

**DOES THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY SUBJECT  
POSITIONS BY MALE PUPILS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL  
HINDER THEIR PERFORMANCE IN MODERN FOREIGN  
LANGUAGES (MFL) BY COMPARISON WITH GIRLS?**

**by**

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**A thesis submitted to  
The University of Birmingham  
for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**School of Education  
The University of Birmingham  
September 2011**

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## ABSTRACT

Does the construction of identity subject positions by male pupils in secondary school hinder their performance in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) by comparison with girls?

Nearing the end of my career as a secondary school Modern Languages (French/Spanish) teacher, I wanted to reflect on some of the problems I had encountered. The most obvious, I felt, was that male secondary school students persistently seemed to perform less well in this subject area than female students. This led me to investigate the social construction of gender, learner identity and the ideologies surrounding MFL. I did this by investigating the role of language and discourse in the construction of culture, identities and ideologies.

The research paradigm is interpretivist and the design is case study, investigating the cultural meanings students construct in the context of MFL. The methodology combines classroom observations and interviews across student population samples in Key Stages 3 & 4. Findings show that MFL learning is a cultural activity, ideologically constructed in discourse. Secondly, findings show that a positive learner identity towards MFL contributes to a greater cultural involvement within the language, rather than solely to its external economic goals, and to an emerging MFL cultural identity. This learner cultural identity is more typically, although not exclusively associated with girls as an absolute since gender is seen as a social construction rather than a priori. Further findings also show that some socially constructed male identities tending towards 'laddishness' can disadvantage boys in MFL and the implications for this are for a wider discourse exploring notions of cultural diversity not only in MFL but also in personal identities.

## **Dedication**

To my wife Dominique, my daughter Sandra and my son Thomas

## **Acknowledgements**

I thank all students and teachers, past and present, for participating in this study and I hope that this research contributes in helping to resolve some of the difficulties faced by many of us in the task of teaching and learning foreign languages in secondary schools.

In this study I have travelled a long road with its many highs and lows and could not have reached destination without the unfailing help, support and inspiration of my supervisor, Professor Angela Creese. All my gratitude goes to her for guiding me to its conclusion.

## **List of Contents**

	Page nos.
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2 Language and Identity</b>	
2.0 Introduction	8
2.1 Language, discourse and cultural meaning	9
2.2 The centrality of language	14
2.3 Structuralism	14
2.4 The socio-cultural language of Vygotsky	18
2.5 Bakhtin – language as discourse	22
2.6 Discourse and social relations of power	26
2.7 Socio-economics and learning/cultural identity- Fairclough	28
2.8 Interactional socio-linguistics	31
2.9 Post-structuralism	34
2.10 Summary	37
<b>Chapter 3 Identity and Culture</b>	
3.0 Identity, language and culture	41
3.1 Learner Identity	42

<i>3.2 Gender and Identity</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>3.3 Gender and Learner Identity in MFL</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>3.4 Gender and motivation in MFL</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>3.5 Motivation; Dynamic Process Model; Imagined Future Selves</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>3.6 Cultural Identity</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>3.7 Conclusion</i>	<i>77</i>

## **Chapter 4 Research Methodology**

<i>4.0 Introduction</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>4.1 Stategy- Philosophical issues; Ontology –Epistemology</i>	<i>83</i>
<i>4.2 Causality</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>4.3 Research Design ( case study)</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>4.3.1 Qualitative Study</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>4.3.2 The Case Study</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>4.3.3 Case Study Population</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>4.3.4 Cognitive Ability Tests</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>4.3.5 Case Study Participants</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>4.4 Research Methods</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>4.4.1 Ethnographic Research Methods</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>4.4.2 Interviews</i>	<i>116</i>

<b>Chapter 4 (continued)</b>	<b>Page nos.</b>
<i>4.4.3 Data Analysis</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>4.5 The Ethics of Research</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>4.5.1 Ethical Issues-Representativeness</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>4.5.2 Equity</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>4.5.3 Consent and confidentiality</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>4.5.4 Interpreting Events- reflexivity</i>	<i>133</i>
<i>4.5.5 Ideological position of researcher</i>	<i>134</i>
<i>4.5.6 Position of the researcher within the research process</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>4.6 Conclusion</i>	<i>139</i>

## **Chapter 5 Quantitative Data Analysis**

<i>5.0 Introduction</i>	<i>141</i>
<i>5.1 Context of quantitative data</i>	<i>142</i>
<i>5.2 Statistical data analysis of G.C.S.E results</i>	<i>143</i>
<i>5.3 Explanation of data types</i>	<i>143</i>
<i>5.4 Presentation of G.C.S.E data</i>	<i>145</i>
<i>5.5 Statistical significance and rationale for statistical difference</i>	<i>146</i>
<i>5.6 Statistical significance using CAT score</i>	<i>150</i>



<b>Chapter 5 (continued)</b>	<b>Page nos.</b>
<i>5.7 Presentation of Higher Grade GCSE results 2003/4/5/6/7</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>5.8 Conclusion</i>	<i>160</i>

<b>Chapter 6 Year 11 case study</b>	<b>Page nos.</b>
<i>6.0 Introduction</i>	<i>162</i>
<i>6.1 Theoretical focus for case study</i>	<i>164</i>
<i>6.2 Interview with Bill</i>	<i>165</i>
<i>6.3 Learner and cultural identities</i>	<i>168</i>
<i>6.4 Interview with Alicia and Anna</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>6.5 Classroom observations</i>	<i>176</i>
<i>6.6 Observation of speaking activity</i>	<i>182</i>
<i>6.7 Interview with Dennis</i>	<i>188</i>
<i>6.8 Dialogue 'Au restaurant'</i>	<i>194</i>
<i>6.9 Learner and cultural identities in practice</i>	<i>197</i>
<i>6.10 Interview with Jasmine and Robert</i>	<i>198</i>
<i>6.11 Theoretical Developments</i>	<i>204</i>
<i>6.12 Connecting cultural and learner identities</i>	<i>206</i>
<i>6.13 Conclusion</i>	<i>207</i>

<b>Chapter 7 Year 9 case study</b>	<b>Page nos.</b>
<i>7.0 Introduction</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>7.1 Theoretical focus</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>7.2 Case Study Population</i>	<i>210</i>
<i>7.3 Interviews with Alex, Mat, Adam and George</i>	<i>219</i>
<i>7.4 Cultural and Learner Identity in Interviews with Georgina and Alex</i>	<i>226</i>
<i>7.5 Interview with Sam</i>	<i>227</i>
<i>7.6 Ethnographic Observation</i>	<i>231</i>
<i>7.7 Learner Cultural Identity as framework for analysis</i>	<i>248</i>
<i>7.8 Cultural Identity and Learner Identity in Interaction</i>	<i>252</i>
<i>7.9 Gendered Identity</i>	<i>254</i>
<i>7.10 Conclusion</i>	<i>257</i>

<b>Chapter 8 Year 7 case study</b>	<b>Page nos.</b>
<i>8.0 Introduction</i>	<i>260</i>
<i>8.1 Themes of analysis</i>	<i>260</i>
<i>8.2 Year 7 case study</i>	<i>262</i>
<i>8.3 Classroom observations</i>	<i>266</i>

<b>Chapter 8 (continued)</b>	<b>Page nos</b>
<i>8.4 Interview with Bella</i>	272
<i>8.5 Interview with James</i>	272
<i>8.6 Analysis in terms of cultural identity</i>	276
<i>8.7 Cultural and learner identities in practice</i>	278
<i>8.8 Interviews with Kayleigh, Francesca and Jessica</i>	283
<i>8.9 Issues of learner identity</i>	288
<i>8.10 Interview with Scott</i>	297
<i>8.11 Learner, cultural and gender identities</i>	298
<i>8.12 Interview with Jessica and Jamie</i>	299
<i>8.13 Conclusion</i>	303

<b>Chapter 9 Findings</b>	<b>Page nos.</b>
<i>9.0 Introduction</i>	306
<i>9.1 Theoretical findings</i>	306
<i>9.2 Empirical findings</i>	310
<i>9.3 Learner identity findings</i>	311
<i>9.4 Cultural identity findings</i>	316
<i>9.5 Gendered identity</i>	321
<i>9.6 Conclusion</i>	323

## **Chapter 10 Conclusion**

<i>10.0 Looking back</i>	<i>326</i>
<i>10.1 Analysis of gender</i>	<i>327</i>
<i>10.2 A search for meanings</i>	<i>329</i>
<i>10.3 Learner and cultural identities</i>	<i>331</i>
<i>10.4 The cultural identity of language</i>	<i>332</i>
<i>10.5 The outcome of research</i>	<i>333</i>
<i>10.6 Strengths of the Research Study</i>	<i>334</i>
<i>10.7 Weaknesses and Limitations of the Study</i>	<i>335</i>
<i>10.8 Further Claims for Knowledge</i>	<i>336</i>
<i>10.9 Implications for the curriculum</i>	<i>338</i>

<b>List of references</b>	<i>340</i>
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## **List of abbreviations**

<i>C.A.T.</i>	<i>Cognitive Ability Test</i>
<i>D.C.S.F</i>	<i>Department for Children Schools and Families</i>
<i>E.U.</i>	<i>European Union</i>

<i>I.C.T.</i>	<i>Information Communication Technology</i>
<i>G.C.S.E</i>	<i>General Certificate of Secondary Education</i>
<i>MFL</i>	<i>Modern Foreign Languages</i>
<i>N.F.E.R.</i>	<i>National Foundation for Educational Research</i>
<i>N.V.Q</i>	<i>National Vocational Qualification</i>
<i>OfSTED</i>	<i>Office for Standards in Education</i>

<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>Page nos.</b>
<i>1-Case study populations</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>2-Distribution of research participants by gender and CAT score</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>3-Year 11 case study participants by gender,CAT score and GCSE grade</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>4-Year 9 case study participants by gender and CAT score</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>5-Year 7 case study participants by gender</i>	<i>111</i>
<i>6-GCSE results 2001</i>	<i>146</i>
<i>7-GCSE results 2002 by CAT band 106-110</i>	<i>147</i>
	<b>Page nos.</b>
<i>8-GCSE results 2002 by CAT band 111-117</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>9-GCSE results 2002 from 16 students from 106-110 CAT band</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>10- GCSE results 2002 by CAT band 101-105</i>	<i>152</i>

<i>11- GCSE results 2002 by CAT band 91-100</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>12-GCSE results 2003</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>13-GCSE results 2004</i>	<i>156</i>
<i>14-GCSE results 2005</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>15- GCSE results 2006</i>	<i>158</i>
<i>16-GCSE results 2007</i>	<i>159</i>
<i>17- Year 11 case study participants by gender,CAT score and GCSE grade</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>18-Year 9 case study participants by gender,CAT score and GCSE grade</i>	<i>211</i>
<i>19- Year 7 case study participants by gender</i>	<i>265</i>

### **List of Diagrams**

<i>Diagram 1</i>	<i>29</i>
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### **Appendices**

<i>Appendix 1 – GCSE performance/gender bar charts . National GCSE data</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Appendix 2 – Interview schedule</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Appendix 3 – Interview transcripts</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Appendix4 – parental consent form for pupil interviews</i>	<i>4</i>

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

After more than 30 years in the MFL classroom, teaching French and Spanish, I felt it was time to reflect on the journey I had made and to consider if students in wide ability schools were any better at foreign languages than when I started in 1977. Obviously this is too wide and general a task to be seriously addressed. However I could not fail to note that at secondary school level, girls made much better progress than boys and a greater percentage of girls than boys ended up gaining the higher grades at GCSE. If there were a problem in MFL learning to be researched then surely this was it. The research interest is two-fold. First there is a general intrinsic interest. A problem has been noticed and there is a fascination as to why this should be the case, once of course statistically, it has been demonstrated that it is indeed a real problem rather than an imagined one. Secondly if one section of the population is doing less well than another, there may be a problem of equity or disadvantage. Lack of equity, as an ethical problem, does not have to be about material resources. It can also be about socio- cultural or educational resources. It is often popularly stated that French in particular is a middle class girls' subject. And yet I, as researcher, being male, born and brought up on an east Manchester council estate, could never have considered myself as middle class. Since other male colleagues I have known during my career were also of working class origin and yet became modern linguists, I felt that there were more issues at stake than just gender and social class in learning a foreign language. Yet as we will see in the study, gender is implicated because certain characteristics have traditionally gathered around the two genders according to

the popularly binary male/female definition. This is how I started out on the research journey.

In chapter two, the literature review, I look at the part language plays in the construction of identity and, more particularly, gendered identity. I show how a view of language has evolved from being an impersonal labelling device used to describe the world to its being actively involved in constructing the social world and human identity. Language is at first seen as having a separate existence from individuals and simply used by them as a tool but at the end of the journey it is very much part of who we are. The vital ingredient in this is discourse and the understanding that language exists and evolves within different discourses that reflect and promote group cultures and interests. In this sense language is never neutral and always contains subjectivity. Language is then seen as related to pupil and teacher identity in classrooms in the expression of their own discourses and those of the school.

In chapter three I outline the connections between identity, culture and gender leading to the notions of cultural and learner identities and at the end of the chapter there is a claim for theoretical knowledge that MFL learning is a socio-cultural activity.

In chapter four I introduce the research design and methodology for the study. In this chapter there is much philosophical discussion with regard to the nature of knowledge in terms of epistemology and the ontology of the researcher in terms of the reality he/she occupies in relation to research participants and research data. Is the social world



knowable in terms of fixed objectively verifiable categories or are social phenomena only amenable to interpretation? Arising from this dichotomy are the philosophical paradigms for research which are either positivist or interpretivist. The choice of paradigm depends on the reality or ontology of the researcher. Is he/she at a distance from social phenomena looking at data in a 'scientific' or positivist model or is she/he actual a part of the social phenomena being researched? The latter model is interpretivist and this is the paradigm that is adopted for this research. In the chapter we see that this paradigm decision leads to a research strategy of case study and a mixed methodology of interviews, classroom observations and a questionnaire. I also discuss the ethics of research focussing on concepts such as internal validity, reliability, representativeness, researcher reflexivity, participant consent, equity, anonymity and confidentiality. I finish the chapter with a discussion on the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the research.

Chapter five is entirely devoted to quantitative data which aims to establish, using statistical evidence, the performance difference between boys and girls in MFL at a South Kent secondary school. In the chapter, I analyze gender differences in the higher grades of G.C.S.E in MFL over 7 years. I use a computer program called S.P.S.S. to establish statistical significance between gender differences at the higher A-C grades at G.C.S.E in French and Spanish.

Chapters six, seven and eight contain 3 different case studies of years eleven, nine and seven teaching groups respectively.

Chapter 6 looks at classroom observation and interview data in a year 11 group. Students can be seen to construct learner identity in MFL in different ways. Some students regard their study of French instrumentally in terms of getting a job by using a knowledge of the language or using it functionally on holiday. Others are more interested in how the language not only reflects culture but also has a culture or diverse cultures embedded within it in terms of pronunciation, accent, grammar and language structures. Some students regard both these learner positions as important. Nevertheless we see that the socio-economic discourses surrounding MFL are powerful enough to justify socio-economics as a *prima facie* motivation for this learning activity. MFL as a learning activity can then be seen as ideologically constructed with socio-economics as a strong driving force. The chapter however shows that an economic motivation alone does not suffice with regard to achieving higher A-C grades at G.C.S.E and that there has to be more of a cultural openness and empathy with the way the language is constructed, how it is pronounced and the culture or cultures it embodies. Students who show this type of cultural interest tend to be those who achieve the higher grades. The theoretical development at the end of the chapter is that language learning is essentially a socio-cultural activity rather than simply economic and there has to be some cultural connection to the language as a learning activity.

The case study in chapter 7 is a year 9 Spanish class. There is more ethnographic observation in this case study because I was fortunate enough to have another teacher with me in the classroom. I was therefore more able to focus exclusively on the case study participants and consequently my research observation diary is much more

detailed. Because of this I focused more on pupil discourse and how pupils are able to frequently alternate between their own discourse and that of the teacher. It is therefore possible in this chapter to see how many, but not all pupils construct their learning identity from different discourses. There is however one pupil who brings into the classroom with her a discourse from her community which does not engage with the hybrid pupil -teacher classroom discourse and she remains an outsider calling out to the other pupils and at times intimidating them. There are pupils who prefer to adhere to the official teacher discourse although they do know how to engage with other available discourses. The chapter shows that these pupils tend to achieve more in the lesson by connecting more exclusively with the cultures of the language being taught. However in this chapter we come to view culture not as a finished product but as a process of enquiry where the classroom can open up cultural opportunities where perhaps none had hitherto existed. We are thus introduced to a practical example of indexicality where ‘small’ culture can index or point upwards towards ‘larger’ culture or where one culture can point towards another culture irrespective of notions of comparative size. We see in the chapter the lack of equity in socio-cultural capital between some of the research participants, meaning that for some MFL as a subject area lacks an interesting content. We also see some possibilities as to how this lack of cultural content can be remedied by connecting across to other areas of the curriculum as opposed to indexing larger or more geographically distant discourses.

Chapter 8 contains the year 7 case study. The data from this case study shows the link between cultural disposition and in this case, growing competence in French. In this case

study I undertake research in the French classroom of another teacher. Again this allows me to focus in more detail on the ethnography of classroom behaviour and discourse.

Students who are keen to produce an approximation of spoken French in a café simulation are re-enacting for themselves what they think it means to sound French. The chapter discusses different interpretations of French culture and takes the view that what we see from a distance as French culture is in fact a dominant culture. It is the culture that has prevailed over all others. It is therefore argued that teachers are asking pupils to re-enact a stereotype that masks a multitude of diverse French speaking cultures.

Nevertheless I argue that this does not really matter because of the concept of the 'other'. Pupils journey towards a cultural 'other' albeit a stereotyped one that nevertheless represents difference and this journey in itself constitutes a cultural enquiry. The importance here is therefore to travel rather than to arrive at a fixed cultural product that is always likely to be static and stereotyped. The fact for example that French post boxes are yellow rather than red does not matter since the importance is the difference rather than the cultural fact in itself. What matters is that they are different in colour and shape and although this may change over time, the importance is the cultural enquiry in the journey rather than any finished product on arrival. The conclusion of the chapter therefore is that MFL learning should be a cultural journey.

Chapter 9 differentiates between theoretical findings and empirical findings. I argue that there are two distinct set of findings although interrelated. Firstly the theoretical findings are that individuals learn with and through their identities which have been shaped and are constantly being constructed within the ideologies of discourse. We learn that

discourse is ideological and not neutral. Discourses also constitute meanings for the learning activity, be this MFL or other learning activities. Foreign language learning is shaped as a functional economic activity, a socio-cultural activity or other such as grammatical, literary etc according to the prevailing discourse that surrounds the activity and the individual. The individual may also appropriate his/her own meanings for any activity from those which are socially available. The other theoretical finding still however shaped by the ideological power of discourse is that gender is not a priori male/female binary but rather a set of characteristics commonly associated with one gender or another and essentially interchangeable. Empirical findings follow theoretical findings in suggesting that there is no a priori link between gender and performance but rather that performance arises from characteristics connected to learner and cultural identities constituted in discourse.

The final chapter 10 looks at the implications of the research findings and I argue that the close tie between MFL and cultural enquiry means that students can gain cultural insights through foreign language study and this can contribute to cultural awareness within all subjects on the curriculum. This can contribute to personal awareness of how identity and social phenomena are culturally and ideologically constituted. MFL and its cultural connections, it is argued, can be a vehicle for the study of culture and personal cultural awareness in general perhaps as its own subject area.

## CHAPTER 2 : LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

### **2.0 Introduction**

The title of my research project is ‘Does the construction of identity subject positions by male pupils in secondary school hinder their progress in Modern Foreign Languages by comparison with girls?’

The focus of the research is to investigate links between performance and gender in the study of Modern Foreign Languages. In this chapter I outline the part that language plays in the construction of identity. I chronicle a line of development from language being seen as an independent structure and a device for labelling a pre-existing social world to language within discourse where it is seen as constructing the social world. This includes the notion of language and discourse as shaping identity and ideology.

The area of research is the link between gendered personal identity and performance in Modern Foreign Languages (henceforth to be known as MFL.). In Chapter 5, using quantitative data, I show that the differences in MFL with regard to examination performance and pupil attitudes are statistically significant between boys and girls at secondary school level in K.S 3 and 4 at the school where I carried out the research as teacher/researcher named under the pseudonym as Brackenmount secondary school.

Fundamental questions now need to be addressed within the research question. These fundamental questions are as follows:-

- What is the meaning of gendered personal identity?

- What are the constitutive elements that make for performance?
- Why, other than it being my subject area, is MFL of particular interest in this research study?

These three questions are addressed in chapter three. However the most fundamental question underpinning the research, which I will address in this chapter, concerns the identity of the individual with regard to the social world. This, as we will see, brings language into focus as a device through which the individual mediates the world and constructs personal identity. The importance of the role that language plays in either describing, mediating or actually constructing the social world will vary enormously depending which philosophical position is adopted. This literature review is more than a definition of terms or naming of parts. It is intended as a journey of learning about the individual and language, starting from a wide open space, in a general context from which a direction is found and a progressively narrowing focus leads finally to a theoretical position from which the research can be conducted.

## **2.1 Language , discourse and cultural meaning**

The line of development of the review will be language in a socio-cultural context based upon claims evidenced in literature, from the perspectives of cultural psychology, socio-linguistics and discourse theories, that personal identity is socially constructed through language and signs in social context. This must stand in contrast to other accounts of

identity which appeal to neuro- biological, neuro-lingistic explanations, or other explanations which involve the biological functioning of the brain. This is not to deny the validity of these explanations nor to say that there should, for ideological reasons, never be interdisciplinary approaches to research. It is more a question of my own interest as researcher and a focus based on the evidence of social science literature, hopefully suggesting that the theoretical base presented here has sufficient depth to obviate any need to look to other disciplines to address the research question. My approach therefore appeals to the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic as opposed to the scientific.

Therefore this literature review is designed to demonstrate the centrality of language in the construction of identity. The varying perspectives on this relationship between language and the individual will be outlined developmentally. At the end of the critical analysis of this development we will arrive at the linguistic focus for the research into the individual's learning identity with regard to foreign language learning. The linguistic position which will be used for the constitution and expression of identities will be one of discourse. However discourse is more than just language. For Fairclough (1989;1992) it is language as social practice because language contains social phenomena and relationships that often invoke ideologies and relationships of power in shaping meaning. Language therefore expresses and points to ways of acting and speaking where meanings have been 'normalized' as common sense by power relations in social structures to become ideology . Language is not separate from social structures but reflects and shapes them over time in a dialectical relationship. For Fairclough (1989) and also my



own approach to this study, discourse is a social practice containing and constraining ways of acting and behaving. Discourse and discursive action shaped by discourse are constrained by social structure in which discourse is only one practice amongst other non-discursive practices. All linguistic phenomena contain social phenomena but not all social phenomena contain linguistic phenomena and so the dialectic between discourse and social structures is not between two equal partners since the relationship between them is asymmetrical (Fairclough 1989:23). Fairclough however draws, in part, upon the work of Foucault (1972) for his own definition of discourse.

Foucault (1972) argues, in a very theoretical and abstract way, that the social world is constituted by discourse. This contradicts Fairclough because Foucault posits that 'discursive formations' provide the foundation that governs all knowledge of objects and social beings meaning that the individual is totally located and shaped within discourse. Foucault refers to 'discursive formations' (1972:121) that establish the rules that govern the statements about the social world that can be expressed and also those that cannot be expressed. The discursive formation does not refer to the interior of language in terms of grammatical structure and lexical items but to its enunciative aspect at the level of statements. Therefore it governs what can be said about the world at a given point in time and at a given place. The discursive formation is a socio-historic phenomenon that constitutes areas of knowledge of objects and social subjects (Fairclough 1992:39). Therefore Foucault argues that the way we use discourse as a social practice governs the type of knowledge we end up with. Different discursive practices would have resulted in different types of knowledge. Discourses are therefore more than languages, they are

social practices that ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1992:57). Therefore economic talk for example gives rise to certain economic concepts and knowledge and excludes others, psychological language gives rise to psychological knowledge and concepts , constituting individual in a ‘psychologized’ way as opposed to, for example, a spiritual or a politicized way. All knowledge is then relative the discursive formation that constitutes it.

This version of discourse as being totally constitutive of social reality and social subjects is not taken up by Fairclough nor by myself in its entirety. Fairclough (1992) differs from Foucault in that he does not see discourse as constituting the whole of social life but instead as constituting one social practice amongst other non-discursive ones. However he does accept that there are areas of knowledge that are talked into existence such as the discourse of ‘flexibility’ in economic and management practices and managerial ideologies in education (Chouliarski and Fairclough 1999;p4;p27). In this study I take up Fairclough’s more general view that discourse is one practice amongst other non-discursive practises which Chouliarski and Fairclough describe as ‘habitualized’ ways in which individuals and groups of individuals apply symbolic and material resources in the production of social life in areas such as economics, politics, cultural life, the industrial and technological world. Fairclough (1992) maintains that discourse is in a dialectical relationship to all these non-discursive features of society and is therefore both contained within and in varying degrees constitutive of non-discursive features of society. Social practices contain and are maintained by power relations producing ideologies which normalize practices as ‘common sense’ meanings.

In the dialectical model of discourse proposed by Fairclough, individual subjectivities, whilst being positioned by discourses of larger social structures, are able to transform the subject positions expected of them and, over time, challenge and modify the discourses.

His position and also my own position in this study is that, through language awareness and discourse analysis, the individual's entire identity does not have to be located and determined within a particular discourse. Individuals do have the agency to challenge the assumptions of the discourse in which they are situated. Neither are they trapped within one discourse but are free to move between different discourses. Individuals then are not automatically and completely trapped within their discourse types without sufficient agency to challenge accepted discursive practice.

Fairclough (1989) furthermore maintains that the constraints upon the discourse types that establish subject positions for individuals, at the same time enable individuals within these subject positions to modify them by combining them with other available discourse positions. The individual is therefore creative in his/her subjectivity, using given constraints as a space for combining and evolving identities.

## **2.2 The centrality of language**

This section will discuss the function of language in defining or constructing the content of the world including ourselves as human participants. This is problematic because of the differing philosophical perspectives on language. At one end of a line of development is structuralism which views language as having an independent existence, external to the individual and at the other end is post-structuralism which views the individual as socially constructed from within language and signs. A socio-linguistic model might lie at various points between these two extremes, suggesting that the individual is neither totally within language nor totally outside it but rather in a dialectical relation to it. Fairclough's (1989;1992) notion of discourse, as mentioned in the previous section, would fit into this model of language. Dialectical here means that the relationship is ongoing and causes change; the individual is changed by language and through language s/he effects change, over time, on the world and on language itself as a tool of mediation. This in turn causes further change in the individual and so the situation continues to evolve resulting in a reciprocal development between the individual and his/her social context. It is important from the debate on language that a coherent, linguistic theory is developed to take forward into the research so that we can define what is meant by personal social identity.

## **2.3 Structuralism**

The importance of language lies beyond the materiality of sounds and marks on paper. This resides in meaning. Where exactly is meaning created? The structuralist approach developed by Ferdinand de Saussure in 'Le Cours de Linguistique Generale' (1966)

places meaning firmly within the structure of language. In Saussurean structuralism language is an autonomous mechanism much like a motor car engine or machine which is self-generating once switched on. The study of language in this model involves an analysis of inter-relating component parts. In the structuralist model the analysis of language is the study of a machine independently of user or social context. This means that in this model, language is always standard dictionary or grammar book usage as no reference is made to individual users. Language either conforms to standard usage or deviates and in the latter case would consequently be seen as deficient in some way. It is either right or wrong. This inevitably leads to linguistic authoritarianism since failure to communicate or understand points to a defective or under-performing literacy capability in the language user. Accusations may be made that the Queen's English is being undermined or sabotaged. In fact these are all socio-political considerations since de Saussure himself acknowledged that word meanings can only ever be arbitrary. There is no a priori link between the word sign and the object it signifies or between the signifier and the signified. There may appear to be a link because of the close association between words and objects but this is only ever association by common consent over time and words can change meanings. Examples abound where words used nowadays no longer carry the same meanings as they did in recent history.

Structuralism basically treats language as a labelling process, defining and refining categories in their oppositions with adjacent categories. Saussure sums up language as follows '----- language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic

system but only conceptual and phonic differences that issued from the system. The idea ----- that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it '(de Saussure 1966; p120 )

I believe that Saussure says much as a precursor to further developments in linguistic philosophy because he states that meanings are arbitrarily assigned by social convention, they are held in place by association with objects, support from other words in the text but also by opposition to adjacent words or groups of words which may compete for the same meanings. For example in gender terms which is particularly relevant to this study, the structuralist view of maleness is partly constituted by its opposition to femaleness or in other words a thing is a thing not just because of its quality as that thing in itself but by opposition to something else, perceived as its opposite.

There is a sense in which there is an embryonic resemblance to discourse although there is never any mention of active agency. An example in how pupils' definitions can change by word association is in the distinction between 'pupil' and 'student'. The signified remains the same but there are competing signifiers for the association. Many years ago nearly everyone would designate 11-16 year olds in school as pupils whereas now many, if not most teachers, refer to the upper ages in this category as students and there are some who refer to year 7's as students. Structuralism would say that there is no necessary link between signifier and signified and that by social convention the word 'student' could gradually, partially or even completely, replace pupil. In another case

this has also already happened in that nowadays no-one refers to a school teacher as a school master or mistress and most people say headteacher rather than headmistress.

However because structuralism does not refer to active agency beyond the idea of social convention there is absolutely no notion of ideology. To many the semantic difference between 'pupil' and 'student' is that a pupil is a passive and often reluctant recipient of knowledge whereas a student is active in his/her desire to research knowledge and skill. This is still tempered by age where year 7's have not yet attained this independence in learning but the expectation is that this has been reached by years 10 and 11.

Nevertheless the ideological trend in education, supported more and more by computer technology, is towards the autonomous learner researching knowledge and being treated more like an adult rather than a child. A word therefore reveals an ideology and is simultaneously constructed by ideology, something that structuralism misses due to its technical focus on the meanings of words and sentences from within the interior of language. Language therefore appears to be innocent and ideologically neutral, devoid of human intention.

There are two issues here; firstly for sentences to be understood social context has to be understood. A decontextualized sentence can only offer semantic possibilities. The full meaning can only emerge with a close examination of social context including other social signs such as gesture, tone of voice etc.

The other issue regards how lexical units relate to wider social context. There has to be interface between the smallest items of language and social context as a semiotic means of communication. This interface is important in this study because it is here that we find the relationship between the individuals' use of the smallest linguistic units and the meanings from the language and social relations of wider discourses. Moreover the meanings of these wider discourses become inscribed into the language units of smaller discourses over time. We will see in the research that individuals, in their use of language, point towards larger meanings and appropriate them. This process of smaller linguistic units reaching up and drawing down meaning from the larger discourses is known as indexicality (Gumperz 1999). This transference of meaning from wider social structures to smaller lexical items has implications for the rationale and viability of this research since the social participants in the classroom situation constantly draw upon wider social meanings in a continual action of indexicality.

## **2.4 The Socio- Cultural Language of Vygotsky\_**

For Vygotsky (1962) all meaning is at first social and these meanings penetrate the object through the word. The word and the object enter into each other through close social association. However for Vygotsky meaning clearly emanates from the social to the physical materiality of words and not the other way round. Word- sounds contain nothing but thoughtless emotional states before the social conferment of meaning. Meaning does not reside in the text and therefore Vygotsky could not be regarded as a structuralist. For Vygotsky language and thought have completely different roots and



only intersect within the individual around the age of two years. Before this the individual has the capacity for language but it is mindless and can only express basic pre-linguistic emotion. Equally thought at a basic level can exist without language much as it does in mammals such as apes. It is only in humans where they intersect that they form a powerful combination so that language can develop thought and thought can take language to higher levels of development. The process of language- thought development in Vygotsky's model is such that the young child learns the most basic linguistic connections between words and objects first before internalising more developed meanings. Thus internalisation of language items and structures precedes fully conscious thought and this has implications for the construction of personal identity. This is because children will be involved in linguistic interactions without a complete awareness of the full impact of possible meanings. These may only 'sink in' at a later stage when the thought- language interface is more developed. There is always some degree of dislocation between language and thought despite the initial interface and overlap because language never totally corresponds in every way to thought. The degree to which the two do correspond is a matter of the personal and intellectual development of each individual.

As language develops and thought- meaning becomes more refined, the individual in possession of this highly evolved artefact can use it to analyse him/herself and others for a better understanding of the world. A conclusion that can be drawn from this is that language is a major tool in the construction of thought and by extension self-concept. Cole (1996) regards language as an artefact used by the individual in mediating the world. Language is, in this view, a highly developed tool which represents the world to

us and which we then in turn use to construct the world. Through language we can understand the definitions of others and we can also construct our own definitions. The implications might be that if we are limited in our use of language then we do not possess the adequate tools for taking control over our own lives and identities and may also be ever at the mercy of the definitions of others. Cole's position is that we construct our cultural world through language and an important implication of this is that, if students' linguistic development is limited then their cultural understandings will also be limited. This may have the consequence for foreign language learning that there may be constraints in students' capacity to reach out towards concepts of cultural difference.

However Vygotsky shows, with the help of peer groups, how social and intellectual meanings can be brought from the outer realm of potential understanding to within the grasp of the individual. This is known as the zone of proximal development, a concept formulated by Vygotsky himself. This concept has a relevance for this research study because the 'capable' peer, teacher or other 'capable' adult in the learning situation is able to advance students towards a linguistic/cultural goal by acting as a bridge between the students' own cultural discourse and the one(s) they are reaching towards. The capable other can therefore bring another cultural discourse within the range of learners through language.

Vygotsky shows in stages how language, which originates in the social domain, is eventually personalized through the process of internalisation. This is done via

egocentric and inner speech. The child processes social language by using it aloud in connection with her/his thinking in play. During play the child narrates action to her/himself in egocentric speech. These language structures turn inwards in a closer association with thought to form inner soundless speech. The end result is that the inner speech structures of the child are a reflection of the larger socio-linguistic and cultural structures. Vygotsky provides a vital framework for the construction of personal identity through language by showing how the social becomes deeply personal via egocentric and inner speech. Vygotsky's position is somewhat deterministic in the assertion that no thought exists within the individual that has not in some way already existed in the social domain. The zone of proximal development is a valuable concept in education because it asserts that understandings can be achieved in group learning with capable peers, who can reach out to make concepts available to those not yet as capable. In terms of this study the processes of learning associated with the zone of proximal development can make cultural and language skill and awareness available to students who, alone, would not have the cultural resources to make connections between their own language and culture and that of the teacher. The underlying position here is that learning is a social activity involving peers, as well as the teacher.

Although a socio-cultural linguist rather than a structuralist, Vygotsky is nonetheless deterministic in the inexorable movement of language, thought and meaning from the social to the individual. The individual duly processes all this in an unproblematic way in that his/her language output will be determined by input. There is no sense of individual agency and if left at this point the issue of pupil identity would be predicated simply on the strength of one social category or another. This is not to deny the validity

of Vygotsky but it is to say that whilst the generality of what he says may be true, no account is made of individual differences and no problematization of meaning occurs within the individual.

Does the individual simply internalise meanings and reproduce them unchanged or are the meanings perhaps more actively appropriated by the individual and then modified or even transformed? We will again see in 2.5 the development of the notion of discourse in which language is not a neutral phenomenon but is imbued with the subjectivities of individuals and the ideologies of their social groupings. This is particularly relevant in the data analysis chapters of this research where, in classroom situations, we see the development and positioning of pupils' learner identities through their use of language within discourse.

## **2.5 Bakhtin – language as discourse**

Bakhtin (1981) moves on from Vygotsky by inserting the notion of ideology into language and meaning. This brings me much nearer to the model of language I will use for the research because, as we will see, Bakhtin does much to individualize language and promote the notion of agency. Bakhtin refers to language as 'ideologically saturated' (1981, page 259). Bakhtin's theories do not undermine Vygotsky but move on to a more developed position in the way in which he describes language as being powered by two opposing forces. These are centripetal and centrifugal forces which intersect within the

individual. The centripetal force unifies and homogenizes language, consolidating it into a unitary centralized system. At the same time however centrifugal forces break down the unified language into the different genres of social groups and identities. These forces intersect within the individual where language is modified by the individual in terms of his/her socio-historical and cultural position. Bakhtin refers to this as dialogized heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin, language resides on the border between oneself and the 'Other'. Words are half the property of someone else. One has to personalize them by imbuing them with one's own intentions. One therefore takes the word from the communal pool of language and appropriates it for oneself. The 'ideological becoming of a human being ----- is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others' (1981;p341). Within the individual there is therefore a constant struggle taking place between his/her own meanings and those of language external to the individual. Individuals belonging to social groups appropriate and adapt language according to their own identities. These genres of language and meaning develop into the phenomenon of discourse as I have outlined in 2.1 and a discourse may become sufficiently powerful not only to maintain itself but also to oppose other discourses.

The impact on pupil identities is such that one cannot say that because, for example, pupils are working class then they are all going to see themselves the same way, with an identity belonging to a particular social category. The identity may depend more upon which discourse pupils occupy rather than which social class they are said to occupy. And even here discourses themselves contain heteroglossia with words and concepts

borrowed from other discourse. That is to say with a modified meaning from the words' original meaning in their original discourse. In Bakhtin's theory of language there is an ideological struggle for meaning within language at all levels. This may not be in terms of traditional class struggle but rather in terms of attempts at discourse colonization where the language of a particularly powerful ideological social group penetrates a less powerful discourse.

In 2.1 I referred to Fairclough's (1989;1992) model of discourse as being shaped by the ideologies contained within social structures. These ideologies may shape discourses within schools in the following ways. The discourse used by school pupils for example is often suffused by current commercial advertising campaigns with their slogans and jingles. As this is rarely analysed, it becomes accepted and repeated as normative. Similarly educational discourse has long since been penetrated by other prevailing discourses such as counselling, performance management and business. One of the favoured approaches in classroom discourse is a brisk and 'business-like' approach. On the other hand a counselling approach would suggest taking the time to know pupils as individuals and creating an emotional bond to facilitate the learning process by dismantling emotional barriers to learning. Teacher identity is therefore not homogenous and is, like pupil identity, the site of ideological conflict.

Whereas in structuralism, Saussure had emphasized that a word meaning existed in relation to adjacent words, Bakhtin goes much further by stating that these words are in

an ideological struggle with each other for meaning. Here we can recall the earlier example of the pupil-student meanings and how the choice of one of the words over the other revealed the prevailing ideology for that designation. This in turn reveals an educational ideology which would say that the individual is an active and ultimately independent learner researching skill and knowledge and therefore a student. This in turn could be said to reflect a dominant socio-economic ideology which calls for enterprise where individuals need to be active rather than passive. Continuing with this example, Bakhtin's dialogism would suggest that the user of a word will choose the word according to the listener and so the user always has to balance his/her intended meaning with the expected meaning of the interlocuter. Therefore a teacher who mostly uses the word 'pupils' may very well refer to them as 'students' in conversation with individuals who are involved with policy such as inspectors or members of the school's leadership. In this communicative process there takes place a two way heteroglossia between, in this instance, the individual teacher and her/his interlocuter and at the same time the teacher and the communal pool of language. The individual thus negotiates meaning at the level of societal meanings and then at the level of the expectation of his/her interlocuter.

In Bakhtin's words, ' All words have the 'taste' of a profession , a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and the hour. Each word tastes of its context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions.' ( 1981, p293)

Bakhtin is a key figure in this research literature because of the connection he makes between language and ideological agency. Language is no longer neutral but reflects the intentions and ideologies of the speaker or group of speakers. People speak from the situations in which they find themselves and the language used reflects their identities at that moment. Where groups of individuals appropriate language and meanings and transform them according to their own situation within a context of social relations, then the concept of discourse is born.

## **2.6 Fairclough- discourse and social power relations**

Fairclough's definition of discourse is as follows:- 'language as social practice determined by social structures' (Fairclough 1989; p17 ). Edwards (1998) also states that 'meanings are created through discourse. Discourses create particular ways of communicating which put forward universal ways of acting. Discourses therefore offer a particular range of semantic possibilities and exclude others'. Fairclough (1989) states that an important aspect of an individual's identity is created through experience of and participation in discourses.

According to Fairclough, discourse contains not only language and social relations but also social power and, as Edwards (1998) maintains, securing meaning, albeit temporarily, is a powerful process. Edwards and Usher (1994) state that power/knowledge relations lie in discourses. Discourses thereby define what can and what cannot be said, who can speak and who must remain silent. Discourses have the power to create meaning and through the knowledge they evoke, albeit localized and temporary, can state what is true and what is false. Discourse in this model represents



powerful social locations which provide the material for the construction of self by the individual. Edwards and Usher (1994) point out that individuals located within discourse remain unaware of it. They describe it as follows:- 'discourse 'speaks' but is yet silent-it is an absent presence, yet a powerful one'. This therefore is why Fairclough (1989;1992) calls for a critical discourse analysis as an activity to question the ideological assumptions of linguistic and media texts and images. Unlike the Foucault (1972) model for discourse, Fairclough does not as a matter of principle maintain that the individual is totally and powerlessly integrated within discourse.

Nevertheless according to Fairclough (1989) the more individuals repeat the ideologically laden words of others, the more they are positioned within ideology and, still remaining unaware of their position, continue to reproduce their words. This is possible, according to Fairclough, due to the concept of power behind the discourse which is the power to project one's social and ideological practices as normal and conventional through language. This is linked to the socio-economic system in areas like advertising, surveillance, consumerism, business, performance management and bureaucracy. In other times and places it may be nationalism, militarism or religious ideology. Fairclough argues that in modern capitalist countries powerful discourses arise from socio-economic realities as these are the principal sources of power and ideology which determine meaning. Educational discourse, for example, is likely to be 'colonized' by more powerful discourses in terms of the curriculum and management procedures. Counselling has already been mentioned as a powerful discourse which has entered education in terms of mentoring students to achieving targets and of course

performance management of teachers underpinned by financial incentives has penetrated teaching discourse from the commercial world. The way in which this ‘colonization’ takes place is outlined in the next section.

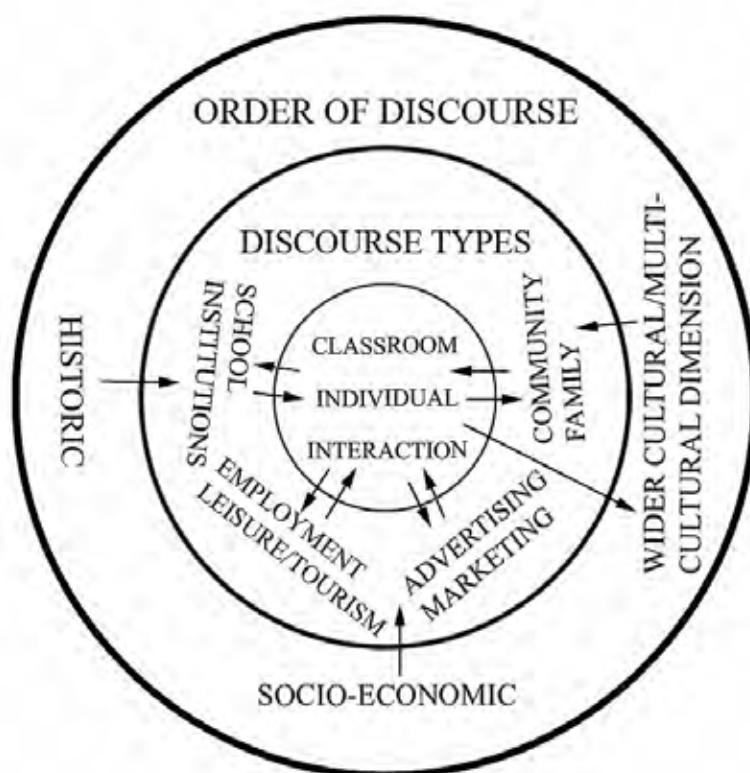
## **2.7 Socio-economics as a basis for Learning / Cultural Identity -Fairclough**

Fairclough (1989) argues that wider and more powerful discourses shape smaller and more localized ones. He argues that the larger ‘Orders of Discourse’ are socio-economic ones in capitalist societies and they set the conditions for the smaller sub-set of discourses which he refers to as discourse types such as advertising, management, counselling, bureaucratic and institutional practices. Educational practices have their own discourse type that is partly shaped by the larger orders of discourse but may also be shaped by other ideologies, not directly connected with socio-economics. The particular examples I have in mind for this are faith schools where other ideologies are present such as Catholic or Islamic. More powerful discourses infiltrate and colonize smaller less powerful ones through the use of language. Therefore in education one can find the language of management, performance, counselling, technology etc.

Discourses, according to Fairclough (1989) exist on three levels: the wider socio-cultural/ socio-economic order of discourse, the discourse type at institutional level and the interactional discourse found in the classroom. Essentially ideological meanings for our social practices are powered by the larger socio-economic orders of discourse and permeate down to classroom interactional discourse. Fairclough views language, thought and social identity as ideologically saturated and not neutral. Social meanings are constructed in discourses through the exercise of power. Ideology here is the

projection of meaning through language and power leading to the ‘manufacture of consent’ Fairclough (1989:4). The individual’s motivations are thus socially constructed within language and social relations in discourses. For the purpose of this research I have adapted Fairclough’s theory on discourse (1989) and this can be seen diagrammatically to influence classroom interaction in terms of three concentric circles as follows:

**Diagram 1:**



*My adaptation of Fairclough's model*

I have made a diagram from Fairclough's model of social production of meaning and interpretation and then adapted and related the model to the production of meanings for MFL as a socio- cultural activity.

Fairclough proposes a form of critical discourse analysis called Critical Language Study to enable individuals to understand their positioning within these competing discourses. Pupils are subject to ideological discourses in schools in such activities as target setting as a form of performance management and also bureaucratic procedures such as C.V's, records of achievement and interview techniques. However there are other discourses which are available as possibilities in the construction of pupil identities, such as the official ones of social control in terms of uniform and school rules, but also unofficial ones. Schools are situated within wider discourses and pupils bring them into school in terms of street fashion, music along with associated cultures, advertising, current community and family cultures. These conflate with the officially approved discourses to offer pupils raw material for the construction of identity. The discourse then which we may call pupil discourse will contain many features of heteroglossia, with pupils using language from overlapping discourses. Is this then still pupil discourse with so many borrowed items? The key element which makes for discourse is the adaptation, the dialogism where the individual is creating his/her own meaning out of the 'mouths' of Others. The individual is a social actor actively interpreting his/her own script along with others in a similar social context. This localized discourse situation will contain its own power relations sustaining preferred meanings whilst negating others, allowing some to speak and denying others. The important philosophical issue here is the dichotomy

between individual free will and determinism. This dichotomy is highlighted in the next section where emphasis is placed on the freedom of social participants in discourses to create and recreate their own meanings from the availability of meaning within wider discourse.

## **2.8 Interactional socio-linguistics**

Interactional socio-linguistics looks at communication practices in the areas where localized smaller discourses and larger discourses intersect. Its emphasis is on the premise that communication in daily utterances relies upon cultural context for interpretation. It provides explanations for this reliance by asserting that social participants do not just apprehend the literal surface meaning of utterances but go beyond the surface meaning to contextual cultural meaning. This calls upon background linguistic knowledge. However a vital concept in linking language practices with larger discourses is indexicality where linguistic items point or project forward to the larger references. These are known as contextualization cues such as code switching, which is a change of language type within a speech event, pronunciation, stress, volume and intonation. These cues point smaller word meanings towards larger socio-contextual meanings as a guide to a better interpretation of utterance. Gumperz (1999) says that interpretation always draws upon the lexical items as well as the communicative context triggered by these lexical items. Meaning therefore has two levels and is actioned on two levels, firstly from within the lexical items used and secondly from the socio-linguistic world outside of the lexical items used, sometimes causing double meanings or ‘double entendres’.

Gumperz (1999) speaks of interactional socio-linguistics as bridging the discourse gap between the wider society and the everyday. Interactional socio-linguistics or I.S concentrates on speech exchanges between social actors in the context of 'taken for granted' background information. The task of analysis is to investigate the linguistic functions in speech exchanges that bring the background context into play to convey meaning beyond the level of the meanings of the lexical items themselves. Social actors bring a whole baggage of wider discourse assumptions with them into an interaction and the task of I.S discourse analysis is to see how these assumptions are evoked in the language used at the level of words and phrases.

Interpretation of meaning is therefore simultaneously drawn from the surface level of meaning from the lexical items and from what Gumperz (1999) says are inferences rooted in wider societal discourse. The meanings contained in the larger discourse are in a sense like a resource bank which is a support for conversation. However it cannot be assumed that all social participants plug into the same cultural resource bank. Individuals from different social backgrounds may not have access or may not wish to have access to this cultural bank of information. However Gumperz points out that the purpose of I.S is in fact to 'show how diversity affects interpretation'. This means that the same lexical items used by one person may evoke a different set of cultural meanings when used or interpreted by another person in the same situation. At the level of teacher and pupil discourses, the wider meanings evoked by the teacher in the classroom interaction of

teaching MFL may not be the same as those evoked by the pupil. Wider ideological discourses surrounding MFL differ. Teachers, managers and policy makers may justify MFL on the basis of the country's economic needs, the ability to sell to other countries in their own languages and the global economy. However pupil discourse may interpret MFL learning as being desirable to support a lifestyle living abroad or working for example as a holiday rep or in a bar-restaurant in Spain. Therefore when referring to reasons for learning MFL pupils may well contextualize their discourse within a wider discourse but this could well be from the community rather than from wider international or global socio-economic discourse. Schools teach the languages of the most economically powerful countries and this is a major consideration in the languages offered in the National Curriculum but pupils may not wish to learn these languages for the same reasons.

The interactional sociolinguistic model shows a dialectical relationship where the individual uses language as an artefact to construct meaning in the world and is simultaneously participating in his/her own social construction through language. The linguistic ingredients are pre-established but they can be chosen at will and meanings modified. In the free will/ determinism debate concerning language and meaning, the social constructivist socio-linguistic position would suggest that there is considerable free will in what we choose from the ingredients already given. Language is a double edged sword in that it can be emancipatory through the creation of new meanings by active

agency but it is also restrictive within its pre-existent meanings which label and constrain.

This is obviously a vital issue for pupils in terms of gender, social and intellectual identity in how they accept or reject meanings and how free they are to generate their own identities. It may seem that free will exists at the level of the modification and change of pre-set meanings of pre-existing ingredients and in the selection of lexical items much in the same manner as we choose items from a set menu. However a deeper resolution of the free will/determinism debate depends on the extent to which social participants find themselves embedded within language and discourse. We may have free will at a surface level of language but not at a deeper seated level of discourse.

## **2.9 Post Structuralism**

In Post Structuralism meaning no longer resides within the structures of language in terms of words, sentences and grammar. These items may help to transmit meaning but they do not of themselves generate meaning. Meaning in post-structuralism is generated through language by agency and power in the social world. Agency creates signs, symbols, social practices, images, gestures, tone of voice, silences and also text which may be combined words and images rather than continuous script. All this is in a state of flux from one social situation to the next and the same arrangement of words which may carry a particular meaning in one situation may generate a quite different meaning in another situation. This depends on who the listeners or readers are, as meaning is not generated by the speakers alone, nor by the listeners alone but by both speakers and



listeners together in a particular social context. Therefore the same utterance made by a person in one context may have a completely different meaning when made by the same person in a different social context with different listeners, or even with the same listeners. To find out what an utterance means, post structuralists will not look at the lexical or grammatical language structure first of all but at the situational context, semiotics in terms of symbols, images, power interactions and relationships of participants. This is analysis at the level of discourse.

Foucault (1972) argues that discourse is much more than signs and language. It is rather about the way the world is ordered through social practices. According to Foucault, analysing discourse is ‘a task that consists of not----- treating discourses as groups of signs ----- but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ Foucault (1972:p54). Discourses are ways of speaking and to find meaning it is not sufficient to refer inwards to lexical and grammatical items but rather outwards to who is speaking, the position they are speaking from, and the effects they are trying to produce. Language and semiotics interwoven with relations of power amongst speakers account for the creation of meaning. Knowledge and meaning are therefore social phenomena which are actively constructed rather than passively uncovered.

This is significant in terms of pupil personal identity or personal identity in general in that identity like knowledge is not a dormant phenomenon awaiting discovery but a social creation made by agreement and negotiation of all interested parties where the

most powerful may well prevail in their definition. All this has far reaching implications for ontology and epistemology. Reality and knowledge become not transcendent, unchanging phenomena but provisional social constructions subject to change with time and place. Reality and knowledge are not fixed entities but subject to socio- historical culture. A pupil's identity is therefore not fixed and monolithic but evolving in time and changing in place and cultural context so that we may talk about continually emerging identities or subjectivities. Thus a person is always in a continual flux of becoming.

With regard to ontology and epistemology, the corollary of Foucault's position is that had social practices and discourses been different, then the types of knowledge and reality we experience now would have been different. Meaning therefore is integral to the situational context which contains so many constitutive elements that no two situations can ever be exactly alike. Meaning is therefore not constant and is highly problematized. It is temporarily held in place by power of definition but power relations can change and new definitions emerge.

Edwards (1998) argues that although discourses are localized in time and socio-cultural place, they offer absolute and universal perspectives within their own terms of reference. There is a certain determinism at the heart of a discourse and, it is only when viewed from the outside that its truth may be seen as relative to other discourses. Thus a religious discourse viewed from its heart will offer participants absolute truth and help create a particular personal identity, whereas seen from the outside or near the periphery

its truth may well be seen relative to other world views or religious discourses. It will therefore be one truth amongst many. This idea therefore has implications with regard to pupil identity within a system of education where pupils should experience a wide variety of discourses making for a wide variety of semantic possibilities for and explorations of personal identity. The reason why discourses from within offer an absolute view of the world is because they are shaped around the intentions of the more powerful participants who allow some things to be said but not others. They allow some participants to speak but silence others. Therefore discourses are about what is not said as much as what is said and as Foucault points out they are about gaps, voids and omissions. Anecdotally, in the world of MFL teaching in the communicative approach ideology in the 1980's it was a brave person who would have mentioned the word 'translation' and 'grammar' in terms of language learning. Yet translation in its place can be of use in learning about grammar and word order. There is now a return to grammar in the National Framework for MFL and few commentators seem to mention the phrase 'Communicative Approach' any more. Discourses are then about creating meanings and excluding others even though these absences and voids contain their own meaning in themselves.

## **2.10 Summary**

The literature review so far has covered the part that language plays in shaping personal identity in a general sense and, towards that purpose, the location of meaning. We have seen the structural location of meaning in terms of lexis and grammar. This was the first mechanistic model of language where meaning is transmitted from speakers' mouths to

listeners' ears in and through language. The meaning is in the sentence either spoken or written

In the second model, a socio-cultural and socio-linguistic one, meaning occurs in the actively reciprocal relationship between the individual and social context through language. The main proponent of socio-cultural language and meaning is Vygotsky, emphasizing the social origin of language and meaning before it enters the individual domain. The model is still deterministic in the standard, unproblematic way individuals internalise meaning. Bakhtin adds individual agency to this process and we have the embryonic concept of discourse. The individual appropriates language modifying meanings to customize them and create an individual sense of identity. Meaning has been analysed in terms of power and ideology within and behind discourse. Sociolinguistics is a model of language in interaction with social contexts and involves looking at the links between larger ideological orders of discourse and smaller everyday interactional discourses. Sociolinguistics, in a practical sense, is able to see how, through linguistic interactions, ideology is transferred from the larger to the smaller. Interactional socio-linguistics uses indexicality to see how interactional discourses draw upon larger discourses to locate their meaning. A key debate has been the one between free will and determinism in language and meaning and this has to some extent been resolved by stating that individuals display free will in the smaller meanings of interactional discourse but that they are firmly embedded within the larger and more powerful ideological discourses. In a sense it is difficult to see the ideological meanings of these

discourses because they have been projected as normalized and neutral. We need some kind of meta-cognition and meta-language to see this and critical discourse analysis is an approach to doing so, suggested by writers like Fairclough. This is because we cannot separate ourselves from language and discourse and as we 'swim in the same sea', we need some sort of reflective tool for analysis. Nevertheless however, ultimately, we analyze language with language which becomes just another type of discourse; academic discourse.

The third language model which was covered is post-structuralism which disperses meaning and identity to the total social context, ever changing according to social situation. Language is not just words but is also semiotic in terms of signs, symbols, silences, images, media text and social practices. The social scenery is in a continual flux and personal identity does not exist as a fixed entity. Neither is there a knowledge or transcendental reality to be discovered since the whole world is a social construction actively created and re-created where individuals are always engaged in the creative process of making meaning. Here meaning and knowledge are active and temporary, temporarily held in place by configurations of social power. Power relationships may change and with them, new meanings and knowledge replace the old. The notion of personal identity as a transcendental concept is replaced by socio-culturally situated personal subjectivities continually emerging in each new social situation. The world in this model is presented as fragmented rather than continuous and this is reflected in personal subjectivities

The developmental line from structuralism to post-structuralism does not mean that structural explanations for meaning are entirely without relevance. It does however mean that structuralism is inadequate as the only explanation for meaning and the further development beyond structuralism has demonstrated a much more comprehensive explanation of meaning within a model of discourse. Discourse does not banish words and sentences; it simply places them in a much wider yet related context. Discourse is however the place where the linguistic journey concludes because this is the arena where meanings are created, negotiated and contested; and it is on this basis that identities are shaped. The version of discourse used in this study is based on the writings of Fairclough as outlined in 2.1 and 2.7. This version contains the constitutive discourse of Foucault (1972) where the social world is constructed through discourse but it recognizes that discourse is just one social practice amongst other non-discursive social practices. In this model individual identity resides at the intersection of the discursive and non-discursive world where the non-discursive world contains discourse but is not reducible to discourse. The next chapter focuses on how language and discourse shape gender and cultural identity and addresses the three questions raised in the introduction to the current chapter.

## CHAPTER 3 IDENTITY AND CULTURE

### **3.0 Identity, language and culture**

This chapter argues that identity, as a social construction in and through language, is underpinned by notions of power and that the fundamental basis for power is the availability of social and/or economic resources. These may be material resources or symbolic resources in terms of the concept of cultural capital (Norton 2000). Norton conceives of identity as ideological and political, inextricably bound up with power and invoking the question ‘What am I allowed to do?’ as opposed to ‘Who am I?’ (2000, p.8 ). According to Norton, identity evokes desires for ‘recognition, affiliation, security and safety’. This study argues for a notion of learner identity.

The three questions expressed in the introduction to chapter 2, are restated below as follows:-

- What is the meaning of gendered personal identity?
- What are the constitutive elements that make for performance?
- Why, other than it being my subject area, is MFL of particular interest in this research study?

The question of the meaning of gendered identity is addressed in **3.2**. The constitutive elements of performance in MFL, of which I argue that gender is an associated element ,

can be found in **3.3**, **3.4** and **3.5**. Finally the reason that MFL is the focus of research apart from it being my own subject is covered in the conclusion **3.6**. I also address this fully at the beginning of chapter one.

### **3.1 Learner identity**

The learner as a social being identifies him/herself with the learning situation and the object of learning and this would underpin motivation and would account for the idea of being motivated. Identity as a concept is ideological since it rests upon who we are and perhaps more importantly what we can do and say in relation to the socio-economic world. The basis for identity is consequently much wider than language, although this is a medium through which it is constructed. This is because dominant social forces are able to highlight the meanings and attributes that are worthy of importance within language. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004: p10) argue that ‘the value of a particular language variety in a symbolic market place derives from its legitimisation by the dominant group and the dominant institutions, in particular schools and the media’. Blackledge (2005;33) asserts that ‘Dominated groups in society are complicit in their own domination because the power of the dominant group is inscribed in the bodies of the dominated’. Thus, the dominated wish to speak and communicate in the same way as the dominant. By doing this individuals may be unable to perceive these language practices as outcomes of historical processes. Thus a particular accent or way of speaking comes to be seen as superior and worthy of emulating since it is associated with the cultural capital of the dominant group.



Language practice is therefore tied up with symbolic and cultural capital and this underpins identity. A speaker therefore speaks from a particular social position belonging to a social network and having access to certain resources whether symbolic in terms of knowledge/ understanding or material in terms of economics, or both. Where it has been stated in the review that identities are constituted in discourse, it should now be evident that discourse has a much wider base than language and that notions of power behind discourse involve both symbolic and material resources. According to Norton (2000) symbolic and material resources constitute cultural capital. Cultural capital, which Norton attributes to the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), involves forms of thought and knowledge that pertain to certain social groups and which are deemed to possess a higher value than other forms of knowledge and thought. Learner identity is then underpinned by cultural capital and value since to learn something is to attach a value to it. It is highly unlikely that one would wish to learn something that one does not have any value for. Learning a foreign language may well have different values according to the different social purposes it might serve. The value may be a material one in terms of financial gain, a socio-cultural identity value or a combination of both. Norton (2000) argues that learning a socially desirable language is an investment in a social identity which offers possibilities of accruing cultural capital. This notion of cultural capital as a feature of identity may play a significant role in foreign language learning.

In the social investment model the language learner is investing her/his social identity in the cultural capital of a dominant second or foreign language with the expectation of a return on the investment. Blackledge (2005) argues that language choice is bound up with language ideology, power relations and political influence. Thus foreign languages taught in main stream schools are generally chosen from economically powerful E.U. countries although, even within these countries, Spanish is favoured rather than Italian or Portuguese, French rather than Flemish or Dutch and German rather than Scandinavian languages. There may be historical reasons for these choices within the languages of E.U. countries but even these historical reasons may well be linked to the past economic and often military reach of these countries in the world.

The learner of MFL is therefore often hoping to enhance or modify his /her identity and align it with a socially desirable form of knowledge. An example of this is the case of Alice, an American student in France. The story is narrated by Kinginger (2004). Alice is a disadvantaged American female student whose family is from an itinerant traveller background living on trailer parks on the edge of towns in different parts of the United States. However she comes to see France and the French language in an idealized way as a country and language of higher forms of culture. According to Kinginger, France is often viewed in America as a repository of high culture and refinement and Alice saw the French language as a means of access to this. By extension Alice, in learning to speak fluent French, was buying in to a new social identity that she hoped would lead to increased cultural capital which she could exploit in socio-professional standing by becoming a teacher. Her story is initially a disappointing one as she negotiates entry into a French way of life only to remain at the periphery. This reveals the relationship

between social power and access to language where less socially powerful individuals are denied a voice and therefore denied the possibility of creating new identities for themselves. Alice's situation improves in more informal encounters with French people in cafes where she manages to develop her language skills. Blackledge (2005) refers to a situation in the Quebec province of French Canada where, due to government legislation in 1977, French became the official language in the workplace and in the public domain thereby raising its status as symbolic capital. A high status language is one that has political and cultural capital and therefore, much like a highly valued monetary currency, everyone wants to acquire it for professional and/or socio-economic return. As Blackledge points out anglophones in Quebec are now keen to learn French just as many continental Europeans are keen to learn English.

Another, yet different, means of shaping identity through language is seen in the practice of 'Verlan' in working class council estates in the suburbs of Paris, known as 'Les Cites'. 'Verlan' is basically a 'sociolect' which is a cultural dialect that has evolved in the milieu of immigrants and the unemployed who have been pushed to the fringes of French society. The language is made by reversing the syllables of French words, adding lexical items from north African and other immigrant communities as well as English language of rap music. Those who speak it are using an alternative to the perceived hegemonic French language in order to position themselves in a new social identity.

Tabouret- Keller (1997) refers to convergence and divergence as concepts that respectively reveal allegiance or dissociation with dominant social groups. In the case of

Alice in France and the anglophones in Quebec, we see an example of convergence towards a dominant cultural language which is French. Alice's endeavours to position herself within the dominant language of French in France constitutes a movement towards a new social identity and away from her former one of social disadvantage. In the case of the speakers of Verlan however we see the opposite effect of divergence, in terms of identity being created by groups who refuse to speak the language of the dominant French language majority and preferring to invent their own.

The ways in which identities are constructed should however be seen as more complex and multi-faceted than a simple choice between linguistic and cultural convergence/divergence with regard to large scale notions of culture. Gieve and Clark (2004) argue for a conception of identity which is not static and linear but rather fluid and multiple in nature taking in different and varied cultures. This would allow individuals to simultaneously take on many cultural identities and socio-cultural practices. In their study of Chinese students' approaches to learning in the U.K, Gieve and Clark point out that, their learning behaviours are less influenced by the passivity and acceptance of authority that is commonly perceived as a feature of Chinese culture and more by the local culture of the situated context. The relevance of this example to this study is that students are able to move between cultural discourses and thereby take on more than one identity. A recurrent theme of this study is indeed interface between notions of large and small cultural discourses or, otherwise stated, perceived national cultural discourse and more locally situated discourses.

### **3.2 Gender and identity**

Since the research question concerns gender in relation to MFL performance and having already discussed language and identity, learner identity and the power of cultural symbolic capital, it would seem a logical progression now to narrow our focus at this point specifically to the identity of gender. Since it has been stated in this research that girls perform better at the higher exam grades at G.C.S.E than boys, it would seem appropriate to ask what it means to be a girl and what it means to be a boy.

This section argues that gender is not a transcendental essentialist phenomenon but is, like other identities and subjectivities, a social construction, based on language and the semiotic world of signs and symbols.

Gender tends to be viewed as binary. An individual is either male with typically masculine characteristics or female with typically feminine characteristics. Bing and Bergvall (1996) point out that language with its categorizing tendencies, polarizes gender identity into one bounded unit or another. Structuralist accounts of language as a labelling device tend to categorize things in terms of opposition, so that male is male partly because of not being female (cf 2.3 section on structuralism). They argue that new categories and new vocabularies need to be created between the stereotypical male-female polarities. As positive language does not exist to encompass the entire spectrum of gender identities, categories which defy this binary polarization tend to be referred to in negative language. The problem with standard structuralist accounts of language is that it is a post- facto labelling device which attempts to freeze social phenomena into

fixed social categories which may not really exist. Eckert (1998) points out that gender cannot be abstracted from other social categories. Gender in an individual is one feature amongst a myriad of others, all interacting with each other in different ways. Given that all these interactions vary according to the particular psychology of the individual, the outcomes do not fall easily into structuralist language categories. Nevertheless structuralist language of bounded categories provide a ready means of understanding the world because they are widely acknowledged and can be easily communicated. At a surface level most people have their own ready-made understanding of social class, gender, old age, religion, ethnicity etc. Structural categories are useful as they can provide a starting point for further understanding but they are not an end point in themselves.

A post-structuralist account would acknowledge the inadequacy of these social categories and regard them as provisional rather than as finished products. They are provisional because identity is unfinished. Identity is unfinished because the socio- historical situation still has a long way to run and socio-cultural situations are varied and multi-faceted. Perceptions and self-perceptions of identity may also change over time and place so that for example notions of age as a social category may change. Concepts of old age, for example, are at present not the same as they were 30 years ago. The same may be said of childhood which became its own category in the Victorian era being often either idealized or exploited and yet was not regarded as a different category in the middle ages. It is acknowledged that the social age category of teen-ager did not exist

before the 1950's and those in that category were simply young adults. The same can be said of gender in that it can only be defined or it can only define itself in social context. Meanings for gender exist in perceptions which change over time and place. The corollary of this is that social construction of perception is an integral part of the social construction of the category itself. Apparent stable identities are conferred by perception from the outside and yet they exist in their own right on the inside in a much less deterministic and fixed way. This means that gender is a problematic construction and cannot be easily split into the usual binary.

Much as in Bakhtin's philosophy, the inner view of a category and the view from the outside exist within the individual in a dialogic manner. This again is an interface between free-will and determinism. To understand categories of identity conferred from the outside they need to be problematized and then unpacked so that socially enforced boundaries can disappear to reveal the continuum of phenomena. An analogy of this could be seen in terms of colour or accent where one colour gradually merges into a recognized other or one accent merges into a recognized other and then the merged forms are no longer seen as a hybrid but as a feature in their own right. This would mean that there is no longer a notion of bounded identity but instead a continuum of multiple identities along which one may provisionally situate oneself.

Creese (2004) refers to masculinities and femininities in the plural where gender is not a finished product at any given time but is in a constant process of social construction.

This social construction can be viewed as active and creative as seen from the inside but can also be viewed in a dialogic interface with more deterministic social perceptions on the outside. The dialogism of Bakhtin can in my opinion be applied not only to the way language and discourse operate but also to social identities such as gender. Creese points out that males and females associate themselves with certain language types deemed appropriate at particular times and not with one language type all the time. This means that boys and girls at school borrow language according to the situation. In this model one must doubt the existence of male language and female language as bounded units but instead there is language commonly associated with a male repertoire and with a female repertoire which individuals choose to dip into. Graddol and Swann (1989) seem to echo this position by arguing that the individual creates and recreates him/herself by identifying with particular ways of speaking. This would in my opinion support the proposition outlined at the end of the last section where the individual displays free-will by exercising language choice from a pre-determined menu. The pre-set menu according to Eckert (1998) is one where women's language is characterized by 'conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward social mobility, deference, sensitivity to others'. This contrasts with men's language which reflects 'independence, toughness, control, competitiveness' (Eckert 1998). This sort of determinism is reinforced by Coates (1997) who maintains that, in social groups, women organize their speech in one particular way and men organize theirs in another way. Both ways are distinctive in single sex interactions. According to Coates, men tend to talk one turn at a time in a social group with each speaker occupying the floor in a solo turn. Contributions from others in the group tend to reinforce the solo speaker's position until the turn passes to someone else.



Women on the other hand tend to share conversation in a jointly owned collaboration with many instances of overlap between speakers and joint productions of language where one participant may finish off someone else's contribution. Coates justifies this dichotomy in male-female talk by arguing that the male-female binary stereotypes in language approved of in society force males and females into these polarized positions.

Men and women are therefore being invited by society to take up socially approved subject positions, according to the version of discourse we have seen expressed in Fairclough (1989) in 2.1 and 2.7 , which social forces have provided. Once taken up these subject positions are reinforced by being continually reproduced in the talk of participants. Again, as Fairclough (1989; 1992) points out this reproduction of subject positions results in 'normalization' or ideological acquiescence to 'common sense'. The choices are not active but the social roles are normalized by everyday practices and are therefore compelling and 'natural'. Individuals could refuse these gender stereotyped modes of interaction and they could challenge them but in the main they are accepted, according to Coates. Coates argues that language use is a marker for gender and this includes not only talk patterns but also language content. Interestingly topic content and patterns of talk seem to be connected in this model, in that women's cooperative relational styles tend to have social relational topics as content. The emphasis appears to be about relating to other speakers. On the other hand men's talk tends to be portrayed as expert where one man at a time pronounces on items of knowledge. The importance here, in men's talk, is perceived expert, impersonal knowledge, opinions and facts

through which men can relate to each other. The point is that men do relate to each other, but they do it through ‘expert’ factual talk rather than directly. It seems to be an oblique way of maintaining relationships. There are views such as those quoted by Yuval-Davis (1997) saying that ‘women tend to be identified with nature while men tend to be identified with culture’. This is apparently justified by arguing that women have been identified with the domestic sphere in society over history and men with the cultural domain. Again, as in 3.1 towards the end of that section, there is a dichotomy between the deterministic socio-historical wider discourse which reaches from the past into the present and the discourse of what really happens on a daily basis.

Here interactional socio-linguistics can help to investigate the links between the wider and localized discourses to see how they are connected and if there is a dialectical relationship where eventually the larger discourse is modified by the smaller ones. Butler (1990) states that in terms of gender, the wider discourse polices the localized interactional ones with regard to what is expected in everyday life of being male and female. Nevertheless each social situation may have its own expectations of male and female and these have to be balanced with one’s own gender performance. Being male in one country may be very different from being male in another country. It is not just a question of place but also of time. What constitutes maleness at the present moment may not have been as that of twenty, fifty or a hundred years ago. This means that the language/ discourse understandings of gender can change, giving rise to new linguistic forms and new gender understandings.

Butler conceives of gender as a performance in that one enacts male/female roles on a daily basis with an eye to the expectations of each social situation. Gender performances therefore vary with social context and to understand how this is constituted it requires an understanding of the demands of the situation and the room for creativity. It is possible to conceive that male gender identity would alter across situations and that there isn't just one unified male identity but rather a multiplicity of ways of being male. Maleness does not exist on its own in isolation from context. It is rather the case of being male and a variety of endless other subjectivities at the same time in different situations. A sense of maleness may differ from one situation to another according to social expectation.

Therefore in relation to this research into gender performance, it is now possible to say that there is no such thing as one gender as a bounded entity in itself performing better in MFL than another gender per se. We may however be saying that it is possible that certain people with certain cultural gender related characteristics perform better than others who do not seem to exhibit the same cultural dispositions. It is therefore not the gender per se that performs better but the characteristics which tend to be gender associated although not exclusively to any one gender.

Gender expectations have a context of varying degrees of freedom and constraint according to the situation and the only way to understand these is to go into the situation to see how it is constituted. It may well be that what is typically understood as a priori

gender differences in language are a feature of power relations in particular social situations where traditionally men have had the power to hold the floor in solo performances whereas women were expected by men in mixed gender interactions to remain passive and consequently to be supportive of each other when they do speak. Swann (1994) echoes this view saying that accounts of male-female language patterns should not ignore power differences that exist between males and females. This is she argues, especially important in mixed-sex interactions where boys tend to dominate and consequently receive all the attention in classroom situations.

There may thus be situations where traditional accounts of male-female patterns of language are now reversed or even that styles of language are a marker of power status regardless of gender. Women in the past perhaps may have adopted a less powerful, more cautious approach but this may no longer be the case. Ochs (1992) points out that ‘few features of language directly and exclusively index gender’. We also have to remember that gender interacts with a plethora of other social and psychological characteristics, all expressed in language and signs.

This would indicate that a discourse approach is the most accessible way to understand gendered identities in situational context and the way that styles of talk may be influenced by power relations whether connected or not to gender. The discursive approach regarding personal identity, be this gender, age, social class or any other category, is that these identities are constituted socially through language and signs in a

dialogic and dialectical relationship between active subjects negotiating their own meanings and an active social environment sometimes emancipatory , sometimes restrictive. This runs counter to a structuralist approach where gender meanings are a priori given and then labelled post facto by language turning them into fixed social categories.

### **3.3 Gender and Identity in the Classroom**

Baxter (2003) argues that she does not recognise gender meanings as fixed and unchanging as subject identity is always constructed within discourse. However she maintains that gender identities are continuously performed in line with social expectations that define maleness and femaleness. Baxter therefore argues that identities are co-constructed in line with definitions of social groups. The discursive nature of gender definitions accounts for the fluid nature of their meanings since these gender meanings are constructed across competing discourses. However she argues that ‘ Constructs such as masculinity and femininity are continuously being contested by dominant social discourses, which vie with each other to fix the meanings of these constructs permanently’ (2003:31). Individuals are therefore seen as negotiating their own subjective positions including gender within these discursive cross currents. Although post-structural accounts of gender do not fix gender positions as powerful or powerless but as fluctuating across discourses, many of the dominant discourses of gender discriminate against women and as such attempt to fix female identity as relatively powerless by comparison with male identity. Baxter argues that classroom

discourse is an example of this where whole class teaching and learning situations favour male students who like to occupy the public social arena with their physical and vocal presence.

This is relevant to my own study since male dominance of social space occurs in the classroom observations of case studies in chapters 6,7, and 8 of the study where many boys exhibit a tendency towards a vocal and physical presence which overshadows female contributions to the public domain and yet their performance falls short of much of the female performance in the MFL itself. Baxter (2003) parallels this in the GCSE curriculum in English with its examination emphasis on speaking in public contexts as an important area of the subject where boys dominate even though female students tend to be much more proficient than boys in collaborative classroom discourse much as they are in the MFL of this study.

Baxter maintains that gender differentiation is ‘deeply embedded within the structures of classroom discursive practice’ (2003:98) and she argues that this is seen in her own classroom research where substantial turns are given to male students in whole class discussions. Male students in these situations use body language to attract the teachers’ attention to have access to the ‘floor’ and use humour to maintain their presence by trying to gain approval from the class and also from male teachers. Humour is thus used by male students as a tool to exercise public power by drawing attention to themselves and belittling others including other more timid boys. It is also used in a more subversive

way to ridicule the lesson itself. Baxter asserts that the public use of humour in class seems to be 'a male thing' (2003:109) as little use of humour in her research was used by girls. Again this male banter is a feature of the case-studies of my own study especially the year 9 case study of chapter 7

The dominant classroom discourse is therefore one where boys take a dominant public role and girls are cast in a supportive role and even help the boys by trying to develop their arguments in discussion. This is relevant to my own case studies of chapters 6,7 and 8 where female students tend to work collaboratively in the MFL lessons whilst many male students project their public identities to the whole class although, in the year 9 study in chapter 7, there is a female exception to this pattern.

Baxter maintains that, conversely female students' public contributions are undermined and heckled by the boys and furthermore argues that male dominated public discourse also disadvantages quieter, less confident males who are unable to act out a dominant male gender identity. Nevertheless she argues that the male domination of public space in classroom discourse reflects male domination of public space in the wider discourses of public life and that, despite female students outperforming males in academic results, access to the public voice is crucial for access to senior positions in society. She therefore argues that for women to be as successful as men in the public arena they need to have equal access to male dominated public speaking discourses.

Francis (2000:15) defines gender as a 'notional' masculinity and 'notional' femininity 'constructed as oppositional to one another' but in continual flux along a continuum with individuals creating contradictions and variations to these 'notions'. She argues that gendered identity can be constructed differently in different cultures but that children in particular try to maintain gender boundaries. She argues that although gender characteristics are not inherently tied to biological sex, they are taken up and performed by males and females. Thus female associated characteristics are in a discursive framework taken up by women and male characteristics feature in a discourse taken up by men. These discursive practices are then varied and resisted by individuals. Nevertheless Francis (2000) argues that in general social practice, gender is generally constructed as dichotomous with power located in male identity. Within her classroom research, Francis observed that in classrooms, boys tend to dominate social space with their physical presence, moving around the classroom much more than the girls and being much more vocal and even aggressive in their behaviour. Boys who do not conform to this model of masculinity, preferring to engage in academic activity, risk being ridiculed by those who express this dominant type of masculinity. Francis argues that such 'laddish' behaviour by boys lead to lower GCSE results than girls, although she does maintain that there is no 'scientific link' to prove this (2000;120). However her own research in interview responses with pupils supports the view that 'laddish' behaviour in terms of a 'laddish' construction of masculinity has a negative impact on boys' learning.



Sunderland (2004) identifies discourses, which although are not initially created in the classroom, are nonetheless reproduced and reinforced in a classroom context. One of these is the 'gender differences discourse'. (2004:p80) which she describes as a dominant popular discourse of gender difference circulating in the social world and media institutions such as newspapers, internet, television and magazines. A 'gender differences' discourse reinforces a binary male/female definition of gender and is reproduced in schools where boys are seen as verbally loud and socially dominant and girls relatively powerless in the classroom. Nevertheless, she argues that despite boys' classroom dominance and girls' relative silence in the classroom, girls outperform boys academically, resulting in the creation of a 'poor boys' discourse where boys are pitied for their lack of academic success. Sunderland argues that these discourses have become easily understood commonsense ideological stereotypes that nonetheless exist in the classroom. Within the 'gender differences' discourse, a more specific 'girls as good language learners' discourse is reinforced by foreign language teachers who do not expect boys to perform as well as girls in MFL, despite there being no neurological evidence, according to Sunderland, to substantiate this 'a priori' gender assertion.

One example she gives of boys dominance in the classroom is in the discourse she identifies and labels as 'Boys- as –OK/Girls-as-not OK'(2004:88). She describes a German lesson where the teacher is asking boys for oral participation in the lesson. The boys remain silent but two girls put their hands up calling out 'we're boys, we're boys Miss'. Sunderland's point in highlighting this episode is that girls can pretend to be boys

with impunity because of the normative dominance of the gender but this would be greeted with derision if boys tried to take on a female identity. The paradox of the 'gender difference' discourse is that even though girls outperform boys academically, boys' presence is more readily acknowledged in the classroom to the point that, in the above episode, girls attempt to take on male identity to have their voice heard.

However such a dominant stereotyped discourse gives the impression of more gender difference than actually exists by simply stating that gender difference exists *per se* because 'that's just the way it is' as an 'a priori' gender fact. There is no account taken for overlap or similarity between genders, neither is there any account for boys' success in MFL, particularly in single-sex boys' schools. In my own study there are a minority of boys who perform well at MFL and perform better than most of the girls in the study.

Sunderland (2004) concurs with (Baxter (2003) in advocating a post-structuralist perspective on gender where gendered identity is co-constructed in discourse between individuals and their social world rather than being determined only by social structures. Consequently one is always in a state of becoming one's gendered identity by enacting gender within a variety of discourses, some competing and at variance with each other whilst others merge or disappear. Therefore there is no one monolithic discourse for gender and gendered identity cannot be forever fixed although, as Baxter (2003) and Sunderland(2004) argue, dominant 'gender difference' discourses attempt to do so.

Sukhnanden et al (2000) echoes the classroom speech patterns, outlined by Baxter, Francis and Sunderland, in her research by stating that boys are more physically prominent and vocal in whole class situations. However she maintains that their style of communicating, unlike in public life, does not serve them well in school generally as their linguistic behaviour is often seen as challenging, resulting in hostile relations with teachers. She maintains that this can have a detrimental effect on attitudes and consequently school performance.

Sukhnanden et al furthermore argue that classroom gender differences exist not only in styles of communication but also in styles of learning. They posit that boys are keen to achieve quick results whereas girls are more interested in the processes of learning and understanding. They say that boys seem to need to have their work validated for it to have any worth, 'their learning tends to improve when they are convinced of the value of what they are doing' (2000:8). The introduction of coursework in GCSE has favoured girls and widened the gap between boys' and girls' examination results because coursework is more concerned with processes of understanding over time than results outcome of exams. Sukhnanden et al present gender identity in the classroom as binary male/female categories due to early socialization in the way gender development conforms to stereotyping in the adult world within families, media, playgroups and early schooling. Therefore girls are socialized into listening and speaking cooperatively and boys are socialized into dominating the public space and gaining results rather than the processes of understanding.

Sukhnandan et al advocate single sex classes to challenge gender stereotyping where boys can learn subjects regarded as traditionally female such as foreign languages without fear of negative comparisons with girls nor feeling the need to impress girls with 'laddish' behaviour. They argue that within a single sex male class, teachers can focus on male style of learning behaviours involving competitive results based activities in a succession of short term tasks. Such activities in their research on single sex classes are described as follows, 'They (teachers) provided the boys with a succession of short term tasks that had clear targets. Lessons also tended to be taught on a whole class basis which allowed the teacher to interact directly with the boys over a greater period of time and to keep the pace of the lesson brisk. In contrast all-girl classes were characterized by greater pupil autonomy, small group work and long term goals' (2000:26). Other strategies were used to make activities competitive by relating them to football, using league table promotions and relegations according to results and a man of the match award. Shknandan et al do acknowledge however that by adapting activities to perceived boys' learning styles they risk reinforcing current gender stereotypes.

In my own study there would be a problem with such a rigid view of gender in that not all boys conform to this type of male stereotyping as not all boys subscribe to the dominant gender view of male competition in terms of short term activities with clear results.

This study therefore argues for a more fluid, multiple view of gender much as is argued by Baxter (2003), Creese (2004) and Sunderland (2004) and where I myself acknowledge that many boys adopt learning and speaking behaviours that are traditionally associated with girls and favour learning processes rather than results based activities. We can see however, in the next section, that motivating boys to achieve success in a subject traditionally regarded as female such as French has, according to Cohen (1996), often involved attempts to adapt the subject to boys' perceived styles of behaviour and never modifying boys' behaviour to accommodate the subject area.

### **3.4 Gender and Motivation in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL.)**

Cohen (1996) says that the study of French in England is 'a useful tool for gendered achievement'. She argues that French is perceived to be a 'female subject' and that it is the femaleness of French that is held to be responsible for boys inferior and girls superior performance. The historical discourse meanings, according to Cohen, are that French has always been regarded as a female accomplishment and regarded as frivolous and superficial. Cohen says that motivating boys to take up the subject and achieve success has always been a matter of changing and adapting methodology to accommodate boys and never changing boys to fit the methods. The national framework for modern languages which started as an optional strategy in secondary schools in 2003 is in part an attempt to address male disaffection in MFL. Much of the rationale is an attempt to improve male literacy in MFL grammatical knowledge and there is a belief that problem

solving at the level of grammatical mechanisms will attract boys, viewing language as a machine of moveable parts.

In much of the earlier literature (cf. Gardner 1985) dealing with more psychological accounts of motivation in foreign language learning as opposed to socio-cultural paradigms of learner identity, gender is an unproblematic social category and there is little discussion on what it means to be male and what it means to be female. Gender is simply an isolated label. However it is acknowledged by Gardner (1985) that girls attitudes towards MFL are 'significantly more positive than boys' and that they are more successful in learning languages than boys. Gardner states that gender differences are non-existent once attitudinal differences are taken into account. However he notes that attitudes in male pupils become less positive with age. There is then subsequently a high correlation between attitudes and achievement as students get older. Gardner furthermore points out that attitudes towards the target language community correlate closely with achievement. Gardner provides the following elements as constituting motivation:- 1- a goal; 2- effort oriented behaviour; 3- desire to follow the goal and 4- favourable attitudes towards the activity. Point number one is seen as the external stimulus and the other three are the intrinsic quality in motivation. Gardner states that the aspect of motivation which relates specifically to attitude is integrative motivation being 'a motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings towards the community that speaks the language'(1985 p83). He states that this is associated with a proficiency in the language and maintains that integrative motivation and language aptitude are the principal factors which account for language learning.

Dornyei (2001) goes much further by saying that really it is only motivation which matters. He states quite categorically that language learners who are motivated will achieve a working knowledge of a second language regardless of linguistic aptitude. However, according to Dornyei, without sufficient motivation even the most able are unlikely to maintain their level of effort long enough to succeed. Gardner (1985) is convinced that language acquisition is such that attitudes are implicated in achievement much more than in other curriculum areas. This is because they involve learning about the behaviours of foreign cultures and call for empathy with other styles of communicating. The foreign language represents cultures and behaviours of the target language country. Thus to learn French successfully means taking on and developing French identities or representations of French identities albeit temporarily, thereby speaking and behaving like one's perceptions of French people. Language does not exist in a vacuum and is inextricably bound up with culture. Therefore when one teaches a second language one is by definition teaching culture, a way of expressing things and ideas, a way of thinking and behaving. Gardner and Lambert (1991) distinguish integrative motivation from instrumental motivation. Whereas integrative motivation stems from positive attitudes and empathy towards the target language community and a desire to participate in the culture, instrumental motivation involves functional reasons for learning a language such as a better job, promotion at work or passing exams. Integrative motivation is held to be superior to instrumental motivation and accounts for additive bilingualism. Gillette (1994) argues that within the same classroom students may well have different motives and goals for their learning with regard to MFL. She

advances the argument that students who have little value for other cultures do not direct their learning towards the language but rather towards completion of the tasks imposed by the teacher. Therefore she claims that students shape their own goals for the learning tasks that teachers set them. Thus for the same task some students may only wish to fulfil the requests made upon them by their teacher whereas others may well look beyond the requests of the teacher by determining their own meanings for learning MFL. The implication is that successful MFL learners are engaging with the language itself rather than the requests of the teacher.

Norton (2000) proposes an ‘investment’ model as motivation for foreign language learning. As mentioned in a previous section this is closely linked to the concept of cultural capital since the language learner is investing his/her social identity in the new language and hoping for a return. Therefore a notion of the identity of the learner as a whole person replaces different types of motivation as proposed by Gardner. The learner may learn for both intrinsic socio- cultural reasons and also at the same time for reasons involving professional and financial aspirations. In the story narrated in section 3.1, the American female student is hoping that proficiency in French will open new social and professional doors. The return is therefore an enhanced social and professional identity. This model of learner identity is more developed than the instrumental model of motivation because it involves more than learning a language to pass an exam for promotion or a better job. It involves a real desire to realign one’s social identity in favour of a socially desirable goal. It may involve an integrative type of motivation



although it is more than a straightforward disinterested wish to integrate since it involves a return in the form of social and cultural capital. It therefore seems to me that Norton has highlighted a new category which supersedes and goes deeper than motivation because it embraces individual identity. Although Norton (2000) advances her social investment model for language learning in the context of immigrants learning English in Canada, I feel that the principal of identity and identification with learning can be extrapolated to British school students learning MFL in England. Wortham (2006) proposes metapragmatic models of identity circulating in wider discourses that can be accessed locally so that learning about cultures, whether it be immigrants in Canada or English students in Britain, transforms who we are as an experience of identity, through a desire to take on different identities.

The social investment model could arguably be a more powerful motivation than the other two because it entails a social and learning identity alignment with the learning task. On the other hand an obvious question and a problem with the social investment model in terms of long term motivation is what happens when the social rewards become exhausted? Fluency in a foreign language needs some maintenance and consequently interest in and engagement with the target language culture. However this would have to be a matter for research rather than speculation.

Since research into motivation, as opposed to learner identity, tends to view gender as a fixed, unproblematic social category, there is no account taken of the exception to the gender trend in the cases where boys do well at foreign languages and become fluent.

Neither is there any account taken of cases where boys' success exceeds that of girls.

Gardner does not appear to offer any explanation of why girls show more empathy with

Otherness than boys and have consequently a higher level of integrative motivation.

Crooks and Schmitt (1991) state that there is a need for research into the area of

motivation and how it relates to success in foreign/second language learning. They say

that given the large amount of effort required for even the smallest rewards 'long term

motivation would seem *prima facie* a most likely candidate for S.L (second language-[my parenthesis] ) success'. It would therefore seem to me that long term motivation is likely

to engage a desire for cultural involvement with the behaviours and language of the target language community. The social investment model of learning identity, powerful in its

own right, having superseded older motivational paradigms may also be problematic with

regard to how long term this investment might be. Once the investment is perceived to

have been fulfilled in some sort of social or professional return, then motivation and the

language gains in terms of fluency may deteriorate.

### **3.5 Motivation in MFL –Dynamic Process Model – Theory of Future Selves**

In Gardner's socio-educational model of MFL learning, he attributes integrative

motivation to socio-cultural beliefs. According to Gardner, socio-cultural beliefs

determine the attitudes which sustain integrative motivation in the long term. Attitudes

divide into two processes; one is long term to sustain integrative motivation and the other

is short term in determining the optimum disposition for classroom learning. However

good teaching may not be enough by itself at classroom level if the surrounding

background discourses are not motivationally supportive. Anecdotally, Dornyei, who grew up in Hungary was expected to learn Russian at school. He recounts the lack of motivation he and others experienced in having to learn the language of what was perceived to be the oppressor. Consequently ten years of Russian lessons at school, much to his regret in later life, resulted in hardly any effect on him and on his contemporaries.

Dornyei and Otto (1998) view motivation as a dynamic rather than static process. There are different types of motivation at various points along a continuum of activity from a 'preactional phase' via an 'actional phase' to a postactional phase' (1998:48). Dornyei and Otto view motivation, evolving over time, as an ongoing process. Therefore the motivation, at the outset of a long term skill such as learning a foreign language, is not qualitatively the same as the motivation required to sustain the activity over time. They maintain that in complex learning activities such as foreign language learning, the importance of the initial motivation to choose the activity is reduced by comparison with the motivation required to sustain the activity. The 'Process Model of Motivation' proposed by Dornyei and Otto (1998) divides the development of motivation into three phases. The first is the preactional phase where goals are set, based on the individual's wishes, hopes and desires. During this phase intentions are formed and commitment is engaged. The commitment stage is vital to trigger action and this is achieved via an action plan which is concerned with conditions and resources such as location of activity, time and equipment. Dornyei and Otto describe the engagement of the activity itself as a 'metaphorical crossing of the Rubicon' because it is now a question of carrying out the activity and committing to it rather than just thinking about it. The type of motivation is

now one of executing the action. This does not mean that the original motivation for choosing the activity disappears, but rather is superseded by another motivation, since an individual may cease from engaging in an activity and then take it up again based on his/her original motivation.

The individual finally moves to the postactional phase which is one of evaluation where positive feedback from peers or teachers becomes another type of motivation for the continuation of the activity or negative feedback can result in abandonment of the activity or disaffection.

Dornyei and Otto concede that the Dynamic Process Model as a rational system of motivation has limitations because the unpredictability and agency of individuals are not taken into account. Sometimes, for example, individuals may continue an activity despite being told that they are not successful since individual motivation may depend on personal mood or fluctuating states of mind.

More recently Dornyei has re-shaped his theory of motivation to take account of individual subjective agency by aligning motivation with learner identity. This new thinking does not discard the task based situated motivation of the process model but it adds to it a theory of future selves into a new system called the 'L2 motivational self system' (2009:p29). This is a three part system consisting of the 'ideal L2 self'. The 'ought - to self' and the 'L2 learning experience as I have already outlined. Dornyei questions whether MFL motivation is linked to tasks themselves as much as the identity

of the individual. In this he joins others such as Kramsch (1993; 1998) and Norton (2000) in recognizing that learning involves the positioning of individual identities. Furthermore Dornyei (2009) argues that individual self-concept draws on imagined future selves as well as on past experiences. In this regard he argues that the position of the learner's identity in learning MFL will draw upon how he /she imagines his/her identity in the future through the learning activity in terms of what he/she could become. The learner can thus envisage a possible desired ideal self and appropriate it. This desired ideal self provides motivation in bridging the gap between a possible future self and one's present self. Dornyei argues that mastering a foreign language is such a long term process that, if this is the goal of the activity then a vision of the self in the future is required much in the same way, by analogy, as in the training of future sports champions. Dornyei retains the notion of integrative motivation by linking one's ideal L2 self to the target language community so that the more one envisages one's future positive regard for the L2 community the more positive will be one's ideal L2 self. The difference between this present account of integrative motivation and the previous version is that now the integrative motivation relates inwards to identity rather than just outwards to target community. Dornyei replaces the former model of instrumental motivation with his concept of 'ought-to self' (2009; 29) which is the pressure to conform to the expectations of others and avoid negative outcomes in terms of passing exams or gaining promotion.

This section has seen a development from social psychological models of motivation based upon objective categories such as instrumental and integrative to models of learner

identity with a more close focus on the individual. We now look more closely at the cultural context of the individual and the construction of meaning.

### **3.6 Cultural identity**

Kramsch (1998) defines culture as socially constructed phenomena that are the results of human intervention within biological processes. These interventions attempt to create order and meaning out of these processes in order to make sense of them. Therefore the meanings created are carried forward outside of the time and space in which these biological processes occur. Thus social meanings for gender go far beyond the phenomenon of biological sex and, in the same way, the social meanings of other biologically based phenomena such as age go well beyond those processes. Kramsch (1998) views culture as shaped by language within discourses. The notion of discourse has been established in chapter 2 largely through the seminal work of Bakhtin (1981). It is through the discourses of social groupings that different cultural understandings of the world are created and therefore socio-cultural understandings of the same biological phenomena are often very different over time and place. Phenomena such as age and gender hold different and often conflicting meanings over time and even within the same social space. Lantolf (2000) defines cultural identity as the totality of present and past cultural resources the individual has access to. Lantolf views culture as 'history in the present' (2000; p171). This places cultural identity at the intersection between our own experience and our access to that which has been handed down to us. Therefore our

personal narratives are moulded onto culturally conventional narratives so that we can make sense of our and others' actions.

Cultural identity therefore is constituted by the dialectical interaction between culture as product and culture as process, both of which represent culture as a determining force and culture as an expression of free-will respectively. The two cultural elements of this dichotomy interact with each other within learner identity to produce a new situation. Kramsch (1993) refers to this new situation as a third place but says it is impossible to define because it varies according to each learner. The third way is a dialectical outcome of the interaction between the subjective process of individual cultural identity and that of the official MFL culture as product, in the way MFL cultures are presented, often as skill based and unquestioning of socio-economic status quo. She argues that skill based language is language for 'doing things with words' (1993;p240) relating to practicalities of language and not to cross-cultural awareness and the cultures of difference. Skill based language teaching reflects the economic utility discourse of MFL teaching and its economic ideology encouraged by social structures rather than a dialectical view in which accepted cultural meanings are challenged. The third place defined by Kramsch is on the other hand a space where the learner constitutes his/ her own meaning and purpose. Kramsch argues that this can be subversive because learners are constituting their own reasons and interests set against those of the state or the institution. She argues that learners enjoy making their own meanings by adapting the language of the 'Other' rather than accepting ready made meanings because the former is

a creative process. Furthermore she argues, as follows, that this space is very personal and cannot be named, ‘ At the intersection of multiple native and target cultures, the major task of language learners is to define for themselves what this ‘third place’ that they have engaged in seeking will look like, whether they are conscious of it or not. Nobody, least of all the teacher, can tell them where that very personal place is; for each learner it will be differently located, and will make different sense at different times’ (1993;257). For some people their own space in the foreign language may be personal or cultural encounters and experiences that they have experienced, poems they have read , film they have seen, books they have read or songs and music they have heard.

My definition of culture in this study is therefore a dialectical one based upon that of Kramsch, where culture, shaped by language within discourses, exists both subjectively in the individual as past and present identity, and objectively in social structures as a product. Cultures as product seem objective and solidified although as social constructions within discourses, they can change over time. This means therefore that objective cultures interrelate dialectically with our subjective experiences to produce something which we can call our own perception of the world and our own cultural identity. This new cultural identity continues as an active process in its dialectical relationship with cultures as product and over time these evolve and change. Therefore the individual cultural identity is active as a process interacting with an active cultural environment as cultural products and causing them to evolve over time. The research analysis chapters 6, 7 and 8 will attempt to show the interaction between pupils’ cultural



discourses and official teacher discourse and how sometimes students struggle to situate themselves as learners to find their own meaning for MFL learning.

Van Lier (2000) takes a similar view to Kramsch in pointing out that learning a language is an interaction between an individual's past culture called up into the present and ecological opportunities or affordances. He argues that 'Language itself is therefore both representational and ecological' (2000;p247), where representational is historico-cultural and ecological is interactive with its socio-linguistic context. Van Lier defines an ecological perspective for language learning as the learner being 'immersed in an environment full of meanings' (2000;p246). Learning therefore is not confined to the brain of the learner in relation to the contents of language as a fixed entity but is seen in the interaction between an active learner and an active environment. For Van Lier the meaning of language is ecological since meaning is derived from a linguistic relationship with the linguistic context rather than from within language itself as a fixed lexical and grammatical system. This means that for language use to develop, the learner has to participate in a linguistic- cultural process. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) refer to the 'participative metaphor' for learning a language as the recognition that the language learning activity is part of a whole and also the wish to engage with others in this wider language community.

The thesis of this research is that students whose learner identities embrace the notion of cultural and linguistic disposition towards foreign language cultures are those who

engage more with the foreign language at the higher grades A- C of G.C.S.E. This is because for language to create meaning, it is more than just teaching foreign vocabulary and grammar but rather teaching different patterns of discourse and therefore different ways of constructing the world through language. This is then a cultural view of language teaching/learning which involves adopting different linguistic-cultural positions. Kramsch (1993) views teaching language as teaching culture. However she argues that all too often language teachers hold an ‘uncritical acceptance of the dominant educational culture of their society’ (1993;183). She furthermore argues that in American schools foreign language learning is about action in order to get a better job and fulfil the American dream rather than reflection. In this way foreign language learner identities have been shaped so that the skill and knowledge are acquired to reflect dominant values in society

To resolve this she calls for critical cultural studies to look at ways in which students perceive the ‘Other’ and to see how this relates to how we perceive ourselves. She proposes that learners should engage in activities to adopt different ways of perceiving the world.

In this research I will argue and demonstrate that the language learning culture which is arranged to fulfil solely socio-economic transactions is not one that leads to a wide and high level of foreign language knowledge and skill.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The literature review of chapters 2 and 3 have been a theoretical journey narrating the development of the part language plays in the construction of identity. A development has been outlined from a starting point where language was viewed uniquely as a labelling and descriptive device, neutral in ideology and without agency, towards language as a constitutive force, within discourse as social practice and therefore ideologically charged. This model of language exists within discourse which has the additional ingredients for agency, social relations and power. Thus language is not only descriptive but also creates the social world from subjective viewpoints within discourses of social power.

My position in this thesis is that identity and more specifically gendered identity is constructed within discourse. Definitions of identity and gender are therefore not ideologically neutral as they are constructed by powerful voices within discourse.

The curriculum within schools is also socially and therefore ideologically constructed within discourse at the level of policy. Therefore MFL has an ideological construction at the level of policy discourse which may not be shared by different individuals occupying other discourses.

The literature review draws upon the work of Fairclough (1989:1992) and Chouliarski and Fairclough (1999) , in chapter 2, who proposes a model of social interaction shaped by wider orders of discourse. Fairclough points out that, in the type of society which can be labelled ‘capitalist’, the wider social orders of discourse are very likely to be socio-economic. In the model of discourse which I have adapted from Fairclough’s work

(1989), cf diagram 1 in 2.7, in order to constitute a similar model for education, classroom interaction in MFL is shaped by wider orders of discourse which are predominantly but not exclusively socio-economic. My argument is that the socio-economic order of discourse is a powerful one and easy to identify with at the most fundamental level of social interaction. Case-study 1 in chapter 6 draws heavily on a socio- economic order of discourse as an initial working theory for research. However as the study proceeds through case studies 2 and 3 in chapters 7 and 8 respectively, there is much more of a focus on the contribution of individuals towards discourse.

Chapter 3 looked at identity, culture and language with a greater focus on culture and language. Language and culture are viewed in terms of symbolic capital and in Norton's (2000) perspective of learning MFL, the social investment model combines cultural orientation and socio-economics into a powerful learner identity. In a sense it could be seen that the 'cultural' is transformed into the 'socio-economic' by viewing culture as social capital.

In the sections on gender, identity and interactional socio-linguistics, the focus is on the part played by individuals in constructing identity. Identity comes to be viewed as less determined by larger discourses and more creatively constructed in social interaction by individuals drawing upon larger discourses although appropriating meaning individually on a day to day basis. Culture is therefore not static but always being created and re-created by individuals in discourse. Gendered identity is not binary but flexible and

adapting to different discursive situations, where individuals borrow gender associated characteristics from those which are available to them.

In the same way that the theoretical journey in language developed from language being a static, labelling device to a creative force, shaping the social world, so identity also makes a parallel journey from a static objective category to a more dynamic, fluid and subjective phenomenon, ever changing and adapting to different discourses.

The thesis of this study is that identity is constituted within language and discourse and, with regard to learner identity in MFL, this involves taking on new cultural identities (Williams et al 2004). Dornyei (1998) also points out that this involves personal change to acknowledge and appreciate difference. The assumption therefore is that if MFL is taught and learned in the same way as other subjects without encompassing cultural difference, students will not go very far. Kramsch (1993) and Van Lier (2000) both argue that foreign language learning is situated as part of a whole represented by the notion of language community which provides cultural meanings which Van Lier refers to as 'affordances' in his ecology of language. The learner learns by engaging with these affordances and striving to participate in the language community. Kramsch (1993) criticizes much of foreign language teaching because it has uncritically fostered dominant socio-economic ideologies and has refused to call them into question. In this uncritical passing on of normative ideology, critical meaning expressing alternative cultural

positions has been stifled and rendered MFL as nothing more than a normative behavioural skill in the service of socio-economics.

This study is directed at the connections between student orientation, within gendered identity, towards cultural difference and MFL linguistic interest. This research is undertaken through interviews with students and observation of classroom behaviour.

The first case study was with a year 11 class and of course the advantage here is that their GCSE exam grades can be correlated to linguistic behaviour in class and to the attitudinal content in the interviews. At the same time the research investigates connections between students who profess no interest in cultural understanding and their linguistic outcomes in GCSE grades and observed behaviour.

Gender as a cultural identity is implicated in these connections between cultural orientation and linguistic interest in fluency and knowledge because boys perform less well than girls in terms of GCSE higher grades.

At the end of its theoretical journey the literature review in itself makes a general claim for knowledge which is firstly that, within the context of a culturally constructed social world, MFL learning is an ideological socio-cultural activity embedded within a cultural context of difference. Therefore it cannot be decontextualized from its target cultural context without a loss of authenticity. Secondly this is more true of MFL in particular,

than it would be of many other socio-cultural learning activities because of the cultural difference involved.

Before beginning the data collection analysis, the next chapter will cover the research philosophy underpinning research design and methodology.

## CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### **4.0 introduction**

This chapter is designed firstly to outline the philosophical rationale underpinning the research strategy, secondly to describe the research methods which flow from the strategy and thirdly to consider the implications for research ethics.

4.1 addresses the philosophical paradigm on which the research strategy is based. This section covers models for ontology, being the philosophical models for the researcher's view of reality in terms of how s/he views and analyzes the social world. For example, does the researcher view him/herself as an integral part of the social world or is he/she positioned at some distance from it as a researcher? On this definition are based considerations of epistemology, or types of knowledge. Is knowledge subjective or objective?

4.2 addresses issues of causality in positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Here we consider the possible threats to reliable knowledge by the researcher ascribing causal meanings. I consider the extent to which accounts of knowledge come from the data itself or from the researcher's interpretation of the data

4.3 introduces the research design for the study and the sample population for the case studies

4.4 outlines the methodology focussing on interviews and observations.



4.5 covers research ethics in terms of representativeness, equity, consent, confidentiality and issues of interpretation.

#### **4.1 Strategy- Philosophical issues; Ontology- Epistemology.**

This section will focus on the epistemological aspect of research in how it is possible to gain knowledge of researched phenomena and what it means to know something. It will be seen that a criterion for knowledge is the ontological position of the researcher, in other words the relationship within social reality between the knowable and the knower.

The research question at the centre of these issues of knowledge and reality or epistemology and ontology is as follows:- ‘Does the construction of identity subject positions by male pupils in secondary schools hinder their performance by comparison with girls?’

The rationale of the argument proposed here is that gaining knowledge of the phenomena of personal identity rests upon the nature of reality with regard to the researcher. The philosophy involved here is whether or not objective reality, such as personal identity, actually exists independently from the researcher who is attempting to perceive it.

Fundamentally this reduces to whether reality exists independently of the observer. Is there a reality ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered? Does, for example, causality exist objectively or is it that sequences of events that routinely exist contiguously are constructed into cause-effect by the observer.

Pring (2000) defines two ontological models. The first one is where reality is objective and detached from the observer. The epistemological implication of this is that reality 'out there' is knowable by the observer and can be measured or quantified. To recall chapter two on the linguistic location of meaning, the gap between the detached observer and linguistic or, in the present case, social phenomena evokes structuralism. The structuralist position with regard to linguistic meaning is that this resides within the structures of lexis and grammar. Much in the same way, a structuralist view of social reality is that meanings are read off pre-existing social categories and labels by a detached observer. Johnson (1997) points out that the positioning of men and women as separate social categories has to be seen as rooted in a structuralist approach to language. Structuralism thus categorizes social reality through linguistic items which exclude each other by creating boundaries and oppositions. Men and women are therefore set up as binary and mutually exclusive categories by language structures with essentialist meanings. Language describes and constitutes meanings but the meanings have no active agency and are enclosed in the structure. The meanings therefore are reified in objective reality and need to be uncovered. This model of ontology tends towards a positivist paradigm of research, analysing reality in a scientific mode through measurement and quantification. Therefore personal identity is viewed as the objective reality of social categories such as gender, social class, ethnicity, age, religion etc. As detached categories, meanings can only come in the form of measurement or labels with numerical values attached and there is no sense as to what it really means to be male, black, white or working class.

In a positivist research model based on quantitative methods, claims for knowledge are based on data sets which, if large enough with respect to the total population, can be extrapolated to a position of generalization. This research has quantitative data and statistical analysis in chapter 5 to establish that there is indeed a real as opposed to imagined research question to be addressed in terms of the performance between boys and girls in a secondary school. For this, gender is viewed as binary as male/female as a general objective category because data is required at surface level over a wide area. However this positivist model in terms of gender as an objective, surface social category cannot take us very far. Again it provides an immediate surface description rather than an in-depth exploration and is useful although only as a point of departure.

The second ontological definition proposed by Pring (2000) is a reality where the borders between observer and observable reality are blurred and indistinct. In this case it is not clear where the boundary of the observing individual ends and the observed reality begins. Could it be that the observer and the observed are all part of the same reality? In this case it is difficult to take a step back to view events from a more 'objective' reality if the observer is an integral part of the reality he/she is observing.

In this model of ontology, the observer's perception may be influenced by the events he/she is observing in a non-neutral manner and indeed his/her act of perceiving or mere presence will affect the social reality of events. Assumptions, personal ideologies and psychological states of mind may also influence perceptions and make a contribution to the social reality being observed. This latter ontological model tends towards an

interpretivist paradigm of research. As the researcher is a part of the phenomena he/she is researching and 'swims in the same sea', it is only possible to have an interpretation of events. This throws up issues of reliability and validity, which will be discussed later on.

A post- structuralist view of the position of the researcher would be one of an active maker of meaning negotiating meaning within an active social environment. S/he is operating and creating meaning within an academic discourse and, in the case of this study, researching pupil discourse which is also active in the creation of meaning. In both cases active subjects, researchers and participants, are creating meaning. Therefore in a post-structuralist model meaning is continually being generated in each social situation and does not transcend or pre-exist context. Edwards (1998) says that meanings are created by signs and words, not on their own, but within social situations which, when specifically located, are known as discourses. Thus in a post-structural ontology, personal identity does not reflect passive social categories which are already in existence awaiting discovery but rather constitutes subjectivities actively being constructed in each social situation.

It would not then be possible to research these active subjectivities from a positivistic strategic position using quantitative methods. Different research methods are therefore required within a strategy of interpretation where researcher and researched are both active makers of meaning occupying the same social reality, although speaking from within different discourses. The issue is how to understand the identity meanings created within a discourse from the standpoint of another discourse without superimposing

categories from the latter discourse which, being academic, is viewed as more influential if not powerful. The title of the research question has been formulated as follows, in line with an ontology which is not structuralist but more fluid, and more open to change and negotiation:- ‘Does the construction of subject identity positions by male pupils in secondary school hinder their performance in MFL at secondary school by comparison with girls?’ An original research title had been ‘Do aspects of pupil identity account for the under-performance of secondary school boys in MFL by comparison with girls?’ However I dropped the latter title because of the position of identity as a passive, reified social category and adopted the new title to reflect identities as subjectivities being socially constructed. It parallels a philosophical journey of understanding of ontology from a detached, objective and static reality to a shared, ever evolving, dynamic reality jointly constructed by all participants including the presence of the researcher.

## **4.2 Causality**

The deconstruction of the notion of identity as a fixed item however does nothing to address the power asymmetry between researcher and participant in practical terms where the former discourse could impose definitions on the latter. Power asymmetry is addressed as an ethical issue later on in the chapter. Pring (2000) says that both ontologies or realities, positivist and interpretivist can co-exist in a hard and soft form and one does not exclude the other. He suggests that the hard reality is a scientific one, which concerns measurement and the soft reality is one of social meanings. Quantitative methods of numerical values and measurements are therefore vital in establishing patterns over a wide area of data and, in chapter 5 of this study, such data has been used

to secure a statistical link between gender and MFL performance. The ontological basis for this is positivist within an overall interpretivist study, thereby creating a scientific or mathematical relationship between researcher and phenomena. However a positivist approach cannot provide deeper explanations because of the distance between researcher and researched. It can only provide patterns. It cannot even provide causality because this distance prevents us seeing relationships between the patterns from the inside. Patterns seen from a distance may simply be juxtapositions or contiguities because reality is only seen at surface level albeit over a wide area. The reason, therefore why this study has to be interpretivist is to explore the surface patterns at a deeper level over a smaller surface area. If there are then suggestions of causal relations between gender and MFL performance, these may be the constructions of the researcher or may exist as possible semantic interpretations emanating from qualitative data?

Robson (2002) says that all causality is, is the establishment of 'constant conjunction' of events meaning a constant relationship between variables. It is nothing more than a co-occurrence of events. Even in physical science it is not possible to state that a phenomenon or event has an a priori and necessary cause for the existence of a subsequent phenomenon or event. One can only ever observe that where a particular variable occurs, another always appears to occur simultaneously or subsequently. This nevertheless, as Robson (2000) points out, is all that is necessary to establish a causal relationship in conventional terms. However he also goes on to say that, in social sciences, causality is virtually impossible to ascribe to relationships involving people

because it is not possible to isolate the operative variables from all the other human characteristics available.

The study, then, has to be sceptical of researcher's meanings as constructions but rather view them as possible interpretations. In this sense data has to speak for itself as much as possible.

Robson (2000) refers to methods of interpretation of research data that call for the researcher to stay close to naturalistic data generated by speaking subjects. He highlights phenomenological interpretation and hermeneutics in this regard. The researcher brackets off his/her reality and records data as it occurs. The spoken text is re-analyzed time and time again for all semantic possibilities and whilst there is a most likely interpretation, interpretation itself is never definitive.

In the research question there is a hypothesis of a general relationship between male pupils' construction of subjectivity and performance in MFL. This is not a hypothesis in a narrow sense where the research tests for a specific feature of reality such as for example a proposition that white British female pupils outperform Asian male pupils in MFL. The study is therefore not testing for a specific hypothesis contained in a proposition. However it is exploring a general hypothesis implicitly contained in the question that there is some sort of link between the way male pupils construct their subjectivities and performance in MFL. In this sense the position of the researcher is subjective to the extent that some sort of outcome is expected which links some aspect of

male pupils' subjectivities with MFL performance. The research itself will be exploratory in discovering a link rather than one of narrow testing of a specific proposition but it would be disingenuous to suggest that there is no expected outcome. Phillips and Pugh (2000) maintain that in undertaking research, all researchers entertain hypotheses about the possible or likely outcomes of their research. They explain that a hypothesis involves expected outcomes that we project from our imagination. It would therefore, as humans endowed with imagination, be impossible not to project possible endpoints and the likelihood of certain results. Phillips and Pugh argue that researchers select data around possible outcomes in a hypothetico-deductive model rather than the so-called scientific inductive model. Walford (2001) supports this view of the subjective nature of research. He says, 'all research might be said to be researching yourself' (2001; P7). He supports this view by saying that in many cases the researcher has her/himself chosen the topic of research out of personal interest or his/her perspective of a problem. He /she then makes the decision regarding the focus of the research question, the methodology and the interpretation of results. He points out that this process requires choice on the part of the researcher and draws upon previous insights and experiences. We are therefore less objective and more subjective in our approach to research than we suppose ourselves to be and the obvious problem that this throws up is one of personal bias in the interpretation of results as well as the conduct of the research itself. These are ethical issues in both a technical and moral sense and will be addressed later on under a separately headed section.



### **4.3 Research design ( case study)**

The design for research is constructed within an interpretive paradigm. That is a search for meanings in a meaning-making environment. Robson (1993) points out three widely acknowledged research design strategies, which are experiments, surveys and case studies. He argues that it is possible to use a mixed design combining these design types. Edwards and Talbot (1994) propose another design strategy, that of progressive focusing. Progressive focusing has a naturalistic rationale, allowing data to emerge naturally from social interaction and then be analysed at a later stage. Interviews are open-ended or semi-structured informant interviews to inform and educate the researcher as opposed to respondent interviews of closed nature heavily structured by the questions. Observation is ethnographic of which more will be said in the methods section. Analysis of the data is then undertaken to establish a focus which is continually refined in the light of further data.

Robson says that choice of design strategy depends on the purpose of research. There are three main purposes; exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Exploratory is concerned with discovery, asking a ‘what is going on here?’ question. Description is describing a situation as it is occurring and explanatory is to find out why something occurs. The simple alignment between research strategies and purposes that Robson gives is that case studies are designed for exploratory work, surveys are designed for descriptive purposes and experiments are for explanatory purposes. Edwards and Talbot (1994) also point out

that surveys are also useful for exploratory work because of the possibility they afford in seeking out connections and patterns in relationships between variables.

My own two purposes in this study are description and exploration. The descriptive purpose of the research is addressed by survey. The surveys in chapter 5 express quantitative data that describe in chart form the relationship between G.C.S.E performance and gender over 7 years. These charts are in Appendix 1. This is descriptive in that it maps a possible correlation between two sets of variables but it is also exploratory at the same time in that the researcher looks at the variables to see if there is a link between them. Survey thus has a passive quality in recording numerical data and an active quality where the researcher looks for patterns, links and correlations between variables.

The main exploratory purpose of the study is a search for participant meanings within three classroom case studies relating to three different year groups. This is designed to gather qualitative data corresponding to an exploration of meanings regarding gender and MFL at greater depth over a much smaller surface area than the survey. The two main case study methods of data collection are classroom observation and pupil interviews, representing a mixed method design. The first data set presents quantitative evidence establishing a link between gender and performance with regard to MFL. The second data set is a qualitative one emerging from the three case studies of a year 7, year 9 and year 11 class.

### **4.3.1 Quantitative Study**

In chapter 5 there is statistical analysis of G.C.S.E results from 2001 to 2007. The rationale for a quantitative chapter in the first place is the establishment of the research question underpinning the rest of the study. The introduction of chapter one has explained the experiential perception of gender difference in performance over the years of a teaching career where it had always seemed that boys performed less well than girls at the higher levels of G.C.S.E. in particular. However this is an observation based on the personal perceptions from lived professional experience and this is likely to include such received wisdom as ‘French is a middle-class girls’ subject’. This can hardly count as knowledge. Nevertheless, it can itself become the object of research to see if there really is a gender difference in performance. The rationale of chapter 5 therefore amounts to the establishment of objective knowledge based on statistical evidence. This does not imply that all knowledge has to be objective and evidenced by statistical data. Knowledge, as we see in the qualitative chapters is also subjective, based on the balanced interpretation of data from the lived experience of individuals and their social groupings. I give further explanation of this in the next section. However the full account of the quantitative data and the gender findings are to be found in the chapter 5.

### **4.3.2 The Case Study**

Following the quantitative chapter 5 which sought to discover connections between gender and MFL performance, I then moved to the exploratory case study which is the main body of the research, to attempt to discover more about the relationship between the gender and attitude/performance variables. This was a qualitative action to explore

feelings, values, attitudes and behaviours towards MFL and identity undertaken in case studies over chapters 6,7 & 8. Expression of values, feelings and attitudes were in the form of tape- recorded semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation in the classroom. Triangulation, to be discussed in the next section, was multi-method between these approaches using the same participants.

There were three separate case studies in the research on the relationship between learning MFL and gender. Each case study was taken from a foreign languages class. The year 11 case study was from a French class taught by me. The year 9 case study was from a Spanish class taught by a new teacher to the department and also by myself. Finally the year 7 study was from a French class taught by a female MFL teacher and colleague in the department.

The languages involved are the ones that I teach which are French and Spanish. I have chosen to undertake three studies to allow for a measure of representativeness of the school population. Thus the year 7 case study represents those at the start of their school career, the year 9 study represents those in the middle and the year 11 study represents those in the final year and therefore at the end of compulsory schooling. Although I have arranged the case studies to represent an age balance, it is not the rationale of case-studies to extrapolate findings to an external population by claiming that the case studies are a microcosm of the total population and thereby findings within the case study must be necessarily true outside the bounds of the case. The rationale is rather to find a truth within the bounds of the case and not to state that whatever is found within these bounds must surely and without doubt exist outside it. Findings may create a hypothesis or even

a likelihood for the existence of the same sort of reality outside the case but then this would have to become the basis of further research. This could be another much larger case study but again findings would relate to the interpretation of data within the bounds of that larger case study no matter how wide these may be. Beyond these bounds lie hypothesis and conjecture. This is because it cannot be assumed that social phenomena are always the same regardless of social context. The underlying philosophy of this research is that social participants construct reality within their own locally situated discourses. When individuals express themselves in interviews or in observed behaviour it is the individual in his/her own socio-cultural time and space who is speaking and furthermore located within his/her own discourse. The individual is speaking his/her own truth in the expression of an individual interpretation and construction of the social world and therefore this truth cannot be extrapolated beyond this location. The case study in this study is an attempt to focus on the truth of an individual or individuals within a localized social context and claims for knowledge beyond these limits could not be valid.

Case study then as a methodology maps out a bounded area where a particular social reality can be a focus of in- depth enquiry. Within the year groups I have mentioned I have selected three classes, each one in years 7, 9 and 11 and in each class I requested volunteers. I was ideally looking for a small group of 12 students per class to make up the case study, equally divided by gender. The exact composition of the research population is detailed below in the next section. This number would allow me some breadth although the number involved also allows me some depth. Because of time

constraints, there is a ‘trade-off’ between breadth and depth. There has to be breadth to ensure the representativeness of the case-study population but the more extensive this becomes the more depth is lost. This is decided by myself as teacher-researcher being sensitive to the practicalities of the research in terms of time. I would not have had the time to have interviewed and observed the whole class for the same amount of time that I interviewed and observed the individuals in a smaller case study. An issue of researcher reflexivity in this regard is to balance the breadth-depth interface.

Nevertheless, not all students wished to volunteer and those who did volunteer did not wish to be imposed upon too much in terms of their own time. Time seems to be a precious commodity for school pupils and in my experience they do not readily give it up. This meant that for those who did volunteer, I only received a limited amount of good will and with regard to those who would not volunteer, this may simply have been because they did not want to give me their own time at break, lunch or after school for no apparent benefit to themselves. It also may have been a lack of willingness to show any help or cooperation with the teacher. The role of teacher/ researcher is one that the students are not used to and for them there may have been a perception of role conflict. In other words it may be seen that the teacher teaches and gives instructions as opposed to collaborating with students in research.

The half-hour interview meant that the student has to give up all his/her breaktime or most of the fifty minute lunch break and this is for no return other than to know they are helping me in a research project. The interview conversation therefore had to be

focussed to get the most out of the time available. The content of the interviews focused on student reasons for wanting or not wanting to learn a foreign language. Several interview transcripts are in Appendix 3. I ask the students if they find the idea of a foreign language useful and the response for this is often for holiday and/or job purposes. I then go on to ask if students might wish to learn about the target language way of life and perhaps would like to imagine whether or not they could identify the notion of a different way of life. I ask them whether it matters or not that they might learn and appreciate the different way of life suggested by the foreign language. The reason for me asking this question is to enquire into cultural identity of students in whether or not it might include notions of difference and ‘otherness’ and whether or not appreciation of differences matters in the leaning of a foreign language. I ask whether students think it is possible to learn the language even if they have no interest at all in the target language culture or even have no interests outside English speaking cultural identity. My rationale for this is to investigate possible connections between cultural interest and identity and the desire to learn or not to learn the foreign language. Questions look at students’ perceptions of difference and ‘otherness’ whether or not they perceive the target language cultures of France or Spain as being different from their own cultures. I also ask students their views with regard to their own national identity, the extent to which they feel affinity with it and if they could imagine themselves being of a different nationality. My rationale for this enquiry into national identity in the interviews is to explore any connection between language and nationality. The impetus for this is the frequent experience of hearing pupils asking why they must study French or Spanish ‘because we’re English and not French/Spanish’. There may therefore exist in the minds of pupils

a feeling that the affinity to their own nationality is somehow connected to their affinity with their 'national' language. Opinions on close attachments to nationality and language may therefore constitute a possible barrier to learning a foreign language.

The year 11 and year 9 class case- studies were taken from my own teaching groups. The year 11 class was the first case-study conducted and this was a French GCSE group. I undertook the research with this group in the school year of 2005/6. The year 9 case study was taken from my Spanish class and I collected the data in the school year 2006/2007. My third and final case study was taken from a year 7 French class taught by a colleague and I collected the data again during the school year 2006/2007. With the year 7 case study, I had a free lesson which corresponded to this class's timetabled French lesson once per week and I was able to interview pupils in lesson time. I also asked the teacher's permission to observe the class during lessons and focussed on the construction of learning identity of those students in the case study. Although I had the support of my colleague I was also conscious of the disruption to her lesson of taking pupils out of the class and so I tried not to keep pupils for too long. Thirty minutes was approximately the time I allocated to each interview taking up half the one hour lesson. I was also conscious of the time I was spending on observation in the lessons and although I get on well with this colleague I still worried about imposing my presence despite her assurances to the contrary. There is a more detailed discussion and focussed description of the interview and observation schedule for this case study in the data collection, analysis and findings of chapter 8.



With regard to the second case study in the year 9 Spanish class, although this was my own class, it was for much of the year taught by a new teacher. Once the teacher had become established with the class I was able to spend part of each lesson observing research participants in the case-study and undertaking interviews in the adjoining office.

The first case-study taken from a year 11 French class was taught by me as teacher/researcher. I undertook interviews outside of class time at break, lunchtime and also after school for students who were staying behind for other activities. As the lone teacher-researcher, detailed observations were a difficult undertaking and also because I was teaching a mixed ability class with some behaviourally ‘challenging students’ in the class. Therefore my observations were not systematic. With this class I found the role of teacher/researcher a difficult one because of the conflict of interest. Obviously there was an over-riding pressure for results in the A-C higher category for G.C.S.E and that had to take priority over my research notes. On the other hand I was close to the class, knew all the students well as I had taught them the year before in year 10 and was closer to the case study group than any outside researcher could be. I was able to take some notes after the lessons and much of the student/teacher discussion data were taken from memory immediately after the lesson. At one point, I was making some notes during the lesson when Anna, one of the case study participants enquired ‘should you really be doing this sir?’ As this was the first case study of the research, I had not fully realized how difficult this would be without anyone to help in this particular class.

In the following year 9 case-study I looked for opportunities to engage in more observation. I did my utmost to ensure that I had another teacher to teach the class and I was fortunate enough to have someone who established herself quickly and taught the class well. I was able to focus on the interviews and observations once I knew that the lesson was under way and working well. Having an in-depth focus on a small group was useful as a background to talking with the new teacher about how the work was being undertaken by this small group. This meant that for half the one hour lesson I observed the class as a whole and for the other half I observed the case-study group or undertook interviews. I had discussed my research project with the teacher and, once established with the class, she agreed to my observations and interviews.

I was similarly fortunate with the year 7 case study that I had a non-teaching period once per week that corresponded to one of this class's French lessons which I was able to keep free. The teacher was a long standing colleague over 7 years and consented to my presence as researcher. Even so I always had the worry that I might outstay my welcome with the class.

#### **4.3.3 Case Study Population**

The participant population had to be a representative one of age, gender and ability within a small case study. It had to be representative of gender since in the research I am looking at how boys and girls may or may not have different cultural constructions of the world. It had to be representative of age since older students, in the course of their school careers, may come to have different cultural views of foreign language learning

from younger students. This is not a longitudinal study so the same students would not be interviewed at a later date. However differently aged students needed to be part of the research to express behaviours and attitudes that may be developmentally related to age. I have also created representation of general ability in terms of three ability bands determined by CAT (cognitive ability scores). Students of each gender were represented deemed as of low, middle and high ability (according to cognitive ability test scores or CAT) at the beginning and end of each key stage. Cognitive Ability scores and their use and rationale are fully explained in the next section . Therefore I proposed 2 male and 2 female students for each ability level in years 7, 9 and 11. The total non-probability sample population would therefore number 36. Non- probability means that the number of participants in relation to the school population of around 1300 is so low that results cannot be extrapolated to the total population. Findings are not generalizable because as I have already explained, claims for knowledge are therefore localized within the confines of a case study. The case study sample was to include low ability students according to CAT scores who are competent students of MFL and high ability students who are poor in MFL. The rationale for this is to explore relationships between identity and MFL that run counter to the expected pattern of CAT predictions.

The case study populations are summarized in the table below with regard to age related year group and gender. I show a further table at the end of the next section showing a general ability related subdivision in the table following the explanation of the Cognitive Ability Scores.

**Table 1:**

**Case Study Populations**

Year group	Boys	Girls
Year 11 – case study 1	6	4
Year 9 – case study 2	7	7
Year 7 – case study 3	5	5

The total number of research participants was 34 which was two less than my expected total. However as I was requesting research volunteers from the three classes I had no control over the distribution in terms of gender. I had explained to each class that I wanted an equal number of girls and boys because the research addressed gender issues in learning MFL in a general sense. The year 7 and year 9 class did have an equal number of girls and boys and in the year 11 class I did have an equal number of boys and girls until two girls dropped out without explanation beyond no longer wishing to take part. No one else wanted to take part in the research and so I was left with the gender imbalance. I did not select participants but simply waited for students to come to see me with their permission slips. In each of the three classes I had asked for 12 volunteers, 6 boys and 6 girls when I had spoken to the students in general terms about my research project. However in year 7, only 10 students volunteered, from a base of informed consent with parental written support to participate in interviews. This represented half the class of 20 but I had expected two more to meet my target of 12 pupils. In year 9, a larger class there were 14 volunteers which were again equally divided with regard to gender and although I had asked for 12 I did not want to turn away students who wanted

to take part in research. With regard to year 11, I requested 12 volunteers of equal male/female composition and originally this is what I got. Unfortunately two girls failed to turn up to the interviews and they later told me that they no longer wished to participate. There were then no further volunteers to replace them.

#### **4.3.4 Cognitive Ability Test Prediction**

CAT scores are designed by NFER which is the National Foundation for Educational Research as the standardized indicator of general ability. CAT stands for cognitive ability tests which are devised by NFER to measure pupils' cognitive ability in language, number and special awareness. The CAT score itself is a mean taken from the results from the mathematical, linguistic and spatial categories and is widely used in schools to predict G.C.S.E results and show value-added. The claim for prediction of G.C.S.E results arises because NFER have cross-referenced their CAT scores with student G.C.S.E grades over very large samples in the student population. They claim, as a result, that G.C.S.E grade correlation with CAT score has an 80% accuracy rate. Thus a CAT score of 105 for example is meant to signify in M.F.L, as well as most other subject areas, that the student is capable of gaining at least a 'C' grade at G.C.S.E. A CAT score of 112+ should access at least a 'B' grade and 120, an 'A' grade. CAT scores also cross-reference to the lower grades of D,E,F&G. Although this type of I.Q scoring was discredited in the past because of possible cultural bias in favour middle class pupils in terms of its language content, it is often schools in working class areas with disadvantaged school populations which have benefited from the value-added data generated by CAT scores. This is because schools can claim value-added where their

G.C.S.E results are higher than the ones predicted by the CAT scores. This value-added claim is particularly useful where exam grades are very low by comparison with national averages in the league tables, especially when they fall below the favoured A-C category. Schools therefore with results below the national average can flag up success in their own terms by showing how much progress their pupils have made from a very low starting point. CAT tests therefore normally take place at the beginning of K.S 3 in year 7 in the first few weeks of secondary school and sometimes are repeated in Year 9. Obvious criticisms are that the individual is not likely to perform well if at a particular time and on a particular day the pupil is not feeling well, or is unsettled in some way. Unfortunately some teaching staff set great store on the results for initial subject setting although many others regard it only as one indicator of ability at a particular time and place. Given that the notion of ability is problematic in definition due to its fluid and variable nature, the CAT score benchmark is probably the best indicator of ability available as long as it is viewed only as a snapshot at a particular time and place. It gives an indication of what the student is capable of at that moment.

Cross-referenced with CAT scores, a case-study sample of high, middle and low ability students was established from students who volunteered for the research years 11 and 9. Year 7 became an exception to this structure by general ability because research findings had begun to indicate that ability to learn MFL had more to do with cultural orientation to MFL than with a numerically expressed general ability. Year 7 was the last case study I undertook where, for this case study, I chose not to use CAT scores to categorize research participants. This is because the data analysis chapters of the year 11 and year 9

case studies (cf Chapters 6 & 7) had provided me with sufficient evidence to show that there was no necessary link between a numerical score and ability and interest in MFL. For the other case studies I had categorized volunteer participants according three bands of high, medium and low CAT scores but I did not use general ability as an initial criterion for selection. Participants selected themselves and the three bands of CAT score were a post facto categorization so that if comparisons were made across gender at least this would be based on a notion of similar general ability, however approximate. Attaching a numerical value to general ability at a given moment of time for a student's entire school career seems to be a phenomenon the schools system along with Ofsted are happy to accept for their statistical assessment of school improvement. It is accepted as a working measure of ability although it can only ever be an approximation rather than an accurate measure.

I proposed that high ability would measured by high CAT score (110-120 for example in terms of the school's ability range). The CAT score for middle ability would for example be in the 91-109 range and low ability 70-90 range. As previously stated, students with low ability CAT scores combined with high ability performance and students with high CAT scores combined with low performance in M.F.L were to be included in the sample. The rationale for this is to explore the identity features of students deemed to be less able but who are nonetheless good at MFL and have positive attitudes. Do these features resemble those displayed by students who are good at MFL and deemed to be able according to CAT scores? By contrast do high ability students according to CAT scores who are poor at MFL have characteristics resembling those deemed less able and who are also poor at MFL. In other words is ability in MFL a largely attitudinal factor? Could it

be the case for example that less able boys who are good at MFL share attitudes that would be expected as predominantly female and vice versa for high ability girls whose ability in foreign languages is perceived to be poor? Attitudes, as mental disposition to learning the MFL may have a linguistic construction and both needed to be researched in this study. These attitudinal factors are addressed in the research data analysis chapters in the interviews and the observations of classroom discourse. The link between attitude and linguistic construction is seen expressed within discourse and the way learner identity is constructed within discourse. These issues are investigated in chapters 6,7and 8.

The MFL focus for the research was French and Spanish as these are the languages that I teach and consequently I have access to these students as volunteer research participants. The summary for the ability related research participant population is as follows for the year 11 and year 9 case studies:-

**Table 2:**

**Distribution of Research Participants by Gender and CAT Score**

	High C.A.T 110-120		Medium C.A.T 91-109		Low C.A.T 70-90	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Year 11	2	0	4	3	0	1
Year 9	1	1	4	4	2	2

In the year 11 and year 9 data analysis chapter I indicate the C.A.T score at the beginning of the research interview transcript with the high, medium or low band category label.



The CAT scores were seen against the background of the qualitative data in the research and had little correlation with students' cultural orientation in MFL. After two case studies there did not seem to be a case for arguing for a numerical relationship between a cognitive ability score and the cultural expression of a student towards foreign language learning. Therefore by the time I undertook the third case study in year 7, I felt that the CAT scores no longer served a useful purpose and so I abandoned them. As already explained I had initially thought this was a useful way of comparing students of otherwise similar general ability especially between girls and boys and also the same gender in order to see what might account for any difference in MFL performance, if there were a difference. It was also interesting to see if, as already explained, any individuals deemed as less able than others in general ability scores were nonetheless more capable in MFL and to see why this might be the case through behaviour observation and attitudinal content in interviews.

By the end of the first two case-studies in years 11 and 9, I felt that there some emerging data to link cultural disposition towards MFL with MFL capability. I felt that the data pointed towards a connection between culture and language. This seemed to reflect the theoretical findings at the end of chapter 3, that MFL is a socio-cultural activity and so that it may well be connected to cultural and learner identity. This made CAT scores as a numerical categorization of cultural and linguistic ability somewhat irrelevant. It seemed at this stage a crude device once I had established a culture – language connection.

Nonetheless I think it had been useful initially to see for example if a male student with a high CAT score might perform less well in MFL than a female student with a low CAT score who through interview and classroom behaviour demonstrated a high level of

cultural interest in MFL. The fact, as can be seen in chapters 6 and 7, that this was the case simply demonstrated the cultural nature of learning a foreign language in particular irrespective of a numerical score and so from that moment the CAT score became a redundant item of data. The year 7 case study therefore contained no CAT score data at all as I focused more on the linguistic- cultural connections. The pseudonyms of research participants alongside CAT scores can be found below in the next section.

#### 4.3.5 Case Study Participants

Below are the case study participants by year and by gender in tables with the data I have used in the research. There are three case studies.

**Table 3: Year 11 Case Study Participants by Gender, CAT score and Actual G.C.S.E Grade**

Name	Gender	C.A.T score/ category (High, medium, low)	G.C.S.E (Foundation or Higher)
Anna	Female	99 (medium)	C (higher)
Alicia	Female	Unknown	C (higher)
Jasmine	Female	108 (medium)	C (higher)
Zara	Female	88 (low)	B (higher)
Robert	Male	106 (medium)	C (higher)
Bill	Male	111 (high)	E (foundation)
Dennis	Male	111 (high)	E (foundation)
Guy	Male	109 (medium)	E (foundation)
Ben	Male	109 (medium)	E (foundation)
Luke	Male	107 (medium)	F (foundation)

The range of scores in the table above is between 88 and 111 which does not quite cover the total range that can be seen within the school. There are sometimes students with CAT scores of 120+ but this is rare since students such as these will have been ‘creamed off’ by the grammar school system. A student with CAT scores of 120+ will have predicted ‘A’/ A\* at G.C.S.E as 120 is the boundary line for these grades proposed by N.F.E.R. At the other end of the C.A.T range in the school there are scores of 70+ although these are not represented in this study.

**Table 4:**

**Case Study 2 Year 9 participants by gender and CAT score**

Name	Gender	C.A.T score/category (High, Medium, Low)
Louisa	Female	90 (low)
Leah	Female	84 (low)
Aimee	Female	94 (medium)
Georgina	Female	104 (medium)
Shannen	Female	108 (medium)
Lauren	Female	106 (medium)
Elizabeth	Female	114 (high)
George	Male	85 (low)
Mat	Male	86 (low)
Fred	Male	98 (medium)
Joel	Male	96 (medium)
Adam	Male	97 (medium)
Sam	Male	104 (medium)
Alex	Male	110 (high)

The CAT. score range in the year 9 chart is between 84 and 114 which is closer to the total range of the school than the year 11 table.

**Table 5:**

**Case Study 3 Year 7 participants by gender**

Name	Gender
Bella	Female
Jessica	Female
Francesca	Female
Kayleigh	Female
Sadie	Female
Jack	Male
Dex	Male
Scott	Male
James	Male
Jamie	Male

CAT scores are not included in the table above because by this time emerging qualitative research data findings from the year 11 and year 9 studies pointed to a lack of accuracy in

looking for a consistent correlation between general numerically measured ability and performance in MFL

#### **4.4 Research methods**

Robson (1993) points out interviews reveal what individuals feel in private and that observation reveals what individuals do in public. The combination of interview alongside ethnographic observation of the same participants in classroom interaction provides multi-method triangulation. I discuss triangulation in the later section on ethics dealing with issues of validity. This mixed method involves an exploration of links between discourse and opinion, thus exploring the connection between language and attitude.

Fox (1995) says that simply focusing on observable behaviour can overlook the importance of thoughts and beliefs when understanding pupil behaviour. He argues that situational observation is one element in understanding pupils but they bring with them into the school situation a mental structure that they have constructed from past experiences. Individuals should thus be seen as their own theoreticians, experimenting with the world and testing their own theories. This is a social constructivist approach where the individual is an active maker of meaning in an active meaning-making social environment. This philosophy is very much in line with the philosophical paradigm of the research where the individual is active in creating and interpreting meaning. Informant based interviews are then a way of enabling students to theorize about their

identities and motives or lack of motives for learning MFL. This, I believe, fits well with the values of ethnography which is the other research methodology of the study.

We now go on to discuss these values in the next section.

#### **4.4.1 Ethnographic Research Methods**

The rationale behind the notion of connecting language use and the social world of the individual through ethnography can be seen contained in the following proposition, ‘-----  
-linguistic ethnography generally holds that to a considerable degree, language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that a close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity’ (Rampton et al 2004). Important features of an ethnographic method of research are naturalistic data emanating from language use within social settings. There is a concern to allow meanings to speak for themselves and to understand the social settings in which these meanings are produced. The position of the researcher is therefore one of an active participant immersed in the social context and activity of his/her research. The principal methods employed are observation over a period of time as opposed to one off observations and also unstructured interviews. This research style suits my position in the school since I am close to events as they happen within each classroom situation of my research case study and know the students well over the years I have been in the school and in the MFL department. I am the class teacher for two of the classes in my research.

Ethnographic researchers would argue that even familiar settings need to be researched because one tends to regard the familiar, within one's own assumptions, as taken for granted phenomena. Unless the data is allowed to flow in a naturalistic way, the researcher can end up understanding more about his/her commonsense assumptions and hypotheses of social action than the social action itself. The concept of 'emic' is where the researcher is able to get behind institutional, social categories and definitions to access social activity as it occurs from the inside. As Rampton et al(2004) points out, social categories such as gender, age, occupation, local identity are not lived out in the same way by all individuals. Individuals all have unique experiences and feelings about their life situation which lies beneath or behind these categories. The notion of 'emic' is to gain an insider view of these subjectivities through language use within an understanding of the social setting in which language is produced. Creese (2004) defines an emic focus as one which 'aims to describe and understand the local meaning making processes of participants' language-in-use.....' (Creese et al 2004). She also quotes a definition of emic by Pike (1967) as behaviour from 'inside the system'. Emic therefore describes linguistic behaviour as it occurs from within a system. The system might give its own official account of what happens with regard to pupils' behaviour and the curriculum and this would provide an understanding of the system in how it appears from the outside. This is much the same as social categories of age, gender, class and occupation etc which provide a view of the individual as a 'theoretical being' on paper. However this 'finished product' is far from being an understanding of the individual or system from the inside with all the inner tensions, stresses and conflicts. The tension highlighted by ethnography is therefore the interface between the 'official and unofficial'



narratives of the system or institution. Rampton (2004) maintains furthermore that linguistic ethnography can explore the conflict and the dialectic between the individual's feelings about her/his existence and the ready-made life that he/she is required to lead. Through a close analysis of language, the ordinary, taken for granted common-sense of social life can be fore-grounded and assumptions can be questioned. These assumptions, which are taken for granted as universal within a particular discourse, may, in the light of analysis from another discursive perspective, turn out to be relative to a localized setting. This realization may be emancipatory for research participants although it must be said that, according to Hammersley (1994), one of the criticisms of ethnography is that it provides only one perspective of viewing events amongst others. It could be argued that, as an active participant in the social setting, the researcher's construction of events is no more or less important than that of any other participant. My own response to that particular criticism is firstly to acknowledge the truth of it and then to add that although the researcher's perspective may well be different, this in itself may be liberating. The realization that it is possible to make a different construction of hitherto common-sense assumptions can liberate participants from a constrained vision of the world.

For this to happen ethnographic naturalistic data collection has to connect with an analysis of wider discourse. Otherwise the other criticism of ethnography, that it is too close to surface detail to see the bigger picture of socio-ideological context, might also be a valid one.(Hammersley 1994) The problem with data which is meant to be naturalistic is that meanings might be interpreted at only a surface and literal level. According to Hammersley this criticism can be especially levelled at ethnography which is too readily

engaged with particulars at surface level that it fails to see underlying or overarching social and ideological realities. In other words it metaphorically sees the grains of wood but fails to see the trees. This would be the danger of a conversational analysis of observed interaction as opposed to discourse analysis which relates surface utterances to wider and more powerful discourses. Therefore a focus on indexicality is called for, connecting small scale interaction to the wider discourse, as mentioned in the literature review chapter. We often see that discourse is all the more powerful because it is invisible and not literally present in participants' conversation. Therefore links have to be made from surface conversation to larger discourse so that participants can themselves develop a critical awareness of how our language use is affected by more powerful socio-economic forces.

I believe that this research study is well suited to an ethnographic oriented approach, within a mixed methodology design that includes semi-structured interviews, since I am not working from a narrowly based hypothesis. Indeed the research is exploratory in terms of looking for connections between male subjectivities and their performance in MFL. The research position would then require more naturalistic qualitative data.

#### **4.4.2 Interviews**

In this section I outline my methods of data collection in the three case studies which in chronological order were year 11- 2005/2006, year 9- 2006/2007 and year 7 in 2007.

As well as ethnographic observation to collect qualitative data, there are also semi-structured interviews for the years 11, 9 and 7 case studies.

### **Year 11**

The data collection in this case study was undertaken through a mixed methodology of classroom observation and interviews. The observations however were limited because I was teaching this class French to G.C.S.E. at the same time as undertaking the research and I relied on making diary entries from memory after the lesson. My aim was to integrate my observation to the teaching of the lesson as much as possible so I could merge the teacher/ researcher roles rather than to allow role conflict.

For example, in MFL lessons it is current practice and has been for some time for pupils to undertake pairwork for speaking, role-play tasks using a tape-recorder. They operate the tape-recorder themselves to produce work in the target language. My other approach was to keep a research diary recording my observations of lessons in terms of pupil discourse and its interaction with official teacher generated discourse. The rationale of the field notes taken from observations and the transcribed dialogues in French was to focus on learning identities and behaviours. I was looking to see how these were related as seen through the activities of the class and how they related to gender. The tape recordings of target language and the observational notes in the diary entries allowed me to reflect on classroom behaviours.

I cross-referenced these observations with the 10 semi-structured interviews so that for example Alicia's or Zara's contribution in class could be seen against her feelings and

attitudes in the interview. It was for example the same with Ben or Dennis. I transcribed interview extracts which highlighted examples of learner identity or learner position and then my aim where possible was to see how this position might reflect or might be reflected in classroom learner behaviour. At times my focus was on foreign language verbal output and engagement with tasks but I also tried to see how this related to the non- foreign language discourse. I was later able to refine this technique of translating between official learning objectives and ordinary pupil discourses in the subsequent case studies where I placed far greater emphasis on ethnographic style observation. As I progressed with the case studies the concept of learner identity developed. The rationale for this concept was how individuals positioned their subjectivities in relation to classroom learning events and thereby to discuss how they defined themselves in the classroom situation.

The interviews were also very important and it was my aim to allow students their own voice. These could not be unstructured conversations around a theme because I felt that year 11 students and also those in other year groups needed some structure in terms of general questions in order to express themselves. In order to give more weight to students own voice some of the interviews such as Anna and Alice, Jasmine and Robert were undertaken as a pair. They requested this arrangement and I felt that it might make for more of a conversation as students responded to each other rather than just to me. In the year 11 Case study six students were interviewed in pairs, Robert and Jasmine as boy/girl pair, Ben and Luke as a boy pair and Anna and Alice as a girl pair. The other

four were interviewed individually. Each student/student pair was interviewed once. The aim of the interviews was to gather data regarding students' own motives for learning a foreign language, their own cultural orientation towards this activity. I also wanted to see how data from the interview correlated with data gathered from the observations.

### **Year 9 case study**

The year 9 case study focussed much more on ethnographic style classroom observations. There were 16 observations from mid-October 2006 to mid-April 2007 which worked out at around one per week if the holidays are subtracted from this period. I was able to make observations of classroom events whilst the lessons were being taught by someone else. This teacher, new to the department had the pseudonym of Lindsey for the purpose of the research study. I was thus able focus my attention for large parts of lessons exclusively on the participants who had volunteered for the research. I was also able to see how they constituted their own discourse in the classroom situation and I made notes on the interactions of class members which I present in the data analysis of chapter 7. The concept of learner identity is developed in this case study through student construction, within discourse, of classroom culture. The interviews are designed for students to express cultural attitudes and the observations are where students enact their culture. In the interviews cultural attitudes include expressions of feelings of identity such as national identity. In chapter 3 we have seen from Dornyei (2001) that learning a foreign language includes taking on behaviours of the foreign language culture and this

may involve feelings of national identity such as the statement often quoted by pupils ‘we don’t speak French because we’re English’. I undertook interviews of 14 students some of which again were in pairs as requested by the student. They told me they felt more confident with a friend who was also part of the case-study research. I taped all the interviews on cassette tape recorder and then transcribed them verbatim by hand in a large note book before typing them onto a word programme. The extracts I selected for presentation in the research were those which I felt illustrated student expression of learner identity.

### **Year 7 case study**

There were 10 year 7 students in this study, 5 boys and 5 girls. There were 10 interviews, this time one per student, and 10 lesson observations. The lesson was taught by a colleague whom I have chosen to refer to as Julia as pseudonym. I agreed with her that I would conduct the research over the summer term months right up to the end of the school year. The interview and observation schedule were to be during one hour long lesson per week. Half the lesson was taken up by observation and the other half by the interview. As with previous case studies I presented data from the interviews and observations which highlighted identity positions of learners.

Examples of full transcripts of the three case study interviews can be found in Appendix 3.

### **4.4.3 Data Analysis**

#### Categorizing Data

In this section I describe the data collection and analysis strategy for the study in terms of the criteria for data selection, rationale for inclusion, thematic framework for analysis and the type of data involved.

#### A priori data categories

The original research question provided an initial focus for the type of data gathered with regard to gender identity and MFL performance. These two areas of focus were elaborated and refined in the research literature leading to a priori theoretical categories to shape interview questions and observational areas of focus. The categories should be described as a priori, in that they are theoretical, shaping the interview questions and observational foci that generate the data. These a priori categories are to be distinguished from empirical themes emanating from the data. The a priori categories are integrative and instrumental motivations as they relate to gender, learner/cultural identities of social investment (Norton 2000), imagined future selves (Dornyei 2004), and discourse as a concept (Fairclough 1989, 1992. Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999 and Foucault 1972).

There was however an empirical, as opposed to an a priori conceptual, category that I selected for the interviews based on my own teaching experience regarding foreign language learning and national identity. I chose this focus because many students

question the need to learn a foreign language since, for them, this seems to go against a basic normalized concept of English being exclusively spoken as part of their own national identity. From my own experience as a teacher many students seem to feel that they are being asked to do something unnatural that ‘betrays’ their own sense of nationality. This focus therefore led to interview questions around their sense of nationality and whether this had an influence on the languages they should speak.

### Empirical data selection and analysis in interviews

The data that ensued from the initial categories contained themes that I chose to highlight for analysis because they contained qualitative descriptions of learner and cultural identities. I wanted to understand attitudes, opinions and feelings that might position participants with regard to MFL.

Therefore the data I selected relating to integrative motivation revealed, on empirical analysis, participants’ learner/cultural identities. This became a theme for analysis, where, for example, language was viewed as within culture and culture within language(c.f Alicia and Zara Year 11 and Georgina Year 9). Instrumental motivation generated empirical qualitative data showing a socio-economic learner/cultural identity as an analytical theme for MFL learning. This was where learning was external to the language itself such as jobs, exams and holidays (setting up a business in Spain cf Sam in year 9, employment and holidays cf Fred and Alex in year 9, Bill in year 11). I was conscious that both these motivations as a priori categories had been oppositional before the data analysis. However during the data analysis they merged as empirical themes.



Therefore I also selected interview extracts where these categories merged into new empirical frames for analysis in terms of learner/cultural identities, social investment and imagined future selves. This would show cultural/learner identities as multiple rather than binary.

I was therefore looking into the data for its quality, in other words the meanings for integrative, instrumental motivations and learner/cultural identities as expressed by the participants, in order to see the existence and, to some extent, merging of old oppositional categories and the emergence of new continuous ones

As well as the nature or quality of data, I looked for gender patterns. I also selected exceptions to patterns such as Robert in year 11, Joel in Year 9 and James in Year 7, in order to show that gender and learning identity cannot be reduced to a simple binary gender relationship.

A school based a priori category had been a numerical ability CAT score which should indicate a pattern where high CAT scores indicate higher MFL grades at GCSE and conversely low scores should indicate lower foundation grades according to the arbitrary high and low categories in the study. The emerging data in year 11 demonstrated that the pre-conceived a priori patterns had to be amended. I therefore selected data to highlight patterns that did not conform to CAT score predictions, resulting in learner identity replacing numerical ability in MFL study.

So although initial interview focus, and observational focus had been shaped by a priori oppositional categories the qualitative data themselves generated empirical themes for analysis that expanded and merged these original categories of focus.

Therefore as well as oppositional patterns, I was looking for exceptions to these patterns where binary categories merged to form a continuity. Thus in empirical analysis, cultural/ learner identities replaced the bounded categories of motivation, ability and, as we see from observations, gender which, as constructed in discourse, is seen as multiple rather than a binary identity.

#### Empirical data in observations

Prior to classroom observation and data analysis, the focus on gender had been as a binary male/female notion following a 'gender differences' discourse (Baxter 2003) as a result of the research question itself, the quantitative data analysis of chapter 5 and much, although not all of the research literature. I had never carried out observational research related to gender before but I had read research literature around the construction of identities within discourse. I was therefore prepared to focus on the enactment of gendered learning identity within discourse. Similarly to the interview data analysis, I selected data for patterns, opposites, exceptions and mergers.

The qualitative data I selected indeed revealed gender difference patterns much in line with research literature (Baxter 2003; Sukhnandan (2000) where boys tried to dominate social space, especially in the year 9 and year 7 case studies (cf Alex, Fred in year 9 and Jack and Dex in year 7) and girls tended to follow the official teacher led discourse.

However, I looked for contrast in the exceptions to this, and found girls who moved between teacher discourse and their own pupil discourse (Kayleigh and Francesca in year 7 and Natasha in year 9). There were male exceptions to the gender differences discourse and I chose to highlight these to show that learner/cultural identity may have gender oppositional themes but they cannot be reduced to these bounded categories.

#### Criteria for selection of data

My data selection for interviews and observations was thematically based rather than based on individual participants. I selected the patterns that I saw emerging from the data. Opposition is part of the pattern, and there was evidence to show male/female patterned opposition such as that between Georgina and Alex in Year 9, Bill and Zara in year 11 and Jack and Bella in year 7. The participants' contributions were selected to highlight this pattern and material that was not relevant to this criterion such as hobbies and pastimes was not used.

Contrast with the pattern was also a criterion that I selected in order to show that phenomena cannot be reduced to a pattern as a priori absolute. So I chose the contributions of Robert in year 11, Joel in Year 9, James in year 7, Francesca and Kayleigh in year 7 and Natasha in year 9 to show that gender identity is not an absolute in itself but a part of cultural/learner classroom identity construction.

Since gender was a focus for the study, I tried to achieve a male/female balance in research participation. This was not possible in the year 11 case studies where two female research participants dropped out but was achieved in the other two case studies.

For the observations of all 30 out of 30, I used the entire fieldnotes for each lesson observation to capture as much of the lesson as I could.

For the interviews I used extracts from all 34 participants from all the case studies. I put to one side sections of interviews that were not relevant to motivation and learner identity, or where there was repetition of opinion or attitude. Sometimes the interview extracts were only a few lines where the contribution simply supported ideas that had already been rehearsed extensively in other interviews.

The tables and list of data with respect to interviews and observations are as follows.

Table 6a INTERVIEWS

Year 11 Case Study Chapter and section	Interview Participants	Focus of Analysis
6.2	Bill Guy	Instrumental motivation external to MFL Instrumental motivation external to MFL
6.4	Alicia and Anna	Cultural /learner identity within MFL Social investment-future selves
6.7	Zara  Dennis Luke Ben	Cultural/learner identity within MFL. Social investment-future selves  Instrumental motivation external to MFL Instrumental motivation external to MFL Instrumental motivation external to MFL
6.10	Jasmine Robert	Cultural/learner identity within MFL Cultural/learner identity within MFL. Future Selves

Table 6b INTERVIEWS

Year 9 Case Study Chapter and section	Interview Participants	Focus for Analysis
7.2 & 7.4	Georgina	Cultural/learner identity, Social Investment
7.2	Lizzie	Social investment-future selves
7.2	Louisa	Cultural/learner identity within MFL
7.2	Lauren	Cultural/learner identity within MFL
7.2	Aimee	Cultural/learner identity within MFL
7.2	Shannen	Cultural/learner identity within MFL
7.2	Leah	Cultural/learner identity within MFL
7.3 and 7.4	Alex; Mat George & Adam	Instrumental motivation external to MFL Lifestyle/ holiday cultural interests
7.5	Sam	Lifestyle/holiday cultural interest Future selves; social investment
7.7	Joel Fred	Cultural/learner identity within MFL Instrumental motivation external to MFL

Table 6c INTERVIEWS

Year 7 Case study Chapter and section	Interview participants	Focus for Analysis
8.4	Bella	Cultural/learner identity. Instrumental reasons
8.5	James; Bella Sandy	Cultural/learner identity. Instrumental reasons Cultural/learner identity within MFL
8.7	Jack	Cultural learner identity within MFL
8.8	Kayleigh Francesca Jessica	Cultural/learner identity in MFL Cultural/learner identity in MFL Cultural/learner identity in MFL
8.9	Dex	Cultural /learner identity in MFL
8.10	Scott	Negative opinion/attitude toward French
8.12	Jamie Jessica	Cultural/learner identity Cultural learner identity

### List of Classroom Observations

#### Year 11

There were 4 lesson observations during January and February 2006. All 4 are included in the study. The key participants in the observations were Bill, Denis, Guy, Ben, Robert, Jasmine, Zara, Alicia and Anna

#### Year 9

There were 16 classroom observations from 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006 to 17<sup>th</sup> April 2007. There are all 16 included in study. The key participants in the observations were Georgina, Natasha, Alex, George, Adam, Joel and Fred

#### Year 7

There were 10 classroom observations from 6<sup>th</sup> June 2007 to 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007. There are 10 included in the study. The key participants in the observations were Bella, Kayleigh, Scott, Jack, Dex, James and Jamie

### **4.5 The ethics of research**

The reason why researcher subjectivity is an ethical issue is about the concern with rendering a justified and balanced picture of reality. If the conduct of the research is defective in a technical sense the outcome will be that false conclusions are published. It is vital that, even though the motives and focus for research may be subjective, the outcomes are balanced and justified. Hammersley (1994) identifies three methods to combat bias- firstly reliability in terms of a naturalistic style of research so that the data speaks for itself, without external interference. This means that the researcher has to remain as unobtrusive as possible so as not to interfere with the flow of data. My choice

of ethnographic observation as one of my research methods to collect naturalistic data tries to satisfy this particular criterion for reliability. This is because my presence in the classes was frequent and I was accepted as an established teacher. Therefore I do not think that the behaviour of the class was affected by my presence. I was the class teacher of the year 9 class even though it was temporarily being taught by a new teacher in the department and so it was seen as normal that I was observing lessons and groups of students. In the year 7 class I was a frequent visitor to the lesson on a weekly basis and I had also introduced myself as teacher in the school who was doing some research. Therefore the students in both lessons were used to my presence. In the year 11 class, I was their class teacher and the students here, as in the other classes in my opinion, behaved as they would normally.

Secondly respondent validation where data and results are referred back to research participants to verify that for them the data and findings represent a true picture of reality. This is a method known as a check for internal validity. If, in the end the data and conclusion make little or no sense to research participants, then the final picture of reality may in some way be biased in another direction. It could be that it represents more a reflection of the researchers mental state or ideology than a real life situation. I have shown relevant sections of the research to students in the year 11 class and invited them to see me for any discussion. The only student who got back to me was Robert who told me that he agreed with my interpretation of data. My intention on completion of the final

draft is to circulate relevant sections to the other students in the other years and to the teacher of the year class.

The third method to combat bias is a check for internal validity known as triangulation. This can be carried out in two ways. Firstly checking data obtained from one source against data obtained from a different source. This would be analagous to an investigation in a criminal case with regard to corroboration to see if a person's story matched the stories recounted by other independent witnesses. The second type of triangulation is by method of data collection. This is to see if different methods of data collection yield the same results. Hammersley's example is a combination of interview and observation to corroborate data and, as mentioned in the methods section this is the multi- method triangulation which I have adopted in the data analysis chapters. These are then the technico-ethical issues concerning the integrity of data and its collection and interpretation.

#### **4.5.1 Ethical Issues- Representativeness**

There are ethical issues surrounding selection of research participants in terms of representativeness in sampling so that the choice of the sample population is not weighted in favour of a particular outcome. There are also ethical requirements at the level of the individual participant in terms of equity, consent and confidentiality.



#### **4.5.2 Equity**

As far as equity is concerned, this involves the same genuine concern for the equal treatment and empathy towards all participants in the research study who after all do not have to participate. Displaying a friendly attitude towards some participants and antipathy towards others could have an effect on outcome. Participants may feel they have to please the researcher in their responses and try to anticipate what s/he would like them to say, thereby encouraging a friendlier attitude on the part of the researcher. This, in my opinion, is particularly acute where there are great power asymmetries between researcher and participant for example between an adult researcher and participants who are children. The issue of power asymmetry in interpreting data is addressed in the conclusion.

#### **4.5.3 Consent and Confidentiality**

Consent and confidentiality as ethical issues are closely intertwined because consent may not be granted by participants if confidentiality is not assured beforehand. Also there are levels of confidentiality and different types of consent. In terms of confidentiality, this means explaining that the participant's data will not be personalized but remain anonymous. References to personal data will only bear a fictitious name or for example a letter of the alphabet. Data will remain within the parameters of the research and this means giving an explanation as to the purpose of the research and why the participant's consent is sought. Therefore confidentiality as a notion comes before consent although

as an action, it is brought to bear after consent has been granted. It has to be the case that total confidentiality can never be assured if information comes to light showing a participant to be at risk in causing damage to himself/herself or to others. Such information would have to be referred to a competent authority. These issues of different levels of consent, confidentiality with its necessary caveat, how this is explained, and referral to competent authority are issues concerning the reflexivity of the researcher. For example, what is the level of consent to be for participation in research? Is it to be fully informed consent, assent, or failure to object. Fully informed consent gives the prospective participant general information about the purpose of research, their role in the research, their chance to participate, their right to withdraw at any time and all assurances of confidentiality with the necessary caveat. This type of consent is, in my opinion, most likely when asking participants to take part in tape-recorded interviews as opposed to filling in an anonymous survey questionnaire. In the case of tape-recorded interviews parental permission would have to be obtained for participants under 18 years of age with assurances that tapes would remain with the researcher and be erased after anonymous transcription due to the risk of voice recognition from the tape recording.

For the three case studies in this research I requested volunteer participation on the basis of informed consent first of all my the student verbally and then by the parent by asking for a parental signature on a consent form. A copy of this consent form can be found in the Appendix 4. In all the classes from which the case studies are drawn I asked the whole class for volunteers after spending part of the lesson talking about the research and its proposal. I spoke in very general terms saying that I was researching how students

approached foreign language learning and that one of the research strands was on gender. I therefore asked where possible for an equal number of male and female students. I achieved this in years 7 and 9 but unfortunately 2 girls dropped out in year 11. I assured students confidentiality, anonymity in the research reports in that their real names would be substituted by pseudonyms. I also said that the cassette tapes on which the interviews were to be recorded would be eventually erased once the research was finished. I reassured students that they could drop out of the research at any time without questions being asked and this is exactly what happened in the year 11 case study.

#### **4.5.4 Interpreting Events - reflexivity**

The research study follows an interpretivist paradigm searching for meaning in a meaning-making environment. However the researcher is also active in making meaning. The consequence of this concerns whether the researcher is searching for meaning or really constructing her/his own meaning from the data available. The checks for reliability, validity, representativeness and the reflexivity of the researcher to maximize equity and confidentiality are designed to ensure the integrity of the data collection. These measures are designed to offset the initial subjectivity of the researcher in her/his choice of topic and research methods leaning perhaps towards expected outcomes or hypotheses. Hammersley (1994) points out that the researcher is always subject to bias because s/he decides the focus of research and which elements to highlight. The flow of data however needs to be protected against the subjectivity of interpretation, which could for example contain an ideological slant on the part of the researcher. Here the reflexivity of the researcher would suggest that his/her ideological

interests or any other bias should be declared in advance of the findings section. The interpretation of data can then take into account any relevant partisan inclination. The next section makes an account of my own ideological position regarding my own learning and subsequent teaching of MFL

#### **4.5.5 Ideological position of researcher**

Walford (2001: p7) claims that ‘all research might be said to be researching yourself’. This is because the researcher has in many cases chosen the research topic, the research question or focus, the methodology and interpretive procedures. This seems to be a very subjective position but this is because the researcher is an ideological subject with his/her own motivations and identity, participating in social contexts and researching other participants in the same contexts where identities are also socio-cultural constructs. The researcher is a reflective social participant reflecting on and interpreting other participants’ ideological positions through his/her own ideology. As a male researcher investigating possible gender differences in ideology and motivation towards learning foreign languages, it is at this moment incumbent upon me to reveal my own motivations for learning the foreign languages that I teach and furthermore my motivations for undertaking this research.

My first foreign language is French which I hold to honours degree level and speak fluently having lived and worked in France. My second foreign language is Spanish which I speak less fluently and of which I would claim to have a working knowledge. I

have taught French to 'A' level and Spanish to AS level although I mainly teach Spanish to G.C.S.E. I hold a Spanish ministry of education diploma in the language and a teaching certificate in Spanish.

As a secondary school pupil, I was always interested in how words fitted together. I was interested in grammar, verb tenses and the 'otherness' of foreign words. I never went abroad before the 6<sup>th</sup> form (year 13) but when I randomly heard foreign languages on the television I would always listen intently and I vaguely knew I liked the sound of French and Spanish. I would sometimes tune in to French and Spanish radio to listen to mysterious sounds that seemed to me to be a barrier as well as a gateway to new insights. My cultural interest was based on the feeling that foreign people spoke in a different code, and consequently knew things that we English speakers did not know. Therefore learning the language was immersing in a world of difference, with different spellings, sounds, meanings, identities and consequently different perspectives on life. Analogous to this would be a desire to understand and be transported by works of music. My motivation towards proficiency and fluency in MFL was ultimately about cultural understanding through the mastery of a code that I wanted to be part of. It certainly had nothing to do with instrumental motivation per se, although coupled with a desire to be a teacher, there was certainly an element of social investment as outlined by Norton (2000). I am therefore aware of my own bias in motivational ideology for learning MFL and I wish in the interests of research validity to guard against this.

[ I have now done this ( by the time of this final draft in September 2010) through respondent validity in checking my interpretation of interview data by referring the interpretations back to the respondents for corroboration. I have been able to do this for the research participants who are featured in the case studies and have been able to corroborate these interpretations. Mischler (1996) points out that the interview is a collaborative discourse and a jointly produced reconstruction of reality. I have tried to conduct the interviews so that the participants are the expert informants with regard to their own motivation, so that they tell me their stories. I also use multi-method triangulation through the use of student interviews and observation of classroom discourse of students participating in this research.]

My motivation for my own foreign language learning was to embark on a journey of discovery and understanding through the languages I learnt. Towards the end of my career my motivation for research is again a journey to understand how personal and gendered identity is shaped as a socio-cultural phenomenon and how this relates to foreign language learning. The foreign language also has a perceived identity and part of the research is to investigate the ideological nature of this and how this might relate to the identity of the student.

There are then two levels of interest. The surface level is an interest in why one gender seems to perform in MFL at a higher level than another and because this question invokes issues of socio- cultural equity within education. However at a deeper level my

interest in this research concerns the formations of identity and ideological positions within individuals faced with this socio-cultural learning activity.

The research therefore links something relatively small at surface level with something relatively large at a deeper level which might well have ramifications for other areas on the curriculum.

#### **4.5.6 Position of the researcher with the research process**

The position of the researcher as an active presence in the process of the conduct of interviews, data selection and analysis can be seen as having an influence on the findings in the data. In an interview the type and sequencing of the questions will shape the type of response given. Even a particular look or tone of voice expressed by the researcher could be interpreted and responded to in a particular way. In an observational setting, participants might behave in a particular way as a response to the researcher's presence. Holliday (2002) points out that, researchers who engage in interpretivist research try to eliminate the influence of researcher presence in order to maximize data as naturalistic and thereby revealing 'objective' truth.

Holliday contrasts this approach with that of 'a progressive research paradigm' (2002;145) within which there is an acknowledgement that researcher influence on data cannot be avoided. Indeed both the researcher and the participant come to the research setting as active meaning makers with their own cultural baggage to inform interaction. The encounter between researcher and research participant takes place in a zone of

interaction that Holliday refers to as ‘a culture of dealing’ (2002; 148). Holliday likens the culture of dealing between researcher and participants to the relationship between the tourist and local people. Because both sets of individuals are capable of making meaning, the research participants respond to the researcher and vice versa in the same way that locals respond to tourists perhaps by trying to impress or benefit from the situation. Both parties may therefore become ‘stakeholders’ in the situation. There is a mutuality in the interaction and Talmy and Richards (2010) define the process and outcome of this mutuality as a co-construction of knowledge and meaning. Holliday argues that it is impossible for the researcher to extract naturalistic data from the social phenomena that existed prior to his/ her arrival on the scene of research. His/her mere presence changes the situation according to the interpretation of the research participant who then constructs and projects meaning thereby contributing to a new situation. The researcher responds to this and constructs his/her own meaning in a dialectical co-construction between both parties. Therefore the interview is not concerned with uncovering dormant passive data from a passive research participant but more of negotiating joint meanings. Talmy and Richards (2010) argue that researchers must understand the relationship between the nature of interview construction and the data it yields. Talmy (2010) furthermore argues that the conventional view of the interview that he terms the ‘research instrument’ (2010:27) is product oriented and solely concerned with the end result whereas the interview conceived as a social practice is also interested in the process within which the product has been constructed. In the social practice model then, there is no naturalistic data to be contaminated by the researcher because it is



acknowledged that the data outcome is the result of a researcher/participant co-construction within the interview process.

The implications of the interview as a co-construction for my own research must take into account the type of questions that I asked and the way they were sequenced in order to shape the responses. Talmy (2010) points out that focussing on the process of the interview as well as the product has significant implications for the analysis of data. It should then be clear that the themes that ‘emerged’ from my interview data would not have emerged if I had asked other types of questions. The meanings and knowledge in the study are therefore discursively constructed by talk relating to learner identity, national identity and motivation. On the other hand if my questions had been constructed, for example, within a pedagogical framework with regard to classroom activities and styles of learning, then the meanings and knowledge would have been discursively located within a classroom pedagogical framework. Knowledge is therefore constructed according to and within the type of discourse that one engages in. (Foucault 1972).

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The methods proposed here within the interpretive paradigm are meant to elicit qualitative data in semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation. Within an interpretive paradigm, the study contains mixed methods. Semi-structured interviews eliciting informant responses can be used to establish patterns and explore issues.

A parallel thrust of the research is the ethnographic classroom observations and in the analysis chapters we see how these combined methods relate to each other and contribute to internal validity

My view at the end of this chapter and, before the fieldwork data analysis, is that the aim of social science research in education should be a contribution towards the emancipation and development of all concerned by research. This should be the case because, in my opinion, the aim of education itself should be about the construction of knowledge and skill for the purpose of one's own freedom and development and that of others.

## CHAPTER 5 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS.

### **5.0 Introduction**

The research question of the study is as follows ‘Does the construction of identity subject positions by male pupils in secondary school hinder their performance in MFL by comparison with girls?’. This chapter seeks to establish a quantitative difference between the performance in MFL between male and female pupils at secondary school. It could be argued that in establishing such a quantitative difference in performance there is necessarily an objective measurement of the perceived difference which would not be the case if I were simply to state that, over my career and in my experience, I have noticed that girls seem to achieve more in MFL than boys. Of course my starting point is this more subjective perception of gender difference in MFL performance because in looking back over my teaching career this is something that has seemed to me to be an obvious problem and still appears to be a problem not only in MFL but now in many areas of the secondary curriculum. However I cannot base a research study on subjective perception without looking first to see whether or not this contains an objective quantitatively measurable truth and consequently constitutes a real research question to be answered rather than an imagined one purely from my own experience.

In order to demonstrate that there is a measurable performance difference based on male/female gender in my own school based localized setting I have analyzed, in this chapter, quantitative data with regard to G.C.S.E exam results for year 11 over a 7 year period showing differences in gender performance with respect to the higher A-C grades.

In Appendix 1 I have also included national statistics from Ofsted and the D.C.S.F showing gender difference in G.C.S.E results nationally. However whilst relevant in terms of the large scale MFL situation, these statistics do not form part of this study in that the data has been generated elsewhere in other localities and is therefore secondary data. This research therefore deals mainly with primary data for analysis from the research locality of Brackenmount school. Therefore in Appendix 1 can also be found the bar charts showing the G.C.S.E results by gender in MFL at Brackenmount school over the same 7 year period and are thus a graphic representation of the tables of results shown in this chapter.

### **5.1 Context of quantitative data within research study structure**

The philosophical research paradigm in terms of epistemology and ontology relating to this research is an interpretivist one rather than a positivist one. This engenders a search for meanings as qualitative data in chapters 6,7&8 involving conversational and discourse analysis. However within the interpretivist paradigm there is a need for quantitative data to ascertain that there is indeed a research question to be addressed. Therefore this chapter is intended to provide quantitative data with statistical analysis and thereby constitute objective evidence on which the interpretive research can be based. It has been widely acknowledged for some time that girls perform better than boys in MFL. However where is the evidence for this and to what extent does it represent a significant difference between male and female performance? The quantitative data addressing the research question of male/female difference in performance is therefore analyzed to assess statistical significance.

## **5.2 Statistical Data Sets and Analysis of G.C.S.E Results**

The quantitative data in this section is focused on the objective assessment of performance at the end of year 11 in terms of G.C.S.E results.

With regard to the statistical survey of student MFL grades at G.C.S.E, I have been able to access the total population of my school for year 11 over 7 years as follows:- 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.

## **5.3 Explanation of data types**

In the quantitative data of G.C.S.E statistics related to gender, the variables involved are gender (numbers of males:females) and G.C.S.E grades. Bryman and Cramer (1990) refer to these as comparison and criterion variables respectively or independent and dependant variables- the independent variable being gender and the dependant variable being the G.C.S.E grade. The data collected can be described as ordinal as the dependant variables are not numerical but rather G.C.S.E grades A-G plotted on a scale. According to Siegel and Castellan (1988), ordinal data are data placed on a ranking scale and exist in relation to each other in terms of greater than or worse than, much as in military ranks such as major in relation to captain or captain in relation to lieutenant. The data here does not necessarily relate to each other in exact proportions as numerical data would in terms of absolute numbers and so does not have the precision to be classified as interval data. This means that for example a grade B only exists as such in its relationship with a grade C and a Grade A. On its own grade B has no meaning. Neither does a grade B exist in exact mathematical ratio to the other grades so that the difference between any two grades is not mathematically exactly the same as between any two other grades.

There is much subjectivity in MFL marking in particular of productive language such as speaking and writing where the grading is qualitative and cross-referenced via number bands to grades A-G. The eventual grade should reflect a descriptor for example whether or not a piece of course work writing which is awarded a C grade conforms to the grade descriptor for a C grade. G.C.S.E grades therefore should be considered as non-parametric data because they only exist in relation to each other and do not relate externally to the outside population. On the other hand an exam result represented in percentages where for example 50% really does mean twice the quantity of 25% would be considered interval data and as absolute numbers would be defined as parametric data. It is important to be explicit as to the nature of the quantitative data because the types of testing for statistical significance are not the same for non-parametric data as for parametric data. The data collection here however is non-parametric ordinal data. The other type of data that relates to this research is nominal data which are headcounts in terms of the male:female ratio. In the survey the numbers of pupils whether male or female obtaining G.C.S.E grades are nominal or categorical data. However Edwards and Talbot (1994) classify this also as non-parametrical data.

I present the quantitative data and, in my commentary on it, discuss the statistical analysis required to demonstrate its significance. The local data are drawn from my own institution of Brackenmount School on the south coast of England. French and German are the main languages taught although some Spanish was taught as an optional business course ab initio in the 6<sup>th</sup> form and therefore results from Spanish do not form a part of this study before 2007. The results presented are from year 11 M.F.L students from

2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 in French and German, 2006 in French only as there were no German entries that year and 2007 in French, German and Spanish. The 2006 result is just from one French class.

#### **5.4 Presentation of Quantitative G.C.S.E data**

The data for 2001 can be seen presented in table 1 in the form of an Excel bar chart in Appendix 1. As can be seen below the girls' performance clearly outstrips that of the boys in the higher GCSE grades of ABC. The proportion of boys/girls in the numbers of entry for the examination was very similar although not exact. More boys than girls were entered in 2001, 92 boys:85 girls. Out of this 1 girl obtained an A grade and no boys. 4 girls obtained B grades as against 1 boy and 25 girls obtained C grades compared with 14 boys. The next grade down which is a foundation grade was fairly evenly divided with the boys: girls ratio being 22:21. There was a preponderance of boys in the lower foundation grades of EFG as follows- boy:girl = E-33:22, F-12:7 and G-9:5. The total higher tier grades A-C combined was 15:30 boy:girl ratio meaning that twice the number of girls to boys were obtaining the highest grades at G.C.S.E.

**Table 6:**

**2001 GCSE Results**

Grades	Boys	Girls
<b>A</b>	0	1
<b>B</b>	1	4
<b>C</b>	14	25
<b>D</b>	22	21
<b>E</b>	33	22
<b>F</b>	12	7
<b>G</b>	9	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>85</b>

From the Mann-Whitney and Chi-square statistical significance tests between the two columns of statistics relating to gender, the difference between them is significant and the null hypothesis can be rejected. The concept of null hypothesis is explained in the next section.

### **5.5 Statistical Significance Analysis and Rationale for Statistical Difference**

The concept of the null hypothesis suggests a starting point of an even split between two categories with all factors being equal save gender. Statistical analysis can calculate the degree to which a difference from the null hypothesis is significant in that it may or not be attributable to chance. If the degree of significant difference between the categories is



calculated as greater than a certain amount, conventionally set at 0.05 or 5%, then the result means that there is a greater than 5% level that the result occurred due to chance. A high figure of significant difference represents a high level of chance as being responsible for the difference. Therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

A case in point, in the 2002 results, is the male- female difference where out of 16 pupils in the CAT band 106-110 one girl obtained a GCSE A grade and one boy a B grade, one boy a C grade and 5 girls C grades, 5 boys D grades. The statistical analysis for significance using the Mann-Whitney test for mean grade rankings shows a result higher than .05 at .091 and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. (see Chart 2 in Appendix 1, also represented below in Table 7) This is because from such a small number of subjects in this category, the small differences in the results could have occurred by chance.

**Table 7:**

**2002 G.C.S.E. Results CAT band 106-110**

Grade	Boys	Girls
<b>A</b>	0	1
<b>B</b>	1	0
<b>C</b>	1	5
<b>D</b>	5	0

In the above data the null hypothesis cannot be rejected because the data set in this CAT band is too small.

The sample size needs therefore to be larger to see if this difference can be maintained over a larger scale. It could be the case that there is not much difference in male-female performance in student categories of high ability but this needs further investigation. If however the degree of difference between the categories is less than the conventionally agreed 0.05, then the low figure suggests a low incidence of chance by which the difference has occurred. Null hypothesis can therefore be rejected. Null hypothesis, to reiterate, assumes zero difference between categories with any difference up to the stated figure deemed to be an acceptable minimal level of chance as a criterion in favour of any of the categories. The issue here is what should the stated figure of significant difference be? Edwards and Talbot (1994) argue that the consensus amongst researchers is that a difference of 0.05 (5%) is considered the minimum acceptable level for significance in terms of the possibility of chance occurrence, above which null hypothesis cannot be rejected, meaning that above 0.05 the difference is such that it could be considered as attributable to chance. This does not mean that above this figure it is a matter of scientific proof that null hypothesis of necessity has to exist between categories. It means that according to the predetermined threshold figure, as a matter of convention, null hypothesis is accepted or rejected.

The next matter to be decided is the type of statistical test to be used to assess significant difference between male and female performance on the 2001 GCSE results. As already mentioned the data is non-parametric and the difference being assessed is between two independent groups. Siegel & Castellan (1988) and Edwards & Talbot (1994) all

recommend the use of the Mann-Whitney U test to compare sets of grades between independent groups. For the G.C.S.E grades in the A-C category of the 2001 results (see table 6), I have used SPSS data editor to calculate the significant difference between gender groups in their rank order of grades on the Mann-Whitney U test with a degree of significant difference of 0.004. This confirms that for the mean of all the ranks of grades, girls outrank boys in A-C grades in MFL in the 2001 results to a degree where the attribution to chance is much less than the threshold of 5%. The figure of 0.004 would be regarded as highly significant and therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected. Another non-parametrical test that can be used to assess significant difference between independent groups of people as nominal or categorical data is the Chi-square test. This tests the overall headcount between groups on the basis of null hypothesis being that the numbers of people from two groups falling into two separate categories are the same. This is testing the head count whereas the Mann-Whitney U test was testing the differences in ranks of grades. The significant difference between the groupings using the 2 way chi square test is .003 and therefore the null hypothesis can again be rejected in respect of the 2001 results.

Chart 2 in Appendix 1, and above in table 7, represents the pattern of male/female performance in the G.C.S.E results for 2002. This is almost a similar pattern in the relationship between boys and girls performance as 2001. However this time the difference in male/female performance in the higher tier grades of A-C is even more pronounced in favour of the girls. In 2002 the boy/girl entry ratio was 110 boys compared to 107 girls and yet in spite of this, only 15 boys obtained a grade in the A-C

range as against 40 girls. The immediate question that arises is whether or not the intake in the year group simply contains a much higher proportion of able girls in relation to boys, thereby accounting for the better results in the high tier grades. To reply to this question it is necessary to ensure that comparison between boys and girls performance takes place on even ground. Therefore cognitive ability needs to be factored into this relationship between boys and girls performance. In many schools cognitive ability is measured in CAT test scores administered and marked by NFER.

As mentioned in chapter 4 I have divided the CAT scores into bands to analyze the 2002 results which are as follows:- 70-80, 81-90, 91-100, 101-105, 106-110 and 111-117.

### **5.6 Statistical significance of difference using CAT scores**

As seen in chart 3 Appendix1 and table8 below, the girls out- perform the boys in the higher grades within each ability band. In the top band of CAT score 111-117, a B grade is achieved by a female pupil although this may not be significant as an isolated case. No male student achieved a B grade in this band. In the next band CAT score 106-110 an A grade is obtained by a girl, a B by a boy, 5 C grades by girls and only one C grade by a boy. However as already mentioned in view of the small number in this category the difference is not deemed to be significant with a Mann-Whitney U test at .091 showing a greater rate of chance than the agreed .05. Null hypothesis on this basis therefore, cannot be rejected. However if the top two bands of 111-117 and 106-110 are combined the statistical significance is such that null hypothesis can be rejected because the sample size goes from 16 in the latter band category to 22 by including the former. This is just enough to make the difference significant with .036 in the Mann-Whitney U test.

See Table 8 below.

**Table 8:**

**G.C.S.E Results 2002 obtained by 6 students from the 111-117 CAT band**

G.C.S.E grade	Boys	Girls
A	0	0
B	0	1

**Table 9:**

**G.C.S.E Results 2002 obtained by 16 students from the 106-110 CAT band**

G.C.S.E grade	Boys	Girls
A	0	1
B	1	0
C	1	5
Total A-C's	2	6
Other grades	13	

By combining the CAT bands of tables 8 &9 there is a large enough data set to produce a significant difference between the gender columns using the Mann-Whitney and Chi square tests and therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected

In the next band in the 2002 results (see Table 3ii in Appendix 1 and table 10 below) which includes the 105 threshold for C grades;101-105, three boys gain a C grade out of a male entry of 16 compared to 11 girls out of a female entry of 18. In percentage terms in this band this represents 18% of boys obtaining a C grade against 61% of girls. The

degree of difference in the 2 way chi square is .012 and the Mann-Whitney U test 1-tailed is .027. Here null hypothesis can be rejected.

In the band range 91-100 (see Table 3iii in Appendix 1 and table 11 below) where students, according to NFER, are not expected to obtain a C grade, 2 boys gain C grades out of a male entry of 23 compared to 12 girls out of an entry of 30 including one B grade. This represents 8.6% of boys in this band range obtaining a C+ , compared to 40% of girls. In the statistical analysis 2 way chi square shows a significance of .016 and Mann-Whitney U test .001. Therefore in this category the null hypothesis can also be rejected. All calculations were undertaken using the SPSS programme.

**Table 10:**

**G.C.S.E results 2002 obtained by students in CAT band 101-105**

	Boys	Girls
Number of students in C.A.T band 101-105	16	18
<b>G.C.S.E grade</b>		
A	0	0
B	0	0
C	3	11

**Table 11:**

**G.C.S.E results 2002 obtained by students in CAT band 91-100**

	Boys	Girls
Number of students in CAT band 91-100	23	18
<b>G.C.S.E grade</b>		
A	0	0
B	0	1
C	2	12

Based on statistical analysis for significant difference between the gender columns the null hypothesis can be rejected on both CAT band data sets. Mann –Whitney and Chi square tests were used on the SPSS. program.

Null hypothesis can be rejected on most tests and it can be clearly and unequivocally stated that at Brackenmount school girls by far outperform boys at 91-100, 101-105 and 106-117 ability bands in the higher A-C grades at GCSE.

**5.7 Statistical Presentation of Higher Grade A-C GCSE results in**

**2003/2004/2005/2006/2007**

The excel bar chart showing the 2003 G.C.S.E. results in Appendix 1 and table 12 below show that in the MFL subjects entry of French and German, out of a total candidate entry of 186, girls outperform boys in the higher grades. 3 girls gain a grade ‘B’ against 1 boy and whereas 16 boys gain a grade ‘C’, girls gaining this grade number 26. This means

that 9% of boys gain a higher G.C.S.E grade against 15.5% girls out of the total entry.

In this year however there was an imbalance in the entry figure between the genders with only 84 males being entered as against 102 females. Obviously with a greater candidate entry, girls are more likely to secure a higher G.C.S.E grade than boys. For this reason there could be no base line of null hypothesis between equal categories and so I have not applied a statistical difference test to assess statistical significance. This is also the same for 2004 and 2007 data where female entries to GCSE outweighed male entries and one would consequently expected a higher level of A-C grades from female students because of this imbalance. However for the 2005 results I have applied a significant difference test because the candidate entry numbers for this year were equitable in terms of gender.

The 2006 results were just from one class and therefore the sample size is not large enough for statistical tests of significant difference. Nevertheless in these years there are still more girls gaining a higher GCSE grade than boys, taken as percentage against their own gender. Thus out of the girls entry for 2003 there were 35% of girls with a higher grade compared with 20% of boys out of the male candidate entry figure.



**Table 12:**

**G.C.S.E results 2003**

Grade	Boys	Girls
	84	102
A	0	0
B	1	3
C	16	26

The 2004 G.C.S.E results in MFL ( French and German) are the most equitable in terms of the gender distribution of higher level A-C grades. Boys gained 17 higher grades and girls 23 out of a total entry of 177 candidates. However there were 95 female student entries as opposed to 82 for the boys. In terms of their own gender boys gained 20.7% of higher grades and girls gained 24%. This percentage gap is the smallest of all the G.C.S.E results in the study although it still shows girls marginally ahead of boys in the higher grades. There are still more than twice as many boys than girls occupying the lowest foundation grade of 'G' – 11 boys against 5 girls which in percentage terms in relation to own gender is 13% 'G' grades for boys against 5% for girls.

**Table 13:**

**G.C.S.E results 2004**

Grade	Boys (82 individuals)	Girls (95 individuals)
Number of student with A-C grades	17	23
Percentage of A-C grades within gender	20.70%	24.00%
Number of student with G grades	11	5
Percentage of G grades within gender	13.00%	5.00%

I have included percentages in the above table since these are the most equitable between boys and girls of all the G.C.S.E results in the study but this still shows a higher percentage of girls gain a higher grade G.C.S.E when measured against their own genders.

The 2005 G.C.S.E results in table 14 below return to a marked difference between girls and boys in terms of the higher grades. In a similar gender candidate entry of 104 boys and 103 girls, only 10 boys gain a higher A-C grades by comparison with 24 girls. As the total gender entry is virtually the same, this means that in terms of the whole entry in percentage terms, 9.6% of boys gain a higher grade by comparison with 23% of girls. Within this there are 2 girls who gain a 'B' grade by comparison with no boys. However at the other end of the scale, out of virtually the same gender candidate entry, 11 boys

(10.5%) obtain a bottom grade 'G' against 3 (3%) girls. 2 boys obtain a 'U'

((unclassified) whereas no girls fail the exam.

**Table 14:**

**G.C.S.E results 2005**

Grades	Boys	Girls
A	0	0
B	0	2
C	10	22
Total number of students	104	103

The difference, in table 14, between the girls and boys in terms of the higher grade of 'C' is statistically significant on a Chi square test using S.P.S.S. The significant difference for the 2005 'C' grade results between male and female students is measured at .003 which is far less than the .05 threshold of difference attributable to chance.

The 2006 G.C.S.E results in M.F.L only figure the French results for one class. MFL had become an optional subject for G.C.S.E nationally in K.S.4 and as there were staffing problems in the MFL department, lots of students had been given an opportunity to opt for a short N.V.Q. vocational related MFL course assessable at level one for just one period per week.

**Table 15:**

**G.C.S.E results 2006**

**A single class that formed the year 11 case study in chapter 6**

Grades	Boys	Girls
A	0	0
B	0	2
C	1	4
Total number of students	8	12

Therefore the results are based on an entry of 20 students for G.C.S.E and so the figures and the differentials are not large enough for statistical analysis by S.P.S.S. tests.

However the trend of better performance at higher grade levels by female students over male students continues albeit with reduced numbers.

As can be seen in the table above and in the bar chart in Appendix 1, 2 female students gain 'B' grades as against 0 for males students and 4 female students gain 'C' grades as against 1 male. There were 8 males in the entry for the class and so the higher grade represents 12.5% of the male entry. There were 12 females in the entry and here the higher grades for females represent 50% of the female entry. Even out of a small sample there is still a visibly significant out-performance by female students over males in the higher grades.

The excel bar chart in Appendix 1 and the table 16 below with the 2007 G.C.S.E. results show that in French, German and (for the first time ab initio over 2 years) Spanish out of

a total entry of 122 candidates, girls outperform boys by 1 grade B and 9 'C's (girls) to 3 'C's (boys). However of the 122 who were entered for the exam there were 66 girls and fewer boys at 56. Girls scored much higher than boys in the 'D' grade with 23 compared to 16 boys. In the higher grade band of A-C, the percentage of higher grades obtained by either gender was very low by comparison with 2001 and 2002 results. Nevertheless girls obtained 8.2% of the higher grades by comparison with boys at 2.4%.

**Table 16:**

**G.C.S.E results 2007**

Grades	Boys	Girls
A	0	0
B	0	1
C	3	9
Total number of students	56	66

The interesting feature of the 2007 results is how both boys and girls A-C results have both declined as a percentage of the total entry by comparison with the years 2001 -2003. The percentages of higher grades as against total candidate entry in these three years are as follows:- 2001= 24.8%; 2002= 25.3%; 2003= 19.3% whereas 2007 = 10.6 %. If only French and German are counted towards MFL in order to equate with the 2001-2003 results, the percentage of higher grades is still only 14.6% in the 2007 figures. Here girls

still dominate in the higher grades with a 10:3 girl:boy ratio but the total of higher grades is in decline

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The statistical findings of this chapter show that there is a difference relating to gender in favour of girls in the higher grades of GCSE. However there are boys who also attain the higher grades at G.C.S.E and consequently this fact leads to the possibility that the difference is not attributable to gender per se as axiomatic of the category but that this difference may also be contingent upon other features .

The premise on which this research study is predicated is that at secondary school, girls outperform boys in MFL. In this chapter, I demonstrate that there is a real research question to be addressed supported by quantitative evidence. However it should be emphasized that gender difference has occurred only at the edges of the statistical data mainly in the upper scores of the categories. This means that within the main body of data, there is no visible gender difference. This would not allow for any conclusion that there is a general gender difference in MFL performance. However there is statistically significant difference in the higher scores in the survey and this might relate to gender in some way, although this is a long way from saying that any such possible difference is an ‘a priori’ gender one or intrinsic to gender. Nevertheless the significant statistical difference in gender performance in the higher GCSE grades gives me some basis to

continue to study such difference in more focus in the interpretivist qualitative data analysis in the case studies of chapters 6, 7 & 8.

## CHAPTER 6 CASE STUDY ONE YEAR 11

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter takes up the theoretical position reached by the literature review, through which the qualitative data generated by the year 11 case study may be analyzed. I argue, in 6.1, that learning and teaching MFL is a socio-cultural activity embedded within discourse and that the meanings within discourse itself are ideological, constructed through relations of power. I also argue in 6.3, that many of these ideological meanings are shaped by socio-economics and that these meanings are readily understood by pupils in the classroom as reasons to learn a foreign language. I then go on to argue, in 6.9 and 6.10, that socio-economic ideology on its own as a reason for learning a foreign language does not facilitate a deeper understanding of language and culture within and around language. In 6.11, I present further theoretical evidence to support initial findings that some students are more disposed to the notion of a cultural journey where they display empathy with the idea of different cultures, whereas others in the classroom feel more disposed to staying within a more localized cultural discourse. I finally argue in 6.12 and the conclusion 6.13, on the basis of the qualitative data evidence presented in the chapter, for a more comprehensive cultural context for the teaching/learning of MFL where culture is not a finished product but an ongoing constructive process integrated into the students' learning identity.



The chapter is an analysis of qualitative data generated by semi-structured interviews and some observations. There are also further theoretical developments as the data refines a theoretical focus surrounding learner and cultural identity.

French is the language I chose for this case study because this was the language that I taught at the time of the research to G.C.S.E in year 11. I chose the year 11 class for the first case study because at the time this class related more immediately than other year groups to the research question in terms gender performance since they took their G.C.S.E exams at the end of that year. The chapter analyzes data from a year 11 case-study made up of 6 boys and 4 girls (2 girls dropped out and it was not possible to replace them). They are listed as follows:-

**Table 17: Year 11 Case Study Participants by Gender, C.A.T score and Actual G.C.S.E Grade**

Name	Gender	C.A.T score/ category (High, medium, low)	G.C.S.E (Foundation or Higher)
Anna	Female	99 (medium)	C (higher)
Alicia	Female	Unknown	C (higher)
Jasmine	Female	108 (medium)	C (higher)
Zara	Female	88 (low)	B (higher)
Robert	Male	106 (medium)	C (higher)
Bill	Male	111 (high)	E (foundation)
Dennis	Male	111 (high)	E (foundation)
Guy	Male	109 (medium)	E (foundation)
Ben	Male	109 (medium)	E (foundation)
Luke	Male	107 (medium)	F (foundation)

As I entered the field to collect data I had no pre-conceptions with regard to findings. I was however guided by theory which in the literature review highlighted connections between language, discourse and identity.

As already explained in the methodology of chapter 3, this case study was drawn from an interpretivist paradigm and used mixed methods of semi-structured interview and classroom observation. Quantitative data in chapter 4 relates to this case-study with regard to the 2006 GCSE results for the whole class and above, these G.C.S.E results are shown for the case-study participants in particular. This serves as data which can be triangulated against the qualitative data for each research participant featured in this case study chapter. At the beginning of the transcribed interview for each research participant I entered the G.C.S.E grade for the 2006 examination. However I did not know what these grades were at the time of the interviews since the results only appeared in the August after the students had left year 11.

### **6.1 Theoretical focus for case study**

The literature review of chapter 1 had narrated a journey of language in relation to personal identity, from structuralism where language is a labelling device to language within discourse where language is key in constituting the social world as an ideological construction. We now pick up again this model of discourse (cf. 2.1 & 2.7) as a theoretical focus for this case study. I will argue a case, supported by qualitative data analysis and followed by a progressively sharper theoretical focus as a consequence, that much of MFL education is shaped by socio-economics drawn from the wider social

orders of discourse (Fairclough 1989). The influence of socio-economics on educational practice was argued in the literature review of chapter 2 (cf 2.7). Yon (2000) points out that the line of argument which views culture as being shaped by socio-economics is essentially Marxist philosophy. This would argue that culture and our consciousness of the world are shaped by our economic relations with the world. Whilst I could not subscribe to the idea that our entire consciousness and identity as human beings were a function of our socio-economic relations with the world, I do think that the discourse theories that I adopt from the literature review (Fairclough 1998;1992) show how discourse translates economic realities from the grand scale to the scale of localized social interactions. However if this seems somewhat deterministic there is also a strong social constructivist theoretical standpoint in this thesis arguing in favour of meaning making by individuals and their social groups. Nevertheless, my own argument, from the data analysis, will be that much of the ideology surrounding MFL in particular, in its most basic and easily understood rationale, is rooted in socio-economics. I propose that for a more culturally developed view and practice of MFL there should be more than a socio-economic basis for its existence and that this should combine with a much wider cultural orientation and interest.

## **6.2 Interviews with Bill and Guy**

In the following interview extract we see a year 11 student's motivation for language learning. This is between the researcher and a year 11 male pupil at a large secondary school in South Kent that I have named Brackenmount Secondary School:

### Extract 1

B = Bill GCSE grade 'E'. CAT score 111

D.E = Dave Evans (Research interviewer)

<sup>1</sup>D.E- Just getting into this question of learning foreign languages, do you think  
<sup>2</sup>it's important to learn a foreign language?

<sup>3</sup>B- Yes because it could be incredibly useful in later life like if you go on a  
<sup>4</sup>holiday or anything like that.

<sup>5</sup>D.E- Right, do you think that's the main use?

<sup>6</sup>B- Or you might want to get a job.

<sup>7</sup>D.E Yeh, do you think foreign languages could be useful for anything else in  
<sup>8</sup>terms of getting to know how people live or is that not so important as getting a  
<sup>9</sup>job or is that more important?

<sup>10</sup>B-It might be to some people but I wouldn't say so to me

Although Bill recognizes the importance of language learning (lines 3 & 4), the wider cultural dimension of getting to know how others might live ( line10), does not interest him. His view is that language learning can provide him with a functional outcome (lines 3&4). His motivation involves getting a job and going on holiday but not identifying with the culture of the target language. This motivation has an external point of reference away from the linguistic activity itself in terms of the fulfilment of a functional and economic goal. This was discussed extensively in chapter 2 (cf 2.2.5) in reference to the early psychological motivational literature of Gardner (1985) and also in chapter 2 (cf 2.1.8) with regard to the shaping of educational discourse by socio-economics as proposed by Fairclough (1889). The economic motive, external to language learning itself is echoed in the following extract by Guy, who learns French but would have preferred to learn Spanish for lifestyle reasons.

## Extract 2

G= Guy , CAT 109 GCSE grade E

D.E = Dave Evans (research interviewer)

<sub>1</sub> DE- Guy is learning a foreign language an important thing to do?

<sub>2</sub> G- yeh

<sub>3</sub> DE- what's the main reason?

<sub>4</sub> G- it's money really isn't it? But I'd like to learn another foreign language, it's nice

<sub>5</sub> DE- what language?

<sub>6</sub> G- Spanish, coz when I'm older I'd like to retire to Spain and live in Spain.

<sub>7</sub> DE- do you go to Spain?

<sub>8</sub> G- we rent an apartment on the coast

<sub>9</sub> DE- Do you know a bit about the Spanish way of life or is it English people?

<sub>10</sub> G- It's mainly English people- it's a touristy place.

Whilst Guy's motives for learning Spanish are understandable in terms of how he might envisage his future plans, his motives are functional or instrumental in Gardner's (1985) terms because they are not intrinsic to the notion of language-culture but lie externally to it.

This chapter then argues that socio-economics are a powerful driving force behind education and the way the curriculum is delivered with a consequence that, in MFL learning ,the more readily accessible reasons for learning lie not within language-culture but outside of it.

The next section takes up again the power of socio-economic discourse in shaping the meaning of MFL in the classroom.

### **6.3 Learner and Cultural Identities**

My thesis then, with regard to MFL learning, is that it is an ideologically contested area of the curriculum and that learner identity in MFL learning draws upon ideology in socio-cultural and socio-economic discourse. Fairclough (1989) argues that social structures have the power to project ideology as normative behaviour. He refers to this as power behind the discourse and this is projected from a policy level discourse to a discourse type at the level of the institution so that the ideology permeates eventually into interactional discourse (cf diagram 1. 2.7). Fairclough defines ideology as meaning imbued with enough social power to project is as normative and ‘take it for granted’ common sense. The following policy statement is an example of this taken from the Nuffield Languages Inquiry (2000)

‘. . . . the time is right for the government to declare a clear commitment to setting a national policy agenda for languages, along with an enhanced international dimension in education, as a contribution to economic success and international understanding’  
(p 64)

This inquiry points to ‘an inadequate supply of language skills available to industry across a range of languages’(p23). Edwards (1994) points out that a feature of discourse is its ability to make meanings seem universal within the location of a discourse and since Fairclough (1989) argues that a socio-economic order of discourse is a very

powerful one, the economic meanings for MFL may be very pervasive. Economic discourse may have the power to permeate smaller discourses. This could well mean that, in the interactional discourse within the classroom, teachers would undertake foreign language teaching that relates largely to socio-economics. Socio-economic discourse, translated to classroom work, could involve writing CVs in the foreign language, job applications, enacting business interviews, arranging business accommodation and meetings. Thus the wider economic orders of discourse are powerful enough to find their expression in classroom activity.

Foreign languages studied in school now are, I argue, driven largely by socio-economic forces although in the past were also influenced by historical forces. In the past as Cohen (1996) outlines, the history behind the study of French as firstly a ‘gentlemen’s’ pursuit in the 1700’s and then almost uniquely a ‘lady’s’ pursuit as the Napoleonic wars posed a threat to Britain. French, at this point, was no longer deemed to be a manly activity and was, according to Cohen, feminized as Englishmen prepared for battle against the French.

However the wider socio-historical situation has now changed and the main languages now studied in U.K. schools are French, German and Spanish. Spanish is gradually overtaking German as the second language after French. This is because, in one discourse it is gradually being perceived as a world language with trading possibilities in South America and in another discourse it is seen as a fun language for holidays in Spain being one of the most visited countries by British holiday makers. There are now,

emerging demands for Mandarin Chinese and Portuguese to be introduced into schools amongst the predictions that Brazil and China are soon to be the locations for lucrative economic markets. By contrast, Scandinavian languages are not studied in schools nor is for example modern Greek because of limited economic/ political power by comparison with more influential E.U partners. I would argue, as in section 3.1, that Spanish features highly in schools whereas Italian is not very well represented because the Spanish language is supported by the socio-economics of South America as well as Spain itself.

Equally community languages are not promoted in mainstream British secondary schools as part of a national curriculum since languages such as Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali or Punjabi do not have the potential political/ economic currency of Mandarin Chinese or Arabic. Furthermore according to Blackledge and Creese (2010) promotion of minority languages would be seen by politicians to undermine a coherent national British identity due to the view that a unified national state is consolidated by a unified standard variety of language.

Brackenmount school, where this research takes place has a Nepalese community on its doorstep and the children of service families from the Gurkha Rifles regiment attend the school and yet there is no community language learning of Nepalese within the school as part of its curriculum or even as a lunchtime or after school activity. Blackledge (2005) argues that, despite the fact that there are now 300 languages spoken in multi-lingual Britain, with particular reference to London, a monolingual ideology still prevails with English viewed as the only national language of the country. Students, therefore, in



mainstream secondary schools are not encouraged to study any of these community languages and cultures and instead are traditionally directed, as already mentioned in this section and in 3.1, to the more economically and politically influential E.U languages. Students are then not accustomed to studying and identifying with different languages and cultures unless there is a government socio-economic rationale behind it and all too often, when faced with MFL, they only see the economic/employment motive for studying it. Blackledge and Creese (2010) refer to an ironical situation, highlighted by Cummins (2005) where fluent speakers of community foreign languages are being forced into becoming monolingual English speakers and yet at the same time are unsuccessfully forced into becoming fluent speakers of dominant European languages.

The power behind the discourse for MFL is thus largely socio-economic. Intercultural understanding, for which Kramsch (1993) defines ‘intercultural’ as the meeting of two cultures across political nation state based cultural/linguistic borders, is perhaps alone not a powerful enough discourse as yet to be the driving force behind language study with regard to curriculum provision. However, does this wider socio-economic discourse resonate with pupils in their motivation to learn a foreign language? Although pupils may not seem likely to want to learn a language to advance the U.K’s competitive position in the world economy, they are perhaps more likely to see the mastery of a foreign language as a way of giving themselves a competitive edge in the labour market. Teachers are likely to adopt this argument as a way of encouraging take up and performance with regard to MFL. Gardner (1985) labels this type of motivation as

instrumental in that it is an externally derived motivation that has the attainment of an external goal as its sole objective.

Nevertheless , both Gardner (1985) and Dornyei (2001) point out that learning a foreign language is a socio-cultural event and requires taking on target language identity or at least relating to aspects of the culture of the target language. As argued in the literature review, this seems to be an argument for a learner identity which has a more profound resonance than simply socio-economic motivation. This learner identity can then be seen as supporting an integrative motivation that Williams et al (2004) say occurs when the student wishes to identify with the culture of the speakers of the target language.

Integrative motivation is regarded as stronger because it is more enduring. This is because it does not subside when a specific external goal has been achieved. It is an internal motivation stemming from a curiosity about the way people live and the ideas they may have. It is regarded as a strong form of motivation because it can involve a desire to integrate into the cultural life of the target language community. It is therefore more of an identity than a motivation because it involves a personal cultural disposition towards difference. Integrative motivation in itself may not seem to be directly connected with socio-economics but this does not mean that it has no ideology. The ideology could be defined as a cultural or intercultural one in the wider orders of discourse. The extent to which this ideology penetrates into classroom interaction may be determined by the enthusiasm and cultural/linguistic expertise of the teacher. The connection may also be made through the pupils' family ideology and cultural links.

#### 6.4 Interview with Alicia and Anna

In this interview we see ‘intercultural’ and instrumental motivations for learning a foreign language. This would seem to me to correspond to Norton’s (2000) model of social investment to which I refer in this chapter.

A = Alicia GCSE mock: 61% = C+ grade.  
Actual GCSE grade = C.  
CAT –unknown, was not tested

AN = Anna GCSE mock: 67% = C+ grade.  
Actual GCSE grade = C.  
CAT- 994

#### Extract 3

- <sub>1</sub>D.E- D’you think that learning MFL is an important thing to do?  
<sub>2</sub>AN- Yeh I’d say it’s quite important  
<sub>3</sub>D.E- Any reason why it’s quite important?  
<sub>4</sub>AN- Well I think it’s good to learn about other countries  
<sub>5</sub>D.E.- Right  
<sub>6</sub>A- It’s needed  
<sub>7</sub>D.E.- Why is it needed?  
<sub>8</sub>A- because if you’re going abroad it’s like useful for your own uses as  
<sub>9</sub>well as if you’ve got a job you can always get higher pay and stuff  
<sub>10</sub>if you can speak another language

The extract above contains examples of integrative cultural motivation by Anna (line 4) and also instrumental motivation by Alicia (lines 9&10). In line 4 Anna refers to MFL as a way of learning about other countries which can be seen as a cultural orientation or disposition towards a foreign language whereas Alicia in lines 9&10 refers to a foreign language as giving access to higher pay. The economic goal suggested by Alicia could be seen as instrumental since it is a goal that lies outside of the linguistic-cultural activity of language learning. However in the following extract Alicia also expresses her cultural views on learning a foreign language.

#### Extract 4

- 1 D.E.- So you say that if you're interested in the way people live it's gonna  
2 encourage you to become more fluent and more ....if you've got sympathy  
3 with the way they live?  
4 A - The way they live, the way they speak, how they construct all their  
5 sentences differently, it's more interesting.  
6 D.E.- So it's all part of the culture?  
7 A-Yeh  
8 D.E.- Right. Would it still be possible to be fluent in the language d'you  
9 think and not want to know about the culture?  
10 A-You probably could be fluent in it but I don't think . . . there would be  
11 things you have to be passionate about it to really sort of show how much  
12 you like it.  
13 AN- you've got to go to that place as well so you can actually.....  
14 A- You have to understand and learn their culture. When you go on  
15 holiday, perhaps to France, it makes you think, 'I really enjoy speaking this.  
16 I like the way they live' and how they're more friendly and stuff.

Alicia understands that language is bound up with culture which seems to be defined by her as a way of living and being, so that the way in which things are said in sentence construction and pronunciation is all part a particular cultural setting. (lines 4&5;lines 14-16). She expresses a cultural commitment towards a language in order to speak it fluently. Alicia has a very good French accent in my opinion as her teacher and seems to strive for fluency. She got a C grade at GCSE. Although she realizes that a qualification in a foreign language is very useful for employment, her motivation is also integrative in wishing not only to know about France but also to sound French when she speaks the language. We see in Alicia's contribution a combination of the earlier psychological models of instrumental and integrative motivations into a learner identity which resembles Norton's (2000) social investment model of language learning. This means that the socio-cultural interest in learning contains within it a potential for economic-

professional success. Thus the cultural and economic are not mutually exclusive and can relate to each other in a combination. We can also see in this extract the two definitions of culture mentioned in section 3.5. Alicia acknowledges a cultural product defined as ways of living and she also wishes to be part of a cultural process in the journey towards that perceived product. It can be argued here that Alicia's cultural identity is a relationship between her perception of cultural product as an objective state and her subjective cultural process of discovery. This corresponds to my definition of cultural identity in 3.5 where culture as subjective process is in dialectical relationship to culture as perceived objective reality to produce a third way as argued by Kramsch (1998). The third way is a product of this relationship which is Alice's own understanding of the target language culture and the possibilities that it might hold for her in the future.

It would be a mistake to think that instrumental and integrative motivations preclude each other. They may co-exist within the learner. As we saw in the literature review, Norton (2000) has proposed a social investment model for foreign language learning which combines these two motivations. In this model the learner invests his/her identity by taking on aspects of target language identity. However, he/she does this to gain a cultural/professional return later on. This increased status may also involve a socio-economic motivation, for example a professional salary in a foreign language based profession. There is therefore in this model a notion of return in the form of an increase of one's own social and cultural capital that does not exist in the purely integrative model. Norton's social investment model would draw upon a socio-economic discourse and also a wider cultural discourse.

## **6.5 Classroom observations**

This section is taken from notes I have taken during and after lessons providing the contextual background and ethos of the class. In terms of MFL ability, the class is wide ranging.

There are a group of girls including those interviewed in the study who sit at or near the front. Alicia, Anna, Zara and Mary sit on the front table. The following observation is taken from my research diary. This extract comes from the early stage of a lesson and shows the different levels of engagement with the foreign language at the outset. I have supplied French into English translations in brackets. We should note the readiness of Zara and Alicia to use French independently and to initiate dialogue with me in the foreign language. It should be noted that there are two completely separate levels of engagement with the lesson where two groups of students are situated at opposite ends of a continuum. At one end of the continuum the level of engagement is with the foreign language and demonstrates a degree of independent fluency from the girls at the front of the class. By contrast at the other end of the continuum the level of engagement is a negative behavioural one, where mainly a group of boys become disengaged from the lesson resulting in bad behaviour. These extremes of the continuum have become two contrasting camps with some individuals in between such as Robert, Bill and Jasmine on the second row, who work but who also engage in their own private conversation. At the

end of the observation I comment about the lack of a seating plan with the result that the class is not an integrated unit. There are therefore two mainly opposing discourses in the classroom dividing along gender lines. The girls at the front engage with the official lesson discourse whereas the boys along the side have taken refuge in their own private discourse. This division however does have some gender overlap as Robert and Bill sit behind the girls whereas Jessica (not in the case study) sits at the side with the disaffected boys

### **Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2006**

*'As we come into the classroom Zara and Alicia often greet me in French by saying, 'Bonjour Mr Evans, tu vas bien, j'espere ? (Good morning Mr Evans, I hope you're well?)*

*They mix the formal and informal register in the sentence but they say it so fluently and with such a good accent that I overlook the mistake. I reply to them and ask them what they have done that morning. As this is a Wednesday just after break they tell me in French the subjects they have done and sometimes complain about how boring it was or how bad the teacher was. I reply by saying, 'Mais monsieur X est tres gentil et tres intelligent' (But Mr X is very nice and very nice and very intelligent) to which they reply 'oh non il est grincheux et pas sympa (oh no he is grumpy and not friendly). I feel that professionally I have to stick up for the teacher or else they might think I am colluding with them. Because this sort of exchange takes place in French, it has an air of playfulness about it as if we are re-defining and appropriating the world in a different language, however superficial that may be. The rest of the students settle into their places but I don't extend this initial exchange to them because I know that my interaction has now got to be formalized within the terms of the lesson. The group of girls at the front are the only ones to initiate conversation in French as they are able to use the language independently. The other students need to be questioned with support from the lesson context ie objectives, review of preceding lesson material. Many of the boys sit down the side including Ben and Dennis and also Luke, Guy, Ben, Kyle and also a girl called Jessica ( Kyle and Jessica are not in the case study). As the lesson moves on the boys seated down the side lose concentration and begin to talk amongst themselves. The girls at the front along with two of the boys, Bill and Robert remain attentive. I set written work to use the past tense to describe their day so far. The girls Zara, Alicia, Mary*

*(not in the case study because Mary didn't want to be interviewed) and the two boys talk amongst themselves as they work. However the boys down the side along with Jessica, a female student, begin to listen to music on their headphones. Also mobile phones come out and as I remonstrate with them I begin to regret not sticking to the schools seating plan.'*

### **Diary Entry: Classroom Background Notes**

*'There is a school policy for seating that is an adjacent boy-girl arrangement. I stick to this for my key stage 3 classes but I feel that this would be tantamount to treating my year 11 students like children. I need to encourage them to take some responsibility for themselves in terms of learning and behaviour. Also I don't want to antagonize them for something so trivial as a seating arrangement. I therefore break with school policy on this particular issue. I also think that education is a social activity and one can learn better in a more relaxed atmosphere sitting next to a friend in a MFL lesson where there is a need to work in pairs in the foreign language. The rationale behind the adjacent boy-girl seating arrangement is a pragmatic one as it is believed that the girl in the pair will provide a role model for the boy's learning behaviour. However the girls do not want their learning to be jeopardized by the boys and one could argue that this policy, whilst aiming at a practical solution to boys' misbehaviour, is simply exploitatively using the girls. The problem is that many teachers do not want to think philosophically because they need to survive in terms of classroom behaviour and exam results. If it works for them, then it is good. I can see the point in the strategy because the boys in this class who are sitting down at the side of the classroom display low level misbehaviour by talking while I am talking and by not sticking to the task when they have to work in pairs. When I approach they go back to the task but as I move away they return to off-task chatter. The girls at the front are always on task, even though they often, especially Friday period 1, intersperse their French speaking by referring to the forthcoming weekend. I capitalize on this by getting them to speak and write in French about their week-end plans, using the future tense. On the second row there is a mixed gender group of Robert, Bill and Jasmine who are interviewed in the study and Bridget who is not interviewed. They also participate in the spoken French and mostly remain on task. Jasmine is keen to do well at G.C.S.E and is always willing to stay behind at break or lunch to go through the work. At the back of the class are two serious girls who work hard but always keep quiet, Suzanne and Helen. They do not participate in class oral work but complete written work conscientiously. Also interspersed along the back row are some isolated girls who find the subject difficult and never take part in the lesson. I often catch them doodling or reading something else but they are quiet and do not disrupt the lesson. I try to get them involved by seating them next to more actively involved students but they always*



*return to the back as soon as they are able. For the observation tape recordings, students worked in pairs as they normally do on spoken work and taped themselves. They play back the tape to hear how they sound in French and I can make suggestions on how they can improve on grammar in the spoken language and pronunciation. They eventually keep their tapes to help with revision for the GCSE oral examination but in the interim they store them at school in their class folders. I sometimes listen to the tapes to assess their spoken work and these are the tapes I have used in the research study.' (end of diary entry)*

The physical arrangement of students in the class reveals a gender difference in that most of the boys congregate together and form their own in-class culture down the side of the room whereas most of the girls sit at the front and although they talk amongst themselves about the forthcoming week-end they still connect with the official lesson discourse. The interesting point is that not all the boys and not all the girls sit together. As already mentioned there is one girl who sits with the boys down the side of the room who behaves much in the same way as the boys and there are two boys who sit with the girls at the front with similar behaviour characteristics of alternating between their own discourse and the official discourse of the lesson. Therefore the divide is not a purely gender one in terms of binary male-female categories and perhaps more of an issue of learner and cultural identity across the genders which I will develop in this and other chapters.

### **Diary Entry: 27-01-06**

The following extract is from a Friday lesson on the 27<sup>th</sup> January. Written coursework for the G.C.S.E should be all completed by the half-term break in mid-February. This is our internal dead-line set early because we know that it is still going to take some weeks after the half-term before everything is in. I have planned this to be a coursework catch-up session where students work individually to complete items of coursework they did not finish at the time it was set or simply did not do. They have a guide and worksheets for a variety of topics. In the extract we see the on-task engagement of some students even though they are listening to some music whereas we see another group who now seem to have retreated into their own discourse.

*'I set the work and then go around to see the students individually or in small groups/pairs if more than one is working on the same coursework. A group of girls, Alicia, Anna, Zara and Mary ( not in the case study) sits on the front row. They are talking and listening to some music but this is quiet and I can see that they know what they are doing. On the second row, Bill and Robert are sitting with Jasmine and Bridget (not in the case-study). Again there is some off-task conversation but I can see that their intention is to do the work.*

*My worry is for the group of boys down the side – there is one girl, Jessica (not in the case study). The boys are Kyle (also not in the case study), Ben, Guy, Luke and Dennis. They have the worksheets and unfinished coursework in front of them but they are completely off-task and talking loudly amongst themselves. Several of them are wearing outdoor coats and initially refuse to take them off. I remonstrate and eventually everyone cooperates apart from Guy who maintains that he is cold. I have to disagree and I refuse to back down and so send him out of the class until he can cooperate. He does eventually return to take his coat off because 'the room is now warm'.*

*The class has now divided into two groups. At the front those who are able to dip in and out of the official discourse, they mix their own talk with the French task. The students on the first two rows talk about which French word or tense to use and pass the dictionary around –but at the*

*same time they are looking forward to the weekend. I am curious to overhear their conversations about what they are planning.*

*The other group at the side of the classroom however are involved in their own life-world and only pretend to work as I approach. However I monitor the group closely for behaviour because from time to time I spot crumpled balls of paper being thrown between them'*

*This class causes me some anxiety because I can see the two groups developing and consolidating. I feel guilty about this because I have allowed this division by not adhering to the original seating plan. The class has therefore more or less divided on gender lines apart from two boys who sit with the girls on the first two rows and one girl who sits with the boys down the sides. On the plus side I have a very good sub-group who want to do the work and get good grades. If I were to re-impose the original seating plan these committed students would no longer support each other's learning. The down side of the current situation is that with the other sub-group, there is a culture of disaffection and they are only working 'procedurally' whenever I approach. (end of diary entry)*

Within the class two distinct discourses are continuing to develop and these have an interactive relationship with official teacher/lesson objectives discourse. The predominantly male student group at the side of the room are becoming disconnected from the official lesson discourse and that changes my relationship to this group to one of behaviour manager. The other mixed gender group of mainly girls alternates between the discourse of the lesson and also their own discourse. Their learner identity is much more closely positioned to the official lesson discourse than that of the predominantly male group and my relationship to them is more in keeping with teaching/learning than with behaviour management. In both of these male dominated or female dominated mixed groups learner identity is not an 'a priori' gender identity but rather it is gender associated, since the group which has a learner identity more closely affiliated to the official classroom discourse is a predominantly although not exclusively a female group. The male members of the group behave in much the same way as the female members

who alternate between the lesson objectives and their own discourse. In doing this they interact with the female students and are an integrated part of the group. The group that is further away from the lesson objectives is a predominantly but not exclusively male group. This does suggest a gender association with learner identity but because of the mixed gender grouping this association should perhaps not be seen as inherently necessary to gender identity.

Two of the female members of the mixed gender group are Zara and Alicia and in the diary entry below I focus upon their learner identity in a class speaking activity. I have chosen to include this extract from my diary because it shows learner identity very closely positioned to official classroom discourse.

## **6.6 Observation of speaking activity**

The following is an extract from a tape recorded class speaking activity observation where Zara and Alicia had been asked to create an interview in French on leisure and holiday activities using past, present and future tenses. Candidates can only gain access to the higher A-C grades at GCSE through the accurate use of these three main tenses. English translations are in brackets. In this extract we can see an engagement with the foreign language from Zara and Alicia who had featured prominently in the previous observations seated at the front of the class. The English translation is included in brackets.

## Extract 5

Zara – Z  
Alicia- A.

<sup>1</sup>Z- Qu'est-ce que tu as fait le week-end dernier?  
(What did you do last week-end?)

<sup>2</sup>A- Je suis alle a la piscine et j'ai fait du velo. C'était super  
(I went to the swimming pool and I rode my bike. It was great.)

<sup>3</sup>Z- Comment s'appelle le dernier film que tu as vu?  
(What was the last film you saw called?)

<sup>4</sup>A- C'était Think Tank  
( It was Think Tank)

<sup>5</sup>Z- Parle moi de ce film  
( Tell me about the film)

<sup>6</sup>A- Il s'agit de comédie et c'était très intéressant.  
( It's a comedy film and it's very interesting)

<sup>7</sup>Z- Qu'est –ce que tu vas faire le week-end prochain?  
(What are you doing next week-end?)

<sup>8</sup>A- Je vais regarder la télévision et je vais jouer sur l'ordinateur.  
( I am going to watch television and play on my computer.)

<sup>9</sup>Z- Ou vas –tu en vacances cette année?  
( Where are you going on holidays this year?)

<sup>10</sup>A- Je vais aller en Floride  
( I'm going to Florida)

<sup>11</sup>Z- et tu vas voyager seule?  
( And are you travelling alone?)

<sup>12</sup>A- Non

<sup>13</sup>Z- et tu vas rester combien de temps?  
( And how long are you staying?)

<sup>14</sup>A- Je vais rester deux semaines  
( I'm staying two weeks.)

<sup>15</sup>Z- et qu'est- ce que tu fais en vacances d'habitude?  
( And what do you do usually on holidays?)

<sup>16</sup>A-Normalement je joue au tennis ou au volley  
(Usually I play tennis or volleyball)

Although this is a routine dialogue about holidays and leisure, it is unscripted. Zara's brief was to ask questions in the past, present and future on leisure and holiday activities. Zara is a good GCSE candidate who eventually gained a 'B' grade and her interview about languages and motivation will follow on in the next extract. From this simple brief she is able to construct questions using all the main tenses in a good French accent (ex.lines 1,3&7). In fact her brief is the hardest because she is using a good knowledge and skill in French to set up the dialogue whereas Alicia is simply responding. However to focus on Alicia for the time being, she uses all her verb tenses correctly and is able to recognize which verb tense to use from the one used in the question (ex. Lines 2,3&6). In the opinion of the researcher she seems to speak with a feel for the language pronouncing the 'r' sounds in her throat and intoning the sentences in a French style. There is a construction of an idiomatic nature in, 'il s'agit de' = it's about. She also uses 'normalement' (line 16) as a replacement for 'd'habitude'(line15)-meaning 'usually', in the last exchange of the conversation. This shows that she has sufficient language knowledge to choose between synonyms. She obviously knows what 'd'habitude' means because she immediately replaces it in answer to the question in the very next word of her reply. I believe this extract shows an understanding of the idiom in the language in what is at GCSE level an exchange of everyday language.

In the following extract Zara expresses her views on motivation for foreign language learning

### **Extract 6: Interview with Zara**

Z= Zara  
year 11 female student.  
GCSE final grade 'B'  
Verbal CAT - 99

D.E- Researcher

<sup>1</sup>DE- O.K is it important to like a country and a people in order to speak a  
<sup>2</sup>language fluently?

<sup>3</sup>Z- yeh because it gives you more determination and encourages you  
<sup>4</sup>more to learn that language whereas if you don't like the country and  
<sup>5</sup>you don't like the language then -----(long pause)

<sup>6</sup>DE- or the people?

<sup>7</sup>Z- because when I tried learning German because I don't like the  
<sup>8</sup>German accent and the German language then it was difficult for me to  
<sup>9</sup>learn it.

<sup>10</sup>DE- Do you think it's important to like the people?

<sup>11</sup>Z- um yes and no, it depends really because all people are like unique-  
<sup>12</sup>it's not just the French people themselves. Some of them yeh but I think  
<sup>13</sup>a French person can be just as English as we are. I mean we could  
<sup>14</sup>like a French person as much as we like an English person. It's just  
<sup>15</sup>being prejudiced otherwise.

<sup>16</sup>D.E- yeh. D'you think there are more similarities between English and  
<sup>17</sup>French people than there are differences?

<sup>18</sup>Z- I could say there are more differences with fashion, food and  
<sup>19</sup>everything yeh

Zara argues that, to learn a language and use it fluently, there has to be a positive regard for the target language country and language- lines 1-5. This may suggest an alignment in MFL learning for Zara between learner and cultural identity so that in order to orientate one's learner identity to language learning one need to be culturally well disposed towards the activity.

She compares this to her experience of learning German which was difficult for her because she did not like the sound of the language –( lines7&8). Zara does not subscribe to stereotypical images of national identities despite the existence of these in the popular imagination. Her view is that everyone is unique as an individual –(lines 11-15). This may suggest that her cultural orientation towards MFL is perhaps diverse acknowledging difference and diversity between people rather than grouping them all as the ‘Target Language Community’. However she recognizes cultural differences on a larger scale in terms of fashion and food (line 16).

At another point in the following extract from the same interview (lines 22 -23) Zara expresses an intercultural interest in language learning, that the foreign languages provides an insight into how other people live their lives

- 22DE- Do you think it's important to understand the way other people  
21live in different countries?  
22Z- yeh its different cultures and knowing how other people live apart  
23from British people and ourselves, so yeh it's good.  
24DE- why is it good d'you think?  
25Z- Again with the language and everything, learning a different  
26language, you get to meet new people and know how other people live  
27 their lives and what cultures people have.  
28DE- ok, fine. Do you think- so would you say you are interested in the  
29life and culture of other countries?  
30Z- yeh, definitely because it's interesting to know how other people live  
31apart from yourself.

In both extracts Zara seems to be expressing both an affective/aesthetic empathy with the sounds of the language itself and at the same time a desire to find out about the culture of



the target country. In lines 22&23 she expresses a desire to go beyond her own cultural experiences from her own location as a British national.

If we look at the accuracy with which she uses French in her interview questions in extract 5 it might be reasonable to make a connection between language use on the one hand and cultural/linguistic empathy/aesthetic appreciation on the other. Examples of this linguistic expertise are the combination of verb tenses within question forms such as :- Qu'est-ce que tu as fait? What did you do?

Qu'est-ce que tu vas faire? What are you going to do?

Qu'est-ce que tu fais d'habitude? What do you normally do?

Other question forms are handled with accuracy such as 'Où vas-tu en vacances cette année?' where are you going on holiday this year? This shows a knowledge and skill in the inversion of 'tu' and 'vas' to form the question. Further evidence of grammatical knowledge is her use of 'que' as a relative pronoun as in 'le dernier film que tu as vu' the last film (that) you saw. Of course in English the relative does not need to be used and it often takes a student with a higher level grammatical expertise to realize that relatives always have to be used in French. There is also the evidence of the more colloquial way of asking a question by making a statement and inflecting the voice at the end of the statement. This is a typically French way of questioning as in the following questions by Zara :- et tu vas voyager seule? And you are travelling alone? And 'et tu vas rester combien de temps?' and how long are you going to stay ( but literally 'and you are going to stay how long?') Finally she displays an ability to use a command in the 'tu' form of the verb in the following: 'Parle-moi de ce film' Tell me about the film. Her French accent throughout is excellent in my opinion as her teacher.

The argument I make here is that there is a connection between Zara's cultural identity as witnessed in the interview and her learner identity as seen in her engagement with and use of the foreign language. This connection is then my interpretation of the data. It seems more reasonable to propose this connection between her learner identity and her cultural interest in the language and the way people live rather than to argue that the proposed associated identities are entirely unrelated.

### **6.7 Interview with Dennis**

We should compare the interviews and observations above with the views of Dennis on MFL motivation. Dennis is one of the group of predominantly male students who sit on the side of the classroom who featured in earlier research diary entry of Friday 27-01-06. Dennis does not seem to express a wish to know language and culture from the inside. At the same time however he has respect for other people's ways of life

#### **Extract 7**

Dennis = D  
Year 11 Male Student.  
CAT 111  
Final GCSE grade E

Dave Evans – DE. Researcher

<sub>1</sub>DE: D'you think learning a foreign language is important?

<sub>2</sub>D: Yeh.

<sub>3</sub>DE: Any particular reason for that?  
<sub>4</sub>D: Cos of people who go on holidays abroad where they speak different  
<sub>5</sub>languages it's easier like if there's an accident you can speak to people –  
<sub>6</sub>something you know.  
<sub>7</sub>DE: Would you not think it would be better if the whole world spoke  
<sub>8</sub>English?  
<sub>9</sub>D: It would be better yeh it would be easier to speak to people but it  
<sub>10</sub>would obviously get rid of some people's traditions and that.  
<sub>11</sub>DE: OK so what d'you think is the main reason for wanting to speak a  
<sub>12</sub>foreign language?  
<sub>13</sub>D: For being able to go abroad and not having to worry about not  
<sub>14</sub>speaking the language.  
<sub>15</sub>DE: OK d'you think it's important to find out how people live at all?  
<sub>16</sub>D: Yeh cos you might insult them if you don't do things they do.  
<sub>17</sub>DE: Yeh does that fascinate you at all, does it interest you?  
<sub>18</sub>Understanding how people live? Do you think it's important?  
<sub>19</sub>D: Well it's good to know that you're doing the right thing its not against  
<sub>20</sub>whatever their religion you're not going to say something that isn't like  
<sub>21</sub>proper.

Dennis's responses are interesting in that they show a respect and a sensitivity for other cultural traditions in lines 8-10, 16, 19-21. He thinks knowledge of other cultures is important not so much for an intrinsic appreciation of different ways of life but so we do not unwittingly offend people abroad by saying and doing the wrong thing. Cultural knowledge here could be seen as instrumental much in the same way as linguistic knowledge in that it may not be appreciated in itself but as a means to an end so that people are not offended. For Dennis, linguistic motivation seems to me to be instrumental as a foreign language is learned in order to get by on holiday (lines 13-14) or to find help in an emergency (lines 4-6). I asked Dennis in lines 7-8 if it he thought it might be better if the whole world spoke English because, if proficiency in a foreign language is regarded as useful in an instrumental way to obtain goods and services whilst on holiday or to effect business transactions, then it could be argued that these functional

tasks would be facilitated if the whole world spoke English. The basis for asking such a question comes from my experience as a teacher where often at the start of a lesson pupils ask why everyone cannot speak English so that they would not need to learn a foreign language. Sometimes it is phrased differently such as to why cannot we all speak the same language because it would make the world an easier place to live in? When I reply by asking what language that might be, the response is always English. I believe such questions stem from a genuine curiosity as to why we have to have different languages because it seems to many pupils that it makes the world an unnecessarily complicated place. It then seems normal that this unique world language should be English because they and everyone they know speaks it (even if they also speak other languages), it seems ubiquitous because of the media, the internet and in the foreign holiday destinations with the consequence that it has become a normative language. Dennis however does acknowledge that foreign languages express different traditions and cultures.

In the continuation of extract 7 below Dennis is very honest in the way he sets out his position on language learning and its usefulness.

- 22DE: Taking French though would you like to speak French fluently?  
23D: I wouldn't wanna you know as I said learn every single word that  
24would appear in a sentence but I'd like to speak it enough that French  
25people could understand.  
26DE: Right but you wouldn't want to see yourself as wanting to be an  
27absolute fluent French speaker and living in France?  
28D: No I wouldn't want to live in France I think there's too many  
29complications you know.

30DE: In what way complications?  
 31D: Well first of all the language and then they have laws and things that  
 32are quite different from over here. It's just that I think Britain's an easier  
 33place to grow up in.  
 34DE: Right. Do you think that's because you're seeing things from  
 35British eyes but if you'd been born in France..?  
 36D: If I'd been born in France I'd like think differently.  
 37DE: Do you think you can swap cultures though?  
 38D: Some of them go into France, start a new life and speak French all  
 39the time. You can definitely do that but it's a choice whether you're  
 40committed to do it because you've got to learn a whole new language  
 41and meet people and I think drive on the other side of the road.  
 42DE: Yeh yeh yeh and you say you wouldn't be committed to doing that?  
 43D: I would rather just stay in England as it is.  
 44DE: Yeh yeh OK Dennis that's fine thanks for taking part in the  
 45interview.  
 46D: That's OK.  
 47DE: Cheers.

Dennis admits that he wants to be able to know French to be understood lines 23-25 but that his choice would be to remain within a British term of reference line 43. He does not want to live in France because of complications in aspects of lifestyle- lines 28-33. Although he views France from an English ethnocentric perspective, he recognizes that this is simply by accident of nationality and had he been born in France then his perspective would have been different. Dennis is happy to stay within the English frame of reference and to know French as a holiday and leisure tool. Dennis has a very high C.A.T score of 111 suggesting a C/B grade at G.C.S.E, much higher than Zara (88). However whereas Zara is interested in the foreign language and culture of French, Dennis does not express this enthusiasm. Zara gains a 'B' grade whereas Dennis gains an 'E' grade at G.C.S.E. It could be argued that the difference between Zara and Dennis in terms of language learning is not the CAT score nor the gender per se but the notion of learner identity (cf. 2.2.7). There is in fact little relationship between the CAT scores and

the final G.C.S.E grades. The cultural awareness of the learner may well lead to a learner identity where one student seems to be more equipped to stay connected to the official classroom discourse whereas the other loses the connection.

Two of the boys in the case-study who sit on the side are Luke and Ben. The following is an extract from an interview with Luke who thinks it is useful to learn a foreign language.

#### Extract 8

L= Luke  
CAT 107  
GCSE grade F

DE= Dave Evans (research interviewer)

- <sub>1</sub>DE- Luke is learning a foreign language a useful enterprise?  
<sub>2</sub>L- yeh it is for travel  
<sub>3</sub>DE- What do you think are the main reasons?  
<sub>4</sub>L-Well if you travel you need to know where something is, how much  
<sub>5</sub>something is.  
<sub>6</sub>DE- Do you need to appreciate the foreign culture?  
<sub>7</sub>L- you need to have an understanding of that culture, not to know it fully  
<sub>8</sub>but to know most of it.  
<sub>9</sub>DE- do you need to have a curiosity about a different culture  
<sub>10</sub>L-yeh I suppose you do  
<sub>11</sub>DE- are you interested in cultural difference  
<sub>12</sub>L- Yeh it does interest me in how differently they do things compare to  
<sub>13</sub>how us Brits do things.

The interesting point here is that unlike Dennis, Luke says he is interested in different cultures and claims later on in the interview that he would like to live abroad to experience a different culture. However because he is caught up with the mainly male discourse at the side of the class, he is not able to translate his cultural interest towards

MFL into practice. This makes me feel as if he understands the theory but is unable to put this into practice. An interview with Ben who sits next to Luke shows a different point of view with knowledge of French as something of a functional nature.

### **Extract 9**

Bn= Ben

DE= Dave Evans (research interviewer)

CAT 109

GCSE grade E

<sup>1</sup>DE- do you think learning a foreign language is a useful thing to do?

<sup>2</sup>Bn- yeh it could be useful for going abroad, asking for directions, things like  
<sup>3</sup>that.

<sup>4</sup>DE- are there any other reasons for learning it?

<sup>5</sup>Bn- well it might be useful for getting a job. It could be useful to have a GCSE  
<sup>6</sup>in it.

<sup>7</sup>DE- what about appreciating a different way of life or culture or living in  
<sup>8</sup>France?

<sup>9</sup>Bn- well that might be interesting to see on holiday but I'm not really that  
<sup>10</sup>interested, I'd rather stay living in England.

<sup>11</sup>DE- do you enjoy doing French?

<sup>12</sup>Bn- hmm not really but I have to do it for the exam

Although Luke and Ben are in the same group in the class, their cultural opinions are very different and it seems that the discourse they express in class might be more powerful than the opinions they hold away from the classroom situation. Robson (1993) points out that the interview represents what an individual thinks in private whereas observation reveals what the individual is prepared to act out in public. Ben's opinions on foreign language learning and his 'off-task' behaviour in the group on side of the room appear to corroborate each other whereas Luke is more problematic. Luke's 'off-task' behaviour does not align with a more 'culturally

positive' view of MFL which may suggest that he is caught in a discourse that has become disengaged with the official lesson discourse.

## **6.8 Dialogue – Au restaurant**

Below is a dialogue which is at basic transactional level of GCSE set in a café/restaurant. This was recorded as part of a speaking lesson in February 2006. The purpose of the observation is to focus on the learner identity of two male case-study participants who have already taken part in research interviews. However as teacher/researcher there is a role conflict in how I view this type of dialogue. The teacher role would tend to assess it against standard GCSE criteria in a determinist, deficit model from an established absolute measure. On the other hand the researcher might see it as an attempt to create meaning by combining the pupils' own discourse with the target language and culture. This would be a less deterministic and more constructivist definition. The dialogue is between Dennis as waiter, featured in extract 7 and Bill as customer whose was featured in the interview in extract 1. Dennis = D; Bill = B. The English translation is in brackets

<sup>1</sup>D- Bonjour, que desirez- vous comme hors d'oeuvres?  
( Hello, what starter would you like?)

<sup>2</sup>B- Je voudrais la salade s'il vous plait  
( I would like the salad please)



<sup>3</sup>D- et que desirez- vous comme plat?  
(and what would you like for main course)

<sup>4</sup>B- Je voudrais (undecipherable but it could be coquille St Jacques) s'il vous plait

<sup>5</sup>D- et comme dessert? (pronounced 'desert')  
(and what dessert would you like?)

<sup>6</sup>B- je voudrais ( undecipherable) s'il vous plait

<sup>7</sup>D- et vous desirez boire quelque chose?  
(What would you like to drink?)

<sup>8</sup>B- une bouteille le Chablis s'il vous plait  
(a bottle Chablis please.)

The structures of the dialogue were scripted and the students had to research the food and drink content for the G.C.S.E speaking exam. Subsequently I would ask students to research other vocabulary content so that their knowledge of dialogues on this topic area could be extended. Food and drink is a topic area for the GCSE speaking tests so as many vocabulary items as possible should be researched prior to the exam.

In terms of quality of language utterance in the context of GCSE assessment criteria, the pronunciation was either unrecognisable or approximate such as the pronunciation of the 'h' in hors d'oeuvres (line1) or the single 's' as in 'desert' instead of the double 's' of dessert (line 5). Another example by Dennis is a hard 'ch' in quelque chose instead of the French soft 'ch' (line 7). All students over the 5 year course have been taught standard French pronunciation, especially in years 7&8 but many students find these sounds strange anyway and also difficult to imitate. It is certainly easier to pronounce them with an English accent. In my experience it is only when students identify with the Frenchness of the sound as an affective/aesthetic appreciation, that they have the

enthusiasm to take on and sustain the correct sound pronunciation. This seems to be a very deterministic position suggesting that sound contains culture in much the same way as music genres such as blues or types of rock. In much the same way a ‘gallic shrug’ communicates a cultural meaning within the gesture as well as being a representation of the meaning and this is where language and culture are inseparable. This means that the connection between language and culture is about sounding like the culture as well as empathizing with it. In terms of GCSE assessment, the dialogue would nevertheless correspond to a foundation level functional level of language since a sympathetic native speaker would be able to understand the language used.

However in data analysis chapters 7 and 8 of the study we learn, via a greater emphasis on ethnographic observation, that cultural meanings are less ‘over-arching’ and deterministic than those interpreted from this dialogue and much more dynamic and formative. We will see hybridity of classroom discourses in these chapters with the result that notions of culture evolve towards a perspective of continuously interacting subjectivities where social participants actively create meanings individually and in groups. The consequence of this is that is that the MFL used in the classroom is not seen as a deficit model by comparison with the standard, as the dialogue above but as real attempts at communication within the hybrid discourses of the classroom. Here the MFL will connect with the culture of the classroom as well as with an imagined stereotyped foreign culture.

The next section looks closer at language and culture.

## **6.9 Learner and Cultural Identities in Practice**

Van Lier (2002) supports a connection between language and culture in his notion of ‘voice’ which he describes as authentic ways of speaking and writing and which occur when the speaker’s identity comes to empathize with the cultural identity of the language or ‘languaculture’. I refer to the concept of ‘languaculture’ (language in cultural discourse) in more detail in 7.13. However a contemporary modern example of language expressing culture and culture inscribed into the fabric of language would be the case of urban street language that was mentioned in Chapter 2 (literature review) which described the ‘Verlan’ urban dialect on the council estates on the outskirts of Paris. This is also echoed in urban ‘hip-hop’ street language in English speaking contexts where dialect use is a sign of identification with the culture. One is not likely to want to imitate and learn these dialects without some affinity with the cultural meanings. Cultural identification in urban dialects such as ‘verlan’ also seems to be well represented by young males and one could not say that there is a preponderance of females achieving a much greater proficiency than males in this type of urban street language. Language learning is therefore a cultural event which has to engage one’s identity rather than something which relates to only gender as a *prima facie* phenomenon.

In the following interview a male student in the case-study, Robert, shows a positive regard for the notion of cultural difference. He undertook the interview with Jasmine who stated a preference for being accompanied by a class friend. They sit together on the second row behind Alicia, Anna and Zara who are the girls in the case-study on the front row.

## 6.10 Interview with Jasmine and Robert

Within MFL we can see in the following extract that cultural motivation is also a male attribute. The following extract is between DE, Jasmine & Robert.

### Extract 10

D.E = Dave Evans (Research Interviewer)

J = female Year 11 student

57% = grade C+.

Actual GCSE grade = C

CAT score 108

R = male Year 11 student

59% = grade C+

Actual GCSE grade = C

CAT score 106

1 DE- Is it important to learn a foreign language?

2 J- I think it is

3 R- If you want to get a job in a foreign country it's really good to learn

4 the language obviously but um but socially it depends on if you want

5 to get a job -----

6 J- Culturally and other things too it's good to speak different languages.

7 R- It's useful to have on your C.V. That's what we're told anyway.

8 DE- are there any other reasons?

9 J- Dunno, it's like good for you, get your brain to learn other languages

10 and stuff.

12 DE- It's good in itself?

13 J- Yeh and when you go on holiday well it helps

14 R- I dunno there's learning maths and learning things like algebra and

15 things but then you've got the language side of learning. It's just a

16 different type of learning. It just broadens your horizons.

17 J- And it helps you learn about different cultures

18 DE- So if you have choice between the reasons of getting a job and

19 earning more money and broadening your horizons, what d'you think

20 is the most relevant? What d'you think is the more important for you?

21 R- I wouldn't like to learn it in a job. I wouldn't like to speak French

22 in a job, but I would if I had to. But I would just get a job in England.

Robert opts for the idea of languages being useful for getting a job if that's what you want to do (lines 3-5). Jasmine emphasizes the cultural motive (line 6). However, Robert shows a critical attitude in line 7, where he does not seem convinced about the economic/job argument for learning a language. This motive does not belong to him, it belongs to other people and he probably has to take it on trust. In lines 14-16 he differentiates foreign language learning from some other types of learning by saying that it 'broadens your horizons'. My interpretation of this is that MFL is really about what is going on elsewhere, away from the physical place of learning. Unlike maths and science which can exist in their own space, MFL depends upon the existence of other worlds which have to be imagined or invoked. This is the wider cultural discourse and depends upon the students' and teachers' motivation towards cultural knowledge and imagination. Modern languages are about making this journey from the place where they are taught to the place where they live in the real world, not only of place but also of culture.

Consider the following extract highlighting aesthetic/affective motivation with regard to the sounds of the foreign language. The labelled participants are the same as for the preceding extract

### **Extract 11**

DE= Dave Evans (research interviewer) J= Jasmine R= Robert

- 1 DE- Would you say that you like the sound of the language that you
- 2 have a feeling for the sound of the language?
- 3 J- Yeh it sounds better than the English language
- 4 DE –what about you Robert, do you have a feeling for the sound of the
- 5 language?

6 R- yeh, I think it's important that they've got the accent but we have  
 7 our accent. It's one thing having a different language but it's very  
 8 unique and I think that's great. I like it.  
 9 DE- Would you like to get to know French people well?  
 10 R- Yeh, pen friends or something. That would really help. I think  
 11 they should do that more often.  
 12 J- It's O.K when you're better and learning it and learning the culture.  
 13 R- Because you would be socializing and you'd be growing on their  
 14 ideas.  
 15 J- Especially if you had someone of your own age then you could  
 16 compare stuff  
 17 R- As you grow older you could still keep in contact.  
 18 DE- Would you like to live in France Jasmine?  
 19 J- Umm if I could speak the language I would but I wouldn't want to  
 20 live there without knowing the language – be too daunting  
 21 R- It would be scary.  
 22 DE- How about you, would you like to live in France?  
 23 R- It's all right going on holiday. I'd have to learn the language.  
 24 DE- But would you like the idea of living like French people?  
 25 R- Yeh, I like it. I'm not really sure about the whole set, eating the  
 26 dinner thing. I don't know if that's stereotypical or not. I don't know  
 27 how I'd do it but I think I'd like it. It would be different. I prefer it to  
 28 going somewhere else because it's French and England and that's the  
 29 connection.

The argument I will develop here is that there is a relationship between cultural and learner identity and in extract 11 it could be argued that it is the students' cultural orientation that underpins learner identity. In line 3 Jasmine says that she appreciates the sound of French more than English and in line 12 she says that it's good to know the culture. In the following line 13 Robert extols the advantages of learning the culture through socializing and developing through learning their ideas. He continues in lines 15-17 by saying that you could compare ideas and remain in contact as one grew older. In lines 25-27 Robert reflects on living within French culture and questions cultural stereotyping. Both students show evidence of cultural interest in French life and in Robert's case he shows evidence of a critical interest in questioning the stereotype of sitting around a dinner table for hours on end. In the following short extract Robert

shows that his cultural interest is very much connected to and involved in the use of language.

### **Extract 12**

<sup>1</sup>DE- Would you say you're good at French?

<sup>2</sup>R- At times. It's strange even if I haven't learned the word, I'll be able to  
<sup>3</sup>pick it up quite quickly and that's exciting, when you're picking up words  
<sup>5</sup>and you're being able to say them once you've learnt them. I think that's  
<sup>6</sup>great.

The fact that Robert is a male student might well suggest an absence of 'a priori' connection between gender and learner identity in MFL learning.

The thesis of this study is to identify aspects of identity that limit male secondary school performance in MFL. It might seem from the data collected so far that all girls are in one category and all boys in another in terms of cultural identity towards MFL. This sort of conclusion could be arrived at with an 'a posteriori' headcount of how many people have said this or that. However headcounts of how many boys or girls are culturally connected or disconnected from MFL learning are beside the point because at best they can only show a vague gender association about how many girls have said one thing as against how many boys have said something else. In the end this would not take us very far and could show us a false division between the genders. It seems that there may be differences within genders rather than between genders in terms of cultural and learner identity. It is true that all the girls in the study have gained 'A-C' grades whereas only

one of the boys has achieved this. However this connection between cultural awareness, linguistic proficiency and gender cannot be seen as an 'a priori' causal one because there is one boy who goes against this trend. Robert expresses the cultural traits that seem to be readily expressed by the girls in the study and this also coincides with his 'A-C' success at GCSE.

I believe, from the data collected in this case-study that there is an emerging connection between cultural and linguistic awareness. Research participants such as Robert, Alicia, Jasmine, Anna and Zara use the word 'culture' to express their interest and motivation in MFL as a cultural product. They are conscious of the semantic value of the word in that it represents the way in which people live their lives and how this, according to the testimony of Alicia and Robert, inhabits the way they speak. Their use of the concept of culture suggests, in my opinion, an awareness of MFL learning as a cultural activity. However the evidence so far does not suggest an inherent causality between cultural awareness and gender. Nevertheless it does orientate my emphasis away from gender as a prime facie dynamic in this research and towards cultural disposition. There may be however a preponderance for a greater cultural awareness amongst girls in the study than boys, suggesting that intercultural awareness is not being included in many boys' identity. The group of mainly boys who sit down the side of the classroom seem to be caught within their own discourse. The fact that one boy in the study shows a greater cultural awareness than the other boys could suggest, on his part, a different educational and social emphasis by comparison with the other boys. This may have future implications for male cultural education as a matter for educational inclusion. I feel that



on the way to these tentative findings, the study also points to an awareness of the ideological and discursive nature of MFL. The subject area is intersected and surrounded by discourses bearing different ideologies that may be combined and also in opposition. Intercultural and socio-economic discourses in the widest sense may be compatible in capitalist economies although the narrower one of immediate job opportunities may not be compatible with MFL as an intercultural activity. Even so, if we recall the interview with Dennis and the interview with Bill in 6.2, MFL does not have to lead to cultural empathy and fluency. It may be perfectly acceptable to learn a language as a way of getting a better job or as a way of getting by on holiday. However I believe that research findings so far juxtapose this level of discourse with the lower grades at GCSE. Therefore the affective and aesthetic empathy that characterizes an awareness of 'Other' may be a prime force towards the very best MFL learning by placing culture at its centre. Culture has many definitions and, as we mention at the end of 6.8, it does not have to signify an imagined target language standard variety but may be hybrid between the official MFL evoked culture and the discursive culture of the classroom, because this is where the learning takes place. Learning French in Quebec, Cameroun or Brussels may not be the same language-culture as learning French as the standard variety in Tours or Paris. There may therefore be a case, as we have seen, for arguing for a close connection between cultural and learner identities in learning MFL. Some sort of cultural connection therefore has to be made between the language as an external phenomenon to us and our own identities. Socio- economics constitute a cultural connection in our type of society and it could be argued that this is the first connection given the argument that we define ourselves to some extent in our socio-economic relations with the world.

### **6.11 Theoretical Development**

We have seen in the literature review that Gumperz (1999) argues, in the notion of indexicality, that speakers in more localized discourses actively call upon and extend towards wider ones in order to specify meaning. This means that speakers reach outwards to gain meaning. If students therefore cannot reach out for the wider meanings necessary for the MFL to make sense, it may become meaningless and consequently the students, much like the boys in my year 11 class, remain within their own discourse. However, the act of reaching out for larger cultural meanings does not guarantee motivation for MFL learning, if those wider cultural meanings are not supportive with regard to the foreign language. For example the concept of nationality can often be counterproductive where pupils state that they are English and therefore should speak English and not speak French because they are not French. Wider cultural meanings are therefore not always on the side of MFL if they are ethnocentric. There may well be, therefore, in this case an ideological, cultural conflict between nationalism/ ethnocentric attitudes and internationalism/globalism within the classroom space.

Kramsch (1993) describes the tensions within classroom space as emanating from oppositional forces from a multitude of psychological, social, political, moral and linguistic constructions of meaning. She says (p.11) that 'it is on the level of discourse that these tensions find both their justification and their dialectic resolution'. A criticism that Kramsch levels at foreign or second language education is that the type of teaching has isolated it from dialectical thought. Course materials depict a bland harmonious life without conflict and ideological meaning. Kramsch maintains that by refusing to be

ideologically critical, MFL teaching has by default espoused a normative conservative socio-economic and cultural ideology. Most text books depict 'typical' families, situations, leisure interests, people at work, children at school in 'normative' functionality. This is very much a functional, practical model that sits well with skill outcomes in preparation for the world of work as opposed to multiculturalism. Most students can only reach out for this practical socio-economic model because the subject itself is constructed to lack discursive meaning and there is no other model of meaning available. The meaning itself has become its skills based outcome, firmly lodged within prevailing socio-economic and employment ideology. Kramsch (1993) goes on to say that the subject area must break out of this ideological strangle-hold and it can 'no longer be the one-sided response to national and economic interests, and the pursuit of economic happiness; it must include the search for an understanding of cultural boundaries.....'(Kramsch 1993;p12). My own position regarding MFL education echoes the philosophy of reaching out to the wider cultural meanings of the target language country to enrich the content of a subject that has a linguistic form although a content that has been sanitized of meaning. Byram (1989) takes a similar position to Kramsch by saying that communicative competence has meant an exclusive emphasis on language use as a behavioural skill. Again this is tied in with vocational aims rather than cultural understanding. Byram defines three strands to MFL teaching:- language use, language awareness and cultural understanding.

These three elements are interdependent in action in that language awareness transmits culture through language use. For example there are ways of saying things that are not word for word translations from English. In other words French is not English using

French vocabulary but rather a different cultural expression. For this reason I highlighted Zara and Alicia's cultural use of French in extract 4 because the foreign language utterances were expressed in a French cultural turn of phrase as opposed to a word for word translation from English.

Bennett (2003) gives an account of intercultural development that includes stages of ethnocentricity where people's world views of other cultures are seen through the default lense of normative socialization. Foreign language use is, in the same way, grafted upon native language constructions with native cultural references. Bennett argues for a parallel integrated development between foreign language and culture so that the target language is spoken and known from an insider's view. Cultural awareness therefore creates linguistic awareness and a much better language use in the end.

### **6.12 Connecting Cultural and Learning Identities**

Foreign language cultural identities and individual learning identities are connected if culture is viewed not as a finished product but in terms of a journeying process by the individual cultural identity towards cultural understanding. This echoes the definition of cultural identity in 3.5 in the relationship between cultural process and perceived cultural product. The interviews with Zara, Alicia, Anna, Robert and Jasmine all show a personal cultural orientation which reaches out to the target language culture. The students are journeying towards another culture from their own cultural position. This is where learning identity becomes a cultural journey. Language and culture become internalized and expressed in learning behaviour rather than remaining forever external and objective.

This is also where the learning process becomes a personal cultural search and new learner identities emerge as new discoveries cause personal identities to evolve and change. These new learner identities are the outcomes of this dialectical process and recalled the 'third way' proposed by Kramsch (1993) which is the learners own cultural spaces. Learning here is a process of discovery of one's own changing identity faced with the encounter of the otherness of difference. We may recall the literature review of chapter 2 where Bakhtin (1981) argued that personal identity always existed on the cusp between oneself and the Other. Case study participants such as Alicia, Anna, Jasmine and Robert who seem to embrace notions of cultural orientation towards language learning extend their identity in the journey outwards towards the discourse of 'Otherness'. The male dominated group which does not move in this direction remains within its own discourse and associated identity. Robert is a male student who is an exception to this. Is he an exception that proves the popularly held rule suggesting that males are just different or does his difference from this popular view of 'laddishness' suggest that gender behaviour is simply part of a culturally learned behaviour associated with gender rather than intrinsically necessary to gender.

### **6.13 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that there is a connection between the foreign language cultural identity and the learner identity of students and that learner identity may be aligned to the wider MFL cultural identity in varying degrees or perhaps not at all. Differences in this connection between foreign language cultural identity and learner identity may exist within gender rather than between genders. At this stage after just one

case study of ten students, the conclusion is tentative, that it is the nature of MFL cultural and learner identity connection that may account for performance in learning rather than an 'a priori' binary gender identity. What is far from clear is the exact nature of this relationship between cultural and learner identity. The contributions of Alice, Anna, Zara, Robert and Jasmine may tend toward the belief that they already possess a MFL cultural identity (or cultural capital, a notion which we will come across in the next chapter) and this, in a very deterministic sense, accounts for a strong learner identity in MFL. Might it not also be the case that a learner identity, created within classroom discourse, creates MFL cultural identity which then in turn further develops learner identity in a two way dialectical process? In this way cultural and learner identities are not two distinctive phenomena but are active, creative and indistinguishable. Cultural/learner identities are thus dynamic and shaped by the interaction between student classroom discourse and the real or imagined target language culture, as suggested at the end of 6.8. It may be that the first year 11 case study has only told one part of the story in a deterministic way of cultural identity acting upon learner identity and that we now need to see more of the process of learner identity developing within classroom discourse. The next chapter 7 is the year 9 case study which focuses much more on an ethnographic style of classroom observation in order to see in greater detail how learner identity might develop within the classroom situation.

## CHAPTER 7: YEAR 9 CASE STUDY

### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter looks at a case study of year 9 students aged between 13-14 years with regard to learner, cultural and gender identities in modern foreign languages (MFL).

The MFL being researched in this study is Spanish and the number of students in the case study is 14 out of a class of 20, made up equally of 7 boys and 7 girls.

In 7.1, I outline two theoretical themes that had emerged from the qualitative data of chapter 6 and which become working themes for data analysis. In 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5 and 7.8 we have interview data and analysis. We see how, in 7.6 whether this relates or not to the socio-economic and socio-linguistic theories underpinning the research. I then go on to the case-study observation data and analysis in 7.7 and conclude in 7.12 with findings indicating a much more discursive and dynamic view of culture than the more deterministic model that emerged from chapter 6. The model of culture that emerges from chapter 7 shows the individual in his/her social groups constructing culture within discourse and interpreting, appropriating and transforming meanings from the more official MFL teacher/ learning objectives cultural discourse. This cultural model reflects my own journey of understanding of culture in a practical day to day context as opposed to a theoretical cultural determinism

### **7.1 Theoretical Focus**

In the chapter 6 case-study of the year 11 class, two theoretical themes for analysis of data had emerged from the qualitative data. Firstly the connections between learner

cultural identity as process and MFL cultural identity as perceived product in 3.5 and 6.12 alongside the loosening of ‘a priori’ intrinsic links with gender and secondly, in 6.3, the notion of MFL learning as an ideological contested area of the curriculum with links to socio-economics. For the latter socio-economic theory I had adapted a model of educational discourse with regard to learning MFL and its meaning based upon Fairclough’s (1989) three- fold definition of discourse in society (cf diagram 1 in 2.7). Fairclough refers firstly to social orders of discourse as being the socio-cultural conditions in which types of discourse can be produced. Fairclough argues that the prevailing social conditions in Britain are those of economic capitalism and free market enterprise. Secondly this affects ‘discourse types’ which is the type of discourse production. Discourse types are basically institutionally generated discourses in such areas as schools, hospitals, advertising agencies, financial companies etc. The third smallest level of discourse is the actual production of text, spoken or written at the level of individual and group interaction.

## **7.2 Case study Population**

The research paradigm is interpretive and the research design is case-study involving a class of year 9 mixed ability male and female students of Spanish. The methodology is mixed-method comprising of semi-structured informant based focused interviews (Robson 1993) and ethnographic observation from a research diary. The observation schedule was twice a week over 8 weeks, totalling 16 observations of classroom behaviour.(cf 4.4.2) The case-study population is one of 14 students -7 males and 7 females. CAT scores are given for each participant and the G.C.S.E grade has been added in September 2009. The case study population is listed as follows:-



**Table 18:**

**Case Study 2 Year 9 participants by gender, CAT score and GCSE grade**

Name	Gender	C.A.T score/category (High, Medium, Low)
Louisa	Female	90 (low) D grade
Leah	Female	84 (low) D grade
Aimee	Female	94 (medium) D grade
Georgina	Female	104 (medium) C grade
Shannen	Female	108 (medium) E grade
Lauren	Female	106 (medium) C grade
Elizabeth	Female	114 (high) C grade
George	Male	85 (low) D grade
Mat	Male	86 (low) F grade
Fred	Male	98 (medium) F grade
Joel	Male	96 (medium) D grade
Adam	Male	97 (medium) F grade
Sam	Male	104 (medium) E grade
Alex	Male	110 (high) F grade

The GCSE results for the case-study show a gender divide although there are two exceptions. Georgina, Lauren and Lizzie gain the higher 'C' grades and the other girls, apart from Shannen, gain 'D' grades whereas the boys apart from Joel and George gain 'E' and 'F' grades.

The first student I interviewed was Georgina a year 9 female student with a C.A.T score of 104 which, in terms of this class I placed in the middle ability range. In this interview Georgina talks about why it is important to learn a foreign language. Her reasons range from the instrumental to the integrative

#### **Extract 1:**

DE=Researcher      G=Georgina ; Actual GCSE grade 'C'

- <sup>1</sup> DE- is it important to learn a foreign language?  
<sup>2</sup> G - I think it is important to learn a foreign language because it can help  
<sup>3</sup> you like when you're older with getting jobs and when you go on holiday  
<sup>4</sup> there's more chance of being able to make friends and understand people  
<sup>5</sup> and also it's fun to learn a language because you can learn about  
<sup>6</sup> different people's way of lives and how they are in different countries.

Georgina's response is wide ranging and draws upon different ideological discourses.

The socio- economic one is in terms of employment- line 3. The leisure consumer one is about holidays in line 3 but then she expands on this with regard to getting to know and understand people in line 4. She then in lines 5&6 widens the leisure holiday discourse into something of wider cultural interest. This becomes more than the functional language of ordering food and drink and would require a wider linguistic range. In an informal classroom interaction with Georgina, to the question 'what is culture in your

opinion?', she responds by saying 'Culture is a way of life and people's culture is important to them'. An interesting answer, as not only does she say what culture is in her opinion but she also ascribes value to it. This triangulates with the interview data in lines 5&6 where she says that it's fun to learn a language because you learn about different ways of life in different countries. The following extract refers to a reason for which other cultures are to be valued.

**Extract 2:**

- <sup>1</sup> DE- D'you think it's an important thing to do (learning about cultures)  
<sup>2</sup> G- Yeh because otherwise you just be kind of stuck to your way of life and  
<sup>3</sup> think that everywhere is like how the U.K is. But different places have  
<sup>4</sup> different cultures and things.

Georgina sees learning about different cultures as liberating in that you can break away from being 'stuck to your way of life' (line 2). The concept of learning a foreign language and culture is regarded as emancipatory and the opposite of localized cultural confinement. This might be exhilarating to some but threatening to others.

Georgina's cultural interest in the target language and its culture can be seen as shaping her learner identity in that it may give her a different reason for learning from the student who learns for the instrumental reason of securing the transaction of goods or services. As we have already seen in chapter 3, Gardner (1985) identified two types of foreign language motivation, instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is externally generated by the desire to get a job, a promotion at work, pass an exam or functionally get by on a holiday trip abroad. This is regarded as a weaker type of motivation than

integrative because it does not endure beyond the situation for which the language proficiency is required. We saw this type of motivation in the interviews in chapter 6 with year 11 students Bill, 6.2, and Dennis, 6.7, who saw learning French in a very functional way of getting by on holiday or as useful for getting a job through a G.C.S.E pass. Integrative motivation on the other hand is a desire for an affinity with the target language community or its culture (Williams 2004). These two types of motivation should not be seen as mutually exclusive and Georgina has shown evidence of both types in extract 1.

However even though the notion of learner cultural identity is the chosen theme of data analysis, the concept of instrumental motivation still provides a readily understood label for a student's perceived need to learn for external reasons rather than as emanating from his/her own identity as a learner. Nevertheless the social investment model and imagined future selves model, as already outlined may, in Georgina's case, be appropriate as a rationale for her learner identity because it encompasses her wide ranging reasons for MFL learning from 'getting a job when you're older' (extract 1 lines 1&2), holidays (extract 1 lines 3&4) to the liberation of learning about different cultures so as not to be 'stuck to your way of life' (extract 2 lines2-4)

When asked about the connections between language and culture Georgina responds as follows in extract 3 later on the interview.

### Extract 3

- 11 DE- D'you think that language and culture go together?  
12 G- yeh, coz your language kind of reflects your culture like some people  
13 use slang.  
14 DE- yeh  
15 G- and that reflects the way that they are and are brought up  
16 DE- So do you think the more you get to know the culture the better you  
17 learn the language?  
18 G- yeh coz the more you learn the culture, like you were teaching us about  
19 Castilian that Spanish culture is reflected in their Castilian Spanish and the  
20 South American non-Castilian Spanish reflects their culture.

Much of Georgina's cultural interest is in the connection to language as in the differences in pronunciation between Castilian and South American Spanish. Her view is that language is contained in the way of life of people (lines 19-20). This does not seem to reflect a socio-economic discourse but rather a wider cultural discourse in terms of the nature of language. Similarly the interview with Lizzie and Aimee in the following extract show that both girls have a keen cultural interest in Spanish.

### Extract 4

DE –Researcher     L-Lizzie; Actual GCSE grade 'C'; A- Aimee, Actual grade 'D'

- 1 DE- what do you think are the main reasons for learning a foreign language?  
2 L- there's loads of reasons  
3 DE- give me all the reasons then  
4 A- Holiday, because if you don't know a language you can't ask for things.  
5 L- Employment cos you can get loads of jobs with languages.  
6 A- and culture so you can learn what they do and what they eat and stuff like that.  
7 DE – which of holidays, employment and culture are the most important reasons?

- 8 A- culture  
9 L- employment and culture.  
10 DE- why culture  
11 L- Because it is important to know what people are like, to be different and stuff.

In the interview Aimee's priority is the cultural reason for learning a language whereas Lizzie combines employment and culture. In line 6 Aimee defines culture as the way people live their lives which would be of interest to her. In line 11 Lizzie also defines culture as the way people are and she also mentions difference. She says that it is important to know about this perhaps implying cultural exploration or discovery. In the next extract Lizzie expresses a view that we are all different because we say things in different ways and that the Spanish identity would be different from another national group due to the fact of speaking a different language (lines 13 -17).

#### **Extract 5**

- 12 DE- Are the Spanish different from English people?  
13 L- they will be different because we might speak in a different way to them-  
14 it's the way we say things so they are bound to be different anyway and  
15 their culture as well.  
16 DE- is that caused by the different language?  
17 L- Well not everything but it has a lot to do with the language.

In the next extract Aimee expresses the view that you have to appreciate the target culture to speak the language well. Lizzie concurs with this.

#### **Extract 6**

DE- Researcher. A- Aimee. L-Lizzie

30 DE- Do you think that in order to speak Spanish or any language fluently, you've  
31 got to like the country and the people?  
32 A- if you don't like the culture, what they do and stuff like that, then there's  
33 no point learning the language, coz you're not going to go there because  
34 that's what you go there for, because of what it looks like and what's the  
35 food like and how people do stuff  
36 L- yeh, actually I agree with you Aimee

Aimee's viewpoint reflects her cultural identity as supporting the foreign language learning, because the foreign language expresses a cultural context. She says in lines 32-35 that the language is supported by the way of life and therefore one cannot learn the language well if one has no interest in the context. In line 36 Lizzie agrees with this.

As with Georgina, Lizzie displays a tentative awareness of some sort of connection between different languages and different cultural identities, transcending concepts of socio-economic necessity, whilst not denying the socio-economics of learning a language. In fact, as we will see later in the chapter, all the female students in the case study demonstrate cultural empathy with otherness and difference at the time of being interviewed in year 9 and, even though not all their grades were ranked as A-C two years later in the G.C.S.E results, their grades were better than students showing no cultural interest at all in the language. (I did not teach the case study students in the intervening years and could only track the progress they had made at the time of their exam results). This is a short extract of an interview with Lauren and Louisa who demonstrate linguistic cultural awareness towards MFL:-

### **Extract 7**

DE- researcher Ln- Lauren Actual GCSE grade 'C'; Ls-Louisa GCSE grade 'D'

- <sup>1</sup> DE -D'you feel foreign languages are important?  
<sup>2</sup> Ln- it's like a connection with a different country, branching out with other  
<sup>3</sup> people being able to know other people from different cultures and stuff.  
<sup>4</sup> DE- right, I would understand by that, that you are interested in how things  
<sup>5</sup> happen in different countries?  
<sup>6</sup> Ln- yeh- just again their culture, like the words and the way they are and what  
<sup>7</sup> they mean.  
<sup>8</sup> DE- What about you Louisa, what's your opinion on the reasons for learning a  
<sup>9</sup> language?  
<sup>10</sup> Ls- Well if you go to a different country you can speak the language and get to  
<sup>11</sup> know the people  
<sup>12</sup> DE- Do I understand then that you are interested in the way people live and how  
<sup>13</sup> things happen in different countries?  
<sup>14</sup> Ls- Yeh very much so.

In the extract above Lauren connects culture with ways of being, language and

meaning.(lines 6 &7). Louisa concurs with Lauren's opinion.

Shannen supports a wider cultural view of language learning in the following exchange

### **Extract 8**

DE-researcher Sh- Shannen Actual GCSE grade 'E'

- <sup>1</sup> DE- But would it be better if they (Spanish people) all spoke English and then you  
<sup>2</sup> could go there (Spain) and there'd be no problem?  
<sup>3</sup> Sh- no because there'd be no excitement in learning a new language.

In this extract Shannen wants to learn a foreign language for the 'excitement' (line 3) of difference. In the following short exchange with another female student in the case-study, Leah explains her need for cultural research.



## **Extract 9**

DE researcher Lh- Leah

- <sup>1</sup> DE- What do you understand by culture?
- <sup>2</sup> Lh- like different sets of beliefs and things like that
- <sup>3</sup> DE- are you interested in getting to know culture and beliefs?
- <sup>4</sup> Lh-yeh before I go on holiday I usually look up the culture of the place I'm
- <sup>5</sup> going to

Leah explains her cultural interest in lines 4 and 5 by researching the culture of her holiday destination before her departure.

The following interview extract may be seen as a contrast to the cultural identity of Georgina, Lizzie and Amy and the other female students, because in the following extract, the cultural content for language learning is more functional in seeking out holiday pursuits. Whilst entirely legitimate as a reason for learning a foreign language, functional reasons may be seen as external to the language itself as opposed to reasons intrinsically contained within the language and its cultural expression..

### **7.3 Interviews with Alex, Mat, Adam and George**

The following is an interview extract between Alex and the researcher. Alex is a male pupil with a high CAT score of 110. In this extract he states exclusively functional reasons for learning a foreign language.

### Extract 10:

DE= Researcher A=Alex. Actual GCSE grade 'F'

- 1 DE- what importance do you see in learning a foreign language. Is it  
2 important?  
3 A- yeh because you can go to other countries and ask for stuff  
4 DE- right any other reason; is that the main reason?  
5 A- that's the main reason  
6 DE- right so what d'you think the attraction is for going to....  
7 A- the weather  
8 DE- The weather?  
9 A- yeh  
10 DE- ok have you been to Spain at all?  
11 A- I went to Costa Brava  
12 DE- ok and were you able to speak any Spanish?  
13 A- I spoke to ask for crisps and a drink

Alex's view of the importance of MFL is functional and his initial reason for wanting to go to Spain is the weather (line 7). He does then extend this later on in the interview.

- 14 DE- Would it be interesting to find out how Spanish people live?  
15 is that an interesting thing?  
16 A- Yeh  
17 DE- Could you imagine being on holiday and that it would be a feature to  
18 find out how people live or would you mainly look for the beach and the  
19 sea or would you look into how people live? What would be important for  
20 you?  
21 A- See how they live and how they're different from us?  
22 DE- Are you interested in that sort of thing, in cultural difference or are you  
23 not interested?  
24 A- Well it's not my main interest but I wouldn't mind finding out.  
25 DE- ok, d'you think Spanish people are different from English people or  
26 are they more or less the same?  
27 A- More or less the same. They drive differently.

Alex understands the possibilities exist for researching cultural difference but this is not a priority for him at the moment (line 22). Alex considers the connection between language and culture in the next extract.

**Extract 11:**

27 DE-D'you think you need to know the culture well to speak the language  
28 well?  
29 A- No  
30 DE- So you think you could speak the language fairly well or very well  
31 without knowing the culture?  
32 A-I think it would help to know it but it wouldn't make you speak better  
33 Spanish, I don't think.

As can be seen in lines 27-33 Alex does not consider that there is a close link between language and culture. A foreign language may often be regarded by students, in my experience as MFL teacher, as basically English with different words. The following interview with Mat reveals reasons for learning MFL lying outside the language rather than within it.

**Extract 12: M- Mat; DE- Researcher**

1 DE- Do you think it useful to learn a foreign language?  
2 M- yeh, yeh  
3 DE why?  
4 M- Because if you go to that country you get to speak to people and say what you  
5 want and buy things and you can get-what do you call them? (gap -----) to be an  
6 interpreter.  
7 DE what do think is the most important category-holiday or -----  
8 M- Work!

- 9DE- Work?  
10M-Work!  
11DE right. Anything else?  
12M Say like you're living out there, it's good to learn the language before you go  
13 out there.  
14DE Would you like to live out there?  
15M Depends what the weather was like.

Mat looks to instrumental reasons for learning a language rather than to the culture of the language itself. His main reason for learning a foreign language is work as he emphatically states in lines 8 and 10 and his main consideration for living in a foreign country is the weather (line 15). In this respect he echoes the position of Alex in extract 10. However in the classroom although Mat sits with the boys he remains a quiet member of the class, keeping much to himself.

An interview with George and Adam reveals a view of the otherness of Spanish culture and people seen from within their perspective of being English.

### **Extract 13:**

D.E – researcher. G- George; A- Adam

- 1 DE- Do you have to like the culture to speak the language fluently?  
2 G- not really  
3 A-no  
4 G- you may not like the people but you will have to use that language if you  
5 go over there.  
6 A- cos you don't even know the people you are speaking to in Spain  
unless  
7 you have met them before and see them on holiday again. You probably  
8 won't know anyone if you go into a town and you just have to get along  
9 speaking to them.  
10 DE- so are you talking about speaking Spanish just to get by?

11 A- yeh  
 12 DE- is it possible to be really fluent if you don't like the culture?  
 13 G- yeh  
 14 A- if you learn the language, live out there and listen to other people  
 15 speaking you can pick it up, I'd say it's possible yeh.  
 16 DE- but do you not need also to like the people?  
 17 G- no  
 18 DE- are you making a difference between liking the country and liking the  
 19 people?  
 20 A - yeh- you probably have to like the country  
 21 G - yeh  
 22 A-yeh the lifestyle  
 23 DE - so you make a difference between people and lifestyle?  
 24 G- yeh  
 25 A- people are different I can't explain it  
 26 DE- go on  
 27 G- when you go on a zebra crossing and people walk past. In England  
 28 people say thank you and that, but most of the time in Spain where I go  
 29 you don't see them saying thank you. So you think they're quite rude  
 30 DE- right  
 31 G- so you don't really like them but you like the country. You don't go out  
 32 there for the people but the lifestyle

In this extract we see George and Adam have an appreciation of Spain from a 'life style' perspective and they perceive a difference rather than empathy between themselves and Spanish people ( lines 22-32). From the interview it seems that they are interested in 'life style' from an English perspective rather than 'culture' from the target language community point of view. (lines 31&32). It would seem that they would like the country without the people. In fact members of their respective families own properties on the 'costas' and they may well view their relationship to the country in terms of ' expat lifestyle' George and Adam in turn would like to live out there as they enjoy the country, the food and drink and social life. However later on in the interview they insist that this appreciation is very much predicated on their own national identity.

<sup>50</sup> DE- regarding nationality, are you both English?  
<sup>51</sup> G - yeh  
<sup>52</sup> A - yeh  
<sup>53</sup> DE- how important is your nationality to you?  
<sup>54</sup> G- It's very important to me like with the world cup  
<sup>55</sup> DE- is that because you're football fans?  
<sup>56</sup> G – yeh  
<sup>57</sup> A- yeh  
<sup>58</sup> DE- if you took away football?  
<sup>59</sup> G- well it is important because it defines you really  
<sup>60</sup> DE- right  
<sup>61</sup> G- all people are different. In the same nationality they have different  
<sup>62</sup> accents, but you're still the same nationality. Like with Spain they might  
<sup>63</sup> hate the British accent. We might hate the Spanish accent and we don't  
<sup>64</sup> really care about it. It's hard to explain.  
<sup>65</sup> DE- is nationality – is it something to cling to or is it something -----?  
<sup>66</sup> G- not really something to cling to but you would say you were British if  
<sup>67</sup> you moved to Spain  
<sup>68</sup> G- because that's where you come from!  
<sup>69</sup> A- because that's where you come from!  
<sup>70</sup> G-yeh  
<sup>71</sup> A- where you've been brought up  
<sup>72</sup> G- you wouldn't just forget about it  
<sup>73</sup> DE- but if you lived there for a while would being British simply not be that  
<sup>74</sup> important anymore  
<sup>75</sup> G- No  
<sup>76</sup> A- I would always say I'm still English- I would always say I was English  
<sup>77</sup> G- yeh

George states in line 59 that nationality is very important to him because 'it defines you really' and in relation to being British, in line 72 George states that 'you just wouldn't forget about it'. In line 76 Adam says that he would always say he was English even if he had lived in Spain a long time.

I think that an interpretation of George and Adam's relationship with the target language culture is that it is viewed from the outside and this is understandable since, as they explained to me later on, there are many English 'lifestyle' communities on the 'costas'. George and Adam visit families and friends during their holidays, who have moved to Spain for the much vaunted lifestyle of beach and entertainment culture. Although these areas are Spanish and Spanish speaking, they have been colonized by British expatriates and so they are constructed as mini versions of Englishness in the sun. Despite George and Adam's regular holiday visits to Spain, although they pass their GCSE in Spanish, they do not achieve the higher grades. However the level of Spanish they are interested in corresponds to functional usage as holiday makers. In the classroom observations we see that they do not involve themselves with the language itself but rather with the general pupil classroom discourse.

The point this study is making is that the higher grades are about connecting cultural interest to the language itself. Going to Spain regularly as a holiday maker is not in itself enough to access higher levels of language. This is because a foreign language has its own turn of phrase, its own idiom and cultural identity is then expressed from within the language. Its verb tenses, word positions may be different with adjectival agreements according to gender and number and furthermore in Spanish the punctuation is different with the inverted exclamation and question marks at the beginning of questions. It involves cultural awareness and appreciation to realize that cultural identity permeates a foreign language much in the same way that hip-hop or rap street culture suffuses Afro-Caribbean street language.

#### **7.4 Cultural and Learner Identity in interviews with Georgina and Alex**

It seemed to me that these two interviews in particular were polar opposites in that the cultural resources which Alex and Georgina draw upon for their meaning are completely different. Georgina understood that culture resided inside the language whereas for Alex the foreign language does not seem to have an intrinsic cultural interest. Alex is however not interested in cultural difference at all as can be seen in the following extract.

##### **Extract 14:**

DE= Researcher A=Alex

- 34 DE- Would you like to live and work in a foreign country?
- 35 A- I think so yeh
- 36 DE- what would be the advantage of this?
- 37 A- Nice place to work
- 38 DE- nice in what way?
- 39 A- better weather
- 40 DE- so what is important to you?
- 41 A- sunny weather
- 42 DE- are you interested in life and culture in other countries or is that not a
- 43 big interest for you?
- 44 A- it's not a big interest
- 45 DE- thanks very much for taking part in this interview .

In line 41 Alex states that the important issue for him would be the weather if live in a foreign country and in line 44 that the difference in way of life is 'not a big interest'.

The points of view of Alex and Georgina are then very different.

Alex is an able boy, in top sets for subjects where they are setted into ability groups but in Spanish his learner identity seems very different from that of Georgina. As we will see in later observations Alex engages positively with the foreign language work but he



does this in an unexpected way, not making the connections that Georgina does to Spanish or Hispanic culture.

Somewhere between Georgina's and Alex's opposed positions we have seen the positions of George and Adam who go to Spain frequently and who enjoy an Anglo-Hispanic cultural lifestyle. However this does not seem to permeate into a linguistic-cultural interest as does Georgina, Lauren and Lizzie. The differences between Georgina, Lauren and Lizzie on the one hand and Alex, George and Adam on the other seem to be the cultural connections to the language itself rather than simply a matter of a priori gender. I was therefore interested to see if there were male students in the case study who expressed similar cultural interests as the girls I had interviewed.

### **7.5 Interview with Sam**

The next interview I set up was with Sam, a male student in the middle ability category with a CAT score of 104. I was interested in looking at cultural identity with the foreign language as a basis for learner identity for MFL learning. Cultural and learner identities are the two themes for analyzing data in this chapter but it is not yet clear whether or not MFL cultural identity accounts for learner identity. Cultural identity has already been defined (cf 3.5) as the dialectic interrelationship between a subjective cultural process and perceived objective cultural product giving rise to new understandings. (Kramssch 1998)

Although Sam does not use the foreign language much in class, he does write it very well and has a sound grasp of word structure and grammar.

### **Extract 15:**

DE- researcher. S- Sam a male year 9 student; Actual GCSE grade 'E'

- 1 DE- D'you find it important to learn MFL?
- 2 S- yeh, maybe if you want to move countries and speak their language.
- 3 It's interesting as well to learn about it.
- 4 DE- right- what d'you think the main advantage would be?
- 5 S- maybe if you wanted to move countries for business and stuff
- 6 DE- d'you think it would be important to understand how other people live?
- 7 S- yeh it's important to learn other people's cultures
- 8 DE- why do you think that?
- 9 S- you've got to respect their culture
- 10 DE- right ok. Are you fascinated by the way people live?
- 11 S- yeh coz they live a lot differently to us, obviously bull-fighting and
- 12 things like that
- 13 DE. So do you think Spanish people are different or the same as us?
- 14 S-They're a lot more different

Sam's motivation for learning MFL is a mixture of instrumental in line 5 in terms of business and in terms of learning about target language culture in line 7-11. In line 11 he says that 'they live a lot differently to us'. Sam's answer to my question in informal conversation , 'What is culture in your opinion? is that 'Culture is something people do which is different to us'. He sees culture therefore as difference rather than as the way we all live. However he clearly appreciates the sense of 'Other' in this difference. In the following extract he is excited by cultural difference.

### **Extract 16:**

- 15 DE- And do you like to know about this difference? Is difference important
- 16 to you or should we all be the same?
- 17 S- difference is good cos then you can learn things off them. If we were

18 all the same it would be boring wouldn't it, so it's exciting  
 19 DE-so you like the excitement of difference? Would you like to work in  
 20 Spain?  
 21 S- yeh that's one of my ambitions, to move out to Spain and maybe start  
 22 my own business or something like that.  
 23 So does that give you motivation for the language  
 24 S- yeh

Sam seems to combine an interest in cultural difference (line 17) with a desire to start a business (lines 21-22). So again his motivations seem to combine instrumental and integrative motivations into an imagined future selves or social investment. The following extract focuses on the relationship between language and culture.

**Extract 17:**

25 DE- D'you think you can speak the language more fluently if you get to  
 26 know the culture?  
 27 S- um  
 28 DE- or does it not matter?  
 29 S- No I don't think it matters really if you learn the culture or not. It's more  
 30 interesting if you do but I don't think you need to learn the culture to be  
 31 able to speak it.

Sam likes to appreciate cultural difference. He has an interest in Spanish culture and understands that both cultural and economic reasons in learning a language make it attractive for him. Further in the interview he says that he would rather be Spanish than English because 'they're fun' and 'they're bubbly characters and they don't sleep' and 'the culture is different isn't it? They have more parties and things like that'. Sam has in fact been to Alicante a few times as his grand-mother has a house there. However he does not make cultural connections to language (lines 30-31) in the way that Georgina, Lauren and Lizzie do, nor Alicia and Zara in the previous chapter 6.

My argument so far is that cultural identity, defined as an exploratory process is a relationship to perceived otherness of the ways of life or product of the target languages and helps to shape the position of the learner with regard to the social phenomena of language learning (cf 3.5;6.12). This definition has the understanding that ways of life are inscribed within the language itself. As we have already mentioned in section 3.5 the definition of culture itself is that culture is viewed as being shaped by language within discourse (Kramsch 1998) and as far as the individual within his/her cultural identity is concerned, it is the totality of memorized past experiences acting upon the present moment. Of course the individual is still engaging with each moment in the present in his/her own dialectical interactivity and therefore the construction of the individual's culture is always on-going and always shaping learner identity. The interviews may reveal participants' historic culture in the present but this is culture as product and this needs to connect to culture as process in MFL to shape learner identity. We will see process more clearly in the ethnographic classroom observations in 7.8

We cannot however negate the students' own discourses that they create in their own groups and which they bring to the classroom and the fact that the classroom as a learning space stands at the intersection of many discourses. Kramsch (1993) describes the tensions within classroom space as emanating from oppositional forces from a multitude of psychological, social, political, moral and linguistic constructions of meaning. The teacher, through professional knowledge and skill in deploying resources, is attempting to reproduce the target language and culture in the classroom. He/she relies

on student imagination and cultural capital to go part of the way on this journey. However interwoven within this, is the students' own cultural discourse and the meanings they create. The best way to capture this and see how this impacts on the learning process is through ethnographic observation.

## **7.6 Ethnographic Observation**

The year 9 class in the case study was observed 16 separate times over as many lessons, on an average of twice per week basis between mid- October and mid- February 2006/2007. There were times when the schedule was broken such as teacher absence, half term and Christmas holidays, a school activity event when the class did not take place and the last week before Christmas when there are other activities. The year 9 class takes place three times a week and on the third lesson of this series I was able to undertake many of the 14 interviews. I did others during my guaranteed non-teaching time. I was able to undertake this intensive programme of research thanks to the presence of another teacher called Lindsay who taught most of the lessons.

During the times of the research observation I sat at various points around the class, looking at the whole class activity, then focusing on various pairs and groups of students, as this is the way they work in practical sessions, and then at times widening my attention back to the whole class. The lessons started with a whole class presentation, generally on the interactive white board or perhaps a listening activity before splitting into groups and pairs. There was then a plenary at the end of the lesson with the whole class. Right at the beginning of the beginning of the year there was a seating plan for the 20 students in the class based on a boy/girl arrangement. This is school policy, with the rationale for

such a seating arrangement being to maintain good classroom behaviour. The general thinking is that where there is a preponderance of boys together, the behaviour very quickly becomes unruly and so the assumption is that girls have a civilizing effect when individually placed with boys. Sometimes the seating arrangement does not last very long, as with this year 9 class, because I do not feel that there are behaviour problems with the boys. I also feel that in a foreign language where speaking work is done in pairs students feel more at ease to undertake this in their own social friendship group. This has never been questioned on occasions when I have had visits to my room by leadership team members because students are moving forward with their work and showing involvement. The consequence of my departure from official policy with this class, although with others I do enforce it, is that there is a gender divide in the class. From the front of the class where the teacher's desk is, looking to the rear of the class, most of the girls sit next to each other on the right hand side. Of course there is an exception to this as two boys sit at the front. The boys sit on the left hand side except for two girls who sit on the front row with two boys as boy/girl; boy/girl. They do this from choice. This division of seating arrangements around gender is very reminiscent of the year 11 case study where there was a predominantly female group with two males and a predominantly male group with one female. With regard to the three participants so far interviewed, Georgina sits with the girls on the right hand side of the class, Sam sits on the left-hand side on a middle row, sometimes on his own as he likes to quietly get on with written work and Alex sits on the back row with two other boys. I do sometimes have to move Alex because of the banter that goes on between him, Adam and George. However I don't feel too guilty about not sticking to the official arrangement because

there is often silly banter on the front row on the left where Charlotte sits with Fred and Kenzie sits with Mitchell in boy/girl arrangement.

## **Fieldwork**

The following is a lesson that I taught myself on the 17<sup>th</sup> October

*'Started the lesson with Salsa music with Spanish lyrics relating to Cuba from the Listos course. Several students danced to the rhythm, two were dancing in the aisle- Fred and Alex, a bit too energetically, slightly over the top. I asked, in the interests of equity, if one of the girls wanted to dance to which George offered his services. Once this little starter activity was finished and the whole class was calm, they had to look at questions on the board about the song. They had to pick out the Spanish for 'I went to the beach', 'I went to a bar', 'I drank a warm coffee'. Fred is messing around at the end of the row and disturbing my question and answer session. He has to be moved but is purposefully very slow in gathering his belongings together. This holds up the lesson much to my annoyance as we had started with a lot of momentum.*

*Alex is looking at a dictionary of Spanish/English language and occasionally interrupts my flow to ask me for words in Spanish. I am a bit annoyed about this but I see that he is doing his own task of making up his own sentences in Spanish. After a double take on my own state of mind I realize that I am reluctantly pleased. He wants to write in Spanish 'I ate a scrambled egg' I have to put him on hold as, with the rest of the class in front of me, I can't think of the Spanish word for scrambled off the top of my head. Georgina and Joel, completely on task answer loads of questions by identifying Spanish phrases on the tape. Lauren normally extremely quiet begins to put her hand up.*

*We then read a Spanish text on Cuba. I read very slowly and get them to give me a gist translation. Mitchell starts off with a good translation of the first two sentences. I then ask for volunteers to read. Georgina reads very well and then Sam. By this time there is some restlessness and I have to bring the class to order by urging the class to respect those who are actually contributing. Five minutes before the end I set a learning homework, learning the regular preterite tense of AR verbs. On the whole this has been a fun lesson because of the music and rhythms of Salsa but it has generated excitement and some silliness from the boys'. (end of observation)*

The lesson reveals an intersection of discourses that is a dialectic where my discourse interacts with that of the students to produce quite often something different. The final product is not always exactly what I had in mind, (although it is with Georgina and Sam), but is a sort of hybrid between different interpretations of the lesson objective. Alex, whom I interviewed earlier on, shows interest in Spanish translating from English but shows no interest in the cultural part of the lesson in terms of the lyrics of the song and how this reflects Cuba. At the beginning of the lesson he did engage with the music in his over the top dancing exhibition with Fred. Apart from this he has spent most of the lesson quietly translating random sentences using a Spanish/English dictionary and he has produced a lot of work by the end of the lesson which needs to be marked. This surely is an argument for the power of independent learning and indeed he seems to have found his own space in line with Kramsch's (1993) notion of third place. In the interview with Alex, he seemed disconnected from the 'official' foreign language cultural perspective although he is very focussed on the mechanics of the language in terms of translating sentences and dictionary research. Fred went in a different direction in that after his mock dancing, he did not engage with the linguistic- cultural content and spent a lot of his time talking with someone else until he was moved.

Another lesson I observed on the 30<sup>th</sup> October featured the same research participants in a dialectical relationship between pupil and teacher discourse. The following account is taken verbatim from my fieldnotes:-

*'Lesson objective –me gusta/no me gusta = I like/I do not like.*



*I ask for a volunteer to do a powerpoint presentation on likes and dislikes in relation to school subjects. All the slides are done and the student just has to present each slide in Spanish. Fred volunteers and then backtracks, suggesting other people, 'Let Adam do it- he's clever, no let Sam do it'. Eventually Fred does it. The teacher organizes the pupils into pairs for dialogues and urges them to speak up in Spanish. Fred protests 'I don't speak Spanish miss'. Claire, who is often absent, doesn't seem too sure of herself meekly asks 'Miss we will work in a three with Georgina?' They do look up to Georgina in Spanish. The group of girls start 'Hablas espanol? (do you speak Spanish?- 'te gusta?' do you like it? Si me gusta mucho- I like it a lot'. The girls perform the same question and answer on likes/dislikes for other subjects and succeed in doing the task. Mitchell and Fred are in a group of 4 talking about where they bought their bags. However the teacher approaches. Mitchell 'no me gusta la religion' (I don't like R.E) then he says 'see I can do it' and looks very pleased with himself. Teacher moves away and Mitchell resumes talking about Christmas purchases. Whole class resumes for a plenary. Fred and George continue to 'banter' in English regarding a Lee Evans D.V.D. Fred has his I- pod out. George and Fred dialogue in front of the whole class- 'me gusta matematicas (I like maths) pero no me gusta la religion (but I don't like R.E). They are told to return to their places to copy out the sentences. George and Fred continue to 'banter'. The teacher calls out to Mitchell 'Turn round and copy' Fred says 'What are we copying miss'? Fred and George continue to banter'.(end of observation)*

The interest in this observation is the duality of action as George and Fred incorporate the lesson within their own discourse. This seems to be an overt feature of many of the boys who are learning Spanish and performing it at surface level whilst maintaining their own discourse beneath the surface. This is a feature of many of the students but it is often hard to capture because most of them switch back onto the work when the teacher approaches or when the class is being inspected. However the 'dual discourse' is very noticeable with Alex, Fred, George and sometimes Mitchell because they are very loud and engage constantly in what I have called 'banter'. I mean this to be light-hearted, jocular exchange of humour, exploiting surface events for the purposes of light derision.

An example is in the following lesson from Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November from part of the lesson that I taught on the past tense.

The following is taken from my research diary notes taken during the observation on the 8<sup>th</sup> November. This is the complete observation as it is with all the observations and without any editing. The brief interaction between Fred and Alex on the one hand and Georgina on the other is salient because of opposing discourses of the two sides.

*'Lesson starts with latino music from Santana coming from the computer. There is a presentation on computer white board on preterite tense of 'er' and 'ir' verbs. Pupils have to copy down and make holiday diary using past tense activities. Fred and Alex seem 'hyped up' –taking Georgina's £1 coin. Georgina is trying to work. Fred makes as if to hand it back to her but drops it at the last moment. This leads to a commotion as Fred and Alex scramble about for it on the floor. (end of observation)*

We can see a problematic encounter between two discourses, that of Fred and Alex, a pupils discourse that is disengaged from the teacher led discourse and that of Georgina who is following the official teacher led discourse by trying to work.

In the next observation of the 14<sup>th</sup> November we see the classroom space dominated by a pupil discourse that is disengaged from the official teacher led discourse. The girls are trying to work although Charlotte, a female pupil not in the case study, is drawn into the boys' banter.

*'The lesson starts with a presentation of the preterite tense. The teacher remonstrates with George for messing around with Charlotte. George lets go of Charlotte and turns to Fred laughing and joking about penis size. George starts to make monkey sounds and then puts up his hand to answer a question by the teacher about verb endings. Mitchell gets out of his chair and pretends to be an old man whilst bending down to pick up his pen. Alex, Fred and Adam are quiet, copying preterite verbs from the board. Fred is playing with coins on the table and*

*turns round to Adam to play 'shove ha'penny'. Alex turns round to disturb Georgina who is quietly working' (end of observation)*

The interesting thing to note here is the hybrid discourse of the boys who mix the teacher led discourse with their own. Alex, Fred and Adam have spent quiet moments working, copying down preterite tense verbs but they rarely do this for any length of time without returning to their own discourse. George tries to draw Charlotte in to this discourse and nearly succeeds until the teacher intervenes. Georgina however remains faithful to the pedagogic discourse of the lesson.

The next classroom observation highlights this discourse hybridity in the lesson participation of George and Alex.

*'I asked pupils how they would write 'Que hiciste ayer? = What did you do yesterday? George comes to the board and writes 'Que' in minute letters that can hardly be seen even from close up let alone from the back of the room. Then in very big letters that take up most of the board space he writes 'hiciste' and then in normal letters writes 'ayer'. He knew the answer but did not have to present it this way except to evoke humour. Alex comes to the board and writes a correct answer in normal sized letters 'escuche musica' (I listened to music)'. (end of observation)*

Here Alex decided to respond without acknowledging the call for humour. The dichotomy between the official lesson objective discourse and pupil discourse can be seen clearly at this moment whereas the two discourses are often intertwined and overlapping. In his write up on the board George sticks with pupil discourse to evoke humour and perhaps also to invoke a likeminded continuation from the next person to

write on the board. I fully expected Alex to reciprocate. However to my surprise and relief, he conformed to teacher led lesson discourse in his write-up.

Alex has a serious side in his work which was particularly visible in a lesson on a Friday afternoon much later in the year in April following the return to school from the Easter holidays. The following is taken from my research diary as field notes for this observation from a lesson much later in the year.

*'We were revising the preterite tense and creating a powerpoint Easter holiday diary on laptops. Every student has a laptop computer for this type of activity and students become quickly absorbed within the creative possibilities that the computers are able to afford in terms of the graphics and varieties of text. At the end of the lesson Alex showed me the text he had quietly created in Spanish which was grammatically correct'. (end of observation)*

Although he claims no 'intercultural' interest, he enjoys writing correct sentences in Spanish. He is a very able pupil in other subjects, has a high C.A.T score and seems to enjoy the intellectual challenge of creating Spanish text. I find Alex enigmatic because he can fool around in one lesson and yet take the work very seriously the next. This is where interpretation is problematic and has to remain unfinished. What I do feel I can say as a general interpretation is that he shows flexible movement between teacher led discourse and pupil discourse. Flexible because this involves changes in his own subjectivity. There are then male students who involve themselves in the teacher led discourse but who still remain in the camp of pupil discourse, moving between the two.

Returning to my observation notes for the lesson on the Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November the lesson finishes with a speaking session immediately following Alex's write-up on the board. After Alex has written 'Escuche musica' (I listened to music) on the board, I throw the 'what did you do yesterday?' question in Spanish out to the class. The following are verbatim notes from my research diary. I have since added my translation of the Spanish sentences into English in brackets.

*'Georgina immediately puts up her hand to reply 'Ayer fui en tren a Londres' (Yesterday I went by train to London). Follow up question by me to Georgina in front of the class, 'Y que hiciste en Londres'? (and what did you do in London?). Georgina replies, 'visite un museo de arte (I visited an art gallery). I redo the question to the whole class' que hiciste ayer?. Charlotte ( not in the interview group) replies 'fui a Londres' To my question in Spanish ' What did you do in London?', George this time replies, 'visite un museo de arte' ( I visited an art gallery). Charlotte goes to the board upon my request to write up 'visite' (I visited). During this interaction Fred is turning around to chatter and so is Alex.'(end of observation)*

The observation above shows how many pupils dip in and out of lessons. Georgina has a high commitment to the lessons and sticks with the lesson objective discourse but George, Fred and Alex to varying degrees do the lesson, take a talk break, go back to the lesson again and then maybe take another break.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> November the theme of preterite tense continues with revision and to create past tense diaries. The following is a classroom observation from my research diary.

*'the lesson begins with question and answer in the preterite tense, starting with the question 'Que hiciste el fin de semana? ( what did you do at the weekend). The answers are painfully slow at coming in – nade (I swam), compre –( I bought), fui-(I went). Fred has to be put outside for talking. He has been re-seated right at the front of the class but still continues to talk. Natasha is sitting quietly on her own after returning to school from a period of exclusion. The class is quiet and begins to fill in*

*past tense diaries. I walk around looking at their work and students ask me if their past tenses are correctly formed. There is then a presentation of Spanish culture. Students fill in worksheets on geography of Spain. Aimee, Lizzie and Georgina are working well. Adam works quietly asking questions now and then' (end of observation).*

The class is generally quiet and on task within teacher discourse. I think the sending out of Fred has an effect and also Natasha's exclusion which is a very serious sanction. Fred will have been 'picked up' by an 'on-call' manager who is a senior member of staff and this will go on his school record and merit a detention. Therefore his parents/guardians will have to be informed. Natasha will now be on a 'post exclusion' report following her return to school and she will have to report to a deputy head with her report to monitor her work and behaviour progress at the end of each day. The class has a subdued feeling and this may well be because pupil discourse had encountered a much more powerful regulatory school discourse resulting in the containment of the former. In my experience this subdued atmosphere does not last very long but it does show the asymmetry in power between discourses and here there is no overlap.

Observation notes for a lesson on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2006 once more show pupils constantly alternating between the different discourses. This is evident from the boys in the class because it is undisguised in terms of volume. There is also Natasha who was not part of the interview group because of irregular attendance at school. The notes are as follows:-

*'Presentation of 'Las Asignaturas' (school subjects) on powerpoint. Pupils write down vocabulary and repeat for pronunciation practice. Pupils start to get overly noisy in their repetitions and told to quieten down. Fred is using this as a cover to turn round and chat. Class now quieten and take part in question and answer session with teacher in Spanish on which*

*subjects they study. George comes out to do the powerpoint presentation to the class. He presents a few frames then Shannon is invited to take over. Alex then goes up, has a change of mind, turns around then goes back again. George then starts arguing with Mitchell about whose turn it is to continue the presentation. Fred goes up to the whiteboard. While Fred presents other pupils are talking amongst themselves- George, Alex, Natasha. George asks the little group 'whose seen Eurotrash?' This engenders talk in the group about the T.V programme. The teacher takes over the presentation for further pronunciation practice and the class repeat whilst some take an occasional break to continue their own talk'. (end of observation)*

Initially it seems from the data that it is only the boys who are overtly constructing their own discourse within the teacher led discourse of the class. Natasha however is particularly vocal when she is in the lesson. She is often absent but her presence is felt when she is there.

The following lesson took place on the Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December. The lesson objective was to research a South American country using internet connected wireless laptop computers. They had to create a powerpoint labelled in Spanish, displaying the flag, the capital city, the population, places of interest, national sports etc. The following are my research notes I took during the lesson. Natasha's contribution should be noted because her discourse is completely disconnected to the classroom discourse. This is reminiscent of the boys in the year 11 class seated at the side whose discourse was gradually becoming disconnected to the rest of the class.

*'Quiet murmur of conversation. A group of girls are giggling at the front. Fred and Mitchell share a laptop and are talking to each other. George is at the back of the class, taking photos of Fred and Mitchell with his mobile phone until told to stop and put the mobile away by the teacher. Shannon asks 'Can we download the national anthem of Peru?' George shouts out 'What about the English national anthem, it's the best in the world?'. Fred*

*shouts out 'Miss is there a Cuban Mafia?' George replies 'Cuba's run by the cannabis league'.*

*Adam, George and Natasha then talk about relationships- who's going out with who.*

*Natasha- 'there's a story about you and Jasmin'*

*George- 'tell me what it is'*

*Natasha- 'Can't you guess?'*

*George- 'it's only your opinion it doesn't bother'*

*Natasha- 'work it out, she went out with Mitchell- she went out with Lee'*

*George- 'I'm not bothered'*

*Fred meanwhile has finished his powerpoint on Cuba in English and is showing the others. The lesson ends'.(end of observation)*

This was a lesson where pupils were given a structured yet creative task mixing target language culture with the MFL. They were allowed to go on internet sites to research their country and engage in independent and autonomous learning. However they were required to come up with a result involving their own powerpoint display. This seems to create a larger overlap between teacher and pupil discourses and more so than is usual since MFL lessons tend to be teacher dominated with all the new input required every lesson. Most of the girls were quiet and on task except for Natasha who clearly uses the lesson for social reasons. She draws George into a discussion about his relationships and he is unable to balance between official/unofficial discourses at this point. Fred has been able to maintain an equilibrium between discourses and finishes his work albeit with labels in English rather than Spanish.

Creese (2004) refers to characteristics commonly associated with gender being taken up by males and females rather than these characteristics being inherently or innately gendered. Gender is therefore a learned culture where male characteristics are socialized and taken up by males and female associated characteristics by females. The boys'



behaviour in the class is therefore socially constructed. Natasha exhibits characteristics which are commonly associated with maleness and in fact when she is in the class she exchanges her 'banter' with the male pupils and interacts very little with female pupils. The following are lesson notes from my diary from a lesson observation on the 24<sup>th</sup> October. In this lesson there is a focus on the interaction between Natasha and Fred. The lesson objective was to describe friends in Spanish and the students are working on this using their text books and dictionaries.

*'Natasha is talking to Fred in a loud voice about her arrest last Saturday for being drunk and disorderly, hitting her mother and assaulting the policeman. She says she smashed a door and would have been charged with disorderly behaviour only her mother dropped the charges of assault, as did the policeman. Apparently she had kicked him accidentally. She is not often in the lesson (fortunately). I had to send her out as she refused to take off her woolly hat on which she stuck pink post -its with insults:- w---er, f---k o-f. She claims to have an Asbo in the area where she lives. Mitchell is working quietly at the front -----'. (end of observation)*

This excerpt shows the boasting of aggressive characteristics which are not normally associated with femaleness. Natasha's discourse goes beyond normally heard pupil discourse since it does not connect at all with the classroom. It seems to be a discourse completely brought in from the outside and silences many of the other students. In fact Natasha does not last long in the lesson because of the hat she is wearing with the insults stuck to it which she refuses to take off and she is eventually taken away from the lesson. One of the last lessons of the autumn term is a focus on Spanish culture in terms of food and drink. This is a short observation where the class is quiet and within teacher led discourse.

*'this is a lesson on food in Spain, with a powerpoint presentation of photographs of dishes. Food is presented from different regions- Gazpacho, Arroz a la cazuela, sopa de ajo, bacalao, empanada etc. Pupils have to match dishes to regions and cities. They then have to present this with a map of Spain as a display. Fred asks the teacher' do they have Sunday roast with Yorkshire pudding in Spain?' The class is really quiet and absorbed in their display work'(end of observation)*

The class is quiet probably because they are absorbed in creative work that they can do and for once I feel that there is not much to report.

The next classroom observation takes place in the New Year on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2007. In this observation we see the way the boys project their personalities into the social space whilst the girls are chatting quietly to each other. Lindsey, the classroom teacher is teaching the class, although at one point I go up to join in a work group of girls.

*'Class does me presento exercise (I introduce my self) in the text book Listos 3. The written work is undertaken quietly. This is followed by speaking dialogues- asking and answering questions about each other. Fred and Alex can't agree on who's asking the questions and so they both ask each other the same questions. They keep asking each other the same questions and neither is answering. They keep this going for some time and eventually Alex starts to answer and with each answer, he says' Fred smells'. Georgina, Lizzie, Aimee and Shannen are doing the dialogues quietly in pairs. I go to sit next to Georgina and Leah to revise the preterite tense with them and ask Que hiciste el sabado pasado? What did you do last weekend? Shannen started to get annoyed because apparently I was not including her in the conversation and not replying to her questions. She got up and left the classroom. I went after her and outside she said she was fed up with the subject because I didn't answer her question and said that she couldn't do the subject. She called Natasha to come with her and they both stormed off. I reported both of them' (end of observation)*

In the observation we can see dissent from one of the female students. This is not the type of silly banter we witness from the boys but something that may have been 'brewing' for some time that I did not understand. On the surface Shannen took offence because I didn't include her in the dialogue with Georgina and Leah and she felt she was

being ignored. I didn't realize that I was concentrating my attention too much on Georgina and Leah and it would spark off this sort of reaction. However this is a different type of behaviour than that of the boys and, in my opinion, may come from a sensitivity that I was unaware of, in terms of jealousy or an underlying fierce competition between some of the girls.

In the next lesson the teacher's objective is adjectival comparisons in Spanish. The gap between the boys' pupil discourse and official teacher led discourse seems to widen without much overlap. This lesson takes place on the 16<sup>th</sup> January. Again Lindsey is teaching the lesson.

*'the lesson objective is using comparative adjectives to describe one's family and friends – mas ---que = more -----than; menos -----que. Fred interrupts the lesson presentation making comments about better looking than, prettier than, shouting out 'I'm not gay'. Fred is told off by the teacher but plays jingles on his mobile which is then confiscated. George interrupts the lesson to argue openly about the task of making comparisons. The task is to write 2 comparisons using mas ---que and menos que ---. However Fred and Adam talk openly and loudly across the class about Vinnie Jones, a footballer recently turned actor in gangster films. George is singing and shouting out to Adam. Georgina, Lizzie, Shannen and Aimee are chatting to each other whilst they work.'* (end of observation).

The boys' pupil discourse seems more pronounced and disconnected from the main lesson discourse since the return to school following the Christmas holidays and in the next lesson this louder male discourse continues. This takes place on the 30<sup>th</sup> January.

*'this is a coursework lesson, working on a coursework of describing friends and family in Spanish. Alex doesn't come into the classroom straight away. When he does he doesn't sit on a chair but on Fred's knee at the back of the class. There had*

*been a new seating plan that the teacher had made in the new term after Christmas but this is completely ignore. Most of the boys sit at the back of the class and the girls on the left hand side. Joel and Mat turn round to talk to the boys on the back row.*

*Lizzie and Georgina are working on vocab asking the teacher how to say 'my parents are called' in Spanish?- reply from teacher 'mis padres se llaman'. Next question is 'How do you say they are divorced?' Aimee's hand is up, Shannen's hand is up. At the back of the class George is playing with a football, bouncing it against a table. Mitchell is at the back talking to George and Adam and Fred are tying a white scarf around Mitchell's head. Towards the front on the left hand side Aimee, Shannen, Leah and Georgina are sitting around the table as a four. The talk is on personal issues as they work. Just in front of the back row on the right hand side Alex and Joel are arguing about a dictionary- Alex is trying to get it back from Joel and leaning over to prod him. Alex gets out of his seat and Fred leans over and puts his hand on the chair to prevent him from sitting back down. Adam is again bouncing his football against the table and Sam is now drawn into this, throwing paper at Mat. The boys now seem to be dominating much of the lesson social and physical space.' (end of observation).*

A 'laddish' discourse type is taking over the back two rows of the class with normally well behaved male students getting drawn in such as Joel, Mat and Sam.

The next week the Lindsey is absent from school and I teach the lesson. This is the first time I have taught the class since October 17th and I continue with the theme of family.

The boys' discourse is still identifiable although slightly quieter on this occasion.

*'Powerpoint presentation with images for which students must write captions based on La Familia (family) ie tengo tres hermanos- I have three brothers; tengo una hermana- I have a sister. Alex is sitting at the back and working quietly answering all the questions. Adam and George are being silly.*

*Their next task is to write sentences on their own family.' (end of observation).*

Alex may have decided that he is bored with messing around as he has decided to do the work quietly on his own. In other classroom observations he has withdrawn from the general banter of male pupil discourse and attached himself to the official teacher led discourse although often on his own independent terms with a dictionary. In the next and

last of the lessons observed we see Fred working quietly with a dictionary on a past tense exercise. The teacher has returned to teach the lesson.

*‘The lesson starts by talking to the class about National Curriculum levels using different tenses in speaking and writing. They have to write the past tense about last weekend or their last holiday. Georgina writes ‘ martes fui en Londres con mi familia (I went in London with my family). En Londres fuimos Academy de arte(In London we went art Academy). Hizo buen tiempo y sol(it was nice sunny weather) Fred sits at the front and quietly works with his own dictionary. Sam writes out a diary as follows:-*

*Lunes (Monday) Manana(morning )*

*Tarde (afternoon)*

*Fui a la playa (I went to the beach)*

*comi en el café (I ate in the café)*

*Martes (Tuesday)*

*Nade en la piscine (I swam in the pool)*

*visite castillos (I visited castles)*

*Miercoles (Wednesday)*

*Fui al cine y mire MrBean(I went to cinema to see Mr Bean)*

*Comi en café*

*Comi pollo- I ate chicken in the café*

*(end of observation)*

Since the teacher has returned from absence the boys seem to have re-engaged with the teacher led discourse and Fred and Sam are working on the language uninterruptedly and this is probably the first time for Fred that he does not engage in banter or mess around. Sam’s written work is very good in its accuracy.

## **7.7 Learner Cultural Identity as framework of analysis**

In the classroom observations of 7.6 we can see the relationship between pupil and teacher led discourses. The boys' pupil discourse seems to be a hybrid discourse which moves between the official teacher led discourse and a 'laddish' discourse much as outlined by Sunderland (2004) in her notion of gender differences discourse and Sukhanden et al (2000). On two occasions, the 16<sup>th</sup> January and the 30<sup>th</sup> January, we see a 'laddish' discourse dominate the pupils' discourse as some of the boys appear to completely disconnect from the teacher led discourse. The teacher is absent for a week, there is a change of teacher in that I take the lessons that week and on her return, the male pupil discourse seems to re-align to reconnect with the teacher led discourse. There does not seem to be an obvious explanation for this, other than conjecture that this disengagement followed on from a Christmas holiday that lasted over two weeks and it took the boys time to settled back into school routines. It could also be that they were affected by a temporary change of teacher but equally it could be attributed to many other things in the background including the cold weather. On the other hand in the last two observations we see Alex and Fred connecting with the teacher led discourse in the way they immerse themselves in the work. What we do see however is the fluidity of the male pupil discourse in its relationship to pupil discourse in general and teacher discourse. It must be acknowledged that the pupil discourse does not split evenly between gender since, for example Joel and Sam, two male pupils, remain within the teacher led discourse most of the time whereas a female pupil, Natasha, on the other hand always disconnects from it. It should also be noted that in the observation on the 5<sup>th</sup> January,

Shannen becomes frustrated with the official lesson discourse and walks out of the class followed by Natasha.

Natasha's learner/ cultural identity does not connect with classroom discourse, neither pupil discourse nor teacher discourse and because she is absent from school so much, she brings her cultural discourse into school from a different community. Her community based cultural identity does not seem to be able to support her classroom learner identity. It is here that we can see the close inter-relation between learner and cultural identity; cultural identity in terms of the connections made from the learning situation to discourses away from the classroom, either to the foreign language or the outside community culture.

The following is a dialogue created, learnt and performed by Georgina, a female pupil in the transcribed interview and Joel a male pupil. This dialogue was created as a classroom speaking activity to practise the preterite tense in Spanish, asking and answering questions on imaginary or real activities undertaken yesterday. I am presenting this to show a cultural identity that is connected to the foreign language itself. English translations of the Spanish are in brackets.

<sub>1</sub>J –¿Que tal?  
(how are you?)

<sub>2</sub>G Estupendo  
(fantastic)

<sub>3</sub>J-¿ que hiciste ayer?  
(What did you do yesterday?)

4G- Hice practico toca la guitarra  
(some confusion here as to which verb and tense to use but the attempt is successful because it communicates to me, 'I played the guitar')

5J- ¿Y que estudiaste?  
(What did you study?)

6G- Hice teatro  
(I did drama)

7J- ¿que comiste?  
(What did you eat?)

8G- (laughter) tome spaghettis  
(I had spaghetti)

9J- ¿Que bebiste?  
(What did you drink?)

10G- Bebi coca  
(I drank coke)

11J- ¿Adonde fuiste?  
(Where did you go?)

12G- Fui en Londres  
(I went to London –a small error, should be 'a Londres')

13J- ¿A que hora?  
(At what time)

14G- A las ocho  
(At eight o'clock)

This represents more than the instrumental concerns of transactions which tend to be a two or three line exchange where one asks for something, receives the answer, then perhaps one asks the price, pays an amount and says goodbye. In the dialogue above there is an enquiry involving the past tense as the main item of grammar and this is used with accuracy. The enquiry revolves around finding out about what someone did



yesterday has a wider cultural area of engagement in the grammar of language rather than simple transaction.

Joel has been to Spain and in an interview with him he shows interest in learning Spanish for the following reasons in this extract:-

**Extract 18:**

DE= Researcher J=Joel. Actual GCSE grade 'D'

- 1 DE- What is the primary importance of learning a language?  
2 J- if you go to a different country, then you can speak to them in their  
3 language and they like you more. It shows that you try to make the  
4 effort to learn their language do they don't always have to speak  
5 English

In lines 2-5, Joel explains that for him learning a foreign language will gain you appreciation and validation from the foreign language community. It shows that you are considerate in sparing other people the effort of always having to speak English. This contrasts with Fred's reasons for learning a language in the following extract

**Extract 19:**

DE=Researcher F=Fred. Actual GCSE grade 'F'

- 1 DE- so what are the main reasons for learning a language?  
2 F- cos if you know the language you can go to other countries like Brazil  
4and other countries that speak Spanish instead of just Spain  
5DE- yeh  
6 F- I mean if you learn you can ask for anything  
7 DE- so you think it's mainly for holidays or are there other reasons as  
8 well?  
9 F- well if you've got a job speaking Spanish down the telephone or

10 something and if you go on holidays it would be helpful cos you can  
 11 ask for stuff  
 12 DE- are you interested in different ways of life and different ways in  
 13 which people live their lives?  
 14 F- you mean different routines of when they get up and that?  
 15 DE- yeh, different cultures and ways of doing things  
 16 F- no not really to me but to other people that could be interesting-like  
 17 they want to know when a Spaniard gets up in the morning, what he  
 18 does, if he has breakfast in a different way or goes  
 19 out. Some people like that but I don't really mind how people do things.  
 20 It's not really interesting to know what people do.

Fred has a definition of culture and appreciates what this interest could mean for some people but he is frank when he says that this does not hold any interest for him at all (lines 16-20). We have seen in the classroom observations that Fred remains very much on the outside of the language activities, engaging in the pupil discourse 'banter'.

## **7.8 Cultural Identity and Learner Identity in Interaction**

An issue may arise here of whether cultural identity as a background feature accounts for learner identity or vice versa. At the end of chapter 6 of the year 11 case-study there seemed to be a predominantly deterministic outcome where students either brought with them into the classroom situation a cultural capital for their learning of MFL or did not do so. I think this chapter has had a clearer focus on the cultural identity students also may themselves create through their own learning identities constituted within classroom discourse. They are thus able to create their own 'cultural capital'.

Two of the students however, Fred and Alex, do not see the foreign language as connected to intercultural awareness. This can impact upon learner identity in different

ways. For example, Alex, at times, enjoys the creation of Spanish text even though he does not seem to have the cultural resources to connect the words he creates to wider meanings and discourses. The language is for him at present a classroom word game. The issue seems to be one of cultural and learner identity rather than just a gender one. Some of the boys and one of the girls (Natasha) in the study do not evoke wider cultural awareness. By contrast all the girls interviewed and also some of the boys expressed intercultural interest and awareness, although not to the sophisticated extent that Georgina and Lizzie make in connecting culture to the forms of language. Georgina connects form and substance from her own independent study interests and imagination even though she has never been to Spain. However she goes into Spanish internet sites, listens to music in Spanish (Shakira, Santana etc) and watches Spanish language versions of films on D.V.D. Once more this recalls the 'third place' concept as proposed by Kramsch (1993; cf 3.5)

Georgina's learner identity seems connected to her cultural involvement with Spanish and this feeds back into the language because the cultural engagement contains the language. So this is more than an instrumental motivation of learning Spanish to get a job although the social investment (Norton 2000) involved may very well lead to a professional return. The cultural disposition of Georgina recalls that of Alicia and Zara in the year 11 case study where there is a strong connection between learner and cultural identity. The cultural identity here should be seen as an active one where the student is engaged in the process of research and discovery for him/herself as opposed to culture as a finished product. This is therefore where culture as product interrelates with culture as

a process. Culture as an active process seems to be a means of transporting one's identity from one place to another through language.

## **7.9 Gendered Identity**

In this case study, the only students who saw learning Spanish solely in terms of functional uses with regard to holidays and jobs were male. Yet generally male/female gender difference in wider cultural awareness is often blurred in as much as differences in gender generally are blurred. Gender can be seen as a continuum between characteristics deemed male at one end and female at the other and which are situationally negotiated. Creese (2004) refers to masculinities and femininities in the plural where gender is not a finished product at any given time but is in a constant process of social construction. As we have seen, Natasha, a girl, has no cultural interest in the target language whereas Joel, a boy, is keen to use it because he would like to be validated by the target language community. There is no simple and clear-cut dichotomy with regard to male/female cultural identity but there are tendencies for female students to assume a greater cultural interest in the language than male students. From the data gathered there is more of a tendency for boys to see the end result of language learning in terms of gain rather than appreciate the process in terms of cultural enquiry. Joel is the male student who provides the exception to this. When I ask Joel towards the end of our interview if he thinks there are male/female differences in attitudes towards M.F.L, this is how he responds:-

*Joel- 'I think it depends. Maybe, I dunno, men might do it because of career and women might do it because they're interested'*

This gives a brief insight into how a male student who is culturally interested in speaking Spanish, views the motivations of his own gender for doing MFL. Joel's view is echoed by an article written in the Times Educational Supplement magazine of the 26<sup>th</sup> October 2007 by Sara Sullivan, head of languages at Woodlands School in Essex. Under the title 'Bring Languages to life –languages age 11-16, she says, to motivate boys, 'invite ex-pupils who have used MFL with success in their jobs- this works well particularly when the ex-pupil is male, earning a good salary and has used, or is using a foreign language at work'.

Powerful socio-economic discourse often seems to supply the default for learning a foreign language in the absence of wider culture. Here Fairclough's notion of orders of discourse permeating down to the socio-economic discourse type at institutional level and then to interactional practice seems particularly relevant. If one is disinclined or unable to learn for intrinsic interest in language and culture and no other meanings seem available, one can always supply economic motivations of employment prospects, the need to sell to the Spanish in their own language or working in leisure and tourism. The problem here is that the focus on learning is geared towards the end result through acquiring linguistic transactional skills rather than a focus on the process of language acquisition. Metaphorically, it is the goal that counts rather than the beautiful game. MFL learning should be more than communication skills and as Kramsch (1993) argues (cf 6.11), there is unfortunately no dialectic within MFL as a subject since course materials present a foreign culture as a bland finished product devoid of ideological difference and conflict. The bland target language culture MFL does communicate is

portrayed as an ideological normative in terms of people's lives, families, interests, jobs etc. It does not reflect ideological and discourse tensions that Kramersch argues exists within the classroom space. As we saw in Chapter 6, Kramersch argues that the subject area must break out of its normative ideological strangle-hold and it can 'no longer be the one-sided response to national and economic interests, and the pursuit of economic happiness; it must include the search for an understanding of cultural boundaries'.(1993;p12). If dialectical content cannot be brought to MFL to challenge intellectually then perhaps the way forward is to take MFL to other areas of the curriculum rather than just Business and Enterprise although this surely has a useful place. In this way students can appropriate a meaningful content to foreign language forms by undertaking some aspects of other subjects in the foreign language. Teachers of other subjects in collaboration with MFL staff could identify in their schemes of work areas and year groups that could be taught in the foreign language in such subjects as history, drama, IT, P.E, geography etc. Citizenship could have a useful part to play if it could focus on different cultures and values rather than the newly proposed politically driven emphasis on British values (Brackenmount Citizenship Scheme of Work Year 9 'British Identity'). Not everything across the curriculum will be suitable but this could give pupils who are disadvantaged by their own cultural capital in MFL a wider range of interests and a more equitable standing alongside more advantaged pupils through a greater opportunity for access to a cultural content for MFL. This would also provide an alternative to the usual work related vocational foreign language competence which is often the default for those deemed less able at MFL

## 7.10 Conclusion

Since this research is from an interpretive paradigm it should be argued that findings are likely possibilities rather than closed and undisputed facts.

There may well be a link between, on the one hand, cultural identity as an active process of discovery and culture as cultural product in a dialectical relationship in order to shape a MFL learner identity, and this may advantage some students over others. Most of the female students in the interviews expressed a cultural interest in the language and socio-cultural meanings. However of itself, this does not become a causal factor in higher language learning so much as provide a cultural capital which subsequently has to be expressed in the cultural process of the language-learning itself and the shaping of learner identity. It is therefore misguided to assume an 'a priori' one way causality between the two by stating that students who have a certain cultural typology, as a finished product, will then, as a consequence, be more proficient in this area of learning than those with more localized cultural resources. If there is a connection between a desire for intercultural understanding and language learning and it seems from the data that there is some degree of link, then it may also be that the classroom based learning of MFL opens up cultural possibilities to create a cultural process where none had previously existed.

Gumperz (1999) notion of indexicality is of relevance here where localized classroom discourses invoke the meanings of wider cultural discourses and reach out towards them. The success of this may depend more on the cultural attitudes of the students as being those of discovery rather than their current cultural knowledge as a fixed entity. Here

culture should relate more to a process rather than a finished bounded product. Gieve (1999) points out that there is very little to connect notions of MFL communicative competency with wider cultural meanings at the level of interactional discourse. This refers to the concept of culture within language which echoes the concept of 'languaculture' expounded by Van Lier (2002) and mentioned in 6.9. Foreign languages have patterns of discourse integrated to their structure which are ways of saying things and types of linguistic behaviour. Gieve proposes that MFL learning should take place at this level of cultural discourse in interactional exchanges rather than at the level of individual words and phrases. This could well bridge a gap between deterministic views of 'large' culture and individual lexical units in classroom settings. Over reliance on theorists like Fairclough in terms of 'orders of discourse' may result in determinism from large culture to small culture whereas the reality may be that 'traffic' in the reverse direction is also be true. Thus MFL classroom learning may result in connections that hitherto had not existed in the mind of the learner. It may be that once connections are being made, a dialectical relationship is engaged between learner and cultural identities that becomes developmental.

We may see Alex for example in Year 9, not as a finished product but as someone in development with an interest in forming sentences although without much awareness of the larger cultural meanings to connect with these isolated sentences. This may well be an example of Kramsch's (1993) notion of third place which is Alex's own interpretation of MFL. What will he be like in Year 11? Will he be making these connections to develop a wider cultural competence, will the subject have become more of a procedure



to get through or will he perhaps have become proficient in manipulating the structures of grammar through an interest in words alone? For MFL to be of intercultural significance for Alex, leading to the higher grades, much depends on me as his teacher, or another, to find the cultural resources to bring the subject to life for him but much also depends on his desire and imagination to create meanings for himself. It seems to me that this would be a dialectical interchange between larger and smaller cultural discourses or between cultural product and process. I feel the task of connecting background cultural identity to learner identity will be much easier with Georgina. The one thing that seems clear to me is that there must be both cultural content and process connections going beyond the classroom for the subject to become more than just a word game or school procedure.

Van Lier (2002) refers to the concept of 'languaculture' where culture and language are taught together. He argues that 'languaculture' presents new realities because each new language brings with it new and perhaps liberating ways of seeing the world and provides individuals with 'affordances' for self and identity. If the learner perceives the MFL cultural context as unappealing, then, according to Van Lier, the new possibility for identity cannot fulfil itself and the MFL learner identity then becomes restricted or non-existent. A discourse of resistance or rebellion can then establish itself against the foreign language. I believe that Van Lier, in his concepts of 'affordances' taken from the notion of 'Languaculture' and Gieve's (1999) notion of language as cultural discourse underline the main findings of my research so far, which is the necessary linking up of the individual learner identity with cultural possibilities inscribed in and transmitted by the modern foreign language.

## CHAPTER 8 YEAR 7 DATA ANALYSIS

### **8.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, the third case study is outlined and analyzed in terms of the themes that have emerged out of the preceding two data analysis chapters. As explained 8.1 the themes of the analysis are learner identity, cultural identity and gender identity. The relationships between these are analyzed in this chapter. In 8.2 there is a description of the year 7 case study and in 8.3 the analysis of the themes begins within the context of ethnographic observation. Interview analysis occurs from 8.4 . In 8.6 we see the relationship between foreign language culture which the official teacher discourse presents to pupils as a finished cultural product and in 8.7 and 8.8, the classroom culture which the students produce in their own discourses. 8.11 focuses on the interrelationship between different identities, where at times they overlap and yet at others we see them at odds with each other depending on the nature of individual pupils cultural and learner identity. The conclusion in 8.13, argues that from the evidence of the data analysis, the students who show interest and achieve more in classroom MFL are those whose own learner and cultural identities are closely connected to a wider perceived MFL cultural identity. The link with gender is shown not to be a necessary one but contingent upon prevalent characteristics that are culturally associated with gender.

### **8.1 Themes for Analysis**

The third data set addresses the issue of performance in a year 7 French class. The three themes that have emerged from the data analysis chapters are theoretically supported in

the literature review. Firstly it has been argued that individual identities are constituted socio-culturally in a meaning-making context, actively making meaning and actively interpreting meaning. It follows from this that our identities as learners are viewed as social rather than bio-neurologically based. Learner identity is then the first theme and context in which the data in this chapter will be analyzed. Secondly it was argued in the literature review that interconnecting and overlapping discourses featured the notion of indexicality Gumperz (1999); van Lier (2002). Pupils may be operating in more localized discourses but this area of interaction invokes references to larger cultural discourses. Therefore the second context for analysis is wider cultural orientation and outward projection towards ‘otherness’. In this regard we saw, in previous chapters that students who were unable or who lacked the opportunity to find a cultural relevance to MFL did not show much enthusiasm or desire to progress to fluency. I refer here to Bill in the year 11 case study, Fred and Alex in the year 9 case study.

Finally the third theme is one of gender as a cultural orientation. It was argued in the literature review that gender is not an ‘a priori’ fixed category but one in a constant process of socio-cultural construction. We also saw in the year 11 and year 9 case studies that there were male students such as Robert in year 11 and Joel in year 9 who were keen to do well in MFL and who connected this with its wider cultural context. Attributes that are associated with one or another gender are borrowed and enacted by social participants and are not inherent as ‘a priori’ categories. The third context for analysis is therefore gender to understand if any gendered socio- cultural characteristics are associated with successful foreign language learning.

## **8.2 Year 7 Case Study**

My first task was to establish a group of year 7 research participants to constitute a case study on the basis of informed student and parental consent since my intention was to undertake tape recorded interviews with students. As I did not teach a year 7 class myself I asked my colleague if I could research pupils learning French in her class. The pseudonym I give to this colleague is Julia whom I had known as a colleague for seven years. With permission from Julia I spent part of the first of 12 agreed visits talking to the class about my research and the reason for it. In very general terms I explained that I was researching into attitudes and motivations towards language learning to see if there were areas where we could help to improve student performance. I explained that I had already conducted similar research in year 9 and year 11 in French and Spanish and that I was looking for a male/female gender balance in my research population in case there were any gender differences to be investigated. I explained that participation would be entirely on a voluntary basis and that they could withdraw their participation at any time. I also explained that the research would involve classroom observations and tape-recorded interviews. I explained that the tape-recorded interviews would be only heard by me and the content would be confidential and that if parts of these were transcribed for a research report, their names and the name of the school would be changed to secure anonymity. I said that parental consent would also be required if they wished to participate. I underlined the fact that I needed student help in my quest to understand the attitudes and motivations to learn a foreign language and that I regarded their participation as a favour to me. They also understood that I was doing this as part of a

research degree and that they were also helping me towards this. I wanted to be entirely transparent in the selfish motive on my part in that the research is part my own journey towards understanding and knowledge leading to a qualification called a Ph.D. I gave all the students in the class a printed letter explaining all the above with a pupil's consent section at the bottom to be returned to me or not by the end of the week. This was a Wednesday period 5, last period of the day and I asked them to return the consent form to me by the end of the day on the following Friday.

I had already spoken to the class teacher about her own issues of confidentiality and anonymity and reassured her that I was researching attitudes that students bring with them to lessons to see how this interacts with their learning. I was not therefore researching her as a teacher and her name would figure as a pseudonym contextually as the class teacher and certainly not in my exchanges with students. Julia and I had worked together in the same department for 7 years and there was and is a high level of trust between us.

I left the class once I had done my presentation to the students and went away to ponder what level of support I might receive. The class numbers 20 so I was hoping for half as a good sample. The pips went for the end of the lesson and I went back to see Julia to see if any students had responded immediately by filling in the pupil consent forms. Eight consent forms had been taken to participate in the research from 5 girls and 3 boys. On the Friday morning I asked permission from the class's English teacher to speak to students in the class during her lesson. I gave the second parental consent form to those

who had already volunteered to be returned to me by the following Wednesday so that we could start the research in the afternoon. I also spoke to the whole class again to thank them for their generous response and to say that now I just needed two more boys to make for gender balance. I was hoping that, once the class knew that there had already been a sound response to my request, more numbers would follow. I left the class and as I was on mid-morning break duty, two boys approached me to volunteer with the assurance that the interviews would take place in lesson time and not in their own time. I replied that of course there was no question of me making any demands on their own personal time and that all this would be done in French lessons.

I gave them a consent letter for their parents and providing this was agreed, I would have a research sample of 10 participants constituting half the class. The students were not selected on ability. Unlike the other year 9 and year 11 case study I did not divide the students into ability bands based on their Cognitive Ability Scores or CAT's. This is because I felt at this stage that initial findings in the previous case studies were beginning to show connections between learner and cultural identity in foreign language learning rather than any connection between a decontextualized assessment of general ability and learner identity in MFL. If we look back on the year 11 case study we see that Zara who has a C.A.T score of 99 achieves a 'B' grade at G.C.S.E whereas Dennis who has a C.A.T score deemed high at 111 only achieves an 'E' grade. In the year 9 case study Joel with a C.A.T score of 97 appears to have more fluency than Alex with a CAT score deemed to be high at 110. The emerging picture seems to one of cultural and personal investment as a principal feature of learning rather than an abstract assessment of ability.

Therefore I have moved away from this type of quantitative data of CAT scores because the emergence of qualitative data from ethnographic observation has shown how learner identity constructs learning in MFL, rather than how numerical values could play any part in this. The CAT score in the light of this now seems irrelevant to the identity construction processes that I am trying to foreground.

The following is therefore the list of research participants for the year 7 case study without the C.A.T scores:-

**Table 19 Year 7 Case Study**

Name	Gender
Bella	Female
Jessica	Female
Francesca	Female
Kayleigh	Female
Sandy	Female
Jack	Male
Dex	Male
Scott	Male
James	Male
Jamie	Male

### **8.3 Classroom Observations**

Once the initial lesson had been used for explanation of the reasons for research and asking for volunteer participants, I had 11 lessons to conduct the interviews of 10 volunteers and to observe them in lessons. Julia would teach the lessons as normal and I would also help from time to time in order to engage with the students as a whole and feel part of the class. The students would get used to my presence not only as someone observing but also someone who was also there to help them with any problems. I was also assigned to the class for a day trip to France and intended to ask for the case study pupils to be placed in my group. The lessons I observed turned out generally to be a mix of speaking, reading, writing skills and computer based language activities with each student using an individual laptop or sharing with a partner. We will now focus our attention on these lessons in more detail to see how the interaction took place with regard to our three themes of learner identity, cultural positions with regard to teacher/pupil discourse interface and gender construction. We will attempt to see the links between these three themes. All the observational data is taken from my research diary in which I made notes on the events as they happened and just after the lesson from immediate recall.

One of the early lessons I saw on Wednesday 6th June in the afternoon was a lesson with a computer based language activity using a French software programme called 'Linguascope'.



*'Pupils are told initially to choose the topic of food and drink from the menu and do such games as 'hangman', word-searches and 'snap' where in two's they have to be the first to recognize a word/picture match and hit the key to score a point. The pupils work alone or in same gender pairings although there are some mixed gender pairs.*

*James has his own laptop and is working alone, quietly doing his wordsearch. He is also matching French words to pictures quietly and quickly as he has to before the picture/word pairing changes to the next sequence. Once he finishes the word-search and snap game in the topic, he moves on to another one. Two girls Kayleigh and Fran are working well together on the same laptop and not making much noise as to who of them wins the snap game. Jack and Bella (male and female pair respectively) have a computer each and therefore do not need to interact with each other but yet they do so outside of the computer based activity itself. Jack keeps turning up the volume of his computer so that the noise disturbs Bella. Jack is evidently more concerned with the noise of the computer tunes and the volume control than he is with the game itself. Bella is annoyed by this and remonstrates with Jack. Jack prods her and Bella responds with a push. Jack in turn responds with his own push and then a 'push and shove' battle breaks out between them. This ends up as a play- wrestle between them on the table top. The noise of the class escalates fuelled by the computer jingles and as I move towards Bella and Jack they stop wrestling and go back to their computers. Scott and Dex are working together, noisily claiming victory over their game of snap. The boys generally appear to enjoy the noise produced by their laptops and most of them now are playing with their volume controls to the extent that Julia has to intervene to calm everything down and re-focus their attention on the language activities.*

*There is no doubt that this is a fun way of familiarization with basic vocabulary in French for topics such as food and drink and at the end of the lesson, once the computers have been packed away, Julia is able to test the class orally by asking them 'what is the French for apple/pear/strawberry etc?' Pupils put their hands up to answer and all the answers are correct.*

*My main observation is to note that whilst all the girls in the case-study are engaged in the language activities or wish to be so engaged like Bella, many of the boys ie Jack, Dex, Jimmy & Scott are experimenting with their volume controls and testing the noise levels to the limit to create a cacophony of sound. However amidst this James continues to work silently not breathing a word to anyone although quietly emitting triumphant whispers when he scores in the various games. James's interaction seems to have been with himself. Jess and Sandy, both girls have worked together quietly sharing a laptop and managing to ignore the noise around them'. (end of diary entry)*

Pupil learner identity seems to be constructed over three levels. Firstly the pupils' relationship with the machine and its physical capabilities. Secondly the pupils' relationship to the activity and thirdly pupils' relationships with each other in terms of the first two relational characteristics. Van Lier (2002) explains levels of development in language communication through the process of indexicality. He argues that language gives us access to the physical world as well as to the social world but that indexicality is the key to language development. This means that, firstly, at a basic level some pupils are exploring and having fun with the physical attributes of the laptops. Secondly other pupils are able to move beyond this physicality to the more symbolic nature of the foreign language. Others in between are operating at an image or iconic level where they are fascinated by the computer's graphics. The indexicality is the upward movement from the physical object with its sound control and jingle noises to its moving graphics and icons and finally upwards to the cultural representations of these images. Laptops allow Jack and Bella to operate at different levels of language. Jack is connected very much to the physicality of the machine, making the jingles and turning up the volume to disturb Bella. Bella however is working at a symbolic level by working out what the French words are as she matches them to the images. Bella therefore seems to be more in line with 'official' expected classroom learner identity than Jack. She is taking her learner identity outwards towards the cultural discourse of the foreign language whereas Jack's learner identity is still caught up with the physicality of the equipment. In accordance with the third relational level Jack brings Bella down to the physical level by engaging in a play fight. Culturally Bella is much closer to the expectations of the teacher than Jack. She is operating at a higher level in terms of teacher expectation in

line with the programme of study. In terms of gender, the girls, Bella, Kayleigh, Fran, Jess and Sandy are working according to the expectations of the teacher which is to develop French vocabulary through computer language games. The boys Jack, Dex, Jamie and Scott are all operating at a lower level of teacher expectation, in terms of the foreign language learning, by physically experimenting with the computer hardware. They are communicating with each other across the class by emitting the different jingles alternately increasing in frequency and volume between each individual or group. However one boy, James is behaving differently. He remains on task and constructs his learning identity according to official discourse expectation and more in line with how the girls behave than the boys.

The following week's lesson on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> June had reading comprehension as its learning objective. This was not from their 'Metro' course book but from comic strip readers with comprehension questions and language activities. The diary field notes entry is as follows:-

*'The lesson is taught by Julia who sets up the activity with a series of tasks to complete. The pupils like this type of independent activity where they can work at their own pace and feel more in control of their own learning as researchers. They are given dictionaries for this and told to put new vocabulary into their exercise books.*

*I was drawn to Jack's behaviour in the last lesson as he disturbed Bella's learning. This time Jack is sitting next to Dex and turning round initiating banter with Lydia (not in the case study) who is sitting directly behind him. Jack's reader has comprehension questions about numbers and arithmetic in French such as additions and subtractions. The task is to understand the numbers in written French, undertake the calculation and write the answer in written French. He either finds difficulty with this or can't be bothered as he keeps calling out the numbers in French to the rest of the class to get the meaning in English from anyone. Dex, next to him is making comments aloud about the cartoon pictures and Jack, interrupting his number calling routine, is making return comments to Dex. Both start to laugh out loud and then Dex turns round to Lydia (not in the case study) to*

*make comments. Dex starts to throw some of the readers backwards over his shoulder in the direction of Lydia. Julia's attention is drawn by this and as she approaches and looks in their direction, Jack and Dex return to their task.*

*The other boy who caught my attention in the previous week was James who had been quietly working/playing at his computer activities. This week he is sitting next to a girl and they are quietly reading and translating to each other the sentences of the story. Bella who had been disturbed by Jack in the previous week is now sitting next to a female pupil. Bella is working well doing written translations of the comic story and wanting to know what various words and phrases mean. She alternates between asking the teacher and consulting her dictionary. She works through 3 different readers in this way. Kayleigh is also working at her understanding of the story alternating between asking the teacher and her own dictionary research. Kayleigh and Lydia are now being disturbed again by Jack and Dex who keep turning round to make comments and occasionally flicking bits of India rubber. Kayleigh and Lydia resist these attempts to draw them into an exchange of banter and carry on with their work. Jack and Dex eventually leave them alone.*

*Jamie works quietly throughout the lesson. Scott is quiet but doodles and attempts to draw some of the cartoon characters in his exercise book. I remark to myself that this is never going to look neat because he is doing this in ball-point pen instead of pencil. Also he does not have any coloured pencils. He is not at all engaging with the foreign language but just with the pictures*

*At the end of the lesson, Julia collects in the exercise books for marking'.  
(end of diary entry)*

Again learner identity can be seen expressed through different levels of language and communication. Van Lier (2002) once more provides an explanation for these different, hierarchical levels of communication in arguing that 'the development of mutuality' as a basic language (2002; p155) stems from the senses of touch, smell, sight, voice. The classroom learner identity can be seen through this lense. Dex and Jack's communication is body language and physical in that they impose their physicality by throwing readers behind themselves and Jack's calling out numbers in French to the class. Dex is making loud comments about pictures. Their communication is not about content but about the loudness and size of presence in terms of shouting and throwing. They are keen to

occupy social space not with content but with presence. At one point they flick bits of rubber eraser at the girls. The girls and also James and Jamie are involved in the meanings of language, using dictionaries and asking the teacher to translate the readers. Scott lies in between these extremes of physicality on the one hand and language on the other because he is involved with the pictures of the readers just as last week he was involved in the graphics of the computer screen.

Cultural identity towards MFL is seen in the capacity to engage with it, in terms of the process/product dialectic that is the main thrust of cultural definition in this study (cf 3.5;6.12), and this is more evident in those reading and interpreting the language. This corresponds only loosely to gender since all of the girls in the case study and some of the boys are working. Two of the boys are reproducing a 'stereotypical' boys' behaviour by occupying social space with their physical presence.

In the following week's lesson, I decide to undertake some of the interviews as I have received all of the parental consent slips. I also observe the early part of the lesson.

Bella attracts my attention as she is keenly working again in this lesson translating the readers. Their work has been marked from last week and they are doing some corrections. Julia has agreed to allow me to withdraw students from the lesson to a nearby office. I approach Bella and ask her if she would mind taking part in the interview. She agrees and we go to an empty office down the corridor.

#### **8.4 Interview extract no 1 between DE- researcher and B =Bella**

In this interview Bella expresses instrumental and functional reasons for foreign language learning.

- <sup>1</sup> DE- How do you feel that foreign languages can be useful?
- <sup>2</sup> B- I think that they're helpful like a holiday you can ask for what you want.
- <sup>3</sup> DE- Are there other reasons?
- <sup>4</sup> B- I think that that's one of the main reasons coz it's not really vital that
- <sup>5</sup> you learn it but it does help if you are trying to get a better job.
- <sup>6</sup> DE- so you say it's mainly jobs and what else?
- <sup>7</sup> B- when you go on holiday you can ask for stuff  
(lines 1-7 out of 170)

In line 5 Bella expresses one of the instrumental reasons for learning a MFL in terms of jobs and other instrumental reason in line 2, that of basic transactions

During this lesson I also interviewed James who had also caught my eye as a boy who worked assiduously. These are the opening lines of the interview with him.

#### **8.5 -DE- researcher. JA = James-male year 7 pupil**

In this interview James also expresses instrumental/functional reasons in terms of jobs and holidays for foreign language learning.

#### **Extract 2**

- <sup>1</sup> DE- Are foreign languages important or not?
- <sup>2</sup> JA- Probably because if you get sent off and work when you're older and

3 you could be put in a business with loads of French people speaking a  
4 foreign language and if you haven't learnt it  
5 at school you might get the sack because you don't know what it is.  
6 DE- Are there any other reasons?  
7 JA- Well once you've learnt it, it could be quite fun because you can  
8 understand what people are saying, when you get to France on holiday  
9 you understand what other people are saying.  
(lines 1-9 out of 120)

The holiday and jobs discourses are very common ones, as already evidenced in this study, as the main reasons for learning foreign languages. The instrumental motivation in terms of jobs is in lines 1-5 where James opines that knowing a foreign language might be necessary to keep one's job. In recalling the literature review of chapter 2, the socio-economic discourse types of leisure and employment are powerful ones and provide immediate socio-cultural reasons for learning a language. These are of course valid socio-cultural reasons for learning a language and are regularly advanced by schools and teachers to promote this area of the curriculum. Nevertheless in the following interview extract Bella's interest in French seems to transcend the jobs and holiday discourse to one of deeper cultural understanding:-

### **Extract 3**

82DE- Do you think the French way of life is interesting?  
83 B- I think it's more interesting than our English life because I've done  
84 what an English kid would do and I haven't experienced what French  
85 people, French kids would do and it's kind of boring for me but it  
86 wouldn't be boring for French people because it would be a new  
87 experience.  
88DE- Would you like to get to know the French way of life and French  
89 people.  
90B- We did that in our junior school- pen pals and all that

91DE- Did that interest you?  
 92 B-It's meeting new people and learning stuff about their daily life-like  
 93 different cultures  
 94DE- Does that help you?  
 95B- yeh it would make me understand languages a lot better. I don't  
 96know that that's what really happens. I don't know if Miss is teaching  
 97us the stuff that -----(unclear) but what they (French people –my  
 98parenthesis) would say would be what they do in daily life which would  
 99help.  
 100DE- Do you think you need to know the country and way of life in order  
 101to-----  
 102B- (interrupting) I think I need to know the main things that French  
 103people or Spanish people or another people speak in their countries.  
 104DE- D'you think you need to do that to be fluent in the language?  
 105B- yeh  
 106 DE- or do you think you can be fluent in the language without being  
 107 interested in that?  
 108 B- I think you have to be interested to wanna do something coz it's  
 109 more ----- if I wanted to do it then I would be able to do more than  
 110what I'd do if I wasn't interested. I would be more capable.  
 111DE- more capable in the language?  
 112 B- yeh  
 (lines 82-112 out of 170)

Bella's cultural interest in the language is evidenced in lines 82 -87 where she would like to know what it means to be a French kid, in lines 92-93 where she is interested in meeting new people and learning about different cultures ,in lines 102 and 103 where she says she should know the main things that French people speak about and in lines 108 - 112 where she opines that interest in the target culture would benefit her ability to speak the language. This cultural disposition is echoed by Sandy in an interview where she expresses her interest in the difference that she perceives between English and French people. The context of the interview extract was discussion about a primary school visit to a French school that Sandy was involved in. The extract starts at line 20 of the interview.



#### Extract 4

DE- Researcher; S- Sandy

20DE – did you stay over?

21S- yeh it's a nice country

22DE- were they different or the same?

23S- no they wear different clothes to us and they look different and

24 they talk different, not just the language but the way they speak

25DE- in what way?

26S- Their voices- it's hard to explain, French have the accents and say

27stuff different to us.

28DE- so they are more the same or more different?

29 S- more different

30 DE – what about the way they dress?

31S- Well they wear knitted jumpers and they're more relaxed than

32English

33DE- more relaxed?

34S- They're more laid back if you know what I mean?

35DE- the children ?.....the adults?

36S- the children really

37DE- yeh

38S- their schools are different to us coz when I went to France they have

39a big hall and

40 they gave out the lunches to us

41 DE – is this difference fascinating?

42S- yeh

43DE- or do you not like it?

44D- I think it's interesting and I like learning about French stuff coz it's

45nice to know

46 what other people live like instead of just English.

(lines 20-46 out of 130)

In lines 23- 29 sandy expresses the ways in which she feels French people are different from us in terms of clothes, their way of expressing themselves beyond the language itself. In lines 31-32 she opines that the French are more relaxed

that English people and in lines 44- 46 she expresses her interest in all these differences

## **8.6 Analysis in terms of Cultural Identity**

The issue here is not French culture as a fixed entity but the openness to culture and linguistic enquiry. Vygotsky (1966) maintains that learning occurs on a socio-cultural plane before becoming internalized within the individual. This would mean that language learning is more of a socialization into culturally embedded language rather than as isolated decontextualized linguistic skills. Bella is capable of appealing to culture as product in terms of the context for her language learning and is able to connect this to what she is doing in the classroom within her cultural process of enquiry involving a desire for authenticity (lines 92-93). There is also a curiosity to know difference and otherness which has never been experienced before and the search for this new ground would be reciprocated by French pupils (lines 82-87). However references to French way of life or culture, as Kramsch (1998) points out, indicates a dominant culture where the cultural characteristics emerge from more powerful discourses. Kramsch points out that the nation state has historically promoted the authentic standard language and culture as a monolithic entity in the interests of national identity. To some extent whether cultural features are seen as authentically French or stereotyped is not the issue here. The issue is the cultural curiosity and the cultural exploration as a dynamic force and not a static outcome.

The following is an interview with James whom we have already seen in extract 2. He understands that people live differently, not just as a national grouping but also as individuals.

### **Extract 5**

16DE- Are you interested in the way other people live their lives and the  
17 cultures of other people?  
18 Ja- yeh because it's different to like my way, our way of life because  
19 everyone is different in their way of life  
20DE- And do you think that has a bearing on how well you speak a  
21 foreign language  
22 if you're interested in how people live their lives or has it got  
23 nothing to do with it?  
24 I don't know really.  
(lines 16-24 out of 120)

James is interested in cultural diversity (line 19) but is unsure as to the effect on his own language learning (line 24). Bella however has an interest in French that goes beyond the classroom as we see in the following interview.

### **Extract 6**

137 DE- What about your hobbies. What d'you do in your spare time out  
138 of school?  
139 B- well I've tried French in my bedroom and I've got maps and I  
140 like finding out stuff and I draw in my bedroom.  
(lines 137-140 out of 170)

In lines 139-140 Bella says that she researches issues of MFL in her bedroom as a hobby.

## 8.7 Cultural and Learner Identities in Practice – James and Bella

Bella claims to have a cultural interest in French that sustains her involvement in the language voluntarily at home (lines 139-140). In the following lesson Bella's oral skills are in evidence in a French class taught by Julia. The following field-notes are taken from my research diary:-

‘Wednesday 20th June. French lesson after the mid-morning break.

*This is an orally based language lesson where Julia the class teacher is doing a speaking activity with the year 7 class. The lesson objective is asking for food and drink in France. At the end of term the pupils will have a class day trip in France in the town of St Omer and it is hoped they will be able to practice their newly acquired French language knowledge and skills.*

*Vocabulary is put on the board for example- Je voudrais- I would like; s'il vous plait- please; merci-thanks; c'est combien?- how much is it? Un verre de coca/de lemonade- a glass of coke/of lemonade. Un café au lait- a coffee with milk. Une glace au chocolat/aux fraises/a la vanille- a chocolate/strawberry/vanilla ice-cream. Bonjour Monsieur/ Mademoiselle, vous desirez? Good day Sir/ Miss what would you like? This vocabulary is brainstormed from the pupils based on what they think they will need to know in a café situation in France. The class is invited to put up their hands with suggestions for ordering food and drink. Immediately Bella puts up her hand to say 'je voudrais une glace chocolat s'il vous plait, c'est combien?' (I would like a choc'ice please, how much is it? Bella then makes up a lot of different requests using the vocabulary on the board and says them aloud to the class. As an observer I am aware that she is dominating the class interaction with the ease in which she is able to pronounce the French café orders. However Julia uses this to the advantage of the class in her use of Bella as a model for the others. The class is then split into groups on different tables where, for each table there is a waitress/waiter and several customers. Bella and James are on the same table. Bella is the waitress and asks James 'Bonjour Monsieur, vous desirez? (what would you like sir). James takes his time to think and quietly replies 'Je voudrais une limonade s'il vous plait' (I would like a lemonade please). At the end of the lesson when the teacher brings everything together in a plenary and asks for a volunteer to come to the front of the class to play the waiter/waitress role for the whole class, Bella volunteers.*

Learner identity and cultural orientation towards the MFL in this lesson are reflected in the ability and willingness of two students, in particular, to speak French. Learner identity seems active in shaping cultural identity within the lesson and these identities constitute James and Bella's social positioning towards the activity of learning. Firstly their learner identity seems to be engaged in the process. Secondly, culturally they are able to enjoin the foreign language discourse in the French role-plays. However although within the lesson it may seem that one identity shapes another, it is impossible to attribute a simple linear cause-effect explanation between learner and cultural identities. This is because it is impossible to quantify exactly the historical cultural capital that these two students bring with them. Interview evidence suggests that they do bring a positive cultural identity towards MFL but it is impossible to say for sure that this is the causality behind their 'on task' learner identity or whether, vice versa, it is their learner identity shaping their cultural identity. It may well be that learner and cultural identities are intertwined to such an extent that they dialectically interacting. On the other hand it would not be correct to say that the two identities are one and the same because interview evidence expresses culture more as a historical product of identity whereas observation evidence expresses the formative nature of culture as a process in identity. Cultural identity then contains a historical capital that is brought to bear in the present moment to contribute to shaping the learner position. Here we should recall Lantolf's (2000) view of cultural identity in terms of the totality of present and past cultural resources the individual has access to. (cf 3.5)

Gender however as a cultural construction or enactment seems here to be less important in terms of these two students within the group activity in that the male/female dichotomy in a binary sense does not seem evident. My view is that, in terms of the learning activities of James and Bella, gender is perhaps less important than the interaction between their cultural and learner identities.

I have focused on Bella and James because in the first few lessons they immediately caught my eye as being enthusiastic students in class. They both know the vocabulary and grammatical structures for basic transactions and requests. Bella is however the more outgoing personality. She is articulate and enjoys drama. She therefore seems to be able to express her identity in French, playing the café waitress role. James is more reflective and quieter, taking his time before responding in French.

In the Monday's lesson of the 25<sup>th</sup> June there is further speaking and listening practice in French café role-plays. Levels of participation reveal a similar pattern to Monday's lesson in terms of Bella and James. It is interesting to note however the participation of Kayleigh and Fran who are not always so positive in their learning identity in MFL. Jack and Dex are also on the table and their level of involvement can also be seen. The following field notes are taken from my research diary

*'the tables are arranged to enact a café scene with pupils sitting around each large table. At one of them James is playing the role of the waiter. He asks each pupil 'vous desirez?' (what would you like?). Jack and Dex don't take part. They are drawing on scrap paper and looking at each other's scribble drawings. Fran responds hesitantly with some difficulty in formulating her order for food and drink. Julia intervenes to say tres bien , tres bien ( very well done) in encouragement.*

*Kayleigh also hesitates but manages to express 'je voudrais un sandwich fromage et un coca'(I would like a cheese sandwich and a coke). Julia intervenes to praise this by saying tres bien- tres bien ( very well done) as encouragement. She also tells Kayleigh not to forget to say 's'il vous plait' (please). Kayleigh repeats 's'il vous plait'. Scott is on the table sitting quietly and so is Jessica, they don't participate. Bella is eager to participate and has her hand up. She articulates her request her request confidently and asking 'c'est combien s'il vous plait monsieur?' (How much is it?). James replies 'Cest trois euros madame' (three euros madam). Jack and Dex are pushing bits of paper towards each other, grabbing each other's hands, laughing and becoming disruptive. Julia has to stop them and tell Jack to move to the other side of the table. The class is then asked to write up their lines of café dialogue into exercise books using dictionaries'. Julia then ensures that the class work in silence right up to the end of the lesson'.*

In the lesson we see similar patterns of behaviour to previous lessons. Jack and Dex are again involved in their own activity, pushing their own drawings to each other until they end up grappling each others' hands. It seems that because of this Julia stops the speaking dialogue work and insists that the class do quiet written work until the end of the lesson. Jack and Dex are more interested in attempting to dominate the table with their alternative activity and the teacher has to switch activities to control them. It is interesting to see Fran and Kayleigh making great efforts to take part and Julia acknowledges this with praise. I feel this encouragement might also be a way of keeping these two girls 'on-side' with the official classroom discourse as they sometimes engage in their own discourse and disengage with the official teacher led one. Jessica and Scott are following the official lesson discourse but less enthusiastically as they are doing this passively, not engaging with it but remaining silent. Bella and James are again taking full part. It should be noted that the pupils are all somewhere between the official teacher led and their own pupil discourse as though this were a continuum. On the one hand James and Bella are enthusiastically within the teacher discourse and on the other hand Jack and Dex are within their pupils' discourse. Kayleigh , Fran, Jessica and Scott can be

located within teacher led discourse although I would view that on this occasion Jessica and Scott are at the margin of this discourse.

An interview with Jack shows that there is not always a convergence between culture as product and learner/cultural identity as process. In the following extract Jack expresses positive cultural reasons for language learning suggesting a cultural capital that is supportive of MFL learning and yet by contrast in the observations we have seen classroom behaviour that does not encompass or even overlap with official teacher/classroom discourse.

### **Extract 7**

DE = researcher; Jk= Jack

- 1 DE- what do you think is the most important reason for learning a
- 2 foreign language?
- 3 Jk- well for me to learn another language is for me amazing because my
- 4 dad went to Japan not too long ago and he said he loved it and I wanna
- 5 do that, live in another country. To do that I have to learn all different
- 6 languages to get there.
- 7 DE- Are you interested in the way of life of different countries?
- 8 Jk- yeh culture and everything and food.
- 9 DE have you been abroad?
- 10 Jk- no
- 11 DE- do you like the fact that people live differently, different cultures
- 12 and ways of life or would it be better if everyone was the same?
- 13 Jk- no because if everybody was the same, life would be very boring
- 14 and I like it when the Nepalese come here coz I have loads of Nepalese
- 15 friends. They're just like my best friends. I get along with them really
- 16 well and they get along with me
- 17 DE- Have you ever thought of learning a few words in their language at
- 18 all?
- 19 Jk yeh they teach me some
- 20 DE-Do they?
- 21 Jk- yeh coz I have this friend called Kim and I ask him to teach me



22 words and he teaches me words  
23 DE- do you think that being interested in other ways of life helps you to  
24 learn a foreign language ?  
25 Jk- yeh.because if you know about the culture it will help you learn  
26 quicker.  
27 DE- Do you think it would be cool to speak French fluently?  
28 Jk- yeh, I think it would be cool to speak any language fluently.  
(lines 1-28 out of 135)

The remainder of the interview continues in an extremely positive regard for the connection between language and culture and yet this contrasts starkly with Jack's classroom learner identity as we have seen in the observations. This underlines the lack of causality from cultural identity to learner identity. Jack has a positive cultural regard for foreign languages (lines 3-6 and 25-28) in which he says he wants to learn MFL in order to live in different countries and thinks that it is cool to speak foreign languages. He also says in line 25-26 that if you know about the culture it will help you learn the MFL and yet all of his ideas have little bearing upon his own learning. As an analogy, the theory does not translate into practice and this may highlight a need for cultural and learner identity, as theory and practice, to interrelate and reinforce each other to produce linguistic knowledge and skill as it does in the case of James and Bella.

### **8.8 Interviews with Kayleigh, Francesca and Jessica.**

The following conversation extracts are with Kayleigh, Francesca and then Jessica. This gives an insight into three individual pupils cultural/learner identities that do not correspond to gender stereotype that says that girls are more culturally orientated to MFL than boys.

## Extract 8

DE- researcher    K-Kayleigh

15DE- Are you interested in different ways of life?

16K- What d'you mean?

17DE- Well how people live and how they might be different

18K- I don't care

19DE- right

20K- I don't mind if they're French, Spanish

21DE- that does not matter right? D'you think that the French live their  
22lives differently or the same as us?

23K- The same

24 DE- Do you think exactly the same?

25 K- no not really

26 DE – do think there might be differences?

27 K- yeh

28 DE- Are you interested to find out or are you not bothered about how  
29 other people live their lives?

30 K- not bothered

31DE- would learning French give you an insight into a way of life  
32 or would it not make any difference?

33K- I don't think it would make any difference.

34 DE- so what is the main reason for learning the language, why speak  
35 French

36 K- I dunno

(lines 15-36 out of 133)

It seems that Kayleigh is starting her foreign language education with little or no cultural interest or cultural disposition for MFL. In lines 18 and 30 she expresses her lack of interest in different ways of life. In line 30 she says that she is 'not bothered'. This does not mean that MFL education cannot promote cultural curiosity. As Kramsch (1998) points out, culture is inscribed in the language and therefore using the language is not just pointing to culture, it is also using culture. Therefore using French language is 'doing' French culture (cf Lemke 2002); the caveat being in the way 'French' culture is seen

generically from a distance. Obviously for this to happen a target language cultural learning environment has to be created. This is never going to be as 'authentic' as being in the country but it should at least index aspects of the target language country and provide a pointer for those pupils like Kayleigh who have never been there. This can serve as a bridge between the classroom and the 'authentic' setting.

However Kayleigh's world view at the moment is predicated on the hegemony of English. This is another extract in the conversation with Kayleigh.

#### **Extract 9.**

46 DE- Would it be best for the whole of the world if we all spoke one  
47 language?  
48 K- for the whole world?  
49 DE- yeh  
50 K- yeh ---I think  
51 DE- what d'you think that language should be?  
52 K- English ---for me  
53 DE- for you?  
54 K- yeh  
55 DE- so for you, you wouldn't mind?  
56 K- no  
57 DE- would it be cool to speak French fluently?  
58 K- No because I'd like to speak English  
59 DE- you'd like to speak English?  
60 K- yeh  
(lines 46-60 out of 133)

The lines 51-58 represent a view in the school often expressed to me casually as follows:-

'Why do we have to speak French sir when we're English?' Lemke (2002) points out that language plays a major role in the development of identity and that when we speak a foreign language we construct a different identity. We can see in Kayleigh's talk and in

the opinion above that there is a desire to be English and to speak English because this is a preferred identity. This might mean that Kayleigh could regard the study of French or another MFL as a complete waste of time or simply she might regard it as a subject she just has to do because the rules of the school say so. It may also be that over time Kayleigh develops a learning and cultural identity for MFL within the classroom even though she may not be able, at present, to draw upon a pre-established cultural identity towards French.

In my research diary observation notes for the lesson on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> June my entry is as follows:-

*'Kayleigh speaks to order food and drink. She has some difficulty pronouncing 'Vous desirez' because of 'r' sound in French but she eventually gets it right with help from Julia'*

The notion of indexicality, as seen in the extract above, may point to an answer in that Kayleigh's opportunity to use French in a classroom situation is a 'pointer' towards an idea of French culture even though this might be a stereotypical one. These beginnings or early steps are at an intersection between the pupils' own discourse and the discourse of the 'Other'. As Kayleigh has never been to France before, she can only access language and culture from within the language by trying to hear it and speak it in lessons so it can be internalized from the social to the individual (Vygotsky 1962).

### **Extract 10**

Interview with Francesca.

DE- researcher; F- Francesca

- <sup>1</sup>DE- Do you enjoy learning French?  
<sup>2</sup>F- I dunno it's O.K but I'm not too keen on it  
<sup>3</sup>DE- so what might be the main reason for learning a foreign language?  
<sup>4</sup>Can you think of a main reason?  
<sup>5</sup>F- no, I don't think it's that important  
<sup>6</sup>DE- Are you interested in the way French people lead their lives or is that  
<sup>7</sup>not important?  
<sup>8</sup>F- no not really  
<sup>9</sup>DE- Would you maybe like to live in France?  
<sup>10</sup>F- no not really  
<sup>11</sup>DE- Are you fascinated by different ways of life around the world?  
<sup>12</sup>F- sort of interested but I'm not really bothered.  
(lines 1-12 out of 125)

Both Francesca (extract 10 lines 6-12) and Kayleigh do not really feel concerned by foreign cultures and identities and are quite frank in declaring their indifference to this. They are also both indifferent to language learning (extract 10 lines 1-5; extract 9 lines 51-58) which could well be viewed, as I have so far argued, as a consequence of cultural indifference. Such cultural indifference to foreign language diversity is also echoed in the following interview with Jessica a female year 7 pupil in the case study.

### **Extract 11**

Je – Jessica ; DE – researcher

- <sup>91</sup>DE- is it better to learn French or for all the French to learn English?  
<sup>92</sup>Je- All the French to learn English  
<sup>93</sup>DE- D'you like the fact that there are different ways of life or would it  
<sup>94</sup>be simpler if everyone adopted one way of life?  
<sup>94</sup>Je- Well I think it would be better if everyone were the same  
<sup>95</sup>DE-Why?  
<sup>96</sup>Je – coz you would know more  
<sup>97</sup>DE – who would it be better for?  
<sup>98</sup>Je- us

99 DE- us but would it be better for them?  
100 Je- no, not really because they would have to learn it. They have to  
111 learn English anyway!  
(lines 92-111 out of 138)

In lines 92 and 100-111 Jessica states that it would be better for us if the French spoke English rather than us speaking French. She says that the French have to learn English anyway.

It could well be argued from the evidence of these interviews with Kayleigh, Francesca and Jessica that cultural identity in terms of historical capital may need to be accumulated within the MFL classroom situation from the cultural/linguistic connections made by the teacher. MFL cultural discourse within the classroom has to be therefore powerful enough to be influential in overcoming indifference.

### **8.9 Issues of Learner Identity.**

A conversation with Dex in the case study shows more positive connections with France. He has been there on several occasions but, much as in the case of Jack in section 8.6, he does not engage with MFL in the classroom. The following short extract shows Dex's positive regard for the idea of living in France

#### **Extract 12**

DE- Researcher D= Dex

1DE- do you like the idea of living in France?  
2D- yeh  
3DE- what would be the best thing about that?

<sup>4</sup>D- Hmm- French people because French people are more polite than the English  
<sup>5</sup>DE- Do you think so?  
<sup>6</sup>D- yeh because when you enter shops they say hello whereas they don't in  
<sup>7</sup>England  
<sup>8</sup>DE- Are you interested by the French way of life?  
<sup>9</sup>D- fascinated by how they live and that.  
(lines 1-9 out of 124)

In line 9 Dex says that he is fascinated by the way of life of French people. In line 4 he has a positive regard for the French in that he says that they are more polite than English people.

Elsewhere in the interview Dex says that he has been to France 'five or six times', however he is reluctant to use the language, preferring to mess around with Jack as we have already seen. As with Jack there is a gap between his cultural views and his practice. Kayleigh herself can also be seen 'messaging around' depending upon whom she is sitting next to. When she is next to Bella, she works well. However, in the interview, Kayleigh admits to dipping in and out of lessons, thereby connecting with both teacher and pupil discourse. She says, 'I don't concentrate all the time. I sit and listen, then talk to my mates and do whatever and then "yeh what was that?" and everything like that but some people like sit and concentrate and do it'.

This is interesting and something I have already covered in the previous chapter 7 where in the year 9 Spanish class male pupils were engaged in their own discourse about Christmas shopping at the same time as trying to attend to the official discourse of the lesson.

Pupils' classroom discourse is a heteroglossia ( Wertsche 1991) imbued by their own concerns, the discourse of the teacher and the cultural discourse of the target language.

This makes classroom discourse for many pupils, but not all, something of a hybrid. As Kayleigh says however many pupils in year 7 concentrate all the time and follow the teacher led discourse; Bella and James are two of this type of pupil. However Jack and Dex, in many of the lessons, rarely attend to what is going on and follow their own concerns until told off.

It may not be long before Bella and James begin to express their own discursive subjectivities in the classroom or it may be the case that their learning identity is firmly entrenched on the side of teacher led discourse.

The following is taken from a diary observation.

*'In the lesson of Wednesday afternoon on the 4<sup>th</sup> July there are quite a few pupils who are unsettled. Kayleigh asks me the seemingly random question of whether or not I have had any tooth extractions. I choose to ignore this but I guess that this is part of her private conversation about experiences at the dentist and I do not really want to fuel this discourse at the expense of the lesson. She then asks me if she can go to the toilet. I have to tell her that I am not in charge of the lesson and she would have to ask the teacher. I know from my own lived experience as a teacher that the studious pupils never want to go to the toilet in lesson time. Pupils from different classes often pre-arrange toilet visits at certain times and then meet up for a chat or even for a smoke in older age groups. This is always difficult for the teacher as the pupils may really want the toilet and so it comes as no surprise to me when the teacher says, "Kayleigh you can go to the toilet a little later on when I've seen that you've settled down to do some work. I want to see you working for 10 minutes" the reply is as follows "no miss please I'm desperate, say 5 minutes" After 5 minutes she is allowed to go. The class is still unsettled and asking clarification about the work. The task is a simple one and yet the questions are coming in left, right and centre. Pupils have to study the lyrics of a French song from the 'Metro' text book, translate some verses and answer comprehension questions in English. Pupils keep asking the same questions as to whether they should copy the song out in French or not. The answer is that they should, so that they have a copy of the song in their exercise books. Bella goes to show the teacher her work having already written the song*



*out in French and fully translated it. She then shows it to me. I go around the class helping pupils to focus on the task so that they can settle down as quickly as possible. Fran is working well and neatly in her exercise book. She talks to Lydia about how the song is laid out on the text book page. James is working well and quietly as usual and so is Jack. Some minutes later however Jack turns round to provoke a pupil called Sian (not in the case study) and causes a stir because he has apparently calling her a 'dog' because she is wearing a black 'Goth' style collar. I have witnessed this but not the teacher and I frown at Jack. He returns to his work and as the rest of the class is calming down I let this misdemeanour go. I keep my eye on Jack as I know that he tends to make provocative banter with the girls. I know he needs to be watched at the moment so that he does not have the chance to give offence.(end of diary entry).*

We see, in the above extract, examples of intersecting discourses representing intersecting subjectivities where pupils switch their subjectivities between different concerns. Bella is still on task and so is James but Jack switches between the official discourse and his own discourse and then back again. Kayleigh was preoccupied by her own concerns and was eventually allowed out of the classroom. Whether she really wanted to go to the toilet or simply meet up with someone in the corridor or elsewhere will remain a question. She did however return to the classroom and got on with her work.

I observed a lesson on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July. In preparation for their forthcoming trip to St Omer, the class is being taught asking for and understanding directions around a French town. The following is the entry from my research diary. The interesting item to watch for is the relationship between official teacher discourse and pupils own discourse.

*'As a whole class Julia is teaching how to ask the way to places in a French town. On the white board she has 'pour aller a -----s'il vous plait?(Can you tell me the way to-----please?) plus the name of a place in town with a symbol. The following are used la poste (post office), le marche (market), la banque (bank), le*

*supermarche(supermarket), la boulangerie(baker), le jardin public(park), la cathedrale (cathedral), la gare (station). Students are given a minute to think of a direction to ask for- they then are asked to put their hands up to ask for a place in French. Hands shoot up after a minute and directions are asked in French from James, Jamie, Fran, Kayleigh, Bella and Sandy in the case study. The others have kept quiet and kept their hands down. Others ,not in the case study, also ask for directions.*

*Julia then points to three possible directions written on the board with self-explanatory arrows ' allez tout droit' ( go straight on), tournez a gauche(turn left), tournez a droite ( turn right). She gets the pupils to repeat the pronunciation as a whole class chorus. She then gets them to work in pairs with friends asking for and giving directions. She puts Jack with Fran and Dex with Kayleigh, she leaves Bella and James together. The other pairs are not with pupils in the case-study. The activity is closely monitored and everyone is on task. After two or three minutes, the class is asked to do a write up in exercise books of all the dialogues using all the place names covered in the lesson. So far every one is on task. With the written work started, after five minutes some of the previous patterns of behaviour start to emerge. Jack and Dex flick bits of rubber and paper pellets at other pupils, causing annoyance among the girls who turn round to tell them to stop. The girls are chatting but getting along with their written work. After some time Fran and Kayleigh retaliate by flicking the bits back. Julia has to come close by and they eventually get on with the written work under close supervision until pack away time'*

Whilst the teacher is in charge of the whole group for whole class teaching, her discourse is the one that is imposed and this not only teaches but also polices the whole class. It is only towards the end when they are asked to do the written work, that some of the pupils find the independence to return to a pupil discourse and with many pupils this is a hybrid of the official work mixed in with their own chat. However for Jake and Dex this means using the social space to engage in play. Teacher discourse has to be imposed to regain control. Teacher discourse is therefore hybrid in that it is both pedagogic and regulatory at the same time.

In the following week of Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> July I go to France for the day and many of the case study group are placed with me. I get to know them more socially. It's a long day.

I take them around St Omer, to the cathedral, to the café to buy drinks in French and also ice creams. The whole excursion eventually leads to Cite Europe outside Calais at the end of the day. We get home late. Although I do not teach this class I have now got to know them very well.

The week following this trip I observe a lesson on the Wednesday afternoon 18<sup>th</sup> July.

The following is my research diary entry for the observation and we should note the proliferation of intersecting discourses within the classroom:-

*'The objective is to write an illustrated account of the day including all the French they heard and spoke. Initially the class settles to work with a low murmur of conversation. James is as usual working quietly but feverishly writing his account of the day. Jamie is spending a lot of time fixing or trying to fix his pen. The lesson started at 2-00pm. By 2-10pm everyone had settled down but by 2-30 Jamie was still trying to fix his pen and had done no work at all. The murmur gets louder edging towards general conversation but the work is still going on. Minutes later Bella is calling out to the front with regard to some gossip about who fancies who. This is the first time in all my observations that I have seen Bella break with the official teacher led discourse. Jamie has now given up trying to fix his pen and is replying to Bella two rows behind. More action is now coming on-stream with Kayleigh tilting her chair against the wall at a sharp angle. Any more and she will fall over. Jamie has just lost control of a box of coloured pencils which he has tipped over his shoulder. He also has leant his chair too far back but only his pencils have fallen and not him. The teacher tells him to pick them all up which he does. Sandy is working hard and quietly and neatly colouring her drawing of the square in St Omer, with the town all to one side and shops and cafes all round the square. Jack and Dex have done very little. They are playing some game which involves comparing the size of their hands and have managed eventually to draw Sandy and another girl into this indecipherable game. Just after this at around 2-40pm the class is called to order. They are given 5 minutes to finish off their illustrated account and then to present themselves in French. At the end of this 5 minute period when the class is absolutely quiet, James is able to say quite fluently ' Bonjour ca va? Moi ca va bien ( Hello, how are you? I'm fine. Then he says to the pupil next to him, ' Comment t'appelles- tu? (what's your name?). There is no reply so he says ' Moi je m'appelle James ( me I'm called James).*

*Bella puts up her hand to say 'Bonjour je m'appelle Bella' ( Hello I'm called Bella) There are no other replies and as the class is quiet the teacher gives them a further 5 minutes to finish off their accounts before they pack away'. (end of diary entry)*

Learner identity is seen in this observation to be at an intersection between the official classroom discourse of writing an account of the class visit to France and pupil discourse. In fact there is a gradual journey from one to the other and then back again as the teacher reasserts control. Bella engages in her own gossip across the classroom and is audible to everyone. Jack and Dex are able to mess around drawing in Sandy who is normally a conscientious student. The class atmosphere is relaxed almost becoming chaotic and yet called back to the official discourse 10 minutes before the end. They are then quiet and on task. At the end James and Bella resume their proficiency in French. It is interesting to see within learner identity, how flexibly the pupils can move between the extremes of tightly structured teacher discourse and pupil discourse and then back again.

The following week is the last week of the term. The last few days are shortened, the pupils leave early and the staff stays on for planning meetings for the next school year. The two lessons I observed are just 40 minutes and the first of these, on a Monday was split into two parts. The first part was exam revision of a topic covered earlier in the term, that of shopping for food and the second part was an end of term written exam on the term's topics. This observation is taken from my field notes.

*' Julia starts the lesson with vocabulary on the white board for shopping transactions- je voudrais (I would like), s'il vous plait (please)with quantities- un litre*

*de (a litre of), un kilo de (a kilo of), une boîte de (a tin of), une bouteille de (a bottle of), une tranche de (a slice of) together with various food/drink items such as jambon(ham), sardines, lait (milk) etc. Other items of vocab are written up to make up a dialogue in a shop such as: voila-( there you are), et avec ceci (is there anything else), c'est tout (that's all), c'est combien?(how much is it?).*

*Pupils have to arrange all the items to make up a shopping conversation. They have to write it out and then enact the dialogue. Julia walks around the class helping individuals. Fran and Kayleigh receive attention from the teacher as they are complaining that it is all too difficult and they can't manage it. As Julia is dealing with these two the others are engaging in the work to different degrees. Jessica goes across the room to see what Sandy has written as she says she is stuck. Bella, James and Jamie are quietly working. Scott puts his hand up for help- he is sitting on his own. Jack and Dex are back sitting together and so far it seems they are doing the work as well as talking about other things.*

*After ten minutes, Julia goes back to the front of the class to write up sample dialogues on the board. Pupils are then put into pairs to enact them- Jack is put with Bella and Dex with James- everyone else can choose their partners. The two pairs with Jack and Dex work well and they seem to take the work seriously.*

*After a few minutes they are told to stop and they are seated individually at each table for the written assessment. It is a small group of twenty and most are able to sit each to a table. They are given the assessment written on the interactive white board and told that they are under exam conditions. They work silently in the final twenty minutes of the lesson'.*

The lesson shows a hybrid teacher discourse that is partly pedagogic and partly regulatory in preparation for the end of term assessment together with the administration of the exam. This particular hybridity appears to be a powerful discourse as the students know that an important assessment is imminent. It seems to change the tone of the class since pupils must feel that their own discourse is constrained by a more powerful discourse related to assessments. They know that this will generate an end of year exam result.

During the next lesson, after finishing my last interview, I go back to the class. This observation is taken from my field notes during the last 15 minutes of the lesson.

*'The teacher shows the class a comedy DVD of the comedienne Catherine Tate. It shows a sketch of a French lesson. In the sketch there is an exchange between a 'pikey' year 11 schoolgirl play by Catherine Tate and a female middle aged French national teacher. The humour revolves around the clash of discourses between the two, the dominant culture vis a vis street culture and the way the student, who refers to herself as 'pikey' ends up speaking a fluent franglais. The two languages get mixed up as the student accommodates French to her own discourse.. The class finds this very funny and there is a great deal of laughter. Julia tells the class to pack away, to stand and dismisses them when the bell goes'.*

Many foreign language teachers and students find this sketch amusing because it presents an exaggerated and stereotyped but recognizable pupil 'type'. The serious and positive interpretation of this is that the pupil in the sketch has actually learned enough French to adapt it to her culture with some fluency and in a way illustrates the point made by Kramsch (1998) of adaptation of the foreign language to the needs of the student. Catherine Tate's school pupils role shows a hybridity of discourse between pupils streetwise discourse and official teacher led MFL discourse. The sketch however shows streetwise 'savvy' discourse getting the better of dominant cultural MFL discourse..

Another interview I undertook was with Scott. Scott has learning difficulties in French according to his teacher and I have observed that he does not participate in class. He has a high absence rate and when I have observed him in lessons, he often doodles or makes pen drawings rather than using the language. The exchange with Scott brought to mind a quote from McLaren (1991) in a chapter on the 'Discourse of the Other'. He asks 'Whose interests are being served by our research efforts? And 'Where do we stand ethically and politically on matters of social justice?' In other words is research taking place because of intrinsic curiosity in social phenomena, simply to shed a light on social events or is there a wider purpose? McLaren answers these questions by taking the

wider view that our understandings should be placed within an ethical framework of social justice. As the researcher I feel these issues need to be reflected upon with regard to the following extract which, it seems, confronts the researcher with socio-cultural inequity and consequently injustice.

### 8.10 Extract 13

#### Interview with Scott

Conversation between DE= researcher and Scott= S year 7 male pupil.

- 1DE- Do you think there's a lot of difference between French and English  
2people?  
3S- I hate the French  
4 DE- right  
5S- I don't know why but I just do- I don't know why  
6DE- ok so would you think there's a difference that you don't like?  
7 S- yeh  
8 DE- O.K  
9 S- but I don't know what it is  
10DE- have you been there?  
11S- it'll be the first time when we go  
12 DE- it'll be the first time, so you don't know why you hate the French?  
13S- no  
14 DE- where do you get your opinions about France from?  
15 S- the language  
16 DE- the language?  
17 S- coz I find the language really hard  
18DE- OK  
19 S- and I don't really want to go there and try to ask for something and  
20they'll talk really fast and I don't understand what they're saying.  
21 DE- does this mean that you're not too interested in learning the  
22language?  
23 S- well my mum says the French ignore us when we say 'Hi' and I don't  
24know if that's true but that's another thing I don't like about them.  
25DE- So does that put you off the language?  
26S- yeh it does.  
(lines 1-26 out of 120)

### **8.11 Learner , Cultural and Gender Identities**

Scott shows antipathy towards the French in line 3 but in line 5 he can't say why. We do get some indication in lines 23&24 as to why this might be the case. Scott has never in fact been abroad and although he lives opposite the French coast he has never been to France. He has therefore no logical reason for hating the French and can only base his feeling on hearsay from his mum. Although he finds the language difficult in line 17, it could be said that his negative opinion about the French also puts him off the language – line 26. In this case it might be possible to conclude that his cultural identity with regard to the target language culture has a negative impact on his learner identity.

Recalling McClaren's quote earlier on, whose interest does it serve in revealing this interview and how does it relate to social justice? The fact that Bella has been many times to France and Scott has never been is a feature of inequality and raises questions of social justice. The school attempts to redress this issue by taking them all to France for the day free of charge, externally funded. Bella's enthusiasm for cultural exploration into how the 'other' lives contrasted with Scott's negative attitude, her love of reading and, according to interview data, Scott's complete lack of reading reflect inequitable cultural dispositions towards MFL learning. For Bella and James it is an exploration into an unknown of what 'French kids would do' whereas for Scott this could well be something he might be wary of. The research is so far showing that MFL is a culturally inscribed activity to which not all pupils have cultural preparation.. Because MFL is an activity culturally inscribed with 'the Other', an optimum disposition towards it seems to be one



of cultural exploration. Kayleigh and Scott, who have never been to France and are not too sure about the purpose of a foreign language, could be restricted to a very localized discourse and cultural identity. This could impact on learner identity (Scott is alienated from MFL due also to negative comments on the French, however Kayleigh is still positive in her classwork) and disadvantages both genders to a greater or lesser degree.

### **8.12 Interview with Jessica and Jamie.**

The simple fact of having visited France however does not guarantee cultural awareness or the appreciation of the sights and sounds of the language as culturally inscribed artefacts. The following two year 7 students, one girl, Jessica, whom we have already heard from in extract 11, and one boy, Jamie have both been to France and yet they reveal little cultural interest in how French people live. Jessica has been to France five times with her primary school as we see in the following interview. These two interviews show that going to France does not necessarily lead to interest in cultural difference in students regardless of gender.

#### **Extract 14**

DE- researcher. JE- Jessica

118DE- D'you not like things different?

119JE- No, not really coz you have to learn more

120DE- so if you have a choice between loads of difference and all the same, what  
121 do you prefer, loads of difference or all the same?

122JE- All the same

123DE- All the same?

124JE-yeh?

125DE- Wouldn't it be a boring world?  
 126JE- Dunno coz we haven't actually tried it have we?  
 127DE- Would you like to live in France?  
 128JE- No  
 129DE- Wouldn't you like to experience their way of life?  
 130JE - If I had to,yeh, but if I had the choice I'd say no.  
 131DE- How many times have you been to France?  
 132JE- 5 times  
 133DE-What's the best thing you liked about it?  
 134JE- Dunno, I just go with the school, otherwise I'd have to stay in school  
 135DE- But if you went with the school to a French school would you try to  
 136 get to know a French pupil or would you stay with your English friends?  
 137 JE- Stay with my English friends  
 138DE- Thanks for the interview Jessica  
 (lines 118-138 out of 138)

The interview constructs a cultural reality of Jessica that does not project itself outwards towards difference and 'otherness'. We have already seen in extract 11 lines 91 & 92 that Jessica thinks that the French should speak our language rather than the English speaking theirs. Here we see in lines 118 -123 that Jessica does not want to learn about difference as she prefers everything to be the same. She has been to France 5 times but she did this reluctantly in order to avoid being left behind in school ( lines 133-134) and in line 137 she states that she would rather stay with her English friends rather than get to know French pupils. I think that it can be stated that along with Kayleigh and Fran, Jessica has a restricted cultural capital in terms of attitude towards difference for learning MFL. This does not mean that MFL cannot create the cultural capital but it does mean a significant socio-cultural disadvantage at the outset.

The following conversation with Jamie reveals little cultural interest even though he has stayed in France on a primary school visit.

## Extract 15

DE- researcher. J= Jamie

- <sup>1</sup>DE-Was France anyway different from England or the same?  
<sup>2</sup>J- It was pretty much the same  
<sup>3</sup>DE- were the people friendly?  
<sup>4</sup>J-Yeh I walked past a group and everyone of them said 'Bonjour' to me  
<sup>5</sup>DE- All in all do you think that French people are the same as us or  
<sup>6</sup>different?  
<sup>7</sup>J- the same  
<sup>8</sup>DE-Are you interested in different ways of life and how people live  
<sup>9</sup>differently from you or are you not that interested?  
<sup>10</sup>J- no, not really  
<sup>11</sup>DE- Do you think that if you like the people you speak the language a lot  
<sup>12</sup>better or does it not make any difference whether you like them or not?  
<sup>13</sup>J-It doesn't make a difference

In line 10 Jamie admits that he is not interested in different ways of life and that liking French people does not make a difference to how well one speaks the language (line 13). I was drawn to Jamie's classroom contributions during a speaking activity lesson on Wednesday afternoon on June 27<sup>th</sup> during our preparation for the day trip to France.

*' The lesson objective was café transactions around the theme of food, drink and also money. There had been an introduction on the Euro and its British pounds currency equivalent. In the conversations students were taught to ask the waiter 'C'est combien?' (how much is it) and the waiter was to imagine a price in euros and say it in French. The customer was then to write this down and say it in English to show it has been understood (we didn't have any real euros from the lesson). In all the groups around the tables Jamie was the only one to fluently quote prices in euros and centimes, using high numbers and immediately correct the others in his group when they misunderstood the English meaning. He was also giving prices to the adjacent waiters when they couldn't manage the high numbers for the centimes. Thus he was able to quote cinq euros quatre-vingt quinze (5 euros 95) fluently and know the meaning in English. However this aptitude for numbers, recognized by the rest of the class, did*

*not extend to spoken French in general and for the rest of the speaking work he fell silent'. (end of diary entry)*

Jamie does not profess a cultural interest in French life even though he has been there and yet he is skilled in the use of French numbers and he is thus able to use the foreign language as a cultural tool for this. I question whether his ability to use basic French as a cultural tool in this way has any significance for his wider linguistic and cultural development? The answer I propose is as follows.

When pupils such as Scott, Kayleigh, Jessica, Fran and Jamie only have access to localized discourses, their language use and field of social interaction may well be restricted. Lemke's (2002) view is that individuals construct identities for themselves when 'speaking different languages or different dialects of the same language' (2002; page 78 ). Lemke also argues that as individuals speak languages, they have experiences of more diverse cultures and access to more possibilities for identity and ways of being human. Language learning seen in this light is emancipatory in that it sets free a restricted identity in a restricted discourse. The restricted vocational discourse of employment will restrict language and cultural identity to CV's, job applications, booking train tickets or airline flights and other limited areas of linguistic functionality. Discourse needs therefore to be built from the point of language use and extend outwards towards the wider target language culture. Foreign language education can be in this way a vehicle for the personal development of identity.

### **8.13 Conclusion – the relationship between learner, cultural and gender identities.**

Language is not an ideologically neutral phenomenon but the bearer of ideology within discourse. It is therefore about culture and is a cultural artefact (Cole 1996). As Cole argues, language produces culture and is produced by culture. This notion of culture being within language and language within culture is true for French as for all languages and, seen from a distance, French is therefore the product and producer of French culture. However on moving closer to the notion of French culture, we can see that there are many French cultures each of which is the aggregation of many subjectivities. Which of these French languages and cultures do we learn as students of French? The answer is not likely to be the culture of ‘Verlan’ as seen in Chapter 2 which is the dialect of Parisian council estates, nor is it likely to be a rural dialect or regional language like Catalan. Cultural and discursive power have consolidated a national hegemonic standard French for ‘educated’ French people and foreign nationals alike to learn and perfect. This is the language and culture of the nation state and it is likely to be this type French rather than Belgian Walloon French or Quebecois that students will learn.

School students are not likely to be able to distinguish between different language types in French and in one naïve sense this does not matter. What matters for the moment is the cultural journey and as Kramsch (1998) says ‘Their desire to learn the language of others is often coupled with a desire to behave and think like them, in order to be ultimately recognized and validated by them’ (1998; p81). Two of the best students in the year 7 class display a good deal of interest in the target language culture. This culture as an end product is not so relevant as the desire for awareness of what the Other does on

a day-to day basis. Bella could have relied on what ‘Miss’ told her about the French but she is not too sure about this, she wants to find out for herself. The awareness that up-close French culture is not exactly what it seems from a distance is something that occurs on a more advanced leg of the cultural journey.

Not all the students possess the cultural capital to act out café scenes from France in the classroom as some have never been abroad. As has been earlier suggested this can undermine learner identity. However Kramsch argues such students need to begin their exploration from where they are since the act of using the language is also using the culture adapted to one’s own situation. This position would indicate that cultural identity with regard to MFL learning can develop from learner identity with one’s own culture as a starting point. They can then build their discourse albeit a culturally hybrid one towards the standard. Here I am thinking of pupils such as Jamie, Scott, Kayleigh and Sandy who is extremely quiet although produces very neat written work.

It can be argued that connections between learner identity and cultural identity appear necessary rather than coincidental. Pupils in year 7 who have little cultural support do not cope as well as those who are fortunate enough to have cultural support and interests. However, on the other hand, there are pupils who show a positive regard towards foreign cultures but do not express this positive attitude in practice. Jack and Dex who were quite positive in my conversation with them about the benefits of learning French have learner identities of minimal engagement with the foreign language in class and their behaviour is unruly. It could be described stereotypically in terms of how boys’ classroom behaviour has often been regarded on many occasions by many



## CHAPTER 9 RESEARCH STUDY FINDINGS

### **9.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I separate my research findings into two types- theoretical and the empirical based on the research.

The first findings, in 9.1, relate to the theoretical developments of the research and the second, in 9.2, to the gradual emergence of an empirical outcome. Findings therefore do not just concern the end result but also the theoretical journey towards this.

In terms of the empirical findings, 9.3 sets out the findings of learner identity in terms of how individual subjectivities have been seen to have been constituted in the study.

9.4 states the findings of cultural identity in terms of the dichotomy between culture seen as a fixed product and culture as an on-going process and how these might be connected.

9.5 summarizes the findings of the connection between gendered identity and MFL learning and 9.6 concludes with a summary of all the findings of the study.

### **9.1 Theoretical Findings**

The research study should be looked at as a whole, in terms of a journey. This is in fact what I wanted the research to be. There was obviously a widely acknowledged gender imbalance in MFL performance both locally and nationally as there is in many other subjects. I argued that this was more pronounced in MFL because this area of study



involves different cultural behaviours and attitudes which cannot be separated out from the language.

At the beginning of the research the gender imbalance was the only 'given' supported by statistical data. The ensuing journey involved investigation into the meanings of gender. Gender either belonged to a fixed social category which ran parallel to a binary biological definition of sex or gender was an ongoing cultural definition involving associated characteristics on a continuum between male/female but not one or the other as mutually exclusive entities. The research journey also looked into meanings. The research follows an interpretivist paradigm which is a search for meanings and interpretation. Via writers such as de Saussure, Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Gumperz, Foucault, Fairclough etc, a model finally emerged of language and meaning as flexible, situated in context and powered by ideology.

The key concept in understanding how language, meaning and ideology can shape identity is discourse. It was not possible for the research study to start with discourse as an 'a priori' concept because discourse only emerged along the theoretical journey and yet it is such an important concept around which the empirical research is built.

Discourse shapes the world in which individuals live and their socio-cultural practices and MFL learning should now be seen in this light. According to one's discursive engagement, MFL can be a practical holiday activity, an economic activity for

employment prospects, an activity for cultural discovery, a technical grammatical activity or a literary activity, amongst others.

Gender also emerged as constituting a flexible and fluid identity as opposed to a fixed and rigid bounded binary male/female social category. This may constitute a theoretical finding to many in the educational world who readily commentate on male and female attainment at school as though male/female, as separately bounded binary units, did not share any common characteristics.

I have discovered a roadmap along the journey of my investigation into gender and performance in MFL, which is that of the construction of identity within discourse. This is not to be framed as a finding since identity and discourse existed before my journey of investigation began. However, I have been able to apply this academic roadmap of identity and discourse to show that meanings for MFL are constituted within the different discourses in which they are situated and these meanings change according to their discursive locations, be they policy, community or teacher and pupil classroom discourses. I would therefore posit that this connection between MFL teaching /learning and its different meanings as constituted by discourse is a theoretical finding and a contribution to knowledge in this field. All these meanings can be seen as ideological and located within and powered by discourse.

The new theoretical findings therefore are that MFL is situated in different discourses which may overlap but which may also be in conflict. In this regard I drew upon

Fairclough's (1989) model of discourse and applied it to MFL teaching. In the course of the research interviews we then see wider cultural discourses expressed by students as they talk about what are basically ideological reasons for learning a foreign language, in terms of the language of employment, earning more money, promotion, setting up businesses and also leisure and tourism. This also includes cultural understanding.

This study however takes a social constructivist perspective which argues for the active capacity of individuals to create meaning and we see this in practice in the classroom observations within student discourse.

Students are then shaped by ideology as are teachers in their practices of performance management, vocational education and bureaucratic procedures in assessment and reporting. Nevertheless within their own discourses, students, as we have seen in classroom observation, define their own situations and have their own interpretations of MFL often as a hybrid mixed with 'official' interpretations. Findings, then, are that MFL is discursive and ideological, and its meanings are subject to socio-cultural and socio-historic interpretations.

With regard to gender we have seen that characteristics which are traditionally gender related do not inherently belong to gender but are associated with a particular gender over time. Such theoretical findings may very well be new for the researcher and general reader even though not for the specialist academic.

To summarize the theoretical findings, these are that the concepts of discourse and ideology shape the meanings for MFL as a socio-cultural activity and the concept of gender as a fluid identity with regard to MFL learning.

We can also state that gender is not an a priori category and therefore male/female are not a priori mutually exclusive in their characteristics and cultural dispositions towards MFL learning. Educational commentators who state that boys are this and girls are that as axiomatic may well be mistaken since they are misled by the notion of gender as a social category.

## **9.2 Empirical findings of research**

The research question , ‘Does the construction of identity subject positions by male pupils in secondary school hinder their performance in MFL by comparison with girls?’, was undertaken over three year groups as individual case studies :- years 7, 9 & 11. Having finished the collection and analysis of the data for these case studies, it became evident that the research was as much about the higher performance of many girls in MFL as it was about the lower performance of many boys. The research was initially prompted by the concerns that the higher grades at GCSE are almost never gained by boys at Brackenmount school and nationally far fewer boys than girls occupy this band of achievement. The research itself has in fact addressed the gendered performance of both genders.

At the end of the year 11 case study it became apparent that there might be some link between cultural identity towards MFL and classroom learner identity and that whilst gender was implicated in this, the study was not to be just about gender. We have seen, as the case-studies have progressed, the emergence of concepts such as learner and cultural identities. As these concepts have come more to the foreground, gender has become secondary and certainly disappeared as an a priori concept. We have instead seen gender emerge as another form of culture to which a set of meanings can be ascribed and borrowed. The findings of the research then view the concept of gender as a set of associated but not inherently necessary cultural characteristics. It should also be noted that a large number of boys and girls share the same grade bands in the foundation grades and, with the emphasis of the findings on cultural and learner identity rather than purely gender, all pupil performance is encompassed by the research. The position that has emerged from the research so far is therefore that all performance in MFL is linked to learner and cultural identity regardless of gender.

### **9.3 Learner Identity Findings**

The study plays out the interface regarding the age-old dichotomy between determinism and free-will. One thing particularly salient in the study is that individual identity is socially constituted, formed and re-formed in social contexts. The classroom is a social context where individual identity or learner identity is constituted in teaching/learning situations. The implication for this is that the student learns not so much with a bio-neurological brain but with her/his identity, constituted not only in the current situation

but also accumulated from an aggregate of previous situations. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning and identity are bound up together in the same process. Learning conceived in this way creates and reveals a sense of who we are in relation to the world. The position we are in now constitutes a different learning context from the earlier models of instrumental and integrative motivations. The concepts of motivation were not part of the subjectivity of the individual but were separate and had to be somehow achieved or integrated within the individual. Dornyei and Uchida (2000) achieve this integration of motivation and self in their concept of imagined future selves as I outlined in 3.5. We are thus in a position where to learn is to redefine one's identity, one's definition of self and way of seeing the world. Learner identity therefore involves the positioning of the whole person with regard to the learning activity. This was seen in the ethnographic observation.

In the year 7 class James works quietly throughout. In the I.T. lesson he is focused on the word games. In the speaking lesson he takes his time and quietly orders food and drink in French. Bella also works enthusiastically, speaking French in front of the whole class and playing the role of waitress in the group situation. On the other hand Jack and Dex position themselves outside the learning activity on many occasions. In the I.T activity using laptop computers, they play with their volume controls to make as much noise as possible.

When Jack and Bella are together, Jack's physicality interrupts Bella's work and her learning is sabotaged. Kayleigh and Lydia can be seen to be working on the reading comprehension of cartoon stories in French but are disturbed again by Jack and Dex

turning round to make comments and flicking bits of rubber in their direction. Jack again positions himself outside the learning activity by calling numbers out aloud to the class in French to get translations- he could have found the numbers page in the text book, looked in the dictionary, ask a more able peer in the class or the teacher. My interpretation is that he is looking for a wider social interaction with the rest of the class and is enacting this through the calling out of random numbers. Dex is doing something similar in making loud comments about the pictures to the class and holding up the reader so everyone can see. The boys seem to be positioning themselves away from the socially restricted nature of the activity and towards the widest possible social audience. They are taking parts of the course material and pushing it out into the public domain as a means for humorous banter. They are using the lesson material as a platform for humour. As we will see the theme of 'banter' occupies a large part of pupil discourse.

Pupil discourse is hard to define because it is not unitary but itself a site of tension caused by multiple influences consisting not only of the overlapping teacher discourse but also the discourses of the pupils' own community from inside and outside the school. Some of the students, such as James and Bella, lean towards the teacher led discourse whereas others such as Jack and Dex orientate themselves away from the official lesson objective. Others such as Jimmy and Kayleigh are situated on the continuum, sometimes leaning one way towards the teacher led discourse when Jimmy takes part in the speaking activity on numbers and prices, and sometimes away from this when he plays around with the volume control. Kayleigh , in a conversation with me as researcher, admits to dipping in and out of lessons.

Discourse hybridity is also a theme that occurs elsewhere in the case study particularly visible in the year 9 case study. In this case study pupils such as George, Alex, Fred and Mitchell engage in their own pupil discourse and the teacher led discourse at the same time. These pupils talk about Christmas and Christmas shopping whilst doing the work generated by the lesson objective. On the other hand other male pupils, Joel and Sam were more closely following the teacher discourse and took part in the lesson activities alongside the female students, Georgina and Lauren. The episode at the whiteboard demonstrated the interface between teacher and pupil discourse when George writes an exaggerated sized script on the board first very large, then very small. He handed the felt tip over to Alex who wrote the reply in a conventional sized handwriting, much to the disappointment of George. This was a relief to me that the activity was not going to be used as a platform for humour after all. Thus George's bid for public banter was not taken up by Alex. Learner identity can be seen as an exercise of individual subjectivity constructed from a situation on a cusp between the individual's own subjectivity and the 'Other'. This is the moment when the individual encounters a cultural position slightly or even very different from his/her own.

The MFL teacher's discourse may represent the 'Other' to a greater or lesser extent but this itself is also a hybrid between his/her professional role of teacher in terms of authority regarding behaviour, lesson ethos, scheme of work delivery but also the incarnation of target language culture albeit at times stereotyped. A teacher may also have within his/her own discourse a political or/and religious or other ideologies. The 'Other' may also be a culture coming into the classroom directly from the outside without



much other discourse mediation such as in the case of Natasha. The issues Natasha, a female student, brings to the classroom from her own community do not really connect to classroom discourse and are therefore not mediated by it since she rarely appears in the lesson. Natasha is viewed by both boys and girls with some trepidation because of her out of school activities and her rejection of both pupil and teacher led classroom discourse. Natasha for the time being at any rate remains an outsider.

In the year 11 class, learner identity amongst some of the girls contains a high level of allegiance to teacher led discourse. The ethnographic observation to support this finding recorded sophisticated linguistic exchanges in the target language and this level of linguistic competence coincided with a positive target language cultural identity in the semi- structured interviews. It occurred to me, at this time, that there was at least an association between the target language these students were able to use and the opinions expressed in interviews. This could be construed as a contiguity between a surface level identity in action and a deeper level of cultural identity. In one lesson there is a fluent conversation between Zara and Alicia. Both are predicted 'B' grades at GCSE and Zara achieves this at the exams. Both Alicia and Zara express enthusiasm for the cultural and linguistic attributes of France as they understand them to be. They both want to know the lives of the 'Other' and understand that you can only fully do this through the target language. Both students acknowledge that one cannot immerse oneself in the target language if there is little regard for the 'Other' with regard to the foreign language community. It seemed then from the observations and interviews that, where there was an observable student identification with the target language in the classroom in terms of

language tasks, there was also a connection to a deeper cultural orientation towards the 'Other'

#### **9.4 Cultural Identity Findings**

Surface events of individuals may very well be connected to a substrata of lived experience that has accumulated over time. This suggests that cultural identity underpins learner identity creating a pre-disposition for learner identity as a surface phenomenon. This position would however seem deterministic by implying that surface subjectivity is determined by a deeper strata of identity and not vice versa. This position ignores the subjectivity of the individual and individuals in general.

Gumperz (1999) suggests that subjectivities can point towards other discourses, appropriate their meanings to reinforce or recreate more local meanings. This would mean that classroom use of a foreign language reaches up to the meanings of the target language wider culture and recreates the language and culture in the classroom. However this may reinforce nationality cultural stereotypes if classroom practise does not contain a critical awareness of the possibilities for diversity in target language culture. This represents the movement of more localized culture and discourse towards wider cultural discourse rather than the opposite.

Whatever the degree of balance between the movement of localized culture to wide or wide to localized, it appeared to me from the year 11 class data, that those students who were using the language with some competence had some cultural interest in the target

language and the way people might lead their lives in a different country. I am referring to extract 5 in chapter 6 of an interview with Zara and in the same chapter, extract 4 of an interview with Alicia. In the interview with Alicia in lines 4-5 and 14-16, Alicia reveals her enthusiasm for French and, for her, how she sees the language suffused by culture in the way it is constructed and spoken. Robert, in year 11 also expresses an appreciation of the sound of French in lines 6-8 of the interview extract, coupled with a desire to know about French culture and ideas in lines 12-14. He sees this as part of his own personal growth. Robert went on to gain a higher grade in French GCSE and he was the only boy in the class to achieve this.

The year 11 case study prompted me to think of performance in MFL as a cultural identity issue rather than just one of gender alone. This provided me with a direction for the rest of the study. Whereas at the outset there had just been statistical differences in performance based on gender, it seemed to me that in view of the high performance of boys such as Robert in year 11, Joel in year 9 and James in year 7 which exceeds that of most of the girls in the respective classes, performance viewed only as a feature of gender is highly problematic. Gender itself therefore needed to be examined and questioned in terms of its commonly perceived binary structure. The outcome of this questioning was that gender was now seen as socially constructed, like culture, rather than biologically determined.

There are characteristics which tend towards success in MFL which have a higher distribution among females than among males. The year 11 data pointed towards

possible links between a wider cultural product and an individual cultural identity process of exploration. Robert (male student) and Zara, Jasmin, Alicia (female students) although they are of a different gender, nonetheless share a cultural enthusiasm for the target language and country. They also share a general cultural interest in other language based pursuits such as reading and English. Robert and Zara did not choose to pursue French at 'A' level but they are now (2008) in year 13 studying for English 'A' level.

As a contrast to this, Bill who is another male student in the year 11 case study had a general CAT benchmark score even higher than Robert and yet did not have the cultural/learner identity to perform as well as Robert.

At the time of this year 11 case study, I used the schools CAT scores, as a general indicator of ability, but then abandoned them later in the study because I felt that they were no longer relevant for MFL. This was because there was now a case for saying that learning in MFL was a socio-cultural identity issue as opposed to one of brain based cognition. Nevertheless, according to the schools grade prediction guidelines, a CAT score of 106 should indicate a C/B grade in French as well as other subjects. In fact Bill's eventual grade was an 'E'. Such discrepancies resulted in abandoning CAT scores for this research, since Robert with a CAT of 106 obtained a 'C' grade and Bill with a CAT score of 111 obtained an 'E' grade.

The interview with Bill in chapter 6 points to individual cultural identity having an impact on learner identity. He states that for him, learning a foreign language is just

about asking for things on holiday or having sufficient knowledge for a job. These motives for learning are understandable but they do not go very far and lead to language learning and assessment at GCSE foundation level accessing grades D,E,F,&G. My conclusion at the end of the year 11 case study is that students regarded as able, because their CAT scores predicted higher grades in most subjects, were however only able to gain foundation grades in French because they were not culturally oriented towards the 'Otherness' of foreign language and culture.

The year 9 case study had much more of an emphasis on ethnography to foreground the discourses pupils were enacting in the classroom generally. This allowed me to see the interface and tension between the pupils' discourse and the teacher led discourse. In ethnographic study of the year 9 class pupil discourse can be seen as a continually emerging subjectivities and behaviours. Identity is therefore seen not as a unitary and finished product but as ongoing, emergent and unfinished, consisting of a multiplicity of subjectivities all creating their own meanings. This continually emerging definition of personal identity also applies to larger scale culture. For example, French or Spanish culture is not monolithic but a multiplicity of diverse cultures as opposed to that of the tourist brochure or the dominant culture portrayed in text books. It may be the urban culture of 'les Cites' or multi-ethnic culture of the French cities. We have seen that as culture is formed in discourses and through power, some discourses can colonize others and portray themselves as normative. It is essential therefore to look into discourses to see the subjectivities at work and the emergent meanings of language and behaviour.

In the year 9 class, the teacher tries to establish her discourse as the normative one. This is taken up by Joel (male year 9 pupil) and Georgina (female year 9 pupil) and they follow the lesson, showing interest in the white board presentations of Spanish cultural events and participating in the language work. Their classroom behaviour seen in chapter 7 and attitudes in the interviews show a cultural position which is disposed favourably towards foreign language learning in Spanish. In this sense they closely follow the teacher led discourse. On the other hand and at the other extreme, Natasha is entirely disconnected from teacher led discourse. In between these extremes we see various points on a continuum where pupils alternate between discourses, between what they bring to the lesson and what the teacher brings to the lesson. The teacher discourse itself is shaped by management discourse through accountability ie lesson observations and scrutiny of lesson plans and also shaped by policy discourse through schemes of work and programmes of study. Ultimately the larger socio-economic orders of discourse as exemplified by Fairclough (1989) have their part to play in the schemes of work and these permeate into management and teacher discourse particularly in terms of work/business related language units. The discourse, for example, of N.V.Q business language is directly linked to outcomes in being able to function in the language to achieve certain business related goals. It is not about the cultural processes and representations of the language which the teacher herself may be interested in, having learned to speak and write fluently in the language and perhaps having lived in the country. The teacher therefore may have to negotiate between the conflicting tensions of management, policy and her/his own personal cultural discourses.

Again, as with the year 11 case study, findings in the year 9 case study are that the students who are culturally involved with the foreign language are those who reach the highest level of competence in language use. Georgina and Joel are those who are, on the evidence presented, the most willing and able to use the foreign language. Many of the boys in the year 9 case study are spending a lot of time alternating between the available discourses in the class and this 'to and fro' takes up a lot of time and intellectual resource. At the same time the boys who were interviewed such as Fred, Alex, George do not express the cultural interest to the same level as that expressed by Joel and Georgina and so, much as in the case of the year 11 study, they learn the language that corresponds to the level of their cultural interest in the target language. Foundation grades at GCSE are those that represent a transactional and instrumental level of language and should not be denigrated as fail grades but revalued in MFL as useful grades for those who wish for no more than to be able to transact in the target language.

## **9.5 Gendered Identity**

Gender is popularly conceived as a binary social category that can be directly mapped onto the biological category of sex. One is therefore either male or female with regard to the social category of gender. Thus one talks of male social attributes such as competition, individual production of conversation participation and female ones such as cooperation, joint production of conversation. The study has shown that such attributes are not intrinsic, innate gender features but are characteristics that are socially constructed and come to be associated with a particular gender. However as these characteristics are not exclusively owned by a particular gender, they may be enacted by

any gender. We have seen that gendered characteristics such as cooperation and competition should be seen as opposite ends of a continuum scale rather than mutually exclusive binary opposites. Therefore individuals may locate themselves or come to be located somewhere at a place on the continuum in one situation and perhaps at another place in another situation. Thus gender associated attributes can be seen as fluid and relative to situation rather than absolute. There are then degrees of male associations or female associations which can be borrowed by either gender. In reality many gender associated characteristics are often seen to be located towards one gender rather than the other such as the popularly conceived ‘boisterous boys’ but this is not an absolute and does not have to be the case.

These definitions of gender are very important for this study in view of the research question which is ‘the construction of subject positions by pupils which may account for imbalance in male/female achievement in MFL learning at secondary school’. I have attempted to identify personal characteristics which appear to be associated with MFL learning and attempted to show that these are culturally constructed. This is to answer the question as to why some individuals identify with MFL learning more than others. Some individuals have developed a more empathic view of the culture of difference in language and behaviour than others and project their curiosity towards that ‘Otherness’ or difference. It appears from the interview and observational research data that more girls than boys enact these cultural positions of cultural empathy with the difference of language, ways of life and differences in identity. On the other hand more boys than girls are simply looking to a result for language learning rather than showing any interest in



the cultural process. This seems to be because more boys than girls prefer to remain within their own pupil discourse, sometimes even detached from teacher led MFL discourse or dipping in and out of the teacher led MFL discourse. Many of the year 11 boys remained at the heart of their own discourse which at the time seemed impervious to teacher led classroom discourse whereas the girls seemed to be more flexible. Robert of course was also flexible and seemed to share some of the flexible discourse characteristics of the girls.

Socio-economic orders of discourse are powerful and permeate into the MFL classroom through business and work related courses and GCSE areas of experience involving the world of work. Teachers themselves understandably use work related motivational issues as a rationale for MFL study because they consider this as being relevant to the needs of students. Learning a foreign language for holiday transactions and increased chances of employment are motives that are readily understood by all students. Whilst both male and female students refer to these motivations in their interviews, it is mainly male students who only refer to employment and leisure transactions whereas many more female students refer to cultural interest and enthusiasm for the 'otherness' of the language.

## **9.6 Conclusion. Summary of Empirical Findings**

The findings in terms of empirical outcomes in this research study regarding MFL learning are threefold. Firstly with regard to the higher GCSE grade levels there is the existence of a connection between language learning and a cultural/ learner identity

disposition towards the language and culture. This link tends to be stronger with more girls than boys.

Successful MFL learning takes place at lower grade levels and this revolves around language learned for the end result of transactions and functions as the only rationale for learning. Here learner identity exists therefore only at a surface level of language.

The second finding on the other hand is evidenced through ethnographic observation in how students construct their own learning identities in the classroom through the interplay between discourses. Many students alternate between their own discourse and the teacher led discourse. They return periodically to base in their own discourse but then re-connect with the teacher led discourse. This enables students to access a wider discourse and bring within their grasp a new language and cultural enquiry. A French café situation in class allows them to bring this cultural event and language within their discourse. Girls tend to follow the official teacher led MFL discourse much more closely than boys whereas boys move more between the teacher led discourse and their own, sometimes even detaching themselves from official lesson discourse and becoming disruptive. Further mention is made of gender with relation to findings in 10.6.

The third finding is that the higher achievements in MFL are not determined by gender as a fixed social category but by individual subjectivities exercising characteristics that allow them to explore the 'otherness' of difference in language and culture. A secondary product of this finding is that culture is not static and closed but multifaceted, unfinished

and related to different settings and contexts. The fact that these characteristics of the third finding tend to be more associated with girls than boys may have implications for the curriculum with regard to cultural studies.

The connections that have been made between learner identity and cultural identity with regard to foreign language learning should point to issues of personal development. I hope to have shown that MFL learning points to larger discourses including the larger socio-economic ones. One can learn a foreign language for socio-economic reasons as well as those of wider cultural enquiry. The problem for personal cultural development occurs when one learns MFL only for socio-economic reasons since MFL becomes restricted to just functional language. MFL learning on the other hand can be seen as an agent for personal development, when Robert so aptly states in chapter 6 ‘it expands your horizons’. MFL learning gives students an opportunity to move to wider and less localized cultural discourses. Opportunities for personal and socio-economic development can then arise from general cultural linguistic development. If the economic has to be the ultimate goal then at least there should be a personal and cultural development process which leads to it. An extrapolation of this position to other areas of the curriculum is that any type of learning should be more than that which relates to targeting measurable outcomes.

## CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

There are three issues that I, as researcher would like to address in conclusion. Where did I start the research, where did I finish and what have I and hopefully readers learned along the way? There are then the implications in terms of how this process can make a contribution to teachers and learners of MFL and its relationship to the rest of the curriculum. In 10.6 there is a section addressing strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the research, how research could be improved in the future and final reflections on claims for knowledge in terms of gender.

### **10.0 Looking back**

The starting point issued from a perceived problem experienced over my career as a teacher of modern foreign languages – French and Spanish. This was that at secondary school level boys seemed to do less well than girls in this subject area and in particular in terms of the higher levels of G.C.S.E as measured performance. This may well be true of other subject areas and the findings of this research may also be applicable to them, in particular with regard to an allied language subject such as English. However my focus was on MFL because for over 30 years this has been my professional activity and my experience was that, as a subject area, MFL stood apart from other subjects on the curriculum because it addressed other cultures at some distance from where the actual teaching takes place. There is a separation by geographical space just as much as with History there is separation by time. Both subject areas, it can be argued, require imagination to reach their cultural source from the classroom or homework study room

but whereas both MFL and History involve analysis and understanding, MFL also requires performance. If the MFL performance is to be 'authentic' in its construction and reflection of target language social life, it would seem to me that it has to be connected to its cultural source and this is what makes it different from many other subjects on the curriculum whose cultural source can be found either locally or at least without overseas travel.

Why then did it 'seem' that boys did less well than girls? The first task was to take the word 'seem' out of the question by collecting quantitative data and undertaking statistical analysis to show that there is a statistical difference in G.C.S.E results with regard to gender, according to the conventions accepted by social scientists for establishing statistical difference between data. This involved Chi square and Whitney-Mann statistical analysis. It was seen that at the higher levels of G.C.S.E there is a systematic preponderance of higher grades attributed to girls rather than boys at Brackenmount school over the years 2001 -2007.

### **10.1 Analysis of gender**

The next task was to analyze what is meant by gender. There is a common sense understanding of gender as a social category. This is that it is viewed as binary in terms of either/or characteristics. One is one thing or another rather than a mixture of many attributes. In terms of a quantitative study conventional social categories are useful as a starting point because over large scale data sets they are easy to understand. However with much more focus I was able to deconstruct the large scale gender binary by asking

what exactly is meant by male and female identity. I learned that gender is not about a mutually exclusive binary male/female definition but about ideas of maleness and femaleness which can be situated on a continuum. Characteristics can be situated at any point on this continuum and do not have to be situated in an absolute manner around any point. This is not to deny that there are associations which historically are attributed to one gender or the other and, although in reality this is not an absolute, the associations still exist sufficiently for gender to be an issue.

Nevertheless the examples which run counter to traditional gender associations mean that, although there are characteristics towards MFL learning associated with gender, they nonetheless transcend it in that these characteristics are not a priori connected to gender. They are merely historically associative. A problem of identity occurs at this stage and this is a philosophical problem that surrounds the research study. If identity is viewed at a distance from the outside as a large scale social category, then everything that can be said about that identity is deterministic. This means that the divisions between one sub-category and another ie male/female, seen from afar, are likely to be crude character attributes of a reified, objective nature.

This view stands against the notion of the free-will of the individual contained in his/her subjectivity. If the subjectivity view is taken, it is no longer possible to say that all males are this or all females do that. Social life works at the level of the individual consciousness as he/she interacts with day-to day context.

On the other hand a view which only focuses on the subjectivity of the individual can miss the larger picture where, commentators like Fairclough (1989) would point out, social forces do exist which are larger than any one individual. The question remains however with regard to the way in which the individual responds to such social forces and of course, this returns us to the philosophy of individual free-will in his/her interpretation and creation of meanings.

## **10.2 A search for meanings**

This study therefore has been a search for meanings. The meanings of gender; and also the meanings of foreign languages. We know that languages contain meanings internally within their own domain but what do they mean externally to the outsider, for whom the language is 'foreign'? Fairclough (1989) argues that when meaning is imbued with enough social power to project it as normative it becomes ideology. I have argued throughout the study that MFL is linked to larger socio-economic discourses that are powerful enough to project the ideas, through programmes of study, to teachers and pupils that it is perfectly normal to have employment and economic transactions as motivation for language learning. I have also argued that this is an instrumental result as opposed to a wider cultural process. As it is a powerful argument, the socio-economic argument is easily communicated and easily understood. The data have shown that it is a baseline argument that does not promote higher language learning because it promotes nothing deeper or higher than the transaction. The data and literature review have also shown that a foreign language or any language is a cultural expression. It occurs through the process of living, it simultaneously expresses social life and produces social life and

cannot be separated from this cultural process in its teaching and learning. To learn the language one has to learn the context and not merely a straightforward formula for a transaction. The data have shown that the students who are interested in the cultural process of language are likely to be those who achieve the higher levels of achievement.

Elliott (2008) maintains that success in education generally occurs due to the cultural attributes of pupils and their families rather than the pedagogy of the school. He refers to the Russian system of education which places a high value on cultural self-improvement and scholarship as a means of attainment as opposed to the British and American systems which place a high value on the instrumental nature of education. I interpret 'instrumental' here as education for the value of specific outcomes rather than the cultural process. In the article entitled 'Cultural values, not teaching are the key to learning, stupid', Elliott argues that success in education depends as much if not more on the intrinsic value of students cultural disposition than it does on the pedagogy of the teachers. This seems an extremely deterministic position to take as it implies that the educational process is already decided by the cultural 'baggage' the pupils bring with them. My view in the study is that cultural identity within the individual is a historic personal disposition towards the MFL perceived objective culture, and it is brought to bear in a dialectical relationship with a situated learner identity process in the present. Cultural identity, as I have argued throughout the study, is both product and process engaged in dialectical interaction. It is objective as a feature of the past although called to the present by individual subjectivity as process. The historical cultural identity of the individual however relates to perceived cultural phenomena or cultural facts. Cultural



identities can shape the situational learner identities in the classroom but this is also a reverse process where learner identities can shape or initiate cultural identities which then act back and further develop the learner identities.

The study started by addressing the question of why boys do not seem to gain the higher grades to the extent that girls do. However, in attempting to transcend the binary structure of gender I have discovered aspects of student identity which seem to be associated with higher learning in MFL regardless of gender. This still can recognize male/female as distinguishable categories but behind this social category, characteristics are no longer seen as absolute and can be taken up by one gender or the other. In this way I try to combine the more reified distant view of gender with a closer view of subjectivity, which basically says that there may be a gender headline but that it needs to be examined in detail for its component parts. There is then a truth in both the distant and near view of the social phenomenon.

### **10.3 Learner and Cultural Identities**

Learner identity as an orientation towards MFL therefore became more important than gender when viewed more closely and this was explored in ethnographic observation. Here students orientated their identities in the class room situation through the interplay of discourses. It was seen that the ones who could position their learner identities within the foreign language learning discourse were those making the most progress. In most cases this appeared to be mainly girls whose cultural identity was closely linked to situational learning identity although this was shared by some boys. By cultural identity

here I refer to both characteristics of openness towards linguistic and cultural difference as well as attitudes of enquiry into difference. My understanding of cultural identity is an active and dynamic openness towards the difference of the 'Other', in the language itself which Van Lier (2002) names 'languaculture'. 'Languaculture' is culture within language and so an interest in the grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation of the foreign language is at the same time an interest in the culture. MFL culture is therefore at the same time inside the language, in its social context and may interrelate with learner identity in a process relating to the learner's present and future imagined selves. (Dornyei and Uchida 2000)

#### **10.4 The Cultural Identity of Language**

The study can be seen as setting MFL within a cultural context and viewing students as cultural learners rather than just language learners in a mechanistic operation.

Therefore learning linguistic transactional formulas uniquely for economic reasons does not position language in its wider cultural context but instead takes a short-cut to an end result without bothering with the cultural process. As a result this does not take us very far.

Ball (2008) argues that 'education is a servant to the economy. Education is now thoroughly subordinated to the supposed inevitabilities of globalization and international economic competition' (Education Guardian 29-01-08). Tomlinson (2008) concurs with this view and is quoted in the same article as follows, 'Education has moved from being a pillar of a welfare state, as intended by the post war Labour government, to being a prop

for a ruthless global market economy-----'. Such commentators would be unequivocal about the nature of the 'order of discourse' or the 'discourse types' ( Fairclough 1989) respectively behind and within the educational system. MFL is then subject to an ideological discourse which is easy to understand.

### **10.5 The outcome of the research**

Success in MFL at higher GCSE grades involves the cultural process of exploration of the 'Other' in its similarities and differences inside and outside of language. The notion of 'Languaculture' expressed at the end of Chapter 6 provides a conceptual model of language learning where language is culturally inscribed as well as transmitting culture. The 'affordances' ( Van Lier 2002) are possibilities for new identities provided by a different culture although the student needs to be oriented and orient him/herself towards this within family, community and/or school context. Much as argued by Bakhtin (1981) the individual is situated at a meeting point between her/his own culture and the culture of the 'Other' which in terms of MFL is the target language culture. As well as gaining cultural insight and understanding, embracing this cultural difference can constitute an accumulation of cultural capital (Norton 2000) because being culturally educated and speaking one or more foreign languages can be a personal investment for the future. This is not the same as being limited to foreign language transactions without the cultural commitment to transcend the surface language.

## **10.6 Strengths of the Research Study**

The main strength of the thesis is the close relation between theory and practice in terms of theoretical notions of language and discourse and their practical applications in the research. Although discourse is the operative theory in practice, the thesis does not start with the assumption of discourse but shows the way in which it has evolved from prior theoretical models of language. The concept of discourse and its function in the research are a strength of the study because it is shown to construct ideology and culture. This is vital for the theoretical finding that MFL is an ideological discourse construction with many possible attributable meanings apart from an overarching socio-economic one.

However another strength is the demonstrable link between discourse, culture, cultural identity and learner identity and the dialectical relationship between the cultural and learner identities. Cultural identity is presented as a research participant's personal theory which draws on historical experience to shape his/her learner identity in the present and vice versa where classroom learner identity, in interactive discourse, can shape cultural identity. This dialectical relationship between cultural and learner identities mirrors a philosophical dichotomy between determinism and the free-will of the individual and I believe that the way in which this philosophical relationship expresses itself in the study is also a strength.

The mixed methodology generating qualitative data is a strength because of the internal validity created by possible corroboration between interview and observation data sets. These two data types correspond to the notions of theory and practice at the level of the

participants where interview data express attitudes, beliefs and opinions representing historical cultural identity and observational data represent the expression of these qualities as learner identity in classroom behaviours. On most occasions in the study there is triangulation between the two data types for example between the behaviours and attitudes of participants such as Zara and Alicia in year 11, Georgina and Fred in year 9 and Bella and Scott in year 7. However there were also occasions where theory and practice did not corroborate each other, such as between the attitudes and behaviours of Jack and Dex in year 7.

Finally, a strength of the research is that gendered identity is analysed as constructed within discourse so that performance in MFL is revealed as not attributable to binary biological gender but to learner/cultural identities associated historically and currently with gender although not inherent to gender.

### **10.7 Weaknesses and Limitations of the Research Study**

The first year 11 case study did not have a strong ethnographic style observational content. This is because in this case study, unlike the other case studies, the dual role of classroom researcher and teacher was in conflict and remained unresolved. In the other two case studies there was a teacher teaching the classes that I researched. A more disciplined approach to the immediate recording of data would have resolved this conflict and in the future I would ensure that this were done in the form of the completion of diary notes before leaving the research setting.

A limitation of the study is that it addresses the research question in one bounded research setting, which is of course a characteristic of the bounded nature of case study. Claims for knowledge will therefore be limited to within the boundaries of the research project reflecting a localized truth. No claims can be made for generalization by extrapolating findings to a wider population. It could be a possibility that the findings be replicated elsewhere in a different location or over a larger area but again this would have to be the subject of a further research project.

### **10.8 Further Claims for Knowledge**

Gender is constructed at the intersection of many discourses. There is therefore not one single gender discourse and so the ‘gender differences discourse’ which according to Sunderland (2004) circulates in MFL education, stating that boys are poor and girls are good at MFL cannot hold true. In the study we have looked at the construction of learner/ cultural identities in interview and observational data and it is possible to state that there is no inherent gender difference relating to MFL performance, although there are historic and current gender related characteristics expressed as learner/cultural identities. Gardner (1985) states that females are more proficient at MFL learning because of a propensity towards integrative motivation, being an affinity towards target language communities and a desire for integration. However Gardner never calls into question gender identity and leaves it simply as an unproblematic binary biological identity. We now know that this is not the case. Gardner also maintains that empathy with target language culture is sufficient motivation to sustain the learning of a foreign language in the long term. We have seen strong indications in the interviews that

empathy is significant in terms of cultural identity but that this is a theory that needs to be translated into practice at the level of classroom learner identities. Dornyei (2000) offers guidance on this link between the notion of integrativeness towards MFL culture and the self in Dornyei and Uchida's (2000) notion of imagined future selves. MFL cultural identity has to relate to the learner's perception of a possible identity for him/herself from the present going into the future. The learner needs to have a vision of her/himself in the future to encompass his/ her MFL self. Therefore learner identity is all important in bridging the gap between self and Other in terms of present and future in MFL learning. Classroom learner/cultural identities also need to relate to the notion of culture within and around MFL rather than simply socio-economic culture lying outside of the language itself. We have seen how these classroom identities have been shaped amidst a hybridity of discourses with many pupils constantly moving between discourses. It must be noted that this mainly concerns male pupils from data evidence. From this evidence most female pupils construct a more stable learner identity in line with official teacher led discourse. We know that there are differences within gender as there are differences between gender but there is a greater tendency amongst girls to learn MFL for reasons within the language and there is a greater tendency amongst boys to learn MFL for reasons external to the language and that these reasons are the expressions of learner/cultural identities rather than gender per se. We have also seen in the case studies that some, but not all, male pupils' classroom behaviour can express a tendency to dominate public space physically, using banter to the point of 'laddishness' and that this can become a barrier to learning. On the other hand we have witnessed, in the year 9

case study, a female pupil who was also able to dominate public space contrary to many expectations with regard to female pupils.

### **10.9 Implications for the curriculum**

If MFL is seen in terms of cultural expression of the 'Other' as opposed to an isolated mechanistic practice, then its cultural context should be explored and not marginalized. Cultural difference and similarity in general should be explored in this area of the curriculum which also connects to other areas. Citizenship is an area of the curriculum which looks at values and it is becoming a contested area in that some commentators call for this to be a conduit for teaching 'British values' and British political and social institutions. As I write at the beginning of 2008, the content of citizenship in schools is not highly prescriptive as yet because it is a new subject and still not compulsory in schools. I refer to this nascent curriculum area because in Britain, where mainstream European languages are taught and a multitude of community languages are spoken in school and local communities, citizenship could be more about cultural studies in general rather than inculcating 'British values' in particular. We have seen in the study that there is a two way inseparable and integral connection between language and culture. Cultural understanding can be accessed through language. Yet it can also come from an exploration of different values and social mores which can lead to the appreciation of diversity between and within the different sections of society and the diversity of other societies.



There are many subjects on the curriculum such as religious education, citizenship, personal and social education, all existing in their separate boxes when fundamentally these subjects and all of the others on offer are about cultural perception. Every subject on the curriculum, not only MFL, is an expression of a cultural perception and interpretation of the social world. Notions of culture underpin this, since we are all culturally constituted as individuals. A study of culture is therefore a study of our own reality and this should form a platform for other subjects on the curriculum. Students can then ask questions about their own identities as well as the identities of others from the same or from different cultures.

A study of culture in schools could well look at students' identity in general to see how it is socio-culturally constructed and how one's perceptions might well be ideologically constituted. Such self-awareness may well give students a critical context for their own learning where they can assess their own motives. They can then negotiate for themselves the age- old problem of their lives being expressions of free-will or determinism. This sort of study goes beyond the study of MFL and can be connected to other subject areas. However, this may very well also serve to promote modern foreign languages and community languages as another way for students to understand themselves, their own cultural position and the diversity of others.

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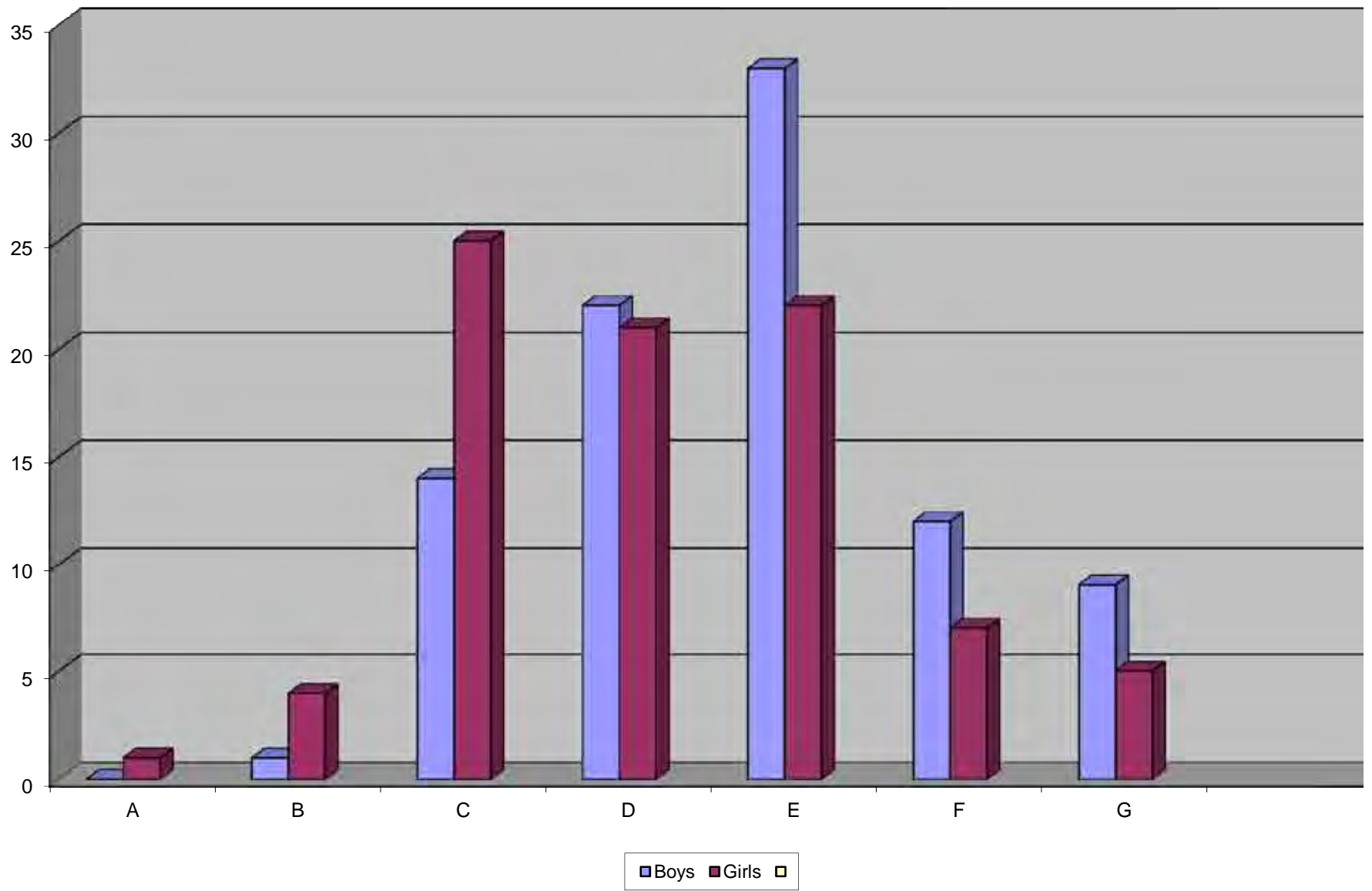
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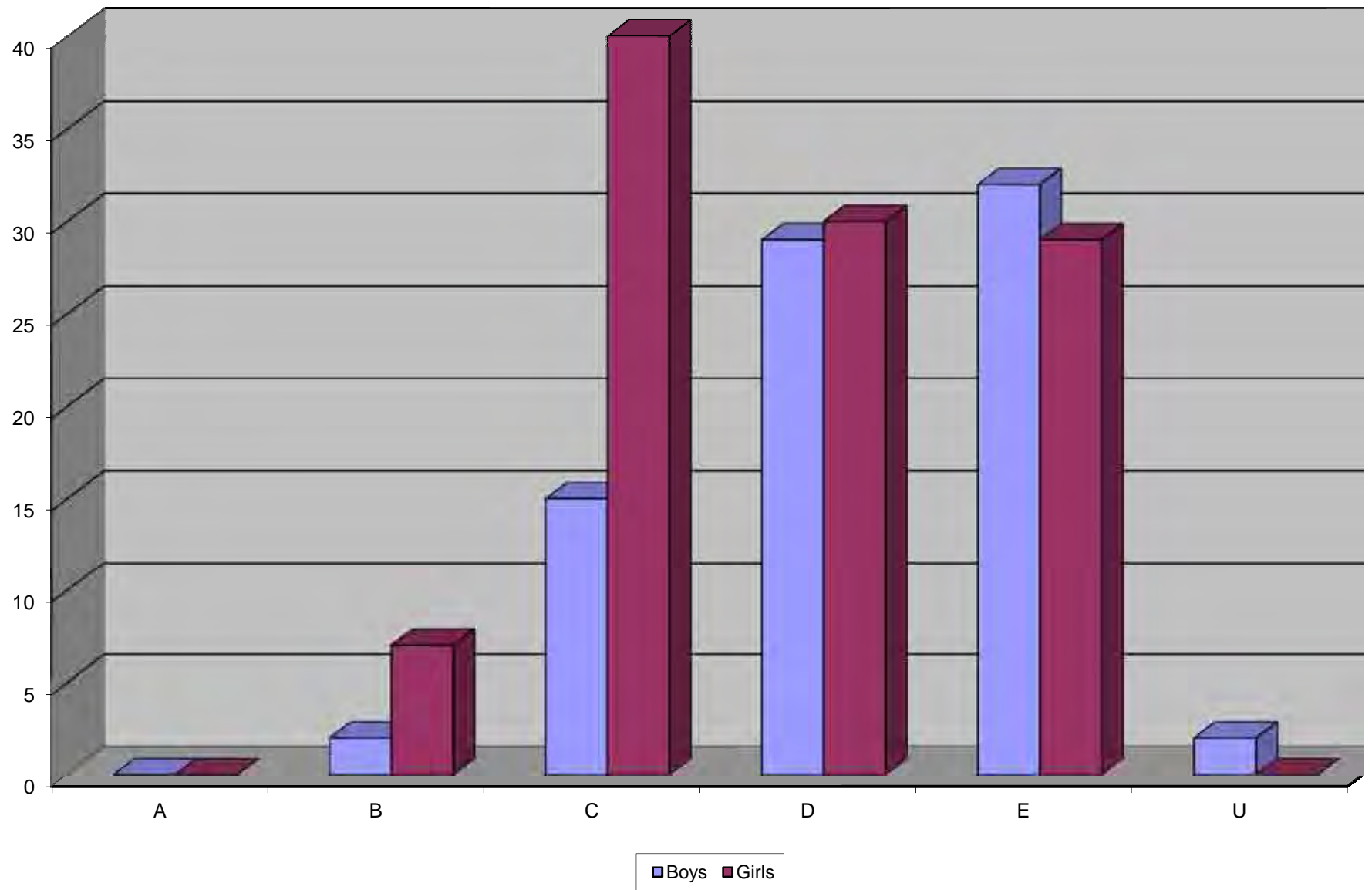
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## APPENDIX 1

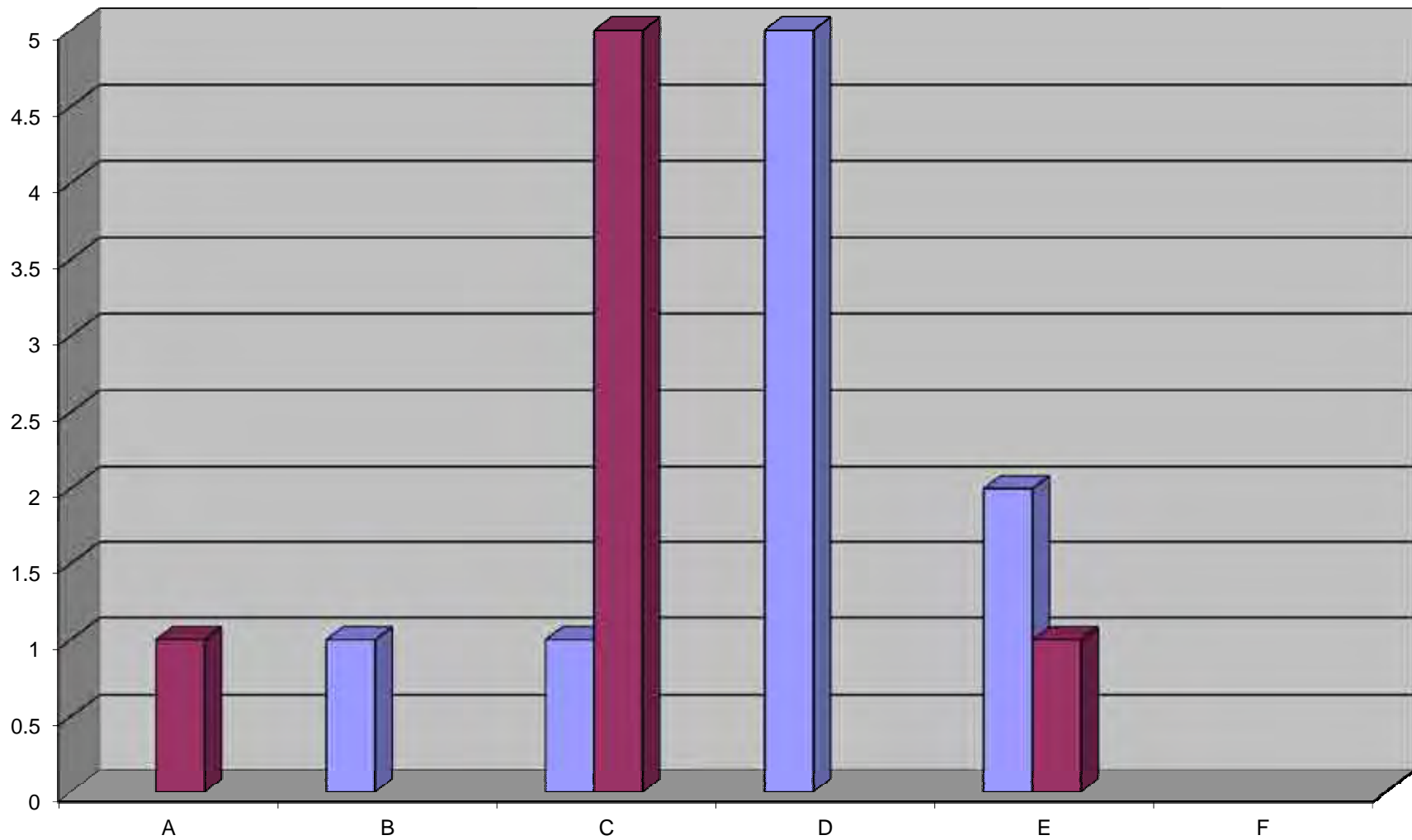
1: BAR CHARTS PRESENTING LOCAL G.C.S.E. PERFORMANCE DATA AT BRACKENMOUNT SCHOOL.

2: NATIONAL DATA



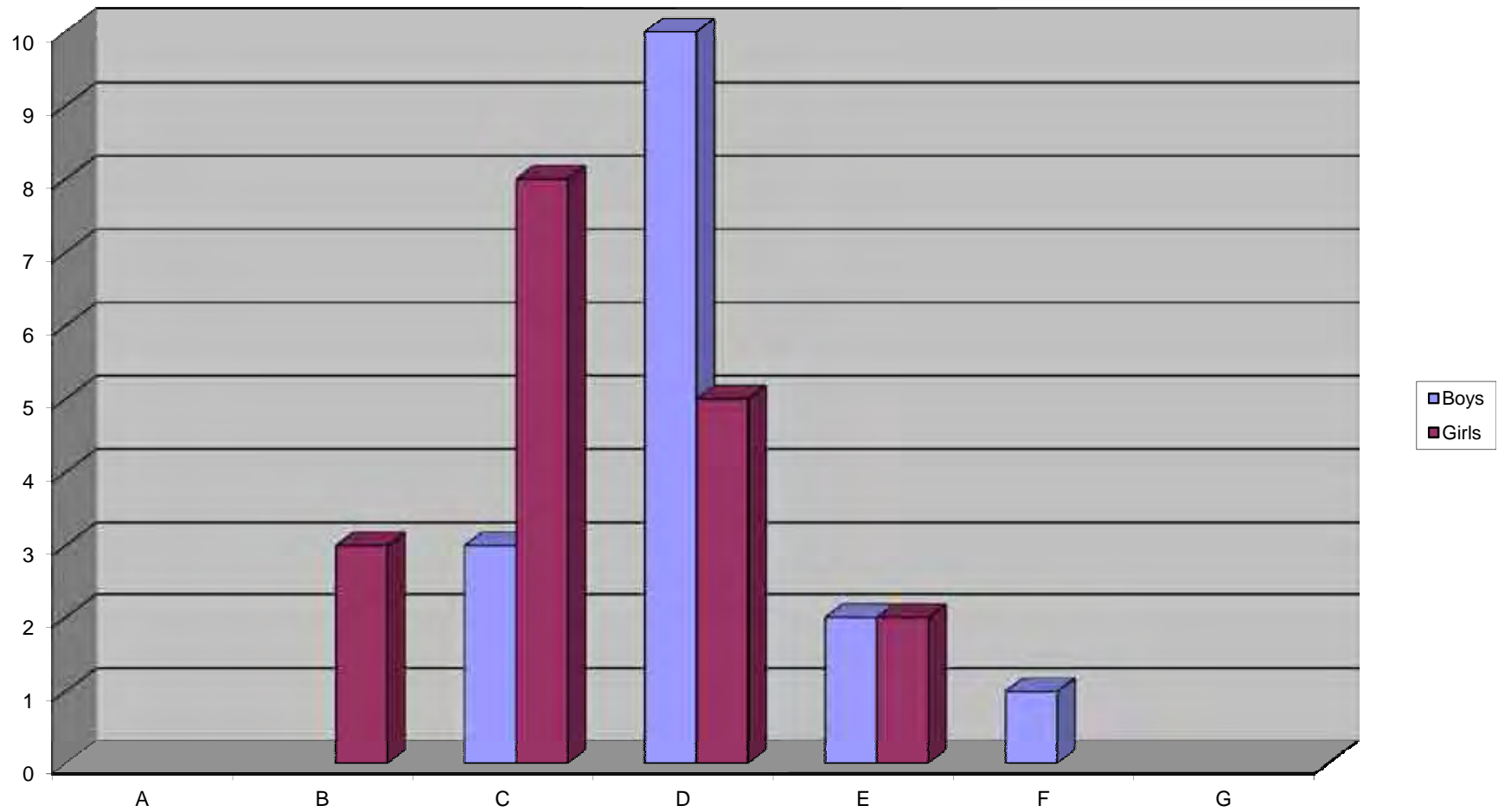


**Gender Performance CAT 106-110 (2002)**

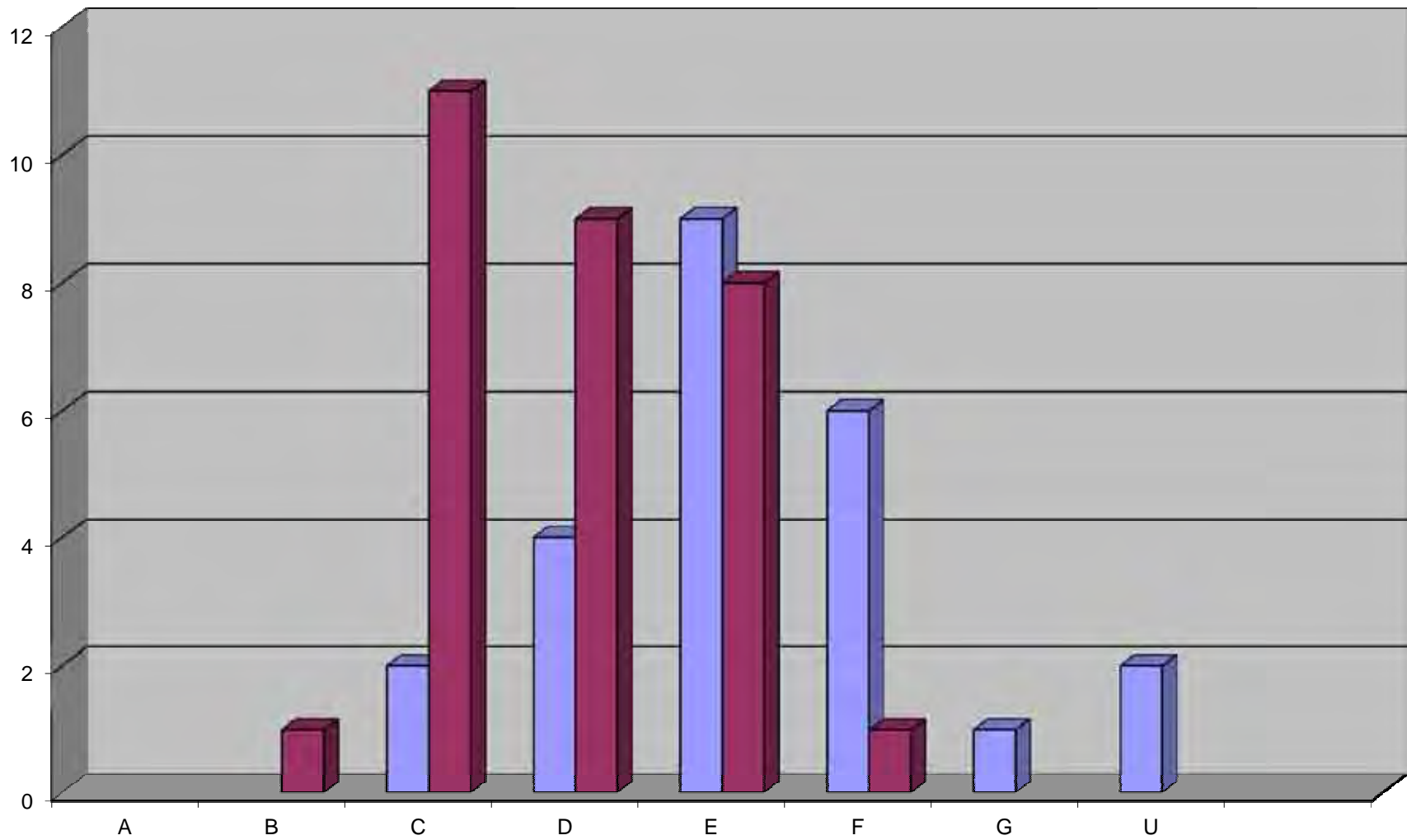




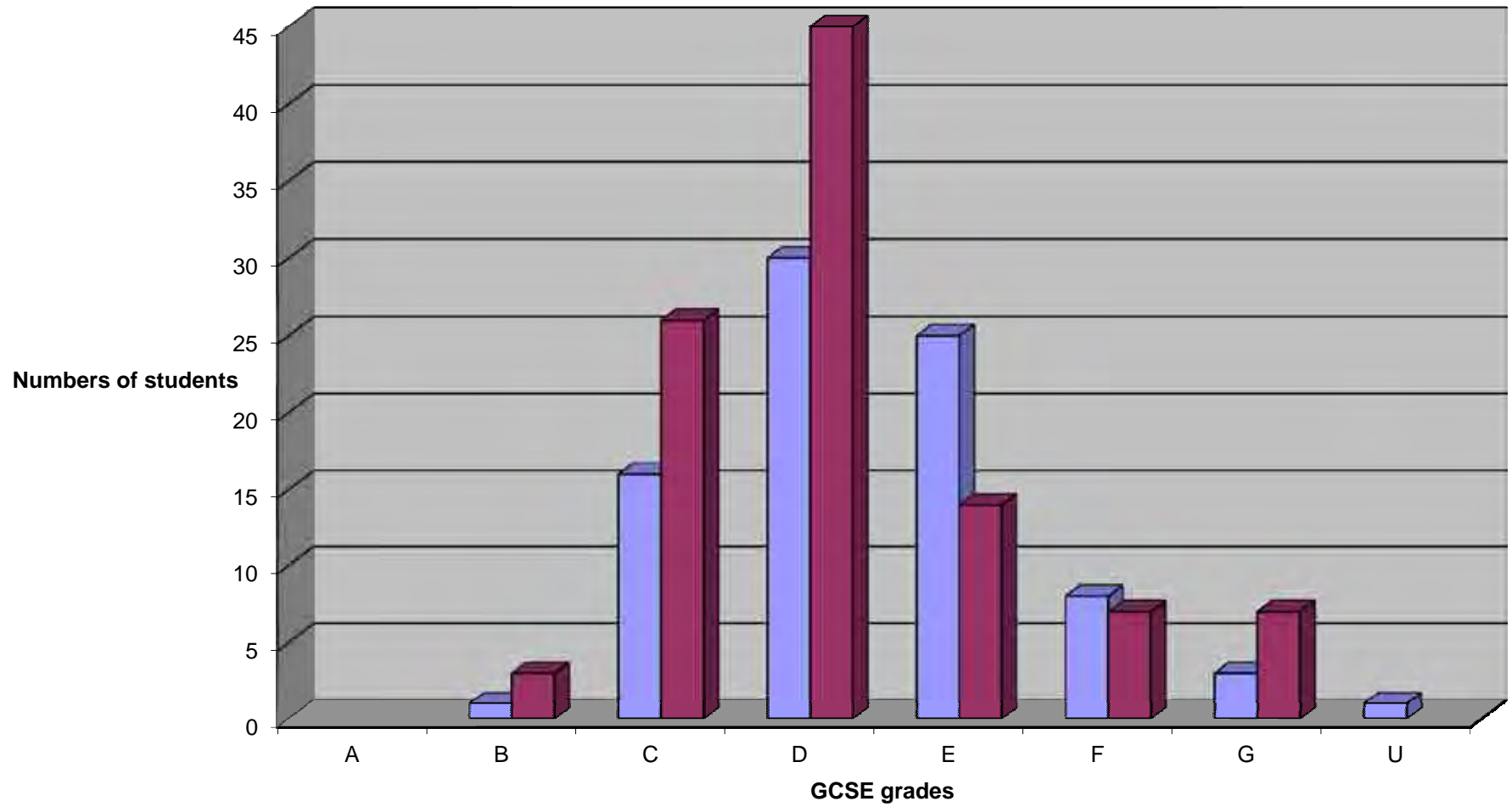
Gender Performance CAT 100-105



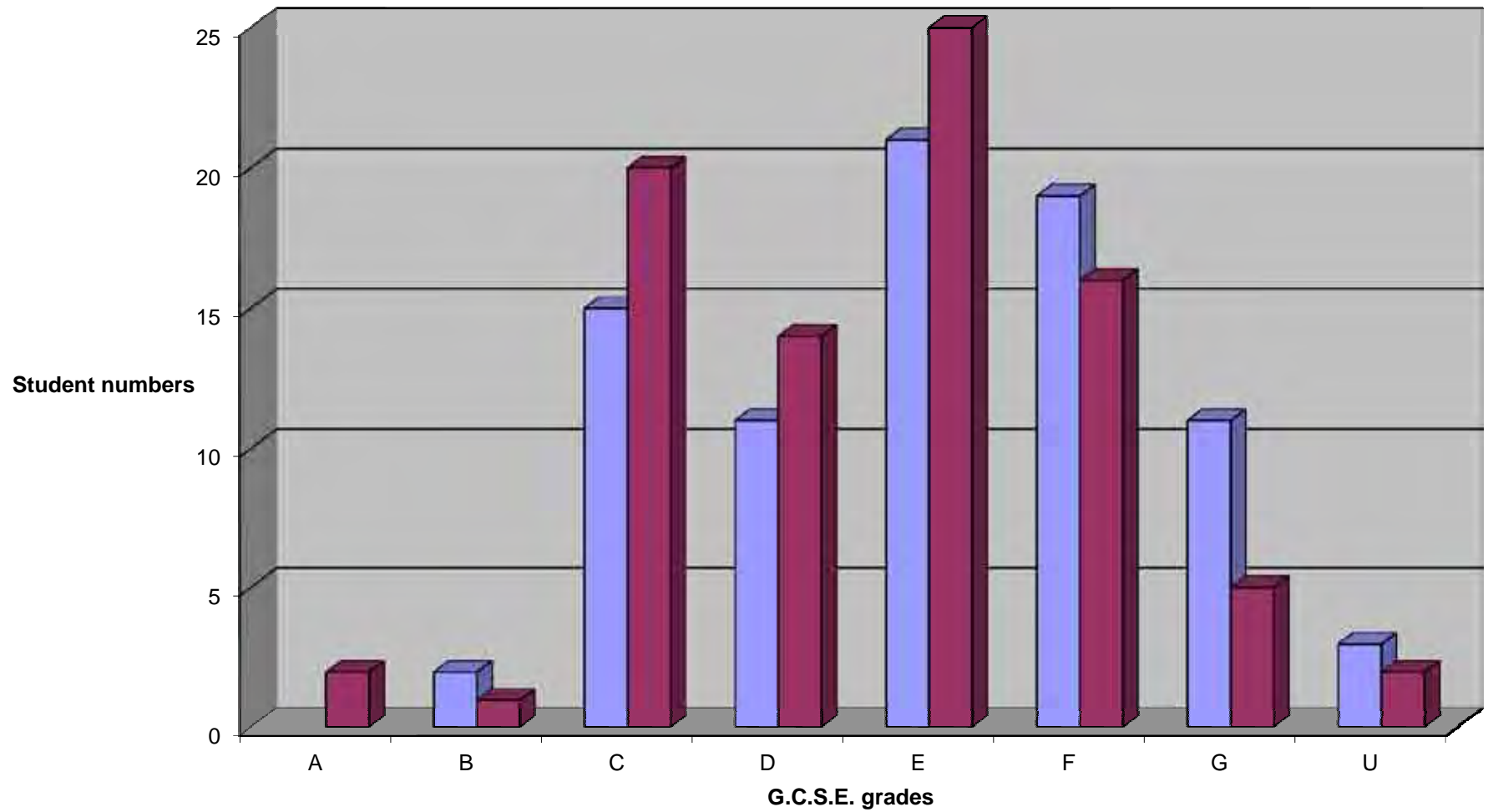
**Gender Performance CAT 91-100 (2002)**



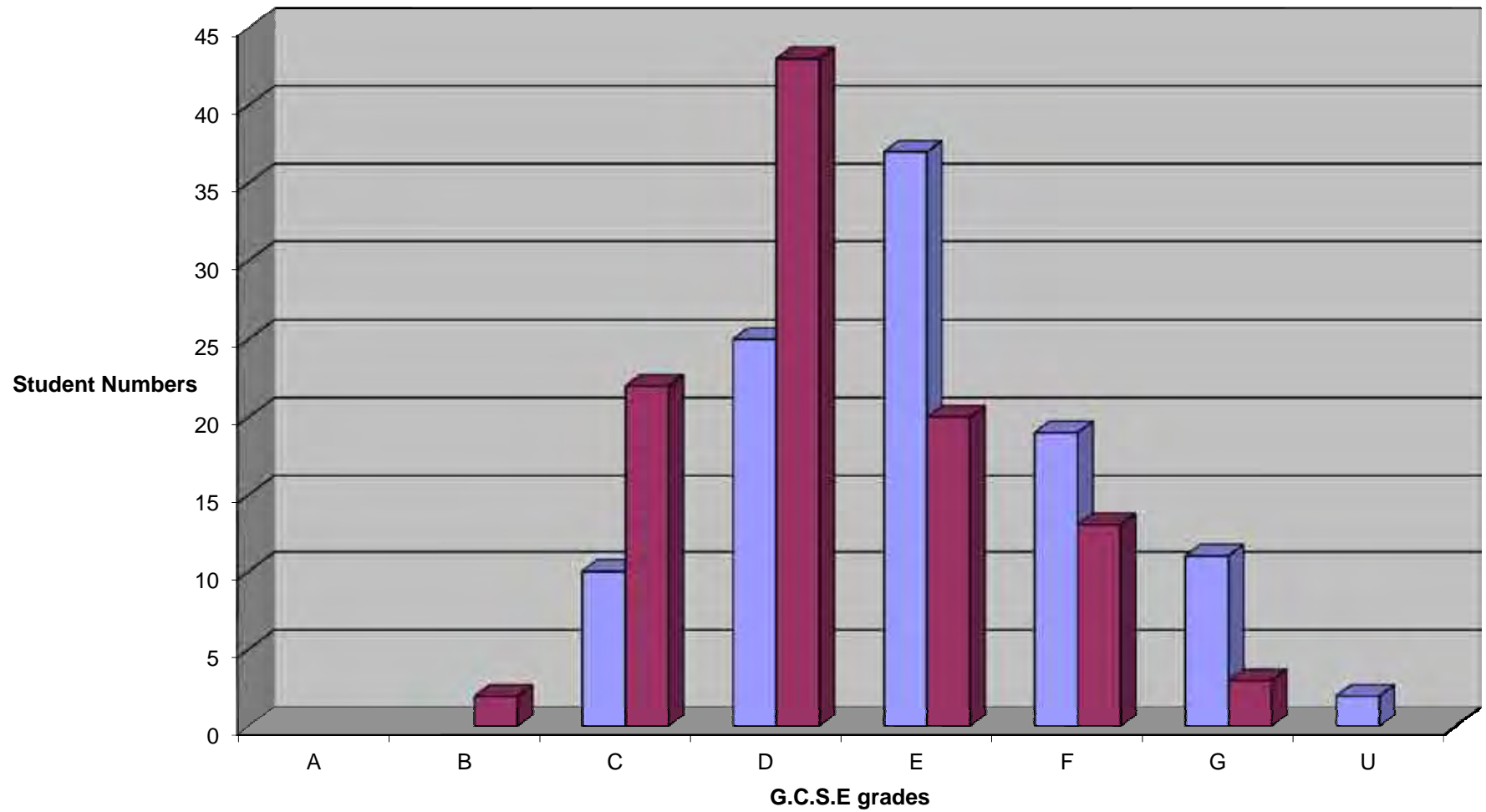
**M.F.L. 2003 GCSE Results by gender**



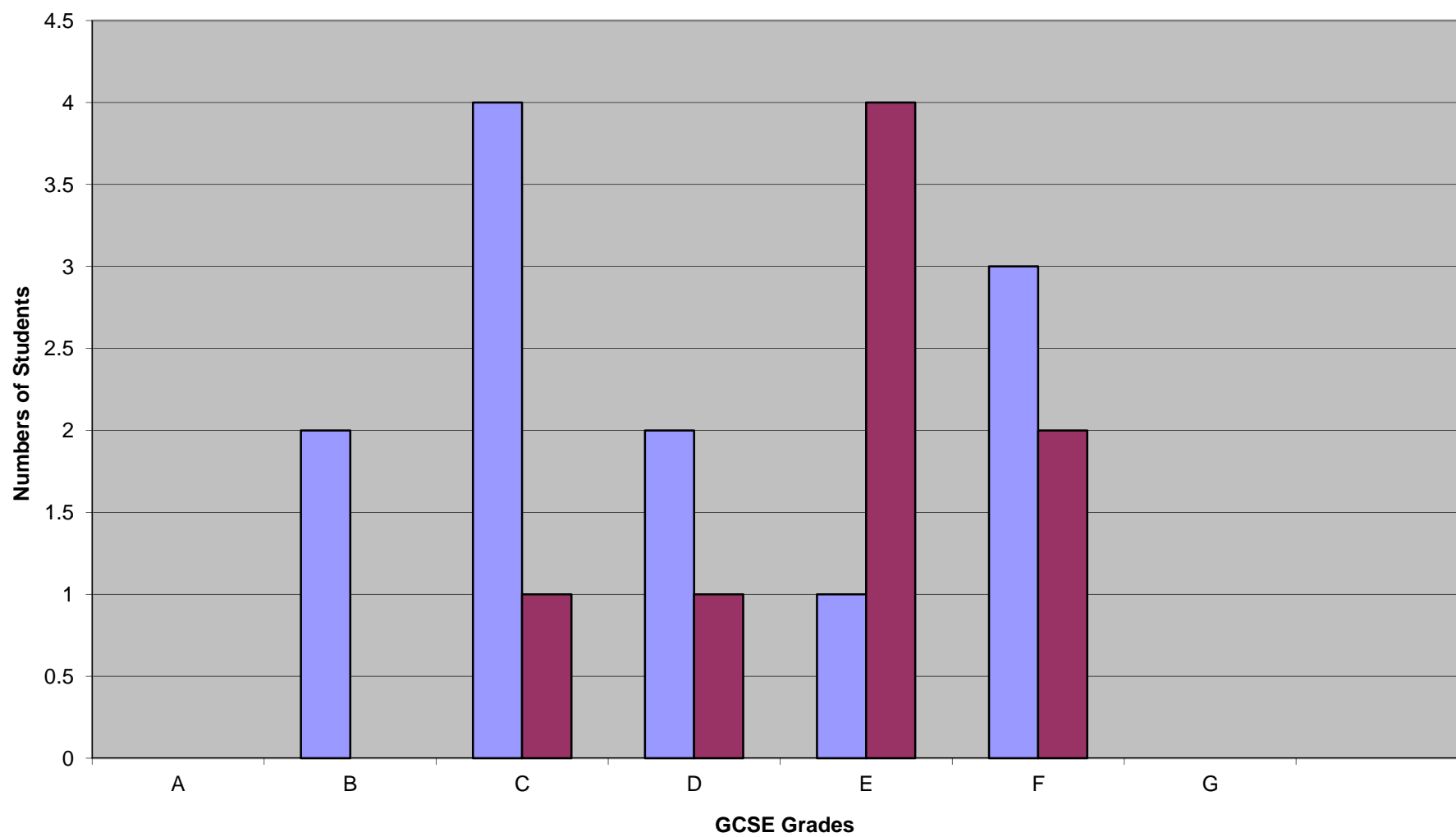
**M.F.L. 2004 G.C.S.E. grades by gender**



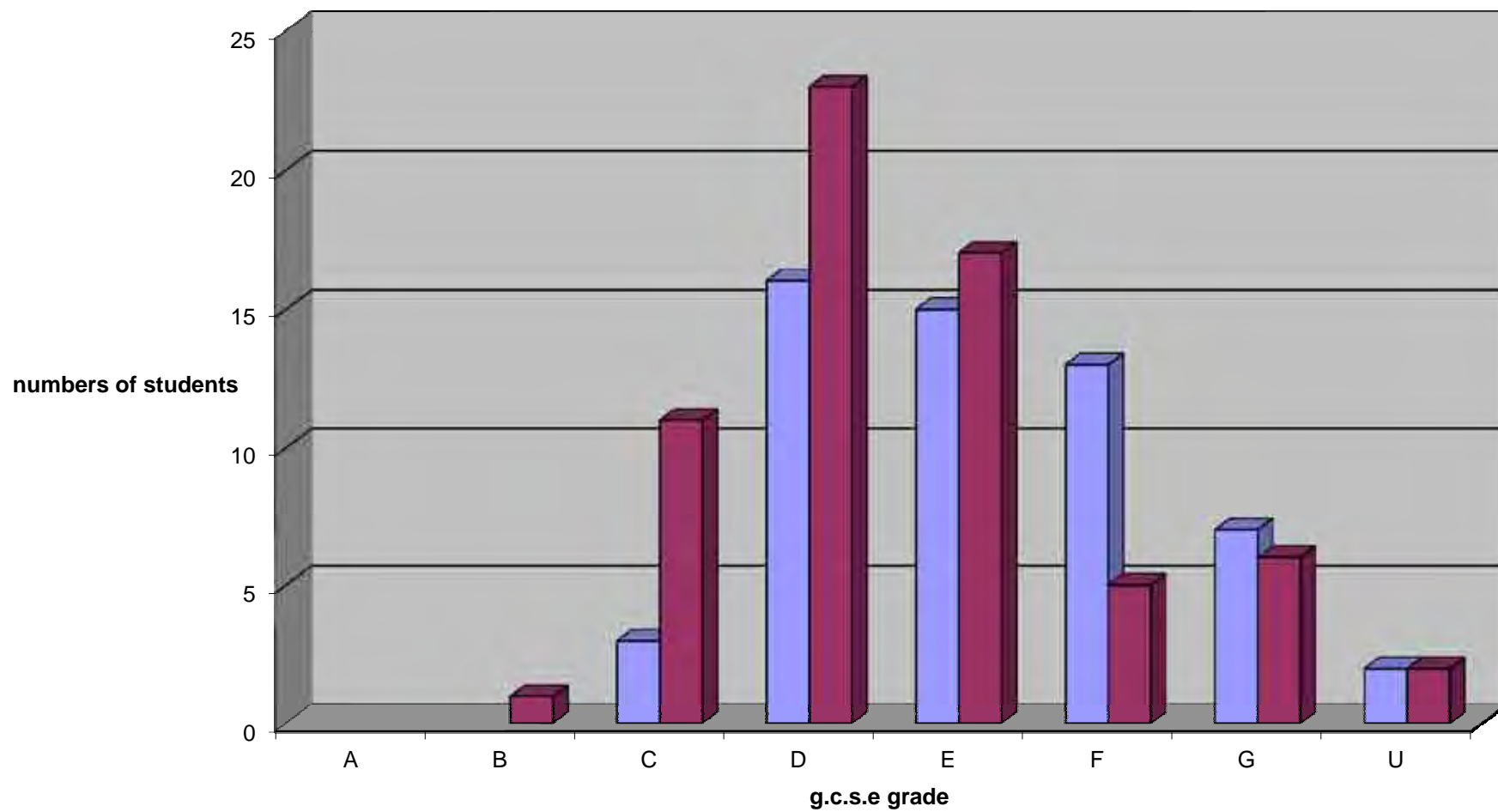
**M.F.L. 2005 G.C.S.E Results by gender**



**Year 11 French GCSE Results 2006 Brackenmount School**



**M.F.L. 2007 G.C.S.E. by gender**



**APPENDIX 1 NATIONAL G.C.S.E DATA BY GENDER IN MFL**  
**% A-C GRADES IN MFL**

Year	Language	Boys	Girls	% difference
1996	French	35.0	50.8	15.8
	German	41.2	57.3	16.1
	Spanish	33.4	50.2	16.8
1997	French	35.3	51.1	15.8
	German	41.8	57.9	16.1
	Spanish	32.8	51.7	18.9
1998	French	34.5	51.3	16.8
	German	42.8	58.1	15.3
	Spanish	34.1	51.7	17.6
1999	French	37.0	54.2	17.2
	German	44.5	59.3	14.8
	Spanish	37.1	54.1	17.0
2000	French	37.2	54.3	17.1
	German	44.0	58.9	14.9
	Spanish	39.1	55.5	16.4
2001	French	38.3	54.6	16.3
	German	45.6	59.8	14.2
	Spanish	39.9	56.1	16.2
2002	French	38.7	54.6	15.9
	German	46.0	60.0	14.1
	Spanish	39.6	57.0	17.4
2003	French	35.6	53.1	17.5
	German	44.0	57.8	13.8
	Spanish	38.0	55.5	17.5
2004	French	38.3	54.2	15.9
	German	49.0	61.9	12.9
	Spanish	42.3	57.9	15.6
2005	French	50.2	66.1	15.9
	German	60.5	72.3	11.8
	Spanish	59.7	70.3	10.6
2006	French	58.0	69.0	11.0
	German	63.0	74.0	11.0
	Spanish	62.0	71.0	9.0
2007	French	60.0	71.0	11.0
	German	65.0	75.0	10.0
	Spanish	63.0	73.0	10.0

Source: D.C.S.F; OFSTED

Note: ‘----the gap in performance between girls and boys in both key stages has not changed and remains too wide at about 16%’ Ofsted (2003).

2006 -2007 results show some reduction in this gap as MFL becomes optional for schools, with students pursuing MFL as a matter of choice.



## APPENDIX 2

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## FOCUSED RESEARCH INTERVIEW

Is it important for you to learn a foreign language?

Why/ why not?

Would it be better if we all spoke English? If so, then why?

Do you like learning French/Spanish?

Would you like to get to know French/ Spanish people?

Would you like to experience a French/Spanish way of life?

Is it important to understand the way other people think and behave in other countries? If so, then why?

Are you fascinated by the way of life and culture in other countries or is this just boring?

Do you think English and French/Spanish people think and behave differently or are they the same in your opinion? In what ways the same and in what ways are they different?

Would it be cool to speak French/ Spanish like a French/ Spanish person or is this idea totally uncool?

Is it important to like French/Spanish people in order to speak their language? Why is this or not the case?

Would you be able to speak French/Spanish fluently even if you might have no interest in French/Spanish cultures?

How important is your own nationality to you? Is it very important or not really something you think about?

Is your nationality better than other nationalities or is it simply different?

Do you like the idea of using languages (French/Spanish or English) for pleasure by reading books, plays, magazines or watching films/DVD's etc?

Would you like to have a French/Spanish friend?

Would you like the idea of an exchange visit in a French/Spanish family and then welcoming a Spanish/French guest into your home?

Where have you gained your opinions about French/Spanish people? Is this from visiting France/Spain, knowing French/Spanish people in England or from your friends/family/television/newspapers/other?

Thank you for taking part in this interview.

## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview with Scott. Year 7 Male Student

S= Scott; DE = Researcher.

DE- D'you think it's important to learn a foreign language?

S- Well yeh, cos if you go to those countries you're going to need to know to say stuff and if you don't you could get muddled up and say something in French and it's actually Spanish

DE- so what do you think is the main reason?

S- I don't know really

DE- Could you get by without it?

S- If you go to countries you do need to learn a bit of their language if they speak a different language.

DE- D'you think it would be better if they spoke English?

S- yes (laughs)

DE- Would it be better if everyone spoke English

S- yes (laughs)

DE- why would it be better?

S- so you can understand it and no language is necessary

DE- So are you interested in the French way of life at all?

S- no

DE- so if you went on holiday somewhere, doesn't have to be France, what would be the reason for going there?

S- Well if it was Spain, I'd go there because it was nice and sunny most of the time and I'd never really have to come in from outside.

DE- Do you go to Spain a lot?

S- no I've never gone there

DE- But you'd like the idea?

S- yeh

DE- ok are you interested in different cultures in the world; a lot; a bit , or not really bothered?

S- no, I'm not really bothered

DE- OK, d'you think it would be quite cool to speak a language fluently or d'you just need to speak it to get the things you want?

S- both would be good but you don't need.. really need it if you go to another country

DE- Do you think it's important to understand the way people live in different countries or is that not so important?

S- Well it could be important but other people don't care they just ---- I dunno, I don't know how to describe it.

DE- Do you think that if you're interested in the way people live in other countries, you speak the language better or does it not make any difference in speaking the language?

S- well if you live in that country for a very long time you're gonna speak that language but I dunno

DE- You're not too sure. What about nationality. Are you English or British or Welsh or Scottish?

S- half German and half English

DE- right, have you been to Germany a lot?

S- no I've never gone

DE- And do you speak the language?

S- I can say some words but I can't make a sentence

DE- Right, would you like to go to Germany?

S- yeh

DE- would you be interested in that way of life if you went?

S- yeh

DE- Why do you think you'd be interested in their way of life in Germany?

S- cos it's more interesting and it's so different to this country. It's so much better in this country.

DE- in this country?

S- yeh.

DE- than in Germany?

S- yeh Germany's better

DE- Germany's better?

S- yeh

DE- But you haven't been there?

S- No but my dad has told me lots about it.

DE- is your dad German?

S- yeh

DE- And has he taught you any of the language at all?

S- Well no cos we got lots of money problems

DE- alright, O.K

S- We can't really go

DE- O.K. fine

S- because we got money problems

DE- Well that's a matter for you Scott, no-one knows about that. So what are your favourite subjects at school?

S- P.E

DE- yeh, what's your next favourite?

S- English

DE- you like English, What do you like about English?

S- I dunno, the things Ms Boyle does with us, it's just fun

DE- What do you do at home , what are your interests?

S- playing on my computer

DE What do you do at home in the summer holidays?

S- Most of the time, I'd be on my computer but other times I'd be playing with my friends and stuff.

DE- Do you prefer doing things outdoors or indoors?

S- outdoors

DE- Do you read books at home sometimes?

S- No

DE- coming back to nationality. You say you're half English and half German. Is the English nationality more important to you than the German nationality?

S- Both are really

DE- So really you'd like to go to Germany one day?

S- yeh

DE- and find out what it's like

S- yeh

DE D'you think you'd like to speak the language?

S- yeh

DE- right and do you do German at school?

S- no

DE-  
have you bought yourself a 'teach yourself German' book?

S- No, I don't have the money. I've only got £1

DE- Right, coming back to France, d'you think there's a lot of difference between French people and English people.

S- I hate the French

DE- right

S- I don't know why but I just do. I don't know why.

DE- OK so do you think there's a difference there that you don't like?

S- yeh



DE- right, OK

S- But I don't know what it is

DE- Have you been there?

S- no it'll be the first time when we go there on the day trip

DE- It'll be the first time, so you don't know why you hate the French?

S- no

DE- Where do you get your opinions about France from?

S- The language

DE- The language?

S- Cos I find the language really hard

DE- O.K

S- and I don't really want to go there and try to ask for something and they all talk really fast and I don't understand what they're saying.

DE- right, O.K. do you think that if you get to know France and the French language better, you might change your opinion? Or have you got your opinion already set?

S- Well my mum says the French ignore us when we say 'Hi' and I don't know if that's true but that's what I don't like about them.

DE- Do you think that that might put you off the language a bit?

S- yeh

DE- O.K Scott, that's really helpful and I've learned a few things from that. Thank you very much for the interview

Research Interview with year 9 male student- Alex

A= Alex; DE= Researcher

DE – What importance do you see in learning a foreign language?  
Is it important and why?

A-yeh, because you can go to other countries and ask for stuff?

DE- Right- any other reason or is that the main reason?

A-That's the main reason

DE- Would it be better if we all spoke English, do you think?

A-No, because if you go to another country and they all spoke English there  
would'nt be any reason going there.

DE- O.K would you not want to go to the foreign country just for the well  
and -----

(----- =OVERLAP)

A ----- Well yeh but it wouldn't be the same if they they all spoke English

DE- Right so what do think the attraction is for you going to-----

(----- = OVERLAP)

A-----the weather

DE- the weather?

A- yeh

DE- have you been to Spain at all?

A- I went to Costa Brava?

DE- OK and were you able to speak any Spanish?

A- I spoke to ask for crisps and a drink?

DE- Had you already been doing Spanish?

A- yeh

DE- Did you get to know anything of how Spanish people live?

A- No, not really because we stayed in a villa owned by English people

DE- Would it be interesting to find out how Spanish people live and how other people live? Is that interesting ?

A- yeh

DE- Could you imagine being on holiday and that being a feature to find out how people live or would you mainly look for the beach and sea? What would be interesting for you?

A- See how they live and how they're different from us?

DE- Are you interested in that sort of thing, in cultural difference or is that not your interest?

A- Well it's not my main interest but I wouldn't mind finding out

DE- so in what way do you think Spanish people are different?

A- The things they eat and drink. What they do – street fiestas and things like that. Completely different from here.

DE- Do you think they think differently?

A- yeh probably

DE- what do you think causes them to think differently?

A- I don't know

DE- Do you think you need to know the culture to speak the language well?

A-No

DE- so do you think you could speak the language fairly well or very well without knowing the culture?

A- I think it would help to know but it wouldn't make you speak better Spanish I don't think.

DE- About nationality, are you English or British?

A- I'm British

DE- Is that important to you?

A- I don't really think about it

DE- D'you think for example that being British is a better Identity to have than another country?

A- It's opinion really. I think Spanish people would say that it's better to be Spanish.

DE- Right

A-And English say it's better to be English?

DE- so would you say it's better to be English?

A- yeh

DE- Why would you say that?

A- Dunno, I don't know what it's like to be Spanish

DE- Would you say then it's better or different?

A- Different

DE- Different?

A- yeh

DE- Could you imagine yourself Alex Smith (pseudonym) being a Spanish person?

A- no

DE- do you think that if you don't like the lifestyle in a country, if you don't like the country. Do you think you could still speak the language?

A- yeh

DE- What are your interests outside of school?

A-Listening to music, seeing friends and stuff.

DE- what are you favourite subjects at school?

A- Media and I.T

DE- What about books- d'you read books?

A- sometimes

DE- What sort of books do you read?

A- Stephen King

DE- do you read a lot of books?

A- not a lot, just the occasional one.

DE- yeh

A- every so often

DE- In class you prefer to write rather than Speak?

A- I prefer to speak because I don't like to write that much.

DE- Do you think Spanish is a boy's subject or a girls' subject?

A- girls probably

DE- why?

A- I don't know, they listen more I think.

DE- Would you like to live and work in a foreign country?

A- I think so yeh

DE- What would be the advantage of this?

A- nice place to work

DE- Nice in what way?

A- Better weather

DE- so what would be the most important thing for you?

A- sunny weather

DE- One last question Alex. Would you be interested in life and culture in other countries or would it not be a big interest for you?

A- It's not a big interest

DE- Thanks very much Alex for taking part in the interview.

## TRANSCRIPTS OF RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

DE- DAVE EVANS (RESEARCH INTERVIEWER)

S- SARAH- year 11 female student

DE- Do you think it's important to learn a foreign language?

S- Yeh definitely, it gives you more confidence and more opportunities in life. So you know if you wanted to go abroad a meet new people it's always good to have at least another language I think

DE- Ok, good. And would you like to go to France and get to know French people?

S- Um well I've already had that experience already, living in France and everything. But um if I had to choose again I would maybe not France; Spain or somewhere else like that.

DE- Do you think it's important to understand the way other people live in different countries?

S- yeh its different cultures and knowing how other people live apart from British people and ourselves, so yeh it's good.

DE- why is it good d'you think?

S- Again with the language and everything, learning a different language, you get to meet new people and know how other people live their lives and what cultures people have.

DE- ok, fine. Do you think- so would you say you are interested in the life and culture of other countries?

S- yeh, definitely because it's interesting to know how other people live apart from yourself.

DE- Do you think when it comes to France that English and French people behave and think differently?

S- Yeh

DE- In what way do you think they're different?

S- I would say the French weren't as laid back as the English.

DE- not as?

S- yeh, not as laid back as the English whereas the English aren't as strict and I personally sometimes think the French are more arrogant than the English but I think it's just different. I think it might be just them with the English because of the history of France and England.

DE- yeh do you think there's a lot of difficulties between French-----

S- yeh conflicts

DE- coming through the history?

S- yeh definitely the wars and everything.

DE- Do you think that's more with France than let's say with Germany?

S- More with Germany than with France.

DE- right

S- But

DE- Do you think that idea has a bearing on whether people want to learn the language or not-the fact the there's been trouble between England and France

S- um it depends, it depends on how much into politics 'cos I think you can get different age groups, say if some middle-aged person wants to learn French then you might look at the conflict between England and France but where as if you was a young girl or young boy who wanted to learn French then they just know the language of love and really it's Paris and the fashion and everything, so it depends on how old you are I think.

DE- Do you think that the antagonisms, d'you think that comes down from generation to generation that someone



let's say at school, their uncle or dad say the French are this and they'll get it from the Daily This or Daily That paper, that the French have done this again and done that?

S- That would make it worse yeh but it depends what----- I've forgotten the word.

DE- I understand what you mean. What about with a country like there hasn't been a past so much, like Spain d'you think

S- I think Spain with the British because it's so British now and loads of English people live there and everything. I think Spain is -----nobody looks at Spain and thinks 'I don't want to learn that language, I don't like the Spanish' as much as they do with the French because Spain haven't had any conflict with England.

DE- O.K is it important to like a country and a people in order to speak a language fluently?

S- yeh because it gives you more determination and encourages you more to learn that language whereas if you don't like the country and you don't like the language then

DE- or the people?

S- because when I tried learning German because I don't like the German accent and the German language then it was difficult for me to learn it.

DE- Do you think it's important to like the people?

S- um yes and no, it depends really because all people are like unique- it's not just the French people themselves. Some of them yeh but I think a French person can be just as English as we are. I mean we could like a French person as much as we like an English person. It's just being prejudiced otherwise.

D.E- yeh. D'you think there are more similarities between English and French people than there are differences?

S- I could say there are more differences with fashion, food and everything yeh

D.E. But what about the way people relate to each other?

S- As we yeh, we have different personalities to the French. We're laid back. I don't think the French are as laid back as we are.

D.E- O.K. just moving on. How important is the idea of nationality to you because you are of British nationality. How important is your idea of being British to you?

S- well-----

DE- is it something that's important or is it something you're not really bothered about?

S- never really thought about it. I'm proud to be English and everything, mainly because of the language and English is the most common language and I'm proud I speak that language but um I suppose I would like to live in a different country and experience other nationalities.

DE- Do you think that being English is better than other nationalities?

S- no, everybody is the same. It's just you tend to back up your nationality more than others.

D.E- Right so it's like being in Eden house or Stour house.It's-----

S- no you're not going to back the other side. It's like supporting a football team or something.

D.E- right but you're not saying that being English is fundamentally better than being-----

S- no. I'm not saying that no.

D.E- If we're looking at languages we write and speak, what is the most important to you , words or things?

S- um, a bit of both really. I would say learning the words

DE- Do you think words are valuable in themselves. What is more important to you, is it doing things or talking?

S- what do you mean by doing?

DE- well are words more important to you than action or is action more important than words. It's a difficult one I know.

S- Action more important than words mainly because ----  
----- (long reflection)

DE- It's a difficult question. What I'm trying to say is 'do words count just as being words or do words only count because they are about objects'?

S- well words are speech and speech is part of everyday life. We all have, like communication towards one another. Yeh words; words and actions

DE- Both?

S- Yeh.

D.E- Do you tend to lean towards wordy subjects or object subjects- I mean objects by science, D.T, things which are practical or do you lean towards wordy subjects like English, French.

S- I lean more towards practical 'cos I perform, sing, dance and act which is all more practical than the words so I would say that to me, 'cos I'm not very academic person to sit down and look at the words and theory of everything.. I would say that practical is more important because you spend you life, when you finish school, I tend to think you do more practical than the words

because the reason we do the theory at school is for the exams.

D.E What about the practical in terms of Science and D.T.. do you lean that way at all?

S- yeh

D.E. yeh what about English? Is English one of your favourite subjects?

S- English is one of my favourites mainly because it's one of my favourite lessons. I just find English interesting. I suppose it could be classed as practical to me, writing a story' cos I like the imaginative and coming up with that sort of thing and everything but as well it's writing, so it's a bit of both, English for me.

D.E- O.K thanks a lot Sarah. Thanks for doing the interview with me.

## RESEARCH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview with Ben, a male year 11 student.

B- Ben

D.E- Dave Evans (Research interviewer)

D.E- Just getting into this question of learning foreign languages, do you think it's important to learn a foreign language?

B- yes because it could be incredibly useful in later life like if you go on a holiday or anything like that.

D.E- right, do you think that's the main use?

B- or you might want to get a job.

D.E yeh, do you think foreign languages could be useful for anything else in terms of getting to know how people

live or is that not so important as getting a job or is that more important?

B-It might be to some people but I wouldn't say so to me.

D.E. right O.K, would you say you like learning French?

B- yeh. I wish it was a lot easier to learn it but it can't be made easier. But I really want to know French and I want to become fluent in it and I want to become fluent in Spanish.

DE- D'you think to become fluent----just like to ask this first of all:- d'you like the idea of getting to know French people?Is that important in being fluent?

B-I suppose yeh because everyone in England talks differently so everyone in France talks differently in a way.

D.E- D'you think you can be fluent if you don't get to know French people well?

B- Yeh, I'm sure you could

D.E- So for you, you don't have to get to know the French way of life and people to become fluent?

B- no, no

DE- O.K. Would you like to experience the French way of life and live in France- get to know French people?

B- maybe, I don't know at the moment

D.E- is it not appealing to you at all?

B- No not really

DE- ok. Are you not fascinated by cultures and ways of life of other people?

B- Maybe if it was like to the extreme but not to, like, just another country

DE- right

B- Like to America or somewhere like that, that is sort of the same as us- sort of- maybe to a poor country or-----

DE- yeh, would you think that for the French, they are more similar to us/

B- yeh

D.E- they are more similar to us than different?

B-yeh, I'd say so.

D.E- Do you think they are different though?

B- in some way yeh

D.E- How do you imagine French people to be different?

B- uh—different attitude because they probably have different thoughts about other things compared to us and stuff.

D.E- What would account for different thoughts d'you think?

B- Like well suppose they don't really care if there's much of a problem, too big of a problem in the world, a bit like the war in Iraq, they didn't care too much about that.

D.E- right so there's a political thing there?

B- yeh I suppose

DE- ok. Suppose you actively disliked French people, would it be possible to still be good at the language?

B- yeh I suppose

DE- D'you think it is?

B- yeh

DE right ok. Regarding nationality. British nationality, because you are a British national I take it?

B- yeh

DE- Is it important to you?

B- No

D.E- it's not?

B- No.

DE- it's not something you think about?

B- No I don't really care

DE- So it wouldn't matter to you for example if you were a French person?

B- No

DE- right OK. Do you think there is any antagonism between English and French people

B- Er

DE- Do you ever pick up an idea that English and French people don't like each other too much?

B- I'd say sometimes yeh

DE- What do you think might be the cause of that?

B- Just people's different views and stuff

DE- Yeh, where do you think they get their views from?

B- Er religion er just old ways of life. They've come down yeh

DE- D'you like the idea of using language. D'you enjoy using language like word games, reading books, reading poetry, just involved with words; do you enjoy that as an activity?

B- er no not really/

DE- right. Are you more orientated towards practical objects say than words?

DE- ok, so what d'you think, not just in French, but in language generally, what do think is the most important between on the one hand, talking, texting or on the other hand doing things like sport, or making things, what's more important?

B- er

DE- communicating with words or doing actions?

B- Doing actions

DE- Doing actions, what sort of actions are you into?

B- er sport I suppose. I 'd say that it's better to do something than say it.

DE- right OK that's interesting. Fine, I think that's about it then. Thanks a lot Ben. Thanks for the interview.



## APPENDIX 4

### PARENTAL CONSENT LETTER FOR PUPIL INTERVIEWS

## RESEARCH INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Mr D.A. EVANS,  
Foreign Languages Teacher,  
B.P.A.A.C  
Autumn Term 2005

Dear Student and Parent/Guardian,

I am undertaking a research degree part-time at Birmingham University. This research concerns how students learn foreign languages in relation to issues such as gender, nationality, geographical location, teaching/learning activities.

I have invited your son/daughter to take part in a tape- recorded interview as part of my research. The recording will be for my research purposes only and will remain totally confidential. After the data has been collected the tape will be erased and no names will be divulged in research findings, thereby safeguarding anonymity.

Research ethics require parental consent. I can also let your son/daughter have a blank copy of my questionnaire guide should you request this.

I would therefore be grateful if you as a parent/guardian would give your consent by signing the following:-

I give my consent to my son/daughter taking part in a research interview, enquiring into attitudes/opinions towards foreign language learning. I understand that the ethics of research demand total confidentiality and anonymity in respect of student participants.

Signature of parent/guardian:-

Thanks for your help,  
Dave Evans