

Residence abroad within language study

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1. Definition and context

While many of the state-of-the-art surveys in Language Teaching address a discrete area of linguistics, defining the boundaries of the present topic is a difficult task. Firstly, residence abroad embraces a form of language learning which is defined by its specific context - and the context itself therefore needs definition. Secondly, it is a complex learning experience whose objectives have only recently been defined, and while those objectives may be primarily linguistic, they are by no means restricted to language gains. Thirdly, a survey of residence abroad must be at one and the same time a study of practice - practice which is not necessarily informed by research and indeed may be driven by considerations quite distinct from language learning - and a study of the research which seeks to guide and underpin that practice. Fourthly, much that has been written about residence abroad concerns pedagogical, pastoral or administrative matters and does not easily fit the established paradigm for language research. Fifthly, it is a field which potentially draws on virtually every aspect of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Let us look first at the context, then at the factors which might be expected to influence L2 proficiency gains, and finally at the sub-domains of language competence in which such gains are, or are not, attested.

1.1 The European context

One of the most widespread myths concerning language learning is that the only way to really learn the language of a foreign country is to go and live there. It is a myth shared alike by teachers and students of foreign languages. Intuitively, we assume that to take part in natural interactions, about real-life topics, with native speakers, must be the ideal route to foreign language proficiency. The practice is consequently very widespread of encouraging or obliging students of foreign language (L2) to spend part of their degree programme in a country (L2land) where L2 is spoken by the native inhabitants (L2landers), to experience genuine immersion (although, in SLA literature, the term 'immersion' is more generally reserved for formal L1land education delivered through the medium of the L2).

The present article concerns extended L2land residence as an integral component of a university degree programme involving one or more foreign languages. It adopts a European, essentially British perspective, acknowledging the substantial differences between Europe and North America in the models adopted for realising the benefits of residence abroad. Since the 1950s, Americans refer to 'study abroad programs', which may or may not take place in an English-speaking country. They generally envisage the short-term transfer of cohesive groups of American students to a different geographical base, where they may benefit from formal (classroom) and informal (naturalistic) language learning, but without necessarily abandoning an American educational framework and academic/administrative support. In Europe, the emphasis has historically been on individuals or at most small groups living independently for a relatively long time in a totally L2land context, relying on local social, academic and institutional support. Students (we use 'student' in the restricted European sense of a university-level learner) rarely receive specific language tuition, although some university placements incorporate in situ language instruction, whether in classes designed for foreign learners or in two-way translation classes beside native L2 speakers; even on European Union exchange programmes the average is only 2.4 hours per week (Teichler, 1991). US students (Abrams, 1979; Brown, 1983; James, 1976; Koester, 1986) are typically English native speakers with modest foreign language (L2) proficiency, and often relatively little experience of L2land (King & Young, 1994: 79), while UK or Irish students, whatever their proficiency level, already have extensive experience of foreign lands

where English is not the mother tongue (L1) (Coleman, 1996a: 87; Swallow, 1986). US students are self-selected: those who go are more favourably motivated towards L2landers, and less anxious at the idea of experiencing foreignness than those who do not (King & Young, 1994); UK students opt for residence abroad when they initially choose their university course.

Within UK and indeed all European higher education, history weighs heavily on language pedagogy. The acceptance of Modern Languages - the English term, unlike most equivalents in other languages (*langues étrangères*, *Fremdsprachen*), retains the contradistinction with Classical languages (although of course European university departments betray their parentage through titles such as *Lettres Classiques* and *Philologie*) - on to university curricula was conditional on subservience to the Classical model in both learning objectives and methods of teaching and assessment. Staff taught and researched the written literature of the L2land, or traced the historical development of the L2, for all the world as if French or German were as dead and unspoken as Classical Greek. Emphasis in language teaching - if language teaching were not considered entirely a matter for lower-level education - concentrated not on proficiency but on style. Over recent decades, university language teaching has generally adopted communicative objectives and more appropriate methods, but the identity of Modern Language departments has been slow to change. University language teaching is generally delivered either by low-status, low-paid teachers, often native speakers, some of whom may have received training as language teachers, or by higher-status, higher-paid non-native speakers, most of whom will have received no training and whose specialism is in a totally different field. Professional links between departments of Languages, Education and Linguistics remain the exception rather than the rule, despite the modernisation of many curricula to embrace a broader and more contemporary definition of L2land culture.

There is, then, often a gap between research-backed knowledge of language and of language learning, and practitioners' awareness of that knowledge, and this has inevitably influenced published work on an area whose focus is predominantly a matter of local practice. Even in this environment where ignorance is widespread and the pedagogical coelacanth lurks in many an academic backwater, there can be few domains where misinformation is so frequent and unsupported allegation so frequently unchallenged. Coleman (1996a: 71) showed how widespread was the unfounded UK myth that residence abroad in most cases means a year as an English assistant in a school (Byram, 1988; Dyson, 1988; Wilson & Everett, 1989; Hantrais, 1989; cf. Thomas, 1993; Meara, 1994b; Nott, 1996). Much of the available literature is not research oriented but practical and sometimes anecdotal: Freed (1995a: 6) refers to 'evaluative reports'; Smith (1983) uses less generous terms. But given the difficulty of carrying out quantitative empirical studies taking into account all the necessary variables, folklore may represent the accumulated outcomes of very many unrecorded, qualitative case studies, and cannot be ignored.

1.2 Preparation and tasks

Increasingly, home universities provide students with extensive 'how-to' handbooks covering such topics as car insurance, opening a bank account, and adapting to different norms of behaviour in university residential accommodation. Such procedures may reduce the intensity and frequency of negative experiences occasioning culture shock and sensations of disempowerment, frustration and alienation, but there is no research evidence. Given the diversity of student destinations and experiences, preparation cannot be too specific (Fryer & Day, 1993: 280). Preparation for the cultural dimension of discourse can obviate certain

problems (Mauranen & Markkanen, 1994). However, preparation is currently inadequate in the UK (HEFCE, 1996) as in Europe in general: Teichler (1994) found 5% of 1988/89 students receiving no preparation at all; where preparation was provided, it was essentially limited to linguistic and practical issues.

Structured tasks common to visits abroad by school pupils or teachers (e.g. Badía, 1994; Byram, 1997) are not normally a feature of European university-level practice (but cf. Critchley, 1994). Many universities, however, do require completion of a project or dissertation, often related to the area visited, one of whose functions is to create a genuine need for the student to make purposeful contact with L2landers, and academic preparation for such research is often provided.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of residence abroad have until recently been left largely inexplicit (Coleman, 1996a: 65-9; Gomes da Costa, 1975; James & Rouve, 1973: 68, 131-145), but originally - and paradoxically - residence abroad was conceived as a way not to have to teach languages, as 'academically rather a waste of time, but a necessary feature of a course to enable a student to 'pick up' the language' (Stern, 1964: 91). Cynically, it could be seen as dons shifting on to foreigners the responsibility they could not shift on to schoolteachers; charitably, as their intuitive recognition that immersion beats - or at least complements - tuition. Today's objectives (Opper, Teichler & Carlson, 1990) fall into four broad categories: improved language competence, academic development, cultural awareness and personal development.

1.4 Type of residence

The exchange of foreign language assistants between Britain and France dates back to 1904. Although there remains a widespread perception that a year abroad normally means an assistantship, in reality it is the 'old' universities (those which acquired the 'university' label prior to 1992) which favour this model, which is financially beneficial both to the student and the home institution, provides work experience of direct relevance to future teachers, and through reciprocal arrangements brings L2landers into UK schools (Nott, 1996: 65). The ban on single-semester assistantships has recently been relaxed, and the number of assistantship places had been steadily increasing (Coleman, 1995a: 20) until cutbacks by the French government in 1997. Work placements ('internships' for US students), a common form of residence abroad in technological and many 'new' universities, are increasingly popular (Kloss & Zemke, 1987) but are resource-intensive to organise and supervise. The very large European Language Proficiency Survey (Coleman, 1996a) found that patterns varied according to the L2 of 4,200 UK students who had completed a period of compulsory residence abroad, but that the majority attend an L2land university during their period of residence, which typically lasts a full academic year (see Table 1). The increasing numbers of students learning two foreign languages normally split the period between two destinations, although some may choose to spend the whole year in a single L2land, perhaps with vacation residence in another.

Table 1: Type and duration of residence abroad, expressed in percentages by target language

	French	German	Spanish	Russian
Type of placement				
Student	53.4	53.4	72.5	91.8
Language Assistant	26.7	19.7	9.7	0.4
Work Placement	11.6	17.3	8.9	2.9
Combination	5.0	5.9	3.9	3.3
Other	3.3	3.6	5.0	1.6
Duration				
Less than a term	11.3	9.5	15.3	24.2
A term	10.1	7.1	8.3	29.9
A semester	18.5	20.9	21.4	21.3
A year	59.8	61.6	54.4	24.6

1.5 Residence abroad: a problem area

In 1995-96 the UK's Higher Education Funding Councils carried out a Quality Assessment of provision in modern languages. Teams of peer assessors visited institutions in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and evaluated the quality of education against the institution's own aims and objectives, on the basis of documentation, observation, and discussion with those involved. It represents the widest and most recent survey of practice, though not the most detailed.

Subject Overview reports (HEFCE, 1996) identified residence abroad as a distinctive and valuable feature of provision, often characterised by effective preparation in the form of practical/academic handbooks and videos, a structured programme of meetings with staff, feedback from returners, 'cultural transition' workshops, TEFL training when required; by support during residence abroad through establishment of clear aims and objectives, staff visits, local link-persons, student learning contracts, learner diaries or 'personal development' files; by debriefing and reflection on return. Assessors noted benefits in linguistic competence, confidence, maturity and transferable skills such as planning and organisational competences. Occasionally the student gains dual (UK and L2land) qualifications.

However, the overall report (HEFCE, 1997) highlights shortcomings in residence abroad provision as the most significant issue of all in university modern language provision in the UK. The assessment found shortcomings in preparation, which was 'minimal' in some cases; in curriculum integration, with two-thirds of French and German departments failing to integrate residence abroad successfully, and a particular failure to build on linguistic progress achieved; in assessment, with the results of L2land residence rarely making a significant contribution to degree classification; in support while abroad, with only a quarter of institutions making pastoral visits, and others relying on casual visits, letters, phone calls or

email. In Spanish and Portuguese, for example, 'the aims and objectives of the period abroad are not fully identified and explained to students; the assessment, certification, monitoring, quality control and outcomes expected are also often vague and undeveloped. Many institutions are criticised for their lack of design, planning, operation and evaluation of the period abroad and its place within the curriculum as a whole' (HEFCE, 1996, 4/96: 20)

In sum, then, in the UK at least (and within Europe the UK has the longest experience of incorporating residence abroad in language degree programmes) the overall picture, of untrained language staff unaware of the findings of applied linguistic research, let alone carrying out research in a linguistic domain, is at its most acute where residence abroad is concerned. It is hoped that projects supported under HEFCE's Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (Phase Two, 1997-2000) will go some way to meeting the present failings.

2. Research of relevance to residence abroad

2.1 Limitations on the generalisability of relevant SLA research

The established label SLA embraces both second and foreign languages, the distinction being that a second language plays a social and institutional role alongside the community's L1, where a foreign language does not. In our context, a more significant distinction is that between naturalistic and instructed SLA. Studies of naturalistic learning often concern immigrant workers. Despite superficial similarities between the situations of residence-abroad students and migrant workers in that both must survive for an extended period as residents of L2land, the former typically do not have families or large social groups where L1 use is maintained, and their social status and motivation are very different. Whereas typical migrants stop learning, i.e. their proficiency fossilises, once they have acquired L2 proficiency adequate to meet their communicative needs (Mac Anna, 1991; Schumann, 1976), most students aim at near-native proficiency (Coleman, 1996a; Horwitz, 1988; Stevens, 1997). And while migrants often constitute a marginalised out-group, students may well be honorary insiders, playing the privileged role, as stagiaire or assistant especially, of intercultural mediator. The mediating function, now widely recognised in definitions of foreign language proficiency, builds on the experience of translating and interpreting which are widely used as university language learning techniques. Herein lies the most fundamental distinction between our learners and migrant workers. Even if temporarily removed from the tutored learning context, the L2land immersion is inseparable from that context. Their learning remains instructed, despite incorporating elements of naturalistic L2 acquisition.

Hence the over-riding importance of preparation. Far from relying, as some universities currently still do, on undirected and haphazard naturalistic processes of acquisition, the learner's home institution has, it seems to me, a responsibility to make the learner as aware as possible of the factors which operate during L2land immersion, so that students - who already have years of tutored L2 learning behind them - can maximise the improvement in their language skills. In reviewing the literature on variables influencing L2land language acquisition, we shall always have in mind the role of such findings in residence-abroad preparation.

Learners of English have often provided a majority of subjects for research, and we must be cautious of generalising findings concerning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) across

other L2s. North America attracts hundreds of thousands from other parts of the world to study English while living in an English-speaking environment. Within Europe, the United Kingdom and Ireland are net importers of exchange students. Worldwide, English today is either a *de jure* or *de facto* second language, introduced early in compulsory education, or is displacing others as the first foreign language, for example in Spain and eastern Europe. New technologies extend the already irreversible domination of English within global communication: over 90% of internet communications are in English. This disparity between English and other L2s gives English-speaking countries a different status from other L2lands, reflected among student learners (Coleman, 1996a: 131).

The generalisability of much published research to our particular context is problematical for other reasons, too. The subjects of otherwise relevant studies may be at secondary school level, or are adults with lower L2 proficiency or less tuition behind them. Typical European residence-abroad students have received at least two years' tuition (in the case of *ab initio* learners), and a typical UK student of French (Coleman, 1996a: 178) eight years, albeit non-intensive. In the substantial study by Ehrman & Oxford (1995), for example, which embraces the full range of individual variables in the language learning process, the total length of intensive tuition varies from three to forty-four weeks, with a mean of 23.5 weeks, and it is uncertain how fully the findings may apply to our students. A similar observation attaches to research carried out in classroom situations, for example on language anxiety (e.g. Ely, 1986a): we cannot assume that individuals' behaviour would be replicated in the naturalistic learning situation of L2land residence. Furthermore, in SLA research, L2 proficiency levels are not always explicit or defined in terms which facilitate comparability (Thomas, 1994); however, L2 proficiency level is important since it defines the type of interaction available to students abroad and their affective response to that interaction, even within otherwise coherent groups (Kaplan, 1989).

Previous state of the art articles (e.g. Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; 1993) have stressed the growing complexity of current knowledge of SLA, and any all-embracing study (e.g. Ellis, 1994) assumes imposing dimensions: all we can attempt here is a rapid review of key factors identified in SLA research generally, highlighting elements of particular relevance to student learners abroad. Our emphasis will be on individual learner variables, since we are concerned with the individual learner, essentially alone in a foreign context and receiving little or no target language instruction. Even in considering individual differences, we should be aware that the impact of certain variables such as culture shock (Furnham, 1993) may be heightened for individuals functioning autonomously.

2.2 Individual variation

It has long been known that individuals bring to language learning different skills, approaches, attitudes and temperaments. Individual variation has also been found in many residence abroad studies. It would therefore seem appropriate that preparation for residence abroad should seek to influence susceptible factors while matching pedagogy and strategy training to the more stable factors which learners bring to the learning process. Section numbers in Table 2 indicate which topics are here considered in detail.

Table 2: Individual variation: factors influencing changes in language proficiency during residence abroad

Affective variables	Cognitive variables	Biographical variables	Linguistic variables	Circumstantial variables
2.2.1 Motivation	2.2.6 Aptitude	2.2.9 Sex	2.2.10 Initial proficiency level and degree of interaction	2.2.11 Type/role
2.2.2 Attitudes	2.2.7 Learning style			2.2.12 Other circumstantial variables
2.2.3 Anxiety	2.2.8 Learning strategies			
2.2.4 Personality				
2.2.5 Acculturation and culture shock				

The variables are not necessarily independent of each other, even when this might appear to be the case, as, for example, with aptitude and type of residence abroad. If one component of linguistic aptitude is linked to verbal intelligence, and verbal intelligence influences performance in the 'A'-level (school leaving/university entrance) examination, and UK students with higher 'A'-level scores tend to choose more traditional universities, and traditional universities rely more heavily on the least administratively onerous form of residence abroad, namely assistantships, then there may well in fact be a link between aptitude and the type of residence abroad. In other cases, for example language anxiety and the level of active interaction with L2landers, the connection is more easily predicted. Perhaps most influential of all but as yet the subject of little empirical investigation is the link between appropriate preparation and the affective and cognitive individual variables. Nor are the categories watertight. Culture shock, for example, is not a discrete event, but the meeting of personality and situation. Problems of definition surround personality, motivation, learning style and other labels featured in the model. However the factors are formally categorised, in reality they merge, overlap and interact in extremely complex ways.

2.2.1 Motivation

Students of most disciplines acquire knowledge and skills within their own culture. Language students are unique in acquiring symbolic elements of a different ethnolinguistic community (Gardner, 1979: 193). For nearly forty years, Gardner and his collaborators in Canada, defining SLA as a social-psychological rather than an educational phenomenon, have developed and refined the notion of motivation in language learning, originally identifying two forms of orientation: integrative orientation (a sincere, positive interest in a people and culture which use a different language) and instrumental orientation (a recognition of the practical benefits of learning a new language), which represent opposite ends of a continuum (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Until quite recently, the integrative/instrumental opposition has dominated research into the motivation of language learners, despite the fact that Gardner does not propose a strict bipolarity (Gardner, 1985). Empirical findings have been inconclusive, sometimes contradictory, though, taken as a whole, they suggest in general terms a real but weak relationship between integrative orientation and successful language learning. Svanes (1987) showed higher correlations with proficiency for integrative motivation, but argued that the difference was in fact accounted for by 'cultural distance' between L1land and L2land. Au (1988) in a critical review of the literature found that integrative motivation is not unitary, does not consider (especially informal) learning contexts, and does not always correlate with higher achievement, so is not in itself a satisfactory explanation. There is also a question of direction: does high motivation predict success or the other way round?

More recently, Crookes & Schmidt (1991), Dörnyei (1994) and Oxford & Shearin (1994) have sought to expand the notion of motivation from social psychology to embrace educational and industrial psychology, including goals, rewards and fear of failure (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). High motivation comes from expectation of success, value attached to success, and belief that the outcome will match the effort. The pedagogical environment should therefore enhance these perceptions among learners, and thus raise their self-esteem and intrinsic motivation (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995).

Motivation as a personality trait would not be expected to change rapidly, but as Oxford & Shearin (1994: 14) note, students' reasons for learning a language do evolve. Surveys such as those of Skehan (1989: 49-72) and Ellis (1994: 508-517) stress that one key element in motivation is success: well-motivated classroom learners perceive their progress, are encouraged by it, and this in turn motivates further effort and further success, in a virtuous circle which many (e.g. McDonough, 1986: 155, 159) see as the strongest motivation of all.

A number of reports have studied motivation of university students. Gomes da Costa et al. (1975) found instrumental motivation a poor predictor of success. Ely (1986b) argues that intensity of motivation determines the impact of motivation type on learning outcome. He confirmed the integrative/instrumental divide, albeit with a degree of overlap, and with both associated with strong motivation, and he added a third, weaker, 'course requirement' motivation. The pedagogical implication is that both types of motivation need to be appealed to and developed. Horwitz (1988) found first-year students in the US had moderate motivational intensity, and tended more to the integrative. First-year non-specialist linguists (Roberts, 1992) seem to perceive language skills as cultural rather than vocational.

In Europe, Schröder & Macht's (1983) study of German, Finnish and Belgian students of non-specialist linguists found mixed motivations including both instrumental (career, becoming better educated) and integrative (interest in the target language community and its media, holiday travel) elements. A qualitative study of fifty above-average British undergraduates (Evans, 1988: 11-13) highlights the influence of earlier experiences (family links, teachers, trips abroad), but stresses the importance both of previous classroom success and of an enjoyment of the language per se in motivating continued study. Singleton & Singleton (1992) identified a similar blend of motivations among Irish learners of Spanish and French. They found instrumentally oriented motivations such as career ambitions counterbalanced by instrumentally oriented motivations such as a desire to live in the target community and to get to know its culture and literature. They also identified a wish to acquire specific language skills, and a broader interest in Europe which may have been influenced by the enhanced integration of the European Union, in which 1992 was a key date.

Data collected from 586 British undergraduates in 1986 and analysed by Meara (1993; 1994a; 1994b) does not focus specifically on reasons for language study, but responses concerning target skills suggest the sample group placed linguistic skills above cultural ones, with work-related objectives in last position.

The European Language Proficiency Survey (Coleman, 1995b; 1995c; 1996a: 96-99, 130-1; 1996b), a very large, repeated cross-sectional study, assessed learner motivations through reasons for study, and again found a mixture of integrative and instrumental motivations, together with a 'classroom requirement' motivation, a residential motive, influence of others, and a 'virtuous circle': enjoying studying the language per se allied to classroom success. The 'virtuous circle' motivation correlated with high achievement, as did, to a lesser degree, integrative motivation, with instrumental motivation related to below-average achievement. The link was diminished by residence abroad. Motivation, which was undifferentiated by gender, remained remarkably stable over the university career, but the study found the balance tipping somewhat towards integrative motivation as students progressed through their course, with a decrease in career motive, and desire to travel and live abroad. European comparisons found wide variation according to L1 (confirming Schröder & Macht, 1983; Kennedy & Schröder, 1992), but stability across L2s with the clear exception of L2 English.

2.2.2 Attitudes

Just as learner motivation and learner success can reinforce one another in a virtuous circle, learners' attitudes affect their success as language learners, and are themselves influenced by this success. Students' attitudes to the L2, to L2landers, to the L2land culture, to the social value of acquiring the L2, to the uses of the L2, and to themselves as members of their own L1 community have all been shown to impact on language learning. Attitudes are culturally acquired in the home environment, and have both cognitive and affective components, so although they can be modified by experience and reflexion, they tend to be deep-rooted and persistent. Our interest in attitudes lies in the fact that 'positive attitudes towards the L2, its speakers, and its culture can be expected to enhance learning and negative attitudes to impede learning' (Ellis, 1994: 200). This finding is widely accepted but not totally unquestioned (Svanes, 1988). As with the closely related concept of motivation, attitudes vary according to L1land (Svanes, 1988; Convery, Evans, Green, Macaro & Mellor, 1997). Females tend to have more favourable attitudes to L2landers (Byram et al., 1991; Cain, 1990; Coleman, in press).

Gardner & Lambert (1972) showed the damaging effects which ethnocentricity, in particular the very negative stereotypes of the French held by North American students, could have on language learning. Cultural stereotyping is universal. Stereotypes, however erroneous, allow us to generalise at one conceptual level while we individualise at another, accelerate communication, and act as cultural icons in defining group membership. Stereotypes are not based on observation of individuals, but they may be founded on generalisations of actual experiences, particularly if negative experiences can be mirrored and reinforced in discussion with in-group members. Stereotypes, which have both a cognitive and affective component, are acquired very young, and, for Europeans at least, become fixed during primary and secondary schooling, and can hardly be altered even by explicitly directed teaching (Armstrong, 1984; Barrett & Short, 1992; Byram et al., 1991; Cain 1990; 1991; Chambers, 1994). They remain strong among university language students throughout Europe (Coleman, 1996a).

Morgan (1993), in a review article linking language learning, culture learning and attitude change, argues that teachers can change learner attitudes, a view shared by Mantle-Bromley (1995), but when learners select only confirming information, for example during a school exchange abroad, their stereotypes are merely reinforced (Morgan, 1993: 70).

Intercultural competence is closely related to attitudes, as to a number of other variables (Citron, 1995). It is clear that students' openness to other cultures will influence their attitudes and actions during residence abroad, and that appropriate preparation in this area, currently deficient (Watts, 1994) is likely to be crucial. The development of language awareness (Donmall, 1985; Hawkins, 1984) is argued to be central to education because it allows learners, uniquely, to adopt the perspective of the other, to look in at their own culture from outside, to become aware that culture is a social construct, is relative and not absolute. A considerable number of related publications address the question of how to take language learners, through experiential learning, beyond the stage of recognising boundaries and differences between cultures to the point where 'the outsider begins to become an insider' (Byram, 1989: 21). Many of these are of direct relevance to student residence abroad, and adopt a definition of intercultural competence as four related skills: *savoir apprendre*, *savoirs*, *savoir faire*, and *savoir être*. They include Baumgratz-Gangl (1990, 1993), Buttjes (1990; Buttjes & Byram, 1991), Byram (1988; 1989; 1997; Byram et al., 1991; Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991; Byram, Morgan & Colleagues, 1994), Cain (1990, 1991), Kramsch (1993), and Roberts (see Roberts, 1997).

Specific initiatives to develop intercultural competence often build on the analogy between cultural learning and ethnographic research (Agar, 1991; Burnett, 1974; Laubscher, 1994; Spradley, 1980). A major project has included training students to carry out an ethnographic project on arrival in L2land (Barro & Grimm, 1993; Jordan & Barro, 1995). The programme is both a cognitive and affective preparation for residence abroad, which accelerates initial insertion, intensifies participation, systematically develops objective listening and observation, and develops self-awareness in relation to attitudes to cultural difference. Students are sensitised to cultural pluralism, and learn to tolerate ambiguity. Provided with a communicative need and purpose from the start of their sojourn, they adopt an ideal role for residence-abroad students, that of the participant observer. Other intercultural sensitisation programmes also exist (Coleman, 1996a: 75; Guntermann, 1995; Harper & Cormeraie, 1995; Inkster, 1993; Lillie, 1994).

If attitudes can affect the results of residence abroad, so too can residence abroad affect attitudes. Even short-term immersion (L2land excursions) can positively influence the affective dimension to the extent that individuals interact with the L2 community (Gardner, MacIntyre & Lysynchuk, 1990), and considerable anecdotal evidence suggests that students return from residence abroad with an enhanced understanding of the target language culture, and a more sympathetic attitude to L2landers. Willis, Doble, Sankarayya & Smithers (Willis et al., 1977), however, found more mixed changes in attitude. More recently, the European Language Proficiency Survey, in repeated cross-sectional studies, showed that students retain and sometimes reinforce their stereotypes of L2landers, while a minority of post-residence abroad students have more negative attitudes to L2landers than do pre-residence abroad students (Coleman 1996a; 1996b; in press). It appears from over ten thousand responses that, depending on L2, between one-twelfth and one-third of students who go abroad return with less positive perceptions on certain qualities, especially inter-personal qualities. The list of qualities on which the proportion of returners' asserting a positive or negative association with L2landers differed from the proportion of first-year students by at least eight percentage

points includes patient, good-humoured, logical, friendly, tolerant, helpful, efficient, hard-working, calm, competent, serious, arrogant, impatient, lazy, emotional and stubborn. In virtually every case, the perception after residence abroad is less L2land-friendly than before, and on many qualities, there is an opposite change regarding L1landers (UK residents), as if students were re-evaluating L2landers and L1landers in contradistinction to one another. A longitudinal study might identify the reasons for this increase in ethnocentrism.

2.2.3 Anxiety

If the extent of active interaction with L2landers correlates with L2 gain (see below), then factors which militate against interaction will be inhibiting factors. Such factors may be circumstantial (location, role within the target community, presence of other foreigners, gender-related differentiation), or they may relate to the individual learner, falling into the cognitive domain (language learning strategy) or the affective domain (attitude, anxiety).

Anxiety, linked with language learning for two decades (Scovel, 1978), is second only to aptitude as a correlate of foreign language achievement (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). Anxiety may be a permanent characteristic of personality (trait anxiety), a response to a particular set of circumstances (situation-specific anxiety) or a combination of the two, when a person liable to anxiety encounters a situation which triggers it (state anxiety). An 'unwillingness to speak for fear of making a mistake' (Stevick, 1978: 78) may affect negatively both the learning of a language in the classroom situation (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 1981), and its performance in any context. Language anxiety is not always negative: just as a sportsperson or an examinee may perform better with the adrenalin pumping, so a distinction is sometimes made between facilitating and debilitating anxiety (Alpert & Haber, 1960; Brown, 1987).

The arousal of language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994: 2) diverts into thoughts of failure, into self-deprecation, and into avoidance, the cognitive resources needed to optimise intake, processing or production in the foreign language (cf. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). In other words, the self-conscious learner's mind is so busy being worried that it cannot spare the processing power required to take in or produce the foreign language. Authentic oral communication with L2landers is most anxiety-provoking, since it makes the greatest demands of the learner (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

While Bailey's literature review (1983) links anxiety to competitiveness, for Horwitz et al. (1986), language anxiety comprises three elements: the psychological concepts of communication anxiety (anxiety associated with any real or anticipated interaction), test anxiety (linked to any evaluative situation, including peer evaluation) and social-evaluative anxiety (apprehension that others will value oneself negatively - a concept close to Schumann's language shock). Aida (1994), following MacIntyre & Gardner (1989), sees test anxiety as state rather than trait anxiety, unrelated to the other components. The behavioural response to communication and social-evaluative anxiety is avoidance and withdrawal. Ely (1986a) found that discomfort discouraged language risk-taking, and thus inhibited participation.

There is a link to integrativeness: the more foreign one perceives the L2 culture to be, the less comfortable one feels. What are the other implications for residence abroad? Since classroom experiences contribute, we should build non-threatening learning environments, and help students to do so themselves by acquiring effective study and learning strategies, including

help-seeking behaviours. In certain circumstances (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Ganschow, Sparks et al., 1994), learners can dominate high anxiety through self-confidence and strategies to manage anxiety and optimise learning. Since high esteem is linked to lower anxiety (Greenberg et al., 1986; 1992) we can seek to build up students' self-esteem and self-confidence, although the very position of foreign language learners inevitably lowers their self-esteem since the lack of mastery of L2 communication prevents them from behaving with their normal competence.

Aida (1994: 158) asserts that there is no significant gender difference as far as anxiety is concerned. Coleman's reiterated cross-sectional study, however, based on self-reporting by nearly twenty thousand university students (1996: 110-5), found significantly higher levels of language anxiety among women. The European Language Proficiency Survey also confirmed the positive impact of experience and proficiency (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b: 111; Willis et al., 1977: 89), finding that while (self-reported) anxiety decreased modestly with age from 17 to 21, students who had just completed residence abroad showed markedly lower levels of language anxiety than other groups. Although the effect appears to fade after return to L1land, mature students of French who had resided in L2land were also less likely to admit to language anxiety than those who had not. In each of four L2s, those who self-reportedly did not mind making mistakes outscored those who were embarrassed, but for most groups there was no significant correlation between the admission of embarrassment and level of proficiency. Coleman speculates on a possible link between increased confidence developed during residence abroad as a result of the sense of coping linguistically with the new environment, and the fossilisation of language proficiency (see below), since students perhaps no longer feel the guilt about making errors which would prompt them to try to eliminate non-native forms and structures.

2.2.4 Personality

Despite the importance we might intuitively ascribe to it, personality in SLA research literature is reduced to only a few measurable dimensions, which Ellis (1994: 517-20) refers to as an unsatisfactory mixed bag of factors and measures providing inconsistent results.

The 'language ego' (Guiora, 1981) is a more or less permeable structure, a particular instance of general ego boundaries. Individuals who have 'thin' rather than 'thick' psychological boundaries between mental, interpersonal and external experience tend to make better language learners (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). Thin ego boundaries are linked to a global (as opposed to analytic) learning style, to a (self-reported) interest in abstractions, to tolerance of ambiguity, and to a preference for flexibility and fuzziness over neatness and sharp, cut-and-dried definition. Ambiguity tolerance is an acceptance of confusing situations without clear demarcation lines (Ely, 1989), situations in which foreign language learners constantly find themselves: the factor is linked to persistence at language learning (Chapelle, 1983; Naiman et al., 1978) and to risk-taking behaviour, an essential for language progress, since its opposites (anxiety, inhibition, anticipated criticism from others or oneself) restrict language practice. University language students as a group in any case have a different psychological profile from students in other disciplines (Entwistle, 1972; Evans, 1988; Moody, 1988), perhaps through unconscious self-selection by appropriate personality criteria. Nevertheless, willingness to take linguistic risks - risk-takers prefer social, interactional, 'performing' activities - has clear implications for authentic communication with L2landers.

The field dependent/field independent (FD/FI) distinction again relates to cognitive style (Carter, 1988), and concerns the relative extent to which individuals' perception is dominated by the overall pattern or 'field' (FD) or whether parts of the field are seen as discrete from the background. In addition to doubts regarding the validity of extending FD/FI from visual-spatial to cognitive perception (Griffiths & Sheen, 1992), and concerns about over-generalisation, the results of research, especially on pedagogical implication, are contradictory and inconclusive (Ellis, 1994: 500-506). However, Skehan (in press), reviewing the literature, relates FI (analytic) and FD (holistic) differences to active/passive approaches to learning in order to define four distinct types of learner.

Extraversion/ introversion (Ellis, 1994, 520-1) is a further personality trait, one of four in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Intuitively based theoretical links between extraversion, sociability, willingness to interact, increased input and practice, and language learning (Naiman et al., 1978; Brown, 1987) have not received empirical support (Busch, 1982, Ehrman & Oxford, 1990). The other dimensions of MBTI are sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving.

Intuitive learners think in abstract, large-scale ways, seeking broad principles rather than detail, while sensing learners prefer concrete facts and sequential learning. Thinking-oriented learners opt for logical, objective processing, whereas feeling-oriented students tend towards affective, subjective approaches. Judging learners are product-oriented, seeking clear demarcation lines and structures, as opposed to perceivers who can live with the unstructured and incompletely defined (cf. ego boundaries, above). There are no clear, simple links between MBTI measures and L2 learning (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). Rather, what emerges is a complex interaction between personality type, learning style (cognitive and affective), and, above all, learning strategies.

Among coordinators of UK residence-abroad programmes, there has been speculation (Doble & Griffiths, 1985) that personality is the most important factor influencing outcomes. Willis *et al.* (1977) indeed found that learners who are more open-minded, more person-orientated and less anxious make better progress during residence abroad.

2.2.5 Acculturation and culture shock

Most researchers and pedagogues agree that extensive and intensive interaction with native speakers leads to improved linguistic skills (see Coleman, 1996a: 73). In the social-psychological tradition of Gardner and Lambert, Schumann's acculturation theory (1978; 1986) further postulates that success in language learning - both the rate of SLA and ultimate achievement level - will be improved where the social (group) and psychological (individual) distance between learner and target language community is lessened, since distance or diminished contact will reduce the quantity and quality of language input, and thus support less learning. Schumann, in defining acculturation as 'the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language group' (Schumann, 1986: 379), sees social factors as dominant for naturalistic acquisition by immigrant learners; while students resident in L2land are in some respects in an analogous position, for them it is rather the psychological dimension, the four affective variables proposed by the theory which come into play. Besides motivation type (integrative/instrumental) and ego permeability, the extent of acculturation (and thus interaction and thus learning) will be determined by the degree of language shock, 'the realization that you must seem comic to speakers of the TL' (Gass &

Selinker, 1994: 237) and of culture shock ('anxiety relating to disorientation from exposure to a new culture', Gass & Selinker, 1994: 237).

Culture shock (Oberg, 1960; Furnham, 1993) seems to be a crucial factor in residence abroad. Aspects of life such as perspectives on time, or knowing which behaviours are appropriate to which relationships, are both fundamental and culturally determined. We intuitively perceive them to be absolute, and painfully discover them to be relative.

Social interactions which vary across cultures include expressing attitudes and feelings appropriately, agreeing and disagreeing, and ritualised routines such as greetings, leave-taking, apologising, thanking, requesting, accepting and declining. Those who possess these social skills within their own culture experience frustration and embarrassment to abruptly find themselves verbally and non-verbally incompetent in the new context. Such stressful, anxiety-provoking situations (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Trower et al., 1978) can arise several times a day. Without social and psychological points of reference, the new arrival in L2land can feel anxious, confused and powerless, can lose self-confidence and trust in others, and may become withdrawn, unspontaneous, socially isolated and alienated. Culture shock is normally, however, a transitional experience on the way to adopting new values, attitudes and behaviours. And those who genuinely welcome new experiences, i.e. those with more flexible or permeable psychological boundaries, are less susceptible to the negative impact of culture shock.

Appropriate preparation for residence abroad is likely to include an awareness of the probability of experiencing culture shock. Furnham (1993) evaluates possible preventive treatments, arguing that mere provision of information is ineffective, cultural sensitisation can fail if merely cognitive, and isomorphic attribution training (i.e. understanding the true causes of particular behaviours) cannot cover the wide range of eventualities. Extensive experiential training involving repeated, supervised real or role-play interactions and personalised analysis/feedback is beyond the resources of higher education, although Furnham (1993: 99) stresses in this context the role of cultural mediators: the title could apply to both L2land exchange students and L1land returners.

One could speculate that many of the attested negative results of residence abroad (e.g. ethnocentric attitudes of returners, failure to make linguistic progress, expatriate behaviours such as seeking out L1land social groups) are related to culture shock, as a consequence either of an avoidance of culture shock, or of a failure to emerge beyond what should be a transitional stage: the withdrawal, social isolation and negative perception of L2land becoming persistent, long-term traits. For acculturation as for other variables, there is evidence of bi-directionality: degree of acculturation influences and is influenced by extent of contact and level of proficiency in a potentially virtuous circle (Clément, 1987).

2.2.6 Aptitude

Language learning aptitude 'is consistently the most successful predictor of language learning success' (Skehan, 1989: 38; cf. Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992: 215). Factor analysis identified four components (Carroll, 1965): - phonemic coding ability: not merely discrimination between sounds, but an ability to codify and memorise sounds and to use sound-symbol links systematically; - grammatical sensitivity: recognition of word function; - inductive language learning ability: identifying patterns and building rules; - rote learning ability: memorisation, especially of L1-L2 lexical links. Skehan

collapses the second and third of these into a single factor, language analytic capacity. Although aptitude is 'a relatively immutable factor' and not open to direct influence, the fact that the memory factor predominates once advanced learners seek to achieve nativelike fluency suggests that access to extensive L2 material might be the most appropriate preparation for many students going abroad, supported by teaching aimed at exploiting the language analytic ability in the case of less advanced students (Skehan, in press). Aptitude, like intelligence, might play only an indirect role in residence abroad, 'because the voluntary nature of these [learning] contexts is such that individuals may avoid them if they wish' (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992). It is likely that affective factors, and the strategies, activities and behaviours adopted will be more influential in our context.

2.2.7 Learning style

Learning style is often considered a facet of personality, embracing the FI/FD distinction considered above. Definitions vary, but generally incorporate a cognitive and affective dimension. 'The cognitive dimension concerns the extent to which a learner is oriented towards studial or experiential learning' (Ellis, 1989: 259), while the affective domain concerns the degree of positive or negative orientation towards the L2 learning task. Ellis (1989) found experiential learning matched well to communicative aims, while studial approach was appropriate for grammatical proficiency. Like Bialystok (1985), he stresses that without at least 'minimal congruity' between learners' cognitive orientation and teaching strategies, potential learning is reduced and debilitating anxiety may be occasioned. Other models of learning style address individual perceptual differences involving the auditory channel, visual channel, kinaesthetic learning (physical responses) or tactile learning, and have underpinned approaches to teaching and learning; but Ellis (1994: 508) concludes that few general conclusions have been reached on learning style.

2.2.8 Learning strategies

Is it feasible to separate who you are from what you do? Initial research into language learning strategies sought to define how effective particular strategies are per se (Naiman et al., 1978). But as Bialystok (1981) stressed, knowledge of personal and situational variables is one thing, and building learning strategies irrespective of them is another. There will clearly be a link, for example, between affective factors such as anxiety, attitude and motivation and an unwillingness to interact with input through listening, reading and conversing (Bacon & Finneman, 1990). Culture also influences strategy use, as teachers of mixed-nationality groups know well. Strategies are differentiated by gender, too (Bacon, 1992), with females adopting more socially interactive strategies (Oxford, Nyikos & Ehrman, 1988), and indeed by learning style and by previous experience of language learning. And of course where needs and objectives vary, so will the strategies adopted to meet them (MacIntyre, 1994).

If early learning strategy research tended to confuse learner characteristics with learning devices, more recent research has concentrated on 'deliberate, cognitive steps used by learners to enhance comprehension, learning and retention of the target language' (Vandergrift, 1995: 88; cf. Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Language learning strategies are also to be distinguished from communication strategies, i.e. those used to negotiate meaning between speakers and which often figure in definitions of L2 communicative competence.

Vandergrift's historical survey (1995; cf. Green & Oxford, 1995; Skehan, in press) describes how advances in research methodology have led to more sophisticated typologies of learning strategy, in particular a tripartite division into cognitive or direct strategies, related to the L2 itself and sub-divided into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies; and two categories of indirect strategy: socio-affective strategies, comprising regulating emotions and learning with or from others, and meta-cognitive strategies, which play a coordinating role, involving planning, strategy selection, and self-evaluation.

Both effective and unsuccessful language learners can identify the strategies they use (Green & Oxford, 1995: 262); the difference comes in knowing how to choose and combine them. Advanced and more proficient learners tend to use a wider selection of strategies (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; Green & Oxford, 1995). But if students naïvely imagine, as many do, that residence abroad automatically guarantees maximum proficiency gain for minimum effort, they need to be made aware that without strategies progress can in fact be minimal (Walsh, 1994). They need guidance, perhaps above all in their socio-affective strategies most crucial to residence abroad. 'Students should be made aware of the key importance of active use strategies involving naturalistic practice, especially in situations where the opportunities for such practice are widely available' (Green & Oxford, 1995: 291). Obviously, extra-curricular reading can be of immense value at any time (Gradman & Hanania, 1991), but the residence abroad context offers unique opportunities for spoken interaction.

In short, our students need help in becoming autonomous learners. It has long been known that good language learners take responsibility for their own learning (Naiman et al., 1978), and much recent educational research and practice has focused on the development of independent or autonomous or resource-based language learning (e.g. Dickinson, 1987; Sheerin, 1989; Little, 1989, 1991; Broady & Kenning, 1996; Benson & Voller, 1997). As recent support materials such as the Open University's Language Learner's Good Study Guide underline, independence necessitates redefining the roles of teacher and learner, but does not imply isolation: on the contrary, social autonomy embraces learning to learn through interaction with others. This is indeed the only way for tutor-independent learners to develop productive skills through authentic communication (Littlewood, 1997: 87-9). Data now emerging concerning the first Open University language courses (Stevens, 1997), involving statistically significant numbers of fairly advanced students, is showing the importance of learning with others, of setting challenging but achievable targets, of not perceiving a simple relationship between effort and achievement, of developing strategies such as risk-taking behaviour.

Residence abroad is perhaps the most significant implementation of an autonomous learning strategy anywhere in the university system, and learner training (e.g. Dickinson, 1987: 163-189; 1992) appears imperative. First, there is a need for 'deconditioning' (Holec, 1979) to rid learners of inaccurate misconceptions, regarding especially aptitude ('you have the gift or you don't') and how languages are learnt: Horwitz (1988) charts the range and extent of misconceptions, which, perhaps thanks to misleading advertising, can particularly concern ultimate proficiency attainment (Horwitz, 1988; cf. Coleman, 1996a, 53-8): the unduly optimistic may be demotivated by lack of progress, and the unduly pessimistic will give up or not try.

Second, learners need to be helped to develop both cognitive and affective skills: (a) metalinguistic awareness, i.e. a knowledge of what a language is, how it is learned, and how to divide it sensibly in setting objectives; (b) metacognitive awareness, i.e. strategies and

techniques, how to identify and use resources, and what one's own learning style is; (c) learning management skills, i.e. the ability to define objectives, select appropriate materials and activities, monitor and evaluate the learning process; and (d) a positive attitude and belief in ultimate success. Research to date suggests teachers can succeed in these aims through combining explicit and implicit means (Green & Oxford, 1995; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rost & Ross, 1991) but may themselves need additional training (Little, 1995). Formal learning contexts may not influence cognitive variables such as intelligence, aptitude and learning style, but they may influence affective variables, especially motivation, attitudes and language anxiety, and one cognitive variable: learning strategies.

2.2.9 Sex

Although the study of gender as a variable in language learning is still at an early stage (Bacon & Finneman, 1992; Oxford, 1993; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995), studies of individual language learner differences related to sex (biological) or gender (socially constructed) have shown that females tend to show greater integrative motivation and more positive attitudes to L2landers, to use a wider range of learning strategies, particularly social strategies (Oxford, Nyikos & Ehrman, 1988) and global/synthetic rather than local/analytic comprehension strategies, have more positive affect towards learning, are keener to seek out authentic input and are more willing risk-takers. Studies of actual results suggest females are typically superior to males in nearly all aspects of language learning, except listening vocabulary (Boyle, 1987), but the effect is indirect, through the learning styles, anxiety, attitudes and motivations typically associated with gender.

That sex is an important differentiating factor is attested by the paragraphs in virtually every year-abroad handbook warning females about different conventions regarding inter-personal behaviour and the danger of 'giving the wrong signals', as well as by actual accounts of females' unpleasant encounters with L2land men (e.g. Polanyi, 1995) leading at the very least to embarrassment and anxiety. Such incidents or the avoidance of them might be expected to influence the strategies and actions of females in L2land, and might help explain the finding by Brecht, Davidson & Ginsberg (1993) that male students of Russian make better progress in listening and speaking while abroad.

2.2.10 Linguistic variables: pre-residence proficiency and interaction with L2landers

The pre-residence proficiency level is one variable which has been linked to proficiency gain during L2land residence. Huebner (1995) has demonstrated the benefits even for ab initio learners, while the fact that greater gains were registered by weaker students has been referred to by Willis et al. (1977), Dyson (1988), Alderson & Crawshaw's small Erasmus survey (1990), and Milton & Meara (1995). Brecht et al. (1993) assert that students with the most solid preparation in terms of reading and grammar make most progress in speaking, listening as well as reading, an observation connected to timing of residence abroad (below). Fryer & Day (1993) claim that even for work placements, general language training, especially in listening skills, is more appropriate than language for specific purposes.

One natural and universal assumption which Schumann's acculturation model shares with Gardner's and many others (see Coleman, 1996a: 73) is that extensive and intensive interactions with native speakers are the route to improved linguistic skills, that the quantity and quality of interactions with native speakers will influence L2 acquisition, and that students who seek out opportunities to use the target language will benefit most from their

stay abroad (Bialystok, 1978; Lussier et al., 1984; Martin, 1980; Parr, 1988; Rubin, 1975; Seliger, 1977; Stern, 1983; cf Ellis, 1994: 233). Students themselves recognise that improvements in L2 competence are hampered by 'too much contact with persons of own country' (Teichler, 1991).

But such views are balanced by studies which found no correlation in similar circumstances (Swain, 1981; Day, 1985). Spada (1985, 1986) and Freed (1990) distinguish interactive (actual dialogue) and non-interactive (reading, watching TV, etc.) contact: both find interactive contact brings more benefit to lower-level learners. Freed (1990) found that level of interactive contact correlated with progress in grammatical accuracy only for less advanced US students on a study visit to France. But only more advanced students derived measurable benefit from receptive contact with TV and radio, books and newspapers. Regan (1995) attributes the individual variation in her sociolinguistic study to the degree of interactive contact with native speakers.

In the 1986 UK survey (Meara, 1994b) self-reported time spent in interactive contact with native speakers varied considerably, with below 50% reporting 'a great deal' of time. However, the proportion of time students claim to have spent interacting with native speakers is the variable which best correlates with self-rated overall improvement, proving more significant than the language studied, the type of placement, or the point in the course at which residence abroad took place (the later the higher the perceived improvement).

Students whose learning strategies and awareness of the SLA process have not been developed before going abroad may be unwilling to seek out opportunities for interactive contact. Even when students recognise the importance of socialising for linguistic development, they try misguidedly to compensate for unsatisfactory formal teaching by additional solitary study (Batardière, 1993). Diaries, revealing students' implicit models of SLA, can show over-reliance on classroom-like strategies and under-exploitation of potentially useful language-learning opportunities (Miller & Ginsberg, 1995). Milton & Meara (1995) found no correlation between vocabulary acquisition abroad and L1, previous length of study, or even contact with L2landers, but a surprising negative correlation with time spent in formal and informal study: the most assiduous class attenders learned less than the others. Perhaps the security of consistent attendance may be a way of compensating for less complete integration into the target language community. Teichler (1991) had similarly concluded that students relying less on formal teaching and more on independent study progressed better.

2.2.11 Type/role

There is much speculation but little empirical evidence as to which L2land role - foreign student, language assistant or stagiaire, each with its own opportunities and constraints - brings greatest linguistic benefits, and why. The students on work placement in Willis et al. (1977) seem to have made greater gains in language proficiency, but they were better motivated, had a more positive attitude, interacted more with L2landers, and had been selected on ability and personality. Students themselves (Meara, 1994b) felt studentships brought least gain, a view echoed by programme coordinators (Doble & Griffiths, 1985). Byram & Aldred (1993) bring together student reflections on assistantships in an extensive qualitative study which brings out, among many other matters, the ambiguous social and cultural role of the assistant as a professional non-native speaker. Once again, type of placement is a factor interacting in complex ways with others, and Teichler & Steube's wide-

ranging typology of study abroad programmes (1991) suggests type of L2land placement is a less significant factor than variables related to the student's L1land

2.2.12 Other circumstantial variables

The optimum length of sojourn in L2land, a factor in Schumann's acculturation model, has understandably aroused speculation. Despite some evidence of correlation with proficiency (Alptekin, 1983: 822; Coleman, 1996a: 89; Teichler, 1991; Willis et al., 1977) and Teichler's suggestion that receptive skills plateau at four months and productive skills at seven months, duration is more likely to interact with other factors than itself to determine proficiency gain. The timing of residence abroad within the university programme does not appear especially significant to students (Meara, 1994b), but coordinators seek to ensure adequate linguistic preparation beforehand (Doble & Griffiths, 1985).

There is very considerable anecdotal evidence that when an individual student is parachuted as English assistant into a small, self-contained and totally L2-speaking community, s/he acculturates rapidly and substantively, with concomitant impact on proficiency. There is also extensive anecdotal and empirical evidence that many residence-abroad students socialise largely within an L1 expatriate group (Willis et al., 1977; Milton & Meara, 1995: 32), or an out-group comprising other non-native L2 speakers. Whatever the benefit for inter-cultural competence of the latter, such students may fail almost wholly to acculturate, and make relatively little linguistic progress. Perhaps because of previous visits in more predictable and secure roles as tourists, au pairs or school-exchange pupils, students expect to integrate more easily than they actually do (Lillie, 1994), a fact which implies that preparation should address both the expectation and the strategies for integration.

The availability of an L1 social group seems intuitively to have the potential to enhance or diminish overall language gain. Talking to compatriots in similar situations can reduce anxiety, relieve the stress of constant L2 use, of language shock and of culture shock, alleviate the fear of loss of identity which may often lead to a preservation strategy (Alptekin, 1983), and thus rebuild the self-esteem and self-confidence necessary for language risk-taking and other effective learning strategies. The learner's L1land support group may be vital at first to obviate total social isolation and potential associated psychiatric problems (Alptekin, 1983). A quantitative study exploring longitudinally the relationship between L2 gain and social contact with L1landers might confirm intuitive advice to students to avoid compatriots after the first couple of weeks.

Clearly, the matter of location in big city or small country town, of urban/rural environment, and of accommodation in university residence, private dwelling with a family, school apartment, flat shared with (non-) L2landers is often a practical one, determined by type of placement or other factors outwith the learner's control. Nonetheless, such factors are likely to have a major influence on opportunities for acculturation and interaction with native speakers (Kaplan, 1989; Noreiko, 1995: 200; Willis et al., 1977). Material, financial and personal problems have also been raised (Lillie, 1994; Teichler, 1994; Teichler & Steube, 1991) as an obstacle to achievement of residence-abroad objectives.

3. Research into language gain during residence abroad

Current practice is imperfect in part because it is uninformed. Given the centrality of residence abroad to the language student's learning experience (HEFCE, 1996), the reiterated

complaint of lack of empirical research into the topic (Doble & Griffiths, 1985: 202; Freed, 1995a: 5, 16; Meara, 1994b: 38; Walsh, 1994: 48; Willis et al., 1977: 5) might be surprising were it not for the educational context sketched in earlier. Recent years, however, have seen, as well as three attempts to survey residence-abroad literature (Walsh, 1994; Coleman, 1995a; 1996: 65-86), two books dedicated to the subject (Parker & Rouxeville, 1995; Freed, 1995a); the latter (Freed, 1995a: 3-16) also reviews relevant literature, and notes the shortcomings of a number of studies: absence of control groups, inadequate sample size or duration, unsatisfactory testing procedures (including ceiling effect and insufficient discrimination), and an over-reliance on self-report rather than objective measurement.

The following paragraphs focus principally on the impact on L2 proficiency of extended L2land residence, excluding consideration of the non-linguistic impact of residence abroad, conventionally measured in terms of personal maturity and independence, of improved academic and transferable skills, and of increased cultural awareness and insight. I also concentrate primarily on specialist language students: although these constitute a minority of those studying languages in UK universities (Thomas, 1993), and a minority of those undertaking ERASMUS exchanges, specialist language students have provided the subjects for most studies. Areas in which residence abroad may influence foreign language proficiency can be summarised as overall proficiency, grammar, lexis, oral-aural skills and fluency, and sociolinguistic competence: they are considered in that order.

In her overview, Freed (1995a) cites Ellis's cautious conclusion on the interaction between formal instruction and naturalistic acquisition: 'there is support for the claim that formal instruction helps learners to develop greater L2 proficiency, particularly if it is linked with opportunities for natural exposure' (Ellis, 1994: 616). J.B. Carroll (1967) as part of a major survey of language students, first found a correlation between time spent abroad and foreign language proficiency, though without analysing the nature of the link nor the particular language skills involved. The major, continuing longitudinal study of students of Russian at the US National Foreign Language Center (Brecht et al., 1993) has shown that study abroad leads to greater proficiency than study at home. Gomes da Costa et al. (1975), Opper, Teichler & Carlson (1990), Alderson & Crawshaw (1990), and Teichler (1991; 1994) also found that study abroad raises proficiency substantially. Milton & Meara (1995: 31) assert that the students visiting the UK in their study learned English as a foreign language nearly five times faster on average during their exchange than they did taking classes at home. Regular pre- and post-testing for the Ohio State-Purdue-Emory Semester Programs, in which students spend a semester at the Pushkin Institute in Moscow has on five successive occasions measured gains on test scores of between 20.2% and 34.3% (Cormanick, personal communication): would that such systematic monitoring were more widespread closer to home!

While residence abroad clearly plays a major part in raising overall foreign language proficiency levels, Raffaldini (1987) found evidence of loss of proficiency upon return. Despite continued tuition, there was attrition in communicative effectiveness, in appropriateness and coherence/cohesion, and an increase in errors of lexis, morphology and structures. Coleman (1996: 48-49) found no evidence of language gain despite tuition after return from residence abroad. Meara (personal communication) found lexical attrition after return. Raffaldini underlines the importance of self-confidence, attitudes to L2 and L2landers, and continued out-of-class practice to maintaining proficiency after return. Ellis (1994: 354) lists three factors related to fossilisation which may be relevant here: a lack of desire to

acculturate, a lack of opportunity to practice the L2, and positive cognitive feedback indicating communicative needs have been met (cf. remarks on confidence, above, §2.2.3)

What of the impact of residence abroad on the different dimensions of the overall construct of global language proficiency? Although a longitudinal study of four German students during a six-month stay in England (Lennon, 1990) reports greater syntactic complexity and a reduction in errors, and Walsh (1994) identified some morpho-syntactic progress in some students, no significant grammar gains were found in a limited American study (Cox & Freed, 1988), or in an extended study of German students in France (Möhle & Raupach, 1983; Möhle, 1984; Raupach 1987), a comparative study of American learners in Spain and at home (De Keyser, 1986; 1991), or a longitudinal study of Irish students in France (Regan, 1995). However, residence abroad has also been claimed to affect the order in which L2 grammar is acquired (Ryan & Lafford, 1992), apparently as a result of increased authentic input.

Vocabulary gains have been shown by DeKeyser (1986, 1991), Lennon (1990) and Walsh (1994), and formed the central focus of a study by Milton & Meara (1995), in which the authors evaluated the growth in English vocabulary of 53 European exchange students at a British University. The test used has been shown to correlate well with other aspects of language performance and therefore represents an indication of general language proficiency. Mean progress was impressive, and although there were substantial individual differences, vocabulary growth was shown to be far greater than during study in the home environment, especially for initially weaker students.

With regard to oral-aural skills, Freed (1995a: 11) reviews several US studies which have linked residence abroad to improved proficiency, while Brecht et al. (1993) highlight gains in speaking. American studies comparing students of French, Spanish and Portuguese who stayed at home to peers who spent six weeks to one year abroad all showed a higher increase in oral proficiency among the latter (Magnan, 1986). Two British longitudinal studies (Dyson, 1988; Willis et al., 1977) found substantial improvement in speaking and aural comprehension, although there was considerable individual variation, and weaker students made more progress. Dyson's respondents also felt intuitively that their progress had been essentially in listening and speaking rather than reading and writing: self-reported gains were thus apparently confirmed by objective measure. The generalisability of Dyson's findings is, however, attenuated, since subjects were self-selected volunteers, of above-average proficiency, and nearly all on assistantships. Meara (1994b: 32) also questions the exclusive choice of speaking and listening tests, their non-standardised nature, the impressionistic marking, the lack of a control group, and the fact that the mean improvement of the group is largely accounted for by the considerable improvement of the weaker students. Other studies using self-report only (Meara, 1994b, analysing data from a 1986 UK survey in which language specialists from traditional universities may again be over-represented; Batardière, 1993) also find self-reported gains concentrated in oral-aural skills.

Fluency has no agreed definition (but see discussion in Lennon, 1990; Freed, 1995b). DeKeyser (1986; 1991) found no significant differences in oral proficiency between the study-abroad and the stay-at-home groups, but noted fluency gains in the former. Walsh (1994) reports gains in fluency by Irish students of German, and Lennon (1990) by German students of English (with high individual variation). Towell's longitudinal study of twelve learners of French shows the crucial importance of residence abroad to the development of fluency in the target language (Towell, 1994; 1995). Fluency may be taken to include speed

and self-correction, and Lafford (1995) found that learners of Spanish who study abroad develop a broader range of communicative strategies for initiating, maintaining and terminating an interaction, while their speech is more rapid and contains more repairs. Freed's comparative study (1995b) shows that after controlling for aptitude, motivation and anxiety, study-abroad students demonstrating lower initial fluency show somewhat greater gains than stay-at-home students.

Laudet (1993) criticises some earlier research on advanced-level learners (Raupach, 1987; Towell, 1987) for using cognitively non-demanding tasks, and thus not exploring the effect on fluency of the demands of cognitive and linguistic processing. Her own longitudinal study followed three Irish students of French for Business, and measured a substantial increase in fluency, which Laudet interprets as improved language processing resulting from residence abroad. The speaking rate (syllables per minute), articulation rate (syllables per second of actual speech) and phonation/time ratio (percentage of total time spent speaking) all increased significantly. The native-like quality of the students' speech was also enhanced by a reduction in pauses, both unfilled and filled (euh...), in drawls (extended vowels) and repetitions, all of which allow the learner additional time for thought and for language processing. Laudet concludes that 'during their stay abroad students have refined their own way of coping with processing difficulties and have developed ways of sounding more like native speakers while giving themselves time to think' (Laudet, 1993: 22). Lennon's small-scale study (1990) reaches different conclusions, finding no increase in fluency and an actual increase in dysfluency markers; Doble (1994), like Willis et al. (1977) found that, in pronunciation and intonation, deterioration can occur, even during and shortly after residence abroad'. Many researchers retain suspicions (reviewed in Coleman, 1996a: 85) that as far as fluency and oral-aural skills are concerned, learners acquire the disguise of the native speaker rather than the identity, the convincing performance and not the underlying competence.

Advanced learners in L2land can achieve near-native ability to recognise L2land dialectal and sociolectal variations, and adopt local stereotypical attitudes towards them (Eisenstein, 1982). Marriott's (1995) study of Australian learners of Japanese shows considerable but incomplete acquisition of native politeness norms, with very considerable individual variation. Regan's longitudinal study (1995) of six Irish learners of French, despite high individual variation, confirms earlier studies (Möhle & Raupach, 1983; DeKeyser, 1991; Huebner, 1991; Guntermann, 1992) in showing that residence abroad has a very striking impact on the acquisition of native speaker sociolinguistic norms, but little on grammatical skills. In other words, students often seem to become more fluent and acceptable to native speakers while not improving their grammatical competence. Sociolinguistic skills also suffer attrition after return (Raffaldini, 1987).

4. Conclusion

Well over a million people study abroad each year; under the European Union's Socrates programme alone the figure is nearly 200,000. The magnitude of this migration, and its cost to individuals and institutions, impose a duty to optimise its positive impact, not least in terms of enhanced foreign language proficiency.

Three broad lessons emerge from this review. There is a demonstrated need for more research, particularly longitudinal studies embracing multiple interacting factors, both linguistic, as in Brecht, Davidson & Ginsberg (1993), and cognitive/affective, as exemplified

by Ehrman & Oxford (1995). Residence abroad must have objectives which are clear to all involved. Preparation is all-important.

The preparation needs to comprise, in addition to practical advice and direct language tuition, four components. Firstly, students need to recognise the role of trait variables - motivation, aptitude, and especially learning style/personality. Secondly, students need to develop self-awareness, to recognise their own learning style, including elements such as ego boundaries and risk-taking, and their preferred strategies. Thirdly, students need to be sensitised to less stable variables, especially attitudes, and to be helped to develop, through deep understanding of cultural relativity and acculturation, intercultural competence, accompanied by the observational techniques necessary to fulfil the role of participant observer. Fourthly, in order to develop the essential learner autonomy, students must acquire three types of learning strategy: cognitive strategies relating to language learning; affective strategies to manage anxiety, and to reduce language and culture shock; and above all metacognitive strategies to enable them to select appropriate strategies and behaviours in the light of knowledge of their own objectives, and their own cognitive and affective make-up.

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