Formative (self-)assessment

as

autonomous language learning

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ABSTRACT

While learner autonomy is often lauded as an important goal in language education, applied linguists have debated if it is a construct that has been given proper attention in terms of definition and assessment. In order to address this debate the researcher implemented a two-phase study within the context of higher education. Theories of learner autonomy, sustainable assessment and transformative learning guided the study design.

In the research design, the nexus between language learner autonomy and assessment as learning was first explored in phase one of the study. Here survey methodology was used on a global scale: Findings from 45 respondents in 13 countries indicate that indeed language learner autonomy is being widely assessed, and, further that a variety of tools, evidence and people are implemented in this task.

In phase two of the study, the most important stakeholders of learner autonomy – language learners – participated in Q-methodological study of their perceptions of the non-linguistic outcomes of learning in an autonomous environment: A total of 30 participants from Hong Kong, Japan and the UK completed a Q sort and interview. The findings of the Q study showed that there were six different ways of being autonomous, and these were interpreted as 'modes of autonomy'. These modes of autonomy were lastly used to devise a tool for the formative self-assessment of learner autonomy.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Dr Richard Pemberton: a wonderful friend, colleague, and PhD supervisor. I miss him greatly.

NOT EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE COUNTED

COUNTS, AND NOT EVERYTHING THAT COUNTS

CAN BE COUNTED.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALL – Autonomous language learning

EFL – English as a foreign language

ELT – English Language Teaching

ESL – English as a second language

ESOL – English as a Second or Other Language

L2 – second language

LA – learner autonomy

LLA – language learner autonomy

MMR – mixed methods research

NLLOs – non-linguistic learning outcomes

1 Introduction

In a TEDTalk (B. Brown, December 2010), an American social worker and researcher called Brené Brown recalls a memory from her days as a doctoral student. She describes how she got excited when a research professor told the class 'Here's the thing. If you cannot measure it, it does not exist.' Her talk then goes on to describe how her research into 'connection' between people developed, and how her desire to measure 'connection' – and thus control and predict it – was thwarted when she discovered that, at the root of connection, was vulnerability: a construct that is not measurable, and, according to Brown, is far from controllable and predictable. This revelation – that her research was premised on a notion which was subsequently shown to be unfounded, caused Brown to have what she called a 'breakdown' and what her therapist called a 'spiritual awakening'. As an introduction to this thesis, I would like to tell you about my spiritual awakening.

There are similarities between Brené Brown's doctoral journey and the one I am about to share with you in this thesis. I initially set out with the aim of measuring, or at least quantifying, learner autonomy in some way. I was not sure what that way was going to be, and so when I discovered 'Q methodology' I realised that this might be the research method that could help me on the route to quantification of what was, essentially, a very subjective area. As my research progressed however, I realised that, for me, the 'holy grail' of calculating the *amount* of learner autonomy that an individual is able to manifest in the process of language learning is not only most probably unattainable, but also undesirable. At heart I am an interpretivist researcher, and one who takes a social constructivist stance towards learning – and learner autonomy and assessment are not

exceptions to that. Learner autonomy lacks clear definition and delineation, which in itself makes it difficult to quantify, but one of the things that makes it important is the focus on the person. By reducing learner autonomy to a number, much of what is significant and meaningful about the concept is lost. In terms of assessment, what excited me about the topic was the notion of alternative assessment as a means of enhancing learning and being in the control of the learner. These views did not sit comfortably with my original aim of being able to give a learner a number to show how autonomous they are compared to someone else.

Interestingly, the cognitive dissonance I experienced at this point became most apparent to me through the use of Q methodology: the stories focusing on the person – which Q methodology helped me to generate – were, I felt, more nuanced than they might have been had I used a more conventional methodology, and they demonstrated to me just how complex our understanding of learner autonomy needed to be. I realised that Q methodology could allow me to retain my interpretivist stance, and at the same time offer greater depth and understanding than might otherwise have been possible using qualitative methods alone.

At the start of my doctoral journey, I was told that research is not linear or straightforward but always messy, like a child 'taking a pencil for a walk' on a piece of paper. Brené Brown's journey took her from connection to shame to vulnerability. Mine has taken me from rather fixed ideas about whether learner autonomy can be assessed or not, to the non-linguistic outcomes of autonomous language learning, to modes of autonomy, to the understanding that autonomy and assessment should both be about knowing our learners and allowing them to develop richer, more fulfilled lives. Here is that account.

1.1 Overview of the research

This thesis investigates the assessment of language learner autonomy[1] but starts from a basic viewpoint: that language learner autonomy has consequences that reach far beyond the language classroom. That, in fact, autonomy is about developing as a language learner, but in ways which benefit the life of the learner beyond language proficiency. In the words of Little (1991, p.8), learner autonomy is about 'the desire to remove the barriers between learning and living'. This view sees language learner autonomy to be about the development of the individual as much as it is about the development of the language learner.

In this thesis, assessment is considered an important tool in that learner development. However, 'assessment' in this context has a particular connotation: one of being a humane process, at the root of which are the everyday concepts of *making judgements* and a sense of *knowing* what one is making judgements about. My work has been greatly influenced in this sense by two scholars – one a Professor of Education, Derek Rowntree, whose seminal book about assessing students asked 'How shall we know them?' (Rowntree, 1977). The other influence is David Boud, a Professor Emeritus of Adult, Higher and Professional Education in Australia, whose work on assessment in higher education and the workplace has, I believe, done much to make us aware of the irrelevance of many assessment practices and how they might be changed.

The research started with the development of a model of learner autonomy to be used in subsequent phases of the study. Then, to set the scene and to complement the literature review, the next phase sought to gain an

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[1] Henceforth, the terms 'learner autonomy' and 'autonomy' are used to signify 'language learner autonomy' unless otherwise stated.

understanding of the worldwide practices of the assessment of language learner autonomy in the field using survey research methods. Thirdly, Q methodology was used to investigate learners' perceptions of the non-linguistic outcomes of autonomous language learning, and the data derived from this phase were used to indicate the emergence of 'modes of autonomy'. These modes of autonomy were then utilised to outline how a tool for the formative (self-)assessment of language learner autonomy might be developed. The tool aims to provide a means by which learners are able to know themselves better (and, where relevant, their educators are able to know them better) and to make better-informed judgements about their progress as autonomous language learners.

1.2 Background and motivation for the study

In 1999, when I started my career in tertiary language teaching, the idea of autonomous learning was relatively new, especially in my teaching context in Japan. The concept of learner autonomy had first been introduced to language learning in the 1980s by Holec (1981) in his work for the Council of Europe, and although the idea had been around before that in education in a general sense, it had not been adopted on a wide scale until that time. Now though, the notion of autonomous or independent learners is wide-ranging. The idea of autonomous learning has not just underpinned work in language learning and teaching, but references to autonomous and independent learners can now be found throughout higher education across all disciplines (e.g., Bull, Quigley, & Mabbott, 2006; Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Todd, Bannister, & Clegg, 2004). Indeed, in some recent work I have been doing on employability in the curriculum, the ability to learn autonomously is regarded as fundamental to what makes a graduating tertiary level student 'employable' in the UK work place. Thus the notion of autonomous learning has taken hold and has

become central to our understanding of what makes good learning, and increasingly, what makes good citizens and good people. Such ideas were implicit in Holec's work as well: that learner autonomy is not just about the learner but is about the person as a whole. According to Holec (1981), the development of language learner autonomy emerged from a democratic ideal in which citizens would be able to take stock of their own lives and contribute to a wider society in ways which enrich our humanity; that, in fact, autonomy was a response to the 'need to develop the individual's freedom by developing those abilities which will enable him [sic] to act more responsibly in running the affairs of the society in which he lives' (Holec, 1981, p. 1).

Developing good citizens and enriching humanity might be considered a grandiose and idealistic view of education and learning, and yet it appeals to me because I believe that this is fundamentally what the role of an educator should be. These idealistic views of autonomous learning also have implications for what it means to provide a university education in the 21st century. This question is currently prominent in the UK, with the rise of neo-liberalism in higher education (Clarke, forthcoming; Sleeter, 2008) and the increase in fees to a maximum of £9,000 per year, payable by undergraduates to go to university. This issue is also being discussed in Hong Kong, where the whole system of education is undergoing rapid reform in the move to a 3+3+4 system of education with the 4 representing an extra year of university education (ECHK, 2000). In Japan, also, where for many years now the numbers of students attending university has decreased, there is an acknowledgement that the homogeneity of society means that there is now a vital need to open up society and develop citizens who are able to operate in an increasingly globalised world, both at home and overseas (MEXT, 2009). In part, it is

for these reasons that these countries formed the context for this research. More about the research context is discussed in section 7.5.4; here my point is simply that higher education institutions and government policy in these three countries, and arguably elsewhere, appear to recognise the need to address what is being sought and achieved by tertiary level students. Furthermore, what is society at large hoping to gain from the process of educating its young people? One of my arguments is that what should be gained through the process of higher education are learners with greater levels of autonomy who are able to utilise their lifelong learning skills through their adult working years.

To return to language learning, in particular, I believe very strongly that developing greater autonomy is important for language learners. Not only does autonomy help language learners to be more effective in the process of learning a language (Benson, 2011b; Dafei, 2007), but good language *users* need to develop greater autonomy too, because language learning does not stop in the classroom. If you are to be a successful user of a language you need to continue your learning in environments where you do not necessarily have the support of a teacher; where you need to maximise the human and material resources around you to support you in your learning endeavours. Further discussion of the relationship between autonomous language use and autonomous language learning is made below in section 2.2 in the discussion about dimensions of learner autonomy (Macaro, 1997, 2008).

So far in this section I have discussed the background for the study in terms of learner autonomy, but what about assessment of autonomy? During my time working as the self-access learning centre (SALC) founder and supervisor at a small, private university in Japan, I was frequently asked by the university administration – who part-funded the centre – and

visitors who came to learn about setting up a self-access centre in their own institutions, how we knew that students benefitted from using the SALC. They wanted to know if there *were* any benefits, what exactly was being learned, how did autonomous learning impact on the language proficiency of learners, and, ultimately, was investment in such learning environments worthwhile? On the one hand I resented having to justify something that was popular with learners. At that time, we had approximately 3000 registered users and were constantly trying to find extra space for both resources and users of the centre. Furthermore, research had found that students enjoyed using the SALC and felt that it provided them with many opportunities to use and practise their language skills (Cooker, 2004). On the other hand I was frustrated that, at that time, no tool existed for being able to *prove* the effect that using the SALC had on learners. We could have looked at various measures of language proficiency such as the KEPT (the university in-house proficiency test with a ground-breaking, group oral component) or TOEIC® (Test of English for International Communication), and compared scores of students who used the SALC and those who did not, but as has been well documented in the literature (Gardner, 2001; Morrison, 2005), there are difficulties in separating the language learning which can be attributed to *autonomous* language learning and that which can be attributed to learning in other ways. After some preliminary research and reading, I started to think that perhaps one way of proving the effect that learning in an autonomous learning environment had on learners was to focus on autonomy rather than linguistic proficiency. That led me towards the desire to be able to measure the level of autonomy of our SALC users, and this led me to the focus for this doctoral research.

What though, is the connection between learner autonomy and language learning? As mentioned earlier, I believe that learner autonomy is crucial for effective language learning. Good language learners do not stop learning when they leave the classroom, and so it could be argued that a lot of the pedagogy for learner autonomy is about encouraging out-of-class learning so that students recognise and maximise the opportunities available to them to practise their language skills in daily life. It is also about equipping students for and encouraging lifelong learning. In other words, to help them carry on learning after they leave school, college or university. In my view, successful language learning has to be considered a lifelong project. As teachers, we see our students in class for a limited number of hours per week. Over the time span of a semester, or even a year, however much time is spent in class will be relatively little time in which to 'make a difference'. What we can do, however, in that time, is ensure that our students have the knowledge and awareness to further their own learning of languages once they have left our classrooms – whether that be at the end of the day or at the end of the course. I believe that as language teachers we have a particular responsibility to support the development of our learners' autonomy, and that this is as equally important as our responsibility to support the development of their language proficiency.

As well as a strong belief in the importance of learner autonomy, I also have a strong belief in the power of assessment to both empower and demotivate learners. This belief comes from my own experiences at school. As an O level student I loved exams. I understood clearly what I had to do and how I needed to study to make the most of my abilities. As a consequence, I did well and I was satisfied with my progress. However, during A levels I was not at all clear about what was expected of me. I did

not understand how to learn or how to succeed at A level. I became very unmotivated and subsequently I did poorly in my final exams. Although I had the knowledge and strategies to work successfully within the assessment system at 16, I lacked understanding of the system and how to work successfully within it at 18.

My story here and the background given earlier in this chapter helps to position me within this research study. To summarise, I am an advocate of language learner autonomy for in-class and out-of-class learning. I understand that assessment is an important part of learning, and acknowledge that being able to assess learner autonomy could have institutional and personal benefits, but I also understand the demotivating power of assessment when learners have little understanding of the assessment system or the benefits of using that system. In this thesis, I hope I have gone some way towards balancing these beliefs and exploring both autonomy and assessment in ways which will benefit our students.

1.3 Research aims

The overall research aims of this thesis are:

1. To define language learner autonomy from a practical perspective in terms of what learners need to do to support themselves in the development of their autonomy.

2. To investigate whether and how language learner autonomy in higher education is currently assessed.

3. To understand learners' perceptions of the non-linguistic outcomes of autonomous language learning as a means by which a learner-informed assessment tool can be developed.

4. To develop a learner-informed tool for the self-assessment of language learner autonomy.

1.4 Thesis outline

Chapters 2 and 3 make up the two parts of the literature review. In these chapters, I position the thesis in relation to the learner autonomy literature and the literature on assessment and argue that effective assessment is fundamental to the successful development of learner autonomy.

Chapter 4 presents the theoretical perspectives underpinning the thesis, drawing on social constructivism, theories of autonomy and transformative learning theory.

Chapter 5 presents the model of learner autonomy developed for this thesis and used as the basis for the two stages of research presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

In Chapter 6, the first phase of research, surveying global learner autonomy assessment practices, is presented and discussed. The chapter includes a description of the survey methodology used, the results of the survey study, and a discussion of the implication of the findings.

Chapter 7 is the first of two chapters dealing with Phase 2 of the research. It describes Q methodology from a theoretical perspective, including a discussion of its appropriateness in this research, and then explains how Q methodology was adapted for, and implemented in, the current study.

Chapter 8 presents the findings of Phase 2 of the research. It discusses the six factors which were generated from the Q methodology study, and contextualises these with an analysis of the interview data, which were also generated in this phase of the research, to create six modes of autonomy.

Chapter 9 is the culmination of the previous two chapters and comes in two parts. Part 1 presents the narrative descriptions of the six modes of autonomy and provides an illustrative profile for one of the learners who defined each mode. Part 2 presents the self-assessment tool developed from the modes of autonomy together with a discussion of its theoretical basis and an explanation of how it was developed and its use is envisaged.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis, explaining its significance, discussing its limitations, outlining ways in which the research has been disseminated and plans for future dissemination, and suggesting some areas for future research.

2 Learner Autonomy

2.1 Introduction

Learner autonomy is commonly defined as complex, multifaceted, and multidimensional (Benson, 2011a, 2011b; Blin, 2004). These terms are a useful shorthand to introduce what has been called a 'slippery notion' (Tschirhart & Rigler, 2009, p. 71), but they perhaps also belie the vast amount of work that has gone into defining and refining what is meant by the term over the last twenty years. Here I argue that the plethora of definitions, versions, and perspectives of autonomy provides a useful, theoretical understanding of what learner autonomy means, and indeed should perhaps lead us to think of learner 'autonomies' (Sinclair, 2008, p. 238) rather than learner autonomy. However, I shall also assert that if we are to push the boundaries of research and practice into learner autonomy then a more practical model is needed. Such a model is outlined in Chapter 5.

2.2 Theoretical understandings of autonomy in language learning: definitions, versions, perspectives and dimensions

Holec's (1981) seminal definition of autonomy in language learning – 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (p. 3) – is reassuringly straightforward compared to the somewhat overwhelming proliferation of definitions (Little, 1991), versions (Benson, 1997), and perspectives (Oxford, 2003; Schwienhorst, 2003) of the intervening twenty years. Despite Benson's recent assertion that 'On the basic definition of learner autonomy, there has been a remarkable degree of consensus' (Benson, 2011b, p. 16) others, such as Macaskill and Taylor, (2010, p. 351) have

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pointed out that 'there does not appear to be a single consensual definition of what is meant by autonomous learning and, indeed, many articles appear to discuss autonomous learning without defining exactly what they mean by it.' Here I review the different definitions, versions and perspectives and argue that there are two aspects to this question of what is meant by autonomy: the theoretical and the practical. Both of these are discussed below.

Theoretical understandings of learner autonomy began with Holec's classic definition (given on page 12 above) which has had an enduring quality. Other definitions which have been influential in contributing to our understanding of what is meant by learner autonomy include the 1990 'Bergen definition':

> Learner autonomy is characterised by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person. (Dam, Eriksson, Little, Miliander, & Trebbi, 1990)

which emphasised the social dimension of learner autonomy and Little's (1991) 'provisional definition' which built on this understanding of autonomy as a social phenomenon:

> Essentially, autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning [...] Because we are social beings our independence is always balanced by dependence; our essential condition is one of interdependence. (pp. 4-5)

Sinclair (1997, 2000) offers a thirteen point definition of learner autonomy which moves towards a more practical understanding. She draws on previous definitions with elements such as 'Autonomy is a construct of capacity', 'Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning', and 'Autonomy has a social as

well as an individual dimension', but includes other important aspects not addressed in definitions of autonomy elsewhere, such as 'There are degrees of autonomy' and 'The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable'. These two understandings of what autonomy is are of particular concern in this thesis: two of the underlying principles are that learner autonomy is not a monolithic construct, and that learners can be more or less autonomous at any one time.

Few other definitions have had an original contribution to make to our understanding of learner autonomy, with the exception of the definition of learner and teacher autonomy proposed by Raya, Lamb and Vieira (2007), which included a transformative element:

> The competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation (p. 1)

In terms of the present study, the Raya, Lamb and Vieira definition is arguably the most useful. In the breakdown of the definition, the authors show how it encompasses notions of autonomy as: a degree of scale, learner control, metacognitive awareness, criticality, and having a transformative function, all of which are pertinent to this study.

Aside from theoretical definitions, autonomy in language learning has also been conceptualised theoretically in terms of versions (Benson, 1997). Benson proposed three versions: technical ('*situations* [emphasis added] in which learners are obliged to take charge of their own learning', p. 19), psychological ('a capacity ... which allows learners to take more responsibility for their own learning' p. 19) and political ('control over the processes and content of learning' p. 19). Benson's framework of versions, whilst widely used and quoted, was criticised by Oxford (2003) for ignoring

the social aspect. Oxford augmented Benson's three versions in her new framework with two sociocultural 'perspectives', which drew upon Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, and Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of Communities of Practice, to underline the importance of a more capable other and cognitive apprenticeships in the development of learner autonomy.

The final theoretical understanding of learner autonomy reviewed here is Macaro's (1997, 2008) 'dimensions'. Macaro is unusual in the learner autonomy literature in that he incorporates second language acquisition theory into his theory of autonomy and includes language use in his model which comprises three dimensions: autonomy of language competence (the developing ability to communicate in the L2); autonomy of language learning competence (the developing ability, confidence and motivation to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies and possibly transfer those into a third, fourth language, etc.); and autonomy of learner choice (the developing ability to set goals, select materials, and feel ownership over the target language). Ultimately, for Macaro (2008), 'autonomy resides in being able to say what you want to say rather than producing the language of others' (p. 60), thus uniquely amongst the other theoretical stances discussed here, Macaro's dimensions clearly address *language* learner autonomy. This, and his emphasis on metacognitive awareness, confidence, and motivation as aspects of learner autonomy are of particular relevance to this thesis.

From these theoretical understandings of learner autonomy, several dichotomies have emerged and include the following:

- Is learner autonomy an attribute of the learner or an outcome of the learning situation (Holec, 1981; Pennycook, 1997)?

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- Is learner autonomy a behaviour or a psychological capacity (Dearden, 1972; Little, 1990)?

- Is learner autonomy a facet of the individual or socially mediated (Benson, in press; Oxford, 2003)?

- Does learner autonomy refer to a capability or an observed behaviour (Allford & Pachler, 2007)?

- Should learner autonomy encompass the emancipatory and transformative notions (Benson, 1997; Pennycook, 1997; Raya et al., 2007) that autonomy has outside the world of the language learner, or is this political and developmental aspect now an anachronism?

From my years of creating what Holec (2009, p. 21) has called 'autonomy-inspired language learning environments', I am keenly aware that perhaps these dichotomies should not be seen as such, but should be regarded more as two ends of a continua along which different autonomies lie. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I believe that further clarification is necessary in order to exemplify the construct of language learner autonomy that was the main underpinning for the basis of this research. Thus, drawing on Cooker (2007), I argue for a view of learner autonomy within language learning which is a personal attribute, evident in both behaviour and attitude, socially mediated, political, and transformative (Raya et al., 2007). By emphasising the transformative nature of learner autonomy, with the attendant focus on power relations, control, and self-actualisation, I propose that from the theoretical perspective, it is here where the interplay between learner autonomy and assessment exists.

2.2.1 Attribute or product?

In the early days of studies on learner autonomy, and with the adjoining interest in the development of self-access centres, there was some debate

as to whether learner autonomy was a product of the learning environment in which learners were placed (Bertoldi, Kollar, & Ricard, 1988; Higgs, 1988) or an attribute integral to the learner. Whilst self-access centres and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) can certainly be a way of encouraging learners along the autonomous path (Gardner & Miller, 1999; Victori, 2000) scholars have more recently agreed that they do not in themselves create autonomous learners (Allford & Pachler, 2007; Cooker & Torpey, 2004). Instead, it is asserted that autonomy is internal to the learner and this 'personal characteristic' (Gardner & Miller, 1999, p. 6) can simultaneously drive forward the development of autonomous learning *and* be the result of autonomous development. As Kenny (1993, p. 433) helpfully points out, 'when learners take the opportunity to explore their own self-concept ... this is their autonomy at work.'

It is now commonly accepted then, that autonomy is a personal attribute, rather than the product of a learning environment or a construct which is external to the learner.

2.2.2 Behaviour or psychological capacity?

Another dichotomy to be discussed in the literature is the Cartesian dualism of learner autonomy: whether it is a personal attribute which is evidenced as behaviour or as a psychological capacity. The difference is an important one for this thesis as there are implications for the understanding of autonomy itself, and for its relationship with assessment. Littlewood, (1996) has defined capacity as 'an ability and the willingness to act on that ability' which presupposes that learner autonomy is a behaviour, albeit in an indirect way. Holec (1981, p. 3) on the other hand, is adamant that autonomy is *not* a behaviour:

> It is indeed an ability, "a power or capacity to do something" and not a type of conduct, "behaviour". 'Autonomy' is thus a

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term describing a potential capacity to act in a given situation – in our case, learning – and not the actual behaviour of an individual in that situation.

Citing Holec, Sinclair (1999a, p. 101) also clearly states her point of view for autonomy as a psychological capacity:

With respect to autonomy in language learning, current understandings of the concept refer to a capacity or ability to make informed decisions about one's learning, rather than actual behaviour...'

and Schmenk (2005) argues for autonomy as a 'human potential' rather than a construct which is socioculturally mediated:

Furthermore, the psychologization of autonomy can sometimes take on forms of naturalization or biologization. Attempts to conceptualize autonomy as an inborn capacity shared by all human beings, for example, clearly aim at neutralizing autonomy on biological grounds. As a result of such naturalization, autonomy is construed as a universal pregiven biological human potential. It may therefore appear to be grounded in our human nature rather than in culturally and historically specific settings. (p. 113)

Whilst the view of autonomy as a capacity certainly has advantages and a logical intuition – in that presumably an autonomous learner is still autonomous whether they are displaying that behaviour or not, in the same way that a piano player can still play the piano whether they are actually doing so or not – it is harder to conceive of autonomy as a useful construct for developing pedagogy if it is not formulated as a behaviour. Indeed, Benson (2011a, p. 73) suggests that 'the validity of our concept of autonomy depends in part on our ability to ground it in observable behaviours and mental states.' Furthermore, evidence for autonomy as a behaviour can be found in the literature on learner beliefs. In her 1995 paper, Cotterall (1995) identified six constructs underlying learners' beliefs about learner autonomy, and then investigated the relationship between those constructs and autonomous behaviour. In a later paper (Cotterall, 1999) these six constructs were then linked to specific behaviours.

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Boud (1988, p. 17) takes the idea of learner autonomy as behaviour further when he describes learner autonomy as '...an ideal of individual behaviour to which students or teachers may wish to aspire'. The importance of this aspiration was shown by Ade-ojo (2005). In his research on the pre-disposition of adult learners towards autonomy, he found that not all categories of learner are willing to be autonomous in their language learning, suggesting that even if one has the capacity, if it is not willingly utilised, then the behaviour will not result.

In a useful synthesis of the 'autonomy-as-psychological capacity' and the 'autonomy-as-behaviour' positions, Little (1990) has argued for autonomy as a psychological construct which emerges *through* behaviour. Thus, while not a behaviour itself, autonomy as a capacity, and the behaviour which is driven by that capacity, are inextricably linked:

> Learner autonomy is essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning. We recognise it in a wide variety of behaviours as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. (p. 7)

In this thesis, I will follow Little and argue that it is the combination of behaviour and capacity working in tandem which comprises another piece of the autonomy jigsaw. In section 5.3, I explain how I operationalised learner autonomy by cataloguing relevant autonomy-focused behaviours.

2.2.3 Individual or social?

Over the years of the development of, and the writing about, the notion of autonomous language learning, it has been regarded as synonymous with terms suggesting that autonomous learning is a solo activity. Two publications in the early 1980s, and one in the late 1990s explicitly linked 'autonomy' with 'individualisation', 'independence' and 'learning alone' either in the titles or in the contents (Benson & Voller, 1997; Brookes &

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Grundy, 1988; Geddes & Sturtridge, 1982). This has led to the misconceived but frequently expressed view, both in the literature and in my personal experience in talking to professional educators, that learner autonomy is about learning alone and without support from others. This is understandably a rather worrying proposition both for learners (who are intimidated at the thought of having to do so) and for teachers (who do not want to lose their jobs!).

Reassuringly, an alternative view of autonomy has been accepted for some time: that true autonomy in language learning does not just have a social element, but is fundamentally a social construct. Little (1990, p. 7) expresses this very powerfully when he states: 'As social beings...total detachment is a principal determining feature not of autonomy but of autism.' Elsewhere, he argues for 'social autonomy' (Little, 1991, p. 27) as the underpinning of psychological autonomy which leads to successful autonomous language learning. Social autonomy develops in environments where naturalistic language use is possible and heavily supported (Little makes the analogy with first language learning situations), and in environments where learners feel in control of their social situation (he gives the example of a woman learning the language of her future husband).

Little further develops his ideas of autonomy as a social construction in a paper co-authored with Dam (Little & Dam, 1998). Here they argue that 'learner autonomy does not equal learner isolation' (para. 7), and talk of 'inescapable interdependence' (para. 8). This echoes Boud's (1988) argument. He posits that interdependence is the ideal end-point of a journey in which learners travel from dependence through counterdependence to independence and finally interdependence. He believes the stage of interdependence to be one of mature autonomy, in

which learners are able to fully interact with a world they have control of. Benson (1996) makes a similar point when he asserts that the issues of power and control, which are so central to the concept of the autonomous learner, can only be achieved through the 'transformation of the learner as a social individual' (p. 34). To paraphrase Benson (op. cit.), and to outline the position in this study regarding the individual/social dichotomy of learner autonomy, there is power in collective decision-making and collective actions: such decision-making and actions are achieved when learners reach the understanding that the most effective learning, perhaps particularly language learning, occurs as a social, and not a solo, activity.

2.2.4 Political or apolitical?

The idea of power developing through the 'social and transformative character of learner autonomy' (Benson, 1996, p. 33) leads logically to the politicised perspective of learner autonomy. This is the most radical perspective, and is the counterpoint to what Sinclair (1997, p. 12) has coined 'learning imperialism': the imposition of a Western version of learner autonomy – one which emphasises the use of strategies, and the development of individuals – at the expense of other versions which may be more rooted in local cultures. The political aspect of autonomy is related to the debate surrounding the implementation of autonomous approaches in different national and cultural settings (Palfreyman, 2003), as well as to arguments concerning the rights of learners and the concatenation of learner, power, and control (Benson, 2000; Crabbe, 1993).

Recent thinking on the political perspective has been informed by scholars such as Benson (1997), Pennycook (1997), Kenny (1993), and Oxford (2003). In arguing for a political version of learner autonomy, Benson (1997) argues that within English language learning it is:

> ...A recognition of the rights of learners within educational
> systems...[and]...a recognition of the rights of the non-native
> speaker' in relation to the 'native speaker' within the global
> order of English. (p. 29)

The political version of autonomy is important to the ideas put forward in this thesis: that learners have rights in assessment practices, and that autonomous approaches can help give learners those rights. Without the politicisation of autonomy the effect of autonomy as being an empowering force behind the learner is weakened.

In an attempt to find some consensus in the debate, Allford and Pachler (2007) have attempted to integrate the various versions under two umbrella terms: 'radical autonomy' and 'gradualist autonomy'. 'Radical autonomy', which they launch a fierce critique of, encompasses the political-critical versions discussed earlier as well as Holec's original definition, specifically the claim that the autonomous learner is able to decide on many aspects of the learning experience, from determining objectives to evaluating what has been learned, 'with or without the help of a teacher' (Holec, 1981, p. 4). Indeed, it is the 'conflict between the teacher's professional expertise and the learner's struggle for autonomy' (Allford & Pachler, 2007, p. 153) which Allford and Pachler are heavily resistant to. Perhaps this is explained by the fact that both have worked in teacher education and thus are somewhat resistant to the notion that teachers can be done without; however, in their versions of learner autonomy, neither Holec nor Benson advocate that the role of the teacher should be diminished – simply altered, so that their 'expertise' is utilised in different ways. Holec (1981, pp. 24-25) describes in detail 'the teacher's new roles' which can be summarised as those of a counsellor (Kelly, 1996) or advisor (Gremmo & Castillo, 2006). Elsewhere I have stressed the importance of having 'expert' advisors, indeed have suggested that there is a case to be made for learning advisors who are more qualified and who

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have greater expertise, than teachers who only work in the classroom (Cooker & Foale, 2005). Benson focuses not on the teacher's changing role per se, but on the development of teacher autonomy. He frames teacher autonomy as part of the expertise of teachers that must be developed if learners are also to 'exercise their own right to autonomy' (Benson, 2000, p. 117); in fact he goes further and as the title of his chapter suggests, argues for learner autonomy as a teachers' right as well as a learners' right (Benson, 2000) in that it is only when teachers are 'prepared to exercise their own right to autonomy' (p. 117) that the broader goals of education – 'shaping the collective life of the society in which ones lives' (p. 114) – are able to be met.

The choices that are made between all of these dichotomies discussed above influence how learner autonomy is construed, and therefore how it is evaluated and assessed. Peer assessment practices have more credibility if one believes that autonomy is a social construct; the position taken here, that learner autonomy encompasses notions of behaviour and psychological capacity has implications for self-assessment; and future-directed self-assessment (Tan, 2007) is relevant if one takes a critical political perspective on autonomy and follows Benson's (2000) argument: that lifelong learning skills empower learners. To summarise the position taken here, the proposal for assessment of autonomy which will be outlined requires an understanding of learner autonomy incorporating autonomy as an attribute, as a psychological capacity emergent in behaviour, and as both a social and political construct.

2.3 Practical understandings of autonomy in language learning

The overview in the previous section offered an understanding of language learner autonomy from a theoretical perspective, but these theoretical

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debates have been criticised as 'idealistic' (Tschirhart & Rigler, 2009, p. 72) and 'of little use to practitioners implementing language learning programmes in the real world' (ibid.). However, such real world understandings of learner autonomy are more difficult to encounter in the literature, causing scholars such as Benson to express a need for 'determining what the necessary components of autonomy are' (Benson, 2011a, p. 65). This is a problematic issue, but a focal one for this paper, and so addressed in some detail here by looking at the work of four scholars: Candy (1991), Cotterall (1995), and Breen and Mann (1997), who go some way towards formulating a real world understanding of learner autonomy.

Candy's (1991) 'Profile of the Autonomous Learner' is a comprehensive and useful collection of 134 competencies, collated from writings of other researchers, spanning twenty years from 1964 to 1984. Candy listed these 134 competencies under 13 headings:

1. Be methodical/disciplined
2. Be logical/analytical
3. Be reflective/self-aware
4. Demonstrate curiosity/openness motivation
5. Be flexible
6. Be interdependent/interpersonally competent
7. Be persistent/responsible
8. Be venturesome/creative
9. Show confidence/have a positive self-concept
10. Be independent self-sufficient
11. Have developed information seeking and retrieval skills
12. Have knowledge about, and skill at, 'learning processes'
13. Develop and use criteria for evaluating

Candy's work was in general education, not specifically language education, nevertheless, his comprehensive list is relevant to our understanding of what is meant by learner autonomy in language learning and many of his criteria have relevance to this study. For example, the criterion 'Be able to choose relevant resources, on the basis of needs, potentialities, objectives, means, and limitations' (op. cit. p. 465) under the heading 'Have developed information seeking and retrieval skills' has a clear relevance to the language learner, whereas others such as 'Be amiable and peace loving' (op. cit. p. 462) seem less relevant. Other criteria are less useful in that they are vague ('Know of available opportunities' op. cit. p. 465) or appear self-defining ('Be able to work autonomously' ibid.). Despite these criticisms, Candy's work is a useful resource for the interested practitioner in language learner autonomy to draw upon.

In section 2.2.2 above, Cotterall's (1995) work on readiness for autonomy was discussed in relation to the discussion on whether or not autonomy is a behaviour or a capacity. However, Cotterall's study was also significant in that it was one of the first studies to attempt to identify components of autonomy in language learning in a practical sense. As mentioned earlier, she identified six constructs underlying language learners' beliefs using a questionnaire study and factor analysis, and then 'hypothesized [the] relationship of each factor to autonomous language learning'. The six constructs underlying language learner beliefs identified by Cotterall were: 1) role of the teacher, 2) role of feedback 3) learner independence, 4) learner confidence in study ability, 5) experience of language learning and 6) approach to studying. The autonomous behaviour which was then linked to the constructs came from the questionnaire statements themselves. For example, the 'learner independence' construct, comprised three statements

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from the questionnaire: 1) I have a clear idea of what I need English for, 2) I like trying new things out by myself, and 3) Learning a language is very different from learning other subjects. Cotterall's study was one of the first to identify autonomous behaviours that could be directly linked back to learners through their beliefs, however the extrapolations made from belief to behaviour are arguably faulty because they ARE extrapolations, in other words guesses about what learners might do. For example, in response to statement 32 'I like the teacher to offer to help me', Cotterall concludes: 'Item 32 suggests that learners who agree with these statements are not ready to initiate enquiries or seek help' (p. 197). Furthermore, in discussing the first construct – the role of the teacher – Cotterall states 'Learners who subscribe to such a view do not correspond to the profile of the autonomous learner. In fact the functions which they assign to the teacher – diagnosing difficulties, allocating time, establishing the purpose of activities – are central to the behaviour of autonomous learners' (p. 197). I shall return to discuss this point later in the thesis.

Breen and Mann (1997) state explicitly that they 'raise issues which are directly related to the practical implementation of autonomous language learning' (p. 132) and that they are concerned with 'what it means to be autonomous' from the perspective of the learner. Their list is a succinct one comprising eight aspects: the learner's stance ('a position from which to engage with the world' p. 134); the desire to learn; a robust sense of self; metacognitive capacity; management of change; independence; a strategic engagement with learning; and a capacity to negotiate. Breen and Mann's list informed the understanding of learner autonomy which is used in this study and presented in section 5.3, but their work also has significance for the likening of practical autonomous behaviour to a mask which can be put on at will by learners wishing to please a teacher:

> Learners will generally seek to please me as the teacher. If I
> ask them to manifest behaviours that they think I perceive
> as the exercise of autonomy, they will gradually discover
> what these behaviours are and will subsequently reveal them
> back to me. Put simply, learners will give up their autonomy
> to put on the mask of autonomous behaviour (Breen & Mann,
> 1997, p. 141).

Breen and Mann argue that this putting on of a mask can be overcome if learners themselves are in control of what is meant by autonomous behaviour. This was the guiding principle behind the current study: that by developing a means of assessing learner autonomy which is learner-informed and learner-formed, the 'mask of autonomous behaviour' would be minimised.

Candy, Cotterall and Breen and Mann all address a real-world understanding of learner autonomy, but I suggest that their models still do not provide enough guidance for language learners or language educators to know how to alter their thinking or adjust their behaviour to become more autonomous. A model which does provide such guidance is presented in Chapter 5.

2.4 Why autonomy in language learning is important

The concept of learner autonomy has become a part of mainstream English Language Teaching over the last thirty years (Schmenk, 2005; Smith, 2003) signified by the inclusion of learner autonomy and its derivatives (teacher autonomy, learner independence, and self-access language learning, for example) as increasingly standard on the strand listings of general ELT conferences, and in text books for teachers on CELTA-type courses and relevant Masters programmes (e.g. Benson, 2003; Harmer, 2007). The universality of learner autonomy can be seen as problematic, however. Benson (2011a), for example, sees the increased prevalence of 'innovations associated with autonomy' (p. 19) such as increased choices and independence for students, perhaps offered within the guise of

timetabled and mandatory 'self directed learning' or 'student centered learning' slots in university course programmes, as a feature of the neo-liberal forces within education, themselves a sign of the globalisation of education and the new capitalism on which our workforces are based. Despite this problematising of the globalisation of learner autonomy, the view I am proposing in this thesis, is that language learner autonomy is a worthy goal for language educators and learners themselves. In fact I will go further and argue that it is a crucial aspect of language learning and I believe that it is important to remind ourselves why this is so. What is it that takes learner autonomy beyond whimsy and into the realms of accepted language learning and teaching methodology?

Jacobs and Farrell (2001) have argued that learner autonomy is central to a paradigm shift that is taking place in English language teaching. In their paper written a decade ago, they listed the eight major changes concerned with the paradigm shift. These were:

1. Learner autonomy

2. Cooperative learning

3. Curricular integration

4. Focus on meaning

5. Diversity

6. Thinking skills

7. Alternative assessment

8. Teachers as co-learners

Jacobs and Farrell argued that 'all the changes are parts of a whole and that the successful implementation of one is dependent on the successful

implementation of others' (p. 4). They further argue that learner autonomy is a crucial part of this paradigm shift as it emphasises the role of the learner, rather than the role of the teacher, and thus is an implied concept in the other seven changes. As such, learner autonomy has significant and practical implications for language education, for example in how classroom groupings are organised:

> [...] the use of small groups – including pairs – represents one means of enhancing learner autonomy (Harris & Noyau, 1990; Macaro, 1997). Learner autonomy is sometimes misunderstood as referring only to learners being able to work alone. By collaborating with their peers, learners move away from dependence on the teacher. Group activity help students harness that power and by doing so they build their pool of learning resources because they can receive assistance from peers, not just from the teacher (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001, p. 5).

Not only is learner autonomy important for the advancement of language learning as a field, but studies done in psychology show that autonomy is a fundamental need in terms of our health and wellbeing as human individuals. In the famous studies done by psychologists Langer and Rodin (1976) and Rodin and Langer (1977), the participants of their study – residents of a care home for elderly people – demonstrated increased levels of alertness, active participation and a general sense of well-being compared to a control group after those same 'innovations associated with autonomy' (Benson, 2011a, p. 19), namely increased choice and increased levels of responsibility, were encouraged in the residents. Not only this, but the sense of increased control over their environment resulted in the residents of the care home living significantly longer than those in the control group.

I am not proposing here that language learners will increase their longevity by becoming more autonomous learners, but I am suggesting that autonomy is a fundamental human need. If elderly residents of a care

home benefit from having increased levels of autonomy in such critical ways then, I argue, language learners will benefit in terms of both learning and life from having more autonomous experiences inside and outside the classroom.

Learner autonomy might not lead to increased life-expectancy, but autonomy is important in that it is closely associated with lifelong learning, which is increasingly an explicit goal of education (Broadfoot, 2005; Jones & Saville, 2009). Lifelong learning may in essence be regarded as an aspect of learner autonomy, and it is also a concept which has particular resonance in language learning – because as language educators we have a duty to provide our students with whatever is necessary for them to be able to take their learning beyond the classroom, by using the human and materials resources around them, and the assets within them, to function effectively in an L2 environment. Lifelong learning is arguably less integral for geography students or history students or engineers. I believe there is something indubitably different about a language student's knowledge and ability to learn how to learn, than a history student's knowledge and ability to learn how to learn, which makes learner autonomy an essential area for inclusion within or outwith the curriculum. Lifelong learning as an aspect of language learner autonomy is a central premise of this thesis.

It is challenging to find scholars within the language learning field who denounce the importance of autonomy in language education, which is in itself testimony to the paradigm shift heralded by Jacobs and Farrell (2001). In a trio of papers on the value and importance of autonomy in education, Hand's proposal and rejoinder (Hand, 2006; Hand, 2010) and Aviram and Assor's defence (2010) make an important contribution to the debate on the value of personal autonomy within general education, but the points they raise are subsidiary in language education and beyond the

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scope of this thesis. From a language education perspective, Ade-ojo, (2005) in his investigation into the pre-disposition of adult ESOL learners in London towards autonomy found 'an overwhelming negative predisposition towards many of the components of autonomy' (p. 206), and thus cautioned against what he termed its 'wholesale advocacy' (p. 207). Aside from Ade-ojo, as far as I am aware, there are few contemporary scholars who write against the importance of autonomy in language learning.

The last point I wish to cover in this discussion of the importance of learner autonomy in language education is perhaps the most important: that learner autonomy results in better language learners and users. Unprecedented research by Dafei (2007) has indicated that learners' proficiency is 'significantly and positively related to their learner autonomy' (p. 1). Dafei (ibid.) investigated Chinese university students and correlated their scores on the Practical English Test for Colleges and a pre-existing questionnaire designed to ascertain the level of autonomy in learners. Dafei's research can be criticised on several counts. For example, the pre-existing questionnaire was focused almost exclusively on learning strategies and thus did not consider other non-strategic aspects of learner autonomy. In addition, Dafei (ibid.) states that the questionnaire had been proven to have high content validity and high reliability, but no data are provided to corroborate this. Furthermore, the original study from which Dafei borrowed the questionnaire is only available in Chinese, and therefore the claims he makes are difficult to verify for non-Chinese speaking researchers. Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, the study is ground-breaking, and there is evidence from elsewhere that learner autonomy has a positive effect on aspects of language proficiency. Dam and Legenhausen (1996) and Klassen Detaramani, Lui, Patri and Wu (1998) evidenced a positive effect of learner autonomy on the acquisition

of vocabulary, in the case of the former, and reading in the case of the latter. In Dam and Legenhausen's study, vocabulary was retained for longer when learned in an autonomy-inspired learning environment; and Klassen, Detaramani, Lui, Patri and Wu demonstrated a significant positive difference in the reading scores of an exam in students who had learned in a self-access centre compared to the control group who had learned in a classroom context.

The difficulties inherent in investigating the effect of learner autonomy on language proficiency and the criticisms of Dafei's study discussed above, illustrate the challenges in researching autonomy discussed in the next section.

2.5 Challenges in researching autonomy

Research on learner autonomy has long been recognised to be challenging because of its intangible and subjective nature. Benson commented on the challenges inherent in research on learner autonomy in his 2001 publication, berating the lack of rigorous approaches to research in the field, saying that 'Often, researchers draw conclusions about the nature of autonomy and the practices associated with it from reflection on their own and others' experiences of fostering autonomy. Far less research has been based on systematic analysis of data' (Benson, 2001, p. 182). In the updated edition of this publication, he has tempered this somewhat, pointing out that the situation has started to change over the last ten years 'with the appearance of high quality data-based studies on autonomy in academic books and journals' (Benson, 2011a, p. 201).

But perhaps there is a need to look deeper and consider why research based on the systematic analysis of data is still lacking within the field of language learner autonomy. Riley's (1996) analogy between research into

learner autonomy and self-access learning on the one hand, and a blind man experiencing bubbles on the other, is helpful in appreciating the full importance of this point: 'He simply does not have the appropriate tools for observing or experiencing the objects in question' (p. 251). Riley's colourful analogy is discussed in further detail in section 7.1, here I will simply argue it is meaningful because intuitively we know him to be correct. Not only is there no standard research method for learner autonomy research, but, as discussed above, we are still not exactly sure of the concept we are researching. As Sinclair (1996) argued over 15 years ago, 'We need [...] to look carefully at the methods of research we use for different aspects of autonomy to ensure that they are really appropriate [...] and [...] we need to be clear about what it is we are looking for when we are looking for proof that promoting autonomy works' (p. 55). More recently Ushioda (2008a) has also commented on the lack of a systematic approach in learner autonomy research and makes a useful comparison with research into motivation and classroom interaction and the methods which have become associated with these fields:

> When it comes to empirical approaches to researching autonomy, I think these approaches do still remain rather under-developed [...] there are plenty of experience-based reports on classroom practice and analyses of classroom practice, but compared to research into other aspects of the teaching/learning process, I think that approaches to researching autonomy ... don't have many systematic tools of inquiry or methods of analysis that have gained widespread credence in the same way that, for example, questionnaires have done in motivation research or, say, conversation analysis in analysis of classroom interaction.

In this thesis, I aim to address the concerns of Benson, and the calls of Riley, Sinclair and Ushioda, by proposing the use of an innovative research method, Q methodology, which takes into account the subjective nature of learner autonomy, and yet which will generate systematic and principled data-driven analyses.

2.6 Levels of autonomy

One of the main motivations for considering the assessment of learner autonomy is found in the belief that 'autonomy is a matter of degree' (Benson, 2007, p. 23). The notion of 'degrees of autonomy' was first discussed by Dickinson (1987) who proposed a complex model spanning eight different stages of the learning process: decision to learn, method, pace, when/where, materials, monitoring, internal assessment and external assessment. Dickinson's definition of learner autonomy was on a continuum, from self-directed learning through self-instruction to learner autonomy, with learner autonomy being 'where the learner takes responsibility for his learning and undertakes all of the management tasks concerned with it' (p. 15). As has been pointed out elsewhere (Taylor, 2007) this emphasis on total independence is now somewhat anachronistic in terms of more contemporary understandings of learner autonomy, nevertheless, conceptualising autonomy in terms of degree was a useful development.

Support for degrees of autonomy also stem from the writings of three scholars in the late 1990s: Littlewood (1997), Macaro (1997) and Nunan (1997). Whilst Littlewood and Macaro each proposed a similar three stage model of autonomy, involving autonomy of language use, autonomy as a learner, and autonomy as a person, both of which can only be said to 'impl[y] [emphasis added] a possible progression from "lower" to "higher" levels of autonomy' (Benson, 2007, p. 24), Nunan (1997, p. 193) explicitly states his belief that there are 'degrees of autonomy'. He proposes five levels of learner action – awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence – although the understanding of autonomy on which these levels are conceptualised is arguably a limited one of engaging with learning goals and materials. Nevertheless, he usefully points out that 'the

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extent to which it is feasible or desirable for learners to embrace autonomy will depend on a range of factors to do with the personality of the learner, the goals in undertaking the study of another language, the philosophy of the institution (if any) providing the instruction, and the cultural context within which the learning takes place' (p. 193).

More recently, scholars have proposed that learner autonomy is fragmentary in nature – even if the learner does achieve complete autonomy within one learning episode, this will not be the case with all learning episodes. For example, Sinclair (2000) argues that the degree of autonomy attained will depend on any one of a number of variables, such as language proficiency, affective factors and task, but adds the important caveat, central to this thesis, that these degrees of autonomy are not stable. According to Sinclair, the variables which may cause learner autonomy to fluctuate include 'affective factors (e.g., mood), environment (e.g., noise, temperature), physiological factors (e.g., tiredness, hunger) motivation (e.g., attitude towards the task, the subject matter, the teacher, materials, co-learners) and so on' (p.8). Complete autonomy can only ever be a future goal, constrained as it is by the interaction of 'personal and situational variables' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 28), although, as van Lier (2007) points out, the learner can operate on an 'increasingly autonomous' (p. 58) basis.

The notion of degrees of autonomy leads us neatly to the issue of assessment of autonomy, which is discussed in the next chapter.

2.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter I first outlined the theoretical and practical understandings of language learner autonomy and concluded that in this research autonomy is construed as an attribute, a psychological capacity emergent

in behaviour, and both a social and political construct with a transforming aspect, but that no practical model of learner autonomy meets the needs of learners wishing to develop learner autonomy or the needs of educators wishing to support their learners in such an endeavour. Secondly, I discussed the importance of language learner autonomy: as a critical element in the paradigm-change which has been taking place in ELT over the last decade; as a fundamental and necessary feature for human development; and for its lifelong learning dimension which is itself essential for language learning. Thirdly, I outlined the challenges in researching autonomy, due to its intangible and ephemeral nature and a lack of suitable research tools. Finally, I reviewed the literature pertaining to levels of autonomy, and concluded that learner autonomy is not absolute, but is likely to be fragmentary and a matter of degree.

3 Assessment

3.1 Introduction

Assessment is an integral part of learning. When, as adults, we set out to learn something, we are constantly assessing our progress in whatever it is we are engaged in learning. It might be a new skill such as car maintenance or upholstery, it might be a subject area such as local history or philosophy, it might be a physical activity such as yoga or windsurfing, or it might be a language such as French or Chinese. As a result of our assessment, we might be motivated to continue, or to give up. Or we might decide that whilst we enjoy learning how to practice yoga from a DVD we would rather participate in a weekly class. Or we might decide we are doing perfectly well at our chosen learning activity and just carry on.

In more formal learning situations assessment takes on a different mantle and one that has indeed become more exacting in the last twenty years. Formal assessment in the UK education system now starts at age 6 and continues until the student leaves education after GCSEs, A levels, undergraduate or postgraduate education. In many cases, assessment of various kinds then continues in the workplace. At all stages, assessment is a big part of our lives, and we should be concerned about the authenticity of it. In the words of Laufenberg:

> We deal right now in the educational landscape with an infatuation with the culture of one right answer that can be properly bubbled on the average multiple choice test [...] that is not learning. That is absolutely the wrong thing to ask ... to ask [students] to always have the right answer doesn't allow them to learn. (Laufenberg, 2010)

As Laufenberg's quote suggests, whilst assessment is an integral part of learning, learning is not always part of assessment. In this thesis I argue that assessment should be much more about learning, because whether we

are learning in school, in the workplace, or for enjoyment in our leisure time, learning is a fundamental aspect of making progress through life. Assessment has a very important role in bringing that learning about, and because, I will argue, learner autonomy is also central to learning, I propose that in the language learning domain we should be thinking about alternative assessment practices.

Alternative assessment has been embraced in mainstream education since the pioneering work of Black and Wiliam and the Assessment Reform Group into formative assessment, or as they called it, Assessment for Learning (AfL) (e.g. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998) in the late 1990s. In the field of language learning and teaching, AfL and other alternative assessments have not been so widely embraced, despite a supposed paradigm shift in assessment in ELT (Davison & Cummins, 2007) and the research into self- and peer- assessment which has been carried out since the 1980s (e.g., Blanche, 1988; Blue, 1988). In language learning and teaching, writing and research about formative assessment have been limited to a small number of specific contexts such as Hong Kong (Lam & Lee, 2010; Mok, 2011) and the UK (Jones, 2010; Leung & Scott, 2009), and amongst a few scholars (e.g., T. Lamb, 2010).

In the sections below, I shall unpack this relationship between learner autonomy and assessment in more detail by discussing the different purposes of assessment and the different assessment practices and how they relate to the development of learner autonomy. Firstly though, I outline what I mean by the term 'assessment', by comparing it to near-synonymous terms such as measurement, testing, and evaluation and discuss the theoretical concepts underpinning the notion of assessment as used in this thesis: constructive alignment and sustainable assessment theory.

3.2 Assessment, measurement, testing and evaluation

This thesis deals very specifically with the assessment of learner autonomy, as opposed to the testing, measurement or evaluation of it. Here I shall provide a brief definition of assessment in relation to other terms, and provide a justification for the emphasis on assessment (as opposed to measurement or evaluation) in this research.

Test, measurement and assessment can be viewed together as a nest of terms, with test at the centre, and measurement and assessment spanning outwards in that order. Tests are a form of psychometric measurement, which utilise quantifiable, numerically-based criteria systems (Bachman, 2004) for measuring how much or how well a student is able to perform. Tests and measurements of this kind derive from a positivist scientific paradigm and are typically used in mainstream language testing (Lynch, 2003). Assessment is typically regarded as a more general, holistic term than measurement and test, and assessments need not be numerically based. Certainly, what has been come to be known as 'alternative assessment' is a radically different concept to measurement and testing, coming from a constructivist scientific paradigm and utilising non-numerical criteria. Forms of alternative assessment are the focus of this research, and are discussed in more detail below.

The terms 'evaluation' and 'assessment' have traditionally been regarded as synonymous by applied linguists although Brindley (1989) and Lynch (2003) distinguish between the more broad-ranging *evaluation* of a programme or institution, and the more specific *assessment* of a learner's achievement.

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3.3 Theoretical concepts of assessment used in the thesis

There are two broad theoretical concepts of assessment which are used in this thesis: constructive alignment and sustainable assessment. These are explained briefly, followed by a rationale for their adoption in this study.

3.3.1 Constructive alignment

The term 'constructive alignment' was coined by the scholar John Biggs (Biggs, 1999; Biggs & Tang, 2007) to describe a process of matching the outcomes of learning to teaching and assessment practices.

'Learning outcomes' refer to what students are able to know, understand, or do, as a result of a lesson, a course, a learning session (SCONUL, 2004) or, for the purposes of this thesis, a period of autonomous learning. Learning outcomes in Bigg's use of the term, are specifically used to drive the quality of learning from an educator's perspective, and not used for managerial purposes of benchmarking or accountability (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 13), uses for which learning outcomes have been adopted. The use of learning outcomes as a driver of educational reform is now more commonly known as 'outcomes-based education' (OBE) or 'outcomes based teaching and learning' (OBTL) and has been widely adopted in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa and Canada, but has been equally widely criticised for being difficult to implement and conceptually flawed (Donnelly, 2007): particularly in less well developed countries where educational resources are limited (Todd & Mason, 2005), and when adopted wholesale within national primary or secondary education systems.

In order to side-step the connotations inherent in OBE, in this thesis I adopt Bigg's original term of constructive alignment to mean simply the

matching of learning outcomes with the processes of learning and assessment. Constructive alignment developed from Bigg's realisation that assessment practices in higher education were not typically driven by the eventual purpose of the learning; in investigating the assessment of learner autonomy then, constructive alignment suggested that the way forward was to look first at the outcomes of learning in autonomy-inspired learning environments, before considering how that learner autonomy could be assessed.

3.3.2 Sustainable assessment theory

In this section sustainable assessment is defined and its use in practical contexts is discussed.

3.3.2.1 What is sustainable assessment theory?

Sustainable assessment theory was developed by David Boud and Nancy Falchikov (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2004, 2006) who, in a series of papers, develop sustainable assessment from an assessment practice, to a theory which 'build[s] on summative and formative assessment to foster longer-term goals' (Boud & Falchikov, 2006, p. 405). Sustainable assessment derives from 'sustainable development'. According to Boud (2000), just as sustainable development is defined as the type of development which meets current needs without impinging upon the needs of future generations, so sustainable assessment can be defined as: 'assessment that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs.' (p. 151). A modified definition by Hounsell and subsequently adopted by Boud (2010) and this study is: 'assessment that meets the needs of the future without compromising the ability of students to meet their present learning needs.'

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For Boud (2000), there is a strong link between sustainable assessment and formative assessment, but whereas formative assessment is assessment for immediate learning (and summative assessment is for certification), sustainable assessment is for lifelong learning. Sustainable assessment does not reject the need for summative assessment but aims to reform the 'inadvertent effects' of it (Boud, 2000, p. 165) through acknowledging, rather than shying away from, the need for assessment to do 'double duty' (p. 160). By this he means that sustainable assessment must do all of the following: meet formative and summative needs; be relevant to learners in the present and for their continued development after leaving the learning environment; and envelop learning content (in this case language) and the learning process itself. The main principles of sustainable assessment are that it is 'socially constructed, participative, embedded and necessarily contextualised' (Boud & Falchikov, 2006, p. 408).

3.3.2.2 Sustainable assessment theory in practice

Boud and Falchikov (2004, 2006) describe ten aspects of teaching, learning and assessment which together comprise a road map for incorporating sustainable assessment practices into learning environments. The ten aspects suggest that such assessment practices should: 1) engage with standards and criteria and problem analysis, 2) emphasise the importance of context, 3) involve working in association with others, 4) involve authentic representations and productions, 5) promote transparency of knowledge, 6) foster reflexivity, 7) build learner agency and construct active learners, 8) consider risk and confidence of judgement, 9) promote seeking appropriate feedback, and 10) require portrayal of outcomes for different purposes. Boud and Falchikov (2006) are keen to point out that

this list should not be considered definitive, but simply a starting point when beginning to think about sustainable assessments.

There has been little use of sustainable assessment theory in empirical work to date. The only known study tested it in a study of tutorials in higher education (Beck, Skinner, & Schwabrow, 2011) looking at the improvement of three long-term learning outcomes – Independent Thinker, Intellectual Maturity and Creativity. The researchers found that the three learning outcomes did improve over time, that student self-assessment improved, and that sustainable assessment theory is useful in areas in which there is a strong commitment to student-teacher equity (e.g. autonomous learning environments where such a commitment is a defining aspect) and student monitoring of student progress.

3.3.2.3 Rationale for use in this thesis

The reason why sustainable assessment theory underpins this research reflects Boud's (2000) overriding goal of sustainable assessment, and that is it gives responsibility to the learner for making judgements about their learning process and thereby move away from focusing on the judgements of others. In the words of Hounsell (2003, p. 74), also an advocate of sustainable assessment:

> The rationale for student involvement is essentially that it encourages greater learner autonomy and self-direction, principally by nourishing a more profound understanding of the criteria relevant to work of high quality, and by furthering the capacity to apply these criteria to arrive at informed judgements.

Furthermore, the emphasis on lifelong learning within sustainable assessment theory matches the emphasis on lifelong learning within learner autonomy (section 2.4), and thus also makes it an appropriate match when looking at the assessment of learner autonomy.

Having discussed sustainable assessment theory, the next section will look at the purposes of different assessments, some of which are incorporated into sustainable assessment theory.

3.4 Purposes of assessment

In her excellent book on *Assessment for learning*, Rita Berry (2008) illustrates succinctly and clearly the differences between what, elsewhere, have been called the 'changing prepositions of assessment practice' (Winter, 2003). She outlines the three purposes of assessment: assessment *of*, *for*, and *as* learning.

Assessment *of* learning is associated with behaviourist views of learning, Berry argues, with a focus on the product of learning rather than the learner. This type of assessment is the most traditional, and has been used for decades to compare students – either to each other (norm-referenced) or to an 'objective' set of criteria (criterion-referenced). Assessment of learning most typically has a summative purpose - in other words is used to 'provide readily accessible and comparable results for others e.g. teachers, employers, parents and government statisticians' (Mowl, 1994, pp. 2-3) - and thus is usually 'high stakes assessment' (assessment with serious consequences for those who are being assessed). To continue the preposition theme, assessment of learning is typically something which is done to learners. It is when assessment is done *with* and done *by* learners that the balance of power within education moves from being teacher-focused to learner-focused, and the needs of the learner are more likely to be addressed.

Assessment *for* learning, or assessment done *with* learners, is associated with constructivist views of learning and is concerned with the process of learning more than the product (Berry, op. cit.). Rather than having a

summative purpose, assessment for learning has a formative purpose, in which the assessment process supports learning. Through the process of assessment, learners and those helping them, understand better what is known and what is not known, what is understood and not understood, and thus is instrumental in the learning process. Assessment for learning is intertwined with learning and teaching, whereas assessment of learning can be seen in linear progression, coming after teaching and then learning. Assessment for learning focuses on the learner. In assessment for learning, the learner and their needs are central to the process. Assessment of learning is synonymous with summative assessment. and assessment *for* learning is synonymous with formative assessment.

Assessment *as* learning, or assessment done *by* learners, is another kind of formative assessment. The difference between 'assessment as learning' and 'assessment for learning' is that the former requires more input from the teacher, whereas the latter requires students to take a more active role in their own learning, as required by sustainable assessment theory. Berry (op. cit.) relates 'assessment as learning' to the development of metacognitive knowledge, as it demands skills such as self-regulation, self-evaluation and self-assessment. As Berry states, 'In this sense, self-assessment is part of the learning process' (p. 11). In 'assessment as learning' then, the learner and their needs are central to the process as in 'assessment for learning', the difference is that with 'assessment as learning', the assessment is the means by which learners learn to control their own learning. In Berry's words, 'Assessment as learning could be said to be an "assessment as learning to learn paradigm"'. For these reasons, it is 'assessment as learning' which is taken as the focal construct used in this study.

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The terms 'formative' and 'summative' were first used by Scriven (1967) in his paper on curricular evaluation. He equated formative evaluation with the process and 'role' (p. 40) of evaluation (e.g. of curriculum reform – understanding how improvements can be made), and summative evaluation with outcome and 'goal' (p. 40) (e.g. of curriculum reform – how do teachers and students react to the improvements). As Scriven's terminology crossed the Atlantic, it became associated not so much with evaluation of curriculum and learning programmes, but more with assessment of learners. In recent years, the concepts of formative assessment and summative assessment have gained greater recognition in general education through the work of scholars such as Black and Wiliam and their work with the Assessment Reform Group, and associated publications such as *Assessment for learning: Putting it into practice* and *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment* (Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998). The emphasis in Black et al.'s work is that teachers should become more aware of formative assessment both in terms of its pedagogical importance, and the means of carrying out such assessment within classroom practice.

The work of Black et al. discussed above, and the work of other formative assessment experts (e.g., Knight, 2002) has given summative assessment something of a bad name in recent years. This is partly to do with what many consider to be the neo-liberal turn and the over-emphasis by governments and policy-makers in the United Kingdom and the United States towards 'new managerialism' (Beckmann & Cooper, 2005) and the need to document achievements and performance improvement in general education through outcomes-related assessments, especially at primary and secondary levels (for example, in the form of *Key Stage* tests in the UK and high stakes *No Child Left Behind* achievement tests in the US)

(Davison & Cummins, 2007). The denigration of outcomes-related assessment is put into perspective by Biggs and Tang (2007), who argue for a distinction between outcomes-based assessments which are used for management purposes and those which are used for enhancing student learning (see also section 3.3.1). It is the latter purpose which Biggs and Tang champion, and which is adopted in this research.

Before moving on to look at alternative assessment, let me by way of contrast first discuss some of the practices associated with traditional assessment.

3.5 Traditional assessment practices

The use of traditional assessment practices is wide-spread and they are closely linked to the notion of measurement, mentioned earlier in section 3.2. Thus traditional assessments usually take the form of examinations and tests and are often used in important high-stakes contexts (e.g. situations where students are having to prove their performance in an area in order to move out of, or on to, the next stage of their education). In the field of applied linguistics, traditional assessments are used widely in the form of proficiency tests, from the large global tests like TOEFL® and IELTS® to locally-written tests designed for use in specific contexts (see, for example, van Moere, 2006). These language proficiency tests have a wide variety of uses; from the low-stakes such as getting a general understanding of how much a student has progressed, to the high- (and sometimes very high-) stakes, such as allowing students to enter a particular university, course or programme, or to permit migration in to a specific country. Whether a test is low-stakes or high-stakes is a subjective judgement and is likely to depend on each student's individual situation.

Traditional assessments have a useful summative purpose, when it is necessary and important to gauge and measure how much has been learned, or how Student A stands in relation to Student B. It is when these types of assessment practices are used to promote learning instead of to measure learning, that they are out of alignment. As Mowl (1994) points out: 'It could be argued that traditional methods of assessment, although perhaps not intentionally, have sometimes tended to overlook the needs of the learner in an attempt to provide readily accessible and comparable results for others' (p. 2-3).

Traditional assessments have been widely criticised in both applied linguistics and general education fields. One of the more vocal critics of traditional testing in applied linguistics is Elana Shohamy (e.g. Shohamy, 2001), who adopts a theoretical critical perspective on testing and for whom 'tests are instrumental in reaffirming societal powers and in maintaining social order' (Shohamy, 2007, p. 525).

In general education, traditional assessments have had their critics for many years. Rowntree (1977), for example, lists eight negative 'side-effects' (p. 35) of traditional assessment including the prejudicial aspects which come from pigeon-holing students into 'types' rather than aiming to identify what makes them unique, and the competitive aspects of assessment, when the 'extrinsic rewards are in short supply' (p. 51) and he quotes John Holt in arguing that under such circumstances, learning is motivated by 'the ignoble satisfaction of feeling that one is better than someone else' (p. 51).

Falchikov (2005) draws on Rowntree's work in discussing the possible negative side-effects of traditional assessment practices. These include issues relating to what is fair in the marking of examinations, and associated questions about reliability and bias of teachers and examiners in

marking; the possible discontent experienced by students in unfair situations when they have had no say in the assessment process; the lack of motivation that might be experienced by students who have no control over assessment and who are the passive receptors of the decisions of others; and the dangers of the 'hidden curriculum', wherein students find themselves adopting strategies to help them decide what is really required by the teacher or institution 'out of the mass of set work' (p. 37) in order to get the highest marks.

What then, are the alternatives to these traditional assessment practices? Self-assessment, as an alternative practice is discussed in the next section.

3.6 Alternative assessment practices

In recent years, assessment practices have become more progressive as scholars within higher education have reacted to the criticisms of traditional assessments discussed in the previous section, and have taken the initiative to innovate in this area, although criticism has been levied that not more alternative assessments are used in progressive pedagogical environments where they might be expected to do so (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000).

In response to this growing call for more alternative assessments, below I shall discuss peer and self-assessment and argue that they have an integral role in developing learner autonomy. Peer assessment is often discussed in tandem with self-assessment, as scholars have acknowledged that there is much common between the two (Falchikov, 2005; Topping, 1998). Peer assessment as the less 'sophisticated skill' (Brown and Knight, 1994, p. 57) is discussed first.

3.6.1 Peer assessment

Peer assessment has been defined as 'an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status' (Topping, 1998, p. 250). The use of peer assessment in education is widespread, and has been documented in many disciplines, including music (e.g., Blom and Encarnacao, 2012), chemical engineering (Davey, 2011), and medicine (e.g., Lurie, Nofziger, Meldrum, Mooney, and Epstein, 2006), as well as language (e.g., Saito, 2008). Peer assessment at tertiary level is acknowledged in the literature as worthwhile as it encourages collaboration and team work skills which are sought after by employers (Brown and Knight, 1994) and is good preparation for developing the skills required for self-assessment. As I shall argue, both peer assessment and self-assessment are integral to learner autonomy, as they help to foster critical reflection and retain control of the assessment process.

Reviews of the efficacy of peer assessment are mixed, but studies have indicated that, when global rather than specific judgements are being made, and when academic criteria rather than professional practice is being assessed, there is little difference between assessment done by peers and assessment done by teachers (Falchikov and Goldfinch, 2000; Falchikov, 2005). However, a meta-analysis of peer assessment research (Falchikov and Goldfinch, 2000) built on: 1) a previous review (Boud and Falchikov, 1989) and 2) a similar meta-analysis (Falchikov and Boud, 1989) both of which looked at self-assessment research. The meta-analysis of peer assessment research generated some interesting comparisons with that of the self-assessment research. Whereas with self-assessment, clear subject area differences were found, with self-assessment being more reliable in science and engineering than social science and arts, no such

subject area differences were found with peer assessment. However, the two assessment types were found to be equally more reliable in advance level courses than introductory level courses.

Research in the language learning field has suggested that when assessment criteria are clearly defined, there is little difference between peer assessment and teacher assessment, whereas differences do exist between self-assessment and teacher assessment (Patri, 2002). Other researchers have shown that learners' perceptions of peer assessment can be both positive (Mok, 2011) and negative (Cheng and Warren, 2005), but even when perceptions are positive, they may have psychological concerns regarding their ability to carry out the assessment (Mok, 2011). In her study of peer assessment in Hong Kong, Mok (ibid.) argues that preparation and training of students could help them gain confidence in peer and self-assessment, which in turn would enable learners to develop their learner autonomy (AlFallay, 2004). In the next section, the role of self-assessment in the development of learner autonomy is discussed in further depth.

3.6.2 Self-assessment

Self-assessment offers a way for second language students to develop their autonomy through forming their own criteria for the quality of their work, rather than being dependent on external evaluation. Developing these criteria enables learners to make informed decisions and meet their own individual needs (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). Self-assessment is the type of assessment most commonly referred to in the literatures on language learner autonomy. Gardner and Miller (1999) formulate self-assessment in three ways: as language proficiency tests designed or partially designed by the learner, as language proficiency tests administered by the learner, or as a combination of these. The emphasis here is on language proficiency

testing, and there has been relatively little discussion in applied linguistics of the deeper philosophical significance that self-assessment should have as a way of developing language learner autonomy. As Benson (2001) points out: 'Research...does not yet tell us very much about how learners make the process of self-assessment relevant to their own learning goals' (p. 159).

Tan (2007) connects self-assessment with sustainable assessment, and therefore with lifelong learning and his work is therefore of interest in this study. He identifies three areas in which self-assessment and sustainable assessment are related, all of which are reflected in the definitions of learner autonomy discussed earlier. The three areas are: 1) the development of critical skills and making judgements about the progress and outcomes of one's own learning, 2) the ability to self-direct one's own learning, and 3) the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning. Tan's (ibid.) research into the perceptions of academic staff towards self-assessment generated three understandings of self-assessment: a) teacher-driven, b) programme driven, and c) future driven. However, only one of these, future-driven self-assessment is concordant with the notion of developing lifelong learning skills.

In teacher-driven self-assessment, 'the role of the teacher primarily focuses on assessing whether students' judgements of their learning are compliant with the teacher's expectations' (Tan, ibid., p. 118). This is reminiscent of Blue's (1988) early work on self-assessment. Blue offers evidence that self-assessment 'works' in the often-reported good match between teachers' test results and students' self-assessment results. The implications of Tan's (2007) teacher-driven self-assessment for learner autonomy are limited, as students are focused on meeting the teacher's expectations, such as deciding whether an assignment is ready to submit

or not (and where the answer must be yes!). There is no means of exercising their self-assessment skills within the wider picture of the learning programme, or beyond.

Programme-driven self-assessment is confined to considering aspects of learning within the programme of study and no more. Tan (ibid.) gives the example of comparing actual grading descriptors with possible grading descriptors and identifying differences with the aim of being able to improve performance next time. The implications for learner autonomy are restricted, as the learning needs of students beyond the immediate call of the current situation are not considered.

Finally, future-driven self-assessment provides an ideal basis for the development of learner autonomy and is of particular relevance to this study. In future-driven self-assessment, the emphasis is on understanding and using student self-assessment to develop students' capacity for exercising their own judgements without depending on the academic. The role of the academic with a future-driven conception of student self-assessment is to utilise the programme of study to develop students' self-appraisal skills in terms of constructing and refining assessment criteria (ibid. pp. 119-120). The emphasis here is on the conscious pedagogical development of the process of self-assessment through facilitation by the teacher. The subject of learning is both programme content *and* self-assessment practices. Tan points out that such assessment allows students to reflect more critically on their learning as well as on their assessment. If this is so, then there is a case for arguing that future-driven self-assessment creates more autonomous learners. What is missing from Tan's analysis is the notion that there is a role for interdependence between students, as well as between students and teachers, for the development of assessment criteria.

3.6.3 The importance of self-assessment for language learner autonomy

Self-assessment is important for language learner autonomy firstly because self-assessment focuses learners' and teachers' attention on to learning instead of accreditation.

With the increasing neo-liberal emphasis in higher education in the UK, in which students pay richly for their education in financial terms as well as in effort expended, and with academic inflation 'in which more and more [qualifications] account for less and less' (Robinson, 1983, p. 12), and too many students are encouraged, 'to regard learning and education instrumentally rather than expressively ... Students come to want "the certificate" more than (and, if necessary, instead of) the learning supposedly signified by that certificate' (Rowntree, 1977, p.45). This attitude is encouraged by educational philosophies in which students are seen as consumers and education as the market. (Falchikov, 2005, p. 36). In this thesis, I argue that fostering autonomy in language learners enables those learners to rediscover learning for themselves. Self-assessment, as a fundamental aspect of learner autonomy, empowers learners and helps them view assessment not just as a means to qualifications, but as a way of enabling them to achieve their learning goals.

Arguably, self-assessment is a means of mitigating the risks which Benson sees in 'delving too deeply into questions of the measurement of autonomy in educational climates in which the 'unmeasurable' often seems to lack value' (Benson, 2010, p. 78). Self-assessment, then, becomes 'autonomous assessment' defined by T. Lamb (2010) as 'any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' autonomy' (p.101). Autonomous assessment is

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different to the assessment of autonomy, which is of interest in this study. and discussed in section 3.7.1.

Just as self-assessment if important for the development of learner autonomy, so, arguably, is peer assessment. A brief review of peer assessment is discussed in the next section.

3.7 Review of previous research

In this section, I shall review some of the previous studies which have investigated the assessment of language learner autonomy.

3.7.1 Assessing autonomy

Whilst there is debate on whether learner autonomy should be assessed or measured (Benson, 2010; Lester, 1995), professionals who are engaged in the facilitation of such learning are frequently under pressure from institutions to prove that autonomous language learning programmes have been worth the investment of time and money that is put into them. Similarly, it is often important for educators to evidence to colleagues, parents and learners that such programmes result in learner gain, and for learners themselves to understand what the benefit has been to them of autonomous study. Despite the pressure to evidence learning success, it is not easy to deliver upon, as those who undertake autonomous learning activities are engaging in complex cognitive, behavioural, social and attitudinal processes and transformations (Chapter 2), which, by their very nature, cannot be accurately assessed through traditional summative assessment procedures alone. As a consequence of this, either the demand for proof and evidence is ignored, or, as discussed below, some attempts have been made to devise procedures for assessing the autonomous learning done.

Barbara Sinclair is one of the few researchers to have set out a systematic method for assessing autonomy separately to language gain. In her seminal paper (Sinclair, 1999b) she argues that the difficulty in assessing autonomy arises from the fact that it is a complex concept which is impossible to assess based on observable behaviour alone. She deals with this difficulty by outlining a framework for assessing learners' metacognitive awareness. The framework is made up of: a) six criteria phrased as questions, b) examples of possible questions which could be asked of learners before/after completing work, and c) three levels of awareness for categorising the answers to the questions, ranging from level 1 (largely unaware) through the transition stage at level 2 (becoming aware) to level 3 (largely aware). An example of this framework, drawn from Sinclair's paper, is shown below in Table 3.1. Sinclair stresses the need for questions to be asked 'systematically' and 'consistently' (p. 104) for a true assessment to be built up.

Table 3.1: An example of Sinclair's framework for evaluating metacognitive awareness in language learners

Criteria	Appropriate questions to ask learners	Typical examples	Categorisation of level of awareness	Language characterised by .
Can the student provide an evaluation of the strategies used?	How did you go about doing this activity? Why did you do it in this way? How well did you do?	'I've just realised that this strategy – the one I've always used – doesn't work for me very well.'	Level 2 Becoming aware (transition stage)	Greater use of introspection (expression of thoughts/ feelings)

Sinclair's framework reflects what may be expected within the 'psychological capacity' view of learner autonomy discussed earlier.

The work of Champagne et al. (2001) is also ground-breaking because, like Sinclair, their aim was to assess autonomy separately to language learning. They talk of 'strong' (p. 48) autonomy, and citing Kenny (1993) they describe this as not just a matter of permitting choice in learning situations, or making pupils responsible for the activities they undertake, but of allowing and encouraging learners, through processes deliberately set up for the purpose, to begin to express who they are, what they think, and what they would like to do, in terms of work they initiate and define for themselves.

This resonates with the political perspective on autonomy as discussed earlier in this thesis by focusing on issues of identity and personal growth in conjunction with the development of the individual as a learner. The development of strong autonomy was one of the aims of Champagne et al.'s work with their task-based English language programme called 'Talkbase', and they describe the assessment of strong autonomy in critical pedagogical terms, looking as much at learners' development of their own identities and their understanding of the autonomous approach, as at the metacognitive awareness argued for by Sinclair. Champagne et al. used different sources as evidence of autonomy during the assessment process, and Table 3.2 below shows some specific examples of these, and in general terms, some of the examples of autonomy discovered during the assessment process.

Table 3.2: Components of the assessment of autonomy (Champagne et al., 2001)

Sources	Specific examples of sources	Examples of autonomy in students
Learners' work	- Written portfolios - Video/audio tapes made outside the class - Presentations	- Expressions of who students are and what they think - Expressions of human emotions - Expressions of what students would like to do
Researchers'/Teachers' observations and records	- Interviews - Classroom videotapes - Notes and discussions about 'report-back sessions' between students and teachers	- Descriptions of learning strategies and 'more adventurous self-directed learning' (p.50) - Reflections and use of personal experiences - Sourcing and use of resources - Critical examination of own and others' work
Participants' self-perceptions of progress	Journals Oral and written evaluations	- Understandings of their own learning - Reflections on the difficulties and challenges of learning - Understandings of the 'pedagogy promoting autonomy' (p.50)

Champagne et al.'s study is important because it goes beyond the assessment of metacognitive awareness as advocated by Sinclair, to consider also elements of learner autonomy pertinent to the social and political definitions of autonomy that were discussed earlier in this chapter, such as the development of the individual and the importance of working with others.

To sum up, the assessment of learner autonomy for language learning poses difficulties for the academy. Although Little (2007) has recently argued that language learning has to be regarded as integral to autonomous learning, as I have discussed above, language learning gain is not the only gain attributable to autonomous language learning experiences, although it is the most concrete aspect for which evidence can be found. As Champagne et al. (2001) stated: '...our programs were doing more for students than enabling them to use language better'; and in a world where being an autonomous learner and having the accompanying lifelong learning skills is becoming increasingly crucial (section 2.4), test scores as evidence of second language acquisition are not enough to demonstrate the benefits of an autonomous learning programme.

Given this, but also given the difficulties experienced by scholars so far, how can we, as researchers and professionals in this field, demonstrate the non-linguistic benefits of autonomous language learning? Here I argue that non-linguistic learning outcomes (NLLOs) can be used for this purpose. Dörnyei (2001) and Legenhausen (2001) have used this term to describe factors affecting the language learning process such as motivation and anxiety; here I use it to refer to statements describing what a language learner knows or is able to do as a result of learning in an autonomy-inspired learning environment, but is not directly connected to the linguistic aspects of their learning. In considering NLLOs for the assessment of learner autonomy, I was interested to hear what learners themselves had to say about NLLOs. For this study, with its focus on learner autonomy and empowering the learner, it became important for the NLLOs to be learner-generated.

3.8 Non-linguistic learning outcomes

As mentioned in the previous section, learning outcomes are most commonly represented in the form of statements describing what a learner knows or is able to do. Such statements have been used in language learning and teaching for some years. For example, the Common European Framework (CEF) (Council of Europe, 2001) uses a detailed set of 'can do' statements as a way of assessing language proficiency, and those countries that subscribe to the CEF have interpreted these into 'I can' statements for self-assessment purposes by learners, for the different versions of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) (Council of Europe, 2000). The UK government's National Languages Strategy has also produced their own list of 'I can' statements for modern foreign language self-assessment purposes, which are linked to the CEF but published as the Languages Ladder (National Languages). Table 3.3 gives examples of these three sets of 'can' descriptors for speaking skills.

Table 3.3: Examples of 'can' statements from the Common European Framework, the European Language Portfolio from the Czech Republic, and the Languages Ladder

Source	Level	Statement
Common European Framework	A2.2 (Waystage) Interaction/Spoken Conversation	Can participate in short conversations in routine contexts on topics of interest.
Czech Republic: European Language Portfolio for Learners Aged 11-15	A2.2 (Waystage) Interaction/Spoken Conversation	I can participate in a short conversation on a topic that interests me.
Languages Ladder	Grade 4 Speaking	I can take part in a simple conversation and I can express my opinions.

A great deal of work has gone into producing the *CEF*, the *ELP*, and the *Languages Ladder*, but despite the emphasis in all of these publications on concepts such as lifelong learning, self-assessment, and even autonomous

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learning, there are no 'can' statements which relate to the development of autonomy. Instead, the focus is on the development of language proficiency.

Non-traditional learning environments such as museums, libraries and archives, have introduced learning outcomes as useful ways of assessing the learning resulting from educational programmes and events delivered to adults and children (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004) which do not form part of a formal curriculum, and therefore what is learned in those programmes is harder to quantify. The framework used in assessing outcomes in museums, libraries and archives is drawn upon later in this thesis.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has sought to signal some of the main issues concerning assessment and how it relates to learner autonomy. The two theories of constructive alignment and sustainable assessment theory were discussed as having theoretical value for this thesis. Assessment as learning was contrasted with assessment of, and assessment for, learning, and adopted as the focal construct of assessment to frame this study. Different ways of thinking about self-assessment drew upon Tan's work into future-directed self-assessment, and finally, existing studies which have attempted to assess learner autonomy were briefly reviewed.

4 Theoretical Perspectives

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline my ontological and epistemological beliefs, and discuss the three layers of the theoretical framework which underpin this thesis.

4.2 Ontological and epistemological positioning

I take an ontological position that is social constructivist in nature. By this I understand that reality does not exist as one objective truth, but that different truths will exist for individuals according to how they have constructed their own realities. This is likely to depend on how they interact with and respond to the world and others around them. Hence, it was important for me to capture the voices of learners and attempt to understand how they constructed their individual notions of learner autonomy. Therefore, these beliefs underpinned my decision to use Q methodology as the main methodological approach for this work.

Along with my ontological position, reflected in this thesis is my interpretivist epistemological stance: I believe that as a researcher, it is important for me to understand the subjective nature of knowledge. This belief underpinned the qualitative approach to research I have taken in this thesis. Despite the methods I have used (survey methods and Q methodology), my interpretation of the data collected and analysed in these partly quantitative ways has focused on understanding the meaning.

4.3 Theories

My ontological and epistemological perspectives are embedded within three layers of theories. Together these theories provide the theoretical perspective for this study. These three layers are shown in Figure 4.1.

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Figure 4.1: Theoretical perspectives used in the study
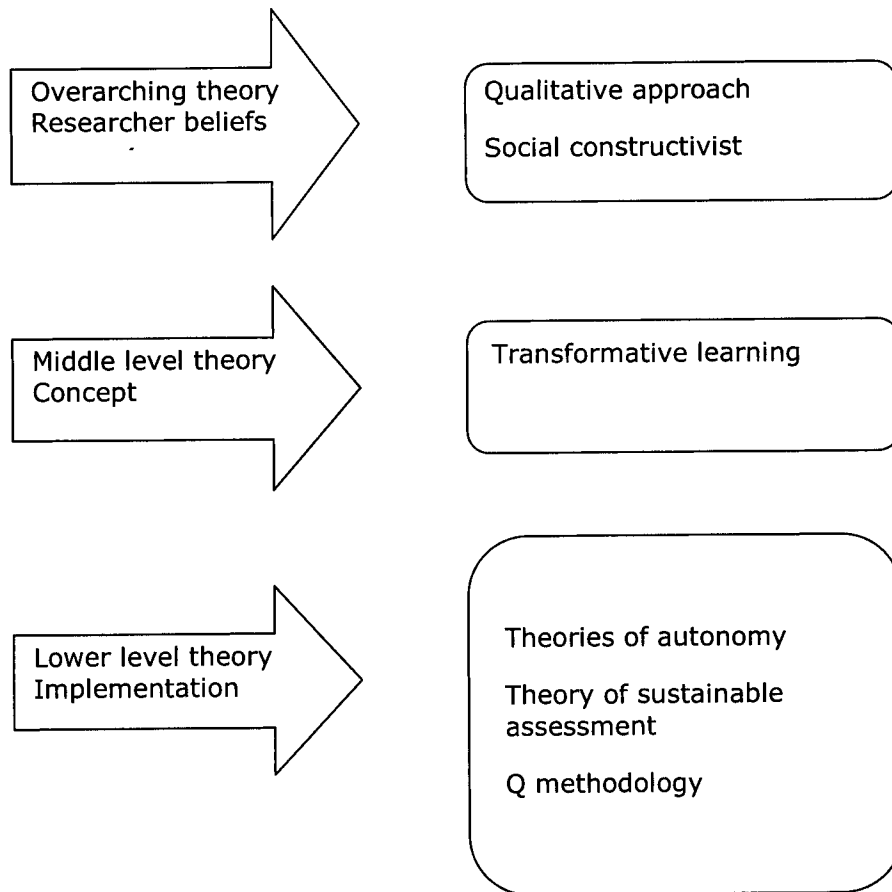
4.3.1 Transformative learning theory

The second part of this study uses the framework of Jack Mezirow's (1978, 1997, 2000, 2009) transformative learning theory as a lens through which to justify method and discuss findings. Transformative learning theory posits that one of the goals of adult education should be to radically change how we view the world in order to develop 'more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative ways of knowing the world' (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 72) so that we can then be more prepared to deal with the world around us 'like adults' (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow describes the deficiency model he considers to be traditional in adult education and decries it as inadequate compared to the learning involved in perspective transformation:

> In the dominant model of adult education, educational objectives are set in terms of specific behaviours to be acquired, usually as dictated by a task to be accomplished or a role to be played. The current performance level of learners is ascertained, and this is compared with the level of performance established as necessary. The shortfall – in terms of required competencies [between actual and desired levels] – is divided into a number of educational exercises reduced to their component elements. These are to be mastered in sequence and with instant feedback on the adequacy of learner performance. Finally, education is evaluated by subtracting measured learning gains in competencies from the behavioural objectives. If learning involved in perspective transformation is important in adult development, and we have evidence of how education is being used to facilitate it everywhere from villagers in traditional societies to middle-class women in university classrooms, this constricted conception of the function of adult education requires fundamental revision. (Mezirow, 1978, p. 107)

Informed by the work of Habermas and Freire, transformative learning theory began with Mezirow's work investigating the number of women returning to adult education in the 1970s. Since then, it has been used in research and practice in a wide variety of adult education contexts as alluded to by Mezirow above. From higher education to workplace education, and from cross-cultural spiritual education in a Japanese as a Foreign Language class in America (Goulah, 2007) to farmer education in Africa (Duveskog & Friis-Hansen, 2009), transformative learning has brought about radical change in terms of how people live their lives.

At the centre of transformative learning theory are 'frames of reference'. In Mezirow's (2000) words:

> A frame of reference is a "meaning perspective," the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions [...] the results of ways of interpreting experience (p. 16)

Frames of reference have two dimensions which Mezirow labels 'habits of mind' [the assumptions we carry with us and which 'act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience' (2000, p. 17)] and 'points of view'

which are the external expression of habits of mind. Put more simply, frames of reference are the ways we look at the world, but Mezirow is specific in how these frames of reference are conceptualised and how they arise. They may be conscious or unconscious, the result of cultural norms or stereotypes, the result of early life-experiences, and 'intentionally or incidentally learned philosophical, economic, sociological, and psychological orientations or theories' (ibid.).

According to Mezirow (1997, 2000), in transformative education, learning takes place in one of four ways:

1. Elaborating existing frames of reference

2. Learning new frames of reference

3. Transforming habits of mind

4. Transforming points of view

In appropriate contexts for transformative learning (see Snyder, 2008) transformations occur due to an initial 'disorienting dilemma' through reflecting critically on our own assumptions (subjective reframing) and those of others (objective reframing), and by then justifying the emerging meaning perspective through critical discourse.

4.3.1.1 Transformative learning and language education

Transformative learning is relevant to language education in two ways: both learning a new language itself, and the way in which languages are learned have the potential to be transformative. Unlike learning other content subjects, such as history, mathematics or psychology, language learning is a 'profoundly unsettling psychological proposition' (Foster, 1997, p. 35), evidenced by a wealth of research into language learner anxiety (e.g., Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Second language learning has the

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potential to undermine learners' sense of identity and create a 'loss of self' in ways that the learning of other subjects just do not do (Hurd & Xiao, 2010; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). In transformative learning terms, this potential loss of self is the 'disorienting dilemma' and it is for this reason that transformative learning theory is useful in considering language learner autonomy. Furthermore, language learning inevitably entails learning about another culture too, and so in this sense the language learner is immediately confronted with the need to adopt a different way of looking at the world, although this may be temporary and may not in itself entail a change in meaning perspective.

We have examined how language learning can result in transformative learning occurring, but it can also occur when language learners 'encounter alternative points of view and perspectives about the way they can learn the second language' (Lugo, 2009). Lugo argues that exposure to different ways of learning 'encourages students to critically question their assumptions about the language', but I maintain that this in itself also encourages critical questioning of how and why language learning is important.

4.3.1.2 Links with language learner autonomy

There are many parallels between transformative learning and language learner autonomy which makes transformative learning theory the ideal theory with which to underpin this research. These include the aim of creating socially responsible individuals, an emphasis on reflection, and the emphasis on the learner and 'what the individual wants to learn' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 31) as the foci of the learning experiences, and an explicit acknowledgement that what, in learner autonomy circles, is known as 'teacher autonomy' is integral to the transformative learning process.

The aim of creating socially responsible individuals is important in political interpretations of language learner autonomy and in transformative learning theory. Little (2004) discusses the origins of Holec's work being 'from the Council of Europe's work in adult education, which emphasised the importance of equipping adult learners with the knowledge and confidence to participate in the democratic process' (p. 70), and this was discussed earlier in section 2.2. Similarly, Mezirow (2000) acknowledges the interrelationships between (in this case personal) autonomy, participating as an adult in a democratic society, and transformative learning:

> The assumption in democratic societies is that an adult is able to understand the issues, will make rational choices as a socially responsible, autonomous agent and, at least sometimes, is free to act on them. Even partial autonomy requires communicative competence and transformative learning. (p. 25)

Reflection is fundamental to transformative learning, as it is through critical self-reflection and reflection on the assumptions of others that enables the required transformation. Taylor (2009) describes three forms of reflection which are instrumental in bringing about transformations in meaning perspective: reflection on content (reflecting on what we perceive, think, feel and act); reflection on process (reflecting on how we perform the functions of perceiving); and reflection on premise (an awareness of why we perceive) (p. 7). In language learning autonomy, critical reflection is a tool for helping to develop autonomy – often manifested in learning journals or diaries, or through dialogue with a learning advisor. Moreover, in this thesis, in which learner autonomy is regarded as a continuum, this same process is also construed as part of what eventually makes a learner autonomous (see section 5.3). The three forms of reflection described by Taylor also pertain to language learner autonomy: reflection on content becomes reflection on the language learnt (e.g., a learner questions, why

is simple past tense used rather than past continuous?), reflection on process becomes reflection on how the language is learned (e.g., a learner questions, was the strategy of writing new vocabulary in word form-specific colours a useful one?), and reflection on premise becomes reflection on why such forms of learning are commensurate or not with one's learning approach (e.g., a learner questions, why wasn't that strategy/resource a good one for me).

Lugo (2009) argues that exposure to different ways of learning 'encourages students to critically question their assumptions about the language', but I maintain that this in itself also encourages critical questioning of how and why language learning is important. Considering autonomy as a 'learner-centred approach to educational practice' (Boud, 1988, p. 17), then who better to ask about the outcomes of autonomous practices than the learners themselves? With a focus on the learner's emic perspective, transformative learning can be seen as a precursor to learner autonomy. In order to realise why it is important to take and maintain control over the language learning process, learners first have to undergo a process of transformation, as their preconceptions about the roles of teachers and learners are critically examined, and their habits of mind are transformed.

4.3.2 Theories of autonomy, assessment, and Q methodology

Theories of autonomy, sustainable assessment, and Q methodology are discussed at length in chapters 2, 3 and 7 of this thesis, and so due to space restrictions will not be addressed further here.

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical framework used in this thesis. Three levels of theory underpin the research: a qualitative and social constructivist stance at the overarching level of researcher beliefs,

transformative learning theory at the conceptual, middle level, and theories of learner autonomy, assessment and Q methodology at the lower level of implementation.

5 A New Model of Learner Autonomy for Assessment

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the complications in researching autonomy, is that the understandings upon which much research is based are heavily theoretical. The broad versions and perspectives outlined earlier have been useful up to a point in helping to shape the field, but they go little way towards isolating the components of autonomy (Benson, 2007). These components may be complex, and in isolation bear little resemblance to the overall construct (Benson, 2010), but if language learner autonomy is to be a useful construct for researchers, learners, and teachers then a detailed model in which those components are identified is needed. In this section I will review some of the more detailed models which have been developed in recent years, and outline my own model which was used as the basis for this study.

5.2 Previous models of learner autonomy for assessment

Benson's (2007) call for a more detailed model of learner autonomy although arguably overdue, until now had gone unheeded. Recently, three scholars have attempted to operationalise learner autonomy for projects relating to the assessment or measurement of language learner autonomy. These models are critically examined below.

For her project investigating the measurement of language learner autonomy in Japanese university students, Murase (2010) developed a model expanding on Benson's (1997) three versions and Oxford's (2003)

four perspectives, by adding nine 'sub-categories' (Murase, 2010, p. 57)

shown in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1: Operational definition of learner autonomy (Murase, 2010)
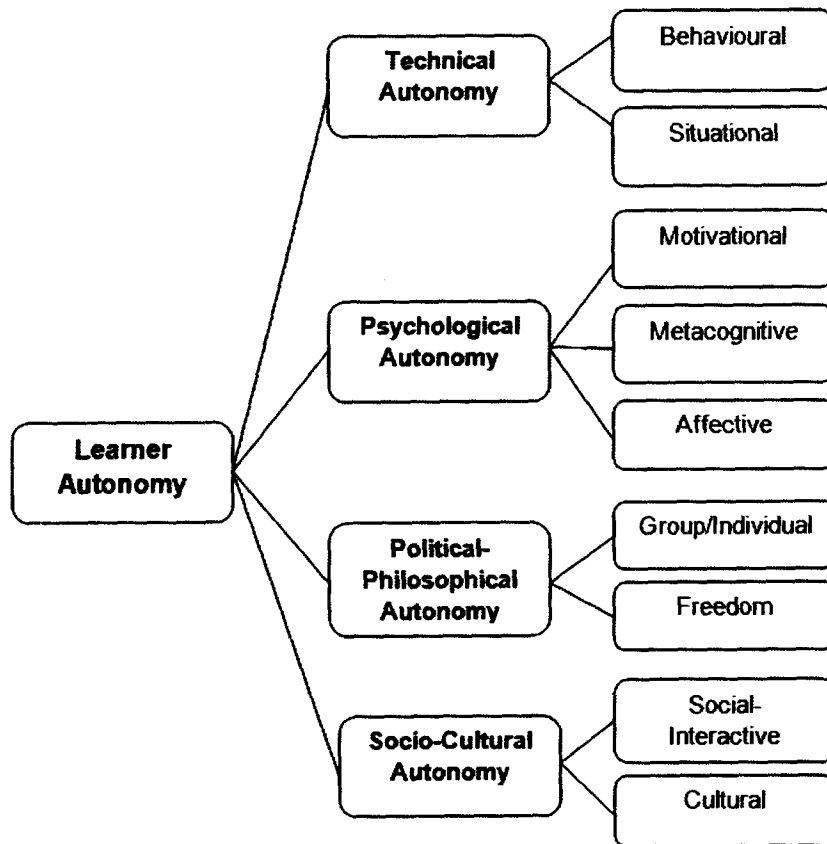
These sub-categories, such as the behavioural dimension, the

group/individual dimension and the affective dimension are drawn from the

literature and are each distinguished through definitional statements. For

example, the affective dimension is defined as 'the capacity to take control

of one's learning by knowing about one's affective states (anxiety, self-

esteem, other emotions) and how to control the affective factors' (Murase,

2010). On its own, the model of nine sub-categories draws the same

criticism as the other versions and perspectives on which it is based, that

these are broad, non-specific aspects of learner autonomy which are not

precise in meaning for researchers or educators. However, Murase went further and subsequently devised questionnaire items based on the definitions of the sub-categories, thus operationalising the model. Questionnaire items were written by 'referring to the literature in relevant areas and existing instruments and utilising the background knowledge about the target context of the research' Murase (2010, p. 139). The major shortcoming of the 'nine sub-categories plus operationalised statements' as a model of autonomy is that it is not clear which questionnaire items relate to which sub-categories; in other words, Murase does not make explicit for her reader how each sub-category was operationalised, although she does allude to the difficulties that she as a researcher had in matching the questionnaire items to the relevant categories and explained that after piloting, some questionnaire items were re-categorised (p. 141).

Similarly to Murase, Dixon's (2011) work investigated the measurement of language learner autonomy in tertiary level language students. He used two models of learner autonomy in his study. The first was developed as a result of a literature review and comprised ten general areas of learner autonomy as follows (Dixon, 2011, p. 117):

1. Control
2. Skills
3. Strategies
4. Confidence
5. Motivation
6. Metacognition
7. Social Interaction
8. Attitudes to learning
9. Actions/Behaviours
10. Responsibility

These ten general areas were used as the basis for the development of a 'Long List' of 256 statements. These formed questionnaire items in which language learners were asked to rate their agreement with the statement on a 7 point scale. From the data collected through the administration of the 'Long List' questionnaire, Dixon used five different procedures (respondents' feedback, range of response, standard deviation, polarisation of response, discrimination index) to select 50 statements for a 'Short List' questionnaire. He then used factor analysis to analyse the data collected through the administration of the questionnaire based on his 'Short List' and this process generated a set of six factors which comprised his final model of learner autonomy. The six factors are listed below in Table 5.1, together with the operationalised statements from the second questionnaire which make up the factors. (Dixon, 2011, p. 233). Dixon defends his model of learner autonomy by arguing that due to his factor analysis technique, the construct of autonomy had not been predefined prior to the development of the questionnaire (the measurement tool); in other words, he suggests that the model of autonomy emerged from the process of measurement and thus is a more reliable construct. This seems like a naïve argument; the construct of autonomy had been predefined by virtue of the 'Long List' and the statements which make up the final six factors have simply been drawn from the original list of 256 items and regrouped through factor analysis and re-labelled. Moreover, critics may point out that if a measurement tool is to be of practical use, having a predefined notion of what is being measured is a useful starting point. Despite these flaws in the development of Dixon's model, it is seemingly more comprehensive than Murase's in that operationalised statements are

Table 5.1: Dixon's (2011) model of learner autonomy

Factors	Operationalised statements
1. Linguistic Confidence	When I read an English text I need to understand every word in it. (R) Every word is important for understanding a listening text. (R) I worry if I don't understand everything when I listen. (R) I worry if I don't understand all the words in a text. (R) I worry if I don't understand all the grammar in a text. (R)
2. Information Literacy	I change the way I write according to who will read it. I look at causes and effects logically. I am confident I can learn English well. I use real English texts (i.e. not made for students) in my learning. I know how to find information in a library. I know how to use English language reference books [..] I know the parts of a book (index, glossary, contents, chapters). I know how to find the information I need on the Internet.
3. Social Comparison	I think learning English is more difficult for me than for the average learner. (R) The other students know English better than me. (R) The other students are more confident than me at speaking English.
4. Locus of Control	To read you must proceed word by word. (R) To remember vocabulary you need to be talented. (R) I learn English because I have to. (R) My way of learning will never change. (R) Memorizing answers is the best way to learn. (R)
5. Metacognition	I can describe the learning strategies I use. I have changed the way I learn after thinking about it. I predict the content before I listen. My writing is better now than it was a year ago. I know techniques to help me remember vocabulary. I fix my problems in vocabulary. I talk to others about how I feel about learning English. It is my job to check my work for mistakes. I am an active dynamic person. I choose the exercises I work on.
6. Self-Reliance	I am good at studying on my own. I organise my time for studying. I notice how other people use English. I am ready to learn in unfamiliar ways. I can choose the method of learning that suits me best. I can study independently. I am good at making choices.

(R) reverse coded

matched to each of the six elements in the model. Nevertheless, Dixon's

model still raises some troubling questions for the practitioner, not least, as

alluded to above the labelling of the factors (why 'social comparison' and

not 'confidence'?); the preponderance of items in the 'information literacy'

scale (eight, compared to five in locus of control and ten in metacognition) which suggests a preconceived emphasis on a resource-based understanding of what is meant by learner autonomy; and the emphasis on vocabulary in the 'locus of control' and 'metacognition' categories.

The third model of learner autonomy examined here is that of Tassinari (2008, 2010, 2011a). With the aim of developing a tool for the self-assessment of learner autonomy, Tassinari developed a 'dynamic autonomy model' shown below in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Dynamic autonomy model (Tassinari, 2011b)
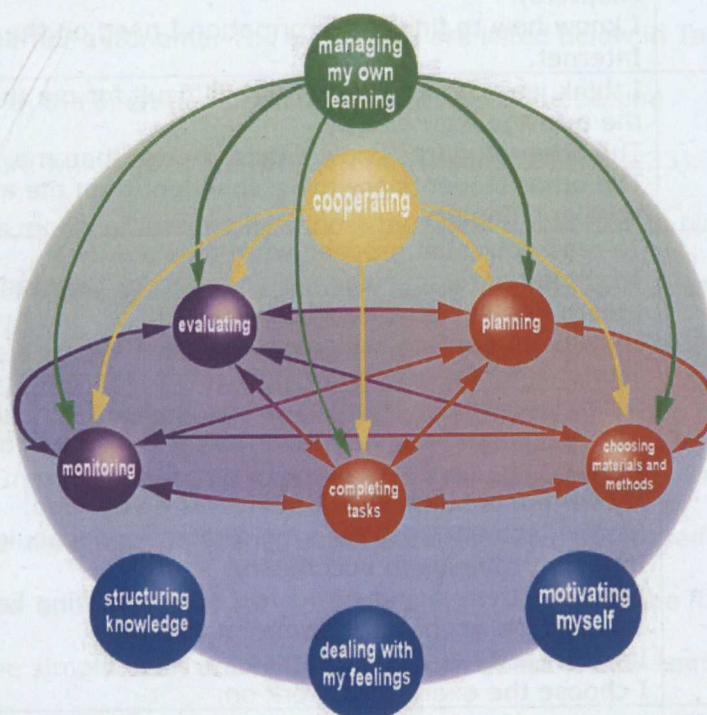
According to Tassinari (2008), the model is not hierarchical, as 'managing my own learning' is the only overarching component. Furthermore, it is both structurally and functionally dynamic, in that each component is related to all other components (structurally dynamic) and learners can choose to start using the model from any component (functionally dynamic). From these ten initial components, Tassinari has developed a set of 'can-do' statements similar to those used in the Council of Europe

European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2000) to operationalise the construct of learner autonomy. Examples for the component 'motivating myself' are given below (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Can-do descriptors for 'motivating myself' from Tassinari's dynamic autonomy model

1.2	I can motivate myself in a way that works for me.
1.2.1	I am aware of my motivation for learning and can reflect on this.
1.2.2	I can motivate myself to learn (for example by choosing materials that interest me, by framing my learning within interesting projects, by learning together with others, by rewarding myself when I succeed).
1.2.3	I can remotivate myself when I notice that my initial motivation is wearing thin.
1.2.4	Think about things that really motivate you to learn then complete the following sentence: I can motivate myself to learn by ...

Overall, Tassinari's model is compelling because of its dynamic quality, and the possibility built into the model for learners to write their own descriptors or can-do statements. In terms of its relevance to the present study, Tassinari's model is also distinct from Murase's and Dixon's in that it is designed for self-assessment, and is presented online in a format which is both engaging and easily accessible for students.

Nevertheless, Tassinari's model could be criticised for being more limiting than Murase's and Dixon's in that it is more a model of self-directed learning, or indeed self-regulation, than learner autonomy. The model emphasises the psychological and technical aspects of learner autonomy at the expense of the political, critical and social. This is perhaps not surprising; Pemberton and Cooker (forthcoming) have described self-directed learning as 'the vehicle through which autonomy is manifested as a concrete, measurable construct', and as Tassinari's model has been

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developed for the purposes of assessment it is the concrete and

measurable which she is concerned with. Nonetheless, if we are to adhere

to the notions of constructive alignment discussed in Chapter 3, and if we

are to provide learners with a self-assessment tool for a learner autonomy

which they themselves construct, then it is important that any such

assessment tool should include the political, critical and social aspects of

learner autonomy for language learning. A model of learner autonomy

which can result in such a tool is discussed in the next section.

5.3 The model of learner autonomy used in the current

study

As the starting point for the research described here, and in response to

the shortcomings of the models described in section 5.2 above, I set out to

build a model in which the components of learner autonomy, including

political, critical and social components, would be distinguished, as

advocated by Benson (2010). In so doing, I aimed to meet a very practical

need by providing answers to the questions 'What is learner autonomy?'

and 'How can I, as a student, develop it?' or 'How can I, as a teacher or

learning advisor, help my students develop it?'

The first stage in building the model involved compiling a list of the

constitutive elements of learner autonomy which could then be developed

into a micro-conceptual framework (Shields & Tajalli, 2006) of categories.

Shields and Tajalli (2006) describe categories as being 'the most basic

micro-conceptual framework to see or use' (p.323), and yet they also

describe them as 'powerful conceptual tool[s]' (p. 323) linked to the

descriptive purpose of research, which in turn is concerned with the

fundamental 'what' questions that research seeks to address. Examples of

the 'what' questions addressed in this research study were 'What is learner

autonomy?' and 'Which aspects of learner autonomy are assessed?' This second question is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Various means were used to compile a list of the constitutive elements of learner autonomy including a detailed search of the literature, reflection on more than eight years of professional practice working with learners in facilitating autonomy, and discussions with colleagues in the field. Thirty four constitutive elements were generated which were then divided into seven categories: learner control, metacognitive awareness, critical reflection, learning range, confidence, motivation, and information literacy. The microconceptual framework of seven categories is shown in Figure 5.3, the full model of learner autonomy in Figure 5.4, and again in an easier to read tabular form in Table 5.3.

Figure 5.3: Microconceptual framework of seven categories of learner autonomy
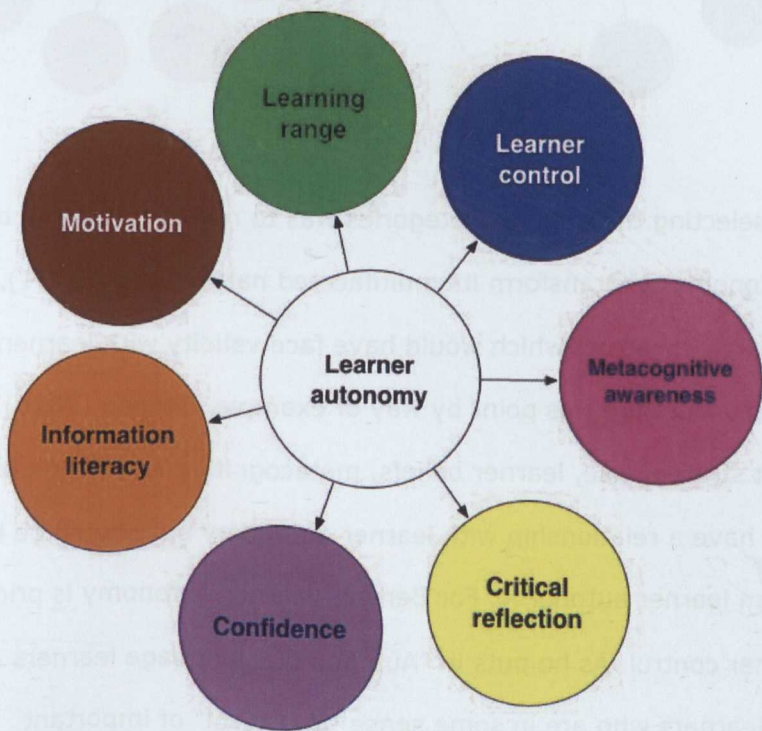
Figure 5.4: Full model of learner autonomy
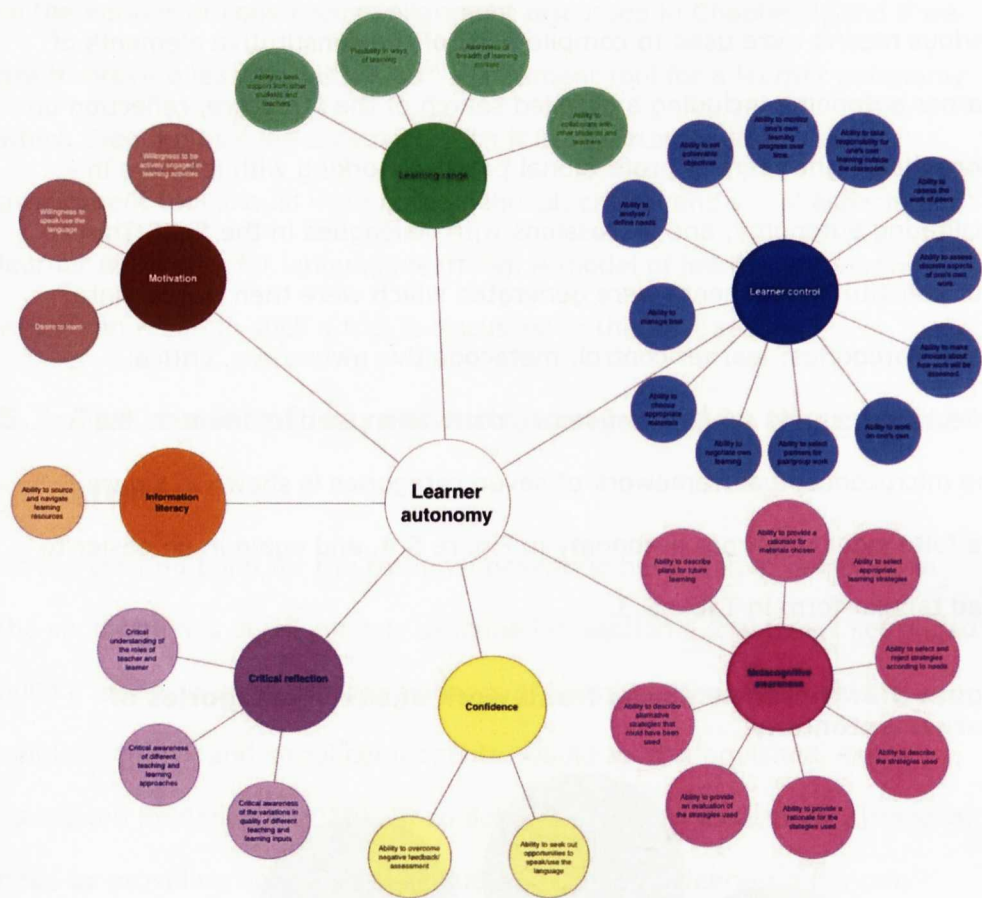
My aim in selecting these seven categories was to reflect the praxis of learner autonomy: to transform its multifaceted nature (section 2.1), into a useful research construct which would have face validity with learners and educators. To illustrate this point by way of example, Benson (2010) argues that strategy use, learner beliefs, metacognitive knowledge and motivation have a relationship with learner autonomy but should be kept distinct from learner autonomy. For Benson, learner autonomy is primarily about learner control. As he puts it: 'Autonomous language learners are, therefore, learners who are in some sense "in control" of important dimensions of their learning ...' (2010, p. 79), although he does go on to describe metacognitive awareness as a form of control in that it is 'the

extent to which [students'] decisions are "informed" by an awareness of options' (Benson, 2010, p. 90). However, for many researchers and practitioners 'learner autonomy as only learner control' does not have face validity: to take just two examples, in his important study on assessment for autonomy, T. Lamb (2010) 'shows how autonomy cannot be discussed without recourse to exploring metacognitive knowledge' (Paran, 2010, p. 10); and others have debated the integral nature of the relationship between learner autonomy and motivation (Spratt, Humphreys and Chan, 2002; M. Lamb, 2011; Ushioda, 2011).

Table 5.3: Full model of learner autonomy: Categories and constitutive elements

Category of learner autonomy	Constitutive elements
Learner control	Ability to analyse/define needs Ability to set achievable objectives Ability to manage time Ability to choose appropriate materials Ability to negotiate learning Ability to select partners for pair/group work Ability to work on one's own Ability to make choices about how work will be assessed Ability to assess discrete aspects of one's own work Ability to assess the work of peers Ability to take responsibility for one's own learning outside the classroom Ability to monitor one's own learning progress over time
Metacognitive awareness	Ability to provide a rationale for materials chosen Ability to select appropriate learning strategies Ability to select and reject strategies according to needs Ability to describe the strategies used Ability to provide a rationale for the strategies used Ability to provide an evaluation of the strategies used Ability to describe alternative strategies that could have been used Ability to describe plans for future learning
Critical reflection	Critical understanding of the roles of teacher and learner Critical awareness of different teaching and learning approaches Critical awareness of the variations in quality of different teaching and learning inputs
Learning range	Flexibility in ways of learning Awareness of breadth of learning content Ability to seek support from other students and teachers Ability to collaborate with other students and teachers
Motivation	Desire to learn Willingness to speak/use the language Willingness to be actively engaged in learning activities
Confidence	Ability to seek out opportunities to speak/use the language Ability to overcome negative feedback/assessment
Information literacy	Ability to source and navigate learning resources

5.4 Comparison of the current model with earlier models

Compared to the Murase (2010) and Dixon (2011) models discussed earlier in this chapter, the model above is fully operationalised. In other words, the constitutive elements provide small goals, or stepping stones, for learners wanting to develop their own autonomous learning, or for teachers or learning advisors wanting to support their students in a similar endeavour. Through depicting these elements as small goals, the model is able to provide answers to questions that learners and educators might have, such as 'How can I, as a student, develop learner autonomy?' or 'How can I, as a teacher or learning advisor, help my students develop learner autonomy?'

Compared to the Tassinari model (2011b), the model detailed in section 5.3 is a comprehensive model of learner autonomy rather than one of the more limited concept of self-directed learning. The constitutive elements within the category of critical reflection, in particular, encourage the learner to think beyond the boundaries of their own learning and to compare the influences of human and material resources upon the learning process. Furthermore, whereas the Tassinari model is the outcome of her study, the model of LA described above was the starting-point from which the self-assessment framework and tool, which are the focus of this study, were researched and developed. Further details about this research and development are provided in Chapters 8 and 9.

5.5 Validation of the model

The model was validated in Phase 1 of empirical research, the survey study, in which the learner autonomy model was used as the basis of a survey into contemporary practices in the assessment of learner autonomy

(see Chapter 6). In the early stages of the survey, the respondents were asked to state if each constitutive element in the learner autonomy model was assessed, not assessed or not an aspect of learner autonomy. Binomial tests were carried out on the responses to these questions, and these showed that the proportion of participants who indicated they either had or had not assessed each component was significantly greater than the chance value, (0.5, p < .000). In other words, the survey respondents acknowledged that the 34 constitutive elements which made up the model were components of learner autonomy.

Next, in Chapter 6, I shall describe the development of the survey and analyse the results in further detail.

6 Phase 1: Survey of Current Practices in the Assessment of Autonomy

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is much debate in the literature about the assessment of language learner autonomy. Although these debates are informed by practice (Champagne et al., 2001; Dam & Legenhausen, 1996, 1999; Sinclair, 1999b), no published work has been done to ascertain the scope of such practices. This chapter describes the first phase of research for this study, which investigated whether learner autonomy is assessed in tertiary level educational institutions; how the assessment is carried out (which aspects of autonomy were being assessed, by whom and by what means), and whether there is one prevalent approach to the assessment of autonomy or whether different, flexible approaches are used, or whether it is more arbitrary than this. In the context of the larger study, the purpose of this phase was to provide a baseline understanding of current language learner autonomy assessment practices, thus complementing the literature review in providing a rationale for further work on developing a tool for the means of assessment.

6.2 Research questions

The overall research question for phase 1 was: What is the current state of the assessment of language learner autonomy within tertiary level institutions worldwide? This main question was broken down into four component parts as follows:

1. Is autonomy assessed?

2. How is autonomy assessed?

3. What aspects of autonomy are assessed?

4. Who assesses autonomy?

6.3 Research methodology

The need to generate a broad, global picture of assessment practices meant that survey methodology using mostly closed-ended questionnaire items was the logical choice, being efficient in terms of researcher time and financial costs (Dörnyei, 2003). The methodology is expanded upon in the subsequent sections, describing the design, piloting, and administration of the questionnaire.

6.3.1 Questionnaire design and piloting

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was developed over a period of a few months and was based on the model of learner autonomy detailed in Chapter 5. The first half of the survey contained questions about the context of the learning situation, such as type of tertiary level institution (e.g. university, teacher training college, etc.), the language or subject being learned, and the type of autonomous learning environment (e.g. classroom, self-access centre, etc.). The second half of the survey was made up of questions based on the seven categories of learner autonomy (e.g. learner control, metacognitive awareness, etc.), divided into 34 constitutive elements (e.g. 'ability to manage own time', 'ability to select appropriate learning strategies', etc.) which were outlined in Chapter 5. For each constitutive element, respondents were asked the following questions:

1. Is the constitutive component assessed?

2. Who carries out the assessment?

3. What tools are used for the assessment?

4. What evidence is used for the assessment?

The questionnaire was piloted in three phases, and these are detailed below.

6.3.1.1 Piloting of the questions (Pilot 1)

The aim of Pilot 1 was to ensure that the wording of the questions was clear and the intention would be understandable to participants (Dörnyei, 2003; Gillham, 2000). This piloting phase involved two participants completing the questionnaire in their own time: Miles,[2] a male English language teacher and a native speaker of English; and Daphne, a female English language teacher and a non-native speaker of English. Both Miles and Daphne had an awareness of learner autonomy and incorporated autonomous learning into their professional practice. Miles piloted a paper version of the questionnaire (Pilot 1a) and Daphne an online version (Pilot 1b), and as the two question piloting sessions occurred two months apart they worked with very different versions.

In Pilot 1a, Miles and I sat together. I asked him to complete the questionnaire and to ask me if at any time the wording of the question was not clear. I observed him complete the questionnaire, and if I saw that he was hesitating at any time I prompted him to explain why this was so (Dörnyei, 2003). When he had completed the questionnaire, we discussed his overall impressions, and I asked him for any recommendations he had regarding improvements. The main results of this piloting are shown in Table 6.1.

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[2] All names used in the thesis are pseudonyms

Table 6.1: Revisions made to the questionnaire after Pilot 1a (paper version)

Findings from Pilot 1a	Examples of revisions Original text → Revised text
Wording of questions not clear in places	Please indicate WHAT is assessed and HOW it is assessed in each case → **Please indicate what EVIDENCE OF LEARNING is assessed and the TOOLS used by the assessor(s) in each case**
Answer options given not comprehensive enough	In which environment(s) does the autonomous language learning take place? (Please select as many as necessary.) Classroom Self-access centre Language lab CALL (computer-aided language learning) lab → **In which environment(s) does the autonomous language learning take place? (Please select as many as necessary.)** **Traditional classroom** **Classroom enhanced by high tech facilities (sometimes called a blended learning classroom, or classroom for multi-mode learning)** **Self-access centre** **Language lab** **Computer lab** **Learners choose where they work** **Other (please specify)**

In Pilot 1b, Daphne and I sat side by side at a computer terminal. As in the previous piloting session, she indicated when a question was not clear and when she hesitated over a question I prompted her to think aloud about why. The results of this piloting are shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Revisions made to the questionnaire after Pilot 1b (online version)

Findings from Pilot 1b	Examples of revisions Original text → Revised text
Initial *Information about the study and participant consent* pages too long and therefore off-putting. Bullet points may be better.	The amount of information was reduced to two pages.
Question 5 Some items require more clarification.	In which environment(s) does the autonomous language learning take place? (Please select as many as necessary.) Traditional classroom Classroom for multi-mode learning (e.g. a 'blended learning' classroom) Self-access centre Language lab CALL (computer-aided language learning lab) Home Learners choose where they work Other (please specify) → In which environment(s) does the autonomous language learning take place? (Please select as many as necessary.) Classroom (traditional) Classroom enhanced by high tech facilities (sometimes called a blended learning classroom or classroom for multi-mode learning) Computer/multimedia lab Language lab Learners choose where they work Self-access centre Other (please specify)
Question 14 Asking respondents to indicate years and months would make it clear how the question should be answered.	Single text box replaced with one box for 'months' and another for 'years'.
Rubric for some questions in need of clarifying.	Please indicate the purposes of assessing language learner autonomy in your environment → Please indicate the purposes of assessing language learner autonomy in your environment (please select as many as necessary).

At the end of the session Daphne discussed her impressions of the online environment and in particular the layout and format of the instrument. Her views resulted in changes to make the layout of questionnaire more user-friendly.

6.3.1.2 Piloting of the questionnaire as a whole (Pilot 2)

The aim of Pilot 2 was to ensure that the graphic design of the revised instrument, the usability of the online software in general, and the questionnaire in particular, were of optimal standard.

Pilot 2 was carried out over the course of 50 days between 6th March 2008 and 24th April 2008. Twelve pilot participants were requested to participate, and full responses were received from 11 participants, representing a completion rate of 91.6%. Pilot participants invited to respond were known to me as professionals working in the language learning field, with an interest in learner autonomy.

In addition to the pilot questionnaire, the pilot participants were requested to complete a second questionnaire entitled *Critical comments on the pilot version of Assessing Autonomy in Language Learning*. This questionnaire asked for pilot participants' feedback on the main research instrument and was completed by 10 out of 12 respondents. Answers to the *Critical comments* questionnaire indicated that respondents took, on average, 35 minutes to complete the main questionnaire. Analysis of the data showed that none of the respondents found the questionnaire difficult to complete, although some did find it confusing in places. For example, one of the areas of comment from three respondents was that they wished to select more than one answer and found it frustrating that they were not able to do this. Consequently I decided instead to insert the following rubric for each question:

> If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below

thus acknowledging the difficulties that respondents might face in this regard, and giving advice on how to proceed should they encounter this

problem. Other minor amendments were made to the questionnaire in response to comments made by the pilot participants.

6.3.1.3 *Piloting the analysis (Pilot 3)*

The aim of Pilot 3 was to test the data analysis and to ensure that the data generated by the questionnaire would answer the research questions satisfactorily. The data generated by Pilot 2 were analysed using similar techniques to those intended for the main study (see section 6.3.5 for further details). No amendments to the questionnaire were considered necessary in light of this procedure.

6.3.2 Main study sampling, access and ethical considerations

From my experiences working as a teacher, learning advisor and researcher in the field of language education, I know that the number of colleagues with the interest and means of promoting learner autonomy is relatively small. Thus, purposive and convenience sampling methods were chosen for this study, with the aim of including as many of the target population as possible. Participants needed to be tertiary-level educators working in the field of language learning/teaching, who were actively promoting autonomy with their learners. Potential participants were drawn from the delegate lists from learner-autonomy related conferences over the previous five years and from my own professional network. Both these sets of potential participants were contacted directly via an individually-addressed email. In addition, emails were sent to six language learning and autonomy discussion lists. In each case, an email was sent in advance directly to the list moderator, asking permission to use the list for research purposes. In all cases, permission was given.

Ethical procedures were incorporated into the design of the questionnaire and information and guidelines for the participants were provided on the

first two pages (Appendix A). Then usefully, the functionality of the software meant that no participant was able to progress beyond the second page if they had not ticked all boxes indicating that they had understood the guidelines and were agreeing to participate on a voluntary and informed basis.

6.3.3 Administration of the questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was administered over the course of 44 days between 8th May 2008 and 20th June 2008. It was considered appropriate in this instance to administer the survey solely through online means, as the target population were considered to comprise what Kaplowitz, Hadlock and Levine (2004, p. 94) have described as a 'special [population] who regularly use the Internet'.

A total of 252 potential participants were contacted via email, with a hyperlink to the online questionnaire included in the body of the message. In addition, an unknown number of potential participants were contacted through postings on six discussion lists, also with a hyperlink to the online questionnaire. Out of the 252 potential participants contacted directly by email, 60 usable responses were generated. Given that Dörnyei (2003, p. 83) describes response rate as the 'Achilles Heel' of questionnaires, this response rate of 24% compares reasonably with other studies using online questionnaires (Crawford, Couper, & Lamias, 2001; Sheehan, 2001). Compared to this figure of 60 responses generated from personal emails, it seems somewhat surprising that 41 respondents were garnered from discussion list postings, where potential respondents would feel little or no personal loyalty to participating in the survey. However, through personal communication with list owners, it can be estimated that the number of subscribers to all six lists is approximately 2400, making the percentage of respondents 1.7%. This is clearly a very low response rate compared to

that gained from professional contacts, but this was not unexpected: as Cook, Heath, and Thompson (2000) point out, the response rate for web-based surveys is improved greatly when the request to participate is sent in a personalised manner.

6.3.4 Data preparation

All incomplete responses and those from non-tertiary level educators were deleted. Furthermore, at two points in the survey, respondents were filtered out: If respondents answered 'no' to the question 'Are any of your students involved in activities under your guidance, which, in your opinion, foster the development of language learning autonomy?' they were automatically skipped to the end of the survey. Similarly, if respondents answered 'no' to 'Is any aspect of their autonomy as a learner assessed in any way?' they were diverted to the end of the survey. The numbers of respondents remaining as survey participants after each of these stages is shown in Table 6.3 below:

Table 6.3: Number of respondents retained at each stage of the survey

Total respondents who started the survey	199
Total number of useable responses	101
Respondents whose students were involved in activities which foster the development of language learner autonomy	88
Respondents whose students' autonomy is assessed (and who therefore completed the full survey)	45

6.3.5 Data analyses

The questions in the second half of the survey were based on the constitutive components in each category of the learner autonomy microconceptual framework (section 5.3). The number of constitutive components in each category varied from two to twelve, so in order to be

able to compare the seven categories in a more meaningful way, the results for the constitutive components in each category were averaged across the category to yield arithmetic mean figures for each category as a whole. This is illustrated below, using the results for the question 'Is this aspect of learner autonomy assessed?' for the 'Confidence' category which comprises two constitutive elements (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Example of averaging of results across categories

Is this aspect of learner autonomy assessed?	Number of responses		
Confidence	Yes	No	Not an aspect of LA
Demonstrated ability to seek out opportunities to speak/use the language	26	18	1
Demonstrated ability to overcome negative feedback/assessment	15	27	3
Sum of the total number of responses in 'Confidence'	41	45	4
Arithmetic mean of the total number of responses in 'Confidence'	**20.5**	**22.5**	**2**

Excel was used to carry out descriptive statistical analyses of the data using counts and percentages, mean counts, and cross-tabulations. These are presented and discussed in the remainder of this chapter using frequency tables, charts and graphs. Where mean counts (as calculated above) are represented in the graphs, these are labelled as 'mean number of responses'.

6.4 Survey findings

The findings of the survey painted a rich picture of the assessment of language learner autonomy in tertiary environments, particularly with regard to who assesses autonomy and how it is assessed. The full range of results is presented and discussed in this section: firstly, the contexts of

autonomy-inspired learning environments, followed by an analysis of the assessment of autonomy.

6.4.1 Contexts of learner autonomy

The contexts of learner autonomy surveyed were:

1. Type of learning institution

2. Country

3. Subject being learned

4. Type of learning environment

The majority of respondents were from universities, with a few from other tertiary level institutions (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Type of learning institution in which respondents were based
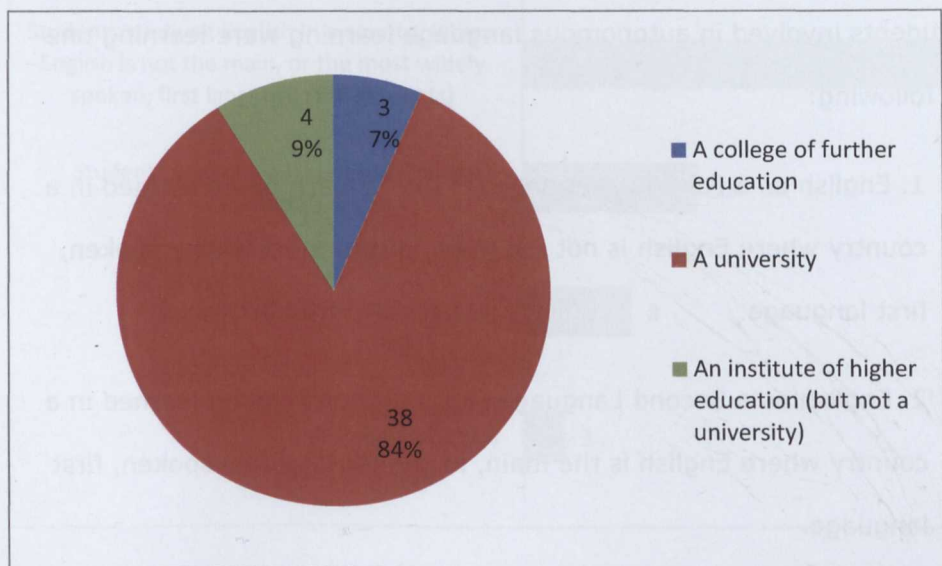
Respondents to the questionnaire were based in 13 countries (Table 4). The countries represented are reflective of the sampling methods used, and no claim is being made that they are statistically representative – or proportionate to – the countries where learner autonomy is promoted.

Table 6.5: Countries in which questionnaire respondents were based

Country	Number
Australia	4
Bahrain	1
China (including Hong Kong)	4
Colombia	1
France	1
Japan	18
Malaysia	1
Mexico	1
New Zealand	1
Portugal	1
Spain	1
United Arab Emirates	7
United Kingdom	4

6.4.1.1 Type of students involved in autonomous language learning

The students involved in autonomous language learning were learning one of the following:

1. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) – English being learned in a country where English is not the main, or the most widely spoken, first language.

2. English as a Second Language (ESL) – English being learned in a country where English is the main, or the most widely spoken, first language.

3. A language other than English.

4. Teacher education.

5. Other.

Whilst it is accepted that from a sociolinguistics perspective these categorisations may be problematic (Pennycook, 2003) they were considered to be the most readily understood for the purposes of this survey. Respondents were able to select more than one answer, and were able to select the 'other' category if they felt the other four options were not appropriate for their context. The responses to the question indicated that the majority of respondents were teaching students of English (and most of these EFL) but teachers of languages other than English and teacher educators were also represented (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Type of students taught by respondents
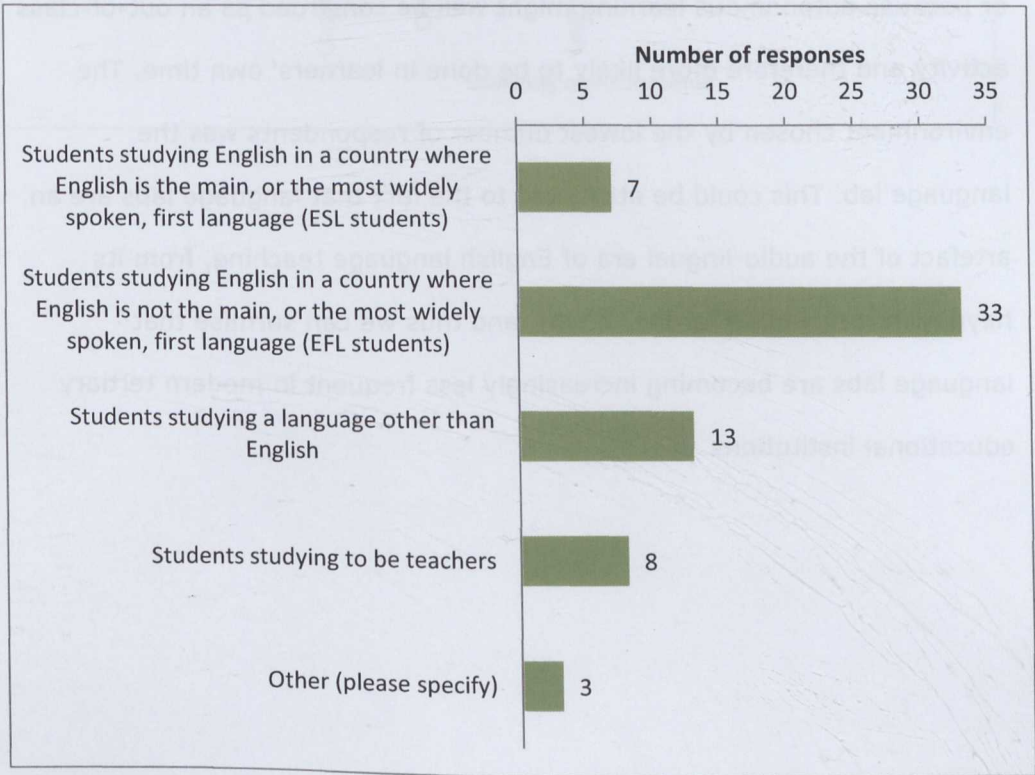
6.4.1.2 Learning environments

Responses to the survey indicated that the majority of ALL takes place in a classroom environment with 37 respondents selecting the traditional classroom or enhanced classroom options (Figure 6.3). The number of responses indicating that learners choose where they work was 22. This was the single largest response, and perhaps explained by the fact that the learners taught by the teachers responding to the survey were tertiary level students who might be given more freedom about where they learn; or because the respondents were advocates of learner autonomy and thus offered more flexibility to their students than might normally be the case; or because autonomous learning might well be construed as an out-of-class activity and therefore more likely to be done in learners' own time. The environment chosen by the lowest number of respondents was the language lab. This could be attributed to the fact that language labs are an artefact of the audio-lingual era of English language teaching, from its heyday in the 1960s (Tarone, 2006), and thus we can surmise that language labs are becoming increasingly less frequent in modern tertiary educational institutions.

Figure 6.3: Learning environments
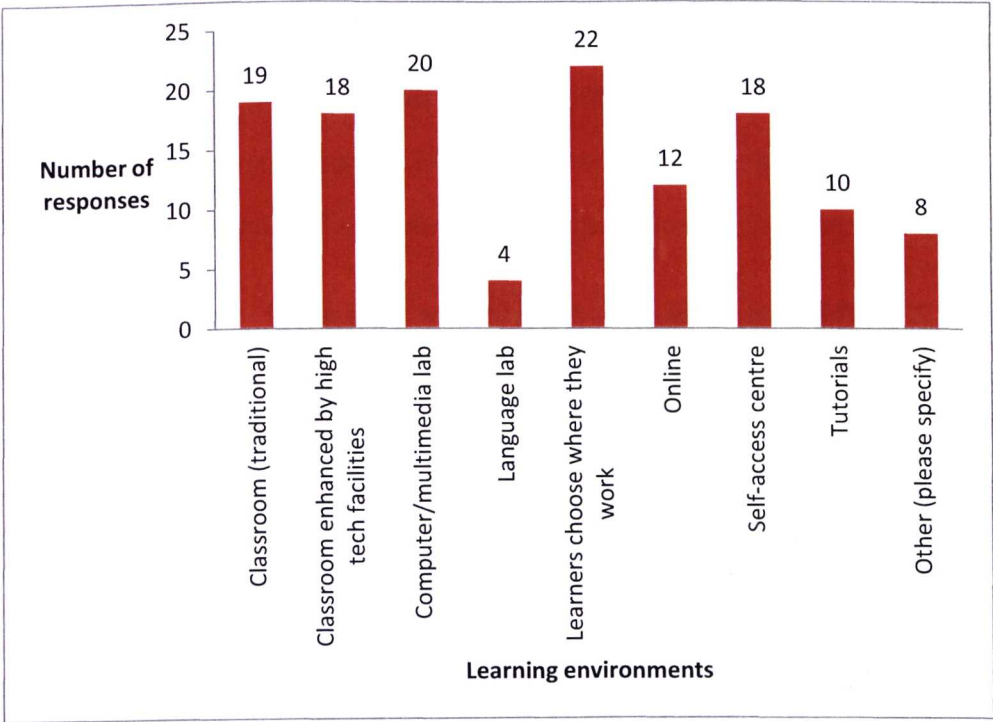
6.4.2 Assessing learner autonomy

The issues relating to the assessment of learner autonomy which were surveyed were whether each component of learner autonomy was assessed or not, which tools and evidence were used in the assessment, and who carried out the assessment. Each of these results is elaborated on below.

6.4.2.1 Which aspects of autonomy are assessed?

For each constitutive component in the micro-conceptual framework developed for the study, respondents were required to indicate whether it was: a) assessed, b) not assessed, or c) not an aspect of learner autonomy.

Two different analyses were done on the participants' responses. Initially, responses a) and b) were collapsed into one on the basis that the participants who chose one of these did consider the component in question to be an aspect of learner autonomy. As described in section 5.5, binomial tests were then carried out which showed that the proportion of participants who indicated they had or had not assessed this component was significantly greater than the chance value, set at 0.5 (p < .000). This result suggests that all 34 components included in the model were deemed by the participants to be components of learner autonomy.

Then, the responses for each constitutive component were analysed further (Figure 6.4). In five out of seven categories, over half of the respondents indicated that the category of learner autonomy was assessed. Learner control was the category which most respondents (61%) said they assessed. The other category for which respondents strongly indicated they assessed autonomy was motivation (60%). In the 'Confidence' and 'Critical reflection' categories, just under half of the respondents indicated that they were assessed (46% and 42% respectively).

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Although all categories were deemed to be aspects of learner autonomy at levels that were highly statistically significant, the metacognitive awareness category seemed to resonate with most respondents as being an aspect of learner autonomy: less than 0.5% said it was 'not an aspect' of learner autonomy compared to 4% for confidence.

Figure 6.4: Breakdown of assessment in each microconceptual framework category

Critical reflection

Not an aspect of learner autonomy 2%

Assessed 42%

Not assessed 56%

Motivation

Not an aspect of learner autonomy 3%

Assessed 60%

Not assessed 37%

Metacognitive awareness

Not an aspect of learner autonomy 0%

Assessed 58%

Not assessed 42%

Confidence

Not an aspect of learner autonomy 4%

Assessed 46%

Not assessed 50%

Learner control

Not an aspect of learner autonomy 3%

Assessed 61%

Not assessed 36%

Learning range

Not an aspect of learner autonomy 2%

Assessed 53%

Not assessed 45%

Information literacy

This component of information literacy is not an aspect of learner autonomy 2%

Assessed 51%

Not assessed 47%

6.4.3 How is autonomy assessed?

Respondents were asked about the **tools** used for assessing autonomy, and the **evidence** from learners on which the assessment was based. **Tools** refer to a) data gathering procedures, such as observations or evaluative interviews, upon which judgements are then based and b) items such as rating scales and descriptor bands, used to assign a grade. **Evidence** refers to a) work that is produced by learners such as learner diaries or portfolios, b) communicative interactions learners engage in, such as interviews or tandem learning, or c) aspects of learners' work, such as the quality or quantity. Data showing how these tools and evidence are used in the assessment of learner autonomy is presented and discussed in the next two sections.

6.4.3.1 Tools

The three tools shown by the data to be used in the assessment of autonomy by the greatest number of respondents are 1) descriptor bands/rubrics, 2) observation, and 3) instinct/judgement. Figure 6.5 shows that in each case these tools were selected by over 30 respondents (N.B. respondents could select multiple answers). In contrast, electronic monitoring systems, oral exams, and percentile ranges, were selected by only one or two respondents.

Figure 6.5: Tools for the assessment of autonomy

Number of responses

Tools	Number of responses
Descriptor bands/rubrics	37
Electronic monitoring system	2
Evaluative interview	17
Instinct/judgement	31
Observation	36
Oral exam	1
Percentile ranges	2
Rating scales	19
Other	23
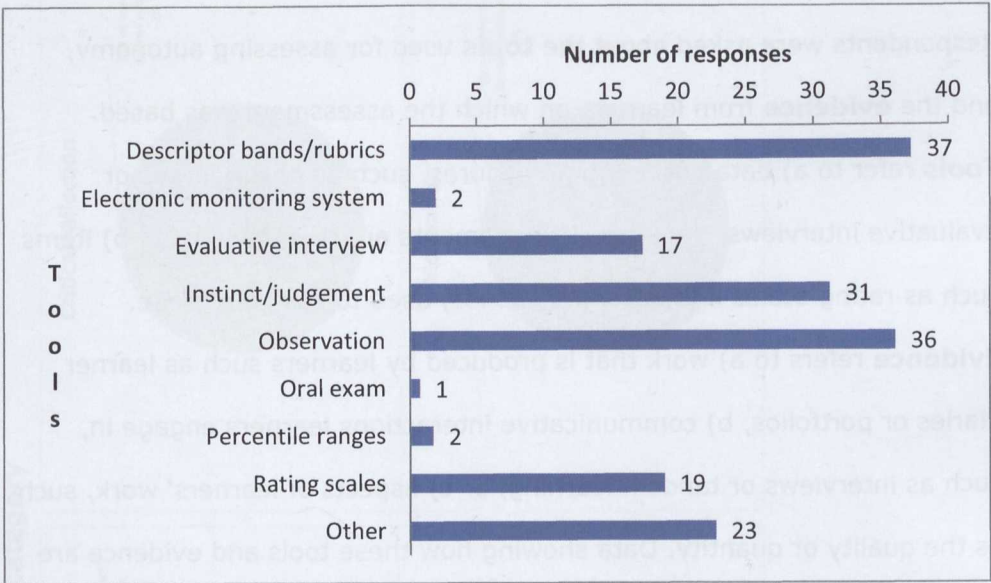
The emphasis on descriptor bands/rubrics, judgement and observation, and less emphasis on exams and electronic monitoring systems suggest a more holistic approach to assessing autonomy, whereby overall, impressionistic accounts of achievement are used more than discrete, precise, measures. Evidence for this can be found in the short comments optionally added to questionnaire responses by some participants:

> These aspects are assessed on a holistic basis.

> I assess my students' ability to use a variety of resources as an indicator of their attempts to develop as autonomous learners, but again this is a holistic assessment.

> Written reflection includes blogs, and the feedback the student gets from educator and peers provides knowledge and skills for group work and project work. Blogs and group/project work are assessed for collaborative learning, taking responsibility for own learning, monitoring own learning and so forth ie holistic.

Figure 6.6 shows the overall pattern of responses when the tools used in the assessment of ALL are analysed according to the categories in the microconceptual framework of learner autonomy. The juxtaposition of the two charts shows that all categories of learner autonomy are assessed using a variety of different tools. My own experiences, backed up by the literature and comments added to the questionnaire, suggest that this is reflecting less a discrete use of, say, evaluative interviews being used to assess metacognitive awareness, but more a multifaceted approach to assessment with a variety of tools used to capture different aspects of autonomy in a variety of different ways. In the words of one respondent:

> I evaluate learners' evaluations of their own independent study outside of class holistically; they write a journal and I give the journal a grade out of 100. The above "abilities" are not evaluated one by one--when there is evidence that a student is "demonstrating" them in their journals, I tend to give a higher grade.

Figure 6.6: Tools used for assessment of autonomy within each category of the microconceptual framework

Legend (top chart):
- Learner control
- Metacognitive awareness
- Critical reflection
- Learning range
- Confidence
- Motivation
- Information literacy

Top chart:
Y-axis: Mean number of responses (0–10)
X-axis (Tools): Descriptor bands/rubrics, Evaluative interview, Observation, Percentile ranges, Other

Legend (bottom chart):
- Descriptor bands/rubrics
- Electronic monitoring system
- Evaluative interview
- Instinct/judgement
- Observation
- Oral exam
- Percentile ranges
- Rating scales
- Other

Bottom chart:
Y-axis: Mean number of responses (0–10)
X-axis (Categories of learner autonomy): Learner control, Metacognitive awareness, Critical reflection, Learning range, Confidence, Motivation, Information literacy

To illustrate the variety of different tools used within the different categories of learner autonomy in greater detail, Figures 6.7 and 6.8 show the spread of responses for the tool 'descriptor bands/rubrics' (Figure 6.7) and for the learner autonomy category 'motivation' (Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.7 shows how descriptor bands/rubrics are used across all categories of learner autonomy, and this pattern is replicated for the majority of tools. In other words, there is no direct match between category of learner autonomy and tool used.

Figure 6.7: Use of descriptor bands/rubrics as a tool for assessment
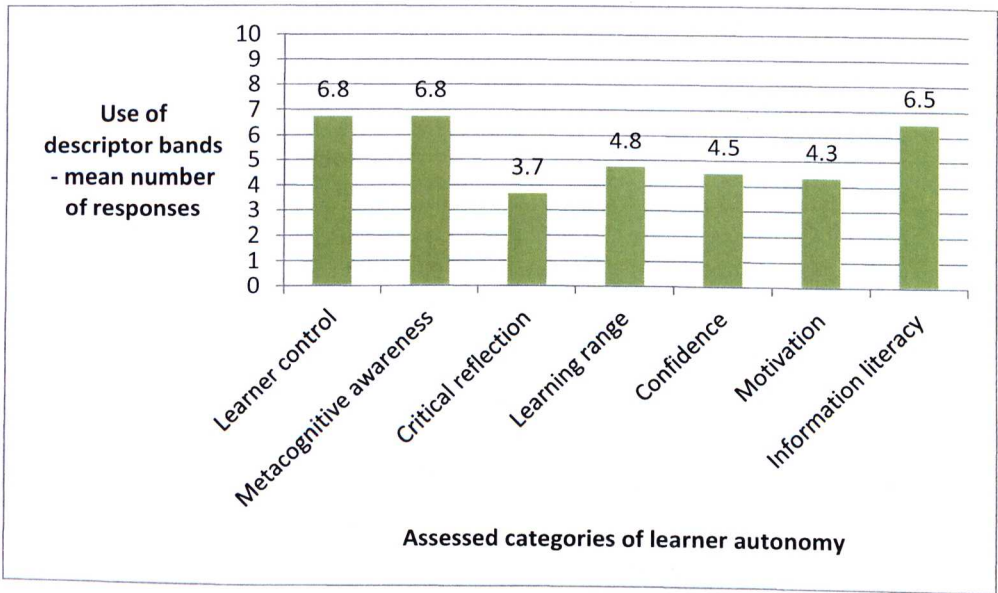
Figure 6.8 illustrates the eclecticism of assessment approaches through the category of motivation with all but the electronic monitoring system used in the assessment of this category.

Figure 6.8: Tools used in the assessment of 'motivation'
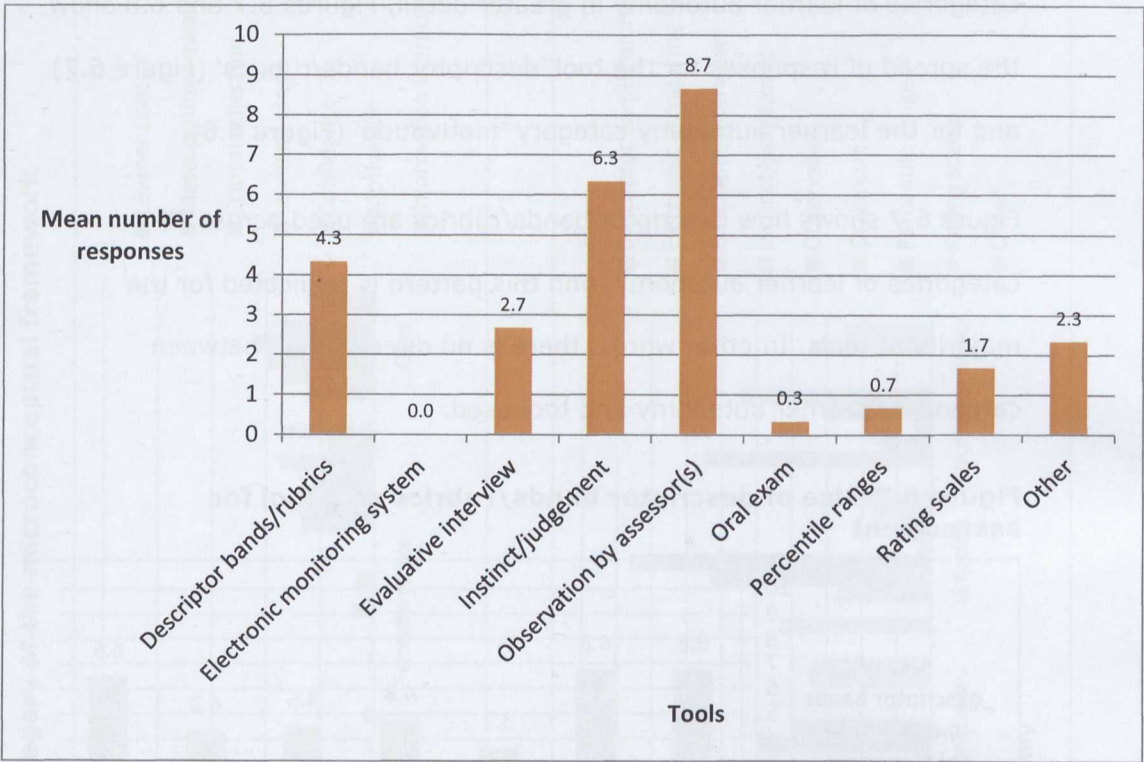
In summary, the findings from the survey have indicated three points:

- A range of tools are used in the assessment of learner autonomy.

- Descriptor bands/rubrics, observation, and instinct/judgement are the most commonly used tools,

- The choice of tool does not appear to be influenced by which aspect of learner autonomy is being assessed.

6.4.3.2 Evidence

The overall pattern of responses showed that written reflections were by far the most commonly reported type of evidence used in the assessment of ALL. Figure 6.9 shows that over 35 respondents reported using written reflections as evidence, whereas quantity of work and learner contracts were selected only by one respondent.

Figure 6.9: Evidence for the assessment of autonomy
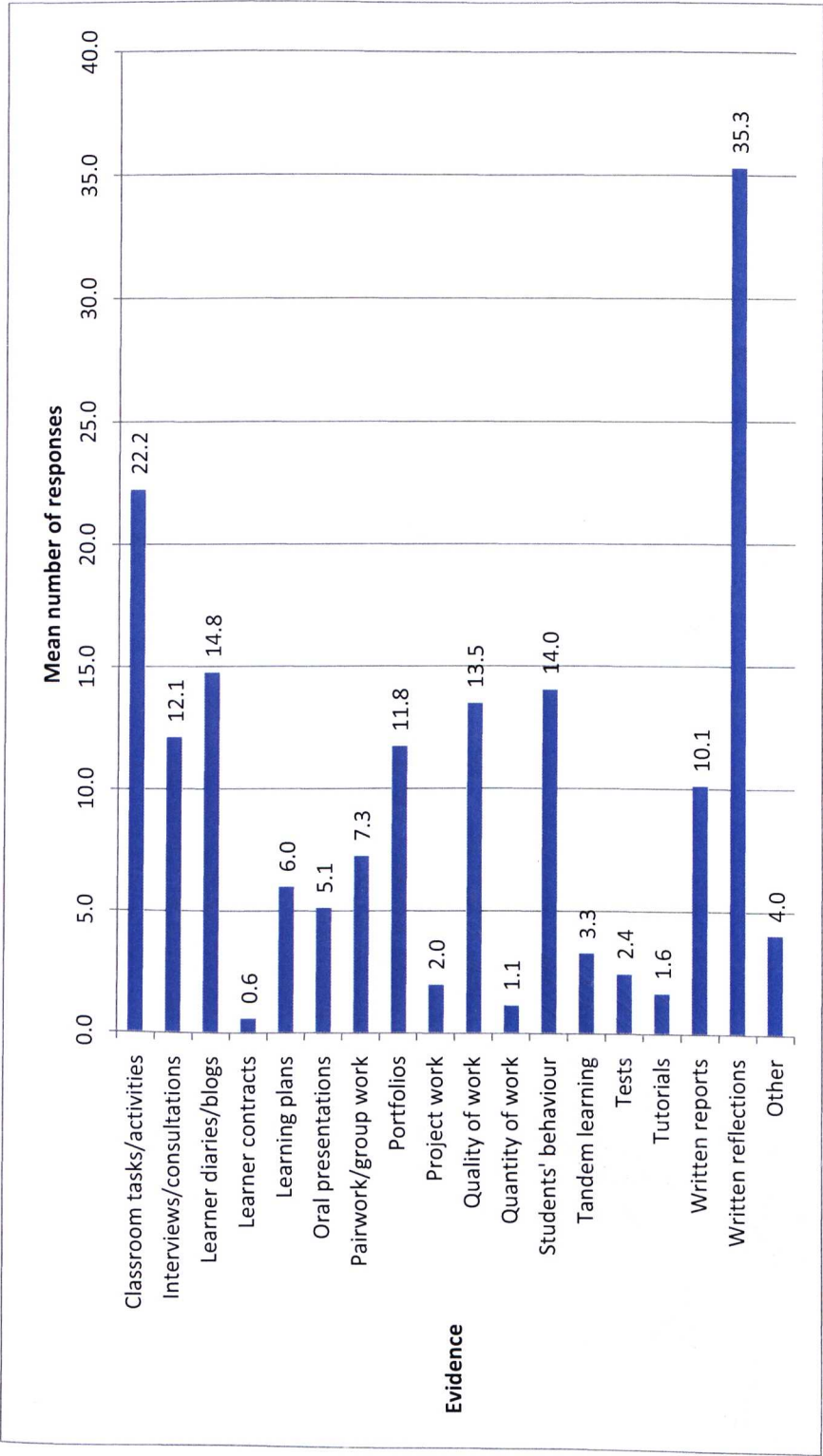
Figure 6.10 shows the overall pattern of responses when the evidence used in the assessment of ALL is analysed according to the categories in the microconceptual framework of learner autonomy. The aim of Figure 6.10 is to provide a visual representation of pattern and not detail. Nevertheless, there are some points worth noticing within the overall pattern: the orange spike on the left hand side of the graph representing classroom tasks and activities used for the assessment of motivation; the pale blue spike to the right of centre representing quality of work used for the assessment of information literacy; and the red spike on the right hand side representing written reflections used for the assessment of metacognitive awareness. The patterns are isolated in Figure 6.11 and commented on further below.

Figure 6.10: Evidence used for assessment of autonomy in each category of the microconceptual framework
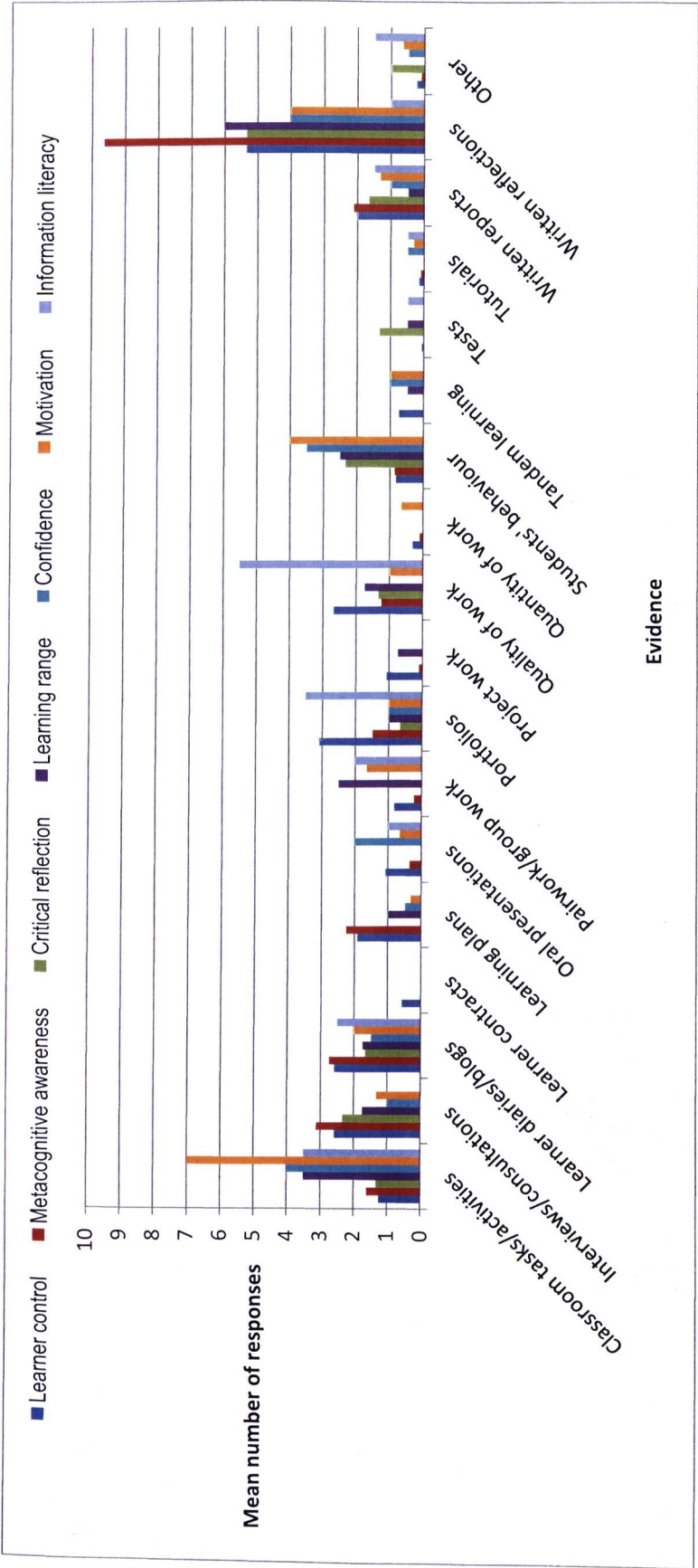
Figure 6.11: Three categories of learner autonomy (metacognitive awareness, motivation and information literacy) shown proportionately within types of evidence used in their assessment
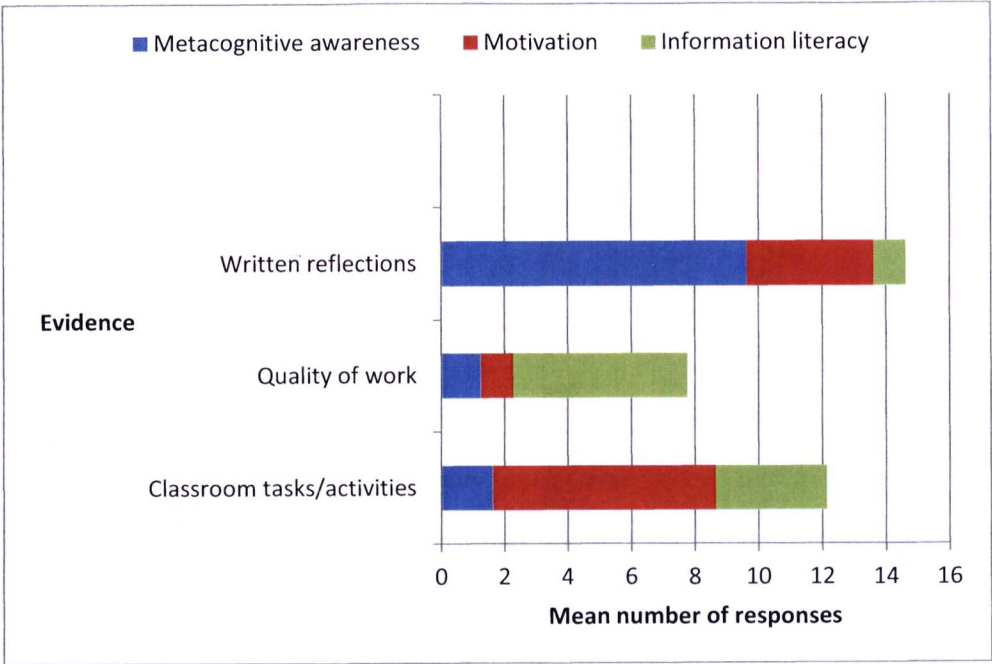
The three distinct spikes observable in Figure 6.10 are isolated in Figure 6.11. It shows metacognitive awareness, motivation and information literacy and the types of evidence used in their assessment as reported in the questionnaire. Written reflections were reported by nearly ten respondents as being used to assess metacognitive awareness compared to four for motivation and one for information literacy. Research has indicated that the development of metacognitive awareness and writing are mutually supportive (Cotterall, 2009; Lew & Schmidt, 2011; Mair, forthcoming; Victori, 1999). In short, these researchers' findings provide some support for assessing metacognitive awareness in this way.

Support for using 'classroom tasks and activities' as evidence of motivation and 'quality of work' as evidence for information literacy is more difficult to locate in the literature, but both make intuitive sense. Teachers, who do most of the assessing, can track learners' involvement in classroom tasks and activities which provides some evidence for the behavioural dimensions of motivation but not the psychological; and if learners are navigating

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resources effectively then presumably this can be traced in the quality of the work that is produced.

6.4.4 Who assesses autonomy?

As discussed in Chapter 2, if learner autonomy is a truly learner-centred approach to pedagogy, then one of the most important aspects to consider when assessing it must be 'who carries out the assessment?' The results from the survey regarding who assesses each category of learner autonomy are shown below in Figure 6.12, in which 'Educator' refers to 'Assessment by the educator', 'Peer' refers to 'peer assessment' and 'Self' refers to 'self-assessment'.

Figure 6.12: Assessors for each category of learner autonomy
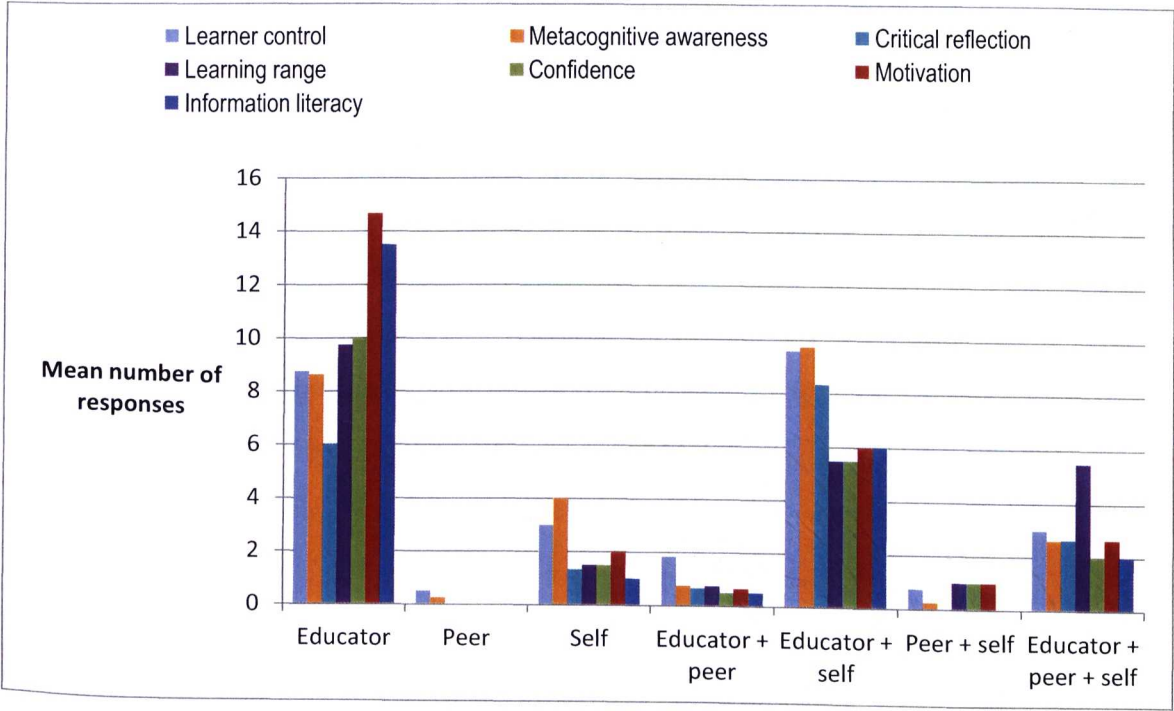
From the patterns shown in this graph, there is little evidence from this survey that language learners and their peers are involved in the assessment of learner autonomy. In fact, it is evident that the educator is reported as being engaged in assessing learner autonomy more than

learners themselves or their peers although joint assessments by the educator and the learner are also well represented. Self-assessment is most common for the metacognitive awareness category which may be explained by the difficulties of demonstrating metacognitive awareness in an observable form and thus difficult for teachers to assess.

Three categories are assessed by educator and self more than by the educator alone. These are learner control, metacognitive awareness and critical reflection.

6.5 Discussion

Whilst it is fair to say that students are being involved in assessments of their own ALL, this survey has also shown that this involvement is on a very minor scale, and that it is still predominantly the educator who takes control of assessment practices. Given the argument laid out in Chapter 3 concerning sustainable assessment and assessment *as* learning, and the importance of involving learners in the assessment if it is to be successful, a case can be made for a change in assessment practices within ALL. Furthermore, if there is one field in which learners should be encouraged to take control of the assessment of their own learning, then arguably that field should be language learner autonomy (see Chapter 3).

7   Phase 2: Learners' Perceptions of the Outcomes of Learning in an Autonomous Learning Environment

7.1 Introduction

In Phase 1 of the research reported in Chapter 6, the questionnaire respondents – instructors based in international tertiary institutions – reported that language learner autonomy is assessed in their courses, but not in any systematic way, and with little input or control from the learners themselves. In my view, it seems paradoxical that in autonomy-inspired learning environments where autonomy is assessed, instructors are not encouraging learners to be involved in the assessment of their own autonomy. Thus, there could be a need to develop systematic learner-controlled assessment methods for autonomous language learner education. Therefore, a learner-generated method of formative (self-) assessment is proposed which would attempt to reflect the main tenets of learner autonomy as defined in this thesis. Such a model would not only be used by learners but, more importantly, would be, in part, generated by them in the service of their own needs and interests, allowing them greater control. In addition, as a formative method of assessment, it is suggested that such a tool would not only help learners better understand their own progress as autonomous language learners, but would also help them become more successful learners, as studies on testing washback (Green, 2006; Watkins, Dahlin, & Ekholm, 2005) and assessment *for* autonomy (T. Lamb, 2010) have indicated.

Whereas the survey research detailed in Chapter 6 had asked educators which aspects of their learners' autonomy they assessed, here it is argued that finding out from learners themselves what they consider to be the

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NLLOs 'non-linguistic learning outcomes' (Dörnyei, 2001; Legenhausen, 2001) of autonomous learning is equally important. However, eliciting these NLLOs from learners posed problems on two levels: Firstly, as a researcher, how could I help learners, with possibly limited English ability, understand what I was seeking to uncover? In other words, how could I help them understand the complex meanings of concepts such as 'learner autonomy' and 'non-linguistic learning outcomes' in ways that made sense to them? Secondly, how could I best tap into the subjectivity of those learners' perceptions and make sense of those understandings?

These predicaments in investigating learner autonomy were illustrated beautifully by Riley (1996). He makes an analogy between evaluating learner autonomy and self-access and the story of 'the blind man and the bubble'. The blind man is intrigued by the concept of bubbles. He hears about them from his friends and is in command of some factual, scientific knowledge about them, but his curiosity leads him further. He asks his friends to make him some bubbles, but when they do they are initially difficult to find, and then seem to disappear as soon as he touches them. Riley asks whether, as researchers of learner autonomy, if we are 'condemned to stumble around like the blind, gesticulating wildly and then destroying the very thing we want to understand?' (p. 251). Perhaps an addendum to this can be found in the work of Ushioda (2008b), who has argued that the field of learner autonomy lacks 'systematic methods of inquiry' and has called for more tools for researching autonomy.

In my search for appropriate research methods for the study of the assessment of learner autonomy, I was struck by the advantages that a relatively unknown methodology, known as 'Q methodology' or 'Q method', or sometimes just 'Q' (Watts & Stenner, 2012), might have to offer in comparison to more traditional approaches such as questionnaires,

interviews and discourse analysis. A full description of the methodology is given in section 7.2, but, in simple terms, it can be described as a research method which:

> ... combines several qualitative elements, such as interviews and document analysis, with the quantitative element of factor analysis [enabling] the researcher to investigate subjective notions, such as perceptions, viewpoints and beliefs, in a much more systematic way than is possible using 'typical' qualitative research methods (Pemberton & Cooker, forthcoming)

Q is congruent with learner autonomy pedagogy as it allows learners themselves to contribute to the development of the research instruments: If learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981), then I believe also that good research on learner autonomy should allow learners to have some influence on the design of that research.

It is not easy to describe Q methodology. An understanding of the theory is needed to make sense of practical examples, and practical examples are needed to understand the theory. Accordingly, I have chosen to firstly provide a brief overview of Q methodology by discussing its eight components. Next I provide a brief history of Q and discuss its philosophical underpinnings. In section 7.3 of this chapter, I compare Q with other research methods commonly used in learner autonomy research. Next, I make the case for Q as an appropriate methodology for the study of learner autonomy and provide a rationale for choosing it for Phase 2 of my research. Finally I explain how each stage of Q was implemented in the context of this research study to investigate learners' perceptions of the non-linguistic learning outcomes of engaging in autonomous language learning practices.

7.2 What is Q methodology?

Q methodology (also referred to here simply as "Q") is a set of research design principles and techniques that allows for a systematic and scientific understanding of subjectivity – in other words, opinions, perceptions and beliefs. Q methodology comprises eight stages and involves collecting statements from the literature or from research participants which comprise the discourse of the area under investigation. These statements are printed onto cards which are then rank sorted by the research participants. The rank sorting procedure is done according to a Likert-type scale, for example from -5 to +5. Through this sorting process, the participants express their unique viewpoint about the area of investigation. The resulting data is subjected to a form of factor analysis known as by-person factor analysis. The factors illustrate typical viewpoints representative of those who have sorted the cards.

The philosophical basis of Q methodology and the rationale for choosing it for this study are discussed in sections 7.2.3 and 7.4. First, the eight stages of Q are expounded on below.

7.2.1 The stages of Q methodology

Q methodology is jargon-heavy and for those readers who are new to it some of the terms may seem unnecessarily complicated. The aim of the following section is to provide an explanation of the principal Q-specific terms and to provide a brief overview of the eight main stages of Q. This will provide a backdrop against which the following sections on the history, philosophy and implementation of Q can be read

Different researchers conceptualise the stages of Q in different ways. For example, Previte, Pini and Haslam-McKenzie (2007) describe the *five* stages of Q, Hogan (2008) lists the 'six fundamental steps' (p. 92) in a Q

study, whereas Robbins and Krueger (2000), Stenner, Watts and Worrell (2008) and Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009) all define the *seven* stages of Q. However, none of these include the post Q-sort interview as a separate step. I have included this interview as a separate step because of the significance which I attribute to this stage. The eight stages of Q, as conceived in this study, are shown schematically in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: The eight stages of Q methodology

ESTABLISH DOMAIN OF SUBJECTIVITY
Set research questions

IDENTIFY AND BUILD THE CONCOURSE
Use literature, statements from learners & teachers, email discussion list

SELECT STATEMENTS FOR THE Q-SAMPLE: SAMPLE THE CONCOURSE:
Use of theoretical models for categorising and sampling

SELECT SORTERS: P-SET
Tertiary level language learners with exposure to autonomous language learning opportunities (Hong Kong, Japan, UK)

CARRY OUT Q-SORT
Rank-ordering of the statements in the Q-sample by the participants

POST-Q SORT INTERVIEW
Each participant interviewed to understand rationale of card placement`

FACTOR ANALYSIS
Resulting patterns of statements analysed using *PQMethod* (factor analysis techniques)

FACTOR INTERPRETATION
Use of NVivo 9 to code statements for card content analysis

7.2.1.1 *Establish the* domain of subjectivity

The domain of subjectivity is sometimes called the 'opinion domain' (Watts & Stenner, 2005). The domain of subjectivity is, quite simply, the focus of the research – the area of subjectivity to be studied. This is normally expressed in terms of a research question. The domain of subjectivity is subsequently used to develop the concourse, and so it is helpful if it is expressed in clear terms, usually with only one proposition.

7.2.1.2 *Identify and build* the concourse

The domain of subjectivity expressed through the research questions drives the concourse development. The concourse is the term used to describe the collection of subjective viewpoints, perceptions, and beliefs which together comprise the domain of subjectivity. It might be helpful to see this process as analogous to collecting texts for discourse analysis or building a corpus to use in corpus-based analysis. The exact nature of the concourse will depend on the domain of subjectivity; for example, a domain of subjectivity around the area of reactions to the 2009 UK Prime Ministerial debates may comprise a concourse of video clips of TV commentators, as well as text-based statements from newspaper journalists and statements derived from oral interviews with the general public. Alternatively, a domain of subjectivity surrounding metaphorical images of learner autonomy may result in a concourse made up of short word-based statements, longer narrative stories, photos, images of drawings/paintings or other artwork and audio and video files. Published Q studies include concourses including pictures (Wilson & Swaffield, 2010, May), audio-visual data (Grosswiler, 1992) and cartoons (Kinsey, 1993/1994).

The concourse of statements represents the full range of opinion surrounding the domain of subjectivity, in other words 'the flow of

communicability surrounding any topic' (S. R. Brown, 1993, p. 94). If a

concourse is not representative of the existing discourse in existence on

the research topic, then the quality of the work will be jeopardised.

Depending on the domain of subjectivity, a full concourse may consist of

hundreds of statements, although it is seldom that a concourse can be fully

and perfectly delineated. One example from psychology where this was

possible (Hilden, 1958) used a book entitled *The teacher's word book of

30,000* words as the basis of the study. Only words of particular

frequencies were used but nevertheless the resulting concourse comprised

1575 items. More typically, other studies have defined concourses of

between 300 and 700 items (Bryant, Green, & Hewison, 2006; Stenner &

Stainton Rogers, 1998; Wilson & Swaffield, 2010, May). Developing the

concourse is one of the most time-consuming aspects of doing a Q study

and the work involved in collecting the complete discourse surrounding the

focus of the study should not be underestimated.

McKeown and Thomas (1988) offer a useful classification of three ways to

develop a concourse: the *naturalistic* method, the *ready-made* method and

the *hybrid* method. The naturalistic method collects opinions from 'real-

world communication contexts' (p. 26) and involves the researcher

collecting opinions from one of the following:

- research participants who will become involved in later stages of the
  study

- research participants who will not become involved in later stages of
  the study, but who are likely to have relevant opinions

- secondary sources such as letters to newspapers, radio or television
  shows, websites, blogs, etc.

The most common way of collecting opinions directly from research participants is through the use of interviews, focus groups, or written sources, such as reflective diaries or essays. If naturalistic methods are not used to develop the concourse, then ready-made methods are used, in which the concourse is developed from sources already in existence and not directly from research participants. These sources might include academic journals, newspapers, official documents, television or radio broadcasts, or online sources. Finally, the hybrid method uses a combination of both naturalistic methods and ready-made methods.

A number of factors must be considered when collecting and editing statements in the concourse. First, just as with questionnaire writing, double-barrelled statements and long statements containing two or more propositions should not be used in Q statements. If a statement contains more than one idea, this may create confusion for the participants sorting the statements: should they respond to one or other idea or respond to both ideas together? How should a statement be sorted if they agree with one half of the statement but not the other?

As well as containing only one proposition, a good statement should be provocative in that it stimulates a response. As Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2007) point out:

> A good Q statement is meaningful to the people doing the Q sorts. It must be understandable, but it is okay if it can be interpreted in slightly different ways by different people. Above all, Q statements must be something that people are likely to have an opinion about. (p. 11)

Meaningfulness, rather than being an intrinsic quality of the statement or image, is a product of the interaction between the research participant and the statement or image. And it is this constructed and dynamic quality of Q methodology which makes it an interesting, and as I will argue later, an appropriate methodology to use for the investigation of learner autonomy.

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It is this, too, which requires careful selection of participants as participants need to have an awareness of the issue under investigation and opinions about the issue represented in the statements/images. As suggested by Webler et al. (2007), it is the participants' individual interpretations of each statement/image which create the subjectivity. The emergent patterns, in the form of factors, which result from this process have the potential to offer new and exciting insights.

7.2.1.3 Generate the Q sample from the concourse

Once the concourse is developed, and the researcher is content that a full range of opinions and perspectives concerning the domain of subjectivity are included and the statements are meaningful and contain only one proposition, the Q-sample is generated or sampled. The Q-sample is the name given to the selection of statements chosen from the concourse, and which are then used by research participants in the sorting procedure. Usually, the statements in the Q-sample are printed on individual numbered cards (see Figure 7.2) although statements may also be sorted online using a program such as Flash Q (Hackert & Braehler, 2007).

Figure 7.2: Example of a card in a Q-sample
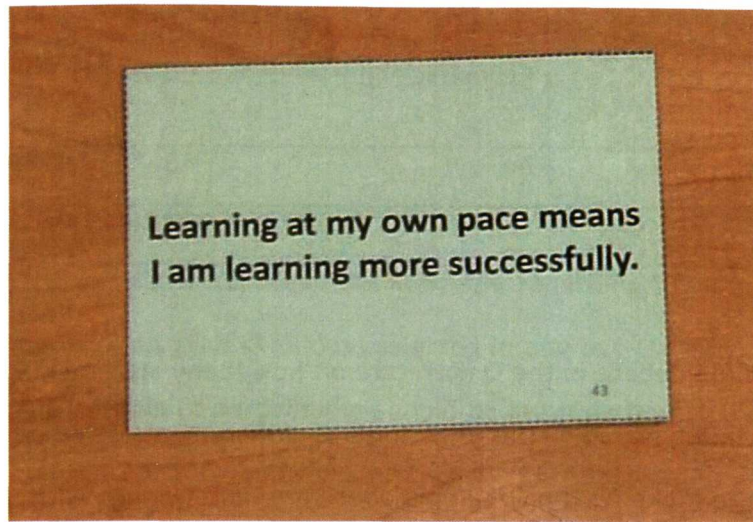
There are two ways of selecting items from the concourse to make up the Q-sample: unstructured or structured sampling. In unstructured sampling, statements are selected randomly using normal random sampling procedures. For example, the required number of statements may be drawn out of a hat, or each statement may be numbered and random numbers generated to select which statements will be included in the Q-sample.

In structured sampling, the statements in the Q-sample are chosen in a principled 'sampled' way from the fuller concourse using a theoretical structure. Such principled sampling arguably results in a sample that is more representative of the concourse, and thus generalisable, than unstructured sampling procedures. An example of the use of a theoretical structure is shown in Kramer, de Hegedus and Gravina (2003) who used Q methodology to evaluate a dairy herd improvement project in Uruguay. They identified two perspectives (the farmers' perspective and the perspective of the larger context) and two pressures (economic and social) resulting in a two by two matrix as shown in Table 7.1 and statements were chosen to reflect both perspectives and both pressures.

Table 7.1: Theoretical structure of the Uruguayan Q sample (Kramer et al., 2003)

Main effects	Dimensions	
	Economic (c)	Social (d)
Perspectives and pressures		
Farmer (a)	Ac	Ad
Context (b)	Bc	Bd

There is some debate in the Q literature on how many statements there should be in a Q-sample. The total number of statements selected from the concourse to make up the Q-sample does vary quite widely, with the optimal number considered to be between 40 and 80 (Watts & Stenner, 2005), although this can also vary (for example, see Webler et al. (2007) who recommend between 20 and 60 statements). As Kramer et al. (2003) argue, the overall size of the Q-sample should not be too overwhelming for participants:

> It is important that the Q-sample be manageable in terms of size: it is very difficult and time consuming for respondents to distinguish between and among upwards of 100 items in a sample. Therefore, Q samples generally tend to number roughly between 30 and 60, with the exact number being decided by the [theoretical structure] (Kramer et al., 2003, p. 346).

Other factors which should be taken into account when deciding on the total number of statements in the Q-sample include the level of cognitive processing required by the participants when sorting the statements. For example, even if the number of statements is relatively small, if the statements are text-based and lengthy then this might be problematic if participants are sorting cards which are not written in their native language. This is less problematic if the statements are image- or scent-based, or if they are objects. Another very practical concern to be taken into account is the space required for physical card sorting. Whilst 30 or 40

cards can be sorted in a relatively small area, it would be far more challenging to find space for a card sort of 100 items, although this is not an issue if the card-sorting is done online.

7.2.1.4 Select the P-set

The P-set is the name given to the participants in the study who sort the Q-sample. There is some debate in the literature regarding the ideal number of participants who should be selected in any one Q study. Some argue that the number of participants should be in proportion to the number required to define each viewpoint (factor) (Webler et al., 2007) whereas others argue for a maximum number of participants in relation to the number of statements in the study. Steve Brown, a Q expert and frequent contributor to the Q Methodology Network list, argues that 'there is no recommended minimum or maximum number of respondents in a Q study and no items-to-persons formula that can be said to apply' (S. R. Brown, 2010, February 24). Furthermore, Brown has made a clear argument for 'oversampling'. In other words, having a larger P-set may be necessary due to the unknown number of factors which will emerge from the analysis and the number of participants who are associated with each factor. In Brown's words:

> There is no set number of Q sorts for any particular study. One of the goals is to have all factors well defined, i.e., to have each Factor Defined by 4-6 Q sorts, each of which has a substantial loading on that factor only. This gives us a good estimation of the perspective that the factor represents and additional Q sorts beyond these 4-6 are superfluous. The problem is, we never know in advance how many factors there are or which individuals are going to be affiliated with the factors, so we tend to compensate for this by oversampling; for example, by selecting 30-40 participants in the hopes that whatever factors emerge will be well defined (S. R. Brown, 2010, September 13)

As discussed in section 7.2.1, it is not only the number of participants which must be considered carefully in Q methodology, but the particular

opinions or viewpoints which each participant will bring to the sorting process should also be considered. For this reason, purposive sampling is often used in Q studies (Bryant et al., 2006) with participants chosen specifically for the viewpoints they are likely to hold.

For similar reasons, snowball sampling can be a useful sampling procedure to use in Q-studies (Webler et al., 2007). In snowball sampling, potential participants are recommended by participants already involved in the study. This can be useful when the researcher requires a particular viewpoint to be represented but has no access to potential participants who might hold those views. By asking existing participants to recommend others who match the required profile, the chances of finding such participants may be increased.

7.2.1.5 Carry out the Q sort

The Q-sort is the name given to the rank-ordering of the statements in the Q-sample by the participants.

The rank ordering process is carried out according to particular instructions from the researcher known as the 'condition of instruction'. The condition of instruction provides the context for the participant to consider whilst they are doing the sort. See section 7.5.5 for details of the condition of instruction used in the current study.

The full rank-ordering of the cards is often preceded by a preliminary sort whereby the participant is asked to divide the cards into three piles. These three piles correspond to the participant's most extreme opinions at both ends of a scale and a neutral category. The labelling of the scale is done according to the research question and using phrases which will be personally meaningful to the study participants. Examples used in previous studies include *most like me* and *least like me* (Falchikov, 1993), *most in*

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accordance with my opinion and *least in accordance with my opinion* (Cuppen, Breukers, Hisschemoller, & Bergsma, 2008), *most like my view of learning in the physics course* and *least like my view of learning in the physics course* (Ramlo, 2006/2007) and *like me in the future* and *not like me in the future* (Kerpelman, 2006). Figure 7.3 shows a participant engaged in the preliminary sorting procedure.

Figure 7.3: A research participant sorting the Q-sample into three piles

Once the participant has finished the preliminary sort, they are then asked to fully rank order the cards in a fixed distribution which typically ranges from -5 or -4 (*least agree, least like me,* etc.) to +4 or +5 (*most agree, most like me,* etc.). Figure 7.4 shows a participant engaged in a Q-sort. The yellow cards form the Q-sample whilst the white strip along the top describes the number of cards required in each column to create a grid formation.

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Figure 7.4: A research participant engaged in a Q-sort

Figure 7.4 shows an example of a fixed distribution grid used in a Q sort.

This is a typical Q-sort grid for a 48 card sort with two cards in the -5 and

+5 positions, three cards in the -4 and +4 positions, and so on, with eight

cards in the 0 position. The position of the cards within one vertical column

of the grid is not meaningful. It is only the position of the cards placed

horizontally along the cline which has meaning when the sort is analysed.

Figure 7.5: Q methodology sorting grid

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

Typically, participants are given a diagrammatic representation of grid, similar to that shown in Figure 7.5, to refer to during the sorting process. Once the sorting procedure is complete, the spread of the cards within the grid can be seen as a visual representation of each participant's viewpoint, although as I shall show, it is not the viewpoint of any one individual which is of interest in Q, but the existence of a particular viewpoint as representative of a possible way of thinking about the topic in question.

When a participant has completed the card sort, either the researcher or the participant transfers the numbers from the cards onto a blank record sheet (usually a print out of the grid formation). This set of numbers comprises the raw data which are subsequently processed and analysed.

7.2.1.6 Post-Q sort interview

After the participant has completed the Q-sort, a post Q-sort interview is

usually, but not always, carried out. The purpose of the Q-sort interview is

to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's rationale for the

placement of each card in the grid. Gallagher and Porock (2010) emphasise

that the subject of the interview is not the domain of subjectivity itself, but

the cause of the opinions about the domain of subjectivity:

> It is important to recognize that the aim of the interview is
> not to explore what participants think of the phenomena …
> but rather to reveal the underlying beliefs and values that
> lead to a particular stance on the issue (pp. 296-297).

Just as with qualitative interviews in the social sciences in general, there

are no set rules for a post Q-sort interview. In some senses, the interview

could be argued to be structured or semi-structured, because questions are

based on explanations for card positioning. In other words, the cards

provide the stimuli and the guidance for the interview just as questions

would in a more conventional interview. However, it may also be that the

participant is allowed or encouraged to talk at length and the researcher

may wish to ask more follow-up questions inspired by the participants'

comments. In this regard the interview is more akin to an unstructured

interview.

7.2.1.7 Analyse the Q sort data – Q factor analysis

The patterns of statements created through the rank ordering process and

recorded in number format are statistically analysed using factor analysis

techniques to generate a number of underlying factors, each of which is

representative of a similar viewpoint. There are, however, a number of

important differences between traditional factor analysis and the form of

factor analysis used in Q methodology. Traditional factor analysis, such as

that used within the 'R-method' tradition, looks for correlations between

observed variables (e.g., items in a questionnaire) across a sample of subjects to generate one or more unobserved variables, known as 'factors' which will explain the existence of those variables. The observed variables are usually greater in number than the unobserved variables. To use a fictional example by way of illustration, in a personality test, it may be discovered that people who scored highly on questions relating to empathy, also scored highly on questions relating to sympathy and philanthropy which may all be explained by a factor labelled as 'pro-social behaviour'. This type of factor analysis can be described as 'by-item' factor analysis as correlations are made between items (variables) to generate the unobserved factors.

In Q methodology, the factor analysis is not 'by-item' but 'by-person', which led to Stephenson, the originator of Q methodology (see section 7.2.2 below) and others describing the analysis of Q-sort data as using an 'inverted' factor analysis technique. In by-person factor analysis, correlations are sought amongst participants across a sample of variables (the Q-sample). The viewpoints of individuals, made operant in the Q-sort, are correlated to derive underlying factors or viewpoints. The difference between Q and R factor analysis is summarised by Watts and Stenner (2005) when they write:

> There is [...] a tendency for Q methodological factor analysis to be erroneously (mis)identified with its more familiar R methodological incarnation, and hence to be viewed as a 'statistical method of data reduction that identifies and combines sets of dependent variables that are measuring similar things' (McGarty and Haslam, 2003: 387). As we shall see, however, Q methodology makes no such psychometric claims. The method employs a by-person factor analysis in order to identify groups of participants who make sense of (and who hence Q 'sort') a pool of items in comparable ways. (p. 68)

Q factor analysis can be done by hand, but nowadays it is typically done using a bespoke software package such as *PQMethod* (Schmolck &

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Atkinson, 2002) or a statistical analysis programme such as SPSS. Bespoke packages are generally recommended for the analysis of Q-sort data; for example, S. R. Brown (2010, July 2) argues that standard statistical analysis packages 'are generally not well constructed for use in Q methodology'; but others advise that factor analyses and rotations should be done by hand or in a standard statistical package such as SPSS so that the process of analysis is fully understood (W. Stainton Rogers, 2010, October 14). In this section, I will describe the process of analysis using *PQMethod*, using examples from the current study.

PQMethod is a DOS-based programme. In general terms, DOS-based computer programmes are anachronistic, but *PQMethod* is still popular and whilst other bespoke programmes exist for Q methodology, *PQMethod* is available freely online and is the programme most cited in the Q methodology literature.

The front screen of *PQMethod* is shown in Figure 7.6. The researcher is required to enter a project name. In this case the project name used was 'hkjpuk'. The programme then opens up to allow for the project data to be entered (see Figure 7.7).

Figure 7.6: Front screen of _PQMethod_

```
PQMETHOD                                                         - □ ×

C:\PQMETHOD\PROJECTS>set EDITOR=c:\pqmethod\ed.com

C:\PQMETHOD\PROJECTS>set VIEWER=c:\pqmethod\view86.com

C:\PQMETHOD\PROJECTS>c:\pqmethod\PQMethod.exe


        +------------------------------------------------+
        |               PQMethod - 2.11                  |
        |              (November  2002)                  |
        +------------------------------------------------+
        |        by Peter.Schmolck@unibw-muenchen.de     |
        |      Adapted from Mainframe-Program QMethod     |
        |           by John Atkinson at KSU              |
        +------------------------------------------------+
        |              The QMethod Page:                 |
        | http://www.rz.unibw-muenchen.de/~p41bsmk/qmethod/ |
        +------------------------------------------------+


   Enter [Path and] Project Name:
```

Figure 7.7: _PQMethod_ screen shot showing project name and the full menu of options for entering and analysing data

```
PQMETHOD                                                         - □ ×

C:\PQMETHOD\PROJECTS>set EDITOR=c:\pqmethod\ed.com

C:\PQMETHOD\PROJECTS>set VIEWER=c:\pqmethod\view86.com

C:\PQMETHOD\PROJECTS>c:\pqmethod\PQMethod.exe


        +------------------------------------------------+
        |               PQMethod - 2.11                  |
        |              (November  2002)                  |
        +------------------------------------------------+
        |        by Peter.Schmolck@unibw-muenchen.de     |
        |      Adapted from Mainframe-Program QMethod     |
        |           by John Atkinson at KSU              |
        +------------------------------------------------+
        |              The QMethod Page:                 |
        | http://www.rz.unibw-muenchen.de/~p41bsmk/qmethod/ |
        +------------------------------------------------+


   Enter [Path and] Project Name:
hkjpuk

 Current Project is ...   C:\PQMETHOD\PROJECTS/hkjpuk
 Choose the number of the routine you want to run and enter it.

   1 - STATES   - Enter (or edit) the file of statements
   2 - QENTER   - Enter q sorts (new or continued)
   3 - QCENT    - Perform a Centroid factor analysis
   4 - QPCA     - Perform a Principal Components factor analysis
   5 - QROTATE  - Perform a manual rotation of the factors
   6 - QVARIMAX - Perform a varimax rotation of the factors
   7 - QANALYZE - Perform the final Q analysis of the rotated factors
   8 - View project files hkjpuk.*
   X - Exit from PQMethod

   Last Routine Run Successfully - (Initial)
```

Next, the researcher is required to enter the file of statements (the Q-sample) under option 1 (States). The entered file of statements from the current study can be seen in Figure 7.8.

Next each Q-sort must be entered. As with any data analysis, care must be taken at this stage to ensure the sorts are entered correctly, although *PQMethod* will provide an alert if one number is duplicated, or if a number within the statement range (in this case 1-52) is not entered. An example Q-sort data entry can be seen in Figure 7.9.

Figure 7.8: File of statements entered into *PQMethod*
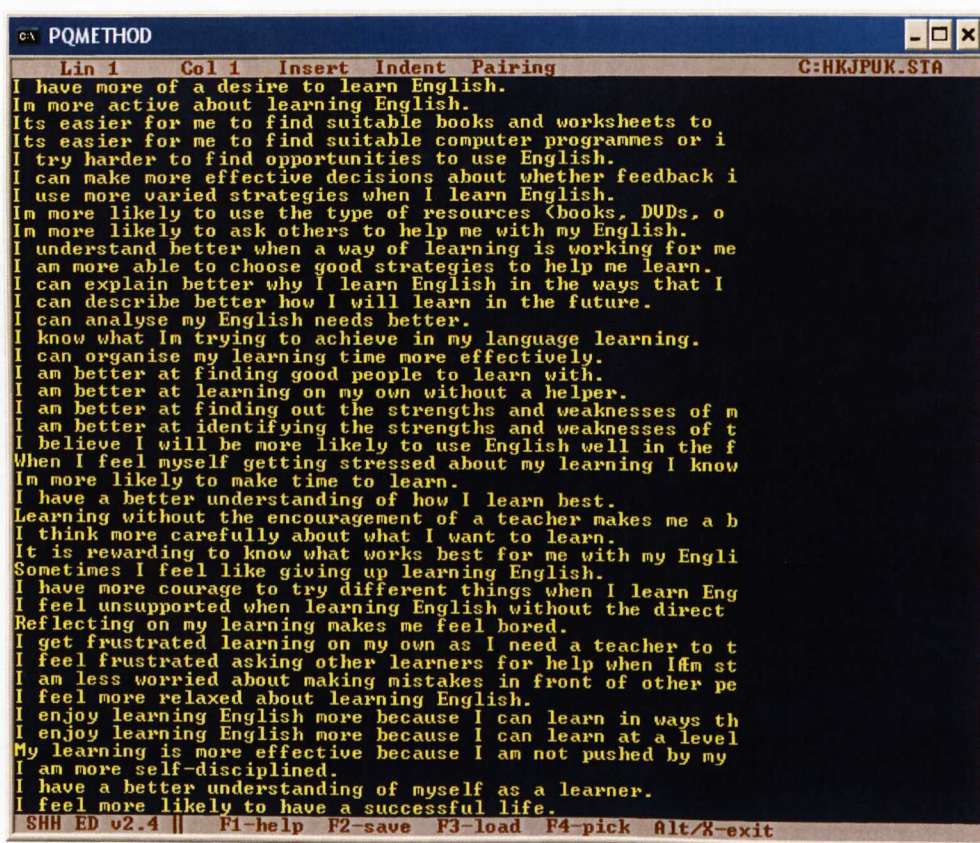
**Figure 7.9: Example of a Q-sort (sorted by Participant 23) entered
into *PQMethod***

```
PQMETHOD                                                              - □ x

23
         -5    -4    -3    -2    -1    0     1     2     3     4     5
       ·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·
       · 28 · 16 ·  7 · 10 ·  2 ·  8 ·  3 ·  4 ·  1 · 19 · 21 ·
       ·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·
       · 39 · 47 · 33 · 18 · 12 ·  9 ·  6 ·  5 · 25 · 40 · 41 ·
       ·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·
            · 49 · 38 · 26 · 22 · 11 · 13 · 15 · 35 · 42 ·
            ·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·
                 · 43 · 45 · 24 · 14 · 17 · 27 · 51 ·
                 ·----·----·----·----·----·----·----·
                      · 46 · 31 · 20 · 23 · 34 ·
                      ·----·----·----·----·----·
                      · 52 · 37 · 30 · 29 · 50 ·
                      ·----·----·----·----·----·
                           · 44 · 32 · 48 ·
                           ·----·----·----·
                                · 36 ·
                                ·----·
  SubjNo: 23   ID: P23


 Press <ENTER> to continue
```
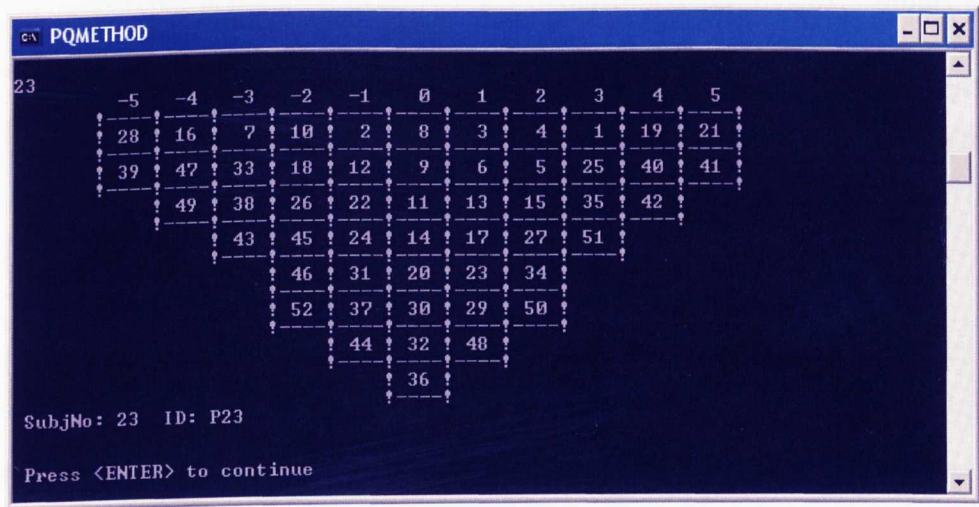
7.2.1.7.1 Factor extraction

There are two possible methods for extracting the factors in *PQMethod*.

These are Centroid factor analysis and Principal Components Analysis

(PCA) factor analysis. PCA is recommended in traditional factor analysis as

it is regarded as giving a mathematically superior solution which is more

precise. Centroid factor analysis is nowadays considered obsolete

(Choulakian, 2003), because, statistically, it offers a less determinate

solution than PCA and 'an approximation in the statistical sense' (S. R.

Brown, n.d.) of what PCA can deliver. However, Centroid factor extraction

is recommended for Q studies because the indeterminacy of the solution

allows for the factors to be rotated judgementally, according to theoretical

concerns, thus allowing the researcher to make sense of the data through

existing understandings and knowledge. The choice of Centroid extraction,

therefore, is not statistical, but theoretical.

7.2.1.7.2 Factor rotation

The recommended factor rotation method in Q methodology is Varimax. If

Centroid extraction is used, once the factors have been extracted and the

automatic Varimax rotation has been carried out, the researcher is given

the option of further manually rotating the factors. This screen can be seen in Figure 7.10.

Figure 7.10: The Varimax factors shown prior to additional rotation


```
PQMETHOD                                                              _ □ ×

Next, varimax factors will be displayed for additional rotations [optional]
and for adding flags [required] - Do you wish to use the
new PQROT program for that (Y/n)?
SUBJ  1    2    3    4    5    6    7   8     SUBJ  1    2    3    4    5    6    7   8

  1   21    1   23   -4   78    9   -1         16   40    3   12   -3   21   -3    9
  2   24   12   44    1   27  -10   39         17   20   30   30    4   54   11    3
  3   16   19   67   -4   -5  -15  -14         18   37  -21  -40   19    3  -10   71
  4    1   14    3    0  -16    8   49         19   49    0   45   -2    7   22   17
  5    7   40   55    8   30    6   -3         20    3   38   20    8  -10   25  -15
  6   14   29   56    5    7   -8    4         21   35   35   18    7    1   17   14
  7    0   12    5   -6   16   16   54         22   22   20   40   12   -9   45    9
  8    6   65   -5  -10   22    8   36         23   11   71   -2   -3   -6   25   25
  9   13   -5   80   -7   19    9   -2         24   25   39   48   12   16   26   18
 10   28   31   46    7  -12   -8   12         25   -5   10   67    5    8   27    1
 11   29   -5   63   -6   24   -8  -14         26    1   26   13    4   32   41    9
 12   35   13  -17  -15   11   57   23         27   10    5   76    3   27   27    5
 13   44   10    6    0    9    7    3         28    8   35    8    2   38   41    4
 14   66   15   28    4    0   13   -7         29   35   68   30    6    5   12  -23
 15    1   72   25   -1   23   -2    7         30   28   38    4    0   16   29   22
More rotating? (y/N):
```

During the process of rotation, the researcher is aiming to explain as much of the variance as possible, taking into account other factors such as eigenvalues, significance levels and the overall number of factors. Some Q methodologists strive to find the best solution using the smallest possible number of factors. Others, usually from the 'British' discourse analytic tradition of Q, regard factors as 'stories' and seek to tell as many 'stories' as possible, and thus do not impose theoretical limits on the number of factors. Rather, the largest number of factors are sought. In fact, in Q methodology, retaining a factor on which only one sort loads is justifiable if that one sort represents the viewpoint of a theoretically significant participant.

Once the manual rotation is completed and the researcher is satisfied with the solution generated, the final analysis is 'written out' into a multi-page document which contains all the information required by the Q researcher for interpreting the results.

7.2.1.8 Interpret the results

The researcher is required to carry out a detailed and iterative interpretation of the results of the analysis to generate meaning in the factors and to provide a picture of the different viewpoints about the domain of subjectivity. The interpretation is based on the viewpoint represented by the factor, the statements themselves, and the post-sort interview data.

Later, each of these stages will be elaborated on and exemplified through the current research study looking at learners' perceptions of the NLLOs of autonomous language learning. First, the history of Q and its ontological, epistemological, and methodological bases are discussed.

7.2.2 Provenance and history

Q was developed in the early 20th century by a psychologist, William Stephenson. Despite the fact that Stephenson was a student of Charles Spearman, the researcher into human intelligence and originator of the non-parametric statistical measure, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ), and had a background in quantum physics, he was very opposed to orthodox traditions of psychology, believing that psychological phenomena could not be measured objectively, but could only be understood from subjective perspectives (Curt, 1994).

As a response to his disillusionment with the traditional psychometric measurements used in psychology, Stephenson (1935) developed the 'inverted' factor analysis and wrote a letter to *Nature* in 1935 in which he introduced his new technique. In the letter, he described the process behind traditional factor analysis and then compared it with his new technique in which the measurement of subjectivity was foregrounded:

> This analysis [traditional factor analysis – LC] is concerned
> with a selected population of n individuals each of whom has

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been measured in m tests. The (m)(m-1)/2 intercorrelations
for these m variables are subjected to either a Spearman or
other factor analysis.

The technique, however, can also be inverted. We begin with
a population of n different tests (or essays, pictures, traits or
other measurable material), each of which is measured or
scaled by m individuals. The (m)(m-1)/2 intercorrelations
are then factorised in the usual way. *(p. 297)*

Stephenson went on to elaborate on his methodology, which was to

become Q methodology, in *The Study of Behavior: Q technique and its*

methodology (1953). However, Stephenson's ideas were not widely

embraced in psychology in Britain. According to S. R. Brown (1997), this

may have been due to the feud between Cyril Burt and William Stephenson

and the "overshadowing influence" (para. 29) of Burt in UK psychology at

the time. Burt's influence may also have been a factor in Stephenson's

decision to leave the UK in 1948 to work at the University of Chicago.

Stephenson never returned permanently to Britain.

The term 'Q methodology' is distinct and is often thought to be related to

either 'quantitative' or 'qualitative' or, surprisingly, because Stephenson

was a physicist as well as a psychologist, to 'quantum'. The explanation is

more straightforward than that and is explained well by Webler et al.

(2009):

The reason for the name 'Q method' is unusual. In the
analysis of survey data, statistics are used to find patterns in
responses across respondents. It is common to compute a
correlation coefficient comparing responses. The most
popular statistical test used produces an 'r' statistic (Pearson
product moment coefficient). The 'little r' was capitalized to
'R' and marshalled to serve as a representative of that
generalized approach to the study of traits. The letter 'Q' was
selected to emphasize that Q method was different from R
method techniques. (pp. 5-6)

Hence Q emanated from psychology, but since 1935 has been used in a

wide range of fields, including agriculture (Kramer et al., 2003),

communication (Goldman & Emke, 1991), education (La Paro, Siepak, &

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Scott-Little, 2009), engineering (M. Brown, 2004), environmental studies (Cuppen et al., 2008), feminist studies (Dell & Korotana, 2000), geography (Robbins & Krueger, 2000), healthcare and health education (Bryant et al., 2006; Cross, 2005), history (Sanders, 1990), management (Williams Jacobson & Aaltio-Marjosola, 2001), political science (S. R. Brown, 1980), rural studies (Previte et al. 2007), and veterinary studies (Graaf, 2007). Having carried out a comprehensive literature review, I am aware of no published studies using Q methodology in the field of applied linguistics, although J.D. Brown (1995) has recommended the Q-sorting element for language curriculum developers among a host of other methods when conducting needs analysis.

7.2.3 Research paradigm and philosophical underpinnings

There is debate in the literature as to how to describe and define Q. Does it sit more comfortably in a positivist or interpretivist research tradition? Should it be classified as a qualitative or quantitative methodology? Here I will briefly discuss these viewpoints and explain my personal view of the philosophical basis of Q and how that has impacted upon the current research.

The original Q methodology, as devised by Stephenson, was underpinned by a clear philosophical standpoint. Ontologically, Stephenson believed that subjectivity, or in other words one's own point of view, is observable through behaviour. Epistemologically, he believed that the measurement of that subjectivity requires that responses to particular stimuli are collected under operant conditions (Robbins & Krueger, 2000). For Stephenson, Q methodology was premised on the notion that subjectivity could be (objectively) measured. In his words: 'We now know that self-reference is subject to operant, inherent structure, represented by transformation into

operant factors. These are measureable, in absolute quantsal units'
(Stephenson, 2007, p. 101)

As Duenckmann (2010, p. 288) argues, Stephenson 'conceive[d] this
method as a way to make subjectivity objectively measurable' and this is
how Steven Brown, and those from the more positivist side of the Q
community, still regard Q methodology. As Previte et al. (2007), point out
'for some scholars, considerable emphasis is given to the fact that Q
methodology allows a "scientific" study of [people's own perspectives,
meanings and opinions]' (p. 136). This is evident in terminology. For
example, the International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity
(ISSSS) is the organisation set up to bring together researchers using Q,
and to disseminate Q-based research. The scientific nature of the
methodology is also emphasised through descriptions employing language
frequently associated with positivist research designs, such as 'robust'
(Cross, 2005) and 'rigorous' (Karim, 2001).

The alternative positioning of Q is more constructivist in nature. Again in
Duenckmann's (2010) words:

> Factors are not perceived as 'real' patterns which were
> discovered by a sophisticated method but as stories or
> constructions that require a strong and creative input of
> interpretation. Although working with numbers and statistical
> procedures Q methodology just like qualitative approaches
> should take the positionality and reflexivity of social research
> into account. (p. 288)

These different interpretations of Q methodology have led some scholars to
argue that the use of Q is divided along national lines, with British and
American 'dialects' (Billard, 1999; R. Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers,
1990). These same scholars argue that it is the British version that has less
emphasis on the 'scientific' notions redolent of positivist research designs,
and has instead morphed more towards a social constructionist model of

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science (John, 1997; Stenner & Stainton Rogers, 1998) to become, in effect, a form of discourse analysis as mentioned earlier. In contrast, the American version of Q methodology is represented as coming from more of a realist scientific model and is regarded by some researchers as simply a way of manipulating opinion data (Billard, 1999; R. Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1990).

As well as discussion surrounding the different dialects of Q, there is debate in the literature regarding whether Q is a qualitative, quantitative or mixed method. The interaction between individuals' beliefs and the propositional statements and the integration of interviews into the methodology has resulted in it being described as 'a qualitative research method that has increasingly been used to identify complex attitudes and behaviours' (Gaebler-Uhing, 2003); and yet the statistical basis of the method warrants its description by some scholars as a quantitative methodology. For example, it has been described as 'a quantitative technique for eliciting, evaluating and comparing human subjectivity' (Robbins & Krueger, 2000, p. 636), and 'a powerful, theoretically grounded, and quantitative tool' (Thomas & Watson, 2002, p. 141). The classification of Q is made even less clear by labelling it *qualiquantological* (Stenner & Stainton-Rogers, 2004) or as 'a "hybrid" of qualitative and quantitative methodology' (Duenckmann, 2010, p. 284). In this regard, Q methodology could be seen as similar to survey research as described by Brown, quoted in Wagner (2010, p. 23), as 'primary research distinct from both qualitative and statistical research, although [it] will often have both qualitative and quantitative components'. If Q does have both qualitative and quantitative components, can it be argued then that it is in fact a mixed method?

In the 2004 publication entitled *Mixing methods in psychology: The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in theory and practice,* Paul Stenner and Rex Stainton Rogers contributed a chapter called *Q methodology and qualiquantology: The example of discriminating between emotions.* The study of emotions is not of interest here, but the title of the book and chapter warrants interest because it is rare that Q methodology is labelled a mixed method, although mixed methods are now increasingly accepted, and arguably welcomed, in the social sciences in general (Creswell, 2010) and applied linguistic research in particular (Dörnyei, 2007).

Purist advocates of mixed methods research would argue that in mixed methods designs there are prescribed ways of collecting, analysing and combining data from the quantitative and qualitative procedures. For example, Ivankova and Creswell (2009) build on the work of Creswell and Plano Clark, in stressing that the timing, weighting and mixing of the different elements should be defined according to one of four mixed methods designs: 1) Explanatory design, 2) Exploratory design, 3) Triangulation design and 4) Embedded design, none of which match with Q methodology.

Within their large canon of work advocating mixed methods research (MMR), Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003, 2009, 2010) describe the nine main features of contemporary MMR. These are listed below (Table 7.2), together with a comparison with Q methodology.

Table 7.2: Main features of contemporary Mixed Methods Research compared with Q methodology

Nine main features of contemporary MMR (taken from (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010, pp. 9-10)	Commentary on Q methodology
1) *Methodological eclecticism* with	Q methodology has its own precise

choice of methodologies driven by research question and not by research paradigms or methods	procedure, philosophy, and data collection and analysis techniques, so limited eclecticism is possible. This is the main obstacle to regarding Q methodology as MMR.
2) *Paradigm pluralism* in which a 'variety of philosophical or theoretical stances' (p. 9) are respected	As discussed earlier in this section, Q methodologists do hold a variety of philosophical or theoretical stances – from positivism to interpretivism, and from a more quantitative perspective to a more qualitative perspective.
3) 'Diversity at all levels of the research enterprise' (p. 9)thereby accommodating exploratory and confirmatory research questions and divergent as well as convergent results of triangulated data	Like traditional R factor analysis, Q methodology can be used for both exploratory and confirmatory purposes. Depending on the purpose, other supplementary research methods, such as questionnaires, may be utilised either before or after Q.
4) 'An emphasis on continua rather than a set of dichotomies' (p. 10)	The Q-sort is a continuum from 'most like me', 'most agree' etc. to 'least like me', 'least agree', etc. The aim in finding the best factor solution is to give voice to as many viewpoints as possible, rather than selecting simply the most predominant views. In these ways, Q methodology also has an emphasis on continua rather than dichotomies.
5) 'An iterative, cyclical approach to research" [including] both deductive and inductive logic in the same study' (p. 10)	In Q methodology, the process of interpreting factors is an iterative one, especially if interview data are used in the factor interpretation. However, Q methodologists would argue for Q as using abductive logic, rather than deductive or inductive logic. It should also be noted, that Peirce, one of the main thinkers of the Pragmatic school of philosophy, believed pragmatism to be the logic of abduction. Given that many mixed method researchers consider Pragmatism to be one of the guiding philosophies of mixed methods research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2009), there may be more room for abduction in MMR than suggested by Teddlie and Tashakkori. See section 7.2.5 for a more detailed discussion of abductive logic.

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6) 'Focus on the research question in determining the methods employed within any given study' (p. 10)	Q methodology is designed to investigate subjectivity, so if the research question concerns some aspect of subjectivity then Q methodology can be utilised. In this sense, the research question determines the method.
7) Consensus on 'a set of basic "signature" research designs and analytical processes' unique to MMR (p. 10)	Whilst Q methodology tends to follow a particular pattern, as shown in Figure 7.1 above, this pattern cannot be regarded as a signature research design unique to MMR.
8) 'A tendency toward balance and compromise that is implicit within the "third methodological community"' (p. 10)	The integral combination of qualitative and quantitative within Q methodology means that Q methodologists quite naturally understand the need for balance and compromise.
9) "a reliance of visual representations (e.g., figures, diagrams) and a common notational system" (p. 10). The common notational system is the use of abbreviations in upper case to indicate the primary stance and theoretical drive, followed by abbreviations in lower case to indicate the supplementary strategy. In between the two abbreviations is either a plus sign or an arrow to indicate the exact nature of the mixing of methods. The plus sign indicates a simultaneous process whilst the arrow indicates a sequential process. For example, QUAL → quan indicates a qualitative study, followed up by a quantitative one. Whereas QUAN + quan would indicate two quantitative studies, carried out simultaneously.	Q methodology uses visual representations extensively to portray Q-sorts and typical arrays. Whilst Q methodology does not use the common notational system of MMR, there is no reason why this should not be the case. Depending on whether the Q researcher is of a more positivist or interpretivist persuasion, Q could be represented using the following notations:# QUAL → quan → qual (the overall theoretical stance is qualitative, with the concourse development using qualitative methods, this is followed by the Q-sort analysis which is based on factor analysis and therefore quantitative, followed by the follow-up interview and interpretation of the factors (both qualitative). qual → QUAN → qual (the overall theoretical stance is quantitative, with the concourse development using qualitative methods, this is followed by the Q-sort analysis which is based on factor analysis and therefore quantitative, followed by the follow-up interview and the interpretation of factors (both qualitative).

So whilst Q methodology matches several of Teddlie and Tashakkori's (2010) main features, from this analysis Q methodology cannot be said to be a mixed method - see especially features 1 and 7 (Table 7.2).

However, Dörnyei (2007) provides a looser definition of what is meant by mixed methods research:

> ... the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study with some attempts to integrate the two approaches at one or more stages of the research process (p. 163).

and Q methodology is certainly compatible with this definition. Even more encompassing of Q methodology is the description given by M. Lamb (forthcoming). He describes mixed methods thus:

> ... small-scale investigations carried out by single researchers less committed to a particular tradition and mixing methods in creative and, to some traditionalists, not always very principled ways (page unknown).

In addition, in mixed methods research, different instruments are used to collect different data which is then analysed in different ways to provide a different piece of the research jigsaw puzzle. In Q methodology, one main research instrument (the Q-sort) is developed using a qualitative approach (the definition of the concourse), and then used to collect quantitative data (a set of rankings in numerical format) which is analysed using a quantitative approach (by-person factor analysis); meanwhile a second qualitative research instrument is then used (in-depth interviews) to gain a richer understanding of the card sort. Finally, the factor analysis is interpreted using techniques more traditionally utilised in qualitative research and described by Gallagher and Porock (2010) as 'card content analysis'. Is this the ultimate mixed method, or something beyond mixed methods?

Perhaps we can find the answer by returning to the Q literature. Watts and

Stenner (2005) argue that 'Q methodology's quantitative features render it

a highly unusual qualitative research method.' Although similar to the

'disgraceful neologism' (Stenner et al., 2008) *qualiquantological* discussed

above, in that this description could be said to lack clarity, I feel that the

notion of a 'qualitative research method with quantitative features' is an

accurate conceptualisation of the methodology, and from my perspective

highlights the strengths of the method, and thus I shall adopt this

definition for the purposes of this study. Next I shall consider the issue of

generalisability in Q, and briefly describe the abductive logic of inquiry

which underpins Q.

7.2.4 Generalisability

The indistinct categorisation of Q methodology is confounded by terms

used within the Q literature such as 'sampling'. Sampling strategies are

used within positivist, quantitative research to ensure that generalisability

to a population can be claimed. In Q methodology, the concourse is

sampled in order to obtain a Q-sample which is representative of the

opinion domain, but Q methodologists should use the term 'generalisable'

with caution. Although the sampling of the concourse is one quantitative

strategy of Q, arguably, this particular quantitative element is more

concerned with process than with epistemology. It is challenging to

understand how Q methodologists can make statistical generalisability

claims, although there is a case for claiming generalisability to theory

rather than populations (Bryman, 2004), or as Bryman puts it, 'it is the

quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data

that is crucial to the assessment of generalization' (p. 285). There is also

possibly a case to be made for 'moderatum generalisability' (Williams,

2000). Williams defines moderatum generalisability as when 'aspects of

[the research focus] can be seen to be instances of a broader recognisable set of features' (p. 215).

With particular reference to Q methodology, Brown (1980, p. 67) describes what could be thought of as moderatum generalisability when he argues that 'Generalisations in Q, unlike those in surveys, are not best thought of in terms of sample and universe, but in terms of *specimen* and *type.*' This is best further explained through the words of Thomas and Watson (2002, p. 154), who put it thus:

> The logic of specimen and type generalization runs like this: if you observe type A, you can predict its behaviour within given contexts, and so on for types B C and D. Type A does exist and does have specific behavioural patterns, but one cannot be certain of how many of a type exist where, only that a given type exists in a given condition. This condition is the Q-study. The behavioural patterns are the Q-samples arranged by a given respondent, and each factor found in factor analysis represents a type.

Williams (2000) argues that in interpretivist research generalisability is 'inevitable, desirable and possible' (p. 209) and that 'everyday moderatum generalisations are what it is that the researcher wants to understand, and of course if she can understand them then she will know something of the cultural consistency within which they reside and is then able to make her own generalisations about that cultural consistency' (p. 220). With regard to the present study, it could be argued that there is a certain 'cultural consistency' in environments where language learners are learning autonomously. Through examining the Q-sample and the description of the research given in this thesis, it may be that colleagues in the learner autonomy field will find something familiar, and therefore of interest and use in their local contexts. It is also hoped that by taking a more systematic approach to the investigation of this area of subjectivity, learner autonomy research can go beyond the 'reflection and reasoning' (Benson, 2001, p. 182) which has characterised research into learner autonomy to

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date. This study can be seen as a response to the previously cited calls

from Benson (2001, 2007) and Ushioda (2008a) for a more systematic

approach to the analysis of data in learner autonomy research.

7.2.5 Abductive logic

Abductive logic as a means of inquiry is an important underpinning of Q

methodology. Unlike inductive, deductive, or interpretive logics, abduction

looks first at the result, or the observed phenomenon, guesses what may

cause such a phenomenon, and then explores whether this is in fact the

case or not. Unlike hypothetico-deductive research, abductive research

assumes that the social world is the product of socially constructed mutual

knowledge – meanings, cultural symbols and social institutions. Stainton

Rogers (2009) posits that the aim of abductive research is to gain insight

into social reality and argues that although abductive data collection

methods include qualitative approaches such as ethnography, interviews

and focus groups, this is, nevertheless, where Q methodology is best

located. The outcome of abductive research is a hypothesis explicating

'what is going on'. It can be more taxonomic than other forms of research,

offering an overview across a range of ideas, viewpoints, and

representations. Table 7.3 (Stainton Rogers (2009) after Blaikie (2000))

shows a comparison of abductive research compared with other logics of

inquiry . The shared ontological position between abductive research and

interpretive research makes it a useful lens for use in this primarily

interpretivist study (see Chapter 3).

Table 7.3: Comparison of different logics of inquiry

	Ontology	Epistemology	Research aim
Induction	The social world is real and separate from human action	Positivism	Identify systematic regularities in cause and effect to develop universal laws.
Deduction		Rationalism	Devise and test hypotheses to discover universal laws.
Interpretation	The social world is socially constructed	Critical realism	Gain insight into social reality through generating models to explain regularities
Abduction		Critical relativism	See how and why different social realities are constructed and deployed to understand the purposes to which they are put.

7.3 A quest for better methods: Comparison of Q with other research methods for learner autonomy

I think it is fair to say that learner autonomy is frequently regarded as an imprecise and unscientific field of study within TESOL and applied linguistics. For those of us who believe that the field of learner autonomy has a great deal to offer the language learner and teacher, this is somewhat frustrating, although if we examine autonomous language learner research, the reason for this becomes clearer. As Benson (2001, p. 182) points out, 'Often, researchers draw conclusions about the nature of autonomy and the practices associated with it from reflection on their own and others' experiences of fostering autonomy. Far less research has been

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based on systematic analysis of data.' If learner autonomy research is to gain some respect in the field, then we need to investigate appropriate methods with which to research it. As Ushioda (2008b) has argued, the field of language learner autonomy is in need of systematic tools of enquiry that have 'widespread credence in the same way that, for example, questionnaires have done in motivation research or, say, conversation analysis in analysis of classroom interaction'.

In advocating Q methodology as a research method for learner autonomy, it is important, too, to compare Q methodology with other research approaches. In this section I shall examine the data collection techniques of questionnaires and interviews, and the data analysis techniques of discourse analysis and structural equation modelling, and discuss their advantages and disadvantages for research into autonomous language learning.

7.3.1 Data collection methods

7.3.1.1 Questionnaires

In the eyes of a researcher not experienced with Q methodology, there may seem to be multiple similarities between the development and use of survey research techniques, particularly a Likert scale questionnaire and a Q-sort (Thomas & Watson, 2002). With both the questionnaire and the Q-sort, the items may be generated in similar ways, either by using statements from research participants or by taking statements from the literature or other secondary sources. Both the Likert scale and the Q condition of instruction and sorting grid require participants to indicate their attitude towards a particular area of interest. And with both a questionnaire and Q sort, the participants are required to indicate their

attitude towards each item by marking their level of agreement, likeability, etc. on a continuum scale.

Where a Likert scale questionnaire and Q-sort differ, though, is in the discrimination that must be made between items. With questionnaires, some respondents will have tendencies to consistently answer at the extremes of the scale, whilst other respondents will consistently not use the extremes. In Q methodology, and particularly when a forced distribution grid is used, participants are required to use the full grid. However, the wording of the 'extreme' ends of the continuum still allows for participants to be more tentative than they might feel they can be with a Likert scale. This is illustrated by the typical labelling on a Q grid, for example, 'most like me', 'least like how I think', compared to that on a Likert scale which will typically be 'strongly agree' 'strongly disagree' and so on. Arguably, forcing participants to use the complete range of descriptions, results in a more intricate understanding of a participant's point of view.

Furthermore, in Q methodology, participants are firstly making a decision on each item, and then secondly distinctions between items, rather than making a decision on each discrete item as with a Likert scale questionnaire. By comparing statements against each other, respondents give their own meanings to the items and through this process pictures of participants' viewpoints emerge through the Q-sort and subsequent analysis. With a Likert scale questionnaire, the meaning attributed to each item is pre-decided by the researcher and the aim of the researcher is to phrase the item in a way which tries to impart this pre-decided meaning to the participants without risk of the participant attributing their own meaning to the item or encountering an ambiguous meaning of the item. As Baker, Thompson and Mannion (2006, p. 42) explain:

> [The Q-sort] contrasts with traditional rating scales where
> items are scored serially and contextual information
> excluded. Q sorters control the rank and therefore the
> contextual significance of each item. The distribution does
> not represent an index of pre-defined meaning, as in a scale,
> but rather the sorter's attributed meaning of the scale. This
> process therefore taps into far richer subjective strata of
> data than conventional rating scales, which are designed to
> limit the potential range and consequent patterns of
> responses.

To illustrate this point, let us consider a simplified and fabricated example

of the questionnaire (Figure 7.11) below with 14 attitude statements and a

Likert scale, and then use the same statements in two fictional Q-sorts

(Figure 7.12).

Figure 7.11: Fictional example of a Likert scale questionnaire with sample answers

		1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree
1	I like learning French.	1 2 3 4 ⑤
2	I like learning German.	1 2 3 ④ 5
3	I like learning Italian.	1 2 3 ④ 5
4	I like learning Japanese.	1 2 3 ④ 5
5	I like learning Chinese Mandarin.	1 2 3 ④ 5
6	I like eating croissants.	1 2 3 ④ 5
7	I like eating sushi.	1 2 3 ④ 5
8	I like the paintings of Claude Monet.	1 2 3 ④ 5
9	I like the paintings of David Hockney.	1 2 ③ 4 5
10	I like experimenting with new vocabulary.	1 2 3 ④ 5
11	I like watching films with subtitles.	1 2 3 ④ 5
12	I like watching cartoons.	1 2 3 ④ 5
13	I like making my own wine from seasonal fruits.	1 ② 3 4 5
14	I like drinking red wine.	1 2 3 ④ 5

Figure 7.12: Two possible variations of a Q-sort derived from the questionnaire in Figure 7.11

Q-sort A

-2	-1	0	+1	+2
9. I like the paintings of David Hockney.	10. I like experimenting with new vocabulary.	2. I like learning German.	8. I like the paintings of Claude Monet.	1. I like learning French.
13. I like making my own wine from seasonal fruits.	4. I like learning Japanese.	3. I like learning Italian.	14. I like drinking red wine.	6. I like eating croissants.
	5. I like learning Chinese Mandarin.	12. I like watching cartoons.	11. I like watching films with subtitles.	
		7. I like eating sushi.		

Q-sort B

-2	-1	0	+1	+2
13. I like making my own wine from seasonal fruits.	6. I like eating croissants.	10. I like experimenting with new vocabulary.	3. I like learning Italian.	1. I like learning French.
9. I like the paintings of David Hockney.	8. I like the paintings of Claude Monet.	11. I like watching films with subtitles.	4. I like learning Japanese.	2. I like learning German.
	12. I like watching cartoons.	5. I like learning Chinese Mandarin.	14. I like drinking red wine.	
		7. I like eating sushi.		

The Q-sorts in Figure 7.12 give two very different possible pictures of the fictional participant who completed the questionnaire in Figure 7.11. For the majority of questionnaire answers, the respondent has indicated agreement at +4 (agree) level. From just looking at the data, we can sense that this is someone who likes learning languages, particularly French, who likes other cultural activities, but is not keen on making their own wine.

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From the Q-sorts, quite a different picture emerges, partly because the Q-sorter is required to distinguish more finely between items than the questionnaire respondent. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of items suggests that the factor analysis will show that the Q-sort A participant is someone who might label themselves as a 'francophile'. They like learning French and eating croissants, they also like the paintings of Claude Monet, watching films with subtitles and drinking red wine. By sorting statements 10, 9 and 14 at the -1 level suggests that although they may like these activities, language learning is of less importance to them than an engagement with French culture. The Q-sort B participant, on the other hand, appears to be a keen linguist, with the learning of French, German, Italian and Japanese appearing at the more positive end of the scale, along with experimenting with new vocabulary and watching films with subtitles.

This example has demonstrated how Q methodology can provide more nuanced understandings of attitudes compared to a Likert scale questionnaire.

7.3.1.2 Interviews

Interviews are not so much an alternative to Q methodology but more often than not part of the tool-kit of the Q methodologist. The post-sort interview, as described above in section 7.2.1.6, is considered an important, although not vital, part of the Q methodology process. However, for those researchers who choose to use interviews as the sole data collection method, Kramer, de Hegedus and Gravina (2003, p. 345) warn of the difficulty in inferring meaning at the data analysis stage:

> Interpretive researchers may [...] fall prey to such a trap by placing too much importance on a-priori interpretation of the rich qualitative data often obtained through interviews. What distinguishes Q from [interviews and questionnaires] is that it privileges the respondent's inference as to what the statements "mean" via the patterning in the Q sort. In this way, Q is more "informed" than [interviews and

questionnaires] because analysis and interpretation of the phenomena is directly aided by the subjects themselves: we allow them to "speak" for themselves via the Q sorting task.

The post Q-sort interview adds meaning to the patterning of the Q-sort and thus the researcher is less likely to be engaged in 'a-priori interpretation' in the same way as for studies based solely on interview data.

7.3.2 Data analysis techniques

7.3.2.1 Discourse analysis

If discourse analysis is 'the analysis of language-in-use' (Gee, 2005, p. 5) then arguably discourse analysis could tell us a great deal about learner autonomy but interestingly, there are very few studies published in the learner autonomy field which take a discourse analytic approach. One form of discourse analysis known as 'I-statement analysis' has been used in an investigation of learner autonomy by Ushioda (2008b) and this is discussed further below. In this study I am advocating Q methodology as another form of discourse analysis which can be used in the investigation of autonomy, with the advantage of being more systematic than 1) other types of discourse analysis and 2) other research methods for learner autonomy. As Webler et al. (2009, p. 5) point out:

> An advantage that Q method has over other forms of discourse analysis is that the participants' responses can be directly compared in a consistent manner, since everyone is reacting to the same set of Q statements. This is not usually the case in other kinds of qualitative discourse analysis.

7.3.2.1.1 I-statement analysis

Ushioda (2008b) advocates 'I-statement analysis' (Gee, 2005) for the investigation of learner autonomy. I-statement analysis is 'a form of discourse analysis that examines how people speak or write in the first person to describe their actions, feelings, abilities, goals, and so on, and how they thus construct particular socially situated identities through

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language' (Gee, 2005, p. 141). The analysis involves the categorisation of verbal or written statements starting with 'I', based on the predicate of 'I'. The choice of categories will depend on the research context and specific focus. Some of the categories and examples used by Ushioda (2008b) in her study included: *Thoughts, beliefs & feelings about learning or using English* (I think English is very important to me; I think practice is the only way); *Personal gains* (I feel more confident; I learned a lot), *Future goals & intentions* (I will make an extra effort; I intend to further my study); and *Constraints & problems* (I have not much time to learn English; I'm very busy).

Ushioda argues for I-statement analysis to be used in autonomous learner research on the basis that the first person reflections and self-evaluations, which are the raw materials for the method, are typical of pedagogies for autonomy. Thus the data analysis tool is a principled match with the focus of the research.

Whilst this tool is no doubt appropriate for systematically investigating data such as reflective writing, which formed the basis of the work that Ushioda was reporting on, its usefulness cannot be extended to all learner autonomy research. One flaw of I-statement analysis for autonomous learner research is that the collection of I-statements is not appropriate to all studies. This is not least because, as discussed in Chapter 2, our understanding of what learner autonomy is, now, more than ever, incorporates notions of interdependency amongst learners. In other words, learner autonomy is social and, therefore, reflections on the learning process are likely to generate 'we-statements' in addition to I-statements. Despite the fact that Gee's (2005) approach was originally conceived to research socially situated identities (p. 124), he does not discuss we-statements, although Wei (2010) has recently advocated the use of we-

statements in learner autonomy research. Despite these perceived flaws in I-statement analysis, Ushioda's (2008a) call for more systematic research, and innovative research methods in learner autonomy is a helpful one, which reflects the Zeitgeist in educational research in general (Gorard, Rushforth and Taylor, 2004) and within applied linguistics in particular (Dörnyei, 2007).

7.3.2.2 Structural equation modelling

Over the last 15 years, structural equation modelling (SEM) has been used increasingly in applied linguistics, particularly in language testing [see, for example, Purpura (1999), Schoonen (2005) and Phakiti (2008)], and even in learner autonomy (Murase, 2010) as a tool for data analysis. SEM is used to test and estimate causal relations between variables. It has been described as similar to factor analysis but with the advantage of indicating 'directional paths' between two observed or latent (unobserved) variables (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 238). Its main use is for the development and testing of theory. It is this theoretical emphasis, and the confirmatory nature of SEM, which makes it inappropriate for use in the present, exploratory, study.

7.4 Why is Q methodology appropriate for this study?

In designing the second phase of this research, I sought a methodology which would allow me to investigate learners' perceptions of a subjective area: what learners themselves felt were the non-linguistic learning outcomes of following autonomous language learning practices. As well as the usual criteria involved in choosing a research approach and methodology, there were two issues which needed to be considered: the abstract and subjective nature of the research area, and the language level of potential participants.

To investigate perceptions, it was felt that an interpretivist approach was necessary, but using conventional interpretivist qualitative methodologies, such as interviews, focus-groups, or open-ended questionnaires was problematic, as it was felt that not all language learners would be aware of the understandings that such methods aim to tap into. Although Cotterall (1995) has shown that learners can be 'ready' for autonomy (section 2.2.2), this does not mean that their metadiscourse of learner autonomy is fully, or even well, developed. For example, to answer a question such as 'what do you think you gain from studying in a self-access centre?' requires a large amount of metacognitive awareness, which not all learners necessarily have. Furthermore, as the majority of my participants would be non-native speakers of English, I was keen to provide as much linguistic scaffolding as possible to make the experience of participating in this research study a positive one. (Interpretation and translation services would have been helpful, but due to a lack of funding I could not make use of such services).

In order to satisfy these demands, a research method by which learners' explicit understandings of the NLLOs of autonomous learning could be elicited in English was needed. The Q sorting procedure, in which participants could be provided with an input of suggested outcomes of learner autonomy, and yet still maintain the integrity of their individual perceptions and subjectivities, met this need. Watts and Stenner (2005, p. 71) neatly summarise this advantage of Q methodology thus:

> [Q methodology] does not deal with participants' own discourse as such, but invites participants to engage in the unusual task of relating (in a complex and in-depth way) with a set of prepared items

In addition, in discussing my research with colleagues in the field, and in examining some of the responses to the questionnaire used in the first

phase of the research, some interesting comments regarding the research design were forthcoming. Some professionals in the field of LA did, it seem, feel the need for a quantitative, numbers-based way of thinking about the assessment of LA. One questionnaire respondent wrote to me in a personal email: 'I can learn a lot from this kind of analytical approach' and other questionnaire respondents seemed to think that because my research involved assessment, it would naturally be done using quantitative methods:

> It is very difficult to assess learner autonomy. Multiples in data collection might stimulate complexity and subtlety of insight and overcome any problems of bias.
>
> Assessment has been done by means of portfolios and project work, so qualitative data rather than quantitative has been taking part of it. Thanks to this questionnaire I have seen other instruments and aspects that would provide quantitative results.

The irony here is that I instinctively reject notions that such a complex and personal construct as the assessment of learner autonomy should only be investigated using quantitative data and statistical analyses, and yet I was also sympathetic to this viewpoint. How useful it would have been, during my time as a self-access centre director, to be able to report to the university administrators on the increased scores of our learners on an 'objective' learner autonomy measure which, being numbers based, they would have undoubtedly regarded as more trustworthy compared to the unquantifiable statements and reflections I utilised.

I am aware of three studies which have developed statistically-based measures of learner autonomy (Murase, 2010; Dixon, 2011; Confessore & Park, 2004) but feel they all lacked the important aspect of tapping into subjective learner perceptions of learner autonomy. Giving learners a score indicating their level of LA may be satisfactory for learners who have

become accustomed to a test-taking educational culture, but would

encourage learners to disregard fluctuating levels of autonomy dependent

upon task type and their psychological state at the time of the learning,

and may adversely affect their motivation to think of themselves as

autonomous learners in the future.

Fortunately, it was through an online discussion site that I found a

reference to Q methodology, and after further research, I decided that this

could provide the input necessary to support learners in their roles as

research participants and provide an element of 'statistical rigour' in the

data analysis, yet still offer enough freedom for learners to contribute to

the design of the research tool. It would also allow me, as a researcher, to

gain an understanding not only of how individual learners perceived the

outcomes of learner autonomy, but also to develop a framework of

different types of perceptions of the outcomes of learner autonomy that

could prove useful for assessment purposes, without labelling learners with

a numerical score indicating that they were *excellent* or *poor* autonomous

learners.

Whilst Q methodology does require an investment of time this can be

tempered somewhat by involving learners themselves in the research

stages – the fact that Q methodology allows the participant to retain a

sense of control over the process and the content of a Q study is one of the

reasons why I think it is particularly suitable for learner autonomy

research. For example, if the focus of the study is well delineated, learners

themselves can generate the concourse through written responses to

questions or by recording their own discussions around the area of

subjectivity. On a practical level, learners could be involved in categorising

statements for sampling and once the Q-sample is created and the

statements are printed on card, they can even cut up their own set of

statements. After the students have carried out the Q-sort they can record their own responses by writing the number of each statement onto a copy of the sorting grid. In lieu of the post-sort interview, learners can even be guided to record orally, or in writing, the reasoning behind their placement of the statements on the grid. In many ways, this is a methodology which offers lots of possibilities for learner involvement and control.

7.5 Q methodology in practice

Having established that Q methodology is a qualitative research method incorporating some quantitative elements, and having outlined the historical and philosophical bases of Q, the eight steps of Q methodology are discussed in relation to the current study. The results and discussion of this phase of the research are dealt with in Chapter 8.

7.5.1 Step 1: Establishing the domain of subjectivity

As described above, the domain of subjectivity is the area of subjectivity to be studied and is usually expressed through a research question. In this study, the domain of subjectivity was expressed in terms of the main research question for this phase of the study:

> What non-linguistic learning outcomes are expressed by adult learners in tertiary level institutions in Japan, Hong Kong, and the UK, as being the result of studying in autonomous language learning environments?

As will be explained in the section below, this main research question drove the development of the concourse and was the focus of the Q-sort data collection process. The research design also included two further questions to be answered through the more detailed analysis of the Q-sort data:

- What are the categories of non-linguistic learning outcomes expressed by learners as being the result of autonomous language learning?

- What are the relationships between any non-linguistic learning outcomes expressed by learners as being the result of autonomous language learning?

7.5.2 Step 2: Identifying and building the *concourse*

In this research study, a hybrid approach to concourse development was adopted using both naturalistic and ready-made samples. Naturalistic samples were generated from language learners and teachers. The language learners were different from those who made up the P-set. In addition to the naturalistic samples, ready-made samples, taken from the academic literature, were also incorporated into the concourse.

This hybrid approach to concourse development was considered to be one of the particular strengths of this methodology for the investigation of learner perceptions of NLLOs in autonomous environments. As discussed above in the introduction to this chapter, one of the difficulties anticipated in researching learner's perceptions of NLLOs was the 'blind man in the bubble' phenomenon. In other words, how would I be able to elicit participants' thoughts about a concept as complex, and somewhat abstract, as 'learner autonomy'? Furthermore, how would I be able to guide the participants towards discussing 'non-linguistic learning outcomes' in ways which gave expression to their own voices?

By using naturalistic samples it was possible to include the voices of language learners in the development of the concourse whilst at the same time ensuring that a comprehensive range of opinion regarding NLLOs was

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represented in the concourse by supplementing learners' statements with ready-made samples from the literature.

Naturalistic samples were generated from four sources:

1. Written statements from L2 learners, on an MATESOL course, in which they described what language learner autonomy meant to them. I had access to these learners through my involvement with a UK university.
2. Written statements from a group of English teachers in Thailand, who were also L2 learners, about what they perceived to be the non-linguistic outcomes of language learner autonomy. I had access to these teachers through a consultancy post.
3. Comments generated from a posting made on AUTO-L – the email discussion list of the International Association for Applied Linguistics Research Network on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning which I contribute to (Cooker, 2009).
4. Oral statements from participants in the pilot stage of the study.

Ready-made samples were found by searching the literature for statements relating to the non-linguistic outcomes of autonomous learning and by adapting many of the questionnaire items from Phase 1 of this research study.

Not all of the naturalistic samples or the ready-made samples were used in their 'raw' form. In the majority of cases they were edited to be understandable to typical non-native English speakers at tertiary education level in Hong Kong and Japan. I used my own judgement to assess the linguistic difficulty of the statements. In keeping with Q theory, each statement contained only one proposition (Watts and Stenner, 2005).

The full concourse for this research study numbered 124 items. It was sent to three experts in the field of learner autonomy for the face validity of the statements to be assessed. This stage is not essential for a successful Q-study, but provided some reassurance that the concourse was as well-defined as possible and that the statements reflected the full range of discourse surrounding the non-linguistic outcomes of language learner autonomy. Examples of the feedback from two of the experts are given in Table 7.4. The third expert panel member gave oral feedback which was fed directly into the revision stage. The expert feedback ranged from judgements on the relevancy of the statements to the topic of non-linguistic outcomes of learner autonomy, to suggested changes in emphasis or wording. Those statements judged by the experts to be not relevant to the non-linguistic outcomes of learner autonomy in a self-access environment, or those statements in which the meaning was duplicated or ambiguous were discarded, leaving a total of 76 statements.

Table 7.4: Examples of feedback on the concourse from the expert panel

Statement number	Linked statement	Source	Part of MLA model of GLOs	Part of LA model of elements of LA	Original statement	Concourse statement (adapted from the original for NNS use)	Notes
4	13	Questionnaire	Skills	Information literacy	Demonstrated ability to source and navigate paper-based learning resources.	**I can find books and worksheets by myself to help me learn.**	*YES but Insert "suitable" before books and worksheets. Substitute "materials" for "books and worksheets" [Expert 3]*
48		Questionnaire	Skills	Learner control	Demonstrated ability to work on their own	**I am better at learning on my own without a teacher.**	*Or someone else (=tutor, friend, helper) [Expert 2]*

7.5.2.1 Pilot study 1

The first of two pilot studies was carried out in order to test the statements and to provide information about their usefulness which could be implemented in the next stage – developing the Q-sample. In the first pilot study, the 76 statements were tested with 15 educators with an interest in self-access language learning who were all members of the Hong Kong Association of Self-Access Learning and Development (HASALD) and who had all had experience being L2 learners. The pilot took place after a presentation I gave on Q methodology and its uses in researching self-access language learning and language learner autonomy.

The aim of the pilot was to help in selecting the statements that would be used in the main study. Eight of the participants (Group A) were each given a set of cards containing 40 of the 76 statements. They were asked to sort these on a grid with the scale ranging from -5 (least like me) to +5 (most like me).

The remaining seven participants (Group B) were asked to sort the remaining 36 statements plus four extra statements identical to those given to Group A to make a total of forty. Instructions were given verbally to the participants. Once they had completed the sort, they were asked to record their own sort pattern on a blank copy of the grid. The data from this pilot study underwent preliminary analyses using *PQMethod* (Schmolk & Atkinson, 2002). One set of data from Group A was discarded as the numbers recorded on the record sheet were duplicated, and there was no way of double checking which statement had been sorted where.

The main aim of these analyses was to identify any consensus statements. Consensus statements are those which participants sort into identical or similar positions. For example, if every participant sorts statement Y at the +5 position, then statement Y is a consensus statement. Such statements

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do not clearly distinguish between any pair of factors and their inclusion in the Q-sample should be questioned. However, the number of consensus statements does increase in indirect proportion to the number of factors which are generated. For example, a two factor solution will usually result in more consensus statements than a four factor solution. In the preliminary analyses of the pilot Q-sorts, a four factor solution was chosen as the most effective solution in that it resulted in 100% of sorts loading on the smallest number of factors (3) with least number of confounding sorts (0).

The total number of consensus statements in this preliminary analysis was 37 but not all these consensus statements were automatically rejected from the final Q-sample. Further discussion of this point is provided in section 8.2.7.

7.5.2.2 Pilot study 2

A second pilot study was conducted to further refine the concourse and to pilot the process of the Q-sort. From the same set of 76 statements 40 statements were selected and given to three pilot participants. The demographic breakdown of the pilot participants is shown in Table 7.5.

The aim of this pilot was to check the process of Q-sorting and to ascertain whether there were any difficulties for participants in understanding the instructions and the statements. Each pilot Q-sort was timed and any difficulties experienced by the pilot participants during the sorting stage were noted.

Each pilot participant was interviewed prior to the Q-sorting process to ensure that they had indeed experienced autonomous language learning. The interview took the form of a brief language learning history. These

Table 7.5: Demographic information pilot study (2) participants

Number	Gender	Level of study	Field of study	Location of educational institution at time of study	First language	Languages learning
Pilot participant 01	m	Postgraduate (MA)	Public policy and management	Hong Kong	Cantonese	English, Mandarin,
Pilot participant 02	f	Postgraduate (MA)	Communication and New Media	Hong Kong	Mandarin	English, Cantonese
Pilot participant 03	m	Postgraduate (MA)	Applied Linguistics	Hong Kong	Cantonese	English, Mandarin, Spanish

interviews proved to be very revealing about participants' attitudes towards autonomous language learning and the decision was made to continue with an initial interview for the main study. The Q-sort and the post Q-sort interview were carried out as explained above (section 7.2.1).

As a result of the second pilot study, the following four changes were made:

1. Wording on some of the cards was altered slightly to minimise confusion and misunderstanding.
2. The explanation of the initial sorting procedure into three piles was clarified.
3. After reflecting on the length of time it took to complete the blank sorting grid with details of each sort and the potential for error, I made the decision to digitally photograph the Q-sort as back-up to the written record made of each card placement on the grid.
4. Maximum timings for the complete procedure were gauged at 1.5 hours.

7.5.3 Step 3: Generating the Q-sample

The third stage in the Q process is to develop the 'Q-sample'. This is the collection of statements, selected from the concourse, to be used by research participants. In Q, the theoretically optimal number of statements in the Q-sample is between 40 and 80. In this study, after piloting, it was decided that the optimum number of statements would be 52. This provided a balance between incorporating enough range of meaning and yet ensuring the Q-sample would be easily handled by participants who, in the majority of cases, would be non-native speakers, and who, therefore, may experience an extraneous cognitive load (Paas, Tuovinen, Tabbers, &

Van Gerven, 2003) if the number of statements in the Q-sample was too large.

A structured sampling method was used to generate the Q-sample and thus the selection of statements was driven by theoretical concerns. The 76 statements used in the pilot study were categorised according to both the theoretical model of learner autonomy used for this study and to a model of 'generic learning outcomes' developed by the MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) to assess learning outcomes in those environments. The theoretical model of learner autonomy is outlined in section 5.3. The MLA model of generic learning outcomes was used because it was the only example of a non-content specific learning outcomes model available in the literature. This model comprises 5 categories shown in Figure 7.13

Figure 7.13: The Museums Libraries and Archives model of Generic Learning Outcomes (MLA, 2008)

Once the statements had been categorised according to these two models, statements for the Q-sample were then chosen from each category in proportion to the number of statements required for the Q-sample and the

number of statements in each category. To explain further, the total number of statements required was 52 whereas the total number in the refined concourse was 76. Therefore, approximately one third of the statements needed to be discarded. By way of illustration, in cases where there were 12 statements in a category, eight of these were chosen at random, although as many of the consensus statements as possible were discarded. If there were 20 statements in another category, firstly consensus statements were discarded, then 13 were chosen at random to be included in the final Q-sample. Two examples of the statements in the Q-sample and the way in which they were categorised are shown in Table 7.6. The full Q-sample of 52 statements is shown in Appendix C. According to Q methodology theory, if the process of reducing the number of statements is done systematically, then this will not affect the sensitivity of the Q-sort because it is the interaction of the P-set (participants) with the Q-sample which generates meaning. As Kramer et al. (2003, p. 345) explain: 'The meaning we strive to find via Q does not reside in the statements; rather meaning is constructed by the study participants as they construct their Q sort'.

Table 7.6: Two examples of how statements in the Q-sample were categorised

Statement	Source	Learner autonomy theoretical model categorisation	Museums, Libraries and Archives Generic Learning Outcomes categorisation
Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy.	Written statement from an L2 learner	1. Motivation 2. Affect	Activity, behaviour and progression
I have a better understanding of myself as a learner.	Written statement from English language teacher	Metacognitive awareness	Knowledge and understanding

7.5.4 Step 4: Selecting the P-set

The P-set for this study was drawn from the geographical areas where
language learner autonomy is a pedagogical focus, as determined in the
survey component of the first phase of this study. Due to financial and time
constraints, not all the areas identified in Phase 1 as being a focus for
language learner autonomy were included. Instead, participants for Phase
2 were drawn from Hong Kong, Japan and the United Kingdom. Participants
comprised ten tertiary level language learners from each country who had
had exposure to an autonomous language learning environment. In order
to clearly delineate such an environment, it was decided to focus on
learners who had used a self-access learning centre as part of their
language learning experiences.

7.5.4.1 Gaining access

Phase 1 survey respondents from Hong Kong, Japan and the UK, who had
acknowledged that they would be willing to be involved in further research,
were contacted and asked whether they had a self-access centre (SAC) at
their institution, and if they did, whether they would be prepared to help
put me in touch with the person in charge of the SAC. In some cases, I was
aware that the survey respondent was the person in charge of the SAC,
and in those cases, I wrote directly to the individual asking for help. An
example of the letters sent to gatekeepers and centre managers is included
in Appendix C.

In all cases help was offered and access was gained to the institution. The
number of institutions involved at this Phase 2 stage of the study is shown
in Table 7.7. The only Japanese institution, Institution H, was known well
to me as I had worked there in the past and at the time of the data
collection I still had a role in the institution as a consultant. Other

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institutions in Japan had been contacted and asked to participate in the study, but one withdrew at the last minute and other constraints such as restrictions on time and finance meant that others had to be rejected.

The means by which potential participants (P-set members) were contacted and asked to volunteer for the study was left to the discretion of the SAC managers (see the letters in Appendices B and C) and is shown in Table 7.7:

Table 7.7: Location of institutions involved in Phase 2, the means of recruiting participants in each institution and the number of participants drawn from each institution

Country	Institution	Means of recruiting participants	Number of participants in main study
Hong Kong	A	1) I went into three classes to 'pitch' and recruit volunteers. 2) I talked about the research with a discussion group in the SAC.	Pilot study only (2)
	B	Word of mouth	Pilot study only (1)
	C	Posters were put up in the centre and flyers left on desks in the SAC.	0
	D	Posters were left in the SAC for students to see.	1
	E	Word of mouth.	2
	F	Individual participants were identified by SAC staff and contact with the participants was initiated by the SAC staff.	4
	G	I drafted emails asking for volunteers and these were sent out to SAC users by the SAC manager. Volunteers were asked to email me directly.	3
Japan	H	SAC users who had taken a SAC-based course were contacted via email by the SAC manager and given the opportunity to volunteer by emailing me directly.	10
	I	Although access was initially given, ethical clearance later became a problem.	0
United Kingdom	J	Posters and flyers were left in the SAC.	2
	K	I attended two classes to 'pitch' the research and recruit volunteers.	8

7.5.4.2 Sampling procedure

In total, 30 participants were needed for the study. Potential participants were contacted via the gatekeepers of the participating institutions using a variety of means as shown in Table 7.7. In keeping with Q methodology theory, purposive and snowballing sampling methods were used to increase the likelihood of the following: (1) only students with experiences of learner autonomy were recruited, and that participants (2) came from both genders (3) represented a range of levels of language study, and (4) had potentially different viewpoints regarding the NLLOs of autonomous language learning.

The demographic breakdown of the resulting P-set is shown in Appendix F. Please note, the pseudonyms used were chosen by me according to the style of name used by the participants themselves. For example, some of the participants from Hong Kong or Mainland China used Western style names, in which case a pseudonym in a Western style was chosen.

7.5.5 Step 5: Carrying out the Q-sort

Prior to the Q-sort, I interviewed each participant about their language learning experiences, and especially about their experiences working in autonomy-inspired learning environments. These 'pre-sort' interviews were carried out in English, and allowed me to ascertain that the interviewees' English language proficiency was good enough for them to understand the Q sample, and that they had had enough self-reported experience of autonomous language learning to participate in the study. Further information is given about the rationale for these interviews later in this section.

Next, each member of the P-set was given a 'condition of instruction'. This is the statement given to participants to help them sort the Q-sample.

Inspired by Falchikov (1993), the condition of instruction used in this study was:

> 'Think about the ways you have developed since studying [your language] outside the classroom without the direct support of a teacher (e.g. in a self-access centre or using the Internet). Sort the statements according to *most like me ↔ least like me*.'

The *most like me ↔ least like me* continuum was provided in the form of a sorting grid shaped like an inverted bell-shaped curve as discussed in section 7.2.1. The *most like me* end of the grid was ranked as +5, and provided two sorting slots for statements. The *least like me* end of the grid was ranked as -5 and also provided two sorting slots. The grid in Figure 7.14 is the grid given to all participants in the main study. Please note that the +5 to -5 rankings are not shown on this grid as this is not considered necessary in Q methodology theory (S. R. Brown, n.d.). The rankings are simply to help participants with the sorting process, and should not be taken as absolute, meaningful numbers in themselves. Instead of the rankings, participants were provided with a card strip indicating how many cards they needed to include in each column from left to right, as this had proved most useful during the pilot procedure. It was felt that providing two sets of numbers for each column would be confusing to participants, and that the *most like me* and *least like me* labels were sufficient for participants to understand and complete the task. The card strip can be seen in Figure 7.4 (p. 125).

Figure 7.14: Main study sorting grid

Least like me

Most like me

Think about the ways you have developed since learning the language outside the classroom without the direct support of a teacher (e.g. in a self-access centre or using the Internet). Sort the statements according to "Most like me" and "Least like me".

During the Q-sort, each participant was asked to firstly divide the statements in the Q-sample into three piles: a *most like me* pile, a *sort of like me* pile, and a *least like me* pile. Then, participants were asked to take the *most like me* pile and to choose the two cards which represent their views most strongly and to place them in the +5 section of the grid. Following this, the participant chose three statements for the +4 grid section, and so on. When all the *most like me* cards had been sorted, the participant was asked to sort the *least like me* pile at the negative side of the grid. Finally, the participant sorted the *sort of like me* cards into the centre sections of the grid. The number of cards in each pile was not fixed as this was dependent on the participant's views. Some participants placed most of their cards in the *most like me* or *least like me* piles. Others had a more equal distribution of statements across all three categories.

When the participant was happy with the card sort, I made a note of the place of each card on the grid, and asked the participant to explain to me their reasoning behind the card placements. The number of cards each participant was asked to explain depended on the length of time the card sort had taken. Potential participants had been advised that they would be giving up 1.5 hours of their time. If plenty of time was remaining then the participants were asked to explain the reasoning behind the placement of every card. If less time was available, participants were asked to focus on the cards at either end of the scale or on other cards which, from my observation, had been sorted in a noteworthy manner. This interview was called the 'post-sort interview' and like the pre-sort interview, was carried out in English.

After the participants had explained their thinking behind the card placements, I thanked them and offered them a small token of my appreciation. The nature of the token varied from country to country. In Hong Kong and Japan participants received a key ring from my hometown. In the UK, participants received a £5 voucher for a nationwide supermarket /department store chain. Participants were not made aware that they would be receiving such a token before they had finished the Q-sorting task.

7.5.5.1 Reflections on the Q-sorting process

In this study, unlike some other studies, the participants were not made aware of the source of each statement. It is interesting to ponder whether it would have been useful for them to know the provenance of the statements. Given that many of the statements were derived from the literature, this may have been irrelevant, overwhelming or simply uninteresting for them and would have added to cognitive load in a task that was already cognitively, particularly linguistically, demanding.

Nevertheless, it is important to note this information was not available to participants and that had it been, they might have sorted the cards in a different way.

In case the participants felt none of the cards had addressed their experiences accurately, each participant was given the opportunity to contribute their own statements at the end of the Q-sort by writing on a blank card. However, none of the participants expressed a desire to do so.

7.5.5.2 Participants' reactions to the methodology

At the end of the Q-sorting and interview process, eight of the participants made unprompted comments such as 'Oh it's interesting! I had a very good experience,' 'I really enjoyed this activity' and 'This is very meaningful.' In my experience, it is unusual for participants in, say, survey research, to comment so favourably on the experience of participation. Such an effect may be attributable to the novel aspect of the task, the extent of the personal reflection and engagement required to complete the task, or the active, kinaesthetic nature of the card-sorting process.

From both a learner autonomy perspective and a formative assessment perspective, it is interesting to consider whether the impact on learners of doing the Q-sort helped them think about their own learning. Because my research participants were not my own students, I had only my perceptions of their reactions to doing the Q-sorts, and the interview data, to consider when making a judgement about this. Certainly, from their comments, it would seem as if participating in this study did help them think about their own learning. As they explained the positioning of the statements to me they used examples from their own learning to illustrate the points they were making. Depending on the length of the interview and the number of statements they explained, some participants volunteered numerous illustrative points from their own learning experiences. It is not clear

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whether it made them more insightful, because I did not have a baseline perspective from which to make this comparison. However, certainly anecdotally, it seems to be the case that the Q-sort and interview gave learners the chance to think about, and reflect on, their own learning. As I mentioned above, several participants commented on how enjoyable the activity was and several commented explicitly on how interesting the activity was and how much they had learned from the experience. One participant said:

> This is very meaningful.... I don't know my pattern of
> learning languages and this interview helped me to
> understand myself....I don't know why I do these thing but
> now I know. Because it is relaxing, this is interesting.

And another commented:

> It made me think a lot about how I work. I hadn't really
> thought about it before. It kind of made me think a lot more.
> I knew WHY I did it, but I never really thought about it.

One of the statements that learners were required to sort was 'Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored'. Out of 30 participants, 16 sorted this statement in one of the nine slots ranked from -5 to -3 thus indicating it was least like them. This seems a particularly noticeable proportion especially as no participants sorted the same statement in one of the nine slots ranked from +5 to +3 which would have indicated it was most like them. It is possible, therefore, that my study attracted participants who were particularly keen on self-reflection and thus found the Q-sort and interview a positive learning process.

7.5.6 Step 6: Doing the Q factor analysis

The Q-sorts were analysed using *PQMethod* 2.11 (Schmolck & Atkinson, 2002), a bespoke package for analysing Q-sort data (section 7.2.1.7). Seven factors were extracted using the Centroid method of factor analysis

and six of these were retained for rotation. Preliminary rotation was done using Varimax. Further judgemental rotations were carried out by rotating five pairs of factors (Table 7.8).

Table 7.8: Angle of judgemental rotations for the five pairs of factors rotated

1st factor	2nd factor	Angle of rotation
1	3	+7
1	4	+6
2	3	-6
3	7	-15
5	6	-4

To determine the defining factor loadings (the Q-sorts which go to make up a particular factor), a significance level of $p<0.01$ was established. This resulted in all but one of the participants' sorts contributing to a factor definition (the participant who did not load on any factor is Participant 29). The full factor loadings for each of the defining participants are shown in Appendix E and an extract is shown here in Table 7.9 for illustrative purposes. Here it can be seen that Participant 27 loaded on Factor A with a score of +0.7135 and Participant 30 loaded on Factor B with a score of +0.3720, which suggests that Participant 27 is aligned to the viewpoint represented by Factor A more heavily than Participant 30 factor is aligned to the viewpoint represented by Factor B.

Table 7.9: Extract from defining participants' factor loadings (Appendix E)

Participant	Factor A loadings	Factor B loadings
P27	0.7135	
P30		0.3720

To identify statistically significant factors, eigenvalues were used. The eigenvalue is also known as the 'characteristic value' and when divided by the total number of Q sorts represents the total variance explained by a factor. In Q methodology, 'by convention' (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 51) factors with eigenvalues larger than 1.0 are taken to be significant. In this study, the six factors had eigenvalues ranging from 1.5 to 4.5, and thus the variance explained by each factor varied from 5% to 15% with the total percentage of explanatory variance being 51%. A single Q-sort in this study would account for 3.33% of the variance (100% of variance divided amongst 30 participants = 3.33%), so all factors have more explanatory power than a single Q-sort (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p. 87). In other words, each factor generated in this study represents more than just one person's viewpoint, although in Q methodology theoretically significant factors representing one solo viewpoint are meaningful.

The correlation between factor scores is shown below in Table 7.10. The strongest correlation between factor scores is 0.5136 and the lowest is 0.0377. As none of the correlations is very high, this indicates that the factor scores are all quite distinct from each other, and thus it can be presumed that the viewpoints represented by the factors are different enough to be included in this analysis. This is not to say that there are not overlaps in the way that the P-set used in this study think about the NLLO of autonomous language learning, however.

Table 7.10: Correlation between factor scores

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	1.00	0.3343	0.5118	0.3657	0.4331	0.2346
2		1.00	0.3036	0.2724	0.5136	0.2277
3			1.00	0.4874	0.3088	0.0377
4				1.00	0.3914	0.1326
5					1.00	0.2771
6						1.00

7.5.7 Step 7: Interpreting the factors

The factors were interpreted using the statements themselves and the interview data, using QSR NVivo 9. Specifically, a version of the card content analysis method called 'distinguishing statement analysis' (Gallagher & Pollock, 2010) was used. Firstly, a node was created within NVivo 9 to represent each factor, and then tree nodes were created within the factor node to represent the relevant statements in the Q-sample. Then, each interview was coded by focusing on the distinguishing statements and thematically analysing them. The findings from these analyses are reported on in the next chapter.

8 Phase 2 Findings and Implications

8.1 Introduction

The factor interpretations described in this section provide a comprehensive and detailed picture of learners' perceptions of learning in an autonomous learning environment. Following the convention in Q methodology, once the factors have emerged, they are regarded as 'viewpoints'. In this study, the Q-sorts generated six factors, which are represented as 'modes of autonomy'. Thus, modes of autonomy are different ways of being autonomous generated through the viewpoints of learners. Drawing on Little (1991) and Sinclair (2000), I suggest that modes of autonomy are versatile, in that learners may find they have more affinity with any mode at any time, depending on a range of variables, including their age, the language being learned, the learning activity or task, the learner's proficiency level, their mood and personality, what they perceive their learning needs to be, as well as environmental variables, such as where learning takes place.

In this chapter, the Q-sort data is supported and contextualised by interview data to provide a detailed picture of the participants and the multifaceted viewpoints they generated. In the next chapter, the Q-sort data and the pre- and post-sort interview data are combined to generate descriptive narratives of the modes of autonomy. These are juxtaposed with narrative profiles of six learners: one representing each mode of autonomy.

8.2 Factor interpretation

The process of factor interpretation is outlined in this section. The six factors are identified, and then the principal features of analysis and the presentation of findings are explained.

As mentioned earlier, the factors presented in this section are described as 'viewpoints' and are interpreted as learners' 'modes of autonomy'. The terms 'factor', 'viewpoint', and 'mode of autonomy' are used interchangeably. Following the convention in Q methodology, the modes are labelled in a descriptive style, and presented according to the amount of explanatory variance for each factor (section 7.5.6), with the factors accounting for more explanatory variance discussed first. The six modes of autonomy (or ways of being autonomous) that emerged are:

1. A love of languages

2. Oozing confidence

3. Socially oriented and enthusiastic

4. Love of language learning

5. Teacher-focused

6. Competitively driven

This chapter includes a detailed description of Factor A, and shorter descriptions of the other five factors due to space constraints. The description of each mode has six parts which are explained more fully below. First, a review of the process of analysis and interpretation, and an explanation of the terminology used in this section is shown in visual form (Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1: Analysis and interpretation in Q methodology

Process of analysis

P30 · · · · · ·
P2
P1

30 sets of Q sort data comprising ranked statements

P7   P4
P18   P2

Similar Q-sorts are grouped together to create an 'idealised array'. This idealised array is a factor. Some Q-sorts are more similar to the idealised array than others (here shown by intensity of grey). The degree of similarity between the individual sort and the idealised array dictates the amount of 'loading' on the factor. Participants whose individual sorts make up the idealised array are said to 'define' the factor.

Six idealised arrays = six factors

Factor

Point of interpretation

Viewpoint

Each factor becomes a viewpoint after interpretation

Mode of autonomy

In this study, the 'viewpoint' is known as a 'mode of autonomy'

The description for each mode of autonomy in the following two chapters has six parts which are detailed here.

8.2.1 Technical information about the factor

The technical information comprises the eigenvalue and the percentage of study variance explained by each factor. For more details see section 7.5.6.

8.2.2 Demographic information about the participants

The technical information is followed by demographic information about the participants who loaded significantly on the factor. By 'loading' on the factor, I mean that Person A's point of view – as determined by their Q-sort – was similar enough to other points of view as to be combined with them to make up a factor (section 7.5.6). The participants whose viewpoints contribute to a factor are said to 'load' on the factor, and those participants 'define' the factor. The defining participants' factor loadings are shown in Appendix E, with the higher numbers denoting a heavier loading (Figure 8.1).

8.2.3 Visual representation of the idealised array for the factor

The visual representation of the full idealised array of the factor is shown in the form of a Q-sort grid. The idealised factor array represents the averaged Q-sort for the participants who loaded onto this factor. To generate the idealised factor array, each statement is weighted according to how heavily the participant who ranked the statement loads onto the factor. Then all the statements are averaged out to give the 'best-estimate Q sort' (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p. 82). The idealised array also shows the statement number and the coding for each statement according to its categorisation within the learner autonomy conceptual framework and the

Museums Libraries and Archives (MLA) generic learning outcomes

framework (section 7.5.3). For example, the statement shown in Figure

8.2, is statement number 40, categorised as 'metacognitive awareness'

(MA) within the learner autonomy conceptual framework and as 'knowledge

and understanding' (KU) within the MLA generic learning outcomes

framework.

Figure 8.2: An example of a Q statement as shown in the idealised array

I have a better understanding of myself as a learner.

MA   40   KU
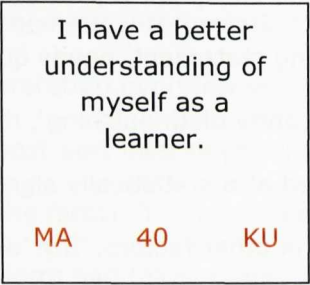
Please note, the idealised factor arrays for Factors B-F are in Appendix H.

8.2.4 Descriptive overview according to the face value of the statements

An overview of each factor is presented after the idealised array. The

overview is compiled from the participant demographic information and the

analysis of the array of statements according to their categorisation in the

learner autonomy microconceptual framework and the MLA generic

learning outcomes framework. At this stage, the statements are taken at

'face value' without the layering of meaning provided through the interview

data.

8.2.5 Thematic interpretation of the statements

Two steps are followed during the thematic interpretation of the

statements. First, those statements considered to be of specific importance

in understanding the viewpoint represented by the factor are isolated in the

interpretation overview table. Following Watts & Stenner (2012), the statements considered to be particularly meaningful in the idealised factor array were: 1) the five statements placed in the highest and lowest rankings, 2) those statements which were sorted higher or lower than the same items were sorted in any other factor, and 3) the distinguishing statements for the factor as indicated by the *PQMethod* analysis. These three types of statements are important as they are arguably the most meaningful in creating the unique viewpoint represented by the factor. However, the term 'distinguishing statement' needs qualification. When a statement is labelled as 'significantly distinguishing', it refers to a statement which has been sorted at a statistically significant different rank compared to how it was sorted in other factors. The 'distinguishing' aspect refers to the statistical probability of the statement being ranked in that position. The placing of the statement may not be extreme. In fact, often distinguishing statements are sorted in the middle ranks at a more neutral level. Nor may there be such a clear difference between the statement in a 'distinguishing' position, compared to any another position. For example, in the present study, statement 25 was a distinguishing statement in Factor D in which it was ranked at the -3 level, whereas in other factors statement 25 was ranked both lower and higher than -3 at the -5, -4, 0, +2, and +5 levels.

Drawing on Hogan (2008), the *z-score* for each statement and, where relevant, the difference between adjacent *z-scores*, are also included in the interpretation overview tables. The *z-score* of each statement indicates the degree of salience of the statements within the factor under consideration. For example, in Factor C, statement 36 was positioned at the +5 level and statement 8 and statement 51 were positioned at the +4 level. In other words, all three statements were positioned towards ('most like me'),

however, the *z-score* for statement 36 is +1.901, for statement 8 it is +1.842 and for statement 51 it is +1.290. This suggests that although statement 8 and statement 51 were both ranked +4, statement 8 is 'closer' to 'most like me' than statement 51, and thus more positively salient for those participants who load on Factor C. In fact, for this viewpoint, the difference between statement 36 (+5) and statement 8 (+4) is less than between statement 8 (+4) and statement 51 (+4).

The second step in the thematic interpretation presents each of the statements in the interpretation overview with an analysis and commentary based on the pre- and post-sort interviews with the participants who loaded significantly on the factor. The interviews were carried out directly before and after the Q-sorts had taken place. The aim of the pre-sort interviews was twofold: firstly, to ascertain whether participants had had experience of autonomous language learning, and therefore were suitable participants for this study; and secondly, to encourage them to focus on these experiences as a way of helping them contextualise the condition of instruction and the statements themselves during the Q-sorting process. The primary aim of the post-sort interviews was to understand the rationale for the participants' ranking of statements in the Q-sort.

Due to the nature of the interviews, particularly the post-sort interviews, in which both interviewee and interviewer were co-constructing the meaning of the statements by observing and analysing their position in the array, the interviews are presented here as a form of 'social practice' (Talmy, 2010). Research interviews as 'social practice' differ from 'interviews as research method' in three ways: 1) they are seen as accounts co-constructed between interviewer and interviewee rather than as reports revealed by the interviewee as truth; 2) they are reflectively discussed and analysed as collaboratively produced and not considered 'contaminated' by

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the influence of the researcher; and 3) they have a process-oriented focus on the analysis dealing with 'what and how' rather than a product-oriented focus on 'what' (Talmy, 2010).

The reader should note that quotes from participants in the thematic interpretations have been included verbatim, including grammatical errors. Where clarification of the meaning is considered necessary, this has been given in square brackets.

8.2.6 Narrative description of the factor

The culmination of the previous stages is found in the narrative interpretation of the factors (these are presented in Chapter 9). The narrative interpretations synthesise the previous elements of the analysis to give a holistic description of the viewpoint.

8.2.7 Limitations of the data analysis

Some of the shortfalls, limitations and constraints of the data analysis can be usefully acknowledged at this stage to enhance the clarity of the findings.

Firstly, three statements were identified through the Q factor analysis as being 'consensus' statements, meaning that they do not distinguish between any pair of factors. These three statements were: a) statement 1 'I have more of a desire to learn [language name]', b) statement 6 – 'I can make more effective decisions about whether feedback is useful for me', and c) statement 22 – 'When I feel myself getting stressed about my learning I know better what to do about it'. Out of these three statements, only statement 1 ('I have more of a desire to learn [language name]') was included in those statements considered to be of specific importance in understanding the viewpoint of any factor. In fact, it was ranked highly in five out of six factors (Table 8.1):

Table 8.1: Ranking of statement 1 ('I have more of a desire to learn [language name]') in each factor

Factor	Ranking
A	+5
B	+4
C	+4
D	+4
E	+3
F	+5

Because consensus statements are of little value in understanding the unique viewpoint of a factor, the data for statement 1 are not included in the factor interpretations below, except in the interpretation overview tables. In future research, these consensus statements should be discarded from the Q-sample.

Secondly, the thematic interpretations do not include data from all of the participants. One of the participants (Participant 29) did not load on any of the six factors and therefore is not included in the factor interpretations. Furthermore, not all participants fully completed the post-Q sort interviews and in some cases did not give a post Q-sort interview at all. The incomplete or missing post-Q-sort interviews were due to the pre-sort interviews and Q-sorts taking the full 90 minutes which I had requested, or to a lack of time on the part of the participants who were not available for the whole of the requested 90 minutes. Consequently, some of the factors are not thematically analysed using interview data from all the participants loading on that factor.

8.3 Factor A: 'A love of languages'

Factor A has an eigenvalue of 4.5 and explains 15% of the study variance, the largest percentage of explanatory variance out of all the factors. Nine

participants load significantly on this factor (Appendix E). Four are mainland Chinese (three living in Hong Kong and one living in Japan) two are students from Hong Kong, and three are British. The breakdown of demographic information relating to these participants is given in Appendix F. A simplified version is replicated in Table 8.2 below for ease of reference.

8.3.1 Overview

It is interesting to note that despite the large number of defining participants for Factor A, none of them are Japanese, and all of them are learning at least two languages, with six out of nine participants learning three languages. With the exception of one postgraduate and one second year undergraduate, all are first year undergraduates.

The idealised factor array for Factor A (Table 8.3) shows that in terms of the MLA generic learning outcomes framework, 'attitudes and values' (AV) and 'activity, behaviour and progression' (ABP) statements were ranked in key places on the sorting grid in the +5, +4, +3, and -5, -4, -3 positions. Research done on the MLA framework suggests that these rankings mean that Factor A defining participants have a high level of empathy, capacity for tolerance, or motivation (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004). Moreover, attitudes and values have been found to underpin actions and behaviour (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004) so the ranking of the ABP statements in key places is a

Table 8.2: Simplified demographic information for participants loading significantly on Factor A

Participant	Gender	Level of study	First language	Languages learning
George	m	Postgraduate (MPhil)	Cantonese/ Mandarin	English, Japanese
Carl	m	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Cantonese	Mandarin, English, German, French
Huan	f	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Cantonese	English, Mandarin, French
Monica	f	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Mandarin	English, Cantonese, Spanish
Ron	m	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Mandarin	English, Cantonese
Qiong	f	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Mandarin	English, Japanese
Rob	m	Undergraduate (Year 1)	English	French, German, Portuguese
Peter	m	Undergraduate (Year 1)	English	French, German, Spanish
Helen	f	Undergraduate (Year 1)	English	French, German, Japanese

logical pattern within the parameters of the generic learning outcomes framework. All six of the statements relating to 'enjoyment, inspiration and creativity' (EIC) were ranked in neutral positions between -2 and +2 indicating that this is not an important part of the viewpoint of Factor A loaders. The statements categorised as 'knowledge and understanding' (KU) were distributed throughout the array, from -3 to +3, so whilst not particularly salient, there is a spread of opinion regarding the importance of KU to the Factor A viewpoint.

In terms of the learner autonomy conceptual framework, in the idealised array all the high ranking positions (+5 and +4) were taken by statements relating to motivation and learner control. Furthermore, negatively worded statements from the motivation category were placed in the lowest rankings of -5 and -4, thus demonstrating the particular salience of these categories for Factor A defining participants and suggesting that motivation is a key factor for this viewpoint. In contrast, all six statements relating to metacognitive awareness were ranked in neutral positions between -1 and +1 suggesting the lack of salience of this construct for Factor A defining participants.

While this overview provides a general interpretation of the viewpoint for Factor A, a more nuanced understanding requires the meaning given to the statements by the defining participants to be considered. The specific meaning of these rankings for the Factor A viewpoint are now analysed and discussed by examining the participants' interview transcripts.

Table 8.3: Idealised Q-sort for Factor A

The Q-sort is arranged in a pyramid from **Least like me (−5)** on the left to **Most like me (+5)** on the right. Each statement is given as: *statement text* — framework code, item number, outcome code.

Rating	Statements (top → bottom of column)
−5 (Least like me)	I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well.** — CR 32 AV • Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name]. — M 28 AV
−4	Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored. — CR 31 AV • I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher. — C 30 AV • Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy. — M 25 ABP
−3	I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others. — LC 20 KU • I am better at finding good people to learn with. — LC 17 S • I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language name].** — LR 9 ABP • I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct. — CR 33 AV
−2	It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn. — IL 3 S • I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [language name]. — LC 46 EIC • I can make more effective decisions about whether feedback is useful for me. — C 6 AV • I'm more likely to review what I have learned. — LC 47 S • My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher. — LC 38 AV • When I feel myself getting stressed about my learning I know better what to do about it. — LC 22 KU
−1	I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name]. — LC 19 KU • I think more carefully about what I want to learn. — LC 26 KU • I can describe better how I will learn in the future. — MA 13 KU • I can explain why I choose the materials I use. — MA 44 KU • I'm more likely to create new strategies to help me learn. — LR 52 EIC • I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]. — C 5 ABP • I am better at choosing a place to learn. — LC 48 S
0	I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn. — LC 49 S • I enjoy learning [language name] more, because I can learn at a level that suits me. — C 37 EIC • I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me. — C 36 EIC • It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language name] learning. — M 27 AV • I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making. — MA 51 KU • I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people. — C 34 AV • I am better at learning on my own without a helper. — LC 18 S • I can analyse my [language name] needs better. — LC 14 KU
+1	I have a better understanding of how I learn best. — LC 24 KU • I have a better understanding of myself as a learner. — MA 40 KU • I have more courage to try different things when I learn [language name]. — C 29 EIC • I am more able to choose good strategies to help me learn. — MA 11 S • I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do. — MA 12 KU • I feel more relaxed about learning [language name]. — C 35 AV • It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn. — IL 4 S
+2	I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me. — CR 45 AV • I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future. — C 21 AV • I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university. — M 42 EIC • I'm more likely to use the type of resources which match my learning style. — LR 8 ABP • Learning at my own pace means I'm learning more successfully. — LC 43 KU • I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name]. — LR 7 ABP
+3	I understand better when a way of learning is working for me. — CR 10 KU • I'm more likely to make time to learn. — M 23 ABP • I am more committed to achieving my goals. — LC 50 ABP • I feel more likely to have a successful life. — C 41 AV
+4	I can organise my learning time more effectively.** — LC 16 ABP • I'm more active about learning [language name]. — M 2 ABP • I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning. — LC 15 S
+5 (Most like me)	I have more of a desire to learn [language name]. — M 1 AV • I am more self-disciplined. — LC 39 ABP

Key

Learner autonomy framework
LC – learner control
MA – metacognitive awareness
CR – critical reflection
LR – learning range
C – confidence
M – motivation
IL – information literacy

Generic learning outcomes framework
KU – knowledge and understanding
AV – attitudes and values
ABP – activity, behaviour and progression
EIC – enjoyment, inspiration and creativity
S – skills

■ Items sorted higher or lower than in other factors and distinguishing statements

The statements regarded as particularly meaningful for the interpretation of Factor A are shown below in the Factor A interpretation overview (Table 8.4), and are highlighted in the idealised Q-sort for Factor A (Table 8.3). Please note that the statements were considered by participants in response to the 'condition of instruction' (section 7.5.5) which read: *Think about the ways you have developed since studying your language outside the classroom without the direct support of a teacher (e.g. in a self-access centre or using the Internet). Sort the statements according to "Most like me" and "Least like me".*

Table 8.4: Factor A interpretation overview

	Statement	Number	Rank	z-score	Difference in z-scores compared to next highest/ lowest†
Top five items	I have more of a desire to learn [my language].‡	1	+5		
	I am more self-disciplined.	39	+5	+1.743	+0.245
	I can organise my learning time more effectively.	16**	+4	+1.519	+0.224
	I'm more active about learning [language name].	2	+4	+1.320	+0.199
	I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning.	15	+4	+1.295	+0.025
Items sorted higher than other factors	I understand better when a way of learning is working for me.	10*	+3	+1.177	
	I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me.	45	+2	+0.828	
	Learning at my own pace means I am learning more successfully.	43	+2	+0.531	
	I use more varied strategies when I learn [my language].	7	+2	+0.494	
	I am better at learning on my own without a helper.	18	0	+0.047	
Items sorted lower than other factors	I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language].	9**	-3	-1.354	
	I am better at finding good people to learn with.	17	-3	-1.112	
	I try harder to find opportunities to use [my language].	5	-1	-0.179	
	I enjoy learning [my language] more because I can learn in ways that interest me.	36	0	0.219	
Bottom five items	Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [my language].	28	-5	-2.409	n/a
	I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well.	32**	-5	-2.282	-0.127
	Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored.	31	-4	-2.002	-0.28
	I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher.	30	-4	-1.934	-0.068
	Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy.	25	-4	-1.701	-0.233
Other significantly distinguishing statements	I feel more relaxed about learning [language name].	35*	+1	+0.320	
	I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn.	49*	0	+0.236	

*Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .05$
**Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .01$

†Shown only for top five and bottom five items

‡Consensus statement - not included in detailed factor interpretation (section 8.2.7)

Factor A is analysed further below by examining the statements in Table 8.4 in more detail and illustrating the rankings using data from the qualitative interviews with eight out of the nine participants who loaded on Factor A. The ninth participant, George, was unable to give a post-sort interview due to time constraints.

8.3.2 Factor A: Higher ranking statements

Overall, the five most highly ranking statements (see Table 8.4 above) suggest a high degree of discipline and control within the Factor A viewpoint. In the sections below, each of these statements is examined in more detail in conjunction with the qualitative interview data from the Q-sorting participants.

8.3.2.1 Rank +5

Statement number 39 – 'I am more self-disciplined'

The Factor A loaders ranked statement 39 as being 'most like me' with the manifestation of self-discipline being, for them, effective time management skills. Associated with this was an understanding that self-discipline could be a motivating force. This association between self-discipline as effective time management and motivating force can be seen in the following quote from Qiong:

> QIONG: Yeah. I think that I am most self-dis-ci [...]
> Disciplined. I think if you want to do something if you cannot control yourself you cannot do anything. Yeah. And you're ...
> if you want to study English you have to be more self-controlled then you can study more specifically. [...] For example, in the morning, I live quite near from here – two stations I can get up late to go to school but I was always get up earlier to go to school and then study in the school, because I think I have to study more positively.

The positioning of statement 39 with the meaning emphasis on the importance of time management and the motivating force of self-discipline is in keeping with the emphasis on the learner control and motivation

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elements from the learner autonomy conceptual framework which are positioned in the key rankings in the idealised Factor A array.

8.3.2.2 Rank +4

Statement number 16 – 'I can organise my learning time more effectively'

As discussed above, Factor A defining participants considered time management to be an important aspect of self-discipline, therefore it is not surprising that they ranked statement 16 ('I can organise my learning time more effectively') in the +4 position, indicating that it was towards the 'most like me' end of the ranking continuum. Furthermore, statement 16 was significantly distinguishing at the .01 level. This, combined with its high ranking, gives added weight to the importance of this statement for the Factor A viewpoint.

The emerging themes for statement 16 in the post-sort interviews were the importance of using available time efficiently and the need to take responsibility for time management when studying at tertiary level. Helen commented on her ability to structure her own time because of the relatively few contact hours she experienced on her degree course:

> HELEN: [...] I believe I've learnt more how to organise my time. Because [...] I'm quite lucky because since there's few contact hours I have more time to study [...] and I can prioritise, like with the day's tasks.

Qiong also described her positive attitude towards making the most of the time she had available to study on her own without the direct support of a teacher, although as a student in a Japanese university she would have had significantly less time than Helen, who was studying at a UK university.

In terms of the need to take responsibility for time management when studying at tertiary level, Peter, also a UK university student, explained how avoiding wasting time was important:

> PETER: Organise my learning time more effectively. I think I can, now, because it's so much more independent. There's no one to say 'you have to do this tonight' 'you have to do this tomorrow, you've got to get it done and we don't care whether you do it or not'. Well obviously they do. They don't care whether you're fully prepared, they'll just pick up on it. And obviously you'll look bad and you won't learn properly. So it's not … you're not being spoon-fed anymore, so I think …
>
> L: No. There's more responsibility on your shoulders.
>
> PETER: Exactly. And it's just a waste of time if you don't really so …

These quotations suggest that Factor A exemplars are successful at developing new actions, forms of behaviour, or progression in organising their learning time. It is also evidence of the control they demonstrate over their learning, further emphasised by the placing of statements 39 ('I am more self-disciplined') and 15 ('I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning') at the higher end of the ranking spectrum.

Statement number 2 – 'I'm more active about learning [language name]'

Three main themes emerged in relation to participants' responses to statement 2: a) the motivating force of communicating with others, b) the positive benefit of self-control and c) variety as a motivator for being active.

Ron had recently become a member of the university branch of the Toastmasters club – an international organisation with the aim of helping members develop public speaking and leadership skills through regular practice and peer feedback in local clubs. Ron described how his newly

formed social contacts, gained through the club, had made him more active

about learning English and had had a very positive affective influence on

his English learning experiences:

> RON: So firstly, 'I'm more active about learning English',
> because I think I really found happiness with communicating
> with others and to find resources that I like and to make
> further improvements [...] So I think I'm more pro-active [...]
> I think learning English this semester I feel much happier
> than before.

Qiong described being more active about learning English as a positive

benefit of being self-controlled. Earlier in the interview she had explained:

> QIONG: [...] If you want to study English you have to be
> more self-controlled then you can study more specifically.
> And, for example if you have some trouble and you're
> disappointed in your study, but if you are self-control you
> can more ... get more ... encourage yourself to study more.

and she refers back to this comment in discussing statement 2:

> L: So you were saying that the fact you get up earlier and
> you come and you study ...
>
> QIONG: In the morning?
>
> L: Yeah. Yeah.
>
> QIONG: I think if some people get lazy they can watch ... like
> study positively ... [studying positively can help overcome
> laziness – LC]
>
> L: OK.
>
> QIONG: Sometimes [we can] just choose ourself to [do]
> much study. But with self-control you can make yourself to
> study. Even if you haven't or you have trouble or difficulty.
>
> L: Right. Yeah. So that's why this one's also here, is it ['I'm
> more active about learning English']? Because you think
> they're sort of ...? Maybe you think if you're more self-
> disciplined then you're more active?
>
> QIONG: Yeah. I think so.

In commenting on the connection for Qiong between statement 39 ('I am more self-disciplined') and statement 2 ('I'm more active about learning English') I was interpreting the juxtaposition of the two statements that Qiong had placed in the +5 ranking. In other words, these two statements were ranked in the highest position by Qiong and thus, as suggested by Q methodology, it was probable that there was a meaningful connection between them. Qiong's commentary seems to suggest that motivation is the link between the two statements. She describes how she is able to motivate herself through self-control even when the process of studying is not straightforward. The notion of self-control is an interesting perspective on the interplay between being active in language learning and motivation. The connection between being active about language learning and one's motivation is also commented upon by Huan. She explained how being active, which she defined as using different ways to learn English, meant that she is not bored, particularly in terms of reflecting on her learning.

> HUAN: I don't feel bored. Because I am active.
>
> L: OK so the meaning of those two are sort of opposite. Number 2 ['I'm more active about learning English'] and number 31 ['Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored']?
>
> HUAN: Yeah. Because I have different ways to learn English so I don't feel difficult to try activities.

Similarly to statement 16, by ranking statement 2 at the +4 level Factor A exemplars may be indicating a greater willingness to develop activities, behaviour or progression in their language learning.

Statement number 15 – 'I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning'

Factor A defining participants ranked statement 15 in a high position at +4, and in interview they were able to demonstrate a high level of

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metacognitive awareness with regard to this statement. For some, 'what they were trying to achieve' was described in linguistic terms. Peter and Helen, for example, both mentioned that they aimed to achieve fluency. But another wider interpretation also emerged in contrast to the 'linguistic goals', which could be termed 'life goals'. In other words, these participants had a clear understanding of what they wanted out of life at university, and this was combined with a strong future self-image, as hypothesised by Dörnyei (2009) in his work on the L2 motivational self system.

Helen had strong linguistic goals. She wanted to achieve fluency and mentioned this at three different points in her interview:

> HELEN: [...] I know I'm trying to achieve fluency in my language learning and that'll lead me to having a more successful life.

> HELEN: Well ... I do want to achieve fluency in three languages eventually. I'd love to ... I do want to go on the JET programme so that'll be my goal, but I don't have a particular job in mind. I think I'm just going to see how it goes.

> HELEN: Like I'd like to take ... to learn a few more languages in the future [...] I'm just waiting until ... to achieve fluency in the first three and then I can take some more ...

However, Peter spoke more broadly about being aware of what he wanted to achieve from his university experiences in general, albeit with a language focus:

> PETER: [...] I think there's probably a culture at university where you learn what you want out of life and you meet other language learners who you've got things in common with. You can talk about, you know, what the point of doing it is and ... yeah.

Rob was notable for the strong future self-image (Dörnyei, 2009) he projected when prompted to explain what he was trying to achieve in his language learning:

> ROB: Well ... I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning because I know that I want to be able to communicate with a French person, and one day, one day in my life I want to speak with a French person and for them not to know that I'm British. That'd be amazing. And then to drop it into the conversation after being with them for a while say 'Oh I'm British you know' and they'll be like 'What??' I'd LOVE to be able to do that one day. [...] So I'm trying to get up to that level. So ... [...] One day being mistaken for a French person, that'd be good! But that's a long way off yet! [laughing] [...] But it's a good aim to go for though!

Linguistic proficiency, and arguably fluency, are central to this strong future self-image but so are the same strong notions of 'language as identity' that were evident in Peter's earlier description of learning what one wants out of life at university.

The analysis of the higher ranking statements in the Factor A idealised array suggest that Factor A represents an autonomous learner who, overall has a love of languages and language learning. As we have seen in the quotes given above, not only does the Factor A learner have a positive attitude towards language learning, but also has a strong identification with target language speakers.

8.3.2.3 Statements ranked higher in Factor A than in other factors

Five statements were ranked higher in Factor A than in other factors (Table 8.4) and were positioned from +3 to 0 in the idealised array. An overall sense of enthusiasm for language learning is demonstrated in this viewpoint through these higher ranking statements. Two of the statements – statement 10, and statement 45 – were discussed in detail in the post-sort interviews by the participants and these are elaborated on below using the interview data.

Statement 10 – 'I understand better when a way of learning is working for me'

The emergent theme for statement 10 was identified as being the motivating effect of having greater metacognitive awareness. Helen explained how she is motivated by knowing that a particular way of learning is working for her:

> HELEN: Yeah. I feel more ... uni's you know, really helped me like learning about study habits [#49 'I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn']. Coz erm ... since want to learn French I do want to study it's just erm ... knowing how to motivate myself and that leads into the other two [#10 'I understand better when a way of learning is working for me'; #39 'I am more self-disciplined']. But now I know it's more a reward getting things done so ... I feel encouraged to do it.

> L: Right OK. What do you mean when you say 'getting things done' you mean sort of completing different activities that you've been set and so on?

> HELEN: Oh yes. Like doing homework and finishing reading a particular book. Like I've just finished reading a Harry Potter book, and that was ... it was really long but I knew it'd be great when I finished it so that motivated me to do it.

The ranking of statement 10 in the +3 position is further evidence that Factor A represents highly motivated individuals who demonstrate that critical reflection is a powerful outcome of their learning in autonomy-inspired environments.

Statement 45 – 'I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me'

Factor A loaders described how learning autonomously appeared to have resulted in them engaging in an active reflection process in considering which activities were good for them. The term 'good' in the statement was interpreted in a number of different ways by the participants. For Peter, it

was defined in opposition to being a 'pointless waste of time'; for Ron, 'good activities' were those he could 'get value from'.

Peter explained how he had stronger opinions about which activities were good for him compared to when he was at school:

> PETER: OK. 'I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me' [#45 (+5)]. Erm ... I think since I came to uni I've learnt a lot more about what's good and what's a pointless waste of time for me. Because [...] I think *[at university]* you know your teachers a bit less, they don't know what works for you and I don't know how they teach so ... Obviously they have to cater to the whole class but sometimes you can feel like it's just like ... if I have a strong ... if I've focused on something more say at A level than they have then it can be a bit more of a waste of time for me, like. Some people need to be pushed more.

Ron described the active reflection process he engages in when exploring his learning choices and activities:

> RON: And erm ... these sort of things I think I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me I think because since I benefited a lot from these activities [...] I have a better understanding of the activities and er [...] I also have tried to find a knowledge ... and how I can get value from these activities.

Earlier in the interview, Ron had described the conscious effort he had made, after achieving what he considered to be a poor grade, to pursue English language learning activities which would help him become more successful in his studies:

> RON: So after last semester I got C class and then I felt quite depressed and this semester I hope I can make some changes. So first thing is speaking. Speaking I think er ... I learned a lot from the Toastmasters Club ...

and later on in the discussion he reiterated how he had actively tried to make an effort to learn:

> RON: So I've experienced so many methods in learning English. But er [...] after I came to [Blinded institution] I thought it's too challenging ... I still ... although I've made

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some effort now since I'm studying Hong Kong I should find
a more efficient, effective way.

L: Right. Right. So do you think you've found that way?

RON: I think that there are ... especially this semester I got
B+ and B+ is relatively ... is quite OK actually.

From Ron's perspective, he received external validation of his choice of

activities from the fact that his grade increased from C to B+. As Cotterall

(2007) has shown, having some measure of progress in language

proficiency is an important aspect of developing confident, independent

learners.

8.3.3 Factor A: Lower ranking statements

The lowest ranking statements for Factor A are shown in Table 8.4. Overall,

the lowest ranked statements are indicative of two main elements in the

'love of languages' viewpoint: participants were comfortable with the idea

of not having a teacher and felt passionate about languages and language

learning.

8.3.3.1 Rank -5

**Statement 28 – 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language
name]'**

Participants representing the Factor A viewpoint had a strong aversion to

the suggestion that learning autonomously had resulted in making them

feel like giving up learning the language. Their reasons for ranking

statement 28 in the lowest position (-5) were a) because they wanted to

learn to communicate well, b) they liked a challenge and c) they felt that

learning the language was 'part of me'.

Learn to communicate well

Monica disagreed with statement 28 because she wanted to be able to communicate well. In her explanation she contrasted the statement with those she ranked at the positive end of the spectrum.

> MONICA: How describe the pattern? I think this is true life. I've put it at the front ...I think these [#39 'I am more self-disciplined' (+5); #50 'I am more committed to achieving my goals' (+5)] drive me to learn, I think I'm more self-disciplined and more committed to achieve my goal and more find time to learn [#23 'I'm more likely to make time to learn' (+4)] . It's not just English it's all the other languages if I want to learn well on my own actually I'm self-disciplined. Like trying to find time to learn. It's a ... how people can learn to communicate well. And then yeah the opposite is I feel like giving up [#28 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning English' (-5)].

Enjoyment of challenge

The tenacity of the participants who defined the 'love of language' viewpoint was evident in the way they talked about embracing challenge. Helen explained how 'even at uni when the studies are very hard' she does not want to give up. Peter stated explicitly that he enjoys the challenge of learning French:

> PETER: 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning French' [#28 (-5)] [laughing].
>
> L: [laughing]
>
> PETER: Well that's not true.
>
> L: Well that's good! [laughing]
>
> PETER: It would be weird if it was. Erm ... yeah I've never felt like that. Even when I get a bit stressed out with work or if it's hard and you just feel like you're hitting a brick wall [...] I've just never wanted to give up to be honest.
>
> L: OK yeah great.
>
> PETER: I kind of like a challenge so ....

Integral to identity

The third theme to emerge as part of this viewpoint was that giving up language learning was not a plausible course of action because it was such an integral part of the identity of the learner.

> ROB: [laughing]. Yeah. The one. 28 – 'sometimes I feel like giving up on French, learning French'. Never. [...] Never ever give up on French. It's not something that I've done for all of my life just to give up on. It would be such a waste. And it's such a ... it's a part ... it sounds clichéd but it's part of me, like learning languages and being French and talking French, and everything it's ... like people at school are like "[Rob's nickname] The Linguist" like do you know what I mean? "He does languages." It's just ... I'd never give up learning French.
>
> L: So it's sort of part of ...
>
> ROB: Like, sport people, football's part of them; musicians that's part of them, geographists, whatever, historians, love reading about history, linguists ... like giving up French, what would I do, like?! Do you know what I mean?
>
> L: So it's part of your identity in a really fundamental kind of way.
>
> ROB: Yeah. Yeah. It really is.

Commensurate with the overall viewpoint for Factor A, the discourse around this statement suggests that strong motivation, and positive attitudes and values towards learning the target language are highly salient for Factor A defining participants. Furthermore, the data reveal a strong intrinsic sense of motivation.

Statement 32 – 'I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well'

Factor A loaders placed statement 32 in the 'least like me' category. The themes emerging from the interview data for statement 32 were that support from others is key to successful learning, that independent

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learning is crucial, and the support of a teacher is not necessary. Rob

explained that his support networks were created from a wide range of

sources, including his friends and the Internet, and these mitigated the

potential sense of frustration he might otherwise feel when engaged in

learning activities without a teacher's support:

> ROB: No, that's not like me. Because, erm ... you can get ... I
> can get frustrated on my own when I'm learning because I
> can't work out how to do something but ... it's not because
> the teacher's not there, because I can use the Internet to
> check how to conjugate a verb, or I can ask a French friend
> how you say this, or ... once again like number 30 ['I feel
> unsupported learning French without the direct support of a
> teacher'(-5)] it's not the teacher who I need support off all
> the time ... there's other ways and means of sorting myself
> out.

Peter spoke of feeling that his learning independence was important and

that being able to self-assess and self-evaluate was useful in helping him

gauge what he needed to work on, so that the support of a teacher was not

necessary:

> PETER: Erm ... I get frustrated learning on my own. You see I
> don't think I ... I think because I'm a bit more independent
> that I don't need a teacher there all the time and sometimes
> you just feel like you're better going off and looking at what
> you need to do. It's ... obviously you're going to make
> mistakes in class and things and they're gonna say you have
> to look at this, but I think you can identify that anyway coz if
> you're trying to have a conversation, say in French, then you
> know what you've got to work on. I don't feel like I have to
> have someone sitting with me all the time saying 'learn this,
> learn this, learn this'.

The strong critical reflection demonstrated by these learners in terms of

their own role in guiding and directing their learning is a salient aspect of

the Factor A viewpoint. The learners describe what Pemberton and Cooker

(Pemberton & Cooker, forthcoming) construe as a 'strong' form of self-

directed learning: one in which learners' already existing autonomy is

exercised.

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8.3.3.2 Rank -4

Statement 31 – 'Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored'

Factor A loaders ranked statement 31 at -4 – low in the idealised array – suggesting that their experiences of learning in an autonomous learning environment had not led them to consider the process of reflection boring. In interviews, they talked about the benefits that reflection offered them: it is interesting, and makes the process of language learning more concrete and more active:

> ROB: 'Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored' [#31 (-4)]. Which it doesn't because when you're reflecting on your learning, you're only making that learning more concrete in you, because it's interesting to reflect on what you've learned, to check whether you actually have learned it and whether you have remembered it, or whether you think 'oh yeah I know that now. I know how to make this sentence'. Do you know what I mean? If you get bored of reflecting on learning languages, then you shouldn't do it because it's all part of it, you're always using what you've already learned.

It is possible that here Rob was confusing reflecting on learning with recycling of learning, although later in the interview, when he was talking about his cognitive reaction to feedback, Rob seemed to be acknowledging the importance of reflection when he said: "[...] I've already talked about that in a way by reflecting on the language learning, because when you get feedback it makes you learn better".

Ron seemed to suggest that reflection is a natural process, and one that perhaps it is easy to engage in excessively:

> RON: ... and think about my ... maybe a problem is sometime I think too much! [...] At least I think reflecting ... I always think of for example the speech and how I ... what I said and what mistake I had or the speech ... how I can improve. How I can improve about the writing. How to improve the process and to be more efficient or even time saving – efficient, and how to make it more smooth [...] So I won't feel bored.

Huan explained

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I don't feel bored. Because I am active.

The Factor A learners' perspectives on the process of reflection are all positive and focus on their desire to improve the efficiency of their language learning which is characteristic of the Factor A mode of autonomy. Interestingly, only one other viewpoint, that which has been interpreted as the 'love of language learning' mode of autonomy, ranked statement 31 in a salient position – also negative at -5, thus supporting the notion that the ability to reflect is part of the make-up of effective language learners.

Statement 30 – 'I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher'

Statement 30 generated three emergent themes from the interview data: 1) that while most of the time Factor A learners did not experience negative emotions when not receiving direct support from a teacher, this did depend on what was being learned; 2) that independent study skills are important for lifelong learning; and 3) that learning in a classroom under the guidance of a teacher is just one of the types of learning that these students engage in, and thus when a teacher is not providing direct support it has minimal impact. These themes are similar to those connected with statement 32 ('I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well' [-5**]), which is a distinguishing statement at the $p > 0.01$ level. Indeed three out of five statements ranked at the lower end of the continuum relate to the perceived role of the teacher, and emphasise the notion held within this viewpoint that a teacher is not necessary.

Helen explained that for her it depended on what was being learned. She required more teacher support for what she called 'academic work' (it is

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not clear what she means by 'academic work' but previously in the interview she had distinguished between reading as recreational and 'university work') but reading in French was not something she felt she required the support of a teacher for:

> HELEN: [...] I feel like I don't really need support if it's something like I said, like reading [...] Coz erm ... yeah I don't feel I really need support in that. It depends if it's academic work then I'd feel unsupported.

Qiong placed statement 30 in the -5 position. For her, being able to learn without the direct support of a teacher had wider implications for (her) life more generally:

> QIONG: I don't think ... teacher can support us I don't think because people have to be independent in the school or in the future and they have to ... we have to study how to be independent by ourself not by the teacher.

Peter ranked statement 30 in the -4 position, together with several other statements which all referred to the role of the teacher in the learning process. Peter's explanation for the rankings is a very pragmatic one; that teachers are important but do not represent "the whole of my learning":

> PETER: I mean it is important. Don't get me wrong. You have to have a certain amount of contact with teachers. And it's important to get that. But I don't think it's the whole of my learning. Do you know what I mean?

Carl, who ranked statement 30 in the -3 position, explained that rather than feeling unsupported when he had no direct teacher support, he felt he was able to learn faster and more confidently, which contributed to his successful learning of three languages:

> CARL: [...] I think without the direct support of a teacher you can study the language in a much faster pace, or you know, I can study much more confidently and that's why I'm successful like this. Yeah.

Overall, the discourse surrounding statement 30 suggests that Factor A defining participants do not need the support of a teacher in their language learning, and in fact working with a teacher may even inhibit their progress. Further evidence for this is found in the positioning of statement 25 which is discussed below.

Statement 25 – 'Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy'

Many Factor A loaders explained their ranking of statement 25 and statement 30 together, as illustrated above in Peter's comments. The theme emerging for statement 25 was that those participants defining this factor had enough intrinsic motivation not to need the extrinsic motivation provided by a teacher.

Rob ranked statement 25 in the -2 position, and explained that despite the ranking, he finds the structure and form of a more formal teacher-led learning environment helpful:

> ROB: Because, 'learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy' [#25 (-2)], you see I wouldn't do a lot of the things I do if it WASN'T for the teacher telling me to do them, in a way [...] Like assignments and stuff especially like, if they didn't matter then I probably wouldn't do them. I'd wanna learn French in the way that I enjoy learning French. Because assignments ... obviously no one likes doing assignments And I can't ... these two, I can't explain why they're there, but they are ... do you know what I mean. *[Rob is referring to statement 25 and statement 38 and talking about why he placed them both lower down in the ranking grid in positions -3 and -2 respectively].*
>
> L: No. That makes sense to me. So with both of them you're basically saying that ...
>
> ROB: I DO need it a little bit ... help from the teacher ...
>
> L: ... yeah, having that structure of a class and a course is useful for you to progress ...
>
> ROB: ... to frame your ... yeah

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L: Yeah. Even though you are very motivated, nevertheless.

ROB: Yeah.

Overall, Factor A loaders are focused on their language learning and have enough intrinsic motivation not to need the 'push' from a teacher.

8.3.3.3 Statements ranked lower in Factor A than in other factors

Table 8.4 shows the four statements which are ranked lower in Factor A than in other factors. Two of the statements were ranked at -3, one at -1 and one at 0. Statement 9 and 17 were discussed in detail in the post-sort interviews by the participants and these are elaborated on below using the interview data.

Statement 9 – 'I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language]' and Statement 17 – 'I'm better at finding good people to learn with'

Statement 9 was ranked at the -3 ranking for Factor A, whereas for other factors it varied sharply between -2 and +3. Statement 9 is also a significantly distinguishing statement at the .01 level, indicating that the placement of this statement in the idealised array was statistically different for this factor in comparison with other factors.

Peter attributed his low ranking of this statement to the perceived lack of community in his learning environment. He understood the importance of group work and collaboration for successful language learning as he had attended a high school which had specialist school status (a school which specialises in a particular area of the curriculum and is funded, in part, by private sponsorship) for its emphasis on collaborative learning. However, at university, Peter felt he did not have the same opportunities for collaboration. He explained his reluctance to ask others to help him with his French as stemming from the fact that he and his classmates did not yet

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know each other very well, as at the time of interview they were only four

months into their degree course:

> L: It's interesting for me that you have this one here. 'I'm
> more likely to ask others to help me with my French' [#9 (-
> 3)]. You've put that as being towards the end of least like
> you, and yet when we were talking before and you were
> talking about your collaborative learning at school and
> everything it sounded as if you …

> […]

> PETER: Yeah since coming to university this is yeah.

> L: Right OK.

> PETER: Obviously I've only known these … my classmates for
> like three or four months […] So I think I'd still … I would if I
> was with my old classmates. If there was more of a … you
> know … if you're a lot closer to them. I mean I think that – in
> a few years if you ask me this it would be way over here [at
> the other end of the ranking grid].

> […]

> L: So you don't quite have the community or something at
> the moment?

> PETER: No, not at all. I don't think it's the same at university
> as it was at school. It's good different but it's also bad, sort
> of thing.

Ron simply didn't feel a need to ask others to help him with his English:

> RON: And … [#9] 'I'm more likely to ask others to help me
> with my English' (-4) … well I think that I had a lot of
> communication with others so perhaps it's not quite
> necessary to ask more.

The lack of need of a social dimension to autonomous language learning is

evident in the placing of these statements, and is in keeping with the

previously discussed lack of need of teacher support for Factor A loaders.

In fact the Factor A viewpoint is somewhat ambivalent to the role of others

in the learning process. This is evidenced further by the positioning of

statement 17 (I'm better at finding good people to learn with) which was

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ranked at -3 in the idealised array, compared to a range from −2 to +3 in the idealised arrays for other factors. Only one participant Helen, commented on statement 17 during her post-sort interview:

> HELEN: Let's see. Yes, I think 'I'm better at finding good people to learn with' [#17 (-2)] because now at uni there's much more people ... many more people who are studying French because at school there was only one girl and me ... and I who were actually studying French at A level ...
>
> [...]
>
> L: Wow that's really amazing for me ... so few people ... yeah ... wow. OK. So now you have more people to sort of ... there's more choice.
>
> HELEN: Oh yeah. Absolutely.

Helen's explanation of her ranking of this item suggests that she agreed with the statement, in other words that she was better at finding good people to learn with, and thus suggests that her ranking of this item at -2 was attributable to it being like her, just less saliently so, than other statements she ranked more positively towards 'more like me'. This is borne out by Helen's report that her personal mid-point or zero column, where the value of statements moved from being 'most like me' to 'least like me' was at -3. In other words, Helen placed cards she felt were 'less like me' only in column -3 to column -5 of the ranking grid.

8.3.4 Factor A: Distinguishing statements

Finally, in this analysis of Factor A, the remaining distinguishing statements listed in Table 8.4 (35 and 49) and not discussed above are analysed. Neither of these statements was discussed in detail by Factor A loaders in the post-sort interviews. Neither statement was particularly remarkable in its positioning; rather they are 'distinguishing' in that the chances of them appearing in these rankings is significant compared to the positioning of the same statements in other factors; however, neither statement is

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noteworthy in its ranking because of its extreme positioning nor because it is ranked higher or lower than in other factors.

Both of these statements, ranked in the neutral area of the array, suggest that the participants loading on this viewpoint have less of a self-centred focus on themselves, in contrast to the 'Independent' viewpoint. This is further suggested by the ranking of statements 4, 24 and 36 at the 0 rank in the idealised array. All of these are ranked at +3 or higher in the Independent viewpoint.

8.4 Factor B: 'Oozing confidence'

Factor B has an eigenvalue of 3 and explains 10% of the study variance. Five participants load significantly on this factor. Two are Japanese; one is a student from Mainland China living in Hong Kong; and two are British. The breakdown of demographic information relating to these participants is given in Appendix F. A simplified version is replicated in Table 8.5 below for ease of reference.

Table 8.5: Simplified demographic information for participants loading significantly on Factor B

Participant	Gender	Level of study	First language	Languages learning
Sally	f	Postgraduate (MEd)	Mandarin	English, Cantonese
Chihiro	f	Undergraduate (Year 4)	Japanese	English, Spanish
Kenji	m	Undergraduate (Year 3)	Japanese	English
Simon	m	Undergraduate (Year 1)	English	German, Italian
Eleanor	f	Undergraduate (Year 1)	English	French, German, Spanish

8.4.1 Overview

Factor B defining participants are both male and female, include postgraduate and undergraduate students, and are learning between one and three languages. They come from a variety of backgrounds, although none of them are from Hong Kong.

An analysis of the categories of statements in the idealised array (Appendix H) shows several distinct patterns. First, the importance of 'confidence' to this viewpoint: All positively worded statements which are categorised as 'confidence' within the learner autonomy framework, are ranked at 0 or above, with four of the nine statements placed in the top three rankings of +3, +4 and +5. The only other statement categorised as 'confidence' was placed in the -2 rank, but this was negatively worded (I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher. This emphasis on confidence is the defining aspect of this viewpoint, and thus it is this emphasis which provides the designation for this mode of autonomy.

The MLA generic learning outcome of attitudes and values is also significant. Six out of the fourteen statements relating to 'attitudes and values' were ranked in the top three (+5, +4 and +3) positions. In addition, one of the negatively worded *attitudes and values* statements (Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name]) was ranked in the -5 position. This combination suggests that the formation of attitudes and values is a salient aspect of the development of learner autonomy for the oozing confidence viewpoint.

Two of the statements categorised as 'learner control/activity behaviour progression' were placed in the -5 and -4 rankings suggesting that learners who are part of the Oozing Confidence mode of autonomy encounter

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difficulties in changing behaviour and activity in relation to control over learning. This, in turn, suggests a low level of self-regulation.

Lastly, five out of six of the statements categorised as 'metacognitive awareness' within the learner autonomy framework were ranked at +1 or above. This suggests that knowledge and understanding of oneself as a language learner has an impact on this mode of autonomy. The only statement categorised as 'metacognitive awareness' not ranked in the positive half of the grid was statement 44 (I can explain why I use the materials I use) which was ranked at the -1 level. This ranking was consistent with other statements relating to learning materials including books, worksheets and computer-based resources. This suggests that the materials used in the learning process are not of particular significance to Factor B loaders.

Having looked at categories of statements, individual statements which are meaningful in the interpretation of Factor B are shown below in Table 8.6 and are highlighted in the idealised Q-sort for Factor B (Appendix H). Factor B is explored by examining these statements in more detail, although due to space constraints only the most significant are reported on here. Data from the qualitative interviews with four out of the five participants who loaded on to Factor B are incorporated into this analysis. The fifth defining participant, Sally, was unable to give a post-sort interview due to time constraints.

Table 8.6: Factor B interpretation overview

	Statement	Number	Rank	z-score	Difference in z-scores compared to next highest/ lowest†
Top five items	I feel more likely to have a successful life.	41	+5	+2.076	
	I believe I will be more likely to use [my language] well in the future.	21	+5	+2.058	+0.018
	I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university.	42	+4	+1.567	+0.491
	I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people.	34**	+4	+0.184	+0.184
	I have more of a desire to learn [language name].‡	1	+4		
Items sorted higher than other factors	It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language] learning.	27	+3	+1.118	
	I have a better understanding of myself as a learner.	40*	+3	+1.106	
	I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name].	19*	+2	+0.961	
	I can analyse my [language] needs better.	14	+2	+0.601	
	I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others.	20	0	+0.167	
Items sorted lower than other factors	I'm more active about learning [my language].	2	0	-0.216	
	I'm more likely to use the type of resources (books, DVDs, online materials, etc.) which match my learning style.	8*	-1	-0.231	
	Learning at my own pace means I am learning more successfully.	43	-2	-0.789	
	I'm more likely to make time to learn.	23	-2	-0.850	
	I think more carefully about what I want to learn.	26	-3	-1.014	
	I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn.	49	-3	-1.297	
Bottom five items	Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [my language].	28	-5	-1.941	n/a
	I can organise my learning time more effectively.	16	-5	-1.833	-0.058
	I am more self-disciplined.	39	-4	-1.833	-0.05
	I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct.	33	-4	-1.385	-0.448
	I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name].	7	-4	-1.373	-0.012

*Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .05$
**Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .01$

† Shown only for top five and bottom five items

‡Consensus statement - not included in detailed factor interpretation (section 8.2.7)

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8.4.2 Factor B: Higher ranking statements

The highest ranking statements for Factor B are shown in Table 8.6.

8.4.2.1 Rank +5

The two items ranked in the +5 position of the idealised array for Factor B – *I feel more likely to have a successful life* and *I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future* – are both future-oriented and suggest positive representations of future selves (Dörnyei, 2009). This interpretation is indicated by the very small difference in the *z-scores* (0.018) for the two items ranked at +5. In both cases, these representations of future selves are expressed in relation to future jobs and careers and, specifically, how their career would impact upon their language learning.

Statement number 41 – 'I feel more likely to have a successful life'

When asked about the placing of this statement, Factor B defining participants suggested that the notion they would have a more successful life, was driven by experiences they had had abroad, the desire to go abroad, or consideration of their future job prospects.

Eleanor talked about statement 41 in terms of the positive impact of her previous experiences abroad, especially with regard to confidence:

> ELEANOR: ... going away and stuff has made me feel confident and that I can achieve stuff I didn't think I could.

Whereas Chihiro explained that she thought she would have a more successful life because of her strong ambition to study abroad as part of her future as a 'great banker':

> CHIHIRO: [...] I haven't studied abroad before [...] but you know [...] I can still study abroad after I've worked some years [...] I want to work for longer, in the company. In the bank. And if I ... yeah ... you know, great banker, I can study

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abroad. So ... I want to keep studying English [...] I will go somewhere and learn about ... you know maybe business or something?

Chihiro had a strong vision of her future ideal self (Dörnyei, 2009) which included her identity as a competent English user.

Simon believed that autonomous language learning had led him to feel he was more likely to have a successful life. He understood that the language itself and his degree qualification would result in a better job:

> SIMON: [...] And I think that'll help me a lot in the future, particularly with this degree because I don't think there's that many people who erm ... who choose to do language degrees, particularly German at the moment, and for that reason I think it will help me in the future. Definitely.

Factor B loaders, therefore, have a strong instrumental motivation towards learning their target language. The belief that they will have a more successful life as a result of autonomous language learning is connected closely to 1) their past experiences living and studying in a foreign country, and 2) representations of their ideal future selves (Dörnyei, 2009) as they envisage studying and working abroad in future.

Statement 21 – 'I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future'

Kenji had a strong image that his future self would involve using English in his job as a translator and explained why he felt that his language learning would impact upon his career:

> KENJI: I'll talk about 21 ['I believe I will be more likely to use English well in the future' (+5)] first. As I said, I want to be an interpreter in future [...] so naturally I want to believe I will be able to use English in my future. [...] Yeah. Strongly. I really want to believe so.

Simon, a first year student of German, envisioned his future self as a successful user of his target language:

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> SIMON: OK. Well at this end, I've put that I'm likely to use my German well in the future and the reason I think this is because obviously with doing four years of German and having a year abroad as well, I think that'll definitely help me to improve quite a lot from where I am now …

Chihiro viewed her ideal future self as working abroad and thus her belief that she would use English well in the future was connected to this:

> CHIHIRO: So maybe … in future I will work in other countries so that's why I put 21 here.

Participants who load on Factor B express the belief that they will be more likely to use the language they are learning well in the future as a result of autonomous language learning. In addition, these participants situate their future ideal selves as being closely connected to the target language culture. Given the proximity in ranking of statements 41 ('I feel more likely to have a successful life') and 21 ('I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future'), both of which were contextualised by the study abroad experiences of the participants, it would seem that one of the underlying beliefs of this factor is in the importance of overseas study.

8.4.2.2 Rank +4

Statement 42 – 'I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university'

Participants loading on Factor B explained their ranking of this statement as due to their motivation to continue learning, which was often career-related, their ambition to study abroad in future, and their desire to be able to communicate more naturally with family abroad.

Simon noted that he hoped he'd be able to learn more after he had graduated from university so as not to waste the skills he had acquired over his four years of study:

> Well, I've put 'I feel more able to continue learning German after university', erm … because I think even after then I wouldn't want to, sort of finish my degree and then sort of not use any of what I've learnt over the four years, so I think I'd like to think I'd hopefully be doing something which involved erm … using as many of the skills that I've learnt over the degree, and that means, erm … hopefully I'll be able to learn more after I've finished.

Chihiro explained her positioning of statement 42 in terms of being able to communicate more effectively with her step-family who lived abroad:

> CHIHIRO: And 'I feel more able to continue learning English after I leave university' [#42] coz er like I told you I have my step-family and friends from other countries so I want to keep studying English and some day maybe in my step-family I can communicate without … no problem. Because sometimes we have a misunderstanding.

In addition, Chihiro believed her autonomous language learning will lead to a successful life in general (section 8.4.2.1), but in particular, her interview evidenced that she is hoping to benefit from the Japanese system of taking time off to study overseas. In order to get this reward for good work, she would have to continue her language studies whilst working. Such an employee demonstrates dedication and commitment to their company.

For Factor B loaders, therefore, the perception that they will be able to continue learning the language after they have finished at university is centred around notions of career ambitions and the motivation to develop human relationships through more effective communication.

Statement 34 – 'I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people'

In the idealised Factor array for Factor B, statement 34 is sorted at the +4 rank. Factor B was the only factor where this statement was placed in a positive ranking. In other factors, it occurs at the 0, -1 and -5 ranks. The ranking of statement 34 in the +4 position suggests the distinctiveness of this viewpoint for Factor B.

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Participants loading on Factor B indicated that an outcome of autonomous language learning was that they had developed a propensity for risk-taking and were less worried about making mistakes in front of other people. Furthermore, they attributed the ranking of this statement – at the +4 level – to what could be interpreted as a constructivist view of learning, in which they viewed the making of mistakes as a positive learning experience.

Eleanor explained how she is often one of the first to speak and break the silence when a teacher asks a question in class. She attributes this to her understanding that learning happens through making mistakes and acknowledges that by making mistakes herself she is helping others by giving them the confidence to do the same:

> ELEANOR: [...] 'I'm less worried about making mistakes in front of other people' [#34 (+5)]. I think if you ask anyone in my class they'd agree with that coz I just ... like I'm one of them people that will just give an answer and if it's wrong it's wrong and just carry on. [...] I'm usually one of the first ... like you know if there's like the teacher asks questions then there's silence, I'm usually one of the first to be like 'OK I'll break the silence and just ask something'. [...] I think it's like since A level. I think the thing is I've made SO many mistakes! [laughing] ... that I've realised like ... you carry on and like people like ... you do some things that are really good so that no matter how many mistakes you make it doesn't really ... and like just my personality I'm quite ... I can come out with quite some ditzy things so I'm used to people laughing at me being like 'Oh my God I can't believe you thought that!' But then like I know personally that I'm capable ...kind of [...] so I don't really mind. And also you're always learning ... if you make a mistake you always learn off it [...] and it gives other people the confidence to contribute and ... they'll be like 'Oh she's made a mistake so never mind if I do ...' so ...

Kenji also acknowledged the power of feeling free to make mistakes in the classroom and how, by doing so, students are able to support each other through the learning process:

> KENJI: OK. Ah! 34 says, 'I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people' (+4). [...] Actually I don't

care about making mistakes, because everyone make
mistake. Even teachers make mistake ...

L: Sure. Especially teachers! [laughing]

KENJI: [laughing] ... and it's really impossible for student not
to make mistake. Everyone make mistake. It cannot be
helped and no one can avoid it. Yeah. So ... I don't know
what others are thinking but when my friends make mistake
in front of everyone I don't care because I also make
mistake. [...] So I cannot say ... I cannot speak ill of others
because my English is also very poor. So we study together.
We cover our each strong point and each weak point so I
think ... mmm ... it's really important to evaluate each other's
strong points and give advice about their each weak points.
[...] So actually as I said before, I don't care about making
mistake.

In summary, defining participants for Factor B are prepared to take risks
with making mistakes in order to develop their own language skills,
demonstrating a high degree of self-confidence, and to support others in
their language development by making them feel less self-conscious about
making mistakes.

8.4.2.3 Statements ranked higher in Factor B than in other factors

Table 8.6 shows the five statements which are ranked higher in Factor B
than in other factors. The positions of these statements in the idealised
array range from +3 to 0. It is worth noting that all five statements relate
to the development of metacognitive awareness which is one of the
identifying features of the autonomy mode which is derived from the
analysis of Factor B.

8.4.3 Factor B: Lower ranking statements

The lowest ranking statements for Factor B are shown in Table 8.6.

8.4.3.1 Rank -5

Statement 28 – 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [name of language]'

Participants loading on Factor B ranked statement 28 in the -5 position; thus, indicating that 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [name of language]' is least like them. Their reasons for this ranking varied. Some reacted with surprise to the statement, as if abandoning language learning had never crossed their minds; whereas, others may have entertained thoughts about giving up in the past, but attributed their current determination not to give up as being motivated by visiting countries where their target language was spoken.

For those learners who responded as if giving up had never crossed their minds, they spoke as if language learning was part of their identity, and was an aspect which almost defined who they considered themselves to be. As Chihiro explained:

> CHIHIRO: 28? 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning English'. Oh coz simply I like English so ... I just like learning languages, so [...] It's simply my hobby I think.

The comment 'It's simply my hobby I think' may seem to be a throw away comment, but Chihiro is Japanese, and for the Japanese, hobbies are a central part of their lifestyles – having a hobby is often considered a way for a person to gain a sense of individuality. For those Japanese in their twenties, hobbies are often considered to be their *ikigai* – the thing that makes life worth living (Mathews, 1996) and Chihiro, as a 4th year university student, will be in this age group. When she says 'It's simply my hobby' she is making a comment about the centrality of learning English to her life and her identity.

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Simon describes his ranking of statement 28 in the -5 position as being due to having an intrinsic motivation to learn German and, like Chihiro, also suggests that German is fundamental to his sense of self:

> L: So how about this one? 'Sometimes I feel like giving up German'.
>
> SIMON: Well I've always been motivated to study it and I don't think that's changed. [...] Over the last couple of months. It's ... to be honest I don't really know what else ... if I wasn't interested in this I don't know what else really would interest me so ....

The second theme which emerges from responses to statement 28 is from participants who are motivated not to give up learning the target language by their drive to have conversations with others in that language, which in turn was often prompted by visits to countries where the target language was spoken. Eleanor explained how her drive to learn German increased after A levels because she realised she had communicative ability and was able to interact with others using German:

> ELEANOR: 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning German'. Erm ... I do very occasionally, but not ... I DID a lot ... that was true two ... three? ... two years ago that was very true. I felt like giving up completely at A level. But then since going there and finding out that I can actually ... like I might not have done well in the exams at A level but I can actually like get by and have conversations and so I don't really feel like giving up anymore. And I'm a lot more ... coz I got so close to having con ... like proper conversations with people, I really just want to go that extra bit and like get to where I want to be so I don't feel like giving up very often.

Later, she makes a comparison between statement 1 and statement 28, painting them in contrast to each other, and again attributing her motivation to learn German to her time spent in the country:

> ELEANOR: Erm ... 'I have more of a desire to learn German'. Definitely! Since going to Germany. Like that's like the opposite of this one [#28 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning German'] really like I felt like giving up before but like I've got so much drive to like want to learn more about German.

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L: Right. So you feel that that really comes from your three months in Germany?

ELEANOR: Definitely. Definitely.

For Factor B defining participants then, statement 28 is suggestive of a strong intrinsic and integrative motivation and a developing sense of identity as a speaker of the target language.

Statement 16 – 'I can organise my learning time more effectively'

Factor B defining participants did not consider that autonomous language learning had made them more effective organisers of their learning time, and this was attributed to a lack of discipline and poor time management skills.

Eleanor was clear that despite her best efforts, and her realisation that time management was important for language learners, she was simply not able to work within a time structure she knew was important:

> ELEANOR: 'I can organise my learning time more effectively' [laughing]. I really can't. I'm not very ... I'm not good at time management! [laughing]. It's not a strong point. I just kind of ... whenever I've got ... like at uni whenever I've got bits of spare time I do try and do a bit more work coz like you just have to knock away at it and when you've not got anything to do you should be doing something else, because there's ALWAYS more to learn, with a language, that's the problem! [...] But I just ... get distracted, or sometimes it'll get really late and I'll suddenly be in the mood to do it and like ... I don't know I'm just not very good with my time. I don't ... like I like structure but then I can get there and I'll like put this hour aside to do it and then I'll be like 'No, I don't feel like it' [...] So it's not very good!

Similarly, Simon also attributed his ranking of statement 16 to a lack of self-discipline:

> SIMON: The top one, about organising my learning time, is linked to not really being more self-disciplined.

Chihiro had a different interpretation of what 'organising my learning time more effectively' meant, and interpreted it as 'being pushed'. Her comments suggest that effective organisation of one's own learning time necessitates a certain self-discipline or self-control which constituted an internal pressure which she was keen to avoid:

> CHIHIRO: Because I like learning English in my pace. [...]
> And that's why I put this card ... [unintelligible] ... Yes. [...] I
> don't like to be pushed [...] About learning English.

8.4.3.2 Rank -4

Statement 39 – 'I am more self-disciplined'

The connection between lack of effective time management and self-discipline is emphasised further by the fact that Factor B defining participants ranked statement number 39 ('I am more self-disciplined') in the -4 position (towards 'least like me'), with a very small difference in *z-score* of -0.05 between statements 16 ('I can organise my learning time more effectively') and 39.

Indeed, Chihiro brought together both self-discipline and time management in her explanation of the ranking, suggesting in fact that she is 'lazy', but she was comfortable with this view of herself as a learner:

> CHIHIRO: I ... yeah ... even though I'm thinking I will achieve
> my goal, I can't ... you know ... wake up in the morning, I
> can't make time for studying [...] Sometimes I admit I'm
> lazy. [laughing]
>
> L: OK.
>
> CHIHIRO: But maybe I like it that way.
>
> L: Right. Right.
>
> CHIHIRO: More relaxed.

In contrast, for Simon, the reason for a lack of self-discipline was attributed to difficulties in concentrating and taking his language learning seriously:

> SIMON: The reason I think that is because ... er ... whilst I've said I'm sort of better at ... some of my techniques are better. I don't think er ...I don't think I'm maybe as serious a lot of the time as I should be about it. [...] And sometimes I kind of find ... sort of have problems concentrating if I'm learning for quite a long time so ... that's why I put that.

This sentiment of not being serious was also present for Chihiro:

> CHIHIRO: [...] actually I take a Spanish class only once a week. So I'm not really serious about it!

It is not clear from the context what Simon and Chihiro mean by 'serious' – but their meaning might be reflected in the belief that they feel more relaxed about learning their language – evidenced by the ranking of statement 35 ('I feel more relaxed about learning [language name]') at the +3 level.

Statement 33 – 'I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct'

Participants loading on Factor B ranked statement 33 at -4 towards the 'least like me' position. They revealed a distinct openness about learning from other learners and demonstrated the constructivist view of learning seen with regard to statement 34 ('I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people') in section 8.4.2.2. Eleanor spoke about the power of collaborative learning in terms of learning about strategies from other students and learning from the mistakes of others. She did not seem to feel concerned that other students would be of little help because of their language proficiency level:

> ELEANOR: Erm ... I put 'I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm not learning German because I don't know if they are correct' because personally even if they're not correct it's always interesting to get like their view on how they got there or why they think that. And ... normally part of what they're saying will be correct and part of what I'm saying will be correct and it's just ... sometimes it helps you to learn from their mistakes or equally they're correct and I'm not so it helps me to learn how they got there. [...] And like also, like if you ask them, you can also learn how they taught themselves it, because sometimes their method of learning vocab or something's more effective than yours.

Chihiro ranked the statement in the -3 position and differentiated between asking friends who were native speakers of the target language and her Japanese friends, and although clearly happy to ask both, she expressed a preference for asking those friends who were native speakers to help her with her language learning:

> CHIHIRO: I'm sure some things that I feel that way I ask my friends about or to make sure with my English is right, but I know Japanese ... like Japanese friends they don't have perfect English so sometimes I ask my Japanese friends about English but I also ask my friends from America or UK or something – English countries ...

These perspectives demonstrate an optimistic approach to working with others and a willingness to be adaptable and flexible in their approaches to learning.

Statement 7 – 'I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name]'

Despite the flexibility in terms of working with others shown in relation to statement 33, participants who loaded on Factor B did not express a willingness to be flexible or experimental in using learning strategies. They did not consider that autonomous language learning had resulted in them using more varied strategies for their language learning, and Participants 20 and 30 both explained that this was simply because they like to use their usual strategies when learning their target language:

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KENJI: [...] I have some strategies but I use ... not I don't use more varied strategies when I learn English just I use usual one.

ELEANOR: [...] But erm 'I use more varied strategies when I learn German'. I don't really think I do coz I kind of ... I get comfortable with like certain strategies and then I just kind of stick to them [...] like I'm open to suggestions but now I've kind of got my way of doing it so ... I'll try new ones but I usually revert back to like how I originally ...

8.4.3.3 Statements ranked lower in Factor B than in other factors

Table 8.6 shows the six statements which are ranked lower in Factor B than in other Factors. Two of the statements were ranked at -3, two at -2, and one each at -1 and 0.

Factor B loaders attributed the low rank of statement 49 ('I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn') to a lack of motivation, self-discipline and self-awareness. Simon suggested that while he finds his degree course in German motivating in general terms, he can sometimes struggle to maintain the habit of studying:

SIMON: [...] I think again that's just the motivation thing about not being as self-disciplined. The reason for that is because a lot of the time I don't have a lot of motivation ... I mean ...I'm not saying I'm not motivated for the course because I really enjoy the course, but just sometimes I find if I'm learning for too long it can get a bit tedious so ... so that's it basically.

Eleanor spoke candidly about her lack of self-awareness and also suggests that getting herself in the mood to learn is tied to self-discipline and motivational issues.

ELEANOR: 'I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn' [#49 (-4)]. I still ... I don't really know how to do that ... like some ... it just ha ... I know I work best in the mornings, but that's about it. Because sometimes I wake up ... like yesterday I had such a productive day, and then other days I can have the whole day free and just literally do like one piece of work and it'll take me like all day and I don't know what it is that gets me in that mood. Like I still haven't worked that out. All I do know is that I do work best in the mornings.

Statement 8 – 'I'm more likely to use the type of resources (books, DVDs, online materials, etc.) which match my learning style'

This statement is noticeable for its relatively low ranking within the Factor B idealised array, compared with idealised arrays for other factors. Statement 8 was ranked at the -1 level for Factor B, where in other factors it was ranked in a positive position at +4, +3 or +2. In Factor B, statement 8 is distinguishing at the .05 level of significance.

In the interviews, it was unclear whether participants loading on this factor were discussing their *use* of the resources exemplified in the statement (books, DVDs, and online materials) or whether they were considering the extent to which they used resources which 'matched their learning style'. For example, Kenji, commented:

> KENJI: And 8. As I said. yeah DVDs or this kind of resources doesn't suit me. Of course reading a books fit my studying but DVDs or ... I never really sure whether podcasts is really useful but other online materials I cannot say they really fit me.
>
> L: Right. Right. Mmmm. So ... so ... if for example ... but still you DO use the type of resources that match your learning style?
>
> KENJI: Yeah yeah yeah.
>
> L: So you think that podcasts and YouTube in particular ...
>
> KENJI: [unintelligible] materials fit me. But in general DVD or other online materials doesn't fit me.

Although Kenji does not talk about a specific learning style, his comments are indicative of learner preferences, and Kenji's use of the phrase 'fit me' (e.g. 'online materials doesn't fit me') suggests that he has an understanding of a style of learning, if not the more formalised learning styles known from a research perspective.

8.5 Factor C: 'Socially oriented and enthusiastic'

Factor C has an eigenvalue of 2.7 and explains 9% of the study variance.

Five participants load significantly on this factor (Table 8.7). All the

defining participants are female undergraduates. Four are Japanese

students and one is a British student. The breakdown of demographic

information relating to these participants is given in Appendix F. A

simplified version is replicated in Table 8.7 below for ease of reference.

**Table 8.7: Simplified demographic information for participants
loading significantly on Factor C**

Participant	Gender	Level of study	First language	Languages learning
Emiko	f	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Japanese	Indonesian, English
Saori	f	Undergraduate (Year 3)	Japanese	English
Momoko	f	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Japanese	English
Ruri	f	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Japanese	English
Agnes	f	Undergraduate (Year 1)	English	German, French

8.5.1 Overview

It is interesting to note that four out of five of the Factor C defining

participants are Japanese, and that all are undergraduate students. Three

out of five participants are learning only one language, and the remaining

two participants are learning two languages. This is in contrast to Factor A,

in which all loading participants were learning two languages or more.

It is noticeable from analysing the idealised array that, in terms of the

categorisation of statements according to the learner autonomy conceptual

framework and the MLA generic learning outcomes framework, there is

only minor patterning within this factor. All categories of statements are

spread across the idealised array, with arguably only one meaningful

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cluster of four statements – categorised as 'enjoyment/inspiration/ creativity' (EIC) within the generic learning outcomes model – positioned in the upper half of the array in the +1 and +2 columns, with a fifth EIC statement in the +5 rank. Within the MLA generic learning outcomes framework, enjoyment, inspiration and creativity as a result of successful learning includes 'innovative thoughts, actions or things, and exploration, experimentation and making' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004, p. 165) and it is this notion of exploration and experimentation in the language learning process which is redolent in the Factor C array, seen through statements such as number 29 ('I have more courage to try different things when I learn [language name]') and number 46 ('I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [language name]').

The individual statements regarded as being meaningful for the interpretation of Factor C are shown below in the Factor C interpretation overview (Table 8.8), and are highlighted in the idealised Q-sort (Appendix H). Factor C is explored in greater depth below by examining these statements in more detail and illustrating the rankings using data from the qualitative interviews with the five participants who loaded on Factor C.

Table 8.8: Factor C interpretation overview

	Statement	Number	Rank	z-score	Difference in z-scores compared to next highest/ lowest†
Top five items	I try harder to find opportunities to use [my language]	5	+5	+1.960	n/a
	I enjoy learning [my language] more because I can learn in ways that interest me.	36	+5	+1.901	+0.059
	I'm more likely to use the type of resources which match my learning style.	8	+4	+1.842	+0.059
	I have more of a desire to learn [language name].‡	1	+4		
	I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making.	51	+4	+1.290	+0.327
Items sorted higher than other factors	I'm better at choosing a place to learn.	48	+3	+1.079	
Bottom five items	I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [my language] because I don't know if they are correct.	33	-5	-1.979	n/a
	Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy.	25	-5	-1.899	-0.08
	I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher.	30	-4	-1.506	-0.393
	I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others.	20	-4	-1.362	-0.144
	I'm more likely to review what I have learned.	47	-4	-1.360	-0.002
Items sorted lower than other factors	I can describe better how I will learn in the future.	13	-3	-1.117	
	I'm more likely to create new strategies to help me learn.	52	-3	-1.011	
	I can analyse my [language] needs better.	14**	-2	-0.915	
	I feel more likely to have a successful life.	41*	-2	-0.823	
Other significantly distinguishing statements	I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [my language].	46*	+1	+0.369	
	It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn.	4*	-1	-0.343	
	I am more self-disciplined.	39**	-2	-0.722	

*Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .05$
**Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .01$
†Shown only for top five and bottom five items
‡Consensus statement - not included in detailed factor interpretation (section 8.2.7)

8.5.2 Factor C: Higher ranking statements

The highest ranking statements for Factor C (Table 8.8) suggest a social emphasis in autonomous language learning and illustrate the focus on enjoyment and creativity discussed in the overview above.

8.5.2.1 Rank +5

Statement number 5 –'I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]'

For Factor C participants, one of the most high-ranking non-linguistic learning outcomes of learning in an autonomous learning environment was that they try harder to find opportunities to use the language they are learning. When they talked about this aspect in the post-sort interview, they focused on social aspects of those opportunities. Frequently, in their interviews, they talked about seeking opportunities to speak or learn with others. For example, Emiko ranked statement 5 at the +5 level, and explained:

> EMIKO: [...] At night I work my friend. In dorm [...] So
> there's a friend in my dorm.

and Agnes, who sorted the statement at -1, a lower ranking than for the idealised array, explained that because of her lack of confidence, she tried less hard to find opportunities to speak German in the UK than she would in Germany. Nevertheless, she did seek out opportunities to talk with her German friend:

> *Agnes:* I don't really try much harder to find opportunities to
> use German, because like I said before I'm not that confident
> in my German speaking, and I'm really conscious of making
> mistakes. So with Inge, I do it a lot because it's kind of a
> vice versa thing, my grammar isn't great, and she'll help me,
> and she's done it a lot longer than I have so ...

Ruri explained why, for her, statement number 23 ('I'm more likely to make time to learn') which she had ranked +5, and statement number 5 ('I

try harder to find opportunities to use English'), also ranked +5, had

similar social connotations:

> RURI: [...] the biggest ... the biggest goal for me is speaking
> [...] Because communication is important. [...] Yeah. I like
> speaking with people [...] So ... and there are many people ...
> foreign people in Japan so I ... maybe three years ago I went
> to Harajuku with my friend and a foreigner asked me the
> way. I was able to answer in English and I was so happy.

The emphasis on communication and social interaction in the Factor C

autonomy mode might be attributable to the phenomenon that Yashima

(2011) has identified specifically within Japanese learners and calls 'the joy

of communication'. This phenomenon was derived from a data-driven study

in which students explained in interviews how they enjoyed communicating

with teachers, host family, and friends they meet through English speaking

activities (2011b) such as the model united nations (Yashima & Zenuk-

Nishide, 2008). According to Yashima (personal communication, September

9, 2011) many of the students who participated in her study, regardless of

their proficiency level, and the fact that most Japanese learners' motivation

to learn is socially structured through peer pressure, social pressure and

self-imposed pressure, mentioned the joy they experienced in

communicating in English, leading Yashima to believe there is something

inherently enjoyable about communicating if it is conducted in a safe

environment.

The 'joy of communication' construct would appear to have particular

resonance in the present study as all except one of the defining

participants for this mode are Japanese, and Yashima's construct was

identified particularly within Japanese learners. Whilst from a learning

styles interpretation, the emphasis on communication and social interaction

might also point to a more extrovert approach to autonomous language

learning, and this is more difficult to reconcile with the demographic

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formation of this factor: Japanese learners are more known for their

reticence in the language classroom than their extroversion (Harumi, 2011;

Kobayashi, 2011).

Statement number 36 – 'I enjoy learning [language name] more

because I can learn in ways that interest me'

For Factor C participants, one of the NLLOs of autonomous learning was

that learning the language became more enjoyable for them because they

could learn in ways that interest them. The participants who loaded

significantly on this factor reported that they found it particularly

interesting to learn using the Internet, films and music.

> MOMOKO: OK and then number 36 ['I enjoy learning English more because I can learn in ways that interest me'] (+4) I really enjoy BBC Learning English [...] It's really interesting.

> RURI: Yeah so ... studying with music ... so I can find new song and learn English is very good way. It's not boring it's interesting. [...] I like watching movies and ... comedy? [...] I can't live without comedy ... so ... [...] And I think English is cool, and watching movies in English is very good way to study English.

> AGNES: (Reading from card): 'I enjoy learning German more because I can learn in ways that interest me.' Yes, it ties in with DVDs again. It does interest me a lot. Because I just find it entertaining. I don't watch much TV, so I enjoy DVDs on their own in English, as well as German.

The emphasis on discussion of resources around statement 36, and the

juxtaposition of statement 36 (+5) with statement 8 (+4) discussed below,

suggests that the participants who load on Factor C enjoy control over

selection of their own resources, and that they are motivated by

personalising their learning through focusing on resources they find

interesting and appealing.

Overall, the +5 statements in Factor C suggest that people who load on

this factor are motivated through social interaction and by focusing on their

own interests. This intrinsic motivation is a prominent feature of the 'socially oriented and enthusiastic' autonomy mode.

8.5.2.2 Rank +4

Statement number 8 – 'I'm more likely to use the type of resources (books, DVDs, online materials, etc.) which match my learning style'

When discussing statement number 8, the participants who loaded significantly on Factor C focused very little on talking about their learning style and the match with resources, and spoke more about their use of the type of resources given as examples in this statement (i.e. books, DVDs and online materials):

> Yes, I am more likely to use DVDs and online […] Definitely.
> I find it a lot more interesting and I have a lot more
> motivation to watch them. *[Agnes]*

> I like to pick DVDs and online materials. *[Momoko]*

and in her pre-sort interview, Emiko had spoken about watching movies and television dramas in English and Indonesian and how she uses Yahoo! in English instead of Japanese when she is searching online. Because statement 8 (+4) was ranked adjacent to statement 36 (+5), with a difference of only 0.059 in the normalised *z-scores* for these items (the same as the difference in the normalised *z-scores* between the two +5 ranked items), this suggests that in ranking this statement, participants' comments were more about their enjoyment and interest in using books, DVDs and online materials, than explicitly how these resources match their learning style. However, it could be argued that these choices are, in themselves, indicative of learning preferences: although no triangulation data is available concerning Factor C loaders' learning styles, or resource preferences.

Statement 51 – 'I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making'

Factor C participants describe being more likely to learn from mistakes when engaged in autonomous language learning. They describe a greater metalinguistic awareness, and an increased propensity for risk-taking in trying out new aspects of language.

Agnes spoke of how she has more linguistic awareness at university than in her high school days, and how, when she is made aware of mistakes by others, she is able to reflect on them:

> AGNES: Erm … I'm a lot more likely to learn from mistakes or errors, because now I'm a lot more aware of them. […] when people … erm … your tutor or lecturer points them out to you, you take them on board a lot more. So you're being made aware of the mistakes. As I said earlier somewhere … I'm much more likely to take on board and then learn from them, and not do it again. So. Especially when I'm talking with Inge, and she'll point something out. Then I'll take it on board and don't do it again.

Saori explained that she tries to use new language, such as a new sentence structure, even if she does not quite get it right:

> SAORI: So even I make differences I will … I will … stra-gle? [struggle]

and suggested that the mistakes she makes help her to develop her linguistic awareness and drive her to improve her accuracy:

> SAORI: And 51 is er … so if I made a mistake maybe I have to improve my skill …

The strategy of risk-taking, and tolerance of that risk, have long been acknowledged as one of the indications of a good language learner (e.g., Horwitz et al., 1986; Rubin, 1975), and this aspect is a strong feature of the Factor C mode of autonomy profile.

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8.5.2.3 Statements ranked higher in Factor C than in other factors

Statement 48 ('I'm better at choosing a place to learn') was the only statement ranked higher in Factor C than in other factors (Table 8.8). Although it is not a significantly distinguishing statement, it is remarkable for being ranked more highly in the Factor C idealised array (+3), than it is in the idealised arrays for other factors (ranged between -1 and +2).

Certainly, for Factor C loaders, statement 48 seemed to be a highly salient statement and one which two of them felt passionately about, and were able to explain in coherent and understandable ways relating to the comforting level of background noise and the need to avoid distracting factors. Both Saori and Agnes felt that autonomous language learning had allowed them to be better at choosing a place to learn. Neither of them described the places they chose as being traditional learning environments such as self-access learning centres or libraries. Saori specifically pointed out that she does not like 'calm' places and that fast food restaurants where music is played are more conducive as places where she can learn:

> L: What about this one? I'm better at choosing a place to
> learn. Tell me about that one.
>
> SAORI: Ahhh! So maybe this is ... so ... I always studying at
> fast food store [...] Like McDonald, or Mos Burger [...] I don't
> like too much calm calm? place [...] so McDonald or Mos
> Burger is er ... they turn on music.

Earlier she had explained that as her house was far from the university she used her time on the train to *"always read and study"*. For Agnes, on the other hand, it appeared that it was not so much that she sought out background noise, but that she needed to avoid distractions in her room that took her attention away from her work:

> AGNES: I'm very good at choosing a place to learn. [...] As I
> said in here a lot, I get very easily distracted. [...] And I
> know that if I work in my room, whether I'm at uni or home,
> then I won't work. [...] I get distracted by anything in my

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room! [...] So for my A levels, I took my laptop to the bathroom. [...] This isn't ... being serious here, I took my laptop to the bathroom, and I studied in the garage at one point! [...] I studied in my sister's room, I studied in the kitchen, and the dining room, and the living room, on the living room floor. I couldn't study in my room. [...] It's the same absolutely anywhere, it's the same at uni, I can't ... I can study in someone else's room, but I can't study in my room. There's too much around to get distracted by.

L: OK. So that's fascinating. Because I'm guessing that here your accommodation is just one room? [...] So where do you go?

AGNES: [...] if I'm working with other people from different courses then we'll go into one of their bedrooms, or we'll go into the bar when it's shut during the day because it's like another common room for us [...] So either that, or the library, or the [blinded university eating area name]. Coz that's got Internet access all day.

Both Saori and Agnes felt that autonomous learning had made them better at choosing a place to learn, and that this was an aspect of control over their learning environment that had become very important to them. However, this statement also indicated a strong metacognitive awareness in the defining participants: both Saori and Agnes showed a good understanding of the factors which might impact upon their learning: for Saori, too much 'calm' had a detrimental effect on her concentration and for Agnes, the unnamed factors she encountered in her room, which distracted her from her studies. For both participants, their ability to seek out environments which they believed were conducive to achieving their language learning goals can be seen acts of learner control.

8.5.3 Factor C: Lower ranking statements

The lowest ranking statements for Factor C (Table 8.8) indicate an intrinsic motivation for language learning – especially when it is 'fun' – and a holistic, non analytical approach to learning.

8.5.3.1 Rank -5

Statement 33 – 'I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct'

Factor C participants' explanations of statement 33 ranking, suggest that they feel positively about asking other learners for help. When they do so, they may ask just one other trusted friend or peer in their class, but they do have faith in the help they receive, and do not feel frustrated at other learners' potential lack of knowledge.

Ruri is adamant that she has no qualms in asking others for help:

> RURI: Ah! I don't feel frustrated. Asking other person.

Momoko described how she works closely with her 'study buddy':

> L: Do you learn with other people?
>
> MOMOKO: Yeah … I have a good study buddy I think. [...] She's really into American English. [...] She goes to America during the school holiday, like me. Certainly she's good at grammar [...] So I always ask her about that. I just ask her – no one else. [...]

Similarly, Agnes explains how the nature of the relationship is more likely to dictate whether she asks for help than the proficiency of fellow students:

> AGNES: Yeah, when I do ask other people for help, not very often, but when I do I don't really mind asking them [...] Because … the reason I wouldn't have asked in the first place isn't because I wasn't sure if they weren't correct, it would just be because I wouldn't have had that relationship with them, but if I did ask them I wouldn't worry if they were correct or not. Because they're also learning so they might have it right …

These comments suggest a social constructivist approach to learning and, in the case of some learners such as Ruri, who engage native speakers to

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support them in their learning, may also be indicative of the intrinsic 'joy of communication' discussed in section 8.5.2.1.

Statement 25 – 'Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy'

Participants' verbal reactions to this statement suggested that autonomous language learning had given them an intrinsic motivation for language learning, particularly when they regarded this learning process to be 'fun', which meant that their reliance on a teacher was less acute.

Saori was clear that her passion for learning English meant that she did not need the encouragement of a teacher. She ranked statement 25 at the same -5 level as statement 30 ('I feel unsupported when learning English without the direct support of a teacher') and when explaining why these were both at the negative end of the spectrum she said:

> SAORI: So I think the most er … most important er … thing … person? Is not teacher … so I think my passion is best. The most important thing. […] So even if I have not a teacher, I don't feel unsupported.

Agnes made a distinction between needing a teacher's encouragement for more serious study, in her case German grammar, and being less 'lazy' when the learning was 'not really work', such as watching films on DVD:

> AGNES: Erm … I do get a bit lazy without the encouragement of a teacher, but then I do watch a lot of DVDs and stuff on my own, which isn't really work … so … it's not really work so it's not really encouragement with a teacher in that respect. But … a little bit lazy.
>
> L: OK … so the sort of … the learning that you do, outside class, would you say that's it more … more sort of in the 'fun' category …?
>
> AGNES: Yes, more recreation in a way, rather than grammar. Because I don't watch DVDs to improve my grammar!

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Momoko's response was interesting for the insight she gives that a learner's need for encouragement by a teacher can change over time as other factors, such as the development of study skills knowledge, can have an impact:

> MOMOKO: And then ... Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy [...] I felt that last summer vacation [...] Because I came here during summer, and then no teachers, and I just came here doing nothing.
>
> L: OK. But then you've put this as least like you.
>
> MOMOKO: That was my last summer. But now I don't feel.
>
> L: Oh I see. Right. So what changed then?
>
> MOMOKO: Erm ... maybe ... I didn't know the first time how to study by myself [...] But like through the year maybe I notice how ... what to do [...] Now I'm not lazy ... about my self-study.

The themes evident in the data for statement 25 then, are the intrinsic motivation and passion for language learning in those participants who load on Factor C, and the increase in motivation which they attribute to learning being fun. The importance of the 'fun' element in out-of-class learning has been acknowledged by Cooker (2010) in relation to self-access language learning and to Hooper-Greenhill (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007) in relation to learning in museums. In an article outlining my personal philosophy of self-access centres and self-access language learning, I argued that the most effective language learning is fun, and that one of the ways of making it so is to integrate language learning into every day 'fun' pastimes such as listening to music and watching films (Cooker, 2010). Hooper-Greenhill (2007) uses the term 'serious fun' (p. 146) to describe activities in museums which 'provoke attention and curiosity, and that are found to be of personal relevance and therefore interesting' (p.146).

8.5.3.2 Rank -4

Statement 30 – 'I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher'

Factor C loaders ranked statement 30 at -4 and the interview data suggests again that intrinsic motivation for the subject means that support from a teacher is not always necessary for this factor, although Factor C loaders may consider support necessary in some specific circumstances, or for some subjects. Often though, simply knowing that someone is available if necessary is enough.

As in her explanation of statement 25 above, Agnes explains that particularly when learning grammar, she needs the support of a teacher:

> AGNES: Erm … [#30 'I feel unsupported when learning English without the direct support of a teacher' (+1)]. I CAN feel unsupported without learning German … erm without the support of a teacher in German. Not for vocab. Mainly for grammar. Just because mainly if you don't understand something the book tells you, there's no other way of telling if you're right or wrong, so if there's not anyone to explain it, you're just going to carry on doing it wrong, and I'm conscious of my grammar, and I don't like talking to people because of it, so …

Momoko, who ranked the statement at the -3 level, explained that this was because she does feel unsupported at certain times of the year, such as vacation times, when she knows a teacher is not available.

Statement 20 – 'I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others'

In discussing statement number 20, participants loading on Factor C explained that they struggled to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, let alone those of others. This feeling was particularly salient if the 'others' were confident in their use of the L2.

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Momoko explained her difficulties with thinking critically about her own language use, let alone that of her peers:

> MOMOKO: Number 20 erm ... I don't know. I'm not sure what's ... what I'm good at [...] So ... it's really like difficult to find ... what point do I need to improve?
>
> L: OK. This is about other people though.
>
> MOMOKO: So ... so I can't think of my thing so it's more hard what they are.

Agnes, on the other hand, whilst able to identify the strengths and weaknesses in her own language production, also struggled with the same process for her peers.

> L: OK. Great. How about this one?
>
> AGNES: I ... not really of others ... I don't really find it easy to identify the strengths and weaknesses of German of others because I find it a lot easier for me because I know where I can foul up and ... I'm always conscious of it, but with other people, if they're confident when they talk it's really hard to pick up on it.

Throughout the first half of the interview, Agnes had indicated her lack of confidence in her German ability (her L2) and her French ability (her L3) through comments such as 'my confidence isn't very high in German', 'like I said before I'm not that confident in my German speaking, and I'm really conscious of making mistakes' and several comments suggesting that she was particularly conscious of having a poorer grasp of grammar than others in her class:

> compared to everyone else here, my grammar's quite poor

and

> I know that everyone else is so much better at grammar than I am. I'm very aware of it. So it's always there when I'm writing. I'm always thinking about it. So it kind of puts me not ... it puts me on edge a bit.

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These comments all emphasise that Agnes would be particularly uncomfortable taking a critical stance of the work of others.

Overall, the analysis of -4 ranked comments from Factor C defining participants suggest they have an intrinsic motivation but occasionally require support from a teacher in specific circumstances, a holistic rather than analytical approach to language and learning, and that they are spontaneous learners who are lacking in linguistic confidence.

Statement 47 – 'I'm more likely to review what I have learned'

Respondents who define this factor indicate that they are not likely to review what they have learned. During interviews, the reasons for this emerged as being simply a dislike for doing the same things again and being too lazy. If the respondents who define this Factor do review anything, then it is likely to be vocabulary if nothing else.

Ruri expressed a dislike with doing things again because she perceived herself as lazy:

> RURI: I don't like reviewing. [...] Coz I'm lazy. I can't do same things again.

whereas Agnes could see the value of reviewing vocabulary:

> AGNES: Because after every class you've always got new vocab. And ... if you just leave it til whenever, the end of the term or exams, you're not going to learn it all. There's too much vocab to learn like that. So if you just learn a bit at a time, and not loads in one go, then it's more likely to sink in better. Definitely.

This reported reluctance to review when engaged in autonomous learning activities is possibly indicative of a spontaneous disposition in which an analytical or systematic approach to language learning is rejected in favour of more spontaneity.

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8.5.3.3 Statements ranked lower in Factor C than in other factors

Factor C defining participants ranked four statements lower than the defining participants of other factors (Table 8.8). Two of these statements they ranked at -3 and two at -2. Here, I will discuss the two statements ranked at -2, as they are statistically significant distinguishing statements and provide an interesting insight into the *socially oriented and enthusiastic* mode of autonomy.

Statement 14 – 'I can analyse my [language] needs better'

Statement 41 is noticeable for its negative ranking within the Factor C idealised array. Whereas other idealised Factor arrays place statement 14 in the +2, +1 and 0 ranks, in Factor C it occurs at the -2 rank. Furthermore, it is prominent as a distinguishing factor at the .01 significance level. Both of these features suggest the distinctiveness of this viewpoint for Factor C.

Only one participant, Ruri, explained her rationale for ranking statement 14 at a low level in the post-sort interview:

> RURI: I can't find my bad point as a learner or ... mmmm ...
> my speaking with big mistake or ... and sounds ... how to use
> the tongue or how to open the mouth is important I find. So
> ... [...] think I can't say correctly by myself but for foreign
> people my English is ... not so good sometimes. [...] So it's
> difficult to notice by myself.

So, for Ruri, it was a lack of metalinguistic awareness, particularly in terms of pronunciation concerns ('how to use the tongue or how to open the mouth') which led her to feel that a better understanding of herself as a learner had not been an outcome of autonomous language learning.

Statement 41 – 'I feel I'm more likely to have a successful life'

Similar to statement 14 above, statement 41 receives its only negative ranking in Factor C where it was ranked at -2. Defining participants in

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other factors ranked statement 14 at +5, +3, +1 or 0. Factor C defining

participants understood 'successful life' in terms of future jobs, and as the

majority of participants loading on this factor were Japanese university

students, this was interpreted in through the lens of the looming and

lengthy job-hunting procedure which overshadows the final two years of

Japanese university students' university education:

Saori – a Japanese undergraduate – ascribed the low ranking to having no

confidence. She was in her third year of study, and in the Japanese higher

education system, this is the year when students spend less time taking

classes, and more time preparing for the stressful job-hunting process, a

process which can have a major impact on their sense of self-esteem:

> SAORI: Erm ... so I don't feel ... my life will be successful. [...]
> So this period is time to decide my job. [...] So I have no
> confidence. So I decide [to rank this statement at the -4
> level].

Momoko was also a Japanese student in her second year of study. Her

perceptions seem focused on the value of the language she is studying

(English) in the Japanese jobs market:

> MOMOKO: OK. So ... 'I don't feel more likely to have a
> successful life.' [...] Because I can maybe talk English but
> English is just tool. [...] Maybe Japanese says that ... so just
> thinking about learning English is good thing but I don't
> know my future because the future jobs is kind of limited so
> ... maybe I need to learn English plus something.

Although statement 41 indicates low confidence on the part of Factor C

defining participants, there is no evidence for this within the overall pattern

of statements in the idealised array (Appendix H). Statements 5 and 36,

for example, both categorised within the 'confidence' category of the

learner autonomy framework, are ranked in the highest position (+5), with

other 'confidence' statements ranked at +3 and +2. Put simply, the reason

that statement 41 is significantly distinguishing within Factor C may be

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explained by the predominance of Japanese defining participants and the interpretation of statement 41 in terms of the arduous job-hunting process.

8.5.4 Factor C: Distinguishing statements

Statements 46, 4, and 39 are the remaining distinguishing statements for this factor (Table 8.8). Statement 46 – 'I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [my language]' – and statement 4 – 'It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn' – are both related to the use of learning resources. Neither statement is distinguishing because of the extremity of the sort (they were ranked at +1 and -1 respectively) but in both cases the varied views about these statements, discussed by the participants in their interviews, suggest that they are distinguishing because of differences in interpretation. In this section, due to space restrictions, I shall focus on statement 39, distinguishing at the $p < .01$ level.

Statement 39 – 'I am more self-disciplined'

Statement 39 is sorted at the -2 rank (Table 8.8) and is distinguishing at the .01 significance level. There is a wide range of rankings for this item across the six factors: -5, -4, +1, +4 and +5.

Out of the Factor C exemplars, Agnes is the only participant who discussed statement 39 in the post-sort interview. Having previously stated 'I'm very bad with time management' she went on to say:

> AGNES: I'm not more self-disciplined, that goes with time-management!

In line with the previous evidence so far, this suggests a lack of a systematic learning approach.

8.6 Factor D: 'A love of language learning'

Factor D has an eigenvalue of 1.8 and explains 6% of the study variance.

Two participants load significantly on this factor (Appendix full factor

loadings). One is a student from Hong Kong and one is a student from

Japan. The breakdown of demographic information relating to these

participants is given in Appendix F. For convenience, a simplified version is

replicated in Table 8.9 below.

**Table 8.9: Simplified demographic information for participants
loading significantly on Factor D**

Participant	Gender	Level of study	First language	Languages learning
Justin	m	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Cantonese	English, Mandarin, Japanese, French, German
Ikuko	f	Undergraduate (Year 3)	Japanese	English, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, French

8.6.1 Overview

The idealised array for Factor D (Appendix H) shows that in terms of the

MLA generic learning outcomes framework, 10 out of 13 'knowledge and

understanding' statements were ranked at 0 or less, with three of these

statements ranked at -4. Such an imbalance could suggest less emphasis

on the product, and more on the process, of learning. This interpretation is

borne out by the ranking of seven of the nine 'skills' statements – which

are process oriented – at 0 or above.

In terms of the learner autonomy framework, two of the statements

categorised as 'confidence' were ranked at the +5 level and two at the +2

level, indicating that confidence in language learning is a feature of the

independent mode of autonomy. Conversely, all statements categorised as 'critical reflection' were ranked at 0 or lower, suggesting that this is a less salient aspect for this mode.

The statements which are particularly meaningful in the interpretation of Factor D are shown below in the Factor D interpretation overview in Table 8.10. They are also highlighted in the idealised Q-sort for Factor D (Appendix H).

Table 8.10: Factor D interpretation overview

	Statement	Number	Rank	z-score	Difference in z-scores compared to next highest/ lowest†
Top five items	I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me.	36	+5	+2.172	n/a
	I feel more relaxed about learning [language name].	35	+5	+1.934	+0.238
	I have more of a desire to learn [language name].‡	1	+4		
	It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn.	4*	+4	+1.303	+0.315
	I have a better understanding of how I learn best.	24*	+4	+1.303	0
Items sorted higher than other factors	I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language name].	9	+3	+1.141	
	I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn.	49	+3	+1.022	
	I'm more likely to review what I have learned.	47*	+2	+0.869	
	My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher.	38	+1	+0.315	
	It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn.	3	0	-0.077	
Items sorted lower than other factors	I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do.	12	-2	-0.477	
	I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future.	21*	-1	-0.196	
	I understand better when a way of learning is working for me.	10	-1	-0.196	
	I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning.	15	0	0.000	
Bottom five items	Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored.	31	-5	-2.172	
	Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name].	28	-5	-2.172	
	I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others.	20	-4	-1.738	
	I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making.	51**	-4	-1.499	
	I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name].	19	-4	-1.499	
Other significantly distinguishing statements	I am more self-disciplined.	39**	+1	+0.434	
	Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy.	25*	-3	-0.988	

*Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .05$
**Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .01$

†Shown only for top five and bottom five items
‡Consensus statement - not included in detailed factor interpretation (section 8.2.7)

8.6.2 Factor D: Higher ranking statements

The highest ranking statements for Factor D (Table 8.10) are explored below by examining the statements ranked at +5 in more depth. None of the +4 statements were discussed in the post-sort interviews by the defining participants.

8.6.2.1 Rank +5

Statement 36 – 'I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me'

From the start of the interview, Justin had spoken about his use of popular culture as a learning resource, and in the post-sort interview, describing his placement of statement 36, he talked about the enjoyment he derived from learning through songs.

> JUSTIN: And I enjoy English more because I can learn it in ways that interest me. Like I can pick up the songs I like, I can search for lyrics, because those materials are on the Web ... just take Japanese as an example, when I take the course, they still teach me the Japanese characters, and I thought oh come on! So many words I need to remember [...] And when I see this song I like I feel oh I must understand it. I must check the dictionary and I... it is really simple, it is like I just open the web, go to Google, Japanese dictionary, and I click it and I copy the words to a Japanese dictionary and that really, and I remember it well. [...] That is the song I like.

Two aspects in particular stand out here – the motivating effect of music for Justin and the systematic approach to using the lyrics as a language learning resource. He went on to describe how he had difficulties learning 'something irrelevant to me' and illustrated his point explaining how learning colours in Japanese is difficult but he can remember 'red' because it is the name of a Japanese song he likes. He then goes on to discuss the problem with this way of learning and how his need to communicate is what really drives his learning.

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JUSTIN: But the problem I feel is like, I just like the red colour, I can remember the colour of red. And the yellow, blue, and maybe a little more. Because all the colours...I can't remember all the colours.

L: Does that matter?

JUSTIN: I think if in this stage that is enough, and maybe maybe I meet Japanese people and make Japanese friends later on I will because the need to communicate, and I may learn more, and I may...because when I...when I got a person to communicate with I got a purpose to learn because I need tell a Japanese friend which colour I like so I remember more.

In fact, much of Justin's interview described the ways in which he learns English, Mandarin and Japanese through films, TV shows and songs, often combining his knowledge of different languages to help him come to an understanding. In this part of the interview he is discussing a Japanese band called *X Japan* and explaining how he is able to learn Japanese from their songs by combining his knowledge of Chinese, English and Japanese:

L: So tell me how you learn from their songs.

JUSTIN: Oh, I like their songs so I listen over and over again and at some point I can...I can grasp some pronunciation and sentence like er, I don't know how to do it like [JUSTIN sings using 'da da da da da' instead of words] so first you've got the rhythm and then some pronunciations you...I can try to imitate like more [sings in Japanese words] so first, in my first experience you've got 3 right out of 10, and then I really like their music so I look for the lyrics and I saw some writings and I saw the Chinese characters, and I saw the translation one, and then I saw the English...the English pinyin...how do you say....English...

[...]

L: Romaji.

JUSTIN: So I saw the romaji so I can have a really good idea about how to sing their songs and maybe this is 50% of, 100% to sing that song. And then, again at some point I can really really favourite song I can write down those characters. Oh yeah that is because I took the course of Japanese, because before that I know some of the Japanese wordings of the song I really like, and the song I really like is called 'Red' and I don't need to learn, I know that is red

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because that is a Chinese character and then I look for that and I find out that is called...this one...it is not Chinese it is Japanese sound so I got this and then I [unidentifiable] lyrics so I got the Japanese...and then before going to the class I know them...this song and Japanese class I learned all the hiragana and katakana, and just re-group those things into a language learning...how do you say this...language learning...notes?...something like that...

Ikuko describes how she feels more relaxed being able to learn in ways that interest her. She attributes this to her personality and her need to be independent from the direction of a teacher:

IKUKO: 'I enjoy learning English more because I can learn in ways [that interest me'. Yeah. Erm ... I like learning English in the ways that I like erm ... I think it's just my personality! [laughing] [...] Like even when I'm studying Japanese I don't like the teachers telling me what to do [...] I'd rather find a way to do it myself [...] So in English ... that's the same I think. When the teacher says something ... no no, when the teachers mean something in the way that I like then I just stick to that. But if I don't like it then I start doing different things [laughing].

L: Right. OK. So you can ... you can sort of focus and concentrate more if you're left to your own devices?

IKUKO: Yes, I feel more relaxed [..] And I don't find it boring, or I don't feel pressure [...] So I like learning in ways ... in MY ways.

For Ikuko, the notion of control over her learning resources and strategies is important.

Statement 35 – 'I feel more relaxed learning [language name]'

In the discussion of statement 36 above, Ikuko claimed she felt more relaxed when learning in *HER* ways; in other words ways that she has chosen and which interest her. However, in discussing statement 35 she explained that at times she does not feel relaxed due to feelings of frustration caused by not understanding her interlocutor:

IKUKO: Yeah and the next one. 'I feel more relaxed about learning English'. Ah! Sometimes I don't feel relaxed.

L: OK.

> IKUKO: When it's times like ... er ... when I can't understand
> what the other person is saying. Like I understand ... how
> can I say it basically? Like they use something ... some words
> like professionals use, I don't get what they're saying,
> sometimes I get frustrated [...] sometimes it's stressing
> because I don't have enough vocab.

Justin clearly identified with statement 35:

> JUSTIN: Yeah, I think this one, 'I feel more relaxed about
> learning English' [...] I think this is me.

8.6.2.2 Statements ranked higher in Factor D than in other factors

Five statements were ranked higher in Factor D than in other factors (Table 8.10). The positions of these statements in the idealised array range from +3 to 0. None of these statements were discussed during the post-sort interviews by either of the two participants who loaded onto Factor D and so are not discussed further here.

8.6.3 Factor D: Lower ranking statements

Four of the lowest ranking statements for Factor D (Table 8.10) were discussed by participants in their post-sort interviews and these are analysed below.

8.6.3.1 Rank -5

Statement 31 – 'Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored'

Ikuko spoke decisively about how reflecting on her learning never makes her feel bored.

> IKUKO: OK. 'Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored.'
> Oh! [laughing] I never feel this way!

Ikuko worked as a highly trained staff member for an online writing centre, in which she gave feedback to other L2 learners on their writing and also received feedback herself on that feedback she gave to others.

Furthermore, in addition to working in this centre, she explained that she also used the online writing centre as a student user. In her role as staff member of the centre and as a student user, Ikuko would have had extensive experience reflecting on her own writing and that of others.

Statement 28 – 'Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name]'

Ikuko expressed a strong disagreement to Statement 28 which she had ranked in the -5 position.

> IKUKO: *[Reading from card]* 'Sometimes I feel like ….' Oh no! I want to keep on improving […] so yeah, I never feel like giving up.

Having a great tenacity for language learning was evident throughout Ikuko's interview. Her language learning history was a rich one. She was born in Japan, but grew up in Singapore, where, due to her schooling in English and her parents' encouragement to speak English at home, her 'mother tongue changed to English'. She perceived herself as having two identities, the Japanese and the Singaporean. When she returned to Japan she attended a Japanese medium school, and although she had English lessons, her English teachers 'didn't want to teach us how to speak'. She described how she maintained her English ability and kept up with the French she had been learning at school in Singapore by talking with her brother and a friend who had also lived overseas, buying her own textbooks, and writing essays for exam preparation. At the time of the interview she was also learning Chinese, Korean and Arabic. Justin, the other defining participant, was also learning five languages, suggesting that this tenacity and stamina for language learning is a feature of this mode of autonomy.

8.6.3.2 Rank -4

Statement 20 – 'I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others'

As discussed above in the analysis of statement 31, Ikuko worked as a staff member of a peer online writing centre at her university. She reflected that her work in the writing centre meant that she was more perceptive at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the writing, but not the spoken language, of others, because when she was in conversation she was too focused on understanding and producing meaningful language:

> IKUKO: Ah! I'm not good at identifying other peoples' …
> when I'm speaking I sometimes find it hard to … how can I
> say? Remember the phrases I want to use when I'm talking.
> [...] So like when I'm listening to other people talking … erm
> … I don't know.
>
> L: So you're not focusing on them so much?
>
> IKUKO: Yes. I'm just trying to understand what they're
> trying to say [...] So I don't care about … but oh! OK. About
> the writing part I used to work in the POWC [Peer Online
> Writing Centre] so I think I'm more careful about that.
>
> L: OK. So if this was about writing, would this have been
> higher up? [along the continuum]
>
> IKUKO: Yes, I think so.

Ikuko's comments suggest that she is aware of the need to be analytical for her work in the writing centre, despite the difficulties she might experience with that. Her comments also emphasise the difficulties for learners in focusing on accuracy in oral production as opposed to written production (Stillwell, Curabba, Alexander, Kidd, Kim, Stone & Wyle, 2010).

8.6.3.3 Statements ranked lower in Factor D than in other factors

Four statements were ranked lower in Factor D than in other factors (Table 8.10). One of the statements was ranked at -2, two at -1 and one at 0. In

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the other five factors, all four statements except two received a positive ranking, and the two exceptions were ranked at 0. What is noticeable is that in their lower ranking positions, three out of the four statements suggest a lack of self-knowledge on behalf of the participants:

- I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do.
- I understand better when a way of learning is working for me.
- I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning.

One of the statements – statement 12 – was discussed in detail in the post-sort interviews by the participants and this is elaborated on below using the interview data.

Statement 12 – 'I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do'

Ikuko ranked statement 12 at the -4 ranking and said she struggles to explain why she learns in the ways she does but that she simply likes doing it that way:

> IKUKO: Yes, I think so. Well, OK. *[Reading from card]* 'I can explain better' [*why I learn English in the ways that I do*]. Ah! It's hard. For me to explain ... er ... why ... [laughing]
>
> L: [laughing]
>
> IKUKO: Yeah! I just do ...
>
> L: You just do.
>
> IKUKO: Yeah I just like doing it.

This suggests a low level of metacognitive awareness which is not evident in other areas of her interview.

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8.7 Factor E: 'Teacher-focused'

Factor E has an eigenvalue of 1.8 and explains 6% of the study variance.

Four participants load significantly on this factor. Two are from Hong Kong,

one is from Mainland China and one is Japanese.

The breakdown of demographic information relating to these participants is

given in Appendix F. A simplified version is replicated in Table 8.11 below

for ease of reference:

Table 8.11: Simplified demographic information for participants loading significantly on Factor E

Participant	Gender	Level of study	First language	Languages learning
Robert	m	Undergraduate (Year 3)	Cantonese	English, Mandarin
Tim	m	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Cantonese	English
Lin	f	Postgraduate (MEd)	Mandarin	English, Cantonese
Yayoi	f	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Japanese	English

8.7.1 Overview

All the defining participants in Factor E – the teacher-focused mode of

autonomy – are Asian students. They are learning one or two languages

(compared with Factor D, for example, where the two defining participants

were learning five languages each).

The items regarded as being particularly meaningful for the interpretation

of Factor E are shown below in the Factor E interpretation overview (Table

8.12) and they are highlighted in the idealised Q-sort for Factor E

(Appendix H). Factor E is explored in more detail below by examining some

of these statements in further depth and illustrating the rankings using

data from the qualitative interview with Yayoi, one of the defining

participants. Post Q-sort interviews were not available for the other three

participants due to time and availability restrictions (section 8.2.7).

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Table 8.12: Factor E interpretation overview

	Statement	Number	Rank	z-score	Difference in *z-scores* compared to next highest/ lowest†
Top five items	I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name].	5	+5	+1.983	
	I feel more likely to have a successful life.	41	+5	+1.762	
	I believe I will be more likely to learn [language name] well in the future.	21	+4	+1.745	
	I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making.	51	+4	+1.661	
	I am more self-disciplined.	39	+4	+1.509	
Items sorted higher than other factors	I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [my language].	46**	+3	+1.375	
	I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well.	32**	+3	+1.146	
	I am better at finding good people to learn with.	17	+3	+1.092	
	I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [my language] because I don't know if they are correct.	33**	+2	+0.610	
	I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher.	30**	+1	+0.526	
Bottom five items	I am better at learning on my own without a helper.	18**	-5	-2.048	n/a
	I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people.	34**	-5	-1.767	-0.281
	It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn.	3*	-4	-1.567	-0.2
	I can organise my learning time more effectively.	16	-4	-1.477	-0.089
	I have a better understanding of how I learn best.	24**	-4	-1.388	-0.089
Items sorted lower than other factors	I feel more able to continue learning [my language] after I leave university.	42*	-1	-0.232	

*Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .05$

**Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .01$

† Shown only for top five and bottom five items

‡Consensus statement - not included in detailed factor interpretation (section 8.2.7)

8.7.2 Factor E: Higher ranking statements

Yayoi discussed the two +5 ranking statements in terms of the need to communicate in order to improve her language skills.

8.7.2.1 Rank +5

Statement 5 – 'I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]' and Statement 41 – 'I feel more likely to have a successful life'

Yayoi was motivated to find opportunities to use English by the social affordances such opportunities offered her. For example, she talked about using the Speaking Corner[3] in her university, and using her boyfriend, who is 'like a native speaker' as a resource to help with her language development:

> YAYOI: Er ... most like me is number 5. Yeah. I took that reservation ... pick the reservation of the ... yeah ... so ...
>
> L: The Speaking Corner?
>
> YAYOI: Yeah Speaking Corner. And I already talked about that my friends were fascinated to ... who live in America for a long time. Actually he's my boyfriend! [...] And we talk in English in the phone [...] It's good for me. But he's native ... like native speaker and I'm not so ... I sometimes confused what he says.

The social emphasis given to statement 5 resonates with statement 17 ('I am better at finding good people to learn with') ranked at +3 in the Factor E idealised array, and with the negative ranking of statement 18 ('I am better at learning on my own without a helper') ranked at -5 and a distinguishing statement at the $p<0.01$ level.

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[3] 'Speaking Corner' is a pseudonymous term describing the function of the facility in Yayoi's tertiary institution.

With statement 41, Yayoi showed that she is also motivated to communicate with others to help her in her aim of using English in the workplace:

> YAYOI: Yeah. I want to have a good life … like successful life […] I want to use the English in my office if possible, so I have to improve my English to communicate with native speakers.

Yayoi went on to explain that her goal was to work in an airport.

The sense of confidence, combined with the pragmatic need to develop language skills, which emerges in this mode of autonomy, suggests an instrumental motivation to learn. Unlike Factor A defining participants, who enjoy the interaction of social affordances for its own sake, Factor E defining participants do not necessarily enjoy communicating with others but see social interactions as a means to a better job and career.

8.7.2.2 Rank +4

None of the +4 ranked statements were discussed by Yayoi.

8.7.2.3 Q statements ranked higher in Factor E than in other factors

All of the statements ranked higher in Factor E than in other factors are distinguishing statements and four of those are distinguishing at the $p<0.01$ significance level. Four of these statements are also related to social aspects of learning. This is striking, not least because of the social interpretation given by Factor E loaders to statement 5, ranked at +5 and discussed above. Two of the statements ranked higher in Factor E than in other factors relate to a sense of dissatisfaction experienced when learning without the direct support of a teacher and one of them to frustration at learning with other learners. Yayoi discussed those relating to teacher support in her qualitative interview, and these are expanded upon below.

Statement 32 – 'I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well'

Yayoi explained why she needed a teacher to support her learning:

> YAYOI: Next 32? I want the teacher give me advice [...] Because I don't know the way I should improve my English skill.

Yayoi is of interest in illustrating the Factor E autonomy mode, because on the surface she appears to be quite self-directed. In her pre-sort interview, she explained how she does improve her own English skills by talking regularly with a variety of native speakers in the 'Speaking Corner' – a self-access facility offered by her university. She also told me she had arranged to spend four weeks later that summer, working in an 'animal care centre' in Canada on a voluntary basis – work experience she had set up for herself and by herself. She also explained that she had taken a learner training course offered by her university the previous year, which would have given her some understanding of how to carry out a language needs analysis and how to choose and use learning resources and learning strategies, and thus have some idea of 'the way [she] should improve [her] English skill'. However, in her pre-sort interview, she also remarked upon an exchange she had had with a native speaking teacher at her university. The teacher had given her advice concerning what Yayoi could say to foreign customers at the shop where she worked part-time, and this had made her 'very happy'.

Statement 30 – 'I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher'

Yayoi ranked statement 30 at a higher level because of her experiences in feeling unsupported in English language learning at the university she was studying at:

> YAYOI: This *[indicating statement number 30]*. This is my
> feeling because now I feel unsupported here [...] I think
> there are not so much direct support in [blinded institution].

Earlier in her pre-sort interview, Yayoi had described her dissatisfaction with her university education. Her best friend from school had applied to the university, encouraging Yayoi to do so as well. At that time, Yayoi was not so interested in attending the university – it is a private university (not uncommon in Japan) and the annual fees are comparatively expensive. Because of the high fees, Yayoi's parents did not support her application. She took entrance exams for a public university (typically more prestigious and with lower annual fees) but she failed the examination. Because she had already taken and passed the exam for the private university she then had no option but to attend.

Yayoi's frustration is arguably more about not having enough English classes than about the lack of direct teacher support in autonomy-inspired learning environments. She was forceful in talking about her Japanese medium-of-instruction English class:

> YAYOI: I hate it! I'm interested the subject but I want to
> take the class by native speaker.

and later:

> YAYOI: In the pamphlet of [blinded institution] it very
> appealed to how English you can improve in here but
> actually I'm not sure ... there are a lot of Japanese class, isn't
> it?!

This suggests a focus on the teacher which is not evident in other modes of autonomy.

8.7.3 Factor E: Lower ranking statements

The lowest ranking statements for Factor E (Table 8.12) suggest a lack of metacognitive awareness and a need for support in the learning process.

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8.7.3.1 Rank -5

Statement 18 – 'I am better at learning on my own without a helper'

Yayoi explained why she had ranked statement 18 in a low position and said that she needs more helpers but that she likes those friends who help her to 'feel like me':

> YAYOI: I want to a friend feel like me. Yeah. If I don't a friend feel like me I'm not so study very hard [...] I need helper help me like friends?
>
> L: It can be anyone yes – a friend or a teacher or ...
>
> YAYOI: I need more helper.

Repeatedly throughout her interview Yayoi describes the people who have helped or influenced her learning: her boyfriend who has lived in America and who is like a native speaker, her best friend who moved from the same high school to the same university and who inspired her love of English through watching English movies, and other friends who are interested in improving their English and with whom Yayoi talks about 'the way to improve English skill'.

8.7.3.2 Rank -4

Statement 3 – 'It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn'

Yayoi personally ranked statement 3 and statement 40 at the -5 level and explained why she did so:

> L: So number 3 [It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn (-5)] and number 40 [I have a better understanding of myself as a learner (-5)]?
>
> YAYOI: OK. Mmmm. Actually I'm not too sure what should I be doing with my English skill. I'm weak at speaking,

reading, writing and listening so I don't know what I should
do.

L: Right. OK. Is this 40 you're talking about or 3?

YAYOI: Both.

L: Both of them together. OK.

YAYOI: Mmmm. Mmmm. Yeah I don't know how to improve
my English skill.

L: OK. So do you think because you don't understand
yourself as a learner very well, it's difficult for you to find
good materials?

YAYOI: Yeah.

Statement 40 ('I have a better understanding of myself as a learner') was

ranked in the idealised array at -3. For Yayoi, these two statements were

clearly linked – with her lack of metacognitive awareness, demonstrated

through statement 40, impacting upon her reaction to statement 3. The

affective impact of this lack of metacognitive awareness also became

evident in Yayoi's response to statement 24 ('I have a better understanding

of how I learn best'), ranked at -4 in the idealised array:

YAYOI: Mmmm. Sometimes I feel stressed because I don't
know the way of the improve English skill so ... my boyfriend
said me ... I can speak English well. But I don't think so. I
need to be a good English learner more and more [...] So ... I
am stressed.

Yayoi's stress, and the use of 'need' when she is talking about her

development as an English learner ('I need to be a good English learner ...')

again suggests that there is an external pressure evident within Factor E

defining participants and which is motivating their autonomous learning.

8.7.3.3 Statements ranked lower in Factor E than in other factors

Factor E is the only factor in which statement 42 ('I feel more able to

continue learning [language name] after I leave university') is ranked in a

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negative position. As a distinguishing statement it is significant at the $p<0.05$ level. It contrasts with statement 21 ('I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future') which was ranked in the +4 position in the Factor E idealised array. This juxtaposition underscores the instrumental aspect of the factor.

8.7.4 Factor E: Distinguishing statements

There were no other distinguishing factors in Factor E.

8.8 Factor F: 'Competitively driven'

Factor F has an eigenvalue of 1.5 and explains 5% of the study variance. Four participants load significantly on this factor: One is Japanese and three are British. The breakdown of demographic information relating to these participants is given in Appendix F. A simplified version is replicated in Table 8.13 below for ease of reference.

Table 8.13: Simplified demographic information for participants loading significantly on Factor F

Participant	Gender	Level of study	First language	Languages learning
Mami	f	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Japanese	English, Mandarin
Paula	f	Undergraduate (Year 2/3)	English	Russian, Spanish
Rebecca	f	Undergraduate (Year 1)	English	French, German
Patsy	f	Undergraduate (Year 1)	English	German, Spanish

8.8.1 Overview

Uniquely amongst all the other factors in this study, the defining participants in Factor F are all female and all undergraduates. None of

them are from Hong Kong or Mainland China and all of them are learning two languages.

In terms of the MLA generic learning outcomes framework, all categories of statements are distributed throughout the idealised array with no distinct patterns emerging. In terms of the learner autonomy framework, statements categorised as 'motivation' and 'confidence' appear particularly salient: three positively worded 'motivation' statements were ranked in the two +5 and one +4 positions, with one negatively worded 'motivation' statement ranked at -4. Five 'confidence' statements were ranked in +4, +3 and +2 positions.

The items regarded as being particularly meaningful for the interpretation of Factor F are shown below in the Factor F interpretation overview (Table 8.14), and are highlighted in the idealised Q-sort for Factor F (Appendix H). Factor F is explored in detail below by examining these statements using data from the qualitative interviews with the four participants who loaded on Factor F.

Table 8.14: Factor F interpretation overview

	Statement	Number	Rank	*z-score*	Difference in *z-scores* compared to next highest/ lowest†
Top five items	I have more of a desire to learn [my language].‡	1	+5		
	Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy.	25**	+5	+2.049	+0.103
	I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future.	21	+4	+1.533	+0.516
	I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university.	42	+4	+1.428	+0.105
	I am more committed to achieving my goals.	50	+4	+1.358	+0.07
Items sorted higher than other factors	I enjoy learning [my language] more because I can learn at a level that suits me.	37	+3	+1.251	
	I can explain better why I learn [my language] in the ways that I do.	12	+2	+0.728	
Items sorted lower than other factors	I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me.	45	-1	-0.249	
	My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher.	38	-3	-1.237	
Bottom five items	I am more self-disciplined.	39	-5	-2.163	n/a
	I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language].	19	-5	-2.044	-0.119
	Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name].	28	-4	-1.775	-0.269
	I can organise my learning time more effectively	16	-4	-1.365	-0.41
	I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well.	32	-4	-1.237	-0.128
Significantly distinguishing statements	I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name].	5*	+2	+0.952	

*Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .05$
**Distinguishing statement with significance level $p < .01$
† Shown only for top five and bottom five items
‡Consensus statement - not included in detailed factor interpretation (section 8.2.7)

8.8.2 Factor F: Higher ranking statements

The highest ranking statements for Factor F (Table 8.14) reflect the themes

of motivation and confidence, discussed in the overview above, and

combine aspects of the 'love of language learning' mode of autonomy and the 'teacher-focused' mode of autonomy.

8.8.2.1 Rank +5

Statement 25 – 'Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy'

Out of all the factors, Factor F is remarkable for the placing of statement 25, which was placed in ranking +5 in the idealised factor array. 'Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy' is an interesting statement to find ranked highly in an autonomy mode, as it suggests dependency on a teacher figure, which is traditionally one of the defining features of non-autonomous behaviour (see Chapter 2). The reasons given for the ranking of this statement could be illustrated through the analogy with the carrot and the stick. Factor F loaders argued either that they enjoyed working for a teacher for whom they had respect or for whom they wished to please (carrot) or that they needed a 'push' from a teacher (stick).

Rebecca explained that just having the teacher 'there' is important for her:

> REBECCA: Erm … and that again … is quite like me. The learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy (+2). I need somebody there

and Patsy felt that she would learn more if she 'had a teacher with [her] 24/7'. She attributed this to the difficulties of 'get[ting] out of the school way of thinking':

> PATSY: [...] obviously if I had a teacher with me 24/7 I'd learn a lot more [...] Because I think it would probably take me a few years to get out of the school way of thinking. You know 'When's that deadline?' 'When's this deadline?' [But] if I had a teacher with me and they were telling me to learn, I'd learn.

Mami related statement 25 to statement 44 (+1) and statement 39 (-5), suggesting that she is lacking in discipline, and, as I pointed out in the interview, that she needs someone (a teacher) or something (materials) to push her more than if she was working on her own.

> MAMI: And second is 'learning without the ...' I think it's ... this is connected tooooooo ... maybe these *[number 44 and number 39]*. 'Learning without the encouragement of a tea' ... yes so. Maybe ... hmmm ... when I learn English without anything, any encouragement of a teacher, maybe I can't be ... a little lazy.
>
> L: Right yeah. So again you need someone or something to give you that push.
>
> MAMI: Yes. I think.

For Paula, the influence of a teacher was less about influencing her self-discipline, and more about encouraging her to work, because she respected the teacher and wanted to invoke the pleasure of the teacher by working hard when her classmates had not done so:

> PAULA: Er ... *[Reading from the card]* 'Learning without the direct support of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy' ... er ... well, because I've wanted to study Russian for years, it makes me want to do it. But when you have a teacher that's ... not necessarily that they're saying 'you HAVE to do this' but ... someone that you respect you actually WANT to do the work. Coz I find that my teachers here I really ... I think they're AMAZING teachers, so I do the work because I respect them. A lot of people in my class they don't do the work, 'huh that's so rude', you know it's ... it's not really encouragement saying 'do this' but it's sort of self-actuating doing it and knowing that you've done it and knowing that I'm going to be better than all these people because they haven't done the work.

This sense of needing competition and to feel better than others, fuelled initially, perhaps, by the desire to please the teacher, occurred elsewhere in the interview when Paula said 'I know it sounds really up myself, but because I do the work I think I'm better than other people'. We also come back to this notion with Paula under statement 37 in section 8.8.2.3 and statement 38 in section 8.8.3.3 below.

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Overall, statement 25 suggests that Factor F loaders derive motivation to learn from linguistic successes. This desire to learn may also be motivated by pleasing the teacher, or wanting to work for the teacher, but in addition the presence of a teacher can also provide a necessary motivational push.

8.8.2.2 Rank +4

All of the statements at the +4 level point to a forward looking, optimistic perspective on the impact of autonomous language learning.

Statement 21 – 'I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future' and Statement 42 – 'I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university'

In keeping with the emphasis on motivation and confidence discussed earlier in this factor description, Factor F defining participants appeared very future-oriented in their approaches to language learning. Paula explained how autonomous language learning had made her feel she would be more able to use her language well in the future:

> PAULA: [...] I think ... my ... in my endeavours to learn Russian I've **made** myself more likely to use it in the future, and I definitely want to use it when I finish uni. I want to go to Russia, so I think learning it on my own, and learning it in a way that makes sense in my head is gonna help me in future.

Rebecca, who had been learning languages by herself since she was five, described how her interest in language learning is increasing the more she uses her language:

> REBECCA: Definitely more likely to use German in the future. It's like progressing each ... the more I use it the more interested I am

and also described her high motivation to learn independently and believed that she would continue this after she leaves university:

> REBECCA: I definitely want to continue with German after I leave uni. I think that's ... I'll do it all by myself again. I wouldn't continue with lessons I don't think. I think it's coz I know I can study by myself and as long as I know there's SOMEBODY there, whether it's in my job or whatever, telling me that I'm doing something right, coz I DO want to work within German, then that should be OK.

Both Paula and Rebecca envisaged themselves using their target language in their future employment. In this, they had strong visions of their future selves (Dörnyei, 2009), being competent language users in the workplace, and these self-perceptions underpinned their drive and confidence.

Statement 50 – 'I am more committed to achieving my goals'

In this extract from the interview with Patsy, she illustrated the power of autonomy when she explained how the more she does for herself, the more she wants to achieve her goals, and how autonomous learning means she is more committed to achieving her goals because she does not react well to other people telling her what to do:

> PATSY: Erm ... I think learning by myself makes me more committed to achieving my goals because I don't react well to people being on top of me all the time and telling me what to do. [...] my first secondary school I went to for three years and no one told me what to do ever and it was bliss because I didn't do anything [...] But obviously that wouldn't have worked with my GCSEs. Then my second secondary school was horrible, and they ... everyone was spoon-fed, told me what to do, and I got out of there after my GCSEs [...] I think the more work you do for it yourself the more you want to achieve your goals because it's not just 'Oh I put in a bit of effort and I didn't get that far' it's 'I put in all that effort and I need to get something out of it'.

For Paula, the evidence of her commitment to achieving her goals came from the fact that she is prepared to put time aside to learn:

> PAULA: And then ... more committed to achieving my goals ... erm ... well because I make time to do it, i.e. ... with most of my other subjects I don't make time to do the work ...
>
> L: OK. [Laughing].

> PAULA: Especially Spanish, not anymore! [Laughing]. But with Russian I put aside a day or a few hours or something to do all my work and go over it once.
>
> L: OK. Wow. That's very disciplined.
>
> PAULA: Yeah. It's only Russian, which is really weird …
>
> L: So why is that? Is it just because you enjoy the subject so much?
>
> PAULA: Yeah, I just love it! And because it's so completely different to English, you need to make time to learn. Because the grammar structure is like completely the opposite. Like they don't have the definite or indefinite article? So 'the' or 'an' is not portrayed by a word, it's … you change the ending of the word, so … you need to make the time to learn.

The commitment to goal achievement displayed in Factor F is evidence of the self-regulation and need to succeed which permeate this mode of autonomy. Strikingly, the quote from Paula above indicates that such commitment is language-specific, thus emphasising the context dependent quality of modes of autonomy.

8.8.2.3 Statements ranked higher in Factor F than in other factors

Two statements were ranked higher in Factor F than in other factors (Table 8.14), however, only statement 37 was discussed by the participants loading on this factor and this is explored in more depth below.

Statement 37 – 'I enjoy learning [language name] more, because I can learn at a level that suits me'

Statement 37 was ranked at the +3 level in the Factor F idealised array, but at the 0 or +2 level for other factors, making it noticeably positively salient in this mode of autonomy.

Rebecca was a UK student who had learned languages from the age of 5. She had had previous experience of going to school in France and Germany where she did not yet speak the language, and then returning to the UK as

a fluent speaker of French and German. She explained how for her,

autonomous learning enabled her to enjoy the languages more because

she could work at a level that was not too difficult or too easy:

> REBECCA: [...] I enjoy it more because I'm doing it at my
> own level. Like I'm not doing anything too basic, but nothing
> too advanced for me. So I can see if my reading should be
> more advanced or whether my listening should be more
> advanced kind of thing [...] Because before I used to be ...
> especially during my A levels – I was just like 'oh my god,
> I'm so far behind on everyone' on certain aspects I'd get like
> really tense about it.

For Paula, also, an element of competition from other learners helped her

during the language learning process to encourage her towards more

autonomous learning:

> PAULA: ... because the people I'm studying with, they're
> post-A level, so they've been doing it for about five years,
> and I just did beginners Russian last year, and other people
> in my class have done intensive Russian, which means they
> did 10 hours a week last year, and I've only done four for
> each ... yeah, for the last year, but I think it's helped me to
> work better, because I'm against people. Because when I
> studied Italian, I had to do it on my own, because I wanted
> to be at the level that everyone else was at.

For both Rebecca and Paula, motivation for language learning was driven

by a sense of competition and comparing themselves to those around

them.

8.8.3 Factor F: Lower ranking statements

The lowest ranking statements for Factor F are shown in Table 8.14 with

the position of each statement in the idealised array, the corresponding *z-*

scores, the differences in these *z-scores* compared with the next lowest

ranked statement, the statement number and the statement wording.

8.8.3.1 Rank -5

Statement 39 – 'I am more self-disciplined'

Factor F loaders ranked statement 39 in the -5 position in the idealised Factor array showing that self-discipline as an outcome of autonomous language learning is least like them. Arguably, this is in contrast to the commitment to goal achievement (statement 50) discussed in section 8.8.2.2 above; however, the high-ranking of statement 39 is complemented well by statement 25 ('Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy') ranked in the +5 position and also discussed above. Many of the reasons given by participants for ranking statement 39 at the -5 level were similar to those they gave for statement 25 at the +5 level such as needing a push from an authority figure.

In this extract below, Mami gives an example of her non-disciplined study habits:

> MAMI: [...] I feel ... lazy about learning English [...] I decide I
> ... I am going to learn vocabulary ... ten vocabularies each
> day [...] But I tend to give up [...] So I don't think I really am
> self-disciplined so ...

Rebecca and Patsy both explained how they need to be pushed. Rebecca felt that her previous success with language learning had led to a more recent sense of apathy and acknowledged how the drive to 'still be the best' can come from competition, or a 'push', from others.

> REBECCA: [...] I know I need encouragement and I need to
> be pushed and I can get lazy like ... as much as I do want ...
> enjoy learning languages I know that I need somebody there
> to always like give me a goal and like make sure I get there
> at the end as well [...] I think it can't just be me on my own
> because otherwise I'll just get lazy about it.
>
> L: OK. That's interesting though because erm ... it seems as
> though initially, when you were younger ...
>
> REBECCA: It was all me. It was all my choice.

L: Yeah!

REBECCA: And it still is. I still want to be really good.

L: Sure.

REBECCA: But I know because ...I think because grown up I was ALWAYS really good then now I need to be encouraged to be that bit better as well, and always have a higher standard to want to be at, kind of thing.

L: I see. I see yeah. And I guess there are ... there's more going on in life now.

REBECCA: Exactly. And there's other people who've done similar things on gap years and things like that now. So I need that encouragement to still be the best.

L: Right. OK. So in what ways would you say that you're not ... that ... that ... that ...

REBECCA: ...self-disciplined.

L: Yeah.

REBECCA: Like there'll be times when I know I could be doing some more work and working on this and doing it myself and really getting better. And instead I'll think 'I'll just go and sit in the kitchen and hang out with other people'. And it's like ... I should really be thinking 'No I should do this coz then I'll be better and then I'll get better marks and then ...' And I know that's the way I'd LIKE to think but I don't always think that way. But I do still really want to be at the top of the class and everything. And I've realised more recently I'm NOT. So then that has encouraged me. Like, that's given me a bit more of a push to get better marks and everything.

Patsy acknowledged that she is not as self-disciplined when she is learning without the direct control of a teacher, but suggested that the lack of discipline is not so important because when she learns on her own she is doing it for pleasure and not just because her degree programme requires it:

> PATSY: Erm ... I think I'm not as disciplined when I'm learning by myself [...] Because I don't have someone on my back. You know the whole of education is someone breathing

down your neck. And when you're doing it yourself you don't have the deadlines [...] that obviously means that I'm doing it more for pleasure ...although obviously I'm doing a degree in it ... the independent learning I do is for me.

Again, Paula explained how her level of self-discipline is greater when learning Russian than other subjects:

PAULA: Yup. I do so much more work. I do a lot more work for Russian than other subjects I just spend so many hours. I enjoy it. So it doesn't really matter. I might spend a day, like a whole day or a whole evening just studying Russian [...] And I'll look at the clock and I won't even realise that four hours has gone.

The selective self-discipline described by Paula, combined with their high expectations of themselves, manifested in the need to be the best, which is a recurring theme throughout this mode, suggests that Factor F loaders might perceive their self-discipline to be low whereas in fact their self-described behaviour suggests the opposite.

Statement 19 – 'I'm better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name]'

Participants loading on Factor F, ranked statement 19 at the -5 level showing that it was least like them. Their reasons for doing so varied from claiming they did not know how to find the strengths and weaknesses of their own L2 use, to what could be interpreted as the difference between L2 acquisition and L2 learning. For example, Rebecca, who had learned French since the age of 5 and German since the age of 9, explained how her exam marks indicated different strengths and weaknesses to those she thought she had:

REBECCA: I always thought my listening was one of my best aspects [...] But when we did our Christmas exams it was my lowest mark and I actually got much higher in my writing, and maybe it's because I've worked a lot harder on my writing recently that now I'm like I've let my listening take a back seat and everything like that. So ... [...] I definitely think ... that's what made me realise and I thought I'd been ...

because I do listen to so much German and French, like, on the radio and things like that, that I'm always listening and I always understand it, that that must be what I'm good at. But because I obviously need to work at getting it down on the paper in the right way to show that although I understand it, somebody else needs to understand it as well.

L: Right. So is that exam technique or is that skill?

REBECCA: I think it's a bit of both.

L: OK.

REBECCA: Because it's not just ...I'm sure if somebody asked me what was being said on the radio I'd be like 'Oh well I understand' but that's just coz I'm used to listening to it but I'm sure if ... I couldn't just say it out loud kind of thing. I think that is what it is a bit.

Patsy explained how identifying one's own linguistic strengths and weaknesses requires metalinguistic knowledge which she did not feel she had:

PATSY: I won't ever pick out my own flaws as well as they [teachers] will. Obviously because I'm not a fluent speaker, so when you make a mistake in a language you honestly don't know it's a mistake. You believe it to be right. Until someone who's better at it than you goes 'Oh no wait! You conjugated that verb wrong'. Because if you thought it was wrong you wouldn't use it.

8.8.3.2 Rank -4

Statement 16 – 'I can organise my learning time more effectively'

Patsy explained her low ranking of statement 16 by saying that for her time management 'has always been one of my massive issues'. Mami attributed her low ranking of this statement to generally poor organisation and planning, and argued that the knock on effect of her poor time management was that learning at her own pace was too slow to be successful.

Statement 32 – 'I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well'

Statement 32 was positioned in the idealised array for Factor F at -4. This contrasts with the positioning of statement 25 ('Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy') being ranked at +5 (and thus being an outcome of autonomous language learning for Factor F loaders that is 'most like me'). We can perhaps then argue that it is not the encouragement of the teacher (or being told one is doing well) which is unlike Factor F loaders, but more the sense of frustration at learning on one's own. For example, Paula, who ranked statement 25 at +3 because she likes working for teachers whom she respects, explained how a good textbook helps minimise her frustration when working on her own and helps increase her sense of autonomy:

> PAULA: 'I get frustrated learning on my own' [as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well] yeah I don't get frustrated because I am quite easy going [...] when it comes to it so I don't think ... it's not very often that something doesn't make sense to me. Not with this textbook anyway. I mean the ones I was using in Australia were absolutely awful, so it would confuse me more and then I would get more frustrated. But here it's different. Because of the textbook. Which gives you more autonomy to go and learn it, which is helpful. So I don't really get frustrated.

In contrast, Rebecca said that she does like some affirmation she is doing things right (but not well) and finds the 'little voice in [her] head' reassuring:

> REBECCA: With 32, I do like someone to tell me I'm doing it right.
>
> L: OK.
>
> REBECCA: So... it's still ... it is sort of like me coz although I know better what ISN'T working, I would do like somebody to tell me what I am doing is the right way of kinda going about it as well.

L: So you kind of like that reassurance … in the …

REBECCA: Yes, exactly. Even though I am independent it's always nice to have that little voice in your head, somebody telling you 'yeah you are doing this right, don't panic, it's all OK' kind of thing. But when I know I'm doing it wrong it's me who has to tell me I'm doing it wrong coz I'll know how to sort myself out afterwards without getting too stressed.

L: OK. That's interesting. So is it sort of a reassurance thing you like or is it that you like to be told you're doing WELL?

REBECCA: I think it's just the reassurance part of it because … I don't know my parents would never tell me I was doing WELL, they'd just tell me I'm doing it right. I think and it's just brought in with that because they didn't like to encourage us too much and say 'yeah yeah you're great' so that when we failed it seemed so much worse […] They'd just say 'you're doing it right' and I think that's what it is for me.

From both these participants we can understand how the notion of support – whether that be from a textbook or a human being, is important for competitively driven mode of autonomy learners in scaffolding their autonomy.

8.8.3.3 Statements ranked lower in Factor F than in other factors

Two statements were ranked lower in Factor F than in other factors (Table 8.14). One of the statements was ranked at the -3 position, and one was at -1. Both statements are analysed in more depth below through the interview data.

Statement 38 – 'My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher'

The ranking of statement 38 at the -3 position, towards the 'least like me' end of the continuum, contrasts with that of statement 32 ('I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well') and statement 30 ('I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher') at -4. It is also in keeping, however, with

statement 25 ('Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy') ranked at the +5 level.

The reasons given by participants loading on this Factor for the ranking of this statement centred around the notion that being 'pushed' was necessary for them to learn well. Rebecca explained 'It does help if there's somebody there […] nagging at me to do a bit more ...', and Paula explained how she pushes herself when she learns autonomously, but in doing so benefits from the extrinsic incentive to talk with her teacher:

> PAULA: I don't think my learning is more effective because I'm not pushed, because I WANT to do well, so ... in a way I'm pushing myself in place of the teacher but at least I'm going to be able to talk to the teacher at the end of the class and talk in Russian which nobody else is going to be able to.

Patsy, who ranked statement 38 in a mid-level ranking, explained why, for her, the card was 'sort of like me'.

> L: So these are definitely the 'sort of like mes'?
>
> PATSY: Yes, a lot of them I think are teacher orientated because they talk about strategies and strengths and weaknesses and activities and resources […] And I think that's mid-point because I'm not really sure what to do with those cards because I don't ... I firmly ... like I believe that I won't ever be able to get as good resources in my own time as a teacher will give me just because I'm not a teacher. You know I'm not ... I don't know what I'm looking for.
>
> L: Yup yup yup. OK.
>
> PATSY: So that's ... like I do get resources but never ... not as good as ... maybe one day but not now.
>
> L: Mmmm. Mmmm. Mmmm. OK. It's also interesting for me, that given what you've just said, that you put this one, 38 ['My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher' (0)], here.
>
> PATSY: What my ...? Yeah.
>
> L: Because this is sort of in ... definitely, you said this is your sort of like me ...?

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> PATSY: I think ... I prefer learning when no-one's on my back BUT at the same time, the other half of my brain is saying if someone was on your back you'd be doing so much more work right now! [...] So it's like however much I dislike people being on my back, I know that if someone is nagging you, you are more likely to do it.

In this extract, Patsy's comment on the nature of teacher involvement in autonomous language learning is an interesting one. She demonstrates a critical awareness and understanding of the professional skill of a teacher in sourcing useful materials for language learning and acknowledges her own lack of skill in this area. Both Patsy and Paula describe a strategic understanding of how the teacher can be used to enable them to advance in their language learning.

Statement 45 – 'I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me'

Statement 45 was ranked at the -1 level, in the more neutral area of the idealised array, but nevertheless at a lower ranking than for other factors. When looked at in conjunction with the rankings for other statements for this factor, it suggests that participants who load on this factor have little concern about their own learning processes. For example, statement 26 ('I think more carefully about what I want to learn') and statement 27 ('It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language name] learning') are both ranked at the 0 level. This lack of interest or concern is illustrated through the words of Paula. In discussing her placing of statement 45 at the -3 level she explained that 'I put it there because it doesn't really affect me much' and later, when talking about her placing of statement 27, a similar lack of interest in her own learning processes is evident:

> PAULA: Yeah. 'It is rewarding ... [to know what works best for me with my Russian learning' #27 (-2).] [...] I don't really think that I think about what works best for me for Russian.

It's not really greatly on my mind saying 'oh it's really good to know how I work' it's … what's really good is that I know it. Like I know what I'm meant to be learning but the whole … I don't really think 'oh this is a really good way to learn for me'. It's not really on my mind very much.

Drawing on the discussion above, this could again suggest a strategic knowledge and awareness of the role of the teacher and learner in the learning process.

8.8.4 Factor F: Distinguishing statements

The one remaining distinguishing statement for this factor (Table 8.14) that has not already been analysed is discussed is statement number 5 ('I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]'). Statement 5 was placed in the +2 position in the idealised array but is possibly significantly distinguishing because of the overall spread of opinion amongst the factor loaders about this statement from +5 to -2.

The overall sense from those who ranked the statement as more like them, is that they are resourceful in finding opportunities to use their language. Rebecca who ranked the statement at +2 spoke of how she is happy to embrace new challenges to give herself opportunities to use French and German. For Mami, the need to seek out opportunities to use the language was particularly salient for her.

MAMI: Mmmm. So I … when I arrived at [blinded institution] I think there are many opportunities to use English […] So … mmmm 'I try harder'? Not only in the university but at home I always try to find opportunities to use English […] But of course in the university, for example, I often go to [self-access centre] and [conversation lounge] and I use English every time. So I think I have to actually use English as much as I can […] so I always looking for opportunities.

Patsy ranked the statement at the lower end of the scale, in the -2 position. Interestingly, her interpretation of the statement was with

emphasis on the *difficulty* of finding opportunities to use the language, as can be understood from this extract.

> PATSY: Yeah. God. I think also maybe that one because I don't find it hard to find opportunities. Like I don't ... I feel like I've got enough. I feel like there's enough help out there for me [...] So I've never looked for any more. Like I think I would if I felt that I was maybe sort of failing a few classes and I really didn't think I was getting the support that I should be, but I think I am, and I've got those few outside influences.

8.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, six factors were analysed as modes of autonomy using the Q factor analyses and the pre- and post- sort interview data. In the next chapter, the narrative interpretations and defining participants' histories are presented.

9 Modes of Autonomy: Towards Self-assessment

This chapter is in two parts. Part 1 presents the full narrative descriptions of the modes of autonomy described in the previous chapter as the results of the by-person factor analysis. Part 2 describes how I utilised these modes of autonomy to develop a tool which learners can use for formatively assessing their learner autonomy and in so doing discover for themselves how to become more autonomous in their language learning.

9.1 Part 1: Modes of autonomy

In this first part of the chapter, I describe each mode of autonomy in the narrative format which is conventional in Q methodology. This narrative interpretation is based on the detailed analyses presented in the previous chapter and makes use of the idealised Q-sort and interview data in constructing a picture of a prototypical learner who would identify with that mode of autonomy. The first numbers in the parentheses which appear after the description refer to the statement numbers and the second refers to the ranking of that statement in the idealised factor array. For example,

> ...they are interested in languages for their own sake, and
> have clear linguistic and life goals associated with their
> language learning (15: +4)

For a complete list of statements please refer to Appendix D.

The narrative interpretation is followed in each case by a summary of the autonomous language learning history of one of the participants whose sort contributed to the definition of the factor in order to illustrate how different ways of being autonomous represented by the six modes of autonomy are rooted in the lives of real learners.

9.2 'A love of languages' mode of autonomy

9.2.1 Narrative interpretation

The learners who identify with the 'love of languages' (LOL) mode of autonomy are interested in languages for their own sake, and have clear linguistic and life goals associated with their language learning (15: +4). For this autonomy mode, language learning is less salient as a means to an end, or as a way of improving their future lives (41: +3; 21: +2). LOL learners are very focused on becoming proficient users of their target language: they wish to communicate well, they enjoy the challenge of learning a new language, and they see being able to use their language as part of their identity (1: +5; 28: -5). They enjoy reflecting on their language learning because they believe that this makes language learning more concrete and active (31: -4; 45: +2). For these learners, the focus is very much on the language, they feel motivated when they communicate with others and use a variety of ways to learn the language (2: +4). LOL learners do not have a strong focus on themselves as individuals or as language learners (35: +1; 49: 0; 27: 0) although metacognitive awareness can be a motivating force (0: +3).

Learners who identify with this autonomy mode are very self-disciplined (39: +5; 16: +4) and regard their self-discipline as a motivator: they use their time efficiently, and take responsibility for their own time management, which impacts positively on their motivation. Consequently, they are very good time managers (16: +4; 23: +3) and work well when they are in control of their own time (43: +2). LOL learners do not feel the need to rely on others to help them learn (9: -3; 17: -3) and work well away from the influence of a teacher, as they are intrinsically motivated and recognise they will not be able to rely on a teacher during their lifelong learning. (30: -4; 32: -5; 25: -4).

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9.2.2 Monica

Monica was studying in one of the top five universities in Hong Kong but had completed her school education in mainland China. At the time of our interview she was studying English, Cantonese and Spanish, in addition to her main subject which was Biochemistry. Monica's experiences as an autonomous language learner started in China one summer, before she entered high school when she began frequenting a coffee shop near her home run by an American couple who also taught English classes. The coffee shop offered a pleasant environment, with 'air conditioning, nice seats' unlike many other similar spaces such as the English corners in universities. Because of this, and because the American couple '[made] it just like an American coffee house ... almost like back home' foreigners liked to visit and other Chinese people would travel 'from far away [to] go to the coffee house just to talk in English.' Because the coffee shop was near the university, students would also gather there, and because of the high numbers of foreigners and the atmosphere created by the owners, those in the coffee shop would speak English. Monica explained that even if she was there with other native Chinese speakers, and there were no foreigners, they would still speak in English, and in this way Monica developed her English proficiency. Not only did Monica practise English speaking through attending the coffee shop, but she also 'learned from other learners in the coffee house how they learn English.' From these friends she learned how to use Voice of America books and audio materials, and to watch the television show *Friends* to improve her accent, which she did by watching the show intensively over a one month period.

Monica explained how her personality changed a little during the time she frequented the coffee shop and she became 'like more outgoing, open, and know how to start conversations and how to keep them on and how to ...

socialise'. The large number of foreigners and their stories and activities such as guitar- or drum-playing also opened Monica's eyes to the world beyond her immediate environment. In her words, her 'horizons changed a little bit' and she became 'more open': '... my world at first was quite like small in China, mainly [name of province] and then suddenly it was almost all the world.'

Monica also engaged in autonomous language learning activities at the time of our interview, learning Cantonese and, to a lesser extent, Spanish in Hong Kong. Her learning of Cantonese started with 'very basic stuff' about vocabulary and tones from a book, but then she learned mainly through talking with local students. Due to her 'very limited time' she was learning Spanish in the 'traditional way' of reading, listening and testing herself from a textbook.

9.3 'Oozing confidence' mode of autonomy

9.3.1 Narrative interpretation

Oozing confidence (OC) mode of autonomy learners have a very strong sense of confidence in themselves and their abilities to learn and use their target language. They have strong instrumental motivation towards language learning and a developing sense of identity as a speaker of the target language. Learning autonomously has had a positive impact on these learners' views of their future – about which they are optimistic. As a result of autonomous learning, they consider themselves more likely to use their language well in the future and to have a successful life (21: +5; 41: +5) since they believe they enjoy improved job prospects for two reasons: 1) they can speak another language (and thus easily travel abroad), and 2) they will eventually be university graduates. Overall they have a very positive future self image. Learning autonomously has had a positive

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impact on how these learners feel about the lifelong learning of languages (42: +4) and they display a strong motivation towards continuing their language studies (28: -5). This strong motivation may also be career driven, or driven by a desire to study abroad or to be able to communicate with family overseas.

OC learners are prepared to take risks with their language in order to develop their linguistic skills (34: +4); they also accept the power of collaborative learning and demonstrate an optimistic approach to working with others and a willingness to be adaptable and flexible in their approaches to learning (33: -4). They are also prepared to support others in their language development by helping them feel less self-conscious about making mistakes (34: +4).

For OC learners, notions of themselves as active learners and being committed to achieving their goals do not have strong salience (2:0; 50: 0). While this finding may seem counter-intuitive it can be explained by OC learners' perceived lack of self-discipline (39: -4). Nevertheless, learning autonomously has resulted in their developing some understanding of themselves as learners (19: +2; 27: +3; 40: +3; 14: +2) and finding satisfaction in knowing what works for them with their language learning. However, interestingly, this does not manifest itself in good time management, or, as mentioned above, self-discipline (39: -4; 16: -5) or knowing how to get themselves in the mood to learn (49: -3). This might be because OC learners have an easy-going approach to language learning (35: +3). OC learners do not use a variety of strategies when they learn (7: -4) but this tends to be because they know what works best for them (27: +3) and so they stick to using the same strategies that they know help them learn (11: +1).

Overall, OC learners are confident and optimistic about their future lives, their developing identities as users of their target language, and their current selves as language learners.

9.3.2 Chihiro

At the time of the interviews, Chihiro was an undergraduate student in her final year studying English and Spanish in a Japanese university. Chihiro's mother had remarried and moved to San Diego, USA, so Chihiro had an American step-family who could only communicate with her through English. This provided Chihiro with some motivation for learning English. In her words 'I think like every time I talk to myself like "You have to study English more, otherwise you can't communicate with them"'. In addition, when Chihiro visited her mother, she heard Spanish spoken in local stores and restaurants and felt 'not satisfied' with herself because she could not communicate. However, Chihiro's main motivation for learning came from her 'strong ambition […] to study English in my future'. Her aim was to get a job in a bank so she could become a 'great banker' and then go abroad to study 'business or something'.

Chihiro had started learning English without the support of a teacher when she was in the first grade of junior high school (age 10) and attributed this to shopping in CostCo – an American-owned wholesale store near her home. She saw some CDs by American artists in the store and because they were cheap decided to buy them. She would write down the lyrics using the Japanese phonetic alphabet for foreign words and loan words (katakana) and then imitated the sounds to improve her pronunciation. This helped her when, at high school, she went on study abroad programmes to Australia and the UK, but these experiences were also challenging: despite having been learning English for so long she was shocked at how little she understood. However, when she met with other

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exchange students from Italy, Spain and other European countries, their shared status as English as second language users meant she felt comfortable in their company, and being able to communicate with them in the lingua franca motivated her more.

When she entered university as an English major, Chihiro was placed in the advanced class where she and her fellow students spoke English between themselves even when they were not in class. This atmosphere of 'no more speaking Japanese' helped Chihiro to improve her English (and her English test scores) dramatically in the first year of university. As well as speaking English out of class time with her classmates, Chihiro took two elective learner training modules in the university's self-access centre which also 'introduced me some ways like you can study from reading, listening, writing' because 'I only knew one way to study English, like listening to music'.

Music, and her love for reggaetón, a genre of Latin American music, was also the motivating force behind Chihiro's original decision to study Spanish. This close connection between popular culture (Murray, 2008) – especially music – and language learning, was also observed in the language learning histories of many of the participants in this study.

9.4 'Socially oriented and enthusiastic' mode of autonomy

9.4.1 Narrative interpretation

Socially oriented and enthusiastic (SOE) mode of autonomy learners are characterised by having an overall sense of enthusiasm and a passion for language learning. They are motivated to find opportunities to use the target language because they know that the more proficient they are, the more they will be able to interact with others (5: +5). In other words, they

are conscious of a cyclical, closely interwoven connection between communication (using the language) and language proficiency. Another way in which SOE mode of autonomy learners' sense of enthusiasm is manifested is in their sense of enjoyment through learning autonomously because they can learn in ways that interest them; they derive particular enjoyment in learning using the Internet, films, music and books (36: +5; 8: +4). When they experience learning as 'fun' in these ways, they are less likely to need encouragement from a teacher. Indeed, their passion for language learning is considered a powerful intrinsic motivating force (25:-5). In contrast, when SOE mode of autonomy learners perceive the subject matter as more serious – and 'grammar' is often perceived in this way – they like to have the support of a teacher (30: -4).

SOE mode of autonomy learners are very people-centred. They are also willing to learn with other people, although this might be only one person at a time, and they do not feel frustrated working with other learners (33: -5). In addition to wanting to learn the language in order to communicate with others, they describe wanting to make others proud of them, or wanting to use their language proficiency skills to get a good job in order to repay parents for their time at university, or simply enjoying the process of communicating with others (5: +5, 21: +3).

Whilst SOE mode of autonomy learners like to have control over aspects of their learning environment (48: +3), they are also prepared to take risks and use their developing linguistic awareness to learn from their language mistakes (51: +4). However, they consider themselves too lazy to review their own language use, with the possible exception of vocabulary (47: -4); this may also be a symptom of 'living in the moment' and not approaching their language learning in an analytic way (13: -3). This perceived lack of analytic ability extends to the language use of others: they do not feel

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confident about identifying the strengths and weaknesses of other peoples' language (20: -4).

Although in some ways, SOE mode of autonomy learners have a good awareness of themselves as language <u>users</u> (51: +4; 44: +2), their metacognitive awareness of themselves as language <u>learners</u> is less salient (13: -3; 40: -3).

9.4.2 Emiko

At the time of the interview, Emiko was an undergraduate in her second year studying Indonesian and English in a Japanese university.

Four months before our interview, in the vacation period between her first and second years at university, Emiko had been on a one-month visit to Indonesia organised by the university. She had stayed with a host family with whom she continued to keep in contact via email. During the trip, she had been paired with an Indonesian 'peer tutor' – a female student who was assigned to work with Emiko in class and to support her in her studies. Emiko said of her peer tutor 'It was good. Same age. I could enjoy talking with her.' Emiko's peer tutor could not speak Japanese, so the opportunities for Emiko to speak Indonesian were optimised. Her peer tutor did speak some English however, and Emiko explained how they code-switched between the two languages when necessary: '[...] when I can't understand Indonesian sentences she explain in Indonesian [...] sometimes when I can't understand Indonesian she can explain in English'. After her classes in the Indonesian university were finished, Emiko would study with her peer tutor and they would go shopping and sightseeing together.

Emiko explained that as well as emailing her Indonesian friend on her return to Japan, she also used books and watched dramas to support her language development. She was able to watch Indonesian dramas in the

university self-access centre, where she also went to talk with the native Indonesian-speaking teacher.

At the time of our interview, Emiko was taking a learner training module in English offered by her university's self-access centre. The learner training module she was taking focused on reading skills, although she had previously taken a more general 'learning how to learn' module, in which she had focused on listening and speaking skills. Emiko explained that listening and speaking were particularly hard for her: 'I'm not very good at listening English. So hard for me.' However, she worked on developing her listening skills by watching Disney movies in the university self-access centre – an activity she described as enjoyable. Emiko also practised speaking English by talking with international students from the United States who lived in the same university dorm as she did. Emiko had one US friend in particular in her dorm, who helped her with her homework. Emiko explained 'I enjoy very good times with her'. Emiko also used the Yahoo search engine in English and talked with English native speaking teachers to help her with her English language development.

Emiko explained that during her junior high school and high school days she had been embarrassed to speak English with native speakers, but she had changed at university as she developed more confidence in her own ability. In her words, '[...] now I can listen but also say, so I enjoy.' She explained 'I like to talk with native teachers' and said she often tried to talk with them in the self-access centre.

Despite living in a dorm, and having to cook and look after herself, which Emiko said left her with less time for focusing on her languages, she was still able to engage in diverse activities to support her language learning outside of class time. As well as using the self-access centres at her university, and communicating with the friends in her dorm and in

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Indonesia, Emiko explained how she used the social networking platform *Myspace* to find friends online, an idea she was introduced to by friends at high school:

> I use Myspace. I put country in – Australia – and age is 18 or 19 then female or male and many friends are. I want to contact with her [...] I have many friends on Internet.

9.5 'Love of language learning' mode of autonomy

9.5.1 Narrative interpretation

Love of language learning (LLL) mode of autonomy learners are dedicated to learning languages (28: -5) and enjoy the process of learning. They feel relaxed when they are learning (35: +5; 22: -1; 34: 0) and especially enjoy learning in ways that interest them (36: +5). They do not get bored reflecting on their language learning (31; -5) and are likely to review what they have learned (47: +2).

Learners identifying with this mode are very independent and not reliant on a teacher for support with their language learning (30: -3; 38: +1), nor do they need the encouragement of a teacher to learn (32: -3; 25: -2). Nevertheless, these learners are very social: they are interdependent, as they are comfortable asking others to help them with their language learning (9: +3; 3: -3) and consider themselves good at finding others to learn with (17: +2).

LLL mode of autonomy learners generally have a strong metacognitive awareness and have a good understanding of how they learn best (24: +4), why they choose the materials they do (44: +2), and how to get themselves in the mood to learn (49: +3). Learning autonomously has helped them to develop the skills they need to find good resources for learning (3: 0; 4: +4) and to create new learning strategies (52: +2).

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Perhaps counter-intuitively then, learners identifying with this mode are not able to explain their own learning process well (12: -2), and they are not good at analysing their own language use or that of other people (19: -4; 20: -4), which might, in turn, explain why they are not good at processing feedback (6: -2; 51: -4*). These three points could be explained by the independent, self-contained nature of these learners. Whilst they have a good internal understanding of their own learning processes, they are less able to verbalise this understanding and consider their own and others language use from a more objective perspective.

9.5.2 Justin

Justin, a student from Hong Kong and a native speaker of Cantonese, was in his second year studying at a university in Hong Kong at the time of the interview. He was learning five languages (English, Mandarin, Japanese, French, German) and was about to spend three months in New York as an intern at a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation connected to the United Nations, promoting environmental health and literacy. Justin was one of the ten most frequent users of his university's self-access centre, which had a focus on computer-assisted language learning. Justin used the centre to practise his English pronunciation, using pronunciation practice software. Justin explained that practising his pronunciation was important for him so that his listener did not suffer:

> [...] listeners may suffer, I mean listeners may suffer try to guess what we are talking about and try to ... try to ... try to control not to laugh when we say something like wrongly [...] I don't want to do this to others. I try to make it better. I know I may not be perfect, but at least better for others to listen.

Although Justin was learning five languages, he considered English 'more important' than French, German or Japanese, which he was learning to 'just make fun'. He described how English is used as the medium of

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education, and although he and his peers may have sometimes referred to Chinese books because they are easy to read, the extra cognitive load that was required to then translate them into English made this a rather futile strategy:

> [...] when you read the Chinese you got the concepts but at the end you need to write the paper and you have to translate to English and then you've got English book too to learn again [...] In my class, very very few students read the Chinese books first, that is really some cases, because at the end they have to translate.

Despite the ubiquitous presence of English within the education system, Justin explained that nevertheless he had difficulties in finding opportunities to speak English in social contexts in Hong Kong: 'Hong Kong people do not talk to Hong Kong people in English.' He did, however, listen to English music, especially the rock band *Linkin Park*, and watched movies and television programmes such as *Britain's Got Talent* and *Hotel Babylon* in English.

In contrast to the few opportunities Justin found to use English in everyday life, he found plenty of opportunities to speak Mandarin. He explained how he always spoken in Mandarin with his Mainland Chinese friends – even if they spoke to him in Cantonese he would 'insist in talk [...] to them in Mandarin [...] so I speak Mandarin and my friends speak Cantonese.' In addition to talking with his friends in Mandarin, Justin would listen to the radio and watch movies and television programmes in Mandarin for 'at least one hour per day.'

Justin's focus on language learning through popular culture, which he described in relation to learning English and Mandarin, was also a strong feature in his Japanese learning. He was particularly fanatical about a band called *X Japan* who had recently reformed. He explained how he listened to their songs 'over and over again and at some point I can ... I can grasp

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some pronunciation and sentence.' He talked about the motivating power of learning through songs:

> And when I see this song I like I feel Oh! I must understand it. I must check the dictionary and I... it is really simple, it is like I just open the web, go to Google, Japanese dictionary, and I click it and I copy the words to a Japanese dictionary and that really, and I remember it well.

Apart from popular culture, Justin found motivation in communicating with other people. In our interview, he frequently referred to friends with whom he practised one of his languages; as he explained, for him 'people is the ultimate goal of language.'

9.6 'Teacher-focused' mode of autonomy

9.6.1 Narrative interpretation

The teacher-focused (TF) mode of autonomy represents the least independent learners, with the defining participants indicating that they like a very teacher-supported approach with their learning (30**: +1; 32*: +3; 18: -5; 25: +2) but are less comfortable seeking support from other learners (33**: +2). TF mode of autonomy learners see the teacher as someone who can encourage them and provide psychological support, but not necessarily direct their learning. TF mode of autonomy learners are confident about their future (41: +5) although feel they would not easily be able to continue learning their language after they leave university (42*: -1).

TF mode of autonomy learners have a strong instrumental motivation to find opportunities to use their target language (5: +5; 41: +5; 39: +4) and believe that it will be useful in a future career (21: +4). However, there is not much emphasis on enjoying language learning for its own sake (35: -1; 23: -1). As well as being teacher-focused, they are also very future-focused, and this drives much of their autonomous behaviour.

TF learners are very self-disciplined (30: +4) and in some ways they have a good deal of control over their learning: they are not worried about making mistakes in front of others (34**: -5), they are likely to develop new ways to use resources (46**: +3) and feel they can analyse their own language learning needs (14: +1). However, they do not think very carefully about what they want to learn (26: -2), they do not feel they can organise their own learning time effectively (16: -4) or choose good resources or strategies (4: -3; 3*: -4; 11: -3), and they do not feel that they are good at choosing where to learn (48: -1). Arguably, these aspects of control over the learning process are traditionally done by a teacher.

9.6.2 Tim

At the time of our interview, Tim was an undergraduate in the second year studying computer engineering in a university in Hong Kong. He was a native speaker of Cantonese from Hong Kong, and was learning one language: English.

Tim was a regular user of the self-access learning centre at his university, and he had a very systematic and precise approach to learning English aided by an online tool available in the self-access centre called Online Language Learning Advisor (OLLA)[4]. He had a good understanding of the structure which OLLA provided for his self-access language learning:

> And OLLA, the software suggest, we need to use ... to have
> three different stage to learning. First is the focus practice,
> transfer practice and general practice. Focus practice that
> means you learn the things that you don't know, through the
> basics. For example, you learn definition from the books,
> then the second stage is transfer task. You use the definition
> to apply in a practical way. For example you use the
> definition and online material, for example like online video,
> something like that. And the last part is the general practice
> that mean you use what you have learned and enjoy the
> learning.

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[4] OLLA is a pseudonymous term.

At the time of our interview, Tim's focused practice was pronunciation – in particular linking, and he explained how he used exercise books and IPA symbols to help him with his focused and transfer practice, and the BBC News website for his general practice, as these materials were all suggested by OLLA. He also talked about using the drama series *Lost* – again in a very systematic way:

> I listen to the characters that is speaking, and then found this part where there's using the linking I will focus on the specific part. And play it again and again to listen and study.

Tim also talked briefly about how his real life learning advisor supports him in his language learning: 'my advisor suggest recently for myself is that I try to recognise the audio in the computer ... choose some software and [...] play it and listen.'

Shortly after the start of our interview, Tim said 'I have a story about my life and learning English – can I tell you?' He then told me how when he was young, his early years of school were, in retrospect, not very satisfactory: '... primary school for me is an empty feeling that I haven't learned anything.' He described how he frequently failed his classes, especially English, until one day an Australian teacher asked him a simple question: 'What's the weather today?' Although it was a simple question, he found it difficult to answer because it was sunny outside, but he had only learned from his textbooks how to say it was hot, and that day was not hot, just sunny. This critical incident (Brookfield, 1990; Farrell, 2008) had a profound effect on Tim just as he was about to start the period of intense examinations which Hong Kong students must sit:

> That year I cried very hard on my state in English and yes ... because in Hong Kong we have public exam [...] so we have to be test on lots of English for exam paper [...] my English is poor but I have no way to learn in English because I do not know how to learn and I really frustrated ... I find that I'm poor in English and I don't know how to learn

One tutor outside the school system told Tim that he had no chance of learning enough to pass his exams, but another teacher helped Tim with some extra support after school, and through this guidance he started to learn 200 vocabulary items per month, which encouraged him. He attributed his ability to use English to this teacher: '... why I can speak [...] is because I found a good teacher in Form 6 [...] she helped me a lot [...] she saved me a lot [...] Before that woman I always cry for my progress.' However, he explained that the sense of frustration described above continued until he started at university, when he finally started to understand the 'many kinds of category' in English, such as tenses, and the understanding of this structure enabled him to 'fight for [English]'.

9.7 'Competitively driven' mode of autonomy

9.7.1 Narrative interpretation

Competitively-driven mode of autonomy defining participants find strong motivation in being better than other learners. They are confident and demonstrate a strong desire to learn (1: +5) they also consider themselves to be somewhat lazy and lacking in self-discipline (25: +5*; 39: -5; 16: -4) especially when they are left to their own devices and not learning with the support of a teacher (25: +5*; 38: -3) or not in a competitive environment. They regard the teacher as a disciplining force, in other words, as someone who they respect and consequently want to please by working hard (especially if that gives them an advantage over their peers), but not as someone who provides encouragement (32: -4). These learners feel they need scaffolding in their language learning through support from the teacher or through the resources, such as textbooks, that they use in their language studies (8: +3).

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Learners identifying with this mode have clear goals and are committed to achieving them, demonstrating a need to succeed (50: +4; 15: +3). They are future-oriented, and see their language skills developing and being useful in their future (21: +4; 42: +4) although they do not necessarily feel more likely to have a successful life because of their language skills (41: 0).

Whilst competitively-driven mode of autonomy defining participants enjoy learning autonomously because they acknowledge it can help them in achieving their goals (50: +4) and because they can learn at a level that suits them and in ways that interest them (37: +3; 36: +3), they do not appear to feel confident in choosing strategies or resources to help them learn (4: -3; 11: -3; 45: -1) and having a reflexive stance on learning is not a salient part of this mode of autonomy (19: -5; 27: 0, 31: -1; 51: -1).

9.7.2 Rebecca

Rebecca was a British female undergraduate in her first year studying French and German in a university in the UK at the time of our interview. She was studying for a double major degree, in which French and German were equally weighted. She considered both her languages to be 'a part of me' and remarked 'there's not many people who are like that.'

Rebecca started learning French from a very young age. She had an older sister, who went on an exchange programme when she was ten and Rebecca was five, and this inspired Rebecca to also want to learn the language. She explained that she wanted to be like her big sister, who returned from France sometimes spontaneously using French instead of English. This accidental use of French 'sounded so nice' and so Rebecca 'nagg[ed] on' at her mother to have the opportunity to learn, until her mother organised a private lesson for one hour per week when she was still

five years old. Outside that time, Rebecca described how she would 'just sit there with all my little books and my little dictionary and stuff learning French.' She described how she was 'so jealous' of her older sister and her two older brothers, as they were old enough to go on exchange but she had to wait until she had reached the legal age limit of nine. When she was nine years old, Rebecca hosted a French exchange student and then she followed in the footsteps of her sister and brothers, and went to France on exchange for six months. Rebecca went to school in France and 'really just [became] a part of their family', adopting the interests of her exchange partner: 'Yeah, you go to school. Do EVERYTHING. Like if they do any particular activities, like she did basketball, you have to do them with them ...'

At the age of twelve, Rebecca decided it was time she did another language and did a second six month exchange in Germany. When Rebecca returned from Germany, she studied alone for her German GCSE while the rest of her class were studying French. This was the first time she had really focused on written German, and the study she did focused on past exam papers, which she received feedback on from the head of German. For extra help and support, she kept in touch with friends in Germany and asked them to send her books and newspapers to help her with her reading. She sat her German GCSE examination in Year 8 (at the age of 12/13) but then did not study German formally again until her A levels three years later. With French, however, she continued to study formally in school, but her teachers gave her more advanced work.

At A level, Rebecca explained that 'I never really had to work as hard as I knew other people did', and so when she started her university studies she was somewhat surprised to find that she did have to work hard, both to keep up with the work and also to catch up with her written language

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proficiency in both German and French. The realisation that she was not at the top of the class, as she had always been when she was younger, encouraged her to be more active in learning outside class time: 'I know in order to get those marks, coz I'm attending everything and I'm clearly doing the work, there has to be something extra that I need to do myself.' Outside class Rebecca explained that she sent texts and spoke in French to one of her flatmates who was also taking French and whose parents were French, and that they listened to French radio. For German, she would 'watch stuff online' and also listen to German radio. Despite this, she felt her listening skills needed work as she had received her lowest mark for listening in her end of term exam. She attributed this low mark to the fact that she did so much listening and always understood it, but needed 'to work at getting it down on the paper in the right way to show that although I understand it, somebody else needs to understand it as well.'

At the time of our interview, although Rebecca was highly proficient in both languages and claimed to prefer French because 'it just sounds nicer' she found that German came to her more easily and she consistently received better marks for her German. She described 'a really big worry of mine' as 'getting things wrong in front of people' and was aware that her more informal way of learning languages might lead to a better colloquial command of the language but weaknesses in the more formal aspects.

9.8 Part two: The self-assessment tool

In Part 2, I shall briefly describe how the self-assessment tool is informed by the theories of assessment discussed in Chapter 3, how it emerged from the modes of autonomy research findings, and how it can be operated by learners themselves, or as a tool for discussion and development in a classroom setting.

9.9 Theoretical basis

The move towards sustainable assessment discussed in Chapter 3, the shift over the last ten years to a focus on formative assessment and the accompanying suggestion that assessment for learning can also be extended to assessment for autonomy (T. Lamb, 2010) are three of the main ideas underpinning the development of the assessment tool shown in this section. The emphasis on self-assessment is also an important focusing principle, for as I discussed in Chapter 3, self-assessment has been considered a fundamental aspect of developing autonomy in language learners for some years.

In Chapter 3, the criteria for incorporating sustainable assessment theory into practice were listed and discussed (Boud & Falchikov, 2004, 2006). Here, I will briefly evaluate the self-assessment tool, presented in Chapter 9, according to these criteria.

1. Engage with standards and criteria and problem analysis
   The assessment tool provides a platform for learners to consider standards and criteria of their own learner autonomy through the key areas for assessment and the assessment criteria. As such, it gives learners practice in 'identifying, developing and engaging with criteria and standards' (Boud & Falchikov, 2006, p. 408).
2. Emphasise importance of context
   By firstly identifying with a particular mode of autonomy, contextualised through the voices of other learners, those using the tool are made aware of the importance of context.
3. Involve working in association with others
   Working in association with others is encouraged through the key areas for assessment included in the tool. Through identifying with the voices of other learners, users of the tool are 'engag[ing] with

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communities of practice and ways in which their knowledge is represented' (ibid.).

4. Involve authentic representations and productions

    The contextualised mode of autonomy, key areas for assessment, and suggestions for improvement are authentic representations and productions of learners' own understandings of the outcomes of learner autonomy.

5. Promote transparency of knowledge

    Use of the tool in itself, whether in an out-of-class or in-class context, promotes the transparency of knowledge.

6. Foster reflexivity

    The opportunity for reflective thinking and learning is built into the process of using the tool and is explicitly encouraged by the tool. The tool allows for 'self-monitoring judging progression towards goals' (Boud & Falchikov, 2006, p. 409).

7. Build learner agency and construct active learners

    As part of the assessment tool, learners are encouraged to create their own assessment tasks by writing their own assessment plan and writing their own identifying descriptions. In this way the tool provides opportunities to appropriate investment activities to their own ends' (ibid.).

8. Consider risk and confidence of judgement

    The ambiguity in the identifying descriptions, the extent of overlap between the descriptions and the key areas for assessment provides the 'scope for taking initiative' (ibid.) which sustainable assessment demands.

9. Promote seeking appropriate feedback

    Elements of the 'key areas for assessment' and 'suggestions for improvement' encourage learners to seek and utilise feedback from others.

10. Require portrayal of outcomes for different purposes

    The tool as a whole, and the emphasis in the rubric that learners' understandings of their own situation may vary from tool-using episode to tool-using episode underscores the notion that different purposes require different outcomes.

In Chapter 4, transformative learning theory was discussed as underpinning the research. I posit here that using the formative (self-) assessment tool (Figure 9.1) has strong transformative potential. Cranton (2000) argues:

> Increasing self-awareness as to how we function in the world involves more than taking a test and acquiring a label. In fact, many approaches to personality and learning and cognitive style become dysfunctional when individuals use their category or label as a justification for not changing [...] but if an instrument is used as a starting point for discussion, interpretation, and critical questioning it can be the beginning of a fruitful journey. (p. 187)

I maintain that the tool presented in this chapter is an 'instrument [...] as a starting point for discussion, interpretation, and critical questioning' of learners' language learner autonomy.

9.10 Designing the tool: drawing from research

The tool is based on the narrative interpretation of the modes of autonomy and contextualised by the thematic interview analyses discussed in the previous chapter. It is conceptualised as a web-based tool, but shown here in a paper format.

The tool is data-driven in that the identifying descriptions were generated from the mode of autonomy narrative interpretations and the learner autonomy histories presented in Chapter 9. Similarly, the key areas for assessment and the suggestions for improvement were derived from the learners' own voices and experiences detailed in the mode of autonomy analyses and the interview data presented in Chapter 8.

9.11 Operating the tool

As a starting point for engaging with the tool, learners read an explicit explanation of the purpose and benefits of the formative self-assessment process in the rubric. Research has shown that this is helpful in getting students involved and motivated in the assessment process (Mok, 2011).

The framework itself comprises five main aspects: the identifying descriptions personalised from the perspective of other learners (the anonymised participants in the study), the key areas for assessment, the suggestions for improvement, and the personalised areas for improvement (Figure 9.1). Learners engaging with the assessment tool firstly read the 'identifying descriptions' and select one which most closely matches their current situation. Whereas in Chapter 8 and Part 1 of this Chapter the modes of autonomy were analysed and presented using descriptive labels such as 'teacher-focused' and 'oozing confidence', in the self-assessment tool, I have decided not to use such labels, as they are arguably not value-free, and risk being understood in a deterministic way by users of the tool. Instead, colours have been used to indicate the different modes of autonomy.

Next, learners engaging with the tool look at the 'key areas for assessment' associated with their 'identifying description' and select which they feel are important or necessary for them to address. By incorporating two elements

of choice into the tool (choice regarding which mode is their best match, and choice regarding which 'key areas for assessment' they wish to address) some of the principles of learner autonomy theory, as outlined in Chapter 2, are being adhered to in the design of the tool. The 'key areas for assessment' are followed by 'suggestions for improvement' associated with each assessment area. As mentioned above, these 'suggestions for improvement' are data driven as they are taken from the learner interviews analysed in Chapter 8.

Next, in order to ensure the tool remains non-prescriptive and non-deterministic, learners are encouraged to consider 'key areas for assessment' in the other modes of autonomy, to ascertain whether these are also of interest to them in the development of their autonomous learning skills. It is assumed likely that there will be extensive overlap in the extent to which learners identify themselves with one mode or another. Therefore, it is expected that learners will find useful 'key areas for assessment' and 'suggestions for improvement' within the alternative modes. They are also encouraged to write their own key areas and suggestions and in this way take ownership of the tool.

Finally, learners are asked to write their own assessment plan, and to engage with the criteria for assessment of their own developing autonomy at periodic intervals. Incorporating this cyclical, iterative aspect into the tool emphasises its formative nature: that it is simply a starting point for thinking about developing autonomy.

Figure 9.1: The formative (self-) assessment tool

This self-assessment tool will help you become a more autonomous learner. Autonomous language learners are more effective and efficient language learners, and develop learning skills to enable them to continue learning outside the classroom and after they have left formal education. There are different ways of being autonomous. These different ways might depend on the language you are practising, how proficient you are in this language, the kind of learning activity/task you are doing, what you perceive your learning needs to be, where you are learning, and how you are feeling today. To help you find out which way of being autonomous is most like you today, and how you can become more autonomous, please follow these steps.

Steps

1. Read the descriptions of language learners in the boxes below, and choose which one best describes your learning situation right now.
2. Check out this learner's key areas for assessment. Are any of these useful for you?
3. Check out the learner's weak areas. Are any of these relevant for you?
4. Read other learners key areas for assessment. Are any of these relevant to you?
5. Read the suggestions attached to the key areas for assessment. What do you want to assess?
6. Draw up your own assessment plan.

Hi, I'm Monica. I'm from China and I'm studying Biochemistry in Hong Kong. I love languages! I'm learning English, Cantonese and Spanish. When I speak English it just feels like part of who I am. I really enjoy speaking in English – sometimes I even speak English with other Chinese people! I try to get good tips and ideas for language learning from other people and I think a lot about how I learn. Actually, I don't really need to be in a class with a teacher – after all, I won't always have a teacher there to help me. Communicating with other people really helps motivate me. I'm also pretty well organised. For example, I'm good at organising my time.

Hello. My name's Chihiro and I'm from Japan. I'm studying English and Spanish at university. My mum lives in America and so I have a good reason for learning English – I want to communicate with my new family! One day I want to live abroad and have a career. I think being able to speak English will help me get a good job.
I love music – especially reggaetón. Listening to English music first made me want to learn. Now I enjoy learning with my friends. I can help them and they help me too. I think it's important to be brave when we speak English and not worry about making mistakes. We just have to do our best!

Hi. I'm Emiko and I'm from Japan. I'm learning English at university. I really enjoy talking with native speakers and there are lots at my university – especially exchange students from America – so I'm lucky! The other day an English speaker asked me how to get to the station and I was able to help him! It was a good experience for me.
My parents don't speak English at all. They are very happy that I am an English student. They supported me to go abroad last year on exchange so I want to be a good English speaker. I went to Australia and stayed with a host family. I still write to them on email and sometimes I find friends using Facebook and I communicate with them in English.

I'm Justin and I'm from Hong Kong. I'm learning English, Mandarin, Japanese, French and German, but most of these I'm learning on my own, just by talking to friends, listening to music and watching television shows. Yeah, I watch Britain's Got Talent. I have to read a lot in English for my studies but I also want to be a good speaker. I use the self-access centre at my university every day to practise my pronunciation. With Japanese, I listen to Japanese music and sometimes I write down the words in Chinese and this helps me remember vocabulary. For me, learning is all about communicating with people and that's why I love learning languages.

Hello I'm Tim. I'm from Hung Kong and I'm studying computer engineering at university there. I also learn English at university because I need it for my future career. I haven't always been a good English student but now I have a good system for learning: I come to our self-access centre three times each week for 2 hours every time. I know exactly how I should use the materials in our self-access centre to help me be a better English speaker. The teachers in our language centre help me a lot. I come and talk English with them when I have spare time. They encourage me and help me choose materials. I must make the most of this opportunity so I can get a good job in 2 years time.

Hiya. I'm Rebecca. I'm from the UK and I'm learning German and French at university. I've been learning both languages since I was really young and to be honest, I'm probably the best in my class, but that's because I work hard … most of the time! Some of the others in my classes are just really lazy. I can be lazy too, but I always study hard in my languages. I'm not sure what kind of job I will get when I leave uni but I definitely want to use my languages so I need to study hard and get better and better. I think I will continue learning when I leave uni because I want to live in Europe. French and German just feel like part of me.

Key areas for assessment

These may be areas of strength
1. Self-discipline.
2. Reflection.

These may be areas of weakness
3. Working with others to help each other improve.
4. Reviewing what you have learned.

Others:

Key areas for assessment

These may be areas of strength
1. Understanding your goals.
2. Risk taking.

These may be areas of weakness.
3. Organising your learning time effectively.
4. Knowing how to get yourself in the mood to learn.

Others:

Key areas for assessment

These may be areas of strength
1. Finding opportunities to use your language.
2. Using appropriate learning resources.

These may be areas of weakness
3. Understanding yourself as a learner.
4. Knowing the best ways to learn in the future.

Others:

Key areas for assessment

These may be areas of strength
1. Asking for help with your language learning.
2. Achieving your goals.

These may be areas of weakness
3. Finding mistakes and errors in your own language use and that of others.
4. Knowing how to use the feedback you receive on your language use to help you improve.

Others:

Key areas for assessment

These may be areas of strength
1. Finding opportunities to use your language.
2. Noticing and learning from your mistakes.

These may be areas of weakness
3. Choosing good resources to help you learn.
4. Organising your learning time effectively.

Others:

Key areas for assessment

These may be areas of strength
1. Understanding goals.
2. Using your preferred ways of learning.

These may be areas of weakness
3. Finding out the strengths and weaknesses of your language use
4. Being self-disciplined.

Others:

Suggestions for improvement from Monica's friends

1. When you don't feel very self-disciplined, think of how good you will feel when you have achieved your task.
2. Think of reflecting on your learning as a way of making that learning more concrete and of understanding how you can improve the process.
3. Think about how other people could help you and support your learning. Think about what you could contribute to, and how you could benefit from, working in a pair or group. Be honest and admit your vulnerabilities to yourself and others.
4. Make reviewing part of your daily language learning routine. Remember that reviewing your work can help you retain language items in your long term memory and save you time in the future.

Your suggestions:

Suggestions for improvement from Chihiro's friends

1. Focus on your goals for the future. What do you need to do in your language learning now and in the future to help you achieve those goals?
2. When you make mistakes in front of others, think about how you might be helping them to feel less self-conscious about making mistakes themselves.
3. Think about the negative consequences of not being organised with your time (e.g. you may not be prepared and may not learn properly). Take responsibility by managing your time in bits (for small tasks) and chunks (for longer tasks).
4. Experiment and find your optimal learning mood setter. Is it silence? Music? Special lighting? Privacy? Hustle and bustle? Would a nap before you start learning help?

Your suggestions:

Suggestions for improvement from Emiko's friends

1. Try to create opportunities for using your target language which will enable you to communicate with others. If you are not in a situation where you can meet native speakers, think about the opportunities online.
2. How do you like to learn? Try using films, music and the Internet or other ways you think are enjoyable.
3. Ask your teacher and other learners you know to help you identify your strengths and weaknesses. Focus on what you enjoy and have confidence that this can also be an effective approach.
4. Try to set yourself long term goals to help you think about future learning. Try to one or two activities over a period of time. At the end of this time period, consider which were most effective for you.

Your suggestions:

Suggestions for improvement from Justin's friends

1. Focus on how collaborating with others can help you learn new ways to study and practise your language.
2. Think about goals as being a good way to motivate yourself and to push you forward in your learning.
3. Record yourself using your target language or concentrate on listening to another conversation. Focus on the language accuracy as well as the meaning you/others are conveying. Are you able to identify any errors?
4. Keep a note of any feedback you get (on written or spoken language). Also keep a look out for indirect feedback (do people misunderstand some words you say?) Consider how you can change your language. Look back on these notes from time to time.

Your suggestions:

Suggestions for improvement from Tim's friends

1. Use the resources available to you in your institution. For example, make appointments to discuss your learning with advisors and participate in language exchange programs with native speakers.
2. Ask the people you communicate with in writing or orally to give you feedback on your mistakes. This will help you notice them yourself in future.
3. Ask your teacher to recommend some resources for the area of language you are working on. Try them out, stop using the ones you don't like, think about why you do like the others. Try to find some similar resources in your self-access centre or online.
4. Think of time management as another way of being self-disciplined in your learning. Protect your time and tell people when you are working so they don't interrupt you. Avoid distractions such as email.

Your suggestions:

Suggestions for improvement from Rebecca's friends

1. What is the highest standard you need to achieve to help you reach your goal in ten years time?
2. Experiment with different strategies, resources and activities until you find a way that you enjoy and think is interesting.
3. Try to objectively compare your language use to that of others around you. How does your language use compare to the others? Keep a systematic record and think of this as a way of helping you accomplish your future goals.
4. Think of self-discipline as a way of helping you keep ahead in your learning. Reward your self-discipline by giving yourself a present or a treat at the end of a period of learning.

Your suggestions:

My personal assessment plan				
Suggestions for improvement	**Done**	**How did you do it?**	**Criteria**	**Comments**
			How useful was this for me? 1. Very useful 2. OK. 3. Slightly useful. 4. Not useful at all.	
			What did I learn about my level of learner autonomy? 1. I'm good in this area. 2. I need a bit more practice but I'm nearly there. 3. I need a lot more practice.	
			Has learning autonomously helped my language learning? Yes A bit No	
			How useful was this for me? 1. Very useful 2. OK. 3. Slightly useful. 4. Not useful at all.	
			What did I learn about my level of learner autonomy? 1. I'm good in this area. 2. I need a bit more practice but I'm nearly there. 3. I need a lot more practice.	
			Has learning autonomously helped my language learning? Yes A bit No	

10 Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This work concludes the thesis by reflecting on the research aims, discussing the significance of the thesis, considering its limitations and describing the dissemination of the research.

10.2 Significance

This work makes a contribution to the field of applied linguistics in five ways:

Firstly, an operational model of learner autonomy has been devised on the basis of literature, experience, and praxis, breaking down the notion of learner autonomy into seven main components and 34 constitutive elements. This model provides a concrete way of understanding learner autonomy; it has been used as the basis for the questionnaire in this study, and can be used as the basis for future research on learner autonomy or when an operational construct is required for professional practice.

Secondly, it is the first known global survey of practices in the assessment of learner autonomy. This contribution provides an understanding of how educators are responding to the need to show stakeholders and learners themselves how effective autonomous learning is. For the first time, we have a clear idea of what is being assessed, how it is being assessed, and who is involved in the assessment procedure. What is clear from the outcome is that language learner autonomy is widely assessed on a global scale, it is typically done by someone other than the learner themselves and a variety of tools and evidence are utilised in the assessment procedures.

The third major contribution made by this work is that it is the first known study on learner autonomy to be carried out using Q methodology. Q methodology is a research methodology allowing for the systematic investigation of subjectivity which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Q methodology was particularly illuminating because of it was able to elicit rich qualitative data which could be approached from a more systematic perspective than, for example, interviews or questionnaires would have allowed. I hope that this study will encourage others to explore Q methodology for learner autonomy, and thereby allow Q methodology to become one of the systematic tools of inquiry which will form the basis of the future learner autonomy researcher's tool kit.

Next, this thesis suggests a new way of conceptualising how learners can be autonomous through the presentation of modes of autonomy. Modes of autonomy are learner-generated viewpoints on what language learner autonomy means in practice. The six modes of learner autonomy described in the study offer, for the first time, the possibility of moving on from a monolithic understanding of how 'learner autonomy' is manifested in learners, thus providing insights into individual ways of operationalising learner autonomy.

Lastly, this work presents a tool for the formative assessment of learner autonomy which can be used by learners themselves or by educators in a formal learning environment. This is the first tool of its sort to be developed. Its strength is in allowing students freedom to develop their own portfolio of assessment techniques for autonomy and to relate it to their progress in language learning. It is hoped that through using this tool, learners will achieve a sense of accomplishment in their own learning. I also hope that through using this tool learners may be exposed to different

ways of evaluating their own skills and progress which will foster a sense of intrinsic motivation and generate an interest in language learning for its own sake.

A secondary use of the tool is its potential use in persuading stakeholders and managers of self-access centres and other autonomy-inspired learning environments of the possibilities in gathering evidence from sources other than purely quantitative ones, to justify financial and non-monetary investments in those learning environments to other stakeholders.

10.3 Strengths and limitations

The previous section described the particular significance of the thesis in terms of the contribution to knowledge in the field of applied linguistics. In this section I shall discuss more generally the strengths and limitations of the research, using the framework of the research aims outlined in section 1.3.

10.3.1   Research aim 1

The first research aim was 'to define learner autonomy from a practical perspective in terms of what learners need to do to support themselves in the development of their autonomy'. The new model of learner autonomy, described in Chapter 5, achieves this aim. The main strength of the model resides in its accessibility: it can be used in practical language learning situations by both learners and educators, as well as for research purposes. Whilst the model has been validated in a research context, it remains to be tested in a language learning environment, and it is expected that such testing would result in revisions being required. One refinement which can already be identified, is the addition of a social dimension of learner autonomy. Although social dimensions are incorporated into the 34 constitutive elements (e.g. 'ability to collaborate with other students and

teachers'), the literature on peer-assessment discussed in Chapter 3, and Phase 2 of this research study, both highlight the importance of the social dimension and suggest that it should feature more prominently in the model, possibly as a separate, eighth category.

10.3.2 Research aim 2

The second research aim was 'to investigate whether and how language learner autonomy in higher education is currently assessed'. The survey research which comprised Phase 1 of the study, and which is described in Chapter 6, achieved this aim.

The strength of the survey was in its global reach, achieved through the online nature of the survey. Despite this global reach, the number of useable responses makes it unlikely that the data are representative of areas where language learner autonomy is actively promoted. In addition, the questionnaire was very long and contravened much of the guidance in the literature regarding questionnaire length. In fact, the analysis of incomplete responses indicates that some participants may have been deterred by the length of the questionnaire. Finally, a few of the responses suggested that some respondents may not have realised that the questionnaire was concerned with their own professional practice and may have thought the questionnaire was talking about assessment practices in general. Researchers looking to use a similar survey in future research should be mindful of this and ensure the context of the questions is clearly demarcated.

10.3.3 Research aim 3

The third research aim was 'to understand learners' perceptions of the non-linguistic outcomes of autonomous language learning as a means by which

a learner-informed assessment tool can be developed'. The Q methodology study (Phase 2) of the research achieved this aim.

The strength of Q methodology was that, on the whole, participants enjoyed the research process and the perceptions data generated were rich, relevant and substantial. In fact, the success of the methodology resulted in feedback from some commentators that using the card sorting process intrinsic to Q, together with the follow-up interview technique, might in themselves be useful ways of performing self-assessments. Using the Q sort and interview in this way could be a productive area for further research into self-assessment.

Despite the seeming success of Q methodology as a research method, it emerged during the analysis stage that the wording of the statements may have been confusing to respondents, as some were worded positively and others negatively. Furthermore, some of the discipline-related terms on the statements were not defined (e.g., 'strategies') and this may have caused confusion or embarrassment. Even though learners were given the opportunity to ask me if they had questions relating to the statements, they may have felt too uncomfortable to do so.

Despite the relevance of the data, during the analysis, I had concerns regarding to what extent the statements had been interpreted as non-lingustic outcomes of learning in an autonomous environment. The data suggested that participants interpreted the statements more readily as aspects of themselves and their identities. Revisiting the data through an ideal selves framework could result in a productive interpretation of this area, and would be an interesting avenue for further research.

Lastly, although Q methodology is designed to investigate subjectivity, it is arguably a more successful methodology when the area of subjectivity is a

controversial one, as this would generate a range of diverse opinion. Whilst Q methodology did allow me to generate interesting findings in this study, it is possible that the central tenet – learners' perceptions of the non-linguistic outcomes of autonomous language learning – or the statements themselves were not divisive enough to maximise the potential of Q.

10.3.4   Research aim 4

The fourth research aim was 'to develop a learner-informed tool for the self-assessment of language learner autonomy'. This aim was achieved and the tool was presented in Chapter 9. The strength of the tool is in the interpretation of the modes of autonomy into a useable framework for self-assessment, although this process was challenging primarily due to significant overlap in the mode descriptions. One aspect of the usability of the tool, which has not been considered here, and which would be a fruitful area for further research, is how it might be used for peer assessment.

Clear directions need to be provided for learners and educators using the tool to ensure that it is seen as an tool to support ongoing reflective learning, rather than a means of labelling learners as a specific type of autonomous learner. The transient nature of the modes of learner autonomy should be stressed. It is envisaged that the future iteration of the tool, in an online format, will aid in this process.

10.4 Future research

The main area for future research is to test the tool for formative self-assessment which was the main outcome of this study. Because the development and the content of the tool is learner-informed, ideally the testing would take place initially in the countries where the research participants were based: Hong Kong, Japan and the UK.

It could be argued, with caution, that there is some similarity between the modes of autonomy research presented in this thesis and the large body of work on learning styles. Ng and Confessore (2010) have demonstrated a link between the number of learning styles that learners are comfortable engaging in, and levels of learner autonomy. It would, therefore, be of interest to investigate how learners perceive modes of autonomy in comparison to models of learning styles.

It would also be interesting to investigate the cultural aspects of the modes of autonomy and whether they offer a new way of understanding cultural dimensions of learner autonomy.

Other modes of autonomy could be identified.

I would be interested to investigate whether different autonomy modes are more successful language learners than others. Does the type of mode you identify with at a particular point in time depend on how much autonomy impacts upon you as a successful language learner?

10.5 Dissemination

10.5.1   Publications

Pemberton, R. & Cooker, L. (forthcoming). Self-directed learning: Concepts, practice and a novel research methodology. In S Mercer, S. Ryan & M. Williams (Eds.). *Psychology for language learning: Insights from research, theory & practice. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.*

Cooker, L. & Nix, M. (2011). On Q: An appropriate methodology for researching autonomy? Part 2. *Learning Learning*, 18 (1), 31-38.

Cooker, L. & Nix, M. (2010). On Q: An appropriate methodology for researching autonomy? Part 1. *Learning Learning*, 17 (2), 24-30.

10.5.2   Presentations

*"When I got a person to communicate with, I got a purpose to learn":
Evidence for social 'modes of autonomy'.* Paper presented at The 16th World Congress of Applied Linguistics (AILA 2011): Harmony in diversity: language, culture, society, Beijing, China, August 2011.

Defining learner autonomy: A new model for teachers, language advisors and learners. Paper presented at Cutting Edges: Autonomy and Community in Language Learning, Teaching and Training, Canterbury, UK. July 2011.

Creating a learner-generated tool for the (self-) assessment of learner autonomy. Paper presented at The 3rd Bremen Symposium, Autonomy and Assessment: Testing, Evaluating and Certifying in Classroom and Autonomous Learning Contexts, Bremen, Germany. March 2011.

Learner autonomy in the language classroom – ten tips for success. Teachers' seminar at The Language Show, Earls Court, London, UK. October, 2010.

Towards a learner-generated tool for the (self-) assessment of learner autonomy. Poster presented at Teachers as Learners, Learners as Teachers, Nakasendo Conference 2010, Tokyo Kasei University, Japan. June, 2010.

The non-linguistic outcomes of autonomous language learning: Learners' views. Paper presented at The First International Foreign Language Teaching Conference, Zirve University, Gaziantep, Turkey. June, 2010.

Q methodology for researching learner autonomy. Poster presented at Autonomy in a Connected World: IATEFL LA SIG/SWON/OU One Day Event. The Open University, Milton Keynes. UK. December, 2009.

Looking for language learner autonomy: Worldwide assessment practices. Paper presented to the Second and Foreign Language Pedagogy Group, Centre for Applied Research in Teacher Education, Curriculum and Pedagogy, School of Education, University of Nottingham. December, 2009.

The assessment of language learner autonomy: Where is the autonomy? Paper presented at the 4th Independent Learning Association Conference. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, June, 2009.

Using Q methodology to research self-access language learning and learner autonomy. Paper presented to the Hong Kong Association of Self-access Learning and Development. City University, Hong Kong. May, 2009.

The assessment of language learner autonomy: Practices in the field. Paper presented at the 43nd Annual International IATEFL Conference and Exhibition, Cardiff. April, 2009.

Developing a typology of assessment for autonomy. Paper presented at the SWAN (Sheffield, Warwick and Nottingham Autonomy) Network Student Conference, School of Education, University of Nottingham. December, 2007

Where Bubbles and Jelly Meet. Paper presented at the 3rd Independent Learning Association (ILA) 2007 Japan Conference. Kanda University of International Studies. Chiba, Japan. October, 2007.

10.5.3   Future dissemination plans

Three journal articles in preparation:

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'When I got a person to communicate with, I got a purpose to learn': Evidence for social modes of autonomy. (Special issue of the *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, July 2012)

Investigating learners' beliefs about the outcomes of autonomous language learning: 'An appropriate methodology'? (Target journal: *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*).

The assessment of learner autonomy: Where is the autonomy? (Target journal: *System*).

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Appendix A: Questionnaire used in Phase 1

Assessing autonomy in language learning

1. Information about the study

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Study Purpose
The purpose of this study is to investigate current assessment practices in autonomous language learning and the values that educators place on these practices.

This study is being conducted by me (Lucy Cooker) as part of my doctoral research at the University of Nottingham. For more information, you may contact me directly at any time using the following contact details:

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Data Usage
Your survey responses will be anonymous and confidential. I will not be tracking or recording information about specific individuals, including the IP address from which the online survey is accessed. In fact you cannot be identified from the data received by the researcher, unless you choose to include identifying information as part of your answers. No personal identifying information will be included with the research results or final report. Certain responses may be quoted in the final report, but participants will not be identified in any manner beyond the country of their institution.

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Assessing autonomy in language learning

2. Information about the study and participant consent - contd.

Participant Requirements

As a participant in this research project, you will be asked some questions regarding autonomous language learning via this online web-survey. The survey questions are designed to collect detailed data on the assessment of autonomous language learning.

In the pilot study, the average completion time for the survey was 35 minutes. It is recommended that you aim to complete the survey in one sitting, as, once started, you are unable to come back to the survey at a later date and continue where you left off.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any time without any consequences or adverse effects by using the *Prev* (Previous) button and deleting your answers, and then either clicking the *Exit this survey* button or by closing your browser window.

How to Participate

Read the **Information about the study and participant consent** pages (this page and the previous page). If you agree to participate, please confirm this by clicking on the relevant statements below, and then click the *Next* button at the bottom of this page to start the survey. Click *Done* when you have finished. If you wish to change any of your answers, please use the *Prev* (Previous) button to take you back to previous pages.

The survey will close on Tuesday 10th June, 2008 at 5.00p.m. GMT.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks or adverse effects to participating in this study, but there may also be no direct benefits. However, you may be interested in how I have designed the survey, or in my conceptualisation of learner autonomy. I also believe that the results from this project will help language educators and researchers around the world who are interested in autonomous learning practices understand what the current status is regarding the assessment of autonomous learning.

Ethical approval

This study has received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham School of Education Research Ethics Committee. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Coordinator using the following contact information:

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Thanks

I would like to express my thanks to David Dixon, a PhD student at the University of Warwick, for sharing with me his research findings regarding the component aspects of learner autonomy, and giving permission for me to use them in this survey.

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Assessing autonomy in language learning

1. Participant consent

☐ I give my voluntary informed consent to participate in this research project.

☐ I understand that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences.

☐ I understand that my responses will be anonymous and confidential, unless I choose to include identifying information as part of my answers.

Assessing autonomy in language learning

3.

Please answer the questions on the following pages according to your own personal professional practice. It may be easier for you to focus on one class or course.

Click "Next" to begin the survey.

Assessing autonomy in language learning

4. Your students

2. Are any of your students involved in activities under your guidance, which, in your opinion, foster the development of language learning autonomy?

○ Yes

○ No (selecting this will take you to the end of the survey)

Assessing autonomy in language learning

5. Your institution

3. Please indicate what type of institution you belong to. (If you work for more than one, please choose only one in order to answer the following questions.)

- ○ A college of further education
- ○ A university
- ○ An institute of higher education (but not a university)
- ○ Other (please specify)

4. In which country is this institution?

Country:

Assessing autonomy in language learning

6. Autonomous language learning

5. How would you describe the students involved in autonomous language learning? (Please select as many as necessary.)

☐ Students studying English in a country where English is the main, or the most widely spoken, first language (ESL students)

☐ Students studying English in a country where English is not the main, or the most widely spoken, first language (EFL students)

☐ Students studying a language other than English

☐ Students studying to be teachers

☐ Other (please specify)

6. In which environment(s) does the autonomous language learning take place? (Please select as many as necessary.)

☐ Classroom (traditional)

☐ Classroom enhanced by high tech facilities (also called a blended learning classroom, or classroom for multi-mode learning)

☐ Computer/multimedia lab

☐ Language lab

☐ Learners choose where they work

☐ Online

☐ Self-access centre

☐ Tutorials

☐ Other (please specify)

7. Is any aspect of their autonomy as a learner assessed in any way?

○ Yes (you will be taken to question 8.)   ○ No

Assessing autonomy in language learning

7.

8. Please explain why aspects of their learner autonomy are not assessed. (Then you will automatically be taken to the end of the survey.)

○ I don't believe that learner autonomy can be assessed separately to overall language proficiency.

○ I do believe that learner autonomy can be assessed separately to overall language proficiency, but language proficiency is what is important. As long as a certain level of proficiency is achieved, it doesn't matter how it is achieved.

○ I do believe that learner autonomy can be assessed separately to overall language proficiency, but don't assess my students on this because....

...please explain your answer further

Assessing autonomy in language learning

8. Assessment of language learner autonomy

The next three pages comprise the bulk of the survey, and each question will take some thought. As you become familiar with the options in the drop-down boxes, you should be able to answer the items more quickly.

On the next three pages, for each aspect of learner autonomy listed on the left-hand side, please indicate whether or not it is assessed, or whether, in your opinion, it is not an aspect of learner autonomy, by selecting an answer from the drop-down box in the first column. All of your answers are important for my research.

If you select "YES" in the first drop-down box ("Is this aspect of LA assessed?"), please then indicate who carries out the assessment, and what evidence and tools are used for assessment, by using the drop-down boxes in the next three columns.

Here is an illustrative scenario from my own professional practice:

My students' demonstrated ability to analyse/define their own needs was assessed by looking at their learning plans (there was a section of the learning plan dedicated to a description of their own needs analysis). I, myself, (the educator), carried out this assessment, and also the students did a self-assessment of their learning plan. I gave each student a score for the needs analysis section of their learning plan by using descriptor bands, and they used the same descriptor bands. Therefore, my answers to the first item in Question 9 below would be:

YES Educator + self Learning diaries/blogs Descriptor bands/rubrics

9. What aspects of your students' *LEARNER CONTROL* are assessed?

If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below.

	Is this aspect of LA assessed?	WHO assesses this aspect of LA?	Main EVIDENCE used to assess this aspect of LA	Primary TOOL used to assess this EVIDENCE?
Demonstrated ability to analyse/define their own needs	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to set achievable objectives	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to manage their own time	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to choose appropriate materials	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to negotiate their learning	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to select partners for pair/group work	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to work on their own	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to make choices about how their work will be assessed	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to assess discrete aspects of their own work	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to assess the work of their peers	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to take responsibility for their own learning outside the classroom	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to monitor their own learning progress over time	▼	▼	▼	▼

Is there anything else you want to say about the assessment of learner control?

Assessing autonomy in language learning

9. Assessment of language learner autonomy contd.

I know that was a very long section! Thank you for your time so far. The next question is a little bit shorter than that!

10. What aspects of your students' *METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS* are assessed?

If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below.

	Is this aspect of LA assessed?	WHO assesses this aspect of LA?	Main EVIDENCE used to assess this aspect of LA	Primary TOOL used to assess this EVIDENCE?
Ability to provide a rationale for materials chosen	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to select appropriate learning strategies	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to select and reject strategies according to needs	▼	▼	▼	▼
Ability to describe the strategies used	▼	▼	▼	▼
Ability to provide a rationale for the strategies used	▼	▼	▼	▼
Ability to provide an evaluation of the strategies used	▼	▼	▼	▼
Ability to describe alternative strategies that could have been used	▼	▼	▼	▼
Ability to describe plans for future learning	▼	▼	▼	▼

Is there anything else you want to say about the assessment of metacognitive awareness?

Assessing autonomy in language learning

10. Assessment of language learner autonomy contd.

Thank you for still being here! There are a few more questions, like the one you've just done. Why not take a short break away from your screen?

11. What aspects of your students' *CRITICAL REFLECTION* are assessed?

If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below.

	Is this aspect of LA assessed?	WHO assesses this aspect of LA?	Main EVIDENCE used to assess this aspect of LA	Primary TOOL used to assess this EVIDENCE?
Demonstrated critical understanding of the roles of teacher and learner	▾	▾	▾	▾
Demonstrated critical awareness of different teaching and learning approaches	▾	▾	▾	▾
Demonstrated critical awareness of the variations in quality of different teaching and learning inputs	▾	▾	▾	▾

Is there anything else you want to say about the assessment of critical reflection?

12. What aspects of your students' *LEARNING RANGE* are assessed?

If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below.

	Is this aspect of LA assessed?	WHO assesses this aspect of LA?	Main EVIDENCE used to assess this aspect of LA	Primary TOOL used to assess this EVIDENCE?
Demonstrated flexibility in ways of learning	▾	▾	▾	▾
Demonstrated breadth of learning content	▾	▾	▾	▾
Demonstrated ability to seek support from other students and teachers	▾	▾	▾	▾
Demonstrated ability to collaborate with other students and teachers	▾	▾	▾	▾

Is there anything else you want to say about the assessment of learning range?

Assessing autonomy in language learning

13. What aspects of your students' *CONFIDENCE* are assessed?

If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below.

	Is this aspect of LA assessed?	WHO assesses this aspect of LA?	Main EVIDENCE used to assess this aspect of LA	Primary TOOL used to assess this EVIDENCE?
Demonstrated ability to seek out opportunities to speak/use the language	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to overcome negative feedback/assessment	▼	▼	▼	▼

Is there anything else you want to say about the assessment of confidence?

14. What aspects of your students' *MOTIVATION* are assessed?

If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below.

	Is this aspect of LA assessed?	WHO assesses this aspect of LA?	Main EVIDENCE used to assess this aspect of LA	Primary TOOL used to assess this EVIDENCE?
Demonstrated desire to learn	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated willingness to speak/use the language	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated willingness to be actively engaged in learning activities	▼	▼	▼	▼

Is there anything else you want to say about the assessment of motivation?

Assessing autonomy in language learning

15. What aspects of your students' *INFORMATION LITERACY* are assessed?

If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below.

	Is this aspect of LA assessed?	WHO assesses this aspect of LA?	Main EVIDENCE used to assess this aspect of LA	Primary TOOL used to assess this EVIDENCE?
Demonstrated ability to source and navigate paper-based learning resources	▼	▼	▼	▼
Demonstrated ability to source and navigate computer-based learning resources	▼	▼	▼	▼

Is there anything else you want to say about the assessment of information literacy?

16. What aspects of your students' *LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY* are assessed?

If more than one answer option is applicable, please try to choose the main answer in each case, and provide any further information in the box below.

	Is this aspect of LA assessed?	WHO assesses this aspect of LA?	Main EVIDENCE used to assess this aspect of LA	Primary TOOL used to assess this EVIDENCE?
Demonstrated improvements in language proficiency	▼	▼	▼	▼

Is there anything else you want to say about the assessment of language proficiency?

Assessing autonomy in language learning

11. Purposes of assessing learner autonomy

Nearly there! Just a few more questions (about 10 minutes) to go.

17. Please indicate the purposes of assessing language learner autonomy in your environment (please select as many as necessary).

☐ To contribute towards students' overall course grades or qualification requirements.

☐ To determine whether stated student learning outcomes regarding the development of autonomy are being met (these outcomes may be stated by you, the institution, or the curriculum).

☐ To determine the stage of development of students' autonomous learning practices so that you can plan better the next learning phase.

☐ To determine the effectiveness of a teaching technique for the promotion of learner autonomy.

☐ To determine the effectiveness of instructional materials in promoting autonomy.

☐ To determine the effectiveness of a learning programme in promoting autonomy.

☐ To determine the effectiveness of a learning environment in promoting autonomy.

☐ To determine whether a learning programme or learning environment is contributing to students' metacognitive development and involvement in the language.

☐ As an integral part of evaluating language learning.

☐ For students to determine for themselves whether they have met realistic levels of achievement.

☐ For students to be able to compare their level of autonomous development to that of other students.

☐ For students to be able to determine the stage of development of their own autonomous learning practices so that they can plan better their next learning phase for themselves.

Other (please specify)

18. Please select the statement below which best reflects your beliefs about the promotion of learner autonomy in a language learning environment.

Assessing autonomy in language learning

12. Your values

19. In your opinion, how important do you feel each of these assessment practices is in developing autonomy for language learning?

	Not at all important	Of limited importance	Important	Crucial
To contribute towards students' overall course grades or qualification requirements.	○	○	○	○
To determine whether stated student learning outcomes regarding the development of autonomy are being met (these outcomes may be stated by you, the institution, or the curriculum).	○	○	○	○
To determine the stage of development of students' autonomous learning practices so that you can plan better the next learning phase.	○	○	○	○
To determine the effectiveness of a teaching technique for the promotion of learner autonomy.	○	○	○	○
To determine the effectiveness of instructional materials in promoting autonomy.	○	○	○	○
To determine the effectiveness of a learning programme in promoting autonomy.	○	○	○	○
To determine the effectiveness of a learning environment in promoting autonomy.	○	○	○	○
To determine whether a learning programme or learning environment is contributing to students' metacognitive development and involvement in the language.	○	○	○	○
As an integral part of evaluating language learning.	○	○	○	○
For students to determine for themselves whether they have met realistic levels of achievement.	○	○	○	○
For students to be able to compare their level of autonomous development to that of other students.	○	○	○	○
For students to be able	○	○	○	○

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Assessing autonomy in language learning

to determine the stage
of development of their
own autonomous
learning practices so that
they can plan better their
next learning phase for
themselves.

Assessing autonomy in language learning

13. General information

20. To what extent do your answers in this survey reflect general policy in your department or institution?

☐ It's not general policy; my answers reflect only happens with learners I am responsible for.

☐ Some other colleagues share the same practices.

☐ It is general policy. My answers reflect what happens with learners in all classes/learning environments.

Other (please specify)

21. How long have you been promoting autonomy with learners (including in your current institution and any previous institutions you've worked in)?

Years

Months

22. If there is anything else you would like to say about the assessment of learner autonomy in language learning, please do so here.

Assessing autonomy in language learning

14. Thank you!

Thank you very much for giving your time to take this survey. If you want your participation to remain anonymous, then please do not complete either of the two boxes below.

23. I am happy to be contacted about participating in further research, and I would like a copy of the results from this survey.

Name

Email address

24. I do not wish to be contacted about participating in further research, but I would like a copy of the results from this survey.

Name

Email address

Appendix B: Sample email inviting potential Q sorters to participate in the study

Dear [blinded institution] Student   27/5/2009

My name is Lucy Cooker and I'm visiting Hong Kong from the University of Nottingham in the UK, where I'm researching self-access language learning for my PhD.

I'm writing to ask if you would be willing to volunteer as a participant in my study. You have been selected because you are a frequent user of the [self-access facility at blinded institution]. I am contacting you with the permission of the [department name at blinded institution].

I would need approximately an hour to an hour and a half of your time, between now and 5th June 2009. First I would like to ask you about your language learning. Then I will ask you to arrange some cards with some statements on them in a specific pattern. This will help me understand your opinions about the outcomes of learning a language in an environment like the [self-access facility at blinded institution]. Finally I will ask you a few questions about how you have arranged the cards.

Taking part in this study will give you the chance to practise your English with a native speaker. Also, I'm very happy to explain my research to you if you are interested.

If you are willing to help me, then please contact me at one of these email addresses:

lucycooker@gmail.com

ttxlc12@nottingham.ac.uk

and tell me your name and when you would be free to meet me at [blinded institution].

Best wishes

Lucy Cooker

PhD Research Student
Mobile: +44 (0) 7811 436581
Supervisors: Dr Barbara Sinclair & Dr Richard Pemberton

The University of Nottingham
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The Dearing Building, Room C16
Jubilee Campus
Wollaton Road
Nottingham, NG8 1BB

Appendix C: Sample email sent to gatekeepers

Dear [name]   30/4/2009

My name is Lucy Cooker and I'm a PhD student at the University of Nottingham in the UK, supervised by Barbara Sinclair and Richard Pemberton. Prior to taking up my doctoral studies in Nottingham, I was Director of the [self-access facility] at [blinded institution].

I'm visiting Hong Kong for a month, from 9th May to 6th June in advance of the ILAC conference, and will be based at HKU. Whilst in HK, I am hoping to be able to collect some data for my doctoral research project. I'm investigating learners' perceptions of the outcomes of working in an autonomous learning environment, such as a SAC, or a classroom where learner autonomy is facilitated. My research methodology involves learners sorting statements (about the outcomes of learner autonomy) onto a grid, and then having a short interview about why they sorted them as they did. The procedure will take about an hour for each participant.

I'm writing to you today in the hope that you would give me permission to visit [blinded institution], and to help me get in contact with a few (5 or 6) students who are regular users of your [self-access facility], and who might be prepared to participate in my research. I would follow your advice on the best way of doing this. It might be for me to draft an email, asking for those interested to contact me, to be distributed via a list, or to visit [blinded institution] at the beginning of my stay and put up a poster asking for volunteers, etc. All participants will be given detailed information about the study before taking part, and will be required to sign a consent form, agreeing to participate.

My study is currently going through the Ethical Approval process in Nottingham, and I expect to hear in a few days that I can go ahead with my study. My supervisors did not foresee any difficulties. Of course I am aware that once I have received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham, I will have to go through the ethics procedure at any other institutions where I carry out data collection activities. Perhaps you would be kind enough to advise me if there is any such process required at [blinded institution].

Many thanks for taking time to read this long message from me. I hope I shall have the chance to meet you soon, and I'm looking forward to hearing your paper at ILAC.

Best wishes

Lucy Cooker

PhD Research Student
Mobile: +44 (0) 7811 436581
Supervisors: Dr Barbara Sinclair & Dr Richard Pemberton

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Appendix D: The full Q-sample of 52 statements

1	I have more of a desire to learn [language name].
2	I'm more active about learning [language name].
3	It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn.
4	It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn.
5	I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name].
6	I can make more effective decisions about whether feedback is useful for me.
7	I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name].
8	I'm more likely to use the type of resources (books, DVDs, online materials, etc.) which match my learning style.
9	I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language name].
10	I understand better when a way of learning is working for me
11	I am more able to choose good strategies to help me learn.
12	I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do.
13	I can describe better how I will learn in the future.
14	I can analyse my [language name] needs better.
15	I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning.
16	I can organise my learning time more effectively.
17	I am better at finding good people to learn with.
18	I am better at learning on my own without a helper.
19	I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name].
20	I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others.
21	I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future.
22	When I feel myself getting stressed about my learning I know better what to do about it.
23	I'm more likely to make time to learn.
24	I have a better understanding of how I learn best.
25	Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy.
26	I think more carefully about what I want to learn.
27	It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language name] learning.
28	Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name].
29	I have more courage to try different things when I learn [language name].
30	I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher.
31	Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored.
32	I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well.

33	I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct.
34	I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people.
35	I feel more relaxed about learning [language name].
36	I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me.
37	I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn at a level that suits me.
38	My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher.
39	I am more self-disciplined.
40	I have a better understanding of myself as a learner.
41	I feel more likely to have a successful life.
42	I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university.
43	Learning at my own pace means I am learning more successfully.
44	I can explain why I choose the materials I use.
45	I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me.
46	I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [language name].
47	I'm more likely to review what I have learned.
48	I am better at choosing a place to learn.
49	I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn.
50	I am more committed to achieving my goals.
51	I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making.
52	I'm more likely to create new strategies to help me learn.

The full concourse of 124 annotated statements can be found in the accompanying CD-ROM.

Appendix E: Factor loadings of defining participants

Participant	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
P1				0.7756		
P2					0.4804	
P3	0.6732					
P4					0.4846	
P5	0.5647					
P6	0.5419					
P7					0.5371	
P8		0.6503				
P9	0.7526					
P10	0.4179					
P11	0.5996					
P12						0.5712
P13			0.4378			
P14			0.6951			
P15		0.6918				
P16			0.4053			
P17				0.5299		
P18					0.6002	
P19			0.5325			
P20		0.3582				
P21			0.3765			
P22						0.4413
P23		0.7153				
P24	0.4329					
P25	0.6583					
P26						0.4354
P27	0.7135					
P28						0.4364
P30		0.3720				

Appendix F: Demographic information for the participants in the study

Participant	Pseudonym	Gender	Factor loaded significantly	Level of study	Field of study	Location of educational institution at time of study	First language	Languages learning	Length of time engaged in autonomous language learning	Hours per week spent on autonomous language learning
01	Justin	m	D	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Government and International Studies	Hong Kong	Cantonese	English, Mandarin, Japanese, French, German		
02	Robert	m	E	Undergraduate (Year 3)	History	Hong Kong	Cantonese	English, Mandarin		
03	George	m	A	Postgraduate (MPhil)	Contemporary China	Hong Kong	Cantonese/ Mandarin	English, Japanese		
04	Tim	m	E	Undergraduate (Year 2)	Computer Engineering	Hong Kong	Cantonese	English	1 year	2 hours
05	Carl	m	A	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Pure Mathematics	Hong Kong	Cantonese	Mandarin, English, German, French	6 months	3 hours
06	Huan	f	A	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Education (English Language)	Hong Kong	Cantonese	English, Mandarin, French	1 years	3-4 hours
07	Lin	f	E	Postgraduate (MEd)	Physical Education	Hong Kong	Mandarin	English, Cantonese	9 months	10-20 hours
08	Sally	f	B	Postgraduate (MEd)	Physical Education	Hong Kong	Mandarin	English, Cantonese	9 months	10-20 hours
09	Monica	f	A	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Biochemistry	Hong Kong	Mandarin	English, Cantonese,	7 years	5 hours

Participant	Pseudonym	Gender	Factor loaded significantly	Level of study	Field of study	Location of educational institution at time of study	First language	Languages learning	Length of time engaged in autonomous language learning	Hours per week spent on autonomous language learning
								Spanish		
10	Ron	m	A	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Business Administration	Hong Kong	Mandarin	English, Cantonese	10 months	8 hours
11	Qiong	f	A	Undergraduate (Year 2)	International Communication	Japan	Mandarin	English, Japanese	7 years	5 hours
12	Mami	f	F	Undergraduate (Year 2)	English	Japan	Japanese	English, Mandarin	1 year	2 hours
13	Emiko	f	C	Undergraduate (Year 2)	International Communication (Indonesian)	Japan	Japanese	Indonesian, English	2 years	5 hours
14	Saori	f	C	Undergraduate (Year 3)	English	Japan	Japanese	English	3 years	1 hour
15	Chihiro	f	B	Undergraduate (Year 4)	English	Japan	Japanese	English, Spanish	10 years	6 hours
16	Momoko	f	C	Undergraduate (Year 2)	English	Japan	Japanese	English	1 year	21 hours
17	Ikuko	f	D	Undergraduate (Year 3)	International Communication	Japan	Japanese	English, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, French	8 years	6 hours
18	Yayoi	f	E	Undergraduate (Year 2)	International Communication	Japan	Japanese	English	7 years	3 hours
19	Ruri	f	C	Undergraduate (Year 1)	International Communication	Japan	Japanese	English	6 years	1 hour
20	Kenji	m	B	Undergraduate (Year 3)	English	Japan	Japanese	English	7 years	9 hours

Participant	Pseudonym	Gender	Factor loaded significantly	Level of study	Field of study	Location of educational institution at time of study	First language	Languages learning	Length of time engaged in autonomous language learning	Hours per week spent on autonomous language learning
21	Agnes	f	C	Undergraduate (Year 1)	German	UK	English	German, French	2 years	3.5 hours
22	Paula	f	F	Undergraduate (Year 2/3)	Business Management/Russian	UK	English	Russian, Spanish	2 years	6-8 hours
23	Simon	m	B	Undergraduate (Year 1)	German	UK	English	German, Italian	8 years	4 hours
24	Rob	m	A	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Modern European Languages	UK	English	French, German, Portuguese	4 years	4-5 hours
25	Peter	m	A	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Modern European Languages	UK	English	French, German, Spanish	3 years	14 hours
26	Rebecca	f	F	Undergraduate (Year 1)	French and German	UK	English	French/German	12 years	3 hours
27	Helen	f	A	Undergraduate (Year 1)	French and German	UK	English	French, German, Japanese	2 years	3 hours
28	Patsy	f	F	Undergraduate (Year 1)	German and Hispanic Studies	UK	English	German, Spanish	7 years	3 hours
29	Indigo	f	none	Undergraduate (Year 1)	French and German	UK	English	French, German	2 years	10 hours
30	Eleanor	f	B	Undergraduate (Year 1)	Modern European Languages	UK	English	French, German, Spanish	2 years	2 hours

Appendix G: Sample interview transcript

Pre-sort interview

L: OK Participant 25, University of [blinded name]. OK thanks P25. So what I'm really interested in, as I explained to you yesterday, is learning more about this here. About the languages you're learning and also how you go about doing that independently when you're... when you're not in a classroom environment. So shall we start there? By you telling me about that and ... or perhaps first of all you want to tell me how you came to do the three languages in the first place. Did you ... have you always been interested in languages?

P25: Yeah, I couldn't really explain it to be honest. It's just kind of ... it's in me I suppose, to want to do it. And I did two languages at A-level.

L: Were they the same as the ones you're studying ...

P25: Yeah, French and German.

L: OK.

P25: I really enjoyed it so ... I couldn't stop to be honest. So I just kept going.

L: Right, OK. That's great. Was your school a school that specialised in languages?

P25: No it was ... But they had a good department and they had a lot of good teachers. It was quite ... yeah a good department. They were very encouraging. It just kind of spiralled really. It was a very good class as well. We all erm ... we all worked together a lot so ...

L: Oh that's interesting. In what ways would you work together?

P25: Well the school was erm... it's part of its specialist status was like on collaborative learning, so like basically the teachers would sort of ... I don't know how it works really but they would ... it would be sort of geared towards us teaching each other a lot more than traditionally, I suppose.

L: Wow that's fascinating for me because that's sort of what I'm really interested in as well.

P25: It worked I think in languages because I did maths A-level as well, aside from those two, and it was a lot more sort of writing from the board, and just copying down what the teacher says and just following that as like a formula and it wasn't anything similar and I didn't enjoy that as much so ...

L: OK.

P25: So for me I think it worked a lot more.

L: Mmmm. So did you enjoy the learning with each other?

P25: Yeah I think it helped. Because we were all at a sort of similar stage I think for languages. If you're just sort of sitting and you're told stuff then

it's harder but if you're working together from a point and going to a different point you know ... you can come along together and you can learn what other people find hard and help them out and you get helped back so ... it was good.

L: Mmmm. Mmmm.

P25: And it can be explained in a different way like a teacher might just get it, but a student will be able to explain to a fellow student why it's ...

L: Because you've gone through the same difficulties trying to understand? Yeah. And that's a really interesting distinction you've drawn there between maths and French and German. Because I suppose languages are for communication, aren't they?

P25: Yeah, exactly so ...

L: So it does sort of make sense to learn them in that way. Yeah. Huh. What kind of activities did you do? Was it mostly presentations? Or did you get a topic and you had to teach it to the class next lesson? Or ...

P25: We did do that a few times actually which was interesting. We would like become the teacher for the lesson which was good.

L: Was that sort of grammar or vocabulary or a variety?

P25: It was topic based I think. We would ...like I remember when we were doing health in French we went away for like two lessons and just prepared like a sort of ten/fifteen minute lecture if you like on a certain part of the French healthcare system.

L: Mmmm.

P25: And we would come back and we'd have like handouts prepared and stuff like that. Erm ... but also like if we were starting a new topic we would just be given like a huge blank piece of paper and we'd get into sort of groups, like three or four, and brainstorm ideas together and then come back and talk about with the class. Yeah, it was good.

L: OK well that sounds interesting. In your school years did you go away to France or Germany? Or did you have any exchanges or trips?

P25: Yeah we had a French trip together. Not a German one. But I've been to France a few times with the school so ...

L: OK right. And so was that something which ... you found particularly contributed to your language interest or ...?

P25: I suppose so. I mean it's ... I mean I suppose every French class goes away to France as part of the curriculum doesn't it, really?

L: [laughing] Yeah!

P25: And we didn't exactly speak a lot of French ...

L: [laughing]

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P25: … but it was still a good part of the course. It kind of … of bonded us together because we did it straight away like within three or four months of starting and I'd just moved schools. I wasn't in the high school part of the sixth form, I just joined. So it was good actually. It became a nice little group.

L: OK. Yeah great. When you went to France did you stay in a hotel or did you stay with French families?

P25: No it was in a hotel.

L: OK yeah.

P25: But I've got a few friends who have done exchanges with families. And they've enjoyed it. So it's worthwhile I think.

L: Mmmm. OK. So let's move on to university now. Tell me about what you do here. Erm … in your classes, if you like, but as I say especially focusing on what you do when you're not in a class.

P25: Well, it's a lot more independent I think here, at university, obviously. We get given, I mean you know what you've got to do for each class. Like it's written down at the beginning of the semester obviously and just the preparation you have to do for it. So obviously I spend a good few hours a week doing that for each different language.

L: That must be loads of work for three languages?

P25: It's not that bad actually. Coz I mean when you enjoy it I suppose you don't really notice.

L: That's true! Good point. [Laughing]

P25: But yeah I do prep, I suppose, mostly, but then when you come away, like particularly for Spanish because I'm doing it from beginners, so like a few months ago I couldn't speak a word of it but now like we'll do grammar seminars and when you come away you have to review it otherwise you'll completely lose it – do you know what I mean?

L: Yeah.

P25: I do make an effort to try and go over my notes for Spanish particularly.

L: Mmm. Mmmm.

P25: And just kind of write it down a few times. Maybe like write it on post-it notes, new things, and stick them on my wall just to like cement it in my head.

L: OK. So you kind of have them around your living area and …?

P25: I'm quite visual I'm told. My room's just covered in stuff.

L: OK. So do you do the thing where you put new vocabulary around and …

P25: Yeah. I try to. I should do more but … stuff that I know that I've not got a clue about I do put up. I try to make it quite colourful.

L: OK. And what other ways would you say your learning is visual?

P25: Erm … I just write everything down to be honest. I like to see it. Do you know what I mean?

L: Do you use colour or?

P25: Yeah, I use different colours. I have a pen like that so …

L: OK [laughing]

P25: [laughing] like the different colours when I'm doing a different language and stuff like that so …

L: Mmmm.

P25: I think it helps. I'm quite organised so …

L: Are you?

P25: I don't think I could not be organised and pass.

L: No, no. I'm sure. Yeah, yeah. OK. So erm … how about … apart from going over your class notes, do you do anything else sort of language oriented because you're interested in it? Like …

P25: I do watch …

L: … watch films?

P25: I watch films yeah. I've got quite a few foreign films. Erm …

L: What's your strategy when you're watching films? How do you go about it? Do you just stick it on and watch as you would any normal film? Or do you listen in English and read the subtitles, or … ?

P25: I would … no I probably would use subtitles most of the time. If I know the film, like some films that I like I see quite a few times then I'll not bother, because seeing the story you pick up more language but …

L: Right …

P25: We have a good TV room in the [blinded name] building which is erm … it's very … you just sit down and that's all there is in the room the TVs so you can just put a DVD in and it's very focused.

L: OK.

P25: Because if I'm at home I'll probably be doing something not really tuned in but … it's a good idea really.

L: So it's kind of like a room especially for watching …

P25: Yeah it's just a media room so …

L: OK. And they have the DVDs there as well that you can borrow?

P25: Yeah they've got quite a big library so it's good. I don't go as often as I should. I started going this semester a lot more. I've been like two or three times. But ...

L: And you do that for all three languages?

P25: I just do it mostly for French and German because Spanish I don't pick much up [laughing], but I'll start eventually I'm sure.

L: Yeah I'm sure you will. Mmmm.

P25: But like at home, I was always taught by my A-level tutor that I should watch the news in French - and German. Which I've tried to do quite a lot. But it's ... even if it's just like ten minutes a day. I suppose I do that like once or twice a week now.

L: OK. That's cool. Do you do that online?

P25: Yeah, yeah. Well I download the podcast.

L: Oh that's a good idea. Yeah. Yeah. All this technology now ...it makes it really easy doesn't it [laughing]?

P25: I know. You've got no excuse have you? To fail?! [laughing]

L: [laughing] yeah yeah I guess that's one way of looking at it. OK. Which language would you say is your strongest out of ...?

P25: Erm ... French.

L: OK. And is that the one you enjoy most as well?

P25: Yeah.

L: Mmmm. Mmmm. What about ... thinking about erm ... communicating with other people. I mean obviously there was a lot of communication around language when you were at school. Did you speak to each other in French when you were at school? And German? Or was your communication through English but ABOUT French and German?

P25: Erm ... We ... it ... well in German we did a lot of English based stuff.

L: Right.

P25: Like we would obviously talk erm ... in like oral classes and things but it was still, we'd be taught in English. But French, the class was a bit more enthusiastic than the German one

L: OK [laughing]

P25: So we would say to the teacher we want to have a lesson totally in French.

L: OK.

P25: And it was good. But here, at uni, every language class is conducted most ... well probably entirely in the target language.

L: Right.

P25: I mean the grammar's taught mostly in English, obviously to help you understand it. But I think it helps actually. I prefer it when you're taught in the target language.

L: Mmmm.

P25: It ... it's a lot ...It just builds the language up a lot quicker I think. You get more confident as well if you hear it a lot more.

L: Sure. Yeah yeah. And so what about communication with other people outside the class. Do you have French friends or German friends?

P25: Erm, I have yeah. But ... Well actually I do have a friend who I email back in French who's my old French assistant.

L: Oh! OK.

P25: She's still learning. She's still at university. But she emails in English and sometimes if I'm confident enough I'll email her back in French.

L: OK. Excellent. So is that email, or do you Skype, or ...?

P25: We mostly email yeah. But when we're coming up to oral class I do have a friend in [Another] University who's doing French. We skype. Not that much but we just like ask each other questions and things. Just to prepare for it. We'd done it before our A levels so that was good.

L: Oh that's a really good idea. So that's someone who was at school with you.

P25: Yeah.

L: Yeah, yeah. OK super. Alright thanks for that background. That's really helpful. I'll turn this off for the time being.

Post sort interview

L: OK what I'd like to do is erm ... write down the numbers of the umm ... of the cards and while I'm doing that I'd like you to explain to me why you put them where you did.

P25: OK.

L: So obviously we're not going to have time to do all of them, but we'll just focus on two ends if that's OK?

P25: OK. Sure.

L: OK. Sorry I need to be sure that's going to catch both our voices. OK. Where do you want to start?

P25: That end.

L: OK. Sure. So go ahead.

P25: OK. <u>I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me</u> [#45 (+5)]. Erm ... I think since I came to uni I've learnt a lot more about what's good and what's a pointless waste of time for me. Because ...

L: OK.

P25: I think you know your teachers a bit less, they don't know what works for you and I don't know how they teach so ... Obviously they have to cater to the whole class but sometimes you can feel like it's just like ... if I have a strong ... if I've focused on something more say at A level than they have then it can be a bit more of a waste of time for me, like. Some people need to be pushed more.

L: Sure.

P25: But obviously it has to be done, because unless you have one on one teaching then you can't ...

L: Yeah yeah. OK alright good. That's interesting. And you have more of a desire to learn French [#1 <u>I have more of a desire to learn French (+5)</u>]?

P25: I think so yeah.

L: Mmm. Any particular reason for that or just ...?

P25: I just think I've been a bit more encouraged since I've got here and I've realised it is what I want to do. Probably.

L: Mmm. OK. Do you have any particular idea about how you want to use your language skills in the future?

P25: Jobs wise, do you mean?

L: Well, however. I mean jobs or maybe you have an idea of going to live abroad or something?

P25: I do want to live abroad. Probably in France. And I do want to use it in my job like I want to look into like interpreting and translation and things and do like overseas postgraduate study and that.

L: OK. Right.

P25: That's my plan at the minute.

L: Right. Excellent.

P25: It will probably change.

L: No, that sounds like a good plan. Mmmmm. OK. How about this column?

P25: [#16 <u>I can organise my learning time more effectively (+4)</u>]. Organise my learning time more effectively. I think I can, now, because it's so much more independent. There's no one to say 'you have to do this

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tonight' 'you have to do this tomorrow, you've got to get it done and we don't care whether you do it or not'. Well obviously they do. They don't care whether you're fully prepared, they'll just pick up on it. And obviously you'll look bad and you won't learn properly. So it's not ... you're not being spoon-fed any more, so I think ...

L: No. There's more responsibility on your shoulders.

P25: Exactly. And it's just a waste of time if you don't really so ...

L: And you said earlier that you <u>are</u> quite organised.

P25: Yeah. I am quite anyway, so ... but I think I've realised that you have to be completely organised otherwise ....

L: Mmmm. OK. And 15? [<u>I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning</u> (+4)]

P25: Yeah, I think now I do know what I'm actually trying to go for. I know what I'm wanting to achieve out of it. I know I want to get fluent. I want to study a bit more round the culture and things like that so ... I think I've had my eyes opened a bit more to what I want out of it.

L: Mmmm. OK. That's interesting. And do you think that comes just from the ... just from being here? Just from being at university?

P25: I think so. I think there's probably a culture at university where you learn what you want out of life and you meet other language learners who you've got things in common with. You can talk about, you know, what the point of doing it is and ... yeah .

L: Mmm. Great. And '<u>I'm more self-disciplined</u>' [#39 (+4)]?

P25: I think I am yes. Like just before I said about having to prepare yourself properly for seminars and things like that and ... get your work done and ... there's just so much more responsibility for ... it's like self-learning now so ... I think it helps.

L: OK great. So let's move to the other end now then. Tell me about those.

P25: '<u>Sometimes I feel like giving up learning French</u>' [#28 (-5)] [laughing].

L: [laughing]

P25: Well that's not true.

L: Well that's good! [laughing]

P25: It would be weird if it was. Erm ... yeah I've never felt like that. Even when I get a bit stressed out with work or if it's hard and you just feel like you're hitting a brick wall.

L: Mmmm.

P25: I've just never wanted to give up to be honest.

L: OK yeah great.

P25: I kind of like a challenge so ….

L: That must tell you that you're in the right place then! OK so tell me about this one. Number 32 [I get frustrated learning on my own and I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well (-5)].

P25: Erm … I get frustrated learning on my own. You see I don't think I … I think because I'm a bit more independent that I don't need a teacher there all the time and sometimes you just feel like you're better going off and looking at what you need to do. It's … obviously you're going to make mistakes in class and things and they're gonna say you have to look at this, but I think you can identify that anyway coz if you're trying to have a conversation, say in French, then you know what you've got to work on. I don't feel like I have to have someone sitting with me all the time saying 'learn this, learn this, learn this'.

L: OK right.

P25: I think it's a bit more gradual than that.

L: So it seems to me also that those you've put in that column might have a similar feel to them, because they're all about, in a sense YOU, and the role of the teacher in your learning. Aren't they? [There are three cards in the column being referred to by Lucy here. They are: #30 I feel unsupported when learning French without the direct support of a teacher (-4); #25 Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy(-4); #38 My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher (-4).]

P25: I mean it is important. Don't get me wrong. You have to have a certain amount of contact with teachers. And it's important to get that. But I don't think it's the whole of my learning. Do you know what I mean?

L: Right. Yup. Yup. OK. Are there any others that you particularly want to talk about? Anything that you … ?

P25: I don't think so.

L: It's interesting for me that you have this one here. 'I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my French' [#9 (-3)]. You've put that as being towards the end of least like you, and yet when we were talking before and you were talking about your collaborative learning at school and everything it sounded as if you …

P25: Yes but …

L: were quite … erm yeah … carry on.

P25: Yeah since coming to university this is yeah.

L: Right OK.

P25: Obviously I've only known these … my classmates for like three or four months …

L: Sure.

P25: So I think I'd still ... I would if I was with my old classmates. If there was more of a ... you know ... if you're a lot closer to them. I mean I think that – in a few years if you ask me this it would be way over here.

L: Do you think?

P25: Yup.

L: Oh OK. That's interesting.

P25: But for now I think it's ...yeah ...

L: So you don't quite have the community or something at the moment?

P25: No, not at all. I don't think it's the same at university as it was at school. It's good different but it's also bad, sort of thing.

L: Right. OK. Alright. That's smashing. That's really interesting for me. Thank you.

P25: No problem.

L: Do you have any questions? Or anything that you want to say?

P25: No.

L: OK brilliant. Lovely! That was quick and easy!

Appendix H: Idealised Q sorts for Factors B, C, D, E, F

Idealised Q-sort for Factor B

Least like me ← ... → **Most like me**

−5
- I can organise my learning time more effectively. LC 16 ABP
- Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name]. M 28 AV

−4
- I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name]. LR 7 ABP
- I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct. CR 33 AV
- I am more self-disciplined. LC 39 ABP

−3
- I think more carefully about what I want to learn. LC 26 KU
- I am better at learning on my own without a helper. LC 18 S
- I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn. LC 49 S
- I'm more likely to review what I have learned. LC 47 S

−2
- I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [language name]. LC 46 EIC
- Learning at my own pace means I'm learning more successfully. LC 43 KU
- I'm more likely to make time to learn. M 23 ABP
- Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored. CR 31 AV
- I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher. C 30 AV
- I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well. CR 32 AV

−1
- I am better at finding good people to learn with. LC 17 S
- It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn. IL 3 S
- I can explain why I choose the materials I use. MA 44 KU
- I'm more likely to use the type of resources which match my learning style. LR 8 ABP *(highlighted)*
- My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher. LC 38 AV
- When I feel myself getting stressed about my learning I know better what to do about it. LC 22 KU
- I'm more likely to create new strategies to help me learn. LR 52 EIC

(centre / 0)
- I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others. LC 20 KU
- I enjoy learning [language name] more, because I can learn at a level that suits me. C 37 EIC
- I understand better when a way of learning is working for me. CR 10 KU
- I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language name]. LR 9 ABP
- I can make more effective decisions about whether feedback is useful for me. C 6 AV
- I have a better understanding of how I learn best. LC 24 KU
- I'm more active about learning [language name]. M 2 ABP
- I am more committed to achieving my goals. LC 50 ABP

+1
- It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn. IL 4 S
- I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me. CR 45 AV
- I can describe better how I will learn in the future. MA 13 KU
- I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do. MA 12 KU
- I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]. C 5 ABP
- I am better at choosing a place to learn. LC 48 S
- I am more able to choose good strategies to help me learn. MA 11 S

+2
- I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making. MA 51 KU
- I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name]. LC 39 KU *(highlighted)*
- I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me. C 36 EIC
- I have more courage to try different things when I learn [language name]. C 29 EIC
- I can analyse my [language name] needs better. LC 14 KU
- Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy. M 25 ABP

+3
- I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning. LC 15 S
- I feel more relaxed about learning [language name]. C 35 AV
- It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language name] learning. M 27 AV
- I have a better understanding of myself as a learner. MA 40 KU *(highlighted)*

+4
- I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university. M 42 EIC
- I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people. C 34 AV *(highlighted)*
- I have more of a desire to learn [language name]. M 1 AV

+5
- I feel more likely to have a successful life. C 41 AV
- I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future. C 21 AV

Key

Learner autonomy framework
- LC – learner control
- MA – metacognitive awareness
- CR – critical reflection
- LR – learning range
- C – confidence
- M – motivation
- IL – information literacy

Generic learning outcomes framework
- KU – knowledge and understanding
- AV – attitudes and values
- ABP – activity, behaviour and progression
- EIC – enjoyment, inspiration and creativity
- S – skills

▓ Items sorted higher or lower than in other factors and distinguishing statements

Idealised Q-sort for Factor C

Least like me ← → **Most like me**

Column −5
- Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy. M 25 ABP
- I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct. CR 33 AV

Column −4
- I'm more likely to review what I have learned. LC 47 S
- I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others. LC 20 KU
- I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher. C 30 AV

Column −3
- I'm more likely to create new strategies to help me learn. LR 52 EIC
- I can describe better how I will learn in the future. MA 13 KU
- I have a better understanding of myself as a learner. MA 40 KU
- Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name]. M 28 AV

Column −2
- I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well. CR 32 AV
- I am more self-disciplined.** LC 39 ABP *(shaded)*
- My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher. LC 38 AV
- I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn. LC 49 S
- I feel more likely to have a successful life. C 41 AV *(shaded)*
- I can analyse my [language name] needs better.** LC 14 KU *(shaded)*

Column −1
- Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored. CR 31 AV
- It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn. IL 4 S *(shaded)*
- When I feel myself getting stressed about my learning I know better what to do about it. LC 22 KU
- I feel more relaxed about learning [language name]. C 35 AV
- I am better at learning on my own without a helper. LC 18 S
- I can make more effective decisions about whether feedback is useful for me. C 6 AV
- It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn. IL 3 S

Column 0
- I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me. CR 45 AV
- I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name]. LR 7 ABP
- I am more able to choose good strategies to help me learn. MA 11 S
- I have a better understanding of how I learn best. LC 24 KU
- I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language name]. LR 9 ABP
- I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people. C 34 AV
- I am more committed to achieving my goals. LC 50 ABP
- I think more carefully about what I want to learn. LC 26 KU

Column +1
- I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do. MA 12 KU
- I understand better when a way of learning is working for me. CR 10 KU
- I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning. LC 15 S
- I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [language name]. LC 46 EIC *(shaded)*
- Learning at my own pace means I'm learning more successfully. LC 43 KU
- I can organise my learning time more effectively. LC 16 ABP
- I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name]. LC 19 KU

Column +2
- I can explain why I choose the materials I use. MA 44 KU
- I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university. M 42 EIC
- I have more courage to try different things when I learn [language name]. C 29 EIC
- I enjoy learning [language name] more, because I can learn at a level that suits me. C 37 EIC
- I am better at finding good people to learn with. LC 17 S
- It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language name] learning. M 27 AV

Column +3
- I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future. C 21 AV
- I'm more likely to make time to learn. M 23 ABP
- I am better at choosing a place to learn. LC 48 S
- I'm more active about learning [language name]. M 2 ABP

Column +4
- I'm more likely to use the type of resources which match my learning style. LR 8 ABP
- I have more of a desire to learn [language name]. M 1 AV
- I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making. MA 51 KU

Column +5
- I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]. C 5 ABP
- I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me. C 36 EIC

Key

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- LC – learner control
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- CR – critical reflection
- LR – learning range
- C – confidence
- M – motivation
- IL – information literacy

Generic learning outcomes framework
- KU – knowledge and understanding
- AV – attitudes and values
- ABP – activity, behaviour and progression
- EIC – enjoyment, inspiration and creativity
- S – skills

▨ Items sorted higher or lower than in other factors and distinguishing statements

Idealised Q-sort for Factor D

Least like me ← → **Most like me**

−5
- Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name]. — M 28 AV
- Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored. — CR 31 AV

−4
- I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name]. — LC 19 KU
- I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making.** — MA 51 KU
- I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others. — LC 20 KU

−3
- I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well. — CR 32 AV
- I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher. — C 30 AV
- I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name]. — LR 7 ABP
- I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct. — CR 33 AV

−2
- I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do. — MA 12 KU
- I think more carefully about what I want to learn. — LC 26 KU
- I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [language name]. — LC 46 EIC
- I can make more effective decisions about whether feedback is useful for me. — C 6 AV
- Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy. — M 25 ABP

−1
- I understand better when a way of learning is working for me. — CR 10 KU
- I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future. — C 21 AV
- I'm more likely to make time to learn. — M 23 ABP
- I am better at learning on my own without a helper. — LC 18 S
- When I feel myself getting stressed about my learning I know better what to do about it. — LC 22 KU
- I have a better understanding of myself as a learner. — MA 40 KU
- I am more able to choose good strategies to help me learn. — MA 11 S

(0)
- I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]. — C 5 ABP
- I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning. — LC 15 S
- I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me. — CR 45 AV
- I am better at choosing a place to learn. — LC 48 S
- I can organise my learning time more effectively. — LC 16 ABP
- It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn. — IL 3 S
- Learning at my own pace means I'm learning more successfully. — LC 43 KU
- I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people. — C 34 AV

+1
- I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university. — M 42 EIC
- I feel more likely to have a successful life. — C 41 AV
- It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language name] learning. — M 27 AV
- I'm more active about learning [language name]. — M 2 ABP
- I am more self-disciplined.** — LC 39 ABP
- My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher. — LC 38 AV
- I can analyse my [language name] needs better. — LC 14 KU

+2
- I enjoy learning [language name] more, because I can learn at a level that suits me. — C 37 EIC
- I am better at finding good people to learn with. — LC 17 S
- I'm more likely to review what I have learned. — LC 47 S
- I'm more likely to create new strategies to help me learn. — LR 52 EIC
- I can explain why I choose the materials I use. — MA 44 KU
- I have more courage to try different things when I learn [language name]. — C 29 EIC

+3
- I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language name]. — LR 9 ABP
- I'm more likely to use the type of resources which match my learning style. — LR 8 ABP
- I am more committed to achieving my goals. — LC 50 ABP
- I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn. — LC 49 S

+4
- I have more of a desire to learn [language name]. — M 1 AV
- It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn. — IL 4 S
- I have a better understanding of how I learn best. — LC 24 KU

+5
- I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me. — C 36 EIC
- I feel more relaxed about learning [language name]. — C 35 AV

Key

Learner autonomy framework
LC – learner control
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CR – critical reflection
LR – learning range
C – confidence
M – motivation
IL – information literacy

Generic learning outcomes framework
KU – knowledge and understanding
AV – attitudes and values
ABP – activity, behaviour and progression
EIC – enjoyment, inspiration and creativity
S – skills

■ Items sorted higher or lower than in other factors and distinguishing statements

Idealised Q-sort for Factor E

Least like me ← ... → **Most like me**

Column −5
- I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people.** — C 34 AV
- I am better at learning on my own without a helper.** — LC 18 S

Column −4
- I have a better understanding of how I learn best.** — LC 24 KU
- I can organise my learning time more effectively. — LC 16 ABP
- It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn. — IL 3 S

Column −3
- It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn. — IL 4 S
- I am more able to choose good strategies to help me learn. — MA 11 S
- I have a better understanding of myself as a learner. — MA 40 KU
- Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name]. — M 28 AV

Column −2
- I think more carefully about what I want to learn. — LC 26 KU
- When I feel myself getting stressed about my learning I know better what to do about it. — LC 22 KU
- I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn. — LC 49 S
- I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name]. — LC 19 KU
- Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored. — CR 31 AV
- I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others. — LC 20 KU

Column −1
- I have more courage to try different things when I learn [language name]. — C 29 EIC
- I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university. — M 42 EIC
- Learning at my own pace means I'm learning more successfully. — LC 43 KU
- I can explain why I choose the materials I use. — MA 44 KU
- I'm more likely to make time to learn. — M 23 ABP
- I am better at choosing a place to learn. — LC 48 S
- I feel more relaxed about learning [language name]. — C 35 AV

Column 0
- I'm more active about learning [language name]. — M 2 ABP
- I'm more likely to review what I have learned. — LC 47 S
- I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do. — MA 12 KU
- I can make more effective decisions about whether feedback is useful for me. — C 6 AV
- I enjoy learning [language name] more, because I can learn at a level that suits me. — C 37 EIC
- I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name]. — LR 7 ABP
- My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher. — LC 38 AV
- I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me. — CR 45 AV

Column +1
- I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher.** — C 30 AV
- I am more committed to achieving my goals. — LC 50 ABP
- It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language name] learning. — M 27 AV
- I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning. — LC 15 S
- I can analyse my [language name] needs better. — LC 14 KU
- I understand better when a way of learning is working for me. — CR 10 KU
- I can describe better how I will learn in the future. — MA 13 KU

Column +2
- I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language name]. — LR 9 ABP
- Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy. — M 25 ABP
- I'm more likely to create new strategies to help me learn. — LR 52 EIC
- I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me. — C 36 EIC
- I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct.** — CR 33 AV
- I'm more likely to use the type of resources which match my learning style. — LR 8 ABP

Column +3
- I have more of a desire to learn [language name]. — M 1 AV
- I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [language name].** — LC 46 EIC
- I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well.** — CR 32 AV
- I am better at finding good people to learn with. — LC 17 S

Column +4
- I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future. — C 21 AV
- I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making. — MA 51 KU
- I am self-disciplined. — LC 39 ABP

Column +5
- I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]. — C 5 ABP
- I feel more likely to have a successful life. — C 41 AV

Key

Learner autonomy framework
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LR – learning range
C – confidence
M – motivation
IL – information literacy

Generic learning outcomes framework
KU – knowledge and understanding
AV – attitudes and values
ABP – activity, behaviour and progression
EIC – enjoyment, inspiration and creativity
S – skills

[shaded] Items sorted higher or lower than in other factors and distinguishing statements

Idealised Q-sort for Factor F

Most like me → (+5) **Least like me** → (–5)

+5
- I have more of a desire to learn [language name]. — M 1 AV
- Learning without the encouragement of a teacher makes me a bit more lazy.** — M 25 ABP *(shaded)*

+4
- I believe I will be more likely to use [language name] well in the future. — C 21 AV
- I feel more able to continue learning [language name] after I leave university. — M 42 EIC
- I am more committed to achieving my goals. — LC 50 ABP

+3
- I enjoy learning [language name] more because I can learn in ways that interest me. — C 36 EIC
- I enjoy learning [language name] more, because I can learn at a level that suits me. — C 37 EIC
- I know what I'm trying to achieve in my language learning. — LC 15 S
- I'm more likely to use the type of resources which match my learning style. — LR 8 ABP

+2
- I feel more relaxed about learning [language name]. — C 35 AV
- I try harder to find opportunities to use [language name]. — C 5 ABP *(shaded)*
- I'm better at knowing how to get myself in the mood to learn. — LC 49 S
- I am better at choosing a place to learn. — LC 48 S
- I can explain better why I learn [language name] in the ways that I do. — MA 12 KU
- I'm more likely to make time to learn. — M 23 ABP

+1
- I'm more active about learning [language name]. — M 2 ABP
- I can explain why I choose the materials I use. — MA 44 KU
- I understand better when a way of learning is working for me. — CR 10 KU
- I have a better understanding of myself as a learner. — MA 40 KU
- I can analyse my [language name] needs better. — LC 14 KU
- I have a better understanding of how I learn best. — LC 24 KU
- I can describe better how I will learn in the future. — MA 13 KU

–1
- I feel more likely to have a successful life. — C 41 AV
- Learning at my own pace means I'm learning more successfully. — LC 43 KU
- I can make more effective decisions about whether feedback is useful for me. — C 6 AV
- I have more courage to try different things when I learn [language name]. — C 29 EIC
- I think more carefully about what I want to learn. — LC 26 KU
- It is rewarding to know what works best for me with my [language name] learning. — M 27 AV
- I'm more likely to ask others to help me with my [language name]. — LR 9 ABP
- I use more varied strategies when I learn [language name]. — LR 7 ABP

–2
- I am better at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the [language name] of others. — LC 20 KU
- When I feel myself getting stressed about my learning I know better what to do about it. — LC 22 KU
- I have stronger opinions about which activities are good for me. — CR 45 AV
- I'm more likely to learn from language mistakes or errors I'm making. — MA 51 KU
- I'm more likely to develop new ways to use resources for learning [language name]. — LC 46 EIC
- Reflecting on my learning makes me feel bored. — CR 31 AV
- I am less worried about making mistakes in front of other people. — C 34 AV

–3
- I'm more likely to review what I have learned. — LC 47 S
- I am better at finding good people to learn with. — LC 17 S
- It's easier for me to find suitable books and worksheets to help me learn. — IL 3 S
- I feel unsupported when learning [language name] without the direct support of a teacher. — C 30 AV
- I feel frustrated asking other learners for help when I'm learning [language name] because I don't know if they are correct. — CR 33 AV
- I am more able to choose good strategies to help me learn. — MA 11 S
- It's easier for me to find suitable computer programmes or Internet websites to help me learn. — IL 4 S
- I am better at learning on my own without a helper. — LC 18 AV
- My learning is more effective because I am not pushed by my teacher. — LC 38 AV
- I'm more likely to create new strategies to help me learn. — LR 52 EIC

–4
- I get frustrated learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I'm learning well. — CR 32 AV
- I can organise my learning time more effectively. — LC 16 ABP
- Sometimes I feel like giving up learning [language name]. — M 28 AV

–5
- I am better at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of my [language name]. — LC 19 KU
- I am more self-disciplined. — LC 39 ABP

Key

Learner autonomy framework
- LC – learner control
- MA – metacognitive awareness
- CR – critical reflection
- LR – learning range
- C – confidence
- M – motivation
- IL – information literacy

Generic learning outcomes framework
- KU – knowledge and understanding
- AV – attitudes and values
- ABP – activity, behaviour and progression
- EIC – enjoyment, inspiration and creativity
- S – skills

■ Items sorted higher or lower than in other factors and distinguishing statements