



THE LANGUAGE LEARNING
SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT

2017

This study was created by



in collaboration with



educaweb (*)



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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE LANGUAGE LEARNING SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT?

➤➤➤ *The language learning sustainability project is an international survey created to evaluate the sustainability of language courses abroad, the overall efficiency of language trips and the impact they have on people's lives.*

It has been proven that speaking two or more languages is highly beneficial to human beings. Scientifically speaking, it can extend and improve the quality of one's life¹. In everyday life, learning a foreign language can give a boost to careers and is of course handy for travelling.

But how difficult can it be? Some might think of language learning as time consuming, others worry that it demands skills they do not have. However, the ways people learn languages today are much more diverse than they used to be.

Language trips are one of the modern ways to learn languages. They are highly recommended as they involve a unique combination of education and leisure. They serve their main purpose – teaching a language – but are also valued as a life experience.

This is why they are worth exploring.

OVERVIEW

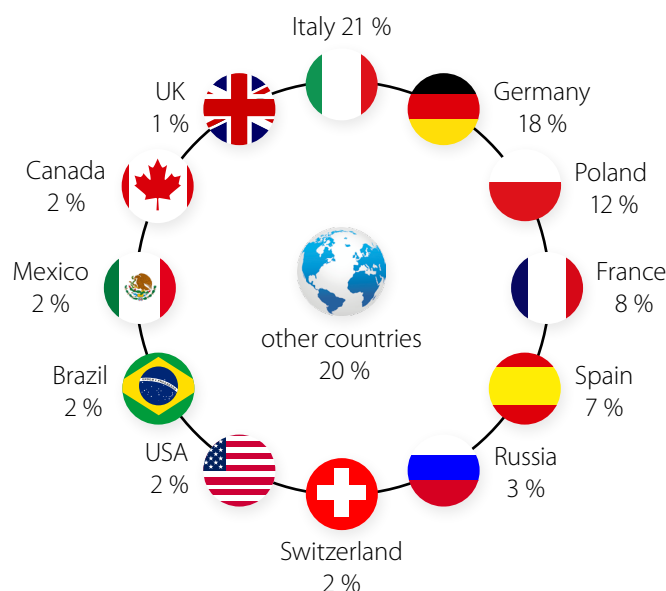
In our survey, we asked approximately **2,000** former students of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds to answer a number of questions and to share their experiences regarding language learning abroad. Here is an overview of the responses.

The results allowed us to look deeper into language learning today and create this study. In this booklet you will find:

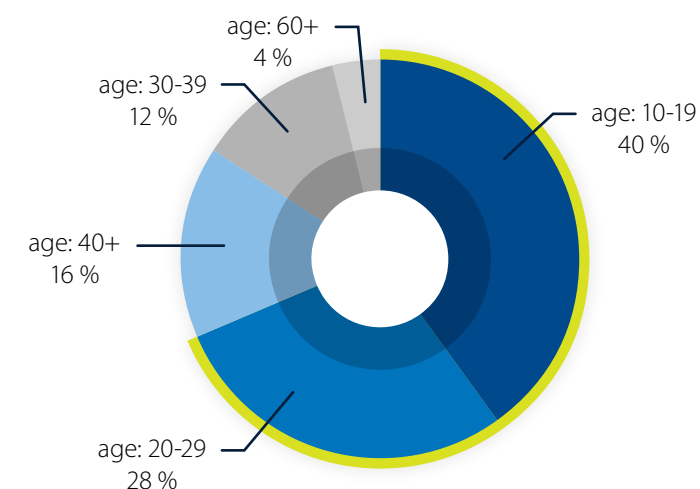
- insights into language learning abroad
- general trends found in the numerous responses
- graphical interpretations of the survey's results
- interviews with language learners

This study expands on the findings of earlier studies (Appendix 1 & 2).

Which country do you live in?

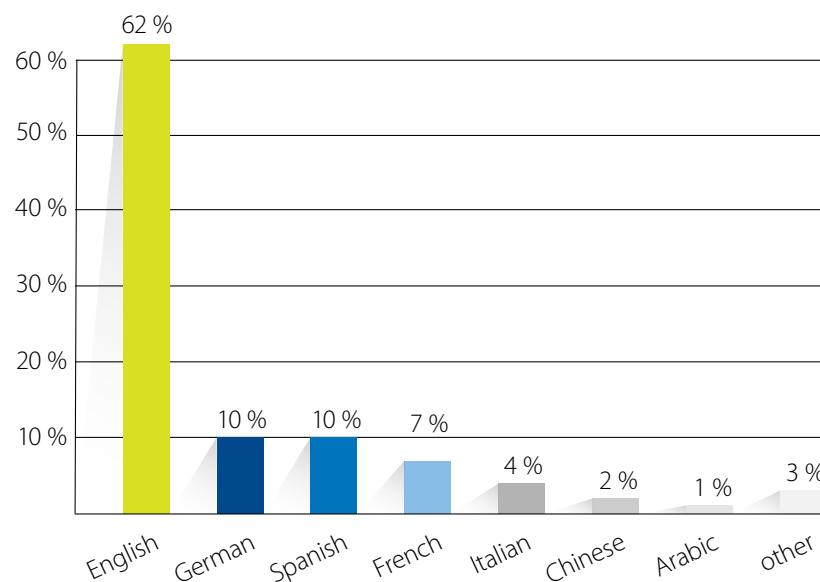


How old were you during your language trip?

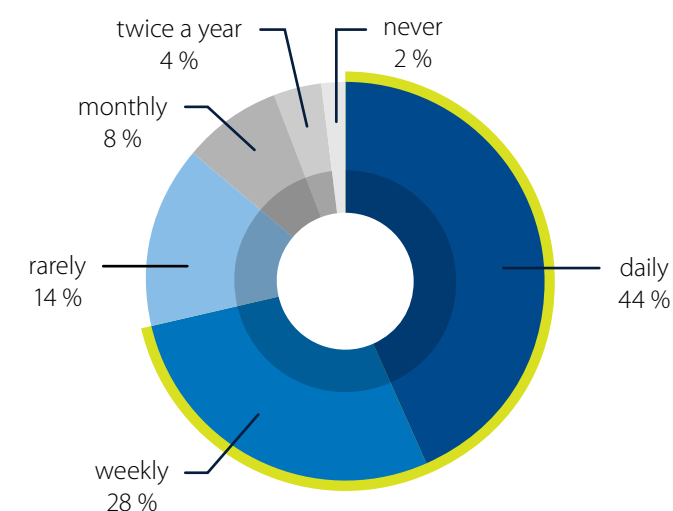


68 %
belong to the young demographic

Which language did you learn?



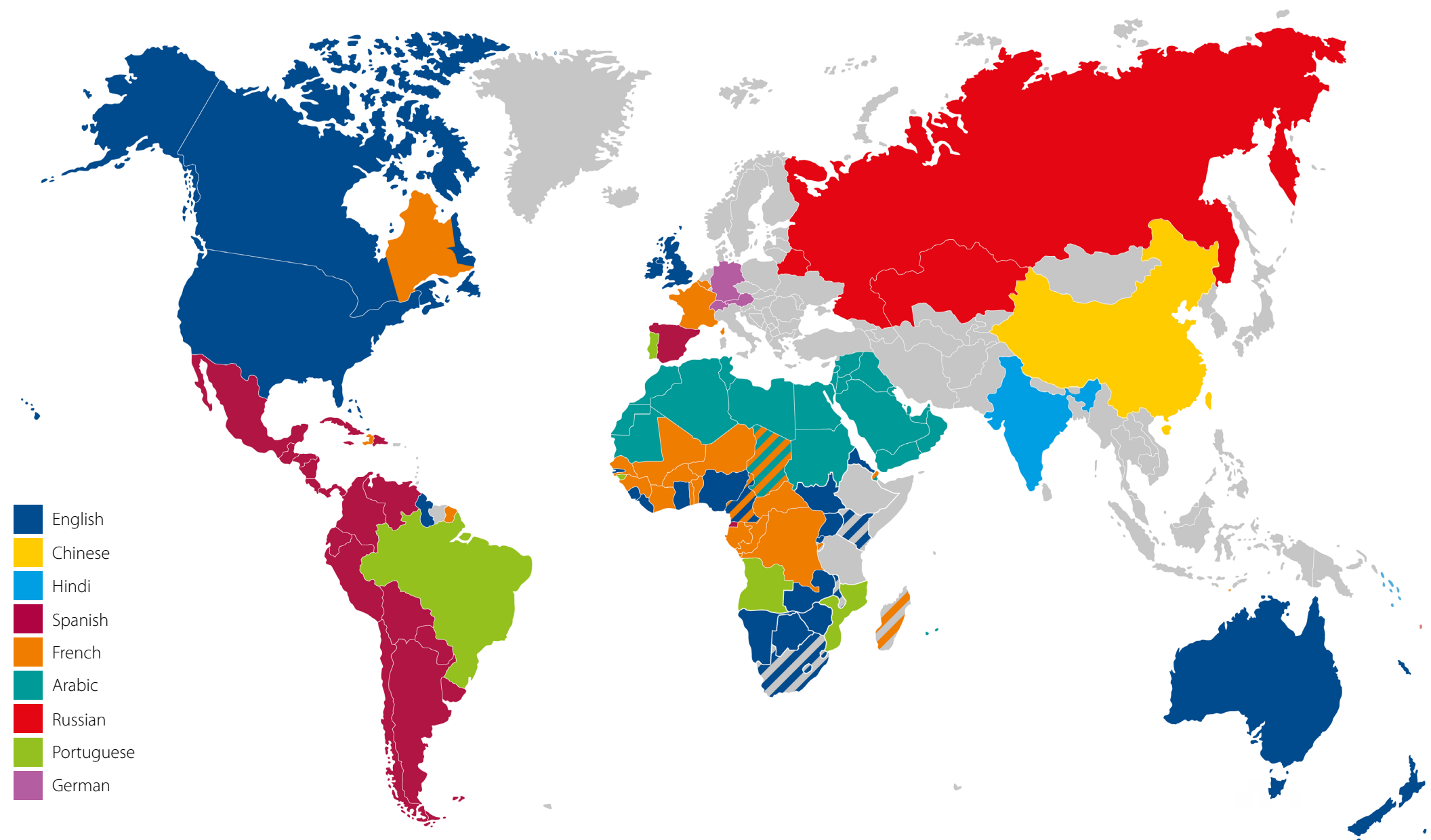
How often do you use this language?



72 %
use it on a regular basis

MAP OF LANGUAGES

»»» This map highlights the most widespread languages in the world. It can be used as a reference for the following pages.



LANGUAGE LEARNING TO ENHANCE MOBILITY & LIFE SATISFACTION

There is no doubt that learning a language is useful. It helps to develop many basic skills and can thus be highly beneficial for professional careers and general self-satisfaction. It also helps to develop communication skills with people from different regions such as:

- **practical skills** – speaking and writing in another language as well as in one's own mother tongue
- **cognitive skills** – the ability to interpret and evaluate with a critical mind

Knowing the structure and logic of several languages also develops one's creativity and problem solving strategies.

Learning another language opens up new job opportunities and can lead to new professional activities through contact with potential clients in their language.

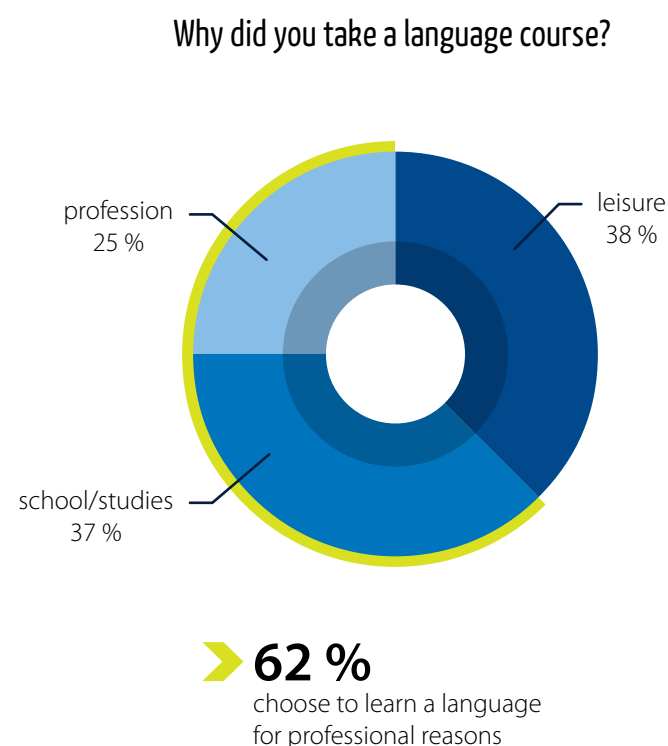
It also has key benefits for personal and social development, and personal satisfaction has emerged as the major reason for motivating learners.

»»»» *Why is language learning important? What does it contribute and what can the long-term effects be?*

Moreover, languages allow us to be more mobile in our professional lives as well as our leisure activities. Learning a foreign language is fun and speaking it makes travelling, living or working abroad more enjoyable and rewarding.

People who speak several languages can contribute positively to international relations and national security. Multilingualism is at the heart of institutions like the European Union². Learning a foreign language is a real asset in a globalised world and is extremely useful for understanding the diversity of the society in which one lives.

The results of our survey show that language trips are a perfect formula for any learners looking to improve their language skills to benefit their professional future and/or their personal development.



"Being able to speak the local language makes travelling in foreign countries a lot easier. We speak Spanish so we are able to receive advice and tips from locals in South America, because there is no language barrier with the locals. The English language is especially important while traveling and enables communication with people from all over the world."

Lisa & Johannes, from the blog [immerfernweh](https://immerfernweh.com)

HOW TO LEARN A LANGUAGE: THE BENEFITS OF IN-PERSON LEARNING – PART 1

»»» There are many different methods of learning available. Nowadays, one can learn a language without leaving the house. With this in mind, going abroad to study might seem like too much of an effort. However, there are real benefits of doing so.

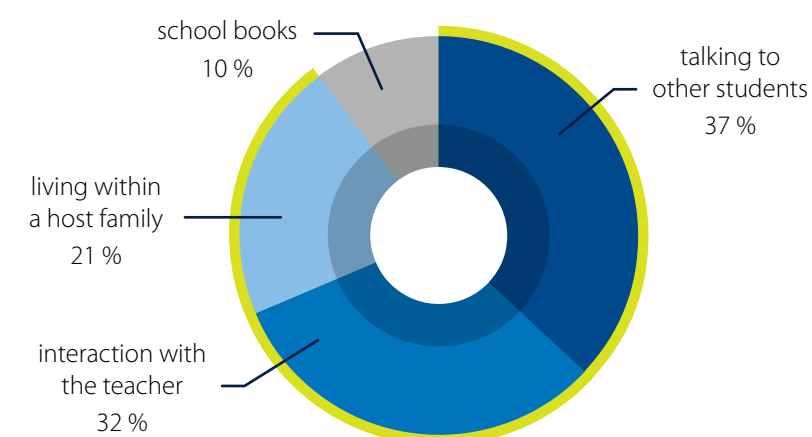
The debate between online and in-class learning still continues in the education world. While they have both been proven to be efficient learning strategies, one might still hesitate to choose between the two. The key to making the right decision is to know what and who these two methods are good for.

Online learning is a convenient and flexible way to start learning a language: online games and quizzes are fun and allow beginners to slowly dive into linguistics.

Through the computer, one also has the opportunity to chat with people from all over the world. The internet is full of good content to boost comprehension, such as videos and films.

However, these resources still lack one of the most important aspects of learning a language to fluency: human interaction.

What helped to improve your language skills the most?



» **90 %**
found the interaction with others to be the most useful resource for learning

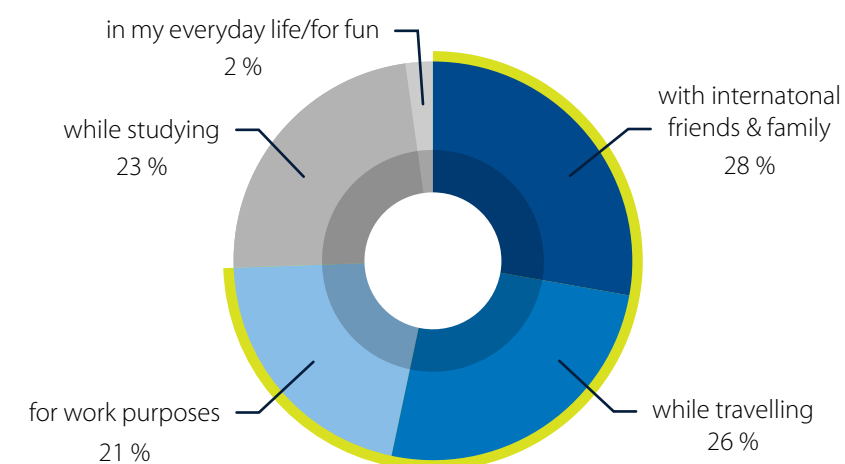
HOW TO LEARN A LANGUAGE: THE BENEFITS OF IN-PERSON LEARNING – PART 2



Non-verbal communication, such as body language, cognitive signs and facial expressions, just cannot be conveyed as well through computers as in real life. Language is consistently changing: regional or generational slang and word play are things learners might only discover by interacting with native speakers. Understanding jokes and idioms is an aspect of language learning that no books or computer programme will teach.

Total immersion is by far the main pro of language trips. It seems language trips have a much more valuable impact on one's memory and learning process. Our respondents clearly benefited from the live interactions they had with teachers, friends and/or host families. The human impact should not be underestimated.

When do you use a foreign language the most?



> 75 %
use the languages to exchange
with others



"I learned English and French the classical way like most people, in school. French was actually my first foreign language, followed by English. Unfortunately, due to the lack of practice, I have forgotten most of it. Plus I wasn't that attentive in school, so it was mostly my time abroad that helped form and solidify my foreign language knowledge. I haven't had the chance to take a language trip yet, but would like to have the opportunity to do so to improve my English."

Ivi, from the blog [WTF Ivi Kivi](#)



"I don't doubt that what I learned in school was good in terms of the grammar, but the practical training abroad was more helpful to me and I expanded my vocabulary and improved my conversations. At university I had to choose another foreign language and I chose Swedish. Unfortunately I don't really feel like I am able to speak the language since I have never lived or spent a lot of time in Sweden and so have been unable to apply what I learned."

Corinna, from the YouTube channel [Corinna Fee](#)



"Because English is a necessity in both my job and when traveling, I participated in group lessons in Sprachcaffe for a couple of years. Contrary to my experience in school, my learning success was distinctly better, because we consistently spoke English and could go through various everyday situations. Today I try to improve my English by watching movies and TV shows, and reading books in English."

Ina, from the blog [Genussbummler](#)

HUMAN IMPACT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING: A WAY TO GAIN CONFIDENCE?

Confidence when speaking the language is a major benefit that language trips can bring to students. At this point, it is important to say that learning a language abroad is a very successful path to fluency but fluency can only be achieved if learners have reached a sufficient level in the target language.

When learning a language, it is important for learners to be able to visually imagine the language they are learning. Teachers and locals can act as a general example of native speakers, whose expressions, body language and general communication styles can be imitated by learners.

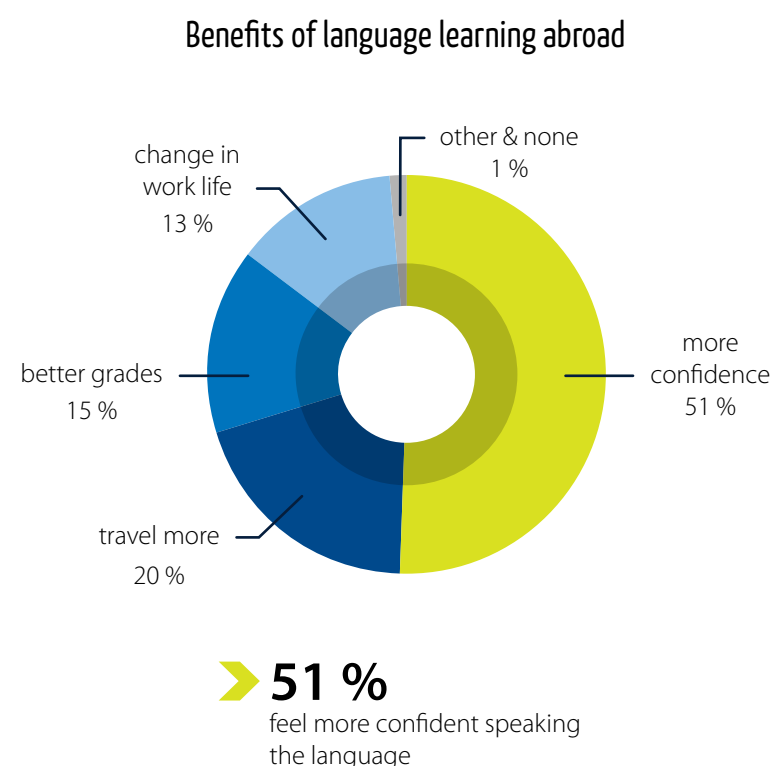
This mirroring experience can be achieved by any learner, even the shyest ones. The process is at first a very passive one. One must observe and analyse all these cognitive signs to be able to reproduce them afterwards. Learners must gain confidence in understanding their surroundings.

»»» When learning a foreign language abroad, students need to adjust to their situation: the new culture, the influence of their cultural reference group and their own personality. Being surrounded by native speakers and locals can be intimidating but is, in the long term, a confidence-boosting solution.

Once all of this becomes familiar, they can start the active learning and attempt to reproduce what they see.

The in-class learning experience is important at this point of the process and becomes a necessary and comforting tool for the learner. The teacher helps to interpret the language and open paths for conversation and active learning. The students become comfortable and gain confidence by processing the newly learned knowledge together and realising that they might make the same mistakes and have the same difficulties. They are also able to see the progress they make as a group and as individuals.

Confidence and competence depend very closely on one another. An important ingredient for developing confidence is “the ability of learners to see the progress in their language learning so that they gain a sense of achievement”.³



INTERVIEW NO. 1

– PART 1



Pierre currently speaks six languages. Over the years, he has developed his own method of learning languages and decided to share it on the internet. He created Le Monde des Langues – initially as a hobby – in 2014. Two years later, he launched his YouTube channel and his first online language course. To date, he has released more than seventy videos and five courses and now makes a living as a language learning mentor.

“Le Monde des Langues has quite a unique approach, because it’s more about learning languages than about one language in particular (English, Spanish, German...). Contrary to popular belief, all languages are more or less learned in the same way and the biggest difficulties are not the ones you might expect at first.”

According to Pierre’s experience, a language learner has to set meaningful goals, work on his/her motivation, find people to practise with regularly, learn vocabulary and use phonetics to improve pronunciation, intonation etc.: “In short, if you know how to learn one language, you can learn all languages. It sure takes time

and effort, but your patience will be handsomely rewarded!”

Pierre’s mother-tongue is French and he has learnt German, English, Finnish, Italian & Japanese. His current goal is not to collect languages but to eventually master the ones he already speaks: “I’m not planning to learn any new language yet, because some of the ones I know are a bit rusty, so I want to consolidate them before tackling a new one.”

Pierre’s main method of learning a language is the active immersion method which comprises two things: immersion in the language and culture, as well as an

active process of learning. “I don’t believe in what I call ‘passive learning’ – the easy, lazy but ultimately inefficient way of approaching a language. If you only spend your time reading and repeating things, it won’t be enough. You have to: 1) immerse yourself in the language and practise it every day; and 2) speak it and write it as often as possible.”

Pierre often stresses that living or travelling abroad is not a prerequisite for learning a language. However, in order to apply his method of active immersion, one has to get out of their comfort-zone and change their language learning environment regularly:

INTERVIEW NO. 1

– PART 2

*“Always remember that every polyglot was once a babbling toddler.
You can do it, too!”*

“A language trip can be an excellent way of boosting your language skills. You’ll be confronted with the language as it’s really spoken by natives, which is sometimes fairly different from what you’ll find in regular language courses. The most important thing is to refrain from speaking your mother tongue (or English, if you’re not there to learn it) and to take every opportunity to practise the language. Don’t be a loner, don’t just go to the tourist attractions, talk to the people around you and immerse yourself in the language and the culture.”

Self-confidence in language learning is one of the topics of our study. After learning five languages, Pierre has developed ways of gaining self-confidence and overcoming fears: “You don’t have to be the most confident person in the world if you want to learn a language. There are very shy people out there who’ve successfully learned several languages.

It is true however, that lacking self-confidence can be a huge stumbling block. If you’re afraid of speaking the language, you won’t dare practise it as often as you should and your progress will be slow. The first thing to do is to realise that you’re not as bad as you think you are. It’s perfectly normal to hesitate, to mispronounce some words... Sooner or later, everybody goes through it. You just have to relax and practise, practise and practise again. Eventually, you’ll be desensitised so to speak, and you’ll no longer be afraid to speak. Always remember that every polyglot was once a babbling toddler. You can do it, too!”

Language trips are indeed a good occasion to put this idea into practice: “When you’re abroad, you’re immersed in the language, it’s up to you to be active and speak with the people around you.”

Click to see one of Pierre’s YouTube videos

MAKING FRIENDS ABROAD: WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

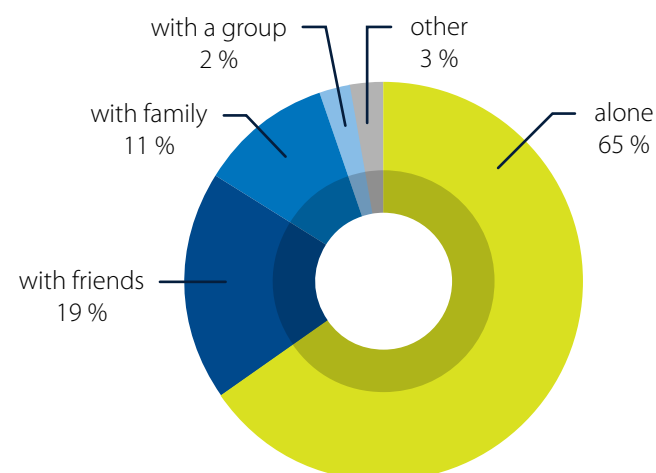
Language trips create tight relationships between students from all over the world, creating many opportunities, from travel to work openings.

One of the two major aspects of language trips is leisure. When going on holiday, one is generally surrounded by friends or family. In our survey, we found that language learning holidays seem to be a very individual pursuit: 65 % of students travelled alone.

But classes and activities are organised so that students mingle and get to know each other. Friendship opportunities are everywhere and so are occasions to practise the language one is learning.

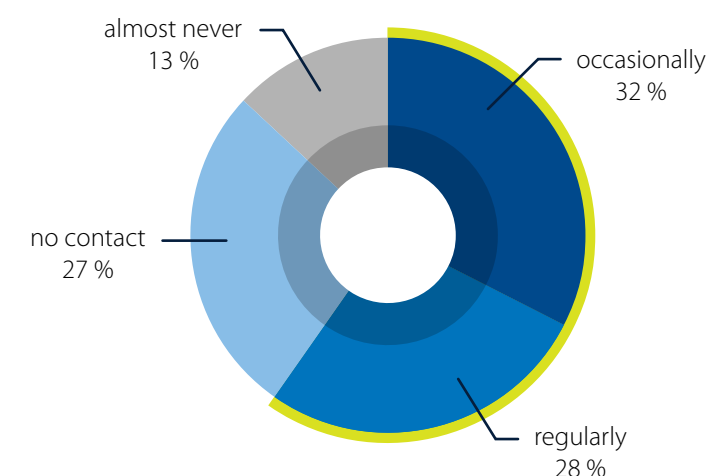
60 % of the respondents said that they are still in contact with their former classmates from all over the world. Seeing as the majority of the students are below 30, language trips might indirectly lead to unique life opportunities.

Did you travel alone or within a group?



➤ **65 %**
travelled alone

Are you still in contact with classmates from your trip?



➤ **60 %**
keep in touch with
the people they met

INTERVIEW NO. 2



Thomas, 42 years old, born and raised in Germany. Vanessa, 37 years old, born and raised in Brazil – they got to know each other in 2005 on a language trip with Sprachcaffe in Malaga, Spain, where they attended the same class. They are now married with two children and live in Frankfurt, Germany.

How did you experience the language trip? Very positive, not only because we got to know each other. The support was good and the teachers were really motivated. Malaga's atmosphere, with its beaches and Spanish lifestyle and culture, contributed a lot to our joy and motivation to learn the language.

Which languages do you both speak? Which one did/ do you use to communicate together during your language trip, afterwards and now? Both of us now speak German, Portuguese and Spanish. Thomas also speaks English. We mostly speak Spanish between us, which is how we communicated on the language trip.

This language trip obviously influenced your life, did it have another impact? On your confidence, studies, careers, for example? Learning a new language and orienting ourselves with a new and completely different environment, and also having fun while doing so, had positive effects on our self-confidence. However, in our case, the language trip didn't directly influence our studies or careers.

Vanessa, you moved away to your partner's country. How was the process of adapting to a totally different culture? Thomas, how was it for you?

Vanessa: It was a mutual decision and a difficult step,

Malaga's atmosphere contributed a lot to our joy and motivation to learn the language!

especially because maintaining a very close relationship with my family was extremely important to me and still is. Also, adjusting to a new country and the different customs and culture was and is difficult. Learning the language is an important component of that.

Thomas: It was obviously easier for me. I have a job and family much closer to me, but there are also adjustments. Now, the close relationships in another country and frequent trips to visit family there, and visits from there, are a part of my life. It is also a challenge to communicate when you don't share a language and culture and you always need to learn something new.

How important have been/are/will be languages in your lives? Thomas: Foreign languages are not very pertinent to my job but for Vanessa they are distinctly more important as, at the airport, she is in contact with a lot of people from different countries.

Vanessa: In the family, languages are extremely important. Bilingualism is central for our children – I speak to both of them in Portuguese, Thomas speaks German – and us to be able to build and deepen relationships with family and friends in both countries. We think that our grandchildren should be able to communicate in their grandparents' languages!

INTERVIEW NO. 3

– PART 1



Ahryun is a student from Korea at Sprachcaffe Frankfurt. She started learning German in her home country and came to Frankfurt to improve it drastically. She is now taking a C2 course and will later move to Great Britain to repeat this experience and learn English.

When did you start learning German? I started learning German exactly 2 years ago at a private language school in Korea. I was a complete beginner and learnt how to read the letters of the German alphabet. However, I couldn't learn enough as I was working at a company. I can remember that time well: I didn't think then that I would now be able to answer these questions in German.

What is your motivation to learn German? Do you have any future project? In fact, not many people in Korea want to learn German. Most people learn English

but I wanted to learn something special. That was a main reason why I chose German. While learning it, I gradually became more interested in Germany.

For Koreans, Germany means cars, beer, sausages and Angela Merkel. That's the normal image of Germany among Koreans. In addition, I wanted to get to know Germany better, so I started watching YouTube videos related to Germany. I am staying here until May and then, if possible, I'll fly to England in September to learn English. After that I plan to work in Germany.

How do you like living in Germany? What are the major differences between living in Germany and Korea?

What I like most is that there are fewer Koreans in Frankfurt than I expected. In well-known cities, for instance New York, Toronto, L.A. and London, there are too many Koreans. Therefore, I can feel like a foreigner here. In Korea I only like staying at home. I find meeting up with people and travelling too annoying there. However, after coming to Germany, I now go out almost every day because I want to speak more German and exchange information with other Korean students about Germany. Germany makes me more social.

What do you like best about the classes? During class it is useful to explain my home country as my teacher always asks us what our home countries are like. Therefore, I need to learn a lot about politics, history etc. In addition, North Korea is a difficult topic for me. Some people at Sprachcaffe don't completely know, for instance, what the difference between North and South Korea is. So I search for current news or teaching material because I want to make it clear. In addition, I once taught other students in my class Korean. My teacher has a lot of interest in foreign languages and cultures. It was fun, although I had to do a lot in a short time.

INTERVIEW NO. 3

– PART 2

Over time my German improved significantly, it's incredible.

Do you feel integrated in Germany now that you speak the language well? Honestly, not yet. Right now my biggest problem is listening comprehension. I can speak freely without difficulty but sometimes I don't get 100 percent of what other Germans say.

I find the German at the language school very different to the German in everyday life. Unfortunately, almost all Germans speak very quickly, so I struggle to understand what they say. Therefore I occasionally answer "yes" to give the impression that I have understood.

Have you made a lot of new friends here? Yes, quite a few. When I first came to Germany, I was always alone because I was shy and as quiet as a mouse. I wanted to change but did not have much success. In fact, I am still very quiet. At first, hearing and speaking were not my strengths. When I spoke to someone, the conversation would often be cut short, at the latest after 10 minutes. Such situations always made me depressed. Therefore, I repeated and learnt fundamental words at home. At that time only my understanding of German grammar comforted me. Over time, my German improved significantly,

it's incredible. When I see other friends whose German is still not that good, I think of myself in the past. Because of this I want to help them. I made a friend from Japan in my class. He said I was a great help to him and that being able to chat with me in German was unforgettable. I was really happy about that. Some of my friends and teachers speak Russian, so I also want to learn Russian if I get the chance.

Do you have a nice story to tell us regarding your learning process or your life in Germany? I memorised useful expressions, for example, "Ich muss mir das noch überlegen". That means: I need more time to decide, for instance, when shopping. So far I have used that expression very frequently. I also learn a lot of synonyms because, when talking and writing, these expressions are of great help. Additionally, it's great to know about many current topics like the secret service, Brexit, refugees, Donald Trump, world history, environmental protection and cruelty to animals because my class often deals with such topics...

WHAT ARE THE HIDDEN MOTIVATIONS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING?

»»» Languages enable one to communicate, move around and travel, but are these the only reasons people learn them? Languages also give access to communities. Be it a subculture, a fan base or just the internet, language broadens one's horizons.

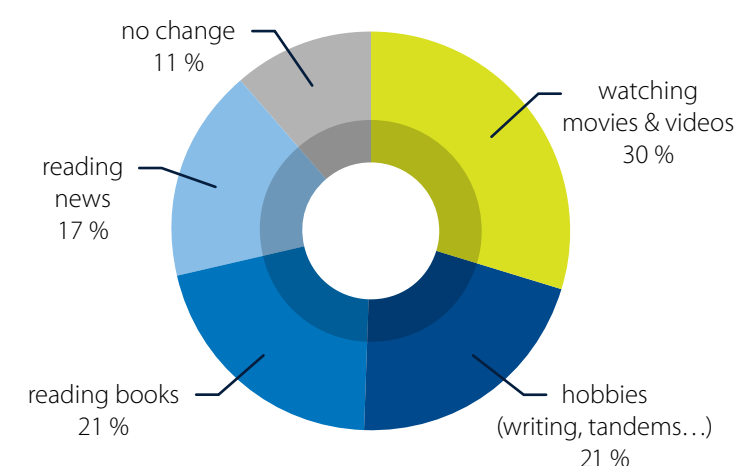
Knowing a language also means understanding a culture. It gives way to a better understanding of contemporary issues such as diversity, social cohesion and globalisation. In this case, language learning might not be the first interest of the learner but only a way to access a targeted culture or group of people. Interest in a foreign language is awakened by a cultural interest.

Integrated motivation⁴ refers to language learning for personal development and cultural enrichment. The goal of the learner here is to be accepted by the culture of the target language.

There are different factors that influence integrated motivation, including the student's attitude towards, interest in and desire to learn the foreign language. These factors are often related to hobbies, travel and/or relationships: one might, for example, want to learn Swedish because of a special someone. Manga or K-pop fans will integrate into these sub-cultures better by learning Japanese or Korean while people driven to volunteer or work in international development in South America will

have more chance by learning Spanish or Portuguese. People orientate their choice towards learning a language that is useful to their desire of integrating into a particular culture or accessing particular content. For instance, the desire to watch videos, movies and TV series in the original language (especially in English⁵) is on the rise. In Germany, a fourth of the younger population (age 18-34) watch English-based content in the original language, half of them with subtitles (Appendix 3).

New habits of students





"TV series and films often lose a lot of their wit through translation. But tutorials on YouTube are also often in English and not in German. Therefore my English has helped me to learn a lot. Another example is various online support systems for programs that I need to conduct my website, which are often only available in English. Without English I would not be able to solve my technical problems."

Ina, from the blog [Genussbummler](#)



"In Germany we have a rather high standard when it comes to synchronisation of foreign series and films. Nonetheless, it is a whole other experience to watch a movie or show in the original language. Parts of the wit and feeling often get lost in the translation. But it's also always an advantage to be able to access other foreign language (e.g. English) sources, such as scientific or political articles, books and magazines..."

Ivi, from the blog [WTF Ivi Kivi](#)

INTERVIEW NO. 4



Daniel and Jessica left their safe jobs at home in 2015 and dared to get out of the rat race. They quit and sold everything. Now they only possess what fits in their backpacks. Since then the pair have been travelling the world. On their blog Life to go and their YouTube channel, they document their life on the road, share their experience, and how much they have changed during the course of their journey.

Do you speak any foreign language? If so, could you tell us about your experience learning this language?

At the moment, apart from our native tongue German, we only speak English. We'd like to change that because we want to travel to Spanish-speaking countries. We not only want to be able to learn another language for fun but also because it is useful for moving from A to B, booking accommodation more quickly and ordering food without miscommunications, etc.. We want to interact better with the locals, which is very important to us: social exchange is what makes the trip special and helps to overcome barriers. And since we are already 31 and 29 years old, we are very excited to find out how

"easy" it will be to learn a new language (and maybe in the future even more new languages)!

As content creators and online influencers, how important are languages (especially English) to you?

English is a necessity for us! We use German in our social media channels. So in our vlogs and blog posts the foreign language is secondary. For travelling, however, we need English everywhere we go – in the jungle of Sumatra, at a market in Vietnam, in the open desert of Namibia – basically everywhere in the world people will speak good or at least a little English. So it has always been possible to communicate somehow.

Do you think that learning English or any other language is a good way to access more content on the internet, like series, films or articles? Definitely! We do enjoy watching YouTube videos like foreign travel channels. In this case, being able to understand English is a huge advantage, otherwise we could only guess what the videos were talking about. It is a great way to access ideas and tips for our own travels. Foreign YouTube channels are a great source of inspiration and information! If one speaks multiple languages, the internet has lots of information and entertainment to offer. Online, but also abroad in other countries, it's great to still be able to go to the cinema, read magazines or watch TV in the local language! For us, it only has advantages!

Would learning foreign languages also influence your content and the type of followers you can get, and maybe even grow your audience? Our content is currently in German. Since our audience comes from all over the world, we have started writing video descriptions in both German and English. We even add an English caption for pictures on Facebook and Instagram. On our blog we integrated Google Translate to make it possible for more people to keep up with us. This means that we also have readers from the US, Thailand, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy etc. If we decided to make English videos, we would definitely reach more people.

CONCLUSION: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

➤➤➤ This study has taught us many things concerning language learning and what language trips can bring to the process. Here are the key points.



Language learning is and will be in constant evolution.

- The internet has boosted the number of resources available to the community of learners and enabled it to grow.
- More and more people are willing or required to speak several languages.
- The demand for more interactive methods of learning is increasing.

The benefits of multilingualism are many.

It brings social and personal development to learners, as well as a better understanding of the world, its different cultures and contemporary issues in general. These benefits drive motivation.

The learning environment is an essential part of the development of language skills. In-class learning and total immersion are greatly encouraged.

- Learning together as a group helps every individual feel part of a shared experience.
- Total immersion allows learners to observe every aspect of the language (spoken and physical), interpret it and recreate it.

These two experiences combined help learners build long-lasting relationships and boost confidence.

APPENDIX 1

Reasons for learning/improving a language

<https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/162962/umfrage/gruende-um-fremdsprachen-zu-lernen-in-europa-in-2007/>

52 %: to get by better while on holiday abroad	17 %: to be able to read books and see movies in another language
51 %: for personal satisfaction	9 %: to be able to study in another country
37 %: to understand other cultures	9 %: to feel more European
31 %: to meet people from other countries	6 %: to understand their family's language
28 %: for work	1 %: other reasons
25 %: to be able to work in another country	1 %: don't know
19 %: to get a better job in their own country	

APPENDIX 2

Key facts 2017 – language courses abroad

by FDSV: <http://fdsv.de/der-fdsv/statistik/key-facts/>

General:

- 58 % of the people who do a language trip are young people (pupils) and only 42 % are adults
- The average duration of a language trip is 2 weeks and costs 1,349 €

Languages & Destinations:

- 79.95 % of people learn English (93.23 % of young people; 58.1 % of adults)
- Adults: 18.2 % Spanish, 8.95 % French, 6.16 % Italian
- Young People: 3.74 % French, 1.79 % Spanish
- Overall: 9.86 % Spanish, 6.3 % French, 3.14 % Italian
- Most people go to Great Britain (44.85 %), followed by Malta (15.38 %), Spain (7.7 %), France (7.46 %), German-speaking countries (4.76 %), USA (3.66 %), Italy (3.01 %), Ireland (2.71 %)

Duration:

- Average: 2 weeks
- If the destination is far away people stay longer (for example USA, Canada, Australia: 3.5-4 weeks)

Age:

- Under 18: 58.25 %
- Under 30: 79.3 %
- Adults: 41.75 %

APPENDIX 3

Watching movies and series in the original language

Representative survey by YouGov: <https://yougov.de/news/2016/01/14/jeder-vierte-junge-erwachsene-schaut-tv-serien-auf/>

~ **12 %** of German people watch American and British TV series and movies in the original language.

- 27 % aged 18-24
- 24 % aged 25-34
- 46 % watch with subtitles
- 48 % watch without subtitles
- The older they are, the less they do

A lot of countries already show the movies and series in the original language with subtitles.

For example: Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark.

Countries which normally use synchronised versions: Germany, Spain, Italy, France.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

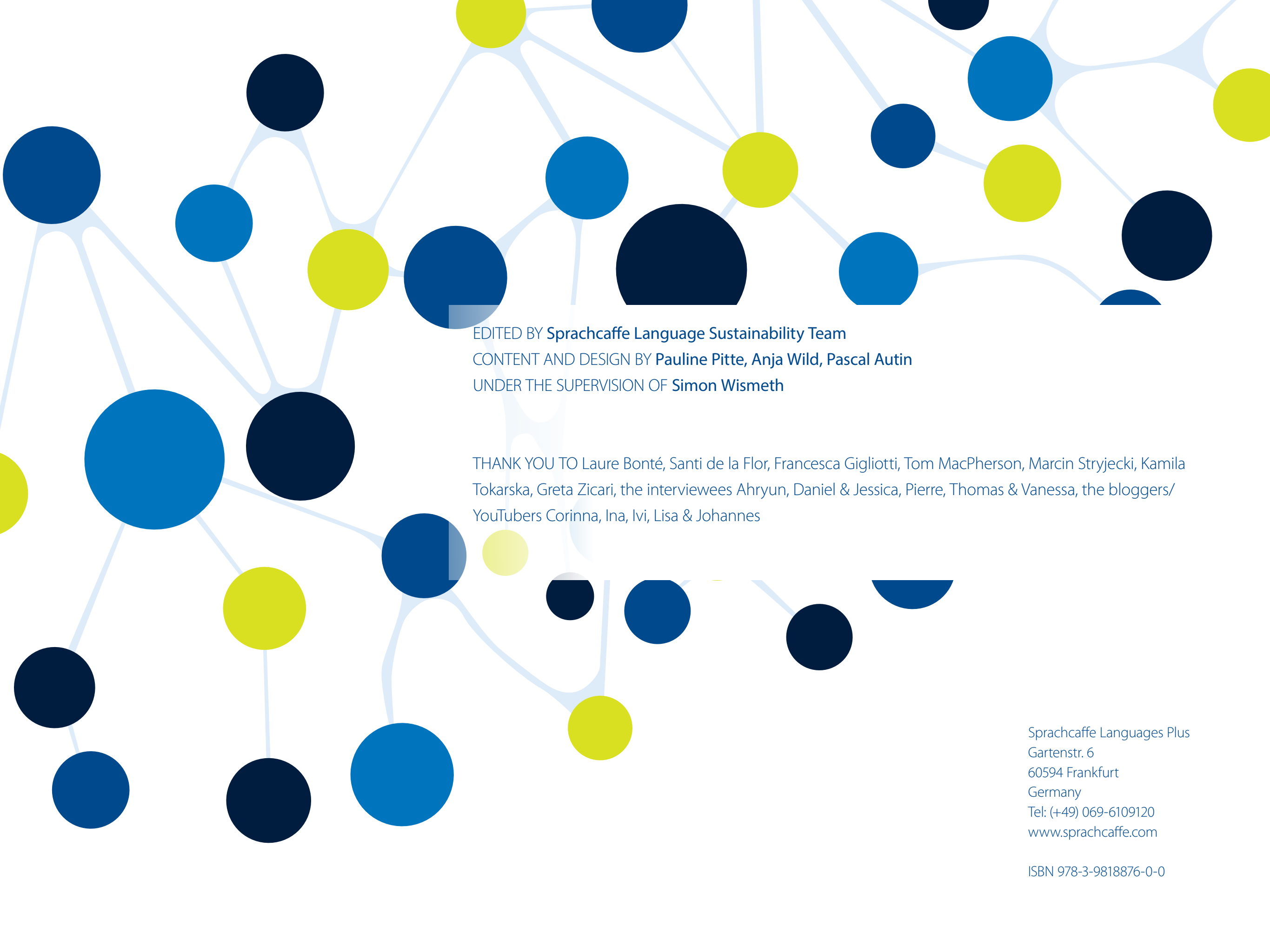
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