speakers. On the one hand, I wanted to use simple transcription rules, which "smoothen speech and set the focus on content" (Kuckartz et al. 2008: 27). On the other hand, I wanted to change as little as possible to represent the interviewees' spoken words and speech patterns, to accurately represent the multi-faceted verbal discourse. I did not want to leave out too many details by editing the information at this stage because I did not know which information would be important for my analysis and "affect the interpretation of the data" (Dörnyei: 247).

Since the subsequent analysis of the interviews did not merely (yet primarily) focus on the semantic content, information on prosodic elements such as giggles, laughs or emphases, a few non-verbal cues (smiles, frowns) as well as pauses were included. Parentheses were used for audible expressions such as (laughs), (giggles), (sighs) and non-audible ones (smiles) which were regarded as emotional non-verbal utterances supporting or elucidating statements. However, further non-verbal aspects, i.e. facial expressions or gestures and paraverbal elements (volume, voice pitch, talking speed) were neglected. Additionally, speech overlaps and simultaneous speech were not marked.

Accents were translated into standard English but I included vernaculars even though I did not consider them in the final analysis of the data. Informal contractions, discontinuations of words and sentences as well as word doublings were also transcribed and grammar as well as syntax were retained despite possible errors to keep the authentic

utterances. Affirmative utterances by the interviewer or the students, such as "uhuhu, yes, right" as well as crutch words such as "ermmmm" or "mmmmm" were transcribed because they could have an influence on the conversation. Numbers were transcribed as numerals. Words with a special emphasis were CAPITALISED and it sometimes occurred that I was not sure about certain words and therefore put a questionmark in brackets next to them (?).

Body language not only plays an important role in the theory of intercultural competence but also has implications on the methodology. Despite the advantages of audio-recording and notes on pauses or smiles, information on non-verbal cues such as intonation, pitch, speed rate, body language or gestures of both the interviewee and the interviewer were lost in the transcriptions. However, they do have an influence on the process of the interview. The only contribution to this aspect is the way in which importance was attached to pauses in speaking, smiles, laughs or sighs in the transcription of the interviews.

The next step was the content analysis of my data. Altogether, qualitative methods of analysis were used because they are more suitable than quantitative methods to investigate social phenomena and the construction of meaning (Dresing *et al.* 2015: 6). In case of this study I wanted to learn how the students defined and evaluated the concept of intercultural competence and what components they regarded relevant in the study abroad context.

The research questions were posed in the way that they allowed for both an inductive as well as a deductive approach. In my analysis and interpretation I followed Mayring's step-models of content analysis (2014) and connected inductive category development (exploratory, formulating new categories from the data) with deductive category application (working through the material with a pre-defined category system and registering their occurrence both in a normal way and in category frequencies) (Mayring 2014: 12). In this sense, the study design was explorative as well as descriptive in order to investigate given dimensions and categories in the models of intercultural competence and at the same time to be able to add new categories deriving from the data. By doing so, the construct of intercultural competence in the context of staying abroad could be extended. This way I could also focus on the interviewees' patterns of argumentation and

on how they expressed motives, presuppositions, expectations and their successes in the study abroad context as a frame of reference.

Mayring (2014: 33) refers to Van Dijk (2007: 4) who states that "[i]t is the way participants *understand* and *represent* the social situation that influences discourse structures" (cursive in original). In this regard, he differentiates between a micro- and a macro context which are mixed in this research study. While the micro-context refers to a specific situation in terms of time, location, the speaking (writing) person, his or her identity, aims, personal knowledge, actions and plans, the macro context refers to the allocation in society, the relevant reference groups, group actions, the institutional as well as the cultural background.

In order to answer my research questions with the provided data, I firstly identified topics for analysis in the models of intercultural competence discussed in chapter 3. In reference to the theory from previous research, selection criteria were established and categories as well as the level of abstraction were defined (see procedure of coding below) to determine the relevant material from the data. Based on the dimensions identified in the theoretical models of intercultural competence, I deducted variables for codes to analyse and evaluate the data. The established category system formed the basis of my analysis and contributed to the intersubjectivity of the procedure (Mayring 2014: 40). The following procedural model (see Fig. 11) shows the structuring content analysis (Mayring 2014: 96) applied for the deductive approach:

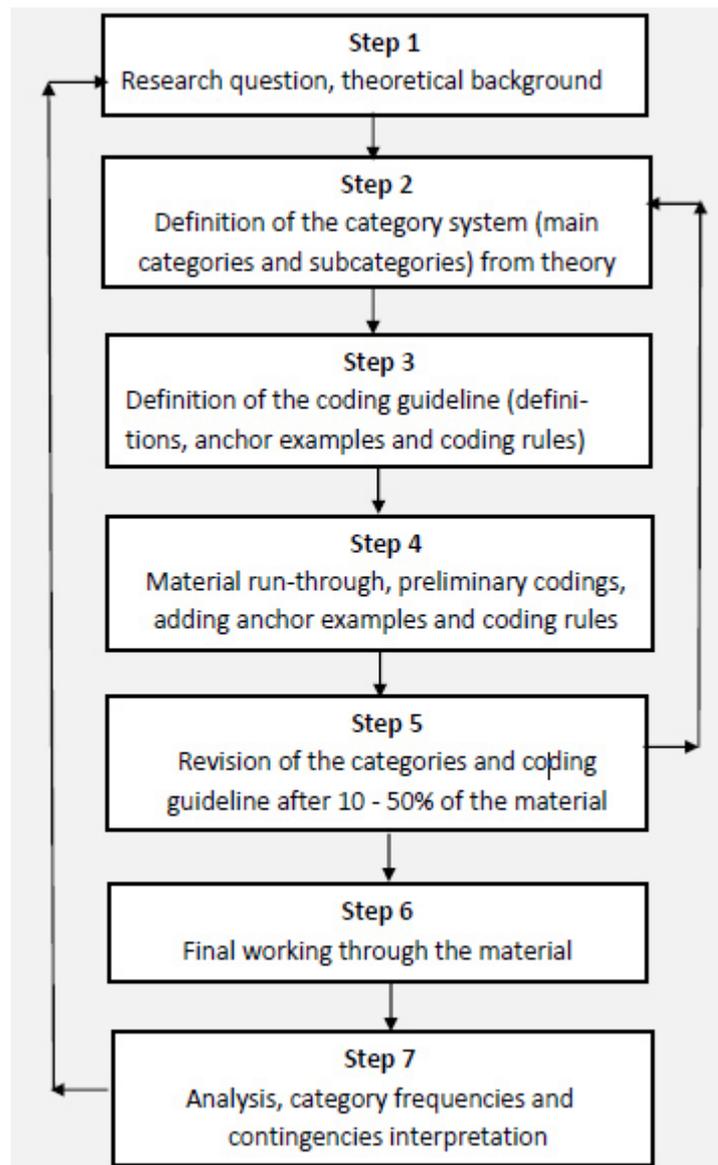


Fig. 11 Steps of deductive category assignment (Mayring 2014: 96)

While the main categories were derived from the previously discussed theoretical considerations (deductive category formation), during the analysis, more summarising categories emerged from the material itself (inductive category formation). For my inductive coding, I reduced the material according to Mayring's step-by-step model (see Fig. 12) in such a way that the essential contents remained and an abstract overview was created (summary) (Mayring 2014: 66). I jotted down comments on the data records which I then clustered into topics (coding for themes). I summarised the statements of the study participants by more general and abstract paraphrases with superordinate meanings which served as macro-propositions (Mayring 2014: 98). The level of abstraction was defined by the research questions and the theoretical background.

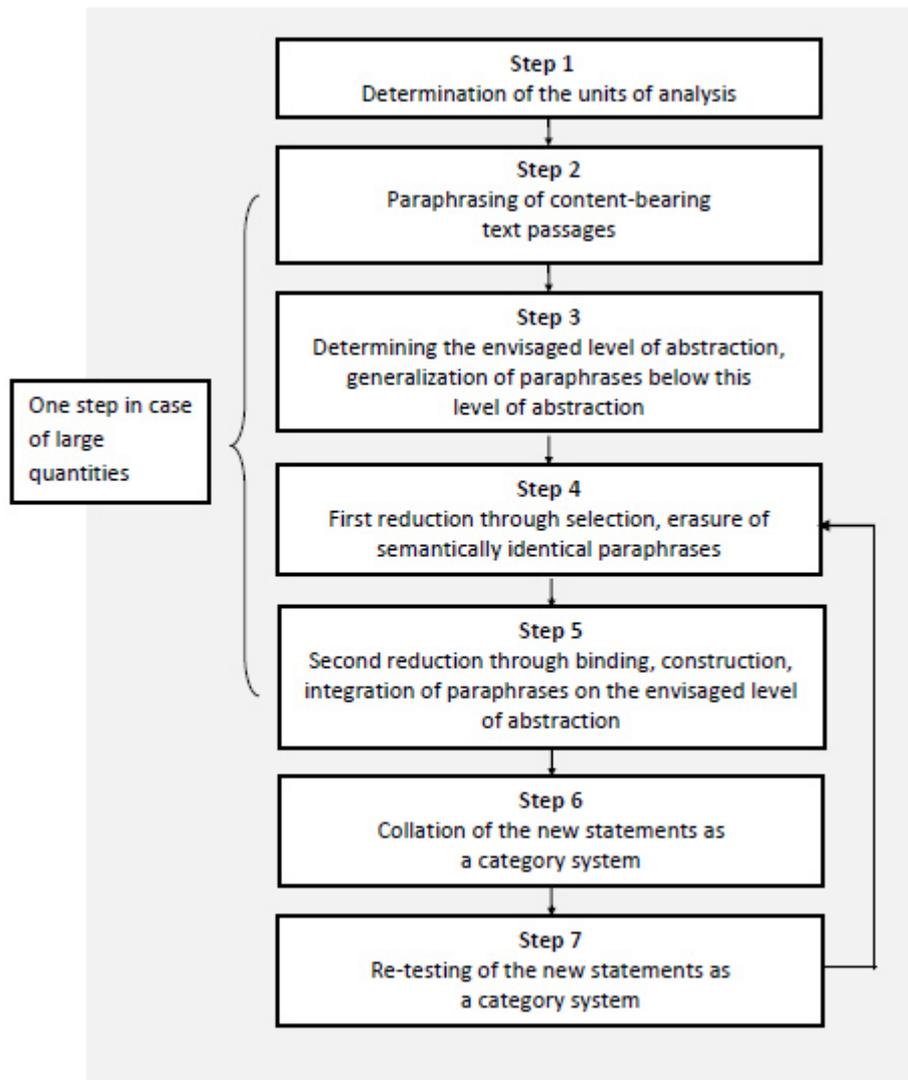


Fig. 12 Step-by-step model of summarising content analysis (Mayring 2014: 66)

In this sense, both a deductive (previous code-system) as well as an inductive (development of codes from the data) approach were applied. Based on the coding approach suggested by Richards (2005: 69), coding was conducted in several rounds. Overall, the data was recoded twice and a hierarchy of codes was established, i.e. a code tree containing main codes and sub-codes was made. In the next step, following Dresing *et al.* (2015: 53– 62), I identified quotations of the students by the aid of my code system, and assigned them to the corresponding categories. For the first cycle of coding I used codes derived from theoretical considerations which were then supplemented with new, context-contingent codes and were interrelated, while analysing and interpreting the data. These inductive codes were developed by combining the research questions, the data and my draft text interpretations which helped to gain an increasingly differentiated perspective on the data (cf. Kuckartz *et al.* 2008: 36–40, cited in Dresing *et al.* 2015: 53).

With each differentiation, the code system became more complex and the data revealed more facets in relation to the concept of intercultural competence.

Since there were semantic overlaps and a blending of the levels of action, understanding, knowledge and attitudes, an exact delimitation was not possible. Therefore, some statements of the students were aligned to more than one category. While some codes contained many different text passages, others only contained a few. Yet, since the categories were found in respect to several interview passages a frequency analysis of the category occurrences was performed. A data collation was conducted in that the category system as well as the frequencies were analysed and interpreted in relation to the research questions. In addition to the comparison of frequencies, partly a correlation analysis was conducted and contingencies were analysed.

The transcriptions together with the filled-in critical intercultural encounter templates were imported into the qualitative data analysis software programme MAXQDA 12, which was used to store, organise, manage, code and analyse the data. MAXQDA 12 made it easy to quantify background information variables such as age, gender, grades, second subject of participants and type of exchange programme. MAXQDA 12 offered different forms of coding: a colour coding system, a drag and drop feature and weightings (from 0 to 100) which could be assigned to each code to indicate how strongly segments fitted the allocated codes (MAXQDA 12 reference manual). These coding methods aided with the analysis of the data and helped to identify good examples of quotes for illustration. The software programme facilitated handling, coding and representing the data in terms of tables and charts. Additionally, it was possible to implement memos for my own ideas and assumptions and to jot down notes on interesting passages. Indexing and tracing the analysis process was also possible which turned out to be very useful for the recordings.

Keeping the research questions in mind, I read the transcripts and looked into inter- and intra-individual discrepancies per dimension and per variable after the first coding circle. Afterwards, I checked the category definitions and my codings in respect to the research questions (Mayring 2014: 98). Additionally, three transcripts and my respective interpretation of them were discussed with the study participants in order to ensure that the interpretation met their intended meanings. Furthermore, the results of the first coding round were reviewed with my supervisor and, as suggested by Mayring (2014: 83), discussed with a peer coder, who separately coded the data based on my coding template.

In the framework of a feedback-loop the categories were then revised and some of them discarded, based on my notes on the material, the feedback from the students and the findings of my peer coder. The coding results were then checked on intra- as well as inter-coder agreements, a process which contributed to the intersubjectivity of the procedure (Mayring 2014: 40). The revised framework was then used to interpret the entire data set.

Mayring (2014: 81) suggests a set of ten to thirty categories to give a good overview. In my case, 9 main categories, 22 sub-categories and 7 sub-sub-categories were deductively and inductively established.

The first coding section is related to the study participants' understanding of the term "culture". Even though there is no consensus on how culture is defined operationally in the context of L2 learning, the researchers on intercultural competence discussed in this dissertation agree on culture as discourse, as a fluid, living concept which is context-contingent (Kramsch 2009, Matsumoto 2006, Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, Straub 2007, Witte 2014). In the deductive development of categorisations on the concept of culture, I followed Altmayer (2009: 125) in his distinction of "Culture as *Bildung*", "Culture as Shared Meaning and Rules", "Culture as Thick Description" and Bourdieu's notion of "Culture as Capital" (1986). Byram (2009) further differentiates between a material (foods, goods, art), a social (language, rules) and a subjective (norms, values) dimension of culture which have also been considered in the initial deductive (sub-)category development. This categorisation also resembles Berger and Luckmann's (1966) differentiation between an objective (political and economic systems and their products) and a subjective (worldviews) culture taken up by Bennett (1993a). The following main categories on culture were initially defined for the data analysis:

- Culture as *Bildung*
- Cultural Forms of Life: Culture as Shared Traits and Behaviour
- Culture as Thick Description, and
- Culture as Capital.

Since the category "Culture as *Bildung*" was not mentioned by any of the students, it was abandoned for the final analysis. Yet, based on the subjective perceptions of the study participants, one further main category emerged:

- Culture as Geographical Entities.

This code was divided into the following sub-codes:

- National and Continental Entities, and
- Regional Entities.

As for the main category "Cultural Forms of Life: Culture as Shared Traits and Behaviour" the analysis of the data resulted in the following sub-categories:

- Directness and Bluntness
- Efficiency and Determination
- Punctuality
- Law-Abidance
- Friendliness
- Social-Emotional Distance, and
- Eating and Drinking Habits.

As for the main category "Culture as Thick Description", the following sub-categories were inductively derived:

- Music and Dancing
- Professional and Academic Bias, and
- Culture and Language.

Overall, the authors of the models of intercultural competence discussed in chapter 3 (Fantini 1995, 2005, Kramsch 1998, 2009, Deardorff 2004) agree that intercultural competence comprises critical awareness, as well as an affective (attitudes), a behavioural (skills) and a cognitive (knowledge) dimension. In this sense, the concept encompasses the knowledge, abilities, attitudes and skills required to perform effectively and appropriately in interaction with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself. In the context of intercultural interactions, the term "appropriate" refers to all participants in a situation being satisfied and that the interaction occurs within the expected cultural norms (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 17). The term "effective" means that the interlocutors involved are able to achieve their objectives (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 17). In the framework of this study, I therefore defined effectiveness by the students' aspirations and their self-defined success in achieving their individual goals for the year abroad.

According to Witte (2014: 239), the core aspect of intercultural learning is intrinsic motivation, a willingness to invest in cultural capital and an interest in the heterogeneity of cultures. Hence, I first appraised the underlying motives and incentives for embarking on a year abroad. The first main code in this category referred to

- Investment and Aspirations

which could inductively be divided into the sub-codes

- Integrative Investment,
- Instrumental Investment
- Personal Growth, and
- Time and Effort Investment.

These aspirations and forms of investment in turn led to perceptions on the next main code, namely

- Effectiveness

which was accordingly divided into the sub-codes

- Integrative Effectiveness
- Instrumental Effectiveness, and
- Personal Growth.

The sub-code

- Lessons Learned

covered coping strategies, skills and knowledge the students used in order to enhance integrative and instrumental effectiveness as well as personal growth.

The concept of the next main code

- Appropriateness

was covered in the students' elaboration on intercultural encounters and was defined according to the various contexts of the narratives.

Another aspect which is raised in the discussion on intercultural competence is language. In most of the research literature it is claimed that language awareness is essential for

successful (intercultural) interaction (Byram 1997, Fantini 2005, Kramsch 1998, Risager 2006, Witte 2014). As a consequence, I looked into the linkage between intercultural competence and the students' subjectively perceived language learning progress as well as the objectively measured language learning. The next main code was:

- Language and Intercultural Awareness.

Intercultural competence and language acquisition also play a role in identity construction. The concept of intercultural competence embraces multiple discourse worlds with circulating values and identities across cultures (Kramsch *et al.* 2008: 15). Hence, it is claimed that intercultural interactions involve an understanding and awareness of the Self and Other (attitudes, interests, values, norms, ideals and worldviews). In the framework of this study, a possible change in perspective in terms of (dis)appreciation of their own and the host cultural communities, a perceived change of interests and a willingness to suspend (dis)beliefs were addressed. Additionally, knowledge and skills for changing perspectives, establishing intercultural relationships and handling critical intercultural incidents were covered. The main deductive code was

- Changes in Perspectives and Identity Constructions

which was deductively differentiated into the sub-codes

- Personal Identity Factors and Development, and
- Collective Identities.

These sub-codes were inductively further differentiated into codes on a third level, hence sub-sub codes. As for "Personal Identity Factors and Development", the following sub-sub-codes emerged:

- Construction of Self
- Changes in Perspective
- Personal Growth, and
- Distinct Language Identities.

The sub-code "Collective Identities" was inductively divided into the following sub-sub codes:

- National Identity
- Social Networking and Integration into the L2-Community, and
- Erasmus Bubble.

While the content-analytical rules grounded with theoretical arguments served as orientation frame, the elaborations of the data remained interpretation of meanings. The final results and their interpretations are elaborated on in chapter 5, where I cite concrete passages belonging to the particular categories as typical examples (Mayring 2014: 95). These specific statements will be analysed in light of the research question in detail.

4.6 Quality Criteria

Quality criteria in social science methodology can be divided into measures of objectivity (independence of the research findings from the researcher), reliability (stability of the measurement) and validity (does the study truly measure what it ought to measure) (Mayring 2014: 107).

Objectivity, unlike in quantitative research, could not be met in this study as I am inextricably a part of the interpretation, which makes it inherently subjective. The outcomes are therefore products of my interpretation and are situation- and context-bound. However, the use of inter-coder agreements (see reliability) could give a measure of objectivity.

The criterion of reliability refers to consistency on different levels. It relates to the "degree of consistency of findings in that instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions" (Silverman 2005: 224). Hence, I checked the category system for intra- and intercoder agreements. When I had finished coding the data, I repeated the coding process and then compared the results, which helped me to check if my category definitions and codings were stable.

Additionally, the findings should be independent of the observer in that different raters come to the same categories and interpretations of a phenomenon. In this study, I have tried to meet this criterion by discussing my interview guidelines and the templates on critical intercultural encounters with my supervisor, colleagues and participating students. In terms of inter-coder reliability, I had a peer coder for a small sample of my data (interview transcripts and intercultural encounters) who coded the data independently from me, yet based on my coding template, to check the consistency between the coding of different raters. Our findings were compared and discussed and consequently, two of my original sub-codes – "stereotypes" and "conflicts" – were excluded from further analysis and the categories were amalgamated.

Another aspect of reliability is that the findings are supposed to be consistent if replicated (Dörnyei 2007: 57). In the case of this study, where the personal accounts and comments of the students are subjectively interpreted, the quality criterion of reliability could not be fulfilled as such, as the main focus lies on subjectivity.

In the framework of this study, I used so-called methodological triangulation (Bekhet & Zauszniewski 2012) and investigated the concept of intercultural competence with various methods (pre-stay interviews, during-stay intercultural encounter entries and post-stay interviews). By doing so, I wanted to increase the validity of the study and ascertain that different methods led to a similar result.

Altogether, the approach to validity by Maxwell (1992) was further taken into consideration. Maxwell (1992: 284–287) introduces five types of validity for qualitative research: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalisability and evaluative validity. Descriptive validity is the primary aspect of validity and serves as the foundation for the subsequent categories. It refers to the factual accuracy of the researcher's account and concerns issues of omission as well as commission. The interview transcripts could be descriptively invalid in that features of the participants' speech such as stress or intonation which might be important for the understanding of the interview were omitted. Despite my notes on body language, pauses or smiles, the transcripts did not grasp all gestures, mimics and non-verbal clues. Interpretive validity is concerned with the meaning that participants attribute to tangible events, behaviours etc., which is grounded in the language they use and their underlying concepts. Hence, the emic perspective instead of the researcher's perspective is at the centre of attention.

Yet, participants may be unaware of their own feelings and attitudes, may recall them inaccurately or unconsciously, or purposely distort or conceal their views (Maxwell 1992: 289–290). Based on these accounts, researchers construct the participants' meanings. In order to meet the criteria of interpretive validity, three transcripts and my respective interpretation of them were discussed with the study participants retrospectively in order to ensure that the interpretations met their intended meanings. However, it was not possible to do so with all participants. Theoretical validity goes beyond description and interpretation and comprises theoretical abstraction in terms of the theoretical constructs a researcher bases the research on or that is developed during the study in order to explain the phenomena under investigation (Maxwell 1992: 291). In other words, the notion of theoretical validity focuses on the question: does the study measure what it claims to measure? Theoretical validity was established in the first chapters where the theoretical framework underlying the study and hence influencing the research design was elaborated. Maxwell (1992: 293) further introduces the concepts of generalisability and evaluative validity. Generalisability questions whether the findings in one particular context with one particular study group also apply to another setting, time and study group. In qualitative research, the term "generalisability" often refers to the development of a theory based on the study of particular persons and contexts in order to make sense of other situations, hence generalising within a community or group for people who have not been interviewed (internal generalisability) or generalising for other communities and groups (external generalisability). Since qualitative research studies are not designed to allow for systematic generalisations for other people, external generalisability is not that important. Generalisation is more aimed at theory development which further shows how the same process in different contexts can result in different outcomes (Becker 1990: 240, cited in Maxwell 1992: 293). This theory may serve to make sense in similar contexts rather than providing conclusions about a specific group of people. Since this study is mainly based on data drawn from interviews, it poses a problem for internal generalisability because inferences are drawn from brief insights into the students' lives and their perspectives. Additionally, attitudes or perspectives that are not expressed in the interview cannot be considered. This exclusion may lead to false inference about actions outside the interview situation (Maxwell 1992: 294–295). Evaluative validity refers to the researchers and their ability to describe and interpret the data without being evaluative, which, like generalisability, is not a priority of qualitative research.

4.7 Résumé

While existing studies on intercultural competence focus on comparing learning progresses of the programme participants, the exploration of the concept of intercultural competence itself remains an open problem. This will be the main focus of the following study. The multi-dimensional approach of this dissertation is based on personal reports which focus on the participants' subjective notions of culture, their expectations, emotions, knowledge, skills, frames of reference and awareness at various points in time (before, during and after their stay abroad) in various intercultural encounters. The approach therefore provides qualitative data on the complex, speculative elements of intercultural competence for language students in the study abroad context. The tools encourage students to reflect and contextualise their experiences abroad as the participants articulate their own understanding of intercultural competence and their personal growth. Hence, the study does not deal with what students think they might do in various social situations but what they actually do and observe. In this sense, there are no objective categories of right or wrong but references of individually ascribed meanings to observations and actions. Hence, the method draws on language learners' contextualisations and insights and provides data to construe the floating signifier "intercultural competence". The findings could serve as incentives for an alternative approach to intercultural competence, which may be implemented into curricula at secondary and tertiary institutions as teaching and learning objectives.

5. Analysis of the Multi-Dimensional Case-Study

Previously discussed models of intercultural competence imply that individuals deal with cultural differences in somehow predictable ways as they learn to become competent intercultural communicators. In this sense, models of intercultural competence serve as frameworks to guide and explain subjective experiences in intercultural contexts and predict people's effectiveness in these settings over time (Bennett & Bennett 2001: 13). However, since no two (language) situations are exactly the same, proposed guidelines in literature rarely provide exact answers (Dörnyei 2007: 16). Common patterns and similar characteristics in groups are assumed but considerable individual variations have proved the range of subjectivity in these experiences. A generalisability of subjective experiences in particular cultural milieus is therefore rather problematic. Hence, I agree with cultural theorists who emphasise the "polyphonic, fractured, contingent, and often disharmonic ways of life and experience" (Brockmeier 2012: 441) and "the heterogeneous multitude of human dramas of everyday lives" (Valsiner 2007: 87), which will be investigated in the following study. The analysis is based on the assumption that intercultural competence does not constitute a simple additive combination of components but rather a dynamic interplay between individual living and learning contexts.

By means of interview data and critical intercultural encounter entries, the students' subjective opinions and affective responses to intercultural interactions are explored. In this sense, the study focuses on subjective constructions of reality rather than depictions of factual sequences of events (Nohl 2012: 23), involving personal opinions, values and attitudes of the participants. These individual recollections of their study abroad experiences reveal subjective, culturally dented meanings which the participants attribute to their own and others' behaviour. As people differ in terms of perception, interpretation and the way they remember contexts, the accounts show a considerable range of variation across individuals (Dörnyei 2007: 27) and various possible interpretations of human experiences.

The findings aim to reflect the students' ideologies when contextualising their attitudes and beliefs in particular social situations. In other words, it is not only important what the participants say but how they express their subjective notions of culture, expectations, motivations, interests, key skills, views and identity formations and for what purposes.

5.1 Students' Underlying Notions of Culture

The concept of intercultural competence is based on various concepts of culture which result in different notions of how intercultural competence is to be understood. However, as it has become clear in the elaboration on current models of intercultural competence (see chapter 3), an underlying definition of culture is not always provided in these concepts (Deardorff 2004, Fantini 1995, 2005). In order to analyse intercultural competence development in the study abroad context for this study, it is therefore important to first elicit the student's underlying understandings of the term culture. As Marcus (1986, cited in Brockmeier 2012: 441) has pointed out in relation to anthropology, anthropologists organise their observations about their study groups based on their own cultural traditions. Hence, it can also be assumed that the students' responses reflect categories of their own model of cultural worlds and their theoretical understandings of culture in the intercultural context. These definitions vary over time and sometimes even within individual interviews, and from context to context – as will be outlined in the following subchapter.

5.1.1 Culture as Geographical Entities

The collected interview data and the intercultural encounter entries reveal that the students understand culture as rather static entities which are geographically defined. Hence, collective nouns such as "the Germans", "the Irish", "the Austrians" or "the Other" are used when relating to shared rules and norms, habits and mentalities. These definitions encompass various behavioural and attitudinal dimensions. In the following subchapters, samples of the students' statements shall illustrate the variety of underlying notions.

National and Continental Entities

Most students reveal an underlying monolithic concept of culture which is often (one third of the students) related to geographic entities such as nations. Student E⁷¹, for example, claims that he deals with intercultural matters on a daily basis, since "it's all multi-national people over in Ireland".

⁷¹ Altogether 27 students participated in the study and were labeled alphabetically Student A – Student Z. The 27th student was labeled Student AA.

Student J, Student N and Student R give similar responses when talking about their daily involvement with foreign students from different countries:

Ermm (...) I have (...) on a daily basis I suppose (...) well, just from being and studying German in college, in that there's Germans in our course and [...] I study sociology and we get a lot of foreign students and [...] we talk around all the cultural stuff and...then on my own experience I teach (...) I teach dancing kind of as well and I would teach a lot of people (...) I've taught groups from France. (Student J)

Irish culture and German culture (...) just ermm (...) again, the differences in how they I suppose organise their daily LIVES. Everything seems to be a little bit more set – ermm - Irish people are kind of go-with-the-flow people (laughs). They do whatever kind of happens [...] I mean, it's not that I don't think the German people are SPONTANEOUS, I just think they have more of a plan on how they do certain things. (Student J)

Oh, an der KULTUR, ich muss mir mal überlegen (...) ja, das ist schwierig, diese Frage ist schwierig zu beantworten (...) ermm (...) ich wusste nicht, zum Beispiel, dass die Deutschen so viel ESSEN (laughs), ja, es sind ja nicht alle fette Sachen (...) erm (...) das fand ich sehr interessant und das fand ich das coolste an der Kultur, dass sie so gern essen und so viel essen. Also beim Frühstück essen sie so viel ja Käse und ja Früchte und Brot und dann essen sie und sie essen was Warmes am Nachmittag und dann auch Abendbrot essen sie was Kleines und dann (...) das fand ich sehr schön. Das vermisse ich einfach. (Student N)

I met a guy from the Czech Republic and we are still in contact quite often and (pause) I met a girl from Luxembourg as well yeah so I think because there were so many different cultures there, erm (...) I took a little bit from everyone and erm (...) that's probably why I didn't really notice too many huge differences between the IRISH and the AUSTRIAN culture because it was NOT really a truly Austrian experience for me (laughs) because of so many different people. (Student R)

I think that Austrians are a lot better mannered than Irish people and a lot more laid-back in a lot of respects. I mean, for example, if you go into a café, you can just sit there for 2 hours with an empty cup of coffee and they don't come over and throw you out whereas after 5 minutes they'd be here taking away your cup and kind of edging you out of the door. (smiles) ermm (...) so I really liked that aspect of that kind of relaxed culture and (pause) I think students because they don't have a certain timeframe that they have to finish their studies in, they kind of take their time and they really get into it and I think they seem to be a lot more (pause) specialised in their areas than an Irish student would be. (Student R)

Student B continuously draws on a comparison of cultures as nations – "the German culture", "the Irish culture, "the Japanese culture" – and shows an exclusive, stagnant understanding of cultures in terms of traditions and attitudes such as helpfulness:

The Japanese culture? Oh, it's crazy. They have their own, like, Japanese people could live without the rest of the world, if you know what I mean. Like, they don't need any other (...) they have no ermm (pause) like distractions from any other cultures, you can see the way other countries can become like very American type of thing. They like their traditions go back hundreds of yours, the food they eat, they still eat all the same (...) and just, (pause) everything day to day, like ermm (...) small things, the way they greet people, they're so polite, they don't ever change, I suppose. (Student B)

Well, conflicts I mean I just had quite a few with German people [...]. It got to a point where, like, we were shouting at each other because it was just like such a difference to how we do act. D'you know if a foreign student was here and any of them went to the Erasmus coordinator [...] I don't know if you know her but she's the nicest woman ever and she'd do like anything for anybody, so so helpful and here or in [PLACE] I'd ask like the easiest question (...) and it was just like (....) no, like no way, no help, that kind of thing (...) just when there was a confrontation and stuff like that I just got really fed up with never getting any help from anybody. (Student B)

Student B's view is maintained throughout her stay and even afterwards. She believes that different nationalities adapt to new surroundings at their own pace, and that moving abroad always involves conflicts with the "other culture". In this sense, Student B maintains an ethno-centric view as elaborated in Bennett's (1993a) DMIS (see chapter 3.4) and Witte's Model of Progressive Principles (2014), in that she contrasts different cultures as homogenised social units.

The underlying notions of culture in the students' statements not only comprise the national level but also expand to a continental dimension. In his post-stay interview, Student X stresses that he became familiar with the international students' environment as opposed to a "German environment":

Yeah, d'you know, and then little bits about the culture and stuff I suppose but ermm (...) I think a year maybe for me wasn't long enough especially in a student environment, where there was other international students as well, I mean, I had a lot of international students, a lot of [...] international friends [...] I had a few American friends, Eastern European friends, a lot of Eastern European friends, erm (pause) you know, Turkish friends, a couple of Asian friends, [...] so I was kind of in a multi-cultural environment [...] as opposed to just a pure, German environment. I suppose if I had gone to do maybe ELA, where I lived in you know, maybe, in a small German town, you know, not a university town, I think my experience would have been very, very different. I was more of in that multi-cultural situation, yeah. (Student X)

In his elaboration, Student X does now not only refer to nations but continents and regions in terms of culture which, however, in themselves encompass different languages, histories and ethnicities that are neglected by Student X. Furthermore, he considers

another cultural dimension, namely *Bildung* (see chapter 1.2.1) in that he was only immersed in one particular social group – the students.

Along similar lines, Student S claims that he feels more tolerant "towards other cultures" as a result of his stay, because for him it was not only "the German culture" but "the Asian and Spanish, every culture [...] you really are immersed into at the same time, which is great", something Student S considers to be an enriching experience. Yet, in retrospect, he also makes an opposing statement:

About certain cultures? Erm, yeah, like I just, I still consider like certain (...) I don't want to be (..) I don't mean to be called racist or anything but no (...) no, just ermmm, like perhaps I still consider, like, some nations, like, perhaps rude and slightly ruder than (..) do you know what I mean? (Student S)

It seems that the further away places are, the more cultural dimensions are perceived as homogeneous entities.

Regional Entities

Apart from national and continental entities, the students reveal an anticipation of cultural differences in terms of regions and demographics. Student U, for example, stresses that he ended up in the former GDR and assumes a different mentality had he gone somewhere more Southern or to the West. In regard to cultural traits he names "chit-chattiness" and "noisiness of people" which he, however, attributes to the fact that he was staying in a little town where "everybody knew everybody and about everything":

Very friendly, very liberal. But then that could have just been the town and area. I was living in [place]. And very open and very friendly people and very inviting. [...] As in friendly, as in 'Come over and we'll have a coffee or we will meet up again.' [...] I found them quite similar to the Irish in terms of friendliness (...) like even going down to the pub there, they were all getting drunk and dancing and having fun. [...] Well, because I was in a little town as well outside of [place], but they were all very friendly and closeby [...] everybody knew everybody about everything, very chit-chatty. (Student U)

A similar stance is taken by Student G and Student X, who assume differences between industrial and rural areas. Student G expects people at his place of study to be "a little less German [...] than the typical German" because of the place's size and history.

I've been to Germany before and I sort of, I don't expect the same out of [place]. I expect the [...] same type of people I guess and the same culture but [place] as a city and as a world city and the history that it has, especially, I expect to be (...) not that I expect to be but I assume it's going to be a bit different [...] culturewise and sort of the way people live as well. (Student G)

Yeah, I guess in hindsight I probably should have looked at other places. Cos [place] was very unique I think. I got a different experience than going to maybe a very German city in the south or even places like Frankfurt are different... I don't know... I just feel like...[place] was a different experience (...) it was not an entirely German experience, it was a [place] experience. Yeah, kind of like an island in the middle of (...) again it's still very German but there are some bits that are very different to other German cities I was in at the time (...) so (...) I am glad, I am definitely glad I went but in hindsight since I was going away to learn German maybe I should have gone to a more intensive German place. (Student X)

[place] still feels very German but some places would not be the super stereotypical German places, but you go to Dresden or you go to Köln and it just visibly looks very German. [...] I never got to go to the Karneval but certain stuff that happens in those cities that [place] would not have quite the equivalent to. (Student G)

I guess I expect them to be a little bit more [...] a little less German as well than the stereotype, typical German just cos because of the history of [place] especially and the influences it has had and the fact that it was the sort of the center that it was [...] during the time of the Berlin Wall, it was the sort of very Western zone, very American influenced as a lot of Germans would be anyway [...] but I guess it's more anglicised and more americanised than the rest of Germany might be. (Student G)

An interesting aspect in this statement is a perceived continuum of culture in that Student G perceives people "a little less German" there, as opposed to his general view. Hence, culture is not perceived as a static and monolithic entity but involves gradual differences, which, in this case, Student G relates to American influences. This acknowledgement of American influences indicates Student G's assumption of a fluidity of culture. In hindsight, Student G thinks that city [name] is very unique and stresses that he would have had different experiences had gone to a "very German city" in the South. He feels he has missed out on "an entirely German experience" because city [name] is a multilingual melting pot. In the same breath, however, Student G states that "it's still very German but there are some bits that are very different to other German cities I was in at the time". Retrospectively, Student G thinks he should have gone to a "more intensive German place". Again, culture is viewed as a gradual concept which implies a continuum from being "less German" to being "more German". In this case, the student believes that the further South you go the more visible German culture becomes. It would have been worth investigating how these attributions to "more German" or "less German" have developed

and what his definition of German culture actually is. Yet, when asked what culture in general consists of, student G claims that he does not know and is not really sure he has a grasp on Irish culture. Overall, Bavarians seem to be "more German" than people from Hamburg or Hannover for students. One reason could be that they identify South Germany with visible traditions (Karneval, Oktoberfest, yodeling) and artefacts (Dirndl, Lederhosen) and vice versa, mistaking regional for national traits. Similarly, Student B and Student D refer to "actual culture" and "true Germany" (Student D) which they define as "traditions" and the rural side of Germany:

German culture (...) see, I was in [place], so they have a [place] culture and then a German culture, I found, (...) ermm (...) German conservative culture I found to be very different from Irish culture which I liked in some senses. (Student D)

Yeah (...) ermm (...) traditional people as well. I kinda like, that's why I want to get to the rural side of it (...), like, see the true Germany, get out of the city. You never (...) in a major city you never really see like what it (...) like what the actual culture is so, maybe, yeah I would like to do a lot of travelling. (Student D)

Unlike parts of Germany, which Student G claims to be influenced by America, Student B's perception of a Japanese culture⁷² is the exact opposite – an assumption which shows a very narrow view of culture, considering the fact that Japan was occupied by US forces and is also very much a culture influenced by the West (see above). According to Student B, the Japanese people could live without the rest of the world because "they don't need any other (pause) they have no ermm (pause) [...] distractions from any other cultures", unlike other countries, e.g. Ireland, which she perceives to be very American influenced. In this case, culture as a homogenised, static unit (i.e. Japanese culture) is regarded as positive, with no "distractions from other cultures", which are negatively connoted. Hence, a demarcation from other cultures is appreciated. This underlying understanding and interpretation of culture also has an influence on intercultural competence development in that people with such a mind-set might find it difficult to efficiently and appropriately act in another cultural context. This thesis has been confirmed in the case of student B as the following subchapters will show.

⁷² Student B has visited relatives in Japan several times and often refers to her experiences there when talking about culture before her stay abroad.

5.1.2 Cultural Forms of Life: Culture as shared Traits and Behaviour

In most of the retrieved data, stereotypes and generalisations dominate the discussion on culture in relation to different behaviour, rules, norms, mentalities and attitudes. The students base their conceptions on rather undifferentiated perceptions of individual incidents and chance encounters which they generalise and relate to features of cultural communities. In the framework of the data analysis, major reoccurring themes of behaviour and attitude – directness, honesty, bluntness, organisational skills, determination, efficiency, punctuality, rule-abidance, friendliness and manners – could be detected, which the students have rated positively as well as negatively.

Directness and Bluntness

One re-occurring theme in the students' accounts on cultural differences is the perceived directness and bluntness of "the German people", based on their stereotypes of Germans the students held before their stay. Student D, for example, claims that in comparison to "the Irish culture", "the German culture" is "very straight forward". Like Student N,

Wir sind ja doch ziemlich ähnlich, würde ich sagen. Also ich glaube schon. Also wir, wir sind vielleicht nicht so direkt, wir sind natürlich nicht so direkt als die Deutschen, was sage ich (...) mmm, aber wir sind genauso aufgeschlossen finde ich. [...] Das wird die meisten vielleicht stören, wenn ich sage, dass die Deutschen so lieb und freundlich sind, aber so war meine Erfahrung. (Student N)

he appreciates that people would tell him if there was something wrong, while the Irish would be overly polite:

German conservative culture I found to be very different from Irish culture which I liked in some senses. I found them very straight and forward which was nice cos Irish people can tend to tip-toe around the subject or are overly polite which definitely is not the case with the Germans (laughs).(Student D)

Yet, Student D also finds the directness quite irritating at times.

Yeah I found that with Germans there was none of that. If something was wrong, they would tell you, which was good...and you always knew where you stood with German people but at times it could get quite irritating. (Student D)

Student O and Student Q similarly claim that she likes the directness and that "they" were telling "you exactly what they were thinking", which Student O considers a German way of life:

I just like the way that in Germany, once you get to know German people. (...) I think it's kinda good that they are so direct. I thought it was really good like (...) our teachers (...) like everyone in class they'd just tell you exactly what they were thinking. (Student O)

Oh Gosh, ermm, I suppose the German stereotype of people being cold is totally wrong like they were really, really nice (...) but they are quite blunt, Germans, I find, whereas Irish people are like (...) dance around an issue, the German just come straight out and ask you and [...] I was sometimes asked something. quite forward questions that maybe Irish people would not ask [...] like, sort of, (...) maybe things about my relationship with my boyfriend and how that was working out when I was away. (Student Q)

When asked on his stance on stereotypes, Student E claims that he does not consider them to be accurate and that Germans and Irish people are not different. Yet, in the course of the same conversation, after a short pause, Student E states that Germans are "more straightforward, definitely". Furthermore, he considers "them" to be more welcoming than "the Irish" in being more direct and accepting:

I don't think any stereotypes are really accurate at all, but I mean, especially with Germans, I mean everyone thinks Germans are 100 per cent serious all the time and everything but they're just normal people (...) like Irish people. They're not (...) there's not that much of a difference in the culture, really. There are small differences, but, well (pause) what kind of differences (...) ermm (pause) well, (pause) they are more straight forward, definitely, and what else (pause) they're more welcoming than Irish people I'd say. (Student E)

well, (...) not exactly, more straightforward about let's say advising you things and accepting you (...) whereas Irish people would be friendly and everything but I think the Irish people are a bit weird about other people sometimes. (Student E)

Despite stressing that he does not avail of a stereotypical mindset, Student E adheres to the idea that the Irish are a bit more awkward than the German people who, by way of contrast, are less afraid to speak up and bring their opinions across:

I don't have any stereotypical kind of image about it (...) ermm, not too sure I know that there are a lot (...) Irish people are a bit more awkward than the German people (pause) a bit like that and ermmm German people are less afraid to speak and put their opinions across, that's the only kinda thing I can say I think for sure like. (Student E)

Again, cultures are perceived as homogenised social units and there is a form of value judgment implied by using the term "awkward" which is rather vague and undifferentiated. This statement also indicates a rather ethno-centric view towards culture and a relatively low development of intercultural competence (Bennett 1993a, Witte 2014).

Not all of the students consider the experienced directness in a positive way. In comparison, a few students interpret directness as bluntness, understanding it as a cultural feature. With regards to a definition of culture, Student U, for example, refers to honesty but based on a personal incident feels ambivalent towards it. Although he appreciates the honesty of the people he has met, he also perceives their ways of interacting as blunt and harsh:

The honesty. [...] Yes, I appreciate it. And the bluntness - get to the point and don't waste my time. Serious, I love that. [...] Sometimes their honesty was a little bit too harsh, like, if you are on the train and some stranger comes over to you and says 'you are fat', like thanks. (Student U)

In this context, Student U recounts conflicts he had during his year abroad and affirms that he considers bluntness a German way of interaction in conflict situations. Student U concludes that Germans do not like to admit when they are wrong:

I was shouted at in the staff room by a teacher because he accused me of taking the tape recorder that I didn't take, and actually lost his temper with me and everyone stopped and looked and [...] Yeah, I have never been shouted at, first of all at a work place and then I had to end up apologising to someone who was shouting at me for something I didn't do but cos they don't like to say they are wrong.[...] They (=the Germans) don't like to admit it. (Student U)

In this case, again, culture is defined by traits such as honesty, bluntness and straightforwardness. Yet, the question remains as to whether these traits are elements of culture, are bound to convention or whether they are part of the part of these individuals' personality. As already pointed out in chapter 1, it is difficult to draw an exact line between cultural components and personality traits.

Efficiency and Determination

Furthermore, one fifth of students mention "organisational skills" and "determination and efficiency" in relation to the concept of culture. Before going abroad, for example, Student J expects cultural differences in terms of the organisation of daily lives in that everything seems to be a little bit more set in Germany with people having plans on "how they do certain things". In comparison, she defines "the Irish" on the whole as "go with the flow people" who "do whatever kind of happens". Again, an exclusive and stereotype-influenced understanding of collective identities in terms of attributions to groups is revealed (see chapter 5.4):

They were organised. [...] I suppose, I think they may be a little bit more, kind of, they get things done quicker almost. In Ireland we seem to be very laid-back, you know. I am not actually sure where that comes from ermm (...), I suppose we just, we kind of let things go as long as we can. [...] I have this feeling that there is more of a drive in Germany or in Austria as I found to get things done properly and soon. (Student J)

There was a definite (...) Irish are kind of like hit and miss, if it goes right, it goes right, if it goes wrong, sure what can we do. Germans may be a bit more - it will go right because we make sure it goes right you know (...) so I suppose a little bit more determined in that sense [...] whereas Irish people are much more laid back. (Student J)

Student C also cherishes an exclusive notion of culture throughout her stay. However, while she claims to want to "just act like a German" and understand "their culture" which she could not define further before her stay. She fills the term "culture" with features such as punctuality and efficiency after her stay abroad. When asked about cultural traits, Student C expresses her appreciation for the fact that "you could rely on times that were given" and it was easier to "get things done".

I think it was a lot easier to get around out there and (...) you knew that you could rely on times that were given and stuff. So it was just easier on a daily basis to get things done. [...] I don't know how to describe it (...) kind of opposite to the Irish altogether. They are like more (...) well, punctuality is one thing, very punctual and they are just not laid back at all, really. It's kind of just a perfection thing, is it? [...] They are perfectionists (laughs). (Student C)

Another supporter of this notion of culture is Student X who perceives everything "just very, very structured":

Erm, I don't know (...) I suppose it just really does boil back down to stereotypes again, you know, someone who is, you know, punctual and kinda like orderly and everything [...] Even when it comes down to studying and it's you know kinda like in the library and, like, I have to do two hours in the library today for this [...] no more, no less (laughs), you know, it's just very, very structured, and there's kinda like no chaos, either in like their physical life with like their bedrooms or their kitchen or even in their personal way of like studying and you know, doing their everyday things. (Student X)

The anticipated cultural difference of culture as organisation and planning is also acknowledged by Student I and Student AA after their residence abroad.

I hope that it would be much better than in Ireland, cos in Ireland everything is unorganised (laughs) everybody, everybody, you know, nobody knows what to do, somebody has to call somebody to find out something and in Germany, you know, everything is organised, everything is on the clock. (Student I)

Germans always have plans so the biggest question is "what are you doing today?" (smile) whereas if I was that, if I was in Ireland, I'd say, I rang maybe for two hours and then decide what I might do. (smile) Ehhh... so they're always on the go I found. Constantly. (Student AA)

Furthermore, Student K finds her previous cultural anticipation of people in Germany "being very ambitious and being very competitive" to be confirmed, which she illustrates with an example of the students' demeanour during lectures and the students' attitude towards their studies:

so, so, so fleißig. Like they work so hard and they have this huge Konkurrenz between the students and everything and [...] I think it's (pause) there is a lot of pressure there ermm and you can feel that a lot. [...] I had to drag my German friends out from studying there. They just work so hard and they just have it in their heads that you know, they're against all these people and they have to do better and (pause) it's very competitive, yeah, in comparison to here. (Student K)

A reason for Student I's codeswitching in *fleißig* and *Konkurrenz* could be that she identifies these terms to a large extent with the German community and therefore uses German expressions to describe them. The use of German terms might also confirm Student I's perception of exclusive difference in cultural traits.

Punctuality

Thirty percent of the students refer to punctuality as a cultural feature, which has already been included in the quotations in previous sections. For example, when talking about her goals for the year abroad, for example, Student C replies "living the culture [...] living in their culture" and understanding "them". When asked what she means by that, Student C replies acting "like a German" in terms of being punctual. Retrospectively, Student G also affirms punctuality as a "true stereotype to an extent". Student N and Student O also acknowledge their previous understanding of "culture equates punctuality" and state that Germans are "immer pünktlich", which is positively connoted:⁷³

It's the stereotypes of like the punctualness [...], yeah the punctualness, the orderliness [...] the very to the point [...] but then again I haven't, I haven't spoken to all the members of staff, and each one is different again. (Student G)

[Sie] kamen vielleicht drei Minuten spät oder manchmal vielleicht ein[e] (pause) vielleicht ist das nur ein Mal [...] passiert [dass sie] 10 Minuten [zu] spät gekommen sind oder sowas. Aber die Deutschen sind verdammt pünktlich. Das fand ich super und jetzt bin ich [es] auch. (Student N)

⁷³ Student N is the only student who wants to conduct the interview in German and feels very confident in his language skills. His usage of German will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.4.

The whole stereotype of German being very on-time and punctual. There is a stereotype (...), it was true to an extent. I mean, I remember getting off the airplane, like, at the airport there, and we went out and looked at the timetable and it said there was gonna be a train in a minute or whatever, and of course it came right on the minute and then left on the minute as well (...) so (...) it's different to Ireland in that respect. (Student G)

In contrast, Student F, Student L, Student U and Student Z find their anticipated stereotype of punctuality disproven and claim that despite opposite expectations, trains were mostly late and people were not on time. On the contrary, they did not perceive people to be "very efficient in a lot of things" (Student U):

Things were delayed like the train that used to annoy me all the time, ermm, they weren't very efficient in a lot of things (...) not very well organised (...) in my school the principal was terrible (...) everything was chaotic. (Student U)

and "not very well organised" but rather "scattered" (Student L).

There is a stereotype of German people that they are really punctual (...) NO. I don't think so, not at all by any means. [...] When we got over there, it was all very scattered so we did not know what to do, where to go and people like (...) punctual and being on time and stuff like that, no, they weren't really. Maybe that was just [place], but I did not think so. I was very shocked by that. Now the buses obviously they were always on time and stuff like that but yeah. (Student L)

Student F similarly says that "the Germans are never on time, I always thought they were on time but they are never on time, they are always late". These statements on disproved stereotypes imply a certain development of intercultural competence skills in that students have started to question their former ideas on cultural traits and behavioural patterns. However, the students now draw on reversed generalisations and have not developed a more differentiated point of view.

Law-Abidance

Furthermore, five students mention cultural differences in terms of rule-abidance. After her stay abroad, Student Q, for example, thinks that young people in Germany are very well behaved and everyone "has a real respect" for rules. She links this idea with her experiences of crossing streets in Germany as opposed to Ireland and explains:

A friend and I did one day [cross the street] and even though there was nothing coming a man on a bike behind us, you know, shouted away 'you see that it's red! The light is red!' So they are, you know, when people came over to visit me, they were like 'why don't we you know cross the road?' [...] and I would say 'well, that's just a rule. Nobody does it because it's the rule so you just don't'. (Student Q)

In Ireland crossing on a red light is quite common but Student Q would never cross on a red light in Germany because nobody else does. Based on her experiences, she ascribes the feature of being law-abiding to culture. Student E similarly recounts:

Don't cross whenever there was a red man. They don't cross the way there. That was, you know, a strange thing when I got there first. It's just no cars and everyone standing there. [...] ermmm (pause), culturally, I don't know. I almost felt they're more ligneant around there, kinda in general with the rules and laws. (Student E)

When asked for a concept of culture, Student N refers to his similarly defined stereotypes of abiding to strict bureaucracy "bei der Bürokratie ermmm [pause] hatte ich Schwierigkeiten [...] [da] sind die Deutschen sehr streng, [...] sehr direkt und manchmal sehr unhöflich" which he, however, stresses to consider normal by now – an indication for Student N's immersion into the new cultural contexts.

A few students diverge from their original assumptions in this respect. In one of her encounters, Student I talks about a change in perspective and a reflexion on her pre-conceived idea that Germans would be law-abiding when one of her German colleagues fakes his parking ticket to avoid paying parking fees:

One day, after our class in Sprachenzentrum which is located about 15 minute tram ride from the main university building me and my German friends [names] drove back to the university by car to have lunch in Mensa. Because there was no free parking spaces in the designated parking area, we drove to the back of the building and [name] stopped the car and parked at the side of the road. I thought to myself 'he's definitely getting a ticket', but it was his car and he was the one driving it. Then he said '[name] will you open the glove box for me please?' And he took out a few parking tickets and picked one of them and got out of the car. He put the ticket behind the windscreen wiper and said 'Let's go'. I was so amazed by what had just happened and simply started laughing! (Student I)

This incident makes her aware of her unreflected stereotypes and she changes her view on generalisations:

I was simply amazed I was surprised that anyone could think of such way to avoid another penalty by sticking an old ticket behind the windscreen wiper. And of course to myself it was very funny and I immediately said to them that I am impressed by his creativity and that he is the first German person that I know to break the law. I immediately felt like making that joke but on the other hand I felt that I am just driven by the stereotype of a law-obeying Germans. (Student I)

Along these lines, Student E changes his mind and retrospectively recounts that "they're [people in Germany] more lenient around there" in terms of laws and rules in general. Yet, in his example, generalisations now take effect in the opposite direction.

Friendliness

Another element which students mention many times in connection with culture is friendliness. Student K talks about an "eye-opener" and a great experience when her stereotypes of Germans being "quite closed" and "cold" is disproved:

I would say that the Germans are quite closed, I mean, they are friendly but closed until you get to know them and then when you get to know them I think (...) and I heard this when I went there at the beginning, that when you get to know them, then they actually become your friends for life but it's hard to make that friendship because they're not so trusting. (Student K)

I had thought before that Germans were quite closed and cold, this being the unfortunate stereotype but these people were all extremely friendly, generous, welcoming and really entertaining! At the after party we spent all our time dancing with the people we had met along the way and have stayed in contact since! It was really an eye opener and a great experience! (Student K)

She perceives the people as extremely friendly, welcoming and really entertaining as a whole. Yet, the dimension of geographical differences again comes into play when Student K questions if the experienced friendliness could be related to the fact that she was staying in a rather small town where most people knew each other. Similarly, Student U states that he expected the culture to be "cold" and people not to be so friendly but after his stay claims that people were "very friendly, liberal and inviting". At the same time he remarks that the friendliness could have just been related to the town, which was rather small. Hence, students show an awareness that the features they attributed to culture could be context-bound and situation specific.

Student G similarly claims that he felt "the Austrians were definitely friendlier than (pause) well not friendlier than Germans but [...] easier to talk to, more open I guess (pause) more sort of welcoming". However, he acknowledges that he bases his opinion on experiences in skiing resorts and has only stayed in touristy areas where customer service and friendliness are of importance to the economy. Furthermore, Student G considers people in Ireland to be friendly but in a false manner because friendliness seems to be a social norm, whereas in Germany people are "more to the point", which he prefers. In this sense, Student G equates culture with perceived social norms.

In contrast, based on an experience with an administration officer, Student D sees his previous worries verified that Germans are rather rude and fears that these features are part of a cultural community. Retrospectively, a change of mind has taken place and Student D relativises his assumptions in that he perceives people to be "holding back more" while the Irish are "overly polite":

At the time, I felt that this person was very rude because of the manner in which they behaved and the longer I was in [place] I saw that most Germans seemed to act in a similar way. At first, I thought it was as other people had said, that Germans are quite cold in nature, but I now see that this is not so. I have come to realise that it is not that Germans are cold, but rather that Irish people are overly polite. What I had misinterpreted to be rude is actually just a reserved mature, something which Irish people lack. (Student D)

Hence, cultural attributions are also reflected for his original cultural community, which, however, still only refer to undifferentiated generalisations.

In regard to culture, Student S hesitantly refers to rudeness and adds that he has experienced situations when he just did not understand why people would do "certain things". Overall, Student S remains quite vague and does not go into detail about what these "certain things" are or what demeanour he considers rude. It would have been interesting to plunge deeper into his concepts but unfortunately, it was not probed any further during the interview and only noticed during the transcription.

Student M has also made contrary experiences and states that "their culture" is opposite to what she had anticipated:

I kind of thought they [=L2 community] are going to be really polite and really friendly [...] but most encounters I had just in shops, not really students, (pause) students were really friendly but kind of older people and in shops, [...] they are not as friendly as the Irish. (Student M)

However, this sample shows a more differentiated approach in terms of politeness being related to different social groups – students versus older people versus customers. Yet, Student M still avails of generalisations when she attributes friendliness and rudeness to culture and further adds:

Mainly on the tram. They [=the Germans] are very reluctant to kind of, like you sit beside them and they won't move to let, let's say older people sit down or (...) and I think it's the total opposite in Ireland. I think everyone is 'take my seat' and just stuff in general, on the tram I just don't think I (..) like blowing their noses and coughing and listening to music really loud. I know people listening to music really loud on public transports here but I would be more inclined to say it to people here, would you turn your music down, than I would over there. (Student M)

Similarly, Student B clings to contrasts and stereotypical assumptions.

Social-Emotional Distance

In terms of features attributed to culture, the students have also made reference to social and emotional distance as a cultural trait. Student F sees her expectations of Germans being "hard to get to know" and "withdrawn" proved in her experiences with her flatmates:

Well, I did expect that it was gonna be hard to get to know German people because they are kind of withdrawn (...) and I found that to be right. I lived with two German girls for the entire year and I still would not say I am very close to them. We got along and we would hang out in the kitchen in the evenings and talk and you know go out and have drinks every once in a while but I would not say I am very close to them. I found it was really hard (...) there was like a barrier there that was really hard to get through. (Student F)

Despite hanging out with them while cooking or going out in the evenings, she does not connect with them, which she attributes to a cultural trait of reclusiveness. Similar conclusions are drawn by Student K who finds a few stereotypes to be "accurate", namely people being "quite closed". Yet, earlier on in the same interview Student K draws contrary conclusions when she states that in general she perceives people from other "cultures" than "the Irish" to be "a little bit more open, not open but less reserved in terms of like feelings and stuff like that [...] showing affection more so" than people from Ireland. Unfortunately, this contradiction was disregarded during the interview process.

In a similar vein, Student I feels vindicated in her previous expectation of cultural differences that people are closed and it is "hard to get to know them". Here, like in the previous sample from Student F, a personal level comes into play, which she considers to be a cultural difference. In the course of her post-stay interview Student I then waters down her generalisations by adding that she does not "want to generalise". Yet she claims that being distant "is kind of their way of being", thus adhering to her framework of exclusive social units that differ in behaviour.

Eating and Drinking Habits

Another aspect that 5 students mention in connection with culture, are eating and drinking habits. After her stay abroad, Student Q is surprised about a different drink culture in Germany and the habit of drink driving which she observed during her stay abroad and has not come across in Ireland in a long time:

I think people are fairly similar although there is this sort of different drink culture in Germany, I mean I know that some people talk about it a lot but I felt that the Germans drank loads like we were, you know, (pause) especially when I had people come over to visit they would think 'oh my Gosh, it's only four o'clock and they are sitting out there drinking' and it felt like people really did drink a lot of alcohol and since I've come back and I hear people talking on the radio about Irish drink consumption I sort of think 'really?', you know, I've seen exactly the same thing somewhere else maybe (...) I think you rarely see people really drunk but there is an awful lot of people drinking. And ermm, occasionally drink driving ermm (...) which is, you know, which is a problem. I think because drinking is considered I mean having a beer with your meal is sort of thought of as like having lemonade with your meal (...) ermm, so having two or three and then getting into your car, I am not sure if it seems socially acceptable but I have definitely seen people do it (...) so (...) which really I have not seen at all here [=in Ireland] in a long while. (Student Q)

Yet, Student Q expresses her doubts as to whether these drinking habits are socially accepted in the German culture and whether her experiences are chance encounters.

In contrast, Student F claims that the Germans and the Irish share the same drinking culture in that it is regarded normal to just have a few pints and go home:

But I think that the Germans and the Irish have that in common and then you go after work or school (...) you can go and have a few pints and then you go home and it's completely normal and in that way I think they use alcohol more sensibly as well since you can have that one or two drinks instead of just getting really drunk all the time. (Student F)

She feels that people do not feel the need to get totally drunk but just have one or two drinks and use alcohol sensibly. Student G also maintains that the culture is the same, based on his experiences of working in an Irish pub in Germany:

You had the stereotype of the very stressed-out and orderly German but most of them were very relaxed and cool people so I'd say it was the same. I don't know how much of that is me being in [place] BUT again (...) yeah (...) I think we meled well, and it got like (...) The fact that there are so many Irish pubs again with so many Germans just drinking like not even, there is no Irish people in there, It's just German people getting served by German people in an Irish pub, just goes to show you how similar we are I guess. (Student G)

Hence, the students think the shared patterns of behaviour and conduct in pubs in Ireland and Germany imply that there are no differences. However, the fact that Irish pubs abroad aim at replicating pubs in Ireland is neglected.

Regarding different drinking habits, Student J extends her understanding of cultures to youth cultures, a term she uses to refer to a shared interest in underage alcohol consumption among young people in Ireland:

I suppose one of the images I got from Germany, I don't know whether this is just because they can actually drink at a younger age than us that they are less mental (laughs) [...] I find the Irish (...) a lot of young people these days, as in teenagers [...] They are all about identity and they always have to have a different identity. When I look at Germany I don't see too much of that, like, there are different groups, like, you've got your different youth cultures but they are not as kind of (...) they are more accepted or something. Like over here, [...] they try and do things at a younger age, as the drinking thing, they are always trying to drink under age and stuff like that but over in Germany it's more like, d'you know, well we can drink when we are 16, there is no rush (...) they relax more about it. (Student J)

Further varying beliefs, styles or values inherent to youth cultures are ignored.

On the other hand, students are also faced with stereotyping from the German community who expected the Irish to be redheads drinking Guinness all the time – stereotypes which the students consider to be very inaccurate. Student H, for instance, claims that she did not appreciate her time in Germany because she was mostly faced with prejudice and generalisations in terms of Irish people "always getting drunk and falling around".

They were like oh, so you are always getting drunk and falling around (laughs) and we were like - not every day (...) most of them thought we were like, people were drunk all the time and we drank Guinness all the time. (Student H)

These sensitivities provide yet more evidence for Tajfel's (1978) thesis that people tend to perceive their own social groups as more heterogeneous and diverse while they perceive other groups as more deindividualised and homogeneous entities.

5.1.3 Culture as Thick Description – Socioculturally Woven Webs of Significance

The collected data show that some students have become aware of a tacit consent on value systems, attribution patterns, frames and norms (Witte 2014: 204) in their communities which guide their perceptions and interactions. The cultural context thus

refers to a meaning context that does not exist materially but is of semiotic nature (Brockmeier 2012: 442). In this sense, the students' elaborations reflect the concept of culture as thick description (Geertz 1973) in terms of a symbolic system of meaning underlying human interaction in a cultural community. Cultures constitute socioculturally woven webs of significance spun by people themselves, a process of interpretation based on a tacit unconscious interpretive frame, acquired in the course of socialisation.

People identify as members of a society, the shared values of which become unconsciously accepted as an "interpretative repertoire" (Altmayer 2004: 127). Acting as a member of a community then means that people have a shared culture of meanings and adhere to its cultural conventions and social values. This community of mind presents the core of cultural life (Brockmeier 2012: 446). Yet, the boundaries between culturally thick notions are fuzzy. People are members of various communities of mind and do not construct utterances with neutral meanings in communication. On the contrary, meanings are "negotiated in interactions within a cultural community" (Brockmeier 2012: 445). In this sense intersubjectivity develops, which refers to the co-construction of shared realities. Hence, the term "culture" is understood as an underlying aid to the realisation of meaning, which is subjective but understood by those who share a culture.

The students reveal an understanding of culture as differing repertoires of interconnected meanings on a few occasions in different contexts, namely music and dancing, professional and academic bias and language communities.

Music and Dancing

In the framework of his first encounter called "Educational Rave Party", Student A equates the term "sub-culture" with "culture" in terms of communities of like-minded people or people with similar interests, which are distinct from those of the majority. In his opinion, music is one kind of shared interest or passion which makes a group of people get along, despite different cultural backgrounds. Even though he has only just moved abroad, Student A feels among friends, welcome and "right at home":

I am very familiar with the rave scene [...] and the positive attitude of those who enjoy these parties is very alike. The only major difference was that I communicated in German. I cannot go to these events every weekend because I have to study but I know where to find them and I can be sure that if I go I will meet some of those people who I already know or I will simply make new friends.
(Student A)

The shared interest in music taste outweighs any other differences in, for example, different mother tongues, which are acknowledged but do not cause problems in understanding. A common cultural frame in the rave scene leads to a familiarity with norms, patterns of behaviour and values, and indicates a sense of belonging and cohesion within the cultural community. In his encounter, Student A stresses the shared interest in partying, the like-mindedness, and a sense of security in that if something happened and he felt lonely, he could always go back to this community. Hence, according to Student A's perception of sub-culture, cultures are not bound to nations, ethnicities or language communities but relate to common interests and passions. On the other hand, Student A does perceive what he calls cultural differences in the behaviour on the dancefloor – "Germans want to have more space and do not like to be poked". Finally, Student A concludes that culture is related to individual people and attitudes as well as their dynamic ways of group formation and is not a fixed entity for everyone. In this sense, Student A acknowledges the fluid nature of culture associated with Geertz' (1973: 3) idea of "thick description" in terms of individual meaning ascription to social contexts. Social action is conceived as a text and by reading these texts, experiences and interactions are woven into the text, resulting in a meta-text which may be translated into another, unfamiliar culture. This process of reading and understanding is an infinite, permeable process influenced by contextual changes.

Student J draws her understanding of culture from similar experiences, in her case her experience as an international Irish dance instructor. During her work as a professional dancer Student J participated in many tournaments and workshops and found that the interest and enthusiasm for the same kind of music and dancing helped to overcome differences in language and views. According to Student J, dancing is a sub-culture which serves a unifying function that expresses a common interest and common goals of individuals. In this sense, in Student J's perception a cultural community is based on common negotiated meanings and shared cultural frames in a dance community.

Professional and Academic Bias

Another aspect of shared interests and goals mentioned in the context of culture is the profession as language assistants. Student Z, for example, claims that he has not detected too much difference between international language assistants because they shared the same goals and were part of the same community, which created their own culture:

I made quite a lot of friends with the other language assistants in [place] and while visiting other students from here I met some of their friends as well and still talk to some of them [...] for the language assistants we had an introductory week [...] where all the English and Irish and New Zealand come together and train together and then you all disperse but there was a group of 5 or 6 all heading towards [place] and we would all come together at the weekends and hang out and experience Germany. [...] No there would not be too much difference. Just like everyone was getting along with what they had to do. (Student Z)

This idea of culture creation relates to Altmayer's (2004: 127–128) notion of a shared reality development. Along these lines, Student U compares the community of language assistants to the regular teachers whom he perceives high nosed:

The teachers, some of them, were quite high nosed (laughs) it was like (...) ok, because like BEAMTENSTATUS or whatever it is (...) snobby, I thought so, but the younger ones were ok. (Student U)

The code-switching for the term *Beamtenstatus* could indicate Student U's connotation of a culture of status and hierarchy among staff within a German school moreso than in the educational surrounding in Ireland. In hindsight, Student U restates that the shared goals and experiences of language assistants have bound them together into a little cultural community with its own coping strategies in German school life. These approaches of Student U and Student Z are both related to Brislin's (1990: 11) notion of shared ideas, values and goal-directed activities that become accepted as right by people who identify as part of a community.

The concept of culture as shared meaning is also noticeable in the students' elaborations on student communities. Student K refers to shared interests and goals which make a university culture:

I think a problem might be the sense of humour is quite different but I think that if you find people who have the same interests as you and I think in a university you do that anyways, because mostly, what subjects do you choose (...) you'll find people who are interested in the same things, so I don't think there'll be too much of a problem. (Student K)

However, this approach bears the risk of levelling cultural differences because of shared interests. The example of university culture relates to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) notion of a social construction of reality which is context-bound and based on intersubjectivity as well as on the interaction of one's own meanings and the meanings of

others, hence a dialectic process. Since group affiliations have revealed much information on identity formation, they will be elaborated on in more detail in chapter 5.4.

Culture and Language

Languages play an important role in the discursive spinning of webs of significance. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural constructivist approach (see chapter 1.3) languages shape meaning in cultural contexts and have an impact on the co-construction of meaning and collective consciousness. This notion is also supported by Brockmeier (2012): "After all, languages are the background systems of our cultural worlds, and the world's thousands of distinct languages open up thousands, at least in part, of distinct cultural worlds" (Brockmeier 2012: 462). Furthermore, language serves as a tool to make subjective realities, values, thoughts and emotions accessible to other people.

Despite the fact that all students name improvement of their language skills as one of their major aims during the stay abroad, the collected data hardly provides any evidence on the students' awareness of an interplay between language and culture. A reason for a lack of this awareness could be that most students stay in their own language communities or used English as a *lingua franca*, which will further be discussed in chapter 5.4.

As a consequence, apart from a few exceptions, the students do not perceive cultural codes in language use and the way languages shape meaning in cultural contexts. They do not feel that their language usage influences their perception or conceptualisation of the world or reflects attitudes and values. In their interviews and intercultural encounter entries, only two students show an awareness of language as means to culturally identify with various groups by using slang, dialect or insisting on English usage. Otherwise, language is perceived as a neutral tool for communication, which is detached from cultural influences, for example:

Well, there was a lot of (pause) other yeah cultures there so, because they didn't have English we had to speak German and there was some German people as well and erm (pause) everybody kinda, it was the language that we could all speak together so, that was fine. It was better that ...in that situation because not everybody could speak English or French or Italian so we all just spoke German because it was just more polite so everybody could understand at least some of what everybody else was saying. (Student K)

It's, yeah, it's the different people when you are going over there, completely different people (...) ermm, and it's the language barrier and the cultural barrier, so, it's just trying to learn the language so that you can overcome that and that will help you overcome, of course, you never learn German and you are never going to fit in, but it's learning the language first and then slowly succumbing to the Germanness, I guess, is the plan. (Student G)

Yet, student G later on points out in a different context:

Like [name] who is Finnish, she's, you'd notice, she has become a lot more Irish anyway (...) she has adapted a lot of the Irishisms, but even at that she (...), like especially if it was stuff like calling and texting people, you'd be texting her and there's an Irish (...) the whole Irish thing of like saying 'bye bye bye bye bye' and this whole thing of, (...) just ritual of saying goodbye where she would just be 'no bye' and finish the text, and be over, and like she (...) an Irish person would be offended but it would be just normal for her to be that punctual with texting, cos it's really, it's small things like that that you don't really...you don't pick up until you get to know somebody I guess. [...] I don't know, she has picked up, it's (...) it's the matter of speaking as well. It's the certain words and Irishisms (...)she would have picked up now as well. The way of interacting, there is a lot of waffle, it's just sort of (...) there is a lot of go between people that does not really amount to a lot. It's like rambling, that's another thing [...] It but it will be interesting to go over to Germany and see how, how conversation works in that regard, but there is a lot of conversing in Ireland, there is a lot of meaningless talk (...) not in a bad way, it's just the way things are done. (Student G)

Both, Student X and Student Y also show an awareness of context dependency of language usage. Student X perceives cultural codes in language in that cultural conceptualisations are reflected in semantics, language usage and structure. Before his stay, Student X states that he wants to learn "little things" which are not taught at school or university, such as colloquialisms and sayings which do not exist in "your own culture" but are used in everyday life:

I mean there's little things that you learn, that I mean, you don't learn in school, I mean, (ermm), if you look at the language aspect, let's say like colloquialisms, d'you know, I suppose that's one aspect of it, ermm, and then, yeah, just things that don't kind of (...) not DON'T exist in your OWN culture but things you don't really do in your own culture or your own country that you learn when you go over there. (Student X)

Along these lines, Student Y worries about not knowing what language usage would be appropriate in what context in Germany. Before her stay abroad, she fears that her lack of sociolinguistic knowledge could lead to misunderstandings with German native speakers who might understand and interpret her utterances differently:

I know our culture, I know our background, whereas in Germany I would not really know what's appropriate to say and what isn't, so I mean what might be normal language or slang language over here might be offensive there and it would not kind of transcribe over. (Student Y)

In retrospect, Student Y states:

There was, I suppose, one of the hardest things for me was little fillers (...) kind of, in the language. We over here, we'd kind of have little jokes that everybody knows about or little sentences like 'd'you know', 'it's grand', 'it'll be fine', little things like that where when you are speaking in German with somebody German, if you said that or tried to even say it in German, it wouldn't make sense and they wouldn't kind of follow what you are saying, probably because German is such a kind of a fundamental language, they say what they need to say and they tend not to have those expanders and fillers in their sentences kind of, I think. (Student Y)

In this sense, Student Y is aware of intercultural semantics. She considers sociolinguistic differences as sources of misunderstandings, conflicts and semantically induced interferences in the way that language may be interpreted differently based on different socially induced repertoires of interconnected meanings.

One interesting aspect in this context previously mentioned is Student N's usage of German throughout the interview. His use of German could indicate an urge to belong to a cultural community and as a consequence thereof to the same conceptual and linguistic universe (Hall 1997: 22).

5.1.4 Culture as Capital

After her stay abroad Student J raises an interesting point in her definition of culture. She concludes that she found no culture there and could not find much to invest there:

I could not connect for a long time. It took me a long time to really start to like the city and the place I was because like I found no CULTURE there, I found no connections. (...) I don't know what it was (...). It was really strange for me because I could not understand what was MISSING. I was, like, there is something missing about [place] and even now when people say to me 'Did you really like [place]?' I go 'yeah' you know but I am not 100% sure (...), like I did love it but I more loved it towards the end because of my friends and connections that I had made but in terms of an actual German culture, I could not see that there was much to invest in there, it was hard. (Student J)

Her elaborations reveal two interesting aspects. On the one hand, Student J regards culture as something to invest in, which could be compared to Bourdieu's notion of different forms of capital (see chapter 1.2.1 and chapter 5.2). On the other hand, to

Student J, it is possible that the term "culture" denotes something that does not exist, hence the cultural nature of human beings is questioned, which contrasts with the current approaches towards the term. In this interpretation, people are not viewed as cultural beings with a cultural identity. It would have very been interesting to investigate this issue further during the interview, however it was unfortunately disregarded and only detected during the transcription of the interview.

5.1.5 Changes of Perspectives

The collected data proves the students' difficulty in stepping out of their own frame of reference and taking on different perspectives. One interesting aspect in this regard is the sources from which students draw their opinions and ideas on culture. Most of the notions of culture are founded on generalisations and conclusions based on the students' personal experiences and encounters before and during their stay abroad. Before their stay, students mainly refer to their perceptions of lecturers of German and fellow students at NUIM (e.g. students G, I or J):

Very erratic but NOT in a bad way like in a very passionate way, [...] the sort of, the very to the point especially when you are talking with (..) but then again I haven't...I haven't spoken to all the members of staff, and each one is different again. I was speaking to [name] the other day and he was, like, (...) I had not talked to him since coming here and he was very nice as well and he leaves a different impression of a German person altogether than say [name]. They are the same people again but like. (Student G)

and form their views using information from the media such as films, personal experiences during previous stays abroad (e.g. students A, E, F, I, K) and tales of family members (e.g. students I, J and V):

We used to go to Germany to do some shopping when we were little and we went I don't know to Lübeck, I think, to some waterparks or whatever, you know. [...] When I was a bit older, me and my sister went to Berlin for a language course. It was two years in a row for the summer and well not for the entire school year but always a month and then next month, next year, another month. So that was very beneficial for us then. (Student I)

My older brother was in Germany (...) where was he, (...) hmm (...) have to think, can't remember, will have to ask (...) He was in Germany a couple of years ago and he did a dance festival there and they actually stayed with German people and the two guys they stayed with, one of the was a foreigner and the other guy, he said they were just 6 foot 6, huge monsters like, you know, they were just really, really, hey were so kind of (...) the way he talks about them, I suppose that's another place I've got my opinion from. (Student J)

A majority of students fit new personal experiences into their original frames of reference and remain on an ethno-centric level throughout their stay. In this sense, the concept of culture hardly undergoes any transformation in meaning during the year abroad. Only a few students understand culture as a fluid, intertwined construct which is discursively produced, subject to change and cannot be clearly delineated. On the contrary, most of the students hold on to a static, monolithic and exclusive concept of culture.

An interesting development in relation to generalisations is that students often hold on to generalisations, but the attributes they allocate to them and fill them with change during their stay abroad, based on their personal experiences. Student D, for example, first sees his previous assumptions of "bluntness" and "straightforwardness" and "sternness" confirmed. Throughout and subsequent to his stay Student D still adheres to a monolithic concept of culture but changes his previous assumptions and finds that people are rather easy-going:

Everyone kind of seems to have the conception of Germans being very strict which I don't think they seem to do from the people I have met. But I believe they like to have fun as well though (laughs). Especially in [place]. (Student D)

Before and during the year abroad, Student E also reveals an understanding of culture as an entity. Despite claiming that he does not consider stereotypes to be accurate, he avails of them to explain his view of culture. However, again, a change in generalisations can be detected. While Student E thinks "German people [are] like Irish people" before his stay abroad he then changes his view and perceives "them" (=the Germans) to be "more straight forward" and "more welcoming". Retrospectively, he concludes that "they" (=the Germans) are "more lenient". Hence, a change of perceptions in terms of different attributions can be detected, which however, are still expressed in generalisations.

Another change of perspectives is a transition from the notion of one cultural entity to a more differentiated perception of sub-cultures, such as youth cultures. During her stay abroad, for example, Student J changes her previous concept of culture with its inherent attributions (organisation and planning) and extends her understanding of culture to sub-cultures, which bind people together based on common interests and goals (see quotations above). During his stay, Student A also introduces the idea of sub-cultures and stresses that cultures are not bound to nations, ethnicities or language communities but relate to common interests and passions (see quotations above).

A third transition in the students' understanding of culture is the perception of a continuum in cultural affiliations towards individuality. In this context, Student A admits that he did have stereotypes in mind but deliberately tried to get rid of them in his mindset and claims that they have disappeared completely by the end of his stay. Hence, in retrospect, a shift towards the concept of culture as a discursively produced concept takes place. Similarly, while before his stay abroad, Student G bases his assumptions of culture on his perception of German lecturers at NUIM, during his stay and retrospectively he refers to a continuum of "very German" to "more intensive German" to "a little less German" in terms of the degree of stereotypes (punctuality, friendliness) and regards all stereotypes to be true to some extent. Yet, in the same breath, Student G contradicts himself, referring back to the members of staff at NUIM. He concludes that different members leave "a different impression of a German person altogether", hence stressing the individuality as a dimension of culture.

Student K raises awareness of a difference between personality traits and cultural traits when she questions if certain behaviour is characteristic "for that culture or [...] depends on the person, the people, the individual". Similarly, Student V and Student X retrospectively stress individuality in culture – "everyone is different, d'you know [...] just because someone lives in a country it does not mean they necessarily follow that stereotype [...] it really does depend on the individual [...]" (Student X). Student V concedes "it really does depend on the individual [...] you have to get to know the person", rather than attributing cultural stereotypes to them.

5.2 Effectiveness and Appropriateness

Intercultural competence is broadly defined as the competence needed for "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world" (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009: 7). Hence, appropriate and effective management are taken as a starting point for discussing intercultural competence. However, it is not quite clear what the concepts of success and failure in the intercultural competence context constitute. In the framework of this study, a differentiation between overall goals and content specific achievements to define effectiveness and success is made.

The students are human agents who engage and construct their environment in unique, individual ways. In this regard, the data provides the opportunity to look at different contexts and analyse individual situations and associated competences. In the framework of the present study, effectiveness is equated with the students' (fulfilled) aspirations for their year abroad. This implies a wide range of divergent subjective definitions of success, derived from the students' subjective trajectories, and as a consequence for the developed competences. Effectiveness, however, reflects a one-dimensional view of a person's performance, hence an etic perspective (Fantini 2005: 1), and does not necessarily take into account the interlocutors. Appropriateness, on the other hand, also involves an estimated perception of the interlocutors. Hence, the students act in a way they consider to be appropriate, which again varies from situation to situation and from person to person.

Referring to Feng and Fleming (2009) and their SAILSA project, this study covers questions on the students' reasons for studying German and participating in an exchange programme as well as their expectations and aspirations. In retrospect, reflections on the students' expectations are elicited in terms of what expectations have been met and what the general benefits and of a stay abroad are (Feng & Fleming 2009: 243). Their goals are also covered in asking the students for advice for future students to make their stay abroad successful.

Prima facie, the study group could be regarded as rather homogeneous. The students have been socialised in Ireland (at least for a few years), they all study German as part of a double subject degree, which implies a shared interest in the subject, and all of them want to avail of the opportunity to go abroad. Yet, as the data shows, the reasons for studying German vary and the students' motives and aspirations for going abroad are equally manifold. This finding confirms Deardorff (2006a/b), who states that the students' outcomes differ depending on their characteristics, their prior experiences and the meaning they give to their intercultural experiences. The students bring along different previous experiences – some students have already gained experience in German-speaking countries in the framework of holidays or traineeships, while for others it is the first time they come into contact with new and unfamiliar cultural contexts. Another difference constitutes their role in the going abroad context. While the majority of students take part in an Erasmus study exchange, four students of the planned pilot phase worked as language assistants during their year abroad. These different roles implicate

different opportunities and constraints such as different aspirations, their role as students or professional non-native speakers and their opportunities for L2 interaction (Coleman 1997: 19), all of which manifest themselves in their experiences abroad. In the framework of this subchapter, the divergent concepts of effectiveness and appropriateness will be illustrated.

According to Bourdieu, "speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it" (1977: 652). Hence, the value which is ascribed to speech cannot be analysed and understood independently from the speakers, their intentions, their networks of social relationships and the distribution of power (see chapter 1.2.1). Yet, speakers do not only want to be heard or understood but also to be believed, respected or distinguished and so on (Bourdieu 1977b: 648). In this sense, learning a language is not regarded the mere internalisation of a neutral set of grammar rules, syntax or vocabulary of a language but learners need to "struggle to appropriate the voices of others" (Norton 2006: 23) in order to follow their purposes and intentions.

Norton Peirce (1995: 17) argues that the concept of motivation in the context of L2 acquisition does not capture this complex relationship between relations of power, identity and language learning. Therefore, she refers to "investment", which involves the socially and historically constructed relationship of the participants to the target language and their many-faceted desire to learn and practice the language. In this context, Darwin and Norton (2015) propose a comprehensive model of investment, which covers the relationship between identity, investment and language learning and addresses the needs of language learners who navigate through different contexts and perform fluid and complex identities. According to Norton (2013: 45), the term "identity" refers to "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton 2013: 45). Agreeing with the poststructuralist view, Darwin and Norton (2015) state that languages construct the sense of self and that identity is multiple and fluid, and a site of struggle (Darvin & Norton 2015: 36).

In their model of investment, they examine the relations of power within the L2 learning process in terms of a right to speak and the intention to accumulate economic and symbolic capital (Darvin & Norton 2015: 37). Inspired by Bourdieu (1997, 1984, 1991), the concept of investment aims to dissolve the dichotomies of conceptions of learner

identity such as good versus bad, motivated versus unmotivated, anxious versus confident and so on. Additionally, this concept of investment (see Fig. 13) considers that the varying conditions of power in different learning contexts may position the learners in multiple and unequal ways which lead to various learning outcomes (Darvin & Norton 2015: 37). In this sense, the model goes beyond the microstructures of power and rather investigates systemic patterns of control within communicative events.



Fig. 13 Model of Investment (Darvin & Norton 2015: 42)

The key constructs of this model of investment are ideology, identity and capital. The term "ideology" refers to a normative set of ideas and is constructed by symbolic power (see Bourdieu, chapter 1.2) which constructs modes of inclusion and exclusion and positions speakers based on race, ethnicity, gender or social class. According to Darvin and Norton (2015), ideologies operate both on micro as well as macro levels and provide structures that shape habitus:

Constructed and imposed by structures of power and reproduced through hegemonic practices and consent, ideologies are dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion, and the privileging and marginalization of ideas, people, and relations. (Darvin & Norton 2015: 44)

The model investigates how these ideologies operate the dynamic structures of power and how they influence the legitimisation of regulatory systems by further examining the relation between communicative practices and systemic patterns of control.

One type of ideology is language ideology, which refers to how a language is "an ideologically defined social practice" (Darvin & Norton 2015: 42) and therefore inscribes the valuing of language. In recent years, new relations of power have reshaped language ideologies, linguistic capital and interactions in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Due to more mobile communication devices, the Internet, social media and more affordable travelling expenses, language learners are now able to traverse transnational spaces, between on-line and off-line worlds or public and private domains (Darvin & Norton 2015: 40). The dynamic nature of these spaces also leads to the asymmetric distribution of power, no longer resting in the simple dichotomy of native speaker versus language learner. Language learners are able to participate in a greater variety of speaking contexts and may "assert themselves to varying degrees as legitimate speakers" (Darvin & Norton 2015: 41).

Based on this differentiated understanding of ideology, Darvin and Norton (2015: 44) regard identity as multiple and fluid and capital as shifting values in different contexts. As elaborated on in chapter 1.2.1, Bourdieu (1986) differentiates between economic, cultural and social power in terms of capital. While economic capital refers to wealth and property, cultural capital refers to educational credentials and knowledge or preferences for specific cultural forms. Social capital, on the other hand, is related to connections and social networks of power. Symbolic capital then refers to the perception of these forms of capital and it is especially this symbolic capital which is relevant for investment. The value attributed to these forms of capital is defined by ideological structures which are continuously negotiated in different fields of struggle. Determined by underlying ideologies, the value of capital changes in different interactions and the interactors gain or lose power. Hence, forms of capital are fluid and dynamic constructs which depend on underlying prevalent ideologies of groups (Bourdieu 1987: 4). The structure of distribution of the different forms of capital at a certain moment in time represent the structure of the social world. In this sense, capital serves as a tool for social reproduction as well as transformation and determines the chances of success and practices (Bourdieu 1986: 46).

Based on their underlying ideologies and varying levels of capital, the language learners now "position themselves and are positioned by others in different contexts" (Darvin & Norton 2017: 45). The concept of identity is therefore defined as "a multiple site of struggle, and continually changing over time and space (Darvin & Norton 2015: 46). The students' habitus (see Bourdieu, chapter 1.2.1) shapes their idea of what is expected of

them, what is reasonable, and how they define appropriate relations; hence it influences their thinking and acting based on a prevailing ideology (cf. Bourdieu 1990: 53). When the students go abroad, they are already equipped with different forms of capital in terms of their own material resources, their linguistic skills, their social networks and so on. By going abroad, the students enter new social fields and their knowledge, skills and resources may be valued differently in their new social environment, which could result in struggle because social interactions involve different social positions and are "indexical of ideological processes of dominance and contestation" (Darvin & Norton 2015: 42). During the stay abroad, the students' linguistic capital in terms of register or style, for example, is measured by interactors against a new value system in a new sociocultural context. In this context, Bourdieu (1977) argues that the term "competence" should also include the "right to speech" and "the power to impose reception" (Bourdieu 1977b: 648).

As a consequence of these struggles of values, the students acquire new material as well as symbolic resources and at the same time use and transform their existing capital into "something that is regarded as valuable" (Darvin & Norton 2015: 45) in new contexts. In this sense, language learners are considered to entail a complex social identity and multiple desires (Norton Peirce 1995: 17). In interactions, they do not only exchange information but redefine themselves (a sense of who they are) and their relation to the social world (see chapter 5.4).

Investment is located at the intersection of identity, capital and ideology (Darvin & Norton 2015: 36) and grasps the relationship of language learners to the dynamic social world. When L2 learners invest time and effort in learning German, they do so because of the acquisition of a wider range of symbolic and material resources (Norton Peirce 1995: 17, Darvin & Norton 2015: 37), which in turn increases the value of their cultural capital and social power:

Whether it is because learners want to be part of a country or a peer group, to seek romance, or to achieve financial security, learners invest because there is something that they want for themselves—it is part of the structure of desire. (Darvin & Norton 2015: 46)

In this sense, an investment in an L2 is also regarded an investment in a learner's own identity which constantly changes (Norton Peirce 1995: 18). Through their desires and imaginations, L2 learners are able to invest in life-changing practices. Like in the model of Darvin and Norton (2015), the study participants are willing to invest in particular

practices because of their desire for specific material or symbolic benefits but also because they recognise "that the capital they possess can serve as affordances to their learning." (Darvin & Norton 2015: 45). The students' hopes for the future are therefore integral to their learner identity (Darvin & Norton 2015: 39).

Like in the study of Darvin and Norton (2015), all of the students in this study perceive their stay abroad as one of their best investments in life. In terms of linguistic capital, all students state the attainment of L2 fluency as their number one priority and feel that by means of their stay abroad, they would avail of extensive exposure to the target language and therefore have plenty of opportunities to practice and improve it.⁷⁴ A mixture of sources of motives and aspirations to achieve this aim could be detected, ranging from integrative to instrumental to personal priorities, which sometimes overlap. These different aspirations lead to the acquisition of different levels of material and symbolic benefits, so the students invest in social capital, economic capital as well as cultural and symbolic capital. In the framework of this study, I covered the students' different forms of investments in learning German in individual contexts, considering their previous experiences in intercultural interactions, the students' reasons for going abroad, their expectations of their stay, a definition of an effective stay abroad and their future prospects.

5.2.1 Investments and Aspirations

All students state the acquisition and fluency of the German language as number one goal for their stay abroad – "To go abroad, just to become more fluent, it won't happen if you don't, I suppose." (Student C) or "well, if I come back and I speak German fluently. That's the main aim" (Student E).

Well, when I first started studying German, I never intended on going abroad. I knew it was the option for the third year but I was like, I never really wanted to, but then, like, come near like, come the middle of second year I was, like, I think I need to, cos my German, I don't feel like I am really able for third year. And I wanted the experience as well. I was like when will I ever get the chance to just drop everything and go away for a year. I was, like, cos when you leave college, usually you have responsibilities such as family, jobs, so, I was, I might as well go. (smiles) (Student W)

However, the reasons for these aspirations and consequent investments are manifold.

⁷⁴In this context, many students express their worry that people might be reluctant to speak German and only speak English to them in order to improve their English skills.

Integrative Investment

On the one hand, the students reveal integrative motives and investment in social capital for going abroad which refer to "a high level of drive on the part of the individual to acquire the language of a valued second-language community in order to facilitate communication with that group" (Gardner *et al.* 1976: 199). Fifty-six per cent of the students express their interest in people and culture and a desire to acquire German in order to interact and integrate with the target community, for example.

Obviously to make, hopefully I will make German friends cos if I just make English speaking friends then they'd want to speak English the whole time. So hopefully that. And then, well, hopefully make friends and probably have connections over there in Germany and just live in Germany and (...) ermmm phewww (pause) just get out of my own house and (laughs) live in Germany. Yeah, live in Germany basically. (Student E)

Well, I hope to become a lot more fluent in German and I hope to make some friendships that I can hold so that [...] that you can have connections there after college, you know, and erm, just well, I am going to a different part of Germany, so I think it's going to be a lot different and I want to maybe travel and see different parts and the way it works in different parts of the country. (Student K)

Well, first of all to make my German perfect (laughs) which I am obviously hoping to do and you know everybody is talking about how Erasmus is a (pause) amazing experience and ermm (...) you know, you could have fun and meet a lot of new people and you can ermmm (pause) make a network of friends from around the world and ermm (...) and obviously the language, you know, I just want to improve my German a lot. That's my aim. (Student I)

They express their desire to rejoin acquaintances, to get to know German-speaking people and their associated cultures – "I like German and I like the German people and the country and all the associated countries and the culture so you know it's broadening one's horizons I guess" (Student G).

Student A deliberately went to a small town in order to be able to meet more locals and make friends:

Not that's what I liked that there were not as many people over there and that it was a little different. And.. I thought it would be better for learning German as well because there would be a lot of foreigners in [place] or [place]. So it was a better chance to meet the locals in a small place, I think. [...] To learn as much German as I can. And I would love to find a part time job as well because that's a place where one can learn a lot, at work, in a restaurant. [...] And then a little bit of travelling as well to see the place. [...] I will have new friends, I think from there, so yeah. I will just be a little bit more experienced again. (Student A)

While Student J did exactly the opposite, yet with an integrative aspiration:

I chose [place] because it seemed one of the places where the German I would be used to would be spoken because it's a bigger city, so it would be kind of more culturalised and that (...) It will probably have a lot of foreign students and they would be used to Erasmus students, whereas I suppose if I went to somewhere very kind of small and deserted I might not be able to cope (laughs). (Student J)

However, a few students also express their concerns about not achieving these aspirations, for example:

Well, I heard many opinions (laughs) obviously, if you study German, there are many people that you encounter and you know, different people say different things. I am worried that there like (pause) like here in Ireland people are very open and (...) I am not saying that it's a very truthful openness (laughs), that it's sometimes it's maybe they seem to be open but they're not really but in Germany it's maybe it's harder to make really good friends that people are maybe a bit closed (pause) ermm, I am not sure how to put this. (Student I)

Hence, these students look forward to immersing themselves into new cultural contexts, getting to know locals and making friends. Student F defines her aspirations in the following way:

If I made a lot of friends and if I've turned [place] and Germany into kind of my third HOME in a way that I feel COMFORTABLE with the CULTURE and with the people (...) and when I know that I can function in that country and I understand how it works. (Student F)

In her statement, Student F includes a sense of belonging and settling in as part of her definition of a successful stay abroad in terms of making the new place another home for her.

All participants take the view that in order to study a language properly, they need to spend time in an L2 country to "get a feel for the culture and the mentality" (Student G) or "the way they use language" (Student K), which, according to them, you do not get by merely reading texts and learning grammar:

I think it's really, really important if you are studying languages to spend some time in the country because you need to get a feel for the culture and the mentality and I think a lot of those (...) what you learn in class, you don't learn, in the country, because you (pause) have to get a feel for the way, they use the language, whereas when you are just reading texts and are doing grammatical things in class, you don't get that. And there are things that you say UMGANGSSPRACHLICH that is not the same at all that you learn so that's why I think it's really important and it really helped me and apart from that, it was a break from really intense study here and I got to meet so many other people, like it was just brilliant. (Student K)

In this regard, Student K furthermore stresses:

I think that when you are learning a language, you shouldn't just learn the grammar and the literature of the language (...) that you need to experience the culture and the people and, like, if you want to learn a language it's because you are interested in other cultures and in the way society works in different parts of the world and maybe you want to live there or work there when you are finished, so I think it's important that you spend time there. (Student K)

Along these lines, all students express their wish to fit in, gain real-life experiences in new cultural surroundings and enjoy their new social life, for example:

submerging yourself in it, I guess. I don't really have a plan but I am going over there and see, just adapt, I guess, is the plan It's going over there and seeing what it's like (...) you can read about it all day and you can prepare yourself but it's going over there and experiencing it first hand (...) and sort of going to say like events they have or going out or going to different, different sort of things in the city and submerging yourself. (Student G)

I use German in my conversation classes and that's pretty much it and you know maybe sometimes if I meet somebody from Germany and talk to them or something in German but I think that it will make me (pause) use the language more freely and in that way, well, looking at the language. (Student I)

The main integrative incentive in this regard is to build rapport with L2 speakers and avail of cultural offers such as festivals, concerts, etc. abroad. A difference in gender in terms of more integrative investment and more keenness to seek out authentic input by female students such as shown by Oxford and Shearin (1994) cannot be detected in this study group.

Instrumental Investment

The majority of students (60 %) express so-called pragmatic, instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert 1972) for their German Studies. They desire to improve their German for utilitarian purposes such as better grades, better career prospects and employment

options. They would like to invest in economic and cultural capital as well as symbolic capital. One major incentive for instrumental investment proves to be a more attractive degree after the year abroad in terms of a BA International –

and more importantly to kind of get a better degree for myself when I leave here as well to get the BA international because it's very competitive out there [on the job market]. (Student S)

– and as a consequence thereof students estimate enhanced career options at home and abroad, i.e.:

Wow, (lacht) das ist eine gute Frage, warum ist es wichtig. Keine Ahnung, ich glaube Goethe hat etwas gesagt, wie man versteht nur (..) nur durch eine Fremdsprache versteht man seine eigene Sprache und ich finde es auch wichtig, weil man lernt eine neue Kultur kennen, man lernt neue Menschen kennen. Man hätte auch die Chance, einen sehr guten Job in der Zukunft zu kriegen. Und das ist natürlich sehr wichtig, also wir wollen ja alle arbeiten, wir wollen einen guten Job haben und wenn man eine neue Sprache [lernt], [...] hat man so viele Möglichkeiten, [...] nicht nur nach Deutschland, NATÜRLICH nach Österreich, in die Schweiz, Ostbelgien, jaja, es ist ja ermm (...) es ist einfach super, also ich habe z.B. in Deutschland gewohnt und ich hatte zahlreiche Jobs, also Studienjobs, ich habe Verkehrserhebungen im Zug gemacht, zum Beispiel, das würde ich nicht (...) das hätte ich nicht für den Rest meines Lebens gemacht, aber durch die Sprache und wegen des Deutschen konnte ich diese Jobs kriegen, weil mein Deutsch gut war und erm (pause) diese Jobs hätte ich in Irland wahrscheinlich nicht gekriegt, obwohl ich ja Muttersprachler bin, auch Englisch..also vielleicht gibt es ja genug Angestellte oder sowas, aber ohne die Sprache hätte ich das nicht hingekriegt und man verbreitet...verbreitert seine Chancen mit einer Fremdsprache, würde ich sagen. Das ist sehr wichtig, eine Fremdsprache zu können. (Student N)

Fourteen students regard Germany to be the primary economic power of Europe with better prospects for jobs, for example:

well, I really, really, like German that's the first thing. I kind of think that German is actually really important at the moment more than any other European language apart from English because of the power that Germany has in Europe at the minute. And, ermm (pause) there is a lot of (pause) ermm (..) like there is like things coming from Germany that we don't have and trading going on that's important to learn. (pause) ermm (pause) yeah, I just think it's nice to have a second language and I think that German is probably the best second language to have at the minute. (Student K)

I guess it's important to study any European language, or any language (pause) German is a big language in Europe, (...) it's important, and the stereotypical answers of good for business or good for stuff like that. I like German and I like the German people and the country and all the associated countries and the culture so you know it's broadening ones horizons I guess, to be clichéed (smiles). (Student G)

Cos I think it's always good to know a language (...) it's not just German, just any language but German in particular it's such a big language and it's spoken in so many countries and I think it would (...) German would get you further than say, Estonia for example, cos it's such a small language and Germany being Germany and being such a huge economic power and political power as well, it's (...) I think it would help if you wanted to go into that sort of (...) in that side of work environment, it's always good. (Student F)

In that respect, 5 students regard their stay abroad as a trial run for a possible stay in Germany:

Money is the big issue. I need to, I will have to get a job between now and I will [...] I will save a bit of money but it's money and if that proves a problem (...) getting a job over there if I can, ermm, which will be a big part, which will dictate how I study as well and what I will do with my time over there. (Student A)

Yeah, it's sort of like a test as well because I've always sort of aspired or wanted to live abroad and work abroad, especially in Germany since I have the language and it's a country that I like so it's always a plan that in the future at some point I might work there or live there (...) so [...] this is a test run [...] if I go over there for a year and I like it and I fit in and everything works then it's a good idea of what I can do in the future, I guess. (Student G)

Another instrumental factor which plays a role in the students' aspirations is their second subject of study. Twenty-six per cent of the students have chosen the universities in Germany or Austria because of their reputation in their second subject, such as French, Spanish, music and music technology, which they want to pursue abroad:

Well, TU is particularly well (...) I thought it was particularly well known for its music technology and recording and it is but it's a lot more study, scientific based, a lot more acoustic based which will be a lot more physics and stuff. But erm [...]. It is because here you can study sound recording which is working in a recording studio and they don't really have any of that in TU [place] but I believe they have it in [place] [...] I hope my German will be a lot better anyway, that's for sure. Ermm (...) I don't really expect any major changes in myself if that's what you mean, ermm, but I definitely expect to come back with a few stories and a bit of an experience anyway. Definitely looking forward to it. But my main reason for going over there is like the ACADEMIC side. I really want to better my German and definitely (...) the few things they have for music in TU [place] is amazing so I am looking forward to that. Might kind of help me realise what I want to specify in in my final year for music which is (...) you have three different topics you pick from in music, so...in music technology so I am completely undecided as to them now so that might help me in (...) over there. (Student D)

Ermm (...) we originally, we heard a talk from other Erasmus students the year before and a lot of them had been in [place] and they had studied Spanish too so I knew I could study Spanish there and they all seemed to have a really good time there so (...) I thought great. (Student O)

The German improvement is number 1 (pause) or at least, yeah that and together with MUSIC tech, cos I (...) you know, I don't want to leave the, I don't want to go over there and devote myself full-time to German and then forget the other subject that I am doing, and the fact that I am going to Berlin and I can study music tech in TU Berlin is a big deal (...) so, it's (...) it's both things, improving my German and getting, I guess getting another view at things (...) getting how, learning how they do it (...) how they teach and stuff like that. (Student G)

Speaking German every day, just getting better at it and just being around the culture and just getting to know more about it, because we learn about it here in college but it's not the same as being there, you know. Yeah, I am looking forward to just speaking a different language for the whole year [...]. Another girl that does French, we are both going to [place] with two others and we said, I will speak French to her, we will speak French only to each other and then speak German to everyone else so we are still maintaining the level of French, so hopefully I won't come back with any English, just forget how to speak it. (Student H)

Furthermore, the place of study in Germany was Student H's first choice because of French:

Yeah, cos I heard it was good for if you want to do French and German and it's close enough to France, so maybe I could go there at the weekends or whatever (...) and it's a university town, like I am not too mad on big cities and so I am here (laughs) so it's like I just go to a university town over there and it was good for French as well, so that's how I picked it. (Student H)

Altogether, the data shows that shifts in economic power also contribute to the valuing of the German language, which consequently have an impact on multilingual encounters.

Personal Growth

Next to instrumental reasons for their German Studies, some students study German because it was their favourite subject in school or because they like the fact that there is a good staff-student relationship at NUIM:

I just picked it ..from when I was in school... just I liked German, it was one of my favourite subjects in school. I picked it then. I didn't really have any idea what exactly I wanted to do so just did what I liked in school. (Student B)

I had a teacher for five years straight teach me German and she's probably one of my FAVOURITE teachers and that's ONE reason anyway. And I liked the language from the very start and my sister would speak it and everything. (Student E)

I don't really know (...) I don't know why it's important. I liked it in school and I wanted to do it in university, so. I think one of the (...) I think it's an important language anyway. (Student M)

I suppose, you know, throughout my studies of German there's always been different people and I suppose I've been quite lucky in the sense that I've had good teachers and kinda good, like a good department here, like encouraging teachers and an encouraging department. I don't think I would have even picked German for college if it wasn't for my secondary school teacher (...) ermmm (...) if I got to the stage if I hated German in first year I probably would have dropped it, you know, I didn't because the German like (...) there is one thing I have to say about the German, like, (...) about Maynooth, the German department, I just have nothing bad to say, I think it's a great department for, you know, I think a part is because it is quite small as well, so there is a good staff - student relationship, you know, so I mean there has been a variety of things that have kind of added to my, I suppose you can say, enjoyment of learning German. And, at the end of second year, not that it was, not that we were made going to Germany, but it was kind of expected of us a little bit, do you know what I mean, we were really encouraged to do so and d'you know, so I am glad I did, d'you know but yeah, so I think if it wasn't for the higher up people in my course of education, I could have a very different outlook. I would have a very different opinion on German and maybe even Germany then, d'you know, if I came to college and my German lecturers were you know, (pause) horrible people, I think I would automatically think, like, oh God, d'you know, I am not going to Germany if this is what the lecturers are going to be like in Germany, d'you know (...) so yeah, it's been kind of a big influence on my perception of German and Germany, I think. (Student X)

Another motive for their stay abroad often mentioned by the students is personal development. Seventy-four per cent of students wish to become more independent, open-minded, self-confident and self-responsible during their stay abroad:

Well, I suppose just living on my own, that's what I am worried about. I've never lived on my own before, I still live with my mum and dad but I am not ermm, too worried about like mixing with people or anything like that. I'm not concerned about that. (pause) [...] And as well, getting better at German (laughs) I hope I come back better (smiles) and more confident and (pause) [...] I hope I will be more experienced, I hope I will be more open minded and of course I hope I am better at German and more confident. [...] I don't know (...) just to kind of (...) I don't know. Figure out my kind of personality, stuff like that, kind of like, see what I am interested in, how I live when I am away from my family, what kind of things I am interested when I am independent and that kind of stuff, so. (Student B)

It's an independence thing as well more than anything else. It's going over there and sort of working it out for MYSELF. [...] So more decisive, more independent, better German would be the (...) sort of more knowledgeable, again, a better idea of what my future might be, cos on top of figuring out if I like Germany, it's sort of like a career move. If I find stuff over there that I enjoy (...) cos I am still quite undecided on what I am going to do after college. So if I go over there and, say, see a course in [place] that I might like to do a masters (...) or anything like (...) it sort of, I guess, this year decides what I will be doing after college in a sense. (Student G)

I think I will be more mature, more cultured and more fluent, hopefully. [...] I hope to be a lot more independent, more experienced, more mature and more cultured. [...] Fluent (..) just know a bit more about different cultures and kind of experience it for myself rather than just learn about it on paper and yeah, feel a bit German. (Student H)

I see myself being more independent (...) ermm, being (pause) able to deal with like small kind of household or you know everyday problems without needing to ask anybody about them. Getting a lot of things DONE, getting things done faster than I would usually, things like sorting out certain, I don't know, anything really you know, issues with like work or, being able to, because being in a foreign country I will hopefully have learned how to just ADAPT to whatever SITUATION comes along and also I hope to be, like, able to use my German in everyday life, to be able to sit and watch German telly. (Student J)

Well, I hope to be more independent because I think being in a different country, you are kind of forced being more independent and self-reliant and I hope to be more fluent in German, of course. And to be more culturally aware (..) and to be, I think as well it will show you that you could live in a different part of the world and still will survive, you don't have to be so close to home, even though it's nice to be around friends and family that you can make a home away from home if you try (..) be open to new experiences. (Student K)

I think I will be even more open-minded that I am now (laughs) [...] yeah, and I won't be using somebody else's words or experiences because I will be using my own. (Student I)

I wanted to go abroad just to, well, first to improve my German but then because I had never lived away from HOME before that, so I wanted to try it and then I chose [place] because the, it was not TOO big a town, or it was not too big a city and from my looking at the university and stuff it seemed like a really good university so. (Student P)

I went abroad for a few reasons. One was to improve my German and another one was to (pause) get away for a while. I thought that after two years, that I had been in Maynooth it was really time to leave, because after a while one kind of realises that it's so small and you can't escape from a lot of things (smiles) and (pause) I think that it's very important for a language student obviously to go over, to go abroad but from a personal perspective, ermm.. it was a great challenge to be away from home for the first time on my own and do all the normal things like go to the doctor and get your eyes tested and all that kind of stuff so it really develops you as a person. (Student R)

Honestly, I had [...] my sister had done it and I thought she was really confident and that kind of thing, so I kind of wanted to aspire to that and then also I wanted to improve my German so I decided that it was the best thing to do. (Student V)

Most students (81%) expect to become more mature and open-minded, and to discover their own priorities in life. They hope to become more self-confident and find out who they are due to their new experiences away from their familiar surrounding, e.g.: "Figure out my kind of personality stuff like that [...], see what I am interested in, how I live when I am away from my family, [...] when I am independent" (Student B). Student J hopes to learn "to just adapt to whatever situation comes along" and Student K wants to enhance her "cultural awareness" and hopes to "make a home away from home".

In this regard, 8 students announce that they are afraid of being homesick before they go abroad and half of them confirm that they did feel homesick during their stay:

I wanted to go for the experience as well obviously and it's, I am a bit of a homebird so I've never lived away from home so (...) but I knew it was only two hours on the plane so that was fine and stuff. And I was really looking forward to living on my own actually, cos I've never lived on my own either. (Student S)

I would say (...) be prepared you are going to be homesick, you are going to have bad days, the culture is going to be different and it's going to take you a while to adjust, like, if you know somebody from there or who has been there before, talk to them, ask them what it's like, is there cultural differences, what is going to be expected of you, what's (...), like, what are the initial differences that you are going to have? See, like, even when you get off the plane, you are going to have to find your way to somewhere: either by bus or by train or somehow, it's like, so (pause), if you have any connections, take advantage of it and look into it beforehand, prepare yourself as much as you can because otherwise, you are just going over there, finding yourself completely thrown in at the deep end. (Student Y)

However, it is difficult to tell what the exact reasons for their homesickness are. More than half of the students (14 students) commuted before their stay and struggle with living on their own during their sojourn abroad. Students refer to the new surrounding and feeling lonely – "I suppose just living on my own, that's what I am worried about. I've never lived on my own before, I still live with my mum and dad" (Student H). However, living independently could have been hard for them in Ireland too. The students who do not commute in Ireland still go home for the weekends, which is not that common in Austria or Germany where students tend to stay at their study locations and spend the weekends together. Hence, it could also be that homesickness is caused by the students not living with their family at all anymore, which might have been enhanced by the fact that they could not hop on a train and go home if they liked. In this regard, 7 students report that one reason for their choice of place of study is the fact that there are airports closeby to fly back to Ireland and that they could go abroad with friends.

Time and Effort Investment

As part of the motivation factor, time and effort investment and changes over time are covered in the interviews. The study shows that there has not been a major change in the amount of time invested in German Studies compared to their reported investments prior to their stay abroad. Eighty-one per cent of the students hardly invest any extra time into an additional exposure to German or intercultural social networking other than doing assignments and studying for exams:

It depends on the week because I have a part time job as well so it depends on how many hours I have to work but I would say 10 hours. [...] Apart from my studies, no, no. I have no time. Sometimes I try to read German newspapers in the morning like I would open my BBC. I read a little bit of BBC and then a give it a go with the Spiegel or something. But only one article, one simple article. And it's easy with the dictionary, you just skim through the text. But that's it. Yeah. And oh, and actually at work I have this manager from South Africa and he is learning German so sometimes we try to speak German. (Student A)

Outside of college I do try study at home as much as I can. I don't have all the time in the world with work and stuff too, but probably maybe an extra hour a day something like that myself. [...] Apart from my studies, not really, no. Not much. It depends on the week because I have a part time job as well so it depends on how many hours I have to work but I would say 10 hours. (Student B)

We get a lot of (...) like we get a lot of grammar exercises and things and I try to do them before class as much as possible, not all the time but I do try and do them [...] I mean outside college, I've had the notion for a while, I have not actually invested in this yet but to start watching German TV and start listening to the German radio just to be (...) to just immerse myself a bit more and maybe start reading German newspapers online (...) and I haven't done that but that's something that I would like to do so (...) how much time (...) I guess, yeah (...) ermmm not many maybe, about 2 or 3 hours, to 4 hours maybe a week, just outside study to study those grammar exercises. (Student J)

This year obviously I have, you know, done a lot more work in terms of study but honestly I have not done a whole lot this year. Ermm (...) in comparison I suppose a bit more than previous years but I have kind of just done the bare minimum and maybe a bit extra (laughs), that's all. Like, I've done all the assignments and I do them on time. I don't really do alnighters so I've planned it really well and stuff but yeah like with German exams now I would study (...) I can cram really good. [...] And maybe get good marks. But during the year like I am very busy with things outside of college actually so (pause) which is good cos I think that helps my college work honestly. [...] Because it's just (...) I don't get too bugged down and that and it keeps everything. A nice balance, you know. [...] Apart from my studies, I would like to say I do but. I got this new app on my phone actually and it has German television on it so I actually listen to that a good bit. And obviously we have to kind of (...) we did in the course, we had to read books and stuff but erm (...) honestly, outside I don't. And I really wish I did. I suppose that's because I am so busy maybe outside of college then I just don't have the time. [...] If I do have a bit of time I wanna watch a bit of telly or you know (...) Outside of college I do try study at home as much as I can. I don't have all the time in the world with work and stuff too, but probably maybe an extra hour a day something like that myself. [...] Apart from my studies, not really, no. Not much. It depends on the week because I have a part time job as well so it depends on how many hours I have to work but I would say 10 hours. (Student S)

Not enough. I do my homework and I study for my exams and all that but I don't think I spend too much time extra time doing it. Not above your average, your normal college work and all that. [...] I would like, I try (..) I've been listening to Disney songs in German on youtube and you know if there is a German newspaper, I will pick it up and try read something but not actively like I don't have German channels on TV or anything like that but I would every once in a while, definitely. (Student F)

I try to read and like watch television in German (...) I don't like, not every day but I would try and watch a film or a programme in German during the week or something. And I listen to German radio, it's live. (Student O)

I usually watch (...) sort of any DVDs that I have at home I'd watch them in German instead of in English because it's much of the same and then...you kind of...it's quite fluent then, your German so. (Student Q)

Probably about an hour per day but it'd be more if I have more homework or (...) and then I'd read some of my grammar book or go back over notes so (...) probably an hour a day and then maybe 2 or 3 hours if I have stuff to do so. [...] I might watch a German movie, but not very often. (Student W)

However, as these extracts already partly show, the form of exposure to German has slightly changed in that students who do expose themselves to additional material use German social media, read German literature and participate in tandem programmes (see below) after their return. Retrospectively, a few students report a change in that they now occasionally listen to German music, watch German films and read German newspaper articles or visit German websites:

Probably about (...) I try to do an hour every day but it doesn't always suffice because like it depends (pause) if I was doing German homework, I would probably spend on translation alone a long time. I remember I spent three hours once trying to do something for with Brian Friel and ermm (...) it's the grammar (pause) and I would pick up a lot in class, to be honest. [...] If I saw German on TV I would watch it and sometimes I have (...) I have a...on the phone I have an app that has German TV on it but mostly (...) a lot of the time I am too tired so it's generally at night-time so far so (laughs). (Student V)

Quite a lot this year, well class time normally, but also a lot of extra work goes into it this year, to clear the grammar work (...) It takes up a lot of time but it's good. This year I actually enjoy it so (laughs) it's ok (laughs). [...] ermm... (pause) it depends, I don't think I actively go and seek it out but if I see something that was in German or if like say my German friends linked something, ok, I would go and read something in German or I would listen to German music. (Student Y)

Probably not as much as I should but (smiles) I would sit down and try and do the work required as best I could but not the whole day everyday. [...] Yes, I listen to a lot of German music and I tend to read, I read a couple of German books, casually, and sometimes I reread the ones we had to do for literature. Every now and again, not very often but sometimes. But my main contact would be music. (Student Z)

Furthermore they have set their phone settings to German and use Facebook in German:

I just I was going to like (...) to the classes so far and whatever homework we had to do because just it's the start of the year, so not studying for exams or anything yet. [...] I watch some German videos on youtube and all that (...) and then, that'd be it. (...) Apart from just I don't know (..) I have friends who speak German as well. [...] Yeah, and assignments, obviously. [...] I guess the odd time I'd be on German websites and stuff and I think I have (...) my youtube language is language and my Facebook is German and everything. (Student E)

Mmmhh, not a lot. Only my compulsory classes that I go to and then the homework, sometimes. [...] Oh yes, yeah. I constantly keep in contact with my German friends so (...) talking over skype and Facebook. (Student U)

In a week, I mean I suppose it all really just depends, I mean there are some weeks when you know I might have two or three assignments to do in one week but I suppose, all in all, in an average week maybe about (pause) independent, like work outside of class, about 10 to 12 hours maybe. [...] Ermm (...) I suppose in the sense that if I am online I maybe go onto Bild.de or something, read some articles, (pause) you know little things like that, I may have a few German friends on Facebook that I would write to, purely in German so it does kinda creep in now and again ermmm (...) I don't really you know read books or anything in German unless they are for courses but yeah (...) now and again (...) I think the Bild.de thing would be the main thing (...) every now and again (...) I try to go on as much as possible and read an article or two. (Student X)

Classes, 8 hours per week and on average probably (pause) three, to four to five hours on top of that, homework. [...] Well, I speak with friends from Germany in German on facebook and then I use most of my things on my computer are in German, so (...) Yeah, I just never really changed it back from the year abroad (laughs). (Student P)

Some students (15%) seek the opportunity to socialise with German speakers in social networks or in person on public transport or with flatmates:

Now, I am in college, 9 o'clock til 6 every single day, so and most of that is in the library, so definitely a lot more. I don't know how much work I am actually doing at that time, I usually fall asleep at some stage (...) but ermm. [...] I try, well I was trying (...) obviously, we have a lot of work with college this year. A lot of readings and (...) but I am lucky enough, a German moved into my parents'. I am living back home with my parents which is good fun (...) ermm (smiles) but erm (...) they are renting out a room in our house to a German speaking from Frankfurt, so it's good. And I refuse to speak English to him but I have to of course when family members are around. But it's good, like he refused to speak German to me at the start but now he is slowly starting to speak to me in German which is good, so I try to speak to him as much as I can in German and still try watch the movies in German. I listen to a lot of German music, well I have not done in the last while. (Student D)

Student K, however, is the only student who participates in a buddy programme:

I would say, well, I go to all the lectures, and then apart from that maybe do maybe another ten hours a week or something, or not even maybe 8. [...] I have met German Erasmus students here who I am a buddy for and they ermm (...) in that sense I would be. I talk German to them in class or translate something in maths. Cos they're in my maths class and it's just like helpful for them sometimes when I can tell them what it is. (Student K)

Student N is in a relationship with a German person and therefore practices German on a regular basis:

Phhhwww (pause) 10, 12 Stunden. [...] mbers: Ja, also meine Freundin ist Deutsche, so wir reden ganz oft Deutsch und mmmm (pause) ganz oft. Ich habe keine Ahnung genau wieviele Stunden, aber jeden Tag ein paar Stunden auf jeden Fall. (Student N)

5.2.2 Effectiveness

Based on the students' aspirations and goals, students define "success" and "effectiveness" in different ways. As already mentioned, the main aim of all students is to improve their German skills and become fluent in the language. Since language acquisition has played a major role in the students' intercultural interactions, the following subchapter 5.3 will be devoted to it.

Integrative Effectiveness

Some of the students' aspirations evolve around building rapport and social networks in the new cultural surrounding. In this sense, effectiveness relates to success in getting to know and befriending people and having intercultural interactions. Fifty-five per cent of the students report disappointment and failure in regard to their integrative aspirations and have found it difficult to connect with people, for example:

I didn't make that many German friends [...]. The encounters I had with Germans were mainly just in the university, like secretaries [...]. It was really cold you know and not helpful at all. That's what I found. [...] There was kind of stand-offish behaviour. (Student B)

Student H and Student V claim that they have felt lonely and perceive German people really difficult to get to know.

I think the whole year was not what I expected at all. I had such high expectations going into it and it just did not meet any of them. I feel really bad saying that but (...) all of us that went there, we were all just like oh my God, this place is cursed and we just didn't have a great time there, I think. I don't know if it was just the place or our attitudes, or just I don't know (...) bad timing. [...] I thought it was gonna be loads of fun and we would get to meet lots of new people and ermm (...) just have time of our lives but that was not the case. [...] I don't know (...) it was just (...) I found the people like really hard to get to know and we kind of (...) I would say (...) encountered a bit of prejudice I would say when we were there, it was really kind of like us and them, like you know we kind of (...) we really felt like on the outside and, I don't know, it was just very (...) It just wasn't home and it was (...) we all kind of had bad luck there (laughs) and it's just [...] At the beginning we thought we would make so many friends and it would be great and then when we got there, no one really wanted to talk to us and we ended up just staying together. (Student H)

It was very hard to get to know the people (...) ermmm (...) it was very tiring to spend a lot of the time with them when ermmm (...) my perception of (...) I felt I was annoying them if I was trying to speak to them a lot ermmm cos I kept making so many mistakes all the time (smiles) but they (...) they (...) on the whole they were very nice people but I found it very difficult to get to know them as such. [...] Yeah and the (...) I find some of the locals cos I was in Bavaria were reluctant to speak Hochdeutsch with me because they spoke Bayrisch. (Student V)

Student J, on the other hand, feels fulfillment when she is able to hold simple conversations in German.

When I got there, the sort of simple things gave me joy, like, you know asking where to go in German or asking where this was or answering someone. That all was sort of the things where I was UPLIFTED because I thought (...) yeah (...) in terms of my German before I went I think it was more that I did have a good basic German before I left, I think, but it was getting over the embarrassment of speaking it. Kind of like I can't say that, and that I think was the biggest achievement (...) was the sort of just leave all that I can't speak German stuff behind you and use what you have and then build on what you have. It was tough at the beginning but as I said the little things then led to sort of bigger things and it was really sort of self-fulfilling to be able to hold a conversation in German for, even if it was only for two or three minutes. You still had that sense of fulfillment, like, yeah, I can do this, you know, that was really good, yeah. (Student J)

The students use different internal as well as external forms of attribution in order to explain their successes and failures in integrating into the new society. In the latter two interview extracts the students ascribe external reasons to the outcome in terms of the rather unsupportive behaviour of the interaction partners. As Dervin (2010: 163) has pointed out, the intentions and the behaviour of the interlocutors play a major role in successful intercultural interaction. The students find that locals are reluctant to speak *Hochdeutsch* (Student V, Student Y), they laugh at the students' attempt to talk German and are unhelpful (Student B, Student H, Student L) or start talking English to them

without giving students the chance to improve their German skills (22% of the students), for example:

I just (...) most of the encounters I did have with German people, I didn't make that MANY German friends, the friends that I did make were French or from somewhere but they were there on Erasmus too so the language we would communicate in was German, so I was still speaking German with them but not with German people. The encounters I had with Germans were mainly just in the university, like secretaries and stuff like that...it was really cold you know and not helpful at all. That's what I found. (Student B)

It was just (...) I think, like when you try and speak German to them some of them would laugh and others would (...) like correct our German and then if they'd ask us then, like where we are from and we would say 'Ireland' and then they started talking English to us automatically so we didn't really have a chance to talk German that much. [...] Erm, yeah, well we spoke English with each other but like all our classes were through German obviously and going to shops and talking to housemates was through German as well but amongst us we did not talk German to other Irish people, just English, so yeah. (Student H)

We tried a lot to make friends and we went out and talked to the Germans but then sometimes if we were out and we would be drinking they would be making fun of us I felt in a way and one of the girls, she came from, she was from Dublin and they would laugh at her German accent and kind of mock it and then you just kind of get a sense (...) there is no point in even trying to [...] Yeah and one night we were talking to someone and he said something rude to one of the girls and I was like - why are you saying that and he was like 'oh, shut up, you are lesser than I am' (...) and I was like 'what do you mean?' and he was like 'You are less important than me' and we were like, ok, that's just get out of here. (Student L)

Yeah, it was amazing [place]. There are some downsides to it and [place] is such a multi-cultural city that I found it quite hard to find people to speak German with and definitely the common language there was English (...). I had to use English more often than I did German which was quite annoying (...) ermmm and academically wise (...) it was not, just the university I was stuck with was not the best. (Student D)

Another external attribution category 10 students mention in this respect is the organisation of courses at university. The courses offered for Erasmus students at their host universities did not permit mixing with local students which made it more difficult to interact with them, for example:

The language course we did do was for Erasmus students so I was in college with Erasmus people, not with German people, that's why I was not in class with German students. (Student B)

Although I thought that my German will be much, much better than it is (...) that was a bit disappointing that I didn't get to use it as much because there were so many people from (...) from, yeah like all over the world, from whatever, Argentina, Mexico, Columbia, they didn't speak German and most of their classes yeah, they were in English [...] so they didn't speak (...) just a few of them really (...) The few youths that I knew that they actually spoke German, so we usually used English because they felt more comfortable. (Student I)

Just like cos we had these intense German classes and it was all Erasmus students and they just broke down, let's say the grammar, which was difficult for us before I went over and they just taught easier than what was taught here. And you were put into classes of your own level so you knew everyone was kind of on the same level as you so no one was afraid to answer like in case they are wrong and yeah [...] The language course we did do was for Erasmus students so I was in college with Erasmus people, not with German people, that's why I was not in class with German students. (Student C)

I'd say cos like I did the start course and we all kind of met each other and it was just Erasmus students and there'd be, there's (...) we had like a lecturer, like, to teach us grammar during the day (...) and then we had a tutor, so they were like doing their masters, like they were students as well so you kind of padder around with them but mostly cos they were in the same boat, we were all in the same boat as one another (...) Oh, you understand what I am going through, so we all just kind of stuck together and there'd be like Erasmus nights out, and there'd be all different things in the town and we just kind of focused on Erasmus students. so. [...]Cos there was the thing - Deutsch als Fremdsprache, they did (...) they like (...) there was a building that had all just courses for like Erasmus students. (Student W)

These findings demonstrate parallels with previous studies by Conacher (2008) who has referred to the Erasmus course structure as a hindering factor to integration. University is closely linked to forms of accommodation which is mentioned as another external cause for negative outcomes:

There's nothing like Campus accommodation like there's here so [...] that's what made it tough as well (...) the first semester, the accommodation we were given, was way out of the city and it was in [...] this kind of like a Neonazi area, so they were really, really unfriendly to foreigners (...) and so that was uncomfortable too, living there, and that was (...) it probably wouldn't have been so bad if it was the second semester after living in Leipzig for a few months but that was like plant there... and it was like living there. (Student H)

In first semester where we were living was really bad and we were, I know (...) it was a half an hour on the tram and I know that's not far in Dublin terms but like it was (...) we were a lot further away than everyone else was so it was hard to kind of like integrate in with everyone else because we were so far away. (Student M)

We had only been in Germany about 3 or 4 days and we had to go sign our lease for our student accommodation with the secretary of our particular apartment block. I went in to her office and sat opposite her at her desk. I was speaking in German to her obviously, but my German was still pretty shaky at this early stage (especially not having spoken German for the past 3 summer months). The flatshare we had been given from our application was awful. It was a 30 minute tram ride from the city and no other students lived around the area. The area was actually more of a ghetto type area (really not ideal for Erasmus students). But it was too late by the time we arrived in [place] to try look for another place so we accepted it but on this meeting with Frau Schumacher to sign the lease I told her we just wanted to sign the lease for 1 semester and not 2. She replied to me that I would be homeless for 2nd semester. This was the beginning of the worst meeting I've ever had with anybody. Literally. So the meeting went on and I had to fill out bank details. The sheet was all in German bank abbreviations, which I obviously would not know, so I asked her for some help in filling it out (it was a bank form for my rent payment which was pretty important so I didn't want to make any mistakes). She replied 'god I thought all Erasmus students were expected to even have a little bit of German' it was really shocking and this kind of attitude continued throughout. I left her office crying, but not before I told her how she was the most unfriendly woman I had ever met. (Student B)

The relevance of accommodation as a supporting or hindering factor for integration in the study abroad context has also been pointed out by Conacher (2008) (see chapter 4). Yet, the data shows that living with L2 speakers does not necessarily lead to a better integration. Student W and Student X shared a flat with L2-speakers but upon return stress that they did not make friends and feel they were not part of the flat community because of "conflicting ideas from what we had as student life" (Student X) in terms of going out during the week:

My housemates were all German and ermm (...) except for two in the first semester, but I think all along I had about 8 housemates, you know, from both semesters ermmm who were (...) the majority of them were German and yeah, they were just very (...) because I had gone from living on a campus situation here in Ireland to live in you know, in a so-called campus situation in Germany with other students and I just (pause) it was just a massive difference. The first thing we wanted to do was just sit around and make a Putzplan and I was like 'Gosh, God love you if you ever come to Ireland, because your housemates are probably going to laugh at you' if you say that (laughs) d'you know what I mean, so ermm, and like, you know I would say, I might be going out on a Wednesday night to a bar or something, and they'd be like 'but it's a Wednesday night.' d'you know 'Why are you going out?' (...) and I am like, why not (...) and it's like (...) 'would you not go out at the weekend?' so there was kind of like conflicting ideas from what we had as student life (...) So, yeah (...) I got from my housemates and then you know, I met a couple of students, in the college as well who just kind of gave off this, I suppose German impression, d'you know, I mean, they were lovely, they were nice people but ermmm I just felt oh (...) they're so German. (Student X)

In contrast, internal attributions refer to causes the students see in themselves as to why they feel they have (not) succeeded in reaching their aim. A quarter of the students ascribe their perceived successes and failures to internal factors in that they made wrong choices or did not pursue their aim, for example:

Just to better my German and like they said you'd have a fairly good fluency when you came back but we don't. The five of us that went. We all kind of are at the same and people were very hard to get to know and to talk to so if we could have made more friends, we would have been able to speak more German. And because there was five of us from here, we were all just speaking English which was probably a mistake as well (smiles). (Student C)

Yeah, I was expecting to get a lot more academically wise out of it. Which again, it could have been my own fault, I could have applied myself a bit more in the classes or found other options, which I did in the second semester, I found some great courses, but just initially it was quite irritating and daunting (Student D)

Furthermore, students blame their own attitudes for the outcomes:

I felt I was annoying them if I was trying to speak to them a lot ermmm cos I kept making so many mistakes all the time (smiles) [...]. They were very nice people but I found it very difficult to get to know them as such [...] I was relieved to come back to people that I knew rather than constanly having to make new friends [...] it knocked my confidence a bit to be honest. (Student V)

Some students (Student L, Student R, Student Y) consider it daunting to throw themselves into the new language situations:

That was another problem I had. Because ermmm, if actually if was in a group situation with people I did not know because I was so bad, I was so worried about having to speak German and stuff like that when I first arrived and because it was a communal kitchen I remember for a couple of days, I was saying to the girls I still did not go down to my kitchen. Because if there was people down there I would be too afraid to, do you know what I mean? But obviously I got over that eventually, fairly quickly. But ermm, another thing as well, every single person that we met in Germany was fluent in English so it was easier for them at times to speak English and that was so easy for us to accept that. Because I said to the girls, a couple of times as well, it would be so much better if we came to this country and nobody knew English. Because we would be ten times better at German because we would be because we would have to, but because it was so (...) if you got stuck in your mind (...) and automatically you could just say it in English. (Student L)

I went abroad for a few reasons. One was to improve my German and another one was to (pause) get away for a while. I thought that after two years, that I had been in Maynooth it was really time to leave, because after a while one kind of realises that it's so small and you can't escape from a lot of things (smiles) and (pause) I think that it's very important for a language student obviously to go over, to go abroad but from a personal perspective, ermm (...) it was a great challenge to be away from home for the first time on my own and do all the normal things like go to the doctor and get your eyes tested and all that kind of stuff so it really develops you as a person. (Student R)

Ermmm (pause), I suppose (...) ok (...) well, partly my own fault, kind of (pause) it was very daunting to throw yourself into that sort of situation when you don't trust your own ability in the language and you are not sure if they'll be able to understand you or if you can understand them. And at the same time you have this group of friends here and (pause) you know (pause) the common language there would be English, because they grew up with it as well, but (pause) I suppose when you have that there, you don't push yourself to go off and make German friends. And I suppose, they're just so different really, I mean there was no real opportunities for mingling, it's kind of like you go to class and that was it (pause) and then, maybe like, say, there was, we had our own Wohnheims, but I actually didn't get on with any of my housemates in my Wohnheim. (Student Y)

These internal forms of attribution of failure have also been identified by Ayano (2010) and Coleman (1996) who show that a perceived unsuccessful stay abroad might have subsequent negative effects on the students' self-perception.

However, despite the fact that most students feel they have not integrated as well as they had anticipated, apart from one student, they all still feel positive about their stay abroad and are happy to have participated in the programmes:

Yeah, because I, I would have loved to look back and would have been like 'I did this and this and this, and I accomplished this and this and this' but I don't see it because, yeah, because I didn't feel I got any results from it. (Student V)

Thirty per cent of the students are happy with their outcomes on integrative motives and have succeeded in making friends abroad, which they mostly put down to internal factors, for example :

Ja, dass ich die Sprache immernoch begreife. Dass ich noch nicht (...) also ich verstehe natürlich nicht jeden Aspekt des Deutschen oder der Sprache. Worüber bin ich am glücklichsten. Ja, dass ich sehr nette Menschen kennengelernt hab. Sehr gute Menschen, wir sind ja in Kontakt geblieben und wie gesagt, für mich geht's nur ums Deutsche und meine Kenntnisse haben sich verbessert und das war für mich der wichtigste Punkt, der springende Punkt, auf jeden Fall. Meine Freundin habe ich kennengelernt. Ich finde die ganz toll, natürlich, brauche ich nicht zu sagen und das war sehr TOLL [name] kennenzulernen, blablabla war natürlich sehr schön, aber ja, für mich ging es immer ums Deutsche und ja, das würde ich sagen, also ich finde die Sprache einfach großartig. (Student N)

I made a conscious effort not to speak any English or as little as possible so that I would immerse myself totally in it [German] and that has helped me a lot this year. So the friends that I made when I was abroad, I still talk to them quite often. (Student R)

Apart from pursuing the overall goal of integration, all students provide samples of context-bound effectiveness, especially in the framework of their analysis of intercultural encounters, which focus on more detail in terms of contexts and adherent skills. A few individual examples will provide insights into the variety of contexts, ranging from shopping experiences to festival visits.

In his first encounter, Student G describes his first shopping adventure when he is looking for bed sheets and linen. He has to ask for help and is delighted that he can make himself understood despite his fears and feels that he has handled the situation well:

Encounter I: Bettdecke in [Place]!

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

This experience was probably my first proper and functional conversation with German people in Germany. It came about out of pure necessity. My room came fairly sparsely furnished and as a result, within the first few days I had to go out and hunt down valuable and very necessary supplies. Bed sheets, quilts, covers etc. With all my relevant vocabulary prepared and at the ready I headed out to the one Shopping centre I had seen on my way train-ride into [place]. Walking over the 'Home' section and working up my courage, I approached a gathering of middle aged women who all appeared as if they worked in the store. Interrupting their conversation, I interjected with my politest and most well-prepared German. Gingerly inquiring as to where I could find their bedsheets and how much they would cost, I braced myself for their retort, an imminent torrent of incomprehensible middle-aged-[place]-women German. To my amazement I actually managed to understand them. And they seemed to understand me. They probably recoiled in the horror at the beaming smile I had on my face. I was able to converse. Finally. There was some to and fro as other women from the group chimed in and gave their opinions. I commented on how the ware in their store was slightly out of my price range. They recommended me some other places and the directions on how to get there. With that, I thanked them and departed.

Time: When did it happen?

Shortly after my arrival in [place]. Probably in the first 2 or 3 days. As I mentioned, our rooms came fairly barren and we were expected to furnish everything ourselves. So I probably waited only a day or two before going out and finally getting the necessities.

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

The event occurred in [place] lovely Kaufhof Galeria. A large department store with just about everything one could need. Albeit at extortionate prices for a lowly student surviving on slave wages.

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?
Was it because... (please tick one or more)

- It surprised me.
- It disappointed me.
- It pleased me.**
- It angered me.
- It changed me.

Who else was involved?

A flock of German women all gathering around their proverbial water-cooler. Two other friends, who had come with me, were present. Though they trailed behind me and provided little help.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

Bar the fact that I knew they were German, they looked no different to anyone else. They could have been Irish for all I cared. It was this that probably made them all the more approachable, thus leading to a more fluid and fluent conversation. They dressed in the normal uniform one would wear whilst working in a shop. It was probably important that they were also a kind group of mature women. Had it been a conversation in German with [place] finest degenerate street hooligans, it probably would have been a bit harder.

Imagine yourself in their position...

Were I them, I would probably be in a state of bemusement the whole time. Regardless of how well I thought my conversation skills were at that point, I was probably the equivalent of a toddler in their eyes. They were going about their own, daily, business when a small child of a man waddled up and spewed out a few loosely connected sentences. Not that they were overly laughing in my face, nor would I in their position. However the image must have been funny. A poor lost tourist inquiring into the price of bed ware with all the eloquence of a baby. In that sense, they probably felt a sense of duty to help me, which explains their friendliness and copious tips and advice. Or maybe its just because they're paid to do it. Probably the latter. At any rate, I would probably have done the same, were I in their position.

Same and different: Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

I guess the whole conversation was cordial, polite and above all else friendly. The biggest similarity between both parties was that both were willing and happy to converse. I was ecstatic to be finally conversing in German and they were happy to help and aid in my search, or so it seemed at any rate. There was a general air of kindness and respect. They didn't look down on me, even though they could have easily. It was more a conversation of equals as opposed to a lecture on any ones part.

As for differences, there were obviously many. In a sense, I had never really conversed with someone before whose frame of mind was so different from mine. This was the first REAL conversation with REAL people I had whilst living by myself

in another country. I had been plucked out of my relatively easygoing life in Ireland and had been forced to communicate with real working everyday citizens of a different culture and land. And it was on their turf as well. They couldn't have been any more different than me, bar them coming from a different planet. (Student G)

Hence, in this context, success is defined by approaching people and asking them for help, and subsequently receiving it. Student M on the other hand describes a Goth festival and a street festival she attended and defines her success in conversing with the other festival-goers, learning more about Goth festivals and their costumes, and having interesting conversations with "many eccentric people". Student A has been successful in that he made a German friend at a party with whom he has found common ground and has met up weekly to converse in German:

Encounter I: Educational Rave Party in [Place]

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

I am a big fan of electronic music and I am well aware that this scene is huge in Germany. I talked to some international students and tried to make them go to a proper German rave party. Unfortunately all of them prefer to go to a mainstream disco. So I found out where such an event takes place in [place] and I simply went on my own. I arrived a bit early because I did not realize that people in Germany go out much later than in Ireland and they also stay out much later. I arrived to a club on my own I listened to the music, had two drinks and then more people started arriving. I decided not to be shy and make some friends. In about two hours I knew lots of people in the club and they were all very friendly. I am very familiar with the rave scene in [place] and the atmosphere and the positive attitude of those people who enjoy these parties is very alike. The only major difference was that I communicated in German. Some people wanted to speak English to me when they realized I am a foreigner. I politely refused saying that I am in Germany to improve my German. At about 5 AM some people approached me and said they are going to a better party. I joined and the other party was indeed even better than the first one. It was very underground, the crowd was amazing and the music was very tough - just as I like it. We partied until 10 AM and on the way out I met a guy who said he feels like having a few more drinks. We bought a couple of beers and went to his place where we talked for hours and listened to Toten Hosen and I played him some alternative music.

The highlight of this evening was not just meeting all these lovely local like-minded people but I could actually feel throughout the night how my conversational German is improving. The following day when I recovered I felt much more confident speaking German and I also stay in touch with some of those people. I cannot go to these events every weekend because I have to study and it gets expensive but I know where to find them and I can be sure that if I go I will meet some of those people who I already know or I will just simply make new friends. (Student A)

On another occasion Student A feels successful and effective because he approaches a fellow student in the student accommodation who usually keeps to himself and invites him for a drink. Student A is pleased and realises that it is good to make the first step in

communication because it provides a good opportunity to meet interesting people who seem to be boring at first glance (see Appendix G). Student H, on the other hand, recounts a failure when a date does not go well. She is disappointed by the fact that her date does not return the favour of buying drinks and is bored because of communication barriers (see Appendix G). On another occasion, Student H changes tandem partners because she feels her interlocutor is yet again not willing to talk to her and engage in a conversation (see Appendix G). Despite her efforts in slowing down in English, altering her accent and finding banal topics to build on common interest, her tandem partner does not seem to be interested in any conversation. Similarly, Student D reports on adapting his pronunciation and wording of English (no slang) in order to get in touch with people.

During her residence abroad, Student J reports on how a misunderstanding occurred because she entered a flat with her shoes on. Her interlocutor seemed offended by her demeanour and Student J reflects on how people are brought up to adhere to different norms which become inherent. She concludes that we take norms for granted and "look down" on people who are oblivious to them or do not comply with them: "When something is a norm in your country you find it hard to understand how people can ignore it elsewhere." Consequently, Student J feels embarrassed and takes her shoes off indoors ever since the incident.

Another aspect is humour. Student K, for example, next to a difference in dress code, detects a different sense of humour and a lack of sarcasm in Germany:

Well, one thing that was huge was ermm, if you dress up for the night out the way we do here, that they (...) the girls don't dress like we dress for a night. well, I knew that already, but I (...) it's still kind of shocking to see, cos they'd be like why are you wearing, like, heels when (...) so you know you have to adjust to that pretty quickly and also manners since, like, there is the humor (...) is very different and sarcasm, they just don't get our sarcasm and stuff like that and there was times when they'd be like (...) questioning (...) ermmm well, I think with the whole (...) and not really laughing where you'd think it was really funny [...] I don't know, just be like, oh, I am just joking like, constantly had to say, like, nur ein Witz, like always like, it's only a joke, it's only a joke and you have to keep repeating yourself. so they're not like beleidigt (...) it's so like errhhhh. (Student K)

After a few misunderstandings she would then revert to saying "Nur ein Witz" in order to make sure that people did not take her seriously and felt offended.

Instrumental Effectiveness

As outlined above, most of the students' motives are instrumentally inclined and they report academic success and failure in terms of their language skills and courses. In hindsight, all but one student are happy that they have gone abroad and feel they have profited from it in terms of German language skills and their academic development. They are happy with the fact that they will acquire a BA international and have gained confidence in speaking German, for example:

When I first came back I felt a lot more confidence in my German and I had like a lot more day-to-day vocab that I didn't know before I went (...) slang as well like so I felt more confident. (Student M)

These students attribute their success to external factors in that they perceive the quality of the courses to be good and challenging. Additionally, they are proud of their attempts to immerse themselves in the new cultural surrounding and of their insistence on speaking German.

Two students report a change in their academic interests, which has been triggered by their stay abroad, for example, in terms of languages:

Being over there and living in another country where another language is spoken made me realise that I have a real passion for learning languages, I really enjoy it. [...] I took up some Spanish lessons while I was there, I always tried to speak a bit of Spanish with my Spanish friends which was quite funny. (Student D)

Student S, on the other hand, found his passion for musicals and acting and took up courses in that field in Germany. Yet, because of this new interest, his willingness to invest into his stay abroad deteriorated during his residence abroad:

I actually found it harder as the year went on because I suppose half way throughout my studies I kind of realised that I really wanted to leave because I knew what I wanted to do with my life [...] and it was very difficult then knowing I have to come back and do another whole year when I could be finished [because] I understood what I wanted to do afterwards. (Student S)

The students regard their change in interests as a success because it has helped them to focus on new fields and to figure out what they want to do in the future.

In contrast, 6 students are disappointed with their lack of progress and the courses they have done. Failure is again ascribed to external and internal attributes. On the one hand, the students are not happy with their choices of universities and feel disappointed, for example:

The college I was in is quite a poorly run college in regards with all the courses. The administration is very, very poor. Well, for Erasmus students there was no help, like for example, I had to chosen to do courses in (subject) over there and when I got there, I went up to the Erasmus officer on one of the first days and I said I had not heard anything about my courses because they were meant to be broken up into introduction days and she told me, after being over there for three weeks that that course had been cut from college, that department no longer existed. (Student D)

I don't know if it's gonna change in the future but I was disappointed that my grades didn't count and I did hard subjects, that's kind of, you know, so don't (...) and especially in first semester, don't take on a lot of work because there is a lot of adjusting to do and paperwork that you have to do that takes a long time so you shouldn't like have too much like difficult subjects, cos you can choose whatever you want so, you know. Don't stress yourself on the subject in the first semester anyway. (Student K)

In terms of internal attributes, they feel they have not applied themselves enough, have not made enough effort or have set their standards too high:

Erm, I suppose, the expectations I had of myself was that I was going to go away for a year, speak German morning, noon and night and come back fluent. (smiles) Really, I genuinely (...) maybe I didn't expect to come back fluent but I expected to come back with a very high standard (...) erm (...) but I suppose in myself, I kind of always set a lot too high standards for myself, erm, but I really did think that by the end of the year, I would come back with a very good competence of German. Erm (...) it didn't happen....but that was mainly because I didn't push myself far enough, I kind of fell into the usual traps of speaking English, finding other English speaking friends. (Student X)

In the framework of their intercultural encounters, 4 students elaborate on more context-specific successes in terms of instrumental motives. Student G, for example, goes to see a professor in order to register for exams and ask about the requirements (see Appendix G). He describes the encounter as a "myriad of confused faces" as he does not understand the professor and is shocked. When he detects the professor's interest in Ireland, he avails of his Irish nationality to connect to the professor. Student G perceives the forthcoming conversation as a "battle of wits" and can now hold a conversation in German, which he is proud of. He succeeds in getting all the information on the exam. Hence, in this context, "effective" means that Student G has used social skills in terms of picking up on his interlocutor's interests and using them to achieve his aim of registering for an exam. A

similar experience is reported by Student E who feels confident enough in approaching a professor and manages to change his exam times (see Appendix G). Student I and Student K on the other hand are happy with their exam results which help them in their career prospects.

Personal Growth

As already mentioned, 74 % of the students want to learn to live by themselves and become more independent, as it is often the first time moving out of their family homes (14 students went straight from their family home to Germany). Hence, in this sense, the students' stay is successful if they can live on their own, make independent decisions, prepare food and manage to deal with bureaucracy in a foreign country, for example:

I think that's a benefit of having a year abroad as well, is that you get a wide spectrum of it and you can see everything really, different angles [...] I actually think I did pick up a lot of Germanness without meaning to because I kind of rebelled against it over there, I was like 'nooo', just being stubborn and mostly homesick, 'I want to go home so I am not doing that' but at the same time, coming home now, I notice how mature I have become, mostly probably because when you are in that situation, you have to do stuff for yourself, but coming back I have no patience for people dallying at a counter, I am like, oh my God, pay for it and go, I have places to be (laughs) definitely, even my attitude towards college, I try not to leave things to the last minute anymore, if I am given an assignment, I know I have to do it, so I need to work up to it, as it is coming, kind of a thing, and I would take things a little bit more seriously now, there's certain aspects of life that I would not be as kind of blasé about anymore I am like ok, I actually do have to do it, I may as well do it now because if I put it off, it's just going to be worse, so kind of that sort of has followed through (...) I for myself am much more organised and efficient but I suppose with directness, I was always kind of direct, but I would find that I don't have patience for people kind of I don't even know, beating around the bush, it's like, there is no need to go around in circles when you can say something directly sort of, yeah. So I don't know, if that was just enhanced (laughs) on my living in Germany or but yeah, we'll find out (smiles). [...] I would not really say I noticed it on my family, because they'd say that anyway, just to annoy me like 'oh yeah, proper German now' but like in work, I would definitely (...) because I started working when I was 17 where I work (...) and I work in a hospital so a lot of the people that I work with are a lot older than me, much older than me and I think they kind of had a tendency to look at me, still as a 17-year-old, as kind of a child coming in and they had to look after me (...) I suppose I come in now and it's not the case at all. They very much so treat me as an adult now, as kind of one of them, because they can't really look down on me when they are going 'how was your year abroad? You lived away on your own for a year, did you? And you speak another language. And oh, they are that different, are they, over there?' Right, d'you know, most of them have not been abroad so they would say, kind of (...) I suppose, they have noticed the difference in maturity level in me as well. So, yeah, I would say people have noticed it, definitely. (Student Y)

Yeah, I was by myself for a year. Living in an apartment by myself. Having breakfast, lunch and dinner by myself. So I think I probably learned an awful lot in that way as well. (pause) Being by yourself. (Student AA)

I thought where I would end up would be slightly different. I thought I would be in a big city or something like that ermmm and I expected there to be (pause) I expected to make some German friends my own age where I lived but that didn't really work out. I got to know some of them a lot better but I had been told you know, don't get too friendly, ermmm (pause) but no, I thought I would learn to live by myself a lot more, and I did. (Student Z)

In terms of personal growth, the majority of students (93%) report that they have become more self-confident, open-minded and more decisive about the future, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.4.2 on Identity and Changes in Perspectives. Furthermore, students are happy to have integrated new customs into their lives, such as recycling bottles and knocking on the desks at the end of lectures:

What did I profit most from? Ermm (...) having to do kind of everything for myself and having to do it all in a different, a COMPLETELY different setting to I was used to, like getting used to things, like, ermm (pause), like, you know the way they do that recycling thing in Germany with the bottles, like, I had never seen that before and I didn't know how it worked but I was always curious, like, and by the end of the semester I was doing it and that was really, like, that was really kind of a step forward for me, I was, like, I've really delved into their culture you know also the tables at the end of lectures they do that thing where they [knocks on the table] and when I came back here I nearly started doing that out of (...) so it really sort of showed me, well you really did integrate. You really did take on their ways and accept, well that is definitely something we could learn from the Germans as well, that recycling thing, it's very good... yeah, I think people could (...) definitely they recycle a lot more than we do. They have a lot of (...) everything is separated (...) all their bins, it's brilliant, so we could learn from that.. but yeah, I think I benefited from just having to sort of put myself out there, and just sort of say, ok, this is the way they work, you have to fit into that. (Student J)

Furthermore, the students have a sense of fulfilment in not being anxious about holding a conversation in German (33%) by the end of their stay, for example:

Erm, I think I am more confident than I was. Like before I went over I think I am more confident speaking German because every week we used to have to do a Referat or presentation in front of the class so at the start it was very challenging, I find, anyway, to stand up in front of a lot of strangers and talk about a topic whereas now I think I'm, like, I have more confidence doing it now. (Student T)

well, my initial plan was always to go abroad to improve my German and I think I always said 'oh, I should be pretty much fluent when I come back' and I didn't think that I would actually be able to achieve that, erm, but it's gotten pretty good so I am really happy with that result. Ermm, (pause) yeah, I think, overall it was a really positive experience. I can't really, yeah. (Student R)

Only one student reports that she is disappointed with her development:

Very much so, disappointed. Yes. I think honestly I changed a little bit for the worse in that (...) in that (...) there's both sides to it (...) good in that I am able to deal with bureaucracy and that kind of thing but bad in that I kind of felt very drained when I came back from Germany and because I was not and still am disappointed about the fact that I didn't do well I kind of. (Student V)

Other students mention aspirations that are not necessarily related to intercultural interactions but are, nevertheless, important for the students. They go abroad to have a good time with their Irish friends (26%)⁷⁵, they want to travel around (37%) or enjoy nice weather and simply have fun for a year:

To learn as much German as I can. And I would love to find a part time job as well because that's a place where one can learn a lot, at work, in a restaurant, because that's what I did here. I just found a job in a restaurant, I talked to people a lot and that's how I learned. And then a little bit of travelling as well to see the place. (Student A)

Definitely getting to experience a new culture, I really like.. saw what it means to live in Germany, what the German culture is, I got to, I definitely got to meet people from all over the world. Had a lot of good experiences (laughs) that I wanted to travel a lot which I did, and I met lots of (...) some really, really great, great people, and yeah it was just a really good experience which is what I expected. (Student D)

Well, I hope to become a lot more fluent in German and I hope to make some friendships that I can hold so that if [...] that you can have connections there after college, you know, and erm just well, I am going to a different part of Germany, so I think it's going to be a lot different and I want to maybe travel and see different parts and the way it works in different parts of the country. (Student K)

Yes, definitely successful, like I got my BA international which was my objective at the beginning, that's what I wanted ..and then like second would have been having fun and enjoying it and you know I did. That's the main reason I kind of went, I suppose, but (...) Yeah, I think so, ermmm looking back now. (Student S)

In hindsight, these motives have proved to be an impediment to integration into new cultural contexts, but all of these students are happy with their stay nonetheless.

5.2.3 Appropriateness

Some of the collected data also provide insights into the students' perception of appropriateness in their intercultural interactions. In this context, student F raises her concerns about her knowledge of German:

⁷⁵ This motive might point towards a fear of engaging with the Other.

Well, probably first I will have to, you know, figuring out stuff like getting a German bank account and a German phone number and learning to speak German and probably just making friends in the beginning cos I know myself, even though English is my third language I get really frustrated with foreign people with bad English...that it takes them an hour to get something said. It takes them another two hours to understand what I am saying and it frustrates me (...) something incredible, and I am afraid that I am gonna be the person that frustrates everybody when I go over because it takes me so long to get something said. Yeah, that's what I am afraid of. (Student F)

All students elaborate on how they act in a way they think is appropriate in the various contexts. Hence, the students consider an etic point of view in their decision-making, especially in conflict situations. The following elaboration provides context-contingent samples.

In one encounter during his stay abroad, Student L equates appropriateness with showing respect for someone's opinion. When he throws a cigarette butt on the ground, an old man approaches him and tells him to throw it into the bin. Student L feels embarrassed and obeys (see Appendix G). The concept of appropriateness in this case is perceived as respecting the old man's opinion and not throwing more stubs on the ground. In another encounter, Student D is faced with a rather unfriendly, unhelpful woman from the administration team (see Appendix G). Even though he finds her utterly rude and unprofessional, Student D thinks he acts appropriately by ignoring her demeanour and using hand gestures to bring his point across in German. In an encounter already mentioned (see Appendix G), Student J talks about entering a friend's room and sitting on his bed with her shoes on. Student J feels embarrassed and ignorant because she would have adhered to the norm of not wearing shoes indoors in Germany (unlike in Ireland) if she had known about it. Since this incident she has taken her shoes off when she enters someone's flat and feels that she now acts appropriately. In another encounter, Student H thinks that she has acted appropriately by staying polite and hiding her disappointment when her invitation to drinks was not reciprocated. However, she assumes that in Ireland it is normal for guys to pay for girls and that therefore her date has not acted appropriately at all, hence reverting to generalisations and a rather undifferentiated view, which may mirror a lack of intercultural competence.

Hence, like with "effectiveness", there is a breadth of interpretations for "appropriateness" that relate to underlying values, norms, motives and attitudes. It is therefore difficult to establish general rules for these terms in intercultural interaction

and any social interaction for that matter. Instead, they need to be redefined according to the specific contexts they are used in.

5.2.4 Coping Strategies

Based on their experiences abroad, the students were asked to give advice for future students, which would have helped them to have a successful stay abroad. These suggestions give some indication of subjectively perceived strategies in order to enhance integrative and instrumental effectiveness as well as personal growth.

As for strategies to enhance integrative effectiveness, the students' responses provide the following information. The main piece of advice given by 30% of the students is to not be afraid to speak German despite making mistakes and to speak German as much as they can. Along these lines, the majority of participants advise prospect students not to be shy or afraid to make mistakes but to take every opportunity to meet people and push themselves to get to know German speakers whenever they can, for example:

Die sollten mindestens 10 Fehler jeden Tag machen. Ja. Und das heißt natürlich dass sie (...) sie sollten keine Angst vor der Sprache haben. Die sollten jeden Tag sehr viele Fehler machen. Sie sollten versuchen, nicht so schüchtern zu sein, nicht so verschlossen zu sein. Sie sollten unbedingt Deutsche kennenlernen. Ja, die können an Kursen teilnehmen oder an irgendeinem Kurs was an der Uni veranstaltet wird, was weiß ich. Fehler, die sollten Fehler machen, jeden Tag, die sollten echt labern und quatschen und Scheiß bauen und Scheiße erzählen. Ja, vielleicht findest du das nicht gut, aber einfach so viel wie möglich. Also das ist der einzige Grund warum ich Deutsch kann, warum ich so gut Deutsch kann nach vier Jahren. Weil ich keine Angst davor hatte, ich hatte keine Angst vor Menschen, vor Fehlern und das ist sehr wichtig und was hat Samuel Beckett gesagt 'Fail, fail again, fail better' oder sowas, sorry, Zitat kenn ich nicht. Mach einen Fehler, mach es nochmal und mache es dann das nächste Mal besser, den gleichen Fehler. Und das stimmt überhaupt. Das würde ich sagen. 10 Fehler jeden Tag, lach, wenn du sowas sagst wie 'Ich bin heiß' statt 'Mir ist heiß' oder sowas, das ist den Deutschen scheißegal, ob du der Problem oder das Problem sagst. Es ist ja das Problem. Es ist ihnen scheißegal, wenn du die Problem sagst. Du weißt, was ich mein. Also, solange dass man sich verständigen kann, ist das einem scheißegal, was man sagt. Einfach, sag was du willst, ich filter alles heraus und ich verstehe was ich verstehen kann, sozusagen. Ja, Fehler, Fehler (Student N)

First of all, if they were going as Erasmus students, don't live in the student dorms, go try and find your own apartment with German people, cos you are a lot more prone to get to know more people and your German will improve. (Student O)

Just (pause) try settling kinda quickly, you know what I mean. I don't really know. Don't be shy, don't be afraid to make friends or organise things with people. And don't be afraid to speak German at all, just you have to try, there's no point in going over and that and not trying at all, so. (Student E)

To be active, to learn as much German or as much of the language and read about the culture before they go and then not to be shy and make local friends. It's good to make international friends as well, alright, but what I really enjoyed and what helped me was making LOCAL friends from this small town or from next from [place] and something, yeah, but just approach the people first and approach the people who you need, basically, so if you are in Germany, approach Germans. [...] What else would I advise (...) not to be shy is very important, speak the language, don't go into English. When somebody needs help with their English, let them go to Ireland (laughs) it's not really what I am here for, yeah, and be proactive, I think, that's very important. (Student A)

Just to keep an open mind about things and just (pause) just try everything you can, like, over there I regret not doing more, like, there was this programme in town called 'StudIT'. It was just, it was for students, for mostly international students, and it was organised with GERMAN students for (...) to get Erasmus meeting each other but meeting other German students and they could travel all around Germany and do daytrips (...) but I didn't get, like, they always used to send me e-mails and I was, like, 'oh, I must go' but I just never took part in the end because I was just so absorbed in [place] and (...) so just don't let anything kind of let it slide cos like the year, like, you think, 'oh I have a whole year', but it just goes by so quickly. Like, I didn't even go and see [place] in my whole year there, like, and I was, like, I wanted to study in [place] and for me not to go and see it at all, so just try and just get involved with everything and just obviously speak as much German as you can because it is, like, at the beginning especially when you talk to someone and (...) and they're like 'oh, this one isn't from Germany' it's like she can obviously speak English, so they answer me in English. Sometimes if I was really not able to say it in German, I'd answer back in English, but towards the end I became stubborn. I was like, 'no I am not speaking in German' - in English I mean, sorry, anymore. Just speak German where you can. and just, obviously you are going to become, if you are doing Erasmus especially, you are going to become friends with Erasmus people but just try to become friends with Germans... cos I didn't become friends with many German people and that I do regret as well that I didn't actually, like apart from my housemates and my friend like I'd go over maybe during the summer and visit them... but apart from them couple friends I have no one really to visit...cos everyone else has gone home to their country and everything so. (Student W)

I would tell them to (...) ermm, to try (...) no matter how hard it is to try and stick it out because, because it feels like it's never gonna get better sometimes but it does (...) ermmm (...) and I would tell them to take, take every opportunity to meet people, seriously, even though I was very depressed at the beginning and I shied away from meeting people but what I should have done was really get out to meet people at the start because by the time it got to Christmas I felt like I had not got that many close friends and I should have had by then so I would tell them to just kind of (...) yeah to ride out that really hard part by going out as much as you can and meeting people and doing all the Erasmus stuff and to push yourself to get to know the Germans because they can be great friends when you do get to know them (...) yeah (...) I would not tell them it's easy. I would tell them difficult but it's worth it. Try it, it's worth it. (Student J)

Be more open because sometimes I ermm at first I was so afraid that (...) of being rejected by Germans and, you know, you know, looking at me differently because I speak, yeah, my German isn't perfect and, you know, just take the chance and be open and that's what it's there for, that's what it's there for, to interact with other people and get to know their way of life and you know. Try to get through to them. Yeah. (laughs) (Student I)

I mean, I suppose, you know, like it's the standard thing - try and speak as much German as possible but it's hard. It's so hard, d'you know, to (...) you got to a point, where, you know like, people are, like,, coming up to you and even Germans, like d'you know, they kind of, like, hear, like, obviously you are not a native speaker and they ask where you are from and then a lot of the time, they try and speak English to you, d'you know, so it's so hard and then when you are in this situation where, you know, you are in a foreign country, it's kinda new and scary and you are just trying to get used to it and then someone comes up to you and speaks English, it's just oh, familiarity, do you know, and then you start getting into a routine, especially with these people. So if there is some people that constantly speak German to you, once you start getting more comfortable, then chances are for the rest of the year, you will speak German to them. But at the beginning you start speaking English to someone the chances are for the rest of the semester, the rest of the year, you are going to speak English, to that person. So, my best advice would just be to just try your hardest, just, you know, have a small group of friends who you speak English with so you can, like, you know at the end of the day, you know Oh god, you know, I don't want to speak another word of German. I just wanna go speak English to my English speaking friends, you know, but try and just make as much effort in speaking German and getting relationships with people where you only speak German with them. And have fun because the year goes by 'snap' it just goes by like you would not believe, you know, so yes, speak German and have fun, you know. That's it. (Student X)

Furthermore, Student V suggests getting into a relationship with an L2 speaker:

I would say just go, attend all those parties and accept all those invites (...) If you are tired say no, obviously, or if you don't have any money, don't go but ermm (...) there are (...) try and get a job and try and get a relationship, I find that some (...) the people who did get in a relationship improved their German tenfold because they were in love with the person who was speaking to them and they wanted to learn so much ermm (...) and other than that (...) if you can at all, don't become friends with the Erasmus people (laughs). (Student V)

In her experience, people who had relationships with L2 speakers during their residence abroad improved their language skills much more than others because they were in love. Hence, Student V takes a holistic approach towards intercultural competence, which includes emotional and bodily levels.

As for possible difficulties, 3 students tell prospective exchange students to be prepared to be upset and homesick but to endure this phase:

Like the homesicknesses can be BAD sometimes, but you get over it and you will see you family again soon. Just try and enjoy, like, some days you'll obviously be down. You'll be, like, I just wanna be home, if I was at home now, mummy would cook me dinner or whatever, but you just have to absorb yourself in the life which I did like after a few months. It was just like I had always been here. It was just so easy to. (Student W)

I would say (pause) be prepared, you are going to be homesick, you are going to have bad days, the culture is going to be different and it's going to take you a while to adjust, like if you know somebody from there or who has been there before, talk to them, ask them what it's like, is there cultural differences, what is going to be expected of you, what's (pause), like, what are the initial differences that you are going to have. (Student Y)

That it's really hard. It's really hard and it was not hard for me but it was very hard for a lot of people and I had a lot of friends who struggled and who were very homesick and a guy actually went home (...) he was supposed to be there for a whole year and he went home after one semester (pause) That it is a lot harder than you think it's gonna be, so you have to prepare yourself for that and you have to prepare yourself to be upset and to be homesick and you've got to prepare yourself that you might want to go home but you have to make a decision that you don't. (Student F)

Another aspect mentioned is organisation and preparation in terms of accommodation. The students suggest gathering information on the living conditions prior to the residence abroad and not living with Erasmus students but sharing accommodation with L2-speakers:

Inform yourself as much as you can cos I kinda think, like especially with the housing as well. I didn't even look it up on the map. I just got offered students accommodation and thought it was great, so took it. So I would really research where you wanna go, where you wanna stay and like make sure you have enough information. [...] I just felt like there was no help really. I don't know if that was just because where we were, I don't really think they university really cared where we were staying and what we were doing. (Student M)

To not have your hopes built up too high and also expectations because when it does not meet that. It's like kind of hard to deal with and can bring you like way down low (laughs). I would say, try and get talking to people as much as you can and ermm, what else, I am not sure, what would I tell them. Make sure they know what the place is like before they go and do a good bit of research into that. (Student H)

Just be really, really OPEN and don't turn down any party or any invitation no matter (...) even if you, like, I just ended up doing really random stuff that I would never do over here, but I did it (...) like we went to board game nights and stuff just to MEET people (pause) ermmm, try not to hang around with people just because they are from Ireland and they speak English, cos I know when I was over there, there was like 10 other people from Ireland, but I was not actually like good friends with them at all but they all hang around together and I know they kind of regretted it in the end [...] So, talk to lots of German people (smiles) ermm, get an exchange partner, sign up for anything, I don't know what else I could say, just be open, really open to anything (smiles). (Student O)

As for the Erasmus community, in retrospect, 70% of the students give the advice of not socialising with Erasmus students or L1-speakers in order to maximise immersion into the L2 context, for example:

I'd say, maybe don't go with friends. Don't go with anybody you are friends with cos it's just easier to just stay with them, so try to be as independent as possible and just do your own thing and don't have any hesitations. Obviously, be careful but just go and jump in (laughs) (Student B)

Obviously you are going to become, if you are doing Erasmus especially, you are going to become friends with Erasmus people but just try to become friends with Germans, cos I didn't become friends with many German people and that I do regret as well that I didn't actually, like apart from my housemates and my friend, like, I'd go over maybe during the summer and visit them, but apart from them couple friends I have no one really to visit, cos everyone else has gone home to their country and everything so. (Student W)

Along these lines, two former language assistants recommend doing the language assistantship programme in order to avoid Erasmus communities and to be more easily immersed into an L2 community:

I would certainly recommend doing the teaching. I didn't get to study last year when I had the idea I might try and do both because we had the opportunity to do both if there was a university there but I'd recommend if you do the teaching, try and do it in a medium size town. Don't go to a big city cos, you'd only speak English but don't end up in a little tiny town where you are going to be on your own. That's the advice I would give. (Student Z)

I would definitely recommend the language assistantship programme. I think a lot of people who came back from Erasmus said that they had loads of Spanish friends (laughs) and no German friends whereas I kind of find that I have a balance of both, ermm [...] in my experience in particular, everyone really was so helpful and the school really made a really concerted effort to speak German with me and then speak English with me when we were in class, you know, if necessary. And then, I guess just to throw yourself into it, like really go for it, ermm (..) I was lucky that there were so many people in my area so if I didn't get on with a certain group of people I could hang out with somebody else but I think other people don't have that luxury and if you didn't really go for it and really put yourself out there, you could just be completely, you know, left to yourself. (Student Q)

In this context, Student AA stresses that future participants of the language assistantship programme should be prepared to spend a lot of time on their own which she presumes not to be the case as an Erasmus student.

In terms of finances, Student L and Student S advise prospective students "to be organised with money" (Student L) and make sure to have a source of income (Student S) in order to have enough money for travelling:

When you are going to a country, have a plan of, like, everyone obviously has some sort of funds or money to go over to these places but definitely be more organised with your money because there was more times when we had to pay for so much and then you'd realise I can't do this, I can't do the other because I have no money left. But have enough money to be able to do really fun things if you wanted to and don't just spend all your time at the one place because there is so much more to see in every single country so much more to see no matter how good it is, there is so much more to see than in just one place. (Student L)

I would probably say, make sure you have a lot of money or a source of income. Like, that is the most important thing I'd say. You know, all joking aside, that is by far (...) if I just think, if I had had more money, I would have got out so much more out of the year. I hate to say it but, you know, at the end of the day we could not go on these trips. People were going on to Poland and to anywhere, you know, erm (...) If you can just barely afford your flight home at Christmas or whatever, and then you have like 50 Euro a week to live off, which I mean, and as an Erasmus student you go out most nights, so it's kinda like, food (...) and you know, it's not a lot of money. [...] And I completely miscalculated, like, you know, really unrealistic, kind of, you know. (Student S)

As for instrumental effectiveness, Student K advises students not to take on a lot of modules in first semester because adjusting to the new surrounding might take up a lot of energy. Five students furthermore recommend attending not only Erasmus courses but also classes in different subjects in order to immerse themselves into the L2 community and expand one's academic horizons.

The variety of aspirations and consequent forms of investment is stressed by Student T. She stresses individuality and has the following advice for prospective students, which sums up the students' experiences in the light of intercultural competence quite well:

At the end of the day it's your own experience. Everyone is different. So, something that one person might find positive or good another might like think [...] it's not like great. [...] Go away with an open mind and just enjoy every minute. (Student T)

The previous samples illustrate a small extract of an abundance of intercultural interaction contexts with different outcomes and different requirements. Despite rather similar circumstances, each L2-learner brings a different set of skills, knowledge, attitudes, personality traits and motives to the intercultural contexts. In the study abroad context,

individual previous experiences, goals and motives have an impact on the subjective outcomes, coping strategies and the perceptions of success.

5.3 Language and Intercultural Awareness

Most models of intercultural competence and most empirical research (Barrett *et al.* 2014, Bennett 1993a, Byram 1997, Fantini 1995, FEIL 2005, Kramsch 1998, Witte 2014) demonstrate that L2 proficiency is essential for intercultural competence and fosters its development. In this sense, languages are not only regarded as communication tools but are socially and culturally embedded and constructed. They are symbolic systems which actively construct social and cultural reality in interaction:

Language use, social roles, language learning, and conscious experience are all socially situated, negotiated, scaffolded, and guided. They emerge in the dynamic play of social intercourse. Our expectations, systematized and automatized by prior experience, provide the thesis, our model of language, and we speak accordingly. (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman 2006: 572)

Languages make meaning and affect the way speakers perceive and construe reality. The individual and the social, the linguistic and the cultural are interconnected in discursive practice. Hence, in sharing language, a shared reality is maintained and transformed within a community (Byram 2008: 111). Culture defined as discourse and meaning making implies, however, that intercultural competence does not only comprise attitudes, knowledge and (self-)awareness but also embraces a range of conflicting and dynamic discourse worlds. Yet, due to a common illusion of effective communication, cultural values and identities which are accompanied by inversions and new inventions of meaning are often neglected (Kramsch 2011: 354) and speakers take their internalised linguistic realities for granted. Learning new languages therefore provides the opportunity to experience and perceive new realities. In intercultural interactions, language learners do not automatically adapt concepts of the target language and culture and do not cast off their native cultural frames of reference, values or attitudes. They rather draw on the beliefs, values and behaviours they have acquired during their socialisation (Byram 2008: 113). In other words, the linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds shape the way interlocutors interpret and communicate in intercultural encounters as new information is filtered through subjective linguistic notions.

Furthermore, Kramsch (1998: 3) points out that language speakers tend to identify themselves and others by their use of language in interactions. In this context, Kramsch (1998: 3) refers to the significance of different forms of interaction and communication styles. People create experience through language and give meaning to it through their chosen medium of communication (face-to-face, e-mail, telephone, text message) or by way of communication style in terms of accents, sociolects or body language. The language used in intercultural encounters may be a *lingua franca* or the native language of one interlocution partner. Hence, language learners might not be fully aware of all the connotations and denotations beneath the surface of intercultural interactions, which may cause misunderstandings (Byram 2008: 113). Therefore, Barrett *et al.* (2014) claim that interaction in intercultural encounters requires plurilingual competence and an awareness that interlocutors may have different levels of language competence and different communication styles which may lead to power asymmetries. Hence, apart from being a tool of communication, language also serves as a "symbol of cultural and social unity and division" (Pellegrino Aveni 2005: 8) which presents the Self and a social identity, making it an instrument of power as well as a source of weakness. In the light of these assumptions, the questions of the present study cover the students' linguistic background and their assessed language aptitude as opposed to their self-perception of language competence in intercultural interactions.

As outlined in chapter 4, 24 of the 27 students whose data has been analysed in the framework of this study are Irish citizens and native speakers of English. The remaining participants from the Czech Republic, Poland and Finland with Czech, Polish and Finnish being their mother tongues speak English fluently. With regard to language studies, two participating students study English, two study Spanish in the framework of European Studies, another two students study French and one student studies Irish as a second subject.

Regarding academic progress, the students' average grades for the language modules GN310 and GN320 as well as the overall grades in German Studies before and after the students' residence abroad are compared. The results are then analysed in the light of the students' subjective notion of progress. The marking scheme of the German Department at NUIM which is used for this analysis is the following:

Letter Grade	Representative Points	Class
A++	100	I
A+	90	I
A	80	I
A-	70	I
B+	68	II – I
B	65	II – I
B-	60	II – I
C+	58	II – 2
C	55	II – 2
C-	50	II – 2
D+	48	III
D	45	P
D-	40	P
E+	38	F
E	35	F
E-	30	F
F+	20	F
F	10	F
F-	0	F

Tab. 7 Marking Scheme of NUIM

The following bar chart (Fig. 14) shows a comparison of grades of the study participants in language modules before and after their residence abroad.

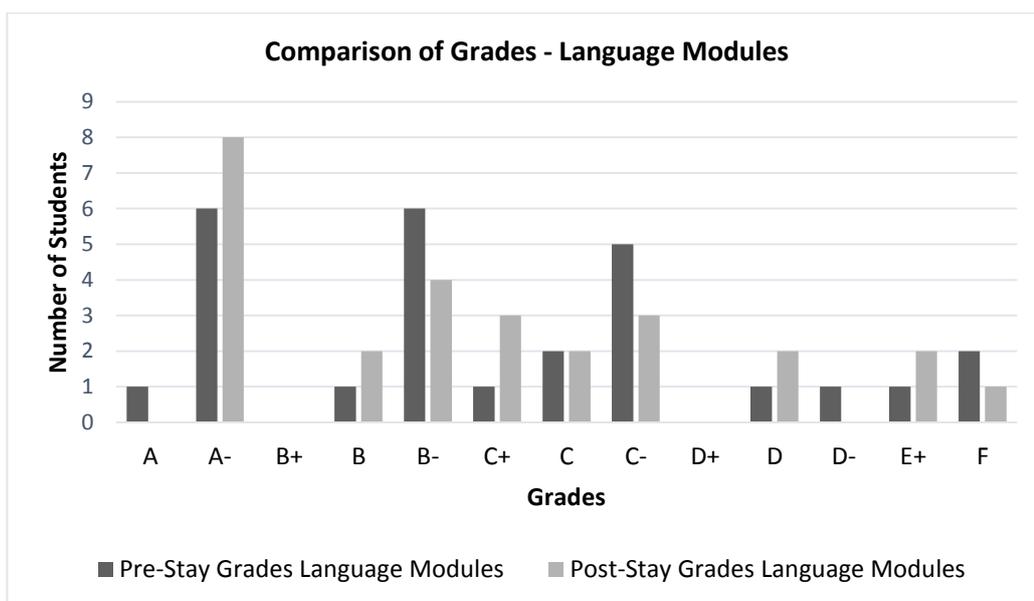


Fig. 14 Bar Chart Comparison of Grades in Language Modules

In Figure 14, the X-axis enumerates the grades according to the marking scheme of the German Department at NUIM, while the Y-axis provides information on the number of students who get these grades before (dark grey bar) and after (light grey bar) their residence abroad. While only one person finishes the language module (on average) with an A prior to the stay abroad, no student achieves such a high grade upon return. The best mark after the stay abroad is an A-, which has been achieved by 8 students – two more students than the year before. Neither before nor after the exchange programme does a student achieve the grades B+ or D+, but the number of students who get a B, a D and an E+ doubles from one to two students in their final year of BA studies. A B- is achieved by 4 students after their time abroad as compared to 6 students before their stay. There is also a rise in the number of students who get a C+ from 1 to 3 students while the number of students who get a C stagnates at 2. The number of students having a C- drops from 5 to 2 after the students' return and while 2 students fail their language module before going abroad, only one does so upon return. In order to protect the anonymity of the students, no detailed information can be provided on the results of individual students but the following developments can be detected. Altogether, 9 participants of the study group improve their grades, 8 students perform worse and 9 students show the same performance after their stay abroad. Hence, only one third of the students perform better in their language modules after their year abroad.

As for those students who study another language, three students improve, three stagnate on the same grade and one student deteriorates in the language performance. This deterioration may relate to the fact that the student has articulated several times throughout the data that the main purpose of going abroad is not to attend German classes but to focus on her second subject of studies.

These grades, however, do not constitute a completely objective reflection of the students' performances. Despite the fact that these exams conform with required standards, they are two completely different exams. Whereas in second year, the students could score by answering simple grammar exercises, the final year exams are much more complex and do not allow for a mere reproduction of memorised content. The level at which the courses are taught is markedly higher, including more authentic material and essay writing. In addition, despite being double marked, the exams are corrected by different lecturers with individual expectations and priorities.

The development of academic achievement is slightly different in the overall performances of the students in German Studies, as illustrated in the following bar chart. Fig. 15 shows a comparison of the overall grades in German Studies before and after the students' residence abroad.

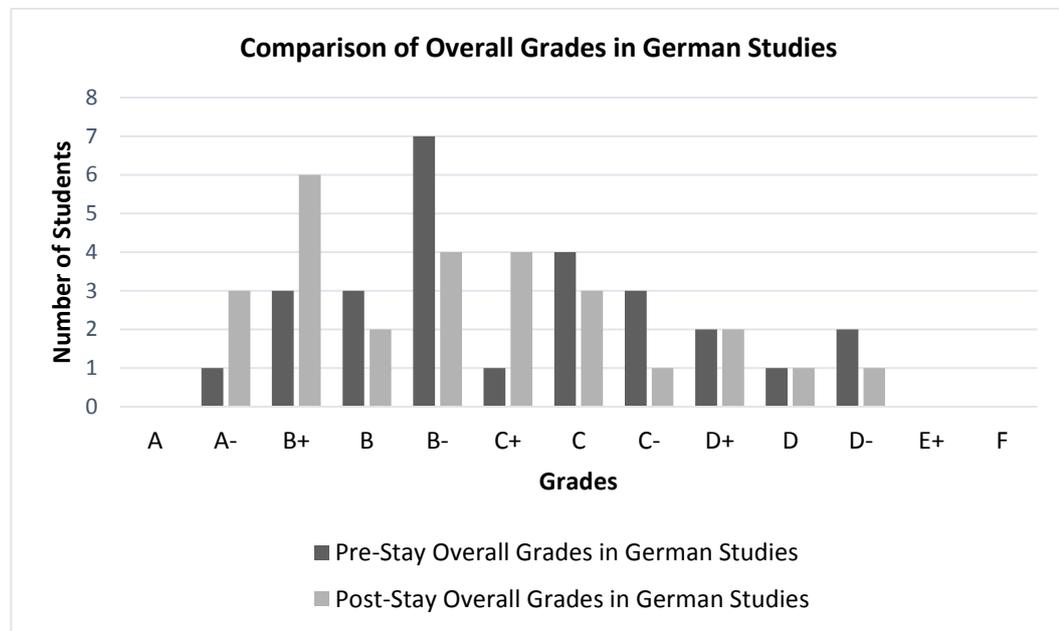


Fig. 15 Bar Chart Comparison of Overall Grades in German Studies

In Figure 15, the X-axis again enumerates the grades according to the marking scheme of the German Department at NUIM and the Y-axis provides information on the number of students who achieve these overall grades before (dark grey bar) and after (light grey bar) the students' residence abroad. These grades comprise all modules of the second and final year of studies on translation, literature, linguistics and Landes- und Kulturkunde. No student achieves an A before or after the stay abroad but neither does a student fail or graduate with an E+. While one person overall finishes the modules with an A- prior to the stay abroad, three students do so upon their return. The number of students who graduate with a B+ and a C+ increases from 3 to 6 (B+) and from 1 to 4 students (C+) in the final year of their Bachelor studies. The number of students who get a B drops from 3 to 2 and the number of students who get a B- drops from 7 to 4 after the students' return. In their final year, 3 students finish their studies with a C as compared to 4 students before their stay. One student finishes the BA studies with a C- which constitutes a drop by two students. The number of students getting a D+ and a D stagnates at 2 (D+) and 1 (D) respectively while 1 student passes the studies with a D- as compared to 2 students before their stay. As for the development of individual students, altogether 13 students have

better overall grades, while 4 students perform worse and 10 students stagnate in terms of their grades. Hence, almost one half of the study participants (48%) perform better in their German Studies after their stay abroad. Considering those students who study another language, three students again perform better, three stagnate on the same grade while the performance of the same student (see language modules) deteriorates.

Altogether, only one third of the students perform better in their language modules after their stay abroad while 48% of the students do so in the overall German modules. One reason for more progress in the overall grades could be that the students feel more motivated to engage with cultural and social components through German (literature, contemporary issues on the news, Facebook) (see chapters 5.2.1 and 5.2.2) because they have become part of their lifeworlds and therefore the students consider them more relevant or identify more with them after their residence abroad.

In this context, Ecke (2014: 136–138) suggests that less proficient learners profit more from a stay abroad than more proficient learners. In the framework of this study, this assumption is confirmed in that only 21% (3 out of 14) of the proficient students (B- or above) prior to their stay improve their grades, whereas 54% (7 out of 13) of the less proficient learners (below B-) do so in the language modules. As for the overall grades, 43% (6 out of 14) of the more proficient learners improve their grades, while 54% (7 out of 13) of the less proficient students do so.

As for the students' subjective perceptions before their departure, all students feel quite confident in their language skills and have the impression that despite making mistakes and not being completely fluent, they can hold substantial conversations in German. The main thrust is: "My German is, you know, I can manage. If I am thrown into a German speaking environment I will be able to you know get along and figure stuff out." (Student F). Upon arrival in Germany and Austria, however, 8 students report that they feel disabused and their confidence is knocked, for example:

In German I'm fairly ok, I have definitely gotten better in the year abroad, so, good conversation level, yeah. [...] I think at first when we went, our German wasn't that great, my German wasn't that great, so trying to initially speak to them, there was that barrier and then that kind of just the time went on and it had been, it had gone to a stage where there was a few months and still I hadn't made friends and then we had made friends with these other foreign students, so we kinda just got into the sink of just speaking to those people because all attempts to try speak to Germans weren't successful because of the language. (Student B)

It wasn't good enough to make a friendship, it was kind of like, just – 'how are you? – good' (laughs). Awkward, kind of like, not good enough to get to know somebody in German. (Student B)

This initial disappointment and questioning of one's own language skills is triggered by their first intercultural encounters in the new cultural surrounding. The following samples illustrate misunderstandings and difficulties in interaction on a micro-level which shape the perceptions of the students.

The aforementioned Student F, for example, recounts her first encounter with her flatmate. She introduces herself in German but her flatmate does not understand her and does not speak English. Hence, Student F avoids her flatmate, feels confused and insecure about her German, and decides to prepare appropriate answers in German for various questions (see Appendix G). Student B and Student D (see Appendix G) recount their experiences when signing their leases for their student accommodation. Student B tries to speak German to the secretary and when she needs to fill in a form with many unknown German abbreviations, she asks for help. The secretary is quite abrupt and responds that she thought all Erasmus students were expected to have even a little bit of German. Consequently, Student B feels shaken and intimidated and refrains from speaking German. Student D describes a similar experience when he signs his lease and converses with the administration officer in German. Student D tries his best to communicate but the officer seems annoyed that she has to repeat some phrases. This experience leaves him nervous and worried for future intercultural encounters in German.

Similarly, while Student G thinks that he has "enough German to get by" before his stay, he is disappointed after an encounter with a German professor because he perceives the conversation to be very one-sided and incomprehensible, despite trying "hard to enunciate [his] German correctly and make [himself] sound as German as possible". He writes:

As with most conversations I have with German speakers, I end up leaving feeling somewhat dejected. Mainly that my German isn't up to par. So this scenario, like most, really influenced me and made me consciously increase the amount I speak German. (Student G)

In comparison, Student G decides to address the matter positively, whereas some of his previously discussed colleagues seem to take their negative experience as a pretext to withdraw. The initial feeling of frustration the students express in the present data has also been reported in Pellegrino Aveni's (2005) study who concludes:

Stripped of the comfortable mastery of their first language and culture and societal adroitness, learners in immersion environments, such as study abroad, often report feeling as if those around them may perceive them to be unintelligent, lacking personality or humor, or having the intellectual development of a small child. (Pellegrino Aveni 2005: 9)

These intercultural encounters might be the first time that learners experience the limitation of being able to express their thoughts and ideas accurately in their full meaning. As the samples show, these challenges in intercultural interactions may have different effects on different students. While some (Student B, Student D) feel frustrated and become more timid and scared of future encounters, others (Student F, Student G) feel more motivated to engage with the German language and develop strategies for successful interactions.

All students in this study report humility regarding their lack of German skills. Sixteen students show withdrawal but also confidence in their ability to learn, and revert to various resources such as preparing German phrases or using non-verbal gestures. The opposing reactions are also discussed in the framework of Witte's (2014) second principle of intercultural competence in that learners might (1) become more willing to engage with the foreign culture and language and develop their cultural capital but they (2) might also be oblivious to any difference and not engage at all, or (3) on the other extreme, they might react negatively with withdrawal to the familiar L1 cultural community.

Another important aspect these samples shed light on is the role of interlocutors in intercultural communication. So far, the students have mainly practised their German in classroom settings and hence in construed writing and speaking prompts. These activities are aimed at practising grammatical structures and particular skills, and the courses of conversation are rather predictable. During the stay abroad, it may be the first time that students are in contact with native speakers other than their lecturers, or speak German to people outside of the university context. In these authentic and naturalistic learning settings the outcomes of interaction are more unpredictable and partly depend on the interlocutors. These interlocutors draw on various levels of language competences, act according to different discursive and social conventions and interpret interaction in the light of different cultural frames of reference which may cause misunderstandings and asymmetries of power in intercultural interactions. Furthermore, native speakers may use dialectal and sociolectal variations of a language, may use slang or socio-linguistic cues

unknown to the language learners. In this sense, people do not only use their subjective voices in communication but also speak with a culturally mediated, collective voice (Bakhtin 1986: 293–294) of a community. Speakers might not be aware of their implicit connotations and denotations and might not be considerate or make special allowances such as speaking more distinctly or more slowly. Hence, even when the language learners speak the L2 correctly, it does not mean they speak it appropriately. Practising appropriateness in language teaching is, however, challenging as there are manifold variations of contexts which involve cultural dimensions of language – starting with the right way of addressing people – and go beyond grammatical accuracy. In this context, Bennett (1993b) refers to a "fluent fool" – "someone who speaks a foreign language well but does not understand the social or philosophical content of that language" (Bennett 1993b: 16). Hence, the cultural dimensions of language which guide the way reality is perceived and experienced need to be considered in intercultural interactions. During their residence abroad, all but one student report a gain in self-confidence in intercultural interactions, which, according to Gardner (1985: 54), is a result of positive experiences. Student H, for example, recounts an intercultural encounter in a foreign language class when she works with two German students. During their group work she is afraid of potential communication barriers and their judgment of her German skills. Even though Student H feels she is good at understanding German, she is shy when speaking it and is afraid of making mistakes. However, working in the team goes well and whenever Student H is stuck for words, she uses body language, gestures or simply looks words up in the dictionary. Hence, she concludes that problems in communication may be overcome and that the fear of making mistakes is only going to stop her from learning. Due to her success in the interaction, she gains more self-confidence for future intercultural interactions. Despite initial frustration when the learners become aware of their limitedness of expression, they may enjoy expressing themselves in a different medium to their L1 in the course of their residence abroad.

Upon return, the majority of students (all apart from two students) report that their very highly set expectations in terms of fluency have not been met. The same result is reported by Badstübner and Ecke (2009: 47–48) who have investigated the motives, expectations and the perceived learning progress of 23 American students for a one-month-stay in Germany. However, even though the participants of the present study do not feel as fluent in German as they have anticipated, they all report a gain in self-confidence in everyday conversations and perceive an improvement, especially in their receptive

language skills. All but one student feel that in terms of language skills they still struggle most with speaking German as compared to reading or writing or listening to it. However, while the students perceive themselves to be successful and have gained confidence in authentic, mostly informal learning settings, for the majority of them, their grades do not mirror this progress (see Fig. 14 and Fig. 15).

A variety of possible explanations as to why the students have not improved their language skills as much as they have hoped is provided in the interviews. The diverging results between grades and self-reported language gain may imply a difference between formal and informal language learning settings and could also relate to sociolinguistic knowledge acquisition and the appropriate use of L2. In the framework of this study it has become clear that L2 learners attained L2 competence through learning declarative knowledge in *Bildungssprache* (erudite language) in terms of a formal linguistic register which is mostly used in the educational or academic contexts and is characterised by more abstract vocabulary and complex syntax than *Alltagssprache* (everyday language). However, the students state their insecurity on aspects of procedural knowledge in everyday conversations before and during their residence abroad. Maybe it is exactly the difference between *Bildungssprache* and *Alltagssprache* which causes a difference in the perception of language skills. While the students feel they have advanced, they have mostly advanced in *Alltagssprache* due to their exposure to authentic L2 encounters and L2 interaction in various social contexts of everyday life. However, they have not necessarily improved in grammar complexity and correctness, scientific register and lexical accuracy, as also confirmed by Walsh (1994). Their acquired sociolinguistic awareness is not reflected within the framework of their module exams, where the focus is mostly on *Bildungssprache*. Apart from chosen conversation topics by the students in their oral exams, the language modules in their final year of the BA programme mainly focus on specific grammar areas such as Konjunktiv I, Konjunktiv II, Partizipialkonstruktionen, Passiv, Relativsätze and highly structured text types such as Erörterung and Kommentar. Hence, the students deal with construed writing and speaking prompts that are aimed at practising certain grammar aspects and particular skills with predictable outcomes instead of everyday language.

By contrast, in authentic intercultural encounters, students acquire sociolinguistic norms and communication strategies rather than grammatical skills, as also confirmed in Regan's (1995) study of six Irish learners of French. Hence, a stay abroad does not automatically

lead to the required linguistic proficiency in language studies because different abilities and skills come to the fore in the various social situations encountered (see also Block 2007). The experiences students have with representatives of other cultural contexts may help them acquire socio-pragmatic skills and awareness, which is not necessarily relevant for the university context. Thus, from an instrumental, academic point of view, the students may not have profited as much as they had anticipated, but their newly acquired skills (i.e. paraphrasing, conflict management, self-reflection, dealing with difference, making friends) may have helped cultural bridging and may have an influence on their intercultural interactions.

Additionally, the data of the study shows that L2 acquisition is not necessarily connected to intercultural awareness. Especially students who are instrumentally motivated and improve their language skills do not show much integration into the new cultural contexts and remain largely on an ethno-centric level of intercultural competence.

The statements by Student H cited so far have shown that the main reason for going abroad for Student H was to improve her French skills. She chose the university based on the reputation of the French department and the place's proximity to France. Her elaborations show that she had the notion of improving her German skills by "just speaking German every day and [...] just being around the culture". Yet at the same time Student H looks forward to only speaking French with one of her fellow students in Germany to maintain her level of French. In retrospect, Student H ponders:

We had great intentions but yeah... but it didn't come to very much. [...] Probably like the social aspect of it. I kind of felt we just kind of went to class and then ended up just being in our rooms that looked like prisons, basically. You know, I just thought it would be more, like, oh, it's good parties and drink German beer with everyone and meet lots of people (...) I don't know (...) it was kind of lonely in a way because you are in this foreign country and you don't really know anyone and then you go to class, and you try to get to know this whole new town and then you go back to your room and it's just, like, here is noone I know here, noone to talk to, and it's just like in their rooms, ah, this is great. (Student H)

In comparison, the data of other students cited so far reveals that the students have become culturally embedded and show critical reflection but have stagnated or regressed in terms of a linguistic progress on an academic scale.

Language as a shared tool by a community also serves as a symbol of identity (see chapter 1). An interesting aspect revealed in the framework of this study is the significance of the Irish language⁷⁶. Language serves as a tool to communicate, reflect and modify one's personal identity and, as Byram (2008: 132) points out, "can in principle be a marker of ethnic and/or national identity – 'I am X because I speak X'". However, the data shows that an inference between the Irish language and an Irish identity does not necessarily apply. This result confirms Byram's (2008) claim that "being Irish is no longer dependent on or marked by speaking Irish" (Byram 2008: 132). All of the 24 Irish participants in this study have been taught Irish in school but only 6 students consider their command of Irish to be better than their command of German and 1 student states to have an equal command of both languages. Of these 7 students, one studies Irish and 3 went to a Gaelscoil and/or Gaelcholaiste. The remaining 16 students claim that their Irish skills are rudimentary and not very good. However, all the students are proud of being Irish and identify with Irish customs.

In the context of L2 acquisition, L2 learners apply different linguistic frames of reference which might have an impact on identity construction and blending of spaces in terms of their perceptions, emotions and attitudes (Witte 2014: 337). In the way people use language, they represent a particular identity at the same time as constructing it (Hall 2012: 34). Hence, language identities are not stable constructs across contexts but are locally situated (Hall 2012: 44) and are reconstituted in interaction and discourse when people speak. In this regard, Student N shows signs of what Berger and Luckmann (1966: 176) refer to as "alternation", which means the rejection of the previous socialisation and identity. Being an *ab initio* student of German at NUIM, Student N has been very motivated throughout his studies at Maynooth to improve his German skills and has taken every opportunity to expose himself to German. After his return to Ireland, Student N is the only participant in this study who wants to conduct the interview in German and feels very confident in his language skills. The reasons for his use of German in the interview could be manifold. It could be that the interviewer's role as a former lecturer of German at NUIM motivates Student N to demonstrate his acquired German language skills and

⁷⁶ According to the Irish Constitution (1994), Article 8, the Irish language is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland, with English being recognised as a second official language. However, social, economic and political factors have resulted in a decline of the Irish language usage and English is the mother tongue of the majority of the population (Darmody & Daly 2015: vii). Although Irish is taught as one of the core subjects in primary and post-primary schools the Census 2011 data shows that only 41,4% of the population claim to be able to speak Irish, with only 1,8% of the population speaking Irish daily outside of school (Census 2012: 40).

show his linguistic progress and confidence. It could also be that Student N takes on this particular language identity to mark positive stances towards social German relationships, in his case the relationship with his German girlfriend. In this regard, Witte (2014) refers to progressive stages of intercultural competence acquisition in that people may progress, stagnate, revert back or assimilate in a way that they identify with new cultural communities more than with their original ones. Throughout his interview, Student N often stresses that he is "ein bisschen eingedeutscht", has totally immersed himself into the new cultural circumstances and has taken over traits of what he perceives to be part of the German culture. Hence, his use of the German language, of colloquialisms and sayings might embody the identification and emotional involvement with these contexts and may imply intercultural competence development. The realisation of linguistic relativity may be expanded to culture and thought and is closely related to the concept of identity, which will be discussed in the following subchapter.

5.4 Changes in Perspectives and Identity Constructions

Culture and language in the intercultural competence and L2 acquisition context are inextricably linked with the concept of identity. As with culture, no universal definition of identity exists. On the contrary, L2 and personal identity in general are considered a holistic, multi-faceted construct, which is "neither unitary nor fragmented" (Wenger 2002: 175) but constitutes an intersection of many relationships people bring into the experience of being a person". In recent research (Block 2007, Kramersch 2009a, Parekh 2008, Norton Peirce 1995, Tajfel 1978), identity is understood as the subjectivities and subject positions individuals inhabit and have been ascribed within various cultural contexts (Block 2013: 18). Hence, (intercultural) interactions constitute complex, dynamic spaces which involve an intrinsically pluralistic self and Other. The multiple self and Other are in dialectical proportion to each other in that the understanding of the Self contains the understanding of the Other (values, norms, ideals) and vice-versa. In this sense, the comprehension of oneself both as an individual and as a social actor on a collective level is only possible by means of distinction from another self.

In the course of their lives, individuals define themselves as members of various groups with associated values, beliefs and attitudes. In turn, they are identified as group members and are ascribed characteristics by others in the interactions of different social groups. Depending on the context, these subject positionings generated by the subjects

themselves and others vary and may have different effects (Block 2007: 18–19, 26). In the study abroad context, it is assumed that the students are exposed to various new cultural paradigms and may be forced to negotiate their identities in terms of unknown interpretations of different facets of their social identities (Benson *et al.* 2012: 178).

When individuals move across sociocultural borders, it is more likely that taken-for-granted, fixed, stable selves will be disturbed and decentred because of critical experiences. In the framework of this study, "identity" refers to how the learners define and present themselves in relation to their attitudes, values, beliefs and goals. It denotes their sense of who they are and what aspects they attribute significance to (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 5).

A shared language may serve as an indicator for group difference and group affiliation. When interactions between social groups involve different linguistic backgrounds, misunderstandings based on different aligned meanings transferred from the L1 to a *lingua franca* are more likely to occur which may have an impact on identity constructions. Apart from a shared language, the students identify commonalities such as patterns of action or goals, which guarantee a certain group consistency and a maintenance of a shared reality (Berger & Luckmann: 1966: 66–75, Witte 2014: 180). Hence, the achievement of mutual understanding goes beyond the linguistic matter (Byram 2008: 113, 121) as different underlying value systems, attitudes, beliefs and norms of collective frameworks may be involved in encounters.

Like the studies by Benson *et al.* (2012), Jackson (2008), Kinginger (2013) and Pellegrino Aveni (2005), the present study investigates particular self-reported impacts of the residence abroad on the participants' identity development. The students use a range of different identities to present and represent themselves, including both personal and social identity concepts. The data analysis focuses on identity negotiation in terms of new subject positions, personal growth and collective identity dimensions.

5.4.1 Personal Identity Factors and Development

The personal dimension of identity refers to the individuals' unique sense of self which is not regarded as a fixed entity but subject to change and development. Personal identity is permeable, depending on the social groups in which the students move and with which they identify.

As expounded in chapter 5.2, the students report various outcomes of their residence abroad which seem independent from L2 acquisition and usage. One aspect often stated by the students is personal growth in terms of becoming more independent, open-minded, self-confident and self-responsible. Studies on residence abroad effects (Benson *et al.* 2012, Jackson 2008) similarly demonstrate self-reported personal development:

Enhanced personal growth, self-confidence, and maturity; a higher degree of independence; a broader worldview; more awareness and acceptance of cultural differences; enhanced intercultural communication/social skills; and a greater appreciation of their own culture and identity (Jackson 2008: 214).

These traits reflect components of current intercultural (communicative) competence models (see chapter 3). Yet, a year abroad does not necessarily engage language learners in broadening their identity (Witte 2014: 362). The following discussion on the present study illustrates the participants' subjective perceptions in the light of Barrett *et al.*'s (2014) concept of intercultural competence and previous empirical findings.

Construction of Self

When asked before and during their stay abroad how the students would define themselves and what aspects they consider especially important, 9 students refer to their personal characteristics, ranging from being laid-back (Student E, Student J), friendly and helpful (Student A, Student K, Student L), independent, strong, honest (Student F) and trustworthy (Student F, Student J, Student L) to artistic (Student G), ambitious (Student F, Student K), tolerant (Student J), mediaphile (Student G, Student H) and open-minded (Student A, Student B, Student D, Student H, Student K, Student L):

Who I am: How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.*

I am a very outgoing, friendly person, always looking for new experiences and adventures. I would also have to say that I am quite open-minded and I love to meet people from all different backgrounds and cultures. I speak 4 languages, English (my mother tongue), and German, French and Irish relatively fluently. I am studying mathematics and German, an unusual combination, but my real passion is for languages and I hope to pursue my studies in this sector in the future. Education is very important to me, as is experience and doing as much as I can with the time I have, I try to maximise my opportunities and fulfil goals as much as possible. I am quite motivated and I think that I have quite good leadership skills and can work well in a group as well as alone. (Student K)

Who I am: How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

Hmm this is a difficult question to answer and one I often ask myself. However for the purpose of this exercise I will try to be as honest as I possibly can. I would define myself as a very open individual. I never try to be something I am not and I pride myself on that. However this open nature that I have leaves me open to abuse by others who may take advantage of this. However I would not change it. For me it is important to always be myself and if I thought I was doing anything other than that I would not be happy in my own skin. This being happy in my own skin is very important to me because and without going in to too graphic of detail I have had struggles with my mental health throughout my teen years which I am not ashamed of what so ever. However after not being happy with who I am for so long I have finally come to terms with myself and who I am. Therefore these personal battles define me greatly and have made me the open to all and honest person I am today and that is how I would like to be seen by others also. In addition music and literature are also a major feature of my life and have moulded me into the person I am today. Books and music have gotten me through the hardest of times in my life. In addition keeping fit and exercise is also a big part of who I am it makes me feel more able to handle life and what it throws at me and it has aided in the creation of the confident and content person I have become day after being the opposite for so many years before that. Therefore my personal struggles and the things that helped me during this time define the person I am today. (Student H)

For further self-descriptions see the entries on intercultural encounters in Appendix G. In a few elaborations, the students comment on their traits in the light of their influence on intercultural encounters and their residence abroad. Student D, Student L and Student I, for example, regard themselves as easy-going and open-minded people who enjoy meeting new people, especially those from other countries and backgrounds. Yet, Student D also expresses doubt about coming across as too rude in new cultural contexts:

I would always just go up and just approach people straight away and get to talk to people so maybe that could be perceived as being a bit abrasive [...] over there. [...] So maybe I would have to dumb myself down a little. (Student D)

These doubts have not been mentioned again by Student D during or after his stay abroad. By contrast, Student J and Student R describe themselves as shy at first contact which sometimes prevents them from making new friends and may cause a problem in the new surrounding:

When I met them first, ermm, like, it was very hard to make friends, and when I went over first I noticed that I was actually quite shy and I really had to push myself to actually talk to people and kind of near the end I was so used to kind of throwing myself at people (laughs) (Student R)

During and after her residence abroad, Student J indeed reports initial problems in integrating in the new surrounding and getting to know people, especially L2 speakers:

Getting to know them very well to be very good friends the way I would be with a lot of people at home that is much more difficult. (...) It's much harder to get to know Germans, I found, well... there is a lot of barriers there like they are very polite on the surface and then it's kind of like you really have to work, you really have to edge your way into their life, because I found (...) now not all of them but kind of as a general, cos I didn't actually get to know [...] but no they were very quiet and they were lovely when I got small talking to them, but, you know, there was a girl who I had met initially at the very start and she was kind of like my basis for this because she was so (..) she would always talk to me kind of like 'hellooo' and blablabla and a few little things but like she never once said 'do you want to do something?' or 'do you want to go for a drink or do you want to go out or?'. I was never, (...) she never invited me anywhere and also I was kind of shy about inviting her and doing anything. It was tough to get to know them well, yeah. (Student J)

She finally overcomes her shyness and connects with people at university. Along these lines, Student G initially thinks he is aware of social etiquette in his cultural surroundings and "blissfully and knowingly ignorant" in Germany which, according to him, may make him an outsider during his residence abroad. Furthermore, Student G considers intelligence to be important in terms of how he perceives himself and how he wants to be perceived by others (see Appendix G). Student G is worried that he may appear to be "a grovelling idiot [...] when one lives and studies in a country where you're no longer familiar with the finer nuances of its culture or language." During his stay abroad and upon return, Student G reports on a few occasions when he felt afraid of coming across as ignorant and making mistakes in German which prevented him from engaging in conversations in the L2 community.

When defining their personal identities, 6 students mention their age. In this regard, the response by Student J stresses the context-contingency of identity attributes: "Age is not the most important factor of my identity, only when it's required to be a certain age for doing something (ie. entering a pub/club) do I become more aware of my age as part of my identity". Nine students respectively name their L2 competences and fields of study as important aspects of their personal identities. The students also refer to their hobbies, interests and passions which may imply subsequent reactions and modes of behaviour in

(intercultural) interactions. Student B (gaelic football), Student D (kayak) and Student J (Irish dancing) state their passion for sports and how it has shaped them into the person they are (see Appendix G). They consider their acquired social skills in the sports contexts to be helpful in the study abroad context and intend to join clubs abroad, which however, was not the case, as no adequate clubs were available. Student A, Student H and Student K (see self descriptions) and Student N state their passion for languages which could also have an impact on their intercultural interactions. Apart from Student H, these students indeed show particular efforts in engaging in L2 conversations during their stay abroad. Furthermore, Student A mentions his passion for electronic music as attributing to his personal identity formation, as he feels a sense of belonging in the community. His interest in electronic music does play a major part in his intercultural interactions as he deliberately seeks out electronic music events and befriends people there (see chapter 5.1).

An important role in the students' identity constructions are their family affiliations. During and after their residence abroad, 5 students mention that their families and partners play a significant role in their lives and have an influence on their identity, for example:

For me it was a lot to do with how embedded I am I think in my family at home. I have a really strong connection. My brother is like my best friend, so leaving (...) the weirdest thing for me was having just my room and outside of it nothing that I knew. Outside of that small room that I had in [place], there was no (...) ermm, like, when I am in my room at home I come downstairs and then I have my family (...) and the weirdest thing was just breaking that. (..) Outside the story, they are not there and that was weird for me because I had never lived away from home before so I thought it was strange. (Student J)

So that was really nice and ermm, kind of when I before I went I would never really have been homesick or anything I would not have gone home often at the weekends and I wouldn't really have missed anyone from home, ermm, but when I came back from Vienna, ermm, I really began to appreciate everything that was there for me and the great support that I have from my family and stuff like that. Ermm, so I don't know. It's going to be hard to go away next year because I really have learned how great it is to be a part of something like that. (Student R)

One interesting shift in that regard is mentioned by Student J, who states that:

Family is a very important part of my identity. Until my year abroad, I feel I took family somewhat for granted, and never valued much what I had right under my nose. Not having my family around has made me realise how close I actually am to them and how much they mean to me. Only when taken out of the family setting could I see how important family is, how integrated I was at home, and how much I depend on them for care and support. (Student J)

This realisation may be linked to the fact that Student J feels homesick during most of her stay abroad and in retrospect feels proud that she has managed to face out the time abroad. Furthermore, it demonstrates the effect of the year abroad in relativizing the internalised perspectives.

Changes in Perspective

When the students are out of their comfort zones and exposed to unfamiliar practices, their taken-for-granted worldviews may be questioned and upset. This contact with other possible worldviews may result in a shift of perspective "along with a concomitant appreciation for the diversity and richness of human beings" (Fantini 1995: 152). In this regard, Student H has the following to say before her year abroad:

I think it will be nice to have the shoe on the other foot. People judge international people over here. I just think it will be interesting to see how they react to me when I am over there so I can see what their perspective is. (Student H)

Studies have shown that immersion in the L2 community may influence the affective dimension positively as well as negatively (Coleman 1997, Murphy-Lejeune 2002, Pellegrino Aveni 2005). A reciprocity is assumed in that attitudes and values affect the results of a stay abroad and in turn are affected by the residence abroad (Coleman 1997: 11). In the framework of the present study, the affective dimension is covered by questions on self-perceived changes in the students themselves and new discernments due to their residence abroad.

Sixty-three per cent of the students report a change in attitudes during their stay abroad, i.e. in their readiness to discard stereotypes. Based on intercultural encounters, Student I, Student K and Student AA dismiss their pre-conceptions of Germans being law-abiding, serious or cold and closed people because they experience them to be friendly, welcoming, funny and entertaining. They feel bad for their originally narrow-minded

approach (Student I, Student K) and conclude that their intercultural encounters are an eye-opener (Student K):

Where I was they were really nice. Like everyone says they're serious and whatever else but I did not have any of that experience, as I thought it was brilliant like they were always friendly and always [...] from my experience. That's [place] anyway. (Student AA)

Encounter I : The first German person I know that does not follow the law

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

One day, after our class in Sprachenzentrum which is located about 15 minute tram ride from the main university building me and my German friends (names) drove back to the university by car to have lunch in Mensa. Because there was no free parking spaces in the designated parking area, we drove to the back of the building and [name] stopped the car and parked at the side of the road. I thought to myself 'he's definitely getting a ticket', but it was his car and he was the one driving it. Then he said '[name] will you open the glove box for me please?' And he took out a few parking tickets and picked one of them and got out of the car. He put the ticket behind the windscreen wiper and said 'Let's go'. I was so amazed by what had just happened and simply started laughing! [...]

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

X It surprised me.

I know it sounds a bit stereotypical but I found it extremely funny 😊

Your feelings: Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were ...I was simply amazed I was surprised that anyone could think of such way to avoid another penalty by sticking an old ticket behind the windscreen wiper. And of course to myself it was very funny and I immediately said to them that I am impressed by his creativity 😊 and that he is the first German person that I know to break the law. I immediately felt like making that joke but on the other hand I felt that I am just driven by the stereotype of a law-obeying Germans. (Student I)

Encounter I : Dinner hopping

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

It was an event organised by the university and a friend of mine and I decided to partner up and join in. We had to prepare the starter and had 4 strangers coming to our house to eat with us, we then had to go to two different locations where we ate the main course and dessert prepared by 2 different teams. We met so many wonderful people on this evening and it was so much fun! They were all Germans and so in total we ate with 12 different people. I had thought before that Germans were quite closed and cold, this being the unfortunate stereotype but these people were all extremely friendly, generous, welcoming and really entertaining! At the after party we spent all our time dancing with the people we had met along the way and have stayed in contact since! It was really an eye opener and a great experience! (Student K)

As a consequence, Student I, for example, decides to suspend her judgments on people according to their nationality. In contrast, 4 students retain and reinforce their stereotypes based on their experiences abroad (see chapter 5.4.1 for further examples). Interestingly, 3 of these students went abroad together and attended the same university. They state their disappointment and dislike for L2 communities and feel that they could not connect. After initial unsuccessful attempts at mingling with the L2 community, they withdrew from L2 contact, kept to themselves and seem to have re-inforced their pre-conceptions.

One third of the students claim that they have become more open-minded towards different cultures as a result of their residence abroad and their horizons have been broadened. Student L, for example, talks about his change of attitude towards the environment which was triggered by the cigarette butt incident (see chapter 5.2.3 and Appendix G). Furthermore, 6 students state that they have become interested in experiencing new places and meeting people. Detecting cultural differences has broadened their horizons and has made them relativise their taken-for-granted views. They have become more aware of the relativity of values and cultural diversity:

I got to know not only Germans. I got to know many people from different countries and I've seen the kind of little cultural differences between us and yeah, it has broadened my horizon I should say, it has, it really has, ermm, at the beginning, like, at the beginning of my stay I had a bit of a yeah (pause) not a very nice situation because I was the only one going to [place] for Erasmus from this university so I was basically by myself and yeah, the international office there, they hadn't considered that and (pause) you know, everybody else had gotten the Erasmus buddy and I didn't and I was left alone and [...] the only thing nice about this whole situation was, that my sister's boyfriend was there and he kind of showed me around because there was nobody else around. (Student I)

I think I am more aware of like different people from different nationalities or their customs and what could be important to them but might not be as important to us or different stuff like that. (Student T)

Along these lines, a willingness to adapt to different lifestyles, norms and habits has been mentioned. In her reflections on identity changes, Student F states that she feels like a guest and since "nobody invited us to come here", she feels the obligation to adapt to unknown lifestyles and norms. Similarly, Student Q reports on how she has adapted her style of clothing to the new surrounding. While in Ireland she would dress up more, she would mostly wear jeans and trousers in Germany. Similarly, Student K reports on dressing down when going out in the evenings in terms of not wearing high heels.

Another change reported by 4 students in relation to their identity is that they feel they have become more blunt and direct with people after their return:

I for myself am much more organised and efficient but I suppose with directness, I was always kind of direct, but I would find that I don't have patience for people kind of I don't even know, beating around the bush, it's like, there is no need to go around in circles when you can say something directly sort of, yeah. So I don't know, if that was just enhanced (laughs) on my living in Germany or but yeah. (Student Y)

Another aspect mentioned is the "travelling bug" (Student D). Upon their return, 26% of the students consider travelling a huge part of their lives:

So, erm, I'd make sure, I suppose, I'd recommend you to just make the most out of it, because we had like a Reise, like a travelticket we paid for at the beginning of the semester and you were able to go all over the (pause) province or the county or whatever and so, we were like in the best. We had [places], we had some nice, really nice cities. [...]. Just go on little excursions or just get out of the apartment. (Student S)

Well, as soon as I got back, friends were saying to me, 'oh, you are so [PLACE] now, which I don't exactly know what that means (..) ermmm but I have real, like, it was definitely a valuable experience, of course living away in another country for a year and change how you look at things, it was nice to (...) before in Ireland it was loads of issues and crises and things going on and it seemed so important and then when you go away, noone is talking about them, there is no (...) so, yeah, it had me put perspective on more things, I think and definitely made me want to travel more so. I have the bug now. The travelling bug. (Student D)

Maybe I am a little bit more happy in myself but yeah it has given me (...) I mean it made me realise I want to keep travelling as long as I can, which is part and parcel of taking Chinese and seeing if I can go to CHINA if possible so yeah (pause) it has influenced me in that way that (...) and as well the German university was very interesting and that everyone seemed to be a lot older than me. I seemed to be one of the younger ones and everyone was intent on or happy to keep studying for a while and it just kind of (...) it was different to the system I was in at home where now, everyone is, like, I have to get done with college and I have to get my degree and do something else, whereas it made me slow down and think for a bit, so now, I am, like, I am quite happy to (...) not that I wasn't before but I am quite happy to keep going with college and maybe if I can get a masters away in a different country or something like that (...) ermm (...) so it has changed my outlook in that respect. (Student G)

While in hindsight these students feel disappointed that they have not travelled around Europe more during their residence abroad, their interest in travelling has been enhanced and might have a positive effect on their intercultural interactions in the future.

Personal Growth

In terms of identity change, 1 student expresses her expectations and intentions to reinvent herself prior to her studies abroad:

I hope to be more independent because I think being in a different country, you are kind of forced being more independent and self-reliant and I hope to be more fluent in German, of course. And to be more culturally aware (..) and to be, I think as well it will show you that you could live in a different part of the world and still will survive, you don't have to be so close to home, even though it's nice to be around friends and family that you can make a home away from home if you try, be open to new experiences. [...] I think it's gonna be a completely different experience and I think you can completely reinvent yourself because nobody knows you and (pause) [...] just yeah, you are free to [...] start over kind of even in a way. (Student K)

This idea may imply a conscious effort to change oneself and work on one's own personality.

In this context, the participants repeatedly mention a sense of accomplishment and pride in having succeeded in living abroad on their own. One third of the students report that they have become more independent because they had to face unfamiliar contexts and look after themselves, for example:

I definitely did a lot more growing up [...] I think it was a good experience, just being thrown in at the deep end. But it was kind of good cos I know I can survive it (laughs) [...] I am able to live away from home for a year and speak in a different language. [...] It [...] made me more independent and, I don't know, kind of, I guess I think I just had to go through the struggles (...) to feel more appreciative of everything else, I think. (Student H)

I went abroad for a few reasons. One was to improve my German and another one was to (pause) get away for a while. I thought that after two years, that I had been in Maynooth it was really time to leave, because after a while one kind of realises that it's so small and you can't escape from a lot of things (smiles) and (pause) I think that it's very important for a language student obviously to go over, to go abroad but from a personal perspective, ermm (..) It was a great challenge to be away from home for the first time on my own and do all the normal things like go to the doctor and get your eyes tested and all that kind of stuff so it really develops you as a person. [...] And I find that when I came back that it took me so long to get used to interacting with my family and my friends from home because I had changed so much and yeah (pause) I mean it's very important to be able to see things from other people's perspectives and if you are in a foreign country, then that's obviously what's going to be a huge task and I found it really interesting. (Student R)

This finding has also been confirmed by Benson *et al.* (2012) and Kinginger (2013). In Ireland, the students either lived at home and commuted to university or at least went

back to their families every weekend.⁷⁷ Abroad, they lived on their own, had to take independent decisions, deal with bureaucracy, and learn to spend time on their own. Based on these accomplishments the students feel more grown up and mature and report that they are also perceived that way by their families, work colleagues and friends. Along with independence, 30% of the students report that they have acquired self-esteem and feel more confident after their stay abroad. Again, they report that they are perceived as more confident by their families, work colleagues and friends. "Confidence" is used in a context-contingent way. Student B (see Appendix G) and Student L (see Appendix G), for example, are proud to have become more self-asserted in speaking their mind in conflict situations, which they regard as personal progress. Student G and Student J feel more confident in themselves and hope to move abroad for their master studies after their BA, which Student G has indeed done by going to China. Similarly, Student AA and Student J are content with their confidence in holding German conversations despite making mistakes and are happy to interject in classes back in Ireland instead of being quiet:

I think I have probably changed too. I am trying to figure out how exactly but yeah, I definitely have (pause) I don't know, like, but I am told I have (smile) maybe I should ask them why (smile) I don't know, I don't know, maybe I am more confident or something now. Oh no, that's definitely true. I would never speak in class before now I suppose, I probably would never do this (laughs). (Student AA)

People said I am louder (laughs) that I am more, like, I think I am more opinionated, I probably got that from, from being around (...) yeah, because I would, I think I interject more rather than just sit back and I'd say things now (...) even in class they found that, like, I would be a lot quieter usually but now I am kind of like 'hang on, I don't understand that, like, could we do that again', or you know, 'could you just clarify that' (...) ermm, yeah, a little bit more, just yeah, personally, (...) people have not directly said to me you have changed since you went abroad but I kind of feel I have and I feel like (pause) my friends would sort of benefit from the fact that I've changed slightly (...) be a bit more outgoing and, you know, they may not realise it (...) they have not said it directly, but I think, I don't know, maybe it's not that evident but I do feel a little bit (...) when I came back initially I didn't (...) it took me a while to sort of reintegrate back into Ireland. (Student J)

Another aspect of personal growth mentioned by the students is their determination and sense of purpose. Thirty per cent of the participants report that they feel more focused and dedicated to their studies, for example:

⁷⁷ In this regard, the question arises if a different living context in Ireland, i.e. moving to another place and being self-sufficient would not have a similar effect.

Even my attitude towards college, I try not to leave things to the last minute anymore [...] I would take things a little bit more seriously now, there's certain aspects of life that I would not be as kind of blasé about. (Student Y)

Additionally, these students state that their experiences have opened their eyes to their future options and have influenced their career choices. Student N, for example, has the following to say:

Ich nehme mich jetzt [ernster]. Ich nehme meine Zukunft [ernster] [...] und ich will einen sehr guten Job kriegen. Ich will Deutsch unterrichten, ich will Englisch unterrichten [...]. Ich will unbedingt einen guten Job kriegen und meine Kenntnisse weiterentwickeln und weiter verbessern. [...] Also ich hab' jetzt bestimmte Ziele und wegen dieser Ziele habe ich mich auch ein bisschen geändert. (Student N)

Overall, the students report a positive effect on their personal growth during their residence abroad. They feel they have become more self-reliant, independent, mature and confident. Yet, while most students feel they have changed for the better, two students report that their self-confidence has decreased in certain areas. Upon return, Student V feels disappointed with her accomplishments and feels that her self-confidence has deteriorated because of that. Student R recounts how she has been deterred due to the high standards at college abroad. While she was used to being the big fish in a little pond at university at home, she then felt like a small fish in a big ocean, which deflated her academic self-concept.⁷⁸

Distinct Language Identities

Apart from personal growth, one fourth of the students refer to perceiving themselves in terms of different identities abroad and in Ireland, which manifests itself in various dimensions. At the beginning of her stay, for example, Student W feels restricted in being herself in Germany due to her lack of German. "I found it very difficult when I was speaking in Germany because I didn't know how to be myself and be sarcastic". She describes her struggle of identities in the following way:

I was just this Erasmus student in Germany, I wasn't [name] from Ireland, like with friends, studying in Maynooth (...) I was just this new person [...]. My housemates [...] thought I was very quiet for the first few weeks even though I am not really and they were like 'you're not very talkative' I was like, I just don't know what to say sometimes (smiles) and obviously we had the 'oh, what do you study' and 'how long are you staying for' and then after that [...] I found it hard to [...] try and find some common ground but eventually I (smiles) came out of my shell a bit and got to know them. (Student W)

⁷⁸ See "Big-fish-little-pond-effect" (Zeidner & Schleyer 1998).

Later on, Student W recounts her progress of creating a new identity in German after her initial frustration with a lack of authenticity in German: "this is not me, I don't know who [...] I am [...] in German but eventually I came round and came to learn new different ways to be myself in a different language". Spack (2004: 45) similarly refers to one study participant who reports that he developed two identities enacted through two different languages. The feeling of two distinct identities based on the command of languages and sociolinguistic norms has also been reported by Student F, Student J and Student M in this study. Along these lines, Kinginger (2013: 344) refers to the students' choices of behaviour based on the pragmalinguistic resources at their command and their awareness of sociopragmatics.

Three students claim that the residence abroad has transformed their sense of self, which, however, has not been sustainable upon their return. Student W resumes that there is a "[name] in Germany" which she has left behind and a "[name] in Ireland" and she perceives these to be different personalities. The feeling of having left an identity behind during their stay abroad is also perceived by Student K. Similarly, Student S and Student X describe how, after their stay abroad a "bubble popped and you got back to your old self" (Student S) and you "slip straight back into your old ways" (Student X) in Ireland:

God, well, it's funny. Cos I kind of, as I said, we were in that bubble. The whole Erasmus thing felt like a bubble and then as soon as it kind of popped you got back to your old self. Do you know what I mean, it's terrible. (laughs) (Student S)

In turn, Student X presumes he would go back into "German mode" and re-adapt to the environment there in terms of structure and modes of interaction if he went back to Germany:

Yes (laughs) my room is still a mess. I think it's a case of like you can't teach an old dog new tricks, type of thing. D'you know, it's like, you can pick up things and when you are in that environment you can adapt to it, but at the end of the day, you are kind of always going to be yourself. I don't know, maybe that's just my personal opinion. Maybe there are studies out there that prove completely otherwise, d'you know, but I think (...) and well, like when I came back from Ireland, like people did see a little bit in me, a little bit of a change but I think after like a couple of weeks, maybe like a month or two, I just (..) and especially once I came back to college, I just fell back straight into my new routine but I am sure if I went back over to Germany, I'd (...) you kind of snap back into it quicker, d'you know, as opposed to the couple of months that it took me the first time round, I think if I was to go back over, and within a week or two I think I would be back into say German mode in as such, do you know what I mean, or the Irish version of German mode, you know, like, so I think. I think when you say, like, did I bring anything back over (...) not as such but there is always going to be a little part of me now that is used to, and able to adapt, d'you know what I mean, so I didn't necessarily bring it and apply it here in Ireland but I can reapply it anytime I go back to Germany, I think. (Student X)

Similarly, Student AA perceives "two separate worlds" in terms of different lifestyles but does not refer to any development of intercultural spaces of identity construction. She has the following to say:

I find it's like two separate [identities]. This is really weird but (pause) two separate worlds nearly [...]. It's a completely different lifestyle and I think you change very quickly. [...] When you are over there, you are automatically going to get up early, you are automatically going to keep going all day, [...] you do lots of things differently but then here you just slip straight back into [...] the culture and the lifestyle of [...] just taking things as they come and relax. (Student AA)

This shift in perceptions and habits could relate to Kinginger's (2013) finding that language learners "exercise agency in selectively adopting local pragmatic norms according to the identities they wish to display" (Kinger 2013: 344). In (intercultural) interactions, not all of our repertoire of personal and social identities is relevant at the same time but they are context-contingent. As such, the individual identity constitutes an "outcome of agentive moves" (Hall 2012: 34) rather than a fixed, predetermined entity. Depending on the interlocutors, goals and the overall activity, different constellations of identities come to the fore and are constructed in these discursive spaces (Hall 2012: 33–34). Similar results have been reported by Murphy-Lejeune (2002).

5.4.2 Collective Identities

Individuals belong to a variety of social groups with different shared interests, values, ideals and goals. Social identity is defined as "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (Tajfel 1978: 63). Hence, social identities are based on various group memberships, i.e. nations, educational institutions, clubs, religious groups etc. (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 5). Personal identity and social identity are interlinked in that the individual contributes to the social identity but also integrates aspects of the social identity into his or her construct of personal identity. The cultural affiliations influence a subjects' different value systems, ways of thinking and feeling as well as how they perceive others.

Social identities are closely linked to the concept of habitus by Bourdieu (1977a, see chapter 1). The perception of oneself and interlocutors in (intercultural) encounters is influenced by the way people have been socialised. In (intercultural) interactions, members of cultural groups interpret and attribute (emotional) meaning based on the collective frames of reference of their cultural communities (Byram 2008: 131). In these interactions, not all of the multiple, intersecting social identities an individual consists of are relevant at the same time. Instead, social identities are dynamic and responsive to the interlocutor, goals and the context (Hall 2012: 33) and are therefore multi-faceted and ambiguous. Due to the multiple group belongings of individuals, "cultural identity fans out in a network of often conflicting relations to other identities and to other social networks" (Brockmeier 2012: 444).

As Spencer-Oatey (2012: 17) points out, "a shared identity needs a shared Other". In this sense, cultural affiliation is based on the concept of group inclusions and exclusions. As outlined in chapter 1, group members tend to perceive their own cultural in-groups as heterogeneous and other groups as homogeneous social categories (Tajfel 1982: 28) which may lead to in-group favouritism or out-group discrimination (Byram 2008: 131), stereotyping and prejudice. The participants of the present study acknowledge group affiliations mainly in terms of an Erasmus Bubble and national collective identities.

National Identity

One form of social identity that has been prominent in the data is the concept of national identity. About one third of the students show that they draw on concepts of national identity and face the L1 community with prejudice and a stereotypical mind-set. These findings have also been repeatedly confirmed by Block (2007) and Kinginger (2013) who found that during the stay, students withdrew from negotiations of difference and instead engaged in discourses of national superiority.

Student B, for example, recounts two incidents when she feels appalled by the demeneavour of L2 speakers. In one encounter, Student B feels awkward and embarrassed by the reaction of a German girl to her attempts to help her put food on her plate and concludes that "it was another German thing to not feel awkwardness like that" and "the other Irish people around felt the awkwardness too":

Encounter II: Give me some food!

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

I was at a party of a French Erasmus friend. I was sitting around the kitchen table talking to some friends. A German girl who I never met before interrupted us and handed me her plate and asked me to fill her plate up with food from the table (she couldn't reach). It was really awkward and the other Irish people around felt the awkwardness too. I didn't know how much food she wanted so I just put some pasta on the plate and handed it back. She was saying "oh my god this is way too much etc" which made it even more awkward because it was as if I had did something wrong. It would have been better if she just asked me to move out of the ay while she got some food. (Student B)

"Feeling awkwardness" seems to be culturally attributed for Student B and it would have been interesting to investigate these attributions further. In another incident, Student B feels angry and uncomfortable that a German stranger opened her birthday card and the personal notes which were clearly not addressed to him:

Encounter III: You opened my post?!

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

It was (date) and my parents sent me a birthday card for my (number) birthday. It was almost 2 weeks later and I still had not received the card. (I wasn't too surprised because myself and other Irish students have experienced problems with post from home and often not receiving packages) Anyway one night a German guy wrote to another Irish student on Facebook explaining that my card had been delivered to me and he would like to return it to me. The message was very odd and his English was really bad. The message was really long and he kept repeating stuff like "I AM LOOKING FOR [NAME]" and there were other strange things such as (a) the Irish girl who he wrote this message to didn't know him and he said he had heard about her through a party (his English was so bad it was hard to understand) (b) at the end of the message he said he wanted to return this letter "from her parents" - he had obviously read my whole birthday card which made me feel so uncomfortable because I knew my parents would have written very personal stuff as it was my (number) and they were sad that I was away from home for that. (Student B)

She feels disappointed because her privacy has been invaded, concluding that "it was another experience of how different German and Irish people are", thus implying that an Irish person would treat personal information with more respect. In these examples, Student B's self-fulfilling prophecies are confirmed and add to the existing stereotypical frame of interpretation of the L2 community. Similarly, Coleman (1996) states that the study abroad experience may enforce a negative view of the L2 community and in Brogan's (2014: 303) study, 32% of the students consider contact with the L2 culture as inherently stressful.

A similar case is stated by Student D who, after one bad experience with administration staff, is worried that "all Germans" are going to be unfriendly and unhelpful (see Appendix G). At the beginning of his stay abroad, he observes that "most Germans seemed to act in a similar way" and perceives his self-fulfilling prophecies to be confirmed. However, during his stay abroad, a change in perspective takes place, yet still remaining on a general level. Student D comes to realise that "it is not that Germans are cold, but rather that Irish people are overly polite. What I had misinterpreted to be rude is actually just a reserved nature, something which Irish people lack."

The data furthermore reveals that the residence abroad seems to make students revert to their stereotypical Irish identities and triggers a sense of belonging to their stereotypical concepts of an Irish culture. In this regard, Jackson's study (2008: 216) and Benson et al's (2012) study also show that Chinese students revert to their Chinese and

Hong Kong identities during their stays in the United Kingdom and Australia. Student J, for example, states in her self-descriptions that her origin and her nationality have become a very important part of her identity now that she lives in a foreign country, while these aspects did not matter to her beforehand. She recounts watching a football match between Ireland and Germany in a German bar. Even though she is not remotely interested in football, Student J identifies with the Irish team, supports them amidst the majority of German fans, and feels proud of being Irish. Student J continues to reflect on national identity and its connectedness with sports in that she feels

a strange transparent interconnectedness between us [herself and her two friends] and the other few Irish people in the bar. [...]; although we hadn't really spoken, it felt like we were some sort of team too, united in our support for Ireland and determination not to let the German fans get the better of us. (Student J)

This incident proves the thesis that an out-group serves as point of reference for the definition of an in-group, in this case football fans of two battling teams. The incident makes Student J realise how much her Irish identity means to her and how passionate she feels about her Irish affiliations. She feels surprised by her emotional response and observes a subjective change of perspective in being abroad and out of her own comfort zone:

I doubt they would feel as 'German' as I felt 'Irish' by being there watching the match. They were in their comfort zone, I was completely out of mine, so the way I perceived the situation was different to the way they did; I saw the bar in two distinct teams: The German supporters and the Irish supporters. Although they seemed determined to win and show us up, their reasons for wanting this were probably much less about connectedness to their national identity and much more about the actual game itself. (Student J)

During her residence abroad, Student J states that being from Ireland is all she feels left with abroad and that she has become "more Irish" in the way that she would sing along with songs and be proud to associate with anything Irish. She presumes that she would have never felt that strongly connected with Ireland if she had not gone abroad.

Student L equally reverts to a national sense of identity. After being told off by a German person for throwing his cigarette on the floor, Student L avails of generalisations and comes to the conclusion that "German people obviously have better respect for the environment". He is worried that he has given "the German people a bad impression of

the Irish", hence taking on a collective "Irish" identity. Throughout his stay, Student L becomes patriotic and feels "even prouder of where I come from" since his return:

Yeah, I never really thought about it much until I went to Germany, I definitely, definitely want to start and learn more Irish. Ermm (...) Because that was one thing that was so embarassing and disappointing because so many people would say to us 'Oh my God, you are from Ireland. Do you have your own language in Ireland?' and ermmm one of the girls could speak Irish, a bit of Irish (...) two of them, I can't speak, I could no (...) I don't know grammar at all but I was so embarassed to say like 'yeah we have but I don't know it.' So that as well and I think as well, ermm (...) you are a lot more, well, I was a lot more proud where I come from (...) and that was a lot to do with the fact that people asked us a lot where we were from and it was like 'I am from Ireland' and they would be asking a lot of questions about Ireland and the majority of time of the times (...) 'Oh I heard Ireland was an amazing place' and I could tell them all about Ireland and could tell them where to go and stuff like that so I am even prouder since I have come back. (Student L)

In terms of ethnocentrism, Student C, Student D and Student Z notice that they take on "absolutely every Irish stereotype" (Student Z) in terms of "drinking and being laid back" (Student C) and "using Irish [English] slang" (Student D) during their residence abroad. The development of stereotyping and ethnocentrism has also been identified by Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) in their empirical study.

Student G mentions an experience which stresses the context-contingent aspect of social identity. Throughout the data he stresses that he is "probably the least patriotic Irishman in existence", does not have a recognisable Irish accent and feels "a very neutral person, nationality-wise". Yet, during his stay abroad, Student G notices that Irish people are welcome everywhere and liked by everyone. Hence, he starts to avail of his origin in intercultural encounters to get in touch with people and find some common ground. In this regard, Benson *et al.* (2012: 178) state that participants in study abroad programmes may be frustrated by being positioned as "Chinese" or "Asian" etc. In contrast, being positioned as "Irish" has not been a frustrating experience for any of the students in this study.

Student R recounts an ambivalent approach towards her Irish identity and reflects on various social identity constellations. At the beginning of her stay abroad, Student R feels glad to be away from Ireland and paints quite a negative picture of Ireland. However, upon return she discovers positive aspects she attributes to Irish culture, i.e. having close-knit family ties. Yet, she also notices that the longer she is back, she is "getting more Irish" and is not "really keen on that". "Getting more Irish" in Student R's perception refers to people

not saying what they think to your face and then complaining behind your back. She feels proud of having taken the directness in expressing her thoughts over from the L2 culture and having integrated these components into her own personal identity.

As for the development of a European Identity, the findings of the present study partly comply with Sigalas' (2010) results. Erasmus does not necessarily strengthen the participants' European identity but rather undermines it:

I mean, see the friends that I had that were like say Eastern European, like I had friends like from Slovenia and Slovakia, Latvia and then like even more like towards Greece and Turkey. I had lots of friends from there but our common language wasn't German, it was English. Ermmm, now, you know, a lot of us could kind of speak German, our levels varied, you know, there was so who were amazing at German who had one German parent, there was the one girl from Turkey didn't have a scrap of German so English was our common language and I think, yeah, I don't think I picked up much from them in the sense that, you know, we were all in this kinda new situation ourselves, I mean we were all trying to adapt to the German situation, as opposed to then (..) learning from the German environment or even learning further from them, we made little jokes and stuff, say like our friend from Turkey we were joking about Kebabs and stuff, and, you know, like, little things like that but erm (...) I think, and then in the second semester I hang around with quite a few Americans and I think maybe then I did maybe pick up a few things in the sense. I came back saying 'dude' a lot and, you know, and we would talk about kind of the differences between America and Ireland but not so much with the European ones. I don't know why. Maybe it's just because with the Americans, you know, there was no language barrier at all. Whereas with the Europeans there was a slightly different language barrier, d'you know, ermm, yeah (pause). I suppose that was it, yeah. (Student X)

Before her stay abroad, Student B, for example, expresses her interest in exploring what it is like to be "more European". This wish is particularly interesting in terms of the self-perception of the student. Despite Ireland being part of the European Union, she would not identify herself as a European citizen. After her year abroad, student B attaches more importance to a national Irish identity:

I don't think so, I don't think I've changed dramatically or anything like that, I mean I just, in myself, the way I think about things would be slightly different. I don't think I'm a different person to how I was when I left. I don't think they're like 'Oh my God, who is this (...) European girl who is coming back?' (laughs) (Student B)

Social Networking and Integration into the L2-community

As for social networking and integration, Brogan (2014: 220) found that 76% of the participating students feel they made good German friends (with 37% ending up in a relationship with Germans). The findings of the current study show quite the opposite, which complies with findings by Conacher (2008). Student N ended up in a relationship with a German speaker and despite initial approaches, only one fifth of the participants report on lasting friendships with L2 speakers, for example:

I always made the first step because I wanted to make German friends and yeah, and it was quite easy. [I am in touch] still, with two of them definitely, or three. Well, he is the linguistics teacher but I know if I was there, if I visited [place], he would meet up. We are always in touch on facebook and I would ask how they are doing and get all the news. (Student A)

Well, yeah, last year, when I was abroad, I made a conscious effort not to speak any English or as little as possible so that I would immerse myself totally in it and that has helped me a lot this year. So the friends that I made when I was abroad, I still talk to them quite often so. (Student R)

I am I talking to them frequently. Oh yeah, there'd be... depends on the people but like I still speak to the school, somebody in the school and a different teacher in the school all the time. (Student AA)

The findings of the present study furthermore highlight that half of the students are faced with difficulties in integrating into the L2 community and find it hard to get to know L2 speakers:

Yeah, they don't, I think I had to put a lot of work in to make German friends (...) ermm, and I think at the beginning they are very closed and cut off, like, they don't really seem interested ermmm (...). If I asked them a question 'where are you from?', they'd answer and they would not be robotic for conversation, they would just leave it at that, so you have to keep trying and trying and I knew that I have to make friends with Germans, this would be better for me but it was quite hard. (Student D)

Along these lines, Student J states: "It's much harder to get to know Germans, I found [...] they are very polite on the surface and then [...] you really have to edge your way into their life." She illustrates her opinion with an example:

There was this German girl. She would always talk to me kind of like 'hellooo' and blablabla and a few little things but like she never once said 'do you want to do something' or 'do you want to go for a drink' or 'do you want to go out' she never invited me anywhere and I was kind of shy about inviting her and doing anything. It was tough to get to know them. (Student J)

The students mention various reasons for these difficulties, such as separate courses for Erasmus students at university, the living conditions in terms of Erasmus accommodation, the small size of the university town with students commuting and not staying around after class and the fact that they are only staying abroad for one year and do not see the necessity to integrate, or feel that L2 speakers are not interested in getting to know them since they will not be staying for longer. Similar findings have been shown by Conacher (2008). Another reason mentioned is the fact that there are no clubs and societies at university which could provide opportunities to mingle with L2 speakers.

In contrast, despite reported initial difficulties, 5 students feel they have established a good social network in the L2 community. They name various reasons for their successful networking: a deliberate avoidance of L1 speakers and Erasmus students, their living conditions with Germans, attending courses with L2 speakers, and participating in events such as festivals and tandem programmes in order become acquainted with locals. However, these conditions do not guarantee successful L2 integration, as the present study shows. Not all students who participate in tandem programmes, share their accommodation with L2 speakers or attend courses aimed at L2 speakers feel they have integrated into the L2 community, which again proves that a myriad of factors is responsible when it comes to successful intercultural encounters.

Erasmus Bubble

In the framework of the SAILSA project, Feng and Fleming (2009: 246) report that students retreat to their comfort zones and befriend people with a shared L1 in the study abroad context. Coleman (1997) and Sigalas (2010) report similar findings. In the present study, 67% of the participants equally report that they largely socialise with L1 expatriates and confirm the early formation of an Erasmus community with L1 as a *lingua franca*. Even though intercultural competence is fostered in these circumstances in terms of attitudes (see chapter 5.4.1), the data of this study show that the majority of students (63%) have failed to acculturate in the new surrounding.

Like other social identities, the Erasmus identity draws on a "particularistic self-understanding and a distinction between an in-group and one or more out-groups that enhances the cohesiveness and the positive self-view of the in-group" (Sigalas 2010: 246). In the case of the Erasmus community, possible cultural differences are not perceived because the community members share the same goals and are in the same boat, as reported in the interviews and in the intercultural encounters:

Everyone is in the same boat. Spanish people are just like Irish people as well as the Canadians. [...] I guess not so much that people are like Irish people but that people are the same [...] once you have the common ground of being in this together on this Erasmus where you don't quite know what exactly you are doing all the time, you get along very easily. (Student G)

Student D, Student J, Student S and Student W confirm this stance and stress that they got along with people from all over the world and with whom they would not have anything in common. Yet, they feel that their shared role of being foreigners in Germany binds them.

I fell into the trap of getting a job in an Irish bar (...) it was just so handy, family friends own a bar over there and when I came over he offered me a job and I fell into the trap of the typical Irish going abroad getting a job in an Irish bar and I was grouped in with a lot of international students (...) but I didn't really have the money to move out. If I could change it I would definitely cut myself off from English altogether. I had hoped to do that in second semester but it just (...) I made friends who were English speakers or could not speak German. (Student D)

I connected a lot with the people who would have been on Erasmus there, like other European students and students even from America that we got to know and, yeah, it was like (...) when you are out of your comfort zone, like, that it's easier to (...) I guess connect to people who maybe you would not be on the same level with in any other, you know, if you were in their country or if they were in yours but given us all (...) because we were all kind of plonked in the same place it was quite easy to get to know, yeah, there was a general feeling of connectedness between all the Erasmus students because it was like we are in this together (...) we are all trying to do well over here, we all want to pass, we all want to learn about Germany (...) we had that kind of (...) we all had that similar sort of drive, I think. (Student J)

In my kind of clique there was like a few people from America, obviously there was a few Irish, there was Italian, there was Mexican, just really interesting there were all just (...) all from all of these different places in the world and we all just fit together [...]. I got to know them and they were just normal and just like me and then my friend from Italy, like he was like a philosophy student, someone that I would never, like, have anything in common with but we just got on so well and a guy from Mexico, just [...] get to know people from all that different countries and how they live and it was just really interesting that I got the chance to do that and just meet, cos, like we're all in the same boat, we all have something in common, we're all just (...) it was good. (Student W)

I met like some great friends, life-long friends, living all over the world and [...] it's great, you know, I definitely feel more like tolerant towards other cultures as well and stuff now cos just immersing, it's not just German, you've, like, like, Asian and Spanish, every culture, like, you really are immersed into at the same time, which is great, so. [...] I plan to go to London soon. I have two friends over there now and stuff. It's lovely, and it's great like that I could potentially be living with them in a couple of years as well and it's just such a shame cause you kind of think 'oh, why can't you just live in Ireland' you know, you just want to bring them home with you. Some of them. You get very attached to people because, as I said, going back to the bubble thing, like. It's such a small group and especially the English and Irish were very close. And we always hang out. We lived in the same apartment block. We lived on the same floor. So, we were very close to each other. Physically anyway. And so, it was really tough when we had to leave them. (Student S)

Student J and Student V elaborate that since they are all out of their comfort zones, it is easier to get to know other Erasmus students than German students, and thus have a certain "safety net" of fellows who share the same lifeworld. In this context, Coleman (1997: 20) concludes that socialising with compatriots may reduce anxiety and rebuild self-esteem and confidence in the students. Ecke's (2014) research also shows that the contact with peers reduces the pressure to integrate.

Another reason mentioned for the withdrawal to the Erasmus community is the lack of German language skills. Student B, for example, states that her lack of German formed a barrier in approaching L2 native speakers. By the time she had gained confidence, she had made friends with other foreign students and did not feel the need to get to know L2 speakers anymore. In this context, Student F raises another interesting aspect:

The Erasmus group is usually really tight as well so that it's really hard (...). I thought we were quite hard to approach by the Germans but I also found that it was really hard to approach Germans. [...] I think the problem was the language barrier that they were not as fond of speaking English as I thought they would be. [...] They would have liked us to speak more German, we would have liked them to speak more English. (Student F)

Student F concludes that since the L2-speakers did not want to meet them "halfway", communication was mostly prevented between the communities, which again stresses the notion of "us" versus "them". A lack of communicative German as an impediment to further interaction with the L2 community other than what was necessary has been confirmed by 70% of the students.

The context-contingency of social identities is furthermore stressed by the fact that the Erasmus bubble burst after the students' stay abroad. Apart from 37% of the students, who state that they want to visit their new acquaintances in the near future, the participants state that they were friends with people on Facebook but would not chat to them on a regular basis anymore because of a lack of common ground.

5.5 Résumé

On the whole, it is not unusual for students to claim that studying abroad has changed their lives (Coleman 1997, Pellegrino Aveni 2005, Williams 2005), and this also applies to the present study. While it may not have an impact on cognitive variables, i.e. intelligence or aptitude, it may especially influence affective variables such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety (Coleman 1997: 18) and concomitant changes in frames of reference and patterns of behaviour. In the context of L2 studies, residence abroad may be considered "the most significant implementation of an autonomous learning strategy" (Coleman 1997: 17) as it fosters experiential, individual learning.

While studies on intercultural competence in the study abroad context focus on comparing learning progresses of the programme participants, the exploration of the concept of intercultural competence itself remains an open problem and has therefore been the main focus of this study. The overall aim of this work was to critically evaluate the relationship between the theory and practice of existing holistic conceptualisations of intercultural competence and investigate its key components based on the students' reflections on the concept of culture, their intercultural experiences and their perceived success in the study abroad context.

The analysis of the data reveals several approaches towards the concepts of culture, appropriateness, effectiveness, language awareness, coping strategies and identity. A majority of students fit new personal experiences into their original frames of reference, adhere to generalisations, feel confirmed in their prejudice and presumptions and remain in their ethnocentric worldviews. Before, during and after their stay abroad, all students unconsciously juggle with clichés and cling to contrasting frames of stereotypes, fixed entities and national characteristics.

With regard to culture, the discussion is dominated by a stagnant, exclusive use of the term, referring to geographical entities – "the Irish" (Student B, Student D, Student E, Student F, Student G, Student K, Student N, Student R), "the Asian culture" (Student S), "the German culture" (Student B, Student D, Student E, Student F, Student G, Student N). The fact that culture is mostly defined in general terms misleads to homogenisation regarding stereotype-influenced shared traits and forms of attitudes and behaviour, i.e. "just very, very structured" (Student X), "blunt" (Student U), "ambitious" (Student F, Student K), "hard to get to know" (Student I), yet referring to a continuum in terms of "a little less German" or "more German" (Student G). Changes in perspectives do take place and preconceived ideas on cultural traits are questioned, but the students then draw on reversed generalisations, such as Germans being "more lenient" (Student E) and "easy going" (Student D) than anticipated. Interestingly, four students stress that they do not consider stereotypes to be accurate and want to refrain from them. Yet, as they talk about their intercultural experiences and notions before, during and after their stay abroad it becomes clear that they too revert to "national" characteristics and fixed entities.

The understanding of culture as entities implies a rather stagnant homogeneity within societies and communities, indicating that cultures are distinguishable from each other. Hence, differences and dynamics within cultures are not anticipated and complexities are simplified or ignored. Only very few students understand culture as a fluid concept which is discursively produced in that they stress how culture "really depends on the individual". On a few occasions, the participants also refer to "culture" in terms of communities with shared interests and passions, such as music taste (Student A).

A precondition for learning in tertiary socialisation is the preparedness to invest time and effort in partaking in new experiences and exploring new perspectives. Depending on the students' willingness and motivation to engage in intercultural situations, a transformation of the learners' mode of perceiving, knowing, expressing and interacting is promoted. The notions of success, effectiveness and appropriateness which the students bring to and develop in their intercultural experiences range widely, resulting in divergent definitions of required competences, depending on the social context. As the study shows, the reasons for studying German and the underlying motives and aspirations for going abroad are manifold, ranging from integrative and instrumental motives to personal priorities. Central to all students is improving the L2 skills. Around half of the students mention integrative aspirations, such as "making a lot of friends" and "feel[ing] comfortable with the people" (Student F) or "submerging yourself" (Student G), which for

55% of the students is not achieved. The students attribute this perceived failure to external factors – "stand-offish behaviour" (Student B) of the Germans or "no one really wanted to talk to us" (Student H) – as well as internal factors – "I didn't push myself far enough" (Student X). Sixteen students express instrumental factors such as "to get the BA International" (Student S) and "einen sehr guten Job in der Zukunft zu kriegen" (Student N). In retrospect they feel they have profited in terms of their academic development and defining new career interests, i.e. learning Spanish or becoming a singer. The most frequently-mentioned motivation factor refers to personal growth, such as becoming "more independent" (Student B, Student H), or defining priorities – "see what I am interested in" (Student B). In retrospect, 93% of the students regard these aspects as fulfilled. Additionally, effectiveness and appropriateness, as well as the concomitant required skills, are defined in regard to intercultural interactions in various contexts. As illustrated in the model of investment by Darvin and Norton (2015), the study also shows that the students' capital was partly not accorded symbolic value by the new structures of power, for example Irish dancing skills (Student J) in Irish pubs in Germany. In relation to aspiration and willingness to invest, no major changes in the amount of time invested in German Studies could be detected. Yet, the students tend to be more aware of German media tools after their return, which may be due to the exposure to German media during their stay abroad.

The students hardly show any awareness of the connection between language and culture, which could be related to the fact that the students mostly mingled with English speakers or used English as a *lingua franca* with Erasmus students. Only two students refer to language as a means to express cultural affiliations by using slang or dialect and German in general. As for L2 competence and grades in L2 modules after the students' stay abroad, a discrepancy between the students' self-perception in terms of gain in L2 competence and their grades could be detected in that only one third of the students performed better and one third even performed worse upon their return. Yet, almost all students report a self-perceived improvement in language skills. Possible reasons for this discrepancy will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

The investigation furthermore focuses on the development of the participants' self-definitions during the stay abroad in order to gain insight into their self-perceptions, their life-worlds, interests and priorities. The retrieved information on these aspects may give some indication as to the influences on students' interactions in intercultural encounters.

The participants report to perform multiple identities while they move between various social fields of action, such as university courses, student accommodation, rave parties, music festivals, sport clubs, school, Erasmus events, family and so on and so forth. In these contexts they are faced with different underlying ideologies, motives, values, norms and attitudes. In terms of personal construction of self, the students enumerate personal characteristics – "friendly and helpful" (Student A, Student L), "open-minded" (Student A, Student B, Student D, Student H, Student L, Student I) or "quite shy" (Student J) – and, as already pointed out, report a change in perspectives in terms of becoming "more open-minded" (Student A, Student L) or "self-confident" (Student B, Student J). One student also refers to the opportunity of "completely reinvent[ing] yourself because nobody knows you" (Student K), which may imply a conscious effort in identity change. In this context, one fourth of the students report experiencing themselves as having different identities in Ireland and abroad, based on the languages and different sociolinguistic norms – "this is not me, I don't know who [...] I am [...] in German" (Student W). Throughout the stay and afterwards, these identities are not perceived as blended spaces but as two different personalities in terms of "two different worlds" (Student AA), an "old self" (Student S) and a "German mode" (Student X). Regarding collective constructs of identity, the participants see themselves as members of multiple groups such as various sports clubs (Gaelic football, Irish dancing), or the Erasmus bubble with shared goals and interests, and they stress their family affiliations – "Family is a very important part of my identity" (Student J). Foremost, however, the students revert to a national identity construct – "I felt Irish by being there" (Student J).

A detailed discussion and reflection on the results of this study in light of the literature review is contained in the following concluding chapter.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Intercultural competence has become an integral part of curricula in primary, secondary and tertiary language education. In this context, attempts have been made to conceptualise intercultural competence models for language learners. However, so far hardly any empirical foundations for these models exist. In the framework of this study, I have therefore analysed the underlying terminological and conceptual challenges and complexities of 8 models of intercultural competence (Bennett 1993a, Byram 1997, 2009, Fantini 1995, 2005, Deardorff 2004, 2011, Kramsch 1998, Witte 2014) in light of their practical use for a specific target group in particular circumstances. The preliminary objective of this work was to empirically examine the speculative components of intercultural competence through a review of relevant literature and an analysis of the subjective views of BA German language students at NUIM who embarked on a year abroad in the framework of their studies.

The overall research question focuses on what intercultural competence constitutes in specific areas of life and in different fields of action. Along with questions on the understanding of the term "culture", the exploration of the students' reflections were aimed at providing information on subjective expectations and aspirations, individual goals and successes, skills and coping strategies, knowledge, language and cultural awareness, and changes in perspective in terms of identity, attitudes and values. The work is based on the notion that participants recount their observations according to their own understanding of intercultural competence, which should serve to refine the construct of intercultural competence for language learners. It was therefore of particular interest to gain insight into the students' world of experience, their subjective theories and constructs of intercultural competence as well as their progression.

This conclusive chapter first summarises the main findings of this research work in light of the literature review in the first 3 chapters. In a next step, theoretical and methodological limitations and shortcomings of the study are examined. Finally, implications and suggestions for further research in the field of intercultural competence are discussed. The findings could serve as incentives for an alternative approach to intercultural competence and could be implemented into curricula at secondary and tertiary institutions to help develop teaching and learning objectives.

6.1 Overview of the Main Findings

Altogether, 8 models of intercultural competence were analysed in relation to their main foci, the underlying concepts of culture, cognitive and affective dimensions, overall aims, pedagogical implications and forms of assessment. The theoretical findings are reflected upon with regard to the experiences and subjective points of view of 27 Bachelor students of German Studies at NUIM.

As has been elaborated in the theoretical section of this work, intercultural competence is not a simple additive combination of components. Rather, the academic discourse on intercultural competence is inextricably linked with persistent manifold theoretical challenges due to the fact that relevant competences comprise ethical precepts as well as cognitive, affective and conative components. These components involve neurobiological and context-contingent psychological individual and group processes, imperfect information and knowledge gaps. The challenges range from the definition of relevant competences, and their assessment and measurement, to their operationalisation (in terms of behaviour) and consequent evaluation of development (in terms of effective performance) (Praxmarer 2010: 5).

At the centre of any discussion about cultural issues is the term "culture" itself. The first research question therefore focused on the concept of culture and its connotative meanings. In the theoretical section of my thesis, I analysed a selection of anthropological and linguistic approaches and established that a consensus on its definition does not exist in the academic discourse. Instead, there are manifold interpretations and definitions even within one discipline of research, ranging from culture as observable artefacts (literature, music or art), culture as tacit knowledge, as value systems and a collective orientation system, to culture as webs of significance where social actions are translated into cultural signs to which meaning is ascribed. As for the interrelationship of language and culture, attention has been drawn to (unequal) power relations between language learners and target language speakers in social interactions. Meaning and language are connected to culture in that through similar interpretations a shared culture of meanings is developed and a social world constructed. In this sense, the term "culture" refers to widely shared values, ideals and norms which are influenced by dominant powers in society in that their definitions become common sense for the majority of the population.

Hence, the understandings entail different political and ideological agendas and manifold purposes such as the promotion of certain values or the protection of a dominant culture.

In the field of intercultural competence, a precise conceptual elaboration on culture is however neglected. The researchers only vaguely define their underlying concepts of culture (Bennett 1993a, Byram 1997, 2009, Kramsch 1998, Witte 2014), but not all of them do (Fantini 1995, 2005, Deardorff 2004). One commonality in contemporary research in the field of intercultural competence (Matsumoto 2006, Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, Straub 2007) is the understanding of culture as a context-dependent, complex and dynamic concept that is rarely the same for different individuals and evolves over time (Avruch 1998: 154). Yet, these underlying notions and interpretations of culture are relevant for the conception and further implementation of intercultural competence and the understanding of efficient and appropriate interaction. Culture conceived as knowledge, for example, implies that cultures are distinguishable and learners need to apply knowledge to new cultures in order to behave in an interculturally competent way. If the term is defined as an agglomerate of values and norms, culture is inferable from statements and behaviour but language learners are not necessarily aware of it. Intercultural competence then refers to a successful interaction of people with different collective identities. Culture regarded as a dynamic and distributed concept implies that cultures are constructed in discourse (Kramsch 2011), which again has an impact on our understanding of intercultural competence. With all these concepts in mind, my argument in my theory section went so far as to refer to culture in a post-structuralist sense as a floating signifier; a signifier with a vague and highly variable signified (Chandler 2007, Lacan 1993). In this sense, culture constitutes an interplay of an ideological, a social, an economic and a political dimension. The term "culture" does not bear any symbolic value in itself but depends on the outcome of struggles of hegemony to give meaning. A floating signifier absorbs rather than emits meaning (Hall 1997: 6) and in this sense, the term "culture" is attributed different meanings according to its usage. It is therefore regarded as a discursive construct which has often become a common sense assumption. As already pointed out, the different aspects of meaning, however, have an influence on how intercultural competence is conceived and implemented. Therefore, the actors' perspectives became the focus of attention of my conceptual analysis. In order to examine intercultural competence development in the study abroad context, this work attended to the subjectivity of the study participants and first investigated their individual understanding of culture against the background of the literature review in chapter 1.

A qualitative research approach served to explore the subjective notions and perceptions on intercultural competence of 27 undergraduate students of German at NUIM. By means of individual semi-structured interviews before and after the students' stay abroad as well as an in-depth content analysis of reported personal critical intercultural encounters during the stay, the students' self-presentations, and their perceptions, interpretations and subjective estimations on key factors of intercultural competence were investigated. Hence, the study provides data to construe what I argue to be the floating signifier "intercultural competence".

Prima facie, the study group seemed rather homogenous. All of the participants have been socialised in Ireland (at least for a few years), study German and have availed of the opportunity to go abroad, which implies a shared interest in the subject. However, as the data shows, the students' elaborations are manifold.

The analysis of the data reveals several approaches towards the concepts of culture by the students. Based on personal observations, the students reduce the complexity of culture, reasoning from a micro-level to a macro-level. General conclusions on cultural features are drawn from individual observations and chance encounters before and during the residence abroad. The data furthermore reveals a tendency towards interpreting culture in the singular, as a delimitable entity of various forms and homogenised social units – mostly nations, language communities or interest groups – in terms of a dualistic "we" versus "the Other". In this sense, the elaborations of the students prove Fox and Gingrich's (2002: 2–5) concerns that a comparison of cultures inevitably results in universalistic and objectivist claims in terms of generalisations, mainly on an ethnic-national level. This understanding of culture as entities implies a rather stagnant homogeneity within societies and communities, and indicates that cultures are distinguishable from each other. In this sense, the students use collective nouns (e.g. "the Germans") and refer to shared norms (e.g. "punctuality") in order to differentiate between cultures.

The notion of culture as *Bildung* (Arnold 1869, Bourdieu 1986, Herder 1785, Tylor 1871), as discussed in chapter 1, has not been referred to by any of the students. The students rarely perceive class differences or differences in education when talking about the concept of culture, despite the different contexts the students live in, for example working in hospitals, bars and schools, and studying. Hardly any students (4 students) perceive

differences in power hierarchy as part of culture or at least they do not articulate it. In most of the retrieved data, stereotypes and observable traits dominate the discussion on culture in relation to different behaviour, attitudes, rules, habits, shared interests and goals. Within the framework of the data analysis, major reoccurring themes of behaviour and attitudes – directness, honesty, bluntness, organisational skills, determination, efficiency, punctuality, rule-abidance, friendliness and manners – can be detected, which the students rate positively as well as negatively. Yet, it is sometimes unclear whether students refer to personality traits or cultural traits. Indeed, personal, social, age-related, situational or conventional constellations are neglected. Furthermore, underlying values or tacit knowledge are hardly questioned or reflected on by the participants of this study. Rather, the students follow Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952) approach and understand culture as shared knowledge in a community, serving as a collective frame of reference for new experiences.

An interesting development in relation to generalisations is that students often hold on to a monolithic concept of culture, but the allocated attributes change during the residence abroad, based on their personal encounters (i.e. from attributes such as "bluntness" and "sterness" to "easy-going" and "like to have fun"). These changes may imply a development of intercultural competence skills in terms of questioning former ideas on cultural traits and behavioural patterns. However, they constitute reversed generalisations as the students still cling to contrasts and stereotypes. On the other hand, the students seem surprised when they are perceived as representations of a stereotypical Irish person, which proves Tajfel's (1978) thesis that while other groups are perceived as homogeneous entities, social groups we are part of are perceived as diverse and heterogeneous. Hence, while heterogeneity is perceived within one's own cultural group, other groups are perceived as more homogeneous entities.

While the majority of the students hold on to a static and monolithic concept of culture in its singularity, a small number of students begins to perceive culture in a more differentiated way as a fluid, discursively produced construct. One fifth of the students define culture as encompassing structures such as educational level, urban versus rural lifestyles, regional and social differences, generation differences or different interests. A few students refer to culture as differing repertoires of interconnected meanings in different contexts in terms of sub-cultures, the members of which share common interests and goals (music and dancing, professional and academic bias, and so on). Their

approaches can be compared to Matsumoto's definition of culture as a set of shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and socially transmitted behaviours (Matsumoto 1996: 16) which guides people's lives. The collected data show that only 3 students perceive a tacit consent regarding value systems, attribution patterns (Witte 2014: 204), and frames and norms in communities, which serve as templates for a subjective and collective existence. However, the students are hardly aware of a discursive process of reality construction and take shared (mostly ethno-centric) frames of reference for granted. Furthermore, they tend to categorise and neglect the processuality and fluidity of culture.

As for the interrelationship between culture and language, the students perceive language to be detached from cultural influences and a neutral tool for communication. Apart from a few exceptions, the students do not perceive cultural codes in language use and the way languages shape meaning in cultural contexts. Only two students mention language as a means to culturally identify with various groups by using slang, dialect or insisting on English usage. Furthermore, only one student regards culture as something to invest in, which could be compared to Bourdieu's notion of different forms of capital.

Some students have difficulties defining culture or cannot verbalise their concept of it. When asked what parts of his everyday life he would view as part of culture and how he has acquired them, one student cannot think of any aspects off the top of his head. However, maybe utterances such as "what is culture anyway" (Student A) indicate an understanding of the elusiveness of the concept of culture in terms of a floating signifier with a highly variable signified, bearing different meanings for different people in different contexts.

In addition to the concept of culture, I explored the underlying manifold definitions of current concepts of competence and model with regard to their implications for intercultural competence research. In the theoretical section of this work I came to the conclusion that the semantic complexity of the notion of competence is partly due to the multi-disciplinary contexts and aligned purposes in which it is used, ranging from its casual everyday use for ability or capability to its use in language education and training in terms of attitudes, skills and knowledge, or its use in professional profiles to meet complex demands within certain contexts. Hence, the term "competence" refers to both inner personal attributes as well as outcomes of actions. Since there is no direct access to a person's consciousness, attitude, understanding and underlying values can only be

reasoned from actions and behaviour. Yet, the question remains as to what exactly can be assessed and measured, especially in light of specific development objectives in intercultural competence.

As for the term "model" in the intercultural context, it has been established that models are value-laden constructs which are developed for different purposes in different contexts. Differences in the basic understanding of the purposes inevitably lead to different anticipated sub-competences. While some models focus on psychological dispositions, others put emphasis on competences, skills or knowledge which are assigned to affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions and partly defined in terms of progression phases. Thus, neither the term "competence" nor the term "model" can be transferred to arbitrary contexts by means of one single specific terminology and meaning.

Altogether, intercultural competence is understood as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultural communities. The models discussed in the theoretical section of this work stress the multidimensionality of cognitive, behavioural and affective components of intercultural competence. An interplay of hypothesised requisites in terms of knowledge, traits, attitudes, motivation and skills is considered necessary for effective and appropriate intercultural interaction and for a change of perspectives to happen. This diversity leads to different answers as to what components intercultural competence comprises and how it can be learned and taught.

Some of these models (Bennett 1993a, Witte 2014) additionally differentiate between ethnocentric and ethnorelative phases in intercultural competence development. Individuals positioned in ethnocentric levels are largely unaware of linguistic and cultural relativity and remain in their own cultural frame of reference. They refer to dualistic cultural "us" versus "them" distinctions and only superficially acknowledge or disparage cultural diversity. In ethnorelative phases, a change of perspectives and a deliberate adaptation of behaviour in different cultural contexts occurs, as individuals become aware of cultural ambiguity and adopt different frames of reference. Altogether the underlying notion of all of these models is that intercultural competence development evolves over one's lifetime without a pre-defined end point; an ideal intercultural person does not exist.

However, as the term comes with manifold nuances and possible meanings, it is not always clear upon what theoretical approach the concept's usage is based. Furthermore, hardly any empirical foundation for models of intercultural competence for specific target groups in particular circumstances exists. Instead, these models seem to be based on the premise of idealised ethical human beings who bring along the assumed knowledge, positive personality traits (open-mindedness, empathy, respect, tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility, to name a few), motivation, self-reflection and skills to shift perspectives, construct subjective blended spaces and achieve mutual understanding in any intercultural interaction. The theoretical section of this thesis therefore came to the conclusion that intercultural competence in itself presents an elusive, partly contradictory, hypothetical and context-free concept that could be described as a floating signifier. In other words, intercultural competence is a contingent, particular and hegemonial interpretive scheme (*Deutungsmuster*), which is often understood as universally applicable.

Intercultural competence regarded as a floating signifier implies that intercultural competence is a discursive construct which cannot hold water and does not simply exist but is rather a product of power discourses, which is susceptible to multiple and even contradictory interpretations. In this context, Lacan (1993) referred to Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty as the master of the signifier, such as mentioned in a dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass* (1872):

Humpty Dumpty took the book, and looked at it carefully. "That seems to be done right – " he began.

"You're holding it upside down!" Alice interrupted.

"To be sure I was!" Humpty Dumpty said gaily, as she turned it round for him. "I thought it looked a little queer. As I was saying, that *seems* to be done right – though I haven't time to look it over thoroughly just now – and that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days when you might get un-birthday presents – ."

"Certainly," said Alice.

"And only *one* for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory'," Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected. "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all.

(Carroll 1872: 123–1, *italics* in original)

A certain behaviour or ability may be judged competent in one context, while incompetent in another. Hence, competence needs to be viewed as a social evaluation of action, which is composed of appropriateness and effectiveness (Spitzberg 2000: 379–380). In language education, language and its speakers therefore need to be understood in the context of social relationships. It can therefore be concluded that the theoretical notion of intercultural competence is defined as an evaluative and normative term which refers to ethical and moral dimensions of social actions, cooperations and co-existence (Straub 2007: 38).

In the discussed models of intercultural competence, the concept is also broadly defined as effective (etic view) and appropriate (emic view) intercultural interaction. Alongside the questions on the underlying subjective notion of culture, this work therefore also explored the students' reflections on personal successful intercultural encounters and the required skills and coping strategies. In this sense, this study is based on Bennett's (1993a) notion that the meaning individuals ascribe to events is determinative for successful intercultural interactions. Underlying motives and goals influence the students' perceptions of success, effectiveness and appropriateness. In this regard, the models postulate an interest in linguistic and cultural heterogeneity and a willingness to engage with other linguistic and cultural systems. These motivation factors are inextricably linked to individual circumstances, personal desires, aspirations and objectives in (intercultural) interactions. Motivation, interest and willingness to invest time and effort in the learning process are in turn closely related to individual definitions and perceptions of success.

The study reveals that students' aspirations and consequently their definitions of success and effectiveness are manifold and depend on the context, including their personal trajectories and subjective desires and ambitions. All students express their enthusiasm for their new experiences and enumerate several aspirations for their stay abroad. Above all, every pre-sojourner aims at improving his or her German language skills. The collected data shows that 56% of the students display integrative aspirations and want to avail of the opportunity to get to know culturally different people in their original social contexts, build new social networks and delve into new cultural contexts. The models in chapter 3 focus on these underlying intrinsic triggers in terms of a willingness to engage with individuals with different cultural backgrounds and an openness to learn from them. The main push factors for going abroad of the study participants are, however, instrumental ones as well as personal growth. The majority of students (60%) express instrumentally-

oriented, utilitarian aspirations in that they expect to gain an international degree (BA international), have better job opportunities and also advance in their second subject. These findings comply with Kennings' (2001: 55, cited in Conacher 2008) results who defines "broadening their horizons", "meeting new people with whom they might become friends" and "enhancing their curriculum vitae" as main push factors and goals for their study stay abroad. Furthermore, these findings demonstrate strong parallels with Feng and Fleming's (2009) results in the framework of their SAILSA project, where students articulated that they expected not only to get a degree but wanted to improve their language skills, experience the culture of the host country and to work there after graduation (Feng & Fleming 2009: 244). Another form of aspiration the students refer to is personal growth in terms of becoming more self-confident, open-minded, independent and more decisive about the future (74%). So far, research has provided contradictory results on correlations between integrative versus instrumental motivation and successful language learning (Coleman 1997: 10). No difference in correlation between the motivators and success could be detected within the framework of this study. However, the analysis of the data shows that instrumentally motivated students do not show much integration into new cultural contexts and mostly take an ethno-centric approach towards immersing themselves in host cultures.

While the concept of effectiveness refers to the accomplishment of individual goals, the concept of appropriateness involves the Other in that valued norms and rules or expectations in a relationship are not violated. In the intercultural context, these dual standards imply that for an intercultural interaction to be conducted competently, the interlocutors accomplish their objectives in a manner that is appropriate to their relationship and the circumstances. In this sense, inappropriate and ineffective interaction is clearly of low quality. An interaction which is appropriate but ineffective implies that the interlocutors do nothing objectionable but do not accomplish their personal objectives in the process. Inappropriate yet effective interaction involves actions such as lying, cheating or stealing which are ethically problematic. A person might therefore be manipulative and calculating, yet effective, which contradicts the original rationale of the interculturally competent person who is understanding and respectful towards differences and appreciative of the Other. Interlocutors who are both effective and appropriate meet the requirements of an interculturally competent communicator (Spitzberg 2000: 380). However, effectiveness and appropriateness are not self-evident

but could be mutually exclusive and must be understood in relation to the circumstances and interlocutors.

Hence, it has been established that appropriateness and effectiveness are context-contingent constructs and relate to the participants' subjective lifeworlds, which makes it difficult to assess intercultural competence development objectively, other than focusing on every student individually. Even though the students are involved in the same task in terms of a stay abroad, they are not engaged in the same activities, as students have different goals, such as grades and career options as opposed to intrinsic interests (Lantolf 2009: 12). Rather, intentionality and individuality need to be considered. Hence, it may be concluded that apart from cognitive components, intercultural competence cannot be objectively measured, rather an interculturally competent person constitutes a socially competent and (inter)culturally aware person in divergent contexts.

In this sense, the study confirms Baird's (2003: 601) statement that defining and assessing intercultural competence with one single model would be unfeasible (Baird 2003: 601). Rather, the results show miscellaneous, context-contingent interpretations of the concept of intercultural competence with blurred boundaries between its components:

[N]ot only do language and learner matter, but so do place, time, others, goals, and motives. In an ecological approach, because everything is connected to everything else, one cannot look at any single entity in isolation from the others, without compromising the integrity of the very processes one is trying to understand and foment. (Lantolf 2009: 18)

The data of this study prove the subjectivity and heterogeneity of intercultural experiences, which make a generalisability of required components and desired outcomes rather problematic. On the contrary, the students' recollections reveal a variety of culturally-dented interpretations of their own and others' behaviour in different contexts.

From the students' self-reported vantage point, their stay abroad has helped them to achieve a wide range of outcomes. With regard to their instrumentally inclined motives, they report academic success as well as failure in their progress in language acquisition. Yet, all of the students except one report that their stay abroad has been positively transformational. They feel they have improved their language skills and have gained a lot for their personal lives in terms of self-confidence, assertiveness, flexibility and open-mindedness. Furthermore, all but one student think they have become more culturally

aware by integrating new customs (recycling bottles or knocking on the desks at the end of lectures) into their daily lives and they believe that their stay has allowed them to form international bonds.

The amount of time invested in their German studies and L2 immersion as an indicator for motivation has on average not changed upon the students' return as compared to before their stay, and only 15% of the students report more engagement with L2 speakers. In this regard, 55% of the students report disappointment and failure in their integrative aspirations. The students state external (organisation, Erasmus bubble, accommodation, design of courses) as well as internal reasons (wrong decisions, lack of motivation, attitudes) for these outcomes.

In addition, the results prove Dervin's (2010) and Zarate's (2003) hypotheses that a person might not behave equally competently in all situations but may be troubled by the context, intentions or behaviour of the interlocutor (Dervin 2010: 163). Despite the students' original willingness to engage, the study shows that students feel stressed and uncomfortable in particular situations and struggle with integration into new social contexts, which may, however, also have occurred in Ireland. Hence, some students reported to behave rather incompetently in some circumstances (e.g. at the accommodation office or during a tandem encounter), as different interactions in different cultural communities and situations evoke different uncontrollable emotions and consequently different reactions.

As for appropriateness, the students reflect on appropriate behaviour in conflict situations with interlocutors, such as staying polite when confronted with rudeness or previously unknown norms and rules (taking off shoes indoors, approaching professors in a very formal manner, separating litter). The students therefore demonstrate skills of interpreting, discovery and relating found in the models of intercultural competence. They have also become able to reflect on their identity and role in the L1 and the L2 context. In this regard, it must not be ignored that there is a difference between acts and discourse (Dervin 2010: 164). Byram (2008: 222) has also pointed out that despite the claim for openness towards others, critical self-awareness and reflection, there is no means to prove or assess if somebody genuinely believes in them and means them. People might, for example, behave appropriately in a certain context but feel disgusted by their own behaviour (Dervin 2010: 164). Furthermore, as already pointed out,

appropriateness and effectiveness may constitute mutually exclusive, contradicting concepts in various contexts.

In order to achieve successful outcomes in intercultural interactions, the students enumerate various skills such as adapting to previously unknown norms, learning to connect with L2 speakers, adjusting to conversation styles, attending cultural events, becoming more open-minded and flexible, dealing constructively with difference, being open to changes of perspective, becoming more empathic, learning how to budget now that they do not live with their parents anymore and finding appropriate accommodation. In this sense, the students demonstrate critical cultural awareness and apply skills of interaction, interpreting and relating such as stated in the analysed models of intercultural competence. However, even though the students claimed openness toward intercultural learning prior to their stay abroad, their actions prove different. Like in Conacher (2008: 5–15) the students perceive barriers in that they mostly stay in foreign students' circles (Erasmus bubble) and perceive themselves to be an outsider group abroad. Therefore, the participants were asked in retrospect to give advice for future students on how to make the stay abroad successful. These suggestions should provide information on subjectively perceived strategies to enhance integrative and instrumental effectiveness as well as personal growth. As for strategies to enhance integrative effectiveness, 30% of the students suggest to speak German as much as possible and to take every opportunity to meet L2 speakers and get to know them. In retrospect, 70% of the students recommend to maximise immersion into the L2 context and withdraw from the Erasmus contacts, which they regret not having done. On an organisational level, the students recommend gathering information on accommodation prior to the residence abroad, sharing accommodation with L2 speakers instead of Erasmus students, and budgeting money wisely. In terms of instrumental objectives, one suggestion is not to take too many modules on at the beginning to give oneself time to settle into the new surroundings. These enumerated skills relate to a range of theoretical assumptions on skills postulated in the models of intercultural competence by Bennett (1993a), Byram (1997, 2009), Deardorff (2004), Fantini (1995, 2005), Kramsch (1998) and Witte (2014).

Most models of intercultural competence discussed in chapter 3 (apart from Deardorff 2004) focus on the intertwining of language and culture. They are based on the notion that the linguistic and cultural backgrounds have an impact on the way speakers perceive, construe and negotiate reality. Languages in turn mirror the collective experience of its

speakers (Haarmann 1990). L2 learners do not cast off their native cultural frames of perception and L1 knowledge which serve as a basis for new experiences and meaning making (Byram 2008: 113). Therefore, in order to understand the Other, L2 learners need to be aware of their subjective, culturally-dented realities. In this sense, language is regarded as socially and culturally embedded and constructed; a tool to exchange subjective values and thoughts with fellow humans and to transform social and cultural realities in interactions, as well as a symbol of cultural cohesion or difference. In comparison to monolinguals, who have monothetically acquired the language and cultural patterns of construal and tend to take cultural constructs for granted, L2 learners gain access to different points of references and discourses. Therefore, it is assumed that L2 proficiency enhances intercultural competence (Byram 1997, Fantini 2005, Kramsch 1998, Risager 2006, Witte 2014) and over time, L2 learners develop an intercultural perspective, a so-called Third Place (Kramsch 1998). However, it has also been established that language skills alone do not account for successful intercultural interaction (Zarate 2003).

Bearing in mind the definition of intercultural competence as the internal transformation of a person's beliefs, attitudes, identity and behaviour for effective and appropriate intercultural interaction, language competence also comprises appropriate language usage, hence sociolinguistic knowledge. In this context, Byram and Zarate (1997) and Kramsch (1998) claim that success in L2 acquisition cannot be compared to developing native-speaker competence, as an ideal model native speaker does not exist and intercultural learning is regarded a life-long process. However, an intercultural speaker should be able to select forms of accuracy and appropriateness required in the given social contexts (Kramsch 1998: 27) across cultures, which is difficult as the knowledge required for successful interaction is dependent on different cultural contexts, and the cultural identities of interlocutors are subject to constant change and development. In the framework of this study, it has therefore been investigated what conclusion on intercultural competence may be drawn from subjectively perceived language learning progress and objectively measured language competence.

As already mentioned, the stated main aim of all students during their stay abroad is L2 improvement. However, the majority of students do not seem to be aware of the mutual interplay between language and culture. On the contrary, language is perceived as a culturally neutral tool of communication, which could be affiliated to the fact that most

students interacted with their L2 communities or Erasmus groups with English as a lingua franca. Apart from two students, the participants remain unaware of the influences that language usage has on their perception of interactions and neglect the use of language as a means of identification with a cultural group.

As discussed in chapter 5.3, all but one student feel more confident in their L2 skills upon return and feel they can hold substantial conversations in most informal L2 interactions. However, the students' self-reported progress on their language skills contrasts with their grades and is not mirrored in their academic linguistic performance upon return. Only one third of the students improve their grades in the language modules and almost half of the students improve in their overall grades. However, it needs to be considered that the grades do not constitute a completely objective reflection of the students' performances because of their difference in requirements in second and third year. In third year the exams are more complex and go beyond reproduction of memorised content. Interestingly, as already established, the study proves Ecke's (2014) suggestions that less proficient L2 learners (54%) profit more in terms of language proficiency during their stay abroad than more proficient learners (43%).

A reason for the diverging results between the academic performance and the self-reported language gain of the students could be related to a difference in formal and informal language learning settings and sociolinguistic knowledge acquisition during their stay abroad as opposed to an attainment of *Bildungssprache* for academic purposes. By contrast, in authentic intercultural encounters, students acquire sociolinguistic norms and communication strategies rather than grammatical skills, as also confirmed in Regan's (1995) study of six Irish learners of French. Hence, a stay abroad does not automatically lead to the required linguistic proficiency in language studies because different abilities and skills come to the fore in the various social situations encountered (see also Block 2007). The experiences students have with representatives of other cultural contexts may help them acquire socio-pragmatic skills and awareness, which is not necessarily relevant for the university context. In this context, the students samples also shed light on the importance of the interlocutors in intercultural communication. While the activities in the framework of the BA German Studies are mainly based on construed writing and speaking prompts as well as grammar structures, the outcomes in naturalistic and authentic learning settings are often more unpredictable because of the interlocutors's different cultural

frames of reference. Additionally, native speakers may use slang or dialectal variations of the language which are unknown to the L2 learners.

Thus, from an instrumental, academic point of view, the students may not have profited as much as they had anticipated, but their newly acquired skills (i.e. paraphrasing, conflict management, self-reflection, dealing with difference, making friends) may have helped cultural bridging and may have an influence on their intercultural interactions. A correlation between language achievement (subjectively perceived as well as objectively measured) and the amount of interaction with the L2 community can be detected in the present study. Those two students who reported extensive L2 community interaction and immersion into the new cultural context also achieved the highest grades in language modules upon their return. Additionally, it is also those two students who report a suitable position between languages, such as postulated by Kramsch (1998) in her notion of Third Place. In this regard, the increased progress in overall grades could result from more active engagement with cultural components in terms of contemporary issues or cultural events after their stay abroad.

A development detected in the data is that the proclaimed confidence in L2 skills before the stay abroad was knocked for one third of the students during their first intercultural encounters when students report humility regarding their lack of German skills and a feeling of disappointment. This may be the first time that the students become aware of their limitations in expression in L2. The students' reactions confirm Witte's findings (2014) in that the students react in different ways to the realisation of cultural and linguistic relativity. Witte (2014) states that the perception of linguistic and cultural relativity may have an impact on the identity construction of L2 learners and may evoke various reactions. On the one hand, they may become more motivated to engage with foreign cultures and languages, but they may also be oblivious to any differences and not engage at all or, on the other hand, they may be frustrated and withdraw to the familiar L1 communities. While some students in this study feel intimidated or worried and withdraw to L1 communities, a few others address the matter positively and try to develop strategies for future successful interactions. These results also confirm Fantini's (1995, 2005) notion that grappling with an L2 confronts how language learners perceive, conceptualise and express themselves and may foster the development of alternative communication strategies and a transformation in their understanding of the world (Fantini 2005). The majority of students report that they preferably associate with

Erasmus students and L1 speakers; they tend to revert to English because they can express themselves more easily and feel more secure. This has also been confirmed by Murphy-Lejeune (2002). In this sense, students retrospectively regard the Erasmus bubble as an obstacle to immersing with L2 speakers. In addition, despite some conscious efforts to socialise with L2 speakers, the majority of students stay in their L1 community.

In this context it also needs to be pointed out that the results of this study indicate that L2 acquisition is not necessarily connected to intercultural awareness. Especially instrumentally motivated students have shown to improve their language skills but do not show much integration into the new cultural contexts and remain largely on an ethno-centric level. Integratively motivated students have become culturally embedded and show critical reflection but have stagnated or regressed in terms of a linguistic progress on an academic scale. These results confirm Hammer's (2012) observation that one does not necessarily have an intercultural experience merely by being exposed to events in different cultural contexts.

Another aspect which has already been pointed out in chapter 5.3 is language as a symbol of identity and the role of the Irish language. Irish is regarded the first official language of the Republic of Ireland and is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary school. Yet, while the students identify strongly as Irish citizens and are proud of their Irish affiliations, they hardly feel connections with the Irish language, with only 7 claiming to be able to hold a conversation in Irish. This confirms Byram's (2008) statement on the independence between speaking Irish and being Irish.

In the theory section it has further been established that learning new languages may challenge existing perspectives as well as the perception and understanding of identities, and may trigger their redefinition and reconstruction (Witte 2014: 177–178). Hence, languages contribute to identity formation in that they serve as indicators for group affiliations and as tools to convey and change one's subjective identity as well as to modify collective identities in discourse. In the framework of this study, the term identity refers to the "core constitution of personhood that influences that individual's intercultural behaviour" (Kim 2009: 54).

According to the investigated models, the acquisition of intercultural competence comprises the ability to understand interlocutors as unique complex human beings with

multiple identities as well as the skills to reflect and negotiate this range of identities (Byram 2009: 330) of oneself and others. Furthermore, the concept relates to the increasing awareness of internalised social and cultural frames of reference in order to change perspective and the ability to take on various identities in different L1 and L2 contexts. This study proceeds on the assumption established in the literature review (Bachner & Zeutschel 1994, Benson *et al.* 2012, Byram *et al.* 2002, Cohen *et al.* 2005, Coleman 1996, Fantini 2005, Hammer 2012, Jackson 2008, Murphy-Lejeune 2002) that in the study abroad context, the students may start to question their taken-for-granted worldviews and negotiate their identities. This, in turn, may result in a change of perspectives and an appreciation of diversity, hence in intercultural competence development and the development of blended linguistic and cultural spaces (Kramsch 1998, Witte 2014).

As was established in the literature review, identity exists independently but is also intertwined with society and cultures (Pellegrino Aveni 2005: 12–15) in terms of individual and collective identity constructs. All of the discussed models of intercultural competence include these identity concepts, and regard identity as a hybrid and permeable construct subject to construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. Deardorff (2006), Byram (2007) and Murphy-Lejeune (2002) emphasise the importance of self-discovery as part of intercultural communicative competence, which is closely related to the identity concept. It has furthermore been established that the models are based on an underlying dichotomy of the own versus the foreign culture and language – a duality of "us" versus "them" – which needs to be precluded and overcome in order to adopt an ethnorelative view and develop subjective intercultural spaces. Hence, intercultural competence implies the awareness of linguistic and cultural relativity, of one's own fluctuations and liminality as well as the impact of one's own multiple cultural affiliations and worldviews on the understanding of others. This insight should ideally result in a change of perspectives in terms of an expansion of cultural frames of reference, a tolerance of ambiguity and the development of alternative sociocultural configurations and systems of meanings.

Thus, the last research question focused on the participants' personal and social identity negotiations and their development in the study abroad context in order to gain insight into their self-perceptions and subject positions in terms of interests, values, attitudes

and goals, and insights into their collective identity dimensions, which have an impact on students' interactions in intercultural encounters.

The study suggests that students are social actors with multiple, varied social identities which emerge from their everyday experiences and are reconstituted and transformed in discourse during the stay abroad. In their statements, the students avail of personal as well as social identity concepts, and provide data on context-contingent identity negotiations and identity development. On the one hand, the students identify from an emic point of view in terms of personal growth (confidence, maturity, independence, awareness), L2 competence and context-contingent attitudes and characteristics (laid-back, open-minded, friendly, helpful, strong, independent and trustworthy). They particularly stress their interests in music, sports, languages and travelling as well as their family attachments which evolve over time. On the other hand, a strong orientation towards a collective identity and an enhancement of pride in national identity is reported by the students, which hints at a rather ethno-centric worldview.

Altogether, the data proves the difficulty participants experience in stepping out of their own cultural frame of reference and taking on different perspectives. These changes in perspective, however, constitute a main component in the intercultural competence models discussed. The majority of students withdraw from negotiations of diversity and engage in discourses of national superiority, keeping a stereotypical mind-set. Although the students become familiar with various forms of bureaucracy, traditions, different ways of life in various cultural communities, different conversation styles or new habits, the majority of them maintain an ethnocentric approach (Bennett 1993a, Witte 2014) in intercultural encounters and feel their stereotypical mind-set to be reinforced or replaced by other stereotypes, such as punctuality or, straight-forwardness (Bennett 1993a), a result which has also been shown by Coleman (1996) and Brogan (2014). Yet, the students do report adopting local pragmatic norms according to the identities they wish to display. Yet, while they observe cultural diversity, they acknowledge it on a rather superficial level and polarise cultural differences, ignoring deeper cultural differences, and revert to stereotypical Irish identities and a sense of belonging to their stereotypical concepts of an Irish culture. It can therefore be concluded that in most cases, the students have not grasped the socially constructed nature of knowledge and have only rarely become aware of the impact of their own language and cultural affiliations on their perceptions (Byram 2009, Deardorff 2004, Witte 2014).

With regard to identity construction, the study has confirmed that cultural identities fluctuate as individuals move between different contexts and situations with different "clusters of intersecting affiliations" (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 14). The students are open to intercultural interactions (Bennett 1993a, Byram 2009, Deardorff 2004, Fantini 2005, Witte 2014) but, for reasons of feeling relaxed and safe, tend to surround themselves with other Erasmus students or L1 speakers. In this context, the participants report on the development of an Erasmus identity (Sigalas 2010), which enhanced cohesiveness in the shared role of being foreigners and being out of their comfort zones (Coleman 1997, Ecke 2014). The context contingency of social identities and group affiliations is stressed by the fact that the Erasmus bubble burst soon after the students' return to Ireland. The majority of students are not in regular contact with their former friends in Germany and Austria after their return because they feel they lacked common ground.

The students also show traces of an ethnorelative approach in that they partly develop the ability to take other people's views into consideration and change perspective (Bennett 1993a, Deardorff 2004, Fantini 1995, 2005, Byram 2009, Kramsch 1998, Witte 2014). They act outside of their own cultural contexts, adapt their behaviour and use different communicative conventions accordingly, in a way they consider to be appropriate in various intercultural encounters, which relates to skills and attitudes stated in the intercultural competence models (Bennett 1993a, Byram 2009, Deardorff 2004, Witte 2014). Furthermore, the participants detect differences in discourses used by people in various cultural communities on a superficial level (Byram 2009, Fantini 2005, Kramsch 1998, Witte 2014) and for the majority, they meet communicative demands, make use of their language skills in communication or adapt their communication style in English to their interlocutors (Byram 2009). However, according to the models, adaptation goes beyond the mere recognition of different worldviews and involves empathy and an understanding of pluralism. In this regard, the learners hardly shift frames of reference or imagine different cultural contingencies. They mostly lack the ability to reframe ways of perceiving something familiar (Kramsch 1998) and only a minority of students critically reflects upon their own values and beliefs or critically evaluates perspectives in one's own community (Byram 2009, Witte 2014). Only for two students, the multi-faceted cultural experience helped to overcome an ethnocentric worldview and to develop blended linguistic and cultural spaces in terms of intercultural third spaces (Kramsch 1998, Witte 2014).

The students report a variety of factors that have contributed to a negative, i.e. ethnocentric attitude, including a failure to make linguistic progress or to establish a social network and resolve conflicts, or to a positive outcome in terms of language proficiency and intercultural immersion. Reported inhibiting factors that led to limited L2 interaction due to a withdrawal into the L1 community or a persistent negative perception of the L2 community range from conative and affective variables (anxiety, lack of confidence, development of demotivation, lack of willingness to interact), and the proficiency of L2 to external variables (location, modules at university, presence of L1 speakers, accommodation, Erasmus community). It has been shown that these individual affective, conative, cognitive and external variables interact in very complex ways, overlap and influence each other.

6.2 Theoretical and Methodological Limitations

The overall aim of this study was to identify key components which the students defined for effective and appropriate intercultural interaction. In this context, it needs to be pointed out that the underlying research discourse of these components is limited to European and North American conceptions, neglecting other, i.e. indigenous, Asian or African approaches towards intercultural competence. A reason for this negligence is the focus on a European linguistic and cultural area where these conceptions are commonly used. Another theoretical shortcoming in this regard is that the depictions of underlying concepts used as a basis for the study are drawn from several academic discourses but mostly from anthropological traditions. While comprehensive overviews on the usage of "culture" (Straub 2007) and "intercultural competence" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009) in different academic fields exist, further research is needed to globally compare and contrast the underlying concepts in their entirety, and culture-specific pragmatics on a metalevel.

Next, throughout this thesis, the fluid and complex nature of intercultural competence and the subjectivity of the concept have been stressed. Researchers claim that cultures should not be considered in isolation or separate from each other but as dynamic, merging and interweaving constructs, whereby people can be affiliated to several cultures in their lifetime. Yet, in the analysis of the data, participants often resort to a division of nations, based on the material provided by the participants. In hindsight, the phrasing of

some interview questions, i.e. "Have you noticed any cultural differences in Ireland and Germany?" may have led to this categorisation.

Furthermore, culture is distinguished from both universal human nature and unique individual personality in the research discourse. It is advocated that culture is a social product, acquired in one's social environment and not inherited. However, exactly where the boundaries between human nature, personality traits and culture lie – or if they exist or are definable – is still matter of humanistic debate and needs to be further explored.

In the theoretical section of this work it was pointed out that intercultural competence is a complex, dynamic concept consisting of several key elements which are interconnected. Interdependence has been analysed in several ways – in terms of the impact of individual understandings of culture on attitudes and behaviour, the significance of different kinds of motivation for effective and appropriate behaviour, L2 awareness in relation to cultural awareness and the impact of different identity constructions on values, attitudes and behaviour, for example the influence of the level of ambitiousness on intercultural engagement or the appreciation of family ties in relation to self-confidence. In the students' elaborations, no gender differences could be detected. However, the interplay of assumed key components of intercultural competence models in terms of how these attributes especially coalesce and are interconnected has not been covered in more detail in empirical studies and needs to be further investigated.

Furthermore, previous research has criticised the fact that most of the current models of intercultural competence do not take into account body language, gestures and mimics. Yet, they form a major part in the interpretation and perception of interactions (Mehrabian 1972: 108) and reveal information on feelings and thoughts expressed in interactions. As Matsumoto (2006: 221) points out, culture influences our non-verbal behaviour, such as emotional expressions and gazing. The meaning and interpretation of body language cues are agreed upon within cultural communities and interpretation patterns can vary, which may contribute to misunderstandings. Byram (2009) had originally attempted to include non-verbal communication in his model but refrained from doing so as he recognised that many teachers would not see the need or feel qualified to teach it (Byram 2009: 322). None of the questions in the research tools of this study (interviews, intercultural encounters) explicitly cover body language as an attribute of intercultural competence and body language has not been incorporated in the analysis

of the present data either. While some students do mention differences in this regard – i.e. in terms of being "stared at" on public transport – differences in intonation, facial expressions, gestures or mimics have been neglected. Since nonverbal behaviour is mostly situated on a subconscious level and therefore difficult to grasp or impossible to unlearn and relearn in a way that can be employed in an automated manner, research on the impact of body language could give some indication as to the causes for intercultural misunderstandings.

Body language not only plays an important role in the theory of intercultural competence; it also has implications on the methodology. Despite the advantages of audio-recording and notes on body language, pauses or smiles, information on non-verbal cues such as intonation, pitch, speed rate, body language or gestures of both the interviewee and the interviewer are lost, which, however, do have an influence on the process of the interview. The only contribution to this aspect is the way in which importance is attached to pauses in speaking, smiles, laughs or sighs in the transcription of the interviews.

As for the methodology, the present study is based on a qualitative research paradigm and cannot be evaluated in quantitative, objective terms. The questions in the interviews and the encounters are based on the assumption that the stories told by the students in the interviews and intercultural encounter forms provide access to their subjective experiences of cultural reality. A narrative approach is implemented to encourage students to reflect and contextualise their experiences abroad and articulate their own understanding of intercultural competence. There are no objective categories of right or wrong but references to individually ascribed meanings to observations and actions. Self-narratives were used because they "play an important role in the construction of identities, and partly because narrative is well-suited to the description of development and change within individuals" (Benson *et al.* 2012: 182). It could, however, be argued that there is an over-reliance on the students' self-reports. Yet, this approach allowed for a particular depth and breadth of the students' subjectivities.

In this context it also needs to be pointed out that a control group was not included in the experimental design because the focus of the study was not primarily set on a cause and effect relation of a year abroad. In other words, the research questions were not aimed at finding out if the participants developed more intercultural competence than their fellow students who stayed in Maynooth. Rather, the focus of the investigation was on

how the students' notions, experiences and perceptions mirrored current theoretical models of intercultural competence.

Despite the consideration of interlocutors in the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Council of Europe 2009), the attributes have been discussed from an emic point of view only in this study. More research is needed on the etic point of view in intercultural encounters. This could form the basis for reflection and intercultural dialogue, for example in terms of a comparison of self- and external perception in intercultural encounters.

Since the overall aim of the study was to focus on key components of intercultural competence models in the study abroad context, it is not possible to compare the students' outcomes with their counterparts who stayed at NUIM. Neither can a comparison be made between Erasmus students and ELA students (who acted as English Language Assistants at German or Austrian secondary schools) as the data was not analysed separately since all students of the main focus group participated in the Erasmus programme. However, a differentiation between these three groups in the future may provide insights into different forms of perceptions and interpretations of the concept of intercultural competence in these contexts, as, for example, the ELA students cannot retreat into an Erasmus bubble, since they are located mainly in small towns.

As pointed out in chapter 4, participation in this study was voluntary and the response rate fell by 45%, which is quite usual in longitudinal studies (Dörnyei 2007: 53, 82). The overall sample size of 27 students with 11 key informants conforms with Dörnyei's theory (2007: 127) that a sample size of 6 to 10 participants is adequate and suffices in an interview study to provide saturated and rich data to understand the (subtle) meanings in the investigated phenomenon. However, there are multiple reasons for attrition and as far as validity is concerned, Dörnyei (2007: 53) emphasises that dropouts may not be random but differential. In the case of the present study, those students who provided a reason uttered that they had fallen ill, they had dropped out of college or they were unwilling to continue because of a lack of time. This fact also contributes to a biased representation of the sample as there could be certain types of participants who remained until the end whereas others with different characteristics did not (Dörnyei 2007: 82). However, a connection of drop-out reasons and characteristics has not been investigated in the framework of this study.

The main study consists of pre-stay and post-stay-abroad interviews as well as reflections on critical intercultural encounters during the participants' stay abroad, which encourage reflection and the development of awareness in dealing with cultural Otherness. This research design is based on the hypotheses of Bennett (1993a), Byram (2009), Deardorff (2011), Fantini (2005), Kramersch (2009a) and Witte (2014) that change happens over time when personal experiences are involved, with personal interaction being essential for the development. The range of different temporal contexts allowed for a more varied picture of the object of investigation as dynamics and temporal variation of reflection could be captured. However, most of the retrieved information consists of retrospective data. In this sense, the qualitative approach in this study does not allow for a measurement of degrees of intercultural competence components or in-depth comparisons among individual students. Furthermore, it needs to be considered that the post-stay interviews with the pilot phase students were only conducted 3 months after their return to Ireland and their memory may have become more selective and blurred at that stage.

Since qualitative research is interpretative, the research outcome is "ultimately the product of the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data" Dörnyei (2007: 38). The researcher is the primary "measurement device" (Miles & Huberman 1994: 7; cited in Dörnyei 2007: 38) and the analysis of the data is to some extent biased depending on the researcher's experiences, frames of reference and underlying concepts, and also on the level of relations with the study participants. Hence, the researcher plays an important role and an objective comparison of the data is not possible, but neither is it the aim of the study. In this study, my own status as researcher and Austrian lecturer at NUIM who is familiar with the study participants could have caused bias, i.e. in terms of interpretations based on self-fulfilling prophecies, in the findings and the study procedure.

Interviews inherently involve a social relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee which affects the procedure of the interview (Maxwell 1992: 295). The students knew me as a lecturer and some students participated in weekly informal *Stammtisch* events which involved open and personal discussions. In the interviews, the participants were not anonymous and knew that their statements could be allocated, which might have influenced their responses. The participants furthermore knew that I would not be indifferent to any of their difficulties or problems. On the other hand, the students also had an idea about my imperfections, which probably made it easier for them

to share personal content and open up in the interviews. It seemed that the participants did not mind talking about their personal experiences; this is also proven by the fact that the students opened up even more after the recording had stopped and revealed very deep-seated personal feelings and beliefs. This conduct in interactions may, however, hint at social desirability bias.

In an information sheet (Appendix A), the students were informed of the study content and it sometimes seemed that the participants provided answers they considered socially acceptable and believed to be expected of them, for example that they had a great time. In this context, it is estimated that the presence of a dictaphone partly inhibited the students in talking completely honestly and freely. After the recording, when the dictaphone was switched off, a few students asked if their answers had met my expectations and apologised for what they thought did not match the desired answers in terms of negative accounts of their stay abroad, difficulties in immersing in the new cultural contexts and getting to know people. Therefore, valuable material was manually collected after the dictaphone had been switched off and integrated into the analysis. Hence, it became obvious that some students had tried to provide answers to please me. In this regard, another influence on the interviewees' responses could have been rhetorical questions such as "You become more open so?", which could have guided their response. Nevertheless, the data provides a diversity and heterogeneity of experiences and perceptions.

A few students uttered contradictory statements, which could also be related to social desirability biases. During his stay and retrospectively one student, for example, refers to a continuum of "very German" to "more intensive German" to "a little less German" in terms of the degree of stereotypes (punctuality, friendliness) and regards all stereotypes to be true to some extent. Yet, later on, he stresses individuality as a dimension of culture. Unfortunately, this contradiction was disregarded during the interview process and only detected in the framework of the analysis. In a similar vein, another student adheres to the idea of the Irish being "more awkward" than the Germans, which is culturally attributed, despite stressing that he does not believe in stereotypes.

As became clear in the analysis of the data, the students sometimes used vague statements that would have been worth investigating further since they could have given more indication of the students' understanding of intercultural competence.

Unfortunately, they were disregarded at the time the interviews were conducted and only detected in the framework of the analysis. One student, for example, wants to explore what it is like to be "more European" and does not feel like "a European girl who is coming back". Her responses indicate that she does not identify as a European citizen, which should have been discussed in light of intercultural competence.

Furthermore, the data shows that questions sometimes remained unanswered in the course of the interviews, but this was hardly pointed out in order to keep the flow of the conversation. A similar effect could be observed in the encounters. The interviews were conducted and the encounters were filled in at the request of the researcher and there were no further incentives to do so. The instructions for both tools said that the participants could skip questions if they felt uncomfortable with answering them. In this context, Bolger *et al.* (2003: 593) refer to "honest forgetfulness" in that the participants forget to answer a question and could also be related to selective memories.

6.3 Implications

There are a number of implications which may be derived from the findings of this study. A stay abroad may provide excellent opportunities for authentic L2 encounters that facilitate language acquisition and an immersion into new cultural surroundings. However the study shows that although a stay abroad may contribute to openness, change in attitudes, beliefs and perspectives, critical awareness and adaptation to new contexts, this is not automatically the case. Not all students have profited to the same extent from their stay abroad. Despite the fact that they feel encouraged to go abroad, build social networks and plunge into new cultural surroundings, they retrospectively feel underprepared for the linguistic, social and psychological challenges they face during their stay abroad. As a result, the students are confronted with new, challenging cultural surroundings, since the outcomes of interaction in L2 are more unpredictable than in a structured classroom setting. These findings could be utilised in the framework of a preparatory module on intercultural competence.

As already mentioned, the department of German in Maynooth offers the module "Introduction to Intercultural Studies" as an optional module (5 ECTS) for postgraduate students. This module aims to analyse the concepts of language and culture in general but also in relation to language teaching and learning. Theories of blended spaces are explored and models of intercultural competence are assessed with regard to their

relevance in the foreign language education context. Given the insights of this study, it might be useful to offer a similar module at undergraduate level, before the students' year abroad, to facilitate intercultural learning and make students aware of possible challenges and positive outcomes of their year abroad.

Altogether, the investigation demonstrates that foreign language education must be regarded in its social environment (Byram 2008: 17). In the interviews, the students report that they form their opinion on the concept of culture and language, based on their previous encounters in the framework of secondary level school experiences, college courses and from the media. According to the students, lecturers provide factual information on grammar, linguistics and literature but also serve as points of reference in cultural matters. Stereotypical frames of cultural references, such as punctuality or directness, and expectations are mainly derived from the behaviour and demeanour of German lecturers, taken as representations of German culture and way of life. Therefore, lecturers and teachers need to be aware of their major role as cultural bodies and points of reference and their contribution to the students' opinion making.

The analysis further suggests that the participants use the term culture unreflectedly and regard it as a fixed entity which is equated with nations. Hence, in the framework of an intercultural competence module, it should first of all be established how the concept of intercultural competence is used in the context of language learning. In light of the myriad of conceptualisations, an initial reflection and discussion on the students themselves as cultural bearers would be helpful to highlight different underlying notions of culture and encourage students to reflect on their subjective relevances attached to different aspects of culture. Given that most participants in this study perceive culture to be a stable concept, it may be helpful to connect to the students' subjective lifeworlds with reference to culture as a fluid construct that is discursively produced – "a collection of various co-existing offerings that are originated by human beings in (re)action to their environment, interests and needs." (Heller 2010: 148). Which of these offerings become cultural norms is determined by existing societal, political and economic power constellations (Heller 2010: 148). Hence, instead of taking cultural norms for granted and assuming that they are widely understood in the same way, regularly implemented reflections on intercultural encounters in the students' own lifeworld may result in an awareness of their own cultural belonging and the complexity of cultural affiliations, which are not reduced to geographical or national boundaries. This process may assist students in distancing

themselves from their own frames of reference and help them acknowledge other frameworks and perspectives in terms of making the strange familiar and vice versa.

The data in this study furthermore indicates that while students perceive their own group as heterogeneous, they tend to perceive other cultural groups as rather homogeneous and as fixed entities. An awareness of the heterogeneity of one's own group, despite social cohesion, may raise awareness of diversity and individuality in other groups too, including auto- and heterostereotypes. Hence, interlocutors' heterogeneity gains in importance, and could become particularly decisive in situations of conflict or misunderstandings. A reflection of one's own construals of the world, underlying notions, emotions, personalities, circumstances or motives for certain behaviour and their dynamics and changeability due to context may therefore contribute to conflict management and may affect (intercultural) interaction positively. In this sense, the interaction with individuals who are moulded by various cultural patterns of construal and not with cultural entities may come to the forefront of the students' thinking. In the framework of this study, the AIE (Council of Europe 2009) has proved to be a good stimulus for intercultural engagement by reflecting on personal intercultural encounters. Its regular implementation could provide valuable starting points for discussion and could contribute to the students' awareness of progress in changes in attitude. It could also draw the students' attention to the complexity of their daily interactions and the danger of generalisations. However, as already mentioned, cultural conceptualisations are more deeply and profoundly embedded and their interpretations are context-contingent. As the data reveals, despite the implementation of the AIE (Council of Europe 2009), many students feel confirmed in their prejudice and presumptions and remain rather trapped in their ethnocentric worldviews. There is no guarantee that these activities will trigger motivation and that the expected learning progress and achievements will ultimately be accomplished. Rather, there is a variety of components (personality features, previous experiences, motivation, socialisation and so on) that contribute to motivation for and success in intercultural involvement. Nevertheless, reflection tools are useful to help students conduct a non-judgmental discussion on similarities and differences in the framework of their own experiences and may make students aware of hidden value attributions, as norms and stereotypes that are taken for granted are more likely to be questioned.

As for language acquisition, the study reveals an interesting aspect in relation to the linguistic self-concept of the students in the L2 setting. Although only one third of the students perform better in the language modules upon return, all students but one report more self-confidence in the use of L2 and refer to successes in expressing themselves in German interactions and accomplishing daily tasks. This development of self-confidence could be related to the fact that the students have developed a sense of "becoming a 'user', rather than a 'learner'" (Benson *et al.* 2012: 189) of German in everyday contexts which leads to a gain in pragmatic competence in *Alltagssprache*, while the students were previously mostly exposed to *Bildungssprache*. The study confirms that a few students indeed use German for their own communicative and reflective purposes for the first time during their residence abroad. This suggests that L2 education should allow for opportunities to be exposed to authentic L2 contexts, maybe in the framework of Internet-based activities or exchanges such as E-Tandems in order to enhance students' pragmatic competence in combination with linguistic competence, thus stressing the importance of interlocutors in interaction.

As for methodology, while this study has focused on the emic view of the students, another area worth investigating would be the external perspective on the acquired skills and knowledge, hence taking an etic approach towards the concept of intercultural competence. Upon the students' return, the lecturers at university could be questioned on their perception of differences along the dimensions of intercultural competence models between students who embarked on a year abroad versus those students who stayed at their home institutions. The emic notions of the students could then be compared to the etic ideas of the lecturers to include another level of perception of the construct.

Of the 27 participants in the study, 8 people now (2016) live abroad (in China, Finland, Germany, Norway and Switzerland), pursuing PhDs, working as teachers and as sales managers for international companies, while 16 students have pursued careers in Ireland, and the present place of residence of 3 participants is unknown. In the framework of a follow-up study, information on reasons why these students went abroad again while other students stayed in Ireland could provide insightful information regarding decisive factors for the willingness to invest in the construction of new identities and success factors for intercultural interactions.

To conclude, as Block (2007: 145–180) acknowledges (see chapter 3) and as it has been proven in the framework of this investigation, a year abroad in the framework of undergraduate studies does not necessarily lead to the development of intercultural competence and a broadening of students' identities if learners are not aware of the potential challenges and do not have the intention to engage. Hence, despite the students reporting on a successful stay abroad and efficient interaction in the intercultural context, the academic year abroad has not necessarily resulted in a change in perspectives towards different cultural frames and the development of intercultural, blended spaces. In this context, it has not yet been adequately explored why learners may sometimes be motivated, extroverted and confident and at other times unmotivated, introverted and anxious, while social distance between language learners and the target language community varies in different contexts (Norton Peirce 1995: 11). Hence, the participants of the study cannot simply be defined as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, open-minded or tolerant, without bearing in mind that affective factors are often "socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual" (Norton Peirce 1995: 12). Furthermore, intercultural competence might not suffice for successful intercultural communication due to inequalities and socio-economic disparities within social communities. Irrespective of intercultural competence skills, individuals with disprivileged cultural affiliations may not have the opportunity to participate in an equal intercultural dialogue (Barrett *et al.* 2014: 24), which in turn does not enable successful intercultural encounters. It has therefore been argued that intercultural competence constitutes a discursive construct which is influenced by power discourses and susceptible to multiple interpretations, and hence represents a floating signifier.

The findings of the study empirically confirm Lantolf's (2009: 18–19) observation that "explanation of any human condition is so bound to context, so completely interpretive at so many levels, that it cannot be achieved by considering isolated segments of life in vitro". Hence, the rather general notions underlying intercultural competence models cannot account for the wide range of eventualities in occasionally stressful social interactions and real-life contexts.

Intercultural competence is a practical wisdom to act virtuously in difficult social situations in diverse cultures. Individual motives, value systems, attitudes, frames of reference and identity concepts are important internal elements to develop practical

knowledge on how to deal with the potential messiness of social interactions in intercultural encounters. Descriptive models of intercultural competence conceptualise intercultural competence and its development but it is more important to gain practical insights from practitioners on how to create an environment that facilitates intercultural learning involving personal experience with unfamiliar values, ideas, concepts and cultural patterns. It is up to the individual learner with his or her subjective baggage of cognitive, emotional and behavioural traits (including the preparedness to invest time and effort) to engage holistically with the other and learn from experience of strange patterns of construal, values, ideas and concepts.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix A: Information Sheet

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, MAYNOOTH
MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND
SCHOOL OF MODERN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND CULTURES



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

DEPARTMENT OF GERMAN
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INFORMATION SHEET on the Research Project

"A reflective model of intercultural competence: An empirical, multi-dimensional approach in the framework of studying abroad"

- This study is part of the above research project in the framework of a PhD.
- The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of students of German at NUIM who have gone or are going abroad for an academic year in the context of their studies.
- This study aims to isolate the impact of the year abroad and NOT to scrutinise or judge individual experiences and attitudes.
- Final-year-participants will be asked to take part in a post-return interview of about 30 minutes to provide insights into their experiences during their stay.
- 2nd-year-participants will be asked to take part in a pre-departure interview of about 30 minutes to provide insights into their expectations of their stay abroad.
- Additionally, 2nd-year-participants will be asked to reflect on their stay abroad by providing information during their stay abroad on intercultural encounters they experience.
- For this purpose, 2nd-year-participants will be part of the group "Year Abroad for German Studies" on the Moodle platform, to allow them to stay in touch with the researcher and their colleagues.
- After their stay abroad, 2nd-year-students will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview of about 30 minutes to provide insights into their experiences during their stay.
- All interviews will be audio-recorded.
- The written data on the Moodle platform will be recorded.
- The anonymity of all participants is ensured as the answers (to interview questions and on the intercultural encounters) will be coded and findings shall be reported anonymously.
- The data gathered in this study is stored for 7 years (after it has been anonymised) and may be used for future research.
- Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from it at any time, without giving reasons.

PhD Supervisor: Dr. Arnd Witte, School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures,
Head of Department of German, National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Tel: +353-1-7083717 E-mail: a.witte@nuim.ie

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

8.2 Appendix B: Consent Form

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, MAYNOOTH
MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND
SCHOOL OF MODERN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND CULTURES

DEPARTMENT OF GERMAN
Researcher: Linda Huber
Tel: +353-1-7083809 Email: linda.huber@nuim.ie



CONSENT FORM Participation in the Research Project

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in research for the project entitled **"A reflective model of intercultural competence: An empirical, multi-dimensional approach in the framework of studying abroad"**

- I confirm that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it.
- I read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- I fully understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.
- I agree to take part in the above study.
- I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I agree to my interviews being audio-recorded.
- I agree to my written data on the platform moodle to be recorded.
- I can request that the recording equipment is switched off should I feel uncomfortable at any stage.
- I can request that written data is deleted should I feel uncomfortable at any stage.
- I am entitled to copies of all recordings made and am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once the study is completed.
- I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) and may be used for future research.
- I am entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details.
- I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

PhD Supervisor: Dr. Arnd Witte, School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures,
Head of Department of German, National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Tel: +353-1-7083717 E-mail: a.witte@nuim.ie

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

8.3 Appendix C: Pre-Stay Interview Guide

Pre-Stay Interview Guide

Components	Content
Introduction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Thank students for their participation. •Purpose: study on students' experiences on their stay abroad •Length: about 30 minutes •No right or wrong answers because the questions relate to personal experience. •Record this interview but I guarantee that your data will be dealt with anonymously in the study. Do you agree with this procedure? •If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, please let me know and I will stop recording. Do you have any questions?
Demographic Data (for Identification):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Age •Nationality •Subjects
Linguistic Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Language competences – how many languages? •Self-perception of competence in German

Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is it important to study German? • Time investment per week – other than studies • Reasons for going abroad • Kind of exchange programme – why? • Choice of place – why? • What courses abroad?
Experience – Culture – Stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you spent some time in a German speaking country before? If so, where and in what role? • Interaction with people with different cultural backgrounds? What contexts? • Who has influenced your view on cultures? How? • Differences based in culture • Experience with stereotypes and their accuracy • Expected cultural differences – why? • What elements in your life do you view as part of your culture? How acquired? • Different styles of communication? • Differences in conflict behaviour?
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge about host cultures?
Skills – Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usage of intercultural skills? • Intercultural relationships? – Insights? • Adaptation to intercultural situations? How so?
Expectations – Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations on your stay abroad – how could they be fulfilled? • What needs to happen for the stay to be a success? • Aspects you are particularly (not) looking forward to? Likes/dislikes? • How do you envisage your life in a year's time? What will have changed?

8.4 Appendix D: Post-Stay Interview Guide

Post-Stay Interview Guide

Components	Content
Introduction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Thank students for their participation.</i> • <i>Purpose: study on students' experiences on their stay abroad</i> • <i>Length: about 30 minutes</i> • <i>No right or wrong answers because the questions relate to personal experience abroad.</i> • <i>Record this interview but I guarantee that your data will be dealt with anonymously in the study. Do you agree with this procedure?</i> • <i>If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, please let me know and I will stop recording. Do you have any questions?</i>
Demographic Data (for Identification):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Nationality • Subjects
Linguistic Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language competences – how many languages? Level? • Self-perception of competence in German
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time investment per week – other than studies? • Reasons for going abroad • Happy with exchange programme – why (not)? • Happy with choice of place – why (not)?

Experience – Culture – Stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has influenced your view on cultures? How? • Interaction with people with different cultural backgrounds? Contexts? • Encounter differences based in culture? • Accuracy of stereotypes? • What elements in your life do you view as part of your culture? How acquired? • Who has influenced your view on cultures? How? • New insights about cultures? Aspects you particularly appreciate/dislike?
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge about host cultures? • Knowledge acquired with relevance to intercultural competence?
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural encounters? How did they make you feel? • Have interests changed during the stay abroad? • Changes in perspective? • Lessons learned?
Self-Perception /Self-Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-perception in different cultural contexts? • Do you think others see you differently since you have come back? How so? • As a result of your experience, do you feel you have changed? Your life? • Are there elements of the host culture that you view part of your own?
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant intercultural relationships? How? • Experience with cultural stress? Coping strategies? • Situations where your values were questioned and how you handled them? • Adaptation to intercultural situations? How so? • Any intercultural skills in your life that were developed? • If you had to pick one aspect, what did you learn during your stay abroad? How?

Looking Back – Looking Forward
Expectations – Success

- Expectations met during the stay abroad? How so?
- Any expectations disappointed?
- What influenced these outcomes?
- Have you profited from your stay abroad?
- Overall successful stay? Why/not?
- Looking back, what would you change about your stay abroad?
- What are you most happy with about your stay abroad?
- If you could give some advice to students, who want to go abroad in the future, what would it be?

8.5 Appendix E: Instructions



Dear Participants,

I hope you are well and had a good summer.

Thank you very much again for participating in my study on your stay abroad and sharing your thoughts and experiences with me. When I interviewed you in April/May I informed you about this moodle course "Year Abroad for German Studies" in which you can exchange information and ideas with your fellow students in forums and chats (see section "Introduction and Welcome"). The platform is also aimed at facilitating you to work on the Intercultural Encounters-Tool. This tool has been designed to help you analyse and reflect on specific intercultural encounters which you will experience during your stay abroad by means of answering questions about various aspects of these encounters.

Altogether, I would kindly like to ask you to discuss **3 encounters** (one every three months) that you have during your stay.

The focus is always on **ONE** experience. Please avoid talking in general terms about a trip that you made and instead choose just one specific encounter or meeting with a particular person from a German speaking country. It may be someone you know or have known for some time/a stranger/a new colleague/... .

Please choose an experience that is important to you – it made you think / it surprised you / you enjoyed it / you found it difficult / funny, etc. – and give this experience a name or title, i.e. "Arrival in Germany" or "Staying with an Austrian friend". It does not matter if the experience is positive or negative.

ALL EXPERIENCES ARE IMPORTANT.

You find the first template of the Intercultural Encounters-Tool in section I and can choose to either fill in the questionnaire on-line or, if you do not have enough time to do so, you may download the questionnaire as a word file and then send it back to me. I guarantee that no other member of the platform will be able to read your questionnaire contributions.

Please feel free to additionally use this platform to exchange information, organise trips, help each other, ... during your stay abroad.

Thanks a million for your contributions and all the best for your studies abroad,

Linda Kuber

8.6 Appendix F: Intercultural Encounters Form



Intercultural Encounters⁷⁹

The “Intercultural Encounters” Tool has been designed to help you analyse a specific intercultural encounter which you have experienced during your stay abroad.



The focus is on **ONE** event or experience which you had with a particular person/group of people from a German speaking country. It may be somebody you know or have known for some time. Please avoid talking in general terms about a trip that you made, and instead choose just one specific encounter or meeting. Please choose an experience which is important to you – it made you think / it surprised you / you enjoyed it / you found it difficult / funny, etc. – and give the experience a name or title, i.e. “Arrival in Germany”, “My first conversation in a foreign language” or “Staying with an Austrian friend”.

This tool helps you to think about the experience by asking you questions about it. Try to answer the questions honestly. It does not matter if the experience is positive or negative

ALL EXPERIENCES ARE IMPORTANT.

Altogether, I will ask you to describe **3 intercultural encounters** (one every three months) you experience during your stay abroad. Please feel assured that your entries will be dealt with anonymously and nobody apart from yourself and the researcher will be able to see your contributions in the Intercultural Encounters Template.

Thanks a million for your cooperation and contributions,

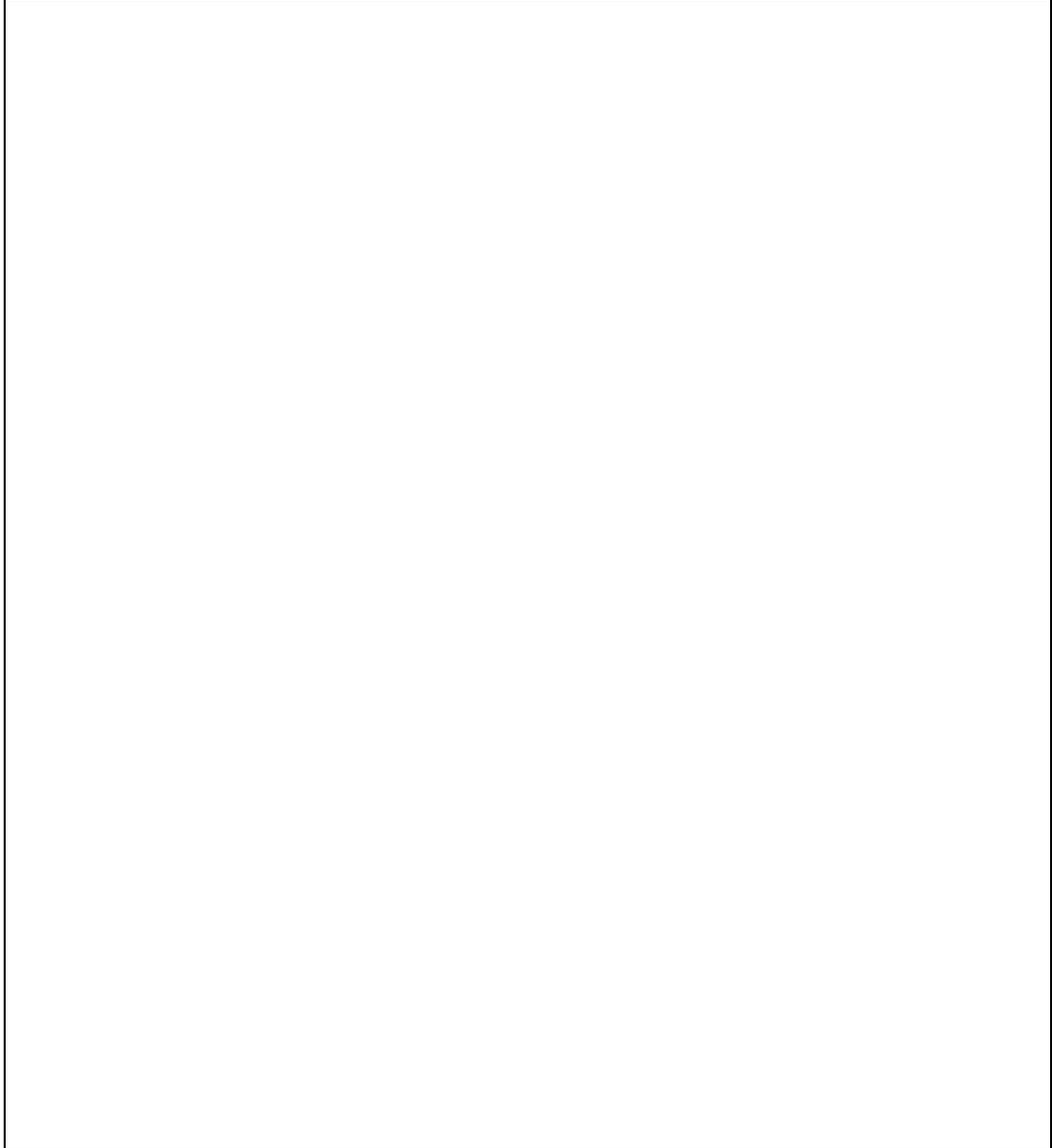
Linda Huber

⁷⁹ based on the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, Council of Europe (2009)

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.*

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the question 'How would you define yourself?'. The box is currently blank.

* Here are some elements you wish to include if you find them to be an important part of your identity: your name, age, gender, family, nationality, languages you speak, studies, hobbies, member of any type of club,

Encounter I

Title: Give your encounter a name which says something about it...

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

Time: When did it happen?

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

- study
- leisure
- at work
- other:

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

- It made me think about something I had not thought before.
- It was the first time I had had this kind of experience.
- It is the most recent experience of that kind.

- It surprised me.
- It disappointed me.
- It pleased me.
- It angered me.
- It changed me.

Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were...

My thoughts at the time were...

What I did at the time was...

(for example: Did you pretend you had not noticed something that was strange? Did you change the subject of the conversation? Did you ask questions about what you found strange?)

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? Happy/upset/etc.. How did you know?

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened? Do you think they found it strange/an everyday experience/unusual/surprising/shocking/interesting/...? Choose one or more of these or add your own and say how you noticed that.

I am not sure because they seemed to hide their feelings by...

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?

For example: I had to explain myself using gestures/to explain words/simplify my language...

Did you already have any knowledge or previous experience which helped you to communicate better? For example: I knew about how people communicated differently which helped me to understand the experience better. I knew for example that...

I am not sure because they seemed to hide their feelings by...

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?

Were you aware **at the time** of any differences and, if so, what were they?

Looking Back...

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other similarities? If so, what are they?

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other differences? If so what are they?

Looking Back...

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?

Choose **one** or **more** of the following and **complete** the sentence **OR invent** your own.

- The way I acted in the experiences was appropriate because what I did was ...
- I think I could have acted differently by doing the following ...
- I think the best reaction from me would have been ...
- My reaction was good because ...
- I hid my emotions by ...

Looking Back...

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?

For example: I had to explain myself using gestures/to explain words/simplify my language...

Looking Back...

Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience? If so, what did you do?

How did this encounter change you?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION!

8.7 Appendix G: Samples of Completed Intercultural Encounter Forms

8.7.1 Student A: Encounter II

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

It's important to have some fun and to learn lots. I like when people are friendly and helpful towards each other so I'm trying to make the first step with this and I expect and usually get the same from others.

I'd like everybody to think that I'm pretty, lovely, intelligent, and friendly.

- [name]
- [age]
- [sex]
- [command of languages]
- single
- music, languages, traveling, sports, reading, drinking

Encounter II: Monday's beer drinking with [name]

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

There was a little student party in the student accommodation and I met [name] there, he said he needs to practise English with me but I convinced him I need to learn German more desperately than he English, so we spoke German and had a good conversation and lots of fun, and we said we would meet every Monday evening and drink one or two beers and have a chat and we have been doing that for months now and we have become very good friends.

Time: October 2012

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

[place], studying, partying

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

It pleased me.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

Some other people were around as well and we talked to them too and they were fun too, but it's just me and [name] who are meeting for a chat every Monday.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

Name: good looking, well dressed, male, younger, Hamburg, studies law, good fun and very clever.

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were...
Good mood, tipsy, eager to meet new people and to speak German.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? Happy/upset/etc..
How did you know?
He said he likes beer, so we had something in common and he wanted to meet some new people as well I think.

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?
We were both curious, wanted to meet new people.
Were you aware **at the time** of any differences and, if so, what were they?
I didn't know anyone, while he already knew lots of people in [place], because he had lived here for about four years.

8.7.2 Student B: Encounter I

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

My name is [name]. I'm [age] years old and I'm from Dublin. I study German and [subject] in NUI Maynooth. I speak fluent English and broken German. I play gaelic football at home. I have a niece and nephew who I adore and great family, friends and boyfriend. Keeping all these people happy is important to me and between them, playing sports and being a full time student, I'm a very busy person. I think my friends would describe as open-minded, relaxed and sometimes impatient.

Encounter I

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

I had only been in Germany about 3 or 4 days and we had to go sign our lease for our student accommodation with the secretary of our particular apartment block. I went into her office and sat opposite her at her desk. I was speaking in German to her obviously, but my German was still pretty shaky at this early stage (especially not having spoken German for the past 3 summer months). The flatshare we had been given from our application was awful. It was a 30-minute tram ride from the city and no other students lived around the area. The area was actually more of a ghetto type area (really not ideal for Erasmus students). But it was too late by the time we arrived in [place] to try look for another place so we accepted it but on this meeting with Frau [name] to sign the lease. I told her we just wanted to sign the lease for 1 semester and not 2. She replied to me that I would be homeless for 2nd semester. This was the beginning of the worst meeting I've ever had with anybody. Literally. So the meeting went on and I had to fill out bank details. The sheet was all in German bank abbreviations, which I obviously would not know, so I asked her for some help in filling it out (it was a bank form for my rent payment which was pretty important so I didn't want to make any mistakes). She replied 'God I thought all Erasmus students were expected to even have a little bit of German'. It was really shocking and this kind of attitude continued throughout. I left her office crying, but not before I told her how she was the most unfriendly woman I had ever met.

Time: September 2012

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

Studentenwerk [place], signing my lease

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

X study = yes

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

X It was the first time I had had this kind of experience.

Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction.

I chose this experience because I don't think anybody would get this kind of treatment from anybody in Ireland. And I felt so disappointed with Germany.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

Frau (name), secretary in charge of student accomodation

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

Older, female, nothing too important

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were...

Felt homesick very, very quickly. Really angry at how I was being treated.

My thoughts at the time were...

I felt like "I'm taking a year out of my life to come to Germany, putting my family under huge financial pressure, to learn your language and you can't even speak to me politely."

What I did at the time was...

I'm a person who cries very easily so I cried but still made myself tell her what I thought about her before I left.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? Happy/upset/etc..
How did you know?

I imagine she felt angry at some stupid little Erasmus student who's German was rubbish.

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened? Do you think they found it strange/an everyday experience/unusual/surprising/shocking/interesting/...?
Choose one or more of these or add your own and say how you noticed that.

I think she felt that it was fine for her to speak to someone that way and I think she was surprised that I had stood up to her before I left.

Looking Back...

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other differences? If so what are they?

I think German and Irish people are very different. An Irish person would be so much more friendly and helpful, especially to a fragile Erasmus student.

Looking back at the situation, are you aware **now** of any other differences? If so, what are they?

I think German and Irish people are very different. An Irish person would be so much more friendly and helpful, especially to a fragile Erasmus student.

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?

Choose **one** or **more** of the following and **complete** the sentence **OR invent** your own.
The way I acted in the experiences was appropriate because what I did was how I should have reacted.

I think I could have acted differently by doing the following: maybe not crying.

I think the best reaction from me would have been: what I did, telling her she was rude.

My reaction was good because, if somebody spoke to me that way in Ireland I would tell the them that they are being rude.

How did this encounter change you?

I built a thicker skin for the harsh attitude of the Germans.

8.7.3 Student D: Encounter I

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

I am a 22 year old male NUI Maynooth student. I study German and [subject] and I am currently carrying out an Erasmus programme in [place], Germany. I speak German (B2/C1 standard) and Irish (B1/2 standard). I am an outdoor sports enthusiast and have worked for a number of years as a kayaking instructor. I have also worked as a barman in many places. Both these jobs require a lot of social interaction so I feel that I have quite good social skills. I like to think of myself as an easy going open minded person who is easy to talk and keen to try everything. I enjoy meeting new people, especially those from other countries and backgrounds and experiencing cultural differences.

Encounter I: My first encounter with German speakers while in Germany

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

The day after arriving in [place], I went to sign my lease and get the keys for my apartment. For this, I went to the administration building of my apartment where I spoke with a woman from the administration team. As this person had no English, the encounter was done through German and as it was my second day in [place] my German was quite poor. I would expect that a member of the administration team for an international student apartment complex would have some English and if not would have some patience with someone trying to speak German, but this was not the case. I found this woman rather rude and had little understanding for my situation. She gave as little help as possible and was keen to get rid of me. I tried my best to communicate through but she seemed annoyed that she had to repeat some things.

Time: It happened on my second day living in [place] 2012

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

It took place in the offices of my apartment complex. I was there to get keys and sign my lease.

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

It was the first time I had had this kind of experience.
 It surprised me.
 It disappointed me.

Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction.

It made me nervous about the coming year in Berlin. I was worried that all Germans were going to be so unfriendly/ unhelpful.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

A member of the administration team from my apartment complex.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

One thing I find worthwhile mentioning is that this woman was not much older than me, maybe five years older.

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were: At the time, I felt annoyed that someone could be so rude and be so unsympathetic to my situation.

My thoughts at the time were: I thought it was very unprofessional for some to behave in such a way.

What I did at the time was: I ignored her behaviour.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? How did you know? I think that she was also frustrated with the situation as my German was so poor, which made communication difficult.

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened?

I would have thought that she found this to be an everyday encounter as she was a member of the administration team for an international student apartment complex, which is why I found the manner in which she behaved so surprising.

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?
I remember using a lot of hand gestures to communicate.

Did you already have any knowledge or previous experience which helped you to communicate better?

I had heard from a few different people that German could be rather cold in nature so I tried to be as nice as possible, but I was still surprise with the situation.

Looking Back...

How did this encounter change you?

At the time, I felt that this person was very rude because of the manner in which they behaved and the longer I was in Berlin I saw that most Germans seemed to act in a similar way. At first, I thought it was as other people had said, that Germans are quite cold in nature, but I now see that this is not so. I have come to realise that it is not that Germans are cold, but rather that Irish people are overly polite. What I had misinterpreted to be rude is actually just a reserved mature, something which Irish people lack.

8.7.4 Student E: Encounter I

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

I am [name]. I am 20 years old. I'm from [place] and currently living in [place]. I feel very attached to [place] and being a [inhabitant of the place]. My family and girlfriend and close friends are extremely important to me. I study [subject] and German and love the language and trying to master it. I am very laid back and easy going. I love football and play for a club and love music. I'm still unsure about a career I'd like to pursue and don't plan to rush any decision. I like all sorts of people but mostly people who are not too high maintenance or people who get too hung on minor details. I dislike unnecessary stress or confrontation and don't like to try and manipulate others or lead them to a certain view or direction. I like to be seen as a rational person who is enjoyable to be around.

Encounter I: Organising an oral exam with a tutor

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

It was after a history class and I had to go and ask about organising an oral exam for after the semester. I walked up to him at the end of the class and he seemed busy talking to other students. I wanted to come across as capable with the language as possible so was mentally preparing myself to speak German in a more polite and formal manner than usual. I was speaking to him and making a greater effort than usual to follow exactly what he was saying as I sometimes have trouble understanding his accent and because I wanted to be as clear about the situation as possible. He eventually suggested I take a big exam after the summer semester instead of an exam after each semester, which I didn't want to do but I was so focused on having a clear conversation with him that I agreed. I left and immediately realised that I had just agreed to something I would have preferred not to do so I had to find him again and correct the situation.

Time: During December in the afternoon

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

A classroom.

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

study

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

It made me think about something I had not thought before.

Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction.

I realised that I should focus more on communicating what I wish to communicate instead of trying to just get through conversations and just being happy with speaking properly through German.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

The lecturer.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

An older male lecturer, probably around 50.

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were: Just hoping I could properly organise my exam.

My thoughts at the time were: Trying to organise my exam.

What I did at the time was: I accepted his suggestion because I was focusing too much on understanding what he was literally saying and should have tried to explain that I wanted something else than what he was suggesting.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? Happy/upset/etc..

How did you know?

I assume he didn't think much of the encounter.

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened? Do you think they found it strange/an everyday experience/unusual/surprising/shocking/interesting/...?

Choose one or more of these or add your own and say how you noticed that.

He seemed to be trying to accommodate me. Everyday experience for him.

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?

I made a conscious effort to speak in a more formal manner.

Did you already have any knowledge or previous experience which helped you to communicate better?

Nothing comes to mind.

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?

No.

Were you aware **at the time** of any differences and, if so, what were they?

I was trying to come across as totally competent in the language whereas it was his normal language so he was just speaking normally.

Looking Back...

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other similarities? If so, what are they?

No.

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other differences? If so what are they?

No.

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?

Choose **one** or **more** of the following and **complete** the sentence **OR invent** your own.

- I think I could have acted differently by doing the following ...

Sticking to my guns and trying to get the arrangement I wanted instead of focusing on coming across as a natural speaker of German.

Looking Back...

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?

I tried to speak as clearly as possible and focus on understanding exactly what was being said to me so that I was clear in what the arrangement was.

Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience? If so, what did you do?

Nothing in particular.

How did this encounter change you?

It made me realise that I should be more focused on communicating what I want to say ahead of just being satisfied with speaking correctly through German

8.7.5 Student F: Encounter I

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

My name is [name] and I am [...] currently studying in [place]. I'm fluent in three languages [...]. I'd like to see myself as very independent, more than most people my age, which is probably because I've moved country a lot on my own. I'm also trustworthy and honest. I am strong and mature, I can handle most situations without panicking and I am not the person who will sit at home crying because I can't do something or because I'm homesick. I believe that I can do whatever I want as long as I put my mind into it. Traveling is a huge part of my life too, I want to see the world. I go abroad as often as I can, preferably with my boyfriend who is apart from my family the most important person in my life.

Encounter I: Meeting one of my flatmates for the first time

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

It was my first or my second day in [place]. I had just arrived and had already met 1/3 flatmates. Then the girl in the room next to me came to introduce herself. I reached out to shake her hand and introduced myself in English when she just replied with an embarrassed giggle I realized that she doesn't speak English. I re-introduced myself in German and said that my speaking in German isn't so good but I can understand a lot. At this stage it had turned a bit awkward and we both just went into our rooms. I was still so insecure about my German at this stage that I avoided her for months! Luckily she's quite quiet and stays in her room a lot so it wasn't hard but I also think she was avoiding me too. It was hard not having a common language at first, her not speaking English and me not being comfortable enough to speak German.

Time: During my first or second day in [place]

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

At my flat where I live.

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

X leisure

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

It was the first time I had had this kind of experience.
 It surprised me.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

Just the flatmate I was talking to.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

She's Asian, Chinese I think. Small, a girl approximately my age.

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were...
Confused, nervous, a little bit embarrassed. Afraid even. I was just hoping that I never would have to talk to her again.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? How did you know?
She seemed embarrassed and shy when she realized that we might not have a common language. I think she was avoiding me for ages after that because she was afraid that we were going to be left in a room with each other and having to talk to each other.
I think she must have been used to it since later I found out that my flatmates have had a lot of Erasmus students staying in their flat and a lot of them haven't spoken a word of German.

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?
Well at first we tried not to talk to each other at all. Now there's the eventual 'hello', and I sometimes tell her if my boyfriend is staying over or if friends are coming over. I don't think she's ever started talking to me first, I am always the one who takes the first step.

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?
I think we both just thought that it was awkward and uncomfortable and we wanted to avoid it happening again which is why we avoided each other.

Looking Back...

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?
I think my reaction was ok because it was genuine. I was taken by surprise. I don't think anything would change if I went back. I just didn't feel comfortable.

How did this encounter change you?
This encounter made me think about small things that could happen and prepare for little things that people might say to me. If I was going somewhere where I thought people might speak German to me I'd try to think about what they might say and what my appropriate answer might be.

8.7.6 Student G: Encounter II

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

Encounter I: I guess intelligence is an important aspect both to how I perceive myself and how others do too. I don't imagine myself being an incredibly smart or especially enlightened person. But as one wouldn't, I don't like to think of myself coming off as stupid or ignorant. In that respect I think I attempt to build up an air of intelligence, at least somewhat so that I don't appear to be a grovelling idiot. Which I think everyone does to a degree. However I guess that becomes problematic when one lives and studies in a country where you're no longer familiar with the finer nuances of its culture or language. You have to accept that you look like the bumbling idiot. No matter how much I like to think of myself as someone who is aware of social etiquette, I have to accept that I'm the outsider. And therefore, almost by default, I'm ignorant of something. So in a sense I've given myself more leeway here. At home I like to be taken serious on the odd occasion. And have people respect an opinion. Abroad, here in Deutschland, I'm blissfully and knowingly ignorant.

On a more character driven level, I like to imagine myself as somewhat artistic. I like to draw and play music. Though to no real end. I largely do it as a pastime and don't really enjoy performing in front of others. I'm no artistic genius, but I enjoy it. In fact most of my hobbies tend to be solitary ones. I enjoy my own company. I can't help it, as egotistical as it sounds. I guess I also consider myself a consumer of media. I live in an age where one could easily sit around all day consuming a never-ending plethora of media; Books, TV shows, Films, Music, Video Games. I find these important too in my identification of myself.

Nationality has always been a funny subject for me. I am probably the least patriotic Irishman in existence. I've always been told I don't look extremely Irish. Nor do I have any recognisable Irish accent or any real strong accent for that matter. Having parents who loved to travel also led to me being born in a different country and travelling a lot in my youth. In that regard I am very lucky. In a sense, all of these compounding factors have led to me becoming a very neutral person, nationality-wise. Whilst I love Ireland and will probably never outright leave it, I tend not to identify myself by my Irish passport.

Encounter II: I don't think much has changed in my definition of myself since I last wrote this. I don't know whether you want me to give a lengthy answer or not. My hobbies, nationality etc. etc. have not changed clearly. I guess, the living abroad has probably made me realise I'm a lazier person than I should be. Both at home and over here. Not that I didn't know that before or anything. But I guess the 'broadening your horizons' part of travelling and living abroad definitely makes you realise how much you could be doing. Its humbling.

Encounter II: Old German Professors, friend or foe?

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

The encounter involves myself and a Turkish friend of mine, both of us Erasmus, attempting to find a professor in order to register for his class. The professor, who like a wizard of old, perched himself in his office atop some unreachable corner of the campus. When we finally found him, an encounter which could only be described as a myriad of confused faces began to unfold. The professor, to whom the wizard metaphor fits like a glove, was an aged and slightly stern looking German man, who greeted us into his office and sat us down in front of his desk. His pencil moustache twisting up into a smile as he cowered over us expectedly. We began asking him about the possibility of taking his classes (which weren't even classes, just exams) and what we would have to do/ the requirements/ etc. As my friend had weaker German than I, I had been elected the spokesperson of our group. Needless to say, I was not prepared for the volley of old age and eccentric ramblings returned haphazardly to us. It was up to me to translate this stream of information, vital for our studies, and relay to back to my friend. And fail terribly, I did. After what felt like 20 minutes of staring blankly at his face, I was pulled out of my shell shock but my friend answering a question for me, about me. Apparently he had noticed my name and was inquiring into my nationality, whether I was Scottish, Irish etc. My friend began replying when my mind woke up again and I finally burst out of my comma. Suddenly it was all clear, my memory jogged and I realised I could speak German again. I began recounting romantic tales of the 'emerald isle' To which he replied in kind and recounted his tales of visiting the country, the pub crawls, and giggling of Lisdoonvarna. Ten minutes later and we were leaving, perplexed but happy to have survived. The old man beaming, standing at his door and bidding us farewell.

Time: At the beginning of this semester. Some early morning, which was a key factor in my general grogginess and unresponsive state.

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

A far squirrelled away office in the Energy Engineering department of [place]. A location which took the greater part of an hour and most of my supremely mediocre navigational skills to find my flat where I live.

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

X study

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?
Was it because... (please tick one or more)

X It surprised me.

Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction.

Both that I could actually decipher the man and the weight of power my Irish passport could carry. I always shrug off and quite dislike the trope of being Irish, and therefore being welcome everywhere and loved by everyone. But this was probably the first time I relished in it.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

Turkish friend and German professor.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

The Professor was a wiry and thin old German man with a moustache and a bald head. It was near impossible to distinguish where he came from. His accent, if he had any, was hidden under layers of old man grumblings. He seemed a relatively respectable figure though, as if he'd been in the university for a long time, and was kept around as he was more of an institution than anything else.

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were: Shock. Fear. Confusion. Terror. All of the emotions involved in speaking German with a native speaker.

My thoughts at the time were: I need to finish this conversation as soon as possible. I just need the answers I came for, and as soon as I get them, I will run out the door.

What I did at the time was: Nod a lot. Smile and nod. As one often does in very one-sided and incomprehensible conversations. As I slowly began to understand the situation, I became more human and less robotic. Though our conversation on Ireland was still a battle of wits, with me trying my best to humour him and looking for the door.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? How did you know?
Probably a little perturbed at first. As we seemed to interrupt his busy schedule. But definitely full of merriment by the end.

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened?
He definitely seemed to be bored and/or annoyed by us at the start. Or at least by his work. Probably looked at us and thought us young whippersnappers. But when he found out he could chat to me, or rather at me, he seemed delighted.

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?
Definitely, I always feel as if I make adjustments constantly in the way I talk, when I speak with others in a language which is not my native tongue. In this case as with many, I probably tried hard to enunciate my German correctly and make myself sound as German as possible. Trying to get rid of any English-isms and make myself sound at least remotely clever.

Did you already have any knowledge or previous experience which helped you to communicate better?

There was no experience in particular that helped, rather the collective experiences that I have gathered. I feel like I draw on all previous experiences when in a situation like this.

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?

Yes, looking back, we were very similar. As most people tend to be. First impressions can be very misleading, and certainly the one I got of the stern old professor was. In the end, he was a very kind and relatable old man, who had even shared past experiences with me due to his visit to Ireland. Though, even if this wasn't the case, I find it's easy to find similarities in anyone, given the time to get to know them.

Were you aware **at the time** of any differences and, if so, what were they?

The differences were definitely quite clear. He was a seasoned veteran and I a young student. Our culture was different, our language was different. Etc etc

Looking Back...

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?

Choose **one** or **more** of the following and **complete** the sentence **OR invent** your own.

- The way I acted in the experiences was appropriate because what I did was ...
manage to connect with someone over a middleground
- I think I could have acted differently by doing the following ...
entering the conversation with more of an open-mind, listening better
- I think the best reaction from me would have been ...
to communicate with confidence from the start of the conversation
- My reaction was good because ...
the situation didn't end terribly with crying and fleeing
- I hid my emotions by ...
looking wide-eyed and stupid

Looking Back...

Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience? If so, what did you do?

Yes, as with most conversations I have with German speakers, I end up leaving feeling somewhat dejected. Mainly that my German isn't up to par. So this scenario, like most, really influenced me and made me consciously increase the amount I speak German. I think my reaction was ok because it was genuine. I was taken by surprise. I don't think anything would change if I went back. I just didn't feel comfortable.

Did this encounter change you? How?

Yes! Despite the aforementioned dejected state in which I left, and how it made me want to up my German level, I gained some confidence through the fact that I was able to hold some sort of conversation with the man. So it definitely gave me some boost of confidence.

I also gained a lot of confidence in how I hold conversations in general. I'm not a conversationalist at all, and can be quite timid sometimes. But the fact that I was able to converse with this previously unknown man about a common topic was very enlightening. So again, it definitely gave me a lot of confidence in that regard.

8.7.7 Student H: Encounter I

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

Hmm this is a difficult question to answer and one I often ask myself. However for the purpose of this exercise I will try to be as honest as I possibly can. I would define myself as a very open individual. I never try to be something I am not and I pride myself on that. However this open nature that I have leaves me open to abuse by others who may take advantage of this. However, I would not change it. For me it is important to always be myself and if I thought I was doing anything other than that I would not be happy in my own skin. This being happy in my own skin is very important to me because and without going in to too graphic of detail I have had struggles with my mental health throughout my teen years which I am not ashamed of what so ever. However after not being happy with who I am for so long I have finally come to terms with myself and who I am. Therefore these personal battles define me greatly and have made me the open to all and honest person I am today and that is how I would like to be seen by others also. In addition music and literature are also a major feature of my life and have moulded me into the person I am today. Books and music have gotten me through the hardest of times in my life. In addition keeping fit and exercise is also a big part of who I am it makes me feel more able to handle life and what it throws at me and it has aided in the creation of the confident and content person I have become day after being the opposite for so many years before that. Therefore my personal struggles and the things that helped me during this time define the person I am today.

Encounter I: The language threesome (and not the kinky kind;-))

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

I had to work with German students on an exercise for class. It was two German and French speaking students who were native German speakers and their French was also of a much higher standard than mine. Therefore there was a mixture of French, German and English spoken between us. We worked well together despite the language barrier.

Time: The week of the 15th of January 2013

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

X study

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?
Was it because... (please tick one or more)

- X It was the first time I had had this kind of experience.
- X It is the most recent experience of that kind.

- X It surprised me.
- X It pleased me.

Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction.

It disappointed me slightly only because I was not able to speak to them in as much German as I liked and made me question if I am doing enough to learn the language . I would have preferred if I could have avoided speaking English all together but unfortunately that wasn't the case.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

Two students from my language class.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

It was one male and one female both from Germany. One of the distinguishing features of the male was that he was very well dressed. He wasn't dressed particular trendy like the young male students that I would be used to in Ireland. His hair was slicked back and he was wearing slacks and a shirt. The female on the other hand was dressed like a young student in their twenties would be dressed (from my experience anyway). The male was tall quite handsome and had blonde slicked back hair and the female was of a very slim build I would describe her as fragile looking almost like if you touched her she would break.

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were...

At the time of the encounter in question I was scared because of the potential communication barriers between me and them. I thought it would stop me contributing to the exercise that we had to do but fortunately it did not.

My thoughts at the time were...

"Ah jaysus these lads are going to think I am a complete thicko". That would sum up my my thoughts at that time pretty accurately.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? How did you know?
I imagine they felt awkward. They too were probably aware of the potential language barriers between myself and them. Also because the two German students knew each other and they did not know me it would have also added to the awkwardness I imagine.

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened?

I imagine they found it a relatively everyday experience. Perhaps it may have had a slight twist as they were probably used to doing group work with all German students and not an English speaking student.

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?

Yeah I used hand gestures a fair bit if I remember correctly. I also had to explain to them some words in English because I was unable to explain to them the definition in German. I also found it easier to write out what I was trying to say because when I was talking to them I would get flustered or nervous from time to time. [...]

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?

I am slightly confused by this question . I am not sure if you want me to answer the question from a perspective of how I thought and felt at the time and how I imagined they felt at the time. I was unaware of any major similarities to how they felt at the time and how I felt.

Were you aware **at the time** of any differences and, if so, what were they?

See answer above.

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other similarities? If so, what are they?

Unfortunately not.

Looking Back...

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?

Choose **one** or **more** of the following and **complete** the sentence **OR invent** your own.

- The way I acted in the experiences was appropriate because what I did was ...
speak to them in the languages they were both proficient in.
- I think I could have acted differently by doing the following ...
being more confident and not afraid of making mistakes while speaking German.
- I think the best reaction from me would have been ...
to speak as much German as possible they would have understood me eventually. However this
may have taken more time away from the exercise we had to do.
- My reaction was good because ...
it helped us get the exercise done faster and allowed me to contribute to it what I wanted.
- I hid my emotions by ...
smiling and attempting to laugh off any mistakes I made while talking to them.

Looking Back...

Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience? If so, what did you do?

I decided to dedicate more time in trying to speak to German students rather than being afraid of it. I decided not to let my fear of looking stupid in front of them if I make a mistake dictate my decisions in relation to speaking to them.

Did this encounter change you? How?

It changed my perception on speaking to German students. Even though I am good at understanding language and grammar etc and even though I am passionate about language I also get quite shy when I have to speak them as I feel I'll make a mistake and what I am trying to say won't be clear. This experience showed me that even if there is a problem in communication they can be overcome. Everyone learning a language is going to make mistakes and that fear of making mistakes is only going to stop me from learning.

8.7.8 Student H: Encounter II

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

I have written this out before so I will try and remember what I wrote last time. Past experience before I came to University has defined greatly how I view myself. Without going into too much detail I previously suffered some mental health issues in the past during my teenage years something which I am not ashamed of but also something I don't particularly want to go into. However it is these trying times that I believe have moulded me into the person that I consider I am today. I would like others to see me as a loyal and kind person as I know the importance of knowing people with such characteristics during times of difficulty in your life. Past experiences have also taught me that you have to be tough sometimes and not too kind to people otherwise they will take you for granted something which has happened to me in the past also. Therefore past experiences and difficulties have assisted in the way I view myself. In addition family and friends also play a great role in how I view myself. Their appreciation and the love they show me makes me believe I am a good person. Also my passion for language not even learning new languages or speaking them but for language itself and the power it possesses and how it works has moulded me into the person I intend to be in the future for my career.

Encounter II: Tandem Partner Trouble

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

I met my tandem partner for the fourth time today . It had not being going well recently due to her unwillingness to talk to me. Everytime I have met her I have felt like I have been making all the conversation trying to get to know her but she can't be bothered to do the same for me.

Time: July 2013

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

In the park. We were meeting there to practise our chosen languages, mine being German hers English.

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

study
 other: practising our languages

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?
Was it because... (please tick one or more)

It is the most recent experience of that kind.
 It disappointed me.
 It angered me.

Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction.

No other reaction. I was disappointed because I felt like I have been making all the effort for zero reward. I was angry because I feel like a good opportunity to practise learning German in a relaxed environment has been ruined due to her unwillingness to try and get to know me as I have her.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

Sie kommt aus Deutschland. Sie studiert Englische Sprachlichen in der Uni. Sie ist in (place). (Ich hoffe, dass [das] richtig ist). Sie ist ziemlich ruhig und es dünkt mir, dass sie hat keine Lust um mich zu kennen lernen.

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were...

I was sad and angry because I feel like a good opportunity is going nowhere. I have not been that fortunate in regards to making German friends so I thought this would be a good way to get to know someone while improving my German along the way. However today was just incredibly awkward and despite me asking questions about hobbies and anything I could think of to get the conversation flowing it was not reciprocated on her end. Thus leaving me angry and upset.

My thoughts at the time were...

Jesus Christ can this encounter get any more awkward.

What I did at the time was...

I asked her had she seen any good films recently. But she does not like to go to the cinema. I then proceeded to talk about the trees in the park at the stage the conversation barrel had been well and truly scraped.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? How did you know?
I have no idea how she felt. I couldn't even hazard a guess she is an extremely difficult person to read. I would like to think she felt as awkward as I did because she was not making any attempt to talk to me and I was just sitting there staring at the trees like a gobshite.

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened?

I don't know how because while my German is far from perfect she could still understand everything I asked her. However she did not ask me anything about myself nor do I think she wants to know anything about me.

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?

When I spoke English to her I spoke slower as I have been told by people I speak fast. In addition I tried to talk about topics as banal as possible such as hobbies, music, books etc so we would be able to find a common interest and thus talk about that. However this person doesn't seem to be interested in anything.

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?

No I have no idea of any similar thought patterns about the situation. She is a person that is incredibly difficult to read so I had no idea what she was thinking. I would like to think she found it awkward I would also like to think that she knew that awkwardness wasn't down to me.

Looking Back...

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other similarities? If so, what are they?

Unfortunately I am not. This is due to not being able to read this person and how she is thinking.

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?

Choose **one** or **more** of the following and **complete** the sentence **OR invent** your own.

- The way I acted in the experiences was appropriate because what I did was ...
try to talk as much German as possible to get some benefit out of it. Even if she didn't attempt to make any effort to get to know me or help me improve my German I still spoke to her in English as much as I could to make the partnership as fair as possible.

- I think I could have acted differently by doing the following ...
Telling her that this partnership isn't going to work out as I feel she has no interest in it.

• I think the best reaction from me would have been ...
Probably to say what I wrote above however I could never be that blunt.

• My reaction was good because ...
It allowed me to still do a bit of speaking in German.

• I hid my emotions by ...
Talking as much as possible.

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?

As I said already I altered my accent so she could understand me a bit easier. In addition I slowed down the speed at which I talk.

Looking Back...

Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience? If so, what did you do?
I have decided to stop seeing this person and try and find a new tandem partner before my final month is up. If they are nice and friendly and interested in talking to me I could stay in touch and speak German to them on skype even when I am back in Ireland.

Did this encounter change you? How?
It made me realize that there is a difference between shyness and just plain rudeness.

8.7.9 Student H: Encounter III

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

I have written this out twice now so I will try and remember what I wrote last time. Past experiences before I came to University has defined greatly how I view myself. Without going into too much detail I previously suffered some mental health issues in the past during my teenage years something which I am not ashamed of but also something I don't particularly want to go into. However it is these trying times that I believe have moulded me into the person that I consider I am today. I would like others to see me as a loyal and kind person as I know the importance of knowing people with such characteristics during times of difficulty in your life. Past experiences have also taught me that you have to be tough sometimes and not too kind to people otherwise they will take you for granted something which has happened to me in the past also. Therefore past experiences and difficulties have assisted in the way I view myself. In addition family and friends also play a great role in how I view myself. Their appreciation and the love they show me makes me believe I am a good person. Also my passion for language not even learning new languages or speaking them but for language itself and the power it possesses and how it works has moulded me into the person I intend to be in the future for my career.

Encounter III: Ein Deutsch Date

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

This event happened a month ago. I went out on a date with a German guy.

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

The date itself took place in the local student bar.

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

leisure

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

- It was the first time I had had this kind of experience.
- It surprised me.
- It disappointed me.
- It angered me.

Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction.
The above three sentiments sum up my feelings about the situation perfectly.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

A German student.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

He was of average height and wore glasses. The first thing I noticed about him is that his dress sense was different than lads from Ireland. He studied science and I study arts so there was a major difference in relation to what we study.

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were...

Unhappiness and disappointment as the date did not go well at all.

My thoughts at the time were...

Jesus get me out of here I am dying of boredom.

What I did at the time was...

I pretended not to notice that I had bought him a drink and he did not return the favour at any stage of the night. He continued to buy plenty for himself but didn't offer me as much as a soft drink.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? How did you know?

I can't imagine this person thought much. Perhaps he felt awkward as the conversation was sometimes strained due to communication barriers. I don't think he could tell that I was offended that he didn't do for me what I had done for him as I hid my annoyance fairly well.

I am not sure because they seemed to hide their feelings by...

Looking at their phone and talking about banal topics of conversation such as our studies.

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?

When I spoke in English I spoke slower as I have been told that I speak fast. When I spoke German I also spoke slow because I am obviously not a native speaker. I spoke slower and in a more simplistic manner without being patronising as I would not like to do that to anybody.

Did you already have any knowledge or previous experience which helped you to communicate better?

His English was not exceptional so I knew I would have to speak slower and more carefully so he understood me.

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?

No I was unaware of any major similarities. Perhaps he too found it a strain due to lack of communication on both sides & different cultures customs. In Ireland generally the man would buy a drink. I am not saying I agree with this and I am more than happy to pay for myself. However when you do something nice for someone it is polite to return the favour.

Were you aware **at the time** of any differences and, if so, what were they?

I was unaware of any major differences. Perhaps he would not have seen it as a big deal to not return the favour.

Looking Back...

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other similarities? If so, what are they?

Communication barriers is the only similarity we possessed.

Looking back at the situation. Are you aware **now** of any other differences? If so what are they?

Date etiquette differences that's all.

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?

Choose **one** or **more** of the following and **complete** the sentence **OR invent** your own.

- The way I acted in the experiences was appropriate because what I did was ...
Was remain polite and make the best of the situation.
- I think I could have acted differently by doing the following ...
Demanding he buy me a drink & get a new personality.
- I think the best reaction from me would have been ...
To remain polite and friendly.
- I hid my emotions by ...
Being polite and friendly.

Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience? If so, what did you do?

It made me want to speak German fluently something I have still not mastered. I went out the next day to enquire about a Tandem Partner.

8.7.10 Student J: Encounter II

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

I would define myself as friendly, approachable, and easy going. I'm quite shy until you get to know me, and sometimes this gets in the way of making good friends. An important part of my personality is to always give everyone a chance, I don't make enemies easily. I would like people to see me as someone who they can rely on, someone who will always listen and try to help.

Name: My name is an important part of my identity because it's an Irish name; I'm an Irish citizen and I speak Irish. Most (foreign) people have never heard it before, and I'm always proud to explain it to them.

Age: Age is not the most important factor of my identity, only when it's required to be a certain age for doing something (i.e., entering a pub/club) do I become more aware of my age as part of my identity.

Gender: I have studied a lot about the topic of gender. Having done this I feel that gender is a more important part of my identity now, which it wouldn't have been as much before.

Family: Family is a very important part of my identity. Until my year abroad, I feel I took family somewhat for granted, and never valued much what I had right under my nose. Not having my family around has made me realise how close I actually am to them and how much they mean to me. Only when taken out of the family setting could I see how important family is, how integrated I was at home, and how much I depend on them for care and support.

Nationality: Nationality is another factor that has only recently come to be a very important part of my identity. At home, I remember once being asked "Do you feel Irish?" and "What does your National identity mean to you?". At the time I would have said that I didn't feel Irish at all, and that I didn't feel like I had much of a National Identity. Now that I'm not in Ireland, I feel I have a very strong National identity. I'm always proud to say where I'm from, and it makes me happy when people know where Ireland is, and especially when they say something positive about it. I will always notice something Irish if I see it (and point it out to others sometimes!) and I am proud to associate with anything Irish (for example I have had to listen to Irish ballads my whole life through doing Irish dance shows and have never sang a word of them, but when we went to an Irish bar in (place) I sang every song !) Nationality has become an important part of my identity, because at first it felt that all I had in this new place was who I am and where I come from.

Languages I Speak: I have always considered the languages I speak to be a part of my identity. English is a commonly used language around the world, so being a native English speaker has always been important to me. Speaking Irish is important because I'm proud of the fact that I can speak my country's native language. German has become a more important part of my identity since moving to Germany, I'm proud to be able to converse with people in German, and it's also a sign of my years of study.

Studies: Being a student is an important part of my identity because it reflects my achievements, the time and effort I've put into studying over the years, and reminds me that I'm still working towards something.

Hobbies: Dancing is probably one of the most important parts of my identity. I've been an Irish dancer for over 17 years, and anything to do with it is always where I feel most comfortable and in control. Dancing is a huge part of my family history.

Member of a club: I have been a member of [a] dance school for over 17 years. This dance school is so important to my identity because it doesn't feel like a club but a family. I've grown up with the other dancers, and there's so much history about the place. I'm always proud to be involved with such a close-knit group.

Encounter II: Keine Schuhe im Haus

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

I went to my German friend's apartment one day and entered his room wearing shoes. I then proceeded to sit on his bed with my shoes on. Although my shoes were not 'on' his bed (they never actually touched the bed), he found it very weird that I would enter someone's room and not take them off, and seemed slightly offended that I would sit on his bed with shoes on.

Time: February 2013

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

I went to visit him in his apartment after I had dinner with my friend who lives in the same building.

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

It surprised me.
 It disappointed me.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

The German guy I visited, and who's room I went into wearing shoes.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

This German man always seemed particularly 'German' to me. He spoke in a very serious, bland tone, and he would usually complain about the lack of efficiency in certain situations (internet not working, etc.). He looked typically German; a tall, broad shouldered blond man. He was 24 years old. The first thing I noticed about him was that he was health conscious and that he obviously took care of himself and worked out. He referred to me a lot as 'Irish', saying "Yeah but you're Irish" whenever drinking excessively was mentioned. He was German in nature but he also had an international flare, he had completed his Erasmus in Dublin which made him very interesting to me.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? How did you know? I'm sure I would have been shocked if I was him that firstly I didn't take off my shoes upon entering the apartment and secondly I didn't even do so upon entering his room! The 'done thing' here is that you remove your shoes, so as not to drag dirt and germs in from the outside, when entering someone's home. People seem to see it as rude here if you don't comply to this norm, and they tend to look at you with a sense that maybe the hygiene in your home country is not as good. I hadn't been to any German homes before, just the dorms of the international students who never asked us to remove our shoes. In Ireland we never ask people to take off their shoes, I think that in itself would be considered rude in our eyes, but I can imagine my German friend's impression of Ireland when he heard this. When something is a norm in your country you find it hard to understand how people can ignore it elsewhere.

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

I felt embarrassed to have entered his room wearing shoes and to have made him think that I had no respect for his home. I actually think it's a good idea not to wear the same shoes into the house that you have been wearing outside, from a hygiene point of view. I was just totally unaware that this was done here and it never dawned on me to take them off. I would have happily obliged and taken off my shoes as I have done on many occasions here since this incident. I thought about the ways in which people are brought up to adhere to different norms like this one, how these norms become inherent in you and you even slightly look down on other people who don't conform to them or who adhere to different norms. I thought of how he must see me now, like I'm somewhat 'dirtier' than he is because of this, and I wondered whether this incident would change his overall opinion of me. I think he felt slightly embarrassed too, because he had just expected me to know so he had to tell me. I'm sure it made him think about Ireland and the fact that we don't adhere to this norm. I think he expected me to know it was the done thing in Germany though, like he was offended that since coming here I hadn't found out that

this was normal, and that maybe I was being ignorant and not conforming to life the way people live it in Germany. I reckon he was shocked at the fact that I was totally oblivious to this norm, having lived here for nearly 5 months, and figured I was still trying to live a relatively 'Irish' life in a German city.

8.7.11 Student L: Encounter I

Who I am

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.

My name is [name]. I am [age] years old. I am Irish. I am male. I would consider myself confident in some respects but not in others. I like to meet people who share the same characteristics as myself, I love and admire hard working, well to do, confident people but only those who respect those with a lack of confidence and as friends encourage them to grow more confident in themselves. With physical work I would consider myself very motivated. I consider myself extremely trust worthy, friendly and helpful. I like to see the same in other people. I love to meet and learn about other nationalities and respect and take great interest in different views on religion and politics etc.

Encounter I: Environmental Respect

Description: What happened when you met this person/these people?

I used to smoke. When I came to Germany, the first day at the airport in (place) I lit up a cigarette. As I would usually do in Ireland unless I was in my home, when I had finished smoking my fag I threw it on the ground and stamped it out with my foot. An old man approached me and asked me through German what did I think I was doing? At first I did not know what he was referring to but when he started to point at the obvious cigarette bins I knew then. I picked up the cigarette butt from the ground and put it into the bin. I thought about it: People in Ireland do not condone throwing sweet papers on the ground at all but I would say that it is acceptable for smokers to throw butts on the ground although it does the same damage to the environment. German people obviously have better respect for the environment.

Time: October, early in the afternoon

Location: Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

The airport in (place). We were all waiting for a bus to bring us to our destination.

Was it ... (please tick one or more)

X other: travel

Importance: Why have you chosen this experience?
Was it because... (please tick one or more)

X It made me think about something I had not thought before.
X It was the first time I had had this kind of experience.
X It pleased me.

The other person or people

Who else was involved?

One of my other classmates who was smoking with me and an elderly man.

Write something about them...

What was the first thing that you noticed about them? What did they look like? Were they male/female, older/younger than you, did they belong to a different region or any other thing you think is important about them?

My classmate is female and had black long hair. She was smoking also but hadn't thrown her cigarette butt to the ground. She looked shocked when it happened. The old man was in a suit jacket and had a green suitcase with him. He had grey hair and also had a brown hat on his head. He looked disgusted but seemed more understanding when he realised it was our first time in Germany. He was from [place].

Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences.

My feelings or emotions at the time were...
embarrassment and worry. I was embarrassed because there were many other people around who seen what had happened. I was worried because I thought I had giving the German people a bad impression of the Irish and it was my first time in Germany.

My thoughts at the time were...
I had mixed thoughts but I did think that he made a good point and I thought about how I should show the environment in Ireland more respect.

What I did at the time was...
I did not realise what I had done wrong because I have never been approached about an incident like this one before. I did not ask many questions as I got the idea.

The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? How did you know?
I think that he felt angry and had obvious respect for his environment. Maybe he also thought that I should not get away with something like this when he as a german wouldnt. I could see he was angry and I could hear it in his voice.

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened?
I think he found it strange and shocking that someone would do something like that, but from living in Germany for over three months now I do not believe that all German people have the same attitude but more people do in Germany than in Ireland.

I am not sure because they seemed to hide their feelings by...
I do not think that German people hide their feelings or beliefs at all. They are very out spoken people.

Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?
My language was very simple and I did use alot of hand gestures to explain myself. This was all down to my nerves and speaking to a native speaker in Germany for the first time after arrival.

Did you already have any knowledge or previous experience which helped you to communicate better?
I have had a lot of experience speaking in lectures in Maynooth. I knew that he as a native speaker would be speaking much faster with a strong accent but I have had many teachers that are native German speakers so I expected that.

Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which **you** thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which **they** thought and felt about it...

Were you aware **at the time** of any similarities and, if so, what were they?
I was not aware of any similarities at the time it happened.

Were you aware **at the time** of any differences and, if so, what were they?
I was aware of some differences. Germany had a better respect for the environment.

Looking Back...

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other similarities? If so, what are they?
Yes, older people in both countries seem to have more respect for the environment.

Looking back, are you aware **now** of any other differences? If so what are they?
Yes there are very few people willing to stand up and say what a majority could believe in and that elderly German man was willing to stand up and say what I had done was wrong.

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions **now**?
Choose **one** or **more** of the following and **complete** the sentence **OR invent** your own.

- The way I acted in the experiences was appropriate because what I did was ...
Respected his opinion.
- I think I could have acted differently by doing the following ...
Not throwing it on the ground.

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made **adjustments** in how you talked or wrote to them?
Yes, because I was a new comer to Germany and my language skills were not yet perfect I did use hand gestures and very simple German to try and explain myself.

Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience? If so, what did you do?
Yes I certainly did. I decided that I should respect the environment in Germany and use the bins provided instead of littering. When I returned to Ireland at Christmas I did the same there and will do from now on.

Did this encounter change you? How?
I have more respect for other countries and their beliefs. I have more respect for the environment everywhere.